



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichen Itza* by Quetzil Castaneda  
Lynn Stephen

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process in terms of larger-scale sociological processes that distribute disease in a systematic fashion across the population.

## Theory and Methods

*In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichén Itzá*, by **Quetzil Castañeda**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. 341 pp. NPL paper. ISBN: 0-8166-2673-1.

LYNN STEPHEN  
*Northwestern University*  
 Stephen@neu.edu

*In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichén Itzá* is a cleverly written, deeply probing "archaeology" of the physical, rhetorical, textual, symbolic, and cultural creation of one of Mexico's premier archaeological and tourist sites. The book also highlights the role of Chichén Itzá in the creation and maintenance of "Maya" civilization in anthropology, tourism, nationalism, and the transglobal imagination of "the primitive." At a deeper level, author Quetzil Castañeda's concern is with how cultures are "imported, exported, deported, transported, reported across cultural topographies." He implicates anthropology and anthropologists as part of cultural espionage that involves networks of power incorporating research foundations, governments, museums, science, capitalism, and regional power struggles.

The "rediscovery" of the "lost city" of Chichén Itzá by John J. Stephens (the U.S. diplomat to Yucatán and Central America) in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by the signing of a contract between the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the State government of Yucatán, and the federal government of Mexico in 1921, marks the beginning of not only a monolithic archaeological and ethnographic research project, but also the construction of a life-sized scale-model replica of Chichén Itzá as itself—"hyperreal" in the words of Castañeda. This physical reconstruction and reinvention of Chichén Itzá, Castañeda argues, is the foundation upon which Mayan studies, regional tourism, and ultimately a plenitude

of identities both local, national, and even international (in the form of Anglo-American Mayan wannabees who sojourn at the site) have all constructed their own realities of "pure" Mayan culture as a contrast to whatever it is they are contesting. On the other side are the inhabitants of Pisté—locals from a Mayan settlement that has become the *antesala*, or waiting room, for visitors to Chichén Itzá. The community abuts the site of the "lost city" of Chichén.

In a delightful rhetorical move, Castañeda contrasts the artisans, vendors, sometime farmers, and sellers of tamales and Coca-Cola of Pisté with the urban-folk continuum communities made famous by Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas, such as Chan Chom, "the village that chose progress." In his historical and current description of the inhabitants of Pisté, Castañeda describes them as having "zero-degree" culture, according to Redfield's scale. Although a succession of foundations, archaeologists, and other outsiders have intervened in the community throughout the century by employing them more or less as the "hired help" who create and maintain the site of Chichén Itzá, only recently has it occurred to anthropologists and others to worry about the "impact" of tourism on the community. Castañeda deftly dispenses with the utility or even the validity of the concept of "impact" by showing the ways in which the creation and re-creation of the archaeological site have been part and parcel of the development of the community. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the "zero-culture" community of Pisté comes together for a short time to fight for independent political status as the 107th "free county" or *municipio libre*, in the state of Yucatán. The advantages of "free county" status are access to more resources and increased political capital. Reluctant to participate in a regional, independent, pan-Mayan movement focused on identity, the practical citizens of Pisté went for a political strategy. They temporarily aligned themselves with an adviser who has connections to the ruling party in Mexico City to try to get the president to personally take on their cause. This strategy ultimately failed, and the intricacies of local politics take over as the movement falls apart.

Castañeda's book is a refreshing mix of cultural studies and political economy. Though the first half of the book is over-

theorized in spots, the second half has several chapters where Castañeda's wit and intellectual creativity abound. In chapters on New Age spiritualists (both Mexican and American) visiting Chichén Itzá during the equinox, a discussion of the struggle over the relocation of vendors and the establishment of a new *tianguis* or market, and his final chapters on the movement for municipal independence, he writes himself into the narrative, bringing together cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the stories he tells and his position in them.

My favorite passage is his description of urban mestizo Mexicans from the capital city who have formed an *Azteca* spiritualist group. As one of them descends the steps of a pyramid during an official equinox ritual (consisting of state-sponsored musical presentations, followed by "the phenomena" in which the steps of the pyramid form the shadow image of a servant as the sun sets), he is confronted by the head custodian of the site, and several police officers and boy scout leaders. Two other, competing spiritualist groups are also holding "illegal" rituals. The attempts to curb their activities rile tourists, who complain that they can't see. The "Azteca" spiritualists then lead the crowd in a chant of "Mexico," alternating between Spanish and Aztec pronunciations. This unifies the entire group, tourists included, and the tension subsides. Castañeda analyzes this scene as the "transculturation of cultural forms in which Mayan notions, visions, and styles of time become hybridized with Western modes of historical representation of the Maya."

In another, equally compelling passage, where he discusses how locals in the market have labeled him a government spy because he is always writing things down, Castañeda writes one of the most honest and searching descriptions of the power relations inherent in carrying out ethnography, stating that "espionage is constitutive of our disciplines."

*In the Museum of Maya Culture* is a rich, multifaceted book that will appeal to a wide range of readers: It is a gem in cultural studies, offers much in the intellectual history of Mayan anthropology, and can be read as a study of the archaeology of knowledge. Not least, it is a pleasure to read.

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*Sociology and Interpretation: From Weber to Habermas*, by **Charles A. Pressler** and **Fabio B. Dasilva**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 208 pp. NPL cloth. ISBN: 0-7914-3043-X. \$22.95 paper. ISBN: 0-7914-3044-8.

PETER BAEHR

*Hong Kong Baptist University and Memorial University of Newfoundland*  
*pbaehr@morgan.ucs.mun.ca*

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Writing a clear and concise book on twentieth-century hermeneutics is no easy hermeneutic task. The subject matter is rich, but complex and abstract; its European inflection is foreign in more ways than one to an Anglophone audience. Exegesis of this material is bound to pose interpretive challenges of the highest order. How have Charles Pressler and Fabio Dasilva handled a project that even in its conceptualization required an act of intellectual courage?

*Sociology and Interpretation* is a tour through the main European contributions to hermeneutics in this century. Proceeding from the plausible axiom that "interpretation is a central aspect of human life," the authors examine a range of approaches to its analysis, notably those of Max Weber, Alfred Schutz, Karl Mannheim, and Max Scheler, and those typical of "contemporary trends," namely the "positivist interpretation" of Emilio Betti, the "humanist" interpretation of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the "critical" interpretation of Theodor Adorno and Jürgen Habermas. A final chapter sensibly rejects the Procrustean attempt to integrate the various perspectives into a "metatheory of knowledge," and opts instead for a modest description of the "nodal points" at which all interpretative theories appear to converge. These include a focus on consciousness, on dialogical context, on conflicting systems of signification, and on language. Particularly welcome in a book of this kind is the inclusion of writers like Betti and Scheler, who are poorly represented in comparable texts.

On the positive side, then, we have a book with an important topic, a defensible structure (though why Betti is more "contemporary" than Schutz is puzzling), and a credible choice of theorists to consider. Potentially, it could have stood as a worthy "rival" to Zygmunt