

# APPROACHING RUINS

## A PHOTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC ESSAY ON THE BUSY INTERSECTIONS OF CHICHÉN ITZÁ<sup>1</sup>

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Fig 1. "The White City of Chichén Itzá," Photo credit: *Fairchild Aerial Surveys, Inc. N.Y.C.* Peabody Museum Photographic Archive, Carnegie #7023. Box 20-29; slide #S11984.

### "THE WHITE CITY OF CHICHÉN ITZÁ"—CAPTION:

This photo (fig. 1), taken from the southeast in the late 1920s, is unique for the distance of the approach to the ruins of Chichén Itzá, which at the time was under construction by Maya and North American archaeolo-

gists—that is, Mexicans, Yucatecans, and Anglo-Americans. The ruins, newly restored with white washed stones, appear as white spots—a "white city"—rising up from a green carpet. It closely captures the western imagining of the savage monotony of the jungle in which the Maya built their ancient civilization.

Identifying with this ironic mystery of civility in savagery, George Lucas used analogous aerial shots, but taken closer in, of Tikal temples emerging from the jungle to depict the cinematographic approach to the renegade hideout in *Star Wars*. While Lucas and other filmmakers have chosen to borrow from Maya archaeology to create science fiction worlds and exotic encounters, as exemplified by Indiana Jones, archaeologists have, in turn, borrowed from Hollywood filmmakers to create not only entertaining but plausible and intelligible stories about the Maya. The Time-Life educational film on the Maya (1995), for example, relies extensively on these Lindbergh-*Star Wars* just-over-the-tropical-forest-canopy shots. Exemplary in a different way is Linda Schele, a famous groundbreaking Maya scholar, who, when interviewed in various documentary films such as a National Geographic film called, *Lost Kingdoms of the Maya* (1993), repeatedly “translates” the Maya notion of *ch’ulel* or “the divine energy/soul of kings” in terms of Obi-Wan Kenobi and the “force.” If Indiana Jones was inspired by Maya archaeologists, documentary films on the Maya seem unable to avoid including dramatic re-enactments of nineteenth century proto-scholars in cinematographic styles that directly allude to the Hollywood archaeologist.

#### APPROACHING RUINS—ALLEGORY

Approach, appropriation, approximation—these are three words whose etymology brings us to the Latin *proprius*, whose syntactical use differentiates between “own,” “one’s own,” “nearer” and “nearest.” Sharing the prefixing derived from Latin *ad* meaning “to,” these words move toward *proprius* or a relation of ownership and identity by comparative proximations (“near,” “nearer,” and “nearest”). *Proprius*—which derives from *prope* “near”—indicates a “making near” such that one cannot be sure if it is indeed properly “one’s own” or just the closest, nearest approximation but still distant and, thus, different, not the same.

Interestingly, Walter Benjamin describes the concept of aura precisely in terms of the semantic play of these words. Aura—from “breath,” “air,” or “wind”—he says is “the unique phenomenon of distance no matter how close it may be.” Using the example of how a mountain across the valley is brought close, is approached, by the perception of the eyes that trace a

line from the trunk of a tree against which one sits, through its branches to the distant mountain, Benjamin defines the aura of works of art as the infinite distance in-and-of proximity. In the age of mechanical reproduction, the aura of authentic originals, he claims, withers away due to the proliferation of copies—identical copies and authentic copies—that appropriate and ruin the aura of the original, thereby giving rise, through film and photograph, to a new mode of aura and a new kind of original, a ruined original.

Ruins and originals. These concepts—derived from Latin *ruina*, “a falling down,” from *ruere*, “to rush,” and *origo*, “source,” and *oriri* “to rise”—entail movements in opposing directions, a “falling down” and a “rising up,” beginnings and hasty endings. Mysteriously, archaeology—a preeminently modern science of *archæ-logos*—has made these two contrary movements live harmoniously together in original ruins.

#### APPROACHING RUINS—MAP

Culture, an elusive and illusive idea, has been conceptualized by more than one scholar as various kinds of ongoing, unfinished, crisscrossed, and/or busy dialogues, negotiations, conversations, interactions, and intersections.<sup>2</sup> How can we then understand cultures that engage another culture—such as Maya culture—in an ongoing negotiation, if there are indeed many such cultures that appropriate and approach, from near and far, in various approximations of contagious contact and transcultural copying? It makes the mind spin to imagine culture as this increasingly involuted intersection of criss-crossing conversations, busy transactions, and intersecting trajectories. It seems that culture itself (and cultures too) would explode or implode into multiple fragments of texts, images, actors, agencies, objects, institutions, events, logics, semantic fields, languages, economies, media, technologies, detours, dispersals, and other debris. In order to remain on course to our destination—the (trans-)cultural crossroads of Maya culture—we will keep our visual focus on the main pyramid of Chichén Itzá, dedicated to the Yucatec Maya’s Feathered Serpent God, Kukulcan. If you will allow me to be your guide, Walter Benjamin and the thematic of reproducible image, will, in turn serve as my guide into the aura of these ruins.

Approach < Late Latin, *appropriare*. Latin *ad*, “to” + Latin *proprius* “nearer,” from *prope*, “near.”

Appropriate < Med. Latin *appropriatus*, past participle of *appropriare* “to make one’s own” < Latin *ad* “to” + Latin *proprius*, “own.”

Approximate < Late Latin *approximatus* past participle of *approximare* “to approach”; Latin *ad* “to” + *proximare* “to come near” < *proximus* “nearest.”

Proper < Latin *proprius* “one’s own.”

Property < Latin *proprietas*, “ownership” < *proprius* “one’s own.”

Aura < Webster, “invisible breath or air, an emanation.”

Aura < W. Benjamin, “unique phenomenon of distance no matter how close it may be,” that is, “difference no matter how identical or the same” < authenticity < presence of original

Ruins < Latin *ruina* “a falling down” < *ruere* “to rush,” “to cause to move with vigorous haste.”

Original < Latin *originalis* < *origo* “source” < *oriri* “to rise.”

Approaching, Number 1.

(A) City of Wax, City of Light

(B) The Road to Light

Approaching, Number 2.

(A) Empty Ceremonial Center, Mecca of Travel

(B) Maya Ruining Maya Ruins of Chichén Itzá

Approaching, Number 3.

(A) *façade du chateau á Chichen* Désiré

Charnay at the Feathered Serpent Column

Entrance to the Temple of Kukulcan

(B) Becoming-Maya, Becoming-Intense

Approaching, Number 4.

(A) Quetzalcoatl at Chichén, March 23 1997

(B) The Mexican Revolution Visits Chichén Itzá

Approaching, Number 5.

(A) Documenting Performance

(B) Eisenstein on the Pyramid—“A Cinematographic Symphony”<sup>3</sup>

Approaching, Number 6.

(A) Pyramid À-Go-Go

(B) Mal Imagen (Bad Image), Third World Invasion of Chichén Itzá

Approaching, Number 7.

(A) “How Did You Get One Without Any People?” (“How Did You?”)

A NOTE about the crisscrossing of language rules, identities, and names may help the reader in this essay about the Maya. Many readers more familiar with news about the contemporary Mayan Indians of Guatemala and Chiapas, if not also Belize, may wonder why this essay is about, and uses the word, *Maya/s* and not *Mayan/s*. The Maya of Yucatán self-identify their persons, communities, culture, and language as *Maya*, in contrast to other Mayan groups of Guatemala, México, and Belize, who are *Mayans* but *Kekchí*, *Ki’ché*, *Mam*, *Chamulans*, *Zinacantecos*, etc. first, “before” being *Mayan* and who speak one or more *Mayan* languages from the *Mayan* language family. The term *Maya* is thus used here as a proper name and throughout in an adjectival form to indicate that which is properly *Maya*, that is properly *Yucatec* *Maya*, understood to reference Yucatán and the *Maya* of Yucatán. Note here that the Spanish form of *Yucatec* as both noun and adjective is chosen over the Anglicized *Yucatecan*. The ambiguity regarding the use of *Maya* arises in a second way: in the identification of the ancient or precolumbian *Maya* (not *Mayans*!), the word *Maya* is also used adjectivally even if the specific ethnic and linguistic identities, both ascribed and self-identified, are unknown or debated. These English and linguistic rules of syntax and naming get crisscrossed with other cultural customs and languages, however, when one considers a non-*Maya* student of *Maya* and *Mayan* cultures. One linguist says “oddly, I would be willing to say that I am a ‘Mayan scholar’ but not that I am a ‘Maya scholar,’ wouldn’t you? Since I myself am not ...er... *Mayan*” (Danziger, 2001. personal communication). As part of the Pan-*Maya* movement, *Mayas*, *Maya* scholars, and other *Mayans* of Guatemala have created a standardized orthography by which to represent all the *Mayan* languages, including the *Maya* language of Yucatán. In México, however, there is no single overarching or even several competing indigenous *Maya* linguistic authority/ies or socio-political consensus that has either accepted this convention or concerned itself with the question, much less created its own similar standardization. In Yucatán, there is an abundance of competing orthographies currently in use; some of these date from the colonial period and several others from the twentieth century. For these reasons, the spellings and grammatical forms used here are chosen because they are part of, as well as reflect, the politics of language in Yucatán. If this confuses the syntactical expectations of the reader, all the better to remind us of the plurality of *Maya* peoples, including the ways in which they address themselves and are addressed by others.



Fig. 1a. "City of Wax, City of Light." Photo credit: Lindberg Photograph, Peabody Museum Photographic Archives, #42-1-61.

APPROACHING, NUMBER 1.—"CITY OF WAX,  
CITY OF LIGHT"

CAPTION:

The Lindberghs were commissioned by the Carnegie to photograph archaeological sites in Yucatán. This aerial close up of the main plaza of Chichén Itzá is taken from the northeast: in the foreground is the Temple of the Warriors, excavated by the Carnegie Institution under Earl Morris; in the middle is the main pyramid of Kukulcan, which was excavated and restored by the Mexican Monumentos Prehispánicos under José Erosa

Peniche. Following the plaza off the image to the right one would find the Ball Court. The white stain in the upper background is the pyramids of "Old Chichén" or the "Pure Maya" section of the site. Even today the plazas of this area are still not as cleared of jungle growth as the supposedly later, main plaza, shown in the foreground, which is thought to have been constructed by the invading Mexicanized Toltec-Itzá Maya. Contrasting with the relative lack of clearing of jungle, visible even in this early photograph, in "Old" and "Pure Maya" Chichén, is the priority given to the restoration and the clearing away of jungle for display of the north plaza, in which are included the two

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Fig. 1b. "The Road to Light." Peabody Museum Photographic Archives, 59-50 Box 20-78, P2449.

"Toltec" buildings in the center of the image and the Ball Court (out of frame to the right). These buildings, the Temple of the Warriors and the Castillo, have always been interpreted as indicating the presence and influence, if not domination, of central México and/or Mexicans over the Maya and Yucatán. The evidence and argument that the cultural and political "influence" went in the reverse direction, i.e., with Chichén dominant over Tula in Central México as suggested as early as the 1960s by George Kubler (1962), has never really disturbed the predominance and acceptance of the interpretation of Mexican hegemony in ancient, Pre-Columbian times. This story, no matter how weakly based on evidence, serves too well twentieth century Mexican nation building and nationalist ideology; further, it provides legitimacy to USA-based science to lay claim to México's Maya margins not only as an "American Egypt" but as a subaltern group ready for

alliance with Anglo versus Mexican America. The twentieth century road from Mérida to Chichén, shown as white incision across the top of the image, cuts a line into the jungle whose material reality has provided the illusion of real evidence for and an objective testimony to the archaeological interpretation of a "Pure" Old Maya in the south and a Mexican-Toltec Chichén in the north (see Lincoln 1986; Jones 1995).

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 1—"THE ROAD TO LIGHT"

##### CAPTION:

Traversing askew the east-west road built from Mérida in the east to Chichén and from Chichén to Cancun in the west, is a now ruined and overgrown "road," actually jungle path, "built" in the 1930s from the southeast by the Maya community of nearby Chan

Kom. This town was made ethnographically famous by Robert Redfield, who described it as an original homeland of the *ur*-concept of "folk culture." In his account, the community sought to connect itself to Chichén and the Americans who worked there, by "building a road" (Redfield's phrase) straight through the jungle to the main pyramid. But curiously, Redfield says that:

"The Road to Light" starts out toward Chicago rather than toward Mexico City. The changes in Chan Kom are in the direction of North American or cosmopolitan urbanized life rather than in the direction of Latin culture... Apparently the spirit of this people is not favorable to the adoption of Latin manners or mores... None of the aesthetic sensibility of Latin culture has found lodgement [*sic*] in the Chan Kom people... The practicality, the exaltation of hard work, and the acquisitive rather than the expressive spirit—these qualities of the villager lead him away from Latin culture toward another, perhaps a predominating stream of world-wide expanding influence. Before progress came to Chan Kom, Chan Kom had a life-view of its own, not at all Latin in nature, and Chan Kom has shaped the progress it has won in conformity with this ethos. (Redfield 1950: 153-54)

Looking back at this text, like the Maya workmen looking at us from the photo, we can see that Redfield disparages Mexico and Mexicans, i.e., "Latin culture," as he celebrates the Maya for their "progress." But, upon inspection (see Castañeda 1995), this "progress" seems more the artifice of intersecting ideologies (Anglo-American democracy, Mexican socialism, Maya tradition) than substantive. As Sullivan (1989) has demonstrated, Morley was enacting international diplomacy through science, so was Redfield. In addition, his claims about the modernizing influence of (Anglo-)America today reads more like an attempt to assuage his funding agency's (i.e., the Carnegie Institution of Washington) concerns about the effectiveness of its scientific philanthropy in stimulating modernization and progress on the part of the natives.

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 1—TEXT:

In 1923 a ten-year renewable contract was signed between the Carnegie Institution of Washington, or

CTW, and the Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública, (SEP). This granted the Carnegie permission to conduct archaeological, physical anthropological, epigraphic, linguistic, climatological, medical, faunal, botanical, geological, historical, sociological, and ethnological studies of the Maya civilization of Yucatán. Sylvanus G. Morley directed these investigations, which were organized under the umbrella of Project Chichén. The Mexican Monumentos Prehispánicos—precursor to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH)—also excavated and restored buildings under the initial direction of José Erosa Peniche, a Yucatec archaeologist and author of the first tourist guidebook to Chichén Itzá (1937). Together these projects transformed Yucatán into a laboratory and Chichén into a factory of knowledge.

In eighteen years of cutting, chopping, digging, sifting, drawing, measuring, writing, painting, photographing, and cleaning, the archaeologists—Mexican, Anglo and Yucatec North Americans—literally peeled back the jungle growth to carve out of, and inscribe in, *para monte* their vision of the Maya. With hundreds of Maya workmen—who were mostly from the nearby community of Pisté, but also from Campeche, Chan Kom, and Oxkutzcab—the archaeologists created ruins, ruins in ruins, and ruined ruins. This "foundation act" (cf. Eliade 1959) was the ritual and originary re-enactment of the scientific cosmivision of early twentieth century archaeology that created—out of the chaos of the profane and "undifferentiated" space of the everyday, that is, out of earth, stone, paper, and ink—the sacred and ordered space of modern ruins.

Taking the debris—the ruins—of an ancient city that had collapsed upon its own remaining remnants, the archaeologists and Maya workmen selectively and strategically constructed buildings and architectural spaces according to their imagining of the past. This work, which is called without any sense of irony "restoration" and "reconstruction," is known by archaeologists to destroy information about the past that is not "restored" and to (often) preclude, as well, the possibility of alternative interpretations (or at least databases) of the past. Obliterating—or ruining—each specific historical moment of an architectural artifact, whose "life" spanned hundreds of years, the work of restoration nonetheless creates, through a mechanical process of "re"-production, a ruin of the ruined building that represents its (archaeologically imagined) essence

and that somehow, mysteriously and almost magically, comes to stand in the place of, and testify to, all of the different phases, uses, and meanings which it has experienced in its history (Benjamin 1968: 221). Like a photograph, as Benjamin noted, the archaeologically restored and reconstructed ruin is, therefore, simultaneously both a copy ("print") and an original ("negative"). It is a copy of an original, however, that never existed—that is, the transcendental sum total of its past, present, and future histories enfolded into a full and original atemporal presence. And it is an original reproduction, an authentic "presence in time and space, [that stands in] its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin 1968: 220). It is the original that it itself copies; that is, it is the signified that it, as a representation of the past, represents. It refers to and represents itself.

Restored to authenticity by the genius of modern science, ruins are original copies—authentic inventions of modernity. Ruins are copies of originals-that-never-existed that cannibalize the aura of their authentic originals by "standing" in the unique place of the latter's debris—in the place of the falling of the original's ruins. Standing in and standing for, ruins are always ruins in ruins. Originals are always (already) ruined. But, more, ruins are always original copies.

**APPROACHING, NUMBER 2—EMPTY  
CEREMONIAL CENTER, MECCA OF  
TRAVEL**

**CAPTION:**

The name Chichén Itzá means "At the Mouth of the Well [Chichén] of the Magicians of Water [Itzá]" in Maya. The main pyramid in the large north plaza, also known as the Castillo, is dedicated to Kukulcan. In the sixteenth century, Bishop Diego Landa described



Fig. 2a. Empty Ceremonial Center, Mecca of Travel. Photo credit: Q. E. Castañeda.



Fig. 2b. Maya Ruining Maya Ruins of Chichén Itzá. Lime Kiln. Photo credit: CIW photographer. Peabody Museum Photographic Archives, #46-1-107. ©President & Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum.

a Maya calendrical ritual that was marked by the descent of Kukulcan from the heavens to assume his position—his “seat” in the temple—and the temporary burden—“cargo”—of responsibility over Time and human affairs. In the mid-1970s, Luis Arochi (1974) identified, if not discovered as he claimed (cf. Castañeda 1991, 1996, and Carlson 1999; Himpele and Castañeda 1997; Villa Rojas 1979; Rivard 1970), “The Phenomenon of Light and Shadow,” which is “an incredible solar phenomenon [that] occurs in Chichén Itzá” during the spring and fall equinoxes on March 21 and September 23. Scientifically calculating the building of the Pyramid, the Maya used the setting sun to cast shadows from the platform bases on which triangles of light formed on the balustrade in a symbol of the rattlesnake and a hierophany of Kukulcan. In 1984, the state of Yucatán began to organize a vernal celebration—that fortuitously coincides with a holiday in honor of a national hero—of the Maya and Kukulcan with music, dance, poetry, speeches, and theatrical performances. Today, tens of thousands come rushing to witness this

phenomenon, whose meaning is intensely debated by archaeologists, archaeoastronomers, ethnographers, Maya, Gnostics, the state, and new age spiritualists. José Díaz Bolio, the famous Yucatec man of letters, student of all things Maya, and himself the “Discoverer of the Serpent of Light,” called Arochi the “Champion of the Serpents” for having stimulated the Event of the Phenomenon of Light and Shadow, which Díaz Bolio called a “Gran Romería” (1982)—that is, a pagan pilgrimage and carnival.

**APPROACHING, NUMBER 2—MAYA RUINING MAYA  
RUINS OF CHICHÉN ITZÁ**

**CAPTION:**

The catalog notation on the image in the files of the Peabody Museum reads: “Chichén Itzá. Lime Burning. Culture 2.” The making of lime, which was extracted from the bedrock limestone to make cement, was a Maya technology and process that fascinated the ar-

chaeologists, given the number of photographs taken of different kilns in different stages of preparation and burning in contrast to the number of images of Maya with "ethnographic content," many of which were filed under "geography." This kind of image is rare, first, for showing the process of building ruins—versus images of the results revealed by excavation and restoration—and, second, for showing Maya workmen at work versus posing them as human measuring sticks by which the Westerner could perceive scale of buildings and artifacts. One cannot blame archaeologists if the archaeological photograph by design focuses on material culture—objects and artifacts—and not humans, given the object of their inquiry. But this human aspect was not lost on either Morley or the National Geographic Society Magazine, which in their initial publications of Project Chichén (Morley 1925, 1936) showed, if not Maya workmen at work, at least formalized images of discovered objects and excavation results in which Maya were present to convey the mystique and aura of archaeological ruins. Although this type of image of Maya building Maya ruins proliferates in educational films about archaeology to both teach and glamorize excavation, it has become very rare, if present at all, in publications created for both professional and broader public audiences. Even the Maya of Pisté, among whom are siblings, children, and grandchildren of archaeological workers, are surprised to see images of familiar buildings and scenes made unfamiliar and strange by the presence of their relatives and neighbors busy building what A.V. Kidder, Director of the Carnegie Division of Historical Research, called a "Tourist Mecca" (Kidder 1930: 99).

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 2—TEXT:

The Anglo North American archaeologists supported an old theory that the jungle was too savage for "Man." Civilization could not be created in such an undomesticable ecology. Thus, the Maya, as the theory goes, could not have built "true cities," especially since it was thought that they were not governed by politicians but by kingly philosopher-priests. The Maya, the archaeologists speculated, had not built cities to live in, but ceremonial centers filled with temples in which the gods would be properly "seated" according to the calendars in order to rule over human affairs. These ceremonial centers were thereby "empty" most of the

year except when the philosopher priests-kings called the masses together to perform rituals to dialogue with the gods. The common Maya, living dispersed in small villages, would travel far from their homes and corn fields, to join the ritual festivals that celebrated the arrival of the divinities to their temples in the "empty ceremonial centers." This archaeological vision of the Maya, which assumes the terms and understandings from debates about the status of the Indians held in 1550 in Valladolid, Spain (see Pagden 1982; Keen 1990; Castañeda 1996: 131-151; Schele and Miller 1986: 18-33; Coe 1992).

In his first annual report as Director of the Carnegie sponsored Mesoamerican research projects, Alfred V. Kidder, a most prominent Americanist archaeologist, stated that:

If Chichén Itzá can be kept both interesting and beautiful, it will without question become a *Mecca of Travel* and incidentally, a most valuable asset for archaeology which, like every other science, needs its "show-windows" because public interest must be aroused and eventual public understanding must be achieved *if archaeology is to go forward*. (Kidder 1930: 99; emphasis added)

Seventy years later, approximately half a million tourists a year visit Chichén to celebrate what the Carnegie archaeologists called the Maya "genius." Curiously, despite Kidder's "best" intentions and stated desire, most might not recognize that the life-size model replica of a ruined original was built for tourists to marvel at the aura of the modern science of archaeological reproduction. Fearing the desecration and destruction of the archaeological patrimony that they are charged to conserve, archaeologists often complain that tourists ruin the ruins.

Robert Redfield, a "first son" of Chicago sociology and founder of an alternative school to Boasian culture theory, was hired by the Carnegie to conduct a sociological study of Yucatán. Redfield directed a team of researchers, including his wife Margaret Park Redfield and Asael Hansen, the latter having studied in Mérida, which was still known as the White City for the henequen boom that lit up its streets with electricity versus the sparkle of the archaeological polishing of ancient stones. These researches led Redfield to his theory of Folk Culture, which lay on a famous Con-

tium between Urban and Folk Societies, mapping, as noted above, Yucatán in relation to Mexico, Chicago, and Modernity. In the village of Chan Kom he met Alfonso Villa Rojas, a Mexican school teacher sent to the rural community by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and Don Eustaquio Ceme or Don Eus, the Machiavellian leader who artfully manipulated the Protestant Mission, the SEP, the barely nascent Socialist League, archaeology, and Redfield. While we have traditionally acquiesced to a flat and surface reading of Redfield's (1950; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934) ironic description of this village leader as a paragon of both Maya folk tradition and of the Progress of Modernity, today we can see that Don Eus was enacting a more complicated theater of representation. Not that Redfield is in error when he repeatedly states how "Chan Kom" crafted itself by manipulating all these non-local interventions in the village—from Redfield's ideology of "American" Civilization to the Mexican and state government's ideals of nationalist modernity. Rather, we must read the detour that by-passes Mexico City—not to mention Mérida—in a straight line to Chicago as a manifestation of Don Eus' extraordinary savvy. The Maya—to be precise many different Maya polities and persons—*had been playing international politics for centuries*. Don Eus was no stranger to the game, and with his back to antagonist Maya in Ebtun, he interpellated both the state and anthropologies. Redfield's and other post-revolutionary ethnographies (and histories) of rural Mexico, like that of Paul Friedrich (1977, 1986), document the ways in which the state did not impose a hegemony, but rather how local agents hailed and called forth the state from far off "center" to take its place (cf. Castañeda 1998), or in Maya terms, to be seated, in the corners of the country that the state only dreamed it could some day rule with hegemony.



Fig. 3a. "Façade du chateau à Chichén Itzá." Photo credit: Photographer for D. Charnay, Peabody Museum Photographic Archives, Charnay Box 20-18:AB. (The spelling follows the original writing on the image.)

APPROACHING, NUMBER 3—"FAÇADE DU CHATEAU À CHICHÉN"—DESIRÉ CHARNAY AT THE FEATHERED SERPENT COLUMN ENTRANCE TO TEMPLE OF KUKULCÁN

CAPTION:

Compare the photographic image with the illustration in pen on page 342 of D. Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World* 1873 (1887):

Pisté, where we arrive, stands on the extreme [eastern] border of the state [of Yucatán]: It has been so often sacked and burnt by the revolted

tuum between Urban and Folk Societies, mapping, as noted above, Yucatán in relation to Mexico, Chicago, and Modernity. In the village of Chan Kom he met Alfonso Villa Rojas, a Mexican school teacher sent to the rural community by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and Don Eustaquio Ceme or Don Eus, the Machiavellian leader who artfully manipulated the Protestant Mission, the SEP, the barely nascent Socialist League, archaeology, and Redfield. While we have traditionally acquiesced to a flat and surface reading of Redfield's (1950; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934) ironic description of this village leader as a paragon of both Maya folk tradition and of the Progress of Modernity, today we can see that Don Eus was enacting a more complicated theater of representation. Not that Redfield is in error when he repeatedly states how "Chan Kom" crafted itself by manipulating all these non-local interventions in the village—from Redfield's ideology of "American" Civilization to the Mexican and state government's ideals of nationalist modernity. Rather, we must read the detour that by-passes Mexico City—not to mention Mérida—in a straight line to Chicago as a manifestation of Don Eus' extraordinary savvy. The Maya—to be precise many different Maya polities and persons—had been playing international politics for centuries. Don Eus was no stranger to the game, and with his back to antagonist Maya in Ehtun, he interpellated both the state and anthropologies. Redfield's and other post-revolutionary ethnographies (and histories) of rural Mexico, like that of Paul Friedrich (1977, 1986), document the ways in which the state did not impose a hegemony, but rather how local agents hailed and called forth the state from far off "center" to take its place (cf. Castañeda 1998), or in Maya terms, to be seated, in the corners of the country that the state only dreamed it could some day rule with hegemony.



Fig. 3a. "Façade du château à Chichén Itza." Photo credit: Photographer for D. Charnay. Peabody Museum Photographic Archives, Charnay Box 20-18:AB. (The spelling follows the original writing on the image.)

APPROACHING, NUMBER 3—"FAÇADE DU CHATEAU À CHICHÉN"—DÉSIRÉ CHARNAY AT THE FEATHERED SERPENT COLUMN ENTRANCE TO TEMPLE OF KUKULCÁN

CAPTION:

Compare the photographic image with the illustration in pen on page 342 of D. Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World* 1973 (1887):

Pisté, where we arrive, stands on the extreme [eastern] border of the state [of Yucatán]; It has been so often sacked and burnt by the revolted

tinuum between Urban and Folk Societies, mapping, as noted above, Yucatán in relation to Mexico, Chicago, and Modernity. In the village of Chan Kom he met Alfonso Villa Rojas, a Mexican school teacher sent to the rural community by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and Don Eustaquio Ceme or Don Eus, the Machiavellian leader who artfully manipulated the Protestant Mission, the SEP, the barely nascent Socialist League, archaeology, and Redfield. While we have traditionally acquiesced to a flat and surface reading of Redfield's (1950; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934) ironic description of this village leader as a paragon of both Maya folk tradition and of the Progress of Modernity, today we can see that Don Eus was enacting a more complicated theater of representation. Not that Redfield is in error when he repeatedly states how "Chan Kom" crafted itself by manipulating all these non-local interventions in the village—from Redfield's ideology of "American" Civilization to the Mexican and state government's ideals of nationalist modernity. Rather, we must read the detour that by-passes Mexico City—not to mention Mérida—in a straight line to Chicago as a manifestation of Don Eus' extraordinary savvy. The Maya—to be precise many different Maya polities and persons—had been playing international politics for centuries. Don Eus was no stranger to the game, and with his back to antagonist Maya in Ebtun, he interpellated both the state and anthropologies. Redfield's and other post-revolutionary ethnographies (and histories) of rural Mexico, like that of Paul Friedrich (1977, 1986), document the ways in which the state did not impose a hegemony, but rather how local agents hailed and called forth the state from far off "center" to take its place (cf. Castañeda 1998), or in Maya terms, to be seated, in the corners of the country that the state only dreamed it could some day rule with hegemony.



— façade du château à Chichen Itza — LIBRARY OF PEABODY MUSEUM

Fig. 3a. "Façade du château á Chichen itza." Photo credit: Photographer for D. Charnay. Peabody Museum Photographic Archives, Charnay Box 20-18:AB. (The spelling follows the original writing on the image.)

APPROACHING, NUMBER 3—"FAÇADE DU CHATEAU Á  
CHICHÉN"—DÉSIRÉ CHARNAVY AT THE FEATHERED  
SERPENT COLUMN ENTRANCE TO TEMPLE OF  
KUKULCAN

CAPTION:

Compare the photographic image with the illustration in pen on page 342 of D. Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World* 1973 (1887):

Pisté, where we arrive, stands on the extreme [eastern] border of the state [of Yucatán]; It has been so often sacked and burnt by the revolted



Fig. 3b. "Becoming-Maya, Becoming-Intense." Photo Credit: Q. E. Castañeda

natives, that the only building left is the church, occupied by a company of twenty-five men. It looks a forsaken, God-forgotten place, a veritable exile for the small garrison quartered here in turn for three months in the year; not that there is any immediate danger, for the natives, who first rose to conquer their liberties, fell to massacring from a spirit of revenge, and now only take the field for the sake of plunder. We have nothing to tempt their cupidity, consequently our escort of fifty men [and twelve Winchesters] is a measure of prudence rather than of necessity... The ruins of Chichen are two miles east of Pisté, and were used as pasture for the cattle of the inhabitants, who at stated periods had the woods cut down, when the monuments were easily distinguished. It was a favorite place, to the prejudice of the palaces and sculptures, which were made the butt by the visitors to shoot at; but since the destruction of Pisté, nature again reigns supreme; every sign of the buildings has disappeared, and the jungle has become so impassable, that twenty men were required to open the old path. This was not my first visit to Chichén,

nevertheless my emotion was profound on beholding again the gigantic outline of El Castillo, which we had decided beforehand should be our headquarters, as from its elevated position it offered many strategical advantages, which would secure us against surprise. It was with considerable difficulty that we climbed the steps, which are steep and completely invaded by a vigorous vegetation; as for our great quantity of baggage, none but the nimble, sure-footed natives could have succeeded in hauling it up on to the platform of the monument. (Chamay 1887:322-324.)

APPROACHING, NUMBER 3—"BECOMING-MAYA,  
BECOMING-INTENSE"<sup>5</sup>

CAPTION:

Following in a rich tradition of heterodox religions and religious practices that include mesmerism, hydrotherapy, and Mormonism, late twentieth century Anglo North Americans began to turn to Mexico and Mexican

Indians for spiritual regeneration, transcendence and reinvention. Spurred by Carlos Castañeda, Yaqui Indians, Joseph Campbell, and more mainstream cultural nationalisms based in Aztlan, one California Chicano, José Argüelles, began a journey into discovering the Maya and transforming standard anthropological interpretations (based on the Carnegie and related research) into a new age theology. The Harmonic Convergence on August 17-18, 1989 marks the transnationalization of this theology and the inauguration of a New Age Maya heterodoxy. Based in an eclectic appropriation of practices and symbols from a multitude of religions and cultures, initiates enter a path of knowledge that “comes from” the Ancient Maya in order to become “Maya”—entailing purification of the “Inner Self/Light Child” to attain the Higher Vibrational Frequency and Oneness of the Galaxy. Here three New Age Maya dressed in white await the equinoctial approach of Hunab Ku Kukulcan at the Feathered Serpent Column entrance to the Temple of Kukulcan. Each came separately, but was joined by others. Moments after this photograph was taken, a group of seven formed spontaneously in the inner chamber of the temple and began “a ritual of love” and “purification” of Self/Universe through “toning” (ritual documented in Himpele and Castañeda 1997).

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 3—TEXT:

After events of recidivism in Central Mexico and elsewhere in the decades after conquest and mass conversions, the Spanish Crown sought to put a stop to missionary inquiry into the history, society, and religion of the Indian subjects. Censorship of publications had a material and symbolic double in the way tens of thousands of Indian cities, i.e., those on which Spanish towns had not been built, were in the course of centuries covered over by a thick carpet of jungle. In Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico, Maya cities became “lost” both in socio-geographic space and in knowledge; in turn, the Indian peoples were lost, or displaced from their origins—and “de-Indigenized,” or transformed into not-native natives who thereby could not legitimately claim rights as people over territory. The historical struggle to create independent nations at the beginning of the nineteenth century stimulated efforts to convert lost cities and lost peoples into primordial origins of these emergent nation-states. The opening of Spanish

America and then Latin American nations to non-Iberian traveler-scientists, such as Alexander von Humboldt (nineteenth century German naturalist), oriented this conversion of Lost Cities into fables of Lost Civilizations. This is clear with the European traveler-antiquarians and proto-anthropologists who endeavored to re/present these ancient societies as civilizations and thus as patrimony within the Eurocentric vision of World-Civilization, or what is today juridically organized as *Patrimonio de la Humanidad* by the UNESCO. Anglo North Americans approached these lost peoples of “advanced” sociocultural status as among the primordial origins of US nationalism, which sought to masquerade as the pinnacle of civilizational development as expressed by Redfield. Ambivalently presented as (US) national-yet-hemispheric patrimony, titles of books and reports, such as *The American Egypt: A Record of Travel In Yucatán* (Arnold and Frost 1909), *Chichén Itzá: An American Mecca* (Morley 1925), felicitously express the point. By approaching the ancient Indigenous peoples as objects of knowledge within the framework of cultures and civilization, US North American and European national and capitalist interests could appropriate the hemisphere in parts and as parcel.

In Yucatán, the *criollo* (“white,” non-Indian) intelligentsia needed and used these foreign travelers, such as Stephens and Charnay, and their travelogues about the Maya to transform Yucatec understanding from fearful hatred and denial to celebratory approach and appropriation—both a “coming nearer” and a “making into one’s own” that nonetheless always implies a distance and difference. Playing off the construction of the Maya as patrimony-primordial origin by Anglo and Eurocentric narratives (and material discursive practices, such as archaeology) of Civilization-Humanity, the Yucatecos folklorized the slippery images, things, and communities of the Maya in moves parallel to those deployed by European countries. Whereas linguistics and ethnologies were used to transform subnationalist ethnics into objects of study known as pre-modern “folk” and the nation into a modern society, the state of Yucatán used the trinity of history, literature, and ethnography to folklorize the Maya as a contemporary vestige of a “vanishing” minority. Given Mexico’s interest in Central Mexican Indians versus the Indians of this “world apart” (see Moseley and Terry 1980) persons such as Mediz Bolio (1987a, 1987b) could com-

Indians for spiritual regeneration, transcendence and reinvention. Spurred by Carlos Castañeda, Yaqui Indians, Joseph Campbell, and more mainstream cultural nationalisms based in Aztlan, one California Chicano, José Argüelles, began a journey into discovering the Maya and transforming standard anthropological interpretations (based on the Carnegie and related research) into a new age theology. The Harmonic Convergence on August 17-18, 1989 marks the transnationalization of this theology and the inauguration of a New Age Maya heterodoxy. Based in an eclectic appropriation of practices and symbols from a multitude of religions and cultures, initiates enter a path of knowledge that “comes from” the Ancient Maya in order to become “Maya”—entailing purification of the “Inner Self/Light Child” to attain the Higher Vibrational Frequency and Oneness of the Galaxy. Here three New Age Maya dressed in white await the equinoctial approach of Hunab Ku Kukulcan at the Feathered Serpent Column entrance to the Temple of Kukulcan. Each came separately, but was joined by others. Moments after this photograph was taken, a group of seven formed spontaneously in the inner chamber of the temple and began “a ritual of love” and “purification” of Self/Universe through “toning” (ritual documented in Himpele and Castañeda 1997).

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pose, with tranquility, eulogies to the Maya in genres typical of Latin American regionalist literatures and forms of modernity (cf. Gonzalez Echeverría 1990).

In the history of foreign travelers in search of ruins, J. L. Stephens, an Anglo North American, and Augustus Le Plongeon, a Frenchman, are among the more noteworthy for proposing antithetical answers to the questions of the day. Stephens (1841, 1963 (1843)), writing two books concerning his "Incidents of Travel" in the Maya world (cf. Himpele and Castañeda 1997), made the persuasive argument that the builders of the mysterious mounds and ruins were not some lost and vanished race, but rather the ancestors of the very same autochthonous Indian people that continued to live in the vicinities of the ruins and, of course, within the territory of the new nations. Le Plongeon, on the other hand—made the opposite argument based on a very old—but at that moment becoming an increasingly unfashionable and illegitimate, line of reasoning. In seeking to explain the origins of Indians, missionaries, such as Diego Duran, proposed the idea that the Indians were one of the diasporic tribes of Israel and that Quetzalcoatl was St. Thomas. Similarly, the Mormons today understand the Maya to be peoples described in the Book of Mormon and Quetzalcoatl to be Jesus Christ. Le

Plongeon, although following this mode of argument, instead, proposed that the Maya were the race of survivors of Atlantis. Inspired by this mystical-religious explanation, twentieth century interpreters—such as José Argüelles (1987, 1989), Hunbatz Men (1990), and many others (Jenkins and McKenna 1998; Gilbert and Cotterell 1996)—took hold of this idea and modified it by arguing that the Maya were originally super-spiritual and hyper-gnostic beings from another galaxy and that Atlantis was either a terrestrial or an extraterrestrial stopping point of these inter-galactic Maya en route to and from Yucatán. In all these religious interpretations, the "Maya are a more advanced people who have left clues for humanity" (Anita Colladoro, interview in Himpele and Castañeda 1997) about the galaxy and how to evolve into more advanced gnostic-spiritual being and beings. In this understanding of the Maya, the word becomes emptied of human, cultural, and ethnographic content to become a sign or mantra and transcendental signifier (Castañeda 1996: 175-200). Montejo (1999; 1993) has made the argument that although the objectives, specific practices, and knowledges might be different, the research of anthropologists (e.g., Freidel, Schele, Parker 1993; cf. Castañeda 1996: 105-107) are not much different in



Fig. 4a. Quetzalcoatl at Chichén. Photo Credit Q. E. Castañeda.

their appropriation of the Maya as body of knowledge and symbol of authority that legitimates science and the careers of such individuals.

APPROACHING, NUMBER 4—QUETZALCOATL AT  
CHICHÉN, MARCH 23<sup>RD</sup> 1997

CAPTION:

When I arrived alone in Cancun in early March of 1997, my friend Marta, owner of Body's Aerobics Gym, told me that there was going to be a big ritual on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, not the 21<sup>st</sup>, that is, not on the day of the equinox. Adalberto Rivera A. (1989)—an archaeo-astronomer and Maya gnostic—was one of the leaders of the event. His group of Cancun *gnósticos* together with the attending priests of the White Brotherhood of Quetzalcoatl (see Friedlander 1975)—the leaders of New Age Maya groups had not been invited to participate—had been organizing the event in celebration of the mystical concept of Five. In a numerology appropriated from Aztec sources, five was a powerful and significant symbol, no doubt due to the fact that there are five “cardinal” directions in Mesoamerican cosmology and, perhaps also, because the Pre-Columbian Mexica calculated that their world was part of the fourth creation called “Five Movement.” In response to my request for details on how March 23, 1997, was related to the numerological symbol of “five,” Marta explained to me that the explanation she received was that the 23<sup>rd</sup> is symbolic of 5 since  $2+3=5$ . No other information was forthcoming, certainly none that reconciled the Christian and Mexica calendars or the fact that the former is based in a decimal system while the latter is a vigesimal. In any case, the White Brotherhood, with extensive experience in dealing with the INAH in Central Mexico and at Chichén, such as for the equinox of 1989 and 1993, requested in advance the right to perform a ritual at the pyramid. The INAH, however, only granted permission to use the plaza without any activity on the pyramids or in the temples. Thus, the Quetzalcoatl Priests organized their group of perhaps 300 into a huge circle in front of the north staircase, augmented by other tourist bystanders who were encouraged to join. Fifteen, perhaps twenty minutes of silence were punctuated with the deep blasts of the conch shell trumpet which signaled the group to break the circle and form into a long human chain, holding

hands, that began to undulate in waves across the plaza and into the Ball Court in a symbolic Quetzalcoatl. There, the Feathered Serpent chain spiraled and swirled into tighter and tighter circles that culminated in copal burning, praying, speeches, and baptism.

APPROACHING, NUMBER 4—THE MEXICAN REVOLU-  
TION VISITS CHICHÉN ITZÁ

CAPTION:

In celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, the government sent the Revolutionary Bell and related icons with a brigade of soldiers to visit every town of the Republic. In August, the entourage arrived at Chichén. Clearing everyone off the main pyramid, soldiers stationed themselves on the corners of the nine platforms and at temple openings. Having been displaced from the Castillo by the soldiers, I ran to the Ball Court, where Tomás Burgos, a tour guide and Pisté resident reporter for the *Diario de Yucatán*, also climbed up to take some photographs. He offered to take a picture of me with my camera: following the architectural lines of the Upper Ball Court Temple on which I lean, one's eye is led to the mountainous temple, whose proximity is perceived despite the distance of the main plaza that lays like a valley between the pyramids. In solemn silence, the Bell was then brought to the west staircase and symbolically raised to the top of the pyramid. Meanwhile a platform was assembled on which a brief *Jarana*, a tradition of Yucatán, was danced. Within twenty minutes the Revolution continued its tour to the next town in this “world apart.”

APPROACHING, NUMBER 4—TEXT:

New Age Maya is a heterodox theology conceived and practiced as an eclectic spiritualism by a variety of Anglo North Americans. The White Brotherhood of Quetzalcoatl, in contrast, is a Mexican spiritual and political Indigenismo, as Judith Friedlander discussed almost thirty years ago (1975); it is a political counter-cultural movement based in Central Mexico seeking “revindication” of ancient Mexican, not Maya, culture through revivalism by mostly urban mestizos. While both are spiritual movements with significant historical



Fig. 4b. The Mexican Revolution Visits Chichén Itzá. Photo credit: Taken by Tomás Burgos, resident of Pisté and newspaper reporter for the *Diario de Yucatán*, as a courtesy for Q. E. Castañeda, using the latter's camera.

legacies, the distinctly American utopianism centered on non-Indian redemption through the Indian would properly, and profitably, place them among the “new social movements” that seek alternative paths to sociopolitical change and democracy in the Americas (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Laclau 1985; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Slater 1985). Both deploy highly polarized gender conceptions based in notions of complementary dualism, as does a third spiritualism, gnosticism, which spread to Mexico from its roots in Europe through transnational masonic cults and popularized literatures. In Mexico, as in all that comes from Europe, and especially in Yucatán, gnosticism has been transculturally nativized to and with Mesoamerican beliefs and symbols. All three, but especially Mexican gnosticism, find appropriate ideas from a variety of Oriental religious sects and spiritualisms with which to further hybridize. Cancun, in particular, is a hotbed of spiritual syncretism and hybridized religiosity; on any given day, any number of the major resort hotels, will be the scene of a religious workshop of spiritual awakening and improvement for the Mexican middle

classes (called *huaches* in disparagement as foreigners by Yucatecos) and resident *gabachos* (non-Mexican, white or European “foreigners”).

Adalberto Rivera A. is an interesting figure of this transcultural hybridity. A Central Mexican resettled in Yucatán, he sought an initial career in tourism as an archaeoastronomer. Entering into the bull ring of touristic interpretation of the Maya with José Díaz Bolio, Luis Arochi, and others, he also became a “discoverer” of some heretofore unrevealed and unknown aspect of the equinox: that Kukulcan is actually Quetzal-Kan and the existence of the Serpent of Shadow that is projected on the plaza floor as a symbolic double or copy of the Serpent of Light that is projected on the balustrade or staircase. His connections in Mexico City and elsewhere gave him an advantage in this fraught market and he successfully courted the state government which granted him the role of providing the official explanation of the Equinox Phenomenon of Light and Shadow. Like many non-local persons employed in public, mid-to-upper level positions in the tourist industry in Pisté, he was a “closeted” practitioner of his Maya gnosticism. But things changed after his

involvement with the political movement of the town of Pisté, the *Lucha 107* (or “Struggle 107”); in interesting parallels and differences, this community-wide effort of lobbying of the state and federal government to change Pisté from *comisaria* or town government to municipal capital or seat of the county was a kind of “new social movement” (Castañeda 2001a,b; cf. Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Slater 1985).

When Pisté lost its gambit, Rivera in turn lost the honorable and prestigious role of official narrator of the equinox and moved to Cancun. At first, he commercialized and began to sell, on a daily basis, his explanation to charter groups using a six-foot miniature replica of the Pyramid of Quetzal-Kan that he had constructed in the Hotel Zone of Cancun. His book, which blended gnosticism, spiritualism, Maya numerology, and miscellaneous symbols from Eastern religions, gave him an entry into organizing his own spiritual group or cult of Maya-based gnostics. At the event of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, he arrived, in the muggy heat of an overcast spring day, sporting the standard white clothing with red sash, a staff of power, and a full, grayed beard to pray with the Priests of the *Fraternidad Blanca de Quetzalcoatl* (“White Brotherhood of Quetzalcoatl”), also known as *aztecas* and *concheros* for dressing as Pre-Columbian Aztecs and using the conch-shell as a horn. After hundreds of persons, including many tourists who joined the group on the spur of the moment, danced in a serpentine chain from the north stair of the Castillo into the Ball Court, there was a moment of silent prayer and then individual blessing by two Priestesses of Quetzalcoatl. Afterwards, by 5 pm, only a council of *azteca* leaders representing different regional groups remained to perform the rite of closure.

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 5—DOCUMENTING PERFORMANCE

##### CAPTION:

During the production of a video documentary on the phenomenon of the equinox event, visual anthropologist and filmmaker Jeff Himpele (standing to the left), was photographed while videographing the ritual of a group of new age Maya visitors. The ritual included placing sticks and stones on the ground to form a hieroglyph around which the group danced, sang,

prayed, and burned incense in anticipation of the epiphany of the “Feathered Serpent” or Kukulcan who appears in the form of seven or eight isosceles triangles of light on the north balustrade of the pyramid, at the foot of which is a six-foot-tall carved serpent’s head (left staircase in the photograph; further to the left the Colonnade, connected to the Temple of the Warriors, can be seen). After this group hug shown in the photo, one woman, with her arms in the air and her body akimbo, approached ecstatic trance and fell in altered state to the plaza floor of the ruined city. Many of the tourists—including a group of Yucatec grade school students on a field trip from Mérida, visiting Maya from neighboring towns, and ethnographers—joined in the performance of the ritual by participating through observation from a distance. The “Maya spiritualists” had become the new tourist attraction as an audience of tourists emerged in an arching human chain to watch the activities of the ritualists from a distance. On the side of this improvised stage a very tanned baby boy (perhaps five years old), who, with his curly golden locks and barely concealing loincloth, pranced around the area like a noble savage, began to interact with the Yucatec school children, who standing at a safe distance in awe extended looks and hands toward the boy as if from the edge of a cage. At another point, one tall, lean, and clean-cut European tourist quickly rushed into the hand-holding prayer circle with a big smile precisely so that his companion could take a quick souvenir picture of his frolicking with the spiritualists. Then, just as quickly, the tourist separated himself from the group and continued on his tour of Chichén. Others turned to approach the pyramid and awaited the arrival of Kukulcan

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 5—“EISENSTEIN ON THE PYRAMID” – A CINEMATOGRAPHIC SYMPHONY

##### CAPTION:

In the early 1930s, the pioneer filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein was invited by a Hollywood company to make a film about Mexico. When negotiations failed, Upton Sinclair decided to finance the Russian filmmaker, who embarked upon a journey without a script. Disagreements led Upton to have Stalin recall Eisenstein to the Soviet Union. The footage shot between 1931 and 1932 however was never released to Eisenstein, but eventually, after his death, made it into the hands of Grigory



Fig. 5a. Documenting Performance. Photo credit: Q. E. Castañeda.

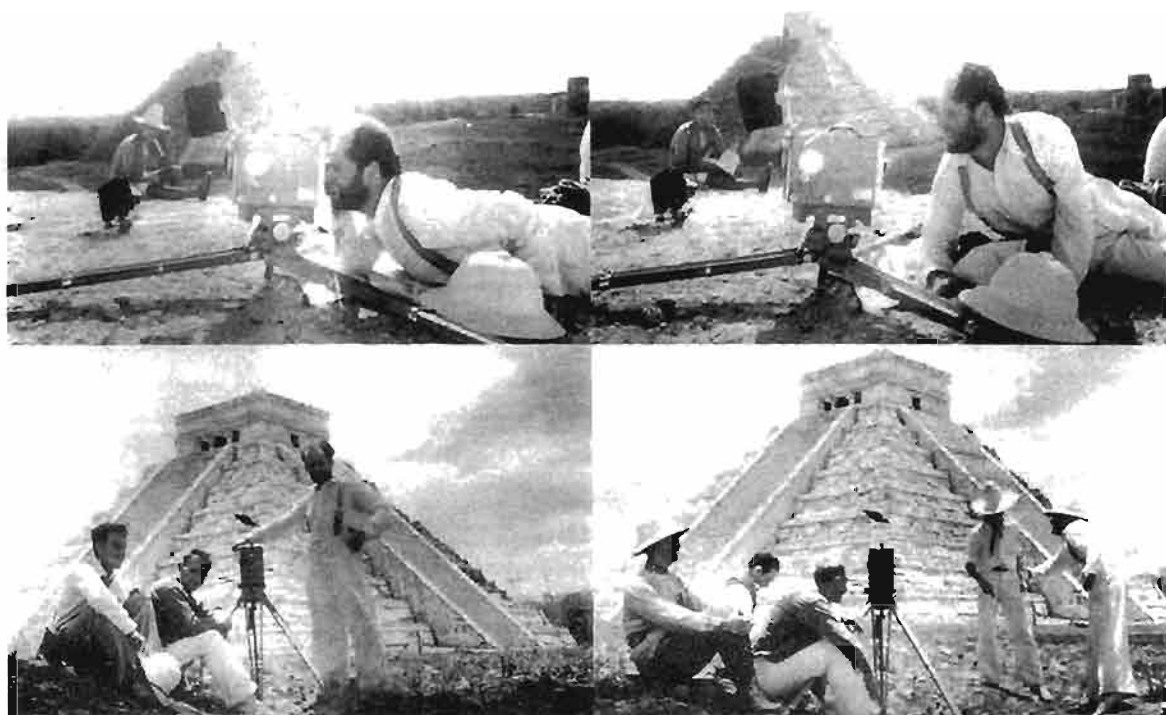


Fig. 5b. "Eisenstein on the Pyramid." Photo credit: The collage consists of images #992, 992a, 989, 988 (top row, left to right; bottom row, left to right). Courtesy of the Eisenstein collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University.<sup>3</sup>

Aleksandrov, the surviving member of original film crew, who pieced together a version of the film based on the film director's sketches and notes. This 1979 production includes a beginning sequence about the Maya and a text written by Eisenstein:

Time in the prologue is eternity. It might be today. It might as well be twenty years ago. Might be a thousand. For the dwellers of Yucatan, land of ruins and huge pyramids, have still conserved, in feature and forms, the character of their ancestors, the great race of the ancient Mayas. Stone—Gods—Men—Act in the prologue. In time remote...In the land of Yucatan, among heathen temples, holy cities and majestic pyramids. In the realms of death, where the past still prevails over the present, there the starting point of our film is laid. As a symbol of recalling the past, as a farewell rite to the ancient Maya civilization, a weird funeral ceremony is held. In this ceremony, idols of the heathen temples, masks of the gods, phantoms of the past, take part. In the corresponding grouping of the stone images, the masks, the bas-relief, and the living people, the immobile act of the funeral is displayed. The people bear resemblance to the stone images, for those images represent the faces of their ancestors. The people seem turned to stone over the grave of the deceased in the same poses, the same expressions of face, as those portrayed in the ancient stone carvings. A variety of groups that seem turned to stone, and of monuments of antiquity — the component parts of the symbolic funerals — appear in a shifting procession on the screen. And only the quaint rhythm of the drums of the Yucatan music, and the high-pitched Maya song, accompany this immobile procession. Thus ends the prologue - overture to the cinematographic symphony, the meaning of which shall be revealed in the contents of the four following stories and of the Finale at the end of these. (Prologue, from *Viva Mexico!*)

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 5—TEXT:

*VIVA MEXICO!* A film never completed is completed as a symphonic unity of the fragments of a dream shattered and widely dispersed by transnational vectors. As Benjamin might have foretold not only from

theory but from the experience that he was then yet to have, politics intervened in Eisenstein's six-month-long ritual journey into the awakening search of an inner true Self. With Moscow calling him home in the midst of spats with Diego Rivera, the Mexican Revolutionary painter, over politically correct postures and positions, Upton Sinclair— an Anglo-American author, socialist, and capitalist backer of the film—pulls Eisenstein's funding due the lack of any kind of narrative whatsoever—master, meta, or even old-fashioned surface plot. This was to be a work, if not also a rite, of passage; a "passage-work." The nationalist fissures of a transnational socialism and the prognostications of market exchange-value irrupted in and disrupted a modern tradition of dreamy discovery of original culture— i.e., the aura of Mexico itself.

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. 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.* With the close-up, space expands; with slow-motion, movement is extended. (Benjamin 1968: 236; emphasis added)

Was this not Eisenstein, calmly and adventurously traveling amidst the dispersive ruins of allegory? As if an award-winning Maya, he refused to give up his secret plot, his secret design for the film — if indeed there was one other than its being secret itself; in refusing to reveal narrative, the secret unity and closure of dispersed filmic debris, he refused Benjamin's politics, Sinclair's economy, socialism's symbol, and Mexico's genre.

You climb the thousand-year-old pyramids of Yucatan and sit purposely at the base of the ruined Temple of a Thousand Columns in order to gaze at the familiar outline of the Great Bear, lying upside down in the Mexican sky, and wait for the moment it sinks behind the Pyramid of the Warriors. And how you sit there deliberately trying to fix the memory of this moment in the future stream of recollections, much as seamen fix their course by the very same stars. (Eisenstein quoted in Karetnikova 1991: 18)

Aleksandrov, the surviving member of original film crew, who pieced together a version of the film based on the film director's sketches and notes. This 1979 production includes a beginning sequence about the Maya and a text written by Eisenstein:

Time in the prologue is eternity. It might be today. It might as well be twenty years ago. Might be a thousand. For the dwellers of Yucatan, land of ruins and huge pyramids, have still conserved, in feature and forms, the character of their ancestors, the great race of the ancient Mayas. Stone—Gods—Men—Act in the prologue. In time remote...In the land of Yucatan, among heathen temples, holy cities and majestic pyramids. In the realms of death, where the past still prevails over the present, there the starting point of our film is laid. As a symbol of recalling the past, as a farewell rite to the ancient Maya civilization, a weird funeral ceremony is held. In this ceremony, idols of the heathen temples, masks of the gods, phantoms of the past, take part. In the corresponding grouping of the stone images, the masks, the bas-relief, and the living people, the immobile act of the funeral is displayed. The people bear resemblance to the stone images, for those images represent the faces of their ancestors. The people seem turned to stone over the grave of the deceased in the same poses, the same expressions of face, as those portrayed in the ancient stone carvings. A variety of groups that seem turned to stone, and of monuments of antiquity — the component parts of the symbolic funerals — appear in a shifting procession on the screen. And only the quaint rhythm of the drums of the Yucatan music, and the high-pitched Maya song, accompany this immobile procession. Thus ends the prologue - overture to the cinematographic symphony, the meaning of which shall be revealed in the contents of the four following stories and of the Finale at the end of these. (Prologue, from *Viva Mexico!*)

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 5—TEXT:

*VIVA MEXICO!* A film never completed is completed as a symphonic unity of the fragments of a dream shattered and widely dispersed by transnational vectors. As Benjamin might have foretold not only from

theory but from the experience that he was then yet to have, politics intervened in Eisenstein's six-month-long ritual journey into the awakening search of an inner true Self. With Moscow calling him home in the midst of spats with Diego Rivera, the Mexican Revolutionary painter, over politically correct postures and positions, Upton Sinclair—an Anglo-American author, socialist, and capitalist backer of the film—pulls Eisenstein's funding due the lack of any kind of narrative whatsoever—master, meta, or even old-fashioned surface plot. This was to be a work, if not also a rite, of passage; a "passage-work." The nationalist fissures of a transnational socialism and the prognostications of market exchange-value irrupted in and disrupted a modern tradition of dreamy discovery of original culture— i.e., the aura of Mexico itself.

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. 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.* With the close-up, space expands; with slow-motion, movement is extended. (Benjamin 1968: 236; emphasis added)

Was this not Eisenstein, calmly and adventurously traveling amidst the dispersive ruins of allegory? As if an award-winning Maya, he refused to give up his secret plot, his secret design for the film — if indeed there was one other than its being secret itself; in refusing to reveal narrative, the secret unity and closure of dispersed filmic debris, he refused Benjamin's politics, Sinclair's economy, socialism's symbol, and Mexico's genre.

You climb the thousand-year-old pyramids of Yucatan and sit purposely at the base of the ruined Temple of a Thousand Columns in order to gaze at the familiar outline of the Great Bear, lying upside down in the Mexican sky, and wait for the moment it sinks behind the Pyramid of the Warriors. And how you sit there deliberately trying to fix the memory of this moment in the future stream — recollections, much as seamen fix their course | the very same stars. (Eisenstein quoted Karetnikova 1991: 18)

An allegory of allegory, Eisenstein nonetheless fits the genre and, especially with the designation of authorial intention created by an imposed posthumous narrative, it fits the stream of future and past travelogues recollecting discovery in Mexico of "Mexico." From Bohemians, D.H. Lawrence, Carlos Castañeda, Monsívais, Quetzil Castañeda, Robert Redfield, The Priests of the *Fraternidad Blanca de Quetzalcoatl*, and Le Plongeon, to Morley, Mediz Bolio, Octavio Paz, José Limón, Roger Bartra, and the protagonists of the Mexican Revolution, the "discovery of authentic Mexico"—or of "authentic Yucatán/Maya"—is a proliferating, and modern, genre of an "approximate" modernity, or, if you will, of an approximating transmodernity. Such genres of approximation, being transculturally constituted, have simply never been just, or just, simply a regionalist discourse nor never outside of modernity. One might wonder, rhetorically and otherwise, whether Mexico is anything other than

"discovery" itself? Is it not just the sign of itself as labyrinthine Discovery of Authenticity? Or, the sign and practice of discovery—and a potential future to be redeemed and/or reconverted by those who will to approach it as such? To approach Mexico as discovery is to go calmly and adventurously traveling among far-flung ruins, ruins in ruins, and ruined ruins.

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 6—PYRAMID À-GO-GO

CAPTION:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from



Fig. 6a. Pyramid À-Go-Go. Original photographs and the scanning of all images by Q.E. Castañeda.<sup>4</sup>

the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition...

...aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value... for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an even greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense. The instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic reproduction, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—*politics*. (Benjamin 1968: 221, 223-224; emphasis added)

APPROACHING, NUMBER 6—"MAL IMAGEN"  
THE INVASIONS OF CHICHÉN ITZÁ

CAPTION:

The first Invasion of Chichén was in its third year when I arrived in the summer of 1985 to do my first season of fieldwork (cf. Castañeda 1996, 1998; Peraza López and Rejón Patrón 1989; Peraza López, Rejón Patrón and Piña Loeza 1987). More than a summer of discontent, it was season in a low-intensity campaign of sporadic violence, complicated subterfuge, and espionage that lasted five years. The invasion—which is the native label given by all sides—included violence not only between state authorities and private capital on one side, and artisans and vendors on the other, but amongst the vendors, who fought each other to control every centimeter of space along paths and in the plazas between ruins. Since the artisans were *campesinos* ("farmers") the possibility of machete fights were real, as indeed resulted once when the INAH arranged for riot police and military to raid the archaeological zone

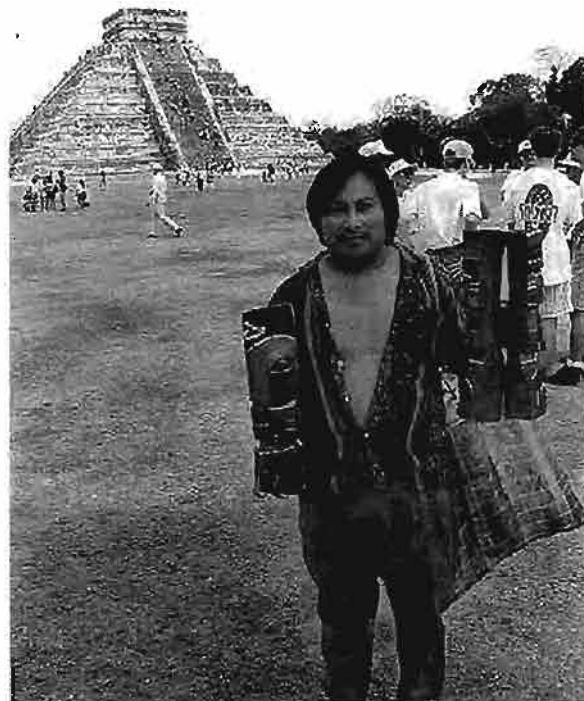


Fig. 6b. "Mal Imagen" the Invasions of Chichén Itzá. Photo credit: Q. E. Castañeda.

in search of the invading artisans. Long standing feuds developed between families of the INAH workers, who sought to expel the vendors, in part for reasons of personal economic interests, and the vendors who claimed Chichén as collective property by both a customary right of proximate residence in Pisté and by juridical right that places the ruins in the *ejido* community land grant. Suspicious of my sustained visit in their community in 1985—which coincided with state and federal level authorities attempting to unionize the petty entrepreneurs—the invading artisans generally did not allow me to photograph their appropriation of space by displays of local, regional, and national handicrafts. The invasion was illicit not only because it threatened ruining the ruins, but because it provided a *mal imagen*, a "bad image," to the invading tourists visiting from the First World. It was this rhetoric and motivation that always propelled the state to sweep Chichén, and other

sites of archaeological patrimony, clear of invading vendors. The *ambulante* (“itinerant selling” or “street-vending”) artisans and food vendors, with their manifest poverty in the eyes of the *gringo*, were clear signs of Mexico’s under and uneven development in the age of the 80s debt crisis. Twelve years later, in the early 1990s, during the third invasion, this man, a veteran Maya artisan from Pisté and an old friend, allowed me to take his portrait under the shadows of a Maya Mecca of Travel.

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 6—TEXT:

In the age of mechanical reproduction, the aura of the work of art withers away. But withering is not disintegration into nonexistence, as many interpreters of Benjamin have argued:

In the Yucatán, I disguised myself as a tourist, masking my anthropological exploit to study tourists, while this professional guise itself masked my touristic desire to revel in direct experience of Mayan culture. But how in this age of simulacrum and pastiche was I still capable of an intense frisson in the presence of the original? Didn’t Walter Benjamin anticipate that the aura of originals would wither in the age of mechanical reproduction? (Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe 1994: 651)

Under the approximations of visual technologies, as Benjamin argues, aura is transformed — reversed and inverted. The logic of this change is grounded by his evolutionary assumptions that shape this most famous essay: from dependence on the tradition of “cult-ritual” that shapes it, to the tradition of politics, aura inverts and reverses its value from original use to ruinous exchange. In other words, society in its pre-modern form is holistic, unitary, and based in religion, that is a shared system of values and mores whose anchoring of meaning and value structures action. Modernity, for Benjamin, as for other nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars such as Durkheim, entailed the radical rupture from and fragmentation of socio-cultural unity—“tradition”— that provides the system of values, or axiology; modern society thereby locates action, practice, pragmatics, and politics, i.e., the praxeological, as the anchoring that shapes and determines meaning and value. Thus, the work of art is

transformed, according to a logic typical of theories of modernity and critiques of capitalism, from functional utility and use-value (given by ritual/religion) to political symbolism and symbolic exchange (located in commodity markets) by film and photo. This inversion of aura from a “distance no matter how close” to a “proximity no matter how distant” is what Benjamin referred to as the “withering away” of aura. But, this exchanging of auras, from the axiological aura of “authenticity” to the praxeological authenticity of “aura,” is, in turn, as reversible as it is reproducible:

Particular fascination was unprofessional. Accordingly, I spent years repressing the appeal of the Maya that had drawn me to those undergraduate courses. In 1991 I discovered a rationale to justify visiting Maya ruins in the Yucatán... The purpose... was ‘to study a small group of tourists participating in a packaged tour, comparing their images of the Maya with those used to market the Yucatán as a vacation site as well as with those created by anthropologists.’ ...the new ethnographic style of turning the gaze back on the Westerner offered me a way out, an acceptable mask to cover my desire. Nevertheless, I was totally unprepared for the physical pleasure — bordering on the erotic — that I felt at the base of the great, majestic pyramid at Uxmal: I was so overwhelmed by its size and beauty, by the sensual appeal of the pyramid’s gently rounded base, that I remember thinking that were I to die right then, somehow it wouldn’t matter. I was awash in emotion, just as my body was being bathed by the hot midday sun. What had for many years been just textbook image was transformed into experience; it seemed to satisfy a deep longing of which I wasn’t even aware. My plan to maintain a distanced gaze — looking at Westerners looking at Maya — could not protect me from desire, emotion, and the power of experience. Again, the Mayan architectural and cultural aesthetic seduced me. [For one young couple the] Maya ruins... were quotes and detritus, a picturesque but arbitrary backdrop to scenes of their own unleashed passions.... Uninterested in the guide’s descriptions... *they read surfaces and I felt deeply, but... for all of us there still was some mystique of the original...* (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 1994: 655; emphasis added).

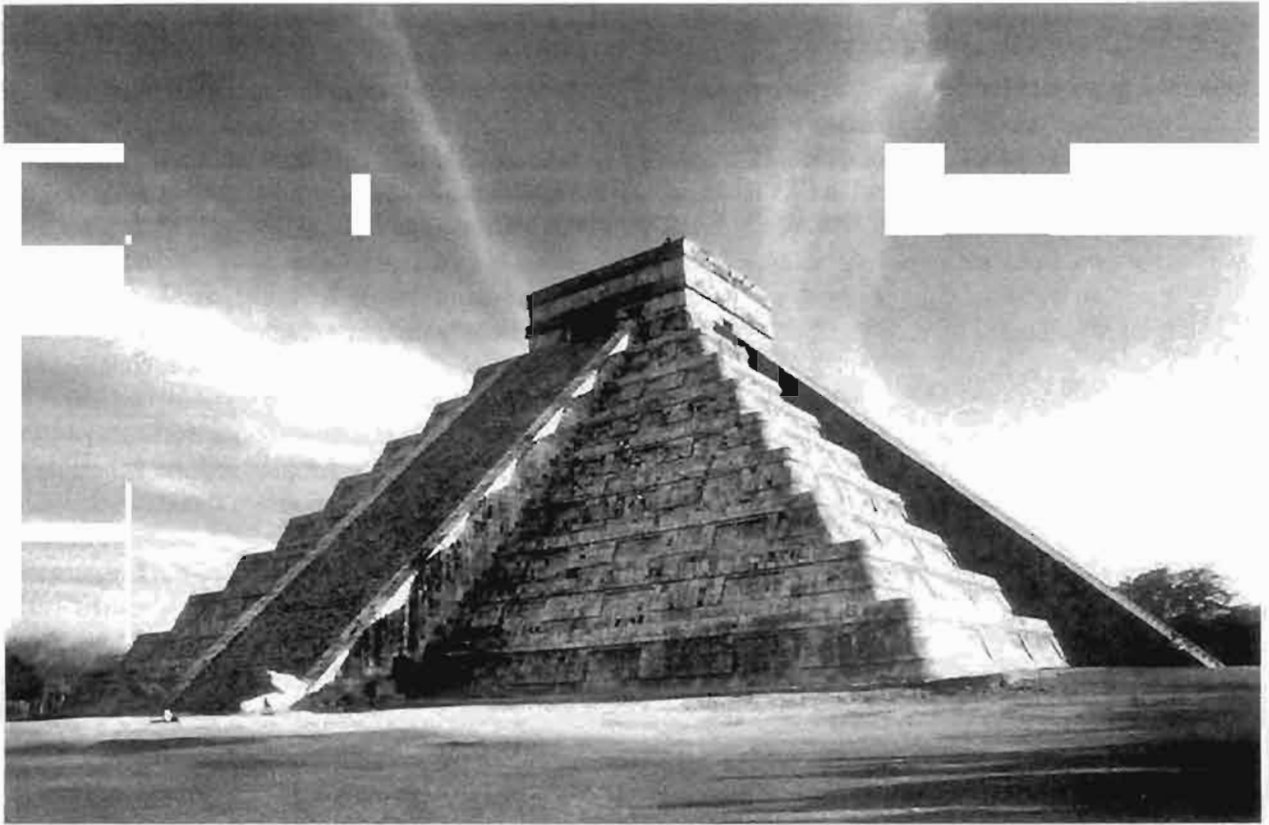


Fig. 7. "How did you get one without any people?" Photo credit: Q. E. Castañeda.

As Taussig (1992, 1993) might say, the mimetic copy, in its approximation of the original, swallowed up the authentic and cannibalized the latter's power, thereby appropriating its aura: ruins in ruins. The problem here is that the ruins, *pace* Mascia-Lees and Sharpe's assertion to the contrary, are indeed a copy, but a copy, like the negative of the photographs that Benjamin somehow does not discuss, of an original that never existed: It is thus copy *and* original, both identical "prints" and the original "negative" from which prints are copied. However, it is *not* the authentic *original* that is implied by Mascia-Lees and Sharpe. Rather, it is the mimetic, mechanical and praxiological reproduction of the ruins in dispersed fragments, from archeological drawings to tourist souvenirs, that give the ruins the "mystique" of an authenticity that is ascribed to a speculative, that is, non-existent, original. Mimetic reproduction ruins ruins.

APPROACHING, NUMBER 7—"HOW DID YOU GET ONE WITHOUT ANY PEOPLE?" (... "HOW DID YOU?")

CAPTION:

The first to observe the angular lines that are produced on the western balustrade of the north staircase of the principal pyramid at Chichén Itzá was Arcadio Salazar, who worked there as a stonemason in 1928. Salazar, father of the current custodian of the ruins, told me eight years ago: "I worked on the reconstruction of the staircase and, one day, when the sun set, I saw a line of luminescent angles that was projected on the balustrade. I reported this to Miguel Angel Fernández, who worked at Chichén for the government, and the next day he saw what I told him I had seen. Miguel Angel Fernández, who was a good archaeologist and drawer, published an article about it, in a journal that he sent me a copy of, but that I lost years later." When I asked him about the name of the

journal, Salazar told me that he could not remember. Fernández was a contributor to the journal of the INAH, and it would be worthwhile to find out if that was the journal in which the phenomenon with which we are concerned was discussed. His archaeological drawings are uniquely good and it is possible that he copied this column of angles in black and white. (Díaz Bolio 1982: 1)

In a double chiasmus of speech and writing, of observation and listening, an original discovery is created by the reporting of an eye witness account (cf. Castañeda 1991). Díaz Bolio notes that the original observation is confirmed by the mimetic reproduction of the Mayan chiaroscuro in a drawing, perhaps black and white, that became lost to memory and the archives. In turn this moment of original discovery is forgotten for decades and the Phenomenon of Light and Shadow, which awaited the exegesis of Díaz Bolio's (1957, 1972) hermeneutic of serpentine symbolism, was known only as a curiosity by those who chanced upon its occasion. Even today, after nine or ten archaeo-astronomers have sought to impose their interpretation on the triangles of light through their own discovery in these ruinous shadows, it is still debated whether there are seven or eight triangles and whether they "oscillate" or "move" and, if they move, do they do so from heaven or earth or the underworld? And where does this symbol of seven triangles of light go? Is it true that the seven triangles of shadow projected on the plaza floor is a mimetic copy or double of the serpent of light projected on the balustrade?

#### APPROACHING, NUMBER 7 TEXT:

One day in the mid-1970s, Don Vincente Chablé, a native of Oxkutzcab employed by the INAH as a custodian of the archaeological zone, was inspired to carve stone and wooden idols in the image of ancient Maya gods to sell to tourists. He took as his inspiration images from Maya hieroglyphic books and the carvings of Chichén. Chablé, not seeking to make reproductive replicas nor to copy other, and older, Yucatec styles of folkloric representations of the natural world, developed a primitivist aesthetic using common tools that he adapted from agricultural work. Later artists would use expensive routers and sharpened forks as tools. At first

he guarded his products, but curiosity and envy compelled a flood of young boys and some adults to secretly observe and copy his techniques and artwork as a way to explore economic alternatives to the unstable subsistence farming of corn. This first generation of artisans were known as *chac mooleros* because of the statue they most typically carved; the *Chac Mool* is the famous reclining figure of a Maya holding a plate or bowl over his abdomen, putatively the place where heart sacrifice is received. This became a term of deprecation not only because of the crude craftsmanship that mass-produced these handicrafts for the tourist market and for the manner in which profits were often consumed in the purchase of alcohol, but because the artisans were often illegal venders using stereotypically aggressive tactics of selling to tourists.

Second and third generations of artisans refined old and created new figures and forms as they dramatically improved techniques and tools. In addition, the strong competition for the Chichén market, which was booming in the 1980s due to Cancun's popularity, propelled the evolution of this work into a unique handicraft tradition, *arte pisteleño*. Entirely originating in the context of tourism, the invasion of Chichén, and the anthropological construction of Maya Meccas of Travel, this Pisté artwork has never been legitimated, promoted, or supported by federal and state agencies such as Culturas Populares, Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), or the Casa de Artesanía. In other words, these governmental agencies never targeted Pisté as a site for what Canclini (1993, 1995) has called the "reconversion" and the re-invention of "traditional" Indian and non-modern "folk" cultures. Pisté, with its long and intimate history with archaeology and tourism, was too unlike the ideal "folk society" of Chan Kom—a town that fit the category as non-modern "tradition" not despite, but because of Redfield's ideological claim of it having "chosen" progress. Pisté has always been too modern and too traditional, too ambivalent and too ambidextrous, for state agencies to intervene to create ideologically pristine "Indians" and "folk" handicrafts capable of reflecting images of an authentic México (cf. Castañeda 1995, 1998).

Nevertheless, more and more persons from Pisté turned to handicraft production in their homes as primary or secondary sources of income in response to the demands of an ever-increasing flow of tourists. Emergent from this cottage industry that mass produces

for the tourist market, some artisans in the 1990s developed techniques, styles, and aesthetic—but not the cult of the artist—that transgress the devaluing categories of tourist kitsch, native replica, and folkloric handicraft that constitutively situates the artwork. Invented in the horizon of the anthropological and touristic fascination of the Maya, *arte pistéleño* is an autoethnographic “art writing” that re-appropriates the Maya. Moreover, this creative and inventive approximation of ancient Maya art is an ethnographic writing of the western Other and the latter’s fascination with the Maya. But, is it “art” or just “artisanry”? If it is “art,” is it contemporary, modern, or ancient art? On the other hand, isn’t it simply tourist souvenirs — kitsch at worst and “traditional” handicrafts at best? By creatively inventing new forms and figures out of the emblematic icons of ancient Maya culture, these artists produce not so much touristic kitsch, but iconic kitsch. That is, this is not kitsch per se as traditionally given by theories of modernity (cf. Calinescu 1987), but the kitsch of an alternative modernity iconic of both kitsch itself and of tourists’ (and anthropologists’) desires for the Maya. The fascination with and for the Maya becomes an ethnographized fetish in an iconic kitsch that approximates modernity—both the modernity of the West and an alternative Maya modernity.

This alternative, approximate vision remains obscured, however, in the shadows of ancient ruins. In repeatedly approaching the ruins, these invading Maya artisans and transgressing artists have been continually swept aside by the multiple agencies of the state, its allies in the private sector, anthropologists, and tourists, both secular and sacred, who assert their own visions of the Maya and Maya ruins.

The wave of enthusiasm for progress was reaching its crest; the Americans were progressive; they had skills and knowledge which Chan Kom could use. So each American visitor from Chichén—ethnologist, sociologist, physical anthropologist, student of the Maya language, investigator of tropical diseases—was welcomed with cordiality and respectful formality, and some were invited to make improving speeches on technical or scientific subjects. *It was suggested in conversations among the villagers that perhaps these Americans were the “Red People” achieving extraordinary things today as they did in the ancient times told about by*

*the old people.* Some of the men of Chan Kom came to Chichén to ask the archaeologists to help them in their efforts to improve the village. The power and accomplishments of these foreigners came to be incorporated into the villagers’ dream of progress.... Dissatisfied with the crooked and roundabout trail that connected their village with Chichén, and with their interests now directed to the city and toward the sources of progressive guidance by way of Chichén Itzá rather than by way of Valladolid, the Chan Kom men cleared a road straight through the bush, using as their object of guidance the top of the Castillo, principal ancient structure at Chichén, which they could just see from a tower they erected near their village. *The road was laid, “straight as the roads of the leaf-cutter ants”; and the people called it “the road to the light.”* (Redfield 1950: 16; emphasis added)

Now, dear reader, we calmly come to the end of these adventuresome travels amidst far-flung ruins and debris. But note that as we have come straight-away to the light of the Castillo, do we not find the road to splinter, fragment, and criss-cross itself in a confusion of images and words, copies and auras? Does the “road to the light” lead “straight” to Chichén or to Chicago—and the *chachakmak* (“red men,” a.k.a. Americans)? And if the road from Chan Kom to Chichén detours past Mexico City to Chicago, does it not also detour away from Chichén to other fantastic places of travel such as Cancun and Atlantis, Havana and New York? Perhaps the one road to light is actually two roads, as Redfield seems to claim, or more, and are made to seem straight by their tangents, divergences, and convergences of their detours. If the one road is many, then, “the light” to which this/these roads lead is not only the “Progress” of Enlightenment that Redfield assumed inhered within the USA and modern Science, but the ancient Phenomenon of Light and Shadow inscribed on the balustrade of the Maya Castillo. The Light is, as well, the chiaroscuro of ruins in ruins, authentic copies, transcultural imaginaries, and criss-crossed cultures. The question remains: how can one travel through this chiasmus and, while attending to the baroque intricacies of its detours, arrive at an approximation—an ethnographic accounting—of the ruined auras of cultures?

## NOTES

1. An earlier, much reduced version of this essay stems from the encouragements of Anne Rubenstein, Gil Joseph and Eric Zolov. I thank them for suggestions on style and exposition, editorial assistance, and ideas on how to enlarge the piece for this venue. In particular, I thank Anne for her constructive critiques and for compelling me to explore this genre of non- or quasi-linear essay based in images. Lisa Breglia greatly contributed to the development of the ideas presented here and, in the course of several drafts, suggested innumerable improvements in the analysis, layout, and presentation of the arguments. While these persons share in making the merits of the essay, the inadequacies and errors are only my responsibility. For her assistance with the Eisenstein material in the Lilly Library of Indiana University, I am indebted to Becky Cape and the staff for their permission to use these materials here. After years of help, I especially want to express my appreciation for Martha Labell, whose immeasurable good and assistance made my periodic trips to the Photo Archives of the Peabody delightful and successful journeys. Without her help and authorization for use of the Peabody photos, this essay would not be.

2. James Boon (1983, 1990, 1999) is the most significant source of inspiration and thinking for the idea used here of culture as a criss-crossing of: metaphors, discourses, texts, theories, symbols, practices, dialogues, intersections, etc. The dialogical concept of culture is elaborated by a rich tradition of theory in and out of anthropology (e.g., Tedlock and Mannheim 1995). Rosaldo (1993) discusses the ideas of busy intersection and of ongoing conversation, the latter of which is attributed to Kenneth Burke. Paul Sullivan (1989) uses the idea of "unfinished conversation" not as a trope or concept of culture per se, but to describe the complex historical negotiations and interactions between cultural agents marked as Maya and anthropologists. The project of this essay radicalizes the agenda he set forth.

3. The collage was made by the university's photography lab at the request of author for this publication. The title uses Eisenstein's phrase "cinematographic symphony" to make a play with the "postmodern" opera *Eisenstein on the Beach* by Phillip Glass and Robert Wilson (1979).

4. Scanned collage of images includes: a) the book *Megalopolis* (Olalquiaga 1992) opened to pages 78-79 showing a José Cuervo Tequila ad based in the idea of the Pyramid of Kukulcan as a blender; b) Diedrich Coffee label for its "Mexico" brand showing the Castillo; c) Budget car rental advertisement; d) an internet logo of the *Diario de Yucatán* which is itself a collage showing the Castillo combined with the yellow walls of the Convent of Izamal and a male-female couple dressed in traditional Yucatec clothing; e) a photograph of the wall in the parking lot of the Houston Intercontinental Airport that indicates the floor of the parking lot based on a representation of a postcard with the Castillo as the stamp; f) the front page of a bilingual newspaper-style tourist information brochure for March that shows the equinox phenomenon as it appears on the side of the Castillo; g) a photograph of the wall plaque of the new International Airport of Chichén Itzá located in Kaua that uses an abstract image of the Castillo; h) a photograph of a Pisté Maya mask in which the headdress consists of a stylized copy of the Castillo; and i) a photograph of a rack of postcards, most of which have representations of the Castillo. Original photographs and the scanning of all images by Q.E. Castañeda.

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