*Translator's Introduction to 'Notebook from the Trip to Visit the Hopi Indians' by André Breton**

Katharine Conley
William & Mary, Emerita

In the summer of 1945, André Breton had just finalized his divorce from Jacqueline Lamba and married Elisa Bindoff Claro in Reno, Nevada, when he set off on a trip to the Hopi Reservation, in the company of mosaicist Jeanne Reynal and her partner, Urban Neininger. He later explained that he had been motivated to satisfy one of his "greatest and oldest desires, which was to meet the Indians—particularly the Pueblo Indians (Hopi and Zuni), whose mythology and art held a special attraction" for him.[1] He intended to publish the "Notebook" he kept on the trip once he returned to Paris and even signed a contract for a book in 1946.[2] Although the contract fell through due to the publisher's financial difficulties, he insisted in his radio interviews with André Parinaud in 1951 that he had not "abandoned the idea of relating the very vivid impressions" he had of his visit to the Hopi villages of "Shungopavi and Wolpi," where he became "utterly convinced of their inalienable dignity and genius."[3] He did an impressive quantity of research for a non-specialist, but was not seeking to write another history of the Hopi people or to provide a new scientific document as a contribution to the "observations of others" that have dominated the historical record of the Hopi. Largely compiled "by non-Hopis," as Thomas Sheridan explains, these accounts and their authors have provided "incomplete, often distorted or erroneous interpretations of Hopi society and culture."[4] Rather, Breton's desire to publish his "very vivid impressions" was likely linked to his search for affirmation of his belief in Surrealism as a universal way of being that existed in multiple forms, which he apparently felt he had found in his encounter with the Hopi, along with confirmation of the worthiness of his lifelong enchantment with Hopi ceremonial objects that dated back to at least the 1920s.

Since the nineteenth century, social scientists have exercised a kind of

Katharine Conley: kconley@wm.edu

intellectual colonialism with regard to the Hopi, whereby they took "authoritative control over Hopi history" and "effectively 'silenced' Hopi voices," resulting in what Hopi scholar Lomayumtewa C. Ishii terms "historicide."[5] Ishii describes the viewpoint of White anglophone archaeologists and anthropologists who have written extensively about the Hopi as fundamentally "evolutionary" and colonialist, founded on the perception that the Hopi are a people trapped in the past and "destined to die."[6] The recent turn in social science towards consultation and collaboration with the Hopi, particularly through the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, would have been of great interest to Breton, because that is what he was trying to do with his visit.[7] He had read books by "experts" such as Leo Crane, the Indian Agent at Keams Canyon for the Hopi and Navajo Tribes starting in 1911; Mischa Titiev from the University of Michigan, one of the "ethnographers who came to be most strongly associated with Hopi," according to Wesley Bernardini and Leigh Kuwanwisiwma in *Becoming Hopi*; Julia Buttree, whose transcription of Hopi music he includes; and Byron Cummings.[8] In the "Notebook" Breton notes twice the Hopi reputation as "the best cultivators of dryland in the world," showing an anticipation of the current trend to tap "traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)" and his openness to consulting with them about their expertise.[9] He makes an effort to record conversations with specific Hopi men, whom he identifies by name. He also shows familiarity with some Hopi history, including the history of those tribal members of Old Orayvi who were "hostile" to the United States government, resulting in resistance to the draft as conscientious objectors and imprisonment, and of those who were "friendly" as a way of keeping the peace and holding onto to land.[10] Breton appears to intuit the Hopi "philosophy of humility and hard work" when he remarks on their peacefulness and their resistance to fighting of any kind.[11]

In the "Hopi Notebook" Breton nonetheless reveals a perennial blind spot regarding his privileged position as an Anglo intellectual able to visit the Hopi reservation as a tourist because he had the means to do so. The context he applies to conversations he has with individual Hopi men reflects the perspective of the Anglo settler schoolteacher and his wife with whom he stays, Mr. and Mrs. Powers, as well as that of Bill Smith, a "young ethnographer."

Despite his dedicated anti-colonialism, Breton failed to see that his access to the objects he treasured was the direct result of his citizenship in a country that was still a colonialist empire in 1945. Even though Breton acknowledges in his interview with Parinaud that Hopi culture had been "despoiled" by Anglo men despite its "creative power," resulting in "miserable living conditions," he failed to see the contradiction of his own role in buying Hopi objects for his personal use.[12] Sophie Leclercq points out how the Surrealists criticized the way ethnographers collected objects by force or at a low price in the name of "science" during the era of colonialism and yet overlooked their own purchases of the same objects on the European market once they had become "antiquities" or works of art that had lost

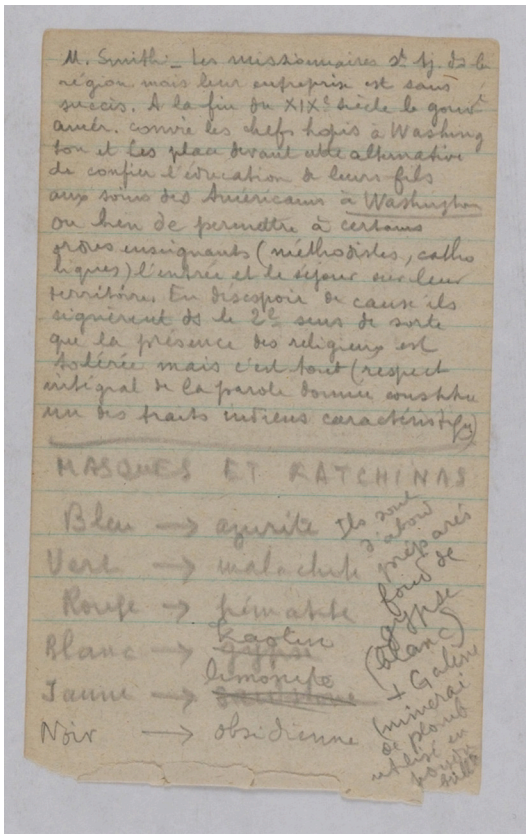

Fig. 1. Page from Breton's "Notebook" @ Aube Breton Elléouët; Association Atelier André Breton, http:/www.andrebreton.fr

their direct connection to their cultures of origin.[13] Breton's idealistic belief that he was *conserving* culture by purchasing objects he was able to buy on the Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma reservations missed his participation in the resulting "transfer of wealth" and cultural heritage away from the communities who had made them.[14]

Breton further reflected the prevailing attitudes of his time in his final art historical study, *L'Art magique,* published in 1957, when he included a photograph of Hopi petroglyphs taken in 1945 by Elisa in a sub-section entitled "People in the process of disappearing: America, Australia, Melanesia."[15] This placement indicates that despite his anti-colonialist positions he accepted the "academic racism" of the prevalent "evolutionary model," as Ishii explains, which presented the Hopi as a people in "scientific" books and journals as "destined to die."[16] His notes show his effort to correlate what he was seeing and experiencing in the American West with what he had read for his research on the Hopi, including Don Talayesva's *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian,* which reflected the life of a Hopi person he

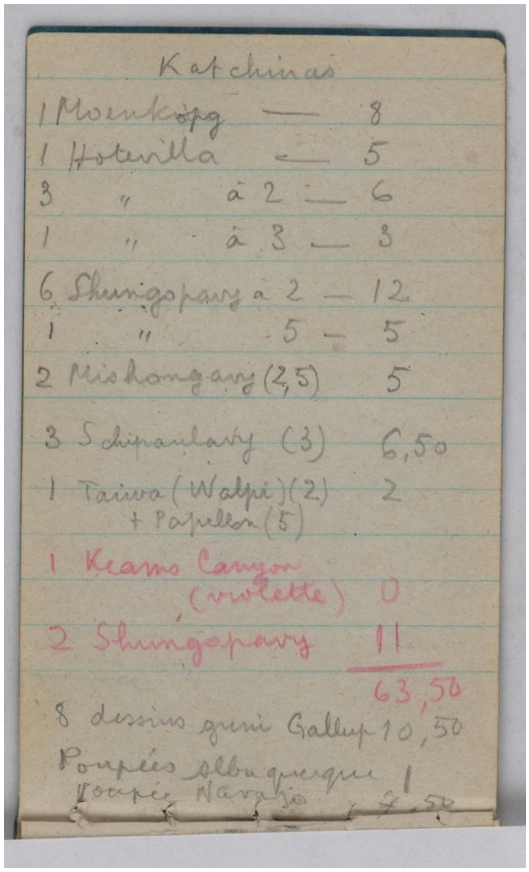

Fig. 2. Page from Breton's "Notebook" @ Aube Breton Elléouët; Association Atelier André Breton, http:/www.andrebreton.fr

admired who was clearly alive, but also the journals from the Smithsonian Bureau of Ethnology he owned, which reflected an opposite perspective that Ishii describes as the "general belief" that indigenous populations like the Hopi "were going to become extinct."[17]

Breton's "Notebook" may seem more contemporary to us than the early twentieth-century, academic journal articles Breton read for his research because it relates what he sees and hears directly, in the style of what Danielle Moretti-Langholz describes as "ethnographic scratch notes," without a scholarly veneer, such as he might have added to his intended volume on *The Hopi Indians*.[18]

As a dedicated anti-colonialist, Breton would likely have agreed with Ishii that "academic discourse formations have a deeper colonial meaning" that "perpetuates power over less influential groups of people" instead of affirming

what Ishii identifies as "Hopi formations," which are "meant for the benefit of all."[19] For Breton believed strongly in collaborative work that served "the benefit of all": from the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* onwards, he espoused thinking and working as a member of a collective group. *L'Art Magique* includes an "Investigation" in which he published responses from at least seventy-three diverse interlocutors on the question of "magic art," including philosophers, anthropologists, artists, novelists, historians, and specialists of ancient religion.[20] These diverse voices amplify his own and that of his collaborator Gérard Legrand, so that the ideas expressed in the volume emerge from a chorus of voices and involve many opinions. Ishii describes Hopi transmission of history in similar terms, explaining how "Hopi culture is multi-cultural, poly-vocal" and purposely lacks "centralized knowledge" because "a total understanding of the entire Hopi scheme of things is never attainable."[21] Breton's own voice shines through as the most authoritative on magical art nonetheless, despite his effort to dilute it, an impression supported by the odd stylistic choice he made to refer to himself in the third person as "André Breton."

Breton's resistance to Enlightenment thought, his preference for art rooted in magic and non-rational traditions going back to the art of the prehistoric caves, and perhaps especially his own surrealist aesthetic of "convulsive beauty," according to which the primary criteria for aesthetic validation rests on the visceral response it elicits, all of which pre-disposed him to be receptive to Ishii's description of "Hopi epistemology" as rooted in a view of "historical events as cyclical and prophetic."[22] "Convulsive beauty," as Breton defines it, is a physical experience that can only appear "from the poignant feeling of the thing revealed" because its expression is not through the language of words but through a physical language of apprehension through sensation and insight rather than sight, that parallels one way the Hopi transmit history, which is through the body: through dance, and through watching bodies perform ancient movements.[23] On the Hopi mesas Breton saw how such ceremonial dances served a parallel purpose to his written histories of Surrealism—from the *Manifestoes* to *Surrealism and Painting* and *L'Art Magique*—by recalling history choreographically in a way that unites all those participating and witnessing the dancing in an intensely present communal moment. From a Hopi perspective, Ishii explains, "the village, the community, the family, the clan, the ceremonial, and forms of knowledge take on the certainties equivalent to those that science offers westerners."[24]

Whereas Renaissance-imposed "rationalist humanism" provides dominant authority to sight, as Breton explains in *L'Art Magique,* the "preromanticism" of artists he admired such as Francisco Goya, William Blake, Henry Fuseli, and Charles Meryon "tends towards rehabilitating the value of the imagination, thus breaking radically from three centuries of Enlightenment thought" and "exploding the strict frame imposed by reason," thus dramatically restoring a "sense of that other dimension that had been suppressed."[25] Breton's privileging of feelings understood

through the imagination and the body in *L'Art magique* suggests his inclination to be receptive to knowledge and history passed down through dance and storytelling, rather than in written records. However the "Notebook" shows that he did not understand fully that the katsinam figures he admired were only representations of powerful supernatural forces that were more directly embodied by the dancers he was able to observe during his visit to the Hopi villages, or he might have been able to see that for the Hopi dancers and observers what he designates as "masks" were actually the "faces" of their ancestors.[26] Breton failed to see the lack of distinction between Hopi religious and secular life in general, mistakenly transposing his dislike of European organized religion onto the Hopi when he insists in the "Notebook" that his admiration for Hopi "art" did not translate into an acceptance of their "religion." He misunderstood the extent to which following "the Hopi way of life" meant "living according [to] the philosophical principles that were passed on to Hopi ancestors by the Earth Guardian *maasaw*," as Bernardini explains, or as expressed even more directly by Bill Preston, a member of the Reed Clan from First Mesa: "'You stick with our sacred rituals and instructions in order to be Hopi.'"[27]

What Breton's "Notebook" brings the reader interested in Surrealism is a confirmation of the importance of wonder—what he identified in the first *Manifesto* as "the marvelous"—in informing his thought about what it means to be human.[28] In August 1945, Breton was keenly aware that the United States had dropped atomic bombs on Japan and that, as a result, the world war that had so disrupted his life was likely to end soon. He was forty-nine years old and coming in contact for the first time with creators of objects he had been collecting since his twenties, when he found his first katsina figure on a buying trip with Paul Éluard. The "Notebook" leaves the reader with a sense that what Breton gained from his visit to the Hopi Reservation was a widened worldview and a motivation to steer Surrealism towards an opening up of perspective that would guide participants in the surrealist community to look beyond their known world. Breton's Hopi "Notebook," especially the poem he composed just as a double rainbow appeared in the sky while he was sitting in a car riding away from the Hopi mesas, shows his openness to Hopi culture, his desire to understand it. In his 1946 interview with Jean Duché, conducted shortly after his return to Paris, he uses the word "impetus" to describe the inspiration he found in the Hopi katsinam he had brought home with him. "Look how these objects justify the surrealist vision, and even give it a new impetus," he declares, claiming the katsinam for Surrealism and subsuming Hopi culture into his own, while simultaneously affirming the importance of Hopi culture and the new energy he discovered through his encounter with it that he wanted to share with his Parisian public.[29]

By the late 1950s Breton and the Surrealists' fascination with the Hopi correlated with the American countercultural focus on the Hopi as the "favorite Indians" of the American Southwest.[30] The surrealist group paid tribute to Talayesva

in their journal *Bief* in 1959, describing him as a model of mental health and nobility. The tribute explains how one of them—clearly Breton—had had a chance to witness Hopi ceremonies and had attempted "to permeate the surrealist group with the atmosphere of those ceremonies" out of respect for them, upon his return.[31] This published statement confirms the impact of Breton's visit to the Hopi Reservation, and, as a result, on surrealist thought and practice. The tribute describes a surrealist process of teaching others what he had seen and learned through "permeation," a mode of learning through sensation rather than through transmission by language. With his "Notebook" and his poem, Breton was attempting to reverse decades of hierarchical scientific research that relegated the Hopi to the past by resituating them with the suggestion that Europeans could benefit from studying the Hopi and their way of life, as a possible solution for reviving and renewing their own culture, sorely damaged by the world war.

For this translation, I made multiple attempts to contact members of the Hopi Tribe through the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office and through outreach to fellow academics who are also Hopi. No one I contacted agreed to talk to me about Breton's "Notebook." This is possibly because Hopi culture is so collectively based that no individual wished to speak to me on behalf of the Hopi community. I regret not including a Hopi voice with this translation; I hope that my quotations from publications by Hopi scholars will bring some of that voice into this study. This translation keeps the vocabulary used by Breton, words that in some cases were appropriated and transmitted by anglophone scholars without consultation with Hopi people. These include references to the katsina dancers as wearing "masks," and katsina figures he avidly collected as "dolls" and Kachinas, known as *katsinam* or *tithu* by the Hopi. The term "katsina" also refers to Hopi religion, as Riley Balenquah, member of the Third Mesa Rattlesnake Clan, explains in a 2017 interview:

> Katsina religion to me would be the connection we have…with the universe. It's our connection of communication with our spiritual world. Through the *katsinam* we are able to express our needs to exist, to help us to carry out our daily, yearly life cycles. Through them we are able to carry out our various responsibilities. Through them we are able to discipline ourselves to be productive, to participate in community, community as family, and community as a tribal gather of Hopi people.[32]

Breton refers to the villages of Oraibi, Shungopovi, Mishongnovi, Walpi, and Hotevilla; contemporary spellings for these villages are: Orayvi, Songòopavi or Shongopavi, Musangnuvi, Walpi, and Hotvela.[33] Breton also refers to Hopi "art," which for the Hopi consists of objects and images that have a practical function as tools for teaching children or are made specifically for sacred Hopi ceremonies.

For the Hopi, "art" is intrinsic to "the spiritual images of Hopi life," as Terrance Talaswaima Honvantewa explains.[34] Breton's lifework could be understood as his definition of "surrealist life," and "art" would be at its heart.

1 André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism,* with André Parinaud and others, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1993), pp. 160-61. I thank Danielle Moretti-Langholz for her help in working on this translation.
2 See Etienne-Alain Hubert's Introduction for details on his plans for publication in 1946.
3 Breton, p. 160. See the "Introduction" to *Conversations* for details about the taping of the interviews in 1951. Mark Polizzotti, "Introduction: The 'Interviews' of André Breton," *Conversations,* p. xii.
4 Breton had read Leo Crane, *Indians of the Enchanted Desert* (Boston: Little Brown, 1929); Julia M. Buttree, *The Rhythm of the Red-man* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co, 1930); Byron Cummings, *Kinishba, A Prehistoric Pueblo of the Great Pueblo Period* (Tucson: Hokokam Museums Association, 1940); Don Talayesva, *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian* (Talayevsa, 1942); Mischa Titiev, *Old Oraibi, A Study of the Hopi Indians of Third Mesa Mesa* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1944); and at least fourteen issues of the *Annual Report of the Smithonian Institution Bureau of Ethnology.* Etienne-Alain Hubert further notes that details suggest that Breton "consulted *The Hopi Way,* by Laura Thompson and Alice Joseph (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1944)" in Etienne-Alain Hubert, "Carnet de Voyage chez les Indiens Hopi," in Breton, *Oeuvres completes,* vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 1225, note 3. On Breton's possession of the Smithsonian annual reports see Fabrice Flahutez, *Nouveau monde et nouveau mythe: Mutations du surréalisme, de l'exile américain à l' »Écart absolu » (1941-1965)* (Paris : les presses du réel, 2007), 340. Thomas E. Sheridan, "Introduction," *Moquis and Kastiilam, Hopis, Spaniards, and the Trauma of History, Volume 1, 1540-1679* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 3.
5 Lomayumtewa C. Ishii, *Voices from our Ancestors: Hopi Resistance to Scientific Historicide*, Dissertation, Northern Arizona University, August 2001 (UMI Microform 16598), 17, 7-8.
6 In particular, Ishii identifies Jesse Walter Fewkes, leader of the Harvard Peabody Expedition from 1935 to 1939, as "imperialistic." Ibid., , Ishii, 17, 75.
7 https://www.hopi-nsn.gov/hopi-cultural-preservation-office/ See for example, Wesley Bernardini, Stewart B. Koyiyumptewa, Gregson Schachner, and Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, *Becoming Hopi, a History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2021).
8 Wesley Bernardini and Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, "A History of Anthropological Research on the Hopi Mesas," in Bernardini et al, *Becoming Hopi,* 76-77. Saul L. Hedquist, Marian P. Hopkins, Stewart P. Koyiymptewa, and T.J. Ferguson report in "A Hopi Atlas," citing Hedquist, Hopkins, Koyiymptewa, Lee Wayne Lomayestewa, and Ferguson in Footprints of Hopi History: Hopihiniwtiput Kukveni'at, edited by Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, T.J. Ferguson, and Chip Colwell, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 52-72, that Crane helped the Hopi petition the United States government to preserve their right to their land. They begin by explaining that "Hopitutskwa means 'Hopi land.' Hopitutskwa is a living landscape used by the Hopi people in their ongoing cultural practices and their historical understanding of the past," in Bernardini, et al, 27. They explain how: "Between 1915 and 1918 Hopi Superintendent Leo Crane made several reports to the commissioner of Indian Affairs describing how Navajo people were increasingly encroaching upon lands traditionally used by the Board of Indian Commissioner of Indian Affairs, noting that the Hopi people had unsuccessfully sought protection of land and property from the U.S. government (United States Congress 1973: 300-301)." Bernardini, et al, 59. "Titiev was 'part of a group of graduate students from the university of Michigan' that included Fred Eggan, Edward Kennard, Jesse Spirer, and George Devereux. These five students were brought to the Hopi Mesas under the direction of their professor Leslie White, as part of a field school program through the Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fe, New Mexico… It is the works of Mischa Titiev and Fred Eggan that have largely come to define the 'ethnographic present' of Hopi society. Titiev and Eggan worked under and anthropological paradigm called 'structural functionalism,' … As a consequence, Titiev's and Eggan's work tends to portray Hopi society as static. … This was a powerful assumption, one that likely encouraged Titiev and Eggan to downplay the dramatic changes and external forces that were buffeting Hopi society in the late 1800s

and early 1900s. … Although the Michigan ethnographers are generally remembered as having had positive relationships with Hopi people, there is also a feeling among contemporary Hopi people that the published works of these academics brought little of value to the tribe. The audience for these ethnographic publications was almost exclusively outsiders, and Hopi people express discomfort about the level of ceremonial detail presented in their work. After the heyday of the Michigan ethnographers in the 1930s, anthropologists were largely excluded from Hopi villages for the next several decades." Wesley Bernardini and Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, "A History of Anthropological Research on the Hopi Mesas," in Bernardini, et al, 76-77.

9 See Paddy Woodworth, *Our Once and Future Planet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 334-35.

10 For more on the tensions in the 1940s between Hopis "hostile to the United States Government" and those who were "friendly" as a negotiating tactic, see Brian Haley, "Ammon Henacy and the Hopi Traditionalist Movement: Roots of the Counterculture's Favorite Indians," *Journal of the Southwest* 58.1 (Spring 2016): 141-43.

11 In an interview from March 13, 2018 with Wesley Bernardini, Leigh Kuwanwisiwma explains how the Hopi "fulfill *Màasaw's* convenant" with their philosophy of "humility and hard work" in order to "become Hopi people. Not Hopi, but Hopi *people*." Transcript on file at the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, Kiqösmovi, Arizona, cited in Bernardini, et al, 332.

12 Breton, *Conversations,* 161.

13 Sophie Leclercq, "L'appropriation surréaliste de 'l'art sauvage' dans l'entre-deux-guerres: the surrealist object in opposition to the colonial object," *Histoire de l'art* 60 (2007): 145-46. See also my "Value and Hidden Cost." See Louis Aragon, "La vérité sur les colonies. Une salle d'exposition anti-impérialiste," *L'Internationale de l'Enseignement* (10 octobre 1931): 21-24.

14 See Jean-Claude Blachère, *Les Totems d'André Breton. Surréalisme et primitivisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 139. In a Bellini Colloquium presentation on the Native American presence in Virginia, Danielle Moretti-Langholz used the phrase "transfer of wealth" in this manner. For a specific example, see Buck Woodward, Danielle Moretti-Langholz, "'To Be Supported and Maintained in all time coming': Funding the College of William & Mary and the Brafferton Indian School," *Building The Brafferton, The Founding, Funding and Legacy of America's Indian School,* eds. Danielle Moretti-Langholz and Buck Woodward (Williamsburg: Muscarelle Museum, 2019), 80-81.

15 Breton, *L'Art magique,* 185. See the "Hopi Notebook," note 6.

16 Ishii, 33, 17.

17 Ibid., 26.

18 This was the title he initially intended for the book he planned, if the contract he had signed had not fallen through, due to the publisher's financial troubles. See Etienne-Alain Hubert's "Introduction to Breton's 'Carnet de Voyage chez les Indiens Hopi,'" in André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes,* vol. 3 (Paris, Gallimard, 1999), 1224, translated here. See also Danielle Moretti-Langholz, "Looking Beyond Himself: André Breton in the American Southwest."

19 Ishii, 193.

20 André Breton, *L'Art magique, Oeuvres complètes,* vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 109-64. Contributors to the "Enquête" include Martin Heidegger, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Maurice Blanchot, Leonora Carrington, Michel Butor, Joyce Mansour, César Moro, and Radovan Ivsic.

21 Ishii, 145.

22 Ibid., 6.

23 Breton first explained "convulsive beauty" in his 1934 article in *Minotaure,* "La Beauté sera convulsive," before inserting this text into the opening pages of *Mad Love* in 1937. André Breton, "La Beauté sera convulsive," *Minotaure* 1.5 (1934): 8-16. André Breton, *Mad Love,* trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 13.

24 Ishii, p. 143.

25 Breton, *L'Art magique,* 88, 92. All translations are mine.
26 Bernardini in an e-mail, 28 March 2023.
27 Bernardini and Preston in Bernardini, 23.
28 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 16.
29 Breton, *Conversations,* 202.
30 See Haley, 136.
31 "Les surréalistes à Don C. Talayesva," *Bief* (1 June 1959). My thanks to Etienne-Alain Hubert for this reference.
32 In Bernardini, 22.
33 See Sheridan, 5, 11, and Haley, 143.
34 Terrance Talaswaima Honvantewa, "The Hopi Way: Art as Life, Symbol, and Ceremony," *Hopi Nation, Essays on Indigenous Art, Culture, History, and Law.* 68. Digital Commons, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1006&context=hopination