## Cancun Journal #4: Friday, 8/29/03

## To Mexico City

Well, I'd hoped to get to bed early because I had to get up at 5 a.m. to catch a plane back to Mexico City, but I discovered I had committed the ultimate activist sin of omission--I'd brought my cell phone, which was finally fixed to work in Mexico, but left the charger back in San Francisco, so I spent a frantic hour emptying all the stuff out of my bags and repacking two or three times until I finally admitted to myself that it just wasn't there. I went to sleep more stressed out than I like to get around little things like that. In fact, I've learned from doing these actions that I can't afford to get stressed out about things like that--the general level of stress is too high already and I don't have energy to spare for worrying about something that really I just need to deal with. But at 5 a.m., as Lisa is driving me to the airport, we are both admitting that we are pushed beyond even our considerably elastic edges and desperately need some rest. I'm hoping for a quiet evening and early bed time tonight. Whether it's Mars or menopause or lack of sleep, I don't want to keep being this irritable and snappish and it will ultimately make me less effective.

I take a taxi from the airport because I am bringing cash to the punks for their bus tickets and I don't want to risk the metro which is notorious for pickpockets and theft. When Lisa and I were here before, we got caught in a crush and she ended up with her backpack open and a hand in her pocket that was not her own--luckily, we were alert and had packed right so we didn't lose anything. I'm going to the meeting of the Mexican Space, a coordinating coalition of Mexican groups, which is being held in a union hall in a working class neighborhood of Mexico City. The driver is a sweet man who has no gender hangups about asking directions, and we ask and ask and ask: shopkeepers, old men with bad teeth, women making tortillas, policemen, other taxi drivers. No one seems to know even where the colonia, the neighborhood, in question is. But the driver is unfazed. "No te preoccupa," he smiles. "Quedar

calma. Vamos a encontrarlo." I am calm--I have in fact surrendered to a near stuperous condition, when we turn a corner and a car pulls up and asks us for directions to the same street. I recognize Carmen, one of the students who is going to the same meeting. I move my bags into their car; her friend and the driver consult a map, and I pay him, thanking him and tipping generously both because he's been so nice and because my partner at home is a taxi driver and I know that a taxi driver's lot is not a happy one anywhere in the world.

We are still asking directions when he returns and tells us with great excitement that he found the street and we should follow him. I can tell this has become a personal challenge and he is full of triumph at meeting it. We follow and finally arrive at the hall.

We're about an hour late but the meeting hasn't started yet. I unload my bags, and have time to chat with some of the other students who are there. There's Mary and Carmen and Mary Carmen, which is a bit confusing but at least they haven't all changed their names for security reasons just after I've learned them. I have time to call the punks, who belong to a group called Tierra Verde. They live way out in the slums, come from there, and form a tight banda that does art and music and radio and permaculture projects and we have raised some money to help them get to Cancun and help us with the eco-encampment.

The meeting begins with a long update on what's happening within the WTO. Sleeplessness has affected my brain and I'm in that lovely surreal state you get into when you don't totally understand a language and hear things slightly wrong, which puts you in a totally different reality. Some group was unable to reach consensus on their declaration and at first, with alarm, I'm thinking it's the campesinos but Carmen assures me it's the WTO itself, which has three different drafts on agriculture, deep divisions on issues of generic drugs and genetically modified organisms, and is not doing nearly as good a job of resolving their political differences as we are. The rest of the meeting is about logistics and plans and organizing and I am glad to be there to give a bit of an on-the-ground report of the organizing in Cancun, even though my Spanish has now devolved into slow motion. Though the Mexicans start meetings late, they are brisk and efficient at facilitating them--unlike, say, the Italians who adore meetings, love political discussion, never seem to get enough of it, and will happily go on discussing and meeting through the night if left to themselves.

Two of the punks arrive to pick up the money. They are impressive, it's like receiving a visitation of Aztec warriors who've decided to get themselves up in contemporary gear. Chiwy, with his bronzed bare arms and aquiline nose, could have stepped off a stele. Luis is solid, with a square, indigenous face. They are both in black, jeans and tank tops adorned with patches they've printed themselves, black and white political art and slogans, along with studs and chains and big black boots. We go find a private space and I hand over the money, feeling like I should be getting something illicit and mind-altering in return for so much cash. But bringing the punks down to Cancun will have its own consciousness-altering quality, and I'm really thrilled they can come and connect with our permaculture team from the north. It's now after three, I haven't had anything to eat yet except some strange egglike substance on the plane and a bit of black coffee, so Carmen and I go out into the neighborhood and I get enchiladas mole for under \$3. The neighborhood is full of small, concrete shops and houses and little stands selling tacos and fruit and cheap clothes and all the other necessities of life, and we walk over to the metro and ride down to Coyoacan where I will stay with Carmen's cousins. The central area of Coyoacan is a remnant of old Mexico, with a beautiful plaza and lovely, old colonial buildings and museums. It's not too far from the university and full of students and cafes and upscale little restaurants and well-kept parks, and I only wish I wasn't so very tired and could go visit the Frieda Kahlo museum at the house where she lived. But I am tired and deeply grateful for an interval of semi-luxury in a beautiful small apartment with dark wood floors and real art on the walls, kilims and carved chests and painted furniture, and a wide-screen TV where the cousins are watching "Lord of the Rings" with Spanish subtitles. Tomorrow will be a full day of training and a night in a gym somewhere with a pack of students probably all smoking nonstop, so I'm happy to rest while I can.

-- Starhawk

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