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Thinker and Visionary in the Medium of Painting

On the Aesthetics of Wolfgang Paalen

Europe

Born in 1905 in Vienna and a pistol suicide on the night of September 23, 1959, in Taxco near Mexico City, where he spent weekends in an artist's hotel, Wolfgang Paalen led a life that was driven by inner unrest, rich in adventure, cosmopolitan, but in its essence a seeking of solitude. Wolfgang's father had been part of the admired jewish bourgeoisie in the moribund Austro-Hungarian monarchy and embodied the typical man of adventurous career and failure in the brief, glamorous heyday of Berlin in the 1920s. Born in 1873 in Bisenz in Bohemia as the son of merchants, he had transformed himself in Vienna into a man of enormous wealth. Impoverishment after Black Friday of 1929, more and more depreciated existence during the later Thirties in Berlin, flight from the Nazis in 1938, derangement and exile in Sweden is his ultimate fate. At the peak of his career as a grand merchant in Vienna, Gustav Paalen had married the German actress Emelie Gunkel. Wolfgang was the eldest of their four children. As the firstborn, he assumed, too early, some of the authority of his frequently absent father in the prosperous, ostentatious household in Zagan, where he was taught mostly by private teachers. He described the time spent in his parents' grand home as 'the best years of my anachronistic childhood.'[1] This place remained a strange liability and source of metaphorical meaning. Until the late Thirties he came back regularly to Zagan, which was his home until he was twenty. Sibling rivalries and poetic-mystical experiences dominated his youth here which, strangely intertwined, were to colour his whole life. 1929 his younger brother, Hans Peter, dies after a shor illness, and 1931 his brother Rainer tries to shoot himself in the library of the house in Zagan. The trace of his brother Rainer, with whom he shared a passion for philosophy, Romanticism, and the study of all manner of visual apparitions and sensory illusions, is lost after 1938.

Wolfgang met Rainer only once more before the war. He reported on this meeting in the autobiographical sections of an unfinished novel entitled *Paysage totémique* published in his art magazine *DYN* in the 1940s: *'Long time later I found R. again, vagabond tracked by hunger and the gendarmes, holed up at the approach of winter in the house of a game-keeper. His poor head of a just-missed saint had for years been running down painfully; however his thought wasn't always reduced to a nightlight. If tiring hours of scraping futile memories and sad jokes that once he explained to me to be the pleasantries of the guard, were near to exhausting my patience, suddenly sometimes his words took fire. Then his hoarse voice became hurried panting, hot on the track, for fear of losing the single thread that was left him to hold me desperately on the threshold of his delirium. I followed him without fear. It was then the most astonishing, the most ingenious treatise of spectres and phantoms. What treasures of subtlety in order to distinguish from the optional mimicry of spectres that he called spectres of position from the simple hallucinatory fringes of a phenomenon of active trace. But he admitted with the best will in the world that sources of error were not excluded, that in order to understand the essence of the real ones, it was necessary to treat with as much seriousness and as thoroughly the problem of false apparitions. The beauty of his system, architectural down to the last of its most surprising correspondences, surprised me always by an almost Kantian rigour from which anything arbitrary seemed excluded.'*[2]

He never got over the loss of his brother. Locked up inside by a strange survivor's guilt, his childhood with its dominant experiences, joys, fears and visions remained an oppressive enigma which overshadowed all his life and art. In the 1940s he remarked to his assistant Edward Renouf: 'My whole life is to see if I can regain my brother.'[3] Surely he meant much more than his brother when he said this. The seemingly absurd hope to find his brother again raises his loss into the sphere of something which goes beyond the concrete person. Perhaps the certainty that something had been taken from him without his knowing the reasons why caused the dull pain which he tried to link to his artistic project: to open the doors which connect with the rooms of the mind where the active traces of an enlightened childhood hide and whose locks are always responsible for one's homelessness in the midst of one's own life and world. Ascribing to Hans Peter the same mixture of visionary seeing and factual-mindedness which characterized himself, Paalen invents a strange blending in which the nature of the one and of the other coincide.

The decision to become a painter was made at the age of 16 at the latest, when he took up sporadic instruction with the Berlin Secessionist Leo von Koenig, a portrait virtuoso of the ashen, deathly faces of German nobility. He shunned the Academy after a rejected application and sought orientation in the French tastes of Modernist-minded Berlin salons and galleries such as Cassirer and Flechtheim, undertaking visual studies of Cézanne, van Gogh, and Matisse until, in 1925, he discovered Cubism during his first Paris

stay. The profound impact of Cubist pictures of the analytical period, but also of Braque's later variations, never faded. From then on, like a pilgrim, he sought interface with Cubism on order to unlock for himself the potential latent in this school. Paalen's premier mental faculties sharpened as he tackled this new challenge. As sure in his ultimate aim as in his judgment, living in Paris, Berlin, and Cassis until 1932, overtaking his actual teachers Hans Hofmann and Fernand Léger, he propelled himself into the imagined constellation of his personal heroes: Braque, Picasso, Kandinsky, Klee, Arp, Brancusi, and Moore. Intensively as he bored into their plasticity problems from his own point of view, he equally quickly established for himself the language mosaic which he wanted to use to reinvent painting.

Like a great arch, Paalen's work spans chronologically the great gulf of the abysmal middle of the 20th century and geographically the great ocean that embodies like nothing else escape from the abyss: in the epoch of mid-century, which he helped to shape with his thoughts, feelings, words, and images, the project of Modernism became a trans-Atlantic, a European-American adventure of the spirit in flight. And the fleeting, nomadic, situational element suited his temperament, gave the heavy bluish smoke with which he enveloped his painted descriptions of mental states like incense the nervous vitality, the excited thoughtfulness, even cerebrality which characterises every genuine new beginning. Paalen needed this feeling as much to create his works as to energise his circle of friends and allies. In it he found the strange connections of thought and image, that seemingly cosmic something mirrored in our consciousness that emerges in almost all of his works, ghostlike and incomprehensible to the common-sensical thinker, and mediates between the symbolic-visionary and the visible world. The symbolic content of these brief flashes of epiphany, the suspensions of time in which the mind is able to assume an unexpected perspective and rises up to special insight, captivated him all his life. He strongly believed that, as in languorous days when the electric tension in the air builds up to unbearable heights and finally discharges as lightning, the constant accumulation in the human mind of never-changing thoughts must also be followed by a sudden discharge, a psychic explosion whipping subconscious thought into the light of daydream, creating the phantoms that in their forms and actions reveal the symbol of the mass soul. But one must be perfectly conscious of the means of its reading. Just as atmospheric symptoms announce the strike of lightning, certain prognostics foretell the imminence of these phantoms in the real world. The utopian function is essential to Paalen's aesthetics in this sense. In the appearance character of the apparition, the strange status of art is expressed as an *as-if* reality of the possible. This status of the *before* in the pre-figuration creates a link to the future. Paalen establishes the pre-figuration as a *before* appearance, as in daydreams we indulge in fancies of accomplishments, desires and ideals. For Paalen, the function and problem of art is to transmit these wish-fulfilment fantasies in a material and medium which make them sensually conceivable for others. The concept of pre-figuration separates Paalen from

the Surrealists, who generally accepted Freud's idea of wish-fulfilment fantasies as powerful, quasi morally forced distortions of original demands. He criticised the danger in Surrealism of seeing art merely as a medium for these distorted expressions of each artist's own traumatic history. Paalen, nonetheless inspired by the theories of his countryman Freud, interprets the distortions of consciousness as the fruit of ideological and cultural oppression which must be filtered by intellectual strength and scientific cognition in order for a not-yet-realised world to announce itself in art as the door to a possible future.

Paalen sought to harness the painting of his time in a project whose essence was to take the measure of his own inner being in terms of two seemingly mutually exclusive parameters: the mathematical, analytical acuity of ratiocination that combined in his head with over-rich powers of imagination and empathy. His art originates in the harmony and in the antagonism of these two, which together or separately assailed his heart. It is like standing looking at Kafka's castle. There is glowing and flashing all around, and yet there is something incomprehensible and repulsive about it. The basic mood of his pictures is melancholy, the longing to leave this life behind for another and thence to look forward and let us look. In 1938 his friend André Breton described this as follows: ***'A barred gate swings open, this is Paalen's realm. The great poplar avenue of his inner life leads into the abyss of childhood with its images of fear, and along the wayside lurk triangular incandescent milestones, chomping their teeth each kilometre (..). Perhaps, yes, surely it is a temptation for the eye in our time to return to that ideal stage of Creation when butterflies formed a single ribbon to be cut from, birds sang a single sol-fa all together, fish swam all around undifferentiated in the hold of a silver ship (..). Windows, blind like the lamps of thieves in the night, children see colours like those refracted in the sphere of a soap bubble – unfortunately they can only be opened from inside. But Paalen's achievement is having gone so far forward that he can see out of the inside of a soap bubble and lets us see the world from there (..). Wolfgang Paalen now rules in those regions where disorientation lurks, on the border between forgotten and inextricably tangled in the underbrush, leading a life of victory that turns to the glory of spring, like the sap when it rises in the clematis.'*** **[4]**

The sense of melancholy, which everyone experiences from time to time and expresses in more or less the same words and images, takes on a strange coloration in Paalen: he serenades with terrible clarity the contemplative quiet of such a position in the in-between world, on the road to transformation, where almost all natural-seeming life has disappeared. The beauty and melancholic tone of these paintings is difficult to describe, but they penetrate to our deepest depths, and yet they exhale a certain cold. Inspiration is one part of it – the other part appears to be an arithmetic problem, cleverly solved, from the first brush stroke to the last. If we give credence to the testimony of his friends, his approach was similar to that of his contemporary and countryman, the writer Robert Musil.[5] Musil longed passionately for a researcher to scientifically unlock his personal

apparitions, his visions, his inner life. Paalen had the very same wish. He was one of the rare artists whose sensitivity to the mystery world of vision found a redoubt in his intelligence. Notwithstanding obvious inner struggles, he never lacked the methodicalness needed to arrive at scientific conclusions. This is why his later relations with the Surrealists sometimes resembled the relationship of a neo-positivist to a religion with popes and priests, dogmas and heresies, schisms and sects. But it is not exclusively calculation that transposes the dominant emotion into the necessary visual language. The difference between Paalen and Paul Klee (with whom he exhibited his *Avertissement I* in a 1934 show) is obvious: Klee sees an interesting root, stone, leaf in his path, and suddenly a drama of antagonistic pictorial energies is ignited in his soul – that's how form-giving genius creates. Paalen sees a raven perched on a dead tree trunk in the dim light of a December evening, senses in this strangely archetypical scene how strange and unknown memories well up inside, and calculates how best to transmit these active traces pictorially and poetically in the language of his art – that's perspicacity at work with pictorial forms instead of with brain twisters taken from physics or mathematics.

Beyond that, it is not easy to say how and why his view and representation of things differs so strikingly from the usual run of the painter's craft, unless one wanted to typecast him as an artist of ideas – something which runs fundamentally counter to his nature and his project. But the temptation is great, since his nature was indeed of a philosophical bent, especially as to those elements of the Kantian tradition which are amenable to scientific enquiry. Early exposure to the Kantian philosophy, one might surmise, deprives the painterly eye of the fundamental natural trust in what is seen and replaces it with a much weightier trust in a disparate paradigm not accessible to linguistic abstraction. For the painter, this metalevel is counterproductive until he realises that he may not believe in metaphysics (which Kant, to be sure, rejects) but must instead use his keen powers of abstraction solely to grasp the most elusive components of seeing, those namely which are wholly dependent on the reception of sensory qualities and generate what is often called a vision.

Using the concrete pictorial arsenal of post-Cubist abstraction, he plunged into the dark adventure of an anamnesis that might be called the activation of pre-memory, a return to those earliest childhood experiences that are interspersed with the physiognomy of the world without our being able to put our finger on them. Painting thus should serve as a mouthpiece in oneself which translates what the instincts whisper and is the key to an understanding in clear language of one's inner life. But clearly this can only be in the sense of questions which become form and contain the germ of the answer: the questioner only gets the answer he needs if he follows his passions. Painting can only be a composition of consonants to which we must add the secret vowels which reveal the sense ordained only and exclusively for us – otherwise the living forms grow numb and become dead

dogmas. The search for the powerful resources of those affective valences, seemingly hidden behind the appearance of things, although they are nothing other than the deeply buried processes of the soul, led him to reject 'metaphysical' concepts of painting, such as Kandinsky's or Mondrian's, which seek to express the being behind the world of appearances in absolute form. For him there were no such forms. On the contrary, they only masked the fear of the incomprehensibility of one's own self, and it was this very incomprehensibility that his anarchistic consciousness was itching to grapple with. In order to tear down this wall of habit in himself and in his iconography, he undertook experiments with himself which each picture documents in its own way. In order to read them properly, one must imagine a space accommodating objects which exert a strange, magical attraction on us because we cannot yet assign any meaning to them. But nothing is more certain than that they do have a very definite meaning. This is the ambivalence in which we find ourselves before one of Paalen's pictures. We awaken from a powerful dream and believe in the moment of awakening that we can feel the substance of the objects around us – nothing separates us from them, until we grasp their objectivity, remember what their function is. Then this substantive sensation is lost as if it had never existed. He seeks to spare us this disappointment, seeks to sustain this state in which thinking becomes sharper and more precise than ever simply because the objects of thought are still on their way to becoming, still somehow nude and undefined: in a state of possibility where object and idea are still the same. Paalen calls a picture that does this a 'possibility space'. Philosophically, he discards all ontology, all causality outside the picture – a subject, an idea, a dream, anything that was already there and now is to be depicted.

But it took more than a simple philosophical act in order to proceed 'unontologically' in this way. This act had to be executed in the work itself, and here almost insurmountable difficulties began. How could the autonomy of sensation be guaranteed in an image that permitted no anchor in recognizability? For Paalen, this challenge led to a stringent analysis of inner flashes of insight, together with painstaking research in the most diverse areas. He had to reinvent the language of Cubism in such a way that it clothed sensations with precision but was not manipulated by concepts already present in the mind, by forms already extant, i.e. already seen (*dèja vu*). He was sure of one thing, and he defended it with every fibre of his art against the realists: the genesis of sensation was never completely attributable to mere sensory data from an object seen somehow and somewhere, that is, its emergence, its *statu nasciendi*, could not be described as if already present in the world. Leaving an exhibition of Surrealist Yves Tanguy (1935), he remarked laconically to Roland Penrose: 'I don't like this descriptive painting.'[6] Salvador Dali's literary-illustrative style became a later object of attack. In Dali he criticised the inability of the viewer himself to participate in a poetic vision of things. The reason behind this aloofness is clear: nothing could be borrowed from sensation and incorporated in the iconography that lent itself to representation by an internal or external

model, no matter how metaphorically charged, narrative or alienated. The whole painting should, rather, limit itself to ciphers which cannot be decoded into clear ideas or unambiguous image associations or comprehended by any other means than by the way they appear. Only a certain vagueness permitted language to communicate ideas and visions that were not inherent in it. Paradoxical as it seems, there is a logic to this if one factors in his assertion that his aim in each painting was to present possibilities of existence. What he means is a combination of forms which challenge the viewer not to grasp an allusion but to discover possibilities of existence in himself. In the mystery-laden atmosphere of pure possibility in which the painter's forms and figures emerge, image and existence fuse into genesis in the act of perception.

The first pictures after 1932 should be seen as an attempt to restate the question as to the reality of the image. Nothing in them points to absolute or relative plastic forms such as we find in the works of members of the *Abstraction-Création* group at that time, who were trying to overcome geometric purism with biomorphic natural forms and references to machine aesthetics. Paalen argued that painters should not let themselves be deceived by any metaphysical search for sublime origins in pure forms. The starting point is nothing but contingence and indifferent possibility, out of which complex and meaningful formations can develop. His paintings don't say anything about the origins of a thing because they are opposed to a mind which thinks it knows what something is if it is acquainted with its origin and presumes to derive the actual value and sense of a thing from the meaning of this origin. The moment which Paalen shows in his paintings neither rises from a substantial beginning, nor does it reach an accomplished end. One is not able to recognise or even surmise anything but culmination of a movement in which out of decay something new comes into being, and recognising this, one will also see that it is thinking itself which recognises in this resemblance its own movement. He makes every seen form dependent on another form or its context and thus creates a self-referential network in which the imagination is easily engaged by points of attraction. One form may seem especially accentuated and shapely, it could represent something in particular – but what? Its open *gestalt* dissolves before our very eyes when we realise that its linear border, which made us notice it in the first place, also belongs to another form, and if we take away the colour, nothing is left but a line with no meaning at all. Paalen forces us to fall back on our sensation as image content by showing us that our seeing is conditioned by strange attractive powers of which we are only seldom conscious. This attraction emanates from a particular participation point in the image where a meaningful, unitary, compelling tendency towards sensation constitutes itself: this is what he declares to be the theme of his paintings. It is not the real object alone that summons up this sensation, but instead the expectation of resemblance. The elongated red form in his 1934 painting *Avertissement I* is experienced as contiguous, because meaning can only be deduced from it as a unity, i.e. as resemblance with something that

is not precisely known. But careful inspection of contour and coloration reveals two entirely independent shapes on the canvas. The sensation of contiguous form is intensified by the very fact that it confounds all logic, and it fairly haunts us because something in us struggles against our inability to understand which of the many possible associations it belongs to. This indeterminacy, together with the failure of every comparison, increases its perplexing attractivity and enhances the possibility of perceiving it as something similar to something else, similar, but eluding satisfactory assignment to any familiar thing (like a strange face that must resemble our own in order to seem strange). We see that Paalen's experiences represented not merely an artistic challenge but an enormous intellectual challenge as well, for a precise analysis of them strongly suggested that the shadow of the evolutionary past still fell on the highest levels of cognitive activity. But what did this really mean for the painter? Apart from the studies that he undertook in the most diverse areas in order to verify his thinking and his hypotheses, he unsparingly subjected his whole mental apparatus to experiments in which he tried to take his powers of receptiveness to the very brink of preconscious sensations of nearness and resemblance. His pictures sought to open up early-childhood memory spaces in which the subject does not seem separate from his surroundings, is not involved in a confrontation with objects. The painter contemplates these manifestations of spontaneously surfacing sensation with the exactitude of the scientist. He enquires as to the length of time he can keep the sensation and the matching image alive in his consciousness and attempts to reflect this magnitude in a relationship with the forms he has invented, their relative sizes and positions in the picture. He translates time into space and attempts to unroll what he perceives inside somewhat like a piece of music that corresponds in time with the process set in motion by seeing the picture for the first time.

In order to clarify what is meant, we may look to Paalen's literary soul brother Robert Musil, who in the 'Clarisse and Her Demons' chapter of *The Man Without Qualities* provides an example of a similar kind of synaesthetic epiphany, proceeding here to be sure from music and not from painting: 'The piano hammered iridescent notes on a wall of air. Although this occurrence was wholly and completely real in origin, the walls of the room disappeared, and in their place arose the golden wrap of music, that mysterious place where self and world, perception and feeling, inner and outer collapsed in indefiniteness upon one another and itself consists wholly and completely of sensation, definiteness, exactness, indeed of a hierarchy of the sheen of ordered details. Attached to these sensual details were threads of feeling running out of the heaving vapour of souls; and this vapour was mirrored in the precision of the walls and seemed to itself clear.'[7] What Musil arrays before us in words here comes very close to what Paalen wanted to tell us in pictures. In every square centimetre he painted, he sought to challenge the nearness of the viewer by making him the centre of attention and declaring: the picture – if it seems to have something to say to you – reveals its secret only if you, like a musician, are inspired to

spontaneous improvisation, and the solution of the mystery will be what you identify as your own in the improvisation, something which might have struck you as alien beforehand!

Paalen had examined the genesis of visionary meaning in earlier works. We discover in *La Offerte* that the schematic two-part facial form in the lower centre of the picture, formally unobtrusive, does not reveal itself as foreground until we force our eye away from the surrounding forms. Not until we register it as spatially clearly in front of the surrounding activity – made possible by its vague resemblance to a facial form – does the surrounding material become background. He reverses the customary selection process in that the meaningful is not selected from the meaningless; instead the meaningless reveals itself as such in the instant in which the meaningful appears as meaning by connecting with our quest for resemblance. That is quite a revolutionary discovery with sweeping implications for painting. It shows that meaning is not pre-existent but rather *pre-figurative*.

Paalen's first Surrealist pictures, around 1937, centre on a particular concern: to communicate, shock-like, the realisation of his own estrangement from himself. Estrangement from the world manifests itself, for him, in increasing distance from the vibrant childhood world of the intact ego, and so he paints his childhood landscapes: spaces spanning frosty, empty, immeasurable distances, vast, silent snowscapes with towering high entities. In the realm of motionlessness, the tides stand still in the green and blue gleam of becoming light. Later he rediscovers this light in an iceberg during his trip through the Pacific Northwest and notes: *'The country so marvellously uninhabited. Innumerable islands and little islands, like bare skins thrown on a gigantic parquet of opal. A little lonely iceberg swims over the flat sea in dark steel, he seems to be illuminated by a green flame inside. The indescribable green near the tone of a chrysopras amazes me, I always imagined icebergs totally white. (..)The dying voice of the Chandenhall iceberg. The heart unbends itself in this light, which is the same as in the morning dawn of the world (..).'*[8] Chrysopras is a semi-precious stone of green-golden transparence, the colour effect that Paalen himself wanted to achieve in his search for a primordial green overlying a golden ground. We always find this green in pictures where he wants to tell a creation story. In the primordial state, the earth is an endless plain immersed in shadowy twilight. There is neither sun, moon nor stars. Strange creatures live on this plain, both near and far. They know neither time nor place. Everything in this world of theirs, even their own filigree appearance, is still possible: hollows can become water holes; blind, silent, unbreathing dormant elements can become plants and animals. All forms of life repose like seed in the desert, waiting for water to propel them from the possible world to the visible world. 'The spirit that immerses itself in Surrealism relives with tremendous enthusiasm the best moments of childhood,' Breton wrote in the first *Manifeste du surréalisme*. Like Paalen,

he knew that a feeling of total freedom surrounds childhood memories, but also a feeling that one has gone astray, has become a stranger to oneself. This gripped the painter especially. It was not enough for him to create these feelings, to blaze the dark path on which one experienced 'anew a precious terror' (Breton). Nor did he want a mystification of feeling, mere astonishment at it, but rather light in the darkness of dream, an awakening and crystalline recognition of dream things, in other words: transparency.

After his return from a trip to Prague, Bohemia and Zagan in the summer of 1937, Paalen inaugurated the totemistic segment of his *oeuvre*. Apart from a few illustrations for the playbill for Alfred Jarry's *Ubu in Chains* at the Comédie des Champs Elysées in Paris[9], Paalen made drawings for F. X. Fornêret's 'Le diamant de l'herbe'. 'Fornêret's *Temps perdu* (..) includes a masterpiece, it is "Le diamant de l'herbe", a story of no more than twenty pages. In no other pen have the commonplace and the mysterious, the pleasant and the terrible undergone so intimate a union,' wrote Breton.[10] Paalen drew four illustrations, which were published along with the text in *Minotaure*. One of the drawings shows how the relationship between a nightscape of ruins described in the tale and poetic inspiration is translated into the hermetic language of the drawing: in the same instant in which the spirit begins to create, the drawing makes what moves the spirit visible, without a hair's breadth between the two. The delicate lineation has the disturbing tendency to shift seemingly of its own accord from an abstract web of threads to hallucinatory figuration. It constitutes a point of emotional concentration by transposing a sensory given into the immediacy of an action that causes the sensation to assume shape and form. Apart from the Art Nouveau effects, such a drawing demonstrates primarily the great significance of line as an autonomous medium of expression for the vibrating, nervous twilight mood in which the image, in projection like a fata morgana, comes to rest in the alternative world of daydream apparitions. The pavilion ruin, overgrown in the wet, moonlit forest, suddenly gives birth to shadow beings floating upward, while womanly bodies and crystalline forms materialise in the trembling filigree vegetation. The draughtsmanlike linear quality of this work transposes the *peinture automatique* technique of spontaneous image discovery in aesthetically amorphous material onto the medium of the drawing.

Paalen was interested in electrifying movement in painting, and the technique that he invented, fumage, lived up to its promise fully. A fumage is a *provocateur optique*, the genesis of an image initiated by candle smoke. Gordon Onslow Ford's recollection of his first meeting with Paalen at the Café Deux Magots in Paris shows how strongly the Surrealists associated this technique with Paalen and his daydreamy manner: 'He usually brought with him to be shared his daily discovery be it an African charm, a rare book or a recent article. He was very much at ease, and he was always in the thick of the conversation, but he appeared to me, in spite of his vitality, to be ethereal as if part of him were winging about elsewhere. To visit Paalen's studio at that time, I have the memory of passing through long dingy corridors as in a

dream. The studio itself seemed misty and the ceiling was far away. On the easel and against the walls were fumages.'[11] With fumage, the painter was able to confirm for himself the validity of the mythos of the Kafkaesque mind which in the painterly act retraces the imponderable trajectory of thought. At the International Surrealism Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in London in 1936, he had contributed a drawing that he called *Dessin, fait avec un bougie* ('Drawing made with a candle'). It consisted of a linear structure of black smoke spots without any additional treatment and shows clearly the significance of fumage as a precursor of line. In oils, the fumage technique functions as a gestural *provocateur optique* which modulates into brushwork or blends with it indistinguishably. Autonomous fumage experiments, either on paper or on primed canvas, are initially as important in his work as oil paintings, the fumage later becoming less of a starting point than painting with oil and brush.

Fumage enabled him to solve a number of technical and content problems. The artistic problem of the congruence between image configuration and production technique, left unresolved by the intersecting lines of the pictures in the wake of *Avertissement I*, ceases to be a problem with fumage. As he said himself, fumage was not only an automatic technique that served to ferret out 'unexpected images in aesthetically amorphous material' but also helped to 'tear down the artificial barrier between poetry and the plastic arts.'[12] It is the precursor not only in principle of the plastic automatism that Robert Motherwell spoke of in the early Forties in contrast to Breton's psychic automatism. Studies by Mattison[13] and Winter[14] suggest a direct comparison, especially since Motherwell abandoned the Surrealist concept of automatism under Paalen's influence in 1941. Everything depended on the process which triggered the sensation. Its locale, which was temporal, constituted the plastic starting point, not the historical, psychoanalytical material. Sensation was not an event in time but spatialised time: through sensation, possibility becomes spatialised, reified experience. This decisive feature is incipient in fumage. It abandons the progressive movement of line in favour of an unfolding from within in which the nervous, fleeting apparition suddenly comes to rest as a plastic image element. The fumage image, then, is a frozen moment, halted parturition, and as such much more than an automatic technique.

As record of the living and vestiges of the past, the extinct, the dead, Paalen's smokeprints do not seem threatening but instead evoke aspects of the bygone, of the remembered, and thus constitute an apologetic bond between artistic consciousness and memory. As a *memento mori* the fumage trace is comparable to a universal function in which time literally impresses itself on sensation and squeezes out symbolic configuration. The metaphor of the *estampille*, which goes back to Baudelaire, is based on a concept of imagination as a divine inpulse (differing from fantasy) 'which perceives the intimate and secret relationships of things, the correspondences and analogies,'[15] the repressed, forgotten affective valences so hard to consciously activate that Paalen was interesting in for his totemic childhood world. Breton noted how the fumages connected with memory, its awakening and

fructification, in the creation of individual myths: 'The art of Paalen seeks to realize a synthesis of myths in progress and myths past and to live this myth in his own flesh and blood. He seeks to bring complete illumination to the night ceaselessly falling over humanity, and to this task he brings the rarest encyclopaedic mind of our time, armed, moreover, with a great blaze of passion. His painting has the wings of that miraculous bird of brilliant plumage described by Simon Rosenkreuz in Les Noces Chimiques which has the power to restore life.' [16]

Fumage, as simple as it may seem in its pictorial effect, corresponds with this pneumatic-transitory context: by linking moment to moment, perceived image to perceived image, like signals, fumage resembles a discharge of purely rhythmic, i.e. temporal convergence. Schiller's concept of the transitory, indicating a playful equilibrium of possibility and form, describes this context. The moment in which the candle flame, flaring up, deposits a black spot on the canvas is, in a sense, the threshold of this equilibrium; possibility becomes reality, like a kind of quantum jump from the indeterminate position of a wave to the verifiable position of a particle. One could also say that the real sensation thus constituted jumps to formal vision in the subsequent painterly act, the feeling of alienation and melancholy jumps to revitalised being, and the sense of fear, of being overwhelmed, jumps to beauty, 'pearls of a beautiful woman,' in Breton's circumscription. Paalen characterises this special moment in the fumage as a unique form of mental presence. In the bedazzlement of the temporal caesura in which images flash into configuration, it is a creative moment underlying both science and art. The real component of the artistic endeavour awakens something thinkable and thus presents unanticipated objectives. The ephemera that fumage leaves behind localises the place in the work of art that Walter Benjamin called time-laden, the place where the viewer 'who engrosses himself in it is cooled as if by the wind of a coming morning.'[17]

With the discovery of fumage, he attracted the attention of the Surrealists and opened up new dimensions of the imagination for himself and his work. They correspond in many ways with the interest during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century in the new exogenous questions posed by the challenge to geocentric and anthropological cosmology in the wake of Copernicus and Galileo. The burning fever of the Copernican worldview gave rise to an ever stronger urge to scientifically reconquer the lost firmament: it is the age of the new reflecting telescopes which discovered the star clusters of dissolving nebulae in the depths of outer space, the age of the fascination with the possibility of multiple worlds. Paalen's fumage figures, consciously or unconsciously the foundation of his later works, have by nature the ethereal character of extraterrestrial entities. However, they also point up the limits of our conceptions of such things. What could be is always only what we can think of. The will to build new bridges to the lost beyond can only show us possibilities for self-discovery.

From the beginning, Surrealism had condensed the poetic legacy of Poe and Baudelaire to its essential point: the attempt to expose the conscious mind

to its own risks and, in its extreme states, to arrive at a differentiation of sensibility. Paalen's interest in Poe, then, was well within the Surrealist paradigm. His totemic landscapes make this especially apparent, and it accounts for the interchangeability which obscures their innovativeness. Poe and his German contemporary E. T. A. Hoffmann both renewed horror as a mode of aesthetic perception in literature. Paalen utilised it in his pictures, but only to bring about the realisation and the recapture of its original childhood quality. Ultimately, horror was to make way for pure receptiveness for what Poe had described in his theory as surprise. Horror was actually a secondary quality superimposed on surprise by its sudden appearance. Kierkegaard had also connected sudden horror as a medium of aesthetic experience with the temporality of its appearance, seeing it in the theological context as clearly negative. 'The horror that grips us when Mephistopheles jumps in through the window and remains crouched in the landing position' is the example he uses in *The Concept of Dread*.[18] The speechlessness that followed such an attack of sudden horror constituted the decisive effect, a void waiting to be filled. Liberating it from theological evil made possible poetological motivation such as Baudelaire pioneered in *Les fleurs du mal*, which can be traced back to Aristotle's de-emphasis of the importance for tragedy of the ghastly in favour of the fearsome.[19] After Baudelaire, fearful visions and demonisations were to be revealed as aberrations of the tormented, guilt-ridden Christian soul in order to restore the original positive power of its other facets, awe and hope. Fear of one's own childhood fear would collapse like a house of cards, for it was the manifestation of this fear itself that constituted its inner structure and not its real counterpoint, objective reality outside the self.

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In Paalen's visual explorations, the reduction of all narrative elements is of decisive importance. This makes it difficult to attribute anything to any one personal idea that might be psychoanalytically revealing. To be sure, the locale in which the uncanny effect arises can be more clearly defined. But it is impossible for the viewer to arrive at a definition of the figure, and this highly aesthetic semantic autonomy brings with it the incertitude which is the focus of everything in the picture. Thus the other, the unknown, in *Les étrangers* appears as a basic configuration of the perceptive horror that is meant to leave the viewer shaken, quite independently of associations. The use of eccentric dimensioning to destroy spatial orientation in the picture serves to release pure horror, like the residues of aesthetic literary symbolism. They constitute the spatial and temporal prerequisite for the apparitions that the viewer may perceive as fearful or even demonic. The glacial landscape, the danger-fraught passage or transit between sheer cliffs, growth in airy heights connecting heaven and earth, all this is familiar dream symbolism, but chosen here more for richness and inexhaustibility of allusion than to describe a certain traumatic experience. The vision vaguely recalls the old Hasidic myth of the necessity of intercourse with the other, who from far away in space and time brings the message of salvation which then is revealed to be one's own capacity to find the treasure not in the far distance but right behind the oven in

one's own house (heart).[20] The myth of the saviour who leads us to self-salvation becomes tangible only as a concrete pictorial experience: the world beyond, which is not at home in the here and now, only becomes perceptible as the sudden appearance in the world of the other. The other corresponds to seeing and belief in this seeing. Thus the other coming into the world is identical to the one who sees it. And the salvation that appeals to the one who has become the other is belief itself.[21]

The youngest member of the Surrealist group, Paalen was at the zenith of his fame in the year 1938. André Breton had written the foreword for the catalogue of his exhibition at the Galerie Renou et Colle, which attracted international attention. The English critic Herbert Read wrote in *Minotaure*: 'The paintings of Wolfgang Paalen are primordial: the senses break through the caul which divides the new-born vision from reality (..). Every great artist invents a new world: but these new worlds reveal the pristine experiences of the human race.'[22] The euphoric response to the show mirrored, in a sense, the position that Paalen enjoyed among the Surrealists as a Hamlet-like seer. This, in turn, was attributable to the general sense of mission which Breton and the critics close to him were able to impart to the younger members of the group. The reviews also include observations which, quite apart from the historical situation with all of its imponderables, can be reaffirmed and confirmed in the works of 1938/39.

In all of the pictures that Paalen painted in early 1938 prior to his show at Renou et Colle, the initially perspective landscape scene changes to become a reduced two-level structure. In *Ciel de pieuvre, Orphée, Orages magnétiques, Plumages, Pays médusé, Taches solaires* and the two versions of *Combat des princes saturniens*, the background in cool blue-green tones shapes the initial fumage entities into format-filling figures and at the same time constitutes an ambivalent pictorial space which cannot be assigned to any concrete material objectivity. The visual experience arising from this approach is a sudden occurrence, surprising the eye, like the peal of a bell or a bolt of lightning presenting itself to the eye like a hallucination. This painterly event structure is followed spatially, as a background penetrated by the eye, by deep silence, like spatial and temporal gravity. The colour coordination of the blue, with its greenish-yellow shimmer, suggesting a horizontal system like distant background radiation, evokes this gravitational pull. A different sense of space and time, this attraction follows surprise as if it had never happened.

On the level of form and content, the fumage entities flowing from a point of origin in the picture develop into an indefinite repertoire of particles, masks, animal heads and zoomorphic shapes permitting each dissimilarity to resolve into resemblance: the linear painterly structure exhibits the manner in which it was made and thus, significantly, allows the process of creation to participate in the formation of the image analogue. These significant referentialities – for they are not clearly identifiable objects – thus all point back to experiential temporal levels: the shock experience of surprise, i.e. the sensation of atomised time in an instant in which every sensation of time coagulates into presence,

and the actual being of time which follows paralysis in a tranquil reverie. The present moment as an *index sui* between *no longer* and *not yet*, as an atom in a succession of discrete atomised states (and not as a point separating transitional moments), becomes the status quo of the temporal substance.

Let us turn our attention to analogies with the Indian art of the American Pacific Northwest and with totemism. They are generally not traceable in the form of direct citations in the pictures. The psychology of totemism interested Paalen for its complex linkage of dream and memory with the world by means of zoomorphic intermediaries. Everything in the world corresponds to a rememberable event, the deed of an animal or a human being in the course of his life, and must, in order to really exist, first be conjured up in the imagination by art objects, songs, etc. that are incorporated in rituals. The important thing for Paalen was overcoming the dualistic view that had always characterised the animistic interpretation of totemism: nature was not 'animated' by the projection of imagined meanings, but rather the surrounding world comes into being only through living memory; it must be poetically sung into being, like a memory that is awakened by a treasured memento. It was this ideal of poetic creation that Paalen found in totemism. Perception means creating the world anew in every instant. What he incorporated in his art was the totemic alloy of aesthetic act and figural appearance: the appearance becomes a vexatious hidden picture within the rythmics of an image in which figuration and free linearity, personification and generation coexist ambivalently. The painting visualises the process of morphosis up to a certain point, where it then comes to a standstill like a natural phenomenon that suddenly stops and resounds in the generic memory.

In all of these paintings, hovering beings rise like chimeras along several courses from the churning base line, threatening octopus creatures with long, long tentacles. Like dragons, they threaten to devour one another, at the same time casting their splintering arms in all directions. The point of departure here appears to be the rich mediaeval traditions of illustrations of ogres and chimeras. In illuminated manuscripts, predators and predator parts were often compounded to form images of dragons and monsters, an additive image structure with correspondences in Paalen's figurations. In Christian iconography, the dragon, a borrowing from the Hydra of Classical Antiquity, represents the monster of the Apocalypse.[23] In the symbolism of the Middle Ages, Saturn appears as the 'god of time that causes all visible things to decay and die (..) and as the ruler of all life-hating knowledge, black magic. (..) Saturnian [creatures] are long-necked screeching birds, peacocks and ostriches.'[24] The apocalyptic monster appears again and again in mythological literature in terms of this latent spatial and temporal concept, for example in the Vedas: 'In the midst of Creation went a huge monster on the back of the sea – on him all of the many gods are arranged like the branches of a tree around the trunk.'[25] In the context of motif symbolism, the subject of the battle of giant birds is most illuminating. It lifts the expressive sweep of the apocalyptic dragon into the realm of catharsis and totemistic predestination.

Paalen himself reported on his interest in the superstitious belief in the fateful simultaneous existence of a personal talismanic symbol with the power to foretell life and death.[26] The ecstatic struggle and death of the totem creatures had predictive character for the fate of the individual. This delegating of power to proxies outside of human physicality (but inside of human spiritual space) shows clearly their relative dependence on the seemingly powerless self, sustained throughout in totemism.

America

In May 1939, shortly after his one-man show in Peggy Guggenheim's London gallery, the Paalens together with Eva Sulzer boarded ship for New York. The voyage was both a new beginning and flight. His success seemed to warrant an expedition to faraway places; the approaching war made it a necessity. After briefly visiting Helene Meier-Graefe in Munich in summer 1938, Paalen had decided to leave Europe as soon as possible. The experience of New York, the trip across Canada to the Northwest Coast, and the exploration of Native American culture made this freely chosen more than outwardly imposed odyssey the fulfilment of his plan for a truly grand and comprehensive travel adventure in mythical America. From the beginning, though, Paalen's final destination was Mexico. During her Paris visit in 1938, Frida Kahlo had invited him to Mexico, and he had accepted also because he wanted to clarify in his own mind his position vis-à-vis Surrealism. Unlike the Surrealists who later fled Europe, Paalen left of his own volition, and for him America was initially not a place of involuntary exile but rather a desired respite, ultimately also a cultural and philosophical respite, from Western civilisation. The desired confrontation with indigenous American cultures was part of a search for the key constituents of otherness which might be the basis of a profound cognitional critique or the Occident such as had not been undertaken since Columbus. Perhaps here lies the deeper reason for Paalen's preferring Mexico to the pulsating art world of New York, in which he nevertheless participated for several months almost every year.[27]

After visiting the New York World's Fair in 1939 Paalen decided to postpone his planned trip to Mexico. Obsessed by the visionary quality of his totemic pictures, he plunged into the scholarly adventure of researching the totemistic world, wanting to track down the living remnants of it on the reservations along the Pacific coast of Canada and Alaska. At New York's Museum of Natural History, he studied the enormous collection of Indian art of the Northwest Coast, for him 'an incomparable piece of fairy-tale', commenting to Breton: 'Suddenly the old craving for those regions of more

than freely chosen affinity arose in me. I have been intensively examining several documentations and looking at various specimens, and I believe I have arrived at new ways of looking at this art, which is surely greater than we think in Europe'.[28] This 'more than freely chosen affinity' lifts his investigations, interpenetrated as they are by the emotional world of his childhood, onto a higher plane than normal scholarly research. Paalen's childhood experience is the conduit to this never-before-seen and yet thoroughly familiar world.

Paalen did not hesitate. Together with his two female companions, travelling light, but not without empty notebooks and books, he took the trans-Canada train from New York via Montreal to Ottawa, then on to Winnipeg, Jasper, across the Skeena River to Prince Rupert, and from there across the Alexander Archipelago via Ketchikan to Sitka, Alaska. From Sitka he took a seaplane to Juneau and Wrangell: 'The sensation of a long march through a hiddenness deeper than the woods allowed us to contemplate perfectly precisely the last ray of a culture of illuminated strangeness in the midst of a nature of unconquerable wildness – and so we attained the destination of our Northwest parcours.'[29] The substance of his intellectual expedition grows point for point, place for place, seemingly undisturbed, sometimes inspired by his passion for collecting objects, which later became the basis of one of the artist's remarkable collection of American Indian art. The logical principles of Paalen's philosophy as developed in the essays he published in *DYN* in 1942-1944 are prefigured in these loose notebooks – quite similar to Lichtenberg's famous notebooks.[30] This makes his travel notes doubly important: first as a direct linguistic mirror of his thoughts, which had been expressed exclusively in his painting since his acquaintance with the Surrealists, and second as a still embryonic private reference for the things he still had to say to the world in words and images.

A key to Paalen's philosophy is an enigmatic sentence fragment at the end of the first *Voyage Nord-Ouest* notebook, probably written after his arrival in San Francisco in September 1939 or shortly thereafter: 'To reduce aesthetics more to a philosophical-metrical system than to an objective one, and more to a moralistic system than to a subjective one.'[31] Instead an opposition of subject and object, what was needed was a philosophically founded system of space and rhythm on the side of the artwork evoking a moral questioning on the side of the viewer. Paalen wanted his genuine aesthetics to be a mathematically clear structure worthy of an Ernst Mach, geometric in its basic lines and without the anti-positivistic liability to confusion found in so much Surrealist thinking. He wanted to show that the opposite of subject and object which gave order to our self-reflection could be obstructive. The goal was to overcome the classical subject-object scheme of the Occidental philosophy of art. The auto-poetic effect of amorphous shapes in the imagination had been rediscovered by the Surrealists for their almanac of inspirational techniques. Breton favoured the appearance of the objective personage in the amorphous chaos of the image. His Surrealism interpreted it within the closed circuit of

personal life determined by the dialectical opposites of consciousness and suppressed desire, literally determined by Freud's interpretation of dreams. Paalen's art is not dedicated to the discovery of the contents of the subconscious but much more to the invention of a new order of things, i.e. the discovery of a sphere between possibility and actuality. He thought this sphere parallel to Heisenberg's model for the microphysics of light in which this strange kind of reality is defined. Paalen too tried to imagine a possibility-space without dimension, determined exclusively by being seen and by how it is seen. One can realize the principle of this aesthetics very good with the famous theoretical experiment with a cat of the Austrian quantum-physicist Erwin Schroedinger: here it is a chance-event who decides if the cat locked in a box is dying or not; for us, however, she is really dead or alive when we have looked in the box. Only the act of seeing decides which possibilities become real and which do not. The state of the cat is to be seen as analogy for the open state of the seeable world, which remains somehow incomplete without the thinkable world.

During his first years in the New World, Paalen's critique of Breton's dialectic led him further and further away from Surrealism. The first issue of his magazine *DYN* appeared in Mexico in 1942, and in it he made his leave-taking public in the article 'Farewell au surrealisme'. *DYN* can therefore be seen as a counterpoint to the New York Surrealist magazine *VVV*, edited by Breton in close collaboration with Nicolas Calas and Matta. Not surprisingly, Paalen's clear dissociation was enough to provoke *VVV* to sharp, categorical rejection of the idea of an open Surrealism of possibilities, as presented in *DYN*. The introduction to *VVV* 1 declared in 1942: 'We reject the lie of an open Surrealism in which everything is possible.'[32] Later in 1942 his essay 'The Dialectical Gospel' followed in *DYN* 2, a commentary on his inquiry into the validity of dialectical materialism. Breton thereupon officially broke off contact with Paalen, although he had called upon him in 1940 to put down his thoughts in writing even if the result partially conflicted with Surrealism (and Breton's dialectic interpretation of chance): 'I noted with sadness that you seem to show me your disagreement, your dismissal à propos 'chance' (..): you think you have got to the bottom of it. After reading your 1940 letters to Calas[33], I guessed more than understood that this could be a simple consequence of your rebellion against Hegel. But the objectification of your thinking is necessary, on this point only too necessary, it seems to me. But I sense, until its voluntary surrender, the extraordinary solidity of the structure of your thinking: for me it is not overly congenial, so it is not for me to defend it in special measure.'[34] The reasons for the break undoubtedly lay in the controversiality and radicality of Paalen's views. As the leading representative of Surrealism, Breton must have felt obligated to dissociate himself from Paalen's views even if, at heart, he could appreciate their worth: 'In the final analysis Paalen is the only one who has tried to do something, and it's too bad that this something was directed a little bit against us. But I am fair enough to acknowledge what he is and what he is capable of. And in general I think it is less important

under the circumstances to abide by the rules of explicit principle than to plunge into the thick of things and bear witness to that with new suggestions,' Breton wrote to Paalen's wife Alice Rahon in 1945.[35]

Chance, for Paalen, does not represent a reality in itself as in the Surrealist theory of the *hazard objectif*. Chance should not be considered the likelihood of an effect resulting from causally determined events; he preferred to see chance as part of the attempt to rationalise and cover the contingence of the world. Behind chance stands our inability to confess that we truly cannot know either the origin of things or the reason why one effect has come about, excluding all other possible effects (which does not mean automatically that they must be considered impossible). Most of the Surrealists did not want to accept the new ideas simply because they were accustomed to seeing objective chance as determined by the two classic Hegelian laws: *all* possibilities tend to manifest and *all* possible cases are liable to repeat some times. In his book on Breton, Clifford Browder analysed the relation of the Surrealists to Hegel. Breton believed that certain people and certain encounters force the phenomenon, but without eliminating the inexplicable element of chance, which he considered mystical and poetically relevant, he follows Hegel in his consideration of chance as a phenomenon through which a metaphysically determined causality synthesises (dialectically) with absolute human finality – leaving practically no space for new possibilities because they could only be finite parts of (objective) nature. With the factual meaninglessness of possibility, a congenial movement like Hegel's opposite pair of *something* and *another*, *subject* and *object*, could in fact only be thought: something always becomes another, and because this other is again a something, the process proceeds infinitely. In formal logic the generation of the single entity remains an eternal paradox which makes the integration of the truly new impossible. The same something is in itself a something, but simultaneously also in front of the other, which is itself a something, another. The problem of this *progressus ad infinitum* was now that the determinating something, i.e. the synthetic principle of identity – which Surrealism wanted to see in the synthesis of conscious and subconscious – either goes together with itself or melds with the other. In 'Dialectical Gospel' Paalen unmasks this idea of a metaphysical principle of opposition and identity as a linguistic atavism which originates in the incapacity of the human mind to construct an identity without a corresponding comparison, a reference, which later develops into an opposite. Behind this anti-dialectical attitude we see Paalen's closeness to Schopenhauer and the Indian Vedas, where all linguistic references for being and not-being are considered unreal because the true base of the world cannot be grasped with words for something and not-something. The sources of all being evade all logical formulations. From the perspective of the Vedas, the intellectual pain of dialectics in the sense of a progressive imagination for cognition only makes sense as an absurd play on words. Paalen's (German) notes are full of such references: 'Milchbrüder – Rahmschwester' (Milk brothers – cream sisters). 'Dämmerlicht – Lämmerdicht' (Dawnlight –

lawndight). 'Dialektische Kaffeekanne mit doppeltem Boden (reversibel)' (Dialectical coffee-pot with double bottom (reversible)). 'Die Lehre (Leere) aus einem Loch ziehen' (To pull the lesson (emptiness) out of the hole). (The dialectical juggler, who tries to demonstrate that there is no white rabbit without a black hat). 'Selbst-mord ist leichter als Eigen-leben' (Sui-cide is easier than self-life) etc.'[36] The Surrealists, convinced of the eternal order of dialectics, tended also to follow Einstein in his philosophical justifications of theoretical physics, remaining affirmative towards the metaphysical concepts inherent in them. Einstein took an emphatically conservative position towards the tendency of his colleagues Heisenberg and Bohr to mystify chance, issuing the laconic statement: 'The Lord doesn't play at dice'.[37] If chance was the dialectical link between universal causality and human finality, why then insist on chance as un-deterministic?

But *DYN* does more than engage in a critique of Surrealism on this philosophical point. Paalen's writings in *DYN* also document his position in the Thirties and conclude a phase of intense basic research and theoretical buttressing. At the same time *DYN* provides the theoretical framework for his painting in the Forties, which Paalen then brought to a conclusion in his essay 'Metaplastic' occasioned by the big *Dynaton* exhibition in San Francisco in 1951.[38] Paalen later stressed that he had been wanting to publish a digest of his own ideas – opposed to what Surrealism had taken from Hegelian metaphysics, dialectical materialism and also from Einstein's concepts of non-Euclidian space.[39] Basically Hegelian and Freudian, the Surrealist system posited a Surrealist consciousness as *plenitudo intellectus*, a dialectic consciousness embracing reality in its totality. The mystical part of the surrealist research had always to find a dialectical correspondence in everyday life reality. Paalen's break with Surrealism proceeds from a positive basic motive. The system in which Surrealism had couched its revelation of what it means to be human was to be opened from without – freed from political bondage in narrow parameters. He was of the opinion that a new assessment of the aetiology of human independence of mind was fundamental for art, and for this very reason it had to be undertaken from without. This was quite in line with Breton's preference; he had always banished ideological debate from Surrealist activities. Thus it is not surprising that he had little inclination to satisfy his own wish for intellectual renewal, for a radical philosophical workshop, by adjudicating it himself. This dualism manifested itself as a serious strain in his relations with Paalen. After the first issue of *DYN* made the rounds in New York, the estrangement went so far that even close friends of Paalen's were threatened with exclusion. Robert Motherwell, for example, whom Paalen had given a letter of introduction to Breton, was then pressured to break off contact with Paalen. Motherwell had translated Paalen's essay 'The New Image' and probably also 'Surprise and Inspiration'[40] into English for *DYN*, and the two of them maintained a close association even after Motherwell's return to New York in 1942. In 1944 Paalen published Motherwell's essay 'The Modern Painter's World' in *DYN*, and Motherwell

served as editor and adviser for Paalen's *Form and Sense*, which Wittenborn & Co. published in New York in 1945.[41] In the excommunication of members – which usually did not definitely impinge on friendships – Breton remained, although occasionally wavering, the final arbiter. In Breton's personality, firmly established basic principles counterbalanced a seismographic sensitivity to new trends; Breton's fundamental openness is often forgotten due to his tyrannical image. As early as in the *Second Manifesto* he had deplored the lack of a profound revision of the ideological foundations of Surrealism: 'I consider it essential not only for practical reasons but also for moral reasons that every individual who dissolves ties with Surrealism should challenge it ideologically and point out its greatest weakness to us from his perspective: nothing of the kind has ever happened!'[42] Paalen's essays can certainly be seen in the context of such a re-examination, hoped-for but never undertaken, of the rigorous categories and hierarchies of Surrealism. Paalen seemed well aware that he himself would not be credited for this spiritual ambition. He later said in 'Metaplastic': 'Human destiny is made of sowing seeds for harvests unknown – which is the freedom (and in human terms) tragedy of its potentiality.'[43] Paalen's seed was his defence of the complex idea of subjectless painting which was nevertheless full of the eternal theme of the encounter of I with the other. Considering both VVV and DYN Martica Sawin points out that 'Compared to Paalen's clearly stated position – "no painting with a subject and no painting without a theme" – and the visual evidence he published to support it, VVV appears lacking in direction. If the unifying centre of a group for Breton was a publication, the centre was not holding very well in 1944.'[44]

Paalen had focused on the crisis of the subject in his foreword to his New York exhibition catalogue and, together with Motherwell, was preparing his book *Form and Sense* for publication. In that book he declared the question of the subject in painting to be the cardinal problem of contemporary art and illuminated it from various perspectives.[45] Matta's more sharply defined images and his metaphysical view of space and time pointed to a pictorial concept that was entirely different from the oscillating indeterminacies of Paalen's pictures and his defence of a non-dimensional vagueness of implicit possibility. Matta's first masterworks of the year 1939, like *The Eve of Death*, manifest his tectonic idea of space which is always thought of as something which underlies all being – an idea which is not found in Paalen's paintings. Here space is conceived of simply as the limit of what we can observe – which falls away when the observer becomes a participant. Paalen's new space is nothing other than the space of imagination when we become participants. Matta focused on metaphysical space – that means space outside human perception and existing independently, an idea which in painting, reflecting imagination and never metaphysics, was unacceptable for Paalen. Matta used the idea of non-Euclidean space simply to enlarge and intensify the classic pictorial dreamscape-space of Surrealism. It remains, in spite of the multi-perspective insights and various interferences of pictorial layers, a measurable

empty box which can be filled up with references to material objects by the painter. Non-Euclidean space wants simply to suggest that, in addition to the measurable dimensions of our visual surroundings (Euclidean geometry with height, breadth and depth), visualising cosmic dimensions in terms of the theory of relativity and its idea of a space-time continuum requires the geometry of Riemann. Space here is not conceived of as infinite but as limitless; one can expand or move in space in all directions without limit but, as on earth, one ultimately returns to the point of origin. In the end, cosmic space also possesses a final but limitless content, like the spheric surface of the earth. Matta's idea of space was also much encouraged by the lectures of Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*[46] into a direction to leave the time dimension and to find descriptive forms for another 'surreal' world 'in which everything is interchangeable and spirits disembodied float free of time'[47] Paalen instead wanted in no way to overcome the correspondence between image and human perception in terms of rhythm. Analogously to the fugue, jazz and Cubist painting, he conceives of space as advancing toward the spectator out of plastic paraphrases as a sort of counter space. He points out that in Cubism the 'elements formerly held as cognitive or conceptual *a-prioris* enter as constitutive factors in the very structure of the edifices of art (..). Now, the great novelty of cubist painting consists in the fact that light becomes a constitutive element in the pictorial texture, that it enters as a dynamic factor in the structure of the picture. (..) That is to say cubism was able to create a new continuum of space-light in which light and shade are no longer illusionist means, but are integrated in the plastic matter like the polarity of graphic rhythms and colour rhythms; the appearance of objects being no longer an end but only a point of departure. And in integrating the time-element by the decentralization of the plastic action, cubist painting arrived at a continuum of space-time unknown until then in painting'.[48] We see how Paalen always tries to transpose non-anthropomorphic entities via analogy into human categories of vision virulent in pictorial language. Matta instead always tended to analyse an object in its true transformation beyond human categories, to which analytical Cubism had strictly limited itself. The real morphology of an object is determined by various states of transformation 'resulting from the emission of energies and their absorption in the object from its first appearance to its final form, in the geodesic, psychological milieu.'[49] Matta as well as Paaalen's friend Gordon Onslow Ford both tried to eliminate the object from human optics, illustrating by this their metaphysical idea of alchemic transformations covered by the dimension of final but limitless space. They left behind Cubism's severe pictorial logics. 'In fact', writes Martica Sawin, 'one Onslow Ford drawing of that period contains a section resembling analytical cubism that is crossed out and inscribed "No Sir".'[50] Paalen's painting, built on his vision of Cubism, in fact did not focus on objects in physical transformation in spaces that exploded the confines of the conventional three dimensions. The figures Paalen recalls by his rhythmical orders of colour neither grow out of a spatial illusion nor do they illustrate the content of a spatially preformed order. On the contrary, he does everything to

avoid attribution of an absolute status outside human perception to a space-time continuum. The figures need to be perceived using the human categories of space and time to become real.

In Matta's masterly paintings and drawings of the years 1941-44, perspective lines put up a framework of a seemingly endless variety of spaces which simultaneously coexist. Matta made lines 'operate separately to suggest multiple perspectives akin to his so-called non-Euclidean spaces.'[51] Line stood for movement in time and space for Matta and Onslow Ford, while for Paalen it was far more a structure to lead the eye rhythmically in its movement over the painting and to compensate for the dematerialised means of colour in giving emotional tone to the latent imagery. The logic of abruptly interchanging space segments interfering to each other by spatial objects and telepathic lines in Mattas and Onslow Fords paintings brought with it the necessity for illustration. Their idea of non-Euclidean space and mysterious interferences between simultaneous objects in a fourth dimension lead in fact again to a most traditional peep-show framework of painting, in which the viewer was threaten as observer. The theme of the I and the Other, the American artists obsessively were interested in, was excluded. Matta's ideas failed at least to convince such artists as Pollock, Rothko and Newman, who were interested in Cubism and totem art. Matta had his own plans for an art magazine in 1942, but nothing came of them. His group sessions with Pollock, Krasner, Baziotes, Kamrowski and Motherwell in spring 1942 broke up, according to Mattison and Winter, over issues of 'precise draftsmanship, perspective, (..) combined with Matta´s attempts to control the artists and his arcane metaphysical ideas.' Motherwell vehemently defended Paalen's position, according to Mattison: 'Motherwell talked about Paalen all the time, he even brought in Paalen's magazine (..).'[52] Peter Busa seemed to have the same impression: 'We were more interested in the formal possibilities and the mechanics of it, (but) Matta felt that was kind of not very cultured. The meetings, friendly at first, turned "intense".'[53] Ethel Baziotes recalled in an interview in 1990: 'Paalen was very much discussed in the Forties and it rivalled the discussions on Matta. (..) He was in the air, and also he was doing something revolutionary and new (..).'[54] Matta evolved a masterly crowning of Surrealist ideas in his paintings of 1939 to 1945, while Paalen opened a new chapter in the concept of space which brought painting to new heights after the war. As he said in 'During the Eclipse': 'When in the middle of wars and reaction the intellectual eclipse seems almost total, the new spirit like a traveller arriving in the night, neither seen or known, installs himself; it is useless to guess his face, he will become one with the day.'[55]

The assertion that there is, rooted deep in the human spirit, an accord between the cosmos and the human being's most uniquely own genius, a cognitive correspondence of thought and dream with the ambient world (such

as is expressed in totemism), could also be applied to the living reality of the recurring figures of myth. For the individual they had always seemed more substantial than empirical physical reality. What Paalen tried to do in his pictures was to relieve a certain blindness to the real cognitive foundations of totemism resulting from the psychoanalytical interpretation models for 'primitive' beliefs (which Freud likened to incoherencies in the thinking and feeling of neurotics) that predominated in Surrealism. One could say that Paalen sees the world of mythology and cosmology as a pre-text for cognitive analogies and not as the postscript of neurotically contorted wish projection: in this uncharted realm between possibility and reality, the unbounded ego achieves empathy with the cosmic analogies that incorporate the ego into the world of flora, fauna and the heavens and thus reinstate the self in the natal process of becoming and fading away in the spheric cycle of eternal transformation. The man-plant, man-beast and man-constellations of ancient cultures are grasped as open reflex zones for the unconsummated human emotional spectrum on its way from substance to modality, i.e. as destining potency.

Paalen now transposed the realm of totemistic mythology into cosmology in order to come closer to those feelings which seemed inherent in two thousand years of Western hubris: the self's feelings of sublime resemblance to (monotheistic) God, of temporal and spatial superiority over all being. It was precisely this innate sense of transcendence which Paalen wanted to elide by introducing a moment of objective insecurity, a relativity of truth which was only valid in relation to sensory experience. What he hoped for was to reduce the ego-bound personality to the self as the simple reality of directly experienced aboriginality, seemingly profaned by a phenomenology of primal sensory experience mirroring cosmic phenomena. Gravity, attraction, separation impulses, incarceration, sensations of cold and warmth, impotencies, weightlessness, insideness and outsideness – this list can be extended to form an endless network with the aim of remembrance and recognition on the level of human sensation and human mentation through art. On this level, the radiation and illumination coming from the first ray of the sun means as much as salvation from the cold of cosmic nothingness, can be equated with the aboriginality that Paalen sought to capture in his later pictures (*Messagers*, 1949). The sublime sensation frees the subject, for the moment of salvation, from the causal universe of the self-created ego in order to unlock for the subject's own orientation the vault of possibility in the realm of experienced resemblance. These 'cosmic' sensations, then, in the form of self-experience, were what bridged the gap to the regions of indeterminate possibility which Paalen proclaimed as a revolution in the concept of the artistic image.

Perhaps in order to clarify this, Paalen wrote a drama which was to be a counterpoint to his new pictorial entities, *The Beam of the Balance*.[56] He availed himself of several figures from the body of universal myths to serve as forms of direct experience and incorporated them in the profane action of his

play. They were not meant to be characters, Paalen wrote in a synopsis of the play, but rather 'the interplay of prototypes which thus far have provided the major figures in the historical pageant of humanity.'[57] Here too the figures, flowing forms without contour, intangible, constitute possible axes of the causal action of mortal beings. That which is humanly possible constitutes the essence of these forms, which were to be imparted to the audience directly, without any barrier of preconceived associations, in order to serve as material for the viewer's own personal drama. At the high-tension points in the action of the play, the figures prove to be visionary time signatures of cosmic meaning: they are to be understood as the underpinnings of reality because they communicate the idea of what it means to be alive. As in the mythology of the ancients, the objects of meditation should blend and blur past and future so that time manifests their oracular tendency. They should represent themselves, they should proclaim truth by pointing man towards the essential human event – like the *choros tragicos* in ancient Greek tragedy. In Paalen's drama they are cosmogones, 'the voices of the great cosmic powers that act like a Greek chorus.'[58]

Accustomed to the high intellectual level of the Surrealists, Paalen had at first been interested primarily in Motherwell, who had studied philosophy. In the course of his loose association with *DYN*, Motherwell promoted the work of some of his own contemporaries, especially William Baziotes, Harry Holtzman and Jackson Pollock, who all had pictures first published in *DYN* 6. Up until the mid-Forties, Motherwell had associated mainly with European Surrealists and didn't meet Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman personally until 1945.[59] The so-called Guggenheim circle of Surrealists was significantly expanded by the addition of the young Americans, who passionately debated all the Surrealist and anti-Surrealist theories of the day. The old schism between Matta and Paalen deepened and entered into this discussion. In retrospect one can say that Matta represented, along with Arshile Gorky and Enrico Donati, the greatest hope on the part of Breton and the *VVV* circle of winning over young Americans to the Surrealist cause. These hopes were dashed later by Gorky's suicide in 1948, for which Matta, who was having an affair with Gorky's wife, was held partially responsible. Matta then left New York.

Nevertheless, Paalen's efforts to have his play produced in New York were fruitless, but in 1945 it was performed privately at the home of the painter Robert Motherwell in East Hampton on Long Island, New York, with friends from the theatre world attending and playing parts.[60] He had come to New York to get everything ready for his show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, which opened on 17 April immediately following Jackson Pollock's second exhibition. He remained with his second wife Luchita as a guest at the Motherwells' for the following months, especially since Alice Rahon-Paalen was exhibiting right after him and he was still hoping to put on his play in New York. That winter William Baziotes, Motherwell and Mark Rothko all had their first one-man shows at Peggy Guggenheim's, and there

was at this time considerable intellectual exchange among New York artists, whose basically competitive attitude did not usually lend itself to cooperative activities such as Paalen envisioned, analogous to scientific cooperation. This competitiveness was surely one of the reasons why he decided to locate his group project in San Francisco, although he enjoyed considerable respect and admiration among the younger New York artists. Rothko's first one-man show with figurative-surrealistic pictures had closed shortly before at Art of This Century; reflecting a personal interpretation of pre-figurative aesthetics Rothko's own work after 1945 was beginning to move conceptually toward a phase in which 'both selves and paintings now *are* fields of possibilities – an effect conveyed (..) by the creation of protean, indeterminate shapes whose multiplicity is let be.'[61]

The analogy that Paalen saw between painterly image and drama resided in the idea that unseen possible forms outside the radius of familiar associations and identities could, via the image, unleash a dramatic play of the imagination that was totally directed at the identity of the viewer and activated an initiate point in that identity. This idea was certainly influential and recurs in the views expressed by American artists in the first and only issue of the magazine *Possibilities*, which Motherwell brought out in New York in the winter of 1947/48 as a kind of analogue to *DYN*.[62] In a text entitled 'The Romantics Were Prompted' in that issue, Mark Rothko wrote: 'I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers(..). Neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance. They begin as an unknown adventure in an unknown space. It is at the moment of completion that in a flash of recognition, they are seen to have the quantity and function which was intended. Ideas and plans that existed in the mind at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur. (..) In the work of art which has inspired him, the artist has caught a glimpse of not yet realized possibilities, he has become aware of the mythological depths only a fraction of whose rich store has been so far revealed, and which he dares to think a keener glance might yet embrace in its totality (..).'[63] Statements such as this were underpinning also for Pollock, Gottlieb and Newman in breaking off their passing infatuation with Surrealism and rejecting the remnants of figurative meaning. Only after this parting of the ways could they develop the pictorial answers to artistic questions that later established the autonomy of American painting. And their trademark styles also proceeded from it, whether in the direction of the open mythical pictures of women in the expressive gestural pictorial language of Willem de Kooning or in the expansion of picture formats to the point of 'abstract sublimity' in Newman and Pollock. Here the standing viewer himself became a vertical manifestation, which in Paalen's, de Kooning's and Rothko's paintings still confronted the self with an iconically construable predecessor being in the act of appearing. In the 'Editorial Statement' in *Possibilities*, Robert Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg traced the 'greatest trust in pure possibility' to the necessity to radically expand the concept of art in a time of political depression, and for Willem de Kooning the concept of

possibility meant 'a wonderful uncertain atmosphere.'[64] Paalen had shown what this concept of pure possibility actually meant for the pictorial system as early as 1942 in 'The New Image' and again in 1944 in 'On the Meaning of Cubism Today.'

The resemblance to Mark Rothko's ideas about his own works and forms, later subsumed under the concept of 'multiforms', is thus highly enlightening. Forms are not to be seen as possibilities in the (Hegelian) sense of pre-existing parts of nature – differing here from dialectical materialism – but rather as the realised possibilities which we can know about in the border regions of the imaginable. Thus the manifestations that bring the possible into the human realm can only be our thoughts, feelings, passions and self-assertion. The belief that they alone constitute the visual bridge to nature around us is the most important point of agreement between Paalen and Rothko, who in his art as in his life abided by the principle that Paalen expressed in *DYN* 1 (1942): 'Painting serves above all to show us that which we cannot see in nature.'[65] It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in 1948 Rothko disapproved when Paalen refused the offer of a guest teaching position at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco such as Rothko himself had held each summer since 1946, preferring instead to live quietly in the woods near Mill Valley.[66] Rothko overlooked the fact that Paalen, notwithstanding his often-expressed longing for solitude, continued to be group-orientated, wanting to move Breton's Surrealism in new directions, and was not really withdrawing to a pseudo-idyllic contemplation of nature. Whatever the grounds for Rothko's disapproval, it turned out to be a warning in that the group that Paalen founded with Onslow Ford and Lee Mullican in 1949, Dynaton, broke up over philosophical differences and the difficulty of reconciling the Dynaton concept with the Zen ideas of the pure harmony of nature and the manifestation of that harmony which John Cage, Mark Tobey, Gordon Onslow Ford and Lee Mullican sought to achieve in California.[67]

Paalen's ideas offered stimulating answers to problems of form and content in this phase of American self-discovery. The overriding question was how, after Cubism, to use rhythm to incorporate temporality in the pictorial plane in order to open up, via concrete experience, an alternative approach to the structures of the imagination. This is especially true of Jackson Pollock's first dripping pictures. In his biography of Pollock, Steven Naifeh points out: 'What seemed static to most people meant a veil of perspectives and possibilities for Jackson's hyperactive imagination. This was always Jackson's problem with reality, both in life and on the canvas: it changed too much too often; it vibrated with too many possibilities to be registered with clarity and precision.'[68] Pollock's spontaneous discovery of dripping in 1946 did not so much introduce a new technique to painting as help solve a concrete painterly problem which Paalen had compared with a fuge in his Cubism essay: 'Not until the fuge does contrapuntal development achieve a complexity of auditive space in which rhythm and depth are in equilibrium – just as the pictorial space of Cubism was the first to bring rhythmic qualities back into painting. For the decentralising plastic action, the gaze of the viewer must

follow endlessly intertwined revolutions and thus brings in the temporal element which, because of the closed circles of perspectivist lines, had become negligible (in comparison with pre-perspectivist and perspectivist painting, it would be possible to speak of a Cubist multispective).'[69] Were Paalen's fumage pictures, then, imitations in the sense of totemistic mimesis (active dramatisation of memory and thought processes) of what a viewer might experience looking at a Cubist picture, a depiction of what he perceives and how he perceives it? And was Pollock trying with his drip paintings to realise a language that has its antecedents in fumage – a language that directly mimics the movement and flow of the mind before the autonomous Cubist image and ultimately captures it so brilliantly that the viewer is irresistibly drawn into the process?

Numerous artists had experimented with techniques similar to dripping before Pollock, and so the claim made by Fritz Bultman, a painter friend of Pollock's, that 'it was Wolfgang Paalen who started it all' seems exaggerated, at least as regards the invention of the technique.[70] But Bultman's assertion does not seem so improbable if we focus on the concept behind the drip technique and recall that Pollock had seen several fumages and encrages in 1940 in Paalen's first New York show at the Julien Levy Gallery, some of which incorporated the all-over form of multispective, and had responded laconically 'I can do that without the smoke' at a demonstration of the fumage technique in New York in 1942.[71] In the history of ideas, Pollock's sudden decision to place the canvas on the floor and, in effect, make himself into the body of the eye was tantamount to the elimination of the last frontier of the subject in the image. The viewer was transformed by active seeing (active mimesis) into one of those anonymous personalities that had occupied the centre of attention in Braque and Picasso. Clement Greenberg understood this when he observed: 'I don't think it is going too far to say that Pollock's drip technique of 1946-50 really picked up Analytical Cubism at the point where Picasso and Braque had left it.'[72]

A cursory glance at Pollock's *Totem Lessons* pictures, which were shown in his 1945 exhibition at Art of This Century[73], enables us to understand the inner power which Pollock invested in his drip technique, making it ultimately the foundation upon which he created his classic works. Pollock's interest in Northwest Coast Indian art had been rekindled by Paalen's article on 'Totem Art' in *DYN* 4-5.[74] In these pictures Pollock concentrated on the very problem that Paalen had made the centrepiece of his interpretation of totemic art: how to find a convincing formal expression for the moment of emotional identification with the other self, the totem. In principle not unlike Newman's wash drawings of the same period, the perpetual event of the present moment appears, like a totem, as a vertical pole in the midst of a rhythmically agitated image structure. Using more or less traditional means, Pollock visualises the drama of the appearance and disappearance of the totem as Paalen had described it in 'Totem Art' in 1943: 'The power of the ancestor, the animal spirit, is conjured up in frantic choreographic action. Action in which all kinds of artistic forms find entry as parts and additions but are not viewed separately

as "works of art", for art is still a medium of direct action at the level of magic.'[75] Pollock's drip technique concentrated this process, as had Paalen's fumage technique, into a common denominator integrating both the act of painting and the act of visual comprehension, presenting the painterly medium (dark dripped paint and white canvas) and the final aim (expansion of the self into the anonymous, numinous other of the over-sized pictorial space) as a single act.

The natural consequence of forcing the viewer to direct his gaze to encompass endless linear superimpositions and circular movements is the dimensioning of the canvas to a format that puts the viewer in the position of a totem: the ego of the viewer opens up with each movement of visual comprehension, only to finally perceive *himself* as enormous space–identity dissolving in what seems the ultimate otherness: limitless but final space. There is only one nurturing mother that is more alien than our own, and that is the cosmos, said Melagros of Gadara in the second century B.C., and only one father who sired us all, and that is the universe. This process of expansion into the most alien of all things is the fundamental concern, extending even into painterly techniques, behind the beginnings of Abstract Expressionism. In fact, Pollock sometimes began his mature drip paintings 'with a loosely cartooned figure or animal, using familiar motions of rendering like an athlete doing warm-ups or a musician running scales; but he then built more free-form returns over this opening matrix as a way of dissolving the imagery.'[76]

Reduced to the format that Paalen tended to, such an orientation towards the theme of permanence would be a puristic abstraction that removes the image from the emotional judgment of the viewer because it represents a precisely circumscribed counterpart in the optical vantage point. The two exceptions are two large paintings, *Messagers des trois poles* and *Les cosmogones*, in which the forms themselves, however, do not go beyond human scale (ca. 180 cm). Paalen's allusion to a figure floating into real space, constituted by linear crisscrossing, thus remains a mediate component which Newman and Pollock dispense with by exceeding optically comprehensible size limits (within a certain explicitly demanded viewing distance): the appearance and disappearance of the figure is located solely in the act of seeing and thus becomes the appearance and disappearance of the self. Up close, in front of the image, I have the concrete experience of the undoing of my ego identity. In this situation it is unimportant which formal means trigger the experience of the appearance of the other in the viewer and cause it to vanish into infinity. The decisive point for Paalen's definition of this new aesthetic was the exclusion of both preconceived anthropomorphic elements and non-figurative puritanism: 'There is no life or death of any being, any individual landscape, constitution and dissolution of any particular situation, but rather the cycle of eternal appearing and disappearing.'[77]

Paalen exhibited the pictures he had been quietly painting since 1941 in February 1945 in Mexico City and two months later in New York at Peggy Guggenheim's. Many New York artists, including the Surrealists, were familiar with Paalen's Surrealist style, and some, including William Baziotes

and Jackson Pollock, had seen his first show at Julien Levy's in 1940.[78] They found his change in style sudden and surprising. 'I didn't sell much, but my show seems to have perplexed everyone, even the Surrealists,' he wrote to the Onslow Fords in June. 'André Breton stayed two hours looking at my pictures – but then he said to Alice that he couldn't say anything about them because of my latest positions.'[79] The critics were also surprised by the quality and concentration of these new works: 'Wolfgang Paalen is not just some new abstruse experimenter. The work, much of it, shows genuine originality,' said the *New York Times*.[80] What Breton found appealing in the pictures may have been the new basic structure that they exemplified and which tied in with his own quest for a textual implication of the reader. The temporally evolved spaces of *Cosmogones*, *Aerogyls*, *Gyras* and *Spaciales* resemble diagrams of a contrapuntal form of vision directed at the theme of otherness, the miraculous and the sudden appearance of the new and unfamiliar and incorporating otherness as its own unique potential. Profane time as the medium in which things move gave way to the momentary advent of a mythical time in which the origins of things cannot be ascertained. Here time was no longer measurable as an open-ended straightaway and hence made it possible to exceed the familiar identity of things. The dialogue of oscillating *autopoiesis* which was Paalen's prime concern, however, was in danger of being sacrificed to a new, rigidly fixed stylistic prescription in American art, one that would only be appreciated as a surface phenomenon.

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1 Wolfgang Paalen, *Notes biographiques*, unpublished manuscript, Onslow Ford Papers, Inverness

2 Wolfgang Paalen, *'Paysage totémique'* (III), *DYN* 3, 1942, p.27.

3 Edward Renouf to Martica Sawin, June 1987, cited in M. Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 253.

4 André Breton, Non plus le Diamant au Chapeau…, in : Catalogue exhibition Paalen, Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris 1938 (English in: London Bulletin No.10, February 1939, p.10-15)

5 3 '*Es ist ewig schade, dass keine exakten Forscher Gesichte haben*!' Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Vol 1, Hamburg 1978, p. 754.

6 Wolfgang Paalen, letter to Roland Penrose, Paris, March 21st, 1935

7 Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Vol.1, Hamburg 1988, p. 144.

8 Wolfgang Paalen, *Voyage Nord-Ouest*, II.1.v, Christian Kloyber Papers

9 Companie du Diable Ecarlate, directed by Sylvaine Itkine, with sets by Max Ernst.

10 André Breton and Xavier Fornêret, *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, Paris 1941, p. 151.

11 Gordon Onslow Ford, 'Paalen the Messenger', *Hommage à Wolfgang Paalen*, Museo de Arte Moderno, Exhibition Catalogue, Mexico City 1967, pp. 24f

12 Wolfgang Paalen, '*Farewell au surréalisme*', *DYN* 1, 1942, p. 26.

13 Robert Mattison, *Robert Motherwell: The Formative Years*, Ann Arbor 1986, pp. 25-43, and 'Between Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism: Wolfgang Paalen and "The New Image"', symposium paper, CAA Conference 'New World Surrealism: The Encounter with Europe', February 1992.

14 Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen, DYN und die Entstehung des Abstrakten Expressionismus*, Wolfgang Paalen, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Exhibition Catalogue, Vienna 1993, pp. 156f. and *Wolfgang Paalen, DYN and the American Avantgarde of the 1940s*, Ann Arbor 1995, pp. 500, 510f., 568, 579, 601.

15 Cf. Baudelaire on Poe: '[*Q*]*ui percoit (..) les rapports intimes et secrets des choses, les correspondances et analogies.*" Cited by Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk* (1927-40), Frankfurt am Main 1982, p. 363.

16 André Breton, *Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism*, New York 1942, p. 25.

17 Walter Benjamin, *op. cit*., p. 593.

18 Sören Kierkegaard, *Der Begriff Angst*, Hamburg 1984, p. 134.

19 Aristoteles, Poetics, chpt. 14.

20 Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Mythen, Träume und Mysterien*, Salzburg 1961, pp. 86f.; Eliade cites from the Chasidic works of Martin Buber.

21 Cf. Jacob Taubes, *op. cit*., pp. 146f., especially his remark that in Gnostic-Manichaean literature not only the saviour was referred to as a stranger but also the saved.

22 Herbert Read, 'Wolfgang Paalen', *Minotaure* No. 12-13, May 1939, p. 90.

23 Cf. Revelations 12, 3f.

24 Wilhelm Bauer, *Lexikon der Symbole*, Wiesbaden 1983, p. 297.

25 Atharva Veda Sanhita, cited after Santillana/Dechend, *Die Mühle des Hamlet*, Vienna and New York 1994, p. 208 note 7.

26 Wolfgang Paalen 'Surprise and Inspiration' and 'Totem Art', *DYN* 2 and 4-5, 1942/43.

27 Paalen is known to have spent longer periods in New York in 1944, 1945 and 1946 as the house guest of Robert Motherwell and Louise Nevelson. See Neufert, *op. cit*., pp. 200 ff.

28 Wolfgang Paalen, letter to André Breton, Long Island, May 1939.

29 *Ibid.*

30 The physicist Gerog Chrostoph Lichtenberg became famous also because of his notebooks, aphorisms, from which Paalen translated, illustrated and published a few in Minotaure.

31 Wolfgang Paalen, 2nd Notebook (*Miniatures I et notes pour histoire*), 1939, b

32 L. Abel, 'It Is Time to Pick the Iron Rose', *VVV*, No.1, June 1942, p. 2.

33 The Greek writer Nicolas Calas came to New York in 1940 and was the culture, youth and travel editor of the Surrealist magazine *VVV*. He was a close friend of André Breton's.

34 André Breton, letter to Wolfgang Paalen, New York July 31st, 1940.

35 André Breton, letter to Alice Rahon, New York February 23rd, 1945.

36 Wolfgang Paalen, *Voyage Nord-Ouest*, Canada 1939, note x.

37 cited from Werner Heisenberg, *Der Teil und das Ganze*, Munich 1969, p. 75

38 Wolfgang Paalen, 'Metaplastic', *DYNATON*, San Francisco Museum of Art 1951, Exhibition Catalogue, pp. 1-11; Paalen wrote the most important parts of this essay in 1941 and published the earlier text as '*La crise du sujet dans la peinture* m*oderne'* in *Revue IFAL*, No. 1, in Mexico City in 1945.

39 Letter to Jaqueline Johnson, Mexico, November 15th, 1944.

40 Winter 1995, p. 432; Motherwell's collage *Surprise and Inspiration* of 1943 from the Guggenheim Collection in Venice was published in *Form and Sense* along with Paalen's essay, and Peggy Guggenheim retained the title when she acquired the work. See H. H. Arnason, *Robert Motherwell*, New York 1982, p. 104.

41 Robert Motherwell, *The Collected Writings*, New York and Oxford 1992, p. 182; their collaboration is documented in an undated fragmentary letter of Paalen's in Motherwell's estate (Dedalus Foundation, New York) referring to various corrections in Paalen's book *Form and Sense*, which Motherwell published as the first in the *Problems of Contemporary Art* series.

42 André Breton, *Second Surrealist Manifesto* (1929), in: Guenther Metken, *Als die Surrealisten noch Recht hatten*, Stuttgart 1976, p. 36.

43 Wolfgang Paalen, *Theory of Dynaton*, in: Exhibition catalogue *Dynaton*, San Francisco Museum of Art 1951, p. 24.

44 Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in exile*, Cambridge Mass. 1995, p. 347.

45 Only a small part of the correspondence with Motherwell has survived in Motherwell's estate (Dedalus Foundation, New York), including an undated letter (1945) with emendations to *Form and Sense*; the fictional character of Carter Stone (introductory interview) is confirmed in that letter, as well as Paalen's original plan to call the book *Form Makes Sense*.

46 P. D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, New York (Alfred A. Knopf) 1938

47 Gordon Onslow Ford, cit. Sawin, p. 64

48 Wolfgang Paalen, *On the Meaning of Cubism Today*, DYN 6, Mexico 1944, p. 6.

49 Roberto Matta, cit. Sawin, p. 29.

50 Martica Sawin, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

51 Martica Sawin, *op.cit*, p. 301.

52 Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen, DYN and the American Avantgarde of the 1940s*, Ann Arbor 1995, pp. 579f.

53 Steven Naifeh, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, London 1990, p. 427.

54 Interview with Amy Winter, September 28th, 1990, Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen, DYN and the American Avantgarde of the 1940*s, Ann Arbor 1995, p. 500.

55 Wolfgang Paalen, *During the Eclipse*, DYN 6, Mexico 1944, p. 20.

56 Unpublished manuscript, Gordon Onslow Ford Archives, Inverness.

57 Wolfgang Paalen, '*Brief Outline of the Beam of the Balance'*, unpublished manuscript.

58 *I*bid.

59 James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, Chicago and London 1993, p. 378.

60 Luchita Hurtado confirmed the approximate date and circumstances of this private performance in a telephone conversation with me on June 18th, 1997. Friends of Motherwell's and the Paalens themselves read the various roles. Motherwell's wife at that time, Maria, was employed in the theatre. Paalen hoped for a production in New York.

61 James E. B. Breslin, op.cit., p. 378.

62 [illegible]

63 Mark Rothko, *Possibilities I*, 1947, pp. 84, 91.

64 Ann Gibson, cited by Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen, DYN and the American Avantgarde of the 1940s,* Ann Arbor 1995, pp. 611f.

65 Wolfgang Paalen, '*Seeing and Showing*', DYN 1, 1942, p. 27.

66 This offer was made by the director of the Academy over dinner in Rothko's apartment in New York, but Paalen expressed no interest. Letter to Jaqueline Johnson, New York, November 8th, 1948. Rothko, in a conversation with Clay Spohn, expressed disapproval of Paalen's refusal which, it seemed to him, was basically laziness (James E. B. Breslin, op.cit., p. 378).

67 See Andreas Neufert, '*Spuren des Kosmos an der Grenze westlicher Malerei', Gordon Onslow Ford: Bilder*, Exhibition Catalogue, Munich 1993, pp. 49f.

68 Steven Naifeh, op.cit., p. 537.

69 Wolfgang Paalen, *'On the Meaning of Cubism Today*', DYN 6, 1944, pp. 4-8.

70 Steven Naifeh, op.cit., p. 534.

71 'Once, when Matta was demonstrating the Surrealist technique (Paalen´s) Fumage, Jackson (Pollock) turned to Busa and said in a stage whisper: "I can do that without the smoke."' Steven Naifeh, op. cit., p. 427.

72 Steven Naifeh, op. cit., p. 535.

73 *Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle* of 1943 was also in the show. Paalen had published it in DYN 6, 1944, together with his Cubism essay, Pollock's first published picture.

74 Robert Mattison, op.cit., p. 225 note 25. Lee Krasner, Pollock's wife, confirmed this in a letter to Mattison of June 25th, 1979.

75 Wolfgang Paalen, '*Totem Art*', *DYN* 4-5, 1943, pp. 7f.

76 Kirk Varnedoe, 'Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work', Exhibition Catalogue *Pollock*, Tate Gallery 1999, p. 49.

77 Wolfgang Paalen, *Notes biographiques*, unpublished manuscript.

78 'I*n Mexico he (Motherwell) visited Wolfgang Paalen, whose show Baziotes and Jackson (Pollock) had seen at the Julien Levy Gallery the year before*.' Steven Naifeh, op. cit., p. 427.

79 Wolfgang Paalen, letter to Gordon Onslow Ford, Mexico 1945.

80 E. A. Jewell in the New York Times, April 22nd, 1945.