

## Equinox or Eclipse? Calm and Adventurous Travel With Simmel Amidst Far-Flung Ruins

Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamics of the tenth of a second, so that *now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling*. Benjamin 1968: 236; emphasis added.

### Equinox or Eclipse? Simmel and the Adventures of Don Avelino

On September 22, 2002, the day before Hurricane Isadora visited Yucatán — Oh, *what* an adventure *that* was! — we were at Chichén Itzá at the fall equinox to celebrate the Maya. There were some 5,000 people and no groups of sun worshipping spiritualists chanting as is usual during spring events. It was rather mundane as clouds hovered over to prevent the sun from creating its play of light and shadow on the side of the pyramid. Thus, we missed the dramatic, fraught and frenzied escalation of emotions that anti-climactically culminates the setting of the sun on the *vernal* equinox.

As many returned to Cancun, many wandered to Pisté, the Maya town near Chichén, we chatted about the event and the people, noting how uninteresting the whole thing was. As we split off into groups, I joined a party at Restaurant Carrousel to eat. I myself was not a little disappointed. You see, I was collecting research materials at the equinox for a conference paper on “Simmel and Similar adventures among the Maya.” You see I had seen a movie about the equinox — something like “Accidents of Tourism”? “Accidental Traveler in Chichén” — I cannot remember now exactly the title.<sup>1</sup> I was certain that I would be able to have a story to tell from this experience. There was one part — this was really funny — where the main character — I think he was a tourist posing as a journalist or documentary filmmaker posing as an anthropologist — anyway, this journalist or tourist meets this new age guru guy inside the temple of Kukulcan. The guy introduces himself saying he is from Egypt and Seattle. At the end of the interview, he got all frisky, hugging and like almost kissing the filmmaker, whispering into his ear that they were brothers in past lives. The Egyptian guru from Seattle even said that they were Maya Princes that learned to levitate together! Wild! And then, you know, the Egyptian Maya Prince stepped back, bowed and, holding his heart, said, “Woowoow!”

What an adventure! Remembering that scene in particular gave me high expectations for my own experience of the equinoctial phenomenon the Maya created at Chichén Itzá so many thousands of years ago. You see I needed data, hard data, to prove Simmel’s theory of adventure. The trouble with data is that Simmel says that adventure is not a substance but a synthetic form — precisely “a form of experiencing.” He theorizes it is a synthesis of the external, fortuitous fragments of the world that intervene in the internal, coherent trajectory of an individual’s life course. Thus, Simmel’s adventure is the subjectivist experience of a transformation, or conversion, of the Self in the face of the difference of Otherness (human or otherwise). Really I think Simmel’s theory is a lot like autobiography or confessions in which the given structures of one’s life are put at risk, nearly forsaken, by chance encounters that detour a person along foreign paths that end up to be the main road of one’s life. Simmel adventure seems to be just story, that is, a narrative of theory. Regardless, the Maya equinox seemed perfect for such adventures, perfect place to research adventure. It seemed like an easy place to escape the routine structures of tourism experience and meet up with the truly external “other” — New Age Maya shamans, Egyptian gurus, Maya tour guides, and anthropologists that all converge on the Chichén equinox. At the equinox one could calmly and adventurously go traveling.

As I waited for my beer, I wondered if maybe that was my problem: I went on a Tourism-Adventure and did not experience Simmel's adventure. You see tourism structures travel *as if* it were adventure, that is as an experience the other, but it is only really the "same" decorated with national geographic signs of exoticism that one encounters. It is all so structured; tourism is a structure of adventure. I was so certain to have an adventure that I expected the unexpected. I was so certain about uncertainty that I did not let the form of experience be experienced; there was no synthesis in which the other became me, intervened in my life course. I was just a tourist (or maybe an anthropologist?) and not an adventurer in Simmel's sense.

It was just that damn movie I saw; it infected my unconscious with images of adventure.<sup>2</sup> I thought to myself, "I was so much in love with the film that it wanted to make me become an anthropologist." It was like an adventure seeing it and "[t]he film left me with a happy satisfied feeling inside. It made me want to sell my belongings, quit work, grow a beard, and become a new-age spiritualist and travel to 'energy zones', such as Sedona and Chitzen Itza (sic)."<sup>3</sup> Looking into the beer bottle, I lowered my head. There was one part of the film that always troubled me, however.

It is where this Maya, who is starving because he hasn't eaten all day, is interviewed by the filmmakers. All they give him is a beer and a banana in exchange for the interview! Can you imagine? So, they ask him questions about the meaning of the equinox since he worked for National Geographic in the 1960s. I remember now, his name is Don Avelino Canul. So he gets this scraggly rope to put on the floor, saying "this is the snake [*culebra*]"; referring, I guess, to the famous Feathered Serpent that is supposed to descend the pyramid of Kukulcan on the equinox. After bending the red knotted eyehook at the end of the rope, so that the curvy, twisted stiff nylon stood up off the floor, he pointed *first* to the knotted eyehook saying "this is the mouth," and *then he pointed to the shadow of the rope*, saying "this is the snake."

The other filmmaker said, "you mean it's the shadow." "Yea, that's *right*, it's *the shadow* that you see there. Look, how many scholars have lied about what they see when they look at this?!" He then stood up and proclaimed, "I am not an educated man, but I would never lie to you." So, the journalist-tourist guy butts in to ask, "what's the meaning? Is there no meaning?" Here Avelino got all ruffled up and perplexed, dumbfounded even, at the silly question, and as he pointed to the light on the wall, he blurted out to the tourist:

The meaning? The meaning! The meaning is the change of the sun ["season"], that's what it *means*! How the sun passes over to make this shadow [of the snake]. The meaning is that *when the sun makes the eclipse it changes the light*. You see here, here is the mouth of the snake [pointing again to the eyehook], here under the head that you see there [pointing to the shadow on the floor]. Well that's all there is. That is all that happens at Chichén. Do you understand now? Do you? Ok, well then, now, you must also understand this: All of those Americans, *how much* do they all *consume* just to see *this*?"

Interesting point, interesting critique of Western consumption and desire for alterity. It is *just* a shadow after all; it's nature and natural for the sun to make shadows, right? It's not *really* a snake, much less a "feathered serpent" or the Maya god Kukulcan, much less the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl, or New Age cosmic vibrational frequency.<sup>4</sup> Maybe, maybe it is just *no*-thing.

As for me, still I cannot help but wonder about the meaning of it all, especially, because *the equinox is not an eclipse* — right? An equinox is a *structural* alignment of binary positions; the sun and the earth are positioned in an orbital structure that establishes a quincunx or five point diagram (two solstices, two equinoxes, and the sun as center point). The equinox are

structural points on this solar quincunx. An eclipse is a *synthetic* alignment of movement; in the “stabilized” relation between two bodies (for example, earth-sun or earth-moon), the orbital trajectory of a third body (either moon or sun) intervenes in a fleeting moment of disappearance in which either sun or moon is placed in shadow, *eclipsed*.

In a sense (the lunar and solar) *eclipses are a momentary synthesis* of all three astral bodies in which each (earth, sun, moon) are opposed to another in the triad and also situated as the synthesis of the other two. This synthesis, of course, is neither Hegelian nor Marxist, but is rather a “non-synthetic” synthesis as per Simmel (also like Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas). In a lunar eclipse, the full moon is eclipsed by *the shadow of the earth* that is cast by the light of the sun, which calmly and adventurously travels across the celestial sky on the side of the earth opposite the moon. In a solar eclipse, the sun is eclipsed by the moon, which means that the sun is blocked from view on earth by *the shadow of the moon*, whose adventuresome trajectory brings the moon in between sun and earth.

Although both equinox and eclipse are premised on, even “grounded” in, the orbits — that is, what might be called *the calm travel* — of astral bodies, the former is a structure that has a constancy and solidity through a permanent structure of repetition and the latter is a fluctuating synthesis based in contingent cycles. Certainly, the equinox is not an eclipse, yet maybe the “phenomenon of” the equinox that the Maya created with the pyramid is a *metaphoric* “eclipse” in a *literal, material sense*.

If eclipse is used in a generic sense of something casting shadow on something else or “temporarily being in the shadow of” then the light of the setting sun “strikes” the base of the pyramid casting a shadow on another part of itself (the balustrade) so that the sunlight that remains on the staircase appears in the shape of isosceles triangles. There is, therefore, a “self” eclipse of the pyramid by itself (the pyramid balustrade is eclipsed by the pyramid base) through the external agency of the sun in its traversal of the afternoon sky. The equinox is thus an “eclipse”; or, maybe it’s just that *the meaning of the equinox* for Don Avelino and *the meaning of the experience* of the equinox is *eclipse*? It sounds crazy or banal, but *not any more or less* “adventuresome” a proposition than the typical interpretations and experiences of the play of light and shadow on the side of the pyramid as: “spiritual and material rejuvenation or new life” and rebirth, a snake, a feathered serpent, the Maya god Kukulcan, the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl, the genius of Maya culture, an ancient Maya ritual, the artifice of archaeology, the epiphany of cosmic vibrations, or an annual solar phenomenon that only happens once every 520 years.<sup>5</sup>

Eclipse or equinox? Either way, the experience is most certainly an adventure of uncertain proportions. The adventure of equinox is a structure, as Don Avelino says, of and for tourists to consume. The adventure of the eclipse, as Simmel might suggest, is a form of synthesis of experience. Simmel, after all, defines adventure as a form of synthesis of the external, fortuitous, fragmentary, passive intervention of the world in the internal, coherent, consistent trajectory of an individual life world. In contrast, the similar Adventure of Tourism seems more like a structure that creates surprises exactly where one pretended both to not anticipate the anticipated and to anticipate the unanticipated.

As if wakened from a dream full of these thoughts, my friends poked at me to join them. It seems I had lost my voice for a moment and I replied, hoarsely, as if I were someone else, “I am fine, fine.” More beers had been served; a second round of toasts began: “To the equinox! To the Maya genius!” Yes, indeed, ching-ching, “to Maya ruins!”

## Whose Adventure Is This Anyway?

I tossed back the beer and looked around. And then I saw him. The tourist-journalist guy with rabbit-ear short-shorts and a Chichén equinox *playera*.<sup>6</sup> He was talking to a woman; they were laughing it up in Maya. As I watched him sit down, it occurred to me that I might interview *him* about *his* adventures among the Maya and Maya ruins.

I gathered my thoughts, my tape recorder, my note-book, and beer and went over to his table. I told him I recognized him: “Aren’t you that guy in the equinox film?” He laughed, nodding his head. Although he already had a beer in his hand, I offered to buy him a beer and offered fruit from my knapsack. I introduced myself, saying that I was doing research on adventure and I wanted to interview him about his experiences. He said, “Uh-hum, go on.” I want to study how tourists experience adventure among the Maya. “Oh, how interesting,” he interjected. I want to collect this experiential data to prove Simmel’s theory of adventure. “Good, good!” It is an empirical study of experience. “That’s good, very good.”

I paused. I looked into his eyes and wondered what he thought. And then he began to speak as if from a deep, dark, tunnel at the end of which I saw a glimmering of light. He spoke, he spoke with his mouth wide open — and I focused on his tonsils flickering the light of the restaurant.

“The trouble with Simmel’s essay on adventure or the adventurer is that one cannot decide whether he advocates for analytical distance based in an objectivist account of subjective meaning or an asymptotic analysis of a subjectivist meaning of a distanced experience. The lack of subjectivist or objectivist *content* of adventure makes this ambivalence more difficult to overcome or even synthesize. On the one hand, adventure does not describe any content. It does not describe any substance, substantive experience, activity or event. On the other hand, adventure is also rather vague as an analytical concept. Although he defines the elements that comprise that which is synthesized, you return to the problem of the tension between subjective culture and objective culture, between subjectivist experience and objectivist ascription, between experience as event and experience as represented. The value of Simmel’s idea is less in its truth, empirical existence, or validity, but rather for its use in producing insights and understandings. But how? After all, by this concept everything and anything might be an adventure from both the subjective perspective of the individual subject who experiences a substantive content and from the objectivist perspective of analytical distance that formally categorizes object-relations. This tension between a subjectivist identification of one’s experience and the objectivist ascription of an experience needs more thought.”

He paused and looked at me to see if I was “with him.” I blurted out, “do you mind if I tape record what you are saying? It will help me understand it better.” He nodded with a thin, impatient smile that seemed to reflect more pain, perhaps intestinal suffering, than approval.

“This tension is especially troublesome in considering adventure in the register of tourism which is, I argue, a social phenomenon that is necessarily devoid of precise content. Tourism itself a kind of “form” — a form precisely in the mode of articulation of discourses, activities, laws, events, performances, images, imaginaries, experiences, etc. It is an apparatus in Foucault’s sense and not a substance; it is also the proper name of a certain multiplicity of strategies of governmentality. This apparatus is the space — the field, the public sphere — in which these strategies are played out to structure tourism as an experience. Tourism is thus a structure of experience. Tourism is a structure of experience that erases its own traces as structure as it structures experience, thus leaving just experience and tourists. Tourism-structures of experience and the experiences of tourism-structures are what are studied as “tourism” while it

is this apparatus and the strategies that provide the conditions of possibility of tourism (as experience-structure) and that are less often investigated as such, especially under rubrics like “the anthropology of tourism.” This experience-structure of tourism is often, perhaps always by definition, Adventure, that is a structure of Adventure.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, tourism is adventure, in Simmel’s sense, when there is within or alongside the structure of Tourism-Adventure, a synthesis of elements that constitute the “form of experiencing” of adventure as synthesis.”

After fumbling with the recorder I had finally inserted the tape and pressed record. When I looked up, and said, “yea, yea. I see what you mean. Woow.”

“Thus, Simmel’s adventure is not in the structured experience but in the meaning of the unexpected and contingent that intercepts structured experience. It is not the tour of the ruins nor the zillion mosquito bites, dehydration, and charming native that sold souvenirs and secretly revealed the really real authentic, back-stage culture, but the reaction and meaning of the reaction to all the above. In other words, like the cannibals, nomads, and migrants, adventure, then, is not where it should be, when it is expected, or where it is anticipated: It is Other. It is the deviate, detour to the plan and projected life-course. But, Adventure Tourism, in contrast, is a structure of experience of the Same. There are no surprises to Tourism because the tourist always already anticipates the unexpected and does not expect anything anticipated. It is like going to the movies where everyone suspends their disbelief that it is not real life, as well as their belief that it is just fiction, to experience as if it were real life. Similarly, the tourist suspends disbelief that what they do and experience is tourism so as to experience as if it were not tourism, as if it were real life: This is the fiction of tourism we ourselves spin in which to suspend ourselves. Indeed, the most precise definition of the tourist is ‘people who actively and insistently believe that they are different than tourists; who fool themselves into believing that what they do, see, experience, and consume is not tourism or as a tourist.’”

I was not a bit confused. But I nodded supportively and encouraged him. “Hm. Go on, do go on. I see what you mean.”

“From another angle this subjectivist-objectivist tension raises other questions, such as *the time* of the synthesis: When is it? Is it in the moment of the experience or of the ascription of a meaning to the experience, whether subjectively experienced by the possible adventurer or objectively ascribed to the putative adventurer? The problem of the temporality of the meaning as a conscious reflection of thought on experience or as the very consciousness of experience in itself might be called, nodding to W. E. B. DuBois, a ‘double consciousness.’

“It is a double consciousness because not only is there this tension between the subjective identification and the objectivist ascription, but there is the double timing and double consciousness of adventure as subjective experience. Is the experience of adventure that moment when you experience or is it that moment when you synthesize the moment of experience as adventure?” The question threw me. I was changing the tape and stopped to look at him wide-eyed. “Yes. I see.” He continued. “You see, the question is about the ontological nature of the synthesis: Is it pure phenomenological experience, which indeed has a consciousness within it, or is it the consciousness of that experience *as experience*? If it were the former, then Simmel’s adventure would be pure subjectivist and not accessible to any analysis, much less description and identification. Indeed, in which case, adventure as synthesis might not even exist! Since it could therefore only exist as the secondary representation of adventure and this is precisely what Simmel excludes from his concept of adventure as synthesis, then adventure would not, does not exist. Otherwise, it seems that adventure-synthesis is that moment of conscious reflection that occurs after the fact when you recall and retell the story of the experience as adventure.

Simmel's adventure as a form of experiencing in which synthesis defines the form seems to convert the experience of adventure into the representation of the experience as adventure. Specifically the narrativization of experience as adventure seems to be the moment of this mysterious synthesis."

"Oh," I thought. *I had not* expected that.

"This is especially surprising — er, or maybe it is not unexpected — since adventure is defined as the meaning the subject ascribes to connect the 'accidental nature... with the character and identity of the bearer of that life ... transcending, by a mysterious necessity, life's more narrowly restricted aspects.'"

This was very exciting and we both paused, closely inspecting each other's face; and, in that pause listened to the tape recorder whirl and wind our voices onto the spindle whorl of mechanical reproduction. But, then he burst out with a wild gesticulation, "If the adventure-synthesis exists in narrative, then to whom does the adventure belong? Does the adventure belong to the one who experienced the adventure or to the one that ascribed the meaning, whether analytical-objectivist or phenomenological-subjectivist, of adventure to the experience? What if there was no experience of the meaning of adventure in the original moment, but only the after-the-fact ascription of it through narrative? *To whom* does adventure *happen*? Might also the audience of the adventure-narrative also experience — "have" and "own" — the adventure in that very moment of the telling and hearing/reading/seeing the adventure?"

"Woow," I heard myself mumble as I stared into his mouth. From this fountain, words poured out into the air — a few hit me in the face, actually — and others rolled onto the table. I could feel their round, smooth curves, like a bullet, between my fingers as he talked. It took my breath away.

"There is not just one adventurer, that is, the story-teller of adventure, but the Listener/Reader/Viewer becomes the adventurer too. The audience becomes author-adventurer in the narrativization of the experience of adventure. The you-audience becomes the I-author. You am I," He said. "And I am you. The Maya have a phrase for this, *in lak ech*, which translates as 'you are my other self, I am your self'"<sup>8</sup>

"I am yourself" I repeated. "You are myself." I felt the vibrations between my lips.

### Echo Skysong Amidst Far-Flung Ruins and Debris

I felt drawn to him. Now, with my tape recorder all set, we were finally getting somewhere. I mean all those windy words at the beginning was like a hurricane that did not seem to be relevant to my needs. Now I felt it. I felt the adventure happening. I could feel the energy between us, between me and this crazy tourist or filmmaker-journalist that just by chance crossed my path. I wanted more. So, I asked him about his own adventures, if he could tell me some of his own experiences traveling among the Maya. "Why did you come here?" I asked.

"Hey! Good question, good question. That's what I ask, you know? I remember at my first equinox in 1988 I had my first encounter with the new age folks. I was quite, uhm, wow, if you know what I mean! You see it was actually March 20<sup>th</sup>, the day before the equinox, but for eight days before and after the 21<sup>st</sup> the phenomenon is still visible because the orbital alignment is a kind of structure — not like an eclipse!

"uh, oh. Yeah, yeah. Hm."

"So there I was in the main plaza of Chichén with all my technology — notebooks, tape recorders, film camera, water bottle, belt buddy. You know? Since the 20<sup>th</sup> is *not* promoted by the state as *the* tourist ritual with music, dances, poetry, and explanations, there are few tourists

that go on that day. Maybe only some 5,000 adventurers were in the plaza calmly waiting for Kukulcan by about 3:30pm. I was walking around taking pictures, getting a sense of what was happening — you know this was my first equinox! — and then I noticed this blond, Anglo woman dressed hippie-style holding a two-foot Buddha in her arms just above her stomach. She was walking around, stopping to let tourists, international and Mexicans, touch and kiss the Buddha. Who would have expected it! So I started taking pictures of her and then it occurred to me that I should also interview her. I got my tape recorder ready and went over to her. I said, ‘Hi, what is your name? Can I talk to you? I am an anthropologist studying the equinox.’ Wow. I was not ready for her! Looking me straight in the eye she said yes of course. Her name was Echo Skysong. My name is Quetzil. Aaaaah. We sat down right there on the plaza in a line between the Ball Court and the north stair of the pyramid where you can see the Serpent descend. I asked what she was doing with the Buddha. Why did she come here? She said she was on a pilgrimage. And I remember repeating her words.”

At that point he inhaled so strongly that he gasped, which startled me. I saw his eyes roll up as he began to speak in voices as if from a dream or a machine, like a tape recording.

“You come here on a Pilgrimage.

*Sí!* I come here on a Pilgrimage, and, um, I come here with ten other people. There are two of us leading this Pilgrimage, it's like a, a spiritual growth journey. It's to bring some love ‘n light ‘n healing wherever we go and to ourselves, as well. Yes, um, I came across this wonderful Buddha yesterday in the marketplace on Isla Mujeres.

Oh, you did.

Yaas, it was incredible. It was just jumped out at me. And so Buddha hadda come along.

It had to come along.

Yes, hee hee hee.

That's the only reason you have this Buddha here.

Well, the Buddha is represented, uh, to me, uh, like a child of light.

A “Child of Light”.

A child of Light. If you see — it's not the Buddha that has the fat belly. This is the Bunya, like the Golden Child. Did you see the movie THE GOLDEN CHILD with Eddie Murphy?

I missed it.

Oh, you have to see it. It's excellent. It's fantastic. This Buddha is like a child of light and all of the children around here are so attracted to it and I say, “The Buddha says, Please kiss me” — they all come to it and, uh, kiss it and I jus’ — it's just such wonderful loving energy that comes through the Buddha. And the Buddha is basically a symbol of what you could call the Higher Self, the Luminous Self, the Christed Self, the Divine Self within each person. So, I don't look to the Buddha as a representation of one specific religion, but more like, um, the Divine within each person, the spark of life ... Okay? And, so, the Buddha wanted to go up there [pointing to El Castillo, the large pyramid at Chichén], and I had to make the long journey, hee-hee-hee, up the castle steps... I had my tape deck on and one thing that I work with... I do healing work back home. I do healing with my hands but I also do Earth Healing or Planetary Healing work with movements and dance. And I didn't do my dance up there but I have certain songs that I listen to and those songs come in and move through and anchor in certain energies and project out certain energies... so, like, I use the song, um, “We Are the World,” “We Are the Children.” *Sí.* Uuummm ... Lionel Richie's “Just Put Some Love in Your Heart.” *Sí.* Uuummm. Some John Denver songs that are Heart to Heart

Uh-huh.

Heart to Heart. Uuummm ... Chariots of Fire by Angelis ... that kind of music. Music that's very inspiring. It's very emotional to go up to this place and to sit here to put that kind of music through your body and to tune into your Higher Self. It's just very emotional. A lot of the people who are in this trip — these are two people in the trip — and it's — you just start crying. You just start crying and many of us have felt like as we're going to these different ruins that we've Been Here Before, we've Been Here Before in other lives. So most of us on this trip believe that we've had Other Lifetimes and we're in, like, a Cosmic Spiral, evolving, um, into a Higher Vibrational Frequency into a lighter body so that we eventually get rid of our physical density ...

I see.

Okay? And I personally believe and many of us on this trip believe that, um, there are many universes out there, that we are just one of many and that, that all of this that is taking place, that perhaps these beings that came here who made these great pyramids and worked with this great mathematical things and could understand the equinoxes and so forth, perhaps these people came from other star systems and that is why they have an understanding of that.

I see.

So we, we definitely feel that, um, this is a special event.

It certainly is.

— a very special event and you can feel it. You can just feel it in your heart. You can feel it in your heart. And everybody here is here for a reason ... Hee hee hee. Including you! Hee, hee.

Heh heh heh heh heh. Ah, yes.

— Doing the job you're doing.

That's correct.

Yes.

So, uh, how, how do you, uh, how do you — what do you, the, the Maya, I mean, what else can you tell me about your under — how else do the Maya fit into your scheme of, uh, this, uh, this spiraling —

Well ... The Maya, my feeling is, the Maya were probably — there's, there's a couple of, from what I understand, there's a couple of different groups that have come in through history, my feeling is that they were beings that were more advanced, that came in from another stellar system —

Uh-huh.

— and created some of this advanced civilization —

Yes.

— and that they computed, um, very easily, all of the different vibrational frequencies that would be coming through in the future. They could see these things that were going to be happening in the future. There is a book that Jose Argüelles wrote called THE MAYAN FACTOR which many people tuned into last August when the Harmonic convergence happened ... Yeah. I think the Mayan people, some of them who have really kept that belief system and followed it closely are probably very attuned to these changes that are going on.

Have you gone and talked to, sought out some of those people who have, some of those Mayas who have maintained these kinds of systems of thought?



I — No I haven't —

On this trip? Have you considered doing that?

I have considered doing that. This first week is with the group of people —

Uh-huh.

— and we only have one week of the pilgrimage [...] The second week I am spending just driving around with a friend of mine to check out new areas for next year, to explore, do more of that kind of thing, so ... so that's yet to come —

Uh-huh.

— Yeah. This is my first time here, my business partner who is doing this trip with me, Marcia Spiegel, she's been coming here for the last three years ... she just got done spending two months down in Guatemala.

Oh, great.

Yeah. So, she, she comes with more expertise in terms of some of the culture ...

Mm hmm.

... and I come with sort of my trusting innocence and, uh, what would you call it, umm, skills in, umm, just working with energies and healing —

Uh huh.

— and meditations and things like that.

Where, where else are you visiting on the Pilgrimage?

Well, uummm ...

What other Pilgrimage sites?

We're, actually, our trip is almost done. We went to Tulum —

Tulum.

— which was very powerful. We went to Xel-ha. We went to Xcaret. Xcaret was very profound for many people. There was this little cavern of water and it was very profound for a lot of people and then the ruins — this doorway like to the sky, it was like a doorway to the sky, literally. You stand up there and it's just ... Ill see out. It was like we — several of us felt like we were there before.

Haanh.

We were definitely there before. On top of the castle here where I don't know that much about the sacrificial rites and stuff that happened here, but a lot of the people in the group felt incredible tears and we haven't yet had time to come together as a group and talk about everything — we're all wandering around today. But, um, it's very, very intense ... very intense here. Yeah.

What do you, why do you think the Mayas left if they were so, why did they — what happened to them?

Why did their culture depart? Well my feeling is that they left us like a key. They left us a system that would be unlocked in time... and that when we were ready to um, rediscover it, it would be available to us ...

Uh-hum.

... and we would uncode it, decode it. That's the same thing like with pyramids — people are trying to understand what are pyramids. Many people think that pyramids are a code for life on this planet.

Uh-huh.

That's what some people think. They take great measurements of the great pyramid, they put it all together and decide that this is the axis of the earth, you know? Who knows? Hee-hee-

hee. Who knows? But it is very, em, very profound. It's very profound. It's my feeling that if beings could create these things so precisely...they knew what they were doing, they knew what they were doing and I feel that they probably levitated many of the stones and they did it with their minds. They didn't have oxen hauling, you know stones across many, many miles. I feel that they were very advanced peoples who, with their minds, could do all of these things. So, any other questions?

Well, let me tell you this —

Okay, okay.

The Mayas believe that the Puzob were the one who created the — the monuments and they did this by — at a time when the stone was so soft that all they had to do was whistle and they made the stone work.

Is that right? [whistling] That's a legend?

Well, it's —

That's what they say.

— it's common —

It's common knowledge?

— it's common knowledge...

Mm hmm.

Ahh, well, heh-heh-heh, I believe that a lot of people believe very strongly about these things.

And you're not going —

It's my business —

It's your business to remain objective.

No, it's not my business to remain objective.

No? Okay.

It's my business to find out the relationship between different forms of understanding —

MMM.

So that I find it very interesting that, in fact, you said, telepathic mind work, and in fact the Mayas themselves have also have come to the same kind of understanding or explanation for the same question of how these were built.

Is that right? That's good *to know*. Okay. Some little kids were asking me if, you know, where does the Buddha fit into your religion, and I was trying to explain to him that we believe that all gods are one...

Uh-huh.

You know, so that it's not any one particular religion, it's not Christianity, it's not this, it's not that. It's difficult to explain. It's like, the Sun God, well what about the Sun God??? Hee, hee, hee. [...] You have a very interesting job. Okay. Well, say, Argüelles, what he does, basically, is he talks about the Mayan calendar and looks at it in light of the different cycles that the Mayans saw as humankind moving through. From time beginning to the end of time. And, uh, he basically said that last year, when the Harmonic Convergence took place that that was a very, very special time and that there was a new influx, actually of energies coming into the planet that were very strong and that were, I would say, raising the vibrational frequency from like down here to like a thousand times greater. And I don't know if you've noticed in your own life, but many people have noticed that their lives have *speeded up*..... hee, hee, hee..... incredibly so. Since the Harmonic Convergence [August 17-18, 1987] many, many things are happening to them and a lot of what you'd call if you do something wrong, you know, so to speak, if you screw up badly, it will come

back to you a lot sooner now than it used to. So, people are noticing that it's like, if you screw up, you'll know it really, really right away. And so, it's really helping, I think, people to be more on track. It's like we don't have a lot of time to fool around with anymore. And there's so much *growth* — many people are breaking up *relationships*, forming new *relationships*, a lot of people are finding what you call their *twin flames*, or *soul mates*, that kind of thing, and many people are *quitting their jobs*, and moving into other things. It's just like all of a sudden there's a *catalyst* that has come through, and energy that has come through which makes it impossible for people to, um, not truly be — *become what they need to become*.

Mm hmm.

So it's kind of like it's forcing us to grow. *It's forcing us to grow*.

Uh huh — how does that — what does that have to do with the Mayas?

Well, what that has to do with the Mayas is the Mayas, uh, believed that last autumn, in August, on a certain day, there were new energies coming through that were like initiatory energies for the planet and that a hundred and forty four thousand light beams or light workers were going to be taking their positions on the planet, doing, sending out, projecting out love and healing for the well-being of the whole planet.

I see.

Okay?

Okay.

So the Mayans tuned into the fact that there are —  
— light workers —

and that — knowledgeable people. *Sí!* Some of them are not necessarily knowledgeable but becoming more conscious, I would say. People, like look at all these people here. Um, probably some of them, some of them maybe unconscious as why they are really here. Some of them may just think they are here as a tourist. But it will probably come to them, why they are, why they are here, eventually

[illustration here]

Uh-huh.

... Okay? So it's like we are growing in our awareness and consciousness and many of us have been sleeping for a long time and we can no longer sleep anymore. Hee, hee, hee. Okay?

Okay.

Some people started waking up a couple years ago and as you wake up, what happens is you start like remembering things or knowing things that you never knew before. Like, I teach classes on crystals and gem stones, *sí!*? And there is no way in the short time that I have worked with crystals and gem stones that I could know what I know by reading books. Do you know what I mean? Do you know what I'm saying?'

Yes.

It's like, when you just work with these things, it just comes to you. So you know that all of a sudden you're tapping into other levels. And that what everybody is starting to do and that's why crystals are so important. They are like little windows of light for each of us and I know you don't have a crystal on. *You should have a crystal*. I should give you a crystal before, before you leave, *okay?*

Well, okay.

I will give you a crystal. Because what it helps to do, the crystals help to clean out your Orc Field and they help to brighten and cleanse and amplify your energy. So, if you're feeling

really great, it's going to amplify all of your wonderful feelings. If you're feeling kind'a down, it's going to amplify that, too, so once in a while, you have to clean your crystal — Ah hah.

— put it in the sunlight, take it away from your body for a while. You don't want to carry it all of the time because it needs a break, you know ... It needs some rest. It likes to be by itself a little bit to recharge.

Yes.

Like a battery.

It's like a battery.

Battery. *Sí!*

Batteries recharge.

*Sí!* Do you believe in crystals and gem stones?

Ahhhh

A lot of people come here with crystals and gem stones around their neck and rings.

I don't personally, no.

Okay. They — I am, uh, very amazed because when I teach these classes, people who are what you'd call, you know, middle class people who work regular jobs who have never had a psychic experience in their life, all of a sudden find themselves interested and drawn to crystals — they come to the class and I charge up a crystal and I hold it over their hand and move it around and *they are amazed because they can actually feel the energy*. They can feel it. Want me to try it on you? I'll try it on you, I bet you'd be able to feel it.”

He stopped suddenly. There was silence. I found myself crouched over the table with my mouth wide open, waiting for the next word, waiting for the fountain of words to splash over me. He looked at me, our eyes met and we peered deeply. I saw myself in his eyes as in a glimmering pool. I was wet all over, sweating. Finally, “then,” I asked, “what happened?”

“For some reason, I had turned off the tape recorder at that moment. Its curious. I turned it off. It's as if I did not want that experience to be recorded, to be copied. I set aside the tape-recorder as she pulled out a large crystal from a pouch. She took my hand, opening the palm up, and asked me to close my eyes. I let myself be taken by her and she held my arm between her two hands and squeezed me. It was as if “two poles of life” itself caught me in her grip. I breathed deeply, relaxing and opening myself. Sitting passively, her energy, she, conquered me. And then I felt it. I felt it. It was a warm piercing flow, smooth — like a shot of mescal, a bullet — spreading yet focused. Time stopped as this pinpointed warmth circled around my palm. My mind was emptied as I only felt this prolonged intensity of increasing warmth and passivity. And then it enveloped my wrist, my pulse froze in the heat, under the heat of this wand-like crystal. The intensity moved up the center of my forearm, slowly as if it had always been there, this energy power floating along my blood and sweating skin. I shook imperceptibly. It was like a corporeal vibration from some galactic vortex. It happened to me. Then it stopped, she broke it off. ‘Do you feel it?’ I only smiled into her two eyes that seemed to wrap themselves around me in a conquering embrace.”

“Yes, yes. Then what? What happened?”

“Well, I don't remember exactly, but nothing really. I thanked her, she thanked me. She needed to get back to her group. Since the equinox phenomenon was starting to happen, well, we watched the Serpent of Light and Shadow descend or ascend — you know, its not clear if it goes up or down from Heaven to Earth, Earth to Heaven, Earth to the Underworld, or from the

Underworld up to Earth. Its crazy, there are even debates about whether there are seven or eight triangles that are projected onto the balustrade by the sunlight. Imagine that.”

“Yes, yes, but what happened? I mean, really, what really happened to you? What did you feel? What impact did it have on your life?”

Quickly, he turned violent, sneering, he spit, “don’t use that four-letter word around me! Impact! Hah! There is no impact! Never! It does not exist!”<sup>9</sup>

“Gosh. Sorry. I did not know. I mean I didn’t think...”

“Yes, yes, that’s okay. It’s alright. But what happened?”

“Well, ok. Sorry.” I continued. “What happened was that she was right. Things *were* speeding up. By May 6<sup>th</sup>, just six weeks later, I broke up with the woman I had been with for six years. I started getting into new relationships with new soul mates, old soul mates, too, I bought crystals and communicated with the *aluxes* during the burning season, then the summer came and everything really went crazy. Every place was flooded with tourists, tourists every where, Pisté, Mérida, the pyramids, spewing tourists. I was working over time, frantically finishing work with the tour guides, doing tours, talking with tourists, visiting sites. The town politics exploded, the mayor was assaulted, the venders threatened to invade Chichén again, hurricane Gilberto destroyed the economy. I finished my dissertation, my father died, I started a new relationship, I got a new job, my first job after my degree, and even then I realized I was going to be fired in a few years, broke up again, became an academic orphan, started another new relationship, got adopted, oh, and, god, there was that student stalker, actually two different ones. Everything changed. Everything speeded up. Everything was in flux, nothing solid, all in motion, movement. All in a matter of four or five years, from March 1988 to the summer of 1992, actually, to March of 1993 when I went to Finland to work with those tourist sociologists.<sup>10</sup> Now, years later, more than a decade later, when I look back on that moment when Echo Skysong awakened the flow within me with her crystals, it hit me. It hit me that that was the five years of the Harmonic Convergence that Argüelles had prophesied on the basis of the Maya calendar system. It was as if for five years I was under this total eclipse, struggling with this overwhelming flow, oceanic flow, flux. I can still feel that past moment now as I tell you now about my experience. I feel that moment now when she massaged my flows with her crystal wand releasing and opening me to the cosmic vibrations. I can feel the experience changed my life. Not at first though. Everything stayed the same, the more everything completely changed. I did not believe it; I did not experience, or believe I experienced, anything different. Although for a long time I suspected something had happened to me, especially because none of the pictures I took of Echo Skysong came out! Not a single one. It was weird, all the other pictures from the roll were fine. It *must* have been her aura — or *something!* — because there were no pictures of her. No images of Echo, only a blank, clear space on the negative in the middle of the roll. It was her aura. It could not be copied. I did not believe it. Later, only later, did I realize that Echo had come from afar to awaken within me these changes that were within — and I remember clearly that moment when I had this realization. I can see it with the clarity of consciousness with which I can see you right now in front of me. That past moment is present. In that past this future remembering of the experience happened to me. I can see she crossed my path by chance, fortuitously as if out of a past life, just to give me this clue, this clue that was already a part of me — and you! It is a part of you too. It resonated within me. I felt it. Her aura. The aura of the crystals. I feel it now that I felt it. Do you feel it? It was a chance encounter at the equinox, it was an eclipse.”

“Woow. What an adventure!” he said.

## “Editor’s Notes” [Endnotes]

- <sup>1</sup> [E.N.: The citation is to *Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá* by Himpele and Castañeda (1997)]
- <sup>2</sup> [E.N.: Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (1994) discuss the anthropological unconscious.]
- <sup>3</sup> [E.N.: These are quotes from students who viewed the film Castañeda (n.d.).]
- <sup>4</sup> [E.N.: Argüelles was the intellectual architect of new age fascination with the Maya. His 1987 book, *Harmonic Convergence*, was a grand religious-spiritual synthesis of world religions; his rendition of the cosmic-spiritual-material history of the universe was grounded in an interpretation of the Maya calendar as a code that defines, charts and represents the energy frequencies/vibrations of the universe. In *Surfing with Zuvuya*, these vibrational frequencies are anthropomorphized as trans-galactic soul-spirit-super humans that “surf” the cosmos and posited as “naguals” or cosmic alter-egos; since everyone has one of these each of us can become attuned to one’s inner truth as a Maya-knower and trans-galactic surfer. See Castañeda (1996, 2001) and Himpele and Castañeda (1997)]
- <sup>5</sup> [E.N.: This view was expressly stated by a woman visiting the equinox at Chichén in 1995; see Himpele and Castañeda (1997).]
- <sup>6</sup> [E.N.: *playera* (Spanish) is a sleeveless t-shirt.]
- <sup>7</sup> [E.N.: “Adventure” in *tourism as a structure* is always capitalized; Simmel’s notion of “adventure” as *synthesis*, as well as the generic concept, is always written in lower case.]
- <sup>8</sup> [E.N.: According to Maya scholars the new age interpretation is not supported by common use of the term; *in lak* means “my family, relative,” thus *in lak ech* means “you (are) my relative.”]
- <sup>9</sup> [E.N.: See Castañeda (1996) for a critique of the idea and discourse of impact, especially in relation to tourism and tourism studies.]
- <sup>10</sup> [E.N.: The work of Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen (1994; Jokinen and Veijola 1997) critiques masculinist approaches in tourism studies. Their insistence upon the importance of the corporeal-phenomenological body in studies of tourism is an inspiration to this essay.]

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