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Elements of Iberian and pre-columbian religious cosmology in central Meso-America

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In order to argue that contemporary performances of religious roles and theater in Middle America in fact are continuous replays of the original trauma of contact and its rehabilitation, and thus act as immanent conduits of the period of conquest and subjugation, the past sixty years of relevant anthropological texts are analyzed as discursive statements. These disciplinary archives rely on much older historical records and narratives, some of which contain ostensibly pre-Columbian accounts or descriptions. As well, anthropologists, and archaeologists with this regional specialization were interviewed concerning their understandings of culture change and conquest, and their observations regarding ethno-analogy and the interpretation of archaeological data and historical narrative. This project relies on a creative combination of sociology and anthropology to tease out the relationships amongst scientific discourse, historical narrative, and ethnographic observation. The problem that historicism renders what has been as what can only be both fragment and figment is judged to be partially assuaged by the performative interaction amongst non-Western pre-contact elements of cosmological beliefs and Western religious models of time, divinity, nature and the universe.

Key words: Cosmology, Meso-America, time, contact, conquest, Iberian.

INTRODUCTION

The problem that culture faces in the face of its own history is to come to know it anew. That what is past cannot be recreated in the same manner in which it occurred is the source of the problem that cultural memory attempts to assuage (Ardener, 1978). When cultures are subject to radical and sudden contact and violence their mortal memory, resident in the consciousness of local actors, suffers a traumatic imposition. If a newly dominant discourse rearranges power relations in its favor without regard to previous institutions or symbolic systems, the pre-contact beliefs may attempt an introspective accounting for the unwieldy presence of these new forms (Beals, 1961; Foster, 1970; Gibson, 1964; Grimes, 1976; Spicer, 1962, Spicer, 1971). Documenting such a shift in cultural performances centuries after their source material transpired is difficult (Bastian, 1975). Ethnohistory, ethnoarchaeology and other anthropological undertakings have been traditionally charged with such a task (Drucker and Gifford 1977a; Hammond and Willey, 1976; Jones, 1972; Soustelle, 1961; Spores, 1973; Tax, 1977; Thompson, 1970).

The task of representing history in Middle America appears to involve the dramatization of history as personal. In order to argue that contemporary performances of religious roles and theater in Middle America in fact are continuous replays of the original trauma of contact and its rehabilitation, and thus act as immanent conduits of the period of conquest and subjugation, the past 60 years of relevant texts are analysed as discursive statements. These disciplinary archives rely on much older historical records and narratives, some of which contain ostensibly pre-Columbian accounts or descriptions (Roys, 1967). As well, 20 anthropologists and archaeologists with this regional specialization were interviewed concerning their understandings of culture change and conquest, and their observations regarding ethno-analogy and the interpretation of archaeological data and historical narrative, some extracts of which are reproduced throughout the text and in the notes. Thus both sociology and anthropology are mustered to understand the relationships amongst discourse, history, and ethnographic observation.

A textual analysis is combined with expert ethnographic style interview. The anthropologists were treated not as a sub-culture engaging in self-definition, but as a group of authoritative voices attempting to define and analyze the cultural groups within their own ethnographic ambit, that is, as Middle Americanists. On the one hand, the analysis of texts proceeds in a temporally displaced fashion, mimicking the displacement we find in the Meso-American contact and religious rituals. One accesses what would formerly in fact be ethnographic statements through the now 'serious' discourse of a specific intellectual history.

On the other hand, the transcription gleaned from actual contact with experts in the field who are interviewed, is now in the process of becoming contemporary versions of, or additions to, that self-same discourse. This methodological facet mirrors the Meso-American cultures' attempts to ingratiate living beings with a past that is not exactly their own. The actual methodological process was dialogic, in that statements found in the texts served as conversation starters for interviews, and commentaries from interviews were used to interpret the body of texts at hand.

The dialogue between text and voice also mirrors that between living cultural activity and the knowledge or culture memory of tradition. The problem that historicism renders what has been as what can only be both fragment and figment is judged to be partially assuaged by the performative interaction amongst non-Western pre-contact elements of cosmological beliefs and Western religious models of time, divinity, nature and the universe. It remains the case, however, that what history may have been, or what it actually was, can maintain its relevance and meaningfulness for living human beings only through the confrontation with tradition (Gadamer, 1976).

In this case, such dialectic occurs most transparently within the ritual performances of 'folk belief' systems throughout Central Meso-America. Such public and role driven theater is present in all cultures, but its special task in the case of the successors to the Columbian conquest is to continuously restore the balance between non-syncretic elements of very different, and sometimes conflicting, traditions (Beatty, 2006; Brandes, 1998; Crumrine, 1976; Madsen, 1967; Megged, 1999; Stockett, 2005). The fact that a culture or civilization can lose itself in another if it does not practice ritual transfiguration and insulation makes such a cultural activity a matter of life and death.

Social change and discursive shifts

Only certain kinds of events are allowable as speech acts or role performances within specifically bounded phenomenological spaces (Abrahams, 1986; Hastrup, 1978). These spaces of culture production and reproduction

have the inertia of inherited tradition as their touchstones. Actors voluntarily coerce themselves to perform within the spaces allotted to them. This commonplace situation is in stark contrast to that in which one culture violently attempt to impose a new discourse and thus new boundaries upon a previous belief system.¹ The former scene describes the ongoing rehabilitation of a 'lost' culture - that of the pre-Columbian civilizations and their hinterlands in Central Meso- America - and the latter conjures the historical sources or motivations for these continuously contemporary performances. That the meaningfulness for local persons of role and theatrical performances, as well as religious rituals, does not need to address or be entirely conscious of either the structure of language and symbol to remain relevant is well known (Iglesias, 1984; Joyce, 2004; Webber et al., 1985).² For anthropology, however, discursive meaning is constructed by comprehending the relationship between the histories of a culture and its current incarnations. If these conflict at some profound level - as would a culture which had undergone a radical loss of meaning at some point in history and the current day to day subsistence and resistance to further losses both material and symbolic - the relationship anthropology would have to seek is one of an 'archaeological' nature, full of fragments and partially mute tongues, impassive monuments and occult hieroglyphs.³

The successors to the peoples who underwent genocide and cultural transformation are not necessarily inheritors of a tradition in the sense that they have a privileged manner in which to reach around their own history and recover what had been taken from them. All of us, as mortal beings, know this existential problem as the personal frustration of partial memory and inability to entirely return to one's past self. To be a descendant and

¹ The degree of violence varied according to the convenience or inconvenience of the indigenous traditions in the eyes of their conquerors. D'Ambrosio (1977) notes that the scientific and mathematical achievements of the Maya and other civilizations, including their applied work in engineering and astronomy were discussed with interest and sometimes amazement by the early chroniclers, and their suppression or destruction was often not seen as relevant to the dual mission of either gold or souls.

² "Most behavior is socialized habit. Only the social scientist and perhaps a few others consciously and systematically question the motives and structures of social action. Having culture is not an exercise in going to the gallery or opera. This is very commonplace in any anthropological textbook. But what is interesting about Meso-America is that for these people, to have their culture means to make an art of it, or to engage very consciously in artistic representation of mythic history. It is almost if what is semi-conscious in one's action in the day to day is brought to light as a stunning contact with the sacred, just as the events of the actual contact and conquest were stunning and in part, fulfilled the native myths." (from interview, anthropologist).

³ "Nowhere else in the world is the contiguity between anthropology and archaeology so close as in Meso-America, or Middle America if you are an ethnographer. Here, we really do need each other, because the past is the present and the present in the past in a unique manner, given the Mayan and other groups' mythic cycles. we can more likely see living history in this region than in most others around the world. But we do have to avoid the pitfall of thinking that those who are living are only akin to their ancestors, especially since the 1970s or so." (from interview, archaeologist).

yet not an inheritor is the common lot of both cultures and persons who are forced to lose themselves in order to live on.

In this context, this research asks 'how does experience relate to text?', and 'how does it precede discourse?' (Bruner, 1986a). That is, what can we know of pre-contact elements of the religious life in the first regions of the Columbian conquest, and how has this record, both historical and ethnographic, been turned into part of the anthropological discourse? By comparing Iberian Peninsula ritual practices with those of Central Meso-America, as well as noting when they appear in the historical record either through narrative accounts or archaeological interpretation, an argument can be made regarding their contemporary relevance (Burkhart, 1988; Christian, 1981).

This relevance occurs both at the level of the personal experience of cultural actors in these regions, but also at the level of a scientific object. Experience is not merely subjective, but is shared in its meaning and perception. The object of science is not only abstract, but lends credence to the outsider's understanding of what can be observed ethnographically.

Yet the scientific object is also constructed throughout the research process. Though it is typical that both ethnographers and archaeologists study what they might experience ahead of time - previous field records of both current and ancient sites, for example - it is also quite common that their own subsequent experience 'in the field' changes their perceptions of what had constituted history. Indeed, it is argued here that the primary function of public ritual, cosmological performance, as well as ethnographic fieldwork and archaeological excavation is to maintain the ongoing relevance of historical events while at the same time assuaging our collective anxiety about loss and the process of mourning (Bruner, 1986b on such a function of narrative in general).⁴

To be able to join again with a community that acts to maintain itself in spite of loss and partial memory is part of the anthropologist's rehabilitation of the problem of social and personal change. The gradual decomposition of the material record of cultural presence and continuity is partially arrested by the work of archaeology, and thus it too has a specific and important role to play in both revealing the past as it may have been, and keeping what cannot now ever again be present part of our collective self-understanding. The dual character of creation and

destruction is self-evident in both. What overcomes loss is the recreation anew of what was imagined to have occurred.⁵ The performance of contiguous elements of both the indigenous and Iberian religious life in contact Central Meso-America as well as in contemporary Middle America more widely is the local means by which history itself is given meaning and people can live on in spite of their histories.

This tension is felt all the more if contact amongst cultures is violent and calculated. When two cultures collide, there will likely be a variety of nodes of similarity that both groups will attempt to use to on the one hand, maintain culture as it would have been without the shock of conquest, or to attempt imposition of what is judged by the newly dominant culture to be superior in form and content, on the other. In contact Central Meso-America, this process contained both dialogue and dialectic. There was but partial success on both sides, and some elements thought to be vanquished by the Spaniards survived relatively unscathed, while many of a civilization's traditions, thought to be impregnable and superior by the Aztecs and their relatives for example, succumbed quickly to the foreign intrusions. The sense that there is merely a Spanish overlay of religious ritual and vocabulary mapped on top of the whole and enduring cloth of pre-Columbian cosmology is ill-equipped to address the problem of performance and meaning, heightened by the our recent experience of neo-colonialism and globalization as well as by our personal experience of the accelerated pace of cultural change in our own lives.

Rather, it is argued here that motifs that could be mutually interchangeable between the two sets of traditions guided the historical process of a non-syncretistic series of protracted religious performance and ritual which has proved to be of mutual cosmological satisfaction, if not at all satisfactory to the indigenous cultures in any other more material realm (Clendinnen, 1980; Crumrine and Macklin, 1973; Jimenez and Smith, 2008; Radding, 1998; Wilk, 1985).

There is also a sense that 'belief's somehow need not be responsible for material quality of life. It is well known that Catholicism adapts itself to local traditions while at the same time preserving its official authority concerning things sacred (Crumrine and Macklin, 1974). That these offices of authority are subject to regular and sometimes highly resistant or dynamic transformations - from the rural animistic 'saints' in the period of contact to the rural roots of Liberation Theology (Richards, 1985; Wasserstrom, 1978a) - is also well documented throughout the ethnographic and archaeological regions in question. The pragmatism of the local priests is a simple manifestation of the lack of insulation between

⁴ "We are all trying to reinvent ourselves so that we can better look at the image in the mirror the next morning. When I go to [Central Meso-America], I am not looking at my usual mirror. I want there to be a sense that change for the better is occurring for people to whom change has historically only been, and mythically, can only be, the same thing - more suffering and just plugging along. I do not want to think of myself in the same way, and thus I try to project some of my aspirations into the field, which is inherently a space of ritual anxiety for ethnographers, even if it is at the same time a space of reality and love." (from interview, anthropologist).

⁵ We will see that this is precisely the function attributable to the Mayan performances of cyclical myth.

would be converts and converters and the process of conversion itself: "It is rather like doing fieldwork. The anthropologist wants to be converted by the native without becoming a native. I want to know the culture as if I were from it, but those teaching me know I am not and never can be. What this does to the knowledge at stake is sometimes anyone's guess." (from interview, anthropologist). The centers of doxa are so precisely because of the presence of institutionally and historically weighted insularity: "The farther I get from the academy, the more uncertain everything becomes!" (from interview, anthropologist). That even science persists due to mostly favorable public opinion (Durkheim, 2003) reminds us that in the presence of mixed or hostile public opinion, ideas must lend themselves to the ears of the unconvinced. In the case of radical culture contact, one is never quite preaching to the converted.

Nodal similarities in space and time and their function

The events that an ethnohistory seeks to bring together are in constant flux both with regard to their analogues and taken discretely as either narrative history and archaeological data or ethnographic observation and contemporary indigenous account. The researcher activates the archive anew. It speaks differently than before (Ardener 1978, Hastrup 1978). Yet the researcher also encounters the cultural actors anew, and asks them to speak as they *had* in fact spoken before.⁶ Yet due to the changing discourse of the sciences and the fashionable politics of our society and those others around us, neither the living nor the dead can speak as they once perhaps did (Loewen, 2006). Even so, the creation of a new worldview made up of modifications of previous traditions which had yet to encounter one another⁷ - in a like manner as does the scientist modify his or her findings in the light of new data - cannot be taken for something once present, and is not analyzable strictly as a set piece, as if folk Catholicism, for example,

⁶ "We always go into the field [down there] and tell them, just keep going normally as if we were not here, you know? of course this is naive. Even physics has an 'observer effect'. So what they do is perform in part for us, and it gives us, and thence anthropological discourse in general, the sense that life as a native is constantly enriched with symbolism, ritual and performances of kinds diverse and sundry. Well, not quite. It is just like showing a new friend around your hometown, and especially a new lover. there is a heightened self-expectation that this time is a special one, and that it may not come again. this sense is indeed ameliorated by the cyclical notions around there, but not entirely." (from interview, anthropologist).

⁷ Hence Crumrine and Machlin (1974) suggests that he 'structural power' of the Easter ritual lies in its ability to mediate between the anthropological analysis of the ceremony and the local traditions therein represented. Sometimes this has been called 'explanatory power', though nothing is really being explained by the ritual. Its origins and its persistence lie in the process of performance itself, and there is nothing didactically historical about either its social function location.

were any one thing at any one time:

"Nothing could be more false than to see in the analysis of discursive formations an attempt at totalitarian periodization, whereby from a certain moment and for a certain time, everyone would think in the same way, in spite of surface differences, say the same thing...and produce a sort of great discourse that one could travel over in any direction (Foucault 1972:148)."

That Foucault's brand of 'archaeology' attempts to reveal a homogenous level of bounded statements emanating from a specific 'region of discourse' - in itself a melange of competing meanings and conflicting interpretations brought together by the discursive function of an authoritative institution such as science or history - suggests that there are nodal similarities that tie otherwise contrary or perhaps even mutually incomprehensible statements together in a fluid matrix.⁸ At the same time, where recognizable nodes do appear within these specific worldviews - the tree and the cross, or the sun and the Christ, for example - comprehension occurs not of the other concept per se, but of the other as affirming the home idea. One already has the mythic interpretations one needs, and thus can apply them to both interlocutor and interloper.

The sense that myth both promotes structure over personality and foregrounds society as a kind of solidarity before the individuated roles that character might play within it, suggests that at the level of mythic narrative there may well be much in common between very disparate traditions, even those which come into contact in a novel and violent manner due to geographical distance and technological difference. The 'static' appearance of myth allows it to represent a time out of time, even if the major trope in the cycle is the nature of time itself, as in the case of the Maya (Bricker, 1981; Farriss, 1987; Gifford, 1977b). Here, temporal units are reaffirmed in their inertial relevance simply by being retold with new labels, old labels, or both at once. The message of the relationships amongst these units is of the greatest import, as it involves living beings in the destiny of the cosmos and connects ourselves with those others who have fulfilled this common fate before us, indeed, also counting on us both literally and figuratively, to follow through and do the same.

The consistency of symbolic action in the domain of discourse allows us passage through the liminal events which might be seen as potential saboteurs to both narrative and history: "Doing fieldwork in a culture where

⁸ Further, "Archaeological study is always in the plural...operat[ing] on great numbers of registers...[but] comparison is always limited and regional. Far from wishing to reveal general forms, archaeology tries to outline particular configurations." (Foucault 1972:157).

people maintain their relationship with history through a kind of performed immanence is a little like living with a whole bunch of St. Paul's, everyone looking over their collective shoulder for the apocalypse." (from interview, anthropologist). If the art of mythic life represents the lives of cultural actors, with all of the vicissitudes of living-on as mortal beings as their constant shadows, then the ambiguity of liminal space must in its own way become a tropic motif. That is, the vagueness of life must need a structural item to be played with as the ever-present catalyst for meaning and purpose. Cosmology then becomes a response for happenstance, and cosmos is filled again with its source of meaning, the opposite or necessary companion to chaos. This is revealed as the 'nature of discourse' in general by all kinds of 'archaeologies', both material and symbolic (Rabinow and Dreyfus, 1985:49-50).⁹

As well, these discourses reveal their own construction by being replayed as living culture. The question of how ethnohistoric reconstruction works by replenishing mythic tradition as an abstract template for cultural performance is always first a question of structure before consciousness. Only thus can a scientific discourse hope to recognize what can be observed ethnographically as having an historical source, even if the roots of such events must ultimately be judged as less important than their fruits. No local actor would suggest that serving themselves before serving the other-world is of the moment, yet all would recognize that in propitiating the abstractions of myth, divinity and cosmos, they themselves shall also be preserved by the power of the hypostasized social. Crumrine (1966) has observed that he first came to understand differences between Mayo individuals and others who might have been unwittingly lumped into the same social class. The event of the 'sundial' is allowed in both Mayo and Mestizo discourses but symbolic value attached to the event is altered greatly. In Webber et al. (1985) the transformation of masks may have the purpose of mediating these cross-cultural tensions of interpretation which must occur in the contiguity of imposed social hierarchies. The chaotic collision of cultures during the contact and conquest period could have destroyed the cosmos as the indigenous Central Meso-American civilizations understood, but the sense that such an appearance was forecast in the mythic texts, as well as the profound assuagement of a cyclical temporality, absorbed the impact of the Spanish in a remarkably adept manner, in spite of the human and cultural sacrifices made along the way (D'Ambrosio, 1977. Burkhart's 1988 ethnohistoric analysis of the potential homologous function of the sun and the Christ, the cross and the tree, suggests that:

"Christian doctrine was 'Nahuatized' in the process of its accommodation to native categories of language and thought just as Christian personages and Christian rites took the place of the indigenous ones that most closely resembled them (ibid:235)."

Though this may have been previously interpreted as syncretic, Burkhart prefers the sense that dialogues happened between indigenas and friars, using both Biblical and Aztec texts in the same fashion as occurs in her analysis. In order to convert so many with so few, to take control of the indigenous power structure through an imposed missionizing and reeducation, the Spaniards conscientiously and purposely converted their own representations to jibe more closely with the local traditions.¹⁰ Indeed, some of these 'fusions' bordered on heresy when compared with contemporary old world interpretations which did not encounter the radicality of cultures not directly foretold by scripture. The hermeneutical device called 'typology' was also employed by friars, as in Motolinia in 1524, as a predictor of future events that scripture was now thought to have implied. The idea of the 'lost tribes' was a convenient utility during this period.

The imposition of traditional interpretations of one's own religious worldview was necessary in many contexts. Another problem that the friars had to accommodate and massage was of course that of 'idolatry'. Yet symbols surrounding the old world Christ had similar meanings and significance as did the new world Sun. Using the Nahuatl language, missionizers were able to blend satisfactorily potentially competing images, sometimes by the creation of new words, and sometimes by stretching doctrinal definitions to encompass Nahuatl associations. One gets the sense that these circumlocutions were made more to assuage the conscience of the Spanish, mendicants or otherwise, than having the function of making the locals feel better about their new subordinate cosmological status. How was it that the invaders knew the indigenous myths better than they themselves did? How was it that they fulfilled them more powerfully, or that they could be their utter fulfillment in the cosmic cycle? (Brennan, 1979; Harvey 1980) Indeed, the idea that sun worship itself was a kind of idolatry for Sahagun and others meant that the natives needed encouragement to look beyond the level of the deity's manifestations to something more metaphysical. The

⁹ "Not that the archaeologist fails to understand statements as meaningful speech act - he is not bracketing all meaning like a structuralist or behaviorist..." (Rabinow and Dreyfus 1985:50).

¹⁰ "Let's face it, if you have a few hundred trying to control a few hundred thousand, the coincidence of disease and firepower is not going to be enough. You have to construct a system whereby the masses approach you with the anxious knowledge that you are representative of a cosmic force. Cortes got lucky on this account, in a way that seems to us almost surreal. But in general, you need to naturalize yourself as if you are more than what they are in some way. It is germane to note that the Jews never fell for this regarding the Nazis, and indeed, the latter did not even try to convince the former of their ultimate power using metaphysical means, as is well known." (from interview, archaeologist).

Nahuatl people did not abandon the sun, however, by simply referring to it as a characteristic of creation.

Hence, although some dislocations of discourse were bound to occur, the resiliency of the symbolic systems of the conquered peoples at length provided the ground for more material resistance and cultural modification. The nodes of similarity in the case of Burkhart are occasion for necessary dialogue and dialectic. Pragmatism aside, what was at stake was the Spaniard's consciousness of their own conscience, already distant and abstract given the horrors of genocide through which the mission extended itself across the Americas, and the possible compassion that those remaining could be afforded at least hypocritical protection by the new regime if they were deemed to be converted and their souls now in God's court, rather than those of the conquistadores.¹¹

Though social change and discursive shifting often leave one with a 'Batesonian muddle' of meanings, it is clear that nodal symbols, once recognized, can both perform as mediators of cosmological discrepancy as well as be performed as the mediation of temporal and cultural discontinuity. Included in the Mestizo mythic cycles one finds the elements of pacification and solidarity as interpreted by the Ladino discourse (Bricker, 1981). The Maya, however, have as their foundational tropes not only cyclical determinism but also the predictive ability of their TIME as an apical concept (Farriss, 1987; Raymond, 1977). Given this, the structural message inherently in all events regardless of actor or specific moment is said to be of ultimate import. Both Ladino and Maya conceptions telescope events to emphasize the structural relations amongst them. That these events occur cyclically and are thus predictable, allows a discourse to 'conspire to communicate' at least the semblance of plausibility to any homologous function suggested by their anthropological investigation.¹² That the order or disorder of the actual ethnographically observed actors is quite secondary to the Maya, for example, and is a mere vehicle for the profusion of allied

events which reaffirms that the cycle continues unabated and indeed abetted by the conquest is what seems to be nearest the heart of Mayan temporal constructs.

A key example of the sense that the cycle of TIME is undisturbed by radical cross-cultural contact is the 1697 fall of the Peten Itza's capital very late in the conquest. Material and logistical constraints plagued the Spaniards here, although Cortes had himself looked in on the peninsular fortress early in the contact period.¹³ Yet from the Mayan perspective, the city was destined to be destroyed that very year, as part of the culmination of a 260 year cycle, with each previous climax resulting in the same event. Apparently at least some of the Maya were 'delighted' at the fulfillment of this part of their local cosmology, though it also forlornly represented the end of truly indigenous rule in Central Meso-America.¹⁴ The year 'Katun 8 Ahau' had seen the same events in all of its previous incarnations, and this was the year that coincided with the Christian calendar's 1697. The Maya actually sent out emissaries before the battle to ask that missionaries begin the preparation for conversion (Bricker, 1981).

Neither the soldiers nor the friars knew at the time they were playing roles in an ancient script. The Lake Peten Itzans participated in their own demise, but it must be noted that in this Mayan cosmology, those actors not merely represented themselves in 1697 but *also* were homologs of all other actors, future and past, who would also correspondingly fulfill *their* structural destinies. One wonders if a similar unreported disaster overtook the Spanish center, later built on the ruins of the Mayan city, in 1957. At a larger than life level as well, the destruction of Peten Itza is also the destruction of Chichen Itza and other similar obliterations. The message is the cycle and the cycle the message. There is thus a non-Euclidean topology to the temporal worldview of the Maya and other regional groups, so that what appears to us as the telescoping of distinct historical events, which may indeed have quite different material causes, is in the native worldview a repetition which reminds one that TIME itself is the cause of all events.¹⁵

¹¹ cf. Van Zantwijk for myriad examples of the continuity of what are referred to as 'autochthonous elements' which have persisted into contemporary contexts for the Tarascans, including the votaries and those who carry duties or 'cargos'. The Aztec Witsilopchtli and St. Francis might be seen as equivalent task masters or role models in their demands (1967:230-1). The historic contact annals of Michoacan, Sahagun, and the Codice Ramirez are full of like examples: "The Aztecs had several forms of organisation, consisting of competitive elements (often dual), and resembling such organisation in the Tarascan area today, the division of chiefship into specialised internal and external responsibilities also existed in Aztec society." (ibid:233). One may question the use of the word 'resembled', however, as it is peppered throughout this part of the text.

¹² "This is the key to the problem. Are we reacting to what we observe in [Central Meso-America] as if it were some self-contained time machine, transporting both ourselves and the local peoples back through history and forward to the future while at the same time preserving everything as it had always been, except there is no time where such is as it 'had always been', for time is the eternally changing eternity. The Maya understand this better than any other people I have encountered." (from interview, anthropologist).

¹³ This was hardly the only area of ambiguity in New Spain. (Hobgood and Riley, 1977) remind us that like the Aztecs, Toltecs, and Tiahuanacoinds before them the Spaniards had immense trouble with the 'northern barbarians, and actually imported Tlaxcaltecan warriors to keep the Chicchimec border raids under control. The area was sought after due to its silver mines, and eventually was brought more firmly under the Spaniard's colonial ambit.

¹⁴ cf. Loewen 2008 for a discussion of this event in the context of competing metaphysical frameworks, and the implications for contemporary globalization. What was at stake was not divine aid but the inevitability of a destiny which was purely structural and could not be taken personally. Indeed, the Spaniards had a fully rationalized version of this idea of fate assuaging the conscience of their violent acts, and no doubt took succor from the later understanding that the locals had already been 'looking forward' to their demise.

¹⁵ cf. also Gossens (1974) for a detailed recantation of a local variant of the fulfillment of cosmic destiny through ritual performance which also has the latent function of preserving a tradition in the face of firsts colonialism, and now globalization.

Given that TIME is transcendent to being, and especially to living beings, this means that neither the Ladinos nor the anthropologists and archaeologists can participate corporeally in the playing out of mythic cycles. Their availability as actors does not mean that they have autonomy in agency.

They are not the cause of the demise of civilization, nor are they to be blamed for acting out what is, in any event, necessary. One can immediately see that the cosmology of Meso-American traditions must have eased greatly the gradually competing sense that something unreasonable and unjust had occurred.

Yet perhaps even the recent political ascendancy of resistance begun by the various 19th century revolutions upending Spanish colonial rule might be part of an ancient cycle (cf. Megged, 1991; Richards, 1985), the culture memory of which has been muted or lost through successive generations of intersubjective acculturation as well as enforced institutional education and the loss of languages of origin.

The paradigmatic set of Mayan tropes can be inserted at the appropriate cyclical space along a syntagmatic chain. Yet these motifs are not mere signifiers, as they are charged with the representing of the immanence of structural items with cosmological import. The necessity of TIME to reappear as an event within time, for example, required the Maya to accept a certain fate regarding the presence or absence of phenomena such as war, ethnic relations, agricultural motifs, or later on, pilgrimage, revitalization movements or revolution. The contiguity of 'cool' and 'hot' phenomenon which group physical and metaphorical events into categories which are strange to Western discourses - for example, female genitalia being cool and artillery explosions being hot (Bricker, 1981: 268) - is more important to the space of meaning than the sense that the Maya can reconstruct history without seeming recourse to actual events, or that 'actuality' in the empirical sense is only a convenient vehicle to be listed with any other manifestation of fated cyclical immanence.

This 'fictive kinship' relationship with history allows interpretation and representation to continue their intimate dialectic: "Do any of us do any differently? How much do you really recall of your childhood, and how accurate is your representation of sorrow or joy, the one underplayed in memory and the other exalted?" (from interview, anthropologist). Bricker reminds us that by imposing structure on experience, the researcher becomes a 'knower' due to the lense of knowing assumed by the analysis. The kind of knowledge produced is discursive and thence deductive in its relationship to further experience. Akin to prejudice or even tradition both in the hermeneutical sense, discourse is what allows the structures of the lifeworld to accept the dynamic of history, and at the same time, demands that the subjectivity of living-on be beholden to community,

society, and the cosmos.¹⁶

This set of demands suggests that how one lives in the present is more than pregnant with how ancestors lived. one's ancestral mode of being is present amongst, even within one, today. The explanation of the past in terms of the present and the downplaying of diachronous events is also detailed in Gossens (1974). In the world of the sun, ethics and aesthetics are indeed the same, though not in the same sense as Wittgenstein may have thought. The moral universe of the Chamulan Maya includes in the same category phenomena and ideas, such as light and darkness, good and evil. This is hardly unfamiliar territory for the Western observer, nor for the discourse from which anthropology has its origins. Yet the categories of good and bad extend well beyond what could be considered cultural stereotypes, while as well not being mere attempts at the denial of the other. Gossens' isomorphic features rest on sharing recognizable space and character within a number of disparate evaluative domains. The reader is placed within the geography of social life.

For example, the cross-tree and sun-Christ reappear as nodal symbols aid the Chamulan discourse's self-perception as occupying a moral high ground, with colonial power centers near 'the edge of the world', and thus far from the source of goodness itself (Gossens, 1974: 16ff). Asocial and non-cultural behaviors increase in frequency the farther one removes oneself from the Chamulan homeland. These actions are not only evident in the work of outsiders, but also infect the Chamulan who is unwary enough to depart from his or her proper abode (cf. also Brown 1981, Rosaldo 1968). This worldview dovetails well with the historical sense that barbaric acts emanate from the distance another world which is not in harmony with the other-world. Both Christian and pre-Columbian figures are shown on the Chamulan cosmological map (Gossens, 1974:23), and the vertical distance which leads to the greater good of the shining sun corresponds with the horizontal distance which leads away to the depths of darkness. Here, no attempt has been made at a syncretism (contra for example, Thompson, 1954). Perhaps an articulation of nodal symbols has not yet occurred in the illustrative representation of the cosmic order? Vogt (1969) suggests that the cross-tree, for example held no Christian significance in Zinacantan (Oakes, 1951; Zimmerman, 1963). A Cuvier like catastrophism marks the cyclical understanding of repetitive cosmogonies.

The pre-Columbian solar cycle of nineteen months is still adhered to (eighteen months of twenty days, and a final one of five, remindful of Saturnalia), and though the Catholic calendar determines the festivals, the

¹⁶ In Bricker's postscript it is admitted that when all else fails, the Maya and others adjust their calendars to take advantage of opportune events, thereby making the analogy with fictive kinship all the more appropriate (Drucker, nd).

indigenous calendar is more closely aligned with seasonal and astronomical phenomena recognized by Western scientific discourses. Space and time are defined as inseparable, also with some empirical recognizance that they are not cosmologically to be separated: "Great social distance also pushes back the relative time, so that asocial behavior eliminated language might easily still occur at the outer limits of the universe" (Gossens, 1974:29). Interestingly, the asocial and the sacred occupy the same conceptual category as both are considered 'other-worldly', beyond this-world of social beings. Yet there are numerous levels of intermediation occupied by beings akin to the saints, whose manifestations in the this-world were much more direct - Ehecatl or wind gods and Chac or rain gods for example (cf. also Brown, 1981). Similarly, the calendar's normative days were used as intermediaries between the present moment and the sacred days of fiestas etc.: "One can specify almost any day in the year by referring to stages of, or to, days before and after...fiestas." (Gossens, 1974: 31ff). Tedlock (1981) also orders curing and the interpretation of dreams within this kind of rubric.¹⁷ That individual interpretation is involved in the curing process pushes the idea of mediation of the sacred into the very being of the living, as the this-world must access the other world - as well as its abstract conflicts, given that the other world also contains the darkness of the asocial - to save *itself* from its own negative intrusiveness. The cold-hot spectrum is also highlighted as having a literal relationship with the sun or light and dark (Gossens, 1974:80-1). These rubrics also allow an oral discourse to become auto-referencing and foreshortened, so that within each narrative, a lengthy repetition of explanatory signage can be avoided for those in the know. The suggestive character of structural literary relations is of course also thus available to the virtuosi, who, in their narrative, can access the repetitive tropes without falling afoul of community illiteracy. It is through such processes that the language of the cosmos is brought home to the moral center of the living.

The social fact of living religion

Coherence, cohesiveness, and the reaffirmation of community are the characteristics of the functional

¹⁷ The Quiche Maya were observed to use four kinds of rubrics for the self-interpretation of dreams: a reverse image of actual future events, a metaphoric or metonymic representation of same, a direct representation of same, and finally as wish fulfillment or merely the wish itself as static. These rules are also employed by professional dream interpreters, and indeed, they bear close resemblance to some of our psychoanalytic rubrics, with hermeneutic inclinations and the use of metaphoric images. The interpretation of dreams is crucial to the maintenance of the local worldview and its cosmology. Evidence of this includes the sheer per capita numbers of those trained to professionally interpret dreams, at that time, an astonishing 10,000 out of a total local population of 45,000. (cf. Tedlock 1981 315ff).

solidarity that the observances of religious rituals as well as the internalized belief in abstract principles maintain (Bricker, 1985). The Durkheimian sense of the studies of nodality in Central Meso-America is self-evident, though the element of the telescoping of temporality and the dramatic performance of history anew is, if not unique, very much in the foreground in this cultural region. "Time and space form a single primordial structural reality for the Chamulas and oral tradition is a part of this reality." (Gossens, 1974: 230). The extension of living memory and living presence deep into a chthonic past allows the archiphonemic structure of oral and theatrical religious narrative to remain relevant well past the historical events that provoked the original social need for their insights. This synchrony, of both the anthropological analysis and of the telescoped Mayan history, allows the limits of a simple empirical snapshot of language, belief and practice to be avoided.¹⁸

This avoidance may also be witnessed as a local cultural maneuver. The interaction between performers and audience during the theater or oral renditions of this synchrony involves everyone in the 'inductive' origins of nodal similarities. The once audience members are transformed into performers by recognizing that they too suffer or experience the sorrow and joy of living on, and are also intimately involved with their share of both the gift and the task of living on within a cyclical imperative. Thus from the level of the performance, where the nodes of myth and life find each other in the consciousness of the local person, on to the level of discourse where the social fact of belief and action emanating from religion are seen as givens, the use of interpretation and representation inform the process from the bottom up.¹⁹

The more grotesque aspects of the conquest may

¹⁸ Gossens uses 184 examples of oral narrative both poignant and anxious, to cross-correlate the two profound conceptualizations of cosmos, space and time, as involving a necessary dialectical relationship. It may, however, be difficult to distinguish between what kinds of motifs bound such a phenomenological space and the contents which fill that space. The new context of the analysis perhaps presupposes that the old context, having not been destroyed, was somehow indistinct and even occult to the observer. The use of 'stylized transition clauses' in Chamulan oral narrative can be used as an entrance point to Gossens data set (ibid:143). These are generally used subjectively by oral performers as stalling devices, as they search their memory for the next events to recount, or something pithy to say regarding the homiletic quality of the performative histories, but they serve a different purpose objectively. Some examples juxtaposed with academic written versions may be germane: Mayan oral clauses: well, most certainly, and therefore, pay attention' - vs. our 'indeed, therefore, in other words, that is to say'. The use of such clauses also heightens the interaction between the audience and the performers - invoking suspense, fatalism, chagrin or humor - because after all, in this cosmology, *all* are part of an ongoing performance which carries them far beyond their living subjectivities *and* the intersubjectivity of all theater.

¹⁹ "Everyone is their own culture's auto-ethnographer in this sense. Who does not have to interpret even what they thought they knew, in the face of others who have an alternate worldview, or who calculate a lie to attain some end that we would not willingly support had we known the whole story. think of advertising! Or even schooling, university etc. These peoples who live [down there] have actually much less of this sort of thing to contend with, at least until very recently." (from interview, anthropologist).

never have been interpreted as radically different from the pain of all departures. Indeed, the idea that each farewell bids the beginning of a new relationship with history and with ourselves, must have eased the sense of impending apocalypse for Central Meso-American civilizations and their hinterlands during the first two centuries after contact. Certainly incorporation of like elements from foreign discourses implies the negation of difference, the addition of sameness, and the extension of an aboriginal 'holism'. The 'stones of contact' are absorbed into the 'fluid pond of discourse' (Gossens, 1974) and the inevitable ripple effect is observable in the decaying interpretations of the authority emanating from dogmatic centers as one moves from urban to rural ethnographic venues. The European contact recurs each morning, and by the end of the day, the descendents of the Maya and Aztecs are once again living in a post-conquest world. In essence, the now subaltern peoples who were the source of rule and cosmos comprehend the end times as what is both past and to come. In this recognition, cultural actors also come to grips with the mortal coil of subjective existence, which began from nothing and to which nothing is also its destination. Even a cycle has within it its own linearity. As with all sacred undertakings, one cannot tell the dancer from the dance.

This ideal of the sacred is hardly limited to its western hemisphere variety. If we turn briefly to look at Iberian constituents of Meso-American post-contact cosmology we find striking resemblance and even replication of rites and language seen in the new world. If much of this latter region's rituals and beliefs are derived from pre-contact Iberian elements intermingled with those pre-Columbian already *in situ*, it is astonishing at how good the fit amongst the elements either was originally, or has come to be over the centuries (Nolan, 1991; Peterson, 2001). Christian (1981) is now a well known ethnohistorical work to this regard. Using Philip the Second's surveys of 1575 and 1578 as archival sources, Christian is able to provide ethnographic data from a relatively early colonial period where activities in Spain may be seen to have influenced at least some or much of the conquest period, ongoing as it was during his reign. Most of those surveyed were in fact illiterate, and thus may be seen to have developed their own syncretic or folk foundations of otherwise Catholic religious practices. In the service of the counter-reformation and even the notorious inquisition, Spanish authorities must have encountered much diversity that was perhaps underplayed in later official reports.

The systematic interest in local religious practices is a first in Western history, although only two of a total of ninety surveys completed over the three year period address this issue. The responses of rural Iberian practitioners, including church officials, bears remarkable similarity to those documented after the first wave of missionization had taken hold in the new world, suggestive of either co-evolution of practices related to

common modes of subsistence or social organization, or that the friar's reports on their new world success were hyperbolized in some manner (Nolan, 1973; Miles, 1957). The idioms that are used by Iberian informants are the same as one would see in any ethnographic work - 'it is the custom', 'it is very old', 'it is the tradition here' etc - and exposed the exotic of the agrarian peasant down the road inasmuch as it translated the behaviors of those on the other side of the earth. Once reported to more central authorities, some of these exotica prompted the Vatican to set new standards for what could constitute a miracle, a vision, or a divine intervention amongst others. Critics like Erasmus had famously charged that the bankrupt appearance of the Roman religion was in part due to the multiplicity of fakes, many contrived by the church itself. Luther himself began his experiment in religious reformation with the sense that what he had seen in Rome had fully departed from the gospel's spirit. It is not surprising then, with local folk Catholicism so diverse and seemingly strange to official practice, that what passed for pre-contact religion when encountered by missions might well be more familiar than chroniclers had first exclaimed (Kubler, 1981; Nicholson 1971).

Indeed, the major revulsions of the earliest Spanish narratives come *not* from rural religious practices but of the apparent excesses of urban grand ritual, the famed pyramids of skulls, cannibalism, and the quite literally heart wrenching human sacrifices on the tops of the monumental city architecture. The tacit sanction given by authorities in Europe to the hinterlands' interpretations of truth and cosmos must have had an influence on the way missions were performed during the same time period in the new world. Indeed, during the late sixteenth century, and once again as a direct response to the new challenge in the north of Europe, Christ was beginning to ascend to His modern status as a figure of worship, though before Mary and the saints were often more important, as they are often to this day in Latin America.

There was a historical and political catalyst to these actions which is seldom recognized. Freed from the competition of Protestantism while in the new world, and eager to capture an entirely new and unexpected franchise of believers to which the nascent Protestant sects would have no access for at least two centuries or more, friars in Central Meso-American and elsewhere no doubt were able to spread the word as it had been spread previously in Spain: i.e. the saints could maintain their ascendant status (Brown, 1981). By acting as guises of local deities, rather than as substitutions or outright supplantations, the saints continued their local dominance over festivals and ritual. Even Jesus is often seen more as another saint than necessarily the unique source of redemption, a culture trait that often puzzles, and sometimes scandalizes, the northern believer (cf. Konrad 1991, and Marcos 1992 for a different context). As with the content of Table 1 above, other items such as

Table 1. Summary of the presence and distribution of cosmological elements and performances with their possible translocatory value.

Events	Spain		Meso-America		'Translocatory value'	
	National	Local	Pre	Post	Higher	Lower
1. pilgrimage	X	X	X	X	X	-
2. shrines	X	X	X	X	X	-
3. shrine keepers	X	X	X	X	X	-
4. fiestas	(X)	X	?	X	X	-
5. holy days	X	X	X	X	-	X
6. images	(X)	X	X	X	X	-
7. divination	-	X	X	X	-	X
8. natural modifications	-	X	-	-	-	X
9. propitiations	-	X	X	X	X	-
10. relics	X	X	?	X	X	-
11. devotional geography	-	X	X	X	-	X
12. cofradias	-	X	?	X	X	-
13. tree (of...)	-	-	X	X	(X)&	-
14 cross	X	X	-	-	(X)	-
15. virgin birth	X	X	X	X	-	X
16. curing	-	X	X	X	X	-
17. 'sun'	-	-	X	X	(X)&	-
18 Christ	X	X	-	X	(X)	-
19. baptism	-	X	X	X	X	-
20. cleanliness	-	X	X	X	X	-
21. abstentions	-	X	X	X	X	-
22. penance	X	X	-	X	X	-
23. dualism	X	X	-	(X)	-	X
24. transforms	-	-	X	X	-	X
25. dialectic	-	-	X	X	-	X
26. simultaneity	X	X	-	-	-	X

Notes : 8 refers to accepted intrusions on the part of a non-theistic nature. 11 refers to mythic place or landscape. 13 and 14 ,as well as 17 and 18, may be contiguous and interpreted one for the other. 23 refers to the discreteness of force or mythic figure. 24 refers to transformation mythology where one being is changed into another and not a mere cohabitation of forms of being. 25 refers to the cycle of eternal return and the tension its set for the present day. 26 refers to the doctrines of the one in the many, such as the trinity.

votives, sacred drama, origin myths, and sacred/profane dichotomies are common to both, although different in their specific content. This fact furthers the argument that nodal translocations at the level of structure took place, and not full-blown substitution of credo and practice. The inclusion within the allegorical performances of new items that take into account natural disasters as well as the events of the conquest are interpreted in the calendrical manner that we have already seen, but in Iberia, this new content appears as original and as an addition to previous narratives, even if the reasons for the occurrence of both good and evil would have remained structurally the same. If one can police behavior but not belief, this situation would have been at least satisfactory to the friars in Central Meso-American contexts, as well

as those who ventured out the of the large centers in much of Europe during the same historical period. One can imagine officials and their narratives as bearing less upon local practices, and thus also scrupulously being able to avoid contamination from them.

Yet there are also apparently conspicuous additions to the arsenal of religious behaviors during post-conquest and early contact periods in the Maya-Aztec regions. These include the introduction of fiestas, relics, and religious brotherhoods (Nolan, 1991). These *cofradías* of course were often modeled on Aztec societies, as Van Zantwijk (1967) has shown, and the idea of the fiesta supplanted other kinds of rituals. The sense of the relic might have found a home in the heart of the Nahua or Maya person through the sense that graven images were

vehicles of the sacred, or put persons in touch with another world in some oblique manner, and were thus requiring of some form of propitiation.²⁰ Even here then, one cannot be entirely certain that Spanish cultural elements are foundational to present practices in once Spanish colonies (Low, 1995 and Nutini 1988, as well as Oakes 1951 for diverse contexts of similar ambiguity). It is not even certain from our contemporary perspective, that *pre-Columbian* elements corresponded to the way in which *pre-contact* social life actually occurred or how it was managed by officials, nor how it may have been hypostasized as a general worldview or cosmology. These are problems that may not have an anthropological or sociological solution. Whatever the brute empirical case may be, it is clear that the translocatory value of both pre-Columbian and pre-contact Iberian religious elements is strong on both sides.

This negotiation of sacred value its ritual markers was not facilitated without painstaking work on the part of the Franciscans who, as stated above, learned Nahuatl as well as the Aztec cosmological architecture in order to impart the Christian soteriologies (Burkhart, 1986). In spite of the overlaps, fundamental differences in worldview were also revealed by such a process, thwarting a more orthodox conversion. Most importantly, the analytic distinction between good and evil, which in Christendom is usually held as binary and discrete; that is, the ultimate good meant the expulsion of all evils. This opposition was not seen as dialectical by the mendicants, but for the locals, forces or concepts such as good and evil were necessary companions which were never in absolute denial of one another. There was rather a 'yin-yang' effect of elements of good laying in evil ground or the opposite. Chaos was not always bad, order not always good. The Nahua sense of the moral life meant staying away from too strictly defining absolutes, and taking all in moderation. The hot/cold continuum is one such rubric. Too much indulgence in 'moral' acts, as was seen in the Christian teachings, might indeed lead to a lack of balance in the cosmic or temporal structure. When all is predestined in a cycle, there would have to be negative events to bring these cycles to a close and thus enable their new beginnings. The moderating and mediating process posited by the Nahua worldview was originally a major point of disarticulation between it and the new influence. This structural difference could have been fatal for any syncretic truth to be established, and suggests that rather than true fusion, as contiguity of beliefs developed which was convenient for both sides:

...opposites complement each other, existing in an overarching unity or synthesis. They cannot be reduced

to an opposition between positive and negative. They contain elements of each other...Christianity tended to assert unity by denying rather than incorporating the second element. (ibid: 38-9).

By virtue of the use of the oratorical devices of Nahua nobles, missionaries attempted to make their kerygma metaphoric, without falling into the apparently ironic traps of idolatry and immoderation. Yet although Burkhart suggests the results were quite 'boring', the content communicated in fact merely served to reinforce the native's beliefs. The missionaries' audiences had little reinterpretation to do. Examples of these more or less transparent linkages abound: baptism was likened to dirt, filth, and the cleansing of bodily secretions.

Even so, ideas such as the pre-reformation trinity, metaphysically disputed in Europe, found deaf ears amongst the indigenous peoples. The Nahua and Maya had deities who could transform themselves, appear in various manifestations and assert their influence from a variety of quarters or social contexts. There was no need for them to occupy the same site as different forms. The simultaneity of the trinity was incomprehensible: "Why would you exchange a deity that had to be one to be more than one, for ones that could be more than one with no originary limit? It's kind of like saying the divided self is better than the taking on of social roles. With the latter, you can always at least pretend to come back to your true self." (from interview, anthropologist). Religious practice, as it moves from the pragmatic to the theosophical, loses nodal articulation and becomes more abstract. The distance between metaphysical elements was not as threatening in this sphere. By also constructing new words in Nahua that appeared to fuse native conceptions and their own, the Spaniards were at least able to convince themselves that conversion had occurred. Metaphors such as sickness as sin and the curing of sickness as absolution from sin were also relatively successful vehicles of communication. The real ethnicides provoked from actual illnesses - occurring in the 1520s and to be repeated from 1576-9 - were rather less successful metaphorically.

Whatever the result of disease vectors, the survivors still had to be come to terms with. The Friars were hardly above the more manipulative fictions of violent theater and gruesome artwork, however, some of which may still be seen in Michoacan. Fear was an all the more direct emotion given the radicality of the conquest and the loss of the security of urban home rule. Even so, the shedding of orthodoxies was finally the path chosen or imposed on the mission in order to give itself an ultimately laudatory self-report (ibid: 231).²¹

²⁰ Wasserstrom (1978a) comments on their exchange in the form of saints. It is plausible these networks of exchange are originally pre-contact and the objects of exchange thence would have less memorial or mnemonic content than the alliances built by the process of the exchanges.

²¹ To this point Spicer deadpans, "What becomes meaningful is probably a function of the oppositional process. Where the pressures are focused in the cultural repertoire of the people, there the symbols and their meanings are

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Within the attempted reflexivity of this investigation it has been shown that what have in the past been called social relations have performative and inter-representational levels exhibiting a particular discursive function. If discourse is said to be a fluid matrix of bounded phenomenological spaces to be filled by the individual at a shared level of meaning in an intersubjective context, then a discursive function is what delimits the possibility of this or that content of what can be shared. Performances or even individual thoughts may be said to fill or color this space in a particular manner often defined by the dominant discourse.²² Many events, however, stretch the limits of this 'boundedness', thereby creating the means of a new culture at least in the abstract sense. It has also been shown that such a process of culture creation, in the minds of some analysts, could take place only through the destruction of an older order, ideal, or creation. The present analysis suggests, indeed, that the very borrowing of Mayan or Aztec philosophical and cosmogonical elements creates new parallels amongst them, abstracted from the local cultural contexts. The discourse of anthropology benefits directly from its object, and the episteme of which it is an aspect is put into a kind of dialectical tension with the alternate tradition. The process of syncretism is similar, as the anthropological analytic has its own articulations with others surmised to exist, re-presented through other texts.

It is possible that within the object of the investigation a multiplicity of discourses are extant, including other articulations that either are created out of traditional elements not originally in contiguity with one another, or have been occluded by the confrontations with traditions, those which any cultural contact must put at risk. In order that they be understood in the present inevitably suggests that they find a home in the etic discourse of anthropology. As such, the nodes of similarity posited to exist 'between' discursive matrices also have another fold to navigate, the hinge between the object of discourse and the analysis which emanates from confrontation anew. If this is seen as a 'level of event', this would constitute a kind of phenomenological horizon,

brought into the identity system, and these pressures change as the interests of the dominant peoples change." (1971:798).

²² Gifford (1977a and b) suggests that the Maya as well, through the two-level system linking rural and urban centers, manifested an architectural landscape that reached back in time when the pyramids were natural landforms such as mountains, and forward to the future, when smaller centers envisaged themselves as becoming the large urban metropolises now long abandoned. From the very bowels of these city edifices were spoken the prophecies which were more empirical accounts than futuristic visions. These role-players were not seers in the usual sense, but those with the knowledge of the cycles of the cosmos. Disbelief in the efficacy of their renditions, and concomitant reluctance to accept the cities rule, is cited as a reason for the Post-Classical collapse. Similarly, (Howry, 1977) notes that the product of 'invisible exchange' were used to prepare for or at least envisage a new and final form, where the smaller becomes the larger etc.

emblazoned with historicism. One can distance oneself from such a boundary if the 'pre-structuralist' ethnographic undertaking be adhered to, with its accompanying understanding of the 'ground' of textuality and archive being the *in situ* empiricities of ethno-history and ethnoarchaeology. Critical thought itself is always revolutionary to the schema of traditional representation. If one cannot know the past empirically as we know the moment of the present, then what is past must be seen as a likeness of certain kinds of presence, and this presence and its analyses are dominated not by critique but by what tends to withstand the immanence of thought.²³ Analogies rather than homologies present the first problem for comparing elements of this kind. Long since abandoned as self-fulfilling prophecy, the mere iteration of likeness holds within it the ultimate weakness of any search for origins. What can occur today in the field is no doubt linked historically with what the record may have observed, or what it may hold within the earth, but these archival traces can only be read in light of what persons accomplish in the present, with their traditions as they can know them.

Aside from the question of knowledge - what did pre-contact peoples know as their tradition and ritual, myth and belief as juxtaposed with what appeared as part of the conquest and the cultural genocide - the sense that one would also have to confront the problem of structure and overlay makes more murky any analysis (for a painstaking attempt at avoiding this problem, see Wasserstrom, 1978b). The textual analysis of the previous seven decades of work in this area suggested a new angle. Spanish and indigenous, though not monolithic entities, were seemingly different enough relative to each other to be homogenous in each other's eyes. This in fact was not the case. Both now appear to have multiple levels of expression, with the ability to inure themselves toward each other involving inter and intra-differential manifestations on the ground.

Yet there were also encountered similarities, assumed before studying local Iberian religion, beset by a new set

²³ Derrida famously notes: "Ethnology - like any other science - comes about within the element of discourse. And it is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he wants to or not - and this does not depend on a decision on his part - the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed in denouncing them. This necessity is irreducible; it is not a historical contingency. [] But if nobody can escape this necessity, and if no one is therefore responsible for giving in to it, however little, this does not mean that all the ways of giving in to it are of an equal pertinence. The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigor with which this relationship to the history of metaphysics and inherited concepts is thought. here it is a question of a critical relationship to the language of the human sciences and a question of a critical responsibility to the discourse. It is a question of putting expressly and systematically the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of the heritage itself." (Derrida, 1978:252). This critical auto-distanciation is the confrontation with tradition that is the home of the hermeneutical endeavor.

of conditions after looking at pre-Columbian texts in tandem with those of the post-conquest. Two or more discourses may be said to have merged, but not in any patently syncretistic manner. The tendency observed here is one of a new creation, rather than the assumption or condition of impossibility of retaining any kind of space bounded wholly by the previous unaltered traditions. Indeed, whether contact is radical or tepid, these 'original' discourses of religious elements slowly change within their own ambits. A new discursive space which takes into account Iberia, the pre-contact Central Meso-America and the anthropological lense is no mere way of a folk religion. This hall of mirrors is also the effect of the mutability of recording and archive over a period of half a millenia or more. The performances of ritual and myth must take to a new set of stages, one in which illusion and disillusion have become hallmarks, and from which one can exeunt only with the intention of forsaking the quest for origins for one of the vision of resilience.²⁴

Central Meso-America is rapidly altered by the iterative function of an historical accounting. The nodal articulations amongst the once discrete elements can only be furthered by the newly constructed discursive boundedness. Later transmissions created nodal hinterlands, as the receding centers of the new authority, military, political and religious, left the atmosphere with more indigenous clarity, or at least, with a more unmolested understanding of what now had to be done to get along. Communication could not be called dialogic in this kind of space, where a hierarchy of technology and of purpose took the place of rural-urban reciprocity. Such a process, which must have recurred many times over the generations succeeding the conquest and ever expanding to the north and the south of the original events, also re-occurs in any present analysis of such events and their records. In doing so, it undermines the methods of recovering such events.

Hence what is lost is not simply found, but recreated as a 'finding', with its loss part of its historical pedigree.²⁵ Artifact, texts, even observed actions within the ethnographic fields are the more valuable, and perhaps the more valid, if they can establish themselves as a

mimesis of origins. The archive, once assumed to be in stasis, was nevertheless only able to become a record of previous events when activated by a new comparative lense, enlivened by the sense that what it contained could not be contained, and what constituted the containers of cosmology were more akin to flesh and blood of the mythic cycles. Their history had an end, and history was thus at an end. The sense that the apocalypse for Central Meso-America had come and gone, and that life as a mere shadow of itself was now to be suspended on the hooks and levers of a foreign worldview, allowed the resistance to true syncretism to flourish. Once again, one cannot legislate belief, even if one can attempt to police behavior. Existence must now proceed to be based near the water's edge of its opposite, the tumult of conquest and the torpor of occupation.

If there is within this analysis an ascending hierarchical relationship formed by thought, performance, act, statement and event respectively, each of which modifies in some small manner the entire structure, one might also show that within each kind of cultural context - the Easter ritual or a Saint's fiesta, a divinatory rite, 'heart sacrifice', crucifixion, baptism or wake - the plurality of 'archaeologies' involved in comprehending elements transfigured and transformed through their very use and the language used to communicate them as embodying a shared meaning, partly imposed and partly autochthonous, cast the very process of analysis as a latter day colonizer.²⁶ One must take over the field of comparisons, one must lay bare the ground of origins, and thence one must reconfigure the basis of understanding. Here, no 'standing under' the event of history is complete without the over-belief animated by the dominance of certain neo-colonial methodologies; ethno-history and archaeology. The levels of assumption being relatively homogenous amongst the actors inter-relating in specific kinds of cultural contexts provide the understated persistence of Pre-Columbian tropes. Can these be separated or identified as pure forms today? As an event or even intent, their individual histories cannot be known ethnographically. Generally, the non-literate populations of rural Iberia and Central Meso-America do not themselves compare their practices with those documented over the centuries, either by their conquerors or their anthropologists.²⁷ This dichotomy of spaces of

²⁴ This is indeed what one needs do as a living being as well: "I cannot see any difference between the function of auto-history and memorialization in Meso-America and what the denizens of any culture in transition around the world - and what culture is not now in transition in this way? - must do in order to forget the unforgettable, and forgive the unforgivable." (from interview, anthropologist).

²⁵ "What archaeologists do is assume something is out there that has been 'lost', and because of this new occult status, the demand that it must be found takes on a kind of moral exhortation. Failure to expose findings permits the bad conscience the present has with regard to the past to continue to vex us. The adventure then is not one of recovery of the lost civilization, but a rehabilitation of our relationship to mortal memory. History is something that occurs in the present, and what may have occurred to create our sites of excavation is subject to what we know is occurring in our own political lives, which are increasingly intercultural and ideological, as in the claim of the 'end of history'. (from interview, archaeologist).

²⁶ "We have to really beware of repeating the conquest by ethnographically over-analyzing these cultures, as they have long been sources for European romance. Did you know there were 'Club Med' like resorts in Meso-America in the mid-nineteenth century? Apart from the climate, there was this sense of exotic and romantic adventure where the natives ere not as likely to take a shot at you as in other tropical regions of the time. Still today, apparently." (from interview, anthropologist).

²⁷ 'Informants' notoriously avoid formal philosophizing about their cultural traditions: "No one there is going to sit you down and explain their metaphysics to you as if living in Meso-America were merely an exercise in fulfilling the structures of the cosmos. They do indeed think they must fulfill them but do so

discourse has all but disappeared in textual analysis, but this is precisely due to the ability of the 'text' to write its own history anew. Living beings also have this power, but it is limited by the inertia of living history.

Because living beings confront themselves in and as historical memory, both as biographies and through cultural narratives, the mechanism of confrontation within and with traditions cannot be reduced to any atomic model. The elements themselves are not hardened beyond the point of impregnation by some different cultural context. While beliefs do die hard, belief as a series of interacting historicities attains its longevity due to its fluid character. Perception of what kinds of events are allowable, what kind of things can be shared within a discourse of attempted dominance and forced social change, is altered by the enduring fact that cultures and peoples around the world defend their inheritance with a kind of counter-discursive vigor. Knowing this to be the case in the present allows some hope that the Pre-Columbian matrix of elements has survived in some form other than formality or formula.²⁸ No doubt there were a variety of material constraints acting on both Spanish and Indigenous performances of belief, and what could be called 'cultural' was not given slavish obeisance in every regional context, either by religious observance or catechistic thralldom. Acculturation, the death of actors, reinterpretation, and loss of meaning were all witnessed as commonplace in the texts. Originally, it was suggested that many nodes could never in fact articulate, and had not done so due to radical culture change (Nolan, 1973). Yet this must be discarded, as the idea of the cultural 'survival' as some kind of anachronism or anomaly is itself an archaism. Rather against the common wisdom to this regard, it would seem that it is persons that survive more than cultures. The latter is changed by the character of the former. Thus nodes of dissimilarity, by definition, are erroneous to such a process. If one cannot escape culture, then culture cannot also escape itself.

Indeed, cultures in contact and conflict with one another become mutually imbricated with sometimes surprising efficacy. The idea of a fusion or syncretism was called into question by examining the 'sun/Christ' and 'tree/cross' events as performative functions, as well as their coexistence betraying a kind of fictive kinship and that their articulation occurred only in their actuation. A cross-list of these many actualities and their possible

translocatory value is once again held in Table 1. Rather than the idea of fusion *per se*, Burkhart's conception of dialogue was more appropriate for this analysis. Experience in the form of thought, intent, or action comes to be encapsulated in a communicative performance that is never final in its form. Therefore, any fusions that might be seen to exist must be momentary, evocative of both traditions but not combining their attributes to form wholly new beliefs or worldviews. The integration of disparate cross-cultural elements into singular events or performances at once disintegrates before our eyes when beheld as a new experience, for what can be called new, as in a religious syncretism, cannot indeed then be taken apart and recognized for its once diverse and discrete constituent elements. This kind of problem and its apparent theatrical and public solution was possibly recognized for instance by the Franciscans and the Nahuatl as they argued their way into an uneasy relationship. Such mutual imbrications of the contact discourses gradually succumbed to a new heuristic, modeling the cosmos along points of contiguity that could be recognized. Forsaken elements of both traditions could now be placed in the role of dialectic, giving a necessary tension to the performative dialogues that publicly proclaimed a 'folk religion'.

This *dialectical* process can be said to have recently culminated in the acceptance of many tenets of Liberation Theology by the Vatican in the 1990s. Here, another patently modern Western discourse, but with strongly communitarian and even primordial Christian elements, mingled with the residue of indigenous belief, and the resurgent first nations politics of Latin America as a whole.²⁹ It has been noted that many of the meta-physical notions of the contact mission found deaf ears amongst these groups. This transfiguration, a bringing down to earth of the ultimate *telos* of the church and its existence has vehemently returned over the past half century. The genocide of the contact century and beyond seemed to be a guttural experience which sabotaged the other-worldly soteriology of the missionaries. It was a calculated event as much as it was inevitably random; 'guns, germs and steel'.

No doubt at the same time, cooperation was key to mutation between or amongst conflicting discourses. A greatly magnified cooptation of the discursive structures which bounded this performative or phenomenological space expanded potential public theater as well as the

without the burden of universal destiny writ into their every move. no one lives like this, except perhaps the 'great' artists or religious prophets!" (from interview, anthropologist).

²⁸ "The Mayan and Aztec worldviews are alive and well. It is only our European inspired arrogance that thinks that they were totally vanquished by the conquest, as grotesque as now those events are generally viewed. Now it is also true to say that our collective guilt regarding this destruction of an entire world and ninety percent of its population may lend a certain insistence to any claim that in fact we did not completely destroy them, and that they survived more or less unscathed. neither position is of course correct." (from interview, archaeologist).

²⁹ "It is ironic to me that Marx, the atheist, is so thoroughlygoingly communitarian and humanistic - like Howard Zinn's 'Jesus' in his 'play on history', Marx in Soho - and it is evidently that kind of Marx that has been taken up by the rural peasants of Latin America and there sometimes opportunistic Freirean leadership. But they have been very successful, and the political change we witness now in the global Latin south certainly is more humane than that of the 1980s and before. This kind of resistance and politics has a history which extends even prior the period of the collapse of the Spanish empire, and may indeed even have plagued pre-Columbian empires, as it did in Northern Mexico." (from interview, anthropologist).

possible longevity of certain elements from both traditions which could be played as or for each other. A shared comprehension of the invocation of events became more realistic. A previous analogy of conflicting cultural blueprints, for example, like an atomic model of contiguity, appears to be too stolid to take into account these processes. Bricker (1981) is a key text to this regard as it augmented the analytic in a common sense manner which attempted reproduction of one of the grounded manifestations of belief. As well, Gossen (1974) and Burkhart (1988) provided similar extensions. Tedlock's (1981) cross-cultural dialogue held an imaginative parallax which suggested that the 'etic' must step into the language of Mayan cosmology. This analysis combined the historical narrative of Maya-Spanish contact with the mythic narratives generated by the events of contact. A reflexivity was the result of such a combination of texts, dialogue placing itself at risk through dialectic.

An example of this 'coloring' of phenomenological spaces occurs as the historical record communicates its way from being part of a distant and abstract discourse to the actor on the ground. What this means to the performer has both the anticipation of the performance in mind but also the memory of past performances, at least ideally connected by generational iteration to the source event of the empirical conquest and the introduction of the Spanish worldview and Christian metaphysics. This is correspondent to the semantic conception of the actor as his or her action, changing the event through its performance and not entirely a scripted puppet. The sense that things can change is at once resonant with the radicality of the conquest and also the *pesante* of the resistance, cumulative and gradual, with the fate of a *gravis* behind it.³⁰ The example of the combination of pacification and indigenous solidarity from the Spanish discourse with the Mayan prophetic and cyclical concepts generated the sense that there was a continuity that was extant in living culture, often overshadowed by previous analyses that focused upon Amerindian and Meso-American cultures' death throes. The telescoping of historical events so that the feeling of their immanence could be represented theatrically or ritually was a common feature amongst the cultures in question.

That history should be present and not past brings to the fore the problem of ascription of structure within

cultured performance was met by suggesting that structure became explicit through the narration of myth and history together, and the reenacted spaces of, contact, conflict and conquest in theatrical ritual. This is more than another heuristic, but apparently a necessary character of any worldview that has been subjugated, subjected to another more materially powerful resource, in order for those now subalterns to survive with any dignity at all. What is dignified, in other words, must also reside in the realm of myth and not merely as a fact of history. It must hold its own within factual life experience and not merely be an element of satire or even critique.³¹ In this sense, it was also found that both being and time for the Maya and other civilizations were constructed as a constant and continuing set of replicative performances about historically distinct events, allowing the solidarity of consciousness that comes from the metaphor of a set of actors portraying all other cultural tenants as part of the play. All are the same actors, though only some may be acting out the metaphor at any one time. The message then is kerygmatically held within the mythic cycle, and that it is a cycle is at once the core of the message. The sense of many-worlds in other discourses which have of late been part of Western cosmology is here seen as being well known by the conquered traditions. That is, it does not matter to the Maya that their history has been strung out linearly by the materially dominant cosmology. Their interpretation follows from the fact that those who did so had no actual narrative function, played no theatrical role in the Mayan performance of life and time. The implausibility of possessing textuality was underscored by this operation, as well as the resistance to a metaphysics which tells us that nothing can return, even while promising a salvation which is premised on the return of the source of all metaphysics. This source is the sacred performance of history as living present, as action and confrontation create tradition.

Hence performance, discursive function, and level of assumption are co-extant and made publicly immanent by the event of actuation. History is not merely reenacted, but is played out. Those who are present have a conscious solidarity with those past, and the dead return through the living. This also is part of the understanding of what allows experience to be shared, as it is not enough to share amongst contemporaries. These people included have only the subjective experience of the latter day results of contact. We need to encounter the objectifying experience of the phenomenon of contact

³⁰ "The 'south shall rise again' has a more profound and empirically correct meaning in Latin America. It is also more ethical, given the events of subjugation. Whatever strange atrocities the Aztecs committed and that were at least partially witnessed by the first Spaniards, we have to keep in mind that we have always told ourselves that our morality is superior to the others. Malinowski's diaries of course represent this viscerality of value. Anthropologists I know who work in these areas generally feel like they are almost doing something 'applied', or even 'action research', whatever that really is, by just stepping into the realm of cultures who are once again beginning to take control of their own destinies." (from interview, anthropologist). It may be noted that the current creation of a new 'OAS' without Canada and the United States perhaps also reflects this trend.

³¹ "People have to believe in their own worth, more so than others must believe in them. We see this process with the Franciscans colluding to conjure 'conversion' where none was really present, and the locals keeping intact private rituals through public performances of the new cosmic agents. Resistance comes in many forms, but the most potent and undeniable presence of nay-saying lays with simply going about your business as usual, all the while acceding in public and very specific contexts to what someone else thinks you are doing." (from interview, anthropologist).

itself. We can do so through the theater of life as it has been, and the immanence of living-on as part of a returning cycle of what their culture must be. The creator or author is disengaged by such a process. They are at once supplanted by the actor and the performer. This latter function fills the discursive space with the substance of why there is this space and not some other. Yet however important this kind of event is - perhaps this is what reconstitutes the shared meaning of culture itself - the content of what fills the evocatory space is not so important. Articulations are not random, to be sure, but their patterned diversity suggests that the script for ritual and religious theater cannot be written in stone. The glyphs of these libretti are metaphoric and not monumental. The play of experience and the perpetuation of this diversity allows for both a statistical and experiential set of possibilities that perhaps ironically keep tradition alive. The adage of a 'living tradition' speaks to this phenomenon, but remains trite in the face of dialectical tensions which are what animates the history of belief. The confrontation with tradition is gained only by risking the life of those who are products thereof, as well as the received wisdom of a culture. This set of interpretations is never finite, never closed off. The Spanish no doubt attempted a kind of radical closure, especially by their burning of indigenous texts and the suppressing of the languages. Ultimately, this failed to be complete, though one must ever be alert to the possibility of a yet more powerful contemporary discourse of globalization completing what had begun c. 1500. The very flux of performance and the raising of the subjectivity of living-on toward the horizon of a shared cultural history is what resist the conquest still.

Resistance in this sense is also the ability to change in order to stay the same represents a kind of cultural adaptation which generates shared experience. What being the same now means occurs through the change of what being was before. Difference as the momentary understanding of what has been changed is quickly discarded by performers as trivial and also inevitable. The rhetoric of 'the same' can always be invoked, and the religious life is a grand stage upon which this solidarity with the origins of life is ever proclaimed. This is the source of the new life for the conquered, as well as for the recurrence of the contemporary cosmologies of post-contact neo-colonial geographies as a kind of activated archive. This record must now stand in the full presence of critique, and ordered to withstand, if it can, the full pressure of resistance anew. No metaphysical necessity is attached to either of these from the direct inheritors of the conquering discourse, but from the discourse of what had been dominant, the sense of cycle is ever ready to call to arms its own metaphysics of *et illud transit*.

This tension is no mere analogy. It is not the result of indigenous epistemology remaking itself in the face of superior explanations of a shared world. It is, rather, a

way of constituting the world of pre-contact beliefs as a dialectical presence and not a mere reproduction or reenactment. Ideas are represented in their interpretation, and are thus reinterpreted. One must recognize to realize, and one must believe to know. The elements of ritual and performance are once again played out by those who play themselves in - a play in which one plays with some sense of regression. One lives to die, and one also dies many times in order to live. Mahler's motto, 'to live, I will die', is appropriate for all civilizations that have borne their own sudden deaths, only to be resurrected by the resistance of what grows out of the foliage of bereavement. This ultimate immanence of death in life could not have been foreign to either of the contact discourses. Their ethical dispositions allowed them to conflict, and both to fulfill its own apocalyptic mythic imagery through the other.

For ourselves as human scientists, as those who live within the suasion of our own technological apocalypse, it is of import that the allegorical suasion of the Columbian conquest and genocide cannot be allowed to convince us of its inevitability. That we know we can act differently is also to know how we have acted. The rationalization for the death of cultures and their rebirth as revolutionary movements calls into question the source for human persistence. Must courage be called forth only in the face of suffering? Must what is humane only appear in reaction to inhumanity? Must a civilization die in order that its self-understanding grace the repast of human history? Not only our own horizons shape the ends of what is to be believed, for though destiny is often calculated from afar, the will to perform the immanence of the sudden occurs within each of us as allegorical beings.

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