IN SEARCH OF THE PRIMORDIAL COMMUNISTS: ANDRÉ BRETON,

SURREALISM AND THE INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES OF NORTH AMERICA

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B.A. York University, 1976
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Fine Arts - Art History)

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 1997

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Date _Aug 24/97_

DE-6 (2/88)

ABSTRACT

During the 1920s and 1930s in Europe, André Breton was actively engaged in anti-colonial pursuits as a result of his commitment to socialist international revolutionary politics. That this was the case is evident in the numerous treatises and lectures in which Breton spoke out against imperialism and its oppression of non-Western peoples. During the same period, Breton also collected and displayed North American indigenous objects. When Breton was forced to flee to New York in the 1940s due to fascist persecution, he continued to engage in these practices. Rather than viewing these activities as separate and unrelated, this thesis intends to argue that one of the reasons North American indigenous objects were collected and evoked by Breton was because the societies that produced them occupied an exalted place within European socialist ideology.

Certainly, there have been art historical studies devoted to the subject of Breton's aligning surrealism with socialist international revolutionary causes. Moreover, in the existing writings on surrealism and indigenous peoples, the attention paid to North American indigenous societies by Breton has been noted. However, in this latter discourse, Breton's interest in North American aboriginal groups, whether in Europe or in the United States and Canada, has been confined to issues of mythology, psychoanalysis, aesthetics and connoisseurship and, hence, the left wing political importance of these societies has been overlooked.

Drawing upon the body of post-colonial critiques engaging the cooption and appropriation of other cultures by the West, this thesis will investigate the European socialist significance of North American indigenous societies and bring it to a discussion of Breton's collecting and display practices. Of particular importance in this matter are the writings of Frederick Engels in which ethnographic data on North American aboriginal peoples was used to offer "proof" that the first human communities existed in a state of primordial communism. What will be argued is that varied dimensions of these imaginary societies were evoked by Breton in left wing strategies during the 1930s and 1940s as part of an oppositional stand against bourgeois ideology, imperialism, fascism and war.

To be sure, the collecting and exhibiting of indigenous objects brimming with socialist significance was not solely defined by political activism; these pursuits were as well bound up with issues of avant-gardism and so-called "primitivism." In order to pursue this matter, this thesis will also draw upon analyses of modernism and the avant-garde in order to provide a clearer view of how and why certain North American aboriginal peoples were drawn into Breton's artistic and political international revolutionary avant-garde strategies at various moments and in differing geographic locales.

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INTRODUCTION

When the Germans invaded France in 1940, numerous members of the European avant-garde were forced to flee into unoccupied territories. Surrealists such as André Breton eventually managed to escape to America where they remained in exile until the mid to late 1940s. Soon after Breton arrived in New York he began to collect and display objects produced by North American aboriginal peoples, a practice that he had previously engaged in throughout the 1930s. Certainly there exist studies that have addressed the attention paid to North American indigenous objects by Breton while in Europe and in the United States and Canada. Yet those who have explored this issue such as the art historians Elizabeth Cowling, William Rubin, Evan Maurer, Mark Polizzoti and the anthropologist Aldona Jonaitis have largely confined their discussions to the aesthetic, mythological, and psychoanalytical appeal of native objects that were collected and deployed as part of a surrealist practice.[1] To be sure, these interests were crucial to the surrealist project. However, what this thesis intends to argue is that for Breton there existed yet another layer of meaning surrounding these peoples and their cultures, one that was specifically bound up with European socialist constructions of North American indigenous societies. These inventions were brought by Breton across the Atlantic to New York as a kind of cultural baggage where they continued to permeate his response to and his depiction of these peoples during his sojourn in North America during the 1940s.

These assertions give rise to one of the central tenets of this thesis: the collecting of items such as masks made by Northwest Coast and Inuit peoples, and the evocation of these objects at events such as the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* in 1936 were informed, in part, by anti-colonial strategies as a result of the surrealists' direct involvement in socialist international revolutionary politics. That a surrealist commitment to left wing revolutionary causes has been left out of most discussions concerning surrealism and indigenous peoples is surprising given that there are numerous studies on the movement stressing the central role that socialism played in its avant-garde strategies. As Helena Lewis succinctly put it in her book *The Politics of Surrealism*:

> Many critics have claimed that they [the surrealists] simply dabbled in politics, but in reality, politics played a central role.[2]

What Lewis means by "politics" is a commitment to Marxism, and her book provides valuable insights into how individuals like Breton began to ally this doctrine with the goals of the surrealist movement as early as the middle 1920s. Indeed, Breton came to believe that the crushing capitalist exploitation of humankind had to be eradicated through the international socialist revolution before the surrealist revolution of mind could occur. As this was the case, Breton proclaimed that surrealism could no longer remain "strictly confined to its first theoretical premises" which had been largely organized

around the concept of the *omnipotence of thought*, that is, the belief that thought in and of itself could transform the external material realm.[3] Instead, he argued that surrealism had to first commit itself to a political movement dedicated to the liberation of oppressed peoples everywhere.[4] This shift in the whole direction of surrealism became plainly evident in 1930 when the title of the surrealist review *La Révolution surréaliste* was changed to *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*.

In art historical literature, the surrealists' engagement with socialist revolutionary theory is often raised only to have it dismissed through vague allusions to the conflicts that the group had with the French Communist Party. For example, in his thesis <u>In Quest of the Myth: An Investigation of the Relationships Between Surrealism and Primitivism</u>, Evan Maurer declares:

> If the ultimate goal of Surrealism was a world in which man could enlarge his sense of realities and function more harmoniously with his inner visions of spirit and desire, it becomes understandable that the Surrealists required more than a mere revitalization of their artistic method and style, and actively involved themselves in an attempt to create a new social system as well. At first they aligned themselves with the Communist movement, but this union, far from being fully realized, led only to bitter struggles and disappointments within the Surrealist movement.[5]

Maurer's portrayal of the surrealists' involvement with the communist movement is misleading: the "struggles and disappointments" that individuals such as André Breton had were

with the French Communist Party and not with communism proper. Indeed, throughout the 1930s and 1940s Breton remained committed to the revolutionary tenets of the communist movement. The difficulties about which Maurer speaks largely arose due to the French Communist Party's abandoning these principles in the 1930s, a retreat which included the desertion of a stand against colonialism and a seeming withdrawal of support from the idea of an international proletarian revolution. But by simply raising these conflicts as an issue, Maurer is able to clear the path for a depoliticized exploration stressing supposed sites of "affinity" between the world view of the surrealists and that of "primitive man" based upon a variety of notions including myth, magic and psychoanalysis.

When approaching surrealist political activities involving indigenous peoples it is important to note that while the collecting and displaying of indigenous objects had a strong political dimension, such practices were not *solely* defined by political activism: these strategies were as well bound up with issues of avant-gardism and so-called "primitivism."[6] More particularly, recent post-colonial critiques have explored how and why indigenous peoples and their cultural objects became incorporated into some avant-garde practices. Examples include Patricia Leighton's "The White Peril and L'Art Nègre: Picasso, Primitivism and Anti-Colonialism" of 1990 and Abigail Solomon-Godeau's 1989 article "Going Native." Earlier Marxist influenced critiques of the avant-garde have as well addressed this same issue. For instance, in his "Some General Observations on the

Problem of Cultural Colonialism" of 1976, the art critic Kenneth Coutts-Smith argued that the cultures and world views of the "primitive" other provided the European avant-garde with an almost inexhaustible source of provocative materials to deploy as part of an oppositional vocabulary. And at a fundamental level, critiques like that of Coutts-Smith have pointed out how competition amongst varied avant-gardes led to what can be called increased cultural colonization, that is to say, the encroachment by vanguard artists on the cultural terrain of non-Western peoples. While these issues will be reconsidered in the following chapters, one of the more pressing questions for this work is why it was that the surrealists specifically turned their attention to the aboriginal societies of North America as part of their artistic and political endeavors in the 1930s and 1940s. Concerning this shift, James Clifford in his book The Predicament of Culture has argued that African motifs, so popular among certain members of the European avant-garde, had been so thoroughly coopted by the 1920s that they became commodified through the culture industry; once this occurred, these motifs became far less effective for use in the oppositional strategies of avant-gardes against the dominant symbolic order. This whole process of commodification suggests some reasons why the surrealists began looking elsewhere for "new" indigenous peoples to evoke in their artistic practices. However, what I intend to argue is that one of the primary reasons surrealists like Breton turned to North American aboriginal peoples was that by the 1920s these societies had

acquired a privileged place within socialist ideology in Europe. As this was the case, they would have been of great interest to Breton, a member of a left wing avant-garde in possession of both an artistic and political international revolutionary agenda.

A question of primary importance for this thesis is how North American indigenous peoples came to be reconfigured within a socialist paradigm in Europe in the first place. In order to uncover the foundation of this construction, one must travel back in time to the late 19th century; it is here that one encounters Frederick Engels's argument that the aboriginal societies of North America offered definitive proof that humankind at its origins lived in state of primordial communism. Subsequently, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, two of France's leading socialist intellectuals, would publish texts further imbuing North American indigenous societies with leftist signification in the early decades of the 20th century. In particular, peoples such as the Inuit and, most especially, the native peoples of the Northwest Coast were portrayed as still acting out an existence economically, politically and morally antithetical to industrialized capitalism. Interestingly, in the well known *Surrealist Map of the World*, which first appeared in 1929 in the journal *Variétés*, one finds evocative evidence of a surrealist interest in these particular societies since the map amplifies in scale areas such as Alaska, Labrador and the islands of the Haida-gwai.[fig.1] What is more, by the early 1930s Breton had acquired a sizable collection of objects

produced by these same aboriginal groups.[fig.2,3,4,5] Given the impact that these socialist constructions had on surrealist collecting and display strategies, this thesis will provide an in-depth investigation of key texts by Engels, Durkheim and Mauss in order to determine how and why North American aboriginal societies and their practices were appropriated for socialist purposes.

Once having explored the nature of the privileged place that indigenous societies came to acquire in socialist ideology by the 1920s, this thesis will trace the subtle shifts in this signification to Breton through the historical trajectory of the 1930s and 1940s. Crucial to this charting is Breton's discovery of the writings of Vladimir Lenin. Specifically, in treatises attacking imperialism, Lenin portrayed colonized peoples everywhere as having a vital role to play in the international socialist revolution. As this was the case, indigenous societies came to be viewed as the colonial counterpart to the Western urban proletariat. The impact of Lenin's writings on Breton and other surrealists cannot be underestimated; indeed, in a later interview in 1951, Breton would characterize the surrealists' embrace of Leninist doctrine in the 1930s as "a mass conversion."[7] Spurred on by Lenin's anti-imperialist treatises, especially in the face of the French Communist Party's jettisoning of an anti-colonialist position and its startling support of France as an empire during the period of the Popular Front from 1936 to 1938, Breton, along with other surrealists and communist intellectuals, began to step up his verbal and

written attacks against European imperialism and its oppression of colonized peoples. An exploration of this tumultuous historical period and these surrealist denunciations is essential to an understanding of how and why North American aboriginal societies came to acquire an increased leftist charge during the 1930s, and, as well, how the collecting and display of objects made by these societies was, in part, linked to anti-colonialism. Moreover, this socialist signification will become crucial later on in this thesis when exploring Breton's anti-imperialist treatises and his collecting and exhibiting practices while exiled in North America during the 1940s.

While social, political, economic and cultural circumstances in France resulted in North American indigenous peoples acquiring further socialist signification, a lack of contextual analysis and an impoverished understanding of left wing avant-gardism has obscured the importance of this development to members of the surrealist group. For example, in the The Predicament of Culture James Clifford has offered up a somewhat depoliticized account of Breton's collecting and exhibiting of indigenous objects during the 1930s.[8] When lamenting the passing of George Bataille's journal *Documents* and the subsequent emergence of André Breton's journal *Minotaure*, Clifford declares:

> The artefacts of otherness were replaced, generally, by Breton's category of the surreal – located in the mythic or psychoanalytic unconscious and all too easily coopted by romantic notions of artistic genius or inspiration. The concrete cultural artifact was no

longer called upon to play a disruptive, illuminatory
role.[9]

There is a problem with this passage in that Clifford seems to
confine the "category" of the surreal only to the realm of the
mythic and the psychoanalytic. Thus, by not recognizing Breton
as a member of an avant-garde committed to a Marxist-Leninist
revolutionary agenda, Clifford misses how the "concrete cultural
artifact" *was*, in fact, "called upon to play a disruptive
illuminatory role" during a period of upheaval in the 1930s. In
particular, in The Predicament of Culture, little reference is
made to the momentous political realities surrounding and
informing surrealist practices such as the Great Depression and
the emergence of the Popular Front. As to what in fact motivated
Breton to collect and exhibit, Clifford reduces these practices
to the need for domination and the fulfillment of the
connoisseurial self. This is not to say that Clifford is wrong
here; members of the avant-garde were avid collectors, and
Breton did problematically wear, upon occasion, the hat of the
primitivist connoisseur. However, by focusing primarily upon
issues of connoisseurship, Clifford presents us with a similar
ahistorical and essentialist problem found in the writings of
art historians such as Rubin and Cowling since the reasons for
Breton's collecting and exhibiting are constructed as the same
in all places and at all moments in times.[10]

Intensifying Breton's vested interest in indigenous
societies in the 1930s was the Nazis' vehement denouncement of
"primitivist" tendencies in avant-garde art. Undoubtedly, it

was not a coincidence that Breton would display indigenous objects alongside surrealist works in the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* of 1936 at precisely the same moment the Nazis' were viciously attacking the supposed "celebration" of non-Western peoples by European vanguard artists in fascist shows of so-called "Degenerate Art." In order to underscore the gravity of Breton's response, this thesis will investigate the display tactics and the propagandistic rhetoric in these fascist exhibitions, ones in which modern art, politics and indigenous peoples were thrown together in a monolithic block.

Due to the fascist persecution of European intellectuals and artists, Breton was forced to flee to North America. Certainly, the political issues (imperialism, fascism and war) which had resulted in indigenous peoples acquiring increased leftist significance in Europe were still burning ones. The question that arises at this point is how Breton managed to pursue an oppositional avant-garde position incorporating European socialist constructions of North American societies in an environment that was completely foreign. The determination of this matter requires that the particular nature of Breton's circumstances in New York be more carefully scrutinized.

A factor that has rarely been discussed in art historical literature as impacting upon Breton's avant-garde activities while in exile is the debilitation caused by his flight from Europe and the hardships he faced as an emigré. More specifically, in these analyses it almost appears as if at one moment Breton was being marginally threatened by the fascists in

Europe and, at the next, he simply appeared on North American shores where he languished until the liberation of Paris. But the reality of the situation was that Breton came dangerously close to being imprisoned by the Nazis; if it were not for the rescue efforts of small liberal organizations in New York he, along with many other surrealists, would have been imprisoned or worse. Once safely in America, Breton suffered - as did the vast majority of European emigrés - from the severe physical and mental hardship of exile. Due to this debilitation coupled with a deep sense of indebtedness to those who rescued him directly from Nazi persecution, Breton's capacity to freely resume the issuing of leftist diatribes in the midst of yet another "imperialist" world war - political views profoundly unwelcome in America - became limited in the extreme. What I intend to argue is that at this point the collecting and display of North American indigenous objects not only provided Breton with a way to bolster a greatly diminished avant-garde identity, but as well such objects became imbued with added socialist signification due to the curtailment of written and spoken anti-imperialist sentiment.

Adding to Breton's urgent need to speak out against imperialism was the intense revival of pro-colonialism amongst the French emigrés who were frantically concerned about the threat to the overseas empire caused by the events of the war. Such sentiment abounded in articles and editorials in the two New York French emigre newspapers *Pour La Victoire* and *France/Amerique*. An examination of these journals will help

bring into view the intense political arena in which Breton collected and exhibited objects made by North American aboriginal peoples.

To be sure, Breton was not completely silent during his stay of exile, and I will discuss the varied oppositional articles that the surrealist did manage to write. However, there are two texts of particular importance when investigating Breton's struggle to mount an oppositional voice to current political events: Arcanum 17 and Ode to Charles Fourier. What will be argued is that while these texts were written at different times and in dissimilar geographical locales - Arcanum 17 in 1944 in the Gaspe and Ode to Fourier in 1945 in the American Southwest - they took up political issues of a similar nature. Moreover, both will be approached as having direct relevance to European socialist portrayals of North American indigenous societies.

When investigating Breton's trip to the Southwest and specific passages found in Ode to Charles Fourier, one of the many issues that will be discussed is how American constructions of its "own" indigenous peoples impacted upon the emigre. What will be argued is that Breton's enthusiasm for peoples such as the Hopi and Zuni was fueled by preexistent exalted representations of these peoples in America characterizing them as communal, peaceful and agrarian. Thus, while for the most part Breton's understanding of North American indigenous societies was one imported from Europe, his admittance of the natives of the American Southwest into the community of the so-

called primordial communists was largely due to these idealized portrayals that he encountered while in exile.

My thesis stops at 1946; it is at this moment that Breton embarked upon his return voyage home. In his possession was a sizable collection of North American indigenous objects. One of the key issues that will explored here is how Breton's amassing of these objects during his period of exile was, in part, in preparation for the possible personal and political difficulties he might face upon his return to what was sure to be a tumultuous postwar world.

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. For example, in her article entitled "Creations of Mystics and Philosophers: The White Man's Perception of Northwest Coast Indian Art from 1930s to the Present," Aldona Jonaitis discusses the surrealists' pursuit of the primitive in a depoliticized fashion stating that the group's interest in Northwest Coast art was defined by the mythological and by the "subconscious that had been revealed to Westerners by psychoanalysts like Freud and Jung." Aldona Jonaitis, "Creations of Mystics and Philosophers: the White Man's Perception of Northwest Coast Indian Art from the 1930s to the Present," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol 5 No1 (1981),p.8.

2. Helena Lewis, <u>The Politics of Surrealism</u> (New York:Paragon House, 1988),p.35.

3. André Breton, "What is Surrealism," in Franklin Rosemont ed. <u>What is Surrealism? Selected Writings</u> (New York: Monad Press, 1978), pp.116-7.

4. And perhaps it is the fact that the movement at its origins was largely non-partisan, committed more to a revolution of mind based in psychoanalytic theory than to revolutionary Marxist-Leninist politics that has provided some art historians with a pretext for minimizing the group's subsequent political commitment.

5. Evan Maurer, <u>In Quest of the Myth: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Surrealism and Primitivism</u> (University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D., 1974), p.87.

6. This body of writings has in the past been placed under the rubric of "surrealism and primitivism." Certainly, the term "primitive" is rarely used today in reference to indigenous societies due to its negative implications. Moreover, the monolithic nature of the term "primitivism" tends to obscure the different ways that diverse indigenous peoples were historically constructed by individuals and groups in the West including members of the surrealist avant-garde. This is not to say that general traits were not, at some time or another, assigned to all indigenous peoples; instead, what is meant here is that Western attitudes towards some indigenous societies were markedly different than others. Certainly, these matters will be elaborated upon in this work.

7. André Breton, <u>Conversations: An Autobiography of Surrealism</u> trans. by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993),p.93.

8. Clifford is one of the more recent scholars to take up the issue of the surrealist's collecting and display of indigenous objects both in Europe and while they were exiled in New York.

9. James Clifford, <u>The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art</u> (Cambridge:Harvard University Press 1988), p.134.

10. An associated problem that arises when exploring the matter of surrealism is that the surrealists have often been treated as a monolithic whole. For example, it is well known that Max Ernst and Wolfgang Paalen had a decided interest in North American indigenous societies and their cultures. However, these individuals rarely participated in the sort of anti-colonialist activities that André Breton was involved in such as the publishing of the 1931 pamphlet "Ne Visitez pas l'exposition coloniale" which articulated opposition to the *Exposition Coloniale* that had opened in Paris in May of the same year. And certainly neither artist issued any statement that even remotely approached the denunciatory vehemence of the anti-imperialist tract "Murderous Humanitarianism" written by Breton and several others in 1932. Indeed, it is precisely because Breton was the founder and the leader of the surrealist group and the one who continually redefined the surrealist's international revolutionary artistic and political agenda against a constantly changing set of historical circumstances that I have chosen to devote most of this study to an investigation of how his collecting and exhibiting strategies were bound up with anti-colonialism in Europe and, as well, in North America.

Concerning Breton's status, there is little doubt that he was both the founder and the leader of the surrealist group. While the literature on the movement has noted the many quarrels within the movement itself, to my knowledge there has never been any systematic argument put forward that the leadership of the group was - at any time - assumed by someone other than Breton.

CHAPTER ONE

Avant-gardism, Primitivism, and Primordial Socialism

One of the primary causes of the expunging of politics from the surrealist interest in indigenous peoples in art historical writings is the wider tendency to portray the artistic avant-garde as a monolithic whole whose activities have little or nothing to do with such concerns. Perhaps the most insightful source when investigating extant divisions within vanguard groups are Marxian critiques of avant-gardism. For example, in an article written in 1982 entitled, "On the Ideology of Avant-gardism," Nicos Hadjinicolaou confronts the portrayal of the artistic avant-garde as a "kind of pure and immutable, stable and coherent idea...."[1] He first distinguishes between right and left wing avant-gardism and then identifies specific tendencies within each camp. Hadjinicolaou contends that right wing avant-gardism and its supporters - by far the largest faction - spurn social or political commitment as a determining factor in artistic practices believing instead that the only criterion upon which art should be judged is formal innovation:

> This tendency, which has the greatest number of followers and has predominated since the Second World War, holds that there is always a group of artists which represents the avant-garde of art, since it manifests the art of tomorrow in its work. According to this tendency, innovation is the sole criterion of artistic avant-gardism, while the socio-political commitment of the artist does not enter into consideration at all. Apolitical attitude, refusal of all commitment, and antagonism against politically committed artists characterize this ideology as a conservative ideology. [italics his][2]

Concerning left wing avant-gardism, Hadjinicolaou makes a crucial distinction between two of its leanings. The first group is described as putting its art almost completely at the service of existent left wing political causes:

> Predominant in the international communist movement from the 1930s to the 1960s, this tendency holds that the avant-garde in art consists of those artists who are progressive on the social and political level, the exclusive criterion of avant-gardism being the artist's adherence to the positions of the political avant-garde.
> In this sense, the artistic avant-garde is actually more like a detachment of the political avant-garde working in the artistic field.[3]

Individuals such as Leger, Gromaire and Fougeron serve as examples of artists who were communists and who attempted to follow very closely the aesthetic dictates of the moderate Left in France. The second faction, however, was far more interested in pursuing a revolutionary political and artistic path. As this was the case, it often found itself at odds with the more moderate leftist factions due to its strict adherence to revolutionary political principles and its spurning of social or socialist realism. This more radical camp, one in which Hadjinicolaou gives André Breton a prominent place, is described as the smallest of all avant-garde groups:

> This tendency is in the minority within the international revolutionary movement, but it can claim many celebrated and important artists. For them, the artistic avant-garde must not only innovate in art, but in the interest and name of socially progressive and revolutionary forces.[4]

Hadjinicolaou details how this revolutionary current and its supporters have often attacked the right wing faction because of its "hidden conservatism" and its "refusal to admit a socially useful role for art."[5] As a Marxist art historian, Hadjinicolaou tends to sympathize with this more radical leftwing segment due to its continued commitment to an international revolutionary cause. However, he views its leftist inclinations as eternally defeated by an overriding ideology of avant-gardism which he condemns as romantic, ahistorical, elitist and inescapably linked to the laws of the capitalist marketplace. But in spite of these misgivings Hadjinicolaou is disturbed by the fact that the right wing apolitical understanding of avant-gardism has come to dominate almost all discussions of vanguard practices:

> And it is the rightwing current which has been, since the beginning of artistic avant-gardism until today, the most powerful — to the point of being taken most often for the whole.[6]

Because Hadjinicolaou's differentiations give rise to an understanding of the surrealists as an avant-garde with both an artistic and international revolutionary agenda, an investigation of the group's activities involving indigenous peoples can effectively be extended outwards into the political realm.

Marxian based critiques of avant-gardism are also insightful when exploring this issue of how and why aboriginal peoples and their cultural objects became bound up with varied vanguard strategies. Frequently pointed out is how the alien

world views of a "primitive" other provided the avant-garde with a vast source of provocative material. In an essay written in 1976 entitled "Some General Observations on the Problem of Cultural Colonialism," the art critic and social philosopher Kenneth Coutts-Smith addresses the history of cultural appropriation underlying avant-garde production. He argues that at the end of the 19th century after landscape and the "twilight territory of the Parisian `demimonde" had been exhausted as a source of subject matter for vanguard painters all vying for leadership of the avant-garde, the "primitive" emerged as a virtual well-spring of exploitable material. Facilitating the avant-garde's cultural colonialism, Coutts-Smith argues, were new theories concerning indigenous peoples developed by the natural sciences in the latter half of the 19th century:

> At various levels throughout late nineteenth century society, from the academic ethnologists and anthropologists, guardians of brand new sciences, to the frivolity of salons and dinner tables, an awareness of extra-European culture was penetrating. Peoples in distant countries and in `primitive' societies began to take on a substance more solid than that of the undifferentiated native. Suddenly, with the possibility of an almost limitless material ripe for stylistic adoption, the vertical take-off of modern art was assured....
> Within thirty to forty years not one corner of non-European culture remained untouched as a source of imagery; either geographically, the most obscure tribal totem or, temporally, the most shadowy Celtic dolmen and paleolithic cave.[7]

In another essay entitled "Ten Theses on the Failure of Communication in the Plastic Arts," also written in 1976,

Coutts-Smith couples avant-gardist cultural colonialism with political and economic state colonialism:

> It is interesting to note that the impact of ethnic and so-called primitive arts on the modern movement since its inception in expressionism and proto-cubism, paralleled the capitalist appropriation of art on a world-wide scale. We are conditioned to regard these events as having consisted of a series of ethnographic influences flowing *inward* from outside, toward the European centers of the avant-garde. Reflection, however, reveals that in reality the reverse process was occurring.[8]

The problematic issue of vanguard artists following in the steps of colonialism is frequently encountered in Marxian critiques. Often parallels are drawn between the phenomenon of capitalism and that of the avant-garde whereby both are seen as constantly in need of raw materials to package and market in order to perpetuate themselves; because both are always on the verge of collapse, both must continually colonize. Hadjinicolaou also constructs broad connections between the emergence of the phenomenon of the avant-garde and nascent forms of capitalism, and he points out the essentiality of "novelty" or the "new" to both. In "On the Ideology of Avant-Gardism," Hadjinicolaou locates the cooptive propensity of the avant-garde as arising out of a rivalrous battle for dominance:

> The phenomenon of avant-gardism is like a "speed-race" between the different avant-gardes who want to outstrip the known and the given; if one wishes to be in the avant-garde it is necessary to surpass the present as well as the other avant-gardes in this frenetic race to the other side of the river.[9]

It may be protested by those holding out for a notion of a oppositional avant-garde that the whole idea of novelty as a determining force trivializes complex and subversive avant-garde strategies. While I believe this is a legitimate objection, to ignore how important the "new" is to the phenomenon of avant-gardism is to skirt around the larger issue of how the ideology of the avant-garde is inextricably and problematically bound up with capitalism. This latter point will be taken up again in this thesis when exploring one possible cause for the surrealists' turning away from the use of African indigenous objects in avant-garde strategies towards objects produced by the aboriginal societies of North America.

An article that adds complexity to the interrelationship between avant-gardism, capitalism and "primitivism" is Thomas Crow's "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts." Like Coutts-Smith and Hadjinicolaou, Crow argues that the phenomena of avant-gardism and capitalism both depend upon novelty, departure and variation in order to prosper. And while Crow's essay is primarily directed towards the issue of vanguard artists' appropriation of low or mass culture in the late 19th century, his analysis offers insight into the issue of avant-gardism and primitivism. Drawing upon theoretical concepts borrowed from sociology, Crow defines the artistic avant-garde as a resistant subgroup or subculture arising out of the bourgeois class itself. This distinction is an important one for it confronts an understanding of the bourgeoisie as a monolithic whole, as a "homogeneous 'dominant' class" with a shared world

view.[10] Instead, we are presented with the notion of the bourgeoisie as a dominant group containing within it dissenting factions characterized by "disaffection and erosion of consensus...."[11] Crow argues that these subgroups, such as the artistic avant-garde, attempted, as part of a formulation of an oppositional identity, to locate and seize spaces perceived of as offering some resistance to increased standardization and rationality under industrialized capitalism. He discusses how sites of leisure became ideal for the articulation of an oppositional posturing; while such sites functioned as a kind of a safety valve or as places where disorder was tolerated and "permitted," they also remained "relatively unregulated," that is, as spaces where "contrary social definitions could survive and occasionally flourish."[12] Hence it is Crow's view that it is not simply the "new" or the "novel" that is being marketed in avant-garde art, but, instead spaces of social practice perceived of as *unalienated* which are then transformed into commodities and sold to other members of an estranged bourgeoisie. To be sure, Crow is not claiming that the bourgeoisie purchased avant-garde art solely for this reason. The very fact that he divides the bourgeois class into varied factions - some of which did not experience marked feelings of alienation - forbids such a generalization. Certainly, as Coutts-Smith has pointed out, the bourgeois consumption of avant-garde art was as well for investment and speculative purposes. In "Observations on the Problem of Cultural Colonialism" he describes the "art boom" or "a very lucrative

dimension of speculation" that arose in late 19th whereby "industrial and corporative marketing techniques allied to sophisticated promotional methods were applied to the merchandizing of art."[13] Like Crow, though, he also argues that the allure of avant-garde art was as well due to its appeal to an "increasingly alienated consumer society."[14] The cultural historian Pierre Bourdieu also warns against making any facile connections between the producers and consumers of culture. In his essay "The Field of Cultural Production, or The Economic World Reversed," Bourdieu stresses the complex web or "field" of interrelationships that surrounds and informs the material and symbolic production of art:

> Given that works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized, that is, socially instituted as works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such, the sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work. It therefore has to consider as contributing to production not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality...but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work - critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such....[15]

Bourdieu's analysis of art as "symbolic objects" calls attention to the complex web within which that which is deemed art receives it categorizations and its associations. Within this context, Crow's analysis of the relationship between the avant-garde's search for resistant spaces and the bourgeois patron is

of use in illuminating Bourdieu's call for an investigation of the social issues affecting the production and/or the display of objects. Crow observes:

> In its selective appropriation from fringe mass culture, the avant-garde searches out areas of social practice which retain some vivid life in an increasingly administered and rationalized society. These it refines and repackages, directing them to an elite, self-conscious audience.....
> Functionally then, the avant-garde searches out areas of social practice not yet completely available to efficient utilization and makes them discrete and visible.[16]

Crow's discussion of the avant-garde as packaging representations of vivid, unalienated social spaces, provides a basis for a more complex understanding of the oppositional potential that the so-called "primitive" had for a surrealist avant-garde in the 1930s and 1940s. That is, while Coutts-Smith rightfully points out how the rise of ethnography and anthropology provided a whole new range of exotic and novel subject matter for the artistic vanguard in the late 19th and early twentieth century, Crow's argument facilitates an understanding of how the "primitive" as subject matter could, for some viewers, offer imaginary glimpses beyond the vital leisure spaces of late 19th Paris back to the very *primordial* foundations of unalienated existence itself.

The Marxian *sociology of knowledge* taken up by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in <u>The Social Construction of Reality</u> is also useful when investigating the avant-garde's gravitation towards indigenous peoples as part of an oppositional strategy.

What emerges from Berger and Luckmann's analysis is a tension-laden interplay among intra-social resistant sub-universes, alternative symbolic universes, and the dominant symbolic order. The authors explore the conflict that occurs when one society is confronted with another in possession of a different history and an unfamiliar or contrary world view. This alternative symbolic universe, they contend, is far more dangerous to the dominant symbolic order than any deviant sub-group such as a leftist avant-garde:

> It is much less shocking to the reality status of ones own universe to have to deal with minority groups of deviants, whose contrariness is *ipso facto* defined as folly or wickedness, than to confront another society that views *one's own* definitions of reality as ignorant, mad, or downright evil.[17]

In this argument, resistant sub-groups simply refuse to abide by the institutional rules. While intra-social conflicts arise, the issues around which dissention is focused are understood by all parties involved. This is not the case when the dominant symbolic order has to contend with radically differing societies whose antithetical concepts, assumptions and practices challenge the absoluteness of its own universe:

> The appearance of an alternative symbolic universe poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable....The alternative universe presented by the other society must be met with the best possible reasons for the superiority of ones own. This necessity requires a conceptual machinery of considerable sophistication.[18]

The "conceptual machinery" which is described as working to articulate the dominant society's superiority systemizes the "other" through preexistent categories. One is reminded here of Edward Said's thesis on how the West - apart from its use of physical domination - "manages" other societies by reconstructing them through disciplines such as history, anthropology and ethnography. Often, while cultural imperialism is not the intent of those who participate in these sophisticated "machineries of universe-maintenance," to use Berger and Luckmann's term, domination is the end result of reformulating alternate societies within fully institutionalized conceptual frameworks.[19] Yet it is not only the dominant institutional order which is guilty of reconceptualizing the cultures of others in order to secure its own interests. As Marxian critiques of the avant-garde have pointed out, resistant sub-groups or subcultures also reconfigure alternate universes. But unlike the dominant symbolic order, these dissenting sub-groups, recognizing the subversive power of alternate societies, embrace, champion and evoke them in intra-societal conflicts. In doing so, however, these same sub-groups often inadvertently facilitate the imperialism of the dominant symbolic order. This is the case with surrealism; once indigenous cultures and practices became "surrealized," they were rendered more accessible and less threatening as a result of being lifted out of context and placed within a Western domain of meaning. When indigenous peoples were reconfigured in paradigms that could be understood by a segment of the viewing audience, these societies

were a step closer to assimilation even if these paradigms were antithetical to those of the dominant symbolic order.[20]

While the "primitive" was, no doubt, crucial to vanguard strategies, a question arises as to why the surrealist avant-garde would specifically turn its attention towards the indigenous peoples of North America. One of the key factors in this shift is that seemingly "dead" alternative symbolic universes were of little use as oppositional material; that is, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, peoples such as the Inuit and those of the Northwest Coast were thought of in France as still living out an "authentic" existence largely antithetical to that of the dominant symbolic order. Additionally, these societies had not been exhausted as source material by previous avant-gardes. More precisely, Picasso was well aware of the success of Gauguin's deployment of a modernist depiction of Polynesian peoples as a means of critiquing varied aspects of European society. By the early 20th century when such motifs had been wholly commodified and, hence, emptied of their critical potential, Picasso turned to African ethnographic objects as a new source of provocative subject matter. Controversy was the partial intent and result of Picasso's borrowings, a cooption which helped secure his notoriety. But by the mid-twenties, after other avant-garde groups had picked-over the remains, the so-called "dark continent" became increasingly commodified through the culture industry. James Clifford's work on how *negrophilie* swept through Paris in the 1920s offers a useful account of this phenomenon.[21] This whole encroachment process is

crucial when understanding why African motifs were rarely if ever touched again by the European avant-garde after the early 1930s, and why it was that members of the surrealist group began looking to North America for the heterogeneous "other." In making this claim I do not wish to imply that the varied societies of the South Pacific or those of Africa did not survive contact with the West. What is meant here is that amongst the artistic elite, non-Western cultures could become *as good as dead* if already exploited as subject matter by previous avant-gardes. Moreover, I do not intend to argue that the surrealists' shift in attention to the peoples of North America was simply due to reasons having to do with commodification: the evocation of these native societies, I believe, was primarily rooted in a surrealist embracement of communist anti-colonialist ideology in the mid 1920s.

The involvement of the surrealist avant-garde in anti-colonialist politics was certainly not unprecedented. As Patricia Leighton observed in her article "The White Peril and L'art Nègre: Picasso, Primitivism and Anti-Colonialism," Picasso aligned himself with anarchist groups who from 1905 to 1906 openly condemned atrocities committed by French Jesuits in Africa as part of their ruthless conversional campaign. This oppression, Leighton argues, prompted Picasso to include African tribal motifs in works such as *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* partly as an expression of protest.[22] But the anti-colonialism of the communist party to which the surrealists adhered was markedly

different than that of the anarchists. As Leighton points out, the communists themselves had a conversional agenda evident in their desire to bring socialism to the colonized peoples of Africa. A Marxist encroachment on indigenous peoples, however, did not begin with their attempt to foist socialism on African peoples in the early 20th century. It began back in the 19th century with Frederick Engels' proclamation that the aboriginal societies of North America represented the primordial stage of political communism.[23] The elaborate framing of these peoples within a socialist paradigm initiated by Engels would be perpetuated by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in the opening decades of the 20th century; collectively, these constructions would come to inform Breton's surrealist political strategies involving North American societies and their cultures in the 1930s and 1940s.

When investigating the exalted place given North American indigenous peoples within leftist ideology, it becomes clear that these societies were crucial to early formulations seeking to locate the primordial roots of communism. Nowhere is this more evident than in Engels' treatise <u>The Origins of the The Family and Private Property and the State</u> published in German in 1884, an extremely important text to socialists throughout Europe.[24] In order to gain some insight into how and why North American aboriginal peoples were framed within a socialist paradigm, it is fruitful to set Engels's text within the context of the latter part of the 19th century in Europe. Of particular importance in this matter are the evolutionary theories of

Charles Darwin and how they were used by Engels and others to legitimate constructions of indigenous societies as the earliest stage in the development of human society.

During the second half of the 19th century in Europe, a new *realpolitik* or toughness of mind emerged after a long series of failed revolutions. In this period, the idealism, utopianism and romanticism that had fueled the French Revolution of 1789 and that of 1848 began to be discredited. Many intellectuals, believing themselves emancipated from idealism, came to embrace philosophical materialism or the belief that all things mental or spiritual were outgrowths of physical or physiological processes. By the end of the 19th century, more and more people began to look to science not merely for an understanding of nature, but for insights into new possibilities for humankind's intersocial relationships. The intellectual mood of the period was reflected in the rise of positivism formulated in the writings of Auguste Comte. Comte contended that the 1789 and 1848 revolutions had suffered from an excess of metaphysical abstractions, empty words and unverifiable high flying principles. Science, he argued, must come to permeate all speculation about the nature of society. Not coincidentally, it was Comte who gave birth to the term "sociology" or the science of society. He proclaimed the period in which he lived as the final stage of the evolution of history, a scientific era in which faith would be replaced by factual knowledge. But perhaps the greatest influence upon late 19th and 20th century social and political thought was provided by Charles Darwin.[25]

When it comes to exploring a 19th century understanding of indigenous peoples and, as well, how they became entangled in European political debates, one of the most significant aspects of Darwinian theory is that it provided what was perceived as a "scientific" understanding of so-called "primitive" societies as representing the earliest stage in an evolutionary development which culminated in the modern Western state. While evolutionary models were not new, Darwin's theories bore the legitimacy of science, and, hence, began to be appealed to by a variety of groups for diverse reasons. In The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion, Adam Kuper describes the decisive influence of Darwin's evolutionary ideas on those writing on "primitive" societies:

> Darwin's The Origin's of the Species appeared in 1859. During the following two decades "a series of 'sociological' monographs appeared dealing with primitive society... Virtually all assumed a direct progress from primitive society through various intermediate stages to modern society.[26]

But Kuper provides a cautionary note pointing out that while ethnographers and anthropologists who published in these decades would frequently be considered as evolutionists in a Darwinian sense, they often found themselves in fundamental disagreement with the latter. He writes: "There is a paradox here, for Darwin's triumph stimulated a very un-Darwinian anthropology."[27] What is meant here is that Darwinian evolution did not imply an overall unified unfolding of history suggesting direction or progress. Instead, what was insisted upon was that it could not

be determined with any degree of certainty what the direction of any evolving species would be. Evolution, Darwin argued, was more of a random process governed by chance rather than by internal purposeful forces. That was, after all, why Darwin's ideas were so provocative. Moreover, Darwin asserted that the development of a particular species depended almost entirely upon environment thereby introducing notions of geographical isolation; both these ideas conflicted with an understanding of history as unilinear. Most anthropologists, Kuper claims, were much more likely to ally with Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theory which posited that "human history was a history of progress, and that all living societies could be ranked on a single evolutionary scale."[28] But, as Kuper goes on to explain, while all anthropologists or ethnographers may not have agreed with the particulars of Darwinian evolution as applied to human history, it was Darwin's principle of evolution *in and of itself* that achieved wide spread acceptance:

> I would not wish to overstate the case. Some early anthropologists were indeed directly influenced by Darwin. Rather more were inspired to adopt broadly evolutionist frameworks of argument.[29]

Once established, an evolutionary framework came to inform a whole variety of social, political, economic and cultural theories.

As Kuper observes, many of these treatises deployed evolutionary theory to sanction a much wider understanding of

"primitive" societies as representing the earliest stage of the
modern state:

> In the second half of the nineteenth century,
> Europeans believed themselves to be witnessing a
> revolutionary transition in the type of their
> society....Each conceived of the new world in contrast
> to 'traditional society' and behind this 'traditional
> society'[30] they discerned a primitive or primeval
> society.

Thus even if an abundant supply of exacting detail on indigenous
societies had come to the attention of 19th century Europeans it
may not have necessarily resulted in the distinct and widespread
belief that these same societies represented much earlier stages
in the development of the modern state; it was the evolutionary
paradigm that ultimately validated this belief. Once the
evolutionary model was firmly established it created a kind of
corridor allowing individuals to move back and forth in time
evoking "primeval" social, political, economic and cultural
practices in analyses of varied aspects of contemporary society.

Kuper's book describes how in the later half of the 19th
century, writers from varied disciplines - anthropology,
ethnography, sociology, law, economy - evoked "primitive"
beliefs and practices in commentaries on modern institutional
life. But in spite of the diversity of these treatises, Kuper
argues that in the 19th century a general consensus developed as
to the fundamental nature of "primitive" life which he refers to
as the *idea of primitive society*.[31] This wholly fictional
community, largely forged out of crude bits of ethnographic data
snatched from disparate colonized indigenous groups, was posited

as the primordial stage in the evolution of Western civilization. It was characterized as having no state, no monogamous family, and no private property; matriarchy not patriarchy was the rule, men and women were given to magic, organized under communism, totemism and clan groups, lived in a close relationship with nature and were fundamentally peaceful. And while by the late 19th century anthropologists such as Franz Boas would challenge the evolutionary framework that gave rise to this construct - a shift that will be discussed in Chapter Two - the *idea of primitive society* itself, Kuper argues, remained largely uncontested for more than four decades, utilized by a wide range of political groups both in support of and opposition to the dominant symbolic order.[32] Moreover, he contends that for almost all these 19th century writers, whatever their position on modern life, "primitive" society was nothing other than their own society "seen in a distorting mirror."[33] That is, they looked back through the corridor of evolution in an attempt to understand their own world: this they did "on the assumption that modern society had evolved from its antithesis."[34] Concerning the use of the "primitive" as "antithesis," Kuper explains:

> What each did, in effect, was to use it [primitive society] as a foil. They had particular ideas about modern society and constructed a directly contrary account of primitive society - or, rather, primitive society as they imagined it inverted the characteristics of modern society as they saw it.[35]

The *idea of primitive society* and its antithetical dimension are both crucial when approaching how and why North American aboriginal peoples came to be incorporated into socialist ideology in the writings of Frederick Engels.

It has been discussed how in the 19th century evolutionary theory facilitated the summoning up of some quality or virtue existent in a past stage of Western civilization perceived of as now regrettably lost to modern humankind. And while wholesale advocations that humanity ought to return to some previous age were rare, writings on indigenous societies were often permeated with idealizations and nostalgia often associated with such things as community, a simple spirituality or an abundance of leisure time. It has also been briefly noted how after a series of failed revolutions utopianism was discredited in an atmosphere of *realpolitik*. This distrust was particularly evident in the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Specifically, while both extolled earlier socialists such as Comte de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier as the founding fathers of socialism, these authors were faulted for creating detailed imaginary utopias which were juxtaposed to the existing dominant symbolic order. And it is at this moment that Marx and Engels attempted to establish the distinction between utopian and scientific socialism. However, in defense of these earlier socialists, Engels wrote in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that it was their limited perspective in the early

19th century that was largely responsible for the construction of these imaginary future societies:

> The historical situation ...dominated the founders of socialism. To the crude conditions of capitalistic production and the crude class conditions corresponded crude theories. The solution of the social problems, which as yet lay hidden in undeveloped economic conditions, the Utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain. Society presented nothing but wrongs; to remove these was the task of reason. It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda, and wherever it was possible, by the example of model experiments. These new social systems were foredoomed as Utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure phantasies.[36]

Rejecting utopianism in favor of philosophical materialism, Engels concludes, "To make a science of socialism, it had to be placed upon a real basis."[37] This materialist denouncement of utopias, I believe, raises at least two important matters. The first is the difference between utopian thinking and *utopias* proper. While utopias were denounced as fantasies arising purely from the realm of the imagination and hence as having no real connection to either the material conditions or the needs of the proletariat, *utopian thinking*, or the ability to imagine a society that was different to the one that currently existed, was essential to the revolution. Now all one could say about the future society was that it would be classless, and that control of the means of production would pass into the hands of the proletariat. Any detailed model of a future society such as Fourier's *phalange* was now frowned upon as wholly imaginary and

non-scientific. Marx and Engels's prohibition was likely influenced by Darwin's theory of biological evolution which insisted that it could never be determined with any degree of certainty what the next incarnation of an evolving species would be. One was allowed to speculate based upon the species' past history but that was all. The second matter is that once fully constituted utopias were prohibited as part of a socialist strategy, a key critical device in the arsenal against the dominant symbolic order was momentarily lost: one could no longer juxtapose a fully imaginary idealized society to the currently existing flawed one. Partly due to the void left by this prohibition, I believe, socialism, now "scientific," turned its attention to the so-called empirical data flooding into Europe. At this moment, the lost future socialist utopia was retrieved through the cooption and idealized reconstruction of past or "disappearing" North American indigenous societies as evincing socialist virtues. Moreover, this transference strategy - largely inaugurated by Engels - drew heavily upon the *idea of primitive society*. Indeed, fully seven out of the eight characteristics of this fictional community were touted as socialist attributes. The commandeering of these traits, however, does not necessarily mean that they were fully oppositional to the dominant symbolic order. As discussed, so-called "primitive" existence was viewed nostalgically by the bourgeoisie as a simpler pre-industrial age free from the constraints of the modern industrialized state. Hence, what more properly occured was a competition for these characteristics

whereby early socialists annexed ethnographic data on indigenous peoples in order to lend "scientific" credence to their doctrine. This sort of cooption, therefore, represents a significant instance of how constructions of tribal societies were appropriated in an effort to legitimize differing political agendas.

In The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels, combining ethnographic musings taken from the journals of Marx along with those found in Ancient Society written by the American ethnographer Lewis Henry Morgan in 1877, initiated an argument culminating in the claim that the native communities of North America offered proof that the primordial forms of human society were *politically* communistic in nature. Engels's thesis was in part, I believe, a reflection of the battle for primacy and legitimation in an arena of competing political ideologies during a period of transition after a long series of violent upheavals in the 19th century.

One of the key strategies in Engels's argument about humankind's primordial communistic origins was the coupling of communism with matriarchy. Such a tactic was, in part, a socialist challenge to the late 19th century European bourgeois concept of the family and associated notions of domesticity and private property.[38] It was a confrontation that marked the origins of a socialist based feminism, a set of oppositional views that will be of importance when investigating André Breton's Arcanum 17 in Chapter Five of this thesis. Engels argued that up until very recently there had been a false

understanding of the historical development of the family since the "science of history" had only gone back as far as the Old Testament for its findings. This failing had resulted in the mistaken belief that the patriarchal family was the oldest form of societal organization. Furthermore, Engels charged that these studies were wholly ideological since their ultimate purpose was to provide legitimation for "the bourgeois family of today."[39] Morgan's thesis, on the other hand, was the first, Engels claimed, to provide a "true" account of the history of the family since his research on the aboriginal societies of America had demonstrated that the patriarchal family had, in fact, been preceded by the matriarchal community. As this was the case, the patriarchal family was not a natural institution but, instead, the product of bourgeois ideology. As Kuper remarks, Engels claimed that in its modern form the family was "just a way of organizing private property - it 'was the first form of the family to be based not on natural but on economic conditions - on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property."[40] Moreover, the modern bourgeois monogomous family was not to be regarded as morally superior since as an institution it enabled an economic exploitation of women by men "comparable to the exploitation of one class by another."[41] And it is here that the 19th century bourgeois ideas of domesticity were heavily critiqued. Engels argued that not only did the patriarchal family largely confine women to the home thereby excluding them from entering the realm of social production, the domestic work they performed - now largely hidden from view -

was no longer even acknowledged *as* labour. As such it was tantamount to slavery.[42] In calling attention to the unpaid domestic labour performed by women inside the home, Engels was able to account for their oppression in "materialist" or socialist terms.

In opposition to the wholly impoverished place of women within the institution of the patriarchal family, Engels invoked the power he believed women once held in the primordial matriarchal communities of North America. He launched into this argument by first praising the importance of Morgan's wholly revolutionary findings concerning the matriarchal roots of humankind:

> Through the gens of the American Indians, he [Morgan] was enabled to make his second great advance in field of research. In this gens, organized according to mother right, he discovered the primitive form out of which had developed the later gens organized according to father right, the gens as we find it among the ancient civilized peoples. The Greek and Roman gens, the old riddle of all historians, now found its explanation in the Indian gens, and a new foundation was thus laid for the whole of primitive history....
> This discovery of the primitive matriarchal gens as the earlier stage of the patriarchal gens of civilized peoples has the same importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy....That this opens up a new epoch in the treatment of primitive history must be clear to everyone. The matriarchal gens has become the pivot on which the whole science turns; since its discovery we know where to look and what to look for in our research.[43]

The role that evolutionary theory played here was to blast a tunnel right through antiquity back to the very primordial roots of Western civilization. Armed with the belief that society at

its origins was matriarchal in nature, the modern patriarchal family and the state apparatus which supported it could now be offered as evidence that humankind had strayed a far distance from its beginnings. Morover, Engels, employing ethnographic data on the Iroquois found in <u>Ancient Society</u>, argued that at this primordial stage, it was the supremacy of women and the domestic labour they performed that had ensured an essentially communistic - organizationally and politically - society.[44] In her introduction to <u>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</u>, Eleanor Burke Leacock discusses Engels's conception of how primitive communistic societies were in fact rooted in and defined by a domestic type economy:

> In primitive communal society, the distinction did not exist between a public world of men's work and a private world of women's household service. The large collective household *was* the community, and within it both sexes worked to produce the goods necessary for livelihood. Goods were as yet directly produced and consumed; they had not become transformed into "commodities" for exchange, the transformation upon which the exploitation of man by man, and the special oppression of women was built.[italics hers][45]

Accordingly, the matriarchal society with its communistic households and communal sharing of property originally stood as an obstacle to all developments leading to the emergence of the capitalist state such as the patriarchal family, the enslavement of women and the coopting of surpluses for private individual use.

As to the specific nature of men's labour in these very early clan communities, Engels claimed that "it was the man's

part to obtain food and the instruments of labour necessary for the purpose."[46] And because the clan was that of the mother and not of the father since it was the women who chose men from outside the community, if for some reason the man wanted to leave the group all he could take with him were the tools he made. The women, on the other hand, retained the property, livestock, and all of the household goods. Engels, though, is somewhat vague as to who owned the products of the men's tools while they resided within the clan. He hints that because the men possessed the tools of production they also owned the resultant products. But he cautions the reader by remarking, "What is certain is that we must not think of him as a property owner in the modern sense of the word."[47] Within the clan itself - an extended polygamous communistic household - all goods produced, Engels argued, were ultimately regarded as the common property of the community at large. Moreover, when surplus wealth was produced, the men could not gain control over it or insist that it go only to their children as an inheritance since in the matriarchal clan - where polygamy not monogamy was the rule - children were not considered as belonging to the men but to the community who collectively cared for them. As Engels describes it, children "could not inherit from their father because they did not belong to his gens within which the property had to remain...his own children were disinherited."[48] But as the clan came to produce substantial surpluses, Engels tells us that men became more solicitous towards the products of their tools of labour. Lured by the greater material wealth now

circulating within the community, they decided to take steps to insure that they and their children would come to own it. What followed, Engels declares, was the *original* revolution.

In a rather long and convoluted argument, Engels speaks of an *original* revolution which resulted in the defeat of the female sex, an event which saw men overthrow women in favor of themselves and their own children. At this precise moment, Engels declares, one could find the origins of patriarchy, and with it, the rise of the state, the family, private property, class distinction and the oppression of women:

> Mother right... had to be overthrown, and overthrown it was....The reckoning of descent in the female line and the matriarchal law of inheritance were thereby overthrown, and the male line of descent and the paternal law of inheritance were substituted for them....The overthrow of mother right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glossed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form; in no sense has it been abolished. [italics his][49]

Thus in Engels' treatise we are told of a previously overlooked revolution in human history where matriarchy succumbed to patriarchy resulting in a shift from shared communal property to private property, from the communal clan group to the patriarchal family, and, eventually, to an elaborate state apparatus which ensured and perpetuated these changes. Furthermore, monogamy in Engels' writings became a political

issue which had everything to do with domination and nothing to do with advanced morality; monogamy, he claimed, was the means by which men could enslave women and be assured of which children were their own so that both the tools of production and the ensuing wealth would be passed on only to their heirs.

And finally, it is with Engels that we see the feminization of the proletariat. He describes the contemporary family and its links to the larger modern social order of the 19th century in this way:

> In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy without any need for special legal ties and privileges. Within the family he is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat.[50]

Thus according to Engels's socialist "anthropology," the grim vestiges of that original revolution were everywhere to be seen in the modern "civilized" world. But vestiges were not enough to conclusively demonstrate that humankind at its origins was matriarchal or that an original revolution had occurred whereby the power once held by women was taken away by men. Consequently, in an effort to offer definitive proof, Engels directed the reader's attention towards actual "living" North American indigenous societies in which mother right, he claimed, still existed. What is more, he imbued these societies with a contemporary political charge by accusing present day Western colonialists of systematically attempting to eradicate mother right in the few remaining societies in which it could be found:

> As to how and when this revolution took place among
> civilized people, we have no knowledge. It falls
> entirely within prehistoric times. But that it *did*
> take place is more than sufficiently proved by the
> abundant traces of mother right which have been
> collected, particularly by Bachofen. How easily it is
> accomplished can be seen in a whole series of American
> Indian tribes where it has only recently taken place
> and is *still* taking place under the influence, partly
> of increasing wealth and a changed mode of life...and
> partly of the moral pressure of civilization and
> missionaries. [italics mine][5]

Very significantly, then, the original revolution was not simply

something that had occurred long ago, but instead, was still

ongoing. By critiquing the oppressive measures of Western

colonialism in this way, Engels can also be regarded as

lamenting the disappearance of these "living" primordial

communistic societies.

When speaking of North American indigenous societies as

replacing the utopian constructs of early socialist figures such

as Fourier or Saint-Simon, a certain amount of caution must be

exercised. Certainly, these societies were not *directly* being

presented as having established an accomplished social order

toward which humankind ought to evolve. Indeed, early North

American aboriginal societies were conceived of as somewhat

"barbaric," and their economies were thought of as undeveloped.

Nevertheless, Engels's discussion of these peoples is permeated

by romanticism, nostalgia and idealizations, an admiration which

seems to have persisted in the writings of some subsequent

"Marxian" anthropologists. For example, in Leacock's 1972

introduction to The Origin of the Family, Private Property and

the State she accepts Engels's construction of North American

aboriginal societies as classless and contends that the lack of exploitation in these communities ought to make us somewhat envious:

> The fact that communism preceded the emergence of classes in human history should not be taken to mean, in some Rousseauesque fashion, that man has lost a utopia...Yet the glimpses into the quality of interpersonal relations that we are afforded from accounts of North American Indians...before they had experienced the alienation from the produce of their labour, and divisiveness of being placed in fundamental competition with their fellow men (whether as exploiters, exploited, or "hangers-on,") do indeed make us somewhat envious. Behind the enormous variety of environmental adaptions and cultural embroideries which can be observed among these peoples, there did seem to be an underlying sense of self-respect and an ability to draw great satisfaction from work and personal relations. Perhaps most bitter to industrial man is the divisiveness which permeates relationships with those most dear, and the enmity between husbands and wives, parents and children.[52]

Then there are the accolades of Engels himself especially when it comes to his characterizations of the Iroquois. After placing these peoples within a praiseworthy matriarchal paradigm, Engels turned his attention to their Confederation claiming it represented the "most advanced social organization achieved by any Indians at the lower stage of barbarism."[53]

Equally relevant when exploring socialist representations of North American indigenous societies is that Engels not only portrayed the Iroquois' past in a highly romantic and nostalgic way, he described the Confederation as both *existent* and as embodying key socialist ideals that humankind ought to move toward in the future. Declaring that the Iroquois Confederation was in fact "still living today" and that "we have the

opportunity of studying the organization of a society which still has no state," he heaps an avalanche of praise upon the whole organization declaring:[54]

> And a wonderful constitution it is...in all its childlike simplicity. No soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, no kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons or lawsuits - and everything takes its orderly course. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole of the community affected, by the gens or the tribe....the household is maintained by a number of families in common and is communistic; the land belongs to the tribe, only the small gardens are allotted provisionally to the households - yet there is no need for even a trace of our complicated administrative operations with all its ramifications...there cannot be any poor or needy - the communal household and the gens know their responsibilities toward the old, the sick, and those disabled in war. All are equal and free - the women included.[55]

So it would seem that in the atmosphere of scientism that swept late 19th century Europe, the utopia of pure imagination was replaced in Marxist ideology by yet another fanciful utopia: the North America indigenous society.

Finally, when it comes to an investigation of the central place that several North American indigenous societies would come to hold within socialist ideology it is essential to observe that throughout <u>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</u> Engels constructed indigenous peoples from all over North America as evincing socialist virtues. For example, when discussing the vitally important matriarchal foundations of these primordial communist communities Engels claims that: "The Indians of the *whole* [italics mine] of the North America at the time of its discovery were organized under

mother right."[56] This broader understanding of the primordial foundations of communism as located amongst *varied* North American indigenous peoples is highly significant when exploring how and why the surrealists came to evoke diverse native groups from North America such as the Inuit, the peoples of the Northwest Coast and, eventually, the native societies of the American Southwest as oppositional to the dominant symbolic bourgeois order.

Engels, then, constructed an indigenous way of life as oppositional to the modern state. Certainly, he was not alone in this sort of manipulation since other individuals and groups also marshalled indigenous peoples in commentaries - both pro and con - on current institutions. Indeed, as Kuper points out, strategies coopting ethnographic and anthropological data were so commonplace by the end of the 19th century that a totally homogeneous "tribal other" emerged. One of the central questions posed by Kuper is if anthropologists began to openly challenge the homogeneity of the *idea of primitive society* as early as the 1920s, why then did this construct of the primitive prevail in one form or another well into the mid and later twentieth century. Indeed, as Robert Berkhofer notes in his article, "White Conceptions of Indians," the anthropologist Franz Boas and his students began to question a monolithic representation of indigenous societies early in the twentieth century. And while a move towards relativism within the discipline of anthropology will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis, it is worth noting here Berkhofer's point that Boas's

move away from an evolutionist framework in the early 20th
century and his subsequent emphasis upon the distinct nature of
cultures, had the potential to disrupt cross cultural
comparisons.[57]

> ...the work of Franz Boas and his students...sought to
> replace the conjectural approach of evolutionary
> history with a more scientific method based upon
> empirical research. These scholars stressed detailed
> fieldwork among specific tribes over theoretical
> speculation and condemned the comparative method for
> ripping cultural elements out of their context to fit
> a preconceived scheme. In their own research they
> emphasized the wholeness of cultures over comparisons
> across cultures, examined the distribution of traits
> rather than their origins, and preferred the mapping
> of cultures in the New World to the elaboration of a
> cross-societal taxonomy based upon evolution.[58]

Perhaps one of the reasons why Boas's stressing the "wholeness
of cultures" and his challenge to the "natural" evolutionary
steps between stages of human development often tended to be
disregarded was that these notions posed an obstacle to
commentaries which had a vested interest in an evolutionary
model which posited that indigenous communities represented an
earlier form of the modern state.

As discussed, one of the groups seeking to coopt indigenous
peoples for varied oppositional purposes was the artistic avant-
garde. But what we see with Picasso, as opposed to Gauguin, was
an evocation of tribal cultures based, in part, upon a
convergence of avant-gardist and political ideologies. The
specific site of this confluence was a stand against
colonialism. As we shall see, this trend became especially
pronounced when the surrealists openly aligned themselves with

the communists in the late 1920s in opposition to the French government's colonial abuses in Africa. At this moment, one is confronted with an avant-garde who by attaching itself to a dissenting political ideology which coopted indigenous peoples was able to further secure and legitimize its own appropriation of tribal cultures in oppositional strategies. Clearly, the two ideologies were markedly different. However, the adopting of an established ideology by a sub-group in order to further its own agenda is not all that uncommon and is discussed by Berger and Luckmann. They note that dissenting sub-groups will often embrace an ideology because of "specific theoretical elements that are conducive to its interests."[59] However, because that ideology is, strictly speaking, not theirs, variations often follow largely as a result of the adoptive groups taking "elements" it needs and slighting those it doesn't. As Berger and Luckmann write:

> Of course once the ideology is adapted by the group in question...it is modified in accordance with the interests it must now legitimate. This entails a process of selection and addition in regard to the original body of theoretical propositions. But there is no reason to assume that these modifications have to affect the totality or the adopted doctrine. There may be large elements in an ideology that bear no particular relationship to the legitimized interests, but that are vigorously affirmed by the carrier group simply because it has committed itself to the ideology.[60]

And while I am not arguing that the surrealists aligned themselves with communism solely because this ideology embraced indigenous peoples and vehemently denounced their colonial

oppression, what cannot be overlooked is how the framing of North American indigenous peoples within a socialist paradigm by Engels in the 19th century and, subsequently, by Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim in the early 20th century would have been extremely compelling for a left wing avant-garde in need of a new "primitive" to evoke.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. Nicos Hadjinicolaou, "On the Ideology of Avant-gardism." *Praxis* #6 (1982), p.44.

2. *Ibid.*, p.45.

3. *Ibid.*, p.46.

4. *Ibid.*, p.46.

5. *Ibid.*, p.46.

6. *Ibid.*, p.45.

7. Kenneth Coutts-Smith, "Some General Observations on the Problem of Cultural Colonialism," in The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art Susan Hiller ed. (London, Routledge Press, 1991),p.28.

8. Kenneth Coutts-Smith, "Ten Theses on the Failure of Communication in the Plastic Arts," *Praxis* Vol 3 (1976), p.89.

9. Hadjinicolaou, p.42.

10. Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts." in Pollock and After: The Critical Debate Francis Frascina ed (New York: Harper and Row Publishers),p.246.

11. *Ibid.*, p.246.

12. *Ibid.*, p.246.

13. Coutts-Smith, p.18.

14. In this case, Coutts-Smith argues that the "arts have, to a certain extent, been required to fill a role of secular spiritualism in the vacuum left by the demise of religion." Coutts-Smith, p.18.

15. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or The Economic World Reversed" in Randal Johnson ed. The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature (London:Polity Press, 1993),p.37.

16. *Ibid.*, p.257.

17. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Anchor Books),p.107.

18. *Ibid.*, p.108.

19. *Ibid.*, p.104.

20. One is reminded here again of Crow's point in "Modernism and Mass Culture" that the avant-garde in its endless search for opposition material makes visible and hence vulnerable areas of intra or extra-social practices. He argues that: "Functionally, the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry: it searches out areas of social practice not yet completely available to efficient utilization and makes them discrete and visible." This latter observation also applies to avant-gardes making visible and hence available for commodification the social practices and objects of other cultures. Crow, p.257.

21. See James Clifford, <u>The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press),pp.117-185.

22. See Patricia Leighton, "The White Peril and L'Art Nègre: Picasso, Primitivism and Anti-Colonialism," *Art Bulletin* (Dec. 1990), pp.609-630.

23. The *Communist Manifesto* was one of the first political treatises to systematically point out and condemn the West's economic exploitation of indigenous peoples. In the treatise, Engels and Marx initiated a critique of capitalism in its expansionist mode declaring:

> The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere....
>   The bourgeoisie by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization....It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <u>Manifesto of the Communist Party</u> (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986),pp.37-38. Certainly there are problems here. Besides the authors use of the 19th century term "barbarian" to represent aboriginal peoples, they themselves were engaged in a kind of colonialism through their efforts to impose socialism on the world's colonized peoples. But as Edward Said has pointed out in his book <u>Orientalism</u>, even though Marx's perception of colonized peoples and his solution to their economic exploitation was orientalist in nature, what

ought to be given some consideration is the fact that Marx's "humanity, his sympathy for the misery of people, are clearly engaged." Edward W. Said, <u>Orientalism</u> (New York:Vintage Books, 1979), p.154.

24. Like the *Manifesto for the Communist Party*, Engels's text was quickly published in many languages including Italian in 1885, Rumanian in 1885, Danish in 1888, English in 1891 and in French in 1892. As for the *Manifesto* itself, a French version was circulated shortly after the Revolution of 1848. A second version was published in *Le Socialiste* in 1885.

Driven by their conversionary zeal, Marx and Engel sought to publish their writings in a wide variety of languages. For example, while in London in 1882 Marx wrote in the preface to the German edition that an Armenian translation of the <u>Manifesto</u> had been offered to a publisher in Constantinople. However, he remarks that "the good man did not have the courage to publish something bearing the name of Marx and suggested that the translator set down his own name as author, which the latter, however, declined." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <u>Manifesto of the Communist Party</u> (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), p.22.

25. Darwin's <u>The Origins of the Species</u> of 1859 and his <u>The Descent of Man</u> written in 1871 greatly contributed to the altered vision of the natural and social realm that arose during the latter half of the 19th century. Among other things, Darwin argued that all species were mutable and that no species was destined to remain the same. He proposed that all forms of plant and animals developed from others that went before them, and that all life was interrelated and subject to the same laws. Moreover, Darwin contended that all species changed not by any intelligent or purposeful activity in the organism, but by a kind of chance; this randomness was perhaps the most upsetting notion about evolutionary biology since it challenged the basic understanding of nature that had stood for centuries. Nature was no longer conceived of as in a state of harmony, but instead, as a scene of struggle with no fixed forms and in unending flux. Everlasting change was now the law of the cosmos and everything seemed merely relative to time, place or environment. Politically, the radical impact of Darwin's ideas arose out of the way in which they became popularized and loosely applied to the social realm in Social Darwinism, a movement whose ideas were often vague and diverse, used by the Right as well as the Left to justify racial or class superiority. For example, the bourgeoisie, emerging triumphant out of the social struggles of the 19th century, used notions taken from evolutionary biology such as "struggle for existence" or "the survival of the fittest" to explain its victory and to justify its dominance over the working classes. These same notions were used to explain supposed inevitabilities such as small economic enterprises giving way to big business, or to justify the occupation of the lands of so-called socially and racially inferior peoples by the more evolved white European nations.

Theories of racial superiority incorporating Darwinian biological hypotheses carried on well into the 20th century and were of particular importance in the formulation of Nazi ideology. Perhaps one of the most politically revolutionary effects of Social Darwinism was the idea that no social institution had to be accepted as something permanent, as enduring for all time. Society began to be conceived of as a living developing organic whole in which all parts were unified through meaningful internal relationships and it was possible for one part to become redundant or even harmful to the rest. Social institutions, it was argued, were meant to evolve; those that did not could become obsolete or redundant. Thus, the institution of the church or the existence of classes, the state, current forms of economic practices could all be conceived of as irrelevant or harmful to the forward development of society. Such notions posed a major threat to the institutional life of the dominant symbolic order.

26. Adam Kuper, <u>The Invention of Primitive Society: The Transformation of an Illusion</u> (London: Routledge Press, 1988), pp.1-2.

27. *Ibid.*, p.2.

28. *Ibid.*, p.3. Several things are worth noting here. The first is that while Herbert Spencer must be regarded as a precursor of Darwin with his theorem that all organic life evolves from a state of homogeneity to heterogeneity, from the simple to the more complex, he was at the same time greatly influenced by Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis, employing it in his later works in biology, sociology, psychology and ethics.

29. *Ibid.*, p.3.

30. *Ibid.*, p.4.

31. Concerning this consensus Kuper writes: "It is striking how much agreement there soon was even on matters of detail." Kuper, p.6.

32. Kuper's intention here is not simply to contextualize: his agenda is to eradicate once and for all a phantasmal understanding of indigenous societies that anthropologists and those in other disciplines have manipulated for over a hundred years:

> ...it is one thing to set an argument in its context; it is quite another to pretend that it cannot be rejected. I start, on the contrary, from the supremely unrelativist assumption that the theory of primitive society is on a par with the history of the theory of aether. The theory of primitive society is about something which does not and never has existed. One of

> my reasons for writing this book is to remove the
> constitution of primitive society from the agenda of
> anthropology and political theory once and for all.
> (This is quite unashamedly a story with a moral.)
> Kuper, p.8.

Thus, it could be said that both the subject matter and the objective of Kuper's text are germane to this investigation which critically explores yet another manifestation of the deployment of the theory of the primitive. For example, throughout Maurer's thesis terms such as *totemism* or *animism* or constructs like the "primitive," "primitivism" or the "primitive mentality" are accepted as universally valid constructs. Because this is the case, arguments for affinity between surrealist thought and activities and those of indigenous peoples appear far less problematic. Turning directly to Maurer's thesis, he describes his agenda in this way:

> It is my belief that in their search for precedents
> for their convictions, the Surrealists were attracted
> to the world view of primitive man, studied
> increasingly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth
> centuries by a variety of ethnographers,
> anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers. As
> it was described by the scholars who were
> investigating it, the primitive mentality directly
> embodied those very qualities which the Surrealists
> were desperately trying to integrate into their own
> lives. It is therefore only around these many points
> of philosophical concurrence, and such related
> concepts as myth, animism, totemism, and magic, that
> my examination of the studies of primitive culture and
> their bearing on the genesis of Surrealism will
> revolve.

Maurer's statement is a tricky one. On the surface it appears as if he is investigating the surrealist attraction to indigenous societies as they were constructed in the 19th and 20th century. However, when one reads the body of his text, there is little critical engagement of these portrayals or of surrealist cooption. As a result, a theory of primitive society remains essentially intact. As stated earlier, Maurer's exploration of these issues adds a great deal to the understanding of the surrealists' interest in indigenous societies. However, a sizable amount of the investigative material in his thesis is directed towards the establishment of affinity. In opposition to Maurer's agenda – and this cannot be stated strongly enough – the basic premise of this work is that no actual sites of congruence exist between the surrealists and the "primitive." Certainly, one reason for this – as Kuper so clearly demonstrates – is that the latter does not exist. The whole matter of surrealism and primitivism is tied instead to the strategies of avant-gardism and tactics of evocation not to any

actual loci of affinity. Evan MacIyn Maurer, <u>In Quest of the Myth: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Surrealism and Primitivism</u> (University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D., 1974),pp.7-8.

33. *Ibid.*, p.5.

34. *Ibid.*, p.5.

35. *Ibid.*, p.240.

36. Robert C. Tucker ed. <u>The Marx-Engels Reader</u> (New York: W.W. Norton &Co.), p.687

37. *Ibid.*, p.694

38. While Engels would pursue women's issues to a greater degree than Marx, the attack on the late 19th bourgeois understanding of family, education and domesticity largely began in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1847. Together, Marx and Engels argued that the family was an unnatural and exploitive institution which transformed women into a "mere instrument of production," there to perform domestic labour for which they were not paid. Moreover, Marx and Engels challenged bourgeois claims concerning the moral superiority of the family and monogamous relations by charging that in reality not only did the bourgeois males avail themselves of the sexual services of the wives and daughters of the proletariat who were driven to prostitution due to economic destitution, they as well took the greatest pleasure in "seducing each other's wives." Hence, bourgeois marriage was not monogamous but instead "a system of wives in common." While Marx and Engels claimed that there was no need to create a "community" of women separate from the category of the proletariat since such a community had "existed almost from time immemorial," in order to expose the concealed hypocrisy of the family and to bring women back into the public sphere, they proposed that women's rights be created through "an openly legalized community of women." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <u>Manifesto of the Communist Party</u> (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), pp.51-2.

39. Frederick Engels, <u>The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State</u> (New York:International Publishers, 1990), p.74.

40. Kuper quotes here from Engels. p.73.

41. *Ibid.*, p.73.

42. The socialists were not the only ones condemning the subjugation of women in the private domestic realm. In Donald M. Lowe's History of Bourgeois Perception (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) he details the varied 19th century challenges to the bourgeois legal consolidation of the privacy of the family, notions of domesticity and the "Victorian" ideal of femininity. He notes that a good deal of this criticism was spurred on by literature defining the behavior of the "proper Victorian lady." These works, it was argued, only served bourgeois ideology by further demarcating male public space from the private space of the family to which the female was confined. Lowe claims that the sheer abundance of these texts in England and France resulted in the ideology of the family being "a bit too shrill." As a result, it began to be attacked from a variety of quarters. Of this literature and the opposition he declares:

> It tried to camouflage repressed tensions in the family, as well as compensate for the family's estrangement from the outside world. Any critique of the bourgeois family had to take into account that private space which sustained it, and the impact of society at large upon the private space. Feminist critique, utopian critique, socialist-anarchist critique – each became more thorough, as it rejected the private-public spatial separation in bourgeois society.

As Lowe points out, sharp criticism was not simply generated by the socialists; indeed, one of the more oppositional texts of the time – besides that of Engels's – was John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women written in 1869. In it, Mill denounced how "women's legal subordination made her a slave of the father and the husband." Lowe, pp.70-74.

43. Engels, pp.74-75 & 82-83.

44. As has been noted by Kuper, Morgan's research on the Iroquois was originally designed to give credence to American democratic political institutions. In The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion, Kuper includes excerpts from Ancient Society where it is stated:

> Out of the ancient council of chiefs came the modern senate; out of the ancient assembly of the people came the modern representative assembly...out of the ancient general military commander came the modern chief magistrate, whether...an emperor or a president, the latter being the natural and logical result.

Kuper notes that "the constitution of the United States is therefore the logical and natural flower of the order of the gens." Clearly Engels's subsequent use of Morgan's theories

underscores how related constructions of the "primitive" could be used to legitimate very different political causes. Kuper, p.71.

45. Eleanor Burke Leacock in her introduction to <u>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</u> (New York: International Publishers, 1990),p.33.

46. Engels, p.119.

47. *Ibid.*, p.118.

48. *Ibid.*, p.119.

49. *Ibid.*, pp.120-121.

50. *Ibid.*, p.137.

51. *Ibid.*, p.120.

52. Leacock, p.25.

53. *Ibid.*, p.156.

54. *Ibid.*, p.157.

55. *Ibid.*, pp.157-8.

56. *Ibid.*, p.151.

57. Robert F. Berkhofer, "White Conceptions of Indians" In <u>History of Indian-White Relations</u> Wilcomb E. Washburn ed. (Washington:Smithsonian Institution 1988), p.543.

58. Ibid., p.543.

59. Berger and Luckmann, p.124.

60. *ibid.*, p.124.

CHAPTER TWO

The Surrealist Map of the World: The View From France

Attention paid to the aboriginal societies of North America by the surrealists is amply evident in the notorious reconfiguration of accepted world geography known as the *Surrealist Map of the World*. While the map defies a singular reading, several peculiarities are highly relevant to this thesis. The original drawing which appeared in the journal *Variétiés* in June of 1929, entitled "Le Surréalisme en 1929," was labelled "Le monde au temps des surréalistes."[1] Obvious are the map's geographical distortions. Russia, and Mexico are magnified most likely due to recent socialist triumphs there. The prominence of China was in all probability the result of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, and the subsequent acceptance of Russian communist advisers into the country in 1923. Africa appears quite small. While this may seem peculiar given that the surrealists were protesting against French governmental abuses in North Africa around the time the map was constructed, the continent's greatly reduced size was likely due to the fact that by 1929, African tribal motifs - for the surrealists at least - had been tainted by the forces of cultural commodification. Thus, the amplification in scale of regions such as Alaska, Greenland, Baffin Island, Labrador and Haida Gwaii now represented a gaze directed towards "new

primitive" peoples such as the Inuit and the indigenous societies of the Northwest Coast.

Interestingly, the enlarged size of areas such as Russia, China, Alaska and the Northwest Coast seems also the result of the map makers apparent use of *map projection* - the projection of a globe to a flat map - developed by the Flemish geographer Gerardus Mercator in the late sixteenth century. As is typical when using this method, the geographical scale of land masses located in higher latitudes becomes badly distorted. Undoubtedly, the deployment of Mercator's projection which has lead to the "natural" enlargement of countries and regions in the northern hemishpere of particular importance to the surrealists is reflective of a certain playfulness so often encountered in the group's practices. But this sort of witticism, I believe, should not detract from the more serious political implications of the map.

Certainly, the diminished size of Africa does not mean that members of the surrealist group abandoned their stance against French imperialism in Africa. To interpret the map in this way is to ignore the contradictions and ambiguities that arise when encountering an avant-garde in possession of both an artistic and political agenda. That is, while the surrealists railed against French colonial abuses in Africa - and continued to do so throughout the 1930s and 1940s - as members of an artistic avant-garde in need of new primitive to evoke, they turned to tribal peoples who, for the most part seemed not to have been incorporated into oppositional strategies by other avant-garde

groups. And as has been discussed in Chapter One, these same indigenous societies also served the surrealists' political agenda since Engels had framed them within a socialist paradigm.

But perhaps most important for this thesis is that by the 1920s, North American aboriginal peoples signaled in the *Surrealist Map of the World* had become additionally imbued in France with a leftist charge by Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim, two of the country's leading intellectuals. Both continued to portray these indigenous societies as acting out an existence that was economically, politically and morally antithetical to industrialized capitalism.[2] As Breton and other members of the surrealist group were fully committed to a Marxist stand against Western imperialism by 1925, it is unlikely that French socialist portrayals of these peoples would have escaped their notice. Also of importance in this matter is that both Durkheim and Mauss constructed objects made by North American indigenous societies as non-alienated and as having a socially transformative power; and as we shall see in Chapter Three, by 1929 Breton was collecting objects produced by the Inuit and the peoples of the Northwest Coast. Since these representations were crucial in the formulation of surrealist oppositional avant-garde left wing strategies, it is important to investigate in some detail how and why North American aboriginal groups became further infused with socialist significance in France during the opening decades of the 20th century.

One of the first French intellectuals to bring North American indigenous societies directly into the troubled social,

political and economic arena in France in the early 20th century was Emile Durkheim.[3] Durkheim was one of the most influential intellectuals in France at the turn of the century; today, he is considered - along with Marx and Max Weber - as one of the founders of sociology. Politically, Durkheim was a socialist of a conservative ilk. More precisely, he was a guild socialist. Like so many other left leaning intellectuals of the age, Durkheim was disillusioned by the gross materialism, rampant individualism and alienation within modern life. He maintained that in a society dominated by industrial capitalism an increased division of labour had all but destroyed social solidarity. Appealing to ethnographic data for validation, Durkheim contrasted "primitive" and modern societal forms arguing that within the primordial foundations of society, community had been prior to the individual. In doing so, he thoroughly rejected the utilitarianism of Hobbes and Bentham which proposed that the individual and his or her self-interest had from the earliest times superseded the interest of the collective. Durkheim argued that in its first form society was utterly unalienated due to a shared or common value system manifested in the *conscience collective*. The term *conscience collective* while similar to the idea of a collective consciousness did not possess exactly the same meaning. Specifically, the *conscience collective* was not simply the passive repository of the beliefs of the community, it was that which compelled the individual to act in a morally accountable

way within society. The coercive ability of the *conscience collective* was due to the fact that it was simultaneously rooted in and exterior to society. In the <u>The Division of Labor in Society</u> of 1893, Durkheim describes the concept in this way:

> The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the *collective* or *common conscience*.....it has specific characteristics which make it a distinct reality....It is, in effect, independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains. Moreover, it does not change with each successive generation, but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with one another. It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them. It is the psychical type of society, a type which has its properties, its conditions of existence, its mode of development, just as individual types, although in a different way....As the terms, collective and social, are often considered synonymous, one is inclined to believe that the collective conscience is the total social conscience, that is, extend it to include more than the psychic life of society....[4]

The process Durkheim describes here whereby the collective beliefs of society attain "objective" status is taken up by Berger and Luckmann in their discussion of *externalization* and *objectivation*. In a chapter entitled "Society as Objective Reality," they elaborate upon how social phenomena become experienced as objective reality. The passage is insightful when approaching the objective quality of the *conscience collective*:

> An institutional world...is experienced as an objective reality. It has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection. It was there before he was born, and it will be there after his death. The

> institutions are *there*, external to him, persistent
> in their reality, whether he likes it or not....They
> resist his attempts to change or evade them. They have
> a coercive power over him....[5]

Durkheim argued that as societies moved towards industrial capitalism, the increased *division of labour* and the concomitant rise of individualism supplanted a shared collectivist perspective thereby shredding the moral fabric of society. Now, the individual was no longer bound by or accountable to the community at large.

Durkheim's charge that the increased *division of labour* was that which had destroyed the *conscience collective*, especially as manifested in "primitive" societies, was another in a series of leftist arguments against classical economic theory espoused by the disciples of Adam Smith. Very briefly, Smith argued that what was most necessary to the advancement of productivity in industrialization was the specialization of workers' tasks, or, an increase in the *division of labour*. While a *division of labour* existed in all societies, Smith contended that the efficiency of labour could be greatly improved if tasks performed by a single worker could be subdivided into simple, repetitive operations carried out by large numbers of individual workers in privately owned factories. The resultant burgeoning of commodities, he argued, would result in increased profits which could be ploughed back into industry facilitating further profitable activity. Smith's economic theories, however, had a decidedly political component. At a time when the bourgeoisie

was attempting to break free from the grip of the aristocracy, Smith argued that an increase in commercial profits in privately owned businesses would cause a rapid rise in the general wealth of society thereby advancing individual liberty. Individuals pursuing their own interests through *laissez-faire* economics would inadvertently bring affluence to all members of society thereby liberating them from the abuses of governmental power.

Out of Smith's treatises arose the dictum that the individual pursuit of self-interest led to the collective good. Marx himself agreed with Smith up to a point. While arguing that the increased wealth and prosperity of the bourgeoisie had indeed promoted societal liberty, he declared that the historical stage of capitalism and the bourgeois class and the emancipatory social function they had served had now passed. More particularly, the continued pursuit of individual self-interest through *laissez-faire* capitalism no longer resulted in the collective good since now the bourgeoisie were hoarding the wealth that the workers' labor had produced. Targeted as rationales for the bourgeoisie's abuse of power were 19th century neoclassical theories of utility, economic treatises in which discussions of the social consequences of the economic base had conveniently disappeared. As such, they became bourgeois ideological constructs *par excellence*, serving only to perpetuate an economic system characterized by continued exploitive class relationships. In his text <u>Socialism</u> written in

1895-6, Durkheim, like Marx, condemned the disappearance of a concern for the collective good in 19th century economic theory:

> ...it is the collectivity which should control... [economic] activity. In other words...social life should be at one with industrial life. But by seeing the latter as only combinations of individual interests, the disciples of Smith... at one stroke rob it of all social character, and arrive at the strange conclusion that there is nothing in society clearly social. For they have withdrawn from it all the old content - namely, the passion of national glory, the respect for common beliefs, etc. - and have put in its place only things and feelings of a private order.[6]

Since the *division of labor* seemed inevitable as the economic base became more complex, new societal forms were needed that would overcome rampant individualism and the almost complete lack of social accountability. While Marx's solution was the socialist revolution, the more conservative Durkheim advocated a coming together of citizens in occupational groups or associations, an organizational mode known as guild socialism. These groups, it was argued, would tend to the moral and occupational development of the individual while finding ways to restrain individualism proper. Eventually, these associations would become so efficient and far reaching that the state would become almost nonexistent, there only to settle disputes. The withering away of the centralized power of state, Durkheim argued, was essential to the reemergence of the shared collective values that he believed had once existed in "primitive" communities. While he did not view the latter as wholly democratic in nature, he observed in The Division of Labour in Society that the lack of a centralized government in

"primitive" societies was accompanied by an absence of individualism and the presence of a collective morality:

> We have seen...that this effacement of the individual has as its place of origin a social type which is characterized by a complete absence of all centralization. It is a product of that state of homogeneity which distinguishes primitive societies. If the individual is not distinct from the group, it is because the individual conscience is hardly at all distinguishable from the collective conscience.[7]

Durkheim's theorizations show him to be a reformist rather than a revolutionist. As a remedy to the rampant, irresponsible individualism under bourgeois capitalism, the guild offered a peaceful means of ensuring against the emergence of the individual as *the* social unit of society while at the same time allowing for the development of individuality under its tutelage.[8]

Durkheim's writings arose out of and, in a sense, were encouraged by constant class warfare in France. Social unrest was understood by Durkheim as a protest against a loss of social accountability on the part of the bourgeoisie; workers' strikes were construed in <u>The Division of Labor in Society</u> as societal imperatives seeking the restoration of shared social bonds and a common morality:

> Men have long dreamt of finally realizing in fact the ideal of human fraternity. People pray for a state where war will no longer be the law of international relations, where relations between societies will be pacifically regulated, as those between individuals already are, where all men will collaborate in the same work and live the same life. Although these aspirations are in part neutralized by those which have as their object the particular society of which

we are a part, they have not left off being active and
are even gaining in force. But they can be satisfied
only if all men form one society, subject to the same
laws.[9]

Yet the problem remained of how the *conscience collective* could ultimately be restored to society. It is at this point that human activity associated with the sacred, especially as manifested in "primitive" societies, became central to Durkheim's vision of social transformation. In <u>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</u> of 1912, Durkheim constructed the sacred as a site from which social change could be enacted. This advocacy marked a departure in thought from <u>The Division of Labour in Society</u>, and would come to have a profound effect upon individuals such as Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille.

Between the writing of <u>The Division of Labour</u> in Society in 1893 and <u>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</u> in 1912, it may have appeared to Durkheim that a move towards solidarity within the Socialist movement in France indicated that humankind was struggling to recuperate a lost sense of community based upon a shared system of values. Specifically, in the early 1890s the French Socialists were split into six competing groups consisting of five organized parties and a number of Independant Socialist deputies. However, under the influence of Jean Jaurès, over the next decade these factions would become fused into one large unified party. Jaurès, was a moderate and a reformist who, like Durkheim, hoped that a moral advancement on the part of the bourgeoisie might forestall a total class war. However, Jaurès was also committed to the unification of the proletariat and he

argued that what had stood in its way was constant strife amongst varied socialist factions.

Jaurès's primary rival within the French Socialist movement was Jules Guesde, a doctrinaire Marxist committed more to revolution than reform. In an attempt to settle their differences concerning the path the Socialist party in France ought to pursue, the two leaders argued out their positions at the Socialist International at its Amsterdam congress in 1904. While Guesde was victorious, he and Jaures joined forces in 1905, and together they formed the Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvriere (SFIO), a unified socialist party which declared itself revolutionary rather than reformist. However, as a result of Jaurès's political guile, his position of power as the leading socialist tribune in the Chamber and his editorship at *l'Humanite*, it was he who would come to influence the political direction of the party; while clinging to its policy of nonparticipation in bourgeois cabinets, the SFIO did not assume a revolutionary posturing but, instead, it pursued a democratic, anti-doctrinaire and reformist path until the assassination of Jaurès in 1914. But while unification was promising and reforms were instituted under the leadership of the SFIO, worker's unrest persisted. Thus even though Durkheim was likely encouraged by a trend towards solidarity, there was still the need to cultivate shared collective values and to address social ills under capitalism. And it was in this more anti-doctrinaire atmosphere that Durkheim sought alternatives to violent revolution by arguing in the <u>Elementary Forms of the</u>

Religious Life that the economic base had to be acted on from

an alternate and more effective social realm: the sacred.[10] Thus

while this text seems to be devoted to a comparative study of

"primitive" religions, it was in actuality a highly political

sociological treatise.

Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life was

not meant to be a study of vanished ways of life since he fully

intended to fashion comparisons between "living" primitive

communities and his own society in the early 20th century.

Indeed, in his introduction Durkheim differentiated between

disciplines such as history, ethnology and sociology, explaining

that while the former two were primarily concerned with

enumerating the practices of past societies, sociology was

interested in the religious forms of alternate realities

situated spatially or temporally closer to modern European life.

It was their "nearness," Durkheim argued, which bestowed upon

them the potential - in the hands of sociologists - to effect

change to society:

> In this book we propose to study the most primitive
> and simple religion which is actually known, to make
> an analysis of it, and to attempt an explanation of
> it....
>   We shall set ourselves to describe the
> organization of this system with all the exactness and
> fidelity that an ethnographer or an historian could
> give it. But our task will not be limited to that:
> sociology raises other problems than history or
> ethnography. It does not seek to know the passed forms
> of civilization with the sole end of knowing them and
> reconstructing them. But rather, like every positive
> science, it has as its object the explanation of some
> actual reality which is near to us, and which
> consequently is capable of affecting our ideas and our
> acts.[11]

Durkheim was driven to the realm of the sacred, in part, I believe, because it was perceived as the only site resistant to the impermanence, constant strife and crude materialism of modern capitalist society. In a word, it was *uncommodifiable*.

Durkheim was not about to allow his ascribing primacy to the sacred over all other realms of human activity to be dismissed as a reactionary retreat into metaphysics or as a revival of Christian values. One of the most radical components of Durkheim's writings, one reflective of his and the SFIO's anti-clericalism, was his charge that the church was no longer capable of fulfilling its religious function in contemporary society. It had, Durkheim argued, lost its relevance to the evolving organic societal whole. In a particularly denunciatory passage he declared:

> The great things of the past which filled our fathers with enthusiasm do not excite the same ardor in us, either because they have come into common usage to such an extent that we are unconscious of them, or else because they no longer answer to our actual aspirations; but as yet there is nothing to replace them. We can no longer impassionate ourselves for the principles in the name of which Christianity recommended to masters that they treat their slaves humanely, and, on the other hand, the idea which it has formed of human equality and fraternity seems to us to-day to leave too large a place for unjust inequalities....we desire another which would be more practicable; but as we cannot clearly see what it should be nor how it could be realized in facts. In a word, the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born. But this state of incertitude and confused agitation cannot last for ever. A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effervescence, in the course of which new ideas arise and new formulae are found....[12]

Throughout his text, he endeavored to make it clear that his study of religion was thoroughly rooted in the scientific method. Moreover, Durkheim differentiated between the methodology and subject matter; science was characterized as objective, incomplete and passive, whereas the sacred was portrayed as dynamic and active, and as a force capable of effecting social change. In regard to his "scientific" privileging of religion in <u>The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</u>, Durkheim explained:

> It is said that science denies religion in principle. But religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in a word it is a reality. How could science deny this reality? Also, in so far as religion is action, and in so far as it is a means of making men live, science could not take its place.
> ...faith is before all else an impetus to action, while science, no matter how far it may be pushed, always remains at a distance from this. Science is fragmentary and incomplete; it advances slowly and is never finished; but life cannot wait.[13]

Revealed once again is Durkheim's urgent agenda of determining *the* locus of effective human action during a continued period of social unrest. The securing of the sacred as that site in an age of skepticism where science had all but replaced religion as the source of explanatory completeness necessitated constant legitimation throughout the text. In the above passages Durkheim implied that sociology had an active role to play in society. No longer confining its task to analyzing the structure of social relationships manifested in social interactions, or even ascertaining general laws of social change, Durkheim imbued sociology with a much more ambitious role. Once having

determined sociologically - that is "scientifically" - that it was religion which ultimately incited human action, he advocated that the sacred must be restored, *in a new form*, if badly needed socioeconomic changes were going to occur. While it may seem that Durkheim was in conflict with socialism by championing religious feelings as those most capable of arousing human action, such was not the case. Indeed, Engels also brought the transformative power of religious belief to bear on the question of socialism in an essay written in 1893 entitled "On the History of Early Christianity." Comparing Christianity in its very early stages with modern socialism, he imparted a religious character to the proletarian movement:

> The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed peoples: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor peoples deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery....Both are persecuted and baited, their adherents are despised and made the objects of exclusive laws, the former as enemies of the human race, the latter as enemies of the state, enemies of religion, the family, social order. And in spite of all persecution, nay, even spurred on by it, they forge victoriously, irresistible ahead.[14]

Moreover, throughout this essay Engels emphasizes how feelings of religious fervor induced by early Christianity were similar to those generated by the modern socialist movement. Of early Christianity he declares:

> We therefore see that the Christianity of that time, which was still unaware of itself, was as different as

> heaven from earth from later dogmatically fixed
> universal religion of the Nicene Council; one cannot
> be recognized in the other. Here we have neither the
> dogma not the morals of later Christianity, but
> instead a feeling that one is struggling against the
> whole world and that the struggle will be a victorious
> one, an eagerness for the struggle and a certainty of
> victory which are totally lacking in Christians of
> today and which are found in our time only at the
> other pole of society, among the socialists.[15]

Also of importance when considering Durkheim's writings on the sacred is Engels's effort to make distinctions between organized Christianity and Christianity at its origins. This carefully constructed separation seems directed towards his desire to secure religious zeal as having a powerful social transformative effect much like the feelings generated by socialism. After having dismissed certain utopian elements in both early Christian and socialist writings, Engels characterized the task of modern socialists in this way:

> The rest consists in exhorting the faithful to be
> zealous in propaganda, to courageous and proud
> confession of their faith in the face of the foe, to
> unrelenting struggle against the enemy both within and
> without....[16]

And finally, endorsing the words of the French historian and critic Ernest Renan, Engels wrote, "The French revolutionary communists...referred to early Christians long before Renan's words: "If I wanted to give you an idea of the early Christian communities I would tell you to look at a local section of the International Workingmen's Association."[17]

Durkheim strove to legitimate his theory of social change by appealing to ethnographic and anthropological data gleaned

from varied indigenous societies including those from the North American continent. Using this data, he critiqued historical materialism by assigning primacy to the sacred over the economic as that which determined all aspects of social existence. In doing so, the sacred not the economic became regarded as a "total social fact." The sacred, or the religious life of the community, included all phenomena viewed and experienced as transcending the realm of the everyday reality of work and domestic duties or what Durkheim referred to as the *profane*. While it was asserted that the split between the sacred and the profane was a universal phenomenon, Durkheim did not regard the two as unrelated, as existing on two autonomous planes. Instead, the sacred was a social phenomenon containing within it, and, hence, capable of affecting, all other social phenomena including human economic activity. In an article entitled "Anthropology and Modernism In France: From Durkheim to the College de sociologie," the cultural historian Michele Richman has described the all pervasive status given to the sacred by Durkheim:

> Religion, he [Durkheim] insists, is the most archaic yet complete mode of social life. Responsible for generating sacred and ideal representations, as well as profane and material ones, it is the form from which all others - aesthetic, political, economic - emerge....[18]

That the sacred was primary, Durkheim argued, was plainly evident in "primitive" religious ceremonies which served to

reinforce the collective values of the community and the individual's place within it.

The power of the sacred to permeate and affect all other social phenomena, however, was not entirely due to its being the repository of collective societal values. Nor was it wholly the result of religious festivals which drew the community together continually reinforcing those values. The power of the sacred to compel citizens to act in a morally responsible way ensuring the preservation and continuation of the community was located in its capacity to physically and psychologically *transform* the individual through specific activities and objects associated with religious ceremonies. The role that the object played in the metamorphosis of the human consciousness is vividly explained in two key passages in <u>The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</u>. In the first, Durkheim describes the power that objects such as masks had in transfiguring the psychic life of the community:

> ... when arrived at this state of exaltation, a man does not recognize himself any longer. Feeling himself dominated and carried away by some sort of an external power which makes him think and act differently than in normal times, he naturally has the impression of being himself no longer. It seems to him that he has become a new being: the decoration he puts on and the masks that cover his face figure materially in this interior transformation, and to a still greater extent, they aid in determining its nature. And as at the same time all his companions feel themselves transformed in the same way and express this sentiment by their cries, their gestures and their general attitude, everything is just as though he really were transported into a special world, entirely different from the one where he ordinarily lives, and into an environment filled with exceptionally intense forces that take hold of him and

> metamorphosize him. How could such experiences as these...fail to leave in him the conviction that there really exist two heterogeneous and mutually incompatible worlds....The first is the profane world, the second, that of sacred things.[19]

In the second passage, Durkheim describes how the metamorphosis of the individual psyche that occured as a result of ceremonies in which these objects were used was that which led to total social transformation.

> We have seen that if collective life awakens religious thought on reaching a certain degree or intensity, it is because it brings about a state of effervescence which changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies are over-excited, passions more active, sensations stronger; there are even some which are produced at this moment. A man does not recognize himself; he feels himself transformed and consequently he transforms the environment which surrounds him.[20]

Durkheim's portrayal of "primitive art" such as masks made by indigenous artists as having an enormous capacity to "figure materially" in the social transformation of the community would have had a particularly strong impact upon the surrealists since they viewed their own artistic practices as having exactly the same sort of capability.

An understanding of Durkheim's "sacred" sociology as a response to the conditions of modernity in France can be explored further by referring back to Tom Crow's article "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts." Crow notes how in France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, sites of leisure served as sort of a safety valve, as places where contrary activity was tolerated. These spaces were perceived as

existing alongside yet outside a world marked by increasing alienation, regimentation, and standardization under economic capitalism. Crow discusses how and why these relatively unregulated spaces where "contrary social definitions could survive and occasionally flourish" were at times seized by oppositional subgroups such as the avant-garde.[21] In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, one finds certain parallels between leisure and religious space. While sacred rituals were not to be regarded as a form of leisure in "primitive" societies, they partly functioned, Durkheim argued, as "a sort of recreation for men."[22] This was the case since during sacred rituals the mind was freed from the encumbrances of everyday life, and, like leisure activity, sacred activity defied notions of utility and rationality. Concerning the former, Durkheim explained that because "the world of religious things was a partially imaginary world," activities associated with it prompted the human imagination or "the free creations of the mind."[23] Regarding the latter, while much energy was devoted to the enactment of specific rituals, there was at the same time a "surplus" energy that exhausted itself in an outpouring of pleasure:

> A surplus generally remains available which seeks to employ itself in supplementary and superfluous works of luxury, that is to say, in works of art. There are practices as well as beliefs of this sort. The state of effervescence in which the assembled worshippers find themselves must be translated outwardly by exuberant movements which are not easily subjected to too carefully defined ends. In part, they escape aimlessly, they spread themselves for the mere pleasure of so doing, and they take delight in all

> sorts of games. Besides, insofar as the beings to whom the cult is addressed are imaginary, they are not able to contain and regulate this activity; the pressure of tangible and resisting realities is required to confine activities to exact and economical forms. Therefore, one exposes oneself to grave misunderstandings if, in explaining rites, he believes that each gesture has a precise object and a definite reason for its existence. There are some which serve nothing; they merely answer the need felt by worshippers for action, motion, gesticulation. They are to be seen jumping, whirling, dancing, crying and singing, though it may not always be possible to give a meaning to all this agitation.[24]

Here, Durkheim constructed the sacred activities of indigenous peoples in such a way that challenged a bourgeois economic understanding of surplus. Specifically, surplus was not that which was retained and ploughed back into business in order to produce further profit but, instead, was that which was non-directed or which escaped "aimlessly." Moreover, besides using terms associated with leisure such as "games" and "recreation," Durkheim portrayed gestures incited by religious ceremony as defying the constrained and directed movements associated with mass production since they were "not easily subjected to too carefully defined ends."

The sacred as revealed in the religious practices of primitive societies was even more desirable than leisure as a social space anithetical to capitalism. Conceived of as existing wholly beyond the profane, it was absolutely uncommodifiable. Moreover, it was constructed not simply as a passive space where contrary behavior was enacted, or at the very least, tolerated, but as a site which could act back on society with transformative power. And while I'm not claiming that

Durkheim's writings were a prime causal factor, the avant-garde did leave spaces of leisure behind in order to occupy the supposedly more "resistant" sacred spaces of primordial societies from which they launched attacks upon the varied ills of the dominant symbolic order. As for the surrealists, while they would have been suspicious of Durkheim's conservative brand of socialism, they would have undoubtedly seized upon his "scientific" construction of indigenous societal forms as antithetical to industrialized capitalism with its cherished notions of rationality and utility.

A specific dimension of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life relevant in investigations of surrealist collecting and exhibiting practices and the Surrealist Map of the World is that while Durkheim primarily drew upon ethnographic data from the tribes of Australia and North America, it was the latter which emerged as privileged. The preferential treatment of indigenous societies such as the Haida, the Tsimshian, the Salish and the Tlinkit can be found in Durkheim's discussion of the primacy of the totemic object within these "primitive" communities. Hence it is here that we see a more specific conjoining of the preeminence of the indigenous object discussed earlier with the aboriginal peoples of North America.[25]

Durkheim assumed the earliest forms of religion to be totemic. He claimed that totemic markings in tribal communities representing "the species of things which serve to designate the clan collectively" were especially evident in Northwest Coast

societies where "animal forms, sometimes combined with human forms" were carved into stone or tall wooden posts.[26] These totemic posts were so omnipresent in Haida societies, Durkheim argued, that "the Haida village gives the impression of a sacred city, all bristling with belfries or little minarets."[27] The importance of the totem as the sign of the primordial communal unit or clan was reflected, Durkheim argued, in the fact that totemic decorations could be found even on the utensils of everyday use. There was, however, a hierarchy of totemic objects the most exalted of which were those associated with religious festivals:

> These totemic decorations enable us to see that the totem is not merely a name and an emblem. It is in the course of the religious ceremonies that they are employed; they are a part of the liturgy; so while the totem is a collective label, it also has a religious character. In fact, it is in connection with it, that things are classified as sacred or profane. It is the very type of sacred thing.[28]

Durkheim constructed these objects in a way that would have held great appeal for the surrealists since he argued that they represented the outward manifestation of the ideas of those who fashioned them:

> It cannot be doubted that these designs and paintings also have an aesthetic character; here is the first form of art....It even becomes clear that men commenced designing, not so much to fix upon wood or stone beautiful forms which charm the senses, as to translate his thought into matter.[29]

Hence at a time when the avant-garde was desperately attempting to evade the modern era's evacuation of the social relevance of

art through capitalist commodification, Durkheim legitimized art's social role by arguing "scientifically" that in its "first form" art was not merely decorative, it was wholly integrated into the life of society.

An objection might be raised here that in an earlier quote Durkheim characterized art as "superfluous" and as "objects of luxury." But what was most likely meant by these characterizations was that art was not a basic necessity of life but rather that which came after the initial material conditions essential to human existence had been met. Art was superfluous in that it exceeded that which was sufficient not as something which was non-useful. This sort of understanding of the material progression of societies was based in Marxist theory. But Durkheim departed from Marx by insisting that art had a concrete role to play in the transformation of society since artistic practices were a crucial factor in the interior transformation of the psyche within societies characterized by their communalism. Hence, Durkheim imbued the "first form of art" not merely with social import, but more importantly, with *socialist* import; indigenous objects as the exemplars of art became simultaneously imbued with both a transformative and a leftist charge. Durkheim's portrayal of the role that the aesthetic object played in humankind's earliest societies was a contributing factor, I believe, in the surrealists' cooption of indigenous objects, and in their exhibiting practices where such objects were displayed alongside surrealist art objects.

North American indigenous societies, Durkheim contended, represented the few remaining communities still offering unadulterated glimpses into the prominent function of totemic objects and the religious ceremonies associated with them since they maintained a way of life largely resistant to the deleterious effects of Western colonization. Comparing North American aboriginal peoples to those from Australia whose traditional ways were represented as rapidly disappearing due to white contact, Durkheim remarked:

> All that has been said of the totem in Australian societies is equally applicable to the Indian tribes of North America. The only difference is that among these latter, the totemic organization has a strictness of outline and a stability which are not found in Australia....The difference is due to the superiority of their social economy. From the moment when these tribes were observed for the first time, the social groups were strongly attached to the soil, and consequently better able to resist the decentralizing forces which assailed them. The example of America thus enables us to explain even better the organization at the base of the clans. We would take a mistaken view, if we judged this only on the present conditions in Australia. In fact, it is in a state of change and dissolution there, which is not at all normal; it is much rather the product of a degeneration which we see, due both to the natural decay of time and the disorganizing effect of the whites.[30]

Durkheim's contention that the peoples of North America were better able to resist the forces of colonialism due to a way of life firmly rooted in the "soil" was likely derived from Marxist discussions of the peasantry. Marx argued that because pre-capitalist relations of production were chiefly agricultural and since the peasantry had possession of the primary means of

production, namely land, capitalism could only free up the peasantry for use as wage laborers either for capital agriculture or for industry if it dispossessed the peasantry of that land or, as Durkheim remarks, through "decentralizing forces." Applying this model to North American indigenous societies, it seemed to Durkheim that their powerful attachments to the land made their way of life more resistant to colonialist exploitation.

Durkheim's privileging of specific aboriginal groups such as the societies of the Northwest Coast may have been the result of a shift that occurred within anthropology - initiated by Franz Boas - towards a more relativist approach. Specifically, while evolutionism was the framework for anthropology by the late 19th century, in the 1880s Boas began to reject the evolutionary model in favor of a more relativist and pluralist one. Subsequently, increased importance was placed upon the distinct nature of indigenous cultures and fieldwork was encouraged as a way of more closely determining the myriad of cultural traits that constituted a particular society's distinguishing characteristics.[31] Indeed, Boas himself spent a considerable length of time among the peoples of the Northwest Coast. Equally important in this matter was that by the early 20th century Boas and his students placed more emphasis in their studies on the way aboriginal peoples had existed in the past than the way they lived at the time they were being studied.[32] Significantly, the demarcation point between the present and the past was contact with the West. To employ the words of Robert

Berkhofer in his article "White Conceptions of Indians," this distinction "led to the designation of cultural areas by the ways of life considered most characteristic before the coming of White peoples."[33] One of the wider consequences of this focus was that greater value began to be placed upon native groups whose cultures were thought of as more "authentic" due to their perceived ability to fend off the forces of so-called civilization, a differentiation that Brian Dippie refers to in The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy as one between the "Vanishing" versus the "Non-Vanishing" American.[34] Thus the localizing and the privileging of peoples such as those of the Northwest Coast in the writings of Durkheim may have been the result of this shift in anthropological procedure and emphasis.

Another intellectual who portrayed North American indigenous societies as still extant and oppositional to industrialized capitalism was Marcel Mauss. Mauss was a widely known and highly respected scholar in France. He was instrumental in the founding of Emile Durkheim's school *Année Sociologique* and he wrote several important works such as *Essai sur la nature et fonction du sacrifice* in 1899, "De quelques formes primitives de la classification" in *Année Sociologique* of 1901-3, and, most importantly, "Essai sur le don" in 1925. Mauss also had a profound influence on subsequent French anthropologists including Claude Levi-Strauss. James Clifford, in the The Predicament of Culture, underscores the considerable

impact that Mauss had on intellectuals in France from the 1920s on:

> Mauss's pervasive influence is hard to pin down since it took the form of oral inspiration in his teaching at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Institut d'Ethnologie.
>
> Nearly every major French ethnographer before the mid-fifties...was the beneficiary of Mauss's direct stimulation. From the perspective of today's intellectual regime, where publication is at a premium and where any idea of value tends to be guarded for the next article or monograph, it is astonishing, indeed moving, to note the tremendous energies that Mauss poured into his teaching at Hautes Etudes. A glance through the schools *Annuaire*, where course summaries are recorded, reveals the extraordinary wealth of learning and analysis made available to a few students....Mauss gave courses on topics from Siberian shamanism to Australian oral poetry to Polynesian and West Coast Indian ritual.[35]

Clifford also remarks upon Mauss's leftist leanings referring to him as "a committed socialist."[36] Certainly, in light of the factions existing within the Left in France in the 1920s, Mauss's political partisanship requires more careful qualification; Mauss, like his uncle and mentor Emile Durkheim, was a guild socialist. As such, he was a conservative and a reformist rather than a revolutionary. Still, as Clifford notes in the quote cited above, Mauss is somewhat difficult to pin down:

> Some recall Mauss as loyal Durkheimian. Others see a forerunner of structuralism. Some see primarily an anthropologist, others a historian....Some stress Mauss's iconoclasm, others his coherent socialist-humanist vision.[37]

Clifford suggests that all of the above interpretations have validity and are not "irreconcilable."[38] What will be advanced here is that in 1925 Mauss was playing the role of a moderate socialist and that the fundamental purpose of "Essai sur le don" was to evoke the primacy of indigenous life as legitimizing the initiatives of the reformist Left who came to power in France in 1924.

Marcel Mauss was surrounded by social unrest. In 1920, a new wave of strikes took place in France involving transport workers, miners and engineers. Mauss, like Durkheim, blamed workers' unrest on social injustices originating out of the economic base. His socialist rhetoric in <u>The Gift</u> is unmistakable when he proclaims:

> It appears that the whole field of industrial and commercial law is in conflict with morality. The economic prejudices of the people and producers derive from their strong desire to pursue the thing they have produced once they realize that they have given their labour without sharing in the profits.[39]

Throughout the 1920s, the French government was run for the most part by coalitions of parties on the conservative right, parties well disposed toward the army and church. And while the left was far too factionalized to emerge as the dominant political party until the mid 1930s, from 1924 to 1926 the Radical Socialists came to power. However, due to their moderate inclinations they favored compromise with private enterprise and vehemently defended individual liberties. They were, though, staunchly anti-clerical and fiercely advocated progressive socialist

reforms especially in the wake of continued workers' strikes. The reformist Left in France was greatly inspired by other socialist victories throughout Europe.[40] Mauss, for example, praised welfare initiatives in England in <u>The Gift</u>, comparing them with similar reforms that were being implemented in France. The following passage from Mauss's essay exemplifies the non-revolutionary agenda of the reformist Left:[41]

> French legislation on social insurance, and accomplished state socialism, are inspired by the principle that the worker gives his life and labour to the community and partly to his bosses....The State, representing the community, owes him and his management and fellow-workers a certain security in his life against unemployment, sickness, old age and death.
>
> In the same way some ingenious innovations like the family funds freely and enthusiastically provided by industrialists for workers with families, are an answer to the need for employers to get men attached to them and to realize their responsibilities and the degree of material and moral interest that these responsibilities entail. In Great Britain the long period of unemployment affecting millions of workers gave rise to a movement for compulsory unemployment insurance organized by unions. The cities and the State were slow to support the high cost of paying the workless, whose condition arose from that of industry and the market: but some distinguished economists and captains of industry saw that industries themselves should organize unemployment savings and make the necessary sacrifices. They wanted the cost of the workers' security against unemployment to form a part of the expenses of the industry concerned.[42]

In maintaining that the state must intervene on behalf of the workers, Mauss seems more the enemy of *laissez-faire* capitalism: rather than calling for a revolution that would see the State – and eventually the worker – take total control of the means of production, Mauss advocated industrial reform. But most

importantly for this thesis, in "Essai sur le don," Mauss argued that the emergence of socialist reforms indicated a return to shared communal values such as those found in indigenous societies and the recuperation of a primordial collectivist economy in which the interests of the individual were defined and confined by the needs of society at large. Mauss called this primordial economy the system of *total prestations*, and he singled out the potlatch practiced by the peoples of the North West Coast and the Inuit as the paradigmatic example of this system at work.

Mauss, like Durkheim, was interested in the notion of total social phenomena, those which contained and influenced all other dimensions of social existence. In <u>The Gift</u>, Mauss identifies the system of gift giving or *total prestations* as such a phenomenon. The gift, in and of itself, was presented as the center of a system of total exchange in which reciprocity and obligation were central features; while the gift could be abstractly understood as freely given, in reality it was never free since it always gave rise to feelings of indebtedness that could only be assuaged through return. As the system of *total prestations* was a variation of a Durkheimian "total social fact" since it was viewed as directly impacting upon economic, social, legal, religious, political phenomena as well as kinship-based relationships, Mauss argued that what arose as a result was a whole myriad of obligations that permeated all of society. In the following passage, Mauss describes systems of *total*

prestations emphasizing their social breadth and the reciprocity and obligations they gave rise to:

> In the systems of the past we do not find simple exchange of goods, wealth and produce through markets established among individuals. For it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations;...Further, what they exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value. They exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances and feasts....Finally, although the prestations and counter-prestations take place under a voluntary guise they are in essence strictly obligatory, and their sanction is private or open warfare. We propose to call this the system of *total prestations*.[43]

Here the system of *total prestations* is not described in and of itself. Instead, it is carefully constructed as antithetical to neo-classical economic theory with its privileging of the individual. As an economic concept, *total prestations* was one that confronted a narrow capitalist understanding of the mechanics and societal function of the marketplace and the meaning of the commodity as something produced and exchanged purely for economic reasons.

In his study, Mauss deployed ethnographic data on a variety of indigenous peoples including those from Melanesia and Polynesia. But the form of *total prestations* most discussed in The Gift was the ceremony of the potlatch as it was understood to be practiced by the Inuit and the tribes of the Northwest Coast. Mauss's own construction of the ceremony was an extremely dense one, but there were several key aspects which he

considered as highly oppositional to the dominant symbolic bourgeois order.

Mauss portrayed the potlatch as a ceremony in which the extravagant giving away of surpluses resulted in a binding system of economic, moral, religious, political and legal interrelationships.[44] The occasion of the potlatch, Mauss claimed, was a celebration of some momentous occasion for a chief and his clan. In attendance were other clans and chiefs from within and without the nation. As Mauss describes it:

> On these occasions are practised marriages, initiations, shamanistic seances, and the cults of the great gods, totems, and group or individual ancestors. These are all accompanied by ritual and by prestations by which political rank within sub-groups, tribal confederations and nations is settled.[45]

As this passage indicates, Mauss constructed the societies associated with the potlatch as hierarchical and the potlatch as that which ultimately established social rank within and outside the community.[46] At the time of the celebration, Mauss claimed, the clan members would relinquish goods they had produced to the chief who would then redistribute them to all in attendance. The public extravagance of the gesture was portrayed as a means to establish the chief's prestige as well as that of the clan:

> We are here confronted with total prestation in the sense that the whole clan, through the intermediacy of its chiefs, makes contracts involving all its members and everything it possess.[47]

In Mauss's portrayal, then, the chief was the dominant representative of the clan who consensually redistributed the community's wealth for his own good and the good of its members.

Due to its competitive dimension, Mauss argued, the potlatch was not to be regarded simply as an occasion where wealth was put on public display and then given away in grand gesture of benevolence. Instead, he characterized the ceremony as "rivalrous" and "agonistic", events in which clans and their chiefs struggled to establish their superiority by entering into a "war of property."[48] But such status seeking displays were not to be equated with secular bourgeois materialism. Instead, they were to be regarded as religious in character since the attainment of great prosperity in the first place was wholly dependant upon the clans being favored by the gods and the spirits of ancestors. The possession and the giving away of greater wealth, Mauss contended, established superior status since it demonstrated a preferred standing with the gods, and, as well, served to express confidence that divine approval would continue on into the future.[49] Framed in this way, the potlatch ultimately became a *sacred* ceremony:

> ... it is one of those phenomena we propose to call 'total.' It is religious, mythological and shamanistic because the chiefs taking part are incarnations of gods and ancestors, whose names they bear, whose dances they dance and whose spirits possess them.[50]

As the potlatch was constructed within the Durkheimian notion of the *sacred*, it necessarily fulfilled in Mauss's construction a

wide variety of social, political, religious and economic functions. Among other things, Mauss contended that the ceremony established intra and extra clan relationships, rank, status and privilege, ensured individual responsibility to the group, paid tribute to the gods and spirits and served the economic function of redistributing surpluses. On this latter economic function Mauss was especially clear:

> What we call total prestation - prestation between clan and clan in which individuals and groups exchange everything between them, - constitutes the oldest economic system we know.[51]

Mauss was in pursuit of a "total" system which would act back on society compelling human beings to behave in a morally responsible way. The virtue of the system of *total prestations* as evinced in the competitive potlatch was that it gave rise to - even if inadvertently - generosity and the "obligation to repay."[52] Thus, in "primitive" societies, Mauss argued, wealth was not hoarded by one person or class of persons; instead, surpluses were expended, consumed, redistributed in such a way that benefited the individual and the whole community.

Mauss argued that the system of *total prestations* became thoroughly disrupted by the rise of capitalism. At this moment, property was not returned fairly because economics became separated from morality; in particular, generosity and accountability disappeared. Not coincidentally, Mauss noted, the ascendance of capitalism was accompanied by the emergence of a philosophy of individualism. Binding utilitarianism and

individualism with *laisez faire* capitalism, Mauss wrote

condemningly:

> The victory of rationalism and mercantilism was
> required before the notions of profit and the
> individual were given currency and raised to the level
> of principles....
>   It is only our Western societies that quite
> recently turned man into an economic animal....For a
> long time man was something quite different; and it is
> not so long now since he became a machine - a
> calculating machine.[53]

However, Mauss, encouraged by recent European socialist reforms,

believed that humankind showed signs of returning to its

primordial roots largely due to the reinstatement of a social

system driven by generosity and the obligation to repay. Largely

prodded by a long series of class struggles it seemed that the

leaders of society, the modern "chiefs," were becoming aware

once again of their responsibility to society prompting Mauss to

declare: "We are returning, as indeed we must do, to the old

theme of "noble expenditure."[54]

One of the most problematic dimensions of potlatching

described by Mauss was what he posed as the Kwakwaka'wakw custom

of destroying property. In Mauss's portrayal of the destruction

of property in the potlatch - one that was greatly exaggerated -

he stressed that the successful bid for superior status by the

chief and his clan depended upon the amount and quality goods

which were distributed as gifts during the ceremony. But because

the gift always gave rise to obligation and since the

acquisition of superior status was at stake, the recipients of

the gifts had to return them with "interest" in order to

establish a position of higher rank. This rivalrous dimension, Mauss claimed, sometimes resulted in apparent unbridled expenditures whereby "whole cases of candle-fish or whale oil, houses and blankets by the thousands are burnt: the most valuable coppers are broken and thrown into the sea to crush a rival."[55] The destruction of vast amounts of surplus wealth, he argued, translated directly into great status:

> Consumption and destruction are virtually unlimited. In some potaltch systems one is constrained to expend everything one possesses and keeps nothing. The rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige.[56]

Moreover, Mauss tells us, because the destruction of property was referred to by the Kwakwaka'wakw as the "killing of property," it necessarily followed that material possessions were conceived of as animate. This issue of the "killing of property" led Mauss to the sacrificial dimension of the ceremony: in so far as the potlatch was essentially religious in nature, pure destruction of some of the property could be regarded as a sacrifice to gods and spirits of ancestors believed to be in attendance. Because pure destruction was associated with sacrifice it seemed not to "require a return...."[57] Mauss appeared both awed and troubled by this form of brinksmanship. On the one hand, he was wholly taken by the idealized concept of the gift that required no return; on the other, because meaning was ultimately retrieved from destruction in the form of great status, the destruction of goods could potentially escalate to the point of being socially harmful. In

any case, Mauss declared that in native societies of the Northwest Coast "destruction seems to be a superior form of expenditure."[58] No doubt Mauss was in part being provocative here by confounding the primacy of the accumulation of capital in his own society. However, challenging declarations such as these would be seized by more radical individuals such as Georges Bataille as *dicta*.

And finally on the subject of destruction, Mauss contended that because this "war of property" was largely contained within the system of *prestation* itself, rarely did issues surrounding ownership of property or rivalry for superiority escalate into warfare proper.[59] While Mauss conceded that war occurred amongst these peoples - most often the result of not repaying a potlatch - he praised the essentially peaceful existence of indigenous societies which practiced the ritual stating that they had succeeded "in substituting alliance, gift and commerce for war, isolation and stagnation."[60] In a very idealized and didactic statement found in the conclusion of his text, Mauss wrote:

> Societies have progressed in the measure in which they, their sub-groups and their members, have been able to stabilize their contracts and to give, receive and repay. In order to trade, man must lay down his spear. When that is done he can succeed in exchanging goods and persons not only between clan and clan but between tribe and tribe and nation and nation, and above all between individuals. It is only then that people can create, can satisfy their interests mutually and define them without recourse to arms. It is in this way that the clan, the tribe and nation have learnt...how to oppose one another without slaughter and to give without sacrificing themselves to others. That is one of the secrets of their wisdom and solidarity.[61]

Clearly these expressions of admiration for North American indigenous societies served to denounce the fervent nationalism and capitalist imperialism amongst European nations which the Left had vehemently denounced as *the* principle cause of World War One.[62]

The practice of the potlatch provided Mauss with potent ammunition in the political struggles in France in the 1920s. Mauss's text was comparative in that every aspect of the potlatch was reconsidered and reconstructed yet again for the purposes of cross cultural critique. The extravagant expenditure of surpluses had particular value in that it served to differentiate the system of *total prestations* from that of industrialized capitalism. Stinginess in these indigenous societies was regarded, Mauss claimed, with the utmost disdain. Referring directly to passages from Franz Boas on the tribes of the Northwest Coast, Mauss wrote:

> ...note the imprecation against 'small chiefs' - 'the little ones who deliberate; the little hard-struggling ones, the little ones whom you have vanquished, who promise to give away canoes, the little ones to whom property is given...the little ones who work secretly for property...the little traitors....[63]

Considered within Mauss's reformist socialist rhetoric in The Gift, the miserly "little chiefs" were likely being compared to the bourgeoisie, individuals in control of industry who hoarded surpluses provided by the labour of the workers giving little back to the community. That Mauss in fact used ethnographic data to attack the bourgeoisie is particularly evident where he

declared that the motives of the great chiefs "are not to be found in the cold reasoning of the business man, banker or capitalist."[64]

In addition to constructing North American indigenous practices as antithetical to cherished attitudes towards surplus, private property, individualism and materialism, Mauss's essay, like Durkheim's <u>The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</u>, reserved a privileged place for the aesthetic object. As we have seen, Durkheim characterized objects decorated with the totem as imbued with great social import. Mauss made similar distinctions. In a chapter entitled "The Power in Objects of Exchange" Mauss argued for the existence of hierarchical distinctions among various items produced within Northwest Coast societies. The most valued were said to be aestheticized objects destined for the potlatch. He observes how their preciousness was reflected in their handling whereby blankets, masks, hats, crowns and bows were stored in distinctive trunks adorned with clan emblems.[65] These forms of art decorated with totemic designs were considered by their producers, Mauss claimed, as "sacralized" property.[66] He characterized their importance in this way:

> Together these precious family articles constitute what one might call the magical legacy of the people; they are conceived as such by their owner, by the initiate he gives them to, by the ancestor who endowed the clan with them, and by the founding hero of the clan to whom the spirits gave them. In any case in all these clans they are spiritual in nature.[67]

The fact that these objects were given away at potlatches, however, did not diminish their importance:

> It is wrong to speak here of alienation, for these things are loaned rather than sold or ceded. Basically they are *sacra* which the family parts with, if at all, only with reluctance.[68]

A passage such as this would have had special appeal for the avant-garde since it countered a capitalist understanding of art as commodities, as mere objects offered for sale on the open market. That is not to say that Mauss did not acknowledge that indigenous societies produced surpluses or commodities for trade. Indeed, he discussed how the Kwakwaka'wakw and Tsimshian made "ordinary articles of consumption and distribution and perhaps also of sale."[69] But aestheticized objects, Mauss argued, held a privileged place within these communities, and were to be appreciated both for their formal qualities and for their "unalienated" character arising out of their integration into the fabric of the community.

As was the case in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, the indigenous peoples of North America - specifically both Inuit and Northwest Coast - were constructed by Mauss as *living* societies in which unadulterated examples of systems of *total prestations* could still be found. Of the latter Mauss wrote:

> Barter is unknown there. Even now after long contact with Europeans it does not appear that any of the considerable and continual transfers of wealth take

place otherwise than through the formality of the potlatch.[70]

Once again, these societies were structured as resistant to the economics of colonization. In an effort to make systems of total prestation practiced by these remote societies appear less foreign, Mauss evoked an evolutionist framework contending that vestiges of the "exaggerated rivalry" of the North American potlatch could still be found in France in the form of certain festivals:

> ...for instance, the French compete with each other in their ceremonial gifts, parties, weddings, and invitations, and feel bound, as the Germans say, to *revanchieren* themselves.[71]

Furthermore, Mauss anticipated challenges concerning the relevance of his cross cultural comparisons by characterizing the tribes of the Northwest Coast as highly sophisticated and "very rich," almost rivaling the European bourgeoisie in their affluence. In doing so, he headed off the objection that the so-called "primitive" peoples about which he spoke had little to lose in the potlatch:[72]

> The notion of value exists in these societies. Very great surpluses, even by European standards, are amassed; they are expended often at pure loss with tremendous extravagance and without a trace of mercenariness.[73]

In this passage, Mauss again deployed indigenous practices as a form of moral critique of the dominant symbolic order, and here, the avaricious and materialistic tendencies of its membership.

Portrayed as sophisticated, wealthy and extant, the native groups of North America made extremely compelling foils in Mauss's cross cultural comparisons. For Mauss, a member of the bourgeoisie, the excessive and extravagant behavior exhibited in the potlatch must have been both seductive and liberating.

Perhaps the French intellectual most roused by Mauss's construction of the potlatch was Georges Bataille. But before looking at his radicalization of Mauss's writings in his 1933 essay entitled "The Notion of Expenditure," I would like to take a brief look at the early extant opposition to the potlatch in order to better understand why it was that the ceremony was seized upon by members of the left in France as morally, philosophically, and functionally antithetical to capitalism. In particular, I want to examine the notoriety the potlatch gained due to the opposition of British colonists to it, an antagonism which eventually led to the ban of the ceremony by Canadian law in 1884.[74]

In <u>An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast</u>, Douglas Cole explores the reasons why the Canadian government took action against the practice of potlatching in the late 19th century. Arguments, he contends, were divided into three categories which at times overlapped: health, morality and economics. Of the three, Cole targets economics as the overriding motive:

> ...the most frequent and serious arguments against the potlatch were those that touched on the system's incompatibility with settled habits of labour and industry.[75]

He remarks that the potlatch ceremony, sometimes lasting for two months or longer, resulted in the natives being unavailable for economic activities such as agriculture and fishing. Moreover, potlatch practices were perceived as antithetical to the fundamental principles of economic capitalism. In particular, Cole argues that the destruction of accumulated savings or the giving away of vast quantities of goods was regarded as wholly irrational and as utterly incompatible with Western economic principles advocating the retention of surplus as profit. Ethically, the practice was considered immoral since "work and savings were directed not towards material progress, but to hoarding and then the extravagant dispersal of money and goods."[76] Forrest E. LaVoilette, in an earlier study of the potlatch entitled <u>The Struggle for Survival: Indian Cultures and the Protestant Ethic in British Columbia</u>, insists, like Cole, that native attitudes towards property and surplus were the major factors contributing to the potlatch ban:

> ...it was recognized that Indians were radically unlike Europeans in their attitudes to property, the rhythm of work and the saving of surpluses.[77]

Franz Boas, who was in British Columbia around the time of the early potlatch controversy, participated in the debates that continued after the prohibition of the ceremony. LaViolette relates how Boas sent a letter to a friend defending the potlatch by likening its principles to those underlying the system of Western banking. The letter was passed on to a local Vancouver newspaper; subsequently, Boas's notions about the

potlatch as a sort of "pre-banking" system were turned into an article published in the 1889 volume of the *British Association for the Advancement of Science*. In the article version which appeared in the *Vancouver Daily Province*, Boas explained:

> It must be clearly understood that an Indian who invites all his friends and neighbors to a great potlatch, and apparently squanders all the accumulated results of long years of labour has two things in mind which cannot but be acknowledged as wise and worthy of praise. His first object is to pay his debts....His second object is to invest the fruits of his labour so that the greatest benefit will accrue from them for his own benefit as well as for his children.[78]

Here Boas attempted to diminish the moral and economic objections to the potlatch by using familiar Western economic concepts such as "labour," "accumulation," "debt," "invest," and "accrue."[79]

Boas's defence of the potlatch raises Berger and Luckmann's observation on how reconfiguring contrary aspects of alternative symbolic universes within that of the dominant symbolic order can lead to assimilation. The two authors speak of the "machinery" of nihilation that becomes activated whenever the dominant order is threatened by radically contradictory world views and practices. They describe two ways that nihilation occurs. The first is to merely assign the phenomenon in question "a negative ontological status" whereby phenomena or "interpretations" of phenomena which collide with those of the dominant symbolic order are simply not to be taken seriously. The potlatch, however, could not be that easily dismissed and,

hence, necessitated the mobilization of the second and more aggressive form of nihilation. In detailing this alternate form of nihilation, Berger and Luckmann emphasize its assimilative nature:

> Second, nihilation involves the more ambitious attempt to account for all deviant definitions of reality *in terms of* concepts belonging to one's own universe. In a theological frame of reference, this entails the transition from heresiology to apologetics. The deviant conceptions are not merely assigned a negative status, they are grappled with theoretically in detail. The final goal of this procedure is to *incorporate* the deviant conceptions within one's own universe, and thereby liquidate them. In this manner, the negation of one's universe is subtly changed into an affirmation of it.[80]

But no matter how it was "managed" the potlatch remained antithetical to colonial interests. This antagonism is crucial factor when it comes to understanding the wider political significance of Northwest Coast cultures since the ceremony offered a site of resistance to economic colonialism and the bourgeois work ethic which informed it.

While the actual meaning and significance of the potlatch is still being debated, Voilette's and Cole's studies both document the ways in which the ceremony stood in the way of local colonial economic ambitions. The economically disruptive side of the potlatch was raised in heated debates appearing in local newspapers at the time. Again, economics was often bound up with issues of morality. In a letter to the editor of the *Victoria Colonist* in 1896, entitled "Evils of the Potlatch," Alfred J. Hall complained of the immorality and injustices

inherent in the potlatch ceremony. Specifically, he maintained that during the potlatch women and the elderly often went hungry and the children did not attend school. Combining morality, economics, patriarchal attitudes with cherished bourgeois notions about progress, he writes:

> There can be no real progress in any direction while this system flourishes, and so long as it lasts the natives acquire but cannot accumulate....
> It is in the interest of this province that we keep our Indians alive; they are worth preserving. What they generally produce is in addition to what our settlers produce. They occupy land the white man does not require. They love the white man, and their ultimate future must be absorption and assimilation to the whites.[81]

What is especially intriguing here is how French writers like Durkheim, Mauss, and, subsequently, Bataille, seized upon and celebrated the same notions surrounding property, surplus, and accumulation that were associated with Northwest Coast indigenous peoples and which the British colonists had so bitterly complained about. Indeed, it is not unlikely that the French commentators were aware of the controversy surrounding the potlatch given the Canadian Government's ban on the ceremony in 1884 and the involvement of high profile figures like Boas in the debates that followed.

What is also noteworthy about the potlatch debate is that there exists a record of a strong oppositional native voice. In February of 1896, a petition was drawn up by one hundred and fifty-three chiefs of the Northern River nations and delivered to A.W. Vowell, superintendent of Indian Affairs for British

Columbia. Excerpts from the petition were reprinted in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*. Here native representatives harshly rebuked white interference with indigenous customs:

> Our lands and our fishing grounds are converted to other hands; licenses are imposed for fishing the waters of the White Crest mountains which we pay with pleasure, for such is your law and we only ask in connection that our potlatches may meet with your approbation....
>
> We see in your graveyards the white marble and granite monuments which cost you money in testimony of your grief for the dead. When our people die we erect a large pole, call our people together, distribute our personal property with them in payment for their sympathy and condolence; comfort to us in the sad hours of our affliction. This is what is called a potlatch - the privilege denied us....
>
> It is a chimera that under the British Flag slavery does not exist.[82]

Interestingly, this letter of protest indicates that native groups were directly involved in economic transactions with the colonists. Thus, caution must be exercised not to construct the potlatch controversy as representative of two radically differing non-interactive ways of life. As Adam Kuper reminds us, at the time Boas was writing, Northwest Coast societies were clearly no longer living a totally isolated traditional existence but instead were "involved in the wide-open frontier economy and society...."[83] Nevertheless, these barely restrained and often inflammatory texts were an indication of a serious political clash and undoubtedly would have further fueled the whole dispute.

That Northwest Coast indigenous communities were specifically being oppressed by the Commonwealth was a factor

that drew these aboriginal groups further into the arena of French left wing political activity. In Communism and the French Intellectuals: 1914-1960, David Caute remarks that one of the central dictates that arose out of the Second Cominterm Congress in Moscow in 1920 was that all international anti-colonial and nationalist movements must be given unequivocal support even if temporarily under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. Caute emphasizes the French Communist Party's determined stance against colonialist imperialism in the 1920s in his observation that: "On no question did the first generation of French communist intellectuals feel more strongly."[84] The surrealist joining with the French communists in their vehement denouncement of the Moroccan War offered evidence of the group's adherence to the party line. However, while the French Communist Party campaigned against its own government's imperialism, it was England that was regarded as "enemy number one' due to its vast colonial holdings."[85] Thus, the persecution of indigenous practices in the Northwest Coast under the British via its Canadian government - repressive colonial measures brought to international attention by individuals such as Boas - would have provided additional fodder for the embracing of these peoples and their practices by oppositional left wing groups, including the surrealists.[86]

Georges Bataille, an intellectual who moved in and out of surrealist circles, coopted portrayals of North American indigenous societies developed by Durkheim and Mauss and reworked them into a full blown revolutionary theory. Tagging

Bataille is notoriously difficult. In the opening of her book Reading Georges Bataille: Beyond the Gift, Michele Richman refers to Bataille as an "elusive" figure who has been "termed a surrealist, an existentialist, a Hegelian, a Marxist, or a Nietzschean...."[87] There is perhaps some validity in each of these appellations. But what is of interest to the project at hand is how Bataille deployed the potlatch to contrive an alternate scenario for the proletarian revolution, a position laid out in his essay "The Notion of Expenditure" of 1933. In doing so, Bataille hauled North American indigenous peoples into the political arena of France yet again.

It must be initially said that "The Notion of Expenditure" owes an enormous debt to the work of Durkheim and Mauss. A rolling of the credits is not meant to demean the text; nor is it to imply that Bataille did not himself acknowledge this debt. It is, however, intended to temper the current and sometimes ahistorical exaltation of Bataille by his acolytes who would prefer to see him as operating within a more eminent circle of intellectual giants such as Nietzsche, Marx or Hegel. In particular, Bataille's essay was largely a continuation of Mauss's appropriative strategies found in The Gift whereby portrayals of North American indigenous societies were deployed in a critique of utilitarianism, classical economy and utility theory. The difference between the two works is the more extreme leftist position expressed in "The Notion of Expenditure." Very briefly - and these ideas will be discussed in more depth - Bataille argued that Mauss's depiction of the North American

native potlatch had demonstrated that loss - the expenditure of surpluses produced by the members of these early communities - played a more vital social role than conservation. As this was the case, Bataille proclaimed that what the modern day proletarians ought to seize was not the "means of production" as a contemporary Marxist or communist might argue but instead the "means of destruction;" only then, Bataille claimed, would they attain power through the reclamation of the right to *expend* what they themselves had produced. In Bataille's formulation, as the workers at present had nothing to destroy themselves, their only alternative was to rise up and demolish their oppressors - the bourgeoisie - in a violent and bloody revolution.

Bataille's essay was politically motivated by continued workers' unrest in France. Evident in "The Notion of Expenditure" is that while Bataille drew upon Mauss's *The Gift*, he did not share the latter's optimism over social reforms that had occurred in France in the mid 1920s. No doubt his skepticism grew during the later 1920s and early 1930s. During this period - especially from 1926 to 1929 - there was a moment of economic revival in France under the conservative government of Poincare when new factories were built and levels of industrial production rose. The workers, however, were largely excluded from their share in the prosperity. Again there were strikes demanding that the lot of the workers be proportionately improved. In response to worker disgruntlement, the French government in 1930 reluctantly adopted a social insurance program. But the workers were still hugely dissatisfied with

what seemed to be a perfunctory gesture. Regarding any and all pretenses to reform, Bataille was both cynical and critical in the "Notion of Expenditure":

> Without a doubt bourgeois society, which pretends to govern according to rational principle...does not accept without protest a division that seems destructive to man himself; it is, incapable however, of pushing this resistance further than theoretical negation. It gives the workers rights equal to those of the masters, and it announces this *equality* by inscribing that word on walls. But the masters, who act as if they were the expression of society itself, are preoccupied -more seriously than with any other concern - with showing that they do not in any way share the abjection of the men they employ.[88]

With the onslaught of the Depression in the early 1930s, the conditions of the workers in France worsened. Industrial production which had risen in 1930 to forty percent above the prewar level fell by 1932 back to the 1913 level and the factory owners did little to ameliorate growing hardships. Adding to the tenseness of the political climate in France was the rise of the extreme right in Europe and the constant inability of the left to marshall any degree of solidarity. But it is not only against the backdrop of these particular social, political and economic circumstances that Bataille's essay ought to be placed. After all, the working class had been protesting since the middle of the 19th century, initiating a period characterized by Bataille as "the unprecedented explosion of *class struggle*."[89] Many of these uprisings had been brutally quashed. Hence not only had the workers' revolution not been actualized, after seven decades of protests, strikes, promises by reformist socialists and

diatribes by intellectuals on the left, no real lasting change
of any kind had been achieved. It was in this atmosphere of
intense frustration that Bataille formulated yet another leftist
attack on the moral, philosophical and theoretical foundations
of capitalism. In the process, he elucidated an extreme theory
of class insurrection rooted in his construction of the North
American native potlatch.

One of the unique aspects of Bataille's contribution to
leftist critiques against utility theory was his attempt to
shift the whole perspective of the debate as it had existed to
date. Bataille argued that *all* previous discussions about what
was useful to humankind were necessarily inadequate because all
entertained a false understanding of the true needs of human
society:

> ...every time the essential question touching on the
> life of human societies is raised, no matter who
> intervenes and what opinions are expressed - it is
> possible to affirm the debate is necessarily warped
> and that the fundamental question is eluded....There
> is nothing that permits one to define what is useful
> to man.[90]

Bataille proclaimed that what was most useful to human existence
was not the production, acquisition and conservation of surplus,
but instead, its expenditure. Under the heading "The Principle
of Loss," Bataille maintained that while production and
conservation were necessary to the first stages of existance in
human communities, after the basic material needs had been met
humankind was no longer compelled to consume all that it
produced in order to survive. In other words, consumption for

the sake of existence no longer needed to serve as the ends of production.

Drawing on the writings of Mauss, Bataille claimed that at the point when societies began to produce surpluses, there arose a distinctly different and superior form of consumption: *unproductive expenditure*. This unproductive form of consumption was, Bataille argued, evident in spectacles, festivals and cult activity.[91] Bataille's advocation was certainly not new and could be found in the writings of both Durkheim and Mauss. Durkheim, in the <u>The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</u>, proposed that during collective activity associated with primitive cults, surplus energy was expended in a fashion which often served nothing at all. Pure expenditure as an existent force was even more pronounced in Mauss's declaration that in Northwest Coast societies destruction seemed a superior form of expenditure. Bataille echoed these observations by noting that in primitive societies one could find activities which "have no end beyond themselves."[92] But what distinguished Bataille from both Durkheim and Mauss was the radicalization of expenditure through the raising of loss to a supreme principle; loss was not merely an outcome of activities such as dancing and music or the ceremony of the potlatch, it was their ultimate end. Loss, therefore, became the true measure of any and all forms of expenditure, a conclusion which led Bataille to declare "*loss* must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning."[93]

Bataille's theorem that it was the principle of loss, not conservation, that played a greater role within the life of human communities formed the basis of an argument directed against the theoretical foundations of capitalism. But his thesis required hard evidence in the form of extant societies in which loss actively played a superior role in economic activity. And as was the tradition in France from Rousseau on down, "primitive" societies were seized upon as part of a legitimizing strategy. But before Bataille could coopt indigenous practices as sanctioning his socioeconomic theorizations, he had to displace extant European constructions of "primitive" economies which had sought to validate capitalism as a practice.

Bataille maintained that classical economic theory had largely been responsible for the mistaken notion that in the earliest forms of human societies production and acquisition took precedence over expenditure. New studies on indigenous economic practices, Bataille claimed, clearly showed that the primordial form of human economic activity was not based upon the exchange of one commodity for another - upon barter - but instead upon the expenditure of commodities. Appealing to new evidence in this war of legitimation, he wrote:

> The secondary character of production and acquisition in relation to expenditure appears most clearly in primitive economic institutions, since exchange is still treated as a sumptuary loss of ceded objects: thus at its *base* exchange presents itself as a process of expenditure, over which a process of acquisition has developed. Classical economics imagined that primitive exchange occurred in the form of barter; it had no reason to assume, in fact, that a means of acquisition such as exchange might have as its origins

> not the need to acquire that it satisfies today, but the contrary need, the need to destroy and to lose. The traditional conceptions of the origins of economy have only recently been disproved - even so recently that a great number of economists continue arbitrarily to represent barter as the ancestor of commerce. [italics his][94]

Bataille declared that the source of a new understanding of the so-called primordial forms of the economic life of humankind was Mauss's writings on the North American potlatch ceremony:

> In opposition to the artificial notion of barter, the archaic form of exchange has been identified by Mauss under the name *potlatch*, borrowed from the Northwestern American Indians who provided such a remarkable example of it.[95]

Thus we see an increasing radicalization of views in France whereby the potlatch itself was now being constructed as definitive proof that the theoretical foundations of capitalism were false.

I would argue that Bataille's essay was part of mounting leftist frustration in France in the 1930s. Earlier, Marcel Mauss believed that he was witnessing the emergence of a new era of economic relationships based upon reciprocity and obligation, virtues which he felt had dominated primitive forms of exchange. By the time Bataille was writing, any optimism on the part of the Left about France becoming a socialist state had all but disappeared. As a result, in Bataille's text we see the formulation of a far more extreme leftist position which coopted the more radical dimensions of the potlatch as constructed by Mauss. Thus while the conservative Mauss was somewhat perturbed

by what he took to be the destructive aspect of the potlatch,
Bataille, the revolutionary, celebrated this ascribed dimension
as evincing a fundamental truth about the nature of humankind if
not the universe itself: the primary need for expenditure. The
destruction of surpluses in the potlatch, as practiced by "the
Tlinglit, the Haida, the Tsimshian and the Kwakiutl," Bataille
argued, drove expenditure to its purest state where loss was at
its greatest and where human economic activity moved as far as
possible from ends bound up with utility. At its most extreme,
the potlatch became diametrically opposed to capitalist
practices of acquisition, accumulation, conservation, and its
redirecting of surpluses back into the economic system in order
to create even higher levels of productive output.[96] Since the
"*potlatch* is the opposite of a principle of conservation,"
Bataille argued, it served as the ultimate vehicle of liberation
for the universal principle of loss.[97]

Bataille's evocation of the principle of loss in indigenous
societies against that of accumulation in capitalist society was
rooted in Marxist economic theory. Accumulation was targeted due
to Marx's claim that the hoarding of capital or wealth in all
its varied forms was the driving force behind bourgeois
capitalism. Also of interest is the role of competition in these
matters. Marx saw that accumulation of wealth in bourgeois
society was itself driven by competition: the rivalry amongst
capitalists for such things as markets and raw materials coerced
them into greater accumulations of wealth just to retain a
position of economic power. Returning to the potlatch, Bataille

contrarily portrayed the ceremony as a primordial competitive economic system where the individual vying for power was coerced not into further accumulation but, instead, greater loss. When property was accumulated, it was so in order to be expended or even destroyed. Thus in North American indigenous societies, Bataille argued, the fundamental imperative of bourgeois society was contradicted.

Since expenditure was being advanced as that which held a primary place within the life of the community, even more noteworthy than the distributive aspect of the potlatch, in Bataille's estimation, was the "spectacular destruction of wealth" that occurred when the potlatch was reunited "with religious sacrifice."[98] Bataille characterized the potlatch as having a distributive and a destructive function both of which were bound up with varying degrees of expenditure. Since loss was being posited as possessing a supreme function, the purer the loss the closer it came to fulfilling that function. But even at its most extreme, the supposed destruction associated with clan rivalry was mitigated since losses were retrieved in the form of superior status. Destruction associated with religious sacrifice, however, was regarded as approaching a much purer form of loss: "unconditional expenditure." Specifically, when wealth was destroyed as offerings "to the mythical ancestors of the donees," there was far less in the way of an expectation of a direct return.[99]

But in terms of evincing economic principles antithetical to the West, all forms of destruction of surpluses during the

potlatch, Bataille argued, demonstrated that in primordial societies loss of wealth was considered worthier than its accumulation. Subsequently, he transformed Mauss's observation that destruction seemed to be a superior form of expenditure in Northwest Coast societies into the dictum that "ostentatious loss remains universally linked to wealth as its ultimate function."[100] And like Mauss, Bataille affixed moral virtues to expenditure claiming:

> ...wealth appears as acquisition to the extent that power is acquired by a rich man, but it is entirely directed toward loss in the sense that this power is characterized as power to lose. It is only through loss that glory and honor are linked to wealth.[101]

Certainly such passages linking "glory and honor" to acts of pure destruction would have been highly provocative in Bataille's argument against the values and suppositions of neoclassical economic and utility theory, notions which formed the very basis of bourgeois ideology.

If Bataille depicted honor and glory as associated with vast expenditures of wealth, then the acquisitiveness of the bourgeoisie must have manifested quite a different set of values. Indeed, Bataille shared Mauss's contempt for this class's hoarding of surpluses. Commonalty is evident in "The Notion of Expenditure" where Bataille criticized the bourgeoisie's negligence towards the proletariat whose labour had provided its prosperity:

> As the class that possesses the wealth - having received with wealth the obligation of functional

expenditure - the modern bourgeoisie is characterized
by the refusal in principle of this obligation.[102]

Like the despised small chiefs who work furtively for their
wealth, the bourgeoisie "hides its expenditures as much as
possible from the eyes of the other classes."[103] Bataille
claimed that this class - unlike the great chiefs of
Kwakwaka'wakw - spent only "for itself" thus abdicating any
responsibility it had to rest of the community.

The bourgeois class, Bataille argued, was in fact born out
of miserliness since crucial to its gaining ascendency over the
aristocracy was the keeping secret of its growing wealth;
consequently, they engaged solely in forms of "restrained
expenditure."[104] Born in avariciousness, once the bourgeoisie
ascended to a position of social dominance, their restrained
expenditure erupted into a full blown "hatred of expenditure"
which eventually became this class's whole "raison d'etre."[105]
Serving as theoretical justification for the bourgeoisie's
tendency to hoard wealth were rationalist philosophical and
economic theories:

> This particular form [of expenditure] was originally
> due to the development of its wealth in the shadow of
> a more powerful noble classs. The rationalist
> conceptions developed by the bourgeoisie, starting in
> the seventeenth century, were a response to these
> humiliating conditions of restrained expenditure; this
> rationalism meant nothing other than the strictly
> economic representation of the world - economic in the
> vulgar sense, the bourgeois sense of the word.[106]

In such ideologies, Bataille argued, one could find the source
of the bourgeoisie's "horrifying hypocrisy."[107]

Bataille's application of the term "vulgar" to theories of political economy which arose in the 17th century was likely rooted in Marx's referring to all economic theory after 1830 – treatises in which the social consequences of capitalism had been expunged – as *vulgar political economy*. These writings were condemned by Marx as merely occupying themselves with surface economic phenomena, seeming not at all concerned with the social injustices of capitalism. In contrast, the virtue of *political economy* as found in the writings of Adam Smith, Marx argued, was that it provided a whole emancipatory social theory facilitating the breaking free from the aristocracy and feudalism. However, after 1830 when the bourgeoisie were firmly in control, classical political economy was no longer needed as an emancipatory tool; such theories had served their purpose – as had the bourgeoisie – and now history had to move into its socialist stage. But the bourgeoisie refused to step aside and they hid their exploitation of the workers in obscurantist neoclassical or utility theory. Bataille, while in agreement with Marx's critique of bourgeois exploitation, was in opposition to the *entire* project of political economy initiated by Smith. This move to a more radical stance was articulated in his argument that it was the principle of expenditure that was most natural to humankind.

Bataille maintained that the basis of the bourgeosie's objection to feudal society was the reckless extravagance on the part of the aristocracy. The middle classes came to believe that

their own moral superiority rooted in the virtue of restraint entitled them to rise up and rule society. But restrained expenditure was even more immoral than reckless extravagance. While not celebrating feudalism as a political system, Bataille maintained that it exhibited the virtue of obligation; while the lords demanded tithes from their vassals which they expended extravagantly to their own benefit, they in turn provided protection and leadership. Both Mauss and Bataille make similar observations about the obligatory relationship between the Northwest Coast chief and his clan. In contrast, once the bourgeoisie came to power, they completely abdicated their responsibility to the lower classes whose labor provided the means to their prosperity. As the dominant class, they gave almost nothing back to the community either in the way of wealth or social leadership, seeking legitimacy for their negligence in utility theory or in individualist political philosophy and economy. Bataille wrote condemningly:

> ...the bourgeoisie are incapable of concealing a sordid face, a face so rapacious and lacking in nobility, so frightening small,[108] that all human life, upon seeing it, seems degraded.

Thus we return to an utterly loaded cultural comparison where, as was the case in Mauss's writings, the bourgeoisie were likened to the small chiefs, despised for their lack of generosity, obligation, and nobility.

Perhaps the most serious outcome of the disappearance from view of extravagant expenditures, Bataille maintained, was that

loss was now almost completely eradicated as a group experience. That is not to say that in "primitive" societies every member of the group could directly engage in unproductive expenditures. To return to Bataille's portrayal of the potlatch, he accepted Mauss's construction of it as an occasion where the rich attempted to establish their superior rank through extravagant expenditures of goods provided by the poorer members of society. The whole issue of exploitation in tribal communities within Marxist theory, is somewhat unclear. Durkheim, Mauss and, Bataille all seem to generally accept Marx and Engels's notion that tribal peoples were pre-capitalist, pre-state, classless in the capitalist sense of the term, and as representing primitive communism, or, the first stage in the development of human social history. In socialist theory, primitive communism held a privileged place since it was the only non-capitalist mode of production, outside of communism itself, where exploitation did not characterize the modes of production. Since indigenous societies were perceived as coexisting in time alongside the other stages of historical development, they were extremely valuable to leftist agendas since the negligible economic exploitation which existed within them could be evoked against the extreme mode of exploitation characterizing capitalist society. But the general absence of class exploitation in these societies did not necessarily mean that hierarchy was nonexistent. Indeed, while Engels characterized tribal societies as essentially egalitarian and classless, he observed that status, rank and hierarchy were all determining social forces

within these communities. Moreover, it must be remembered that these societies were considered as existing in a state of "primitive" communism; the future communist state while encorporating virtues existent in these primordial communities would evolve to more a fully egalitarian form.

Interestingly, Bataille's essay presents societies such as the Inuit and especially those of the Northwest Coast as a slightly more advanced stage of human history where the striving for status, rank and hierarchy had given rise to increased levels of economic exploitation. At times he constructs potlatching as a primordial economic system in which one group of individuals unfairly exploits another in its struggle for dominance. But Bataille, like Engels, Durkheim and Mauss, wanted to secure these peoples and their practices as ammunition against the dominant symbolic order. He maneuvered his way around increased levels of economic exploitation by portraying these societies as ones in which "the exploitation of man by man is still very weak."[109] This amelioration of exploitation was based upon several factors. First, the chiefs in exchange for goods provided "social leadership services."[110] Secondly, exploitation for personal reasons had its costs; in order to acquire status the chiefs could not keep what was given to them but instead were obliged to give wealth away. And finally, while the poorer members of the group could not themselves directly expend, because the potlatch in all of its forms was a festival and thus *public* in nature, everyone could at least bear witness to these spectacular losses thereby vicariously taking part in

them. Bataille directly contrasts the public visibility and dispersal of wealth on festive occasions in native societies to the situation in modern day France where "wealth is now displayed behind closed doors" and where "the expenditures taken on by the capitalists in order to aid the proletarians," is nothing but "subterfuge."[111] Thus, the ultimate transgression of the bourgeoisie was its complete and utter cooption of expenditure, a crime which called for nothing less than a violent and bloody revolution.

The underlying revolutionary political theory informing Bataille's essay is Marxian in nature: the bourgeoisie had abused their economic power by keeping for themselves surpluses produced by the working classes. In order to put a final end to that exploitation Marx called for a violent revolution which would see the proletariat rise up and seize the means of production so that they could collectively share the wealth they themselves had produced. Bataille also calls upon the forces of violent revolution as a means to empower the proletariat. But in "The Notion of Expenditure" there is a shift in perspective concerning the ends of the revolution. According to way in which Bataille framed the most recent data on indigenous peoples, when societies began to produce surpluses they engaged in a superior form of economic activity characterized by expenditure. The destruction of surpluses in the original forms of human community in North America, Bataille argued, revealed a primal need to destroy. The North American potlatch seemed to Bataille to be the most compelling example of how surplus wealth

- money and commodities - was ultimately destined for expenditure, and it was through practices like the potlatch that loss as a principle - loss as a universal force - became liberated. Thus, where Bataille differed from Marx was his contention that what the poor were excluded from was not power based upon the possession of surplus wealth that their labor produced but instead power generated by their privilege to expend or destroy it. "Power," Bataille declared, "is exercised by the classes that expend."[112] Here, the focus of discussion is shifted from the forces of production to the forces of destruction, from a universal principle of conservation to a more fundamental principle of loss. A social revolution rooted in violence, therefore, had a twofold purpose. Firstly, it would allow the historically dispossessed to finally be able to expend what they themselves had produced. Secondly, violent revolution would liberate destruction *in and of itself*. As for the actual mechanics of the revolution, because the attainment of power was ultimately linked to expenditure, and since the proletariat had nothing to destroy themselves, the only thing left for them to expend was their oppressors:

> ...the poor have no other way of reentering the circle
> of power than through the revolutionary destruction of
> the classes occupying that circle - in other words,
> through a bloody and no way limited social
> expenditure.[113]

In his introduction to his translation of Bataille's early essays, Allan Stoekl draws parallels between the potlatch and Bataille's vision of the revolution in which the proletariat

seizes not the means of production but instead the means of expenditure:

> Through Revolution, for the first time, the "lower" classes take control of the *means of expenditure*. And what they expend is precisely the ruling class, in a bloody and orgiastic social *potlatch*. [italics his][114]

Stoekl's associating the potlatch with violent revolution in Bataille's writings is wholly appropriate since the latter had been appealing to the ceremony for legitimation throughout his essay. In doing so, the indigenous peoples of North America and their practices were once again coopted and imbued with a highly oppositional leftist political charge in France.

The question arises as to why Bataille would advance a social theory based upon loss as a supreme principle. Certainly the extremity of Bataille's theory partly arose out of a period of renewed leftist frustration. But I believe that the radical theoretical basis of Bataille's essay was also a coalescence of notions taken from the new and revolutionary post-Newtonian universe combined with recent anthropological data on indigenous practices. This is not to say that Bataille had some expertise as a physicist just as his portrayals of indigenous economic practices does not mean he can be regarded as an anthropologist. Instead, Bataille, using the latest discoveries of physics, did what other individuals had done before him: he applied them to the social order. Drawing upon late 19th century theories on radioactivity and thermodynamics and 20th century theories of astrophysics, he argued that the cosmos was now conceived of as

exhibiting tendencies towards disorder, a place in which pure and irretrievable expenditures of energy frequently occurred. The Newtonian universe, one characterized as orderly, rational and balanced, and as smoothly running without strife, rivalry or contention was replaced by a cosmos in which unconditional, unbuffered loss was a vital and essential force.

In light of this new and revolutionary understanding of life itself, Bataille judged all previous social theory conceived of within the framework of a rationally ordered universe as utterly false. While a post-Newton understanding of the universe is implicit in the theoretical underpinnings of "The Notion of Expenditure," its presence is unmistakable in other writings, and is especially evident in Bataille's evocation of the image of the sun. For Bataille, the unceasing outpouring of radiation from this celestial body stood as the preeminent manifestation of a universe in which loss held a central role. And it was here that Bataille turned to portrayals of indigenous societies for further legitimation. Deploying what was now a long standing depiction of primordial societies as in tune with the forces of nature, Bataille argued that primitive peoples had always intuitively known what modern physics had only recently discovered: that loss was a principle and necessary force unto itself and that a universal expenditure of energy was continually manifested in the realm of the everyday:

> I will speak briefly about the most general conditions
> of life, dwelling on one crucially important fact:
> Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant
> development. The origin and essence of our wealth are

> given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses
> energy - wealth - without any return. The sun gives
> without ever receiving. Men were conscious of this
> long before astrophysics measured that ceaseless
> prodigality; they saw it ripen the harvests and they
> associated its splendor with the act of someone who
> gives without receiving... In former times value was
> given to unproductive glory, whereas in our day it is
> measured in terms of production: Precedence is given
> to energy acquisition over energy expenditure....[115]

Thus legitimation was sought in humankind's primordial societies reconstructed once again as in harmony with nature. The fact that the concept of the universe that Bataille was deploying was the antithesis of older Newtonian universe did nothing to disrupt that affinity. It was within this newly conceived universe that Bataille, using material found in the writings of Durkheim and Mauss, reconstructed indigenous societies of North America as those in which both conservation, and more importantly, expenditure, played an essential role.

In summary, of significance when exploring the surrealist interest in the indigenous peoples of North America is the leftist coveting of these societies by individuals such as Durkheim, Mauss and Bataille for the purposes of critiquing the moral, cultural, political and economic values of the dominant symbolic order. In the continued battle for legitimation, these intellectuals coopted data taken from the "sciences" of ethnography and anthropology in an effort to argue that socialism was the natural state of humankind. Moreover, these same societies were constructed as still largely resistant to the economics of colonization. And in this continued borrowing of ethnographic data, the political partisanship of the

individual from whom the information was obtained was of little importance. After all, Engels's theory locating the primordial stage of political communism with American native societies was based upon data derived from the writings Henry Lewis Morgan, an American Republican senator.[116] Subsequently, Georges Bataille unabashedly took constructions of North American indigenous peoples from the conservative socialist Marcel Mauss and used them in the formulation of a radical and bloody revolutionary theory. As for the surrealists, the special appeal of the texts of Mauss and Durkheim for this avant-garde in need of both a new primitive and a left wing ideology, was that North American peoples were being imbued with socialist "virtues" in France. The fact that both Mauss and Durkheim were reformists and not revolutionaries made little difference since the surrealists could simultaneously reject the formers' conservatism while commandeering their subversive socialist constructions of indigenous societies.[117] This selective approach was also the case when it came to the more extreme writings of Bataille: while it is likely that Breton would have been intrigued by Bataille's construction of North American indigenous practices as antithetical to bourgeois classical economic theory, the latter's inordinate concern with violence and, especially, his deviation from established socialist revolutionary doctrine through his shifting of attention from the means of production to the means of expenditure would probably have been met with opposition. Indeed, Breton had already complained about certain counter-productive excesses and indulgences on Bataille's part

in his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1930, charging, among other things, that: "M. Bataille professes to wish only to consider in the world that which is vilest, most discouraging, and most corrupted, and he invites man, *so as to avoid making himself useful for anything specific*, 'to run absurdly with him....'"[italics his][118] At the very least, Bataille's coupling of North American indigenous societies with radical theories of violent and bloody revolution would have conflicted with Breton's idealized - if not utopian - understanding of these peoples.

And finally, the collecting and exhibiting of North American objects by the surrealists was particularly useful in bridging their own avant-garde ideology with that of the left wing political party with which it sided. By the mid 1920s, these objects and the societies which produced them were brimming with an oppositional leftist signification generally understood by the French intelligentsia due to the body of socialist writings which surrounded them. Certainly, the *Surrealist Map of the World* in part reflected the political significance of these peoples. Furthermore, I would argue that the surrealist brandishing of North American indigenous objects was intended to offer visible support to living primordial communist societies oppressed by, but still offering resistance to, colonialism.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. The "Surrealist Map of the World" appeared in *Variétés* in June of 1929. Its title - "Le monde au temps des surréalistes" - demands that this remapping be placed within a surrealist paradigm at a particular moment in time. What is significant about the map is not simply the finished product but the deliberation present in *act of mapping*: the devising, plotting or laying out of an agenda.

2. A surrealist interest in these indigenous peoples was partly due to the writings of Franz Boas. Boas spent a great deal of time in British Columbia, Baffin Island and Alaska in the late 19th century. In 1927, he published a book entitled <u>Primtive Art</u>, roughly half of which was devoted to reconfiguring North West Coast indigenous objects within Western artistic paradigms. Undoubtedly, the surrealists were intrigued by certain aesthetic "virtues" of a poetic and synthetic nature which they saw in these objects, an interest that has been discussed at great length by contemporary art historians such as Evan Maurer, Willian Rubin, Elizebeth Cowling and others. The sheer weight of these treatises, however, has had the effect of burying the oppositional political charge that these same peoples held for the surrealists in the 1920s and the decades that followed.

3. This latter point is vital for it was precisely that arena that the surrealists would eventually operate within whether writing manifestos or putting on exhibitions.

   Durkheim is someone all too often overlooked in discussions of the surrealist coveting of North American indigenous societies.In James Clifford's book, for example, Durkheim's name is mentioned infrequently. This omission is rather strange since Clifford devotes a sizeable amount of text to Georges Bataille, an individual who was enormously influenced by Durkheim.

4. Emile Durkheim, <u>The Division of Labor in Society</u> (New York: The Free Press), p.80.

5. Berger and Luckmann, pp.60-1.

6. Emile Durkheim, <u>Socialism</u>, (New York: Collier), p.180.

7. Durkheim, p.194.

8. One the key aspects of <u>The Division of Labour in Society</u> is its application of biological Darwinism to the social realm. Apart from an overall scheme of things which saw a societal evolution from the simple to the more complex, Durkheim loosely deployed Darwinian notions of struggle to explain the mechanics of rampant individualism in capitalist societies and the subsequent deleterious effects upon the human social realm. Referring the reader directly to Darwin, he explained that when similar animal species compete for the same food resources,

their rivalry rarely becomes violent as long as there exists an abundance of those resources. But when the numbers of those species greatly increases conflict is sure to follow. Applying Darwin's thesis to the economic realm of his own society, he argued that unbridled competition amongst individual capitalists proved that "men submit to the same law." Durkheim, p.266.

9. Durkheim, p.405. While Durkheim uses the term fraternal here he wholly supported an understanding of the evolution of society as moving from matriarchy to patriarchy. And like Engels he praised the discoveries of Bachofen concerning the matriarchal origins of human communities:

> Primitive civilizations offer privileged cases...because they are simple cases. That is why, in all fields of human activity, the observations of ethnologists have frequently been veritable revelations, which renewed the study of human institutions. For example, before the middle of the nineteenth century, everybody was convinced that the father was the essential element of the family; no one had dreamed that there could be a family organization of which the paternal authority was not the keystone. But the discovery of Bachofen came and upset this old conception.

Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (New York: The Free Press), p.19.

10. As for Durkheim's privileging of the sacred as a site of social change it is probably worth mentioning that Marx never advocated a facile deterministic model whereby the elements in the superstructure could not be regarded as influencing the economic base. Marx's theory of historical materialism asserted that the material basis of any society was its economic system, its relations of production. This was the primary reality upon which the superstructure rested. The superstructure was comprised of varied institutions or the complex machinery of society controlling the legal, political, economic, cultural and kinship life of the society. Because Marx believed that the primary direction of causal influence was from the economic base to the superstructure and not the other way around, any revolutionary changes to that superstructure had to originate from the base. But again, while Marx's model privileged the economic base he never asserted that aspects of the superstructure could not come to have an effect upon the economic base; in fact, the dialectic demanded that the superstructure be regarded as acting back upon the base. To claim otherwise is to reduce Marx's model to crude determinism.

11. Emile Durkheim, <u>The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</u> (New York: The Free Press), p.13.

12. Durkheim's vilification of the church and his clearing of this institution out of the arena of the sacred and his call for a new mythology and a new sacred would incite Mauss, Bataille and members of the surrealist group. Durkheim, p.475.

13. Durkheim, p.478-9.

14. Frederick Engels, "On the History of Early Christianity," in <u>Marx and Engels: Writings on Politics and Philosophy</u> Lewis S. Feurer ed., (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 168.

15. *Ibid.*, p.180.

16. *Ibid.*, p.183.

17. *Ibid.*, p.170.

18. Michel Richman, "Anthropology and Modernism in France: From Durkheim to the College de sociologie," in <u>Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text</u> ed. by Marc Manganaro (Princeton University Press 1990),p.194.

19. Durkheim, pp.249-250.

20. Durkheim, p.469.

21. Crow, p.246.

22. Durkheim, p.426.

23. *Ibid.*, p.426.

24. *Ibid.*, p.426.

25. *Ibid*, p.135.

26. *Ibid.* pp.123&135.

27. *Ibid.*, p.135.

28. *Ibid.*, p.140.

29. *Ibid.*, p.149.

30. *Ibid.*, 132-3.

31. For an in-depth analysis of the varied factors accounting for Boas's challenge to the evolutionary model see Kuper's chapter entitled "The Boasians and the Critique of Evolutionism" in <u>The Invention of Primtive Society: Transformations of an Illusion</u>, pp.125-151.

32. Berkhofer, p.543.

33. *Ibid.*, p.543.

34. This dichotomy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five of this thesis. Brian W. Dippie, <u>The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy</u> (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982),pp.284-296.

35. Clifford, p.123.

36. *Ibid.*, p.64.

37. *Ibid.*, p.125.

38. Ibid., p.125.

39. Marcel Mauss, <u>The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies</u> trans. by Ian Cunnison (New York: W.W. Norton 1967), p.64.

40. In Austria, the socialists during their brief period of power from 1918 to 1920, were able to sustain a reasonably high level of wages and unemployment relief while taking effective measures against unemployment. In Sweden, the socialists took power in 1920 where they subsequently increased pensions and unemployment relief, reduced working hours and introduced maternity benefits and a national medical service.

41.   It is revealing to make comparisons between Engels's portrayal of North American indigenous societies with that of Mauss based upon a revolutionary versus a reformist socialist platform. For Engels, original native societies were classless in nature, a state in which the individual was subsumed within the community and the tools and products of labour were shared by all. For Mauss, while the community took precedence over the individual in indigenous societies, the individual retained a central place. This is consistent with Mauss's view on communism which he saw as a step too far in its total subsuming of the individual within the state. Fearing a loss of individuality in any future communist society, Mauss declared:

> ...the individual must work and be made to rely more upon himself than upon others. From another angle he must defend his group's interest as well as his own. Communism and too much generosity is as harmful to him and society as the selfishness of our contemporaries or the individualism of our laws. Mauss, p.67.

42.   *Ibid.*, p.65.

43.   *Ibid.*, p.3.

44.   The basic goods necessary to life were of course retained.

45.   *Ibid.*, p.4.

46.   It is worth mentioning here that while Mauss speaks of the dominance of the chief, he depicts these societies as matrilineal in nature. Of the tribes of the Northwest Coast Mauss states:

> Social organization...is fairly consistent throughout the area though it ranges from the matrilineal phratry (Tlingit and Haida) to the modified matrilineal clan of the Kwakiutl....Mauss, p.35.

47.   *Ibid.*, p.4.

48.   *Ibid.*, p.4&35.

49. *Ibid.*, p.37-8.

50. *Ibid.*, p.36.

51. *Ibid.*, p.68.

52. *Ibid.*, p.40.

53. *Ibid.*, p.74.

54. *Ibid.*, p.66.

55. *Ibid.*, p.35.

56. *Ibid.*, p.35.

57. *Ibid.*, p.40.

58. *Ibid.*, p.102.

59. *Ibid.*, p.102.

60. *Ibid.*, p.80.

61. *Ibid.*, p.80.

62. A problematic aspect of the potlatch for Mauss was that it presented obstacles to the exemplary portrayal of the system of *total prestations*. This was not due to the supposed destructive dimension of the potlatch but instead to its rivalrous and hence escalatory nature. Mauss noted that "outside pure destruction the obligation to repay is the essence of the potlatch." A predicament arose when a chief had insufficient property to put on an even more extravagant potlatch. And since at a previous potlatch the chief and his clan had accepted property as gifts, they were obliged to make a "worthy return," that is, a return "with interest."If they could not do so, Mauss claimed, then they became indebted, and could even lose their status as free men. The regular occurrence of this regrettable situation led

Mauss to characterize the Northwest Coast potlatch as "the monster child of the gift system." This dimension of the potlatch, however, did not prevent Mauss from frequently exalting the ceremony throughout the text as being antithetical to economic practices within his own culture. (p.40&41)

63. *Ibid.*, p.101.

64. *Ibid.*, p.73.

65. *Ibid.*, pp.42-3.

66. *Ibid.*, p.43.

67. *Ibid.*, p.42.

68. *Ibid.*, p.42.

69. *Ibid.*, p.42.

70. *Ibid.*, p.42.

71. *Ibid.*, p.5.

72. *Ibid.*, p.4.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

74. In his book <u>Aboriginal Peoples *and* Politics. The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989</u> (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), Paul Tennant notes the importance of the ceremony to native autonomy stating that: "It was in good part through the potlatch that the coastal leaders continued their own authority and were able to resist the control of the church and government." It was largely due to the fact that the potlatch offered some degree of resistance to church and government that it became the focus of attention. Tennant critically declares:

> Thus it was to the potlatch that missionaries and agents turned their attention. In their eyes it became the epitome of anti-government pagan depravity. As a

result of their pressure and recommendations, the
Macdonald government had Parliament amend the Indian
Act in 1884. "Every Indian or other person who engages
in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known
as the "Potlatch" [*sic*]...is guilty of a misdemeanor,
and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not
more than six months nor less than two months in any
gaol or other place of confinement." Tennant, p.51-2.

75. Douglas Cole and Ira Chakin, <u>An Iron Hand Upon the People:
The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast</u> (Vancouver:
Douglas and McIntyre, 1990), p.18.

76. *Ibid.*, p.20.

77. Forrest E. LaVoilette, <u>The Struggle for Survival: Indian
Cultures and the Protestant Ethic in British Columbia</u> (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 1973), p.32.

78. *Ibid.*, p.75 La Voillette notes that Boas's likening the
potlatch practices to those of a bank likely prompted some
native leaders to do the same. He cites an article that appeared
in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* entitled "The Nootka Chief
Speaks" where one Chief Maquinna states:

> Once I was in Victoria, and I saw a very large house;
> they told me it was a bank and that the whitemen place
> their money there to take care of, and that by-and-by
> they get it back, with interest. We are Indians, and
> we have no such bank: but when we have plenty of money
> or blankets, we give them away to other chiefs and
> people, and by-and-by they return them with interest
> and our heart feels good. Our potlatch is our bank.

Victoria Colonist (Wednesday, April 9 1896), p.6.

79. Boas's reformulation of the potlatch was most likely part of
a larger effort to defend it. However, such a portrayal does
open the issue of Boas's own political stance. While it may be
somewhat difficult to determine his partisanship in the 1890s,
by 1930 he was clearly in support of the Left. In a letter from
Fort Rupert dated December 8, 1930, he explained that one of the
primary reasons he left Germany for America was the existence of
anti-semitism in his native country. But he also notes that he
soon became disillusioned with life in the United States due to
the harsh conditions endured by the working class. Boas wrote:

> The people here don't want to see the necessary
> socialization of society because the country is so
> large. But the misery of the working class is as bad
> here as over there....I am fully convinced that the
> Russian Revolution will force some progress. It will
> take some time, but it will happen as in the French
> Revolution....The way it is now, things cannot go on!

80. The Ethnography of Franz Boas: Letters and Dairies of Franz
Boas written on the Northwest Coast from 1886 to 1931. ed by
Ronald Rohner, Trans by Hedy Parker. (Chicago, University of
Chicago Press, 1969), p.295-6.
Berger and Luckmann, p.115.

81. Victoria Daily Colonist (Sunday March 15th, 1896), p.7.

82. Victoria Daily Colonist (Thursday, Feb 20, 1896) p.7.

83. Kuper, p.134.

84. David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-
1960 (London: André Deutsch, 1964), p.206.

85. Ibid., p.206

86.   An additional matter that needs to be addressed is the
issue of whether or not Northwest Coast cultures were perceived
as matrilineal or patrilineal by Boas. This point is of some
importance since Engels was quite insistent upon conjoining
matriarchy - the tracing of descent and inheritance through the
female line - with communism. It would have been taken for
granted that in the "primitive" societies of the Northwest Coast
there would be no state and no monogamous family. These
societies were also thought of, as we have seen with Durkheim
and others, as communal, organized under totemism and clan
groups and as living in a close relationship with nature. In
addition, Northwest Coast societies were perceived as
essentially peaceful in nature and there was no openly violent
conflict between these peoples and the British the likes of
which arose between the French and the Iroquois in Eastern
Canada. But Boas, partly driven by the competitive dimension
existing in all academic fields, began challenging Morgan's
widely accepted theory that all societies progress from a
matrilineal to patrilineal organizational form. Reversing
Morgan's evolutionary model, he claimed that the Kwakiutl were

in fact moving towards a matriarchal form of organization from an original state of patriarchy. However, this speculation was characterized by uncertainty. As Kuper explains:

> Boas had argued in 1890 that their legends and their system of transmitting crests showed the Kwakiutl to have been originally matriarchal and totemic, though they were so no longer. In 1897, he was using essentially the same evidence to argue that they had on the contrary been originally patriarchal, and were now in the process of becoming matriarchal.

The point here is not to get to too involved with the specifics of ethnographical or anthropological theory, but instead to stress broader assumptions that were circulating at the time. The prevalent and persistent theory was that primitive societies, especially those of North America, evolved from matrilinial to patrilineal organizational forms; Boas's uncertain challenge did little to shatter this belief. Kuper, p.138.

87. Michele H. Richman, _Reading Georges Bataille: Beyond the Gift_ (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982),p.1.

88. Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure" in _Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939_ trans. by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985),p.125.

89. _Ibid_. p.125.

90. _Ibid_., p.116.

91. _Ibid_., p.118.

92. _Ibid_., p.118.

93. _Ibid_., p.118.

94. _Ibid_., p.121.

95. _Ibid_., p.121.

96. *Ibid.*, p.121.

97. *Ibid.*, p.122.

98. *Ibid.*, p.121.

99. *Ibid.*, p.121.

100. *Ibid.*, p.123.

101. *Ibid.*, p.122.

102. *Ibid.*, p.124.

103. *Ibid.*, p.124.

104. *Ibid.*, p.124.

105. *Ibid.*, p.124.

106. *Ibid.*, p.124.

107. *Ibid.*, p.125.

108. *Ibid.*, p.125.

109. *Ibid.*, p.123.

110. *Ibid.*, p.123.

111. *Ibid.*, p.124&126.

112. *Ibid.*, p.129.

113. *Ibid.*, p.121.

114. Allan Stoekl, p. xvi.

115.   Georges Bataille, <u>The Accursed Share Vol 1</u> trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp.28-9.

116.   In Kuper's brief biographical background of Morgan he notes that the latter was a wealthy industrialist and that between 1861 and 1869 he served as an American congressman and senator. Kuper, p.49.

117.   Clifford also notes the "fast-and-loose way that ethnographic fact was being used by the early surrealists." That members of the group would do this should come as no surprise since that is exactly what they did with the texts of an even more conservative scholar, Sigmund Freud. Clifford, p.125.

118.   André Breton, <u>Manifestoes of Surrealism</u>, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972),p.181. For a larger discussion of the wider ideological differences between Bataille's theories and those of surrealists such as Breton see Richman, pp.49-56.

CHAPTER THREE

Surrealism, Leninism and Imperialism:

The Colonial Proletariat of Color

When exploring the political dimension of the surrealist interest in indigenous peoples, it is important to recall that the alteration of the course of surrealism towards communism was largely prompted by a stance against colonialism. Specifically, a rebellion of Berber tribes in the French colony of Morocco led by Abd-el-Krim initiated the Riff War of 1925, a struggle which called attention to France's oppressive colonial policies in North Africa. In June of that same year Henri Barbusse launched his *Appel aux travailleurs intellectuels* demanding that left wing French intellectuals take a definitive stand against the French government in this insurrection. Among those who signed the *Appel* were the editors of *Clarté*, a surrealist publication. In his book <u>Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960</u>, David Caute remarks upon the impact that the war had upon members of the surrealist group:

> ...the war and the consequent persecution of communists had a formative, if not decisive influence in bringing the young intellectuals round *La révolution surrealiste* into sympathy with Marxism-communism.[1]

As Lewis observes, this surrealist alignment with the Communist Party on the anti-imperialist issue caused an internal shift within surrealism itself:

The Riff War was important enough to give their movement an entirely new ideological direction and field of action because they were profoundly disgusted with the resurgence of imperialistic exploitation. Therefore, in 1925, with France in the throes of another war, the Surrealists...could begin to consider themselves Marxist Revolutionaries.[2]

Indeed, Breton, who joined the communist party in 1927, remarked some years later that the group's stand on the Riff War was responsible for a new orientation in the movement from a depoliticized to a politicized avant-garde stance. In "What is Surrealism" of 1934 Breton declared:

I consider that one can distinguish two epochs in the surrealist movement, of equal duration, from its origins (1919, year of the publication of Les Champs magnetiques) until today - an intuitive epoch and a *reasoning* epoch. The first can summarily be characterized by the belief...in the omnipotence of thought, considered capable of freeing itself by means of its own resources. This belief witnesses to prevailing view that I look on today as being extremely mistaken, the view that *thought is supreme over matter*....

During the period under review, in the absence, of course, of all discouraging exterior events, surrealist activity remained strictly confined to its first theoretical premises....No coherent political or social attitude, however, made its appearance until 1925; that is to say (and it is important to stress this), until the outbreak of the Moroccan war, which...placed suddenly before us the necessity of making a public protest....The protest...marked the breaking away from a whole way of thinking; it...created a precedent that was to determine the whole future direction of the movement. Surrealist activity, faced with a brutal, revolting, *unthinkable* fact, was forced to ask itself what were its proper resources and to determine their limits; it was forced to adopt a precise attitude, exterior to itself, in order to continue to face whatever exceeded these limits.

Surrealist activity at that moment entered into its *reasoning* phase. It suddenly experienced the necessity of crossing over the gap that separates

> absolute idealism from dialectical materialism.....on
> the supremacy of *matter over mind*.[3]

Here, Breton is clear about how international left wing anti-colonialism was the catalyst initiating an embrace of Marxism. Moreover, in this quote the rarely apologetic Breton declared that the nascent, pre-Marxist stage of surrealism was mistaken in its belief that the principles of intuition and *omnipotence of thought* could alone bring about the freedom of humankind. That is not to say that Breton abandoned the original surrealist project of bringing about a liberation of the mind; rather, in the late 1920s members of the group began allying themselves with the Communist Party believing that the international socialist revolution - which included the liberation of the world's colonized peoples - had to occur before the surrealist revolution could be realized. While Breton from time to time "adjusted" the interrelationship between the surrealist group and the Communist Party, he believed that the surrealist revolution "would have better prospects of success if the people were better fed, specifically if they were given peas instead of potatoes":[4]

> We hold the liberation of man to be the *sine qua non*
> of the *liberation of the mind*, and we can expect this
> liberation of man to result only from the proletarian
> revolution.[5]

Unfortunately, though, it is on that initial phase of the movement that much of the literature on surrealism and indigenous peoples has focused. Frequently, emphasis is placed

upon the surrealists' "intuitive" understanding of indigenous objects, or how Freud's *omnipotence of thought* was that which formed the basis of an affinity between a surrealist world view and that of so-called "primitive man." No doubt these interests explored by Evan Maurer, Elizabeth Cowling and others were extant. But the problem is that while a change in the course of surrealism towards a commitment to international socialist revolutionary politics has been explored in and of itself by cultural historians such as Helena Lewis, rarely has this shift been investigated in terms of how it impacted upon the group's activities having to do with colonized peoples including the native societies of North America. Concerning this matter, I have already investigated how these peoples came to occupy a central place within socialist ideology by the 1920s. Moreover, I have explored an obvious surrealist interest in those same peoples evident in the *Surrealist Map of the World*. In order to better understand the growing political signification acquired by these peoples in the 1930s, I want to examine the social, political and economic events in Europe during this decade. Of particular importance to this investigation is the abandonment of an anti-colonialist position by the French Communist Party, yet another shift in the surrealist movement from Marxism to Marxist-Leninism and, very importantly, the rise of fascism.

The year 1930 marked the beginning of the Great Depression. While not as severe as in America or Germany, by the middle of the decade, close to one million workers in France were unemployed. Adding to the tension was the election of Adolph

Hitler to the position of chancellor in Germany. Particularly upsetting was the growing hostility towards the Republic that began to manifest itself in France in the form of fascist-type organizations similar to those emerging in Germany and in Italy. Moreover, an older French rightwing organization, the *Action Française*, was joined by other extremist groups all of whom became increasingly active. Generally speaking, these organizations were anti-republican, anti-democratic, and, in some cases, monarchistic.

Largely due to the fear that fascism was spreading to France, liberals, democrats, organized labour and the varied socialist parties all found themselves moving towards common ground. The French Communist Party, also alarmed by fascist activity inside the nation's borders, began to align itself with all liberal and socialist anti-fascists groups. The end result of this clustering was that the moderate Radical Socialists, the Socialists and the Communists all came together in a coalition known as the Popular Front.

The electoral victory of the Popular Front in 1936 marked the first time in French history that the Socialists became the leading party in the Chamber. As for the Communists, while they did not formally join the Popular Front, they offered it their full support. In doing so, they greatly increased their representation in the chamber. The importance of the Popular Front's victory cannot be underestimated for it appeared to the French intelligentsia that the Russian Revolution had finally come to pass in France. And while its ministry led by Leon Blum

lasted only a year, it put into effect far reaching legislation: industry awarded blanket wage increases to all workers, laws were passed providing for a forty hour work week, vacations with pay, and collective bargaining laws. In addition, steps were taken to nationalize the armaments and aviation industry, aid was given to farmers through price fixing and government purchases of wheat, and the Bank of France was reorganized and placed under government control in order to break the power of the some two hundred families which had controlled it.[6]

While the French communist party did not formally join the Popular Front, it was eager to assume leadership of the coalition's cultural program. According to Julian Jackson in his book <u>The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38</u>, while the P.C.F. lacked a structured cultural policy in the 1920s, in the growing leftist atmosphere of the early 1930s the Party began to more clearly articulate its cultural position.[7] In 1932, they inaugurated the *Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers* which espoused its commitment to a revolutionary proletarian culture. But once the P.C.F. fully allied itself with the Popular Front and assumed its cultural leadership, it attempted to widen its membership during this window of opportunity through a shift in its position concerning revolutionary politics and art. Specifically, in *Commune* - the A.E.A.R.'s chief publication - the P.C.F. began to actively woo artists and intellectuals not on the basis of their commitment to communist ideology or revolutionary art forms, but instead,

upon their opposition to fascism. As their ranks grew, the Party regularly began to publish in the newspapers who the latest famous artist or intellectual was to join the A.E.A.R.[8] As Caute explains:

> The brandishing of names was clearly taken to be of cardinal importance in the struggle, with the consideration that all other considerations tended to be swept under the carpet.[9]

Jackson has noted that while the A.E.A.R. initially promised that the party was fully committed to a revolutionary proletarian culture, by 1934 it abandoned this position. The communist intellectuals of the Popular Front, intent upon breaking down the all barriers between the P.C.F. and the people withdrew any support it had for difficult avant-garde art forms in favor of more approachable ones. But while opportunism was certainly a factor, these were difficult times as individual countries in Europe were wrestling with economic internal problems caused by the Great Depression while fending off the infiltration of fascism. These dilemmas gave rise to isolationism, and in France, as elsewhere, there was a need to look back to the cultural roots of the country in order to rally the people.

This rousing of nationalism amongst the masses under the leadership of the P.C.F. took the form of a celebration of the French Revolution which came to symbolize French liberty and freedom during this period of economic devastation and increasing fascist activity. Huge spectacles in the form of

pageants were organized where people turned out in the costumes of the Revolution; floats were built upon which the key events of the Revolution were re-enacted, and professional artists were engaged to paint monumental portraits of revolutionary heroes like Robespiere, Voltaire and Marat. What is more, huge exhibitions of French art were organized bringing together the works of artists associated with the revolution such as David, Delacroix, and Courbet.

Thus, by the middle of the 1930s, the Communist Party in France took up a defense of what they had previously opposed: bourgeois culture. In his book <u>How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War</u>, Serge Guilbaut takes up the matter of the about-face by the P.C.F. on culture:

> ...the Popular Front would have to attract prestigious figures, well-known bourgeois artists and writers, in order to confront the enemy with a strong and credible image, the image of a united and dynamic front. In order to carry out this seduction of bourgeois personalities, the Communists were obliged to tone down certain slogans that had been central to their campaigns of the early thirties, especially their harsh and unrelenting attacks on the capitalist system. Of particular interest...was the Popular Front's rehabilitation of the notion of culture that had been defended by the bourgeoisie against earlier Communist attacks. The value of culture was reaffirmed by the Communist party, which saw an opportunity to strengthen its hold on certain national political organizations while at the same time increasing the unity of the masses. By defending the national cultural heritage, the revolutionary party was able to forge an alliance with the middle classes, which might otherwise have been susceptible to a similar culturally based appeal from the fascists.[16]

While no doubt opportunism played a role in the P.C.F.'s compromising their earlier position on culture, as Guilbaut and Jackson both note, the Popular Front coalition was deeply afraid of the fascists, an apprehension that history would prove to be fully justified. Indeed, the Seventh Congress of the Cominterm held in Moscow in 1935 directed that the threat of fascism demanded a temporary class collaboration. Thus, it became necessary for the Popular Front to "eliminate all differences of opinion and sources of conflict among the various antifascist groups."[11]

The Communists' collaboration of the 1930s was not the first instance of an alliance with moderate socialist groups and the more enlightened segment of the bourgeoisie against a common foe. As has been discussed, the Second Cominterm Congress of 1920, identifying imperialism as one of the greatest threats to global revolution, called for an international support of all anti-colonial movements even if under bourgeois leadership. Throughout the 1920s, members of the P.C.F. were vehemently anti-colonialist and were even imprisoned for protesting against the Riff War. It was a period when "the communists alone condemned all colonialism without reservation."[12] The protests against French colonial abuses continued throughout the late 1920s and the early 1930s. As late as 1933, the P.C.F. was still proudly reminding its members in its journal Commune of Barbusse's *Appel* against the Moroccan War.[13] But after 1934, the P.C.F.'s abandonment of an anti-capitalist rhetoric and its shift towards bourgeois culture was also accompanied by a

"virtual silence" on the issue of colonialism.[14] Even worse, the P.C.F.'s defense of French nationhood unavoidably resulted in the upholding of an understanding of France as a colonial empire. Caute sums up the situation well when he declares:

> The left-sectarian phase gave way to...the new nationalist line....The nation which the communists were now defending embraced the overseas territories with their vast natural resources, including those expropriated by the Versaille Treaty.[15]

In regards to the P.C.F's overall record on a stand taken against colonialism from 1934 on, Caute remarks somewhat acerbically:

> By nature and sentiment hostile to all forms of colonialism, the communist intellectuals gave proof of their discipline in allowing themselves to lapse into a *politique* silence on the subject from 1934 until the late 'forties when, with the Party irrevocably isolated, nothing was to be lost by reverting to a more traditionally Marxist posture of opposition. The evidence suggests that the closer it has come to power, or to a real influence over government policy, the more equivocal has the P.C.F. become about France's overseas territories. Few and far between were the intellectual voices raised in protest.[16]

One of the few voices raised in protest over the P.C.F.'s withdrawal of support for indigenous peoples oppressed by colonization was that of André Breton. Most likely fueling Breton's ire were the anti-imperialist writings of Vladimir Lenin which the surrealist became fully acquainted with in the early 1930s.

Within the constellation of communist notables, Lenin was the authoritative figure on imperialism and its importance to

the international socialist revolution. Imperialism, according to Lenin, represented capitalism in its late or final stages, the moment when monopoly had replaced competition, and where national internal oppression of large numbers of workers and peasants by a small bourgeoisie capitalist class had been superseded by the domination of the majority of the world's population by a small number of capitalist nations. Lenin's outward shift in focus towards the subjection of indigenous populations by the West was of great interest to Breton since it facilitated the heralding of colonized peoples – societies which were already being deployed in surrealist artistic and political strategies – as the counterpart to the Western proletariat. And as we shall see, a Leninist influenced rhetoric would turn up in Breton's anti-colonial tracts of the 1930s and 1940s.

Several points of clarification must be made when investigating Lenin's theory of imperialism and his creation of a fully international proletariat. Perhaps most important in this matter was that through his writings on imperialism, Lenin transformed the original vision of the revolution as proposed by Marx. Specifically, where Marx had conceived of the socialist revolution as occurring primarily within the context of Western Europe, Lenin envisioned it in terms of a global perspective. In the preface to the French and German editions of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* of 1916, Lenin was quite specific about the beginning of a new era of imperialism and the subsequent oppression of non-European peoples:

> Private property based on the labour of the small
> proprietor, free competition, democracy, *i.e.*, all the
> catchwords with which the capitalists and their press
> deceive the workers and the peasants - are things of
> the past. Capitalism has grown into a world system of
> colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation
> of the overwhelming majority of the people of the
> world by a handful of "advanced countries...."[17]

Moreover, Lenin frequently condemned in the harshest terms the ruthless behavior towards colonized peoples by European nations such as France, Germany, England, Italy and Austria. In his well known pamphlet "Socialism and War" published in German in 1915 and in French in 1916, Lenin declared:

> Six powers are enslaving *over half a billion* (523
> million) inhabitants of colonies. [italics his] For
> every four inhabitants of the "great" powers there are
> five inhabitants of "their" colonies. And everyone
> knows that colonies are conquered by fire and sword,
> that the populations of colonies are brutally treated,
> that they are exploited in a thousand ways (by
> exporting capital, concessions, etc., cheating when
> selling them goods, subordination to the authorities
> of the "ruling" nations, and so on and so forth.)[18]

Although the phenomenon of imperialism had regrettably resulted in the division of the world amongst the most powerful industrialized nations thereby forcing colonized societies into participating in a global capitalist economy, imperialism was, Lenin argued, a kind of mixed blessing; while profoundly oppressive, the exploitation caused by capitalism in its imperialist phase could potentially bring about a proletarian consciousness on an international scale. In his essay "The War Programme of the Proletarian Revolution" of 1916, Lenin

explained how imperialism quickened a world wide socialist battle against capitalism:

> One of the main features of imperialism is that it accelerates the development of capitalism in the most backward countries, and thereby widens and intensifies the struggle against national oppression.[19]

Moreover, while it was necessary that revolutions still occur within the dominant industrialized nations, because colonial holdings were *now* the distinguishing feature of capitalism in what Lenin regarded as an overextended and, hence, precarious stage, socialist inspired insurrections in the colonies could do irrevocable damage to the economic system in its entirety.

Lenin's reformulation of the revolution in internationalist terms necessitated the redefinition of the world's oppressed within a socialist paradigm. More to the point, depending upon the degree of capitalist development in colonized territories, indigenous peoples began to be portrayed as proletarians or, at the very least, as *potential* proletarians. This socialist imposition upon non-Western societies was rooted in the belief that "backward" peoples everywhere were being forced into an economic relationship with capitalism and hence were being transformed into an exploited labouring class.

But what made the colonial populations of particular importance to the revolution was the fact that because they had, for the most part, not gone through varied "stages of development" such as that from peasant to European urban worker, the relatively sudden economic exploitation and repressive

measures brought about by imperialism were less likely to be
hidden by a long succession of indigenous ruling class
ideologies. As this was the case, Lenin argued, the colonial
laborer was even more predisposed toward insurrection than the
urban worker. As Rolf H. W. Theen explains in his book <u>Lenin:</u>
<u>Genesis and Development of a Revolutionary</u>:

> It is the economically backward, suffering from the
> domination and exploitation of the advanced countries,
> which tend to be most inclined toward rebellion
> against the existing order. In short, revolution is
> not likely to occur in countries where capitalism is
> highly developed, but in countries where it is still
> in the state of infancy....
>   In a backward society, Lenin reasoned, especially
> one which comes into active contact with an advanced
> civilization, all the contradictions and strains
> endemic to capitalism are exacerbated. In the epoch of
> imperialism it was possible for backward nations to
> inherit and take over advanced Western developments
> and ideas, to adopt the most radical political
> ideologies originating in an industrial society, and
> thus to become carriers of advanced social - i.e.
> "proletarian" - consciousness.[20]

What is of additional importance here is that not only did Lenin
formulate a key role for non-Western peoples in an international
socialist revolution, he defined a new aggressive role for the
party's intellectuals: now the communist intelligentsia - a
political vanguard which included Breton - became responsible
for the dissemination of Lenin's "advanced" revolutionary ideas
both at home *and* abroad.

But perhaps most crucial in the matter of colonized peoples
coming to be thought of as part of an international proletariat
in some socialist circles was the tendency in Lenin's writings
towards homogeneity; that is, in his desire to create a global

proletarian consciousness Lenin made few actual distinctions between varied indigenous colonized populations.[21] What is more, in his essays Lenin frequently referred to all peoples exploited by capitalism - urban or colonial - as proletarians. For example, in "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism" of 1916, Lenin declared:

> The exploitation of oppressed nations...and especially the exploitation of colonies by a handful of "Great" Powers, transforms the "civilized" world more and more into a parasite on the body of hundreds of millions of uncivilized people....Modern society lives at the expense of the modern proletarian.[22]

Theen also addresses the broadening of the category of the proletarian that accompanied Lenin's universalizing of the revolution:

> In 1920 Lenin went as far as to suggest that the Marxist slogan "Proletarians of all countries unite" had become obsolete. Henceforth it should read: "Proletarians of all countries *and oppressed nations*, unite." [italics his][23]

Certainly Lenin's reconstruction of non-Western peoples in socialist terms is highly questionable. Nonetheless Lenin's attack upon the West's exploitation of native populations and his portrayal of indigenous populations as the colonial counterpart to the urban proletariat is of crucial importance when investigating Breton's anti-imperialist tracts and his evocation of indigenous objects in the 1930s and 1940s.

In a later interview with André Parinaud in 1951, Breton spoke of how his reading of Trotsky's book on Lenin had sent him

"into raptures."[24] When asked why so many surrealists converted to Leninism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Breton responded:

> I admit it looked very much like a mass conversion. If this were religion, the fervor of our intentions alone would have been enough. The Surrealists in particular gave much of themselves. They adhered to the view that what was still - and by far - most shocking about the world around them was the subservience in which a minuscule part of the human race held the rest, with out any justification whatsoever.[25]

Breton's response that what was most shocking was the stranglehold that the minority had upon the global majority is clearly reminiscent of Lenin's anti-imperialist rhetoric. The first and most conspicuous instance of an incorporation of Leninist doctrine directly into the surrealist political consciousness can be found in the pamphlet "Ne Visitez pas l'exposition coloniale" of 1931, signed by Breton and eleven others, protesting against the Exposition Coloniale which opened in Paris in May of 1931. As was the case in the 1920s, the surrealists continued to protest against French governmental abuses in Morocco, Libya and central Africa. Moreover, they accused the nation's chief industrialists of colluding with church and state in their plundering of the colonies. Indeed, one of the most objectionable aspects of the Exposition Coloniale to the surrealists was its flagrant celebration of French imperialist ventures. The unabashed nature of this visual statement, the authors declared, marked the full-blown emergence of France as an imperial power:

> La présence sur l'estrade inaugurale de l'Exposition
> Coloniale du Président de la République...du Cardinal
> Archevêque de Paris et de plusieurs gouverneurs et
> soudards, en face du pavillon des missionnaires, de
> ceux de Citroën et Renault, exprime clairement la
> complicité de la bourgeoisie toute entière dans la
> naissance d'un concept nouveau et particulièrement
> intolérable: la "Grande France". C'est pour implanter
> ce concept-escroquerie que l'on a bâti les
> pavillons....[26]

And very importantly in regard to Leninism, the authors of the
tract used the occasion of the *Exposition Coloniale* to point out
how distant colonized peoples oppressed in this new era of
imperialism ought to be thought of in revolutionary terms; after
all, it was Lenin, the authors declared, who "a reconnu dans les
peuples coloniaux les alliés du prolétariat mondial."[27]

The anti-imperialist tone of the surrealist attack on the
exhibition intensified in a second pamphlet entitled "Premier
bilan de l'exposition coloniale." The tract was in response to
a fire which destroyed the Dutch East Indies pavilion. Breton
and other intellectuals proclaimed that the violence of the fire
put an appropriate end to the capitalists' shameless cooption
and display of indigenous objects obtained through plunder,
stating succinctly: "Ainsi se complête *l'oeuvre colonisatrice*
commencée par le massacre, continuée par les conversions, le
travail forcé et les maladies."[28]

Lenin's reformulation of non-Western peoples exploited by
imperialism as the colonial allies of the proletariat - if not
proletarian themselves - and his call for revolution on a global
scale involving those same peoples provided further political
legitimation for surrealists' avant-garde oppositional

appropriative strategies. Specifically, with the inclusion of Leninism into surrealist ideology, North American indigenous objects - already regarded as the cultural property of living primordial communist societies - could as well be conceived of as the cultural production of colonial peoples who now, according to Lenin, had a direct role to play in the international revolution by rebelling against the economic exploitation of the West. No doubt serving to fuel the political significance of North American peoples and their objects in the 1930s was the French Communist Party's abandonment of an anti-colonialist stance and its sudden support of the French Empire. And perhaps it was the evaporation of a strong anti-colonialist stance on the part of the P.C.F. and, as well, recent colonial abuses in Africa that prompted Breton to issue one of his strongest statements against colonialism in his "Murderous Humanitarianism" written in 1932.[29]

Breton's essay bears the unmistakable influence of Lenin's writings on global imperialism and his proletariatization of the world's indigenous peoples. Specifically, Breton clearly states that he is defending "the proletariat of today, whether metropolitan or colonial" against "a holy-saint-faced international of hypocrites.[italics his]"[30] But the treatise was not only intensely anti-imperialist; it was anti-racist as well. While it might be inferred that Breton was on most occasions condemning *white* oppression, divisions along the lines of race became more emphatic in "Murderous Humanitarianism" where the colonial proletariat was assigned additional meaning

as persons of color. In the tract, Breton condemned the "agents of imperialism, [who] have grown fat off the colored races," and in an extended passage he declared that surrealism's commitment to the international proletarian revolution must be regarded as inseparable from a commitment to freeing peoples of color:[31]

> In a France, hideously inflated from having dismembered Europe, made mincemeat of Africa, polluted Oceania and ravaged whole tracts of Asia, we surrealists pronounced ourselves in favour of changing the imperialist war, in its chronic and colonial form, into a civil war. Thus we placed our energies in the service of the revolution – of the proletariat and its struggles – and defined our attitude towards the colonial problem, and hence towards the color question.[32]

Breton's foregrounding of racial issues represented a subtle but crucial shift simultaneously facilitating the surrealists' alignment with left wing revolutionary politics and their oppositional avant-garde strategies involving the evocation of indigenous cultures. In particular, indigenous peoples victimized by colonialism became extremely oppositional since according to Breton it was the colonial "proletariat" whose conditions of life were "even more wretched than those of its European equivalent...."[33] Moreover, as Breton argued throughout his essay, the colonial proletariat had a much longer history of violent oppression. Offered as evidence were the indigenous people of America whose reward for extending "a most cordial reception to the Christopher Columbian invaders" was "total extermination."[34]

At exactly the same moment the French Communist Party was abandoning its defense of colonized societies, these same peoples and their cultures were being seized by the Nazis - the P.C.F.'s principal ideological foes - for use in propaganda strategies. Specifically - and this will be discussed in detail - the Nazis proclaimed that the inclusion of cultural motifs drawn from "racially inferior" peoples in vanguard art epitomized the degeneration of Western society. In many accounts of the rise of Nazism in Germany, fascist propaganda regarding race, politics, and modern art are frequently dealt with as separate matters which overlap in places. Often the issue of race achieves predominance due to the horrific war crimes committed against the Jews and other minorities. Consequently, what can sometimes be lost sight of is how in Nazi ideology, Marxism, Bolshevism, the Jew, "primitive" peoples and their cultures, and the avant-garde were all thrown together in a monolithic propagandistic block.

This fusion is most evident in touring shows of so-called "degenerate art" that began as early as 1933. Christoph Zuschlag in an article entitled "An Educational Exhibition': The Precursors of Entartete Kunst and Its Individual Venues" has discussed the fascists' merging of Bolshevism, the Jew and modern art in these exhibitions:

> By wreaking vengeance on art the National Socialists sought to settle old scores with the Democratic Weimar Republic and thus lend both legitimacy and internal political stability to their own rule. This aim was supported in propagandistically effective fashion by stigmatizing modern art as "Jewish-Bolschevist," which

was intended to mobilize preexisting prejudices against modern art and to foment anti-semitic and anti-Communist sentiment at the same time....

The irrational polemics against "Jewish-Bolschevist" art (one of the most widely used slogans to characterize "degenerate" art) were a distillation of that Nationalist Socialist view of the world that discovered the workings of "international Judaism" everywhere it looked: "The 1918 Revolution was Jewish, as was the whole of the Weimar Republic; Jewish, too, was Marxism and the Soviet 'dictatorship of blood,' and so too, of course, was the international investment capital; the political parties of the left were a 'mercenary force in the pay of the Jews,' and finally, democracy, parliament, the majority, and the League of Nations were Jewish."[35]

What Zuschlag astutely points out is how Nazi propaganda was held together by the irrational glue of prejudice: a preexistent distaste for vanguard art and native anti-semitism were fused and marshalled against communism. And while all distortions of form in the supposed culture of communism were offered as visible evidence of an inherent sickness, by 1935 what was singled out and paraded in shows of "Degenerate Art" as *prima facie* evidence for the degeneracy of "Jewish-Bolshevism" was the latter's celebration of "racially inferior" cultures in modernist primitivism. Thus in essence what we are presented with is yet another deviant sub-group deploying indigenous peoples and their cultures in oppositional strategies.

The Nazis' vehement denunciation of primitivist tendencies in avant-garde art was, in part, aimed at the *internationalist* underpinnings of communist ideology. Specifically, the focus of the fascist attack was on Lenin's agenda of putting aside racial and ethnic differences in order to facilitate an international

proletarian consciousness. And as we shall see when we come to investigate the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* in 1936, around the same time that surrealists were evoking indigenous objects as representing the cultures of the colonial proletariat that ought to be liberated by international communism, the fascists were parading "primitivism" - as embedded in European modernist practices - in such a way as to *obstruct* that agenda. In a sense, then, these display strategies were engaged in a sort of dialogue which drew indigenous peoples even further into the political arena of the 1930s.

In a speech entitled "An End to Art-Bolshevism" inaugurating the *Great Exhibition of German Art 1937* at the opening of the House of German Art, Hitler attacked the modernist culture of the "Jewish-Bolshevists" as reflective of their internationalist agenda. He declared that for this group art "was defined as nothing but an international communal experience, thus killing altogether any understanding of its integral relationship with an ethnic group."[36] Hitler's denunciation of modernist practices as "international" simultaneously served to promote German nationalism and theories of Aryan supremacy. Based upon notions taken from social Darwinism, Hitler imagined a coexistent cultural and racial evolution which was culminating in the art of the German peoples:

> From the history of development of our people we know
> that it is composed of more or less differentiated
> races, which in the course of millenniums, thanks to

the overwhelming formative influence of one
outstanding racial core, resulted in that particular
mixture which we see in our people today.

    This power, once capable of forming a people, and
thus still today an active one, is contained here
again in the same Aryan race which we recognize not
only the carrier of our own culture, but as that of
the preceding cultures of antiquity as well.

    ...we who see in the German people the gradually
crystallizing end result of this historical process,
desire for ourselves an art which takes into account
within itself the continually growing unification of
this race pattern and, thus, emerges with a unified,
well-rounded character.[37]

In order for these neo-classical art forms to take hold in

Germany, Hitler demanded a simultaneous racial and cultural

cleansing from the midst of its people. In the following excerpt

from Hitler's speech, we see how avant-garde art, especially in

its "primitive" phase, is fused with notions of racial

inferiority:

    "Works of art" that are not capable of being
understood in themselves but need some pretentious
instruction book to justify their existence - until at
long last they find someone sufficiently browbeaten to
endure such stupid or impudent twaddle with patience -
will never again find their way to the German
people.

    ...only barefaced impudence or unfathomable
stupidity could dare to offer to our present age, of
all ages, works that might have been made ten or
twenty thousand years ago by Stone-Age man. They speak
of the primitive in art, and they forget that it is
not the purpose of art to move backward and away from
the evolution of a nation, that its task can only be
to symbolize the living evolution.

    ....A glorious and beautiful type of human being
is emerging....this human type, you gentlemen of the
prehistoric, spluttering art brigade, is the type of
the new age. And what do you create? Misshapen
cripples and cretins, women who can arouse only
revulsion, [38] men closer to beasts than human
beings.....

But while the issue of "race" is central here, it is inseparable from politics: the cultural motifs of other races in all avant-garde art was condemned by the fascists as a political act in support of international communism. In the exhibition guide book for the *Entarte Kunst* show which opened in Berlin on February 26th 1938, visitors were instructed to spurn modernist primitivist works since they were part of a communist scheme to erase "racial consciousness":

> The many works shown here serve to demonstrate that degenerate art often lent its support to that segment of Marxist and Bolshevik ideology whose objective is the systematic *eradication of the last vestige of racial consciousness* [italics theirs]....here we are presented with the *negro* and the *South Sea islander* as the evident racial ideal of "modern art."[39]

As this statement makes clear, the Nazis considered the primitivizing of vanguard art as extending beyond the mere inclusion of African motifs; such a narrow focus would have been insufficient to publicly demonstrate how "Jewish-Bolshevist" art sought the abolishment of an international global racial and ethnic consciousness. The fascist concept of the "primitive," therefore, encompassed an extended range of indigenous peoples including those of the South Pacific. But perhaps the gravest charge in this passage was that in the "Marxist-Bolshevist" attempt to establish an international artform based upon a willful embracing of primitive motifs, they had elevated the art and, hence, the non-European races to a position of preeminence.

The economy of means characterizing fascist propaganda is as well evident in the choice of the term "degenerate" applied to the modernist culture of the "Jewish-Bolshevists" since it could be deployed by the Nazis to characterize the supposed low intellectual, cultural and moral state of communism, and, at the same time, buttress racist theories of Nordic supremacy by alluding to a devolvement from proper or normal standards to earlier forms or stages. But one of the problems the Nazis encountered was that while the word "degenerate" affixed to modern art served fascist strategies, they required a visual motif that would publicly signify this state of degeneration to the German masses. In early posters for Nazi Degenerate Art exhibitions, such as that in Munich in 1936, what we see are geometric motifs highly reminiscent of the suprematist art of the Russian avant-garde attractively rendered in deep blue, red and white.[fig.6] Between the geometric forms is printed "Exhibition of 'culture documents' of the decadent work of Bolsheviks and Jews."

But very quickly there is a change in the appearance of posters and covers for exhibition guides. The rationale for the change was most likely due to the fact that while these motifs were very close to those of Russian avant-garde art, it may not have been immediately apparent to the German public why geometric abstract forms rendered in attractive colors were to be regarded as degenerate. What was required were images that would more closely reinforce the tirades given by high ranking Nazi officials at these shows and in the many didactic passages

that appeared on cards dispersed throughout the exhibition displays. Almost at once, abstract geometric motifs were abandoned for modernist primitivist designs that were now presented as exemplifying the culture of the Jewish-Bolsheviks. For example, on the poster for touring "Degenerate Art" exhibitions of 1937 and 1938, the graphic designer - H. E. - rendered fanciful modernist primitive motifs such as palm fronds, a giraffe's neck and head and an Africanized mask, in strident colors of mauve and black.[fig.7] Also in 1937, a photograph of a modernist primitive sculpted head by Otto Freundlich entitled *The New Man* appeared on the front cover of a "Degenerate Art" exhibition guide book, a work which again turned up on a poster for a show in 1941.[fig.8]

The reason for this change, I believe, becomes plainly evident in Rudolph Herman's poster designed for "Degenerate Art" exhibitions that took place between 1938 and 1940.[fig.9] On the poster appears a fanciful modernist primitivized head rendered in unpleasant shades of orange and black. Most tellingly, lurking in the darkened background is the stereotyped physiognomy of the so-called "racially inferior Jew" made to appear as if a sinister shadow of the illuminated primitivized head. With this image, the Nazis were able to put a public face to the monolithic block. Firstly, it "revealed" the internationalist agenda of "Jewish-Bolshevists." Secondly, it illustrated how the so-called inferior non-white races had been elevated to a position of preeminence in "Jewish-Bolshevist" avant-garde culture thus evincing what were for the Nazis the

low intellectual, moral and cultural state of both the Jews and communism. Thirdly, the Jew as "shadow" reinforced Nazi propaganda alleging that the Jews had covertly attempted to take control of German institutional life. Fourthly, the head coupled with the shadow served as a visually didactic statement of the biologically degenerate state of the "Jewish-Bolshevists" by equating the level of their racial evolution to that of peoples prejudicially regarded as the lowest on the evolutionary scale. And finally, this primitivist tendency in avant-garde art served as a perfect foil for the fascist neoclassic aesthetic exemplified in the works of artists such as Arno Brecker. [fig.10]

It is against the backdrop of these events in Europe that the surrealist strategy of displaying "primitive" objects alongside their own must, in part, be investigated. In particular, in the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* in 1936, organized by Breton and held at the home of the "primitive" art dealer Charles Ratton, a sizable selection of indigenous objects including those from North America were exhibited with natural objects such as crystals, found objects, and found objects reworked by various members of the group into surrealist works. Moreover, sculptures by Picasso and the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp such as his *Bottle Rack* of 1914, were also on display, perhaps in an effort to establish the avant-garde pedigree of the surrealist movement during a historical moment when a searching for and displaying of roots was not uncommon.

As for locating the exhibition in the home of Charles Ratton, the choice may have been based upon Breton's strong desire to display North American indigenous objects alongside those fashioned by the surrealists. That is not to say that Breton did not collect such objects on his own. As discussed, at the exact same time the *Surrealist Map of the World* was being drawn, members of the group were avidly collecting objects produced by the Inuit and the peoples of the Northwest Coast. The reason why Breton did not have this collection in 1936 is that he - along with Paul Eluard - had to auction off these items due to the economic hardships of the time. Included in the auction, which was held at the Hotel Drouot in Paris in July of 1931, were thirteen Inuit pieces, mostly whale bone carvings and masks, and twenty seven objects from the North West Coast such as masks and totemic animal figures.[40] [fig.2,3,4,5]

Similar items were again on view at the Exhibition of Surrealist Objects in 1936. However, since Breton had auctioned off his own collection in 1931, he had to now rely upon Ratton's collection as a source for these objects which were exhibited alongside surrealist works.[41] Also present on the exhibitions walls were indigenous objects produced by the peoples of the Antilles, New Hebrides and New Guinea. Not coincidentally, the Antilles and the New Hebrides were French colonies and both had been prominently featured in the *Surrealist Map of the World*.

As for the "politics" of display at this moment in time - an exhibition strategy that will be investigated shortly in more detail - these objects could be evoked by the surrealist avant-

garde as a protest against France's flagrant imperialism, the P.C.F.'s abandonment of an anti-colonial stance and their embrace of France conceived of as an empire. Moreover, Breton's flaunting of "primitive" culture in the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* was, I believe, a bold assertion of an affinity between surrealism and peoples of color at time when the Nazis were staging shows fiercely condemning the avant-garde's preoccupation with indigenous societies. Indeed, native objects were hung on the wall in such a way that *insisted upon* certain connections between the surrealists and indigenous peoples.[42] Undoubtedly, by 1936 the public would have been aware of how in "Degenerate Art" exhibitions, "primitivism" and avant-gardism were both fused and imbued with a hugely negative charge. In fact, the Nazis, using an epoxy of race and politics, buttressed - albeit for perverse reasons of their own - the claims of affinity that the surrealist avant-garde had been making all along. And in some sense the fascists were right about some avant-gardes' deployment of "primitive" motifs as an act in support of left wing politics.

Recent assessments of display methodologies in ethnographic museums have addressed how the placement of objects in proximity rather than in relative isolation can develop more powerful meanings since proximity can facilitate a desired context. In an article entitled "Objects of Ethnography," Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted how in some exhibitions, objects are set in context through the use of long labels, charts, diagrams

booklets and catalogues; but she also argues that proximity alone can function as a contextualizing device serving as "object lessons":[43]

> Objects are also set in context by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind....
> In-context approaches exert strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large numbers of artifacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another....Whether they guide by the physical arrangement of objects or structure the way the viewers look at otherwise amorphous accumulations, exhibition classifications create serious interest where it might be lacking. For instruction...viewers need principles for looking. They require a context, or framework, for transforming otherwise grotesque, rude, strange, and vulgar artifacts into object lessons.[44]

When looking at photographs of the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects*, it is clear that the use of proximity as a contextual device has been deployed in the show. Indigenous objects, and in particular masks, have, in places, been positioned high up on the wall. Carefully arranged below were display cases of other objects including surrealized ones.[fig.11] Hence, rather than placing indigenous objects alongside those made by the surrealists, Breton established a hierarchy of sorts whereby the viewer would look up at the masks and then down at the many objects displayed directly beneath them. While the circumstances underlying the interrelationship may not have been immediately apparent to the viewer, at the very least, the connection was made. Certainly, the title of the show alone indicated that indigenous objects in the show were to be conceived of within a

surrealist framework. Strengthening this frame of reference was the complete lack of data as to the meaning of the indigenous objects to the societies that produced them; context would have asserted difference and, hence, would have disrupted supposed sites of "affinity" so necessary to surrealist oppositional strategies.

Through a lack of context and the use of proximity indigenous objects were, therefore, made far more amenable to cooption. In an article entitled "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue" Spencer R. Crew and James E. Simms emphasize how new meanings can emerge when objects are arranged in this fashion:

> With objects transformed from one temporal continuity of use to another, their meanings are entirely reconstituted; the proximity of things to one another perhaps has more authority, more readable meaning than the things themselves.[45]

So while authors such as Evan Maurer or William Rubin discuss how the surrealists were intensely interested in ethnography and anthropology, there is little evidence of such a commitment in surrealist practices; instead, what we find is the *exclusion of* ethnographic data so as not to interfere with surrealist avant-garde strategies.[46]

Another matter raised by the evocation of indigenous objects at the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* is the tactical difference between *incorporation* and *equivalence* in the group's practices. That is, some authors such as Rubin and Maurer have

scoured surrealist works in search of an incorporation of "primitive" motifs usually in an effort to strengthen arguments that sites of congruence between a surrealist world view and that of the homogeneous "primitive" actually existed. However, to look for primitive motifs *within* surrealist works is to partly ignore the group's exhibiting tactics: while the surrealists did at times "primitivize" their practice through the "surrealization" of indigenous motifs, they also chose to publicly display actual ethnographic objects alongside their works. Hence, the strategy of equivalence must be distinguished from that of incorporation. The question then arises as to the nature of the analogous "virtues" between these objects and surrealist works at a time when both were displayed in close proximity.

One of the many problems when interpreting the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* is that there was no accompanying explanatory catalogue.[47] Undoubtedly the show served a variety of surrealist oppositional strategies bound up with poetics, psychoanalysis and magic. However, there were, I believe, additional perceived sites of congruence for Breton, ones directly related to his communistic involvements. The first concerns the "virtues" that these works acquired once indigenous peoples were brought into the arena of the international socialist revolution by Lenin. Once indigenous peoples came to be regarded as part of the community of the international proletariat, their cultural output could be hailed

during the heated cultural debates of the Popular Front about what sort of art forms would best liberate the consciousness of the European proletariat, as art produced *by* a proletariat, one which was wholly unalienated, non-oppressive, and untainted by bourgeois hegemony and capitalism. Not coincidentally, this was a claim that the surrealists had been making about their own art forms all along.

Secondly, as discussed in the second chapter, many of these objects - especially those produced by the peoples of North America - had been imbued with exceptional social import in France by both Durkheim and Mauss. In the Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim, had declared indigenous objects such as the ones the surrealists preferred to collect and display as the "the first form of art."[48] Thus, at a time of upheaval when both dominant and oppositional groups were struggling for legitimacy through a searching for and displaying of roots, the surrealists laid claim to the primordial roots of artistic practice as their own.

Moreover, Durkheim had argued "scientifically" in his sociological treatises that in its first form, art was not merely decorative: objects such as masks were said to be completely charged with social import, capable of causing an interior transformation of the psyche resulting in far reaching societal benefits for the collective within these primordial "socialist" communities. In Mauss's The Gift, objects decorated with the totem such as the mask, were also given a privileged place within primordial socialist societies, portrayed as imbued

with social import, and, hence, as wholly unalienated. Interestingly, in the earlier *Premier bilan d'Exposition coloniale* of 1931, the importance of indigenous objects to both sociology and artistic avant-gardism was noted in a passage concerning the destruction of indigenous objects in the fire at the Dutch East Indies Pavilion. The authors proclaimed:

> Les découvertes modernes dans l'art comme dans la sociologie seraient incompréhensibles si l'on ne tenait pas compte du facteur déterminant qu'a été la révélation récente de l'art des peuples dits primitifs.[49]

Because of these "revelations" which appeared in prominent political sociological texts, "primitive" objects and the peoples who made them were probably more comprehensible to the visitor to the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* than the surrealist objects displayed below. Hence it may have been the case that indigenous objects supplied the context or the framework for Breton's "object lessons."

Finally in the matter of these objects' signification at this historical moment, there was the long-standing portrayal of the peoples who made them as essentially peaceful, unalienated, matriarchal, having no monogamous family, and no state. These attributes could be evoked through these societies' cultural production at exactly the same time that the Popular Front and the Nazis were espousing the virtues of the family, the organized state, and country in an era characterized by increased militarism, social upheaval caused by capitalism in

crisis, and patriarchy manifested in the figures of Stalin and Hitler.   Concerning the family, in "Premier bilan de l'exposition coloniale" the authors as part of their protest against bourgeois capitalism evoked the absence of the family in North American indigenous societies through a direct reference to Engels's <u>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</u>. The reference to Engels comes in a passage which declared that the fire at the Dutch Pavilion which had destroyed indigenous objects acquired through colonialist occupation ought to teach capitalism a lesson. That is, the blaze seemed to underscore the idea that what was acquired through violence perished by violence. But the authors felt that most likely the only ones who would be educated by this unfortunate event would be the Marxists, contending that the illumination provided by the fire was akin to Engels's enlightenment upon encountering Morgan's research on the primordial origins of the family:

> Seule, la science matérialiste pouvait bénéficier de cette valeur d'étude, comme Marx et Engels reprenant les observations de Morgan sur les Iroquois...l'ont mis parfaitement en lumière dans leurs recherches sur l'origine de la famille.[50]

This statement raises a number of key issues. Firstly, the passage clearly indicates that the surrealists like Breton were aware of the central place occupied by North American Indians in Engels's writings. Secondly, given the central importance of the Iroquois in Engels's formulations, it is interesting that the surrealists did not collect or display objects made by these particular indigenous peoples. There are most likely several

reasons for this omission. The first has to do with the ambiguous relationship that the French colonists in Canada had with the Iroquois. Specifically, while the Iroquois where notorious for massacring French Jesuits, they often opportunistically colluded with the French colonialists in battles against other indigenous groups. The second matter is that the Iroquois were frequently portrayed as warlike and, hence, were unsuitable foils in an era of escalating violence. And thirdly, other "living" North American indigenous peoples, specifically the Inuit and the peoples of the Northwest Coast, had more recently been imbued with socialist significance and, in a sense, had superseded the Iroquois in importance. After all, these peoples had been constructed as living primordial communist societies whose "authentic" way of life was currently being threatened by the unrelenting grip of colonialism.[51]

Also of importance when approaching the issue of what Breton was writing around the same time he was displaying the indigenous objects of societies viewed as possessing communist attributes were the joint declarations issued by Breton, Bataille and others for the surrealist based group *Contre Attaque*. This highly aggressive collection of essays railed against capitalism, imperialist wars, fascism, and the institutions of family, state and patriarchy promoted by both the fascists and the Popular Front. For example, in an essay written in January of 1936, entitled "Contre-Attaque la patrie et la famille," Breton, Bataille, Maurice Heine and Benjamin

Péret collectively declared in a series of succinct sentences and paragraphs:[52]

> Un homme qui admet la patrie, un homme qui lutte pour la famille, c'est un homme qui trahit....
>   La patrie se dresse entre l'homme et les richesses du sol. Elle exige que les produits de la sueur humaine soient transformés en canons. Elle fait d'un être humain un traître à son semblable.
>   La famille est le fondement de la contrainte sociale....
>   Père, patrie, patron, telle est la trilogie qui sert de base a la vieille société patriarcale et, aujourd'hui, a la chiennerie fasciste.[53]

Given the foci of attack in these tracts, it can be seen how the virtues assigned to "primitive" societies and their cultures would have continued to serve as foils right into the late 1930s.

By the end of the 1930s, the European consciousness was preoccupied with fascist aggression and the growing threat of war. As serious as these events were, however, they served to fuel rather than temporarily displace anti-imperialist concerns amongst some factions of the left. Breton, for example, held the position that capitalism in its final stage of imperialism was the underlying cause of economic, political and social upheaval and, as well, fascism. No doubt he was encouraged in these convictions through his friendship with Leon Trotsky, an individual acclaimed by Breton in his talk "Visit with Leon Trotsky," on November 11 1938, as being "one of the two leaders of the 1917 revolution" and for his continued defense of "Lenin's thesis."[54] Indeed, Trotsky, in his essay "Once Again, Whither France?" written in March of 1935, had claimed that the

cause of fascism was rooted in imperialism and he condemned the French Communist Party for being ignorant of this reality:

> The program of the Communist International – written in 1928...states: "The epoch of imperialism is the epoch of capitalism in its death agony." By itself, this statement, which was formulated by Lenin a long time ago, is absolutely incontestable and is of decisive importance for the policies of the proletariat in our epoch. But the authors of the program of the Communist International failed utterly to understand the thesis, which they had mechanically adopted, on capitalism *in its death agony* or *in decay*. [italics his] This lack of comprehension stands revealed with especial clarity in respect to what is to us the most burning question, namely, fascism....
> The inability to understand the meaning of Lenin's thesis on "capitalism in its death agony" has prevented the present policies of the French Communist Party with its character of noisy impotence, supplemented by reformist illusions. Although fascism represents the organic product of capitalist decay, the Stalinists have suddenly become convinced of the possibility of putting an end to fascism without touching the foundations of bourgeois society.[55]

In 1938, not long before Breton fled to America, he visited Trotsky in Mexico. At that time Breton crafted – with the help of Trotsky and Diego Rivera – his "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art." It was this treatise that launched the *Federation internationale des artistes revolutionaires independants* or *FIARI*. While the document was vehemently anti-fascist and anti-Stalinist, the direct influence of Trotsky is clearly evident where imperialism is identified as being the root cause of historical upheaval at that moment:

> In the present period of the death agony of capitalism, democratic as well as fascist, the artist sees himself threatened with the loss of his right to live and continue working. He sees all avenues of

communication choked with the debris of capitalist collapse.[56]

When Breton returned to France that same year, he, along with several other members of the group, continued to launch anti-imperialist tracts. An important matter raised by these protests is that while they continued to be rather fierce in nature, they also displayed an awareness of how the open expression of political opposition was beginning to be threatened by fascism. Hence, while this thesis will take up the issue of how and why Breton's political views were curtailed while he was exiled in North America, it is important to note how this repression actually began in Europe in the late 1930s. One essay that is particularly revealing in this regard is "Ni de votre Guerre ni de votre Paix!" of 1938.

The surrealist treatise "Ni de votre Guerre ni de votre Paix!" was critical of a series of current events: the League of Nations' failure to stop the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Japanese aggression against China in 1937 and the Munich settlement of 1938.[57] Moreover, the document warned that yet another imperialist war was about to break out:

> ...la guerre qui menace de surgir de l'inextricable conflit d'intérêts impérialistes dont l'Europe est affligée ne sera pas la guerre de la démocratie, pas la guerre de la justice, pas la guerre de la liberté. Les États qui, pour les besoins de l'heure et pour ceux de l'histoire, prétendent se servir de ces notions comme des pièces d'identité, ont acquis leurs richesses et consolide leur pouvoir par des méthodes de tyrannie, d'arbitraire et de sang. Les preuves les plus récentes de l'indignité de ces États sont encore vivantes dans la mémoire collective.

> Ils ont laissé l'Italie anéantir l'Ethiopie notamment parce que toute résistance victorieuse opposée a l'envahisseur *blanc* eût encouragé les peuples coloniaux a se délivrer de l'étreinte impérialiste....
> Ils livrent la Chine a l'impérialisme japonais.
> Aujourd'hui, si les puissances pseudo-démocratiques se mettent en mouvement, c'est afin de défendre un État qu'elles ont crée a leur image, un État foncièrement capitaliste, centralisé, policier, statique.[58]

At the end of the document the group expressed their ongoing support of revolutionary principles declaring that a new Europe would emerge out of "la révolution prolétarienne."[59] However, while the tract was profoundly anti-imperialist, it revealed, at the same time, a sensitivity that speaking out in this fashion was now a dangerous practice. Specifically, rather than being signed with the individual names of those who produced it, the document was simply designated as originating from the "Le Groupe Surréaliste." As Helena Lewis points out in The Politics of Surrealism, the reason why the authors began to sign their tracts in this way was due to "fear of reprisals by the government, especially against foreign Surrealists residing in France."[60] Indeed, by 1939 Breton had been labelled as a dangerous political agitator, and his name appeared on the Nazi "hit list." After the fall of France in June of 1940, Breton's precarious position was shared by hundreds of left wing intellectuals many of whom fled into the country's unoccupied south. While temporarily safe in the port of Marseilles, they became increasingly vulnerable after the signing of the armistice between Marshall Petain and the Germans due to a

clause within the document designated as Article 19 which declared:

> The French government is obliged to surrender on demand all Germans named by the German government in France, as well as in French possessions, colonies, protectorate territories and mandates. The French government binds itself to prevent removal of German and civil prisoners from France into French possessions or into foreign countries.[61]

At first the Germans were only interested in the Greater Reich, that is to say Germans, Austrians, Czechs and Poles. However, this interest was shortly extended to include anybody the German government wanted. Largely due to the rescue efforts of a small liberal enclave in New York, surrealists such as Breton eventually managed to escape to America where he remained until the mid-1940s.[62] While one might assume that once safe on the other side of the Atlantic Breton would have actively resumed his oppositional avant-garde activities in the midst of yet another imperialist war, as shall be explored in the next chapter, the myriad of circumstances associated with exile resulted in his continued restraint. But in spite of this persistant coercion, Breton managed to pursue - even if in a limited fashion - anti-imperialist strategies, ones which reactivated socialist constructions of North American native peoples and their cultures brought across the Atlantic from France.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. Caute, p.206.

2. Helena Lewis, <u>The Politics of Surrealism</u> (New York: Paragon House, 1988), p.35.

3. André Breton, "What is Surrealism," in Franklin Rosemont ed. <u>What is Surrealism? Selected Writings</u> (New York: Monad Press, 1978), pp.116-117.

4. *Ibid.*, p.128.

5. *Ibid.*, p.131.

6. As was the case in America during the Great Depression, all measures were aimed at both recovery and reform and Blum openly characterized his program as the French "New Deal." As one can well imagine, the French right, those who had formerly owned the banks and big business, and the quasi-fascist groups that had taken their cue from Germany were not pleased. Greatly alarmed, they accused the government of bringing the Communist Revolution to France declaring that soon a French Lenin would follow Blum. Moreover, the election of a Jew as the head of this coalition socialist government fueled French anti-semitism, and the right bitterly claimed that the fate of France was outside the Catholic church and in the hands of a leftist, a Socialist, and - just as bad - a Jew. Some went as far to take up the slogan "Better Hitler than Leon Blum." In the end, however, the labour reforms of the Blum government seemed to come too late. While French workers got a forty hour work week, German arms plants during the same period began operating on a twenty-four hour basis. Even some French moderates argued that the factories should have been operating longer hours in order to rebuild the French arsenal at a time when Germany seemed to gearing up for renewed military aggression. The Blum government also came under attack by the communists for not giving aid to the besieged Spanish Popular Front and it was accused of following an isolationist policy not unlike other nations such as America. By 1938, the Radical Socialists returned to their conservative posturing under Daladier. Their concern was not increased labour disgruntlement over the nullification of the forty hour work week, but Germany's expansionist mode. In 1940, France fell to Germany.

7. Jackson's account of the whole Popular Front phenomenon in France is perhaps one of best on this period in the country's history. See Julian Jackson, <u>The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38</u> (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989

8. Outside of urban areas, the French Communist Party as part of their cultural program and enlistment campaign established centers called the *Maisons de la Culture* throughout the countryside, community centers that were much like the ones that emerged in America in the 1930s. Since rural people tended to be rather conservative, these centers recruited not so much on the basis of communist ideology, but instead, upon the celebration of the history of French culture. In other words, the French Communist Party chose both to defend this legacy against fascism while at the same time radically increasing their own national political power in this window of opportunity. As a result of this softening of their own position, their membership grew from 12,000 in 1929 to almost 100,000 by 1939.

9. Caute, p.36.

10. Serge Guilbaut, <u>How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War</u> trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983),pp.17-18.

11. Guilbaut, p.17 For more conservative modernist painters such as Leger and Delaunay, as well as for the more politically radical avant-garde groups like the surrealists, the P.C.F's switch from a promise of a revolutionary culture to a support of *traditional* French bourgeois culture resulted in a great deal of outrage and feelings of betrayal. In order to fully understand this reaction it is important to first note that artists as well as musicians, theater people and cinematographers solicited by the communists were offered something that they had always wanted: a direct way to speak to the masses and put them into a revolutionary frame of mind. Thus, when the communist party took the traditional cultural line of the Popular Front, it gave rise to a fierce controversy in 1935 known as *La Querrelle du Realisme* whereby artists who represent different camps – realism, abstraction and radical avant-gardism – entered into a common arena in order to argue out their positions.

12. Caute, p.206.

13. Ibid., p.207.

14. Ibid., p.207.

15. *Ibid.*, p.207.

16. *Ibid.*, p.205.

17. Vladimir Lenin, <u>Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism</u> (New York: International Publishers, 1939), pp.10-11.

18.   Vladimir Lenin, "Socialism and War," in <u>Lenin on War and Peace. Three Articles</u> (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966),p.8.

19.   Vladimir Lenin, "The War Programme of the Proletarian Revolution" in *Lenin on War and Peace<u>. Three Articles</u>* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966),p.59.

20.   Rolf   Theen,   <u>Lenin: Genesis and Development of a Revolutionary</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.11.

21. One of the points of interest in the writings of Lenin is the perpetuation of Engels's idealized construction of primitive peoples as found in <u>The Origin of the Family, Privated Property and the State</u>. Refering to Engels's text, Lenin spoke of the communistic nature of "primitive" societies in his lecture "The State" delivered at Sverdlov University in 1919:

> Fairly definite traces of these primitive times have survived in the life of many primitive peoples; and if you take any work whatsoever on primitive culture, you will always come across more or less definitive descriptions, indications and recollections of the fact that there was a time, more or less similar to primitive Communism, when the division of society into slaveowners and slaves did not exist. And in those times there was no state, no special apparatus for the systematic application of force and the subjection of people by force....
> In primitive society...there were yet no signs of the existence of a state. We find the predominance of custom, authority, respect, the power enjoyed by the elders of the clan; we find this power sometimes accorded to women - the position of women then was not like the unfranchised and oppressed condition of women today - but nowhere do we find a special category of people who are set apart to rule others and who...systematically and permanently command a certain apparatus of coercion, an apparatus of violence, such as is represented at the present time...by the armed detachments of troops, the prisons and all the other means of subjugating the will of others by force.

Vladimir Lenin, "The State," in <u>V. I. Lenin: Marx - Engels - Marxism</u> (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947),p.427.

22.   Vladimir Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," in *V. I. Lenin: Marx - Engels - Marxism* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947),p.309.

23.   Theen, p.114.

24.   André Breton, <u>Conversations: An Autobiography of Surrealism</u> trans. by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p.93.

25.   *Ibid.*, p.97.

26.   André Breton, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret, Georges Sadoul, Pierre Unik, André Thiron, René Crevel, Aragon, René Char, Maxime Alexandre, Yves Tanguy and Georges Malkine, "Ne Visitez pas l'exposition coloniale" in <u>Tract Surréalistes et Declarations Collectives: 1922-1939</u> ed. Jose Pierre (Paris: Chirat 1980),p.195.

27.   *Ibid.*, p.195.

28.   *Ibid.*, p.199.

29.   Franklin Rosemont notes that the article was never published in French; instead, it appeared only in English in Nancy Cunard's <u>Negro Anthology</u> published in London in 1934.(p.324-327)

30.   André Breton, "Murderous Humanitarianism," in Franklin Rosemont ed. <u>André Breton. What is Surrealism? Selected Writings</u> (New York: Monad, 1978), p.324&326.

31.   *Ibid.*, p.324.

32.   *Ibid.*, p.325.

33.   *Ibid.*, p.326.

34.   *Ibid.*, p.326.

35.   Christoph Zuschlag, "An 'Educational Exhibition': The Precursors of *Entartete Kunst* and Its Individual Venues," in exhibition catalogue "<u>Degenerate Art</u>": <u>The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany</u> (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, (February 17-May 122, 1991), p.83. The quotes he includes are taken from Eberhard Jackel, <u>Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrchaft</u> (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986),p.60.

36. Adolph Hitler, "Great Exhibition of German Art," in Herschel B. Chipp, <u>Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p.478.

37.   *Ibid.*, p.478.

38.   Adolph Hitler quoted in catalogue *"Degenerate Art"*: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany, pp.384-386.

39.   *Ibid.*, p.376.

40.   An interesting question that has been raised in some texts concerned with the particulars of surrealist collecting is did the *availability* of objects on the open market affect what indigenous societies the surrealist chose to ally themselves with. Cowling observes - as have the majority of art historians - that by the mid 1920s, the surrealists were principally interested in the Inuit and the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast. But she remarks that this preference was not immediately apparent when looking at surrealist collections in the 1920s; specifically, surrealists such as Breton had far more Oceanic, African and Pre-Columbian objects in their collection than they did objects from Alaska, Labrador or the Northwest Coast. However, she warns against interpreting this imbalance in their collections as an "accurate reflection of their preferences." Turning to the market in Paris for clarification, she explains that "there was a constant supply of Oceanic, African and Pre-Columbian material on the European market throughout the 1920s" whereas "American Indian material was always very difficult to obtain." In fact, one of the few way the surrealists could even view large numbers these objects was to travel to ethnographic museums located in Germany and London. Hence, while it would seem that the market was more accommodating to a surrealist affiliation with African, Pre-Columbian or Oceanic objects, the group chose to establish a more direct "affinity" with North American indigenous peoples whose objects were harder to come by. Elizabeth Cowling, "The Eskimos, The American Indians and the Surrealists," *Art History* Vol. 1 No. 4 (December, 1978),p.486.

41. In the press invitation Breton notes that the indigenous objects were "chosen from the collection of Charles Ratton." The invitation is reprinted in the exhibition catalogue, André Breton. La beauté convulsive (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne. Centre Georges Pompidou, 25 Avril au 26 Aout, 1991), p.229.

42. Again, it is not coincidental that Breton chose to display objects produced by peoples Hitler referred to as the South Seas Islanders.

43.   Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Objects of Ethnography," Ivan Karp ed. Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics of Museum Display (Washington:Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991),p.390.

44. *Ibid.*, p.390. Finally she declares that "there are as many contexts for an object as there are interpretative strategies." p.390

45. Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in Ivan Karp ed. <u>Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics of Museum Display</u> (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p.163. The authors further remark:

> A narrative is being constructed by the audience, whether the exhibition developers like it or not. the space between the object and the label is an active one....The political choice made by the exhibition maker is, then, in what way, when, and how much to intervene in the shaping of this event. p.173

46. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett remarks in the closing statement of her article:

> The question in not whether or not an object is of visual interest, but rather how interest of any kind is created. All interest is vested. p.434

47. The only elucidation in regard to the show was Breton's rather lengthy invitation to the press. But the statement merely provided a brief itemization of the objects on display and vaguely alluded to their "poetic power."In <u>André Breton. La beauté convulsive</u> p.229.

48. Durkheim, p.149.

49. <u>Tracts surréalistes et declarations collectives 1922-39</u>, p.198.

50. *Ibid.*, p.198.

51. Indeed, appearing in the final issue of the surrealist journal *Minotaure* published in May of 1939, was an article written by the artist Kurt Seligmann in which he quoted a Tsimshian "elder" as complaining that the destruction of indigenous material culture by Europeans had resulted in a decline of tribal beliefs. Seligmann had made his way to North America in 1939. Once there, he headed out to British Columbia in an effort to get a firsthand look at Northwest Coast indigenous cultures. Refering to the totemic objects surrounding them, photographs of which appeared in the article, the Tsimshian declared:

> Pour nos jeunes gens ce sont des objets de temps
> périmés, ayant perdu leur force. La magie des
> bicyclettes, des cinémas, des chemins de fer leur
> paraît infiniment plus attirant, et ils parlent sans
> beaucoup de respect de nos vieillards qui connaissent
> et gardent jalousement les anciens secrets.

Kurt Seligmann "Entretien avec un Tsimshian," *Minotaure*, No 12-13 (Mai, 1939), p.67

52. It is worth noting here that that the values of "la patrie et la famille" were also promoted by the Right. This became especially evident in 1941 with the "replacement of "Liberté, Egalite, Fraternité with 'Travail, Famille, Patrie" under Petain. Maurice Larkin, <u>France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1986</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.91.

53. André Breton, Georges Bataille, Maurice Heine, Benjamin Péret, "Contre-Attaque la patrie et la famille," in <u>Tracts surréalistes et declarations collectives</u>, p.294.

54. Rosemont, p.177. As Helena Lewis notes in <u>The Politics of Surrealism</u>, Breton's gravitation towards the French Section of the Trotskyist Party of the International Worker was largely motivated by his disgruntlement with the P.C.F., and, especially, by the Stalinist orchestrated Moscow Trials. Lewis p.142.

55. David Salner ed. <u>Leon Trotsky on France</u> (New York: Monad Press, 1979), pp. 88-89.

56. André Breton, "Manifesto for an Independant Revolutionary Art," in <u>What is Surrealism? Selected Writings</u> ed. by Franklin Rosemont (New York: Monad Press, 1978), p.187.

57. Concerning Italian imperialism, in 1935, Mussolini went to war with Ethopia partly in order to fulfill his dream of creating an "Italian Empire" that would rival or surpass that of ancient Rome. And while Ethiopia - one of the few African nations that had withstood European colonial aggression - was part of the League at the time, the organization did little to intervene. One obstacle to the mounting of a unified response was that certain rightwing factions in France were supportive of the Italian dictator. In fact, in 1935 a scandal arose in France when it was rumored that Pierre Laval, the French Foreign minister, had formed an alliance with Mussolini by promising to allow Italy a free hand in Ethiopia. Due to this lack of support for Ethiopia, and despite tenacious resistance from Ethiopian forces, Italy was able to defeat the country in 1936 and subsequently combined it with Italian Somaliland and Eritrea creating a greatly enlarged Italian East African Empire. The fact that the Italian fascist state previously supplied troops

and military equipment to Franco only served to fuel the surrealists ire over this overt imperialism. With respect to the aggression against China, in 1937, Japan, using the pretext that the Chinese had fired on its troops at the Marco Polo Bridge near Peking, launched a full scale invasion of the country. Again, the best the League could do was mount a protest and, despite resistance from Communist Chinese forces, Japan eventually gained control over most of China. To make matters worse, America, who was not a member of the League, profited directly from the conflict: because no war had been officially declared the American government was able to bypass its neutrality legislation and extend loans to the Chinese. American industrialists profited as well by selling badly needed scrap iron, steel, oil and machinery to Japan. Concerning the Munich settlement, when rumors began circulating that Hitler was about to invade Czechoslovakia on the grounds that he was liberating "Sudete Germans" - Germans living in that part of Czechoslovakia bordering Germany - Mussolini proposed a four-power meeting in Munich of Germany, Italy, France, and Great Britain. What resulted was the Munich Treaty in which Hitler was given essentially what he wanted; at the conference, Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier representing Britain and France respectively, intimidated by the German military machine, forced Czechoslovakia to give up the Sudeten territory. The loss of this fringe which contained the mountainous approaches and Czechoslovakia's fortifications left the country completely defenceless leading to its total invasion in 1939. Yet in spite of their weakness Daladier and Chamberlain were received as diplomatic heroes in their home countries. Chamberlain even boasted that he had brought "peace in our time."

58.   Jose Pierre ed. <u>Tracts Surréalistes et Declarations Collectives 1922-1939</u> (Paris: Chirat, 1980),p.339.

59.   *Ibid.*, p.340.

60.   Helena Lewis, <u>The Politics of Surrealism</u> (New York: Paragon House, 1988),p.153.

61.   Varian Fry, <u>Surrender on Demand</u> (New York: Random House, 1954),p.ix.

62.   The liberal affiliation primarily responsible for the rescue of many members of the European avant-garde was the Emergency Rescue Committee. The organization was formed in New York in 1940 in reaction to the American government's slow response to the plight of the European refugees. While its primary movers were well placed individuals within the New York educational community, its membership also included persons from other anti-fascist organizations including the American Federation of Labor, varied Jewish associations and the Museum of Modern Art. The E.R.C. managed to raise funds primarily through appealing to growing liberal anti-fascist sentiment in

New York. The individual chosen to lead the E.R.C.'s rescue mission was Varian Fry, a young New York classics scholar and the editor of two liberal publications, <u>Common Sense</u> and <u>The Living Age</u>. The story of Fry's rescue efforts in France is a rather remarkable one. All in all, he and the members of his operation managed to get over one thousand individuals safely out France through legal and illegal means. Some of the saved included Marc Chagall, André Breton, André Masson, Max Ernst, Benjamin Péret, Heinrich Mann, Jacques Lipchitz and Wilhelm Herzog.

CHAPTER FOUR

North America: Unpacking the Valises in a Foreign Land

Very shortly after Breton arrived in New York, he began again to collect objects produced by North American indigenous societies. Breton's obtaining of these items from local curio shops and from George Heye's Museum of the American Indian has been discussed by Even Maurer, William Rubin, Elizabeth Cowling, Edmund Carpenter, James Clifford and, most recently, by Mark Polizzotti in his book <u>Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton</u>.[1] A problem with these texts, however, is that they continue to confine Breton's interest in indigenous societies and their cultures to issues of aesthetics, mythology and psychoanalysis, and there is little in the way of an elucidation concerning the socialist significance of these peoples to Breton during his period of exile in North America.

Another difficulty with these texts is that the information within them tends to get recycled over and over again. For example, Clifford's investigation of surrealist collecting and exhibiting while in New York draws heavily, in places, upon a twenty year old article written by Edmund Carpenter entitled "Collecting Northwest Coast Art." The probable allure of Carpenter's article is that it facilitates the placing of surrealist collecting and exhibiting within the realm of connoisseurship. Specifically, Carpenter's emphasis on how the surrealists only chose objects of "very high quality" furnishes Clifford with further evidence that the surrealists were in fact

engaged almost exclusively in connoisseurial activities.[2] Referring to Breton, Ernst, Masson, Tanguy and their friend, the "anthropological flaneur" Levi-Strauss as a "band of primitivist connoisseurs," Clifford likens them to a cloud of locusts, "stripping" the museums and curio shops of Inuit and Northwest Coast objects.[3]

As to why the surrealists selected these particular objects – beyond motives having to do with connoisseurship – Clifford offers an explanation which tends to be somewhat dismissive. Specifically, he deprecates the significance of aboriginal cultures to the surrealists by taking at face value Carpenter's arguable claim that North American indigenous objects were esteemed by the members of the group as "visual puns."[4] Clifford compounds the seeming trivial nature of this interest by noting in the same paragraph – depending upon Carpenter once more – that the surrealists were able to obtain these objects cheaply since George Heye thought of them as "jokes."[5] Thus the close proximity of the terms "puns" and "jokes" serves to undermine the seriousness and the complexity with which these objects were regarded especially by someone like Breton. Certainly, given Breton's intense anti-colonial activities throughout the 1930s, any continued pursuit of North American indigenous societies amidst yet another "imperialist" war ought to be placed within the much more consequential arena of left wing avant-gardism.[6]

There are, I believe, three primary obstacles to the gleaning of insights into the left wing significance of North American indigenous objects to Breton during his period of

exile. The first is a lack of awareness in regard to the European socialist constructions of these societies. Second, there is almost nothing written about the nature of the political atmosphere in the French emigré community surrounding Breton while in New York shedding light upon how and why these inventions became revitalized. Of particular importance in this matter is the continuance of prewar debates imported from France, and the outpouring of pro-colonialist sentiment in the French emigré press brought on by the wartime threat to the empire. Third, in this literature there appears to be little understanding of how Breton's activities having to do with North American aboriginal peoples within this political arena were shaped by the experience of persecution and the debilitation of exile.

With respect to Breton's escape from Europe, one of the most frequently encountered misconceptions is that after the invasion of France, Breton simply packed his bags and moved to North America until the fascist storm blew over.[7] For example, in Anna Balakian's 1994 introduction to *Arcanum 17* - a text written by Breton while in Canada in 1944 - she characterizes the emigré's stay in North America as self-imposed when she declares:

> In <u>Arcanum 17</u>, written during a three-month stay in Canada, on the Gaspe Peninsula, the self-exiled Frenchman tried to find light and hope in the bleakest year of World War II....[8]

Elizabeth Cowling maintains that after the fall of France, Breton willfully moved to America partly in order to pursue the "primitive." In her essay, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists," she characterizes Breton's relocation as a calculated one, as a matter of choice:

> The fall of France led to the break-up of the Surrealist group, and Breton, Ernst and others *chose exile* in the United States. There, at last, they could satisfy their desire to see and surround themselves with large numbers of fine North American objects. [italics mine][9]

These passages portraying Breton's stay in North America as self-imposed or as an opportunity to pursue some burning interest are partly misleading. A close investigation of the period between 1939 and 1945 reveals that members of the surrealist group did not freely choose to go to America; instead, like so many other artists and scholars, they were forced to flee Europe due to Nazi persecution.[10] Moreover, if it were not for the direct rescue efforts of a conglomeration of politically liberal groups in New York, surrealists such as Breton would have likely remained trapped in the south of France. As for Breton's period of exile, it is too often assumed that he simply continued in his role as a member of an oppositional avant-garde. Contrary to this assumption, I would argue that Breton's indebtedness to a foreign host who liberated and sheltered him from Nazism limited his ability to carry on in this capacity. Undoubtedly, one mitigating factor was an awareness on the part of the emigrés that the refugee

organizations responsible for their rescue had made guarantees that the Europeans would not engage in politically antagonistic pursuits once safely in America. That is not to say that the exiles were denied arenas of critical activity: one oppositional zone common to both the emigrés and the Americans was a stance against fascism and its threat to freedom of expression. But for the most part, a certain segment of the emigré population was obliged to compromise its political beliefs so as not to antagonize its hosts. For instance, the question arises, after Breton's open and ardent expression of anti-imperialism in France up until the very late 1930s, why the emigré's response to the intense revival of French pro-colonialism was, by comparison, rather constrained.[11] No doubt one possible answer - apart from the fact that the emigré's political circle had been disrupted by the war - is the obvious one that the espousal of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric would have been extremely unwelcome in America. However, in spite of the circumstances restricting the nature of Breton's counteraction, he did write oppositional articles and texts. And as was the case in Europe, the issuing of dissenting anti-imperialist treatises was accompanied by the collecting and evocation of objects produced by societies constructed as evincing socialist virtues.[12] Thus it is to that highly charged political atmosphere in New York that I first wish to turn in order to more fully understand how and why socialist constructions of North American societies that Breton brought with him became resurrected.

The French press, either shut down or censored by the Nazis, reemerged on the other side of the Atlantic along with the emigrés. The two key journals, both published in New York, were *France\Amerique* and *Pour La Victoire*. An investigation of these newspapers reveals that the war and the events that led up to it provided fuel for the rekindling of social and political debates from the prewar period. One argument that seems for some to have been settled as a result of the course of the war was that the possession of colonies was not simply economically beneficial, it was essential for the survival of nationhood. Looking back to the mid-1930s, a conception of France as an empire was widely supported even by the French Communist Party. But as Maurice Larkin noted in his book *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1986*, while support for the empire was extensive in the 1930s, there were small pockets of resistance:

> As for the French...the empire was for most of them a source of reassurance and pride. During the period when France had been slipping down the international ladder of economic and military strength, she had acquired the second greatest empire in the world. When nationalists lamented the numerical superiority of Germany, imperialists pointed to the fact that the new 'Greater Germany' had a mere 76 million inhabitants against the 109 million of France and her empire. Anti-colonialism in France was restricted to a small segment of the population, and was to continue that way until the maintenance of the empire came to require a military and economic outlay that created serious tensions within French society in the 1950s.[13]

As evidenced in collective surrealist tracts, the surrealists in Breton's camp represented one small oppositional sub-group

antagonistic towards French imperialism. But by 1942, judging from the emigré newspapers in New York, any criticism concerning French colonial holdings had all but disappeared. This apparent uncontested and even zealous support for the empire which appeared almost daily in the emigré press was primarily the result of two factors: the belief that French colonies in North Africa would be the key to the liberation of the nation, and the growing concern that the disruption caused by the war might result in the loss of those colonies in the postwar world. Concerning the former, it was thought that the strong military presence of Russia on the east coupled with that of an Anglo-American alliance on the west would bring about Germany's loss of any access to the sea. The only path left for the Germans to pursue in order to prevent this from occurring was south to North Africa into territories held by France. It was believed that if the French colonies could be militarily strengthened, Germany would be completely surrounded and ultimately defeated. In September of 1942, Henri de Kerillis, a former Deputy Minister in the Daladier government and the chief columnist and spokesperson for *Pour La Victoire*, described the political situation in North Africa in this way:

On se demande souvent: "Où se déroulera la dernière phase de la guerre?"
Une semblable question ne venait pas a l'esprit lors de la grande guerre mondiale No.1. Il était clair alors que si les Allemands parvenaient à prendre Paris, ils devenaient les maîtres de la situation....Mais dans cette guerre mondiale No.2 tous les facteurs sont différents....La vie de la France ne se joue plus quelque part sur les bords de la Seine ou sur les berges de la Marne, mais sur les théâtres

> lointains et à d'immenses distances....C'est pourquoi,
> il n'est pas exagéré de dire que l'avenir de la guerre
> dépand dans une très grande mesure, de ce qui se
> produira ou ne se produira pas sur le bastion Nord
> africain....
>   D'autre part si l'on considère la place immense
> que la France tient sur le continent africain, le rôle
> que peuvent jouer les territoires occupés par les
> troupes de Vichy et par les troupes gaullistes, on
> arrivera à la conclusion que notre pays est appelé à
> devenir dans cette bataille ultime un facteur de toute
> première importance, un facteur décisif. Quand ce
> n'est plus dans les plaines de la France que décidé le
> destin de l'humanité, c'est sur les confins de son
> maginifique Empire.[14]

De Kerillis's view concerning the strategic importance of France's colonies proved to be well-founded as the Anglo-American invasion of North-West Africa on November 8, 1942 was a contributing factor in the eventual defeat of the German military machine. But almost immediately after the Allied landing, the French began to worry that the presence of the Americans in North Africa might result in a loss of French prestige among the "natives," and even lead to insurrection and renewed demands for national sovereignty by "its" colonized peoples. In fact, after the Allied victory the French seemed more concerned about their colonial holdings than they were about fascism. In an article entitled "Storm Clouds Over Africa" the conservative de Kerillis mused:

> The arrival of the Americans has had for effect the
> complete destruction of the remnants of French
> prestige with the natives of North Africa. Only now do
> they fully realize the defeat of our arms of which
> until now they have had but a vague idea through the
> medium of the fiction of the independent Government of
> Vichy. The new master, the American "roumi," by
> suddenly appearing on their countryside, awakens in
> their souls their old xenophobia, which has lain

> dormant under the benevolent rule of the French....It
> is imperative that no defeat or series of defeats, nor
> the dramatic disagreements that have arisen between
> the Americans and the English, and between Frenchmen
> of all political categories, give them suddenly the
> opportunity of a general insurrection. Without any
> doubt they would take advantage of it.[15]

One can only imagine Breton's ire in response to the sort of popular pro-colonial sentiment expressed here since according to Lenin the instabilities caused by an imperialist war were viewed as the ideal opportunity *for* revolt by colonized peoples against the capitalist nations of the west. And if Breton harbored any initial hopes for the possibility of these revolts actually taking place due to a loosening of France's colonial grip, they would have quickly dissipated when the United States and Britain made it clear that they had no intention of interfering with French sovereignty. Even worse, both countries began making guarantees that after the war they would assist in restoring the *entire* French Empire as it had existed in the prewar years. Specifically, in February of 1943, after a meeting between British and American diplomats and General Henri Giraud, the then leader of the French African war effort, it was reported to the emigrés in the pages of *France/Amerique* that the postwar Empire was at last secure due to certain guarantees obtained by Giraud from both nations. In an article entitled "Behind the African Coup," Michel Pobers declared in a celebratory fashion:

> General Giraud [was given] formal assurances that "the
> restoration of the complete independence, the
> greatness and the pre-war size of France is one of the
> war aims of the United Nations."

> In even greater detail, the agreement went on:
> "It is well understood that French sovereignty should
> be reestablished as soon as possible over all the
> territories, in the mother country and in the colonies
> where the French flag was flown in 1939." This
> guarantee of France's former frontiers includes
> Alsace-Lorraine and Indo-China as well as all French
> possessions in Africa.[16]

Of course history would eventually show that Roosevelt's image of the postwar world did not include the resumption of pre-war European colonial empires: instead, he envisioned their dismantling and the placement of countries previously governed by France under the control of the United Nations.[17] But at this moment in time, it must have appeared to Breton that now with the expressed support of America and Britain the oppression of the colonial proletariat would continue on into the postwar world.

No doubt adding to Breton's dismay was both the pro-colonialism and the resurgence of pre-war political struggles caused by shifts in Allied support between General Giraud and General Charles de Gaulle. The Americans and British had originally supported General Giraud over de Gaulle as leader of the French military in North Africa. However, very quickly both nations began having second thoughts about their backing of Giraud. As for the British, they became convinced that de Gaulle was more committed than Giraud to mending an Anglo-French alliance. Moreover, de Gaulle allayed the British fear of communism by professing all along that he would never permit a communist take-over in postwar France even though he was supported by communist factions of the French Resistance and was

held in relatively high esteem by the Russians. While the Americans had similar political concerns, they became increasingly mortified over Giraud's tendency to espouse anti-democratic and pro-Vichy sentiments, a regime from which America had now distanced itself. Consequently, the Allies agreed that de Gaulle would leave London for Algiers in order to join Giraud. This he did in May of 1943 and on June 3rd, he was given the position of co-president of the newly formed French Committee of National Liberation.

The formation of the Committee significantly added to the wave of optimism sweeping over the emigrés in New York. Appearing on the front page of *Pour La Victoire* in June of 1943 was an article entitled "France United" in which it was declared:

> From now on France is one, free, and fighting side by side with the four great countries at war: England, China, America and Russia. From now on there is a French diplomacy which will replace the "missions" and "delegations" of Generals de Gaulle and Giraud – missions and delegations which, despite the merits of their members were considered by the other positions as the living image of factions gnawing at the heart of France for their subsistence.
>   So henceforth, there is but one French army, at its head General Giraud and all the generals of de Gaulle's heroic army.[18]

In the same issue of <u>Pour La Victoire</u> excerpts were printed from speeches delivered in Washington by Henri Hoppenot, the Acting Head of the French Military Mission in North Africa. High on Hoppenot's agenda was to thank Americans for the military help they were providing toward France's liberation.

But most importantly, in this speech we see the continued belief
that the prewar empire would be restored in its totality after
the war as Hoppenot expressed the utmost confidence that as a
result of this union - sanctioned by the British and the
Americans - not only would French soil recently lost to Germany
be regained, but so also would colonial territories taken by
Japan:

> The French Committee for National Liberation brings
> together for the supreme struggle, under the
> leadership of two great military chiefs, men whose
> authority will be exercised with only one end in view:
> that end is to wage war and to win. The whole French
> Empire is behind these men to free France, held by the
> Germans, and to free Indo-China held by the Japanese.
> The liberation of France is linked to the liberation
> of the world.[19]

But the appointment of de Gaulle as co-leader of the French
Committee of National Liberation was also the cause of a three-
way split of loyalties amongst the French in France and abroad:
the Gaullists, the Giraudists and the Petainists. Moreover, many
of the prewar conservative parties began to become more active,
groups such as the Royalists, or the "Action Française," who
tended to be pro-fascist, pro-Vichy, anti-British, anti-American
and dedicated to the restoration of a monarchy in France. As for
the split between the Giraudists and the Gaullists, the division
soon became moot when only after a few months de Gaulle
skilfully maneuvered Giraud off the Committee. By April 1944, de
Gaulle was at the helm of the Committee and had established
himself as the leader of the French resistance movement. The
convolutions of these varied alliances represent in more than

just a minimal way the persistence of political feuds amongst the French both in New York and abroad. As de Kerillis noted with some understatement in 1943: "The political families of the pre-war period did not entirely disappear during the great upheaval."[20] The sustaining of this social and political microcosm by the emigrés in New York is highly significant for it more clearly establishes the arena in which Breton wrote, exhibited and displayed.

Expressions of pro-colonialist sentiment among the emigrés in New York was not simply bound up with their concern over the immediate safety of the empire. Interestingly, from time to time articles were published stirring up nostalgia for the bygone days of French colonialism in Canada. One of the reasons these articles are of particular interest to this work - besides the fact that they reflect both the depth and the breadth of this resurgence of pro-colonialism - is that some texts continued to construct native groups such as the Iroquois as violent and bloodthirsty. While it has been discussed how negative portrayals were a factor in these societies being excluded from the surrealist *pan-Indian* universe, it is worth considering, I believe, how the perpetuation of such constructions may have been a factor determining the sort of indigenous objects Breton collected while in New York. An instance of this sustained depiction can be found in an article by Monique Lemonnier published in *France/Amerique* in 1943 entitled "Pionniers français d'Amérique." The lengthy column was dedicated to the French Jesuit missionary Isaac Jogues killed in Quebec by

Mohawks in 1646. In one passage Lemonnier melodramatically reconstructs an incident when a whole Iroquois tribe savagely beat the "Robes-noires" led by Jogues:

> Les guerriers Iroquois et leurs prisonniers étaient attendus par une population en délire: la vue, nouvelle pour eux des prisonniers, les "Robes-noires" comme ils les appelaient, sorciers maléfiques dans leur imagination, auxquels ils attribuaient tous les malheurs de leurs tribus, les surexcitait au plus haut point. Vieillards, squaws, enfants mêmes rivalisaient entre eux de fureurs et de férocité. Avertis par les cris de guerre du retour des guerriers, ils se tenaient en double file, de chaque côté du chemin montueux où devaient passer les prisonniers, chaque sauvage armé d'une longue tige de fer....Le Père Jogues, placé le dernier, trébucha, et tomba, couvert de sang....[21]

The Jesuits, not surprisingly, were presented as a well-intentioned lot who were ultimately defeated by native superstition:

> La superstition des Iroquois étaient telle qu'ils ne voyaient partout que sorcelleries et maléfices. Le signe de la croix, dans leur esprit, était un enchantement néfaste qui pouvait faire mourir....[22]

Near the end of her account, Lemonnier laments the defeat of Montcalm and the eventual end to "le rêve de domination française en Amérique du Nord."[23] But she goes on to remark that even though France did not successfully establish a colony in North America, in Quebec:

> ...si la domination politique de la France était finie, son influence morale était encore immense; le sang des martyrs n'avait pas coulé en vain.[24]

The purpose of the article, however, was not simply to bemoan the failure of French colonial ambitions in Canada; Lemonnier's primary intention in dredging up the blood of the martyrs was to draw attention to modern day French "martyrs de la liberté."[25] These individuals, she declared, should look as a source of inspiration to the Jesuit Fathers, to "le souvenir de ceux qui étaient morts pour libérer les âmes."[26]

While this portrayal of the Jesuits' presence in Canada is an unmitigated whitewashing of history, the seemingly never ending construction of peoples like the Mohawk and other Iroquois as savage and warlike helps explain why these tribes were continually excluded from surrealist strategies seeking to evoke so-called "peaceful" indigenous societies against the warring imperialist nations of the West. Moreover, it is important to observe - if not condemn - the exact way in which these peoples were being represented against the backdrop of current historical events: if Lemonnier is likening the French martyrs of the 1940s to those of colonial Quebec, then it is quite probable that German aggression is being implicitly equated with the supposed "savagery" of indigenous societies.[27]

Concurrent with efforts on the part of the French to maintain their power over the sovereign nations of others in the 1940s was a growing interest in the United States to extend its sphere of influence into countries north and south of its borders. A cultural manifestation of this trend was the *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition which took place in January of 1941 at the Museum of Modern Art. This show is of some

importance for my purpose since it provides an instance of a competing claim within America itself - also for political purposes - to some of the same societies coveted by surrealists such as the "Eskimo" and the peoples of the Northwest Coast. Furthermore, surrealism itself was drawn directly into the arena of the exhibition in an attempt to sanction certain pressing political needs at this moment in American history.

The *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition was a complex affair that can be explored from a variety of perspectives. For the purposes of this thesis I want to investigate the show within historical circumstances defined by political internationalism on the eve of the United States' entry into the war.[28] Specifically, the exhibition was designed in such a way to make it appear as if a rich tapestry of centuries old indigenous cultures from all over the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America was the rightful inheritance of the American people. By endeavoring to create a sense of ownership over the native peoples within and surrounding the United States, liberal internationalists working through the Museum of Modern Art hoped to promote feelings of national pride while at the same time geographically extending the collective consciousness of the American citizenry beyond the nation's borders at a moment when the White House felt threatened by the growing forces of fascism. That is not to say that the motives behind the exhibition were solely defined by American internationalist interests; René d'Harnoncourt, the show's organizer and the General Manager of the Department of

the Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board, had been pushing
for the acceptance of native culture through such shows for some
time. However, what the *Indian Art of the United States*
exhibition amply demonstrates is how d'Harnoncourt's cultural
objectives and other interests of the Roosevelt government were
mutually self-serving. And as William Jackson Rushing points out
in his Ph.D. thesis <u>Native American Art and Culture and the New
York Avant-Garde, 1910-1950</u> this was not the first time
d'Harnoncourt had capitalized upon the political needs of the
White House in order to further his own agenda. Of the earlier
period of the Great Depression Rushing noted:

> In that time of intense pre-war searching for national
> values, d'Harnoncourt was a sensitive instrument for
> Roosevelt's New Deal policies....More than once, a
> not-so-latent nationalism was used by d'Harnoncourt as
> justification for celebrating the aesthetic
> achievements of Native America.[29]

After a lengthy discussion detailing the interrelationship
between the political and cultural ends of these exhibitions in
the 1930s, Rushing continues to place the *Indian Art of the
United States* show in the early 1940s largely within an
isolationist paradigm:

> One would be remiss, however, not to mention once
> again the political and cultural rewards that were to
> be obtained from associating Indian art with the
> United States. More than ever, it seemed, the nation
> needed to find the taproot of its cultural strength.[30]

While I believe that Rushing is right in his assessment that
during the early 1940s there was a need to strengthen the

resolve of a beleaguered population, I want to extend this discussion by arguing that by this time the political component of the show was more properly defined by internationalist than by isolationist interests.

In 1941, the political scene in America was changing. While isolationist sentiment was still strong, the White House was not as concerned about the economic depression of the 1930s as it was with turning the nation's attention outwards beyond its borders to the threat posed by fascism. As mentioned earlier, it was at this moment that d'Harnoncourt with the assistance of Frederic H. Douglas, the Curator of Indian Art at the Denver Art Museum, presented over a thousand indigenous works from the United States, Alaska and Canada with the implication that these works belonged to the American people.[31] Very importantly, this unbridled hemispherical annexing was endorsed by Eleanor Roosevelt in the forward to the show's catalogue. While the actual text was written by d'Harnoncourt, Roosevelt signed it and it was presented as originating from "The White House."[32] It declared:

> At this time, when America is reviewing its cultural resources, this book and the exhibit on which it is based opens up to us age-old sources of ideas and forms that have never been fully appreciated. In appraising the Indians' past and present achievements, we realize not only that this heritage constitutes part of the artistic and spiritual wealth of this country, but also that the Indian people of today have a contribution to make toward the America of the future.
>
> In dealing with Indian Art of the United States, we find that its sources reach far beyond our borders, both to the north and the south. Hemispheric interchange of ideas is as old as man on this

continent. Long before Columbus, tribes settled in
Arizona brought traditions to this country that were
formed in Alaska and Canada; Indian traders from the
foot of the Rocky Mountains exchanged goods and ideas
with the great civilizations two thousand miles south
of the Rio Grande. Related thoughts and forms that are
truly of America are found from the Andes to the
Mississippi Valley.[33]

At exactly the same time Americans were being encouraged by the

wife of the president to review their hemispheric "cultural

resources," its worth recalling that the White House - much to

the outrage of the isolationist majority - began to engage in

internationalist and interventionist pursuits. In June of 1941,

the White House gave Britain fifty destroyers in return for

permission to establish military bases in the Bermudas, the

British Caribbean islands and, very significantly, in the

Canadian province of Newfoundland. Also in 1941, the American

government secured military bases in Greenland and Iceland to

protect its shipping routes from possible fascist aggression.

Turning to its southern borders, plans were developed for a

joint hemispheric defense with the Latin American republics.

Gaining a strengthened hold in Mexico was of particular

importance since not only did Mexico directly border the United

States, the two countries also had a long history of antagonism.

And eventually as a result of Roosevelt's diplomatic skills,

Mexico - along with Venezuela and Brazil - joined the Grand

Alliance in 1942 thereby keeping the Latin American nations

within the American sphere of influence. The *Indian Art of the*

United States exhibition played its part in these political and

military encroachments in Canada, Mexico, and Central and South

America, by encouraging Americans to take possession of the cultures of indigenous peoples from these same nations. Indeed, while America's "own" native peoples maintained a privileged place within this hemispheric legacy, special attention was given to indigenous groups inhabiting countries directly to the north and south of the United States. In the exhibition catalogue constant mention was made of the vital importance of the Mexican influence and several chapters in the catalogue were devoted to native cultures residing well inside Canadian borders including the Inuit and the societies of the Northwest Coast. Serving as visual aids in the exhibition catalogue were dotted maps each of which displayed the entire North American continent even when the geographical location of a particular indigenous group was quite localized.[fig.12] Of particular interest is the very first map in the catalogue which took on a military look as dots were amassed protectively along the margins of the United States and Canada, territories which included the shoreline of British Columbia, Alaska, the Northwest territories, Northern Quebec, Newfoundland and the Gaspe. [fig.13]

Yet another way that the *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition show can be regarded as internationalist is that it was likely, in part, a response to Nazi exhibitions in which the cultures of non-white peoples were being wholeheartedly dismissed as "degenerate." In this way, the New York exhibition shared certain similarities with surrealist shows in Europe, and especially, the *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects* in 1936. What

was also comparable about these two shows - not to mention highly questionable - was that both treated the cultures of other societies in an extremely proprietary fashion. As for the Museum of Modern Art, as a major American cultural institution dedicated to international vanguard art, it would have almost been obliged to put on counter exhibitions to shows of "degenerate art" that were touring Europe at exactly the same time. The anti-fascist dimension of the *Indian Art of the United States* show is touched upon by Rushing. He points to a passage in the exhibition catalogue where d'Harnoncourt states: "To rob a people of tradition is to rob it of inborn strength and identity. To rob a people of opportunity to grow through invention or through acquisition of values from other races is to rob it of inborn strength and identity."[34] Rushing situates this passage in terms of current fascist rhetoric and strategies:

> This statement's polyvalence reflects both the exhibition and the catalogue. For although he [d'Harnoncourt] was speaking ostensibly about Native American peoples, he was thinking, perhaps, about the racial oppression then occurring under totalitarian regimes in Europe. And since this nation's future just then was clouded by the darkness of fascist violence, it is possible, even likely, that d'Harnoncourt was speaking about America itself, urging its people to find in Native American values a sense of inborn strength and identity.[35]

Thus the celebration of America's "own" indigenous cultures in the MOMA show in conjunction with the often apologetic tone in the catalogue concerning past internal colonialist practices, and the advocation that cultural practices of non-white races

should be embraced by Americans all suggest that the exhibition served as a response to racist Nazi theories of Aryan supremacy with their associated calls for an ethnic cleansing.

While the individuals involved with the *Indian Art of the United States* laid claim to, and hence in some sense indirectly competed with the surrealists for indigenous cultures within North America, what is interesting is how the surrealists' admiration for societies such as the "Eskimo" and those of the Northwest Coast was marshalled in encouraging the American public to accept this *pan-Indian* legacy as their own. Specifically, the reviews of the show publicly articulated sites of "affinity" between the surrealists and North American indigenous peoples by reconfiguring native cultures within a surrealist paradigm. To be sure, the tactic of pointing out how a certain segment of the European avant-garde held indigenous objects in high esteem in an effort to elevate them to the category of "art" was not new. After all, African tribal sculpture had achieved the status of art in the West partly due to approbation by the cubists and, especially, Picasso. There was, however, considerable risk when it came to the surrealists' endorsement since their practices were generally unpopular in America even amongst art critics. But at a time when there was a need to extend the foundation of the American cultural legacy, the sanction of the surrealists had to do.

One of the questions that arises about these proposed sites of affinity is why several American critics located them

specifically within a psychoanalytic paradigm. To be sure, the surrealists had displayed North American indigenous objects alongside their works in Europe; but the group was notorious for not supplying written materials at these shows elaborating upon the nature of supposed congruences between their own works and those produced by native groups. While it is not being suggested here that the American critics were completely ignorant about surrealist strategies, there is ample evidence pointing to their lack of an awareness concerning the theoretical foundations of surrealism. So the question remains as to why several New York critics would specifically point to a surrealist psychoanalytic interest in these societies and their cultures. Rushing suggests that one possible reason for this association was that "Jungian interpretations of primitive and neo-primitive art were commonplace in the early 1940s."[36] Certainly one of the most crucial sources at the time for this sort of reading was the original version of Robert J. Goldwater's highly influential book Primitivism in Modern Painting published in 1938. Goldwater, a fine arts instructor at New York University, was one of the first art historians to systematically bring the American art community's attention to the surrealists. He described them as the "pioneer explorers in the realm of the subconscious" and argued that their interest in North American indigenous peoples was based upon "psychoanalytic theories."[37] And in a review of the exhibition entitled "Lo, the Rich Indian: Art of the American Aboriginals" Jeannette Lowe makes direct reference to this psychoanalytic connection:

> That the Modern Museum has taken a step in the new
> appreciation of these [native] values is clear the
> moment the eye lights upon a thirty foot totem pole at
> its front door. Bright red and blue, the carved raven,
> killer whale and devil fish may strike the eye, more
> accustomed to such fauna in the world of Surrealism,
> as symbolic of the unconscious mind.[38]

There were of course other reviews which attempted to establish surrealist associations of a more general nature; but all seemed intent upon employing surrealism to convince the American public that the objects on display at the MOMA show were to be esteemed as "art."[39] The critic Jean Charlot, for example, attempted to overcome an American aversion to the departures from realism found in Inuit indigenous objects by pointing out how doctrinal surrealists regarded them with great admiration:

> ...the distorted spirit masks of the Eskimos,
> conceived in visions induced by fasting or by drugs,
> receive today the praise of orthodox surrealists.[40]

And it has been pointed out by Rushing how d'Harnoncourt's holding the exhibition at an institution dedicated to international modern art encouraged associations with European avant-garde movements, a display strategy facilitating these objects' acceptance as art or what he refers to as "the process of aestheticization – that is, the authoritative validation of the objects as intrinsically fine works of American art worthy of consideration."[41]

The *Indian Art of the United States* show and its reviews provide a way to broach the whole issue of the debilitation of

exile. Specifically, as Breton arrived in the city just months after the *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition he would have undoubtedly been aware of the links already established by the American critics between surrealism and North American native cultures; the preexistence of this correlation likely provided Breton with additional encouragement - if not open permission - to collect indigenous objects since in America these objects represented one of the few recognized dimensions of what was now a greatly diminished avant-garde identity.

Almost all the European emigrés experienced a considerable disruption to their former identities. Theodor Adorno, in an article entitled "A European Scholar in America", recalled his unsettling experience as an exile in 1939, and he distilled the turmoil of his emotions into an uneasy relationship between "autonomy and adjustment".[42] This phrase succinctly captures the fundamental dilemma of all the emigrés or "those of whom it was expected that they would prove themselves in the new land not to be so haughty as to insist stubbornly on remaining what they had been before."[43] Reflecting further upon his own experience of rescue from Nazi persecution, Adorno wrote: "I was full of gratitude for the deliverance from the catastrophe that was looming up as early as 1937." Yet in spite of this indebtedness, he felt the need to assert some sense of self:

> I was not about to give up my own individuality... the tension between these two impulses, may in some degree, define how I related to my American experience."[44]

Here, Adorno seizes the essential elements determining the often troubled psychology of the emigre: feelings of indebtedness and a loss of personal identity coupled with the need to preserve it in the face of adversity. Certainly, previous professional roles such as that of scholar, artist, musician, labour or political leader were modified or even wholly subverted. Part of the reason for this disruption was that these individuals had little or no opportunity to prepare for their voyage to America, frequently arriving with a wholly inadequate knowledge of its customs or language. As the artist Jacques Lipchitz wrote in his autobiography:

> Although I was enormously grateful...I was frightened about going to the United States, about which I knew very little: and also I had no money or other resources, or even a word of English."[45]

For the most part, the refugees arrived in a state of mental and physical exhaustion. Following the officious procedures at customs, accommodations were provided either by the sponsoring groups or by friends who had arrived previously. Often, the coming of the most notable European figures was anticipated by friends or devotees in New York. Breton, for example, was eventually met by friends or "Les 'troupes' de Breton" who had prepared an apartment for him.[46] Although Breton was fortunate in this regard, he was still dependant on others for even the most basic necessities.

Yet another substantial difficulty faced by the emigrés was their lack of language skills. Although a large proportion of

the Europeans could speak a little English, they had to rely primarily upon the voices of others, a disability adding to their feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness. This language handicap, though, did not always result in efforts to overcome it. As exiles, many regarded their forced presence as temporary, a belief which resulted in a refusal, or, at the very least, a resistance to learning the new language. Reluctance was especially prevalent amongst the older exiles whose dwindling self identity caused them to cling to their language and notions imported from Europe. Often members of the European intelligentsia were reluctant to learn English since the subtle nuances of their own languages were vital to intellectual concepts not readily translated into English. But some emigrés refused to learn English due to feelings of superiority, regarding American cultural traditions as lacking refinement. A case in point is Breton. Max Ernst, interviewed in New York in 1946, stated, "André Breton does not speak English. He persists in thinking everything not French is imbecile."[47] But all too often a posturing of superiority hid the massive insecurities of the emigre. For example, returning to Breton's refusal to learn English, Ernst also had this to say:

> Possibly his reluctance to attempt to speak English for fear of some embarrassing error is related to some childhood experience. In any case he is actually frightened--'scared' at the thought of having to learn English.[48]

Breton's disinclination and apprehension were, then, further manifestations of exile affecting the scope and character of his avant-garde strategies during his stay in North America.

One of the most disruptive aspects of exile for the Europeans was diminished status. This loss of prestige was often accompanied by a concerted effort to cling to old identities and a clustering with fellow emigrés. In an article published in 1940 entitled "The Psychology of the Refugee," Gerhart Saenger directly addresses the problem of the exiles' sudden loss of status:

> The refugee arrives only after he has gone through experiences perhaps unparalleled in the history of modern mankind. His security as well as his belief in values he had always considered fundamental have been undermined. Only his education and his former status are left as bases of self respect and emotional balance.
> The immigrant, feeling rejected by the Americans whom he considers his equals, and misunderstood by those whom he meets . . . turns to his old crowd. Here he is still the prestige-endowed person he was in the old country, here people speak his language, understand his problems, cherish the same values.[49]

Even being well known in New York did not exempt the emigré from the many predicaments of exile. As political refugees, the emigrés had to leave behind almost all of their possessions necessitating the rebuilding of a body of works in new environment fraught with hindrances. As Lipchitz wrote:

> The need to work tormented me; but at this time I found myself so upset, harassed by a thousand anxieties, and in such a psychological condition that it was absolutely impossible for me to grapple with the subject which preoccupied me.[50]

And as celebrated as many of these artists were, the recipients of adulation from a small segment of the New York art scene, their status in America was not nearly as great as it had been in Europe.

When considering how a disruption to Breton's identity was a mitigating factor in the resumption of any and all prewar avant-garde strategies, it is illuminating to take a brief look at a group of European emigrés who did continue to mount highly oppositional left wing critiques when they were relocated in America: the members of the Institut fur Sozialforshung, better known in North America as the Frankfurt School. In his essay entitled "Social Theory in a New Context", H. Stuart Hughes addresses this almost singular occurrence juxtaposed to the overwhelming silence of those exiles who "were obliged to a minimum of concessions - at the very least to simplify one's idiom." Hughes concludes that while the members of the Institut experienced difficulties common to all exiles, the fact that they managed to organize their own voyage to America and bring with them their possessions and wealth generally freed them from critical restraint:

> Quite different was the Institut....[which] usually had plenty of money. Originally based in Frankfurt...it had fled Germany early enough to save its endowment...Whether in New York or on the Pacific Coast, the Institut was defiantly and uncomprisingly Teutonic. Its prime movers, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, defined their task in a characteristically complex fashion as one of mounting an avant-garde assault on mass culture while preserving what was best in the tradition from which they had sprung. In neither role were they particularly concerned about their public.[51]

As Hughes notes, the possibility of continued self-determination furnished by financial independence was clearly an exceptional circumstance. For someone like Breton, an impoverished refugee rescued by the American liberal bourgeoisie, such critiques were simply not possible.

Breton expressed his awareness of the compromises he was obliged to make as an emigré and his concern for his own identity on several occasions. For example, in an address to the students of Yale University in December of 1942 entitled "Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars," Breton proclaimed that the fundamental principle continually informing surrealist theory and practice was the quest for freedom:

> It is the only word that would burn the tongue of Goebbels; it is the word which commands the inscription that his crony Petain could not bear on the face of public monuments. *Freedom!*[52]

But he conceded that the pursuit of this ideal was laden with pitfalls since individuals were all too often overcome by powerful forces thwarting their goal. Of his own situation Breton lamented:

> It was breaking faith with freedom to renounce expressing oneself personally...outside the strict framework in which a 'party' wishes to contain you, even if it be thought, the party of freedom (loss of the feeling of uniqueness). It was equally erroneous for others to believe that they would always be so much themselves that they could be compromised with, no matter by whom. Freedom is at once madly desirable and quite fragile.[53]

While it may be argued that the often judgmental Breton was referring to other surrealists whom he continuously accused of being seduced by capitalism's monetary lure, it seems clear that here he is referring to compromises he himself was obliged to make.[54]

Another document reflective of Breton's diminished capacity as an artist-emigre is "Originality and Liberty," written in America in early 1942. Certain aspects of this essay are especially revealing. The first is Breton's concern for his own identity:

> However hard a man may try to maintain the apparent continuity of his life and his own course...giddy doubts still haunt his questioning. Even the most stable and best poised minds cannot help be fixed, for the moment upon the mighty shrieks of sirens, the dragon like tongues of flame which forebode the roar of tanks being hurled against each other.[55]

Second, while Breton does not rail against America in the text, he is more critical of the position of the artist within American cultural life. The most likely explanation for this uncharacteristically critical moment is that "Originality and Liberty" appeared only in *Art in Australia*, a far distance from his geographical location in New York. He wrote:

> There are those efforts by totalitarian governments to restrain at all costs, the spirit of discovery, of invention in art. Therefore also on the otherhand, certain quite obscure efforts which tend to dissuade and sidetrack the spirit. On the one hand, those persecutions of free artists; on the other, a more or less well intentioned guarding against certain extremes. And who...will consent to admit that the need for new discovery ought to stop here or there as if the current had been cut off for the time?[56]

While it may be argued that this guarding against extremes was intended to refer to the cultural situation in France, a characterization of the Vichy government as "more or less well intentioned" seems highly unlikely. It's more reasonable to assume that Breton was referring in a somewhat critical manner to the dilemma of the impoverished artist-exile who had achieved liberty in America but was denied freedom of expression.

Feelings of indebtedness and diminishment among members of the European avant-garde do not seem at first to completely explain Breton's reticence in openly decrying the outpouring of pro-colonialism among his own countrymen published in the French emigre newspapers. However, upon investigating these journals it becomes apparent that *all* of the French emigrés, regardless of political partisanship, experienced a vulnerability directly affecting what could or could not be publicly expressed. For example, in 1943 an editorial statement in *Pour La Victoire* attributed the journal's lack of a more critical stance concerning French power shifts or French-American relationships to indebtedness, obligation and, very importantly, to a fear of reprisals against all of the emigrés:

> Whatever may happen, the French people in North America are undoubtedly in a better position to appreciate the deep-seated reasons which dictated the attitude of *Pour La Victoire* in the last few months. If we had adopted a partisan attitude, if we had embittered the moral climate of our emigre life with ideological feuds and factional conflicts, the Americans would have been justified in lodging bitter protests against us.[57]

But while the political circle around these newspapers may have refrained from printing in its pages debates or quarrels imported from France reflecting existent divisions within the emigre community, their feelings of restraint paled beside those of individuals such as Breton since the political climate in America was such that the more conservative groups which controlled both *Pour La Victoire* and *France\Amerique* - regardless of the divisions within them - could still espouse sentiments common to them all: unbridled and unopposed pro-colonialism and feelings of elation associated with promises that the French empire would be fully restored in the postwar era. For Breton, however, the factors associated with exile made the expression of anti-colonialism or a condemnation of America's commitment to help rebuild empire profoundly difficult. Nevertheless, in spite of these constraints, Breton did manage to mount an oppositional critique, one which included the revival of European socialist constructions of North American indigenous societies.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. As Elizabeth Cowling notes in her article "The Eskimos, The American Indians and the Surrealists," as early as 1942, there was "considerable rivalry" for these items. Frequented were New York curio shops, especially that of Julius Carlebach on Third Ave. Topping the shopping list were objects produced by Inuit and Northwest Coast natives. Carlebach also offered to serve as a liaison between the surrealists and George Heye, the director of the Museum of the American Indian. The bulk of Heye's collection of Inuit objects had been acquired by the Museum of the American Indian in 1919 when the A. H. Twitchell collection from the region of Anvik and Bethel located on the Yukon River was given to the institution. The acquisition was announced in The Annual Report of the Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation for the period from April 1, 1919, to April 1, 1920.

When the surrealists arrived in New York, the nature of the market was markedly different from that in Paris in the late 1920s: African and Pre-Columbian objects were valued as "art" objects and, hence, were either expensive and/or difficult to obtain, while North American indigenous objects were readily available. Certainly, some North American tribal objects, such as those made by the Apache or the Iroquois, were largely confined to museum cases since they were esteemed as representing the cultures of "vanished" societies. On the other hand, North American native "crafts" were inexpensive and easily attainable largely due to the efforts of Rene d'Harnoncourt, the manager of the Department of the Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Specifically, d'Harnoncourt, in an attempt to promote the sale of "authentic" indigenous crafts, incorporated "Indian" markets into major shows of American native "art" which took place in the late 1930s and early 1940s in urban centers such as San Francisco and New York. These markets made available to the American consumer objects such as Navajo rugs and blankets, Cherokee baskets and Osage beaded and braided belts. However, as has been discussed, neither these societies nor these types of objects were of interest to surrealists such as Breton. What was of great excitement was that objects produced by peoples most coveted by the group - the Inuit and the peoples of the Northwest Coast - could be obtained cheaply from curio shops or through George Heye who sold these items to the surrealists for very little money. At last Breton could acquire for himself "authentic" objects produced by societies imbued with left wing artistic and political significance. Moreover, the lack of recognition for these objects in New York, a low status reflected *in* their inexpensiveness, gave the emigre a cause of sorts; now the task became to "rescue" these objects from oblivion and to show the Americans why these items ought to be held in high esteem. For a discussion of the "Indian" market, see William Jackson Rushing, Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-Garde, 1910-1950 Ph.D. Thesis, University of Texas (1989),pp.376-96.

Concerning the transactions between Heye and the surrealists, it is almost impossible to find out precisely what items were sold to whom since no detailed records of the sales were kept. When I visited the Museum of the American Indian in the summer of 1993, an extensive search of the sales records between 1941 and 1945 revealed no specific sale to any one member of the surrealist group. Most of the Museum's sales during this period were listed under the heading "miscellaneous," and, hence, I must assume that this heading covered the sale of these indigenous items to the surrealists.

2. Clifford, p.212.

3. *Ibid.*, pp.238-9 The term "stripping" was used by Carpenter and is quoted by Clifford.

4. *Ibid.*, p.238. Carpenter stated: "The Surrealists themselves, emphasized visual puns and it was visual puns the Surrealists collected." Edmund Carpenter, "Collecting Northwest Coast Art," in Bill Holm and Bill Reid, <u>Indian Art of the Northwest Coast</u> (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975),p.10.

5. *Ibid.*, p.239.

6. Clifford's lack of historical contextualization when it comes to the surrealist's period of exile is rather curious since the importance of historicity when approaching collecting and identity or the paying attention to the "shifting history of these discriminations" is stressed throughout <u>The Predicament of Culture</u>. It is partly due to Clifford's emphasis on historical context that I have traced shifts in existent meanings affixed to North American indigenous societies and their cultures by members of the surrealist group. Overall, it is my contention that from the late 1920s through to the end of Breton's stay of exile the socialist construction of these peoples and their cultures was a constant factor informing his collecting and exhibiting practices; however in New York - as was the case in Europe - changing circumstances resulted in slight shifts in emphasis and signification. Clifford, p.226.

7. There is a great deal of literature regarding the Nazis' vehement denunciation of avant-garde artists, and on the impact that exiled European artists had on American vanguard art. But little has been written on the actual circumstances surrounding the surrealists' flight to America or on their initial reception once in exile.

8. Anna Balakian in André Breton, <u>Arcanum 17</u> trans. by Zack Rogow (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994), p.8.

9.   Elizabeth Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists, <u>Art History</u>, Vol.1, No.4 (December, 1978),p.492.

10.   Here we encounter yet another romantic mythological understanding of the avant-garde; that is, many art historians have perpetuated an unreal portrayal of notable vanguard artists as special beings who retain the power of self-determination even during periods of complete upheaval.

11.
. It's not as if Breton did not have access to journals in which contrary political views could be expressed; indeed, there were two Surrealist/American avant-garde journals published in New York in the 1940s - *View* and *VVV* - the latter of which Breton served as an editorial advisor. However, an investigation of both journals reveals little in the way of a leftist critique of America's economic, social and political life, and, most significantly, nothing that might be thought of as a full blown anti-colonial treatise.

12.   Once again, there is in the writings on surrealism a dearth of in-depth accounts pertaining to the surrealists' stay in New York. James Clifford, for example, relies upon older accounts such as Edmund Carpenter's which, while of interest, is extremely limited in its scope and in its understanding of the whole phenomenon of avant-gardism. Perhaps one reason why the same articles are used over and over again is that there is surprisingly little in the way of an archival nature concerning the surrealists' period of exile in America in New York City itself. In the summer of 1993, I researched the city's many libraries, and even with the help of numerous librarians and archivists I found little in the way of materials detailing the comings and goings of the surrealist emigrés. I also carried out research at the *American Archives of Art* in Washington D.C., again with disappointing results. Upon returning to New York City, I went to the French Consulate to see if they had any record of the surrealists' activities. There I was told that all such information was of little interest and had been destroyed long ago. The whole direction of my research now changed: the task became to explore the reasons why the surrealists came and went with hardly a trace apart from the odd exhibition and certain texts written while in exile. Accordingly, I researched the many sources necessary to recreate the experience of flight, the circumstances of exile and the social, political, economic and cultural atmosphere in New York in order to better understand why it was that surrealist emigrés such as Breton kept such a low profile.

13.   Maurice Larkin, <u>France Since the Popular Front. Government and People 1936-1986</u>. (Oxford: Clarendon Press University Press, 1988), p.32.

14. *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi 5, Septembre 1942),p.1.

15. *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi, 16 Janvier, 1943) p.11.

16. *France/Amerique* (Samedi 23, February 1943),p. 1.

17. Roosevelt's rationale was hardly altruistic: once free from European domination, nations such as those in North Africa or South East Asia could be opened up to American economic exploitation.

18. *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi, 19 Juin, 1943),p.1.

19. *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi, 19 Juin 1943), p.12.

20. *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi, 3 Juillet 1943), p.1.

21. Monique Lemonnier, "Pionniers français d'Amérique," *France/Amerique* (Samedi 24, Aout 1943),p.9.

22. *Ibid.*, p.9.

23. *Ibid.*, p.9.

24. *Ibid.*, p.9.

25. *Ibid.*, p.11.

26. *Ibid.*, p.11.

27. A telling exception to the exclusion of the Iroquois was the taking up of Iroquois myths and themes in paintings by André Masson, a surrealist who was continually preoccupied with violent subject matter throughout the 1930s and 1940s. During the 1930s, he was influenced by the ideas of Georges Bataille and together they advocated - largely through writings in their journal <u>Acéphale</u> - that the only way to achieve human liberty was through a wholesale release of violent expenditure that would sweep away all repressive institutions. Given this position, it may have seemed to Masson that the Iroquois had the right idea when they burned or beheaded Jesuits in an effort to clear the priests and their oppressive Christian ideology from their midst. Masson's political position and his artistic practices in the 1930s and 1940s are dense and highly complex affairs deserving of their own study.

28. For an in-depth discusssion of the history of these exhibitions, especially the shows during the Great Depression see William Jackson Rushing, <u>Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-Garde, 1910-1950</u>. Ph.D. Thesis The University of Texas, 1989.

29. Rushing, p.384.

30. *Ibid.*, p.415.

31. *Ibid.*, p.347.

32. *Indian Art of the United States* Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941),p.8.

33. *Ibid.*, p.8. This was not the first time Eleanor Roosevelt had ventured to break America's myopia; as early as 1939 she was attempting to turn the nation's attention towards international affairs by speaking out on the need to assist European refugees. The political strategy of the Roosevelts in the 1930s and early 1940s was for the most part a team effort. While the President was primarily espousing isolationist rhetoric - appealing to the majority of the American people - the First Lady was openly encouraging Americans to look abroad. As for her signing of of d'Harnoncourt's text, Rushing notes that: "Although the President declined, d'Harnoncourt was pleased that he was willing for the the First Lady to do so." Rushing, p.385.

34. Rushing, p.415.

35. *Ibid.*, pp.415-6.

36. *Ibid.*, p.405.

37. Robert Goldwater, <u>Primitivism in Modern Painting</u>, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938. p.162-163.

38. Lowe, p.7 In George Vaillant's article he as well placed Inuit objects within a surrealist paradigm:

> One emerged into a bright white light, the modern Eskimo room, where small masks reflected a fancy that embodies the imaginative concentrate of surrealisme. George C.Vaillant, Indian Art ot the United States: An Exposition at the Museum of Modern Art, " <u>Art Bulletin</u> No 23 (June 1941), p.168

39. Rushing also makes note of a broad "linkage of Native American art to Surrealism and other modern movements" and how "several critics...compared Surrealist, Eskimo and Northwest Coast Art."Rushing, p.386 & p.409

40. Charlot, p.165

41. Rushing, p.407

42.   Theodor Adorno, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," in <u>The Intellectual Migration</u> edited by Donald Fleming (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1969), p.339.

43.   *Ibid.*, p.339.

44.   *Ibid.*, p.339.

45.   Jaques Lipchitz, <u>My Life in Sculpture</u> (New York: 1972), p.144.

46.   Martica Sawin, "Aux Etats-Unis," in <u>La Planete Affolee. Surrealism Dispersion et Influences 1939-1947</u> (Paris: 1986), p.109.

47.   Max Ernst, quoted in "Eleven Europeans in America." pp.17-18.

48.   *Ibid.*, p.18. One of the claims here is that behavior such as Breton's cannot be reduced to mere elitism. It is, I believe, too often assumed that the imposing, outwardly confident, and outspoken Breton could not possibly have been affected by exile. For example, Irving Sandler wrote in an article entitled "The Surrealist Emigrés in New York." in <u>Art Forum</u> (May, 1968), p.27., "The emigre thought of himself as more sophisticated and acted generally as if he were in the sticks . . . Breton's refusal to learn English was symptomatic of this attitude and it kept him at a distance from most Americans." While Sandler's characterizations may partially be true, reasons having to do with debilitation are equally relevant.

49.   Gerhart Saenger, "The Psychology of the Refugee," Contemporary Jewish Record (May, June 1940), p.264.

50.   Jacques Lipchitz quoted in "Eleven Europeans in America," p.24

51.   Hughes also points out that the American public had little understanding of what the members of the Institut were saying about its culture. He states, "Indeed, their audience existed chiefly in their imaginations and did not materialize until the 1950s." H. Stuart Hughes, "Social Theory in Context," in <u>The Muses Flee Hitler: Cultural Transfer and Adaptation</u> Jarrell C. Jackman, Carla M. Borden eds. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press 1983), pp.113-115

52.   André Breton, "Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars," in <u>What is Surrealism</u> Franklin Rosemont ed. (New York: Monad Press, 1978), p.242

53.   Ibid., p.243.

54.   Nicolas Calas took Breton to task in an article entitled "The Challenge of Surrealism" over the lack of political critique on the part of the surrealist while in exile. He states that when Breton wrote *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto, or not*, it was a "disappointment" to him and to Breton's "Marxist friends." Again, the point here is that Calas seemed to have little understanding of the constraints under which Breton was placed. Nicolas Calas, "The Challenge of Surrealism," in <u>Transfigurations. Art Critical Essays on the Modern Period</u> ed. by Donald Kuspit (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Press, 1985), pp.83-85

55.   André Breton, "Originality and Liberty," in <u>Art in Australia</u> No. 4 (Dec,. Jan., Feb., 1941-1942), p11.

56.   Ibid., p.12.

57.   *Pour La Victoire* (samedi, 6 mars 1943),p.1

CHAPTER FIVE

From the City to the Margins: The Exile Strikes Back

In February of 1942, shortly after Breton arrived in America, he wrote an article for *Pour La Victoire* entitled "Carnet de Martinique: Eaux troubles." Breton had been briefly interned at a concentration camp on the island of Martinique during April and May of 1941 before arriving in New York in July of 1941, since the French authorities in Fort-de-France - taking their cue from the Vichy government - viewed Breton as a dangerous agitator. The article provided Breton with an initial opportunity to resume his pre-war critique of French colonialism. He began by condemning the ruination of island's landscape through decades of economic exploitation:

> L'exploitation agricole du pays, pratiquement réduite
> à la culture de la canne à sucre laisse d'immenses
> espaces en friche....[1]

The decimation of Martinique was blamed on "la colonization telle qu'elle se poursuit ici depuis trois siecles." In addition, Breton pointed out how French imperialism continued to oppress the native peoples existing within the colony declaring that he witnessed:

> ...l'effroyable lassitude des nègres toujours esclaves
> qui, pour un salaire de sept francs en 1941,
> continuent sans espoir à couper et lier les cannes.[2]

But this sort of anti-colonial rhetoric very early on in Breton's stay was rarely ever publicly articulated again during

his period of exile. In fact, an investigation of both *Pour La Victoire* and *France\Amerique* reveals that Breton never wrote - or perhaps was never asked to write - for either journal again. Most likely in the weeks and months following the printing of Breton's essay, the emigrés' growing enthusiasm and concern for the French empire resulted in the exclusion of anti-colonial views.

Breton had another opportunity to publicly express anti-colonialist sentiment in textual form and the surrealist took full advantage of the opening. The article entitled "A Great Black Poet: Aimé Césaire," written and published in 1943 for the small New York review *Hemispheres*, was primarily devoted to extolling the verses of the Martinique poet Aimé Césaire whose works, Breton claimed, he encountered by chance while detained on the island in 1941. Breton used the occasion, I believe, partly to express opposition to the pledges that were currently being made by Britain and the United States to assist France in the restoration of its prewar empire, since his essay is wholeheartedly concerned with the fate of colonized peoples in the postwar era. In the text, Breton demanded that after the war independence be given to all nations tyrannized by the imperialist nations of the West. Moreover, he declared that if "men of color" were not granted their freedom from the grip of colonialism at this time then they would have no other choice than to revolt. Quoting from Pierre Cot's article "Les différents types de constitutions démocratiques" published in

1943 in *Le Monde libre*, Breton indicated that he would support any future international colony-wide revolution:

> Behind this resplendence [of Cesaire's poetry] is the poverty of a colonial people, its shameless exploitation by a handful of parasites....There is the resignation of this people who have the geographical disadvantage of being seedlings scattered widely across the sea. And behind even that, a few generations distant, there is slavery, and here the wound is reopened. It is reopened by all the grandeur of lost Africa, by the inherited memory of the abominable treatment suffered, by the consciousness of a monstrous and forever denial of justice of which an entire community was the victim....'In the former colonies, which must be subject to a new type of regime and whose evolution towards liberty will become a topic of international discussion, democracy will put a full stop not only to the exploitation of people of color but also to the social and political "racism" of the white man.' We await with impatience the day when beyond these colonies, the great mass of men of color will cease to be kept at such an outrageous distance and confined to second rate employment. If the international settlements which will come into effect after the present war do not fulfil these expectations, the opinion that the emancipation of people of color can only be the work of those people themselves, with all the implications inherent in that, would be definitely endorsed.[5]

While the emphasis here is upon the victimization of blacks largely due to French colonial holdings in Martinique and Africa, the use of phrases such as "people of color" indicates that Breton was addressing all victims of colonial oppression.

In the same year that Breton published his article on Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire wrote an essay for the journal *Tropiques* published out of Fort-de-France in Martinique entitled "1943: Surrealism and Us." In it, Cesaire states that for colonized peoples the significance of surrealism was its politically revolutionary agenda. Including several direct

quotes from Breton, especially those having to do with surrealism's dedication to the cause of liberty, Cesaire declares that Breton had awoken the revolutionary spirits in blacks everywhere:

> When, in 1943, liberty itself finds itself threatened throughout the entire world, surrealism, which has not stopped for a moment to adhere to the task of the total emancipation of mankind, sums up everything within this single magical word: freedom....
>
> Millions of black hands across the raging skies of the world are going to register their dismay. Set free from a long torper, the most disinherited of all peoples will get up on their feet on the plains of ashes....
>
> It is a matter of finally transcending the sordid antinomies of the present time: black/white, European/ African, civilized/savage....Cleanse the blue flame of the soldiers produced by colonial inanities. Recover our worth...our unprecedented fellowship.
>
> Surrealism, binds tight our hope.[4]

Cesaire's article is an extremely important one for here we have a rare opportunity to hear a voice from the victims of colonial aggression; that voice clearly states that the colonized peoples to whom Breton spoke or about whom he wrote recognized surrealism's commitment to an anti-colonialist revolutionary agenda.

Breton's resumption of treatises in support of the colonial proletariat - as limited as they were - was again accompanied by the display of North American indigenous objects. And it is Breton's evocation of these objects that is all too often overlooked in the literature on surrealism. That is, while it has been frequently noted that Breton collected objects produced by North American native societies while in New York, what has

rarely been pointed out is that he displayed them as well. That this is the case is conspicuous in photographs of Breton's living quarters in New York. Reproduced in the catalogue <u>André Breton: La beauté convulsive</u> are two photographs of his studio-apartment at 45 West 56th Street. [fig.14, 15] In both, we can see how Breton set up his *atelier* not unlike the ones he occupied in Europe where indigenous objects were assertively displayed. While this array of North American indigenous objects could be viewed solely as a show of possessions, such an interpretation, I believe, would be far too narrow in its scope.

Undoubtedly, the reestablishment of the *atelier* and its appointment with indigenous objects by the dispossessed emigré were crucial to his need for continuity, providing a way for Breton to recuperate some semblance of his former avant-garde identity. And it has been discussed how the collecting and, here, the display of North American cultures may have been in part stimulated by preexistent sites of affinity by American art critics just months before Breton arrived in New York. But just as importantly, in consideration of the treatises that Breton was writing in response to the resurgence of pro-colonialism amongst the French and in light of current events which seemed to indicate that the oppression of colonized peoples would persist into the postwar era, I believe that these objects continued to be thought of by the emigré as representing the cultures of peoples struggling against the forces of imperialism.

In one photograph, we see a fireplace upon which Breton has meticulously lined up his Kachina dolls or *teehoo*. The surrealist's interest in the societies of the Southwest is something that shall be addressed shortly. All of the figures are evenly spaced and each faces forward. Directly under the *teehoo* Breton has consciously positioned himself as also looking outwards, as dramatically gazing into space.[fig.14] Overall the effect of this deliberate congruence in posturing is not simply one of ownership but one which accentuates unity or solidarity as the viewer's eye jumps back and forth between Breton and the assembled figures lined up above and behind him. A construction of affinity is particularly pronounced in the second photograph of Breton's New York *atelier*.[fig.15] Carefully arranged on the wall in a semi-circular and symmetrical pattern are Inuit and Northwest Coast masks. The intimacy created here is quite remarkable: posing as if unaware of the camera, Breton stands directly in the center of this pattern of objects some of which create a halo or umbrella over his head. Breton is further fixed in space by the two masks on either side of his head. The curved shape of the Inuit mask on the left serves to bracket the overall arrangement and the arc of its bottom half leads the viewer's eye directly to Breton. Moreover, the mask's eye, which appears in profile, seems fixed upon Breton who has turned his body towards it. Breton's downward gaze and his slightly parted lips create the impression of intimate communication, an effect which is enhanced by the Inuit masks above him which seem to serve as silent witnesses to this private moment.

Both of these photographs, I believe, seek to amplify a portrayal of affinity between the surrealist-emigré and his collection of indigenous objects in a way that had rarely been seen before; and it is almost as if these items and the cultures they represent had increasingly become internalized into the emigré's identity. Perhaps it was the case that the displacement of exile engendered feelings of identification with the marginalized societies who made these objects.[5] Furthermore, surrounding himself with objects imbued with socialist significance may have allowed Breton to bolster an oppositional avant-garde identity by defining himself in *contradistinction to* his American hosts, many of whom regarded these objects as mere ethnographic curiosities. And finally, I believe that it is vitally important to keep the few tracts he managed to publish in mind when looking at how he positioned himself amidst these displays. In fact, in light of the circumstances curtailing these treatises, the display of objects made by colonially oppressed peoples most likely became the loci of increased socialist significance for Breton during these years of exile.

An issue raised by these photographs is that judging by the collection of *teehoo* in Breton's New York apartment, the emigré seemed to have developed a full blown interest in the societies of the American Southwest. The select inclusion of these objects along with those produced by the Inuit and the societies of the Northwest Coast suggests that by the early 1940s peoples such as the Hopi and Zuni had secured a place within the surrealist North American *pan-Indian* community. One possible reason for

their embrace is that Breton would have came into direct contact with idealized portrayals of these peoples in America characterizing them as communal, peaceful, agrarian, in possession of a rich cultural tradition and as still "living" an existence resistant to the ruinous forces of industrialization. Thus, while for Breton European socialist portrayals of North American indigenous peoples and their cultures persisted throughout his period of exile, what cannot be overlooked is how American constructions of its "own" indigenous peoples directly impacted upon the emigré.

Undoubtedly one way Breton became acquainted with the Pueblos' exalted status in America was through his interaction with George Heye while in New York. Indeed, Heye's Museum of the American Indian which Breton visited was laid out in a fashion that upheld the privileged place of the indigenous societies of the Southwest.[6] Specifically, the exhibits devoted to native groups such as the Hopi and Zuni were located on the second floor of the building segregated from the bulk of native American groups such as the Iroquois, the Apache, the Plains Sioux and the Comanche situated on the ground floor. On the second floor, display cases were filled with *teehoo* or Kachina "dolls," tapestries, baskets and pottery, all of which emphasized a domestic, peaceful way of life devoted to agricultural production and the making of crafts.[7] In contrast, the exhibits on the first floor allotted a great deal of space to clubs, knives, tomahawks, bows and arrows, "war" shields,

battle clothing and rifles. While I am not suggesting that these tribes did not produce or come to possess such objects, the mere fact that these exhibits were physically segregated from those on the second floor had the effect of reinforcing popular American stereotypes of these peoples as violent and warlike. In fact, it may have been the displays on the ground floor that prompted Marcel Duchamp to concoct an image of a scythe wielding American plains Indian portrayed as figure of death - simultaneously straddling his pony and the globe - for the front cover of the March 1943 issue of the New York based surrealist journal *VVV*. [fig.16][8] The fact that the figure is decked out in the stars and stripes may have alluded to the unleashing of the enormous American military machine against the Axis. Undoubtedly, the aura of peacefulness that had surrounded groups such as the Hopi and Zuni for decades protected them from being portrayed in such a negative fashion. Perhaps one of the best investigations concerning the origins of highly idealized portrayals of the tribes of the Southwest in America itself can be found in the research of Jackson Rushing referred to earlier in this thesis.

In his dissertation, Rushing reminds that "The American Indian never existed."[9] Rushing's pronouncement is reminiscent of Kuper's advocation regarding the wholly illusory construction of the *idea of primitive society*. And like Kuper, Rushing contends that the fanciful portrayals of indigenous peoples in America were dictated by the ideological needs of those who fabricated them. Concerning the peoples of the Southwest, they

were portrayed very early on as peaceful, communal, devoted to domestic arts and spiritual practices. The origins of these idealizations began in America in late 19th and early 20th centuries when ethnographers came to believe that they had encountered in the Southwest a living and restorative component of America's historical past. These perceptions, Rushing declares, almost immediately gave rise to the same sort of privileging of native societies that occurred in Europe:

> Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century ethnologists and photographers were thus exploring and recording a way of life opposed to their own: mechanized, transitional, secularized, unsettlingly new and urbanized. It is hardly surprising that they found aspects of Pueblo life vastly superior to their own.[10]

Conceived of as such, these peoples came to serve as foils in critiques of modernity in America since they were thought of as living in a "primitive state of cultural development usually associated with agrarian life which had not been tainted by the ill effects of capitalism and secularization."[11] Thus, while the societies of the Pueblo were not constructed *systematically* within a left wing paradigm in America, their portrayal was not dissimilar to socialist characterizations of the tribal peoples of North America, a congruence which facilitated their being taken up by the surrealists.[12]

As was the case with the European avant-garde, early American vanguard artists soon deployed the "primitive" in oppositional strategies. Rushing explains how artists' colonies sprung up at Santa Fe and Taos in the early decades of the 20th

century. From these sites, far from major urban centers like New York, painters and writers launched critiques against the varied ills of modernity. Rushing, aware of the contradictions and ambiguities that arise when dealing with the artistic avant-garde, is quick to point out how these early American vanguard painters were critical of the phenomenon of capitalism while remaining tied to it through their connections to the culture industry:

> ...the avant-garde colonists at Santa Fe and Taos began a period of intense patronage of Native American art. Both of these outposts of avant-garde culture maintained close ties with New York, simultaneously representing an extension of its art world and a critique of the modern urbanism it typified.[13]

The artists ensconced in the Southwest, believing that the utopian way of life in the Pueblo was threatened by modernity, set about to collect and preserve and stimulate local authentic native production. Fueling such lamentations and salvaging was the newly founded tourist industry in the Southwest and the emergence of native made tourist arts and native performances for the hordes of visitors from the East. Soon, "authentic" Southwest indigenous objects became imbued with an oppositional charge signifying an extant but beleaguered way of life. These same objects were marshalled in critiques against economic mechanization whereby hand made native crafts became touted as vastly superior to mass produced commodities. Of particular significance when investigating Breton's interest in the societies of the Pueblo is that when the emigre arrived in New

York, east coast urban artists were still firmly encamped in places such as Santa Fe, Taos and Sedona. Thus, through direct contact with the arts community in New York, Breton would have become familiar with this sort of posturing on the part of American vanguard painters.[14]

Rushing's account of the ongoing activities at the artist colonies and the subtle shifts in signification that occurred around native objects and peoples of the Southwest as the century progressed is, of course, a great deal lengthier than the exegesis given here. However, at the end of Chapter Three in his thesis Rushing provides the reader with a brief summary of the underlying impulses informing critiques of modernity calling forth the peoples of the American Southwest during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In his precis, Rushing stresses that the perceived viability of these critiques was rooted in the belief that the tribes of the Southwest were still "living" communities:

> First of all, the analysis above of texts...reveals a concern, indeed, one might well say a fear, shared by many of the writers about the increasing secularization that typified modern American life. The sustained physical presence of these writers in the Southwest was itself a critique of urbanism, with its attendant psychic distortions. But more than just establishing alternative lifestyles, individuality, and outposts of avant-garde culture, collectively, the colonists were attempting to regain a lost sense of community and social intimacy which they saw *still existent* in Pueblo life....[italics mine][15]

A depiction of the indigenous way of life in the Pueblo as still existent is also taken up by Brian Dippie in his book <u>The</u>

Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Policy. Dippie claims that in the 19th century societies such as the Hopi and the Navajo became viewed as "non-vanishing" as opposed to other indigenous peoples whose ways of life were thought of as almost extinct.[16] Concerning the interweaving of varied texts and perceptions in America which gave rise to this dichotomy, Dippie explains:

> As the situation sorted itself out, plains Indians, whose old-time culture was in shambles, came to represent the vanishing race, and the Navaho and Pueblos the revolutionary idea of Indian continuity and survival.[17]

This portrayal - and one may recall the texts of Durkheim and Mauss here - was rooted in the belief that the economies of these societies had remained resistant to the forces of white domination.[18] Dippie declares:

> An explanation was not hard to find. The Hopi had preserved their traditional economic base, and it had supported their culture substantially unchanged through the years....
> In isolated areas of Arizona and New Mexico, the sedentary Pueblos and the wandering Navajos followed their old ways, hoeing their gardens, tending their flocks, weaving blankets, fashioning their silver and turquoise jewelry, going to "sings," and practicing ancient rites much as they had always done.[19]

Moreover, Dippie argues that the "phenomenon of southwestern cultural survival" persisted well into the 20th century. Offered as evidence is a passage from the anthropologist Ruth Bendedict's highly influential book Patterns of Culture of 1934 where she declares:

> The Pueblo Indians...are one of the most widely known
> primitive peoples in Western civilization. They live
> in the midst of America, within easy reach of any
> transcontinental traveller. And they are living after
> the old native fashion. Their culture has not
> disintegrated like that of all the Indian communities
> outside of Arizona and New Mexico.[20]

In consideration of these American depictions of the societies
of the Southwest, ones in which we encounter similar
oppositional "virtues" found in European socialist of North
American indigenous tribes, it should come as no surprise that
Breton would be wholly amenable to admitting them into the
surrealist *pan-Indian* universe.[21]

Accounts of how the American urban avant-garde retreated to
these remote areas partly in order to mount critiques against
modern life is reminiscent of similar journeys undertaken by
the French avant-garde in the late 19th century. In Fred Orton
and Griselda Pollock's article "Les Donnéés Bretonnantes: La
Prairie de la Représentation," the authors discuss how for urban
vanguard artists like Paul Gauguin the agrarian inhabitants of
Brittany were conceived of and constructed as embodying virtues
lost to modern civilization. And although significant
differences existed between portrayals of the native peoples of
the American Southwest and the Breton peasantry, both societies
were portrayed as traditional, spiritual, communal, agrarian and
close to nature. And like the artists at Santa Fe who
participated in the very system they critiqued, those at Pont
Aven simultaneously launched critiques of modernity's vulgar
materialist economy from these regions while maintaining close

ties with their commercial dealers in Paris. Moreover, Pollock and Orton use the example of Gauguin in Brittany to expose a much broader tendency in Western avant-garde practices whereby all constructions of these seemingly remote, traditional societies were continuously defined in contradistinction to a singularly urban perspective:

> All these viewpoints, though they have different forms and work from different ideologies, perceived the world from an urban point of view which was based on the recognition of change and an awareness of difference. With this understanding we can locate the prevailing use of such notions as remote, savage, primitive, rustic, simple or attributions of superstitiousness of fatalistic piety....Their meanings are produced, as are all meanings, within relations of difference....All of these levels of differentiation or distance are predicated upon a point, a center, a given cultural norm, from which something is being seen as removed or distant. Remote means far from civilization. Thus, remoteness in distance metonymically signifies its opposite, the center of civilization, which, in nineteenth century France, meant Paris.[22]

Remoteness and insularity were additionally defined by the unfamiliarity and the ruggedness of the terrains of Brittany and the Southwest. Thus, it might be said that the primordial atmosphere evoked by the landscape fueled a construction of these peoples as primitive, remote, rustic, timeless and so on. In addition, the inhospitableness of the terrain appeared to offer a buffer zone or a shield to the deleterious effects of modernization. But while both of these areas seemed a world apart, by the late 19th century they were readily accessible by rail. And as was the case in America, the tourist industry in France had a major role to play in the perpetuation of these

areas as representing a way of life lost to modern civilization. As a result, both Britanny and the American Southwest were transformed into objects of consumption, luring tourists with promises of wistful glimpses into a pre-industrialized stage of the history of humankind.

What makes this comparison between Brittany and the American Southwest particularly pertinent to this thesis is that it establishes a pattern of avant-garde behavior whether in Europe or in America; indeed, in August of 1945 Breton visited Hopi and Zuni reservations located in the "remote" regions of Arizona and New Mexico. Although Breton did not travel to the American Southwest exclusively to make contact with the indigenous peoples who lived there since his primary purpose was to obtain a divorce from his wife Jacqueline in Reno Nevada and marry Elisa Claro, nevertheless, he did continue to Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. Here, amidst the "alien" austerity of the "ancient" desert landscape where it was imagined native peoples still lived out a peaceful, pre-industrial social existence, Breton continued the long established avant-garde tradition by launching a critique of the West in his poem <u>Ode To Charles Fourier</u>, a text dedicated to the 19th century Utopian socialist Francois-Charles Fourier.

The utopian socialist writings of Francois-Charles Fourier are notoriously eccentric featuring an intermingling of social, political and economic critique, theories of human psychology based upon passional attraction and a highly idiosyncratic cosmology. These physiological and cosmological dimensions were

undoubtedly of interest to Breton and have been amply explored by Evan Maurer. But very importantly, there was as well an interrelationship between Fourier's utopian socialism, idealized socialist constructions of North American indigenous peoples and the political debates taking place among the French in the 1940s. Concerning this intermingling, Kenneth White in the introduction to his translation of <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u> points out how in a letter written to Jean Gaulmier on January 21, 1958, Breton claimed that in the American Southwest he found a "renewed source of inspiration" in both the nineteenth century reformists and in the indigenous way of life amidst the "unprecedented ideological confusion" of the 1940s."[23] And in terms of a more precise historical context, it is important to note that because <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u> was written in 1945, the "ideological confusion" of which Breton speaks was that of the initial postwar years.

Breton was aware of Fourier's treatises even before his period of exile: in his <u>Anthology of Black Humor</u> published in 1940, the surrealist devoted several passages to Fourier, an individual who, Breton declared, had received the highest praise from Engels:

> Marx and Engels, so severe with their precursors, have rendered homage to the genius of Fourier in its sociological expression....Engels presented Fourier as 'one of the greatest satirists[24] of all time' and as no less a peerless dialectician.

However, in that same letter to Gaulmier in 1958, Breton wrote that initially his understanding of Fourier was somewhat cursory

since it was based upon second hand sources; it was not until

his stay in North America that he had the opportunity to read

Fourier's texts in their original form. Noting how he took

Fourier's writings with him on his voyage to the Southwest,

Breton explained:

> Until 1940, I scarcely knew him except through anthologies which are interested in him only from the angle of social reform. In New York, I was able to get hold of his complete works....These five volumes and almost they alone accompanied me on a rather longish trip I made in the summer of 1945 in the West of the United States.[25]

Breton also indicated to Gaulmier that while he began Ode to

Charles Fourier in the garden of his guest house in Reno,

Nevada, the poem derived its ultimate inspiration from time

spent with the indigenous peoples of the American Southwest.

Specifically, Breton likened the grandeur and the

marginalization of the natives of the Pueblo to the greatness

and the eventual obscurity of Fourier. Calling forth the image

of the noble savage Breton wrote to Gaulmier:

> Between the beginning and the end of the poem must be read in...the trip I made before returning to New York, through Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico, motivated especially by the intense interest I have in the Indians - the Pueblos in particular. The destiny that has been the lot of these men and their impressive dignity constituted a base for my dreaming, a canvas on which the personality of Charles Fourier...was destined to imprint itself in full relief.[26]

A more tangible connection between the peoples of the Southwest

and utopian socialism was that indigenous societies, and

especially their pre-industrial economies, were highly esteemed by Fourier. In fact, the economic base of these indigenous communities may have provided inspiration for Fourier's utopian socialist *phalanstery* since activities such as weaving, basket and pottery making were promoted as exemplary, as reflective of an economy and, hence, a whole non-alienated way of life in tune with nature. It was Fourier, more than any other 19th century utopian socialist, who privileged agricultural production over industrial production. Only reluctantly accepting the industrial age, he expressed a desire to return to a simpler way of life. Engels commented upon this distinguishing feature of Fourierist socialism as compared to other utopian socialisms which embraced industrialization in <u>On The Division of Labour in Production</u> where he explained:

> Both writers [Owen and Fourier] would have each member of society occupied in agriculture as well as industry; with Fourier, industry covers chiefly handicrafts and manufacture, while Owen assigns the main role to modern industry and already demands the introduction of steam-power and machinery in domestic work.[27]

It is likely that Breton's own enthusiasm for Southwestern indigenous production was stimulated even before he made this trip since he had viewed display cases full of Pueblo handicrafts in Heye's Museum of the American Indian and at The American Museum of Natural History. Undoubtedly, these peoples' pre-capitalist economy contributed to Breton's "inspirational" feelings during the aftermath of yet another "imperialist" war.[28]

The title of Breton's poem was no doubt a response to propagandistic poems written in France during the Occupation eulogizing the Vichy government; specifically, the apologist for the right, Paul Claudel, wrote his much publicized *Ode to Petain* in 1940, followed by his glorification of de Gaulle in 1944 in a poem entitled *Ode to de Gaulle*.[29] As for the poem's artistic methodology, it does not employ *automatism*, and, at certain points, the verses erupt into fairly straightforward critiques of current political events. As to his jettisoning of automatism in <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u> - the preeminent surrealist literary device - Breton later explained to Gaulmier:

> The text is fairly controlled (relieved as much as possible of the dross which encumbers automatic texts) ....Its elaboration was part *critical*: I permitted myself in this case the luxury of an infraction of my own principles...and my idea was to give this infraction of my principles the sense of a voluntary, freely chosen sacrifice to the memory of Fourier....[30]

What is being verbalized here, I believe, is Breton's need to engage the political postwar reality in a forthright fashion and his worry that the convoluted juxtapositions of automatism might conceal political protest at a moment when such expression was paramount. But even the more poetic passages were loaded with left wing import.

In several of these less straightforward verses, Gaulmier proposes that Breton reflected upon the troubled evolution of international communism, expressing his desire to see it

continue to its final completion. The passages singled out are as follows:

> Others came who were armed with more than persuasions
> They led the ram that was to grow
> Till it could turn from the east to the west
> And if the violence lurked between its horns
> All spring opened up in the depths of its eyes
>
> The existence of this fabulous beast alternately exalts and troubles me
> When it butted the world trembled and there were great clearings
> Which in places have been overgrown again
> Now it bleeds and feeds...
> I only hope it will retain enough mettle to go the whole way
> Fearful to think it may have been cankered long ago beside the marshes [31]

Gaulmier contends that the "fabulous beast" represented the Russian Revolution and that the vexation expressed by Breton was due to the betrayal of the original revolutionary principles by Stalin and by the French Communist Party.[32] Commenting further upon Breton's musings, Gaulmier emphasizes the ongoing importance of the Russian Revolution to the surrealist and how the duplicity of the French Communist Party was one of the primary source of antagonism between the surrealists and the P.C.F.:

> Jamais André Breton n'a affirmé avec plus de simplicité que dans ce passage l'immense intérêt, les alternatives d'espoir et de déception que la révolution russe a fait naître en lui, et qu'il convient pour les apprécier objectivement, de séparer des démêlées des surréalistes avec le parti communiste français.[33]

These verses and Gaulmier's interpretation provide crucial insights into Breton's attitude towards communism: contrary to writings that always want to distance Breton from communism it is quite clear that in the initial postwar period the surrealist was still committed to an international revolutionary socialist agenda, hoping that it would be able to maintain "the mettle to go the whole way." The deleterious effects of internal colonialist policies that Breton witnessed in the Southwest likely contributed to the sustaining of his commitment to the international socialist revolution which he believed would lead to the liberation of all indigenous peoples oppressed by the West. And, indeed, in Ode to Charles Fourier one finds the continued expression of anti-colonialism. Pertinent to this inclusion is that Fourier himself had vehemently denounced the West's oppression and exploitation of indigenous societies in the Americas. In Fausse Industrie of 1836, Fourier condemned European colonialism which had set about to "civilize" native peoples through the brutality "des gibets et des baionnettes."[34] Such atrocities, Fourier claimed, had resulted in the "extermination des races mexicaine et péruvienne."[35]

As Eli Zaretsky points out in his book Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life, the word "civilization" was "Fourier's term for competitive capitalism."[36] Fourier's charge, then, was that economic motives lurked beneath claims to bring the secular and religious betterments of civilized society to the more "backward" peoples of the world. Fourier's decrying of this duplicity likely reminded Breton of his own denunciations in

"Murderous Humanitarianism." Returning briefly to this treatise

the surrealist had charged that declarations purporting to bring

the benefits of civilization to indigenous peoples were, by his

time, utterly untenable:

> Gone were the days when the delegates of this
> snivelling capitalism might screen themselves in those
> abstractions which, in both secular and religious
> mode, were invariably inspired by the Christian
> ignominy and which strove on the most grossly
> interested grounds to masochise whatever people had
> not yet been contaminated by the sordid moral and
> religious codes in which men feign to find authority
> for the exploitation of their fellows.
> When whole peoples had been decimated with fire
> and sword it became necessary to round up the
> survivors and domesticate them in such a cult of labor
> as could only proceed from the notions of original sin
> and atonement.[37]

Almost a century earlier, Fourier, in his Theory of the Four

Movements of 1841, had also admonished those professing to

improve the lot of indigenous peoples while foisting their

economic system upon them, declaring:

> You who pretend to labour for the good of the human
> race, do you believe that six hundred million
> barbarians and savages form no part of the human race?
> Yet they suffer; well what have you done for them?
> Nothing....
> Far from succeeding in civilizing and uniting the
> human race, your theories gain only the profound
> contempt of the barbarians and your customs excite
> only the irony of the savage; his strongest
> imprecation against an enemy is to wish him our fate,
> and to say to him: "May you be reduced to working a
> field!....Yes, civilized industry is...abhorred by
> free peoples....[38]

Fourier, like Lenin after him, equated agricultural labour

foisted upon colonized peoples to industrial labour forced upon

the European working classes; all slaved for the economic
benefit of an elite dominant group. It is likely that Fourier's
condemnation of "civilization's" oppression of indigenous
American populations would have had a particularly strong
resonance for Breton amidst the abject poverty of the natives of
the Southwest. And in Ode to Charles Fourier, Breton saluting
Fourier from the bottom of a Hopi *kiva* - a ceremonial chamber -
provides the utopian socialist with an update on
"civilization's" continued subjugation of indigenous peoples:

> But looking from the past until now one has the
> impression that the *paths of happiness* are more and
> more scattered.
>   Poverty, swindling, oppression, slaughter are
> still the same ills for which you branded
> civilization.[39]

However, while these peoples had undoubtedly been defrauded
and impoverished by internal colonialist policies, as has been
discussed, they were also viewed as something of a phenomenon in
America since it was believed that the resilience of their
traditional agrarian communal way of life had warded off the
ruinous economic ambitions of the West. As Breton would have
come into direct contact with these constructions and given the
fact that he was reading utopian socialist texts, it was likely
the case that he as well regarded these societies' communal
attitude as antithetical to bourgeois capitalism. Indeed, in
Fourier's writings communal ownership over the productive assets
of society was pitted against *laissez-faire* capitalism. Fourier
charged that the existing economy was aimless and extremely

unjust since all labour in society was directed toward the
private profit of a select class. In <u>Theory of the Four
Movements</u>, Fourier in a typically socialist fashion condemned
the individualist foundations of division of labor in society:

> Industrialism is the latest of our scientific
> chimeras; it is the mania of producing in confusion
> without any system of proportional compensation,
> without any guarantee to the producer or wage earner
> that he will participate in the increase of wealth....
>   Industry offers a subversion far more striking;
> this is the opposition of *the two kinds of interest,
> collective and individual*. Every person engaged in an
> industry is at war with the mass, and malevolent
> toward it from personal interest.[40]

Fourier demanded a more fair and equal distribution of
income among all productive members of society. While it was
held that the Revolution of 1789 had achieved certain civil and
legal equalities, what was needed was a further step towards
complete social, economic and political equality. These early
views, I believe, had a direct bearing upon the emergence of
Marxist based anthropology. While Marx and Engels retained much
of Fourier's critique of existent class inequalities, they
distanced themselves from utopian socialism with its imagined
just societies such as that of the *phalanstery* in favor of
scientific socialism with its reluctance towards the
blueprinting of any future community. As discussed in Chapter
One, Marx and Engels, relying upon "scientific" data gleaned
from the emergent disciplines of anthropology and ethnography,
turned to "past" but still existent primordial communities in
which it was believed there was a more equitable distribution of

wealth. Undoubtedly, Breton felt that he was amidst such a community in the American Southwest in 1945. And as Engels had evoked the socialist virtues of the societies of North America during the struggle for political legitimacy in the late 19th century, I believe that amidst the "ideological conclusion of the 1940s" Breton saw the peoples of the American Southwest as the guardians of key socialist ideals that humankind ought to embrace in the postwar world. That is, while it has sometimes been assumed that Breton was evoking an earlier Utopian socialism in contravention of the dictates of Marx and Engels, he was, in a sense, following in the footsteps of the latter two by turning to North American indigenous societies viewing them in a highly idealized fashion during a period of political upheaval.

One of the issues closely bound up with the events of the war, indigenous peoples and Breton's presence in the Southwest was that of race. Specifically, visits with marginalized indigenous peoples oppressed by whites was likely a factor in prompting Breton to broach the matter of the need to set right in the postwar world wartime injustices committed against the Jews. In <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u>, Breton, speaking once again to Fourier, declared:

> Fourier they've scoffed but one day they'll have to
> try your remedy whether they like it or not
> Even if it means making certain modifications in your edict
> Beginning with the reparation of honor
> Due to the Jewish people[41]

The question arises here as to the nature of these "modifications." The answer, I believe, concerns passages in Fourier's Theory of the Four Movements in which the utopian socialist makes disparaging remarks about the Jews. Gaulmier briefly touches on the issue of anti-semitism in Fourierism by noting how in this text Fourier makes inquiries into the historical persistence of anti-semitism asking: "Fut-il jamais nation plus méprisable en corps que celle des Hebrew?"[42] Gaulmier states that Fourier answers his own querry by explaining that the Jews were continually maligned "en partie parce qu'ils sont confinés dans le commerce et l'usure, activités parasités dont il faudrait les détourner."[43]

Gaulmier argues that because Fourier's condemnations were directed solely towards the economic activities of the Jews his comments were not of a "caractere raciste."[44] Gaulmier's defense of Fourier should certainly be challenged; but the immediate issue here is that while Breton seemed hugely impressed by Fourier's writings, he was at the same time self-conscious of the fact that he was extolling an individual who had portrayed Jews in a negative fashion. As someone who had been persecuted himself and who had personally witnessed the oppression and internment of the Jews overseas, Breton most likely felt the need to distance himself from anti-semitism in Fourier's writings. Undoubtedly by 1945 Breton was aware of how Vichy had persecuted the Jews. Moreover, by this time rumors of the Nazi extermination camps were in full circulation in New York.[45] Thus, following a period when racial minorities had been

brutally oppressed and amidst peoples who themselves had been systematically persecuted, rounded up and segregated on reservations, it is not at all surprising that the emigre felt the need to raise the issue of rectifying the wrongs committed against the Jews.

Breton's call for reparations for the Jews may have also been initiated by the dearth of articles dealing with racial oppression in the French emigré newspapers throughout the surrealist's stay in New York. That is not to say that such protests were completely nonexistent; in fact, one article is of particular interest since it confronted the sort of negative portrayal of the Jews found in the writings of Fourier characterizing them as inordinately preoccupied with vulgar commercialism and usury through banking activities. Written in 1943 and entitled "The Plight of the French Jews," the report assumed the preexistence of this stereotype and the mistrust and paranoia it fueled and it set about to remind the reader that the Jews, contrary to popular prejudice compounded by fascist propaganda, were not outsiders who had managed through commercial and banking activities to surreptitiously seize the reigns of power in France:

> What is the pretext for this new wave of terror? Are the Germans still trying to prove to the French people that they are freeing them from "Jewish power and money"? Not at all. In France, as the French people know, the Jewish power was very weak. Out of more than 900 deputies and senators, less than forty were Jews. Not a single one of the big papers was Jewish. The stocks of all the great banks and public utilities were widely distributed among the general public and did not come under Jewish control. The same was true

of the great industrial enterprises -- Schneider, Comite des Forges, Renault and the rest.[46]

But the overall number of articles condemning the persecution of the Jews and other minorities in the French emigré newspapers was questionably scant. Hence, the infrequent appearance of protests amongst the emigré community may have additionally stirred Breton to demand that justice be given to the Jews in the postwar world just as he was calling for an end to the colonial oppression of indigenous peoples by whites.

Another postwar matter confronted by Breton in <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u> were calls in the emigré journals for the restoration of prewar bourgeois family values disrupted by the Occupation and war. In <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u> Breton resumed a straightforward prewar critique of the institution of the family declaring: "La famille ressort d'aparté, de piétinement, d'égoisme, de vanité, de division, d'hypocrise et de mensonge."[47] In <u>Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life</u>, Zaretsky elaborates upon Fourier's critique of the bourgeois family by reminding the reader that socialist denunciations of the family were inseparable from early debates having to do with domesticity and the oppression of women:

> Fourier's commitment to communities that would unify the personal and social needs of people is related to his unusual sensitivity to the problems of the family and to the oppression of women.... In this way the cause of the emancipation of women came to be linked, in the early nineteenth century with the defence of individualism against the bourgeois ideal of the family.
> Fourier wrote that the 'extension of privilege to women is the general principle of all social

progress'. His main charge against the French
Revolution was its failure to abolish the
family....The bourgeois family 'brought domestic
society to the highest degree of isolation and egoism
by dividing it into sexual couples or exclusive
households. Would it be possible to push unsociability
farther?'[48]

Not coincidentally, Breton had as well addressed the bourgeois subjugation of women a year earlier in a book entitled Arcanum 17, a text that was also written from the margins. Hence, I would argue that Arcanum 17 and Ode to Fourier are interelated since both are evidence of Breton's continued evocation of socialist doctrine concerning the inseperable issues of the patriarchal family and the place of women in society. Moreover, as was the case in Ode to Charles Fourier, in Arcanum 17 portrayals of North American indigenous societies figured prominently in the formulation of an oppositional response to current debates concerning the future postwar French society.

The year before Breton travelled to the American Southwest, he ventured into Canada, eventually making his way to the Gaspé. There, during the summer and fall of 1944, Breton wrote Arcanum 17. At first, one may wonder what possible link this text could have with constructions of indigenous peoples; after all, Arcanum 17 is devoted largely to mythology, folk tales, alchemy and the occult. Certainly, in the existing body of literature on surrealism there is little suggestion of any ties between this text and portrayals of North American native peoples. The connection, though, is there and it concerns passages in which

Breton speaks out against the disempowerment of women in French society; more particularly, Breton's championing of women's rights most likely arose out of socialist feminist theory espoused by Frederick Engels in <u>The Origin Of the Family, Private Property and the State</u> in which the original power believed held by women in the native societies of "the whole of North America" was marshalled in critiques of the bourgeois family and the oppression of women.[49] As Breton would have undoubtedly been familiar with Engels's polemics, what has recently been referred to as Breton's proto-feminism in <u>Arcanum 17</u> was, in reality, inextricably bound up with preexistent socialist feminist theory imported from Europe. Because so much of the literature discussing Breton's support for women's causes in <u>Arcanum 17</u> tends to be somewhat ahistorical, what must be more closely investigated are the socialist roots of Breton's feminism in the writings of Engels and why the surrealist would choose to expose them in 1944.

As Zack Rogow explains in the preface to his 1994 English translation of <u>Arcanum 17</u>, one of Breton's central preoccupations in his text is the French myth of Melusina, a guardian fairy of the Chateau of Lusignan. Melusina was afflicted with a condition whereby one day a week she took on human form above the waist and serpentine form below. The tragic nature of the tale ultimately revolved around her being condemned forever by her husband to this realm of "semi-human existence" since he could not resist the temptation of looking at her in this half-human, half-serpentine form.[50] Rogow

believes that the folk tale served as a vehicle to express Breton's concern for the seemingly endless marginalization of women in society. Referring to Breton's "feminist interpretation of this story," Rogow explains:[51]

> Breton uses Melusina as a symbol of the status of women in contemporary society -- reduced to half her humanity because she cannot play a full role in our culture....He makes a strong case that the kind of pain caused by World War II will only end when women assume leadership....
> Breton's feminism in *Arcanum 17* is the most striking feature of this book because it seems so strong and far-sighted.[52]

Rogow's argument is based upon a passage from <u>Arcanum 17</u> in which Breton condemns men's constant abuse of power and demands that it be handed over to women thereby returning them to a socially dominant position:

> Let us resolutely yield the passing lane to the supposedly "irrational" feminine, let it fiercely make enemies of all that which, having the effrontery to present itself as sure and solid, bears in reality the mark of that masculine intransigence which, in the field of human relations at the international level, shows well enough today what it is capable of. I say that the time is past when we can be satisfied on this point by mere whims, by more or less shameful concessions; instead, those of us in the arts must pronounce ourselves unequivocally against man and for women, bring man down from a position of power which, it has been sufficiently demonstrated, he has misused, restore this power to the hands of woman, dismiss all of man's pleas so long as woman has not yet succeeded in taking back her fair share of that power, not only in art but in life.[53]

While Breton's denouncements and his call for rectification are plainly evident, any characterization of the surrealist as a proto-feminist must be carefully scrutinized. Even Rogow is

aware that his portrayal has been met with resistance; in his introduction, he includes a passage from Whitney Chadwick's book, <u>Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement</u>, in which she questions "the depth of Breton's feminism in <u>Arcanum 17</u>."[54] Chadwick argues that the role assigned to woman in Breton's text, although somewhat empowering, is not one of independence from man but rather a secondary one whereby woman is assigned certain virtues brought forth by man in order to complete and inspire him. Rogow concedes that the criticism is valid. However, he objects to Breton's being judged by current feminist criteria stating that "we should be careful when measuring the politics of a book written in 1944 by today's standards. For its time, <u>Arcanum 17</u> was explosive."[55]

Anna Balakian in her introduction to the same translation of <u>Arcanum 17</u> also warns against characterizing Breton as a feminist stating, "Breton is no feminist in the political sense we use the word today."[56] However, she champions Breton by arguing that he was not simply seeking equality for women in <u>Arcanum 17</u>, he was elevating them to a position of superiority:

> He is not asking for women's "equality" with men but something much greater. He is suggesting that woman is superior to man in the very resources that must be tapped to bring peace, harmony, and serenity on our planet.[57]

The passage from the text that Balakian offers as evidence of Breton's exemplary exaltation of women is as follows:

> This crisis is so severe that I, myself, see only one solution: the time has come to value the ideas of

women at the expense of man, whose bankruptcy is coming to pass fairly tumultuously today. It is artists, in particular, who must take the responsibility, if only to protest against this scandalous state of affairs, to maximize the importance of everything that stands out in the feminine world view in contrast to the masculine, to build only on woman's resources, to exalt, or even better to appropriate to the point of jealously making it one's own, all that distinguishes her from man in terms of modes of appreciation and volition.[58]

While Breton does once again speak out on behalf of women, both Rogow's and Balakian's portrayals of the surrealist seem rather aggrandizing; Balakian believes Breton ought to be congratulated for an exaltation of women that went beyond mere equality and Rogow ultimately refuses to relinquish a construction of Breton as a proto-femimist. While all of these debates are of interest, once again there seems to be little in the way of a discussion of the theoretical foundation of Breton's feminism and almost nothing about what it was that prompted this seeming sudden support for women in 1944. An investigation of these matters clarifies how and why constructions of North American indigenous societies brought from Europe were revitalized once again in Arcanum 17.

Rogow's characterizations of Breton's views as "explosive" or "far-sighted" ought to be considered within the larger context of preexisting socialist feminist theory. In particular, Rogow's assessment should be extended backwards in time where it would ultimately encounter a truly "explosive" critique regarding the oppression of women within the bourgeois family found in Engels's The Origin of the Family, Private Property and

the State. Undoubtedly, one must exercise caution when discussing the place of feminism in Marxism. Marx himself offered little support to feminist causes and many Marxists view feminism as nothing more than another bourgeois "deviation" from the path to the Revolution. Engels, however, differed from Marx in his lifelong support of women's causes. Other key Marxists like Lenin and Trotsky - two individuals highly esteemed by Breton - built upon the writings of Engels by stressing that the emancipation of women was crucial to the transition to socialism. In this sense, there was an additional connection between women and colonized peoples in that the success of the socialist revolution depended upon the liberation of all oppressed groups. In order to understand how North American indigenous peoples came to play a role in the formulation of Breton's "feminism" in Arcanum 17, it is necessary to return in more detail to Engel's portrayal of the supposedly superior status held by women in these "primordial communist" societies and how this representation was deployed in critiques of the impoverished status of women in 19th century Europe.

One of the most important dimensions of Arcanum 17 when one investigates the influence of Engels's socialist feminist writings on Breton is that the surrealist is not insisting that power be *given* to women; instead, he is demanding that power be "*restored*" to them.[59] Furthermore, Breton's scenario whereby power was taken from women and subsequently abused by men represents the central thesis of The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. This is not to say that Breton

was directly summoning up native women. Instead, he was arguing, I believe, for the return of the kind of power that Engels claimed women held in the primordial communist societies of North America. And in claiming this, I wish to reiterate my belief that there was no need for Breton to directly refer to Engels or to native communities in Arcanum 17 since the roots of the declarations found in the text would have been recognizable to the audience for whom Breton was writing as arising out of the history of the stages of humankind formulated by one of the founders of the socialist movement. Specifically, Engels argued that at that very moment men overthrew women in favor of themselves and their own children in the "original evolution," one could find the beginnings of the family, patriarchy, the rise of the state, private property and class distinctions. No doubt Breton looking at the world around him from a leftist perspective in 1944 would have seen ample evidence for man's incessant abuse of that misappropriated power.

Engels deployed the exalted rank of women in North American indigenous societies as a foil to critique what he regarded as the enslavement of women by men in 19th century bourgeois society. In particular, Engels' condemned the institution of the family and the laws which protected it as maintaining the inequality of women by confining them to the private domestic sphere. What is more, once women were banished from the public realm, the essential domestic labor they performed also disappeared from view. This state of affairs, Engels claimed, was in marked contrast to primordial North American native

communities where women's performing of domestic chores was highly visible. As such, the essentiality of this labour to the economic functioning of the community was evident to all. In his cross-cultural comparison Engels declared:

> As regards the legal equality of husband and wife in marriage, the position is no better. The legal inequality of the two partners bequeathed to us from earlier social conditions is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of the woman. In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to the women of managing the household was as much a public, a socially necessary industry as the procuring of food by the men. With the patriarchal family and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a *private service*; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production.[60]

Engels's argument that management of the household ought to be valued as a public industry and not as a private function performed for the man should not be regarded as mere lip service still confining women to the domestic sphere. On the contrary, Engels argued that the women of his time ought to be given free access to all economic avenues. But, as is often heard today, Engels objected that in modern industrial society the woman was only offered one of two choices: either she stayed at home looking after the family or she worked; she could not do both. This either/or situation, Engels argued, applied to both factory jobs and the professions:

> Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again .... But it was opened in such a manner that if she carries out her duties in the private service of her

family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. And the wife's position in the factory is the position of women in all branches of business, right up to medicine and the law.[61]

Necessary to the change in the economic base was the socialist revolution. And while Engels was aware of his own prohibition against utopianism, he speculated that in decades following the revolution economic gains made by women would liberate them from their current position of subservience to men permitting both freedom of choice and open participation in the public life of the community. He also implied that in the future society, women would be provided, as was the case in the fundamentally democratic primordial communist societies, with "equal votes."[62] Of this post-revolutionary society Engels proclaimed:

> What we can now conjecture about the way in which sexual relationships will be ordered after the impending overthrow of capitalist production is mainly of a negative character, limited for the most part to what will disappear. But what will be new? That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other consideration than real love or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practices of each individual -- and that will be the end of it.[63]

Thus the socialist revolution, Engels believed, would give back to women their self respect, their status, their equality and their freedom to chose; women's power as it had once existed in the indigenous primordial communist societies of North America described with such enthusiasm throughout The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State would, it was hoped, be restored.

In Arcanum 17, Engels's socialist feminism was mobilized as a critical response to discussions about the place of women in postwar France.[64] That is, in the year immediately preceding the liberation, articles began appearing in the New York emigre newspapers about the need to rectify the low status of women in the new Republic. In order to understand why this would be an issue at all necessitates a brief look at the social, political and economic status of women in prewar France.

Undoubtedly there was a need to address women's rights in the postwar world since historically women in France had been severely disadvantaged. To be sure, women in many European countries held low status. But this was especially the case in France where an almost continual lack of civil, legal and economic rights perpetuated women's lesser standing within society. Maurice Larkin in France Since the Popular Front notes that the paucity of women's rights was largely the result of Napoleonic law: after the Revolution Napoleon's preoccupation with the restoration of hierarchy and stability throughout French society gave birth to the Napoleonic Civil Code which "made married women legal minors, subject to their husband's

authorization in many matters" and which forbad their entering into public economic ventures on their own.[65]

While the code was amended in 1938 when women were given full legal rights under the law and their formal duty of obedience to their husbands was abolished, the French court system still considered the husband as the "chef de la famille."[66] Hence, any action taken by a woman thought of by her spouse as not in the best interest of the family could be legally denied. As a result, in the 1930s only about one-third of the wage earners in France were women, a small percentage that could not be accounted for simply by the number of women remaining at home caring for infants. Larkin also contends that women were further excluded from the work force by male-dominated trade unions which "saw women as potential competitors." Consequently, the unions "paid little more than lip-service to improving their conditions and inferior rates of pay."[67]

Yet another major obstacle to the economic empowerment of French women was that until 1944 they were denied voting privileges. Women's disenfranchisement was largely due to Republican secularism: since there were twice as many Catholic women as men, it was feared that giving women the vote would result in the election of a right wing majority hostile to the anti-clerical legislation of the pre-war period. Fear of the ascension of the right was fueled by the fact that after women in Spain were given the vote in 1931 there occurred a series of right wing victories in the elections of 1933. These successes

were "invoked by French anticlericals as incontrovertible proof of the folly of enfranchising women."[68] In her text, <u>Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968</u>, Claire Duchen also takes up the question of women's suffrage in France in the 1930s. She points out that it was not simply the Republican secularists who were opposed to giving women the vote but the political Right itself:

> The question of women's suffrage ought to have been resolved before the war and the principle had indeed been accepted by the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) after the First World War, but had always been rejected by the more conservative senate (upper house).[69]

As for the left, they supported women's suffrage in theory only. Like the Republicans, they too were worried that women would vote *en masse* for political parties associated with the Church. The failure on the part of the French left to support women's suffrage in the 1930s in more than a cursory way was angrily attacked by Trotsky in his article "Once Again, Whither France?" written in March of 1935. The article is important for it would have sustained Engels's feminist critique within the socialist circle in which Breton moved. Arguing that the emancipation of women was crucial to the socialist revolution, Trotsky declared:

> There are to be found "Socialists" who dread giving the women the right to vote, in view of the influence which the Church has upon them....
> Every revolutionary crisis is characterized by the awakening of the best qualities in the women of the toiling classes: their passion, their heroism, their devotion. The influence of the Church will be

swept away not by the impotent rationalism of the "freethinkers," not by the insipid bigotry of the Freemasons, but by the revolutionary struggle for the emancipation of humanity and consequently, first of all, of the working woman.

The program of the socialist revolution must resound in our time as the tocsin for the women of the working class![70]

In <u>Arcanum 17</u>, Breton's dismissal of the idea of the "supposedly irrational feminine" was perhaps, in part, a reflection of his mentor's comments critical of so-called rationalist arguments against giving women the vote.

During the period of the Occupation, the bourgeois family and the state apparatus supporting it was thrown into complete disarray. Apart from the fact that women like men were now being shot or imprisoned for their participation in the Resistance, domestic activities performed by women necessary to the proper functioning of society - once hidden away - now became publicly visible. Duchen discusses both the visibility and politicization of women's domestic labour during the Occupation where she writes:

> During the Occupation, the distinction between the private and domestic world of women and the public world of men had been broken down both by the activities of women in public life and by the intrusion of politics into the home: the domestic had been politicized by the Occupation as, for instance, the act of cooking became subversive if the meal was for a member of the Resistance. The domestic had also become a more public affair: queuing, scavenging for firewood or for water, sharing the scarce cooking facilities and the limited food. Activities that usually took place in the privacy of the home now took place out in the open. The home itself had...been transformed into a hybrid community, no longer composed of a single family unit, but of people thrown together out of necessity.[71]

It was largely the result of the return of women to the public sphere that discussions were prompted in the emigre press over the need to address women's issues in the future postwar Republic. Even before Liberation, de Gaulle, while still in Algiers, pledged in his Ordinance of 21 April 1944 that he would extend the vote to women in the new Republic and see to it that they would be allowed to run for political office on equal terms with men. And indeed on 29 April 1945 women voted for the first time in French history. This is not to say that from this point on women in France achieved political and economic power equal to that of men; nor is it to argue that de Gaulle's motives for initiating reform were completely altruistic. Certainly any declaration from Algiers during this period must be considered as an attempt to disassociate the Committee from the Vichy government. In regard to the latter's attitudes towards women, while traditional economic, family and gender roles were disrupted during the Occupation, Vichy still promoted a wholly traditional role for women within the confines of the French family. Of the continued disempowerment of women under the Vichy regime, Duchen remarks:

> The Vichy motto had been 'Travail, Famille, Patrie' (Work, Family, Fatherland'.) Legislation had made divorce more difficult, prompted traditional roles for men and women, and attempted, albeit not very successfully, to prevent married women from working in the public sector.[72]

In contrast to this perpetuation of prewar attitudes towards women, the government in Algiers took on a seemingly more

"enlightened" view by declaring that one of the highest priorities of the Fourth Republic would be a dedication to women's "issues". However, while the Gaullist position appeared to be devoted to the empowerment of women, closer investigation reveals its distinctly conservative attitude towards the family, women's place in the home and traditional gender roles. It was, I believe, what was in actuality a call for a return to the traditional prewar family in the postwar world that Breton - deploying Engels's socialist feminism - confronted in Arcanum 17.

In September 1943, *France/Amerique* published in two parts an article written by Marcel Sauvage from Algiers entitled "La IVeme Republique et la revolution feminine." The text is an important one since it publicly articulated the French Committee of National Liberation's vision of the future role for women in postwar French society. Sauvage began by acknowledging the economic advances made by women, commenting favorably upon the way in which they had made their way into the professions, the traditional economic domain of the male bourgeoisie. Believing that women's self-initiative ought to have its political rewards, Sauvage declared on behalf of the Committee:

> Les femmes ont pris partout conscience des
> responsabilités du travail, de l'initiative du
> pouvoir, des besoins sociaux en fonction même de leur
> avenir et du nôtre. Elles sont installées désormais
> dans toutes les professions qui leur procurent une
> indépendance économique avec une autorité
> incontestable. On ne comprendrait plus, dans ces
> conditions, qu'une démocratie réelle puisse refuser à
> la femme sa liberté politique et le droit de défendre
> des intérêts, à la fois particuliers et généraux, que

nos parlementaires ont méconnus au détriment de la Nation....[73]

Sauvage further remarked that the Fourth Republic's granting of political rights would foster women's self-determination, stating:

Dans le reclassement, la réorganisation de nos énergies, de nos ressources françaises, la première place revient de droit aux femmes. Et, puisque nulle action, de nos jours, n'est possible sans le recours a un pouvoir politique, elles doivent être admises au plus tôt dans le corps électoral comme dans tous les cercles du gouvernement....La femme, avec son bulletin de vote, pourra aider puissamment sinon accomplir en majeure partie la révolution que nous attendons...dans la Quatrième République.[74]

However, amidst all of this seemingly enlightened rhetoric resided a profoundly traditional and paternalistic point of view. Sauvage begins to yearn for a pre-industrial age when the institution of the family was at the very center of French society and women the custodians of its values. Accordingly, he defines the women's revolution in the future Republic as a return to traditional family values:

Il n'y a pas si longtemps, la femme gardait le foyer, les traditions, les façons coutumières...et les choses. Mais depuis que le machinisme industriel, poussant à l'extrême les luttes économiques et sociales, à multiplié les besoins factices et les vanités, l'idée familiale s'est affaiblie.
     Il convient donc de bien définir le sens de la Révolution féminine dans la Quatrième République. Elle exige un retour à la féminité, libre enfin mais assurée d'elle-même, un retour à la mission naturelle de la femme pourvue de tous les moyens d'accomplir cette mission dans un monde mécanique ou règne la confusion des valeurs et des genres.[75]

By the end of the article, the traditionalism lurking within the Committee's position concerning the role of women in postwar France - a conservatism masked somewhat by enfranchisement - became conspicuous when Sauvage, not unlike Vichy itself, launched into a glorification of motherhood, declaring:

> On pourrait donc résumer ainsi le débat sur ce plan: soyez mères pour être belles, soyez belles pour demeurer Françaises, à ce titre tous les dôits et prestiges sociaux ou politiques vous seront acquis.[76]

Thus what was presented as a commitment to a women's "revolution" in the Fourth Republic was in reality a call for the reestablishment of traditional prewar family and gender roles; women were now "free" to return to their natural mission: motherhood. And again, it was the perpetuation of prewar patriarchal attitudes and traditional economic, family and gender values in crucial articles such as this that Breton confronted in a socialist way in Arcanum 17.

What is more, Breton's impatient dismissal of "the more or less shameful concessions" being offered to women, his call for the bringing of "man down from a position of power" coupled with his insistence that power be restored into "the hands of women" went beyond being merely anti-patriarchal by boldly insisting that matriarchy ought to be the very basis of the postwar society. This latter advocation in particular, I believe, was one which summoned up as a foil the supposed matriarchal foundations of the primordial communist societies of North America. Clearly for Breton, the women's revolution planned for

the postwar world did nothing to address the injustices of the *original* revolution spelled out in Engels's <u>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</u>.

The wholly radical nature of Breton's socialist feminist rhetoric found in <u>Arcanum 17</u> would undoubtedly have been unwelcome in the French emigré press.[77] Denied access to these journals as a vehicle of expression and anxious to participate in this debate, Breton had 325 copies of his book printed upon his return from the Gaspe; by December of 1944, <u>Arcanum 17</u> was available for sale at Gotham's Book store in New York.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1. André Breton, "Carnet de Martinique. Eaux troubles," *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi, 14 Fevrier, 1942),p.5.

2. *Ibid.*, p.5.

3. André Breton, "A Great Black Poet," in <u>What is Surrealism? Selected Writings</u>, pp.234-235.

4. Suzanne Césaire, "1943: Surrealism and Us." <u>*Tropiques*</u> Nos 8-9 (October, 1943),pp.14-18.

5. What these photographs also reveal is that indigenous objects collected by the surrealists in New York were displayed outside the arena of the private commercial art gallery for purposes not directly tied only to connoisseurship.

6. While in New York, I discussed with several curators of The Museum of the American Indian the issue of what the museum looked like in the early 1940s. They explained that with the exception of glassing in of the display cases and the addition of explanatory cards - the latter of which change with extreme infrequency - the museum's displays appear today much as they did in the early 1940s when the surrealists viewed them.

7. The American Museum of Natural History which Breton frequented as well also devoted a great deal of space to the display of native cultures from the Southwest.

8. *VVV* No. 2&3 (March, 1943),p.1

9. William Jackson Rushing, <u>Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-Garde, 1910-1950</u> (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1990),p.10

10. *Ibid.*, p.42.

11. *Ibid.*, p.189.

12. It is interesting to note that while native groups in America were generally not systematically constructed as communists, they were at times referred to as proletarian. In Richard Slotkin's book <u>The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890</u> he explains that in the late 19th century, the American bourgeoisie in urban centers were deeply concerned about the emergence - on their side of the Atlantic - of a new class: the proletariat. In particular, they believed that industry's drive for a source of cheap labour would result in the rise of an "alien-born

proletariat." Specifically targeted were the Irish, blacks and Chinese. Thus, the perceived danger was not only the potential threat that socialism posed to cherished principles of private property but also the threat that a "racially inferior proletariat," or "those races and classes which are inherently degraded," would present to the forward development of "civilization" in America. The Paris Commune of 1871, in particular, created immense concern among industrialists over the possibilty of associated worker violence in American urban centers. The anti-socialist rhetoric amidst what Slotkin refers to as the "Red Spectre of the Commune" likened the behavior of the workers to that of "savages" and there were articles in the newspaper comparing working-class ferment to "impending trouble on Indian reservations." But while the rebellious proletariats were referred to as "savages," native peoples at times were constructed as potential proletarians. Specifically, it was held that at a time when the spread of "civilization" was causing traditional native life to disappear, one the few options remaining for these peoples was to join the laboring masses. This of course was a proposal partly intended to end native dissidence through assimilation. And Slotkin notes how the terms proletariat and savage were "continually reversed"; while workers were often presented as "worthy producers" and, hence, "models for the Indians," they were as well "Indian themselves, savage in their propensity for violence and evasion of toil, using strikes and mobs to block access to businesses and public squares just as the Indians use violence to block railroad access to the West." Moreover, the "Indian" was seen as a particularily dangerous breed of worker – and one is reminded here of constructions of Northwest Coast peoples – due to the threat they posed to the system of private property. Specifically, it was held that indigenous peoples had little regard for the principle of private property or values bound up with Western industrial production. For an in-depth discussion of this period and these sorts of constructions see Richard Slotkin, <u>The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890</u> (New York: Atheneum, 1985),pp.302-345.

13.   *Ibid.*, p.84.

14.   Max Ernst was one of the first surrealists to head out to the artist colonies. In the summer of 1943, Ernst drove through the American Southwest eventually making his way to Sedona. He was so taken by the site that in 1946 he moved to Arizona, bought land in Sedona and began construction of a home. <u>The Max Ernst Papers</u> from the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (Roll No.3829).

15.   *Ibid.*, p.186.

16.   Brian W. Dippie, <u>The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy</u> (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982),p.284.

17.   *Ibid.*, p.285 In Dippie's book there is an in-depth discussion of the texts which gave rise to a construction of the indigenous peoples of the Southwest as the "non-vanishing Americans." Dippie, pp.284-296

18.   In his essay "White Conceptions of Indians," Berkhofer investigates how a perceived lack of disruption by white's resulted in some native societies being viewed as existing outside of history and as the antithesis to "civilization." Always aware of how the "Indian" was a white conception, he explains:

> Since Whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness as they defined them would forever be opposites. Only civilization had history and dynamics in this view, so therefore Indianness must be conceived of as historyless and static. If the Indian changed through the adoption of civilization as defined by Whites, then he was no longer truly Indian according to the image. Because the Indian was judged by what Whites were not, change toward what Whites were made him ipso facto less Indian. Berkhofer, p.529.

19.   *Ibid.*, p.287. Like Rushing, Dippie notes how the perceived "cohesiveness and purity of Pueblo and Navaho life" was particularly attractive to early vanguard American painters who "began congregating in Taos and Sante Fe late in the 19th century." Dippie, p.287.

20.   Ruth Benedict quoted in Dippie, p.289. Again, see Part Six of Dippie's text for a detailed account of how and why American anthropologists continued to construct these peoples in this fashion. In addition, Dippie discusses the varied ways this vision of the peoples of the Southwest impacted upon American native policy in the early decades of the 20th century.

21.   It is worth noting - especially in light of Dippie's discussion - that Breton's collecting and exhibiting of objects from the American Southwest was specifically meant to evoke the Hopi and Zuni and not the Navajo. The Navajo were constructed in a less favorable light as being more warlike in nature. And as was the case with the Iroquois, ambiguous colonial entanglements were most likely the cause of this negative portrayal. Throughout the eighteenth century the Navajo were in conflict with the Spanish and the Pueblos in what is now New Mexico. In the 1770s the Navajo joined forces with the Gila Apaches and

fought against the Spaniards in the Apache war. But by 1785, the Navajo developed relatively friendly relations with the Spanish invaders and fought with them against the Apaches. By the very early 19th century, the Navajos waged war once again with the Spanish in New Mexico and hostilities persisted into the American period. What's more, they continued to carry out attacks upon other Pueblos including the Hopi. In adding this, it is not my intention to perpetuate a construction of these peoples as savage or warlike but only to point out how this long history of antagonism, one perpetuated and amplified in the popular imagination, resulted in these dwellers of the American Southwest being excluded from any strategy intending to juxtapose peaceful, agrarian, domestic, oppressed indigenous societies to the warring imperialist nations of the West. Nor do I intend to perpuate a portrayal of the Hopi as inherently peaceful. As Albert H. Shroeder and Omer C. Stewart point out in an article entitled "Indian Servitude in the Southwest," there were long standing animosities amongst varied tribes in the Southwest often resulting in battles in which the Hopi actively participated. It is most likely the case that the Navajo's joining of forces with the Spanish colonizer against other tribes and the martial conflict with white American settlers was the cause of these people's being constructed as warlike in nature. See Albert H. Schroeder and Omer C. Stewart, "Indian Servitude in the Southwest" in <u>History of Indian-White Relations</u> ed. Wilcombe E. Washburn (Washington:Smithsonian Institution, 1988),p.412.

22. Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock "Les Données Bretonnantes: La Prairie de la Réprésentation," in <u>Modernism and Modernity: A Critical Anthology</u> ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York:Harper and Row, 1982), p.295.

23. André Breton, <u>Ode to Charles Fourier</u> trans. by Kenneth White (London: Cape Golliard Press, 1969), no page numbers in book.

24. André Breton, <u>What is Surrealism? Selected Writings</u> ed. by Franklin Rosemont (New York: Monad Press, 1978), p.192.

25. White, no page numbers in book.

26. White, no page numbers in book.

27. Engels, "On The Division of Labour in Production," in <u>The Marx-Engels Reader</u> ed. by Robert C.Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p.720.

28. Yet another pertinent factor in regard to the *phalanstery* was that while no such community was ever established in France, Victor Considerant, a disciple of Fourier, founded a *phalanstery* in Texas in the 19th century. While the colony failed, the nearness of the ill-fated community to New Mexico and Arizona

may have caused Breton to experience a sense of kinship with this French pioneer socialist who had also made his way from the American east coast to the Southwest almost a century earlier.

29.   Larkin, p.83. Larkin discusses how these sorts of uncontrolled gushing were quite common in the early 1940s. One of the best known of these "overblown tributes" was written by George Gerard. Entitled *Pater noster* and dedicated to Petain, the verses read:

30.   Our father who stands before us, thy name be glorified, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth so that we may live. give us our daily bread, though we five nothing in return. Give once more life unto France. Lead us not into false hope nor into deceit, but deliver us from evil, O Marshal. Larkin, p.83.

31.   White, no page numbers in book.

32.   Gaulmier, p.87.

33.   *Ibid.*, p.87.

34.   *Ibid.*, p.30.

35.   *Ibid.*, p.30.

36.   Eli Zaretsky, <u>Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life</u>, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p.96.

37.   André Breton in <u>What is Surrealism: Selected Essays</u>, p.325.

38.   Charles Fourier, <u>Selected Works</u> trans. by Julia Franklin (London: S. Sonnenshein, 1901),p.82.

39.   White, no page numbers in book.

40.   Fourier, <u>Selected Works</u>, pp.86-88.

41.   White, no page numbers in book.

42.   Gaulmier, p.88.

43.   *Ibid.*, pp.88-89.

44.   *Ibid.*, p.89.

45.   For an in-depth discussion of Vichy's persecution of the Jews see Larkin, pp. 82-107.

46. *Pour La Victoire* "The Plight of the French Jews" (Samedi Fevrier 6, 1943), p.1.

47. Gaulmier, p.71.

48. Zaretsky, pp.87-8.

49. Engels, p.151.

50. Zack Rogow in André Breton, <u>Arcanum 17</u> trans. by Zack Rogow (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994), p.19.

51. *Ibid.*, p.19.

52. *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

53. André Breton, <u>Arcanum 17</u> trans. by Zack Rogow (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994), p.62.

54. *Ibid.*, p.20.

55. *Ibid.*, p.21.

56. Anna Balakian in André Breton, <u>Arcanum 17</u> trans. by Zack Rogow (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994), p.12.

57. *Ibid.*, p.12.

58. Breton, p.61.

59. *Ibid.*, p.62

60. Engels, p.137.

61. *Ibid.*, p137.

62. *Ibid.*, p.151.

63. *Ibid.*, p.145.

64. One of the factors contributing to an absence of historical analysis is that <u>Arcanum 17</u> was written in the remote region of the Gaspé in seeming isolation from the events of history. This apparent disconnectedness has provided some authors with a further opportunity to romanticize the avant-garde. Balakian in her introduction to <u>Arcanum 17</u>, for example, gives the reader a hugely romantic version not only of Breton's stay in the Gaspe but also of his whole period of exile. Conjuring up the vision of the sensitive isolated genius she remarks:

> ...he [Breton] kept his distance from the society of artists and their patrons in America. He was seeking in the loneliness of his exile a meaning, a direction: and hating masters, whether divine or political...found his final solace in primitive legend, and in alchemy, which seemed to provide powers for the mind to transform anguish into ecstasy. His most brilliant achievement in his physical and spiritual entrapment in America was indeed *Arcanum 17*.
>
> In *Arcanum 17*, written during a three month stay in Canada, on the Gaspe Peninsula, the self-exiled Frenchman tried to find light and hope in the bleakest year of World War II by seeking solace in the forces of the universe, the powers of love, and the wisdom of old alchemic philosophies.

Here, Balakian seems to distort history in order to further dramatize the conditions under which <u>Arcanum 17</u> was written: while exile was grim, 1944 was hardly the "bleakest year of World War II" since Paris was liberated in August of 1944. As Breton arrived in the Gaspé with his partner Elisa on August 20th, remaining there until late October, <u>Arcanum 17</u> was written *after* Paris was taken back from the Nazis, a definite high point for all French emigrés. Moreover, although he was geographically isolated in the Gaspe, there is no reason to assume that Breton became cut off from the events of history. If anything, the news of the liberation of Paris would have been a cause for celebration amongst the local French Canadian population. Balakian, p.9.

65. Maurice Larkin, <u>France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1986</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.22.

66. *Ibid.*, p.22.

67. *Ibid.*, p.17.

68. *Ibid.*, p.22.

69. Claire Duchen, <u>Women's Rights and Womens Lives in France 1944-1968</u> (London: Routledge, 1994),p.33.

70. Leon Trotsky, "Once Again, Whither France?" in <u>Leon Trotsky on France</u>, ed by David Salner, (New York:Monad Press, 1979), p.113.

71. Duchen, p.12.

72. *Ibid.*, p.23.

73.   *France/Amerique* (Samedi, Septembre 25, 1943),p.11.

74.   *France/Amerique* (Samedi, Septembre 18, 1943),p.2.

75.   *France/Amerique* (Samedi, Septembre 25, 1943), p.12. Moreover, Sauvage attacks the French women's movement charging that those within it had initiated a regrettable trend towards unfeminine behavior. The adoption of a more masculine deportment, he argued, had done a disservice to the women's movement due to the "inauthenticity" of a path that sought equality with men by behaving like them:

> Ces intérêts féminins, les plus légitimes, souvent mal compris hélas, ont été en partie dévoyés, dans la mesure où les femmes travailaient a se libérer hors cadre. Ici et là, la libération de la femme a pris l'allure vulgaire, inadmissible d'une singerie des moeurs masculines avec tout le ridicule et les dangers que cela comporte. Sauvage, p.12.

I think its important to note that Sauvage's disapproval here was reflective of a much wider - and conservative - prewar attitude amongst men in France hostile towards the feminist movement. With respect to that antagonism Duchen remarks: "Feminism had been equated with loss of femininity, with adopting the unfeminine posture of making demands, of speaking out, of complaining. Duchen, p.44.

76.   *Ibid.*, p.12. It is interesting to note that while in the Fourth Republic women were given the vote, the nature of the education surrounding suffrage was such that it actually encouraged them to continue to remain in the domestic realm. Duchen remarks:

77.   As new citizens, it was believed that women needed to be educated so that they could play their new role responsibly, and in discussion of women's suffrage in newspapers, women's magazines and political parties, the emphasis was on information. "What is a Constitution?" or 'Voting: a practical guide for women' were not unusual titles for articles. Underlying all discussions was the assumption that women, novices in the public world, would only be able to understand politics if it was presented to them in terms of home and family....France was 'une grande Maison' and the housewives of France could now take care of it. The political education of women was therefore a simple affair of showing them that France was no more than a large household, and that those who ran the country shared the concerns of the housewife and mother: looking after the moral and physical welfare of the family. Duchen, p.36.

Augmenting the Algiers' government's rather exalted depiction of woman, as mother was yet another construction of woman in the emigré newspapers which would have had the effect of further segregating women from the realm of the everyday: woman as saint epitomized by the figure of Joan of Arc. In celebration of her Feast Day on 30 May, the pages of *France/Amerique* and *Pour La Victoire* in May and early June of 1943 and 1944 were full of articles comparing France's situation to that of the saint centuries earlier. The articles bore such titles as "Joan of Arc and Us", "Joan of Arc: The Saint of Our Country", or, "Jean of Arc Unite Us." For example, in an article entitled "Joan of Arc's Message," it is explained how at first the Germans, perhaps unaware of the full signification of the saint, promoted the cult of Joan of Arc believing that it would rouse anti-Allied sentiment amongst the populace. According to the author, once the Germans realized that the saint was also a martyr of France divided, they banned any and all public commemoration:

> The Germans will certainly not permit the ceremonies and parades traditionally held throughout France....In the first year of the occupation they imagined that the cult of Joan of Arc could be used to revive the old anti-British feelings among the French people, and far from opposing it, they willingly encouraged it.

But they soon recognized their mistake. For now, no longer did the French people celebrate the Joan of Arc who "kicked the English out of France," but rather the "Saint of France" whose wonderful example and martyrdom has lit up our history and pointed out for future centuries the line of duty whenever the enemy desecrates the soil of France....

> We can understand why our unhappy countrymen, whose spirits have been hardened in the agony which they have suffered, have been struck by the extraordinary analogy between the plight of France in Joan of Arc's time and the plight of France at present. *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi, Mai 8 1943), p.1.

In the article, the reader is provided with a rather lengthy and convoluted history lesson dedicated to the likening of current political divisions within France to those of the 15th century which led to Joan of Arc's demise. The text stated that "today France awaits a Joan of Arc to repeat her last posthumous miracle of French reconciliation." *Ibid.*, p.2.

Significantly in <u>Arcanum 17</u>, Breton directly expressed his opposition to this sort of enshrining of women in these articles, declaring:

After so many female "saints" and national heroines
fanning the combativeness of this or that camp, when
will we see a woman simply as woman....Breton, p.61.

CONCLUSION

Collecting for a Postwar World

In the previous chapters I have been arguing that Breton's activities having to do with North American native cultures while in Europe had a significance extending beyond matters of psychoanalysis, mythology or connoisseurship. Specifically, these activities were as well part of a left wing avant-garde practice conjoining the issuing of oppositional treatises with the display of objects made by indigenous societies constructed as evincing socialist virtues. The continuation of this strategy by Breton during his stay of exile was the result of several factors including the occurrence of yet another imperialist war, the Nazis touring shows of so-called "degenerate art," the reemergence of prewar debates imported from France, and the rise of pro-colonialism amongst the emigré population in New York and abroad. Moreover, Breton's anti-imperialist tracts combined with the collecting and display of indigenous objects was as well prompted by the growing belief among the emigrés that after the war France's colonial empire would be fully reconstituted. That is, while the emigrés were a far distance from France, emboldened by Allied victories and roused by promises of future assistance to rebuild the empire, they began very early in their stay to look ahead to the postwar era.[1] As this was the case, Breton's collecting of North American indigenous objects ought to be considered, in part, as a purposeful act in anticipation of future anti-colonial struggles in France in which these

objects could be deployed. And it is around this issue of Breton's planning for postwar anti-imperialist strategies that I wish to bring this thesis to a close.

Shortly after the war and just before his return to Paris in 1946, Breton openly renewed his attack against the oppression of colonized peoples during a trip to Haiti in December of 1945.[2] Much has been made of the controversial lectures Breton delivered to Haitian intellectuals praising the country's achievement of independence in the 19th century and stressing the need for a continued push towards freedom from oppression in the postwar world. These speeches, it would seem, had a role to play in the Haitian "Revolution of the Seventh of January" in 1946. Apparently, when the more inflammatory segments of Breton's lectures were published in the Haitian newspaper *La Ruche*, the chief journal of a group opposed to the Lescot regime, the government stepped in and suspended the publication. As a result of this censorship, Haitian students demonstrated in the streets the next day. The following day, the students were joined by workers who had just declared a general strike. As a result of this political ferment, Lescot was forced to flee Haiti three days later.

The overthrow of the Lescot regime in the "Revolution of the Seventh of January" was, of course, waiting to happen as the majority of the Haitian people were living in abject poverty. But very quickly, tales of Breton's having actually initiated the revolution began to spread to Paris, rumors which assisted, no doubt, in the recuperation of the surrealist's reputation as

an oppositional figure to be reckoned with. Later in France, Breton would publicly play down any direct role he had in the revolt. When asked by Jean Duché about the apparent "hand" he had in the Haitian revolution in an interview published in the newspaper *Le Litteraire* on October 5 1946, Breton replied:

> Let's not exaggerate. At the end of 1945, the poverty, and consequently the patience, of the Haitian people had reached a breaking point. You have to realize that, on the huge Ile de la Gonave off the Haitian coast, men earned less than one American dollar for an entire day's labor, and that, according to the most conservative newspapers, children in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince lived on tadpoles fished out of the sewers....
>
> In a first lecture on "Surrealism and Haiti," I tried, both for the sake of clarity and out of deference to the underlying spirit of this history, to align Surrealism's aim with the age old goals of the Haitian peasantry. In conclusion, I felt driven to condemn "the imperialisms that the war's end has in no way averted and the cruelly maintained game of cat and mouse between stated ideals and eternal selfishness," as well as to reaffirm by allegiance to the motto of the Haitian flag: "Union makes strength."[3]

While Breton makes it clear that what ultimately triggered the revolution were the horribly oppressive conditions under which the Haitian people lived, he also seems to have made good on the promise he made in 1943 in his article "A Great Poet: Aimé Césaire"; that is, in 1945 in Haiti, Breton directly threw his support behind the victims of imperialism who had not, as of yet, been liberated in the early postwar years. In an interview with René Belance published in the *Haiti-Journal* in December of 1945, Breton reaffirmed his adherence to internationalist revolutionary principles when asked to elaborate on what Belance

properly recognized as surrealism's political commitment to colonized peoples everywhere. Belance inquired:

> I know that one of Surrealism's primary aims is the abolition of "differences that exist between men." Do you think the methods you promote have the potential to bring this about? What advantage can people of color, the eternal target of imperialism, gain from embracing Surrealism's way of thinking, feeling, and living?[4]

Breton's response returns us to one the central premises of the surrealist movement from the late 1920s on: while Breton insisted that there were ties of a psychoanalytic nature between the thought processes of indigenous peoples and those of the surrealists, what is of particular significance is that he declared that the international socialist revolution had to take place before the surrealist revolution of mind could occur:

> Yes: keeping in mind class and other barriers that we must first overcome by other means, I believe that Surrealism aims, *and is the only one to aim systematically*, at abolishing these differences. You know that with Surrealism the accent was moved off the *ego*, which is always somewhat despotic, and on the *id* common to all men. But this would lead me to retrace the entire development of Surrealism over the past twenty years.
>
> Surrealism is allied with people of color, on the one hand because it has always been on their side against every form of white imperialism and banditry, as demonstrated by the manifestoes published in Paris against the Moroccan War, the Colonial Exhibit, etc.; on the other hand, because there are very deep affinities between so-called "primitive" thought and Surrealist thought: both want to overthrow the hegemony of consciousness and daily life, in order to conquer the realm of revelatory emotion.[italics theirs][5]

And it should be said that Breton's stated dedication to an international revolutionary agenda ought not be regarded as mere lip service paid to the politics of communism which he had incorporated into the surrealist movement over a decade earlier: both in words and in action Breton displayed a lifelong commitment to the cause of oppressed colonized peoples everywhere.

Breton's wartime collecting of indigenous objects in preparation for the postwar world was additionally bound up with issues of identity. That is, Breton's apprehension over his identity was not simply caused by the immediate circumstances of exile in New York; like most French exiles, Breton was as well worried about his future status in France after the war as someone who had left his country in its time of need.

Almost immediately after the Liberation, articles began to appear expressing the exiles' worry over their inevitable return home. Excerpts from an article entitled "We, the exiles" published in *Pour La Victoire* on April 15th 1944, revealed feelings of culpability on the part of the French emigrés:

> To those who come back from exile the French will say: "You ate when we were hungry. You kept warm when we shivered. You were free when we were enslaved. What did you do for us?"[6]

The emigrés' anxiety was justified: in the months following the Liberation a purge of Vichyites and suspected Nazi collaborators began, an often swift and bloody affair motivated by revenge and a desire to cleanse from France all of the old

postwar elites. The Conseil National de la Resistance, the political body which drew up plans for the organization of the French state after the war, promised retribution in its charter of 15 March 1944 against all those suspected of collaborationist crimes and special courts were immediately set up to deal with the guilty. Undoubtedly the emigré community in New York would have heard rumors of the awful revenge taking place against those suspected of disloyal activities. While it was likely that by 1946 Breton would have been reassured that no direct action would be taken against those who had "deserted" France in the late 1930s, there was still a lingering apprehension about his reception and a considerable degree of concern over the future status of his prewar avant-garde identity. As Breton later commented in his interview with André Parinaud, before returning to Paris he was fearful that surrealism had been completely disparaged:

> When I left America in the spring of 1946, I didn't have a very clear idea of the intellectual situation in Paris. For a long time, in fact, I'd believed that everything that had been upheld between the two wars would be gone over with a fine-toothed comb, and that even Surrealism would not be spared.[7]

Anna Balakian in her book <u>André Breton: The Magus of Surrealism</u> also commented upon Breton's difficult return to Paris in 1946.[8] Balakian interviewed Breton in 1951, and in her book she explained why it was that Breton still experienced great discomfort six years after the fact:

After all, he had left France in the period of its agony and had not returned until the liberation. Although every rational evidence supported the fact that it would have been impossible for him to stay in Paris during the Occupation, still in retrospect absence had a psychological reality that could not be erased from the minds of Parisians who had stayed. He had not suffered the physical privations, and the scars that mental anguish and worry leave on a man are not as ostensible as those of physical involvement in danger, fear, battle, famine. There was a general feeling that he had sat out the war, he who had professed to be so militant,[9] so libertarian, so courageous in the use of words.

It was, then, due to the worry over a possibly hostile reception in postwar France and the expectation of continued anti-colonial agitation that Breton "armed" himself with objects thought essential to the impending struggle. And arm himself he did: while the political refugee arrived in America with almost nothing in the way of personal belongings, he returned home with an arsenal of North American indigenous objects to deploy in oppositional avant-garde strategies.

An exploration of precisely how North American indigenous objects were put to use by Breton in postwar France is beyond the scope of this thesis. Certainly, a contextual investigation of the social, political, economic and cultural arena in which Breton exhibited in the years following the war ought to take into consideration such general matters as the physical damage suffered by France and renewed workers unrest, in part, due to severe food shortages. Also of importance was the initiation of the Cold War between the United States and Russia which raised serious issues for French communist intellectuals. Specifically, the Americans, alarmed by the emergent strength of the French

Communist Party in the postwar, introduced the Marshall Plan in 1947 which promised war ravaged France massive material and financial aid if it sided with them against Russia. The French Left, in response to what they believed was political blackmail, began a strong anti-American crusade claiming that the Marshall Plan was nothing short of American imperialism. Thus, there arose a rather interesting scenario whereby it was now France that became the "victim" of imperialism and, as had occurred in many of her colonies, there began a movement towards national unity and independence.

Anti-Americanism on the part of the P.C.F. was accompanied by a new hard line communism which claimed strict ideological unity with Stalinist Russia. Since Breton had long regarded Stalinism and the policies of the French Communist Party as a betrayal of the original revolutionary principles laid out by Marx, Engels and Lenin, the postwar display of objects made by peoples occupying a central place within international socialist revolutionary politics would have continued to serve as a vehicle of opposition.

Also pertinent when exploring the French postwar arena was the emergence of markedly different intellectual and cultural trends. Of particular importance was that upon returning home with his sizeable collection of indigenous objects, Breton found himself face to face with a new kind of avant-gardist "primitivism." More particularly, before the war an understanding of the "primitive" or "primitivism" was primarily bound up with indigenous peoples and the impact that their

cultures had upon European avant-garde practices. In postwar France, "primitivism," especially as practiced by artists such as Dubuffet, was rooted more in an eclectic mix of the art of the insane, children's art, naive art and the crude renderings of Paleolithic societies. Often, "primitivism" was conjoined with postwar existentialism connoting primordial passions such as violence, terror, awe and even madness. What ought to be ascertained, then, is the precise place that indigenous societies and their objects now held within this altered category of the "primitive."

Perhaps of primary consequence when investigating Breton's postwar display strategies is that once reunited with other surrealists, he picked up where he left off by issuing a succession of heated anti-imperialist tracts. No doubt, the P.C.F.'s failure to take a stand against renewed French imperialism in the years following the war further incited surrealist anti-colonialism. Concerning the P.C.F.'s continued dereliction in the postwar period Caute remarks:

> Despite acute colonial problems in Madagascar, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Indo-China, as well in Syria and the Lebanon, the communists emerged from the war no more inclined than any other party to act on the principles of Marxism-Leninism.....Whatever their private feelings about this blatant abandonment of the Leninist position on colonialism, the Party intellectuals did not feel inclined to either protest or pursue an independent and more enlightened policy on their own.[10]

In Lewis's discussion of the surrealists' postwar stand against French imperialist activity in Vietnam and North Africa, she emphasizes Breton's return to an openly aggressive posturing:

> One of their [surrealist] post-war manifestoes, published in 1947, was *Liberté est un mot Vietnamien*, denouncing the French intervention in Indochina. As always, Surrealism was anti-militarist and anti-colonist, opposing the resurgence of imperialism in France just as it had done in 1925 at the time of the Riff war in Morocco....Most important, Breton was one of the signers of the famous *Manifesto of the 121* against the Algerian War....[11]

While I do not intend to trace Breton's exhibiting strategies - such as on the occasion of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1947 - through these and other complex circumstances in this study, I want to call attention to two instances when Breton himself publicly defined the central importance of North American indigenous peoples and their objects to surrealism in the postwar era.

I have argued in Chapter Five that Breton displayed North American objects in his *atelier* in New York partly in an effort to bolster a diminished avant-garde identity, and as a way to emphasize the supposed "affinity" between surrealism and indigenous peoples. In the conclusion of this thesis, I have proposed that these same objects would come to perform a similar function in postwar France. And indeed, in the very same year that Breton returned to Paris, he reestablished his *atelier* and appointed it with the objects he had collected during his stay of exile. We know this was the case since in the aforementioned

interview with Jean Duché in 1946, the surrealist was asked questions about the North American indigenous objects displayed about the room. In fact, what is especially interesting about Breton's *atelier* in the postwar years is how he may have used it as a stage for interviews partly in order to *elicit* questions about the significance of North American indigenous societies and their objects to surrealism. If this was indeed a tactic on Breton's part, then it was a successful one. Duché asked Breton:

> What benefit do you derive from all these masks, emblems and strange objects I see around you? And where did you find those extraordinary [kachina] dolls?[12]

Breton explained to Duché that the masks were "Eskimo and Indian" and that the dolls were brought back from his "visit to the Hopi Indians of Arizona."[13] As for their importance to surrealism, Breton declared that not only did these objects "justify the Surrealist vision," they "gave it a new impetus."[14] This pre-eminent place was partly due to a supposed "poetic" content which, Breton claimed, could also be found in present day surrealist art.[15] But just as importantly – and this recalls the writings of writings of Mauss, Durkheim and Bataille – North American indigenous objects, Breton argued, defied bourgeois "rationalism and utilitarianism." Finally, as if to punctuate the profound importance that these objects held for surrealism, if not the West itself, Breton declared:

> Today, it's above all the visual art of the red man that lets us accede to a new system of knowledge and relations

In a series of radio interviews with André Parinaud in 1951, Breton once again elaborated upon North American indigenous peoples whose objects he had collected while in exile.[16] In the interview when Parinaud asked about the circumstances which gave rise to the writing of Ode to Charles Fourier, Breton replied:

> I wrote the Ode to Charles Fourier during a trip to the western United States, which allowed me to visit Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico....I was able to satisfy one of my greatest and oldest desires, which was to meet the Indians -- particularly the Pueblo Indians (Hopi and Zuni) whose mythology and art held a special attraction for me. I haven't abandoned the very vivid impressions I experienced in their villages...where I became utterly convinced of their inalienable dignity and genius, which contrasted so sharply and movingly with their miserable living conditions. I don't understand how the streak of justice and reparation that sometimes carries the white man toward the black and the yellow, more and more often neglects the Indian, who has given so many proofs of his creative power and has been, by far, the most despoiled.[17]

Besides the impact that the poverty of these peoples had upon Breton, most important for this project is that North American "Indians" had now been elevated to a supremely oppositional status, constructed here as the most despoiled of all colonized peoples on the face of the earth. Due to this portrayal, objects brought back from exile - now the "art" of the most oppressed - could be evoked as signs conveying support for the victims of imperialism everywhere in surrealist postwar anti-colonial avant-garde strategies. But again, a comprehensive study of Breton's display tactics amidst one of the most convoluted periods in French history must remain as yet another chapter in the tumultuous story of surrealism.

NOTES FOR CONCLUSION

1.   In Laura Fermi's book <u>Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe 1930-1942</u> she comments that the French were the last to emigrate to America and the first to return home. Fermi believes that it was de Gaulle's establishment of his Free French provisional government in North Africa in 1943 that was the primary cause of renewed feelings of patriotism. Moreover, concerning the French emigrés' strong desire to go back to their country and resume their lives, she remarks that while the French did harbor ambiguous feelings about France's capitulation to Germany, they did not experience deep feelings of resentment or outrage towards their homelands as did the Germans and European Jews. Laura Fermi, <u>Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe 1930-1942</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968),pp.123-124.

2.   Breton returned to New York in February of 1946 and in May he finally returned to Paris.

3.   André Breton, <u>Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism</u> trans. by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993),p.201.

4.   *Ibid.*, p.193.

5.   *Ibid.*, p.193.

6.   *Pour La Victoire* (Samedi Avril 15, 1944), pg.1.

7.   André Breton, <u>Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism</u>, p.161.

8.   Anna Balakian, <u>André Breton: The Magus of Surrealism</u>, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.214.

9.   *Ibid.*, p.214.

10.   Caute, p.208.

11.   Lewis, pp. 167-8.

12.   Jean Duché, quoted in <u>Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism</u> trans. by Mark Polizzotti, (New York, Paragon House, 1993), p.202

13.   *Ibid.*, p.202.

14.   *Ibid.*, p.202.

15.   The notion of the supposed poetic "affinity" between surrealism and indigenous peoples has been discussed at length by Maurer and Rubin.

16.   Parinaud had wanted to interview Breton since 1946 when the surrealist returned to Paris but was unable to carry out the project until 1951 when he became a journalist for French National Radio. Polizzotti, p.xii.

17.   André Breton, quoted in *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* trans. by Mark Polizzotti, (New York, Paragon House, 1993), p.161.
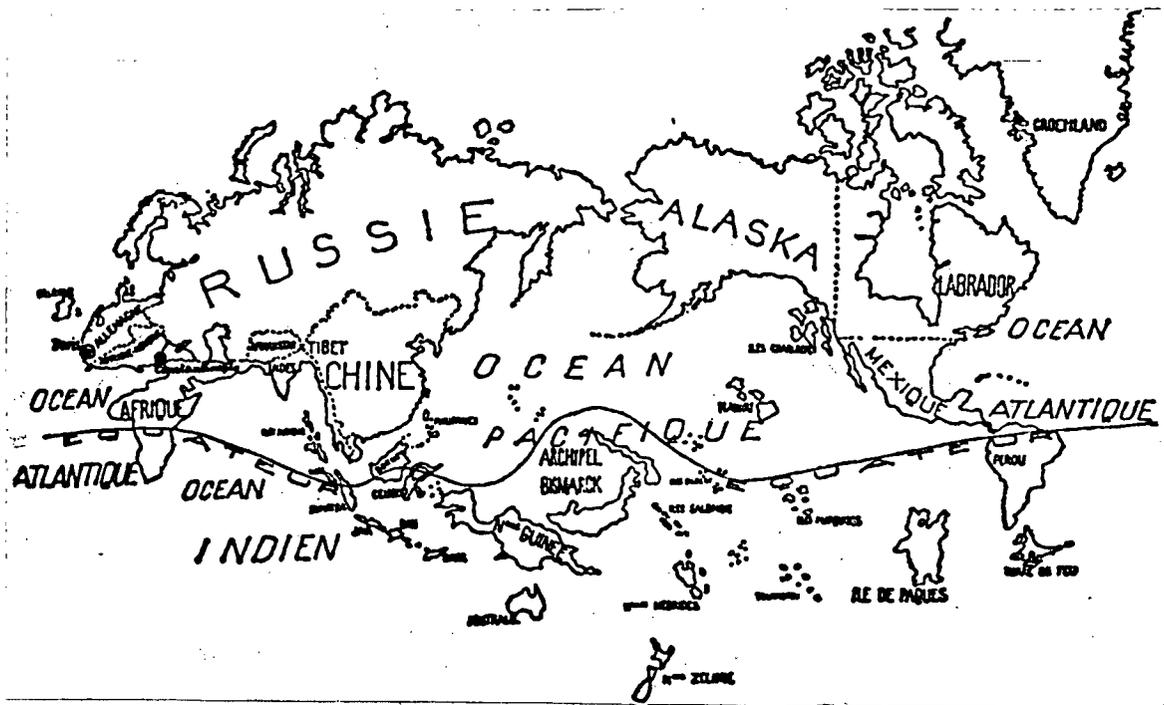
Figure 1: The *Surrealist Map of the World* (Source: *Variétés* (Juin, 1929)
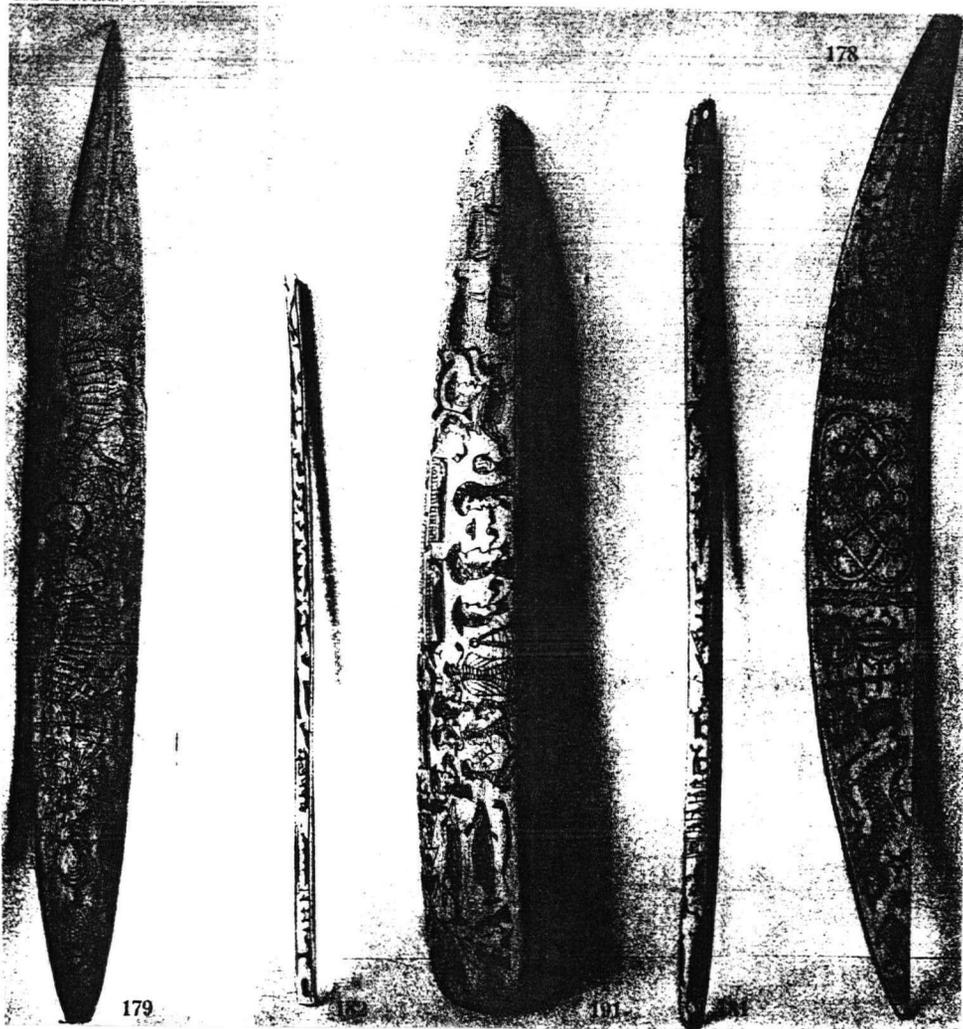
Figure 2: North American indigenous objects collected by André Breton and Paul Eluard. (Source: Auction Catalogue for <u>Collection André Breton et Paul Eluard</u>. Hotel Droûot (Les 2 et 3 Juillet, 1931)

Figure 3: North American indigenous objects collected by
André Breton and Paul Eluard. (Source: Auction
Catalogue for Collection André Breton et Paul
Eluard. Hotel Drouot (Les 2 et 3 Juillet, 1931)

Figure 4: North American indigenous objects collected by
André Breton and Paul Eluard. (Source: Auction
Catalogue for <u>Collection André Breton et Paul
Eluard</u>. Hotel Drouot (Les 2 et 3 Juillet, 1931)

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Figure 5: North American indigenous objects collected by
André Breton and Paul Eluard. (Source: Auction
Catalogue for Collection André Breton et Paul
Eluard. Hotel Drouot (Les 2 et 3 Juillet, 1931)

Figure 6: Poster for *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition.
        (Source: "<u>Degenerate Art.</u>" <u>The Fate of the</u>
        <u>Avant-Garde in Germany</u> (Los Angeles County Museum
        of Art, (February 17-May 22, 1991)

Figure 7: Poster for *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition.
(Source: "Degenerate Art." The Fate of the
Avant-Garde in Germany (Los Angeles County Museum
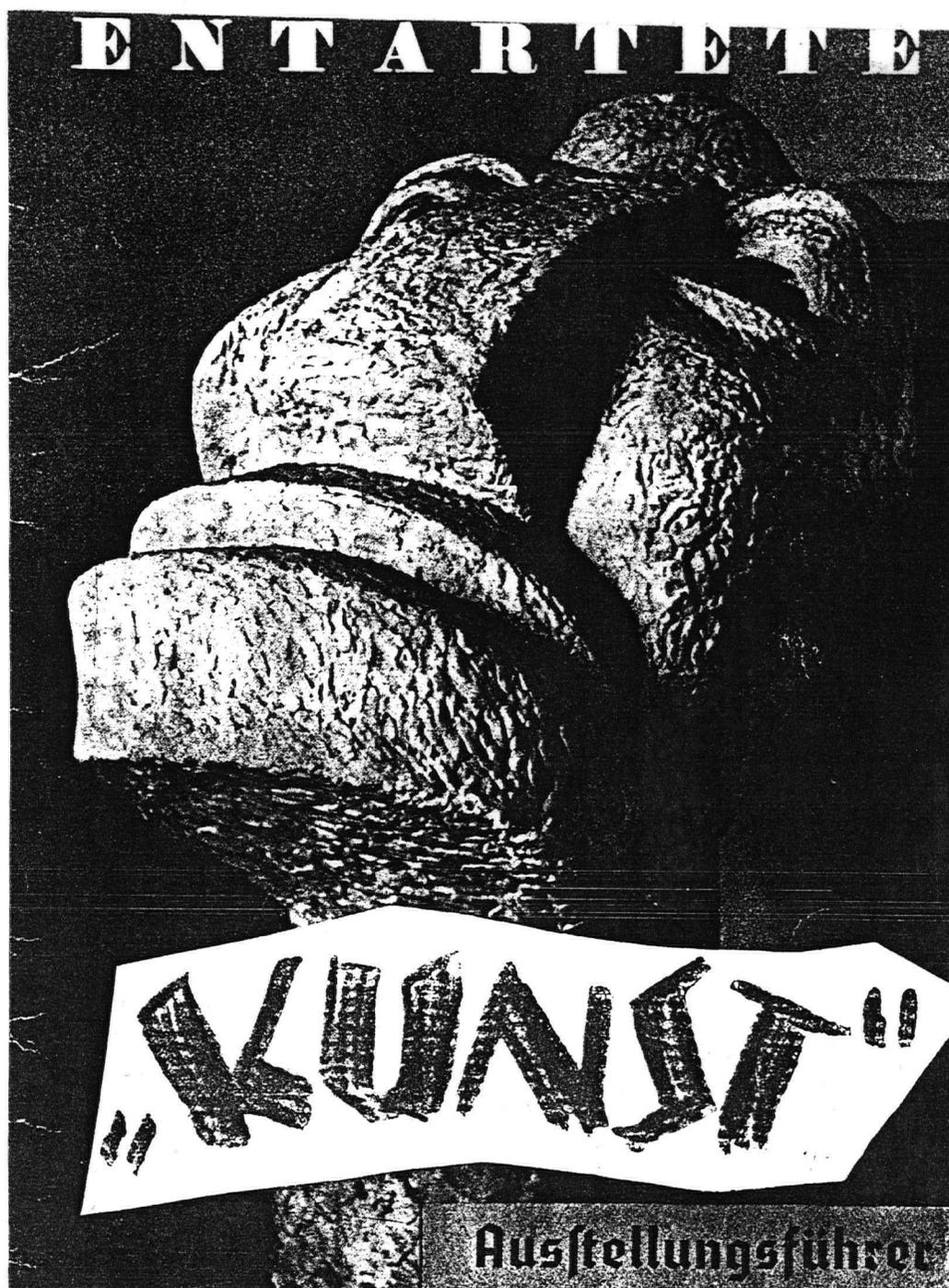of Art, (February 17-May 22, 1991)

Figure 8: Poster for *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition.
(Source: "Degenerate Art." The Fate of the
Avant-Garde in Germany (Los Angeles County Museum
of Art, (February 17-May 22, 1991)

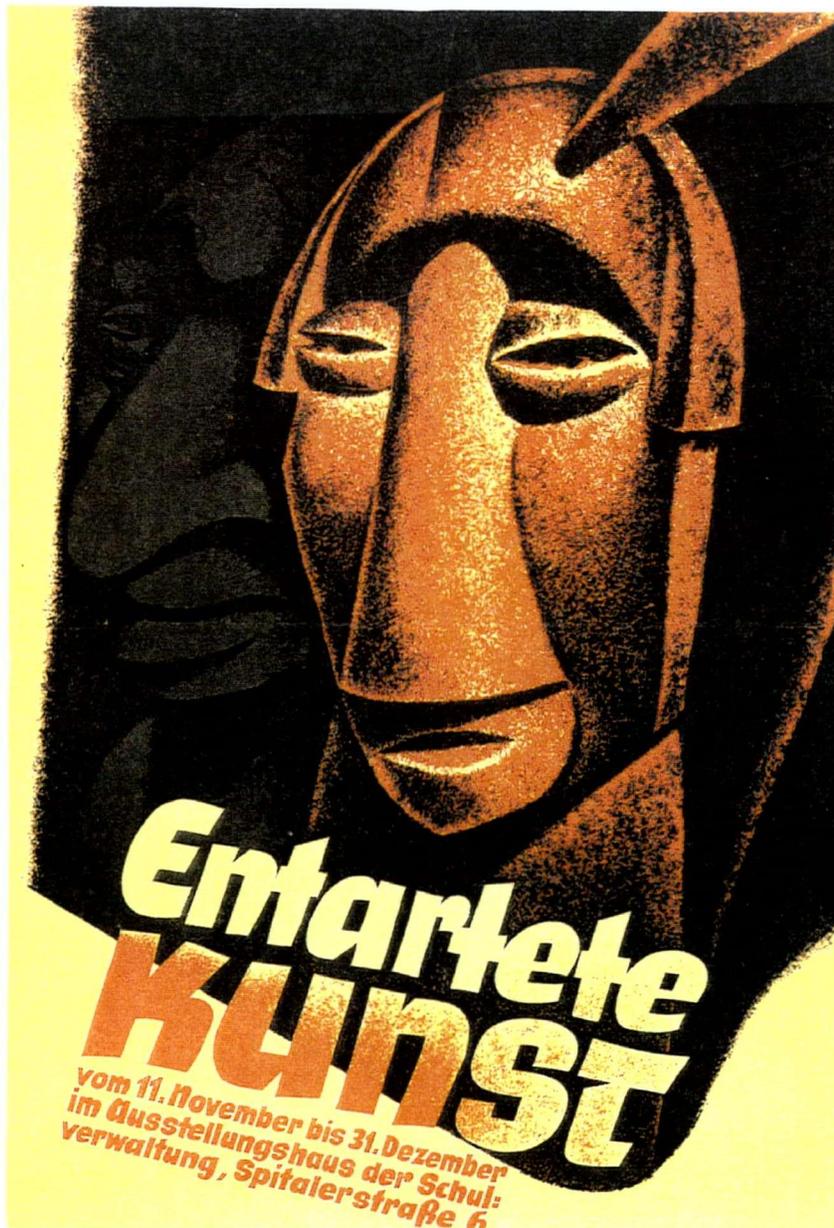Figure 9: Poster for *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition.
(Source: "<u>Degenerate Art.</u>" <u>The Fate of the</u>
<u>Avant-Garde in Germany</u> (Los Angeles County Museum
of Art, (February 17-May 22, 1991)

Figure 10: Arno Breker, *Bereitshaft*, 1937.
(Source: "Degenerate Art." The Fate of the
Avant-Garde in Germany (Los Angeles County Museum
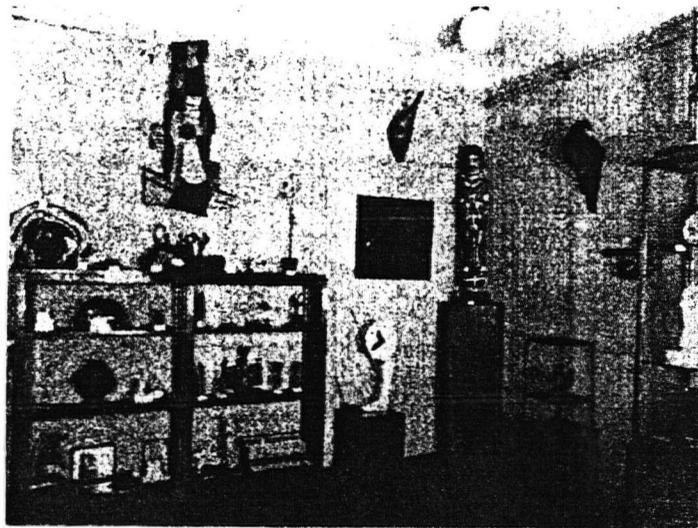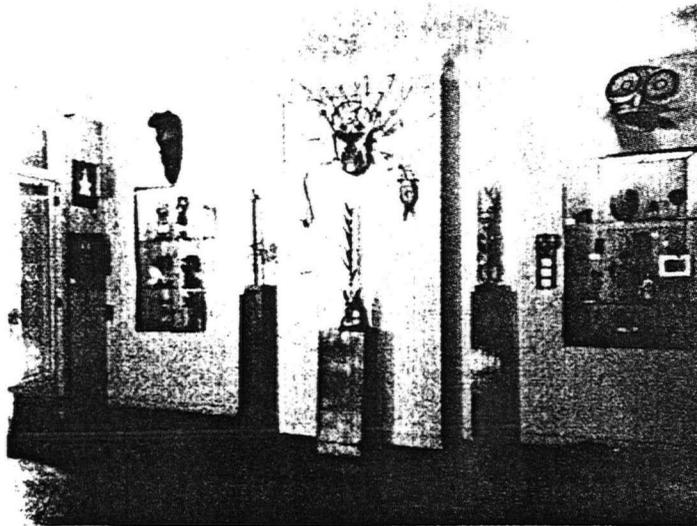of Art, (February 17-May 22, 1991)

Figure 11. The *Exhibition of Surrealist Objects*, 1936. Photographs by Man Ray. (Source: <u>André Breton. La beauté convulsive</u> Musée national d'art moderne. Paris: Centre Edition du Pompidou, 1991)
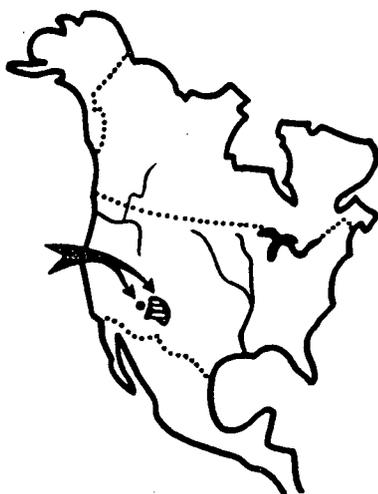
Fig. 33. Area inhabited by the
Pueblo Cornplanters.

Figure 12: Map of North America. (Source: Frederic Douglas
and Rene D'Harnoncourt. Indian Art of the United
States. Museum of Modern Art. New York: Plantin
Press, 1941.

THE ENGRAVERS OF
THE ARCTIC

THE CARVERS OF
THE NORTHWEST

THE CARVERS OF
THE FAR WEST

THE SCULPTORS
OF THE EAST

THE PAINTERS OF
THE SOUTHWEST

IMPORTANT SITES
IN THE SOUTHWEST
1. AWATOVI—ARIZONA
2. MESA VERDE—COLORADO
3. MIMBRES—NEW MEXICO
4. SNAKETOWN—ARIZONA

IMPORTANT SITES
IN THE EAST
5. SPIRO—OKLAHOMA
6. MOUNDVILLE—ALABAMA
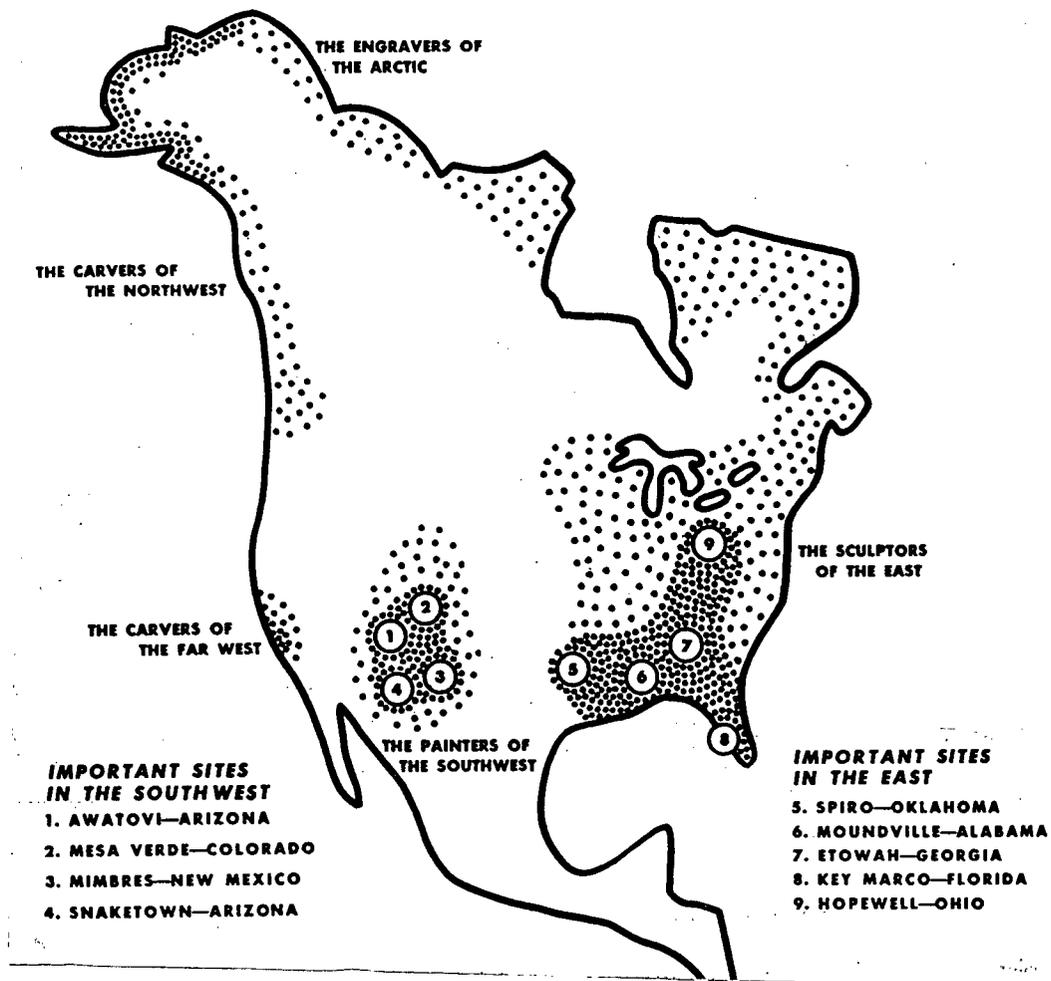7. ETOWAH—GEORGIA
8. KEY MARCO—FLORIDA
9. HOPEWELL—OHIO

Figure 13: Map of North America. (Source: Frederic Douglas
and Rene D'Harnoncourt. Indian Art of the United
States. Museum of Modern Art. New York: Plantin
Press, 1941.

Figure 14: New York apartment of André Breton.
(Source: <u>André Breton. La beauté convulsive</u>.
Musée national d'art moderne. Paris: Centre
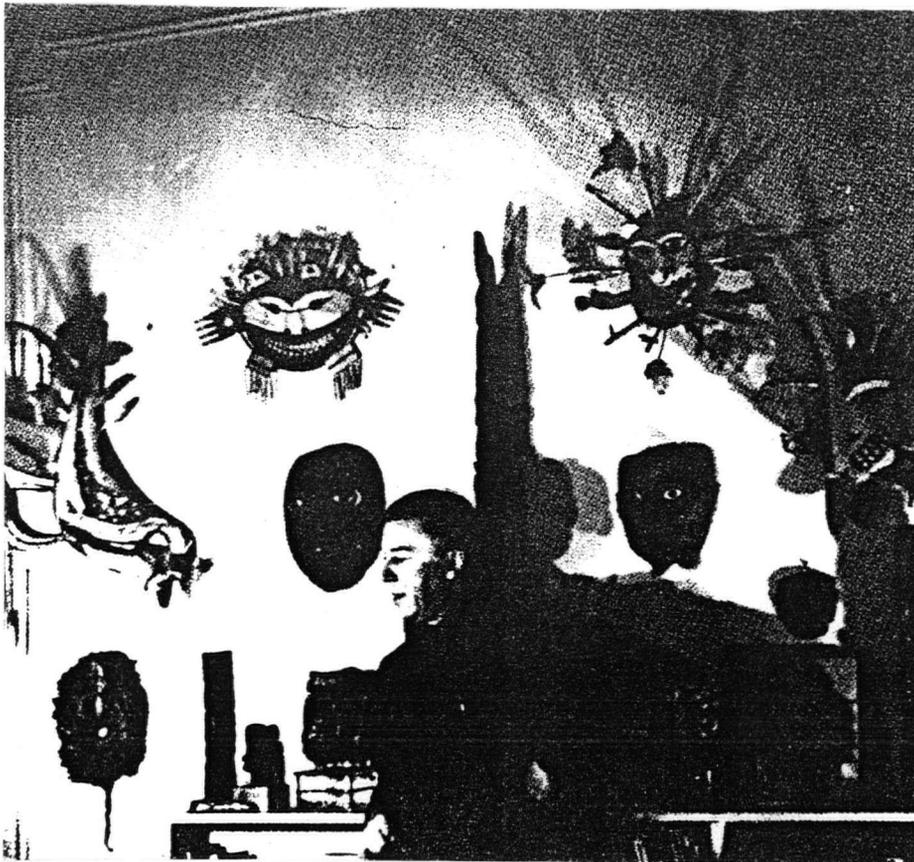Edition du Pompidou, 1991)

Figure 15: New York apartment of André Breton.
(Source: <u>André Breton. La beauté convulsive</u>.
Musée national d'art moderne. Paris: Centre
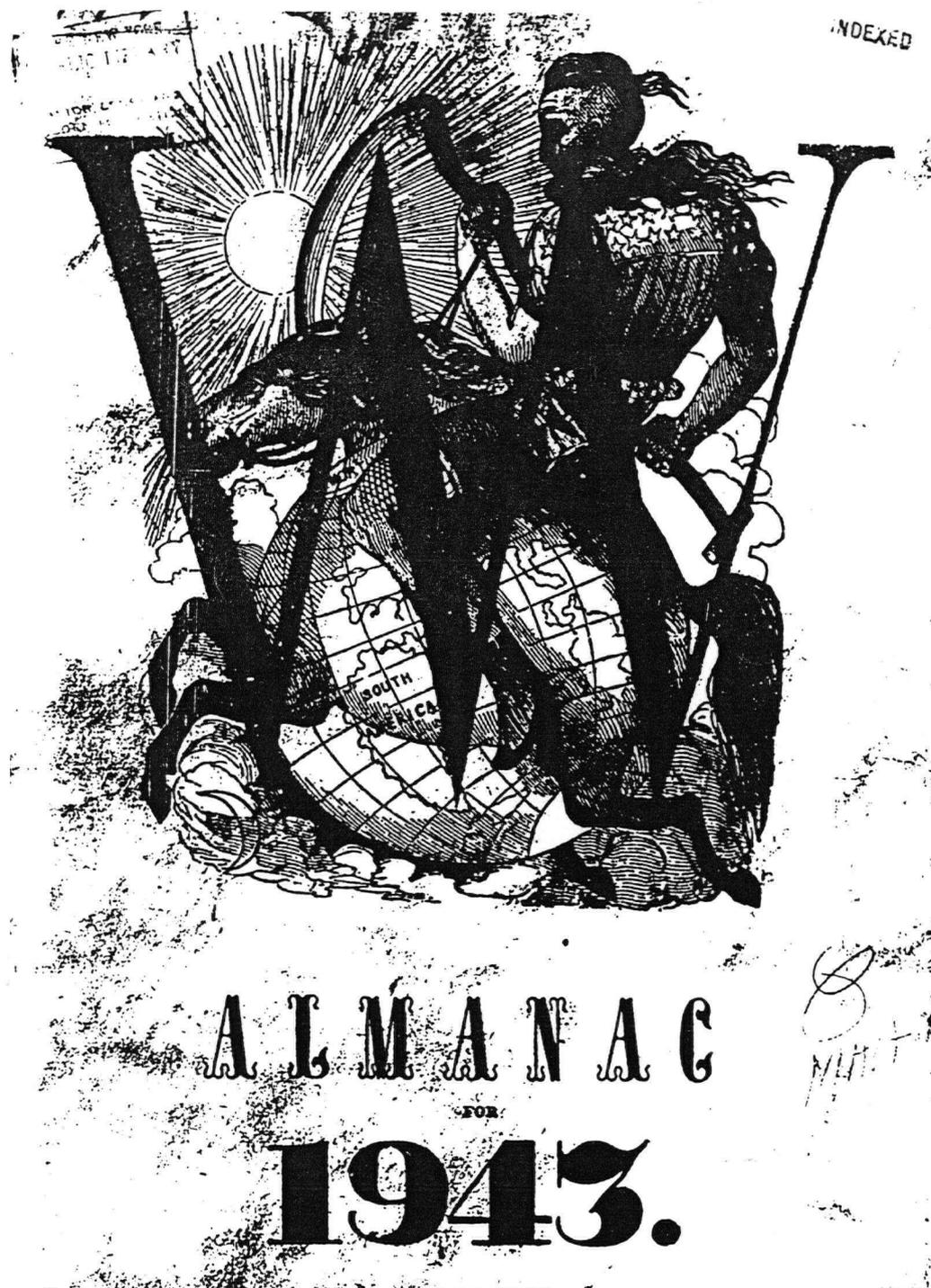Edition du Pompidou, 1991)

Figure 16: Marcel Duchamp, Cover for *VVV*, 1943. (Source: *VVV* Number 2-3 (March, 1943)

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