

(Sur)real or Unreal?

Antonin Artaud in the Sierra Tarahumara of Mexico

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Ever since tourism became a major feature of Mexican economic development after 1940, its most distinguishing attribute has been the re-creation of economies around the symbolic value of indigenous culture.¹ The marketing of the ethnic peoples of the Sierra Tarahumara or Copper Canyon region of Northwest Mexico as a distinctive selling point has been no different from that of other regions. The promotion of so-called “authentic traditional cultures” has historically been, and continues to be, involved in the tailoring of local products, or, the representation of heritage, landscape, and peoples to a changing global audience—e.g., domestic and international tourists—in an attempt to lure them to a place that has a developed identity.² In the minds of both residents and tourists, this identity sets the Copper Canyon apart from other locations in the Republic of Mexico. Although these place identities derive from many sources, their literary roots precede the tourism framework, going back to the late nineteenth century.³

Probably more so than any other, one writer who unwittingly contributed much to the promotion of the Sierra Tarahumara as a tourist destination was the French poet, director, and actor Antonin Artaud (1896-1948). Artaud is widely regarded as one of the great seminal forces in the evolution of modern theater, modern art, and more specifically, of modern Mexican cinema.⁴ *The Theater and Its Double* (1938), considered to be his most important work in the genre of theater criticism, was partially conceived during his famous 1936 trip to Mexico. His drug-fueled experiences there with the Tarahumara (Rarámuri) would preoccupy legions of readers, authors,⁵ filmmakers, and his own writings until his death. In fact, it may be said that the Western tradition of the drug pilgrimage to Mexico may have found its origin in Artaud, and not Carlos Castaneda.⁶ But many questions remain concerning Artaud’s purported journey to the Sierra Tarahumara, including the veracity of his observations on the Rarámuri themselves. In order to reveal the

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factual limits of Artaud's reportage, this paper situates his literary works on the Tarahumara within a larger ethnographic and anthropological framework in order to suggest that he fabricated, exaggerated, and embellished the "truth" of his experiences among these mystical people.

Artaud traveled to Mexico for a variety of reasons. First, he was recovering from a series of professional and financial failures in Paris and was searching for new sources of inspiration and income. Additionally, he was physically and emotionally ill as a result of years of drug addiction (opium and heroin) and mental instability; or, as 2008 Nobel laureate J.M.G. LeClézio put it, "Europe was a living hell for him."⁷ Deeply fascinated by the occult and esoteric knowledge spanning the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the *Zohar*, *Popul Vuh*, *Chilam Balam*, and other works focusing on astrology, alchemy, and tarot, Artaud came to Mexico in search of the primeval principles of the cosmos with which to reinvent himself. He believed that amongst its races of "pure red Indians" he would find a people that would reveal these secrets to him, and in the process, he could cure his "inner landscape" of many years of "inexplicable torment."⁸

The indigenous peoples of Mexico, especially unassimilated groups like the Tarahumara, appealed to Artaud because he considered them to be, as he put it, "a challenge to this world in which people talk so much about progress only because they despair of progressing [...] They do not see reality and they draw magical powers from the contempt they have for civilization."⁹ More specifically, Artaud believed that these "first peoples" drew magical powers from their surrounding landscape, since it was pervaded everywhere by spirits, gods, and powerful plants. If he could learn how to tap into this primal world, or the "fundamental principle" as he called it, he would be able to locate the social, moral, and hierarchical "truths" that were the proverbial keys to unlocking the vast secret of human existence and harmony in the universe.

Contrary to the materialism and the "proliferation of the products of machines [that have] infected the organism of Europe with a collective form of scurvy,"¹⁰ Mexico was furthermore a new nation emerging from the throes of recent Revolution. In an article entitled "What I Came to Mexico to Do," published on July 5, 1936 in the *El Nacional Revolucionario* newspaper, Artaud wrote:

I came to Mexico in search of politicians, not artists. And this is why:
Until now I have been an artist, which means I have been a man
without power.

The fundamental question is as follows: The present civilization of Europe is in a state of bankruptcy. Dualistic Europe no longer has anything to offer the world but an incredible pulverization of cultures. To extract a new unity from this infinity of separate cultures is a necessity.

As for the Orient, it is totally decadent. India is lost in the dream of a liberation, which has value only after death.

China is at war. The Japanese of today seem to be the fascists of the Far East. China, in the eyes of Japan, is a vast Ethiopia.

The United States has done nothing but multiply to infinity the decadence and vices of Europe.

There remains only Mexico and her subtle political structure which has not changed fundamentally since the golden age of Montezuma.

Mexico, that precipitate of innumerable races, appears as the diffuser of history. From this very precipitation and from this mixture of races she must extract a unique residue, from which the Mexican soul will emerge.¹¹

Some of Artaud's thoughts about Mexico were probably influenced by post-revolutionary intellectuals like Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos. After the Mexican Revolution many liberal intellectuals and governmental officials regarded indigenous peoples, because of their political, socioeconomic, and cultural "backwardness," as obstacles to the creation of a unified and modern Mexican nation. Comprising some "two-thirds" of the total Mexican population, Mexico's indigenous people were seen to constitute a serious challenge to national reconstruction.¹² In turn, a series of post-revolutionary reconstruction and development programs were initiated to solve the Mexican "Indian Problem." This so-called *indigenismo* policy advocated that the necessary consequence of nation-building was to dissolve the Indian element into the mestizo element, or to merge the "virile race of bronze" with the "virile race of iron."¹³ This fusion would become the ideological symbol of the new modern regime—the mestizo or "cosmic race."¹⁴ This imagining of the national community seemed to advocate the total dissolution of indigenous identities in favor of a new comprehensive matrix. The best formula put forward for the latter was miscegenation or *mestizaje*, the inevitable emergence and ascent of mestizos as the true citizens of the Mexican *patria*.¹⁵

At the same time, however, the notion of a national, popular Mexican culture continued to rest heavily on the achievements of the indigenous past and contemporary "folkloric" aesthetics. Both were nationalized as symbols, objects and artifacts, and glorified by prominent writers, artists, and academics.¹⁶ Even though these traditional and authentic symbols were (mis)appropriated out of their daily context in order to build a common culture, the notion was never abandoned that

although being Mexican rested on strong cultural (i.e., indigenous) foundations, being Mexican really meant becoming modern (i.e., *mestizo*) in order to enter the world stage.¹⁷

In the same *Revolucionario* article, Artaud expanded upon his Mexican project:

I came to Mexico to look for a new idea of man.
Man confronted by the inventions, the sciences, the discoveries, but as only Mexico can still present him to us, I mean with this armature of the outside, but carrying deep within him the ancient vital relations of man with nature that were established by the old Toltecs, the old Mayas—in short, all those races down through the centuries created the grandeur of Mexican soil.

Mexico cannot, under pain of death renounce the new conquests of science, but it holds in reserve an ancient science infinitely superior to that of the laboratories and the scientists. Mexico has its own science and its own culture; to develop this science and this culture is a duty for modern Mexico, and a duty of this kind is precisely what constitutes the passionate originality of this country.

Between the now degenerated vestiges of the ancient Red Culture, such as one can find them in the last pure indigenous races, and the no less degenerate and fragmentary culture of modern Europe, Mexico can find an original form of culture which will constitute its contribution to the civilization of this age [...]

Beneath the contributions of modern science which is every day discovering new forces, there are other *unknown forces* [my italics], other subtle forces which do not yet belong to the realm of science but which may belong to it someday. These forces are part of the vital realm of nature as men knew it in pagan times. The superstitious mind of man gave a religious form to these profound understandings which saw man, if you will permit the expression, as the ‘catalyst of the universe.’¹⁸

One may ask, what are these “unknown forces” that Artaud speaks so strongly about here? Foremost, it was the sacred peyote cactus that sprouted from the “grandeur of Mexican soil.” Artaud believed that peyote was essential to his, and perhaps mankind’s, salvation: “I felt [...] that I should go back to the source and expand my pre-consciousness to the point where I would see myself evolve and *desire*. And Peyote led me to this point. Transported by Peyote I saw that I had to defend what

I am before I was born, and that my Self is merely the consequence of the battle I waged in the Supreme against the untruth of evil ideas.”¹⁹ Elsewhere he wrote: “I took Peyote in the mountains of Mexico [...] and at the time those three days seemed like the happiest days of my life. I had stopped tormenting myself, trying to find a reason for my life, and I had stopped having to carry my body around. I realized that I was inventing life, that that was my function and my *raison d'être*, and that I suffered when my imagination failed, and Peyote gave it to me.”²⁰

In the Sierra Tarahumara

In the summer of 1936 Artaud left Mexico City after a six-month stay of lecturing and fund-raising for his trip to the Sierra. He traveled by train to Chihuahua, and from there it is assumed that he jumped aboard another locomotive to Bocoyna, just outside of Creel and near the Jesuit Mission center of Sisoguichi, the gateway to the heart of the Sierra Tarahumara at that time.²¹ He located a “mestizo” guide and translator and then saddled a horse to begin his mythic odyssey behind the Mexican mountains.²²

Until recently, it was not known what motivated Artaud to travel to the Sierra Tarahumara, or even where he had first learned about the ritual use of peyote amongst its indigenous inhabitants.²³ However the source of inspiration may reside in a poem and in the correspondence between Artaud and the writer and ambassador, Alfonso Reyes (Mexico’s most famous “man of letters,” 1889-1959).²⁴ In an obscure and posthumous article, Reyes states that his poem *Yerbas del Tarahumara* (Tarahumara Herbs), widely regarded as one of his finest, was first published in France in the summer of 1929. It most likely motivated the curiosity of Artaud.²⁵ In this work, Reyes speaks about the Tarahumara coming down from the mountains during a bad harvest year to sell their medicinal plants in the streets of Chihuahua. He also discusses their peyote usage in the following stanza:

They drink spirits of maize and peyotl,
herb of portents,
symphony of positive esthetics
whereby into colours forms are changed;
and ample metaphysical ebriety
consoles them for their having to tread the earth,
which is, all said and done,
the common affliction of all humankind [...]
they will be first with the triumphant news
the day we leap the wall
of the five senses.²⁶

Reyes received several letters directly from Artaud before his trip to Mexico. In a

letter dated April 16, 1936, Artaud asked Reyes if he could recommend a group of the “pure race” he could visit, so that he could come to learn about the “magical force” he believed was embodied in their communal rituals and dances.²⁷ Artaud thought that through the experience of cultural practices of such “primeval” peoples, he would be able to discern how nature, the world, and humanity could be better unified for the advancement of all society, which he thought was in a state of anarchy.

Some scholars have questioned whether Artaud actually made the trip to the Sierra or participated in the peyote ritual.²⁸ It is known that the Rarámuri of the period continued to practice an ancient religion based on magic, solar worship and blood sacrifice, and that they believed that ritual communication with their deities was predicated through the ceremonial use of the psychotropic peyote cactus, a sentient plant sent directly from the gods. This cactus was used by powerful shamans in their healing rituals, in which Artaud was certainly interested.²⁹

I believe that Artaud did visit the Rarámuri, but that his famous account of “The Peyote Dance” is not based on his participation in the ritual. Rather, he may have witnessed preparations for a minor funeral rite that had a peyote “curing” component to it. If Artaud did not participate in the ritual, he must have relied heavily on the accounts of others whom he did not credit. To my mind, Artaud’s famous work “The Peyote Dance” is nothing more than a mixture of fact and fiction and a distortion of history. But it is a fascinating story that has captured the attention of modern-day travelers, writers, filmmakers, and government tourist promoters who seek to either experience, document, or sell their own visions of utopia amongst, as Artaud put it, the “Primeval Race.”³⁰

Aside from the probable influence of Reyes on Artaud’s decision to visit the Rarámuri, why is it that we have no record of where in the Sierra Artaud actually “participated” in the peyote dance? For example, only one of his published works stemming from his trip to the Sierra, *The Rite of the Kings of Atlantis* (1936), provides a specific site, Norogachi. A glance back to the early ethnographic works of the twentieth century, all of which I believe Artaud used as primary sources of information to fabricate and embellish his numerous accounts, reveals why he would have focused on this part of the Sierra for psychic exploration: the area encompassing Norogachi as far as Narárachic was the center of Rarámuri shamanism.³¹

Second, although we know Artaud employed the use of a “mestizo” interpreter in his dealings with the Rarámuri, some scholars question how Artaud was able to penetrate the inner minds of the “secretive” peyote priests, let alone other Tarahumara informants along the way, since he provides several excerpts of such philosophical encounters.³² Artaud spoke little or no Spanish, and certainly no Rarámuri in the area could have been an interlocutor over the course of only six to eight weeks (although questions remain over the length of his stay).³³ Was he able to

communicate with his interpreter beyond a basic level? Probably not, and certainly it is extremely doubtful that he could ever have penetrated the “essence” of Rarámuri culture in just a short time.

Third, others have asked why Artaud didn't travel to Huichol country instead of the Sierra Tarahumara.³⁴ It seems that his trip to the Sierra occurred too early in the year for him to witness a major peyote ritual among the Rarámuri.³⁵ After all, the Huichol would have seemed to be better candidates, and at the time of Artaud's Mexican sojourn there was much French language literature on them.³⁶ Moreover, the Huichol lived closer to Mexico City, they were equally unassimilated in 1936, they partook of peyote throughout the year, and their “sacred assistant” (peyote) pervaded nearly every facet of their material, artistic, and religious world.³⁷

While it may not seem fair to treat Artaud as an anthropologist, it is important to briefly touch upon the problem of interpreter accuracy and informant access as it is brought into high relief through the accounts of Artaud's predecessors to the Sierra, the ethnologist Carl Lumholtz and anthropologists Wendell Bennett and Robert Zingg.³⁸ Like Artaud these writers sought intimate contact with the Rarámuri in their attempts to record religious and other cultural information. However, Lumholtz, Bennett, and Zingg faced great difficulty in finding responsible and knowledgeable interpreters throughout the course of their extended stays in the Sierra. As Lumholtz noted long ago:

The duty of the *lenguaraꝥ*, as the interpreter is called, is to smooth the traveler's way among the distrustful Indians with skillful words, to get provisions, make bargains, and explain to the Indians the purpose of his visit. Last but not least, he must obtain all possible information from them. This may mean one day's hard work, and the trying of his patience with many apparently futile questions which are made to get at the Indian's real meaning. Thus it may be understood how one is completely at the mercy of one's *lenguaraꝥ*, and how important it is for the success of an expedition to find the right man. There is nothing else to do but to try and try again, one after another.³⁹

Bennett and Zingg also speak at length about their difficulties in finding suitable Rarámuri interpreters, especially since “the majority of them do not speak Spanish.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, they were practically useless unless they lived in or were acquainted with the same “home territory” as their subjects.⁴¹ I also encountered this latter situation. When I conducted dissertation research in the Sierra, I had to employ several bilingual (Spanish/ Rarámuri) interpreters when working with monolingual Rarámuri elders, and these language assistants were typically village relatives of the elder family member I was interviewing.

Bennett and Zingg's first interpreter, a highly acculturated Rarámuri man,

was hired at the mission of Sisoguichi where it is also believed that Artaud met his “mestizo” interpreter. Although he was fluent in Spanish and Rarámuri, his knowledge “of Tarahumara customs was very limited,” and at “the end of the first month we let him go.”⁴² Apart from such logistical difficulties, Artaud tells us that by the time he witnessed the peyote dance he had been in withdrawal from heroin for at least one month, and that the symptoms were quite severe:

I did not mount my horse with a body pulled out of itself and which the withdrawal to which I had abandoned myself deprived henceforth of its essential reflexes; I was not that man of stone whom it required two men to turn into a man on horseback; and who was mounted on and dismounted from the horse like a broken robot—and once I was on the horse, they placed my hands on the reins, and they also had to close my fingers around the reins, for left to myself it was only too clear that I had lost the use of them [...] Twenty-eight days since this inexplicable torment had begun [...] The hold was therefore upon me, so terrible that to go from the house of the Indian to a tree located a few steps away required more courage, required summoning the reserve forces of a truly *desperate* will.⁴³

Such testimony makes us wonder whether Artaud was physically able to participate in the ritual, let alone emotionally coherent enough to accurately portray the ritual in words. Then again, perhaps the peyote shamans of the Tarahumara felt enough pity for this apparently wretched shell of a man such that he certainly needed to be cured of his ailments. But this is doubtful because as Bennett and Zingg noted, they encountered great difficulty in simply obtaining information about peyote from practicing “doctors.”⁴⁴ Lumholtz speaks of a peyote shaman he convinced to sell him a few specimens “which the Tarahumares worship—a betrayal of the secrets of the tribe, for which the other shamans punished him by forbidding him ever to go again on a *bikuli* [peyote] journey.”⁴⁵ Lumholtz also states that certain “shamans washed their hands and rinsed their mouths immediately after eating from my vessels, because *bikuli* [peyote] would be angry with them for eating strange food cooked by strange people.”⁴⁶ This said, the Rarámuri always have been wary of outsiders whom they meet with great suspicion.⁴⁷ Today, as well as in the past, they are reluctant to enter into conversation with strangers.⁴⁸

With all of the these points taken together, we ask whether Artaud’s writings were not based more in fantasy rather than concrete reality, and if in fact second-hand source material formed the foundation upon which he constructed his many (in)famous narratives. In an attempt to put the latter problem to rest, I will provide a representative sampling of Artaud’s excerpts from “The Peyote Dance” and contrast them with those made, for the most part, by earlier observers which are eerily similar.

This is an exercise that, I believe, has never before been attempted.⁴⁹

Artaud's subsequent comments must be placed into their context. The first four pages of "The Peyote Dance" describe in vivid detail Artaud's physical torment resulting from his body's withdrawal from heroin. After twenty-eight days of this "heavy captivity," and only twelve days after he had arrived at "this isolated corner of the earth," he became extremely distraught by the news that the peyote rite would be postponed for another excruciating week due to the death of a local man.⁵⁰ Bill Merrill, an authority on the Rarámuri and especially their religious concepts regarding the soul, observed several death rituals over the course of two years while living with the Rarámuri in the late 1970s. His detailed descriptions of "final death" rituals called *napisó osimáchi* ("when we write with ashes"), like those for peyote, "are never staged during the maize growing season."⁵¹ Indeed, when Lumholtz speaks about his participation in the peyote ritual he says that it took place on a wintry evening in December.⁵² Reconstructing Artaud's travels from his written works and other correspondence, we learn that his journey to the Sierra lasted between six to eight weeks, began in late August, and ended with his arrival in Chihuahua City on October 7, 1936. With others, I have observed that the Rarámuri maize harvest almost always begins in mid to late October or early November.⁵³ It would then seem that Artaud was in the Sierra at the wrong time of the year to witness any ritual activities associated with peyote or even the major ceremonies associated with *napisó*. Merrill's explanation for the restriction "is that holding these ceremonies before the maize is mature would anger God who would destroy their crops."⁵⁴ Of course, the first frosts of the year also appear in mid-October to early November.

It is possible that Artaud witnessed preparations in conjunction with a smaller death ritual, which Merrill notes can be held at any time of the year. However, he would not have been allowed to participate in it.⁵⁵ Perhaps 1936 was an anomalous year and the maize was ready earlier than usual (very doubtful), or, maybe a family decided to tempt fate and the wrath of the Gods by conducting a *napisó* rite anyway. After all, "the dead present the greatest danger to the living in this interim period. They are said to remain near their living relatives until the completion of this ritual and will punish them by making them ill or taking the souls of their children if they feel forgotten."⁵⁶ So if the traditional arrival of the maize harvest was only weeks away, perhaps the inherent risks posed by the dead outweighed those of the Gods? This is also unlikely, since Merrill stated that no outsider would ever be allowed to participate in a Rarámuri death ritual.⁵⁷ These are highly personal events and are reserved for family members only.

I believe that Artaud did not participate in the peyote ritual since he was in the Sierra at the wrong time of the year. Further, he must have borrowed heavily from the writings of other observers who did witness the ritual. Artaud wrote:

As daylight faded, a vision confronted my eyes. I saw before me

“The Nativity” of Hieronymus Bosch, with everything in order and oriented in space, the old porch with its collapsing boards in front of the stable, the fire of the Infant King glowing to the left amid the animals bleating, and to the right the Dancer Kings. The kings, with their crowns of mirrors on their heads and their rectangular purple cloaks on the backs—at my right in the painting—like the Magi of Hieronymus Bosch.⁵⁸

These “Dancer Kings” were nothing less than the *matachines* dancers who participate in *napisó* rites as well as other ceremonies that mark important holidays on the Rarámuri ceremonial calendar.⁵⁹ Basauri describes the *matachines* as men “who dance to the accompaniment of Indian violin music and wear showy cloaks of various colors and headdresses adorned with crowns of mirrors, plumes, and beads, not to mention Chinese crepe paper of various colors. In these dances they attach small bells to their legs with leather straps and the principle dancers carry rattles.”⁶⁰ Bennett and Zingg recorded the same costume, as did Merrill for a group of *matachines* dancers who participated in a large *napisó* some fifty years later.⁶¹ It is also important to note that in Norogachi *matachines* are never performed during the timeframe Artaud visited the area. For example, they are only performed during October 11-12th (*Día de la Virgen del Pilar*), November 1-2 (*Día de los Muertos*), December 11-12 (*Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe*), December 24-25 (Christmas), January 5-6 (Epiphany), February 1-2 (*Día de la Candelaria*), and on May 3, when the largest *yumarí* celebration (e.g., curing of the agricultural fields, petitioning the gods for rain) takes place.⁶²

I believe I have provided evidence to support my assertion that Artaud in fact witnessed the preparations leading up to a minor Rarámuri death ritual rather than participation or even observation of a peyote ritual. I would like to underscore the idea that he borrowed heavily from earlier writers in order to provide his readers with a stirring account of the peyote dance, since this contention reveals new insights into the work and life of one the Sierra’s most infamous visitors and promoters.

In his essay on the peyote dance Artaud reports that “[d]uring the day two young goats had been killed. And now I saw on a branchless tree trunk that had also been carved in the shape of a cross, the lungs and hearts of the animals trembling in the night wind.”⁶³ Lumholtz offers the same testimony with more context:

Goats are sacrificed only at burial functions. If the people do not give the best they have for sacrifices, they will obtain only poor results [...] On the third day after death, the relatives begin to prepare the first feast for the dead, which is held within a fortnight. One or two sheep or goats are killed, and the lungs, heart, and the windpipe are hung from a stick outside the burial-cave.⁶⁴

Artaud continued,

Another tree trunk has been placed near the first, and the fire had been lighted in the middle of the circle [...] When I approached in order to discern the nature of this burning center, I perceived an incredible network of tiny bells, some of silver, others of horn, attached to leather straps which were also awaiting the moment for their ritual use.”⁶⁵

The “bells” Artaud describes belong to the *matachines* dancers, which I described earlier in a passage by Basauri: “In these dances they attach small bells to their legs with leather straps and the principle dancers carry rattles.”⁶⁶

We have now arrived at the event where the peyote is made visible to all:

Ten crosses in the circle and ten mirrors. One beam with three sorcerers on it. Four priests (two Males and two Females). The epileptic dancer, and myself, for whom the rite was being performed.

At the foot of each sorcerer, *one* hole, at the bottom of which [was] the Peyote plant. And the hole, with a wooden or earthen basin inverted over it, represents rather well the *Globe of the World* [my italics]. On the basin, the sorcerers rasp the mixture.⁶⁷

Compare Artaud’s description to Lumholtz’s extended version of essentially the same passage:

The master of the house in which the feast is to be held gives some plants to two or three women appointed to the office of shaman’s assistants [...] The women grind the plants with water on the metate, and then take part in the dance [...] The shaman (sometimes there are two) takes his seat on the ground to the west of the fire, about two yards off. On the opposite side of the dancing-place, towards the east, the cross is placed. The shaman’s male assistants, at least two in number, seat themselves on either side of their principal, while the women helpers take a position to the north of the fire [...] Close by the shaman’s seat a hole is dug [...] As soon as the shaman has seated himself, he takes a round drinking-gourd, and by pressing its rim firmly into the soil and turning the vessel round, makes a circular mark. Lifting up the bowl again, he draws two diametrical lines at right angles in the circle, and thus produces a *symbol of the*

world [my italics]. In the centre he puts a hikuli, right side up; or he may dig a hole in the centre [...] and place the hikuli in this. He then covers it up within a hollow sphere. The gourd may be replaced by a wooden vessel of similar shape; but in any case it is firmly planted in the ground to serve as a resonator for the musical instrument—the notched stick, which the shaman leans against the vessel, and on which with another stick he rasps an accompaniment to his songs.⁶⁸

Before ending the Peyote Dance with a description of the shaman's rasping stick and particular ritual movements associated with the number three, some of which are described below as well as in Lumholtz, Artaud paints the final scene:

He spat after drinking the Peyote, as we all did. For after the twelve phases of the dance had been performed, and since dawn was about to break, we were passed the ground-up Peyote, which was like a kind of muddy gruel; and in front of each of us a new hole was dug to receive the spit from our mouths, which contact with the Peyote had henceforth made sacred [...] After I had spat, I fell to the ground, overcome with drowsiness [...]

[Later] aroused and staggering, I was led toward the crosses for the final cure, in which the sorcerers shake the rasp on the very head of the patient. Thus I took part in the rite of water, the rite of the blows on the skull, the rite of that kind of mutual cure which the participants give each other, the rite of immoderate ablutions.⁶⁹

Again, compare Artaud's previous observations to those of Lumholtz:

The drink thus produced is slightly thick and of a dirty brown colour [...] Close by the shaman's seat a hole is dug, into which he or his assistants may spit, after having drunk or eaten hikuli, so that nothing [...] of the precious fluid [...] may be lost.

The secondary effect of the plant, depression and drowsiness, shows itself more plainly on the company when they sit down between the dancing, than on the well-trained shaman.

Just at daybreak, as the fire is dying out, the shaman gives the welcome signal that the dance is over, by three final raps on his notched stick. The shaman rises from his seat, carrying in his hands his rasping implements, and, followed by a boy who carries a gourd

with water, he proceeds to confer upon everybody present the benediction. Stopping in front of each one, he solemnly dips the point of the rasping-stick into the water, and after touching the notched stick lightly with the wetted end, first in the middle, then on the lower end, and finally on the top, he daubs the head of the person three times with it. Then he rests the end of the notched stick against the man's head and rasps three long strokes from end to end, throwing out his hand far into the air after each stroke. The dust produced by the rasping, infinitesimal though it may be, is powerful in giving health and life. Now he turns toward the rising Sun, holding out his implements to him; and, quickly rubbing up and down a few times at the lower end of the notched stick, he makes a long stroke from end to end, passing the hand far out from the stick toward the Sun. By this act, three times performed, he waves Hikuli home.⁷⁰

The question must be posed: did Artaud really visit the Rarámuri? I think so. In 2005, I interviewed one of the few Rarámuri elders who recalled his visit. Erasmo Palma, the renowned 80 year-old Rarámuri troubadour and poet who received a lifetime achievement award from former Mexican President Vicente Fox, told me that he met the Frenchman when he was just eight years old.⁷¹ In a conversation that began with my query about his views on the importance of Rarámuri culture to tourism in the state of Chihuahua, Erasmo meandered through a host of other topics ranging from the "peopling of the New World" to worldwide brotherhood, deforestation, and marijuana cultivation. He said of Artaud:

They said he was crazy, because he said the truth was with the Tarahumara. When he came here I was a boy. We showed him a place over there [he points to the northeast of his *rancho*] where there is a rock art site near a cave called Piedra Pintada [in Rarámuri it is called *rebebabuéami*, "signed" or "marked rock"]. He said that the truth was there. But now you can't see it very well. I made a song about him. Nobody liked him and they thought he was crazy; they gave him shock therapy. But no, he was lively, he didn't eat very much, they gave him false pills. He didn't lose his knowledge. But because they didn't feed him, he had to die. Before he died, he put his shoes on to come to Mexico to cure himself with the peyote. But he died.⁷²

Erasmo's concluding remarks make reference to Artaud's time in the mental asylum in Rodez, France, where he received electric shock therapy, little food, and was treated with false cures. As a result, Artaud slowly began to die, or as Erasmo has said, "he was cruelly tortured without cause... [and he] died like Christ."⁷³ But before



Fig. 1. The rock art site of *rebebahuéami* where Artaud “found the truth.” © Lars Krutak

Artaud expired, he wished to return to the Sierra Tarahumara in order to cure himself, “to find the one who would truly heal him. He died carrying a mystery to the tomb; he died dreaming of his Tarahumara brothers and the Tarahumara Sierra. He wanted to make known what he lived [and experienced] in the Sierra, but his countrymen didn’t believe the truth,” Erasmo explained.⁷⁴

Another Rarámuri elder has commented at length about the significance of caves and other natural features in relation to indigenous cosmology and self-improvement (Fig. 1). Perhaps similar testimony was shared with Artaud, since it was at such places that Erasmo believed he eventually arrived at “the truth.” The elder explained:

There are places that have great strength for one that knows how to understand and feel. They are places of unique power that comes out of the earth. It can be a place apart, somewhere in the fields, in the mountains, surrounded by rocks or boulders, at the entrance to a cave, at the high summit or at the rim of a canyon. If you stay there in silence for a very long time without sleeping – best is through the night – you might feel like new, ready to face and do many things you couldn’t do before.⁷⁵

Visual Icons and Enduring Metaphors

Antonin Artaud left behind a literary legacy that positions the Rarámuri within a powerful visual regime of representation, and that frames them within a landscape mixed with exoticism, primitivism, and mysticism. More specifically, he understands them as an exotic people who inhabited a land seemingly lost to time; as a primitive people who remained largely unacculturated and untouched by modernity because they lived outside of the world system; and as a mystical people who possessed spiritual profundity and deep metaphysical insight into the workings of the universe. The Rarámuri became symbolic capital because of their distinct uniqueness.

Of course, once the Copper Canyon and its indigenous inhabitants were “discovered” by modern travel writers after World War II, and by Mexican tourism officials after the 1960s, these symbolic stereotypes would be deployed in a market context to classify, code, and sell the Rarámuri and their environment for tourist consumption. Because they were “portraits of the past,” or “like fossil[s] come to life,” “these children of nature” were the collective “consciousness” of the region.⁷⁶ The Tarahumara dwelt in a “magical space” “as if suspended in a vacuum where the clock never moves;” with such terms, these descriptions have reinforced (inter)national ideologies concerning the commodification of indigenous culture.⁷⁷

Indeed, Mexican anthropologists have recently commented at some length on the particular influences that Artaud and even Lumholtz continue to have on the popular imagination of Mexico, on the development of anthropology in the Sierra Tarahumara, and on tourism promotion itself. For example, Mexican anthropologist Augusto Urteaga writes that Artaud’s and Lumholtz’s narratives were invaluable because they revealed for the first time the cultural and religious systems of the Rarámuri in humanistic terms.⁷⁸ Their stylized narratives captured a sense of wonder, adventure, and day-to-day immediacy resembling a personal diary or travelogue. These writers also revealed highly personal moments—e.g., trials and tribulations—that allowed readers to see into the character of the authors and the indigenous peoples with which they interacted. When they recorded their own feelings and reactions to particular incidents and individuals—e.g., encompassing respect, loneliness, humor at their individual weaknesses, and nostalgia—they revealed the humanity of the Tarahumara like no other authors had before them.

Obviously Artaud’s and Lumholtz’s ability to interact closely with small groups of people allowed them to portray the richness and textures of Rarámuri cultural life through “truthful [and] representational narratives.”⁷⁹ Urteaga continues that the Copper Canyon country and its people have since become a point of reference “only after” Artaud and Lumholtz exposed the Tarahumara to large audiences around the world.⁸⁰ And because their literary works address the shared, meaningful, and personal experiences and interactive communication that many cultural tourists and others seek to gain from their experiences with indigenous peoples, Artaud and Lumholtz are part of the narrative about cultural tourism in the

region.

While otherwise in agreement, the Rarámuri scholar Juan Luis Sariego believes that it was largely through the “rediscovery” of Artaud’s work in the Sierra Tarahumara, specifically his *D’un voyage au pays des Tarahumaras* (1945), that awakened an “unusual fascination.” This fascination was shared between the second generation of European anthropologists who returned to the Sierra in the 1970s, and the Mexican promoters and practitioners of tourism (by way of the Spanish language version of the same work, *México y viaje al país de los Tarahumaras*, 1984).⁸¹ Of course, since the country established the Artaud Prize for Literature (*Premio Artaud*) in 2003 for the best literary work of the year focusing on “cultural subjects” and which also embodies a “monumental literary force,” Artaud’s popularity has in recent years perhaps eclipsed Lumholtz’ in Mexico.

Today, however, tourism planners envision a different kind of *monumental* force for the Sierra Tarahumara. They are masterminding a hotel and resort boom here; the opening of the region’s first commercial airport in Creel, slated for 2015, is to accommodate jetloads of new tourists. This development, among many others in the works, presents a paradox. In bringing the Rarámuri into the fold of the global economy by means of increased tourism, industry planners may soon destroy the stereotypical Indian that they have been so eager to create and preserve. To this day, the Rarámuri are seen by Chihuahua state tourism promoters as “a tribe of very primitive and peaceful natives” who comprise the “living anthropology and archeology” of the region.⁸²

1 Alex Saragoza, “The Selling of Mexico: Tourism and the State, 1929-1952,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

2 Arjun Appadurai, “Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

3 The writings of American explorer Frederick Schwatka created enduring symbols and stereotypes that continue to remain at the heart of Copper Canyon and Tarahumara tourism advertising today. Frederick Schwatka, “Land of the Living Cliff-Dwellers,” *The Century: A Popular Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1892), 271-277; *In the Land of the Cave and Cliff Dwellers* (New York: The Cassell Publishing Co., 1893).

4 Raymonde Carasco, “Notes pour Un Cinéma de la Cruauté: Artaud, Buñuel et le Cinéma Mexicain,” *Art-Latina*, No. 1, n.p. <http://www.raymonde.carasco.free.fr/telechargements/notes-pour-un-cinema-pdf> (15 December 2008).

5 Many widely-read “Beat” writers like Lawrence Ferlinghetti were influenced by Artaud. Ferlinghetti, who founded the famous beatnik haunt and publishing house City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, pays homage to “that wild junkie [...] mescal landscape Artaud apprehended.” Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *The Mexican Night* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 13. City Lights published a selection of Artaud’s writings to American readers that continues to be reprinted. Jack Hirschman and Lawrence

Ferlinghetti (eds.), *Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1965). Artaud's Tarahumara writings have also reached a wide audience through numerous other monographs published in the United States, France, Spain, Germany and Mexico, not to mention articles (too many to list) published around the world. For select American publications see: Antonin Artaud, *The Peyote Dance*, Helen Weaver, trans. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976); Jeff Biggers, *In the Sierra Madre* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Bettina L. Knapp, *Antonin Artaud: Man of Vision* (New York: David Lewis, 1969); Jean-Marie G. LeClézio, *The Mexican Dream; Or, The Interrupted Thought of Amerindian Civilization*, Teresa L. Fagan trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Susan Sontag (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Helen Weaver trans. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); and Nathaniel Tarn, *The Embattled Lyric: Essays and Conversation in Poetics and Anthropology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007). For selected Mexican writings, see: Antonin Artaud, *México y viaje al país de los Tarahumaras* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984); Luis Cardoza y Aragón, *Antonin Artaud: México* (México, D.F.: UNAM, 1962); Luis Mario Schneider, *México y el surrealismo (1925-1950)* (México, D.F.: Arte y Libros); and Pedro Tzontémoc, Luis M. Schneider, Louis Panabière, Georges Lavaudant, *Tiempo Suspendido: Fotografía sobre La Ruta de Antonio Artaud en la Sierra Tarahumara* (México, D.F.: Casa de Las Imágenes, 1995).

Both positively and negatively, anthropologists also refer to Artaud's work in the Sierra. See Juan C. Castro, *La sierra Tarahumara o los desvelos de la modernidad en México* (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992); Bernard L. Fontana, *Tarahumara: Where Night is the Day of the Moon* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing, 1979); William L. Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls: Knowledge and Social Process in Northern Mexico* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988); Juan L. Sariego, *El indigenismo en la Tarahumara: identidad, comunidad, relaciones interétnicas y desarrollo en la Sierra de Chihuabua* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional Indigenista y Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002); Pedro de Velasco Rivero, *Danzar o morir: religión y Resistencia a la dominación en la cultura tarahumar* (México, D.F.: Centro de Reflexión Teológica, 1987).

6 One writer has pointed out that there are many similarities between Artaud's Tarahumara peyote memoirs and ideas in Casteneda's Don Juan books, but no evidence has come to light to confirm that the latter borrowed or was influenced by Artaud himself. Richard de Mille, *The Don Juan Papers: Further Casteneda Controversies* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2000), 395.

7 LeClézio, *Mexican Dream*, 165.

8 Artaud, *Peyote Dance*, 3 and 47.

9 *Ibid.*, 3.

10 Sontag, 370.

11 *Ibid.*, 370-371.

12 Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Porrúa, 1960 [1916]), 9, 171-181; Frances Toor, "Editor's Foreword," *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1925), 3; Frances Toor, "Mexican Folkways," *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1932), 206. As Knight has reported, this is a highly inflated number aimed at promoting and justifying the governmental policy of integration. Census figures recorded at the time of the Revolution document that the actual indigenous population of Mexico was around one-third of the total sum. Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910-1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, Richard Graham, ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 74. But popular literary "propaganda" and ideological works beginning with Manuel Gamio's (1916) *Forjando patria (Forging a Nation)* and the widely-read and bilingual English-Spanish publication *Mexican Folkways*—of which Gamio was a founding editor—proclaimed that in "Mexico there are about ten million, at least two-thirds of the population, [who live] in the remnants of their ancient civilization. It is these ten million [Indians] that the President [...] has promised to incorporate into modern life." Toor, "Foreword," 3.

13 *Forjando Patria*, 5-6.

- 14 José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica* (Madrid: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925).
- 15 Guillermo de la Peña, "Social and Cultural Policies towards Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives from Latin America," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 34 (2005): 722.
- 16 In 1921, Vasconcelos, head of the newly-created Department of Public Education (SEP), organized an exhibition of Mexican handicrafts in Mexico City, and in 1924 he brought folkloric groups from around the country to showcase their regional dances in the capital. Saragoza, "The Selling of Mexico," 97.
- 17 Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 46.
- 18 Sontag, 372-373.
- 19 *Peyote Dance*, 75.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 82. Scholars have noted that Artaud's Tarahumara writings of the 1940s are unreliable because by that time he had entered psychiatric care in Paris. Moreover, his experiences in Mexico were no longer fresh, and his memory and psyche were damaged both by drugs and repeated sessions of electric shock therapy. In a letter dated March 1, 1947, he wrote to longtime friend André Breton: "Thus for the past 10 years I have on me and I see around me an insane horde of corpuscles, animalcules, fluid bodies, more or less spectral figures who have no other occupation, no other purpose than to act against me as ghouls, lemurs, vampires, and to ceaselessly exhaust my humours, my secretions, and my vital juices." Hayman, 110-111. Therefore, I will focus largely on Artaud's writings that were published during the year of his Mexican stay (1936) or those, like "The Peyote Dance" (1937), that were published immediately after his trip. Of course, I will also utilize "The Peyote Rite Among the Tarahumara" (1947) because it contains important information that traces, albeit obscurely, his geographic route. All of these publications were later published in the compilation *The Peyote Dance* (1976), which I refer to throughout this paper. In the end, Artaud would spend seven long years in the asylum, three of which were in solitary confinement. He stated that his writings of this period were "written in the dulled mental state of a *convert* whom the magical spells of the priestly rabble, taking advantage of [my] momentary weakness, were keeping in a state of enslavement." Artaud, *Peyote Dance*, 43.
- 21 Luis M. Schneider, "Power and Devotion: Artaud ~ Tzontémoc," in *Tiempo Suspendido: Fotografía sobre La Ruta de Antonio Artaud en la Sierra Tarahumara* (México, D.F.: Casa de Las Imágenes, 1995), 135.
- 22 *Peyote Dance*, 21. Artaud may have been confused over the true identity of his guide. The anthropologists Bennett and Zingg noted that they procured one of their early interpreters, a highly acculturated Rarámuri man, from the mission at Sisoguichic. Wendell C. Bennett and Robert M. Zingg, *The Tarahumara: An Indian Tribe of Northern Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), xi.
- 23 Tarn, 93.
- 24 Octavio Paz stated that "any systematic study of contemporary Mexican literature must begin with the work of Alfonso Reyes." Paz also praised Reyes as one of the greatest prose writers in the Spanish language. Octavio Paz (comp.), *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, Samuel Beckett trans. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1958), 213 and 36. Subsequent writers have also made this distinction, stating that Reyes and Paz are the two greatest masters. Adolfo Castañón, *Arbitrario de literatura mexicana: Paseos I* (México, D.F.: Editorial Vuelta, 1993), 489.
- 25 Alphonso Reyes, "Artaud: No se juega infamemente con los Dioses," *Universidad de México: Revista de la UNAM*, (Junio): 6.
- 26 Paz, 189.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 6-7.
- 28 Jean-Marie G. LeClézio, "Antonin Artaud: le reve Mexicain," *Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle*, Vol. 667-668 (1984); LeClézio, *Mexican Dream*, Tarn, 92.
- 29 Carl S. Lumholtz, "Tarahumari Dances and Plant-Worship," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XVI, No. 4

(October, 1894); Carl S. Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico: A Record of Five Years' Exploration Among the Tribes of the Western Sierra Madre*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902).

30 In 2006 I met a group of young tourists from Italy who came to the Sierra seeking a peyote experience à la Artaud with a practicing shaman. Previously, these travelers were in Oaxaca gathering hallucinogenic mushrooms for an extended "trip." For recent filmmaking projects focusing on Artaud's Mexican travels and literary work, see Raymonde Carasco, *Los Pascoleros-Tarahumaras* (1996) and *Ciguri-Le Dernier Chaman* (1999). The former traces Artaud's trail in Tarahumara country and documents the Rarámuri's Easter celebrations. The latter explores the oratorical performances of the "last" generation of Tarahumara shamans, alternating them with Artaud's texts on peyote. Both parties seek a higher plane of consciousness that is accessed through peyote rituals. It should be noted here that Artaud's literary and artistic influence continues to enthrall Mexico to this day. In 2005 the country inaugurated "La Semana Artaud" to pay homage to the Frenchman's promotion of various aspects of Mexican culture to the world. The weeklong program featured radio transmissions and dramatized performance of his works, roundtable discussions by leading Artaud scholars, musical performances by the leading Rarámuri poet and troubadour Erasmo Palma (b. 1928) who met Artaud in the Sierra when he was a boy, and a video recreation of Artaud's journey to the Sierra Tarahumara. Arturo Jimenez, "Comienza la Semana Artaud; habrá actividades en various foros," *La Jornada*, 24 de Septiembre, 2005, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/09/24/a08n2cul.php> (24 July 2007).

31 Narárahic lies approximately 40 km away from Norogachi. It is connected by a well-used trail, and the journey can be accomplished on foot in three to four days. For discussions concerning Rarámuri shamanism in relation to geography, see Carlos Basauri, *Monografía de los Tarahumaras* (México, D.F.: Talleres Grafico de la Nacion, 1929), 69; Bennett and Zingg, xiv and 253; Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*, 198 and 311-312 and 314.

32 For example, "I wanted to find out more about Peyote. I walked over to the Priest to question him." *Peyote Dance*, 33.

33 Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 65; Schneider, "Power and Devotion," 135; Tarn, 93.

34 Tarn, 95.

35 Lars Krutak, *Selling the Copper Canyon: Tourism and Rarámuri Socioeconomics in Northwest Mexico*, PhD dissertation, Arizona State University, 2009, 122-123.

36 Léon Diguët, "le Peyote et son Usage Rituel les Indiens du Nayarit," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1907); Léon Diguët, "Idiome Huichol. Contribution à l'étude des langues Mexicaines," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, Vol. 8 (1911); Léon Diguët, *Les Cactacées Utiles du Mexique* (Paris: Archives d' Histoire Naturelle, Société Nationale d'Acclimation de France 4, 1928).

37 Carl S. Lumholtz, *Symbolism of the Huichol Indians* (New York: Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History 8, 1900); Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*.

38 Lumholtz spent five years in the Sierra Madre of Mexico. Bennett and Zingg spent nine continuous months in the Copper Canyon region.

39 *Unknown Mexico*, 200.

40 Bennett and Zingg, ix-x.

41 *Ibid.*, xiii.

42 *Ibid.*, xi.

43 *Peyote Dance*, 46-47 and 57.

44 Bennett and Zingg, xiv.

45 *Unknown Mexico*, 376-377.

46 *Ibid.*, 360-361.

47 *Ibid.*, 416.

48 Basauri, *Monografía*, 66.

49 Tarn proclaims, “Certainly, a more extensive investigation should consolidate and compare the [...] main descriptions that Artaud gives of his rituals with the scenarios detailed in the ethnographic literature. It will not be easy because links and recognition marks are often lacking in Artaud.” And, “[d]espite whatever I say here, please be assured that I continue to believe in two possibilities: that Artaud did reach the Tarahumara and that he did not reach them.” Tarn, 95 and 92.

50 *Peyote Dance*, 48.

51 Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls*, 172-173.

52 *Unknown Mexico*, 375.

53 My observations here regarding the harvest are based on fieldwork conducted in Norogachi where it is presumed that Artaud participated in the peyote dance. See also John G. Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Beer, Ecology and Social Organization* (Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1978), 64; Merrill, 18.

54 Merrill, 173.

55 *Ibid.*, 172.

56 *Ibid.*, 173.

57 Merrill, personal communication with the author, 2009.

58 *Peyote Dance*, 49.

59 In the ethnographic literature, the terms *matachine*, *matachini*, and *matachines* have been used to describe this Rarámuri dance, but *matachines* appears most frequently and will be used here. In the Tarahumara language, these brightly costumed performers are called *avíame* “dancer(s),” and the dance itself *matachini*. William L. Merrill, “Tarahumara Social Organization, Political Organization, and Religion,” in *Handbook of North American Indians: Southwest*, Vol. 10, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1983), 299; David Brambila, *Diccionario Rarámuri—Castellano (Tarahumar)* (México, D.F.: Buena Prensa, 1980), 39 and 306. The term *matachine* is most closely related to the Italian term *mattacino*, meaning “jester, mimic, buffoon,” a role assumed by early *matachines* groups in Spain for theatrical interludes in burlesque comedies. Brenda M. Romero, “The *Matachines Danza* as Intercultural Discourse,” in *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas Y Bailes Mexicanos* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 189.

60 Basauri also describes the “Matachines” in an earlier article for the bilingual Spanish/English publication *Mexican Folkways*: “[they] dance to the music performed on violins by indigenous players, dressed in capes of very loud colors and wearing crowns adorned with mirrors, feathers, beads and colored paper. They put leather jingles on the calves of their legs, and carry *sonajas* [rattles] like those of the Tutuguris [dancers].” Carlos Basauri, “Creencias y practicas de los Tarahumaras,” *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 3, No. 4, (1927): 231. See also Basauri, *Monografía*, 70.

61 *The Tarahumara*, 302; *Rarámuri Souls*, 177.

62 Krutak, 124.

63 Artaud was fascinated by the Rarámuri’s reverence for the cross. He also believed that the “cross of Man quartered in space” was the Rarámuri’s way of making manifest “an active geometric idea of the world to which even the body is related.” Moreover, “the Land of the Tarahumara is full of signs, forms, and natural effigies which in no way seem the result of chance – as if the gods themselves, whom one feels everywhere here, had chosen to express their powers by means of these strange signatures in which the figure of man is hunted down from all sides [...] for it is over the whole *geographic expanse of a race that Nature* has chosen to speak.” *Peyote Dance*, 9 and 12. Artaud believed that the cruciform was embedded everywhere in the “primeval” landscape of the Sierra, especially in rocks and in trees. Over the years, many Artaud scholars have questioned his fantastic and surreal descriptions of the Sierra landscape, and wonder if he was in fact seeing pictographs or “less concrete forms” due to heroin withdrawal. Tarn, 95. Based on my experience in the area, and especially around Norogachi, I can assert that there are many rock art sites in the region through which Artaud traveled;

and without a doubt most feature one or a series of crucifixes in varying contexts. Moreover, there were other “optical miracles” where at “every bend in the road one sees trees that have *deliberately* been burned in the shape of a cross.” Artaud, *Peyote Dance*, 16. These, I should note, are nothing more than the Rarámuri practice of carving large crosses into pine trees to demarcate the boundaries of their long-distance race courses. Lumholtz pictures such a tree bearing the caption “Cross Marking the Track of the Foot-runners.” *Unknown Mexico*, 283.

The anthropomorphic columns of rock that seem to speak and come alive in Artaud’s “The Mountain of Signs” (1936) are equally characteristic of naturally occurring geologic formations, like the contemporary tourist attraction “The Valley of the Monks” near the village San Ignacio; this formation, among others, is located in the same area that Artaud visited. These columns of weathered volcanic tuff near San Ignacio resemble human forms, or as the locals attest, erect phalli (the area is called Bisabirachi, “place of the large penises”). I believe such outcroppings are Artaud’s “creatures facing each other and opposing each other to mark their eternal conflict, their division, their duality, awaken[ing] strange memories in me. And I beg[an] to think that this symbolism conceals a Science. And I find it strange that the primitive people of the Tarahumara tribe, whose rites and culture are older than the Flood, actually possessed this science well before the appearance of the Legend of the Grail, or the founding of the Sect of the Rosicrucians.” *Peyote Dance*, 17. Artaud continues, “If the greater part of the Tarahumara race is indigenous, and if, as they claim, they fell out of the sky into the Sierra, one may say that they fell into a *Nature that was already prepared*. And this Nature chose to think like a man. Just as she *evolved* men, she also *evolved* rocks.” *Ibid.*, 13. What I find so interesting about the preceding two statements is that Artaud, once again, must have borrowed heavily from Lumholtz to formulate them. For example, was Artaud able to record Rarámuri myths as well as everything else he alludes to in a period of less than two months among them? Hardly, since Lumholtz did this for him. He specifically recorded their “Deluge” legend, and two creation myths, one of which stated: “According to another tradition they descended from heaven with corn and potatoes in their ears, and were led by Tata Dios [their highest God] into these mountains, the middle of the world, having originally come from the north-east or east.” *Unknown Mexico*, 298 and 297; *Peyote Dance*, 50.

64 *Unknown Mexico*, 334 and 384.

65 *Peyote Dance*, 50-51.

66 *Monografía*, 70. It should be noted here that Basauri’s accounts of Rarámuri curing rituals and dances are the only early sources to use the name “Tutuguri” for their most famous healing dance performed by the Rarámuri during their death, peyote, and other important rituals. Carlos Basauri, “The Resistance of the Tarahumaras,” *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (1926): 40; Basauri, “Creencias,” 219; Basauri, *Monografía*, 48. Artaud describes the movement of this dance in his 1937 version of the “The Peyote Dance” but he does not refer to it, nor the *matachines* dance, by name. In later works like “Supplement to a Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara” (1944) and “The Peyote Rite among the Tarahumara” (1947) he speaks of the “priests of Tutuguri.” His last written work, penned just two weeks before his death, bears the title “Tutuguri: The Rite of Black Night” (1948). Lumholtz and Bennett and Zingg use dialectical variants for *tutuguri*: *rutuburi* (Lumholtz) and *dutubúri* (Bennett and Zingg).

67 *Peyote Dance*, 52.

68 *Unknown Mexico*, 364-365.

69 *Ibid.*, 366-372; *Peyote Dance*, 46-54.

70 *Unknown Mexico*, 364-365; *Ibid.*, 371-372.

71 The award is dated January 17, 2002, and hangs proudly on the wall of his new “recording studio” in his family rancho at Tuchéachi on the outskirts of Norogachi, in a wooden frame created by his son-in-law Isidro. This award was for Erasmo’s achievements in the preservation and studies of

traditional music and Rarámuri culture. In September 2008, he received the Gawí Tónari (“World Pillars”) Prize at the 4th annual Chihuahua International Festival in Chihuahua City for his promotion of the region’s traditional music. Attended by such luminaries as Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo and Nobel Prize recipient Rigoberta Menchú, not to mention the former Governor of the state of Chihuahua José Reyes Baeza Terrazas, the Festival featured some 450 cultural activities by artists from 21 countries, who performed at 53 different municipalities across the state. Ricardo Cerón, “Chihuahua International Festival,” *El Universal*, September, 2008, <http://www.pvmirror.com/mexicomirror/208/chihuahuainternationalfestival.html> (3 October 2008).

72 Krutak, 132-134. I first visited this rock art site in 2003 with Erasmo’s son Carlos Palma and other colleagues who were visiting Norogachi during Easter Week. One rock art specialist provides a detailed and illustrated description of the locality; see William B. Murray, “Tres sitios de pinturas rupestres en la Alta Tarahumara de Chihuahua,” *Anales de Antropología*, Vol. 20 (1981). Interestingly, Artaud completed numerous drawings with captions while he was institutionalized in France. After his release from the Rodez asylum in 1948, he began writing a text to accompany many of these drawings entitled *50 Drawings to Murder Magic* which were to be subsequently exhibited in a Paris gallery. His sudden death from cancer the same year interrupted the project, but recently the project was completed and published. Many of these drawings were taken from the margins of his last notebooks and parallel the anthropoid figures, spoked wheels, and skeletal beings that comprise the rock art site of *rehebahuéami*. Evelyn Grossman (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: 50 Drawings to Murder Magic*, Donald Nicholson-Smith trans. (London: Seagull Books, 2008). To this day, I have never heard Erasmo sing this tune. While conducting research for my dissertation in the summer of 2008, I came across the book *Tiempo Suspendido*, that focused on the travel diaries of several writers and one photographer in their attempt to retrace the footsteps of Artaud through the Sierra. It was during this literary and photographic journey that the researchers met Erasmo in June 1992; he subsequently composed his ode to Artaud which is printed therein. Prior to the *Tiempo Suspendido* project, I am not sure if Erasmo had access to Artaud’s biographical information outside of what he may have learned from the project members. But Erasmo has traveled widely over the course of his illustrious career. He told me he has visited at least fifteen foreign countries, many of which are in Europe. Tzontémoc et al., 150.

73 Ibid., 140 and 144.

74 Ibid., 140.

75 Romaine Wheeler, *Life Through the Eyes of a Tarahumara* (Chihuahua: Editorial Camino, 1992), 43.

76 George M. Bradt, “The Tarahumaras: Twentieth-Century Cave Dwellers,” *Natural History*, Vol. LVII, No. 9 (1948): 392; Martin Litton, “Land of the Little People,” *Pacific Discovery*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (1954), 5; México Desconocido, *Guía México desconocido: Barrancas del Cobre*, No. 51 (México: D.F.: Editorial México Desconocido, 1999), 23; México Desconocido, *México Desconocido: así es Chihuahua* (México, D.F.: Editorial México Desconocido, 2006), 46. *México Desconocido* is the self-proclaimed “National Geographic of Mexico” magazine.

77 Ibid., 46; Allen G. Pastron, “Tarahumara Transhumance,” *Pacific Discovery*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (1975): 11.

78 Augusto Urteaga, “Narrativas etnográficas en la Sierra Tarahumara, México,” *Frontera Norte*, Vol. 9, No. 18 (1997): 203.

79 Ibid., 203.

80 Ibid., 203. The founder and director of the contemporary dance-theater group *Pappa Tarahumara* (Japan) was “so influenced by the Surrealist author [Antonin Artaud] that he named his company after the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico’s Copper Canyon, about whom Artaud once wrote.” Victoria Looseleaf, “Give It Props for Surrealism,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January, 2006, E-33.

81 Specifically, the German anthropologist Claus Deimel. See Claus Deimel, *Tarahumara: Indianer im Norden Mexikos* (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1980); “Die Peyoteheilung der Tarahumara,” *Schreibheft*,

Zeitschrift für Literatur, Vol. 25 (1985); *Híkuri ba: Peyoteriten der Tarahumara* (Hannover: Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover, 1996); Juan L. Sariago, “La Antropología de la Tarahumara: Nuevos y viejos debates,” in *Chihuahua Hoy: visions de su historia, economía, política y cultura*, tomo III, Victor Orozco ed. (Chihuahua: Chihuahense de la Cultura Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 2005), 239-240.
82 Secretaría de Desarrollo Comercial y Turístico del Estado de Chihuahua, “Directorio de Servicios: Copper Canyon Guide,” (2006), 5.