

Cancun Journal #13: Sunday, 9/7/03

Dolphins and Plans

In the early morning light, the eco-village looks a bit like a child's construction project, with its hanging orange funnels for sinks, its cascade of graywater barrels now filled with beautiful plants, its bicycle-wheel pump. It's beautiful! Today we are getting the last systems up and running, hanging our signs which don't look quite as much like that 10th-grade science project now that they are laminated and out here next to the real examples. Rodrigo and the punks are getting the pump working, fitting the rope which runs over pulleys and carries small rubber pistons through a pipe. The pistons bring up water which dumps into a spillover that feeds the tank for the sinks. Over on the other side of the Casa, Erik and others have been setting up some showers. The women will shower inside the gymnasium but there are no other showers for the men on this side of the encampment. We're proud of ourselves. The only cloud on the horizon is the fact that there aren't any--no rain, and none predicted for seven days. Fortunately we have some city water as a backup for our rain catchment, but it would be nice to see it work. On the other hand, it will be much nicer for the campers if it doesn't rain! I've accepted that my contribution will be the educational signs and the documentation--I'm just in and out of too many places to focus on a specific project.

Then I run off to the dolphin march. The same group that made the sea turtle costumes for Seattle have made 365 dolphins out of foam for a march that will focus on the environment and on the many places that capture dolphins so that tourists can swim with them. You wear the foam dolphins like a hat, and as we gather and put them on, a school of the wild sea mammals leaps out of our heads and begins to cavort. We gather in a circle in the plaza in front of the Palacio Municipal, and some of the local Cancunistas perform a ritual. They are dressed in white, the women in beautiful flounced, embroidered dresses, and begin by sounding the conch shells.

The sound reverberates over the plaza, wild and familiar at the same time. They light copal in many chalices and the sweet incense billows over the crowd, taking with it some of our jangledness and stress.

The circle is beautiful, a double-layered reality, for if you squint your eyes and let the humans disappear, it looks as if a school of dolphins were circling. We are all given signs to hold--"Protect Mother Earth," "Don't swim with slaves!" They invoke the directions in four languages: Mayan, Nahuatl, Spanish and English. The invocations are beautiful and succinct--both virtues when you are standing in the broiling hot sun wearing a foam dolphin on your head. I'm smelling paint fumes--look behind me and realize they are boarding up the front of the Palacio Municipal, taking no chances on the coming crowds destroying city property. But there is no police presence for this ceremony and march. Everything is peaceful, as we begin to sing and chant in Nahuatl. The drums are going behind the songs, people in the circle shake rattles or clap in rhythm, and energy begins to build. I can feel it working and feel the subtle strength of energy formed and directed with an intention--going out into the earth, healing and protecting.

I have to leave early to run back for a direct action training--to which no one shows up. Most of the internationals here are already experienced, and although many people say they want trainings, no one seems to be able to find the time to attend them when they are scheduled. I have truly begun to appreciate the virtues of hierarchy--how sweet and simple to just be able to tell people what to do and have the entire backing of a society and its police power to make them do it!

Especially if I'm the one giving the orders! In my next life I intend to be a benevolent but absolute monarch of some small, peaceable country--but in this one, I shortly find myself back in another long, consensus meeting where twenty or thirty people are trying to reconcile their various ideas, opinions, and desires, struggling to respect each other no matter how intensely irritating they find each other, and sweating like pigs in a sauna.

We are once again called upon to change our vision of the action. Abram, one of the Mexican students, explains the political context and the latest thinking of the Zapatistas. "The system is like a many-headed serpent, and we have to strike at its vital organs, its center, not by throwing ourselves against its military power but by claiming our own autonomous spaces and creating the world that we want there." And doing that in a way that confronts power, that makes clear the differences between

them, that draws a boundary and establishes a frontier between the worlds. They are very smart, these students, and deeply influenced by the Zapatistas, who are now focused on building their own communities, providing their own services, reenvisioning their own lives. It's the same spirit that prompted us to build the eco-village, the same impulse that is driving the mad puppeteers to create intricate moving sculptures and flags stenciled with Mayan Gods.

The students' analysis relieves us from trying over and over again to figure out how to make an unarmed, nonviolent, mass assault on an island defended by the mass police and military forces of global power, and lets us think more creatively.

Reporters keep asking me what has changed since Seattle. In Seattle, it was vitally important that we blocked the meeting, in part because it sent such a strong message to the world and the discontented delegates of the global south that there was massive popular opposition to the WTO. Now, popular opposition is endemic, the WTO is deconstructing from within, and the new cutting edge is to begin to build and realize our visions.

After the meeting I run off back to the eco-village. The pump is up and running, the showers now drain into a beautiful swale packed with rocks which were just under the surface of the immaculate land but which are now hidden under mulch and leaves in case the city decides to remove more potential weapons. The campesinos are starting to arrive, busses rolling in. People come strolling up to the eco-village, staring at the installations and the posters. A small campesino is staring and staring at one of the pictures of our Sonoma County, California, land that illustrates the concept of Agro-forestry. I go over and talk to him and he says that he recognizes the land because he has worked near there. He is one of the many, many economic refugees of the ongoing war on the poor who have made that long journey north to work in the fields and vineyards of our lands--and now returned. We have walked the same hills, traveled the same roads, and have been in entirely different worlds while we did so: the world of the privileged landowner citizen, the world of the vulnerable, undocumented migrant worker. And now our worlds converge.

An assembly and a late-night meeting close the day, along with a fiesta in the Parque de Palapas. Sunday nights are always fiesta there: people eating in all the small lunch stands, the little merry-go-round and ferris wheel are lit up and running, vendors bring their crafts out for a street market, and the amphitheater, this night, is the site of a resistance film festival.

Activists, policy makers from NGOs, punks, hippies and local people are all sitting together watching the images onscreen of other struggles, other battles. Around us is music and color and life, a little bit of that world we are fighting for, where we all share privilege and vulnerability, the vicissitudes of life, the fruits of the earth, the carnival and the miracle.

-- *Starhawk*

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