

The background is a deep red color with intricate, embossed or carved patterns. On the left, there are several figures in traditional attire, possibly from the Tarahumara region, engaged in what appears to be a ritual or a craft. The central figure is a man in profile, wearing a tall, square-topped hat and a long, flowing robe. To the right, there is a vertical column of repeating geometric and organic motifs, resembling ancient stone carvings or pottery designs. The overall aesthetic is historical and cultural.

JOURNEY TO MEXICO

REVOLUTIONARY MESSAGES
& THE TARAHUMARA

*Antonio
Lujan*

JOURNEY TO MEXICO

Antonin Artaud

JOURNEY TO MEXICO
REVOLUTIONARY MESSAGES
& THE TARAHUMARA

Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

Edited, introduced, and with notes & a chronology
by Stuart Kendall



Contra Mundum Press New York · London · Melbourne

*Journey to Mexico:
Revolutionary Messages &
the Tarahumara*

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Stuart Kendall

First Contra Mundum Press
edition 2024.

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Library of Congress
Cataloguing-in-Publication
Data

Artaud, Antonin, 1896–1948
Journey to Mexico:
Revolutionary Messages &
the Tarahumara /
Antonin Artaud

—1st Contra Mundum Press
Edition

532 pp., 5 × 8 in.

ISBN 9781940625645

- I. Artaud, Antonin.
- II. Title.
- III. Hanshe, Rainer J.
- IV. Translator.
- V. Kendall, Stuart.
- VI. Editor, introduction.

2023947852

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INTRODUCTION

LIFE IS ELSEWHERE

Stuart Kendall

... I do believe
that
nature
is about to speak

Antonin Artaud, *50 Drawings to Murder Magic*

On 10 January 1936, the poet, actor, and dramatic theorist, Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) departed Europe on a journey to Mexico that would take him from the streets, cafés, and lecture halls of Mexico City to the remote mountains of the Sierra Tarahumara where he participated in indigenous rituals. The journey would last only ten months, culminating in some six to eight weeks spent among the Tarahumara (Rarámuri), but it was to be a profound turning point in his life.¹ Within ten months, after returning to Europe, he would begin a period of internment that would last almost nine years.

Despite the claims of some critics & biographers to the contrary, Artaud was quite specific about the motives and intentions for his trip. Artaud didn't just leave Europe. He fled it. "I came to Mexico to escape European civilization, born of seven or eight centuries of bourgeois culture, & out of hatred for this civilization

& this culture. I hoped to find here [in Mexico] a vital form of culture" (228). "I have come to the land of Mexico to seek the foundations of a magickal culture that can still burst forth from the forces of Indian soil" (122). The vital form of culture that he sought was one wherein individual & communal behaviors were rooted in the soil of a place, wherein the rituals of religion, conceived in its tri-partite forms of belief, action, and experience, reinforce a connection in human lives between the earth & the sun. By connecting the environment, individual life, & communal life through ritual, religious or mythological consciousness becomes ecological consciousness.

Artaud's search for a vital form of culture, however, would not be a simple one. Aside from the emotional, physical, and financial challenges of the journey, he would have to confront and attempt to untangle the legacies of Christian conquest & colonialism & the imposition of modern European forms of government & economy, both Capitalism and Marxism. In contemporary terms, his appeal to indigenous culture would first require an intense and intricate effort at aesthetic, religious, political, and philosophical decolonization. This intellectual work would not be without a psychological cost. The very structure of his identity, the borderline between self and world, between mental and physical space, would come to be in question, as would the modern European notion of subjectivity itself. His search for a vital form of culture would ultimately require him to

grapple with altered states of his own consciousness. To think in other terms requires one to become an other. In 1936, Antonin Artaud was far from the ideal candidate to undertake such a journey.

To say that Artaud is a paradoxical and difficult figure is to understate the matter considerably. As a dramatic theorist, his influence on the theatrical arts in the twentieth century, particularly through his book *The Theater and Its Double* (1938), has been second only to that of Bertolt Brecht. His work as an actor includes roles on the stage with some of the most significant dramatic companies of his era, as well as in at least two classic films, Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927) & Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). But he was also a poet and *homme des lettres* who wrote with tremendous energy, force, and fierce originality. His greatest works may be his poems and letters, *Correspondence with Jacques Rivière*, *The Umbilicus of Limbo*, *The Nerve Meter*, and later, *Artaud the Momo* and *To have done with the judgment of god*. But also, in his final years, as he filled hundreds of notebooks with written matter, he used his pencil to draw, shattering the distinction between writing and drawing, producing a haunting and virulent body of work as a visual artist that has been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world.

Despite the renown of Artaud's work as a poet, actor, dramatic theorist, and visual artist, the events of his life all too often eclipse our experience of that work.²

It is another profound understatement to say that Artaud's life as a writer and artist was complicated by his addiction to opiates and his struggles with mental health. Having been prescribed laudanum as a palliative to his mental and emotional suffering as a young man, he remained an unrepentant but desperate addict for the rest of his life. "I am an opium addict the way that I am myself [,] without healing myself. To stop taking drugs is to die."⁵ Even as he struggled with addiction, attempting detoxification cures again and again, he wrote about his drug use and railed against drug laws throughout his career. "Let the lost lose themselves," he wrote in 1925.⁴ His drug use and defense of drug use would contribute to his mystique among readers across subsequent generations, particularly readers interested in the Beat Generation and the counterculture in the 1960s. If one views Artaud primarily through this aspect of his life, it is tempting to see his journey to Mexico as being motivated by an interest in taking peyote among the Tarahumara. An early English translation of some of these materials was titled *The Peyote Dance* undoubtedly in an effort to appeal to this reading.⁵ This association is particularly and indeed painfully misleading since peyote is a sacred plant and sacrament in a religious rite. It also produces a completely different kind of chemical impact on the body than opiates do. Opiates are sedatives, taken to relieve mental and physical pain. Peyote is a hallucinogen, taken to open one's perception.

Even more significantly though, at the far edge of Artaud's experience, in a delirium of dreams and visions, signs and symbols, enchantments and spells perceived to be immanently and aggressively at work in the world, lies madness, where the self truly is an other. Artaud's almost nine years of internment in psychiatric hospitals testify, as a simple fact, to the depth and extremity of his daily combat with perception and reality during those years of his life. His *œuvre* cannot be considered without taking account of the problem and possibility of madness, of the relationship between madness and meaning, madness and civilization. This is also to say that his *œuvre* inevitably and inexorably tempts the edge of radically distinct discourses, the critical and the clinical, where the question is not that of signs & symbols but that of signs or symptoms.

But even at that edge, as an argonaut of the soul and cartographer of consciousness, Artaud was also and perhaps finally & foremost a modern mystic. His most persistent struggle — etched in myriad forms — was the struggle to exist, the drama of consciousness caught between emptiness & existence, being and the void. While his most frequent and familiar references might be fellow *poètes et artistes maudits* — Baudelaire, Poe, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, and Van Gogh most often — the deep core of his thought derives from the classic works of religion, myth, and the esoteric tradition. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*,

Milarepa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the *Zohar*, the *Popol Vuh* and *Chilam Balam* were among books he read, re-read, and recommended, essential points of reference. Much of his later work in particular maintains a combative dialogue with the Gospels. Heraclitus, Pythagoras, & Plato were important to him, as were writers in the alchemical tradition, like Paracelsus and Robert Fludd, and more recent figures associated with esotericism and the occult, like Fabre d'Olivet, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, & René Guénon. In this light it is telling that the first name Artaud mentions among people who might help him find his way to Mexico was Louis Massignon, a specialist in comparative religious studies who had had his own mystical experiences.

Given this range of reference, work, & experience, it is unsurprising that Artaud has been a fecund focus of theatrical, literary, and philosophical criticism. Susan Sontag, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva and the other writers & critics associated with the journal *Tel Quel* are only some of the most prominent critics and philosophers whose work shaped the reception of Artaud's œuvre even as it shaped the direction of theirs.⁶ Given the breadth & depth of this legacy, in literature, philosophy, and the arts, in some senses, whether we know it or not, we are always already reading under the influence of Artaud, and we have been for a long time.

The territory traversed by Artaud, the motives and methods, the problems & limits articulated by his life and oeuvre, anticipated our own.

One contemporary critic, Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, summarizes the challenge facing readers of Artaud: “The temptation is great — and it remains — to divide up this unique oeuvre and to privilege this or that moment in order to exhume what one believes is the truth of Artaud’s discourse.”⁷ The temptation, in other words, is to read Artaud selectively, to prioritize one’s own interests, to find oneself in this or that aspect of Artaud’s vast corpus; to prioritize Artaud’s career as a poet, an actor, a dramatic theorist, or visual artist, or his life as an addict, madman, or mystic; to read Artaud through the lens of literature, theater, philosophy, religion, or even anthropology.

By gathering together writings related to Artaud’s journey to Mexico, the current collection is symptomatic of both sides of this temptation. It presents only a selection from Artaud’s vast corpus but in assembling that selection, it brings together an almost impossibly wide range of materials: the scenario for a tragedy; essays, lectures, and notes on Mexican and European arts, religion, and civilization; poetry written in reflection of ecstatic and visionary experiences of indigenous rituals; as well as letters written before, during, and after his journey to Mexico. The writings span fifteen years, from early 1933 to February 1948, only weeks before Artaud’s

death. The majority of them were nevertheless written between 1935 and 1937, as he prepared for, embarked upon, and returned from his journey to Mexico.

One might say that the book falls into four acts: the rising action shows Artaud as he prepares for his journey to Mexico, sketches his initial ideas, takes notes, proposes himself to people who might be of assistance to him on his way. The second act reveals Artaud in Mexico City, at the podium and in print, hurling his revolutionary messages past his audience. By the third act, something has happened, Artaud has already been to the Sierra Tarahumara. Though at least two of his reports were filed from the field, the action itself has taken place off-stage and the hero has been profoundly changed. The final act takes place years later, in a different country. After eight years and eight months of confinement, Artaud returns in thought and vision to the land of the Tarahumara, sifting through his memories for messages that have become still more revolutionary in their virulence and intent.

In another way though, this book collects at least three books, none of which was realized by Artaud. Only two of them were even suggested by him. In a letter written on 21 May 1936 to his erstwhile supporter, Jean Paulhan, editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (*N.R.F.*), Artaud boasted that a publisher in Mexico was interested in a collection of his "writings about the autochthonous cultures of Mexico" as well as some of his writings

on theater. He proposed the title *Revolutionary Messages*. Perhaps inevitably the volume failed to appear, if indeed it had ever really been discussed. Artaud may have been using the idea of it as a lure to convince Paulhan that he was being taken seriously in Mexico. Real or unreal, decades after his death, Paule Thévenin, the editor of Artaud's *Œuvres Complètes* at Gallimard, would use his proposed title for her own assemblage of his writings about Mexico, granting the project posthumous verity.

The gathering nevertheless should not be mistaken for the book Artaud might have had in mind. In the interest of completeness, Thévenin's collection attempted to present all of Artaud's texts from Mexico, his lectures as well as the articles, essays, and reviews he published in newspapers and journals. Some of these pieces were indeed focused on autochthonous Mexican cultures and topics on the theater. But there were other pieces as well, articles Artaud may have been asked to write by editors in Mexico who believed he had something to say on a particular topic that might have interested their readers. Would Artaud have retained all of these pieces in his own collection of these writings? Which of his other writings on theater might also have been included? There is no way to know: none of Artaud's letters and notes provide an outline for the volume.

When he returned to Europe at the end of his journey, he pressed Paulhan to publish some of his writings from Mexico in the *N.R.F.* &, after some delays, he was

successful. Two essays were published together as *Journey to the Land of the Tarahumara* (D'un voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras) in *N.R.F.* No. 287 (1 août 1937). The first of these, "The Mountain of Signs," had been written and published in Mexico. The second, "The Peyote Dance," was newer, the precipitate of months of consideration, writing, and revision over the spring and summer of 1937. These two pieces would be republished with a supplementary letter as a small book in 1945 & gather additional supplements & addenda as Artaud shifted through the meaning of his journey to Mexico in other essays, letters, and poems written during the final years and even weeks of his life. A book collecting this material was ultimately published posthumously as *The Tarahumara* (Les Tarahumaras, 1955).

But even that collection did not precisely represent an assemblage organized as Artaud might have intended: several manuscripts had been recovered in the years since his death. Still later, when Thévenin came to present the material on the Tarahumara in Artaud's *Œuvres Complètes*, she expanded the collection even further, including essays that Artaud had published in Mexico but subsequently either lost or abandoned, or both, as well as letters related to the journey.

By presenting the letters alongside the other writings, a third book emerges, one that in some ways overwhelms the other two. This third book is a book about the other two; it tells the story of the journey to Mexico.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Tarahumara is the Spanish name for the Rarámuri people.
- 2 For biographies of Artaud in English, see Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (Faber and Faber, 1995), and David A. Shafer, *Antonin Artaud* (Reaktion Books, Critical Lives, 2016). For an exhaustive treatment in French, see Florence de Mèredieu, *C'était Antonin Artaud* (Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006).
- 3 Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. 8, éd. Paule Thévenin (Gallimard, 1971) 25. Hereafter Artaud, OC volume (year) page number.
- 4 Artaud, OC 1 (1970) 320.
- 5 See Antonin Artaud, *The Peyote Dance*, tr. Helen Weaver (Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1976). *The Peyote Dance* is a translation of some of the material published in French under the title *Les Tarahumaras* (The Tarahumara).
- 6 Needless to say, the critical literature on Artaud is immense. For a survey, see Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, *Antonin Artaud: L'Incandescent perpétuel* (CNRS Éditions, 2022), or, for a detailed engagement with this critical tradition in English, see Jay Murphy, *Artaud's Metamorphosis: From Hieroglyphs to Bodies without Organs* (Pavement Books, 2016).
- 7 Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, "Singularité d'Antonin Artaud," *Europe*, 875–874 (janvier–février 2002) 104.
- 8 Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres*, éd. Évelyne Grossman (Gallimard, Quarto) 212. Hereafter *Quarto*.
- 9 Florence de Mèredieu, *C'était Antonin Artaud*, 543.

JOURNEY TO MEXICO

REVOLUTIONARY MESSAGES

& THE TARAHUMARA

THE AWAKENING OF THE THUNDERBIRD

It is a fact that civilization wakes us up. A civilization where the sky is agitated while men sleep is a civilization that has missed its aim.

This is why, much more than the Italo-Ethiopian war, what is currently happening in Mexico is of vital interest for civilization.

THE REBIRTH OF AN INSPIRED RACE

The Indianist policy of the current Mexican government doesn't only indicate a revival of indigenous nationalism.

It is not a state policy; it is a race policy. It is not just a nation that is being formed: it is a real civilization that is being born.

A DIRECTED CIVILIZATION

This rebirth of civilization is conscious. If one speaks here, in Europe, of directed economy, we think that one can speak in Mexico of directed civilization.

It is necessary to insist on the point that this rebirth is not artificial. Mexico is in reaction against Europe. It wants to rediscover its tradition. That doesn't mean it retains the superstition of the past.

OPEN LETTER
TO THE GOVERNORS
OF THE STATES OF MEXICO

Gentlemen, Governors,

I came to Mexico on a mission from the French National Education Secretariat.

The purpose of this mission is to study all manifestations of Mexican theatrical art; but it is in life that I want to do it, not on the boards.

And it is the indigenous art of Mexico that interests me here above all.

For me, the culture of Europe has failed and I believe that in the unbridled development of its machines Europe has betrayed true culture; and myself, in turn, I want to be a traitor to the European conception of progress.

The sacred Indian rites and dances are the most beautiful possible form of theater and the only one that can really justify itself.

So far these rites have interested only archaeologists & artists.

Archaeologists have spoken of them as scholars, that is to say very badly; artists have spoken of them as artists, which is to say even more badly. They did not know how to extract both the secret science and the deep meaning these rites conceal.

There are predestined places on earth, made to preserve the culture of the world. And in France, the enlightened, but also worried, anxious youth, and I would say even desperate, are now turning their gaze with all their soul to these predestined places.

Present-day Tibet and Mexico are the nuclei of the culture of the world. But the culture of Tibet is made for the dead; this is where we can still learn, to detach ourselves from life, the technical means of dying well.

The eternal culture of Mexico was always made for the living. In the Maya hieroglyphs, in the vestiges of Toltec culture, one can still discover the means of living well; to drive sleep from the organs, to keep the nerves in a state of perpetual exaltation, that is, completely open to immediate light, water, earth, and wind.

Yes, I believe in a force sleeping in the land of Mexico. And it is for me the only place in the world where sleep the natural forces that can be useful to the living. I believe in the magickal reality of these forces as one believes in the salutary and curative power of certain waters.

I believe that Indian rites are the direct manifestations of these forces. I do not want to study them either as an archeologist or as an artist, I will study them as a scientist, in the true sense of the term; and I will try to let myself be consciously penetrated by their soul healing virtues. When human magnetism is exhausted, one must return to the earth to regain one's strength.

The primitive rites of the Indians are in communication with the earth, and their dances, their animated hieroglyphics, their occult movements, unconsciously translate its laws.

Between the earth and man, the spirit of man periodically interposes, disturbing the pure forces of the earth by extracting from them the mire of divine superstitions.

But just as periodically the natural forces of the earth reappear and put an end to the false spirits of the gods.

I want to thank the Government of Mexico here for allowing me to get in touch with the true culture of Mexico; and I want to thank the Governors of the States in advance for their help, hoping that they will enable me to travel to any place where the red soil of Mexico continues to truly speak its language.

I CAME TO MEXICO TO ESCAPE
EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION ...

I came to Mexico to escape European civilization, born of seven or eight centuries of bourgeois culture, and out of hatred for this civilization & this culture. I hoped to find here a vital form of culture and I have found only the corpse of the culture of Europe, which Europe is already beginning to rid itself of.

There are conscious people in Europe; in France there are also some. These people are the revolutionaries and I am a revolutionary like them. But, we want to pose the problem of revolution in a total way, and, in order to bring an idea of total revolution to fruition, we think that Marxism is not sufficient.

The revolution of Marx posed the problem of social revolution in a technical way. We think that the social revolution is only a separate aspect of the total revolution and that to consider the revolution exclusively from the social aspect is to prevent it from being brought to a successful end.

The problem does not appear to us as the substitution of one class by another class to ultimately arrive at the suppression of the classes; but it is to seek in man's ways of living the reasons for an eternal perversion.

When someone talks to me about eating right away, I answer that we must immediately look for ways so that everyone can eat right away. But when I am told:

Let's feed everyone immediately and, afterwards, the arts, sciences, and thought will be able to develop, I answer no, because that is where the problem has not been well posed.

For me, there is no revolution without a revolution in culture, that is to say, in our universal way, our way, for all of human beings, of understanding life and of posing the problem of life.

To dispossess those who own property is good, but it seems to me better to deprive every man of the taste for property.

Culture is eating; it is also knowing how to eat; and for me when I think, I eat, I devour and I assimilate thoughts. I receive the impressions of nature from outside and I expel them outward in thoughts. It is the same vital act, it is the same function of life that makes me think and eat. Separating the activity of the body from that of the intelligence is to pose the problem of life badly. The materialist concept of the world actually separates the two functions. Marxists believe in nourishing the body to allow the mind to function freely. This is for me a lazy attitude, a false notion of human happiness.

All creation is an act of war: war against hunger, against nature, against disease, against death, against life, against fate.

I am not for the sybaritism of individual peace. I am not for the arts of peace. Creating in peace is a bourgeois attitude, and if I am against all bourgeois attitudes, it

is because I have a real notion of the spirit of property. Hunger, cold, love, sickness, and lack of sleep are not things from which one can derive artistic enjoyment. I am not in favor of artists procuring artistic pleasures at the cost of cold, hunger, sleep. I do not accept that artists individually possess their own satisfactions, because I am against the spirit of property, against the spirit of possession, on all possible levels.

There is a war between Marxism and myself, and this war rests on a distinct notion of individual consciousness. Marxism claims that it is impossible to reach consciousness directly because consciousness is something that we have no knowledge of. We want to force individuals to behave socially in an equitable manner by forcing them to do so through the determinism of facts. There is in this attitude a contempt for human consciousness which I share, and I think with Marxism that every individual is rotten.

I am in favor of the enslavement of human consciousness by matter, but I do not believe that the economic analysis of the world, that the reduction of all of the problems of the world to the simple economic factor, is the best means of achieving this goal.

To feed everyone is not to cure the world, but alongside a satisfied stomach there are the vices of the conscience, the passions, the idiosyncrasies of individuals, the spirit of madness and of crime, and also the betrayals of individuals. Every revolution has its traitors,

and when, in a proletarian government, a proletarian betrays and passes over to reaction, is it because he ate too much or because he did not eat enough? I am asking you to answer me and, in doing so, please do not believe that I am oversimplifying the question.

Like you, I have a material notion of life and of being. But it is not enough for me to feed man; I want to understand how the life of man is perverted. Just as there are diseases of human organs, so there are alterations in human consciousness that to me are diseases. Stealing, betraying, deceiving are diseases that must be controlled. Hoarding is also a disease. I try to get a clear idea of human biology, and I want to attack human biology to prevent my ignorance from ever allowing it to enact vengeance.

Marxism has posed the problem of human biology badly. It denies the world of consciousness, and I want us to enter the world of consciousness with iron in hand, and for the revolution to take place, first, in that world. We know that the Marxist position is to succeed one day in mechanically explaining consciousness, but before we can do that I don't know what new madness will have time to crush the revolution.

Marxism cannot explain consciousness and refuses to recognize the world of consciousness because it believes that this would be to recognize the absolute reality of the spirit. And me, I say that because of this it adopts a spiritualist attitude. Its fear of studying conscious-

ness as a world in itself means that, in speaking of the phenomena of consciousness, it continues to apply the old spiritualistic language that still draws a distinction between matter and spirit. Before the spirit, the materialist finds himself disarmed. I want one to enter into armed combat with the realm of consciousness because I have a material idea in mind, although I have an anti-materialist philosophy of life. I believe that life exists. I don't believe that life is born of matter, but I believe that matter is born of life.

There is a mysticism in Russia. Materialism is a mysticism, anti-imperialism is a mysticism, the struggle against fascism is a mysticism, the destruction of the family is a mysticism. I mean that there is a collection of ideas here which, by the mere fact of being formulated, provoke a direct action on the mind. The human mind, which moves fast, corrects its outward attitude and behavior in life according to its ideas. There is in this an immediate alchemy of consciousness. Those who betray their ideas are shot in the name of the value of those ideas and of the human and material attitude they entail. This supposes that we admit a particular life of consciousness, of consciousness that forms and deforms reality.

I say that if materialism did not believe in the life of ideas, it would renounce speech. It is therefore obliged, first of all, to admit a life of ideas and to judge ideas according to unverifiable laws. It takes this attitude

because it cannot have another, and because the materialist explication of the world has stopped without explaining a whole set of facts that ceaselessly transform the life of the world.

Shooting traitors is fine, but it's a bit of a simplistic attitude. Who would venture to say that we have thus extirpated the spirit of betrayal? I claim that the spirit of betrayal is a curable and material thing, which it is possible to achieve materially.

Revolutionary biology has abandoned within consciousness a whole collection of notions that also belong to the counterrevolutionary consciousness, that is, to a bourgeois idea of man, nature, and life.

This is why I say: there is no revolution without a revolution in culture, that is, without a revolution of modern consciousness in the face of man, nature, and life.

It is for me a bourgeois idea to separate the problem of life from the problem of culture, the problem of life in man from the problem of life in nature, the problem of the body from the problem of the mind, and the problems of physiological diseases from the problems of mental diseases.

This analytical concept of the world is a lie of European culture, that is, a lie of the white spirit. So I add: there is no revolution without a revolution against the culture of Europe, against all forms of the white spirit, and I do not separate the white spirit from the forms of white civilization.

The white spirit is materialistic, but if life arose out of matter, it would take 50,000 years of experience to extract the laws of life from the experience of matter. If, contrarily, I believe that life governs matter, I can immediately organize matter through a knowledge of life.

The bourgeois world has never known life, but it has always known matter. It is on an exclusive idea of matter that the European world has lived. To know life solely through experience is to think that each experience in itself has a particular life value and from there it follows that each art form has a particular life value, that works of art are valid in their form and by their form and books by their written content.

There is an idea of the capitalization of forms as there is a capitalist form of life. You think like me that culture is not in books, but that it is a way of being in life. Eating, drinking, sleeping, loving, thinking, dreaming, that's culture, but you still have an experimental idea of life, and I ask you to tell me how you reconcile this contradiction.

If you admit that culture is a vital thing, you cannot recognize an existence in itself in written, painted, or sculpted forms of life, since you think that what lives is not the forms but the life that is found below them. Therefore, you must be ready like me to burn all forms that only imitate life. Alongside the capitalization of forms there is an idea of the petrification and conservation of forms, and that too is bourgeois.

It is because I have a unitary idea of culture that I say that thinking, sleeping, dreaming, eating, it's all the same thing. All of this is life. But I say that this same spirit of the collector who accumulates paintings and books and amasses stones in museums is also the spirit that hoards provisions, that asphyxiates the production of the world, and that diverts for the benefit of a few individuals a whole ensemble of material wealth whose enjoyment belongs to all.

If I say that true culture is not the one that is written, it is because I have a sense of life as that which moves, and culture is linked to a principle of life as that which moves. Capitalist Europe believes in the culture of books because in its conservative soul it has an idea of life that is not dynamic.

I don't believe in the culture of books, I don't believe in the culture of written things because I consider life as a free man; free, that is to say, that which has never been able to be concatenated.

However, I ask what happens to the materialistic idea when science, in its last stage, teaches us that there is no matter, that all life is energy, and that matter, in its multiple forms, is only one expression of this energy.

We examine atoms to understand matter, but each atom disappears in the sieve of science and transforms into a particular version of the dynamism of energy. Human thought is also an energy that takes on forms. And what prevents us from considering this energy in

its particular form and from capturing this intense source of energy?

At the same time as matter, science destroys spaces. It is said that the notion of space is no more than a form that allows the human mind to distribute, each in its place, the various forces of energy. All great cultures deny this notion of space. China, for seven or eight thousand years, has been talking about emptiness and says that it is emptiness that is found at the origin of life. The Mexican Cross emerges from the void; it represents an idea of space that unfolds from the void. The six branches of the complete cross intersect at the same point, and this central point represents the void.

The cross of Christ symbolizes a human idea; it represents the death of Christ. It is an anthropomorphic idea. The Mexican Cross emerging from the void shows us how life enters space. It indicates how the emptiness of space can give an outlet to life.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Stuart Kendall is a writer, editor, and translator working at the intersections of philosophy, poetics, media, & design. He is best known as the author of a biography of Georges Bataille, published in Reaktion Books' series Critical Lives, and as the editor and translator of seven volumes of Bataille's writings, including *Inner Experience*, *Guilty*, *On Nietzsche*, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, and *The Cradle of Humanity*. Contra Mundum published his *Gilgamesh* (2012; 2020) as well as his translation of *Phrases: Six Films* by Jean-Luc Godard.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Rainer J. Hanshe is a writer and the founder of Contra Mundum Press and *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*. He is the author of two novels, *The Acolytes* (2010) and *The Abdication* (2012), and the editor of Richard Foreman's *Plays with Films* (2013) and William Wordsworth's *Fragments* (2014). He is also the author of the hybrid entity *Shattering the Muses* (2016), a collaboration with Italian visual artist Federico Gori, *Closing Melodies* (2023), a phantomatic encounter between Nietzsche & Van Gogh, and *Dionysos Speed* (2024). Work of his has appeared in *Cæsura*, *Sinn und Form*, *ChrisMarker.org*, *Asymptote*, Black Sun Lit's *Vestiges*, and elsewhere. In 2016, Petite Plaisance published an Italian translation of his second novel, *The Abdication*. Shorter and longer works of his have been translated into other languages. His own translations include Charles Baudelaire's *My Heart Laid Bare* (2017; 2020), *Belgium Stripped Bare* (2019), and *Paris Spleen* (2021) and Évelyne Grossman's *The Creativity of the Crisis*, as well as longer and shorter works by other authors. His translation of Léon-Paul Fargue's *High Solitude* is due out in 2024. *Beyond Sense*, a vatic exploration of the aphasiac disintegration of Hölderlin, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Artaud, is forthcoming in 2025, *The Accumulating Wreckage: Poems, Essays, & Other Texts* in 2026, and *Paris Without End: Assorted Translations From Giacometti to Artaud: 1914–1964* in 2027. He is at work on a new book entitled *Humananimality*.

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JOURNEY TO MEXICO: REVOLUTIONARY
MESSAGES & THE TARAHUMARA

was handset in InDesign CC.

The text font is *Migra*.

The display font is *Scala Sans*.

Book design & typesetting: Alessandro Segalini

Cover design: CMP

Image credit: Sanctuary tablet from the Temple of the
Sun, Palenque, Mexico, ded. * 9.13.0.0.0 (692 CE).

JOURNEY TO MEXICO: REVOLUTIONARY
MESSAGES & THE TARAHUMARA

is published by Contra Mundum Press.



Contra Mundum Press New York · London · Melbourne

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CONTRA MUNDUM PRESS

is published by Rainer J. Hanshe

Typography & Design: Alessandro Segalini

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ON 10 JANUARY 1936, the poet, actor, and dramatic theorist, Antonin Artaud departed Europe on a journey to Mexico that would take him from the streets, cafés, & lecture halls of Mexico City to the remote mountains of the Sierra Tarahumara. The journey would last only ten months, culminating in some six to eight weeks spent among the Tarahumara (Rarámuri), but it was a profound turning point in his life.

Artaud didn't just leave Europe. He fled it. "I came to Mexico to escape European civilization ... I hoped to find a vital form of culture." The vital form of culture that he sought was one wherein individual and communal behaviors were rooted in the soil of a place, wherein the rituals of religion reinforced a connection in human lives between the earth & the sun.

But Artaud's search for a vital form of culture would not be a simple one. His appeal to indigenous culture would first require an intense and intricate effort at aesthetic, religious, political, & philosophical decolonization. And this intellectual work would not be without a psychological cost.

Journey to Mexico collects very nearly all of Artaud's writings related to his voyage to the land of the Tarahumara: the writings he prepared prior to this journey; the pieces he published in Mexico and the lectures he delivered there; the essays, letters, and poems that he wrote in the years after his journey, reflecting on and reframing his experiences. A selection of letters written before, during, and after the trip conveys the very personal — the physical, emotional, and financial — challenges of the journey.

Artaud's *Journey to Mexico* takes us far from home to the limits of art and anthropology, myth and religion, to confront the legacies of colonial conquest and the possibility of decolonization in a desperate search for a "vital form of culture."



Contra Mundum Press

ISBN 978-1-940625-64-5



9 781940 625645

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Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

Edited & introduced by Stuart Kendall