

## **Blood, Cannibalist Desire, and Embodying the Other: Artaud's and Leiris's Anthropological Encounters**

From Bataille's advocacy of 'un monde semblable à une blessure qui saigne',<sup>1</sup> Artaud's *Jet du sang* and Mexican writings, to Leiris's experience of ritual sacrifices in Africa, and Dalí's *Autumnal Cannibalism* (see figure 1), the circulation of blood and desire to devour flesh have repeatedly haunted Surrealist works. Blood and cannibalism pose disquieting questions, for blood flows when the skin-deep boundary between one's interiority and the world is ruptured, and cannibalism is a literal incorporation of as well as inhabitation by an other who is also just similar enough to oneself to disturb one's ontological status. These questions become particularly pertinent in the encounters with non-European peoples by Artaud and Leiris, who were extremely interested in anthropology and had various intense experiences in Mexico and Africa. In Artaud's accounts of his visit to the Tarahumara Indians, and in Leiris's *Miroir de l'Afrique*, which includes his ethnographic diary and reflections during his trans-African expedition 'Mission Dakar-Djibouti' with anthropologist Marcel Griaule, we find that Artaud's and Leiris's bodies, thoughts and writings become inextricably implicated in local ritualistic practices involving blood, sacrifice, and cannibalistic symbolism. Intriguingly, their experiences of the other – as recorded by themselves – are immersed in symbolic acts of ingesting the other's blood and flesh, be it the peyote that incarnates the Tarahumara people and religion for Artaud, or the sacrificial cockerel in Gondar for Leiris. Thus relations between

drinking blood, eating flesh, and a cosmic system of exchange with various alterities and categories of being seem to arise.

What are precisely, however, the nature and implications of these relations? More specifically, firstly, what is blood's significance and function in Artaud's and Leiris's thought and works? – as a concrete bodily substance, a symbol, as well as an aesthetic value? Secondly, what do Artaud's and Leiris's anthropological encounters tell us about their enduring obsession with blood, cannibalism, and alterity – concerns always present in their thought but which were further animated by these encounters? And thirdly, how do this obsession and experience transform subjectivity and the world for Artaud and Leiris? These questions also tie in with theories and concerns in recent anthropological studies, especially those on cannibalism, ontology and cosmology of certain indigenous cultures in South America. For example, Viveiros de Castro has expounded 'Amerindian perspectivism' by arguing that Amerindian peoples' cannibalistic consumption of their enemies' blood and flesh is a metaphysical act that allows them to enter into a relationship that embodies the other's perspective (indeed, literally incorporates the other) and can 'see from the enemy's point of view.'<sup>ii</sup> This view supporting the multiplicity of perspectives and possibility of switching ontologies is also central to the recent 'ontological turn' in cultural and philosophical anthropology, which considers the perspectives of different beings not as different beliefs about one singular reality, but as generators of different multiple realities.<sup>iii</sup> These anthropological theories have great relevance to Artaud and Leiris, since they also treat the question of blood and cannibalism in regard to a system of negotiation between alterities. They will therefore be read in

dialogue with Artaud's and Leiris's writings to shed light on the latter as well as show how the two French writers' ethnographic fictions differ from anthropology properly speaking.

In the following, I first examine Leiris's involvement with blood and possession by the spirit *zar* in Gondar, which leads to a mutual cannibalism between the *zar*, the possessed human being, and the sacrificial animal. This cannibalism disrupts Leiris's subject position as the European ethnographic observer. The trajectory of blood rupturing the 'skin' of subjectivity is then traced in Artaud's experience of symbolic blood and cannibalism through ingesting the peyote juice during his participation in the Tarahumara peyote rites. In particular, the significance of peyote consumption for Artaud lies in the function of blood as a sign that produces the aesthetic sensation of being both outside and inside oneself. Leiris's and Artaud's encounters with blood and exposure to other subjectivities thus offer an interesting pair of comparison, through which we could better understand the problematics surrounding blood and the different relationalities that can be extrapolated from the two writers' different accounts and approaches.

### **Leiris and *Zar* Possession in Gondar**

In 1931, sick of France and Europe and filled with self-disgust, Leiris embarked on the French ethnographic expedition across Africa with Griaule. That Leiris was always intensely interested in anthropology and the non-European other is certainly true; but more importantly, he made this trip in the hope of treating his existential

malaise. As he confessed in the diary which he kept as an ethnographic and autobiographical record, later published as *L'Afrique fantôme*:

Faute de pouvoir – pour des raisons morales liées à mon pessimisme [...] je suis comme châtré. Et voilà peut-être, au fond, tout mon problème. Pourquoi je voyage, pourquoi je m'ennuie, [...] Il m'a fallu quelques semaines à peine de vie abyssine pour [...] comprendre avec la plus indiscutable lucidité [qu'il] faut changer.<sup>iv</sup>

The transformation of the self is therefore a key thread running through Leiris's documentation of his various experiences in Africa. But it becomes particularly prominent during his stay from 1 July to 5 December 1932 in Gondar, Ethiopia. This episode consists of 'des pages qui comptent parmi les plus intenses de son journal,'<sup>v</sup> for Leiris started off to research the local cult of the spirit *zar* as an ethnographic observer, but ended up in a total breakdown of distance, plunging himself into the mire of sacrificial blood, *zar* possession and theatrical trance. Examined in more detail, this experience proved to be a profound transformation for him in a few significant ways.

To start with, Leiris notes that, according to the Abyssinians of Gondar, the *zar* is a special type of spirit that in fact shares humanity with human beings but nonetheless commands awe from people and must be treated with great care.

Le *zar* est nettement distinct du démon ou ganén, [...] Alors que les ganén sont de purs esprits, d'origine divine, *les zar sont d'origine humaine*. [...] Conçus comme semblables aux hommes – à cette différence près qu'ils sont des invisibles – les *zar* constituent une population d'esprits mâles et femelles organisés en société hiérarchisée [...] en tous points semblable à la société humaine.<sup>vi</sup> [my italics]

Although the *zar* are fundamentally human, they have an ambiguous ontological status of being the human and non-human. Furthermore, although the *zar* can strike someone significantly as a punishment for not paying due respect ('La première faute qu'on puisse commettre contre les zar, c'est de les mépriser'),<sup>vii</sup> the *zar* are always already inherently existing in every human being:

*'Tous les gens, même prêtres, même moines, sont à quelque degré habités par le zar.'* Toutefois, les seuls qui seront frappés manifestement sont ceux dont on dit que 'leur étoile est facile à prendre' et que *le zar trouve leur sang savoureux*. En somme, des prédestinés.<sup>viii</sup> [my italics]

That blood should be an important reason for the *zar* to strike someone shows that not only does blood serve as the trigger for the experience of possession, but also, being struck by a *zar* is something 'fated' that depends largely on the person's being already naturally disposed to possession. Through possession, blood then becomes a

symbolic sacrifice that the *zar* claims from the possessed person. Interestingly, the latter then turns into a medium for the *zar* – the human-horse ('cheval') – and will become ravenous for more blood and flesh, wanting to obtain further sacrifices:

Quand le génie se manifeste, c'est qu'il exige un sacrifice ou, comme on dit, un 'sang'. C'est en la personne de son 'cheval' qu'il recevra le sacrifice.<sup>ix</sup> [...]

Ils consistent essentiellement en l'égorgement d'une victime appropriée, le *zar* buvant le sang et consommant la chair de la victime par l'intermédiaire de la personne possédée.<sup>x</sup>

Blood is thus the crucial link in a chain of relations, the *zar* drinks the possessed person's blood and passes on its appetite for blood and flesh to the possessed person. And this desire and act are considered as a therapy to get the human-horse out of possession: 'les éléments fondamentaux du traitement, sont: l'interrogatoire, la transe qui en est le moyen, le sacrifice'.<sup>xi</sup> Remarkably, this blood-thirst is also a cannibalist desire, a desire of the *zar* through its human-horse for *human* blood and flesh, besides the human-horse's consumption of sacrificial animals. As Leiris observed about the possessed women in the local neighbourhood who, allegedly, made symbolic sacrifices through eating children and abortion:

La femme de Ménélik, pour se guérir de la lèpre [i.e. one symptom of spiritual possession], a fait égorger des enfants et remplir une grande jarre avec leur sang.<sup>xii</sup>

[Le *zar*] a fait avorter Emawayish, a bu invisiblement le sang de la mère et consommé la chair de l'enfant. [...] Emawayish déclare qu'en pareil cas la femme ne goûte ni à son propre sang ni à la chair de l'enfant; c'est le *zar* qui consomme invisiblement.<sup>xiii</sup>

The structure of the relation between the *zar* and the human therefore evolves around blood and cannibalism: a first sacrifice is enacted through *zar* possession and the drinking of human blood, but the human-horse needs to re-enact this first sacrificial instance through further sacrifices by consuming more blood and flesh as a medium for the *zar*. *Zar* possession is therefore contagious, just as flowing blood that spreads contagiously across different borders and bodies. And because the *zar* is originally human, these sacrifices through spilling blood, killing and eating sacrificial animals or human beings can all be considered cannibalistic.

What significance does this ethnography of the *zar* cult have for Leiris? In fact, while Leiris observes these practices and beliefs about the *zar*, he becomes increasingly implicated and finally loses his ethnographer's distance, entering into the *zar* cult's system of contagion through blood and sacrifice. This breakdown of distance notably occurs on the following two occasions, one where Leiris participated in sacrificing a chicken to the *zar*; another where he entered into a trance after seeing the female human-horse Emawayish drink blood:

Je tiens le premier poulet par les pattes; Enqo Bahri [i.e. the master of ceremonies], qui le tient par la tête, l'égorge au couteau. Malkam

Ayyahou [a possessed human-horse who is also a sorceress healer] arrache vivement une plume blanche, l'humecte en la trempant dans la blessure. Puis elle me trace une grande croix sur le front et [...] me passe la plume entre les lèvres, pour me faire goûter le sang. [...]

Le dépeçage de la première victime terminé, Malkam Ayyahou me place la dépouille sur la tête, les pattes pendant derrière et les ailes me couvrant les joues.<sup>xiv</sup>

This sacrificial killing, smearing and drinking of blood became the moment of initiation for Leiris, for mysteriously, he felt possessed after the experience. The next day, he expressed astonishment at his abnormally huge appetite the night before, attributing it to the *zar* rather than himself.

Aujourd'hui, je finis mes poulets. Je suis étonné de constater combien hier j'en ai laissé peu. Il faut vraiment que ce soit le *zar* qui mange, non le 'cheval', car je ne me serais jamais soupçonné une telle capacité.<sup>xv</sup>

Another occasion when Leiris felt an intense experience of possession is when he saw Emawayish drinking sacrificial blood, as narrated by Jacques Mercier:

Son [Leiris] émotion d'avoir vu Emawayish en transe, le sang sacrificiel aux lèvres. Il parvint même, dans un demi-sommeil, le 1<sup>er</sup> septembre, à



être possédé: un vieux symptôme – hurler dans son sommeil au terme d'un rêve – avait investi son désir de possession.<sup>xvi</sup>

In fact, Leiris's 'possession' on both occasions is very ambiguous, for it is unclear whether he is struck by the *zar* or is imagining himself to be struck. The significant point here is, however, not the reality of his trances and 'possession', but the theatrical and simulatory nature of *zar* possession itself, in the sense that it is in fact a phenomenon and experience where the boundaries between imitating and being are unclear. As mentioned above, the *zar* only strikes people who are already inherently prone to possession, and in a way it can be said that Leiris wanted to be possessed and was always already inclined to being possessed. This is evidenced by his self-reflections:

J'aimerais mieux être possédé qu'étudier les possédés, [...] La connaissance abstraite ne sera jamais pour moi qu'un pis-aller.<sup>xvii</sup>

Dimanche. Mal de tête. Pas de messe, heureusement! Peu sommeillé, comme si j'étais hanté par des succubes.<sup>xviii</sup>

Je suis loin de mon indifférence de ces jours derniers. Certains diraient, peut-être, que je commence effectivement à être possédé.<sup>xix</sup>

During his stay in Gondar, Leiris increasingly imagined himself to be possessed, and

this fantasy reveals the intricate interrelations between the fear of possession, willing oneself into it and entering a trance, becoming obviously possessed and finally losing oneself by being the *zar*'s medium. All this makes possession seem like a kind of performance. Indeed, as Leiris noted, *zar* possession is saturated in theatricality and simulation:

'Le *zar* ressemble à son cheval', dit-on. Il faut en déduire qu'on tendra toujours à assigner comme génie attitré à un individu donné un *zar* dont les caractères idéaux seront conformes aux caractères réels de cet individu donné; [...]

Le *zar* constituerait pratiquement une sorte de masque de théâtre que la personne ne ferait que revêtir.<sup>xx</sup>

There is a complicated relationship of simulation here: the *zar* is similar to the human being and connects to her through a relationship of imitation, and the human being imitates the *zar* to the extent that she impersonates it. Ultimately, the behaviour of the human-horse can be definitely attributed neither to the *zar* nor to the person herself. Instead, as Leiris remarks, it is theatrical personas that the human-horse, who is both *zar* and human, takes on and performs. In this sense, the human-horse is depersonalised and leaves her original self and body temporarily, assuming other bodies and different categories of beings.

Les *zar* constituent une galerie de personnages caractéristiques

constamment liés à une action, [...] Ils ressemblent à cet égard à des personnages de théâtre, puisque ceux-ci n'existent qu'en fonction des événements scéniques qu'ils conditionnent et dans lesquels leur caractère trouve son illustration.<sup>xxi</sup>

À toutes les questions qu'on peut leur poser à ce sujet, les possédées répondent que 'c'est le zar qui fait tout' et que, pendant **le gurri [i.e. manifestations of trance]**, 'le cheval est inconscient'.<sup>xxii</sup>

The specific roles and bodies that the human-horse performs are often radically different from their original selves; for instance, switching between male and female bodies, or suddenly manifesting the *zar's* personality rather than one's own (for example Malkam Ayyahou, who assumes brusquely the personality of her zar from time to time):

Il arriverait qu'un homme possédé par un *zar* femelle non seulement fasse le *fukkära* [i.e. 'un thème de guerre analogue aux récitations',] de ce *zar* femelle (parlant donc comme s'il était du sexe féminin) mais encore se livre à des travaux de femme et pousse la métamorphose jusqu'à devenir sujet à la menstruation.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Malkam Ayyahou [...] la vieille qui, sitôt le don fait, nous baise les mains, est dans tous ses états. Instantanément elle a revêtu la

personnalité d'Abba Qwosqwos, le *zar* militaire qui la possède.<sup>xxiv</sup>

This theatrical impersonification, tied in with the exchange of bodies and personalities through blood and cannibalism, enables the human-horse to undergo a profoundly transformative experience. More specifically, what does it change in the relationship between the human-horse and her world? In particular, what does it change in and for Leiris? To start with, the theatricality of *zar* possession entails a switch of perspectives and subjectivities, for the possessed human being has surrendered her own ego and body. Her behaviour manifests her depersonalisation, especially in that she refers to herself in the third-person rather than the first-person voice:

Pour chacune des activités de sa vie [...] il a un *zar* particulier [...]. À tel point que sa personnalité réelle peut disparaître complètement et qu'une femme comme Mälkam Ayyähu, par exemple, constamment possédée par un génie, même en dehors de toute transe, ne parlait jamais d'elle-même qu'à la troisième personne, ainsi qu'il est de rigueur quand un *zar* parle de son 'cheval'.<sup>xxv</sup>

The human-horse is a *zar* incarnate and no longer completely human, while being simultaneously similar to a sacrificial animal due to the predatory nature of the *zar*'s occupation of the human's body and person. More importantly, the human-horse is also aware of this change of ontological status, for it is not only in trance states that

she realises her body and actions are not under her self-control. The switching and embodiment of many different bodies and perspectives therefore become possible: the spirit *zar* with the human person; gender switches between man and woman; bodily states of being simultaneously stricken and acting as healer; behavioural states of performing and being. Leiris's case, however, is even more complex, for it involves switching between the white coloniser and the native, master and slave, observer and object of study, eater and food.

These switches between perspectives, bodies, subjectivities and categories of being effectuate a principle of exchange in the cosmos that is facilitated by the fluidity and contagion of blood and the cannibalist desire to cross categorial and ontological boundaries. A law of reciprocity holds when usually opposite subject positions assume each other's roles and functions. For instance, in the predator-and-prey relationship, as anthropologists have noted, 'Reciprocity between eater and eaten is a moral law that permeates mythology and ritual: "[He] who wants to get food must become food".<sup>xxvi</sup> According to Viveiros de Castro, this reciprocal switching of positions enables you to see and embody another perspective, even your enemy's.<sup>xxvii</sup> Thus it is a liberating experience that throws one open to a maximal alterity. Considering Leiris's encounter with the local people of Gondar and *zar* possession, his fear of and fantasy about being possessed became liquidated like the contagious sacrificial blood he tasted, which then channeled him into being possessed (or at least genuinely feeling so) in the end. Via this perspectival switch, Leiris experienced a radically other subjectivity that he would never have experienced if he had stayed in his role as a distanced ethnographic observer and

European coloniser.

On the other hand, despite the radical alterity that the switch of perspectives confronts one with, there is nevertheless also a return to and perpetuation of the self. Since by being theatrical and simulatory, this exchange of perspectives through possession does not distinguish strictly between acting and being, mask and reality, other and self. The human-horse could well be engaging in a theatrical performance of possession, or imagining oneself into it, as Leiris seems to do. As mentioned above, the *zar* only strikes people who are already inherently *zar*-like. Therefore the perspective and impersonation of the *zar* are far from a forcible imposition of a completely external and alien perspective onto the human-horse, and often it is unclear whether the *zar* possesses the person or the person imitates the *zar*. *Zar* possession can also be a way of performing oneself, the mimesis being so self-identical that the human-horse is not acting in a self-aware or artificial way:

Si théâtre il y a dans ces manifestations, c'est un théâtre à qui sa base même interdit de jamais s'avouer tel.<sup>xxviii</sup>

[...]

Si tant est que la possession soit un mensonge, il semble donc que pour les adeptes ce soit du moins un mensonge auquel ils croient globalement, l'acceptant dans l'ensemble, [...] un théâtre joué peut-être lui aussi, mais *avec un minimum d'artifice et en dehors de toute intention d'en imposer au spectateur.*<sup>xxix</sup> [my italics]

Rather than characterise the state of possession as inauthentically theatrical, Leiris realises that it is an in-betweenness that resists the dichotomies of authenticity versus inauthenticity, spontaneity versus artifice, and puts them in suspension:

Entre la possession que l'on pourrait dire authentique [...] et ce qu'on appellerait à l'inverse possession inauthentique (simulée délibérément pour se donner en spectacle ou pour exercer sur autrui [...]) il existe trop d'intermédiaires pour que la frontière ne soit, pratiquement, difficile à tracer.<sup>xxx</sup>

Although the embodiment of other perspectives and subjects does enable the experience of radical alterity, it is always an incomplete assumption of the other's perspective and partial loss of the self. In any one instance of possession, there are always multiple and divergent subjectivities, beings, and power relations entangled together rather than one clean persona. The perpetuation of and return to the self in spiritual possession and perspectival exchange can therefore be understood as a 'de-subjectification and generative transformation of self and other', as the anthropologist Miho Ishii argues about *buuta* impersonification in South India, which is similar to *zar* possession and informs us about the concept of permeability.<sup>xxxii</sup> Perspective change can be, as Ishii shows, 'the capability for freeing oneself from one's subjectivity enough to let various perspectives come and go through the permeable self'; and through this co-existence of multiple perspectives, the impersonator 'transform[s] both his and others' perspectives'.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Coming back to Leiris's personal experience and its significance, we have an even more complicated case of theatrical simulation than the Abyssinians' case. With the Abyssinian human-horse, a complex double simulation is in play, for even an 'authentically' possessed person would 'faire du théâtre' and simulate the *zar's* actions – which in turn simulate the actions towards which the possessed person is originally pre-disposed. But when it is the case where an Abyssinian simulates being possessed, then this involves simulating a simulation. Leiris is, however, imitating the Abyssinian human-horse who is imitating the *zar* who is imitating theatrical personas. We could speak of a triple simulation here. Nevertheless, this theatrical simulation, even when fantasised and brought upon oneself, is not ungenue for Leiris because it is not an imposition upon himself. On the contrary, his possession grows organically out of his desire for the other and meets the *zar's* perspective and spiritual seizure just like the contagious mingling in a spontaneous spread of fluids (most notably, blood). By perceiving *zar* possession as theatrical, Leiris also asserts it as a fundamentally aesthetic experience – aesthetic in that this experience is rooted in transforming one's perception, appearance and certain forms of behaviour in the world (*aisthesis*: sense perception, sensation); and that the possessed person acquires and performs a certain *style* of being possessed.

Both the simulatory and aesthetic dimensions of possession are crucial to Leiris, for he both assumes the perspective of alterity and retains a self-reflexive perception of his own theatrical stylisation through this perspectival change. This is shown as he comes into contact with the *zar* in the way that the Abyssinians would experience it, behaves in ways that his original self would not, and sees himself and



the world differently during his trances, but is nevertheless sufficiently clear-minded to observe and write about his experience, no matter how fictional and 'phantomic' this record becomes finally. In Michael Janis's view, through this self-recording, Leiris attempts an auto-ethnography with 'a field of knowledge that [is both] esoteric and exoteric', staging a '*mise-en-abîme* of the exoticised fetish' by making himself the 'ritual object'.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This ontological transgression, present within the incompleteness of self-and-other exchange discussed above, thus perfectly illustrates the fluid messiness of blood that triggers the exchange. Leiris in spiritual possession 'is not so permeable as to lose his self completely', just as he 'is not so impermeable to let nothing enter into [his] self'.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

This transformative experience of self and perception that Leiris's anthropological encounter brings about is very powerful. Contrary to the enclosure of European identity that reeked with self-disgust and which Leiris believed pessimistically could only be perpetuated in himself, Leiris found that in *zar* possession, his subjectivity and being could be so easily dislodged, that he could so easily assume the theatrical mask of the *zar* persona. This ease of perspectival and ontological switch is exhilarating but also frightening, for Leiris realises how the total submersion in alterity, or oneness, as Kevin Inston argues, 'can prove counterproductive' and 'destructive'.<sup>xxxv</sup> When Leiris falls back into his self-position after his trances, he undergoes a depressing disenchantment and feels even more discomfort and alienation when returning to France and European culture: 'Revenir; être vieux; avoir derrière moi ce que j'avais devant. Comment pourrai-je jamais revivre en France?'<sup>xxxvi</sup> We understand that this perspectival switch is a double-edged

sword, both liberating and coercive, heightening the sense of free-flowing transfer whilst simultaneously intensifying the conflict between different subjects and perspectives.

In sum, Leiris's African writings and experiences reveal blood to be the crucial link of an exchange system – 'une sorte de principe d'échange'<sup>xxxvii</sup> – that liquidifies the fixedness of different bodies, subject positions and categories of being. Through the spilling and consumption of blood, a form of symbolic cannibalism is carried out, for the process involves an inter-devouring between beings that share fundamental similitudes and common humanity. This mutual cannibalism unsettles Leiris's subject position and challenges not only his complicitness with colonial ethnography and unequal power relations but also his very bodily existence and behaviour, – something which he both welcomes and dreads.

### **Artaud, the Peyote Rite, and Blood as Sign**

Leiris's anthropological encounters point to a symbolic rather than literal understanding of blood and flesh, for the acts of drinking human blood and flesh are not always tied down to actual eating, but are protean and can take different forms of enactment (e.g. often through a sacrificial animal and daubing its blood). This signals a shift from the actual substances of blood and human flesh to their signs, and nowhere is this shift more prominent than in Artaud's experience of the peyote rite in Mexico. As we will see, Artaud's involvement with blood, cannibalism and the Tarahumara Indians reveals the mutability of the substances of blood and flesh and their status as signs of cosmic exchange and aesthetic value.

In January 1936 Artaud embarked on his journey to Mexico, fuelled by the desire to flee from Europe and its cultural decay. During his stay there, he visited the Tarahumara people to see their indigenous religious practices, in the hope of curing his own metaphysical angst and alienation, as well as gain some revelation therefrom. 'Je suis venu au Mexique prendre contact avec la Terre Rouge,'<sup>xxxviii</sup> he declared, and professed his belief in cultural regeneration through blood: 'le sang véhément des vieilles races dont, sous une apparence renouvelée, peut revivre la force éternelle.'<sup>xxxix</sup> In the therapeutic purpose of his encounter with the Mexican Tarahumara people, Artaud's motives are very similar to Leiris's in Gondar. Like Leiris, Artaud was plagued by the problems of his own subject and the cultural paradigm which Europe imposed on others, and was seeking for ways to rethink and overcome them. And Artaud was not disappointed, for while staying with the Tarahumaras he learned about their cult of the hallucinogenic peyote cactus and experienced some of the most extraordinary moments of his physical and spiritual existence.

In Tarahumara religious practices, the peyote is revered as a divine being and its cult consists of highly formalised rituals that include different stages of peyote hunting, peyote gathering and food preparation, ritual dancing and peyote consumption. From anthropological studies of peyote rituals in Mexico – e.g. Lumholtz's notes (1902) about the Tarahumaras' ritual celebration of the peyote's divine healing powers, Myerhoff's record of the peyote hunt (1974), and Stewart's study (1987) affirming the peyote's figure as protector – we understand that the peyote is treated as a being with will.<sup>xl</sup> Like the *zar*, the peyote shares an element of

humanity with people, and can be seen as a person. As Artaud noted meticulously during his participation in the peyote rites:

CIGURI [i.e. Tarahumara name for the peyote] [...] n'est pas une plante, c'est un homme à qui vous avez retranché un membre en faisait sauter le champ de Peyotl. [...]

Il en est du Peyotl comme de tout ce qui est humain.<sup>xli</sup>

The central idea of the peyote cult is that the peyote is a divine personality who gives itself as a gift to its hunters and eaters. Peyote consumption therefore has a logic of sacrifice, symbolising the peyote's self-sacrifice to its hunters and eaters. But like the *zar* who visits people predestined to be human-horses, the peyote is selective of its recipients, in the sense that its recipients need to deserve it and are in fact fated to receive it:

Ils disent, ces prêtres de Ciguri, que le Peyotl ne se donne pas à tout le monde et que pour accéder à lui il faut être *Prédestiné*.<sup>xlii</sup>

[Seulement] quand ses adeptes ont obtenu par l'accomplissement religieux du Rite que Ciguri veuille entrer en eux.<sup>xliii</sup>

By letting itself be hunted and eaten, the peyote gives its spiritual and vital power to its eaters, and enacts both a sacrifice and divine gift. The peyote, 'saluted in the

same way as a man,<sup>xliv</sup> occupies the position of the benevolent donor who gives a gift. This gift imbues its receivers with *mana*, or spiritual power that protects and gives good luck as well as vitality, as Artaud affirms when he equates 'le jus d'un fruit [i.e. peyote]' with 'la source de la vie'.<sup>xlv</sup> The receivers then go into trances and have experiences of spiritual possession.<sup>xlvi</sup> This involves, just as *zar* possession does, a complex system of cosmic transfer and connection between different subjects and perspectives.

Blood and symbolic cannibalism thus play a crucial role in these rites. As Artaud's observations show, the peyote juice is a substance pertaining to a divine person that is consumed, it is therefore understood as the blood of the peyote. Because the peyote has a fundamental humanity, drinking and eating the peyote is also a kind of symbolic cannibalism. If Artaud's participation in the peyote rites reflects his desire, as Tsu-Chung Su argues, 'to immerse himself in ancient blood' that 'guarded not only an ancient secret of race, but also an eternal myth of truth',<sup>xlvii</sup> then through this symbolic cannibalism, Artaud wants to incorporate and live ancient myths. To better understand how the logic of a metaphysics of blood and cannibalism transforms Artaud, it is key to examine the process of his peyote-induced trance and his reflections upon it.

The overall impression given by Artaud's intense personal experience of the peyote rite is that it is saturated by the flowing and circulation of blood, both concrete and symbolic. Artaud was first initiated through the spilling of his own blood through the ceremonial guidance of a Tarahumara shaman, whereupon he had

an illumination of consciousness which then led to an out-of-body experience, similar to being possessed:

C'est un dimanche matin que le vieux chef indien m'ouvrit la conscience d'un coup de glaive entre la rate et le coeur. [...] Il se précipita sur moi [...] comme s'il voulait m'exterminer. Mais c'est à peine si la pointe du glaive me toucha la peau et fit jaillir une toute petite goutte de sang. —Je n'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.<sup>xlviii</sup>

After this initiation, Artaud experienced an ecstasis that is similar to bewitchment, namely, the possession of his body and whole person and his total immersion in the shamanic ritual context of magic and spirits:

J'ai été, au sens littéral du terme: *ensorcelé*.<sup>xlix</sup>

Couché bas, pour que tombe sur moi le rite, pour que le feu, les chants, les cris, la danse et la nuit même, comme une voûte animée, humaine, tourne vivante, au-dessus de moi.<sup>1</sup>

Seemingly under a spell, Artaud no longer felt that he was speaking from his own self but was de-personalised into a site of experience rather than ego-centric subjectivity. After he drank the peyote juice with the Tarahumara peyote dancers, his narrative switched from 'je' to 'on', referring to himself in the impersonal third-person, just as the human-horses in Leiris's ethnographic diary do after they have become the *zar's* medium:

On ne sent plus le corps que l'on vient de quitter et qui vous assurait dans ses limites, en revanche on se sent beaucoup plus heureux d'appartenir à l'illimité qu'à soi-même car on comprend que ce qui était soi-même est venu de la tête de cet illimité, l'Infini, et qu'on va le voir. On se sent comme dans une onde gazeuse et qui dégage de toutes parts un incessant crépitement. Des choses sorties comme de ce qui était votre rate, votre foie, votre coeur ou vos poumons se dégagent inlassablement et éclatent dans cette atmosphère qui hésite entre le gaz et l'eau. [...]

Je n'en vis pas plus et tout s'évanouit ou ce fut moi qui m'évanouis en revenant à la réalité ordinaire.<sup>li</sup>

The ingestion of the peyote made Artaud **literally *in*-spired (i.e. infused by a spiritual breath)** and his body became like ethereal gas and flowing water. The divine peyote filled his body and consciousness and his self evaporated into limitlessness, namely, a sensation of infinity, as well as became diffusely ubiquitous in the 'swooning'

ensemble of the ritualistic situation. Like *zar* possession, Artaud's experience also involves the switch of perspectives and the substitution of the self by another being. And as Artaud watched the Tarahumara peyote dancers consume the peyote and perform, he found echoes of his own trance and ecstasis in their bodies and expressions, as if they corresponded and connected to his experience.

Les sentiments qui irradiaient de lui [i.e. the shaman], passaient l'un après l'autre à travers son visage, [...] *manifestement n'étaient pas les siens*; il ne se les appropriait, ne s'identifiait plus avec ce qui pour nous est une émotion personnelle.<sup>lii</sup>

Deux servants se courbèrent contre la terre où ils furent l'un en face de l'autre comme deux boules inanimées. – Mais le vieux Prêtre devait lui aussi avoir pris de la poudre car une expression inhumaine s'était emparée de lui. [...] Alors les servants semblèrent sortir de leur boule inanimée. L'homme d'abord secoua la tête [...] La femme agita le dos. [...] on comprenait que ce n'était plus du tout un homme et une femme qui étaient là, mais deux principes.<sup>liii</sup>

Like Artaud, the peyote dancers were also out of their bodies and imbued with the peyote's spirit, temporarily giving up their individual personhood. All participants in the rite enter, via the connection of peyote's blood and *mana*, into a system of contagious transfer and merging of different bodies, perspectives and subjectivities.



In this way, they as an impersonalised mass of sensation and consciousness are able to experience the situation holistically without clear distinctions between different individualities.

Besides the spiritual change and openness to alterity that the peyote's blood enables, its ritual construction of consumption and dancing also has the significance of an initiation into cannibalism. The connection between shamanic dance and cannibalism finds plenty of support from anthropological studies, for instance the Bella Coola's religious Cannibal Dance, during 'the performance [of which] the cannibal dancer became possessed by an animal force that caused the dancer to want to bite people and filled him or her with an insatiable desire for human flesh'.<sup>liv</sup> Also, in Aztec myth – which is most likely the prototype for Tarahumara peyote rite – consecrated hearts of sacrificial human victims are called the 'eagle-cactus fruit' (note the recurrence of cactus here), originating from a story about the sacred eagle perching on a cactus tree 'in a boggy pool of white water – the colour for sacrifice'.<sup>lv</sup> The link between the fruit of religious cult (peyote in the Tarahumara's case), sacrificial blood, and flesh shows that cannibalism and blood drinking are not pinned down to consuming literally human blood and flesh, but about what substances are *considered* blood and flesh, as well as the way they function as signs of transmigration between bodies and spirits in rituals. These connections and functions are also reflected in Artaud's observations of the Tarahumara rites. For instance, parallel to the peyote dance, Artaud notes another ritualistic dance around the sacrifice of a bull that heavily involves spilling, smearing and drinking blood, as well as eating the bull's meat:

Les Indiens conduisirent un bœuf sur la place du village et, après lui avoir attaché les pattes, se mirent à lui déchirer le coeur. Le sang frais était recueilli dans de grandes jarres.<sup>lvi</sup>

[...]

Ils dansèrent ainsi jusqu'au coucher du soleil, et pendant qu'il dansaient d'autres Indiens recueillirent morceau par morceau le corps du taureau dont ils abandonnèrent la tête sur la terre. [...] Tous burent le sang chaud et mille et mille fois recommencèrent à s'agiter en forme de grenouilles.<sup>lvii</sup>

The way the Tarahumara people kill the sacrificial bull, consume it, then dance in a hallucinatory state with convulsive movements is like a mirror reflection of their peyote rites. Both bull and peyote dances point towards the symbolism of cannibalist practice through the substitution of human blood and flesh by the bodily substances of sacrificial animal or the cult plant. As Marilyn Strathern has remarked, Melpa mortuary rites, for example, 'transfer the spirit of the corpse into the world of the ghosts by means of a pig sacrifice, [...] eating the pig flesh coincides with the release of the deceased's soul. The pigs [...] are substitutes for the [deceased] person's body.'<sup>lviii</sup> Although the Melpa people are different from the Tarahumara, they serve as one example among many showing that cannibalism – as practised in various cultures – can be taken in a primarily symbolic sense and the substance of cannibalist consumption is *mutable*. Therefore, Artaud's experience of the peyote rite

may be understood as an engagement with symbolic blood, cannibalism, and possession by another perspective and being.

Nevertheless, unlike Leiris's partial and uncomfortable preservation of his self despite the ontological transgression in *zar* possession, in **this perspectival transfer** and state of being imbued by the peyote spirit, Artaud also felt truly inside himself and being his genuine self. His body was pervaded by a feeling of illumination and heightened self-awareness, which was not oppositional to but integrated in the awareness of the divine spirit, so that he claimed to perceive in himself a more fundamental humanity after the experience of peyote-induced hallucination:

Le Peyotl ramène le moi à ses sources vraies. —Sorti d'un état de vision pareille on ne peut plus comme avant confondre le mensonge avec la vérité. [...] Et toute la série des lubriques phantasmes projetés par l'inconscient ne peuvent plus brimer le souffle vrai de L'HOMME, pour cette bonne raison que le Peyotl c'est L'HOMME non pas né, pas INNÉ, et qu'avec lui la conscience atavique et personnelle entière est alertée et étayée.<sup>lix</sup>

Ultimately, Artaud is simultaneously out-of-himself and in-himself. Through the peyote possession he arrives at a deeper understanding of his subjectivity and its relationship to the world. His own self and perspective are changed, but in the sense of becoming more truly himself, more 'innate' and 'awakened' to its primordially. Having switched perspectives and gone out of his former self, Artaud returns to a

self-perspective that is also transformed, a self that has healed and improved in certain aspects. This is why he asserts that the rite was for him 'la guérison par le Peyotl. Le Peyotl d'après ce que j'ai vu fixe la conscience et l'empêche de s'égarer, de se livrer aux impressions fausses'.<sup>lx</sup> We may say that Artaud's in-between state of both self and other perspectives is also like the *buuta* impersonator who has a 'double perspective' that 'permits the person to act in between identities', maintaining just enough of himself to 'turn back into himself' and be self-reflexive.<sup>lxi</sup> From Artaud's ability to note down, even posthumously, the peyote rite in meticulous fashion, it is understood that he is not in a state of daze that incapacitates his thinking. At least he was clear-minded enough to remember many details for his later writing of the event, to have enough material for literary invention.<sup>lxii</sup>

To conclude, similar to Leiris, Artaud's anthropological encounter also involves the shift and embodiment of perspectives, showing the flexibility rather than fixedness of different perspectives, ontologies, and bodies. Through peyote juice as symbolic blood, Artaud navigates between the person of the peyote, the Tarahumara peyote eaters, and himself. This circulation of different subjectivities strengthens their interrelationships and cross-contamination rather than sets them apart into distinct and self-enclosed entities. The substance that cannibalistic practices involve can therefore change depending on what perspective one embodies, namely, what ontological category one belongs to at the moment of ritualistic enactment. For instance, from the standpoint of the peyote, blood is its own juice; from the standpoint of the Tarahumara shamans, both the sacrificial bull's blood and the peyote juice stand for the blood of a person sharing some common humanity with

them. Thus blood and cannibalist desire do not only take concrete form as a few determined specific substances but can be many different substances in different religious contexts, for they are ultimately signs of gift exchange and of the flow of perspectives, like hinges that enable one to swing between different ontologies and experience different and multiple realities.<sup>lxiii</sup> On the other hand, blood is not only a currency for perspectival transfer and cosmic exchange, it is also very significantly, for Artaud, a sign that produces aesthetic sensation. This is the sensation of being simultaneously outside and inside oneself, a sensation of desire for Artaud – not desiring for an other that is lacking, but a desire that lacks a stable subject (as Deleuze would argue about desire), or even, a desire that makes the subject and its ontological status unstable. Being in this state of desire, acting it out through the peyote rite, and experiencing the process of desiring are all aesthetic for Artaud, for they are rooted in his sensations, perception and consciousness of the world and himself. Although blood has been interpreted as a sign for Cruelty in Artaud's theatre aesthetics by various critics,<sup>lxiv</sup> there is no need to refer every theme Artaud engages with to his theatre theory. Blood, though connected intimately with Artaudian theatre, reflects a deeper concern that Artaudian theatre aims to realise: the production of aesthetic sensation via the sensations of appetite, hunger and desire. Indeed, precisely because blood is a symbolic currency via which one's body and subjectivity become fluid, it attests to Artaud's life-long preoccupation with 'refashioning' himself (e.g. 'Je n'ai plus qu'une occupation, me refaire'),<sup>lxv</sup> and continues from the anarchist and carnal body of Artaud's Heliogabalus through Artaud's theatre-space-as-body to his later 'corps sans organes'. This shows that

Artaud's force of philosophical thought is not only significantly manifested in his *Théâtre et son double*, but also runs throughout his works and should be better recognised for its relevance to the phenomenological understanding of body and experience.

### **Artaud and Leiris in Comparison**

Artaud's and Leiris's anthropological accounts about blood now offer us an interesting case for comparison. If for both writers, blood facilitates the shifting of perspectives and opening oneself to exteriority, how do their experiences differ from each other and reveal different aspects of the notions of blood and cannibalism? To begin with Artaud, compared to Leiris he is not so tortured about his identity as a figure representing European colonisation, simply because his interest in Mexico and other cultures and how they could re-invigorate his idea of culture was not primarily political but on the deeper level (as he would claim) of liberating and refashioning the body, metaphysics, and aesthetics. Artaud never made a big deal about not having a clear definition for his cultural identity but always wanted to keep himself open and flexible, without an identity that opposes or excludes others. This can be seen from Artaud's various denials of identity based on cultural categories and his anarchist calls to liquidate any boundary of the self, in his *Héliogabale*, for instance, where he describes the infamous Heliogabalus as one who 'court de [...] forme en forme, et de feu en feu, comme s'il courait d'âme en âme, [...] et qui a le goût des métamorphoses'.<sup>lxvi</sup> This amorphousness of identity and disregard for political relations may explain why Artaud's interaction with the Tarahumara people is

immersed in a hallucinatory experience of ultimate indifferentiation where Artaud's outsider position as the European man is minimised. Thus the relationship between Artaud and the Tarahumara is not defined culturally or politically, but *ritually*, for Artaud is uninitiated in regard to the peyote cult. In a certain sense, Artaud is not fundamentally changed through his peyote experience. Rather, this experience has enabled him to better rediscover and remain truly himself. Having always had a deep-seated cannibalist desire, Artaud is a cannibal to start with, constantly practising cultural anthropophagy by plucking and assuming personas and perspectives from other cultures:

Je mangerai le corps d'un lama grillé,

le corps d'une vierge,

le corps d'un brahmane,

le corps d'un rabbin, [...]

Car je suis un cuisinier.<sup>lxvii</sup>

The switch of perspectives and identities therefore comes quite easily to Artaud and is precisely what he seeks. With the peyote, it is a heightened instance of such a switch and cannibalist desire, but not an extremely uneasy experience for Artaud.

Leiris, however, is not a cannibal to start with and he feels much more conflicted and uneasy about the shift and transgression of his identity and subjectivity during his spiritual possession. Leiris's simulation of *zar* possession is a theatrical mimesis not because he is putting on masks of the other or of the *zar* over his

authentic European identity, but because his European identity was also a mask to begin with, and an uncomfortable one too. Unlike Artaud who finds himself more genuine after the trance, when Leiris is no longer possessed, he somehow feels even less himself. When he realises his own inauthenticity, he is plunged into deeper depression: 'Je songe: décidément je ne sais pas m'arranger tout seul, jamais je ne suis à la hauteur des événements [...] je ne parviens à composer qu'une creuse figure de théâtre'.<sup>lxviii</sup> Although like Artaud, Leiris's obsession with blood and cannibalistic desire for *zar* possession are triggered by the desire for alterity that is so extreme that only by consuming and being consumed can he satiate his existential and identity-obsessed hunger, he needs to first overcome his anxiety about his uneasy political and colonial power relationship with the Abyssinians before reaching the more metaphysical and aesthetic level of experience that Artaud is primarily concerned with. After all, Griaule's Dakar-Djibouti expedition in which Leiris participated involved plundering and stealing artefacts and religious objects (especially the Kono masks) from local peoples in the name of the anthropological project of knowledge. And Leiris was painfully aware of this, condemning this imperialist violence by expressing his utter disgust at the white European man while simultaneously enjoying his privilege and sometimes even abusively despising the African peoples as uncouth and lazy 'nègres'.<sup>lxix</sup> To break free from this vicious cycle of conflicting self-hatred and superiority complex, Leiris understood that he needed a fundamental transformation. *Zar* possession offered such an opportunity, and through it, ultimately Leiris came to realise that spiritual possession is no longer only about the political and colonial or even inter-human relations, but exists on a more



radically metaphysical and 'anatomical' level (as Artaud would say): the otherness that Leiris desires is a bodily otherness as well as an *ontological* otherness.

The divergences between Artaud's and Leiris's engagements with blood show that the process of shifting and transgressing subjectivities is neither easy nor ever complete. Although Leiris is more tortured by the experience, finally he also echoes Artaud in articulating an understanding of blood that not only seeks to surpass cultural and political differences, but also subjectival and ontological ones. For blood is not only a sign and hinge between perspectives, it is *itself also a perspective* – one that has no fixed position because its state of being is in constant flux and has infinite potentiality to metamorphose. And this perspective of blood is also one that Artaud and Leiris would like to dwell in, so that they could rupture any self-enclosure, imposed power relations, and the dichotomy of self and other. Even more significantly, blood is not only a currency for perspectival transfer but also a supreme *aesthetic* value. For both Artaud and Leiris – whether it is about a metaphysics of the mythic body or theatrical simulation – blood is an aesthetic phenomenon. And it is this aesthetic side that marks the major difference of Artaud's and Leiris's anthropological accounts from ethnography properly speaking, the pursuit of which is epistemological before anything else. For Artaud and Leiris, the aesthetic surplus of the function and symbolism of blood is crucial, since it is not enough for them that blood is a pivot in **perspectival and cosmic exchange and that it serves to reverse power structures and break down categories. Blood also has to be the threshold for** an aesthetics – sensations obtained through corporeal ecstasis, narcissistic self-mimesis or the state of insatiable desire – that is enacted in one's subjectivity and

perception, even if it involves the depersonalisation of the subject. Blood's significance thus does not need to be about gaining more knowledge. Simply immersing oneself like a pulp in this ontological mishmash of different concentrations of subjectivities is already an experience well-worth having for Artaud and Leiris. In other words, through engaging with blood, Artaud and Leiris want to *be* in a certain way, not necessarily *know* about it. For example, we find Artaud professing his faith in the living truth of his own blood: 'Sur les routes où mon sang m'entraîne il ne se peut pas qu'un jour je ne découvre une vérité'.<sup>lxx</sup> Artaud considers blood to have thought and consciousness – 'toutes mes veines mentales' – that directly hook onto the nervous system, and therefore consciousness, instead of remaining fixed in the brain, can be disseminated in the entire body through a blood circulation consisting of 'tous les chemins de [la] pensée dans ma chair'.<sup>lxxi</sup> In this case, blood is a bodily truth, a poetic creativity (from *po-ema*, *ema* = *aima*, the *poiesis* of blood, as Artaud interprets it),<sup>lxxii</sup> an aesthetics of being that takes an anti-Cartesian approach by positing the experiential body rather than the analytical mind (or logocentric head) as primary existence.

As for Leiris, he explicitly professes that he is not seeking knowledge but sensory contact and impressions, and when he reflects on his ethnographic writing he breaks out into impatience:

le 27 août

Travail languissant de traduction de texte avec le boiteux. Songeant aux fulgurations incessantes de la vieille, au charme insolite qui émane

de sa fille, mesurant l'immense prix que j'attache à fixer leurs paroles, je ne peux plus supporter l'enquête méthodique. j'ai besoin de tremper dans leur drame, de toucher leurs façons d'être, de baigner dans la chair vive. Au diable l'ethnographie!<sup>lxxiii</sup>

From these disclosures, we understand that Artaud and Leiris treat their anthropological encounters as aesthetic and self-exploratory projects, not primarily epistemological ones.

As for cannibalist desire, it arises from the aesthetics of blood as the desire to fuse, be fluid, and heal from the wounds of one's previous body and identity. In other words, cannibalist desire reaches out to an experience of an unstable subject, of the very state of desiring. With Artaud, this means in particular a desire directed towards making anything solid, opaque, and obstructive such as a block of flesh into a fluid pulp that enters unresistingly into the free-flowing system of blood and ontological circulation. Thus distinct and determined identities and subjectivities are broken down into a constant movement between diffuse and porous ones, which one could still embody to the fullest extent, albeit not as a fixed position of identity but a site for holistic experience. For Leiris, cannibalist desire also means the desire of the other for the self, a desire originating from alterity rather than from the subject position, as in the case of the *zar* who longs for human blood and flesh. Through this reversal of the desiring structure, Leiris discovers that cannibalism is in fact an inter-desiring between alterity and identity that enables the switch between

subject positions. In the end, one cannot desire without being desired, nor be desired without desiring.

### **Concluding Remarks**

By way of conclusion, we may first return to Dalí's painting *Autumnal Cannibalism* for a moment (figure 1). Here we see two indistinct and oneiric bodies cut and morph into each other, presented on platters and a table like food for a feast. A mutual *jouissance* and antagonism seem to be at play as the bodies open up to each other's cannibalist desires, as well as open up to us viewers by inviting us to devour them. Indeed, you cannot cut into another body and perspective without being cut yourself; you cannot bleed and maintain your identity barrier of skin against the world. This is one of the most important revelations that Artaud and Leiris gained through their encounters with non-European others: namely, to live subjectivity as a wound, as Bataille would say. As I have argued above, via the theme of blood in their anthropological encounters, Artaud and Leiris experience an ontological shift between different perspectives and beings and are exposed to, indeed, inhabit a radical alterity temporarily. At the same time, they do not lose the self but rather, re-discover it within the context of the co-existence of multiple perspectives and realities. The self is therefore re-situated in a different structure of relations to the world, showing that Artaud's and Leiris's desire for the other, though always incompletely carried out and partial failures in its political and ontological transgression, are far from inconsequential and leave them profoundly changed. Thus I argue against the view held by certain critics like Phyllis Clarck-Taoua that

Leiris did not engage in a meaningful, non-colonial way with the African peoples he met.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Artaud's and Leiris's anthropological encounters are not so much about an exoticist appropriation of the other to the self, nor unambiguously about seeing 'from the enemy's [i.e. Other's] point of view', but about being and perceiving in-between multiple viewpoints and shifting across them. This explains blood's significance in their experiences and self-reflections. **As a sign that enables one to easily slip into a mask, and a flowing, permeable and permeating perspective** that can be embodied but also disembodied, blood facilitates not only the adoption and better understanding of other subjectivities, but also the diffusion and mingling of multiple subjectivities and perspectives into one conflux. These perspectives could be that of indigenous peoples of Mexico or Gondar, the European subject or foreign outsider as Leiris and Artaud stand for, the spirit *zar*, the divine peyote, or sacrificial animals. The self that enters into this conflux is revealed to have an infinite flexibility for self-deconstruction, re-construction and transformation. This is both a cannibalistic metamorphosis and aestheticisation of the self through changing one's perception, undergoing different degrees of intensity of experience, and experimenting with diverse stylisations of framing the self in various mimetic situations.

As anthropologists such as Marilyn Strathern have famously demonstrated, the formation of personhood **understood in many cultures** is not only a process of individualisation but also one of *dividualisation*.<sup>lxxv</sup> Instead of being atomistic, the self involves connective and recombinatory personhoods, depending on the different relationalities and contexts in which it finds itself. This dividualisation and recombinatory capacity of the self thus explode distinct ontologies and work against

the logic of cultural and ethnocentrism, for the differences between subjects and perspectives are shown to depend on the way of categorisation and context formulation rather than any essential distinction. For instance, if for Leiris, cultural difference and power relations seemed to be the insurmountable chasm between the Abyssinians and himself, the Abyssinians on the other hand did not see Leiris as other as defined through the lens of European exoticism. More likely, they saw Leiris as part of the common humanity that animals, plants, the *zar* spirit and certain other divine beings all share with human persons. These beings are different from human persons not because they are essentially or culturally different, but because they occupy different bodies and perspectival positions, for example the positions of predator in relationship to human persons as prey. And through *zar* possession, Leiris becomes as susceptible to being prey as the Abyssinians, thus the cultural difference between him and the Abyssinians becomes subsumed under perspectival, or positional difference. An interstitial space that does not dichotomise sameness and difference but allows them to co-exist and interact is created. This space reveals to Artaud and Leiris that only through thinking, bleeding, performing and writing blood are they able to have certain meaningful experiences and find new ways of encountering the other and transforming the self. In this way, Artaud's and Leiris's ethnographic fictions also show themselves to be deeply *comparative* in nature. Through traversing and comparing different perspectives, embodiments, and realities, they bring about a realisation that is both disarranging and beneficial: whether it concerns the Abyssinians or the Tarahumara and their spirit gods, these non-European others have a different set of concerns from that of Artaud and Leiris.

Namely, the crisis of the self and European culture is primarily a problem for the European man before anyone else. Thus the struggle against Eurocentrism that many critics see in Artaud and Leiris is *itself* yet another perpetuation of European parochialism and refusal to be genuinely interested in the other. I believe that Artaud and Leiris became aware of these issues through their experiences in Mexico and Africa, which give us glimpses of a more sincerely ethnographic and ontological appreciation of what the alterity they encountered taught them. This helps us envisage a reading of Artaud's and Leiris's anthropological writings that goes beyond classic post-colonial critiques which always maintain them in the centre of power, for their position of being in the centre and in the cultural body of the European were precisely what their writings *displaced*. By seeking to overcome the self-centrism of any supposedly individual agent such as that of the European coloniser, Artaud and Leiris affirm the possibility of changing not only power relations with the other but also physical, psychological, and aesthetic relations.

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- ii Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*, trans by Catherine V. Howard (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- iii See Paleček and Risjord, 'Relativism and the Ontological Turn within Anthropology', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 43.1 (2012): 3-23; and special issue, Colloquium 'The Ontological French Turn', *HAU* 4.1 (2014): 259-360.
- iv Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), 321.
- v Michel Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1996), 897.
- vi Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 929.
- vii Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 924-25.
- viii Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 926-27.
- ix Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 929.
- x Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 937.
- xi Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 935.
- xii Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 337-8.
- xiii Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 367.
- xiv Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 442.
- xv Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 443.
- xvi Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 897.
- xvii Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 324.

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- xviii Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 333.
- xix Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 342.
- xx Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 944-5.
- xxi Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 1033.
- xxii Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 936.
- xxiii Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 985.
- xxiv Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 338.
- xxv Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 942.
- xxvi Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 115.
- xxvii Viveiros de Castro, 1992.
- xxviii Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 1045.
- xxix Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 1049.
- xxx Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 1054.
- xxxi Miho Ishii, 'Playing with perspectives: spirit possession, mimesis, and permeability in the *buuta* ritual in South India', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 795-812 (795).
- xxxii Ishii, 'Playing with perspectives', 795.
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- xxxv Kevin Inston, 'Michel Leiris' Anthropology and the Ontology of Finitude', *MLN* 129.4 (2014): 1009-34 (1011).
- xxxvi Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 347.
- xxxvii Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 933.
- xxxviii Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 720.
- xxxix Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 730.
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- xli Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1684.
- xlii Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IX (Paris: Gallimard), 114.
- xliiii Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1685.
- xliv Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 17.
- xlv Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1680.
- xlvi For more about Artaud's understanding of gift exchange and the Tarahumara peyote rite, see Xiaofan Amy Li, *Comparative Encounters between Artaud, Michaux and the Zhuangzi* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015)
- xlvii Tsu-Chung Su, 'Artaud's Journey to Mexico and His Portrayals of the Land', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.5 (2013): 1-9 (4).
- xlviii Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1680.
- xlix Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 769.
- l Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 775.
- li Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1689.
- lii Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1682.
- liiii Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1686.
- liv Sanday, *Divine Hunger*, 6.
- lv Sanday, *Divine Hunger*, 177.
- lvi Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 757.
- lvii Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 759.
- lviii Strathern quoted in Sanday, *Divine Hunger*, 24-25.
- lix Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1690.
- lx Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1692.
- lxi Ishii, 'Playing with perspectives', 798.
- lxii Even in the unlikely case that Artaud's participation in the peyote rites is completely fictional, as Le Clezio suggests.



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- lxiii As is argued in the recent ontological turn in anthropology, perspectivism does not mean relativistically plural views on one single reality but shows the co-existence of multiple realities. See special issue, Colloquium ‘The Ontological French Turn’, *HAU* 4.1 (2014): 259-360.
- lxiv See Su 2013; Ruby Cohn, ‘Artaud’s “Jet de Sang”: Parody or Cruelty?’, *Theatre Journal* 31.3 (1979): 312-18; and Evelyne Grossman in Artaud *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004)
- lxv Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 164.
- lxvi Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 468.
- lxvii Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XVIII, (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 143.
- lxviii Leiris, *L’Afrique fantôme*, 319.
- lxix Leiris, *L’Afrique fantôme*, 172.
- lxx Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 106.
- lxxi Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 166, 146.
- lxxii Artaud, *Oeuvres*, 1114.
- lxxiii Leiris, *L’Afrique fantôme*, 352.
- lxxiv See Phyllis Clarck-Taoua ‘In Search of New Skin: Michel Leiris’s “L’Afrique fantôme”’, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 42.167 (2002): 479-98.
- lxxv Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)