

(Re)-Attaching Truth to the Physical Realities of the Universe: Antonin Artaud and J.M.G. Le Clézio's Philosophical Quest

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Disenchanted by the artifice, sterility, and intellectual myopia of Western society, the tortured artist Antonin Artaud and the Franco-Mauritian writer J.M.G. Le Clézio embarked upon philosophical quests in an effort to (re)-attach their fragmented consciousness to fundamental ontological realities from which there is no escape. A profound sense of cosmic alienation and existential malaise forced both writers to flee the modern world and its erroneous and misleading abstractions that have led the modern subject further from basic truths. Realizing that anthropocentric thought systems are predicated upon simplistic dualities, Manichean logic, and comforting illusions, Artaud and Le Clézio turned to traditional civilizations in a desperate attempt to understand what existence truly entails for an ephemeral being that is inextricably linked to a greater life force that constantly evolves to generate new life. Cognizant that no substance exists in a sort of cosmic vacuum completely isolated from other particles of matter and that all notions of existential superiority are founded upon arbitrary distinctions that are antithetical to the human condition and the physical realities of the universe, both authors attempt to (re)-discover their small place in the larger biotic community of life.

The purpose of this intertextual study is to explore the philosophical crisis which implored Artaud and Le Clézio to seek a remedy for their immeasurable anguish in the form of a more realistic worldview that accurately articulates what it means to live in an interconnected and interdependent relationship with the rest of the biosphere. Although numerous critics have noted the influence of Artaud's writings upon Le Clézio, these comparisons have been rather superficial in nature. Thus, this investigation endeavors to probe common threads between these two extremely divergent writers in a more systematic fashion. Moreover, this exploration will also elucidate that a deep existential void and a loss of cosmic identity compelled both authors to reject Western society and its homocentric, materialistic values.

Describing the existential pain and alienation from which Artaud appeared to suffer his entire life, Louis Sass affirms, "Body, mind, and external reality: all seem distant, uncoordinated, unreal. He lives instead with a chronic ontological nausea, always on the brink of some vaguely sensed and ineffable, yet horrifying devastation" (76). The intense cerebral anguish to which Sass refers is a by-product stemming from the narcissistic delusions of grandeur of a species that has become so self-absorbed that it has conveniently forgotten the universal laws which govern the fleeting existence of every sentient creature. Underscoring this "enjeu existentiel," Guy Dureau asserts that the voyage of self discovery which motivated Artaud's travels reflects an attempt to "dissiper le profond dégoût ressenti à l'égard de cette obscurantiste et philistine culture occidentale qui, faite de mots et de concepts, a perdu toute prise sur la réalité de la vie" (92).

Indoctrinated from birth by complex abstract concepts which ironically are often entirely incompatible with even a basic understanding of how the universe operates, the modern subject often feels disconnected from a part of himself without being able to pinpoint the precise source of this cerebral turmoil. Explaining that healing this cosmic rupture is the impetus which fueled Artaud's vision of a "theater of cruelty," Bettina Knapp posits, "Western man today feels cut off from nature and from himself [...] the drama *per se*, looked upon symbolically, is Creation, the enactment and reenactment of the pain man experiences as he is torn away from his original state of unity, from 'Mother Earth' [...] As the story of Creation is enacted before him, the spectator is filled with nostalgia for the primordial connection which he had nearly forgotten" ("The Mystic's Utopia" 125-126). As Knapp notes, it is impossible to separate Artaud's works from the philosophical search that ultimately produced them. Indeed, Artaud's dramaturgical theory articulated in his most renowned text *The Theater and Its Double* should also be understood in the context of a fractured subject longing to (re)-establish a spiritual communion with the impersonal cosmic forces which represent the origin of all life.

Given the poignant cerebral trauma that concretizes the quotidian reality of many early LeClézian protagonists such as Adam Pollo, Roch, and Beaumont, several researchers have associated these initial narratives with those of French existentialists such as Camus, Sartre, and Malraux.¹ Similar to the searing pain that Artaud describes in his autobiographical writings, the anguish of countless alienated protagonists from Le Clézio's first works reflects a profound yet often nebulous sense of loss and displacement. In this vein, Jean-Paul Mezade identifies the source of Adam Pollo's distress and inability to project any semblance of meaning upon his absurd existence as being emblematic of a severed being that possesses only a "certainne mémoire de la matière" (50). The aforementioned, anthropocentric abstractions based on wishful thinking rather than rigorous intellectual or scientific inquiry that are indicative of much of Western philosophy represent the root of the problem as opposed to the solution.

For this reason, Bruno Thibault elucidates that Le Clézio's diverse characters incessantly flee "les concepts, et les systèmes abstraits qui conditionnent la vie moderne pour renouer contact avec le milieu naturel et la réalité matérielle qui nous entoure" (*La*

Métaphore Exotique 40). As Thibault correctly affirms, Le Clézio's protagonists reside on the periphery of society or sometimes even quite far removed from the globalized world not to escape reality but rather to understand humanity's small place in it to a greater extent. Expressing sentiments that are reminiscent of Thibault's interpretation of the Franco-Mauritian author's *œuvre*, Gérard de Cortanze asserts, "sa littérature n'est pas une littérature d'évasion, mais de recherche" (17). Fully aware that possible answers to rudimentary existential questions like "Who am I?" and "What am I" are much more complex than simplistic notions such as Descartes's *bête machine* theory would have one believe, many protagonists from the early stage of the Nobel Laureate's career intuitively realize that occidental ideology conceals bittersweet truths instead of revealing them. As the author himself explains in an interview with De Cortanze in reference to both Western ideology and the European educational system, "la société dans laquelle j'ai grandi, européenne, teintée du léger décalage de l'éducation mauricienne et d'un substrat breton très ancien, ne tend pas à former des jeunes gens dans cette ligne-là. Elle leur demande, au contraire, d'oublier totalement que le monde existe. Un jour, le monde leur tombe dessus ils sont très étonnés" (20-21). Le Clézio illustrates that many of the elaborate, artificial, and theoretical systems that Western civilization has created to enrich our appreciation of human existence and to increase our erudition have backfired to the point of rendering the modern subject incapable of recognizing the most basic material realities of the world in which we live.

Affirming that the modern, urbanized world in which an individual no longer has a primordial relationship with the cosmic forces that sustain all life has become a "vaste cage à singes," Le Clézio explains, "je fuyais la vie agressive des grandes villes, à la recherche de quelque chose que j'ignorais [...] D'une certaine façon, j'attendais de rencontrer quelque chose, ou quelqu'un, qui me permettrait de sortir de mes obsessions et de trouver une paix intérieure" (*La Fête chantée* 237; 11). Thai culture and Buddhism originally nourished the Franco-Mauritian author's nomadic philosophical quest during his stay in Bangkok as a "coopérant,"² an influence which is clearly evident in his early narratives such as *Le Livre des fuites*, but Le Clézio would ultimately discover the ontological truths for which he had been searching because of his extensive contacts with Amerindian civilizations (Meyer 36). These sustained living experiences with numerous autochthonous Mexican civilizations in addition to his sojourn with the Emberas and Waunanas in the Darien region of Panama from 1970-1974 would profoundly transform Le Clézio and his writings. Although the author does not idealize these indigenous societies as he clearly articulates in a recent interview with Maya Jaggi from the British newspaper *The Guardian*, these encounters would help the young writer ascertain the source of his cerebral malaise. Asserting in the opening lines of *La Fête chantée* that his entire *Weltanschauung* would forever be altered by Amerindian philosophy, Le Clézio reveals that this artistic project is an attempt to verbalize an "expérience qui a changé toute ma vie, mes idées sur le monde et sur l'art, ma façon d'être avec les autres, de marcher, de manger, d'aimer, de dormir, et jusqu'à mes rêves" (9). Given that Le Clézio's contacts with divergent Amerindian peoples undoubtedly concretize the nexus of an existential search that would ultimately come to fruition, this study will focus on the so-called "Indian texts" (Waelti-Walters 107).

Similar to Le Clézio, a quest for truth rather than an effort to elude reality was the impetus that compelled Artaud to seek answers to life's most rudimentary questions far from the confines of Western civilization. Although he would spend much less time with the Tarahumara in the Sierra Madre in comparison to Le Clézio's aforementioned extended travels and it is even debatable whether Artaud actually ever made this trip at all,³ it is clear that naïve escapism was not what fueled the tormented author's metaphysical pursuit. Justifying his motivations and the purity of his intentions, Artaud reveals to a Tarahumara priest, "Je lui dis que je n'étais pas venu chez les Tarahumaras en curieux mais pour retrouver une Vérité qui échappe au monde de l'Europe et que sa Race avait conservée" (*Les Tarahumaras* 27).⁴ Reiterating that the incongruity between homocentric Western ideology and the material realities of the universe is the veritable origin of his immense anguish, Artaud confesses, "Certes, je n'étais pas venu au fond de la montagne de ces Indiens Tarahumaras pour chercher des souvenirs de peinture. J'avais assez souffert, il me semble, pour être payé par un peu de réalité" (49). Given that Occidental society attempts to conceal unpleasant facts with enticing yet illusory ideology designed to transcend material reality, the modern subject must strip away thick layers of simplistic anthropocentric logic to (re)-approach fundamental truths that are self-evident to many indigenous communities.

Referring to "le Comment et le Pourquoi des principes et des explosions primitives de la Nature," the author states, "Dans la montagne tarahumara tout ne parle que l'Essentiel, c'est-à-dire des principes suivant lesquels la Nature s'est formée; et tout ne vit que pour ces principes : les Hommes, les orages, le vent, le silence, le soleil" (72; 72). Artaud observes that the Tarahumara are instinctively aware of the cosmogonic origins of all life forms given their close connection to the natural world. Cognizant that every organism is arbitrarily thrown into the chaos of existence by impersonal cosmic forces that predate human beings and which will probably exist after the ultimate demise of our species, the Tarahumara realize that the universe has no center. Elemental matter and energy never truly disappear, but they incessantly change shapes in order to generate new life.⁵ These astute observations of the inner workings of the biosphere in addition to modern science⁶ refute simplistic notions of human superiority and the right of one organism to exercise control over the rest of the planet. Knowing that the ongoing evolutionary processes of the earth do not respect artificial existential categories such as 'human' and 'animal,' both Le Clézio and Artaud were seeking a less myopic worldview that more accurately articulates the symbiotic rapport between homo sapiens and the rest of the material universe. By placing our species in a sharply distinct ontological category from the remainder of the ecosphere, Western society has effectively eliminated any meaningful way for the modern subject to relate to the larger community of life to which everything is connected. Haunted by a faint but disquieting sense of displacement from the cosmic whole, Le Clézio and Artaud began their philosophical journey to find their small place in the larger mystery of existence by first (re)-discovering the earth.

Far from "la coalition infernale des êtres qui ont accaparé et pollué la conscience comme ils désordonnent la Réalité," both writers encountered cultures where the Indian voice was still alive and well (*Les Tarahumaras* 101). In reference to D.H. Lawrence and

Antonin Artaud, J.G. Brotherston explains, “it was the blighting product of a continent whose traditions and philosophy-Humanism, Rationalism, and the ‘superstition of progress’-man must escape in order to save himself. While claiming to enhance man’s status in the world, the Renaissance had in reality diminished him in the cosmos” (182). Brotherston further elucidates,

True revolution was impossible without the discovery of ‘living culture’ and Mexico was one of the last places, if not the last, to find it. And in this respect they both felt post-revolutionary Mexican politicians to be a disappointment, since they were failing to awaken the ‘Indian spirit’ interred in their country [...] Despite centuries of miscegenation between diverse American tribes, and with Europe, they saw such a culture lying intact [...] Both dreamed of a fuller society in which the blood sun-wisdom of the Mexican Indians, knowable through their literature and directly, would redeem man (182; 187).

As Brotherston notes, Artaud’s fascination with the Mexican Revolution is inseparable from his philosophical quest of (re)-connecting modern man to the cosmos. For Artaud, the only path to existential redemption which could heal the festering sores of cosmic alienation is to revalorize ecocentric autochthonous thought. Artaud’s philosophical revolution entails a spiritual (re)-awakening, an intellectual purification, and a deep understanding of the universe including humanity’s place in it.

Decades after Artaud’s brief stay in the Sierra Madre with the Tarahumaras, Le Clézio discovered that the fragile Amerindian voice still resonated throughout Mexico. Although much of the country has embraced the materialistic virtues of the industrialized world, vibrant indigenous cultures in various regions of Mexico have been able to resist integration into the global village. As Raymond Cadorel explains in the context of Le Clézio’s fiction, “Le Mexique reste une terre privilégiée, où la voix indienne-en dehors de tout folklore-peut encore être perçue, mais il est vrai aussi que cette voix risque de s’être éteint bientôt” (79). For the Franco-Mauritian author, this privileged space is vital to the future aspirations of all humanity given that the thought systems of these traditional peoples counterpoint simplistic homocentric ideology that threatens to destroy the ecological equilibrium that sustains life itself. In a universe visibly scarred by centuries of endless exploitation, the immense erudition of Amerindian societies, whose spiritual and political leaders foretold the environmental crisis because of their profound comprehension of the biosphere and its cycles, must finally be valorized. Realizing that the complete disappearance of Amerindian philosophy and wisdom could be the final nail in the coffin which ultimately seals humanity’s fate, an essential aspect of Le Clézio’s entire literary project is to ensure that this faint echo continues to reverberate even in a very rigid intellectual landscape.

In *Le Rêve Mexicain*, described by Paul Archambault as “perhaps the best and most controversial of Le Clézio’s ‘Mexican’ works,” the Nobel Laureate affirms, “Malgré le désastre de la Conquête, malgré la destruction annoncée par les augures, cette force n’a pas cessé d’exister [...] malgré l’abîme du temps et de la destruction [...] leur musique

et leur parole peuvent encore nous émouvoir, en un temps où la fête païenne n’est plus qu’un souvenir lointain dans l’inconscient de notre mémoire” (290; 144-147). Realizing that what has been decimated can never be fully recovered, Le Clézio expresses the sincere hope in *Le Rêve Mexicain* that enough fragments of autochthonous knowledge and cosmic sensibilities remain in order to save the human race from rapacious consumerist desires. The author urges modern society to conserve the precious traces of the Amerindian “rêve d’un autre monde, d’un autre temps [...] (qui) laisse en nous une trace indélébile [...] d’une civilisation perdue à tout jamais” (212). Moreover, Le Clézio muses about how these remnants could enrich Western society and deviate its destructive course. As the writer explains, “Aujourd’hui, malgré le gouffre qui nous sépare de ces cultures, nous pouvons imaginer ce qu’elles auraient créé [...] L’on peut imaginer l’importance que cette évolution aurait pu avoir pour le monde, comment elle aurait pu changer les concepts européens de spiritualité, l’idée de l’homme, de la morale, de la politique” (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 243). The cautiously optimistic tone of this passage underscores both why the Amerindian voice is so relevant and how it could be the key to (re)-conceptualizing modernity.

Additionally, indigenous worldviews, based upon centuries of meticulous observations of the universe, could potentially help Western society to dismiss simplistic logic inherited from Renaissance humanism and Cartesian dualities. Not only has the planet been placed in serious peril because of anthropocentric ideology, but fundamental ontological truths have also fallen by the wayside due to misguided fantasies. Although the universe and the physical laws that govern it defy purely abstract hierarchies that are a product of wishful thinking, Renaissance humanism provided the greatest philosophical delusion of all by placing one species at the center of existence. As Bruno Thibault notes, “le rationalisme européen produit un humanisme étriqué et néfaste : d’une part parce qu’il place l’homme au centre de l’univers et prive la nature de la place qui lui revient” (*La Métaphore Exotique* 31).

In all of the Amerindian texts, Le Clézio juxtaposes occidental homocentric intellectual paradigms to more realistic thought systems that emphasize cosmic interdependency, unity, and chaos. Presenting the Amerindian *Weltanschauung*, the author elucidates, “L’homme indien n’est pas le maître du monde [...] il a été détruit plusieurs fois par des cataclysmes successifs” (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 229). Realizing that all attempts to impose a definitive order upon the universe are ephemeral in addition to the fact that all species arbitrarily appear in a given form from primordial forces that are beyond anyone’s control, “ils ne veulent pas conquérir le monde [...] Instinctivement, l’homme indien élimine tout ce qui le sépare, tout ce qui le rend supérieur” (*Haï* 152). Espousing biotic egalitarianism rather than a superiority complex predicated upon theoretical constructs that are in stark opposition to reality,

L’indien n’est pas séparé du monde, il ne veut pas de la rupture entre les règnes. L’homme est vivant sur la terre, à l’égal des fourmis et des plantes, il n’est pas exilé de son territoire. Les forces magiques ne sont pas le privilège de la seule espèce humaine [...] L’homme a peut-être dominé la création par ses techniques agricoles et par ses ruses de chasse, mais il est regardé par les forces surnaturelles comme les autres êtres (*Haï* 111-112).

Instead of relying upon faulty but comforting homocentric logic to offer answers to rudimentary existential questions and to provide meaning, the Amerindian civilizations with whom Le Clézio lived are able to accept their smallness in the larger scheme of life.⁷ Cognizant that a cataclysmic event similar to the one that originally set various cycles in motion thereby creating human beings and every organism could one day generate another clean slate, traditional autochthonous communities reject anthropocentric notions that are far removed from inconvenient truths.

For Artaud, indigenous Mexico also represents a privileged intellectual and spiritual space whose inhabitants have not forgotten basic ontological realities. Decrying Western society and highlighting the shamanic⁸ experiences which profoundly altered his perception, Artaud asserts, “C’est un dimanche matin que le vieux chef indien m’ouvrit la conscience d’un coup de glaive entre la rate et le cœur [...] J’en éprouvai aucune douleur mais j’eus en effet l’impression de me réveiller à quelque chose à quoi jusqu’ici j’étais mal né et orienté du mauvais côté, et je me sentis rempli d’une lumière que je n’avais jamais possédée” (14). The author explains that the bittersweet existential epiphanies triggered by this sacred rite are much more traumatic than the physical anguish itself. Painfully aware of the same abstract distortions of reality as Le Clézio which are indicative of Western metaphysics, Artaud attempts to loosen the cerebral shackles that prevent him from (re)-connecting to the cosmos and himself.

Realizing that any sort of simplistic ideology which places one particular species on an ontological pedestal as members of an elite race designed to govern all of creation is antithetical to material realities, Artaud reveals, “la Renaissance du XVI^e siècle [...] et l’Humanisme de la Renaissance ne fut pas un agrandissement mais une diminution de l’homme, puisque l’Homme a cessé de s’élever jusqu’à la nature pour ramener la nature à sa taille à lui, et la considération exclusive de l’humain a fait perdre le Naturel” (73-74). Noting that the organic cycles of the earth indiscriminately created all life, the writer further explains, “cette Nature [...] Comme elle a évolué des hommes, elle a également évolué des rochers” (42). Artaud is struck by the realization that the rudimentary laws of the universe apply to every sentient and non-sentient being that inhabits this planet. Similar to the aforementioned distinct Amerindian civilizations of which Le Clézio has a deep understanding, Artaud observes that the Tarahumara embrace their cosmic smallness knowing that transcendence from the same primordial cycles that breathed life into them and every other creature is impossible.

Instead of creating artificial paradises that await believers after the end of their fleeting existence on this earth, the path to spirituality, existential meaning, and salvation entails reducing the distance that separates one from the cosmic whole to the greatest extent possible for numerous autochthonous civilizations. Fully aware and able to accept the reality that promises of immortality in a given form which serve as the basis of Western monotheistic religions are purely theoretical and speculative, many indigenous spiritual paradigms urge the subject to (re)-establish a more intimate rapport with the chaotic forces that link all species together in a complex, interconnected web. Although Western ideology and its simplistic dichotomies separates the spiritual and material realms thereby proposing a radically different remedy for existential anguish

related to the absurdity of the human condition, pantheistic belief systems are predicated upon a profound comprehension of the biosphere and one’s place in it. As opposed to concealing or softening material truths, the mystical worldviews of many traditional societies compel the individual to communicate directly with the natural world to which everything is connected.

Rejecting the abstract nature of occidental existential cures that are unable to offer him any solace or even temporary relief from his cerebral trauma, Artaud’s philosophical quest is also a spiritual journey. Highlighting that this sense of longing is reflected in the writer’s dramaturgical theory, Guy Dureau notes that Artaud’s fascination with “les forces cosmiques originelles” is emblematic of an effort to “établir des ponts entre l’humain et le divin” (90; 103). In sharp contrast with contemporary mainstream Western theology, Artaud discovers that the sacred and the profane inhabit the same physical space for the Tarahumara. The divine does not exist disconnected from quotidian reality in a realm far removed from this universe, but rather these indigenous peoples realize that they are part of a larger sacred mystery which they will never fully comprehend. Explaining that “Les Tarahumaras ne croient pas en Dieu et le mot ‘Dieu’ n’existe pas dans leur langue,” Artaud clarifies “ils vivent matériellement près d’elle (la nature) [...] parce qu’ils sont faits du même tissu que la Nature et que, comme toutes les manifestations authentiques de la Nature, ils sont nés d’un mélange premier” (76; 77). The physical and ideological barriers that Western society has erected to domesticate the remainder of the planet are antithetical to the conceptualization of divinity that the writer uncovers during his brief sojourn with the Tarahumara. Members of this rich culture have a difficult time conceiving why humankind would even wish to separate itself from the primordial soup that created and which sustains all abundant life given that their religion is *elemental*. A greater understanding of the planetary forces which transcend the needs and desires of one species fosters a more profound comprehension of oneself.

Although the European invaders mocked the spiritual beliefs of Native Americans upon their arrival in the new world, Artaud posits that pantheistic religions are much more compatible with scientific principles. Reiterating the nefarious effects of the Renaissance including the cosmic disconnect which haunts the modern subject, Artaud affirms, “Où ai-je déjà entendu que ce n’est pas en Italie mais au Mexique que les peintres d’avant la Renaissance ont pris le bleu de leurs paysages [...] Les peintres italiens d’avant la Renaissance étaient initiés à une science secrète que la science moderne n’a pas encore complètement retrouvée” (71). Given that they venerated a sacred cosmic entity which they astutely observed in order to ascertain knowledge about themselves and the universe that spawned their species, it is not surprising that the Tarahumara and many other indigenous cultures were originally well in advance of their European counterparts in astronomy, astrology, ecology, and science in general. If he were still alive today, Artaud would be happy that modern researchers have made tremendous strides since his untimely demise. However, despite the fact that contemporary ecologists and quantum physicists have validated many of the very ideas at which the ethnocentric *conquistadores* scoffed, Western forms of spirituality

have changed very little to reflect ecological truths. Thus, free thinkers like Artaud continue to deconstruct the shaky edifice upon which Western metaphysics and theology is constructed. Until occidental thought systems evolve to match what recent scientific discoveries have proven, modern man's search for the truth will never be fulfilled.

Similar to Artaud, Le Clézio explains that by dividing "la matérialiste et "la spiritualiste," Western society inadvertently produced both a fragmentation of consciousness and knowledge (Lovichi 120). Detached from a part of themselves and reality, early Leclézian anti-heroes struggle to create any lasting semblance of meaning. As Sevkett Kadioglu asserts, "Il ne sera pas déconcertant de dire que les protagonistes des romans de la première période de Le Clézio souffrent d'une angoisse due à l'inadaptation au monde auquel ils appartiennent" (125). Kadioglu further elucidates, "cette société destructive a rompu le lien de l'homme avec la réalité en séparant le matériel du spirituel et l'esprit, de la nature qui ne peuvent mettre en œuvre la pensée quand ils ne font qu'un" (128). With no realistic frame of reference for conceptualizing the world and their relation to it outside of misleading, anthropocentric abstractions, Adam Pollo, Roch, Beaumont, François Besson, and numerous other Leclézian protagonists are unable to fill their deep existential void. Le Clézio's later characters will choose the same spiritual path that has edified traditional civilizations ever since the first humans appeared on this earth. In order to project meaning upon their absurd existence, Alexis, Lalla, Laïla, and other protagonists from the second half of the Franco-Mauritian author's career delve deeply into the sacred earth to experience life more fully. Indeed, this elemental communion between the subject and the object seems to have dissolved the searing cerebral pain that often paralyzed earlier Leclézian characters.

The appearance of this ontological and epistemological remedy in his fiction is clearly the result of the author's extensive contacts with Amerindian civilizations that significantly altered his worldview. Whereas "le monde moderne s'est accoutumé à séparer la nature et la pensée," "Ce lien charnel qui unissait les Indiens à leur terre est le principe même du *containment* et du contrat terrestre énoncés par les écologistes tels que Theodore Taylor ou Charles Humpstone" (*La Fête chantée* 187). Le Clézio reveals that Amerindian societies do not compartmentalize knowledge into isolated boxes or separate thought from nature. For the autochthonous societies with whom the author spent a considerable amount of time, true erudition is entwined with understanding the cosmos. Moreover, all Amerindian thought systems coalesce given that they share the same goal of facilitating a greater comprehension of the planet and oneself.

Although science often competes and conflicts with faith as the arbiter of truth in Western civilization because of the hypothetical nature of mainstream occidental religious beliefs, Le Clézio underscores the remarkable cohesiveness that is indicative of Amerindian spirituality, philosophy, and science. As the writer indicates in *Le Rêve Mexicain*, "Mais à la différence des Européens, que la science opposa à la religion, les astronomes amérindiens concevaient un plan entièrement dédié aux cultes des dieux" (254). By worshipping the very substance that their scientists also study, the Franco-Mauritian author asserts that the entire Amerindian way of life reflects "un système de

pensée cohérent, c'est-à-dire véritablement [...] une philosophie" (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 257). Perhaps stoically accepting the only realities of which an individual can be certain in addition to one's epistemological limitations, as much Amerindian wisdom unequivocally suggests, is what allows Le Clézio's later protagonists to find an intellectual equilibrium and serenity that eluded his earlier tortured characters. Many of the complex theoretical abstractions that Western society initially created to maximize human happiness and prosperity are so divorced from fundamental ecological realities that the modern subject has completely lost his existential bearings given that he now possesses only faded reminiscences of the cosmic forces that brought him to life.

As peculiar as it might initially sound, the landscape itself was perhaps the greatest existential remedy that Artaud and Le Clézio would experience in different regions of indigenous Mexico. In a remote and rather inaccessible corner of Northwest Mexico, Artaud would immediately be struck by both the splendor and cruelty of the topography of the Sierra Madre. As André Spears asserts, "The Tarahumara landscape functions as a text in which all nature—the cosmos itself—speaks to humankind" (20). Removed from materialistic Western society that tends to conceptualize the rest of the cosmos from a strictly utilitarian point of view, Artaud realizes that the earth itself possesses the 'signs' for which he had been seeking. By (re)-establishing a direct, sensorial contact with nature, Artaud is now aware that separation from elemental matter is impossible. Moreover, the biosphere itself holds the key to unraveling the enigmas concerning the universal saga of humanity and every creature that has ever inhabited this planet. Highlighting the notion of cosmic history, actuated by epiphanic revelations in the mountains of the Sierra Madre, which permeates Artaud's entire *œuvre*, Julie Peters notes,

Both humans and events here are functions of the landscape [...] In the rush of metaphors of sublime nature that alone seem sufficient to express the sublime violence of cataclysmic historical events as they unfold in space, the human and natural landscapes become indistinguishable [...] In the intermingling of body and landscape we can see Artaud's general erasure of the divide between the realm of (human) symbolic agency and the nonintentional realm of objects (natural or otherwise). The human body itself is part of the cosmic symbolic system (233-234).

Although the pervasive puritanical ideology of occidental civilization cautions us to be wary of succumbing to the temptations of our 'weak flesh,' Artaud affirms that it is our corporality which allows a subject to relate in a meaningful way to the larger cosmic body to which all substances are linked. In a sterile atmosphere epitomized by suppression of sensorial pleasure and misguided efforts to transcend cosmic reality itself, the modern subject has forgotten that he is interwoven into the object whose veritable essence he denies.

Attempting to articulate into words the ontological revelations that he intuitively internalizes by touching, tasting, feeling, hearing, and smelling the Sierra Madre landscape, Artaud confides in a letter to his friend Jean Paulhan, "Arrivé en plein cœur

de la montagne Tarahumara j'ai été saisi de réminiscences physiques, tellement puissantes qu'elle me parurent rappeler des souvenirs personnels directs; tout: la vie de la terre et de l'herbe, en bas, les découpures de la montagne, les formes particulières des rochers" (113). Artaud's direct contact with a topographical space that resists complete domestication appears to reanimate his dim but poignant cosmic memory of the elemental forces that would eventually create humanity after billions of years and innumerable cataclysms. Expressing an intense and mystical feeling of *déjà vu* initiated by a close communion with the mineral realm, Artaud explains, "tout me parut représenter une expérience vécue [...] Tout cela n'était pas nouveau. Or l'impression du *déjà vu* est vague, je veux dire sans date [...] car cette expérience organique vécue [...] C'étaient des réminiscences d'histoire qui venaient à moi, rocher par rocher, herbe par herbe, horizon par horizon" (113). Artaud's realizes that the story of the earth cannot be confined into the *history* of one species that appeared ages after life had already begun. Additionally, the artificial and arbitrary nature of Western conceptions of time have produced a temporal disconnect from the physical realities of the universe. Traditional societies that have maintained a primordial rapport with their land do not suffer from the delusion that the social construct we call time began with the first humans. The Tarahumara landscape reveals to Artaud this ecocentric and scientific truth concealed by anthropocentric occidental logic.

Decades after Artaud's travels to indigenous Mexico, the cosmos itself would also speak to Le Clézio. Elucidating that Mexico is truly a privileged spiritual and existential space in a section of *Le Rêve Mexicain* aptly entitled "Antonin Artaud ou le rêve mexicain," the author declares, "Le Mexique est une terre de rêves. Je veux dire, une terre faite d'une vérité différente, d'une réalité différente. Pays de lumière extrême, pays de violence, où les passions essentielles sont plus visibles et où la marque de l'antique histoire de l'homme est plus sensible" (214). After philosophically musing "Qu'est-ce qui fait du Mexique un des lieux privilégiés du mystère [...] un lieu où le moment même de la création paraît encore proche alors que déjà s'annonce, inexplicablement, l'autre moment suprême, celui de la destruction du monde ?," Le Clézio speculates, "Est-ce la nature même du pays, terre de volcans, de déserts, de hauts plateaux si proches du ciel et du soleil [...] par opposition à l'antiquité des terres d'Europe, formées par l'homme, soumises à son usage jusqu'à la stérilité parfois" (214). Although the Franco-Mauritian author deconstructs simplistic notions of an unspoiled virgin territory as nothing more than a dream, he also expresses that rugged landscapes with a much lighter ecological footprint than modern urban areas remind us of our smallness in nature. Places in which matter itself has yet to be radically transformed by human beings are a clear example that cosmic elements cannot be fully appropriated or mastered. Moreover, the repetition of the word "vérité" in this passage should not be taken lightly. For both Artaud and Le Clézio, a basic realization of the uncontrollable fury of planetary forces, such as volcanoes and earthquakes, fosters intellectual humility.⁹ Although this cosmic modesty mirrors fundamental ontological truths that dictate the existence of every ephemeral being that has ever roamed this planet, Western ideology has obscured these material realities with imaginary, egomaniacal fictions.

Reiterating how each divergent Amerindian civilization with whom he resided helped him to (re)-connect to the earth, himself, and rudimentary truths, Le Clézio lauds both the radiant beauty of Indian women and their physical surroundings,

Ce sont les femmes, surtout. Elles sont si belles, si émouvantes [...] elles portent enelles, à chaque instant de leur vie, dans le moindre de leurs gestes, une force qui semblevenir du plus profond du temps, et qui les unit au lieu qui les a créées [...] Leur beautéest indifférente aux transformations du monde alentour [...] Le pouvoir de ces endroitspeut seul nous changer, parce qu'il nous fait connaître la vérité du monde, sonenchantement (*La Fête chantée* 199-200).

The Nobel Laureate deeply admires the attributes of Amerindian women because they are a manifestation of the material landscape that propelled every sentient being into the chaos of existence. The beauty to which Le Clézio refers in this passage is not a sexually charged superficial appreciation of female corporality, but instead it is the cosmos itself which is the veritable origin of the author's attraction. Furthermore, the author's homage to "les femmes indiennes" is indicative of his reverence for the truth and his disdain for artifice. What impresses Le Clézio the most about Native American women is the existential reality that they represent. These indigenous women shine brightly like the truth that illuminates humankind allowing one to experience life more fully.

In addition to the topography itself of traditional Mexico, their initiation into shamanism by Amerindian spiritual leaders is also a salient feature of Artaud and Le Clézio's philosophical quest. Expressing deep sensibilities that are similar to many traditional forms of Amerindian spirituality, both authors would seek ontological meaning by (re)-establishing an intimate relationship with the terrestrial sublime. As Raymond Cadorel explains, "C'est une communion de nature religieuse que cherche Le Clézio [...] C'est aussi renoncer à l'anthropocentrisme occidental, revenir à une conception cosmique de l'homme, au mariage du ciel et de la terre" (74; 88). The elemental nuptials¹⁰¹⁰ This term is used in the same sense as Albert Camus employs it in the essays that comprise the collection *Noces*. For a brief, intertextual discussion of the pantheistic euphoria in the essays of Le Clézio and Camus, see Moser, Keith. "Rending Moments of Material Ecstasy in the Meditative Essays of Two Nobel Laureates: Le Clézio and Camus." *Romance Notes* 49 (1): 13-21. or pantheistic communion described by Cadorel is a leitmotif that pervades Le Clézio's entire corpus. Highlighting the author's notion that the traces of decimated Amerindian cultures which remain could allow the modern subject to (re)-discover the universe and himself, Bruno Thibault asserts, "la littérature comme le chant chamannique indien [...] est une réponse aux maux et aux tensions qui hantent la société" ("Le Chant de l'abîme" 44). If the Amerindian voice vanishes completely, the potential remedy for the existential anguish that it represents could lead to a spiritual death for which no cure exists.

Underscoring the resilience of traditional shamanic beliefs that have somehow survived despite centuries of systematic persecution, Le Clézio elucidates, "Sorcier, médecin, astrologue, le chamane est le symbole du contact direct avec l'au-delà. Il est

le devin, celui qui guérit ou qui ensorcelle [...] Mais plutôt que cette magie noire, c'est un système de pensée particulier qui inspire le chamanisme [...] c'est l'esprit chamanique qui est resté vivace dans la pensée indienne" (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 246-248). Although much of Amerindian culture has been forever lost, the author notes that the mystical worldview which is the foundation of shamanic spiritual paradigms still thrives. Moreover, Le Clézio criticizes ethnocentric ideology which has reduced the complexity and richness of Amerindian shamanism to nothing but 'black magic.' This unflattering assessment is an oversimplification if not a blatant misrepresentation of Native American religious thought.

Affirming that the divergent autochthonous cultures of the Americas have much to offer the modern world in dire need of a radical paradigm shift, the author attempts to resuscitate the fragments of the ecocentric and cohesive worldview of these conquered peoples in *Le Rêve Mexicain*. Unable to grasp the deeper symbolic meaning of Amerindian religious ceremonies, the European invaders often ridiculed sacred rites that they perceived to be outlandish superstitions. However, Le Clézio notes that every Amerindian spiritual practice was intentionally designed to foster a greater understanding of the physical realities of the universe and an individual subject's place in it. Proposing that the aforementioned unity of all Amerindian thought systems explains why these customs have been able to avoid extinction, the writer reveals, "malgré l'abolition du clergé et de l'autorité politique indigène, malgré l'interdit des cérémonies et la destruction des temples, les anciens rituels de curation chamanique purent survivre [...] Dans la plupart des sociétés indigènes du Mexique [...] les rites [...] sont maintenus, parce qu'ils exprimaient la continuité du mode de pensée indigène, symbolique et incantatoire, une autre façon de percevoir le réel" (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 248). Given that Western abstractions created to provide meaning sometimes have little basis in reality, it is not surprising that non-anthropocentric spiritual paradigms have managed to survive since they are perhaps more realistic than hypothetical paradises.¹¹

The alienated modern subject intuitively realizes that the relationship between his species and the material world to which he is linked is much more complex than homocentric logic posits. Cognizant that the elaborate, alluring fictions that divide human beings from elemental matter and which justify utter hegemonic domination over the rest of the biosphere are chimerical fantasies but presented with no alternative, Le Clézio's early protagonists are intellectual nomads in search of truth and authenticity. Shamanism in its purest form as a "religion d'extase," predicated upon a direct communion with the cosmic forces that generated all life, is a valid point of departure for (re)-conceptualizing the rapport between humankind and nature which seems to allow the author's later characters to find happiness and inner contentment (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 200).

Summarizing the primordial lessons that he learned in the Darien region of Panama from 1970-1974, Le Clézio reveals,

Je découvris, au long de ces mois et de ces années, ce qui était le respect de la nature, non pas une idée abstraite, mais une réalité : le bon usage des

plantes et des animaux [...] Ce que je découvrais ainsi, c'était l'intelligence de l'univers, son évidence, sa sensibilité. La relation étroite qui unit les êtres humains non seulement au monde qui les entoure, mais aussi au monde invisible, aux songes, à l'origine de la création (*La Fête chantée* 15).

Although the Nobel Laureate adamantly insists in a lengthy interview with Keith Moser¹² that he is not a militant environmental crusader, it is evident that the author clearly advocates a "healthier approach to ecology" (Jaggi n.p.). Aware of the undeniable reality that the earth sustains all life on this planet including humans, Amerindian civilizations realize that wreaking havoc on limited natural resources upon which all organisms depend is a narcissistic, self-destructive act that could prefigure the end of life itself. These basic realities which homocentric Western society has attempted to undermine or even dismiss entirely with faulty logic explain the apocalyptic tone of Le Clézio's recent narratives such as "Pawana." The shamanic initiations which the author describes alongside his spiritual guide "Colombie"¹³ in "Le génie datura" and *La Fête chantée* are emblematic of the necessity of (re)-establishing a direct correspondence with the most rudimentary reality of all: matter.

Similar to the shamanic experiences that Le Clézio depicts during his stay with the Emberas and Waunanas which would profoundly alter him and his subsequent writings, sacred Tarahumara rituals would also allow Antonin Artaud to (re)-connect himself directly to the organic cycles that breathed life into everything that exists. During these mystical trances, visions, and hallucinations to the so-called 'other side' which entailed the usage of the mind-altering substance peyote,¹⁴ Artaud was struck by intense ontological epiphanies that would at times destabilize him. As Bettina Knapp explains, "Artaud established direct contact with the Tutuguri (the Sun) [...] therefore opening the unlimited and inhabited ways of the cosmos [...] and suddenly knew his Self, so brutally dismembered by European civilization that lives on art/artificiality [...] at that moment was connected with the elements [...] body and spirit worked in perfect harmony with the gods that emerged from the very elements-and were life itself" ("The Mystic's Utopia" 62). The pantheistic ecstasy and related trauma that Artaud experienced during the spiritual ceremonies in which he was invited to participate reminded him that all true knowledge is elemental. In order to find any semblance of truth and deep meaning, Artaud would need to shed his purely Western cloak and embrace both the euphoria and searing pain of what it means to reside temporarily in an interconnected, interdependent universe that has no true center.

Speaking directly to the reader and insisting that "Ces paroles du prêtre que je viens de rapporter sont absolument authentiques," Artaud recounts the epiphanic realizations induced by peyote administered by a Tarahumara priest (28). After accepting the shaman's invitation to "goûter à Ciguri moi-même et de me rapprocher ainsi de la Vérité que je cherchais," the author reveals, "Mais une vision que j'eus et qui me frappa fut déclarée *authentique* par le Prêtre et sa famille, celui qui doit être Ciguri et qui est Dieu. Mais on n'y parvient pas sans avoir traversé un déchirement et une angoisse, après quoi on se sent comme retourné et *reversé* de l'autre côté des choses et on ne

comprend plus le monde que l'on vient de quitter" (29). First, it should be noted that Artaud insists that his flight from occidental civilization is not an attempt to escape, but rather to (re)-discover the *Vérité* that eludes modern man trapped in a sterile, anthropocentric labyrinth of the mind.

Moreover, the ontological revelations facilitated by this vision are not always pleasant. Similar to the bittersweet realities highlighted by Le Clézio in his early seminal essay *L'Extase Matérielle* which predates his encounters with Amerindian civilizations,¹⁵ Artaud would be struck by the ontological paradox that is indicative of the existence of every fleeting being. Although every organism is mortal and will one day perish, a complete death or disappearance from this earth is impossible because the basic building blocks of life and cosmic energy itself continually change their given temporary forms to regenerate both sentient and non-sentient entities. Corresponding with matter is a form of communicating with the divine, eternal forces that created the original spark thereby sending various cycles into motion. Thus, Artaud's search for truth outside the limitations of mainstream Western ideology including its philosophical and spiritual paradigms also leads him closer to God.

Despite his perplexing and sometimes even incoherent reflections in which he tries to reconcile Christianity with Tarahumara shamanism that he would later repudiate,¹⁶ Artaud is clearly most drawn to the concept of terrestrial redemption. In stark contrast to contemporary monotheistic religions which affirm the existence of a paradise far removed from this earth created by a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent deity, many pantheistic belief systems assert that the imperfect world in which we live is the only path to transcendence. For this reason, Artaud's literal and inner journeys are emblematic of an ontological and spiritual search for his place in a universe replete with splendor,¹⁷ ugliness, and cruelty. In fact, Artaud's often misunderstood (re)-appropriation of the world 'cruelty' and the dramaturgical vision that he articulates in *The Theater and Its Double* are inseparable from the violent cosmogonic forces that cast everything into chaos. As Jean-Joseph Goux explains, Artaud's ideal "theater is destined to confront the dark forces" (18).

The deep cosmogonic symbolism of Tarahumara shamanic rituals would feed Artaud's fascination with the origins of the universe. Through primordial rituals, dances, chants, visions, and hallucinations designed to commune with elemental matter, Artaud hoped to unravel possible answers to the greatest existential questions of all. Convinced that the earth alone possessed the key to understanding what and who we are, Artaud embraced shamanic customs because of their focus on communicating with the chaos of which the human species constitutes merely a small fragment.¹⁸ As Artaud elucidates in what is perhaps the most important essay of *Les Tarahumaras* "Le rite du peyotl chez les Tarahumaras" "le rite du Ciguri est un Rite de création et qui explique comment les choses *sont* dans le Vide et celui-ci dans l'Infini, et comment elles en sortirent dans la Réalité et furent faites" (23). In "La montagne des signes," a mystical vision would trigger a more profound comprehension of these same ontological and material realities. As the narrator declares, "Il n'était pas tout à fait midi quand je rencontrai cette vision

[...] Il me sembla partout lire [...] une histoire de genèse et de chaos [...] Pas une forme qui fût intacte, pas un corps qui ne m'apparut comme sorti d'un récent massacre, pas un groupe ou je n'aie dû lire la lutte qui le divisait. Je retrouvai des hommes noyés, à demi mangés par la pierre" (43-44). The peyote dance in addition to this intense trance would reveal to Artaud that every combination of particles including the human body bears a faint trace of the original cataclysmic event that gave birth to life. Moreover, each fragment of the larger cosmic whole is also a microcosm of the germ that will one day destroy the planet as we know it.

Numerous Le Clézio scholars, such as Bruno Thibault, Jean-Paul Mezade, and Claude Cavallero, have highlighted that the Franco-Mauritian author's fascination with cosmogony is a salient feature of his philosophical and spiritual quest as well. In the writer's fiction, several protagonists muse about a 'reverse voyage' to the precise instant in which life began in order to understand themselves and the world around them more fully. As Mezade underscores, many Leclézian characters seek "cet instant primordial, entre temps et non-temps [...] jusqu'à l'état de chaos, jusqu'au stade embryonnaire" (153). In a similar vein, Thibault notes that recent works like "*Le Chercheur d'or* et *La Quarantaine* ne décrivent pas des voyages d'exploration ou de colonisation: ils décrivent des voyages initiatiques qui mènent à 'l'autre côté', c'est-à-dire à la découverte de la pensée primitive" in which "la répétition symbolique et rituelle de la cosmogonie" plays a fundamental role ("La Métaphore Exotique" 845; 846). Although this impossible dream never fully materializes into reality for most of the author's protagonists for obvious reasons with the possible exception of Naja Naja from *Voyages de l'autre côté* that can somehow inexplicably temporarily escape her ontological shell of being and transform into other forms of matter, the symbolism of this journey is paramount to understanding Le Clézio's philosophical search.

The Laureate's Amerindian texts reveal that cosmogony is the heart of the shamanic initiation to which Thibault refers. As Le Clézio asserts in *La Fête chantée*, "Le voyage initiatique forme, avec le thème de l'émergence, le mythe fondamental du monde amérindien. Il est étroitement lié aux croyances cosmogoniques des religions précolombiennes [...] Le voyage initiatique du chaman est aussi l'accomplissement d'un cycle [...] Descendre aux enfers, c'est retourner vers l'utérus de la terre-mère, où se cache le secret de toute vie" (175). For both Le Clézio and Artaud, the cosmogonic search is the most important philosophical quest of all given that this *voyage à rebours* is an effort to find definitive answers to fundamental ontological questions. However, although this direct contact with the impersonal cosmic forces that created all life could unravel the existential enigmas that have haunted innumerable civilizations since the appearance of the first human beings on this planet, it should be noted that this initiation entails a considerable amount of suffering. In order to attain a state of serenity, the subject of shamanic ecstasy must find descend into an infernal abyss. Indeed, Le Clézio also articulates the 'dark mysticism' that is inherent in Amerindian philosophy and forms of spirituality.

In Western terms, there is no 'heaven' outside of 'hell' and vice versa in many indigenous thought systems. In both *Le Rêve Mexicain* and *La Fête chantée*, Le Clézio

elucidates that the often misunderstood Amerindian concept of ‘Mother Earth’ is much more nuanced than the European invaders realized. As the author explains, “Ce rôle à la fois bénéfique et maléfique de la terre-mère, créatrice des hommes et maîtresse de la mort [...] Le symbole d’une terre-mère à la fois nourricière et mortelle est au centre de la philosophie amérindienne [...] Le monde qui les entourait était beaucoup plus qu’un décor, il était l’expression d’une divinité” (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 265-266). The cosmogonic voyage to the very core of Mother Earth where life originally surged is not a reflection of a naïve, utopian worldview, but this philosophical and spiritual journey is instead emblematic of a profound understanding of a cosmic entity that sustains life but which will one day indiscriminately take it away.

For this reason, during what the writer describes as “Le moment le plus intense de la vie des Emberas et des Waunanas [...] Beka, la fête chantée,” the shamanic leader attempts to “entrer en relation avec les forces du mal” (*La Fête chantée* 17; 18). This passage illustrates that although Le Clézio’s quest for intellectual equilibrium and a deeper appreciation of his own ephemeral existence would begin to take shape because of his experiences with various Amerindian civilizations, he would find no remedy that could completely efface the absurdity of the human condition from which his early protagonists greatly suffered. Nevertheless, the Franco-Mauritian author’s later characters seem to be able to accept the physical realities of the universe from which no transcendence is possible and to find beauty and ontological significance in the unordered chaos. Moreover, the epiphanic instants of euphoria that his protagonists experience by communing with the cosmos reveal the gratuitous nature of human existence and negate unfounded anthropocentric ideology. Characters like Alexis, Lalla, and Juba endeavor to take advantage of every fleeting moment that life affords given their realization that “La vie sur la terre n’est qu’un bref instant entre le chaos initial et le chaos final” (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 259). Fusing with the sacred material realm in an interconnected and interdependent universe sets them free from the chains of Western society that have attempted to obscure rudimentary truths. Elemental contact with primordial cosmic forces can revive the faint echo that compels the alienated modern subject to flee a pervasive intellectual landscape where enticing fantasies often overshadow reality.

Yet, despite the myriad of similarities between the two authors’ philosophical and spiritual journeys, the fundamental ontological truths that Artaud discovered in the Sierra Madre never appear to have quelled the existential anguish from which he suffered until his untimely demise. Moreover, the pantheistic communion with other forms of matter that the rugged landscape and his initiation into shamanic rituals fostered is often eerily similar to the painful reminiscences triggered by the chestnut tree in Sartre’s *La Nausée*. Articulating his frustration concerning the limitations of elemental nuptials, Artaud reveals, “Depuis ma première prise de contact avec cette terrible montagne dont je suis sûr qu’elle avait élevé contre moi des barrières pour m’empêcher d’entrer” (46). Aware that a complete fusion with the material world is impossible, Artaud ponders how much a subject can truly understand the universe and his place in it. Even if he is able to remove all of the physical and ideological obstacles that Western civilization has

erected that prevent one from having a meaningful relationship with the cosmos, to what extent can human life and existence in general be comprehended given that other material particles resist human appropriation? Summarizing the existential crisis that permeates his entire being on this ‘terrible’ mountain, Artaud asks himself these disconcerting questions, “Avais-je jamais connu la joie, y avait-il jamais eu au monde une sensation qui ne fût pas d’angoisse ou d’irrémissible désespoir [...] Y avait-il pour moi quelque chose qui ne fût pas à la porte de l’agonie” (47). Instead of redeeming him from the poverty of the human condition, Artaud’s mystical correspondences in the Sierra Madre sometimes seem to degenerate into the same *extase horrible* that paralyzes Antoine Roquentin.

Given the fact that Artaud never appears to have found any sort of contentment or deep appreciation of life, numerous critics have noted that his existential quest forever remained unfulfilled. Underscoring how one of the aforementioned euphoric experiences went terribly wrong, Louis Sass explains, “Before long, Artaud’s sense of cosmic transformation seems to have turned negative, his sense of mystical union undermined by an encroaching and all too familiar sense of ontological insecurity and catastrophe” (83). Concerning the aforementioned limitations of a perfect marriage with the natural world that clearly haunted Artaud, Sass concludes, “If it is a synthesis, it is one founded upon negation rather than reconciliation: all of the elements are there, but denied rather than affirmed” (88). Echoing similar sentiments, Kimberly Jannarone affirms, “He never writes of people being happy, and his dream for the individual is its dissolution, not its fuller articulation [...] Artaud’s prose relishes the carnage, pointing us away from any wishful interpretation of this as an imagined restorative event” (15; 42). As Jannarone highlights throughout her insightful and provocative monograph *Artaud and His Doubles*, perhaps the only existential remedy that the author would fully embrace is the yearning for another cataclysmic event that would annihilate humanity entirely. Does Artaud wish for the modern subject to live more authentically once again in harmony with the elements, or rather does he only envision ontological salvation through utter destruction of our species?

In *Le Rêve Mexicain*, Le Clézio offers a plausible explanation concerning why Artaud’s experiences with the Tarahumaras were not able to dissipate the existential pain from which he suffered his entire life. As Le Clézio concludes, “Artaud ne trouve pas en réalité le Mexique qu’il cherche. Il ne le trouve que dans les livres [...] Ainsi, de plus en plus, Artaud semble se refermer sur lui-même pour suivre son rêve de retour à l’âge d’or de l’empire Aztèque” (220-221). Whereas Le Clézio is aware that the notion of finding a “true culture” which has been “protected from occidental influences” is chimerical, Artaud appears to become lost in an impossible dream of resuscitating a lost civilization to its original grandeur (Boldt-Irons 124; Goux 19). Underscoring that an artist can only hope to preserve the traces of rich Amerindian cultures that managed to survive the conquest, Le Clézio laments, “Moins de cinquante ans après que culminait cette civilisation cruelle et poétique, ses chants furent couverts par le silence angoissé de la Conquête” (150). Although the Franco-Mauritian author attempts to re-animate

the Indian voice by picking up the pieces which could perhaps save humanity from an ecological and spiritual demise, Artaud appears to have never been able to confront the fact that a so-called “pure culture”¹⁹ does not exist nor can a lost civilization be completely restored. Both authors would flee Western society in search of a more meaningful existence, but Le Clézio’s philosophical quest seems to be more realistic and grounded in reality. Did the delusion of reviving indigenous Mexican cultures and restoring a world order that was turned upside down by the European invasion of the new world prevent Artaud from actualizing a state of contentment? By completely devoting himself to an unfeasible artistic project that could never come to fruition, was the tormented writer’s spiritual and philosophical search doomed before it ever began?

In conclusion, Le Clézio and Artaud’s fugue from occidental civilization was driven by a desire to (re)-discover basic material truths that govern the existence of every ephemeral being which has ever existed in an attempt to understand themselves more fully. This effort to peel back the thick layers of Western abstractions that often distort the modern subject’s perception of reality led them on transformative journeys in which they would come into contact with autochthonous Mexican civilizations. Removed from simplistic and sometimes overtly erroneous anthropocentric thought systems designed to delineate the relationship between humankind and the remainder of the universe, both writers would develop a more ecocentric *Weltanschauung* that corresponds to a rudimentary comprehension of the cosmos and the organic cycles that created and which sustain all life on this planet. However, whereas Le Clézio’s later fiction seems to suggest that he found the intellectual equilibrium and the profound ontological meaning for which he had been longing, Artaud appears to have plunged ever more deeply into despair in his tragic final years. Although their initiation into shamanic rituals and the cosmogonic symbolism that they entail would indeed facilitate a greater understanding of fundamental material truths for both authors, only Le Clézio’s ‘Mexican dream’ would ultimately culminate in serenity.

Notes and References

- ¹ See chapter two from Keith Moser’s *Privileged Moments in the Novels and Short Stories of J.M.G. Le Clézio: His Contemporary Development of a Traditional French Literary Device*. New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2008.
- ² It should be noted that the French government relocated Le Clézio to Mexico given his denunciation of crimes against humanity related to prostitution and human trafficking. As De Cortanze notes, “Envoyé en coopération à Bangkok, J.M.G. Le Clézio en fut expulsé après qu’il eut dénoncé la prostitution enfantine de se développer en Thaïlande”(38).
- ³ See the chapter of *Le Rêve Mexicain* entitled “Antonin Artaud ou le rêve mexicain.”
- ⁴ All direct quotations from Artaud himself are taken from the collection of essays, letters, and notes entitled *Les Tarahumaras* published by Gallimard in 1971 unless otherwise noted.
- ⁵ This is the focus of Le Clézio’s seminal essay *L’Extase Matérielle*.
- ⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of modern scientific concepts such as Commoner’s first law of ecology, the first of law of thermodynamics, and quantum contextualism in the

context of Le Clézio’s fiction, see chapter four from Keith Moser’s monograph *J.M.G. Le Clézio: A Concerned Citizen of the Global Village* (Lexington Books, 2012).

- ⁷ It should be noted that the concept of “petitesse” permeates Le Clézio’s early essay *L’Extase Matérielle*.
- ⁸ The importance of shamanism for both authors will be systematically explored in a later section of this essay.
- ⁹ The concept of cosmic humility is also clearly evident in *L’Extase Matérielle* in which Le Clézio asserts, “Alors, il faut s’humilier [...] il faut se faire tout petit devant ce qui existe” (69).
- ¹⁰ This term is used in the same sense as Albert Camus employs it in the essays that comprise the collection *Noces*. For a brief, intertextual discussion of the pantheistic euphoria in the essays of Le Clézio and Camus, see Moser, Keith. “Rending Moments of Material Ecstasy in the Meditative Essays of Two Nobel Laureates: Le Clézio and Camus.” *Romance Notes* 49 (1): 13-21.
- ¹¹ Clarifying that Amerindian conceptions of divinity do not imply that the planet is any sort of utopia or ‘heaven on earth,’ Le Clézio asserts, “Pour les anciens Mexicains, il n’y avait pas de séparation entre les hommes et les dieux. Le monde terrestre, avec toutes ses imperfections et toutes ses injustices, avec sa splendeur et ses passions, était l’image momentanée de l’éternité” (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 112).
- ¹² See the postscript from Moser’s *J.M.G. Le Clézio: A Concerned Citizen of the Global Village*. New York: Lexington Books, 2012.
- ¹³ It should be noted that the autobiographical, indigenous character is named “Colombie” in “Le génie datura” and “Colombia” in *La Fête chantée*. Despite this minor linguistic variation, Le Clézio underscores the importance of the same shamanic experiences in both texts.
- ¹⁴ Le Clézio also highlights the significance of the powerful hallucinogen ‘datura’ or ‘Iwa’ in the shamanic rites that he witnessed in indigenous Panama. However, the writer insists that drug usage is not gratuitous in traditional Amerindian societies and it is merely one tool that an experienced shaman utilizes to initiate a type of spiritual (re)-awakening. As the author explains, “Les drogues font partie des techniques du chamane, soit pour les cérémonies de curation, soit pour les rites guerriers” (*Le Rêve Mexicain* 188-189). For this reason, this essay focuses on the philosophical and spiritual role that shamanism itself fills in many autochthonous communities.
- ¹⁵ Indeed, Le Clézio’s philosophical quest, which would start to bear fruit after his sustained living experiences with divergent Amerindian civilizations, had already begun in the 1960’s.
- ¹⁶ For instance, Artaud confides to his friend Henri Parisot, “j’ai eu l’imbécillité de dire que je m’étais converti à Jésus-christ [...] C’est vous dire que ce n’est pas Jésus-christ que je suis allé chercher chez les Tarahumaras mais moi-même” (58-59). Furthermore, the chapter of *Les Tarahumaras* entitled “Supplément au voyage” in which Artaud articulates bizarre concepts such as “Ciguri-Jésus-christ” is more indicative of delirium rather than a reflection of a cohesive worldview (102).
- ¹⁷ Kimberly Jannarone presents a compelling argument in her recent monograph *Artaud and His Doubles* that the angst-ridden writer never seemed to find any real happiness or relief from his ontological trauma. This essential nuance will be briefly addressed at the end of the essay.
- ¹⁸ Other non-Western cultures, such as Balinese society, with similar ecocentric worldviews were also part of Artaud’s metaphysical “exploration des forces occultes de l’univers-dont

l'homme serait le réceptacle microcosmique-forces [...] constitutives de ce qu'il appellera 'la Cruauté'" (Dureau 89). Affirming that the theater of cruelty is a reflection of this all-encompassing artistic and philosophical project or "sanglante cosmogénèse," Dureau asserts, "dans *Le Théâtre et son double*, il imagine la représentation théâtrale comme une manière de renouer avec le Chaos des origines, dans le désordre duquel il s'évertue à vouloir conquérir un ordre" (93; 94)

¹⁹ In works such as *Ourania* and *Raga*, it is evident that Le Clézio realizes that cultural *métissage* or hybridity has always been unavoidable. Moreover, similar to Glissant, the Nobel Laureate valorizes the cultural exchanges that are emblematic of *la créolité*. In *Les Tarahumaras*, Artaud adamantly insists that Tarahumara culture has not been 'contaminated' by occidental influences.

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