



fig.1 Oxford's First Anthropology Diploma class. Back row: Wilson Wallis, Diamond Jenness, Marius Barbeau. Front row: Henry Balfour, Arthur Thomson, R.R. Marett. (Photo: © Canadian Museum of Civilization, Marius Barbeau Collection, image J5337)

VITALISM IN CANADA'S ANTHROPOLOGY AND ART

Barbeau's Early Twentieth-Century Connection to Modernist Painters, Especially Emily Carr

The interrelation of totem poles and modern paintings displayed in close proximity made it clear that the inspiration for both kinds of art expression sprang from the same fundamental background.

Marius Barbeau, 1932¹

Some of Canada's early twentieth-century museum-based anthropologists promoted vitalist notions in their new social science discipline, attempting to "humanize" the rigours of working within an emerging field modeled on the natural sciences. In the case of Marius Barbeau (1883–1969), vitalism seems to have significantly facilitated his collaborations with various Canadian modernist artists.² Not only did Barbeau understand and valorize their work in vitalist terms, but the artists themselves seem to have been in accord, to some extent, with a variety of vitalist concepts about matter, memory and re-presentation. Jennifer Hecht has described how vitalism resurged strongly in late nineteenth-century France in reaction against scientific explanations of life, when many people decided that:

the phenomena of life and consciousness are not explicable through physics, chemistry, and biology: something sort of spiritual is going on. Vitalism instead posits the idea that some natural force is responsible for all life and suggests that we speculate about its nature from the facts at hand. All living things tend to be understood by vitalists as meaningfully united in this force, so our individual solitude in this life is either a mistaken impression or a temporary exile from our place within the universal life force.³

In particular, vitalism lauded human labour and artists' processes of "creation" as the means to connect with this force and effectively invest matter with consciousness and intention, often referred to as "souls." In Britain and Europe, these ideas were expressed by philosophers, social scientists, and art theorists, and were quickly transmitted to Canadians. It is this cultural trend that concerns me here.

To explore the inter-disciplinary confluence that emerged from this shared early twentieth-century proclivity towards aesthetic vitalism in anthropology and fine arts, I examine Marius Barbeau's education at Oxford and

Paris, and his ensuing collaborations with Canadian visual artists. Although I focus on his professional ties with A.Y. Jackson, Edwin Holgate, Arthur Lismer, and Emily Carr, he worked with many more visual artists. I suggest that their relationship was predicated on shared education patterns and practices that fostered compatible ontological assumptions about culture, nationhood, history, “nature” and art. I present these intertwined biographies, therefore, to illustrate an epochal moment during which vitalism gained cultural currency in both museum anthropology and modernist art in Canada, drawing the two disciplines together. This is not to say that Barbeau’s painter associates were particularly, or avowedly vitalist, but to underline that they participated in vitalism as a prevalent reaction to nineteenth century scientific evolutionism that forged a vitalist, yet still evolutionist, *zeitgeist* at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A self-described “pioneer collector,” Barbeau strove to “salvage” indigenous cultures by directing their “artifacts” toward ethnological and art museums in Canada, Europe, Britain, and the United States. From Quebec’s rural farms and villages he acquired handcrafted fabrics, furniture and agricultural tools and deposited them in urban collections. Barbeau however intended his repositories as more than a conservation program: he aimed to inspire artists who could re-inject the “soul” of indigenous and folk cultures into an accumulative, if not inclusive, modern Canadian art history. Thus he deliberately worked to manipulate collective memory through his intense concern for what now seems to have been a proto-multicultural art and aesthetics. Museum anthropology, he suggested, could provide an aesthetic wellspring for Canada’s “new world” art movements and everyday life. By working from indigenous and ethnic art forms Barbeau predicted that Canada’s modern artists could produce works of uniquely Canadian character. This in turn would attract international recognition for a culturally distinct and independent Canadian nation-state. In popular and professional publications, he predicated this vision on certain vitalist notions about the lingering presence of history in indigenous and folk material cultures, and on equally vitalist expectations that artists could intuitively revivify and materialize such fading cultural memories through their artworks.

It was at Oxford and Paris (1907-1910) that Barbeau learned to focus on the past, a location for meaning that he would maintain throughout his long career at Canada’s National Museum (1911-1949) and into his active retirement (1949-1969). Therefore, he did not publish his fieldwork results as functionalist ethnographies that aimed to provide snapshot views of cultural communities. Thus, he was not a mid-twentieth century cultural anthropologist of the kind recently decried by James Clifford or Johannes Fabian for writing about cultural communities as if they existed in a never-ending “ethnographic present” (i.e. the moment when the ethnographer actually visited the society he or she described).⁴ In fact, Barbeau’s texts yield little sense of the lived realities he

encountered during his numerous field trips. Instead, he wrote profuse and speculative treatises on the ethnographic “origins” or “diffusions” of social technologies, mythologies, folk tales and material cultures. In the grand workings of time, bodies, practices and materials flowed between various points on the globe, ever surging towards the present moment of layered cultural deposits. Barbeau’s perspective on socio-cultural communities trafficked in and against time, in conformity with vitalist preoccupations.

For Barbeau, all cultural communities within Canada’s borders derived from immigrants, whether they were “Indians” who had wandered from Asia across the Alaska panhandle long ago,⁵ or those who later arrived from Europe and Great Britain.⁶ Rather than passively accepting these accumulated cultural layers or arbitrating political justice between specific “waves” of immigration, Barbeau sought to collect and preserve traces from them all. He felt that a grand compendium of culturally diverse histories would provide greater resources for modernist art to express the country’s unique composite character. Indeed, he believed this process would bring immortality for “dying” cultures within a historically charged and vibrant modern nation. This was the cultural material upon which Canada’s modernist artists were supposed to establish their unique position within a cosmopolitan art scene.

Barbeau’s key trans-historical manoeuvre, then, was to connect modernist art-making processes to ethnological collections and ethnographic field sites. This he justified through ideas compatible with Henri Bergson’s vitalist philosophy and with the earlier vitalism of Britain’s Arts and Crafts Movement. He also drew inspiration from the lectures of his Oxford professor at the Unitarian college, “rev. Carpenter,” who lectured on comparative religion, promoting a universalist and liberal view of “spiritual” and ontological diversity across cultures and historical eras which was compatible with Barbeau’s vitalism.⁷ How were artists supposed to assume this extraordinary proto-multicultural nation-building burden, and why did Barbeau judge his own ethnographic methods insufficient for the task?

“Race” and Material Culture from Oxford to Ottawa

To understand Barbeau’s work, one must revisit the philosophical underpinnings of anthropology at Oxford where he was initiated into the nascent discipline and graduated (1910) from Oxford’s first cohort of anthropology students (fig.1). That cohort was not trained by professional anthropologists because there were none at the University.⁸ It is also important to consider that the nineteenth-century quest to secularize matter and the material world infused the emergence of anthropology and the development of museums. Charles Darwin’s natural history and Charles Lyell’s stratigraphy explored creation in nonbiblical terms, and Herbert Spencer described human societies as organic

life forms whose growth suggested social powers inherent to the material world. Meanwhile many British scholars saw the industrial revolution as proof that mankind “progressed” by means of technology in an ever-improving ability to manipulate matter. Oxford’s pioneering social anthropologist, Sir Edward Tylor (1832-1917), even declared that religion was “part and parcel of the history of nature” and that, “our thoughts, wills, and actions accord with laws as definite as those which govern the motion of the waves, the combination of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals.”⁹ Fittingly, Tylor lectured from Oxford’s Pitt-Rivers Museum where the museum’s evolutionist array of ethnological specimens backed his argument that artifacts embodied human history and recorded the march towards civilization. Larger public museums and world fairs also presented a similar object lesson. Such combined emphasis on evolution, history and material culture was still very much in force when Marius Barbeau ventured from Quebec City to Oxford in 1907. He absorbed it as his own working premise and it remained at the core of his work at Canada’s National Museum.

Barbeau’s later innovative collaborations with modernist artists celebrated materiality as a reservoir of memories and thus as a vehicle for the exploration and shaping of human history. He apparently assumed that his Canadian job as government ethnologist was to promote appreciation for collective memories, and he saw this as a matter of reflecting on cultural history processes as part of broader natural contexts. In this he was somewhat like Tylor, who had assumed that human religion was part of the rhythms of “Nature.”

Barbeau’s Oxford tutor was a classics philosopher, Robert Ranulph Marett (1866-1943) (fig.1). He co-founded Oxford’s new anthropology diploma program in which physical anthropology was a required course and he saw anthropology as a Darwin-inspired enterprise closely tied to the study of “race.” Not only did Marett accept that humanity was divided into “races,” he insisted that somatic categorization “extends to mind as well as to body.” Form matched content: “Contrast the stoical Red Indian with the vivacious Negro; or the phlegmatic Dutchman with the passionate Italian...surely the race-factor counts for something in the mental constitution.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Marett’s own work on prehistoric cave art was a foray into the origins of art, which he believed must be tied to the artists’ somatic qualities. When he noted that Europe’s prehistoric art resembled that of living “savages,” he promptly assumed their bodies must be similar too. For Marett, “race” categorized social groups, psychological profiles, bodies and artifacts interchangeably.

If, like Wilson Wallis in his Oxford co-hort (fig.1), Barbeau read Edward Carpenter’s books on evolution, then Barbeau also acquired a related but slightly different vitalist understanding about how bodies and artifacts were connected.¹¹

Carpenter made it clear that memories could become sources of creativity: “memories, the accumulated experiences, habits, the whole thought-concatenation which has built them up, is there – only waiting to be brought again into consciousness.”¹² That process of consciousness allows one to go way back to the “primal being...which underlies all thoughts.... When we reach to it we reach the source of all Power.”¹³ Rather than seeing our bodies as material legacies, he advocated them as “mental legacies” so that our bodies became “our own race-mind made visible.”¹⁴ This invokes a strongly creationist position beyond standard evolutionist thought. It would however, help to further contextualize Barbeau’s preoccupation with the “racial” bodies of artists and craftspeople and his sense that art was a crucial indicator of “vitality,” personal and collective.

What is more, Carpenter’s philosophy would provide a framework for understanding Barbeau’s later persistent concern with locating “vitality” in Canadian art. We can see this concern, for example, when Barbeau gave a public talk in the late 1920s on the *West Coast Art: Native and Modern* exhibition: “These manifestations of Canadian art, both ancient and modern are of vital significance. ...they will pass on to posterity. Thanks to them, and to others of like quality we may no longer fear that death will wholly obliterate our generation. Something of our times will survive.... There is little danger that culture, once become a vital part of ourselves, will cease to exist” (underlined in the original).¹⁵

Like his friend William Morris, Carpenter saw workmen and artists conjoined through manual labour, and regarded their work as an investment in the material world that carried the personal stamp of craftsmen. As Morris had asserted, goods on sale were really “the lives of men,” industrialized or not; while machine-made goods were without “soul,” handcrafted objects were an enduring tribute to the skill and soul of their makers. Thus all works of art would become “venerable amidst decay” because “from the first there was a soul in them, the thought of man, which will be visible in them so long as the body exists in which they were implanted.”¹⁶ Carpenter, however, described such work as belonging to the creative process of evolution itself: “feelings in Man clothe themselves in mental images which he, by throwing his vitality more and more into them, can make practically real to himself; and which by roundabout processes like writing books or setting workmen to build houses he can in time body forth and make real to other folk.”¹⁷ Thus, workers and artists alike could generate new forms by passing them “outward from the subtle and invisible into the concrete and tangible.”¹⁸ This melding of Arts and Crafts ideas to more explicitly vitalist and evolutionist philosophies would have helped Barbeau upon his return to Canada when he encountered various notions about the ontological position and cultural significance of diverse material cultures and art making, and strove to reconcile them through collaborations with modernist visual artists.

Barbeau's Return to Canada

When Barbeau came back to Canada, he was distressed to find he could not readily identify "pure blood" indigenous artists as R.R. Marett had led him to expect. At Oxford, Barbeau had learned to assume that cultural knowledge and technical abilities adhered to "races." At home, he was frustrated when his attempts to pursue the pre-historic origins of Canadian art were thwarted by "half-breeds" and his fieldwork conditions in Canada proved more complicated than Marett's prehistoric research in European caves. This disjuncture between "race" and art production led Barbeau to decry conventional anthropological fieldwork methods: "the ethnologist is a fool who so far deceives himself as to believe that his field notes and specimens, gathered in the raw from half-breeds or decrepit survivors of a past age, still represent the unadulterated knowledge or crafts of the prehistoric races of America. When they do, it is only in part."¹⁹

Barbeau found Quebec folklore studies more rewarding and pronounced that a "century after the fall of Quebec, the colony remained as French as the first day, not in political allegiance, but in the spirit and the blood."²⁰ He believed that this corporeal and spiritual purity of French Quebec had preserved their folk songs and pre-industrial craftsmanship and allowed him to trace their artistic practices back to the French Renaissance. Nonetheless, by the early twentieth century industrialization had changed Quebec's rural life and Barbeau lamented that it had "withered up under the dust of automobiles" and that "folk singers are dying out."²¹ One way or another, racial purity and its (supposedly) direct link to technological processes was disrupted by modern conditions in Canada. Thus Barbeau discovered that "race" set difficult criteria for studying art production across time and space. His copious wax cylinder recordings and his extensive photographic records were approved scientific methods for capturing "races" and their traditional technologies before they disappeared. But these mechanical instruments could not reconnect with or resurrect what Barbeau sought: the lingering inner vitality of cultural lives past.²²

Paradoxically perhaps, a solution to these historical and methodological problems was provided by Barbeau's Oxford anatomy professor, J.A. Thomson as well as by Marett. Arguably, of course, Barbeau's very "problem" was formulated in response to their teaching. Thomson coauthored with Patrick Geddes, the book *Evolution* (1911) which cribbed heavily from Henri Bergson's musings on evolution in *Matière et mémoire* (1896) and *L'Évolution créatrice* (1907). Inspired by Bergson's vision of evolution as a continuous and creative unfolding of life itself, they adopted his ideas of "la durée" and "l'élan originel" to proclaim that human bodies were superior to machines because they contained "an immaterial autonomous factor, or 'entelechy' which is the living creature's innermost secret, in fact its directive soul."²³ Barbeau's tutor, Marett, corroborated this position in his own later work, *Psychology and Folk-lore* (1920):

Human history is no Madame Tussaud's show of decorated dummies. It is instinct with purposive movement through and through; and so must be represented by folk-lore, kinematographically as it were. Now it is the special business of psychology to emphasize the dynamic side of life, or in other words the active conditions that enable us to suck strength and increase out of the passive conditions comprised under the term environment. It is because we have experience in our inmost being of what M. Bergson would term 'real duration,' that the notion of development becomes possible for us at all.²⁴

For Marett, this implied that anthropologists should turn to psychology because it was "superior to sociology, for the reason that as the study of the soul it brings us more closely into touch with the nature of reality than does the study of the social body."²⁵ Wielding a very Bergsonian condemnation of social "science," he suggested that folklore's historical approach recognizes that cultural phenomena "may at the same time be inwardly apprehended as a phase of mind."²⁶ Here we see Bergson's preference for intuition over intellectual analysis as a method for studying humans and their material worlds, both of which creatively unfold through time. To understand them is to intuitively seize their inner workings, or "soul," within the processes of evolution. Thus evolutionist perspectives were connected to the anthropology of religion by a slightly different means than in Edward Tylor's earlier broad assumption that human religion occurred within the larger process of evolution in the natural world. Furthermore, Marett expressly declared that a Bergsonian approach would be beneficial to "the anthropology of savages."²⁷ This echoed his earlier admonishment to students that pre-historic humans took pride in their artistry and that unless one could sense their aesthetic pleasure and "learn to sympathize, you are no anthropologist."²⁸ Good anthropologists were open to "intuitive" appreciation for artistic processes, from any point in the evolutionary scale. As for artists, including prehistoric or "savage" ones, they left significant traces, marks of memory, available to the attentive modern gaze.

It seems that Marius Barbeau decided that his early museum work was limited by adhering to methods that Marett called "abstract" and Bergson termed "intellectual," meaning a process of breaking down objects of study into little pieces and then reassembling them, but without probing the more profound understandings afforded by intuition and its direct access to "souls" and to Bergson's *durée*. Only this latter means of working, believed to be typical of artists, could transcend the disruptions of recent historical moments and changes, to reach for truer, deeper understandings of how life forms unfolded across time and space. Barbeau continued to take photographs and to record songs and stories, but expected these methods to capture only the current superficialities of cultural phenomena, not to "recreate things" from the



fig.2 Langdon Kihn, *Tsyebasa or Grouse with Closed Eyes* (Stephen Morgan), 1924, drawing, photographed by Marius Barbeau, c.1924. (Photo: © Canadian Museum of Civilization, image 63002)

inside.²⁹ In the early 1920s he significantly shifted towards collaborating with modern artists in what appears to have been an effort to recapture the vitalist benefits of intuitive insight for his ethnology and public anthropology practice.

This change occurs markedly in Barbeau's work after the 1920 publication of Marett's *Psychology and Folk-Lore*, which cites Bergson's work as an inspiration for folklorists. It was also at this point that the Canadian Pacific Railway provided Barbeau with his first opportunity to collaborate with a modern artist. It commissioned him to write a book on Plains Indians in hopes that regional ethnographic "colour" would lure tourists onto CPR tracks through western Canada. Barbeau's *Indian days in the Canadian Rockies* was published in 1923 with illustrations by the American artist, Langdon Kihn (1898-1957),³⁰ who had already done many Indian portraits in his travels across the United States. An amateur anthropologist, he worked enthusiastically with Barbeau and they remained friends and collaborators for many years (fig.2). Kihn's paintings so impressed Barbeau that he promoted their sale to prominent Canadian collectors and convinced the anthropologist Edward Sapir, his division director at the National Museum, to request funds for purchasing Kihn's original works.

Sapir, in turn, justified the acquisition by claiming that the paintings would “beautify our exhibits” and give them “a touch of life.”³¹

Barbeau shared these revitalizing hopes for the museum and harboured even grander plans. In popular and scholarly articles Barbeau declared of Kihn: “Though an outsider himself [i.e., an American citizen], he has contributed to open up a new field, so far neglected, and thus to enrich national consciousness.”³² If contemporary native and folk arts were “dying out,” they could be resuscitated through incorporation into the work of modern artists. This assertion went beyond the nineteenth-century German practice of commissioning artists to make visual records of national monuments, “rendering memory into a two-dimensional copy.”³³ Although similar in its insistence on “the necessity of collective awareness of historical consciousness” and in its moral imperative to collect and preserve history,³⁴ Barbeau attributed artists with a peculiar ability to link contemporary moments to those in the past. Above all, he expected artists to connect contemporary cultural communities through intuitive aesthetic visions of culturally purer pasts, which were then supposed to become contemporary perceptions. As Bergson had put it, “Our past...is that which acts no longer but which might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation of which it borrows the vitality. It is true that, from the moment when the recollection actualizes itself in this manner, it ceases to be a recollection and becomes once more a perception.”³⁵ Intuitive artistry was key to developing a new, national consciousness and even contemporary perceptions. It was a question of recognizing and working within the creative process of social evolution. This was, however, to be a cross-cultural consciousness as it would join the historical layers of cultural groups that had migrated to Canada.

For Marett and Barbeau, it was also a means to transcend boundaries between “races.” Barbeau assumed that “races” were material products of time and that evolution was a process through which specific physiognomies and material cultures emerged as conjoined cultural artefacts of shared significance. Artistic intuition, however, gained access to the inner *durée* or *élan originel*, or so Barbeau’s Oxford professors J.A. Thomson and R.R. Marett had led him to expect. Barbeau undoubtedly saw “races” as products of time and accepted Bergson’s critique that atemporal, scientific ways of knowing were incomplete without the benefits of intuitive processes. Whereas intuition was a sufficient method on its own, intellectual analysis lacked the benefit of intuitive insight. As Bergson stated, “The flux of time is the reality itself, and the things which we study are the things which flow. It is true that of this flowing reality we are limited to taking instantaneous views. But, just because of this, scientific knowledge must appeal to another knowledge to complete it.”³⁶ Art production thereby completed the relatively superficial and repetitive scientific study that Bergson regarded as quantitative rather than qualitative; as mechanistic rather

than connected to the ever-evolving changes or flow of nature through time. For Barbeau, this was a departure from other aspects of his work, which he proudly considered “scientific;” however he apparently collaborated with modern artists so they could complete intuitively what he himself could only more superficially approach through scientific methods.

The hidden logic that ties all time together was accessible to artists who approached their subject with empathy and intuition. As Bergson had asserted: “The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it. This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model.”³⁷ Similarly, Barbeau expected his artist collaborators to transcend temporal barriers in Canada that he saw as populated by different “races.” Artists could enter the profoundly temporal physiognomies of their indigenous sitters, retracing their evolution through time, whereas Barbeau himself could only capture their bodies and material culture in their most recent manifestations, a stage that he considered to be one of decline.

Barbeau never entirely accepted Franz Boas’ argument that culture must be separated from human body types, despite enjoying a long and fruitful collegial association with the founder of twentieth-century American anthropology.³⁸ Boas clearly regarded these distinctions as a necessary means to avoid social inequities and unjust assumptions about racial character and intelligence. Barbeau, however, might have seen Boas’ argument as Bergsonian acts of scientific analysis that broke into pieces whatever they examine without comprehending the more significant inner temporal whole. Unfortunately Barbeau was not given to theoretical pronouncements or debates with the Boasians on this score. This avoidance is highly Bergsonian: “Art, we are told [by Bergson], should be the product of genius, of ‘intuitions,’ not theorizing.”³⁹ In any case, Barbeau seems to have been convinced that “race” and its impurities (e.g. “mixed-bloods”) could be somehow transcended through “intuition” and artistry.

He was so pleased with Langdon Kihn’s work for *Indian Days in the Canadian Rockies* that he encouraged Canadian artists to do portraits at his Tshimshian fieldwork sites. Again Barbeau found the outcome satisfying. Although the indigenous populations had “changed as radically as have their surroundings,” he reported, artists could “penetrate under the surface” and with “ample imagination” they could attain “a clear, individual reading of human souls even at a time when they seem about to fade away from this materialistic world.”⁴⁰ From promoting Kihn’s work, he went on to encouraging the portraiture of Canadian artist Edwin Holgate, as well as numerous totem pole and village studies by A.Y. Jackson (fig.3) and others. These painters apparently



fig.3 A.Y. Jackson, **Kispayaks Village**, 1927, oil on canvas, 64 x 82 cm.
Shown in the *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* exhibition.
Courtesy of the Estate of the late Dr. Naomi Jackson Groves. (Photo: ©
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, #19844.049.001)

accepted Barbeau's appreciation of their work and appear to have found his cultural revitalization goals credible, as they continued to collaborate with the ethnologist on various projects.

Landscape as Collective Memory

Barbeau worked closely with several members of Canada's expressly nationalist landscape painters, the Group of Seven. He also promoted the career and renown of Emily Carr and introduced her to the eastern Group. These painters had knowledge of art movements from Europe; several were British trained while others had studied in Paris when Bergson's lectures were in vogue.

The Group of Seven does not appear to have been directly influenced by Bergson's ideas as far as I am aware, even if his thinking was widely accepted throughout France and in England, where several of them had studied. Barbeau himself became familiar with European trends through a number of experiences ranging from passing under Guimard's Art Nouveau icons at the entrances to

the Paris Metro, avid gallery visiting during his student days and his holidays in Germany and Italy, to visiting art colonies in Brittany where he possibly took some painting instruction during one of his Oxford term breaks.⁴¹ It was from his studies at Oxford and Paris, however, he learnt most about the significance of peripheral folkloric areas to the origins of modern society, and gained the expectation that contemporary artists could somehow recuperate those origins. These academic lessons were reinforced by his visits to Brittany where Paul Gauguin had established the treatment of local French folklore as “primitive,” a painting trend that continued well into the twentieth century. Barbeau would later accompany Group of Seven members and associated artists in Canada to his own folklore and ethnographic fieldwork sites in Canada, and provide them with advice for their independent travels to these places. Exhilarated, Barbeau reported their results in British Columbia: “Scenery, totem poles, native graveyards and Indian physiognomies all went down upon canvas or into plastic clay at a terrific pace.... When the time came for the visitors to depart, they buckled up their fat portfolios with a light heart. Their search for truth and beauty had not been idle. They carried off with them new riches that had become their own.”⁴² Much as Bergson had described painters as being changed by their work as their continuous process of creating in turn constantly recreates them themselves,⁴³ Barbeau thought these artists had somehow become connected to the local history of life in this remote area of northwestern Canada. This was the sort of result that he expected from Group of Seven artists who, he wrote, “had continued the ‘invasion’ of the Northwest, among them J.E.H. MacDonald and Lawren Harris, of the Group of Seven;”⁴⁴ and “Arthur Lismer, of the Group of Seven, [who] went to the neighbourhood of Banff.”⁴⁵

It was Emily Carr, who visited his fieldwork areas independently and whom Barbeau considered the “most interesting find then made...she set her heart upon expressing her surroundings in paint, after she had come back from the art schools abroad. While the spell was on her, from 1910 to 1912, she filled her studio with hundreds of sketches and canvases illustrative of Indian life and art and wild landscape.”⁴⁶ In vitalist terms, the new nation-state was reconfigured across time and region; its artistic canon diversified, yet consolidated, through landscape painting. Furthermore, these modern artists’ work could provide the means for others to recognize such remote locals of “truth and beauty.” Vitalism promoted the idea that bodily gestures involved in art-making processes could somehow be psychically mirrored by those who later viewed the artworks, thus prompting the public to appreciate the evidence of “vitality” before them, and to transcend time and space in the wake of the artists’ earlier intuitive labour.⁴⁷ In such circumstances, revealing “truth and beauty” *was* contingent on the artists’ ability to connect intuitively to the historical depth of human life in various parts of the country. Barbeau thought that such interconnection assured

aboriginal and folk peoples a lasting presence in Canada's new history of art and it promised the new settler-state a distinct presence on the world scene. Barbeau expected this could be achieved by linking "primitive" and "folk" histories to modernist "fine" arts through a vast array of local landscape images.

This vision was, of course, predicated on the assumption that native material cultures were in some way broken, discontinued and therefore had to be taken up by modern painters. Here Barbeau reportedly blamed not only the racial impurity of indigenous artists, but also their fading faith in their own material cultures in the face of European missionaries who forced native groups to abandon indigenous rituals. According to a West Coast newspaper, he declared, "Creative art among the British Columbia Indians has largely passed out, as they have abandoned paganism and adopted Christianity. Carving of marvelous totem poles, as insignia of tribal power and social rank, rose to its height...and today the art is dead.... They do not believe in traditions any longer...they do not, indeed, believe in themselves."⁴⁸ Barbeau expressed alarm that some people had destroyed their own totem poles and concluded that the "art now belongs to the past."⁴⁹ By painting such poles in situ, however, A.Y. Jackson and Edwin Holgate were charged with immortalizing the poles' profound temporal connection to their local landscapes, even while reconfiguring them as part of an evolving political configuration. In this way, Barbeau orchestrated the revitalization of his own artifact collections by encouraging modern artists to link indigenous peoples and their material cultures to the latest evolutionary, i.e., contemporary creative, moment. The result he hoped would assure an enduring public recognition and appreciation for his ethnological collections.

In Barbeau's nation-building aesthetic, the land became a repository of all its inhabitants' lives, past and present, a composite unconscious and source of artistic inspiration for a proto-multi-cultural collective memory. For this, he seems to have drawn upon Bergson, but also upon Lyell's stratigraphy, Freud's "unconscious," and possibly even to some extent, Durkheim's collective "representations," as well as more recent theories of cultural diffusion.⁵⁰

This naturalist ferment was also evident in Barbeau's enthusiasm for the paintings by A.Y. Jackson and Arthur Lismer after the summer spent with him on the Île d'Orléans in 1925. While Barbeau recorded the architectural history and contents of churches on the island and gathered folkloric materials from its inhabitants, his artist friends sketched the island's farm life, people, tools and animals. Their later studio paintings, however, mostly described depopulated landscapes. Apparently, the images were intended to subsume all the human activity the painters had witnessed and sketched, as if the landscape itself could invoke cultural histories. Such interpretations were perfectly satisfactory to Barbeau, despite his own "scientific" care to collect and record the very



fig.4 Installation photograph of *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern*, 1927. Emily Carr's hooked rug with a killer whale design at the left, was purchased by Barbeau and subsequently sold to the National Museum (now Canadian Museum of Civilization). (Photo: National Gallery of Canada)

lives erased from the landscape canvases. For him, artists' renderings of the land apparently embodied all human activity,

Barbeau curated a number of exhibitions for art galleries, museums and world expositions, such as the Canada building at the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris, where he routinely hung modern landscape paintings as "backgrounds," grand geographical and historical summaries to legitimate his foregrounded displays of indigenous and folk material cultures. Such juxtapositions of modernist paintings and ethnographic artifacts evoked rather Bergsonian moments when past memories become transformed into current perceptions. Junctures of past and present were expected to revitalize the present and so reshape the future. As A.Y. Jackson put it, "Barbeau has the happy faculty of creating enthusiasm and of bringing to our attention the fact that our past is not as meager as it seems."⁵¹ Barbeau's most renowned exhibition of this sort took place in December 1927 when he collaborated with Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery of Canada, to mount the show *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* (fig.4). It traveled from Ottawa to Toronto and Montreal, and included work by those artists who had accompanied him to his fieldwork in northern British Columbia, as well as work by Emily Carr and others. In his notes for the catalogue, Barbeau recognized indigenous artifacts as "art" and connected them to territory: "A commendable feature of this aboriginal art for us is that it is truly Canadian in its inspiration. It has sprung up wholly from the soil and the sea within our national boundaries."⁵² He also stipulated that the land was literally common ground for all artists who live, or have lived, upon it and that, "The interrelation of totem poles and modern paintings displayed in close proximity made it clear that the inspiration for both kinds of art expression sprang from the same fundamental background."⁵³ This was not a separate process, but an integrated and ever-evolving one by which "the moderns responded to the same exotic themes" and one "enhanced the beauty of the other and made it more significant."⁵⁴ Furthermore, by including work by landscape painters from both eastern and western Canada along with the native art, "the East and West have joined hands in a common appreciation of one of [North] America's most inspiring pictorial backgrounds – the Rockies and the Northwest coast." This was a clear allusion to Carr as she was the sole West Coast artist to provide such "pictorial backgrounds" as the other West Coast artists had all provided artifacts or "naïve painting" that were foregrounded in the show. The country's unity was promoted through the aesthetic interpretation and appreciation of its one complexly cultural and historical body of land.

The 1927 show, in which modernist painted "backgrounds" were grouped together with West Coast indigenous artifacts - and Carr's handcrafted objects emblazoned with West Coast designs - was installed by Edwin Holgate. In late

October of that year, Barbeau had written to Holgate, "It seems agreed that Mr. Brown should request you to come here for about a week before the exhibition, so that we may have your help in connection with the artistic display of both pictures and Indian specimens."⁵⁵ When the show moved on to Toronto, Holgate was again asked to help with its installation.⁵⁶ Although Holgate did not write about hanging this show, his contemporaries clearly believed he grasped the exhibitions' significance and could successfully convey its meaning to visitors.

This ability was not entirely contingent on Holgate's French training, or direct Bergsonian influences, but could suggest that he was aware of the installation format at the Barnes Foundation of Merion, Pennsylvania where folk arts and African sculptures from the permanent collection were grouped around (predominantly) French modernist paintings. Barnes purchased most of the collection in Paris, and was heavily influenced by both Henri Bergson and Paul Guillaume (a Parisian who promoted African art appreciation as a means to remain in touch with Europeans' supposedly earlier selves). "In thought," Barnes believed, "we have progressed from the metaphysics of Hegel and Kant to the creative evolution of Bergson and the pragmatism of Dewey; in plastic art, we have gone beyond Monet and Rodin to Matisse and Lipchitz...."⁵⁷ Barnes brought modernist paintings and African sculptures back to the United States to edify its citizens, particularly Blacks, about the importance of and interrelations among all these art forms. We could assume that Holgate was probably aware of the Barnes display of its permanent collection by 1927, because the previous year Arthur Lismer wrote to the Barnes that he approved of their publications on art education (upon which its hanging style was predicated) and promised to tell his friends about them.⁵⁸ Furthermore, a Group of Seven exhibition in Philadelphia the year before the 1927 Ottawa show, might have provided an opportunity for those involved with the West Coast exhibitions to become familiar with the newly opened Barnes Foundation. In any case, Carr informs us that Lismer was also with Holgate while the *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* show was hung in Ottawa.⁵⁹

Barbeau predicted that Canada's diverse cultural communities would provide the new settler state with a "soul" that was "multiple"⁶⁰ and forever embodied in the landscape. His steadfastly evolutionist perspective allowed him to look to the future and proclaim, "the thousand voices of prehistoric men in the forests, along the rivers, on the mountains, in the tundras of the great north and on the edges of glacial arctic seas, will never cease to confer on all of Canada distinctive traits that come from its own habitat."⁶¹ Canada's expansive landscape was a memory bank that assured its national character, whatever geopolitical entity might be formed there in the future. Barbeau, like Bergson and other evolutionists such as Freud, was convinced that "character" accrued from the past. What was

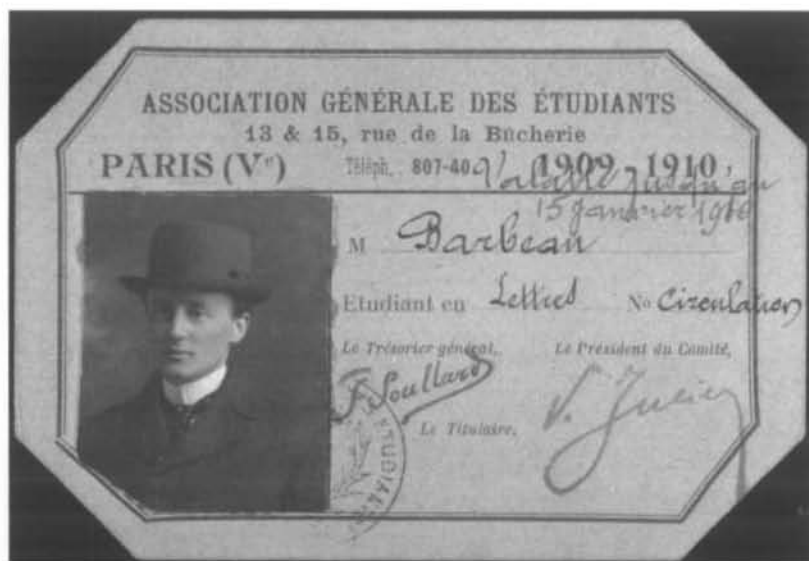


fig.5 Marius Barbeau's Paris Student Card, 1909. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hélène Rioux [née Barbeau] Collection. (Photo: © Canadian Museum of Civilization, image 86-1198)

past, however, was recorded in the world.⁶² Memories were psychic and material. From Barbeau's evolutionist viewpoint, this was not a "spiritual" conviction but a reasonable scientific understanding about how cultures accumulated through time; and he did not, for example, share Lawren Harris' theosophical convictions. As Sanford Schwartz has explained, "it was possible for modern intellectuals to reaffirm the reality of the human spirit without ignoring the major achievements of natural science."⁶³

Bergson and Parisian Artists

Some of Barbeau's Canadian artist collaborators trained in Paris; a few were even studying there while Barbeau himself attended courses at the École d'Anthropologie, École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section des Sciences Religieuses) and the École du Louvre (1907-1910) (fig.5). A.Y. Jackson, for example, was at the Académie Julian in 1907, Emily Carr lived in France from 1910 to 1911, while Edwin Holgate studied and painted in France in 1913. In general, Canadian painters trained at rather conservative French art schools and had relatively little contact with the avant-garde.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, their travels

and occasional participation in various Paris salons drew their attention to new ideas about painting. This included the vogue of painting in exotic settings, in some ways a continuation of earlier orientalism, and also a prolongation of the focus on organic forms from art nouveau and the Arts and Crafts Movement, which had complemented the nineteenth century's evolutionist focus on nature.

Many artists working in France at that time adjusted their work in accord with Bergson's admiration for (what he saw as) artists' ability to participate directly in the evolutionary process. He advanced this idea in his fashionable lectures at the Collège de France, unusually popular events in the first decade of the twentieth century when several Canadian painters were in France. Attendees were not just philosophy students, but Parisian intellectuals of all disciplines, as well as artists, political activists and social celebrities. As a result his lectures precipitated much press coverage.⁶⁵ Bergson's lectures contributed directly to social movements as well as to academic theory and had an important effect on artists.

A significant number of painters working in France at the beginning of the twentieth century exploited Bergson's vitalist philosophy as a means to reject naturalist and realist tendencies of the past. Certainly his philosophy directly influenced Cubist and Fauvist art movements through such artists as Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Henri Le Fauconnier, Henri Matisse, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, J.D. Fergusson, and Anne Estelle Rice among others.⁶⁶ His vitalism promoted the idea that painting was about depicting how things "felt," not just how they looked. Artistic "intuition" became key, while form and colour became re-coded as indices of psychic Bergsonian connections between artists and their subject matter. Heightened colour conveyed Bergson's idea that colour keys directly conveyed vibrations and changes in life itself.⁶⁷ Mark Antliff estimates that the "attack on Impressionism in the name of Bergsonian *durée* was common currency among the Parisian avant-garde by 1909."⁶⁸ In contrast to his exaltation of painting, Bergson criticized photography as a mechanical process limited to superficial representations, a conviction later echoed by painter Emily Carr⁶⁹ and Marius Barbeau.⁷⁰ Avant-garde painters concurred with Bergson that a "'first kind of order is that of the vital or of the willed,' and is found in 'a free action or a work of art,' and in 'life in its entirety, regarded as a creative evolution'."⁷¹ His vitalist philosophy validated and championed cubism;⁷² and Henri Matisse is said to have specifically devised compositions to adhere to Bergsonian principles as they were conveyed to him by his close friend, Matthew Stewart Prichard (1865-1936). "Prichard not only nurtured Matisse's interest in Bergson, in 1915 he...contributed a preface to an exhibition of Matisse's art in New York, defending the artist in Bergsonian terms."⁷³ Matisse appears to have found Bergson's philosophical reflections on time helpful in his pictorial attempt to pursue what he considered "oriental

space."⁷⁴ Thus the concept of *durée* became significant for a generation of artists who worked in Paris during the first decade of the twentieth century, and it is highly probable, that even those artists who did not directly encounter Bergson's vitalist writings or ideas, had some understanding of them as they were part of larger cognate ideas at the time. Whether they took any specific interest in these conditions or not, they inevitably had an influence on modern Canadian artists who trained there and later collaborated with Marius Barbeau.

Carr in France

A telling example of explicitly Bergsonian instruction is Emily Carr, who went to France in 1910 intending to study at the Académie Julian, which A.Y. Jackson had attended three years earlier. She also had an introduction to the English painter Harry [William Phelan] Gibb, who advised her to attend the Colarossi Academy that had once attracted Whistler, Rodin, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Modigliani and Matisse, among others.⁷⁵ Gibb was a friend of Braque and Matisse, and Gert rude Stein reportedly said of him that he "foresaw everything" in modern painting.⁷⁶ It was under his instruction that Carr painted at Concameau in Brittany and Gibb helped her see that "painting could be more than an accurate transcription of visual fact. By using pure colours and simplifying forms, even by defying perspective, an artist could express something different. A picture could represent an artist's unique vision, an idea...there was the possibility of conveying another dimension of reality."⁷⁷



fig.6 John Duncan Fergusson, **People and Sails at Royan**, 1910, oil on cardboard, 44 x 57 cm, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, courtesy of The Fergusson Gallery, Perth & Kincross Council, Scotland. (Photo: © Perth Museum and Art Gallery)

These were lessons she also learned from the Scottish artist, John Duncan Fergusson (fig.6). Carr was in France for little over a year and lacked both time and enthusiasm for mastering French, so these men were valuable translators and instructors of emergent aesthetic trends. Fergusson in particular, was “considered to be the leader of the English-speaking artistic community in Paris.”⁷⁸ In response to the 1909 Salon d’Automne, he “had moved away from his earlier admiration for Whistler, now dismissed as too ‘decorative,’ towards Matisse and the ‘Matisseites:’ ‘The paint that best expresses their emotions is to them the right paint,’” and he promptly became an enthusiastic proponent of Bergson’s *élan vital* and his notions about artistic labour.⁷⁹ At the Atelier Blanche, Emily Carr “worked contentedly under Fergusson” from October “through November” of 1910.⁸⁰ Gerta Moray adds that Carr returned to Fergusson’s teaching “in the spring of 1911,”⁸¹ after a winter breakdown and recovery in Sweden.

Fergusson was so enamoured with the potential of Bergsonian rhythm that he inspired a young writer to start up an arts magazine named “Rhythm.” The periodical attracted illustrations from Picasso and Derrain among others, and it is possible that Carr saw its first issue in the summer of 1911. It is also most likely that once Gibb submitted Emily Carr’s paintings to the Salon d’Automne, Fergusson would have overseen their inclusion in the 1911 show because he served on the jury that year and was also a *sociétaire* from 1907 to 1912.⁸² Maria Tippet suggests that “If she learned anything from him, it was how to see rhythm in nature.”⁸³

Indeed, towards the end of her life, rhythm became the leitmotiv of Carr’s painting process and characterised the dynamic bond she felt with the landscape and to a lesser extent, indigenous West Coast cultures. For an artist to perceive “extensive rhythms required an effort of intuition” Bergson had declared.⁸⁴ “That an effort of this kind is not impossible, is proved by the existence in man of an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception.”⁸⁵ It was this intuition that carried artists’ vision beyond normal perception and into the very pulse and rhythm of life itself. Whereas scientists’ intellect was blind to the material world’s inner duration because it focussed merely on surface appearances and utilitarian functions in a search for facts and general laws that stopped time, artists’ intuition offered a broader understanding of life and the inner patterns of movement of nature and life itself.

“For an artist it was this rhythm that served to bind the pattern of colours and shapes that make up a canvas into an integral organic whole.”⁸⁶ It is very much in such Bergsonian terms that Carr wrote about her intuitive relationship to the British Colombian landscape, about her intuitive relationship to the British Colombian landscape, her painting process and how it could effect the viewer: “I think we miss our goal very often because we only regard parts,

overlooking the ensemble, painting the trees and forgetting the forest. The movement shall be so great the picture will rock and sway together, carrying the artist and after him the looker with it, catching up with the soul of the thing and marching on together.”⁸⁷ Carr’s description accords with Bergson’s ideas about the experience of art viewing in his *Time and Free Will*. As Antliff summarizes, “The painting therefore is both an integral, organic entity imbued with the rhythmic duration that created it, and an agent for creative development on the part of the beholder.”⁸⁸

According to Reynolds, Fergusson helped Carr as well as the New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield, to overcome “cultural cringe” in Paris, “perhaps because a Scottish background made him appreciate their problems.”⁸⁹ It seems unlikely that Carr was sufficiently emboldened to frequent Fergusson’s favourite Café d’Harcourt on the Boulevard St. Michel. Marius Barbeau, on the other hand, stayed at the Hôtel d’Harcourt⁹⁰ and is unlikely to have harboured such sensitivities. In any event, by end of her life, Emily Carr considered her studies under Harry Gibbs and John Fergusson “more memorable” than her work at the Colarossi school.⁹¹ What has been lost to popular accounts of Canadian art history, then, are not the connections to Paris and the Parisian art movements as much as the contingent appropriation and application of the broader cultural phenomenon of vitalist attitudes toward matter and memory particularly through Bergson’s significant role in promoting such philosophies and anthropology’s significant role in promoting vitalist philosophies among Canadian artists after they returned home. Above all, what has been lost is our ability to recognize the broad cultural influence of vitalist ideology upon art production in early twentieth-century Canada.

Ian Thom’s curatorial essay for the 1991 exhibition, “Emily Carr in France,” points out that Gibb and Fergusson were important art teachers for Carr. When Thom mentions the “New Art” that Carr was determined to learn, he does not position her art teachers within a particular philosophical trend. Nonetheless, he persistently tracks her increasing ability under Gibb and Fergusson’s instruction, to capture “vitality”⁹² and “energy”⁹³ in her painting, using Bergsonian terms, although without making mention of the philosopher himself or his influence upon Carr’s mentors. Nonetheless, Thom cites Carr’s description of watching Gibb paint the French countryside, and this allows us to see to what extent she was impressed by his Bergsonian approach to painting: “the scene was more than what was before us. It was not a copy of the woods & fields, it was a realization of them. The colours were not matched, they mixed with air. You went through space to meet reality.”⁹⁴

Thom’s statements also help provide a basis for recognizing and interpreting the influence of French primitivist aesthetics on Barbeau and Carr who were in Europe at similar times and both later applied Bergsonian concepts about art



fig.7 Emily Carr's, *Autumn in France*, 1911, oil on cardboard, 49 x 66 cm. Shown in the *Emily Carr in France* exhibition, 1991, Vancouver. (Photo: National Gallery of Canada)

to the Canadian context. It is important that Thom closes his essay with the observation that it was by learning about the "New Art" in France, that Carr was able to return to her "Indian work" with renewed intensity of purpose. Her time in France had, in her words, "vastly widened my view on my Indian work. I was doing bigger freer work. I attacked my material with a bolder feircer [sic] spirit. Indian art made a much deeper impression on me than it ever had before."⁹⁵ According to Tippet, this was because Gibb had assured Carr that totem poles and native villages on Canada's West Coast "were entirely suitable subjects" for the new approach to painting, a judgment based on his knowledge of recent work by Picasso.⁹⁶ True to her teachers' "Matisseite" version of Bergsonianism, Carr showed Fauve, rather than Cubist, attitudes to French landscape in the Salon d'Automne. *La Colline* and *Le Paysage*, demonstrate her newfound Bergsonian attitude towards painting. The National Gallery's well-known *Autumn in France* (fig.7) is from this period. That this approach suited North American indigenous subject matter would become her most important lesson from France.

Her experience in France drew Carr to eastern Canadian artists, particularly the Group of Seven members, when she visited the 1927 *West Coast Art* show. It was Barbeau who recommended that she be included and Carr showed more works, including *Totem Poles*, *Kitseukla* (fig.8), than any other artist. Although she had virtually abandoned painting by the time she met the Group, she recognized their pictorial ambitions because they shared many of her vitalist assumptions about modernist art: "I'm way behind them in drawing and in composition and rhythm and planes," she wrote with Fergusson's terminology in her diary, "but I know inside me what they're after and I feel that perhaps, given a chance, I could get it too."⁹⁷ Seeing the work of these other Canadian painters "had waked something in me that I had thought quite killed," she wrote.⁹⁸ She explicitly compared her recent Ottawa (and Toronto) experiences to her studies in France: "The only big show I had been in before was the Salon d'Automne in Paris. Out West I found it very painful and unpleasant to hang an exhibition. They hated my things so! Here everyone was so kind that I wanted to run away and hide, yet I did want, too, to hear what they said of my work. I had not heard anything nice about it since I was in France."⁹⁹

Barbeau's own connection to Bergson is more complicated since his tutor and main inspiration in Paris was Marcel Mauss, a Durkheimian, and thus a member of an anti-Bergson faction in Paris academia. But as Jennifer Hecht has recently pointed out, Bergson and Durkheim both formulated alternatives to the scientific materialism of late nineteenth-century anthropology.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, Bergson's vitalism rivaled Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Thought* (1912), largely based on lectures delivered during Barbeau's studies abroad. These were competing alternatives to earlier, staunchly atheist, scientific materialism; and as Michel Fournier has pointed out, many Durkheimian disciples were also Bergsonians.¹⁰¹ Marcel Mauss, however, was a student of comparative religions and a complex intermediary figure who wrote about religion in relativist terms well before Durkheim himself. Barbeau's student notes on Hubert and Mauss' 1899 essay on sacrifice show that he conscientiously marked passages that described the rite as a collective means to reconfigure material across time and space in the interests of social solidarity. Indeed, Barbeau might well have construed Hubert and Mauss' conclusions that sacrifice promoted ontological satisfaction within the material world as a counterpart to Bergson's expectations from artistic intuition and *long durée*.¹⁰² They state that once matter has been ritually transformed into a sacrificed object, it becomes a question of "mental and moral energies," which confer a type of "*cercle de sainteté*" that protects human desires, social relations and property.¹⁰³ Because society is made of things and events as well as humans, sacrifice can follow and reproduce both the rhythm of human life and of nature.¹⁰⁴ Ritual sacrifice was thus a counterpart to Bergson's intuitive acts typified by artistic creation in the sense that they both



fig.8 Emily Carr, *Totem Poles, Kitseukla*, 1912, oil on canvas, 127 x 98 cm.
Shown in the *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* exhibition, 1927, Ottawa.
(Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery)

had a role within a larger unfolding natural world. Interestingly, structuralist anthropologists in the 1960s and 70s failed to recognize a natural history and evolutionist, perspective in Mauss and Hubert's work. In their descriptions of such ritual acts, however, they offered the promise of community-wide solidarity and created spaces for it within the natural order. In this regard, Barbeau could understandably consider them as somehow belonging to the enveloping vitalist trend in European cultural ideology during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Movements Across the English Channel

Barbeau was in the paradoxical situation of having Oxford professors who advocated French vitalism and Paris professors who were socially and intellectually connected to British Fabians. Marcel Mauss was friendly with the founding Fabian socialists, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and an avid admirer of the co-operative movement. While Mauss dismissed William Morris as a "Christian socialist," Beatrice Webb decorated her apartment with Morris' wallpaper.¹⁰⁵ On both sides of the English Channel, artistry was appreciated in lingeringly Arts and Crafts terms, and with vitalist ideas never far removed. Barbeau appears to have melded Arts and Crafts enthusiasm for handcrafted goods with Bergson's horror of mechanism and his assertion that manufactured goods were impoverished because they embodied only mechanical processes. Britain's art community had already embraced modern vitalism for some time, as it was a tendency that arguably predated Bergson's continental theory and English vitalism was tied to William Morris through Rosetti.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, William Wallis, from Barbeau's anthropology cohort at Oxford, published a defense of Edward Carpenter's work against Bergson's. According to Wallis, Bergson's *Évolution Créatrice* (1907) merely rearticulated the chapter on "exfoliation" from Carpenter's 1889 book, *Civilization: Its Cause and Its Cure*.¹⁰⁷ There, Carpenter objected to cause and effect explanations of evolution and proposed that evolution was driven by an "inner force," sometimes described as "desire" or "consciousness."¹⁰⁸ For the purposes of this text, however, this accusation is interesting because it shows that vitalist philosophy was written on both sides of the English Channel in this general period, and demonstrates a certain degree of cultural consensus and currency for its ideas.

It also shows that the British Arts and Crafts Movement was compatible with vitalist notions of art making advanced in France. In any case, Barbeau appears to have responded to William Morris' call for the revival of pre-Industrial crafts with a Bergsonian concern for recuperating memory through artistic labour. Thus Barbeau could follow Marett's advice to promote primitivism in the museum context and see it through both Bergsonian and Arts and Crafts

perspectives. "We must get over our prejudice against revival as a tampering with our museum specimens; and may even assist...in the rehabilitation of the simple life, so that it shall be homely, and yet not boorish. The nation can afford to recapture something of its primitive innocence," wrote Marett.¹⁰⁹ The presentation of modern visual artists' reinterpretations of indigenous or folk life was considered sound museum practice and good for the health of the nation. As Marett had published this call for primitivist revivalism shortly before Barbeau began his collaboration with modern painters, it may well have inspired the latter's enduring work with Canada's canonic artists. Similarly, Barbeau could honour Marcel Mauss' conviction that pre-industrial production and consumption were the bases of human solidarity through objects. Key to this was the understanding that material culture embodied human lives.¹¹⁰

William Morris' message on the enduring "soul" within handcrafted material cultures was no doubt also a comfort to Barbeau, who was severely distressed by the decay of indigenous and folk material cultures in Canada. Not only would his ethnological collections bear witness to the lives of earlier inhabitants of Canada's territory, they would provide the vital materials required for contemporary artists to commune with that vitality. Barbeau's promotion of handcrafted materials made by indigenous and folk populations was also, however, an appreciation of medieval societies' unalienated labour, following Morris as well as Hubert and Mauss. This view held that objects, in their very matter, contained the healthier quality of social lives lost through most forms of industrialization. Although not Bergsonians, Hubert and Mauss were intensely interested in the potential of museums for promoting social re-incorporation, or at least recognition, of such social relics.

Many of Barbeau's artist collaborators in Canada were enthusiastic supporters of the British Arts and Crafts Movement through their links to British art schools that promoted William Morris' ideology.¹¹¹ Lismer was at the Sheffield School of Art in England from 1898 to 1905 and Fred Varley was also a student there. Grace Melvin, an illustrator for several of Barbeau's books was trained in Glasgow, a celebrated Scottish centre for the Movement. As dedicated art teachers who preached their British philosophy in Canada (Melvin and Varley in Vancouver, Lismer mostly in Toronto and Montreal), they promoted the value of seeing art making as a heightened form of manual labour. They also enthusiastically incorporated historical and ethnological themes in their own artistic productions and pedagogy.¹¹² Like Morris himself, Melvin and Lismer delighted in medieval pageantry and the exploration of exotic crafts and designs,¹¹³ emphasizing ethnology in the Canadian context as a theme for dramatic reenactments as well as aesthetic design and craftsmanship. As well, many of the Group of Seven worked at the Grip where Art Nouveau and

the Arts and Crafts movements were key aesthetic orientations.¹¹⁴ Thus these artists extended Barbeau's ability to popularize cultural re-vitalization in Canada. Art teachers helped realize Barbeau's projects and trained future modern artists who would be receptive to Canadian ethnology and in doing so transmitted some sense of European vitalist notions about art production to the following generation.

Conclusions

This cultural phenomenon of vitalist thought in early twentieth-century Europe deeply influenced the work of anthropologist Marius Barbeau and those Canadian modernist painters with whom he collaborated. Yet acknowledgement of that era's philosophical orientation has been lost from our current understanding of their work. Barbeau's most remarkable ethnological and museological method – encouraging contemporary artists to work with him in his aboriginal and folkloric fieldwork sites – appears to have been prompted by his European education on the psychology of memory, particularly the positive effects of human psychic connections to time and matter as theorized by Henri Bergson and others of the vitalist cultural moment in Europe such as Edward Carpenter, William Morris, R.R. Marett, Émile Durkheim, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss.

Like others who led aesthetic movements in settler-states by adopting indigenous motifs in modernist decorative and fine arts, Barbeau wanted to make Canadians feel truly at home in their new territory and to accept it as a nation distinct from Europe. He also wanted them to experience some reconciliation with earlier inhabitants of the land. Such aims distinguish settler-state aesthetics from European primitivism, as Nicholas Thomas has pointed out.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, Thomas' stipulation that European primitivism was psychic while new world primitivist aesthetics were territorial, does not entirely apply to Barbeau or to his artist collaborators. Their application of European educations and ideas to Canadian ethnology and painting was heavily influenced by Europe's evolutionist philosophy and its emphasis on vitalist psychology. Painters associated with Barbeau may have been sympathetic to European ideas about art making as a process that yielded psychic access to earlier historical and cultural lives and provided a means to revitalization. Although recent academic literature characterizes these expectations as "primitivism" (with all the baggage that this term acquired in late twentieth-century "identity politics"), they were originally part of a earlier larger philosophy of life and "creativity" that encompassed both social and natural lives.

The breadth of this vitalist vision ceded to a post-World War II revisionist cultural ideology that expunged evolutionism and divided the "social" from the "natural," rendering the vitalist vision and aspirations of Barbeau and his artist

collaborators incomprehensible and invisible. Only by reconstructing a sense of their earlier historical and cultural moment, can we grasp “the big picture” that many of those canonic Canadian landscape and portrait paintings sought to index. To understand the work of Barbeau and those artists, we now need to be aware that they participated in a broad vitalist cultural ideology of art production and reception that was imported from Europe and has subsequently been eclipsed.

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Notes

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- 1 Marius BARBEAU, "The Canadian Northwest: Theme for modern painters," *American Magazine of Art* 24, no.5 (May 1932): 337-38.
- 2 Ibid., 331-38, and "Indians of the Prairies and Rockies: A theme for modern painters," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1932): 197-206. See also Edward SAPIR, "Culture, Genuine and Spurious," *The Dalhousie Review* 2, no.23 (1922): 165-78, and "Culture in New Countries," *The Dalhousie Review* 2, no.23 (1922): 358-68. See also, Harlan SMITH, *An Album of Prehistoric Canadian Art* (Ottawa: Memorial Museum Bulletin 37, Anthropology Series 8, 1923).
- 3 Jennifer M. HECHT, *The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 277.
- 4 See James CLIFFORD, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 2 (1983): 118-46, and Johannes FABIAN, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia Press, 1983).
- 5 BARBEAU, "How Asia Used to Drip at the Spout into America," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 24, no.3 (July 1933): 163-73.
- 6 See Fernande SAINT-MARTIN, "Origines et destin des cultures dans l'œuvre de Marius Barbeau," *Voix et Images* 2, no.2 (1976): 240-54.
- 7 See Archives National de Québec, Fonds Marius Barbeau, Microfilm reel #5087 (-06,M-P 51/9/245 à -06,M-P 51/9/256).
- 8 Arguably, Edward B. Tylor had been the first professional British anthropologist, however he was semi-retired by the time Oxford established its anthropology diploma program in 1907.
- 9 Edward B. TYLOR, *Primitive Culture: Researches Into The Development Of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art And Custom*, vol.1 and 2 (London: Bradbury, Evans and Co., 1865 [1871 edition]).
- 10 Robert Ranulph MARETT, *Anthropology* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911), 60-61.
- 11 W.D. WALLIS, review of Carpenter's *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning*, in *American Anthropologist* 22, no.4 (October-December 1920): 381-82.
- 12 Edward CARPENTER, *The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and Its Powers* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1902 [1927]): 211.
- 13 Ibid., 212.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 BARBEAU, "The Plastic and Decorative Arts of the North West Coast" lecture notes, Canadian Museum of Civilization Archives, Barbeau Papers. File: Lectures on the Ethnology of B.C. (1926-7) B-F-527: 13-15.

- 16 William MORRIS, "Art and Socialism: A Lecture Delivered Before the Secular Society of Leicester," *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. XXIII (London: Longmans Green and Company [1884] 1915), 196-97.
- 17 Edward CARPENTER, *The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and Its Powers* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. [1904] 1927), 22.
- 18 Ibid., 32.
- 19 BARBEAU, "The Native Races of Canada," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Section II (1927), 52.
- 20 BARBEAU, "French Canada: its Survival," *The Dalhousie Review* 11, no.4 (1932): 435.
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44 BARBEAU, "The Indians of the Prairies and Rockies," 202.

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...l'artiste vise à nous introduire dans cette émotion si riche, si personnelle, si nouvelle, et à nous faire éprouver ce qu'il ne saurait nous faire comprendre. Il fixera donc, parmi les manifestations extérieures de son sentiment, celles que notre corps imitera machinalement, quoique légèrement, en les apercevant, de manière à nous replacer tout d'un coup dans l'indéfinissable état psychologique qui les provoqua. Ainsi tombera la barrière que le temps et l'espace interposaient entre sa conscience et la nôtre; et plus sera riche d'idées, gros de sensations et d'émotions le sentiment dans le cadre duquel il nous aura fait entrer, plus la beauté exprimée aura de profondeur ou d'élévation.

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56 AGO Archives Box: A4.2.2 11. Exhibitions: Curatorial 1928. 000252 (Relevant Ref. A-8-5-5) Dossier: Exhibition: Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern January 1928. E. Pinkerton to E. R. Greig Esq., 19 Jan. 1928, "I have already arranged with Mr.

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60 BARBEAU, “L’âme d’une grande nation,” 216.

61 Ibid. (my translation), 217.

62 BERGSON, *Creative Evolution*, 5.

63 Sanford SCHWARTZ, “Bergson and the politics of vitalism” in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the vialist controversy*, eds. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992): 288. See also HECHT, *The End of the Soul*.

64 A.Y. JACKSON, *A Painter’s country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1958).

65 ANTLIFF, *Inventing Bergson*, 4-5.

66 Ibid., 10. Its influence also stretched to Italy’s Futurist movement.

67 Mark ANTLIFF, “The Rhythms of Duration: Bergson and the Art of Matisse” in *The New Bergson*, ed. John Mullarky (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 1999), 189.

68 Ibid., 203.

69 Gerta MORAY, “Northwest Coast Native Culture and the Early Indian Paintings of Emily Carr, 1899-1913,” PhD. Thesis, Toronto, University of Toronto, Art History, 1993, 412.

70 Barbeau interview with J. Crawley, August, 1955, for CBC Profile. See also SLANEY, “Working for a Canadian Senses of Place(s),” 91.

71 BERGSON, *Creative Evolution* in ANTLIFF, “The Rhythms of Duration,” 194; MORAY, “Northwest Coast Native Culture,” 269.

72 See ANTLIFF, *Inventing Bergson*, 3-134.

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74 Ibid., 190-92.

75 In 1945, Emily Carr’s sister Alice, recalled that while in Paris, Emily Carr “attended day classes at Julian’s and night classes at Colarossi’s.” (See Kyle to C. Scott, July 15, 1945 in AGO Archives: Box: 19 Exhibitions: curatorial 1945. 000261 A-8-7-2, Dossier: Exhibition Emily Carr Memorial Exhibit October 19 - November 18, 1945).

76 Maria TIPPETT, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Markham: Oxford University Press, 1979), 86-87.

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78 Angela SMITH, “Tigers in Paris: Katherine Mansfield, Emily Carr, John Duncan Fergusson and Fauvism” in *Outsiders in Paris: John Duncan Fergusson, Katherine Mansfield and*

their *Circles*, ed. H. Beale and A. Smith (Stirling: Stirling French Publications, 2000), 25-45, 38 and Siân REYNOLDS, *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural connections in the Belle Époque* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 74.

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82 TIPPET, *Emily Carr*, 97.

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84 ANTLIFF, "The Rhythms of Duration," 188.

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87 CARR, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 66.

88 ANTLIFF, "The Rhythms of Duration," 197.

89 REYNOLDS, *Paris-Edinburgh*, 77.

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91 See Ira Dilworth, "Emily Carr: Biographical Sketch," in Box: 19 Exhibitions 1945, 000261 A-8-7-2, Dossier, "Emily Carr Memorial Exhibit, October 19-November 18, 1945," Art Gallery of Ontario Archives, 7-8.

92 Ian THOM, *Emily Carr in France*, exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1991), 13, 32.

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101 Michel FOURNIER, *Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 13.

102 See the Québec National Archives, Microfilm Reel No. 5087 (-06,M-P 51/9/245 à -06,M-P 51/9/256).

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- 104 Ibid., 307.
- 105 Beatrice WEBB, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Vol. II*, Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, eds. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap and Harvard University Presses, 1983), 38, and Marcel MAUSS, "Les idées socialistes. Le principe de la nationalisation" in *Écrits politiques* (Paris: Fayard), 252.
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- 110 Marcel MAUSS, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Translator, W.D. Halls (New York and London: W.W. Norton [1923-4] 1990).
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LE VITALISME DANS L'ANTHROPOLOGIE ET L'ART AU CANADA

La relation de Marius Barbeau aux peintres modernistes, particulièrement Emily Carr, au début du XX^e siècle

L'anthropologue des musées canadien Marius Barbeau (1883-1969) a collaboré avec les artistes modernistes à la préservation des cultures indigènes et folkloriques. À cette fin, il a travaillé avec des membres du Groupe des Sept et s'est employé à faire connaître l'œuvre d'Emily Carr. Non seulement Barbeau a-t-il compris et valorisé leur travail en termes de vitalisme, mais les artistes eux-mêmes semblent avoir été d'accord, jusqu'à un certain point, avec divers concepts vitalistes de la matière, de la mémoire et de la re-présentation. Le vitalisme a resurgi fortement dans la France de la fin du XIX^e siècle, en réaction aux explications scientifiques de la vie. Nombre d'intellectuels, d'artistes et de membres éminents de la société européenne affirmaient que la physique, la chimie et la biologie étaient incapables d'expliquer la vie dans sa plénitude. Ils croyaient que tous les êtres vivants étaient interconnectés de manière signifiante à travers une « force vitale » qui était en quelque sorte de nature « spirituelle ». Le vitalisme célébrait particulièrement le travail humain et le processus de création artistique comme moyen de se connecter à cette force et d'octroyer à la matière conscience et intention, souvent appelées « âmes ». En Grande-Bretagne et en Europe, ces idées ont été exprimées par des philosophes, des sociologues et des théoriciens de l'art et ont été rapidement introduites au Canada par des anthropologues et des artistes canadiens qui ont été en Europe.

Pour explorer cette confluence, j'étudie l'éducation que Marius Barbeau a reçue à Paris et à Oxford et sa collaboration avec des artistes visuels canadiens. Bien que je me concentre sur les relations professionnelles que Barbeau entretenait avec A.Y. Jackson, Edwin Holgate, Arthur Lismer, en portant une attention particulière à Emily Carr, il a aussi travaillé avec d'autres artistes visuels. Je suggère que ces relations étaient fondées sur des modèles communs d'éducation qui ont favorisé une compatibilité de principes sur la culture, la nation, l'histoire, la « nature » et l'art. Leurs biographies entremêlées illustrent un moment significatif alors que le vitalisme acquérait une valeur culturelle dans l'anthropologie muséale aussi bien que dans l'art moderniste au Canada.

Barbeau, qui se décrivait comme un « collectionneur pionnier », s'est efforcé de « sauver » les cultures indigènes en envoyant leurs « objets façonnés » à des musées d'anthropologie et d'art au Canada et à travers le monde occidental. Il a aussi collectionné les arts folkloriques du Québec, afin de préserver la culture de sa propre enfance dans la Beauce. Plus qu'un simple conservateur, il a voulu que ces collections inspirent aussi les artistes à réinjecter « l'âme » des cultures indigènes et folkloriques dans une histoire moderne de l'art canadien qui soit accumulative, sinon inclusive. Il s'est efforcé délibérément de manipuler la mémoire collective par son souci intense pour ce qui paraît maintenant avoir été un art et une esthétique proto-multiculturels. Cette vision comportait certaines notions vitalistes sur la persistance d'une présence de l'histoire dans ces cultures matérielles primitives, ainsi que l'attente vitaliste de voir les artistes raviver intuitivement et matérialiser, à travers leur art, ces mémoires culturelles en voie de disparition.

C'est à Oxford et à Paris (1907-1910) que Barbeau a appris à voir le passé comme un lieu de sens, perspective qu'il a conservée durant toute sa longue carrière au Musée national du Canada (1911-1949) suivie d'une retraite active (1949-1969). Le directeur d'études de Barbeau à Oxford, Robert Ranulph Marett, diffusait les idées d'Henri Bergson, qui favorisait l'analyse intuitive plutôt que l'analyse intellectuelle comme moyen d'étudier les humains et leurs mondes matériels qui, les uns comme les autres, se déploient créativement à travers le temps. Il soutenait que les comprendre, c'est saisir intuitivement leurs mémoires internes, ou « âme » à l'intérieur du processus d'évolution. Les bons anthropologues étaient ouverts à l'appréciation « intuitive » des processus artistiques à quelque point que ce fût sur l'échelle évolutionniste. Des artistes, y compris les artistes préhistoriques ou « sauvages », avaient laissé des traces importantes et des marques mémorielles que pouvait découvrir un regard moderne attentif.

Les textes de Barbeau révèlent peu du sens des réalités qu'il rencontrait au cours de ses nombreuses expéditions. Il écrivait plutôt d'abondants traités spéculatifs sur les « origines » ou la « diffusion » ethnographiques des technologies sociales, des mythologies, des contes populaires et des cultures matérielles. Pour Barbeau, toutes les communautés culturelles à l'intérieur des frontières du Canada venaient d'immigrants, qu'ils aient été des « Indiens » venus d'Asie à travers le détroit de Béring, ou qu'ils soient arrivés plus tard d'Europe ou de Grande-Bretagne. Plutôt que de se poser en arbitre entre des « vagues » d'immigration spécifiques, il cherchait à collectionner et à préserver leurs traces à tous, pour fournir plus de ressources afin que l'art moderniste puisse exprimer le caractère composite unique du Canada dans une compilation de mémoires.

En France, Bergson est devenu célèbre pour avoir soutenu que l'évolution est dirigée par des forces « spirituelles » à travers le temps, forces perceptibles pour ceux qui travaillent de manière intuitive plutôt que scientifique. Il soutenait que les artistes avaient accès d'une manière unique à la force intérieure et à la durée des sujets qu'ils peignaient, que ce soit des paysages, des objets ou des personnages. Pour les artistes canadiens étudiant à l'étranger, particulièrement Emily Carr, la philosophie de Bergson leur avait offert ainsi une place à l'intérieur de la soi-disant « évolution » inégale des divers groupes culturels du Canada. Relativement à l'anthropologie, le directeur d'études de Barbeau, R.R. Marett, préconisait le vitalisme de Bergson et l'appréciation des arts « primitifs » comme véhicules pour l'intégration des « primitifs » dans la société et les formes culturelles « civilisées ». Cependant, le directeur d'études de Barbeau à Paris, Marcel Mauss, adhérait à la vision rivale de Durkheim d'« âmes » et de « forces » vitales de la Nature, qui, néanmoins, cherchait à humaniser l'évolutionnisme et la laïcité dans la société du début du XX^e siècle. On apprécie rarement le fait que les études d'Emily Carr en France étaient explicitement bergsoniennes et, par conséquent, à l'origine de sa capacité à reconnaître et à valoriser le travail du Groupe des Sept. Elle partageait aussi l'ambition de Barbeau d'immortaliser et de revivifier les « cultures en voie de disparition » par une combinaison de collections ethnographiques et de production d'art moderniste.

Bien que Barbeau ait étudié à Paris avec une faction intellectuelle durkheimienne opposée à Bergson, cette opposition était complexe, avec des défections périodiques vers le camp opposé. Au fond, durkheimiens et bergsoniens cherchaient tous des moyens de reconnaître le sens de la vie humaine sans avoir recours à la tradition judéo-chrétienne ou aux sciences physiques européennes récentes. Bien que cette tendance soit née pendant les études de Barbeau à l'étranger, au moment où la France avait déclaré la séparation de l'Église et de l'État (1905), sa collaboration avec les artistes a débuté dans les années 1920, peu après que Marett eut théorisé des observations « de bon goût » sur sa pratique de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie publique.

Traduction: Élise Bonnette