

Cancun Journal #3: Thursday, 8/28/03

Many Meetings!

Two iced chocolate mochas and a comfy couch in this restaurant have made up for not having lunch until 6 pm. It's been a big day, and we've done a lot. The convergence center is open! We arrive mid-morning after finishing the last of our proposal for the eco-encampment. The landlord has workers still clearing out the space--a big, three-story building of concrete. Somehow in this work I seem to end up spending a lot of time in big, echoey concrete buildings--but I'm grateful to have this one. The bottom level smells heavily of mold, but we have the third and fourth floors and access to the roof, which requires ducking through a small doorway and then climbing an iron radio tower, but has a broad view over much of downtown Cancun City-- including a view of the major roads, which those of us who have survived police raids appreciate.

The energy is building, and more and more people are coming into town. In the early afternoon, we have a meeting to discuss actions with at least twenty people there, mostly internationals of that breed who have somehow made these actions a focal part of our lives. I sometimes think of us as an intuitive, self-organized, volunteer nonviolent army, all responding to the same call, some inner voice that says, "Hey, this is it--put aside your other work, nothing else is as important right now as this effort to turn the tide."

We brainstorm actions, everything from puppet marches to naked water ballet to spell out "No WTO" with our bodies.

We're trying to come up with creative ways to have an impact on the meetings, which will be very, very difficult, sequestered on the island as they are. But we will try, even though the possibility of police brutality is always in the back of our minds and sometimes in the forefront of discussions. Two years ago, at a protest here of a World Economic Forum meeting, students were brutally beaten by police. I've seen the video, and it reminded me of Genoa, with cops losing control and whaling

away with their big batons in bone crunching fury. But the same students are coming back. On the plus side, they weren't tortured in jail, like activists were in Genoa, and were released fairly quickly. The internationals are wary of getting arrested or of the kind of nonviolent civil disobedience tactics we often use at home, but the Mexican students are undaunted. "I wouldn't want to put any campesino or Mexican student at risk of getting arrested," one of the internationals says, but Anna, one of the Mexican students, just shrugs. "They will do it anyway. Even if it's badly organized and not done well, they will still do it."

Most of the ideas center around street theater and creativity. Whether or not we can get to the meeting, we can create a carnival of opposition in the streets of Cancun City, and over a week we will need lots of creative ideas.

Then I manage to get hooked up with ethernet to more easily get my email, and discover that I've already offended someone in Cancun City with my description of it as a model of globalization. So I just want to say that there is quite a lot about this city I really like. It's my theory of urban design that you can tell how coherent a city is by how easy it is to accidentally run into the people you need to meet--and here it is easy. Of course, the convergence center and the media center and the downtown park are now all within a block of each other, and that helps. But it is laid out in interesting patterns and angles that leave open plazas and spaces everywhere for small parks or children's playgrounds tucked into corners, and it certainly seems more affluent than many cities I've been in. And the officials in the city government are doing their best to accommodate the floods that will soon descend, and as I wrote yesterday, were very open and interested in our permaculture proposals.

We have been hanging out with Cancun residents and people who work here and live here. Cancun, I know, is better than a whole lot of places (try Rafah, for example, in Gaza!), but it suffers from globalization as do many similar places in the U.S. and around the world. A friend of mine in Orlando, Florida, says the running joke there goes, "It's good that the Disney corporation has created so many jobs, because you need three or four of them to survive!"

Cancun lives on tourism, but most tourists never see Cancun City. They are taken off to big hotels or resorts, most owned by multinational corporations, with all-inclusive package deals and they never need to venture out beyond the hotel zone. Which means all the delightful small businesses and good,

cheap restaurants and lively clubs and taxi drivers don't benefit much from the money they spend. Money comes in, but most of it goes right back out again. In an ecosystem or an economy, abundance depends not just on how much money or rainfall or nutrients enter a system, but on how many times they recirculate before they leave.

The action meeting is followed by a meeting to resolve some issues that have come up around working together, and then by a meeting to lay out a plan for getting the convergence space up and running. Which is where I duck out for mochas and food, finally.

Then in the evening we have our first asamblea, the first general meeting of all the groups planning actions and programs. There are about twenty of us, and we go around and share the different projects. There's a media team setting up a media convergence for the independents who will cover the event. There's a group which will host a festival of films about resistance. The puppetistas are concentrating on three Mayan Gods, Chac, the God of rain, who is upset about water privatization; Itzma, the God of maize, who is angry about the contamination of Mexican corn by genetically engineered pollen; and Kukulcan, Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent of all Mesoamerica. "What, no Goddesses?" I ask. They say they are considering Ixchel, Goddess of the Moon and weaver of spiderwebs.

I'm not working on the puppets myself, so I can't say much more, but I trust Ixchel to make herself heard in this process.

In case you are wondering what it takes to pull off a mobilization like this one, here's a list of the various working groups, not counting the special projects like our permaculture project and the film festival:

- Outreach
- Media (dealing with the mainstream media, that is)
- Indymedia
- Food
- Water
- Medical
- Legal
- Housing and encampments
- Convergence Space
- Communications
- Security
- Puppets and art

Action planning
Training
Facilitation and translation
Cultural events
Materials--flyers, broadsheets, etc.
Fundraising

And that's not even including the NGOs organizing forums or fighting to get visas for their participants or any specific action coordination.

By the end of the night, Mike has been translating almost nonstop for about twelve hours. With his quiet, cheerful manner and his long, braided beard, he's an example, to me, of the kind of activists who have somehow been deployed by the cosmos to do this work--young, smart, studying Latin American political systems, radical without being annoying about it, easygoing and indefatigable, just doing a grueling amount of work without making a fuss about it.

We end the meeting in a state of exhaustion, and go out for beer and food and a midnight ride around the Casa de la Cultura after a cloudburst, to observe the water flow.

-- *Starhawk*

[BACK to Cancun Journals Index Page](#)

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