

*Introduction to “Notebook from the Trip to Visit the Hopi Indians” by André Breton’ **

Etienne-Alain Hubert

In mid-June 1945, after a stop in Chicago, André Breton and Elisa Claro arrive in Reno, Nevada. They met friends there, the mosaicist Jeanne Reynal and her husband, Urban Neiningger, who found them a place to live for the few weeks of residency Breton required for his divorce and who became their travel companions.¹ Breton used the time in Reno to finalize his divorce with Jacqueline Lamba and regularize his union with Elisa soon afterwards, on July 30th. The trip allowed them to venture outside of Reno, just as, a year earlier, Breton and Elisa had traveled in Canada as a welcome and energizing respite from their more restricted life in New York.² Breton would commemorate the exciting natural landscapes they visited in Utah and Nevada in *Ode to Charles Fourier*, landscapes in which they found vestiges of the American Western landscapes from movies and Western adventure novels so admired by Breton’s friend, Jacques Vaché.³ Breton still had in mind one of his “legendary friend’s” final messages, in which Vaché imagined he might become a “trapper, or a thief, prospector, hunter, or a miner, a welder—Arizona Bar (*Whiskey—Gin and mixed?*).”⁴ These dreams of Vaché’s probably had a lot to do with the trip Breton planned. Haunted by the memory of his friend, he went so far as to feel his presence while in an outdoor bar situated near ruins in the Nevada desert.⁵

Breton’s stay in the United States allowed him to renew his interest in the Pueblo people, initially stimulated by his discovery of their art in 1927, when he reproduced a Hopi katsina in the October 1927 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*.⁶ In New York, Breton bought Native American works of art from Julius Carlebach, with which he expanded his collection and that wound up displayed on the wall of his studio in his Paris apartment.⁷ Accustomed to serious reading, Breton researched the Hopi extensively in scholarly journals and expanded this research with visits to ethnographic and natural history museums, interviews with experts, and lists of readings. Some of these notes and references appear in his “Notebook.” He had

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the idea to publish the “Notebook” as early as September 15th 1945, upon his return to New York, when he wrote his former editor in Paris, Léon Pierre-Quint: “I’m planning to send you the manuscript I’ve mentioned before, a sort of travelogue in which I will bring together my writings on Mexico, Martinique (which have only appeared so far in fragments in newspapers and magazines) and on the Pueblo Indians, about which I have abundant documentation. This publication will require a large quantity of photographs as illustrations.”⁸ The project led to a contract signed on June 2nd, 1946, with the Éditions du Sagittaire for a separate book with the tentative title of *The Hopi Indians*. The publisher’s financial trouble as well as the fact that Breton drew from the “Notebook” for his *Ode to Charles Fourier* may have contributed to the postponed realization of these planned publications.

High up, at the feet of three mesas in northeastern Arizona, resistant to the efforts of missionaries, and more or less preserved from contact with European settler culture until the second half of the nineteenth century, the Hopi Indians have been studied by well-known anthropologists such as James George Frazer, Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Close to Breton during their stay in the United States, Lévi-Strauss later wrote the preface for *Sun Chief*, the autobiography of Don C. Talayesva, whom the Surrealists admired as “a lesson in good mental health and nobility.”⁹ Other Surrealists such as Max Ernst, Matta, and Jorge Camacho also took a passionate interest in the Hopi.

Breton and Elisa spent almost the entire month of August 1945 traveling with Reynal and her husband to the Navajo, Zuni, Apache and Hopi villages in Arizona and western New Mexico. They passed several times through Gallup, where they would stay and were able to visit the nearby petrified forest, mentioned in the *Ode to Charles Fourier*. On the Hopi Reservation they were able to watch the annual summer rituals and discover the striking sun-baked villages.¹⁰ Photographs of these villages make them seem uninhabited, due to Hopi resistance to tourism and photographers. Built one on top of the other, the Hopi houses are barely distinguishable from the mineralized ochre stone mesas from which they rise. These unadorned travel notes infuse melancholy into anthropological observation and express fellow feeling for the endurance of a people surviving difficult circumstances, and, are invested in pursuing questions of paramount importance.

On a 3 x 5 lined notepad that allowed him to be discrete, Breton made notes and occasional sketches with short explanations. The spelling has been adjusted to common usage, including the spelling of “medicine man.”

Translation from the French by Katharine Conley

* The text of the Notebook was established by Etienne-Alain Hubert from the Notebook manuscript and published in Breton's Complete Works under his direction, with Philippe Bernier, Marie-Claire Dumas, and José Pierre. André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, eds. Marguerite Bonnet and Etienne-Alain Hubert (Paris: Gallimard-coll. Pléiade, 1999), 183-209. Introduction by Etienne-Alain Hubert, in Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 1223-25. My thanks to Marie-Claire Dumas for putting me in touch with Etienne-Alain Hubert.

1 As indicated by Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1991), 527. Jeanne Reynal was also a friend of Marcel Duchamp's and participated in the "Surrealism in 1947" exhibition. Translator's note: Reynal "was a significant figure of the New York School, a mosaicist who showed with the Betty Parsons Gallery." See: <https://www.ericfreestonegallery.com/artists/jeanne-reynal>

2 Translator's note: Breton and Elisa took a trip to the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec, where Breton wrote the first draft of his book dedicated to Elisa, *Arcanum 17* (1947). See André Breton, *Arcanum 17*, trans. Jack Rogow (Los Angeles, CA: Green Integer, 2021).

3 Translator's note: André Breton, *Ode to Charles Fourier* (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1969).

4 Letter to André Breton from 14 November 1918. Translator's note: Jacques Vaché, *Jacques Vaché and the Roots of Surrealism: Including Vaché's War Letters*, ed. Franklin Rosemont, trans. Guy Ducornet (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2008), 353.

5 See "Trente ans après," *La Clé des champs*, in André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 787.

6 Citing one of Paul Eluard's *Lettres à Gala* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) from June 1927: "Here, we have found, Breton and I, Pueblo dolls from New Mexico. It's incredible." Hopi katsinas are wooden figures carved out of poplar wood, made to teach Hopi children about their religion and representing the masked dancers who perform in religious rituals and incarnate invisible life forces. The word *Katsina* refers either to the spirit-life forces or the dancers or the wooden figures representing the spirits and the dancers. Breton describes these figures in an interview with Jean Duché. Translator's note: In the Duché interview, Breton comments: "I brought back these dolls from my visit to the Hopi Indians of Arizona. Look how these objects justify the surrealist vision, and even give it a new impetus." In André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1993), 202. *La Révolution surréaliste* (The Surrealist Revolution) was the first surrealist periodical published in Paris over twelve issues, from 1924 to 1929.

7 On Breton's collection see the exhibition catalogue by Vincent Gille, *La Danse des Kachina* (Paris: Pavillon est arts, 1998), 45-81; 174-76. There are also two essays by Gille: "Partie liée. Le Surréalisme et les Hopi" and "La Révolution surréaliste." See also M.-E. Laniel-Le François, José Pierre, Jorge Camacho, *Kachina des Indiens Hopi* (Saint-Vit: Amez, 1992). Translator's note: Julius Carlebach had an antique store at 1040 Madison Avenue frequented by the Surrealists during their stay in New York in the early 1940s. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 261 and <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/10/14/archives/julius-carlebach-of-gallery-featuring-primitives-is-dead.html>. In 2002, the part of Breton's collection known as Breton's Wall was donated by his daughter Aube Breton Elléouët to the National Museum of Modern Art at the Pompidou Center in 2002. For the donation of Breton's Wall to the Pompidou Center see <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/17/arts/surrealism-for-sale-straight-source-andre-breton-s-collection-readied-for.html>.

8 French National Library (BNF) Acquisition 18358, folio 393. Several interviews with Breton (by Gérard Tilly, *Le Pays*, 30 May 1946; Jean Bedel, *Libération*, 30 May 1946, etc.) confirm the project. Most likely the plan was to use photographs taken by Elisa.

9 *Soleil Hopi, L'Autobiographie d'un Indien Hopi*, by Plon, 1959. Translator's note: The preface by Claude Lévi-Strauss appears only with the French translation. Original American edition: Don C. Talayesva,

Sun Chief, The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942). See André Breton as part of a “Déclaration collective,” “Les Surréalistes à Don Talayesva,” *Bief* 7 (1 June 1959), in *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives, 1922-1969*, t. 2 (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1980). My thanks to Etienne-Alain Hubert for providing this additional reference.

10 Details provided by Breton suggest that he consulted *The Hopi Way* by Laura Thompson and Alice Joseph (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1944).

