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*“A 2016 Joint Symposium ‘Special Report’ from the Working Group on Exhibitions to the Subcommittee on Archives and Storage” (Continues “Contributions on the ‘W’ Cache and Related Sources”)*

Documents Ostensibly Pertaining to the Origins and Development of  
“The Order of the Third Bird”

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XXII  
The Witkacy *Łyczeczka*

We have here the fabricated skeletal remains of an amphicephalous marine creature, its twin antipodal skulls encased in thick resinous molds that resemble death masks left unfinished. Associated documentation seemingly establishes that this amphibious piscine specimen/sculpture was once the property of virtuosic polymath artist Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), a leading figure of the Polish avant-garde known in the 1920s and 30s. It would appear that Witkiewicz (or "Witkacy," as he was often known) associated this two-headed *memento mori* with the spectacular collapse of his longstanding friendship with the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski. In 1914, Malinowski, then making preparations for his first trip to the Trobriand Islands, was notified of the suicide of Witkiewicz's pregnant fiancée Jadwiga. Concerned for his friend, Malinowski invited Witkiewicz to accompany him on the expedition as a draughtsman and photographer. As the journey progressed, however, their intimacy unraveled. The reasons for this estrangement have never been clear, but new evidence, recently come to light in the W-Cache, strongly suggests that the initial dispute involved a practice of sustained attention to a Trobriand lime spatula carved by one of the "bone weavers of Botalu." It would seem that Witkiewicz, in the course of a passionate Colloquy, accused Malinowski of falling adequately to set aside his technical expertise concerning the manner of the artifact's manufacture, a legitimate complaint under the tenets of an orthodox Order of the Third Bird which the latter had apparently invoked in some detail (this would be, of course, practice). The conflict escalated rapidly, and is perhaps best understood as a hot, local eruption of a larger doctrinal division among early twentieth-century European associates of the Order — a split sometimes shorthanded as "the ancients versus the moderns," but better characterized as an emerging schism between the considerable majority of "traditional" Birds, and an insurgent clique of practitioners who in this period began to conceive of the Practice as a "scientific" technique for refining observational precision and recall. Malinowski, it seems, had come under the sway of the latter — to Witkiewicz's mounting consternation. The rift widened in the decades that followed, and episodically vomited forth further discord, most notably in the form of Witkiewicz's sniping attacks on anthropological functionalism. He took the latter to be a "petty empiricism" that endeavored to "explain away" so-called primitive religion — which was, as far as Witkiewicz was concerned, the existing expression of the so-called "metaphysical sentiment" that lay at the vital core of the human person (and hence desperately required defending from the ravages of demystifying positivism). The object itself may be a parody of evolutionary thought, but this is pure conjecture. What is certain is that Witkiewicz called it his *łyczeczka*, or "little spoon," perhaps in reference to the fateful lime spatula.

