Culture Clash

The conquest through myth and dance
Myth and Dance

• Myths
  – Quetzalcoatl (Sahagun, Cortes, Diaz del Castillo)
  – Lost Tribes of Israel (Diego Duran)

• Dances
  – Conquest of Jerusalem, 1539
  – Danza de los santiagos, 1988
  – Danza de las plumas, 1994
Myth and Dance

• Spanish justification / Indigenous explanation
  – Narrative of retroactive storytelling
  – Omens, visions, divine intervention
  – Prophesied, inevitable, divinely ordained

• Themes
  – Directionality
  – Prophesy
  – Divine punishment for past wrongs
  – Space for subversion (dissonance between text and performance, or subtext)
Quetzalcoatl

Diaz del Castillo

Cortes

Sahagun
Quetzalcoatl

Diaz del Castillo

Cortes

Sahagun
Lost Tribes of Israel

Mapa de Cuahtinchan

Diego Duran, History of the Indies of New Spain, 1581

Speculum humanae salvationis, 15th century
Lost Tribes of Israel

Mapa de Cuahtinchan

Diego Duran, History of the Indies of New Spain, 1581

Speculum humanae salvationis, 15th century
Lost Tribes of Israel

Antiquities of Mexico, 1831

Codex de Chimalpahin, 1621

Diego Duran, History of the Indies of New Spain, 1581

Speculum humanae salvationis, 15th century
Three kings, our grandfathers

Chronicle of Don Domingo de San Anton Munon Quauhtlehuaniitzin
- “And as for this aforesaid Aztlan, these ancient Mexitin Azteca Teochichimeca had tarried there, had lived there, had been there for one thousand and fourteen years, as appears in the ancient Mexitin Azteca book of their year count and way of life. And also it was one thousand and sixty-four years after Jesus Christ, beloved son of God the true deity, was born that they left [to come] hither and emerged and came away from Aztlan. And then it was also six thousand, two hundred and sixty-two years after our Lord God created the world at the very beginning of time. And also it was four thousand and twenty years after the world flood known as the deluge took place, when there was the destruction everywhere in the world that took place in the time of the seer, prophet, and lord, Saint Noah by name.”

Exercicio Quotidiano
- “For as soon as Your beloved Son was born, You called to our grandfathers, the three rulers, who became our firstborn, our oldest children, as regards the Faith, so that they would recognize Your beloved Son...You three lords, rulers, the very admirable Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior: I cling to your sides, I who am a sinner, and much do I importune you. I revere you. You are our grandfathers.”

Nahuatl prayer
- “They who are our grandfathers, the three sovereigns, they became our forebears, our progenitors through belief, us idolaters. They went to take on our behalf the believing in you [God] and the knowing of your precious child.”

Record of the Arrival of the Mexica
- “They arrived there in the year One Rabbit, 1090, the year in which began and was founded the priesthood of the Cistercian order that pertains to St. Bernard the Abbot. In the year Two Reed, 1091, our years were bound; the fire drill was welded on Mt. Coatepetl. The years Three Flint, 1092; Four House, 1093; Five Rabbit, 1094; Six Reed, 1095, in which began the work of the comendadores of St. Anthony the Abbot...”
Theater and Dance

- Louise Burkhart:
  - “Friars began staging Nahuatl plays as a strategy for evangelization. They thought it led many people to Christianity.”
  - “Although theater, in the sense of a prepared dialogue spoken by a group of role-playing individuals in front of an audience, did not exist before the Spanish invasion, the friars recognized the importance of public ritual in preconquest religious life and promoted these activities and rituals, as long as they were now Christian in content and purpose.”

- Inga Clendinnen:
  - “After the conquest the Mexicans were to display an early, puzzling and enduring passion for the dances of the Moors and Christians.”

- Robert Ricard:
  - “…the participants, the actors proper, the supernumeraries, singers, and dancers [in Mexican missionary theater] were Indian, and...everything spoken or sung was in the native language, most frequently Nahuatl.”

- Richard Trexler:
  - Morismas are a “military theater of humiliation” in which the indigenous performers, linked to the Moors, “exhibited their own defeat.”
Theater and Dance

- **Max Harris:**
  - “The long popularity of dances and festivals of Moors and Christians in widely divergent cultures is due to the tradition’s remarkable flexibility of historical referent and contemporary application. The Christians can be Carolingian knights, medieval crusaders...New World conquistadors, or New Mexican settlers. The Moors can become Moriscos, Turks...Jews, Aztecs, Chichimeca, or Comanches. Into the public transcript of historical conflict, various hidden transcripts can be insinuated, exposing the scars left by past traumas, negotiating current power relationships...”

- **Inga Clendinnen**
  - “Spanish colonists may have thought they were celebrating the victory of light-skinned Christians over dark-skinned ‘heathens,’ linking the defeat of the Moors in 1492 to the defeat of the Aztecs in 1521. But...the history being dramatized was not one of conquest but of reconquest: Spanish Christians had driven out Moorish invaders. It was this image of liberation rather than that of Spanish victory that attracted indigenous Mexicans to the imported tradition.”
Theater and Dance

Danza de los santiagos, 1988

Conquest of Jerusalem, 1539

Danza de las plumas, 1994
Theater and Dance

Conquest of Jerusalem
Tlaxcala 1539
Conquest of Jerusalem, 1539

- 1517, Luther nails 95 theses on a church door in Wittenburg
- 1521, 1526, 1529, 1534, Ottoman Turkish expansion
- Hopes for the New World, 12 Franciscan missionary friars
- Spain would sail the converted Indian armies to the Mediterranean where they would join forces with the armies of Charles V in a final crusade against the Muslims and Jews, culminating in the liberation of Jerusalem and the conversion of Jews, Muslims, and pagans.
Conquest of Jerusalem, 1539

- “Turcophile king of France”
- 1538, the Pope negotiated an alliance between Spain and France, freeing Charles V “for an attack on the Turks or the Lutherans”

- 1539, word reached New Spain. Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza dispatched the news and festivities and celebrations were ordered.
Conquest of Jerusalem, 1539

- Tlaxcala, Feast of Corpus Christi
- Encompassed an area the size of 4 football fields
- Over 1500 actors
- 3 Armies:
  - **Charles V**: “the Spaniards” - soldiers in drab costume played by native actors
  - **Viceroy Mendoza**: “the Christians” - Tlaxcalan and Mexican warriors, as well as numerous other tribal armies from New Spain, Peru and the Caribbean in elaborate dress
  - **Hernan Cortes**: “the Moors” led by the Great Sultan of Babylon and Tlatoani of Jerusalem, “the Marques del Valle Hernando Cortes” and the Captain General of the Moors, “Pedro de Alvarado”
- Santiago and St. Hippolytus
- Surrender of Cortes to Charles V (played by a Tlaxcalan lord) and the real baptism of the Indians playing the Moors

“Jerusalem” woodcut in *Weltchronik, 1493*

Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain, c. 1541*
Conquest of Jerusalem, 1539

Text
- The fall of the Moors and the final crusade and recapture of Jerusalem by the combined forces of the Europeans under Charles V and the converted Indians under Viceroy Mendoza, along with the divine aid of Santiago and St. Hippolytus.

Subtext
- Contact zone
- Indian forces, the true Christians, defeat Cortes and Alvarado
- Recapture Jerusalem/Tenochtitlan which was unjustly held by the foreign invader Moors/Conquistadors
- God allows the Moors/Conquistadors to conquer them once (on the feast day of St. Hippolytus), but once converted, he hears their prayers and sends the brown horse of St. Hippolytus to rout the Sultan/Cortes and the Moors/Conquistadors.
Theater and Dance

Danza de los santiagos
Cuetzalan 1988
Danza de los santiagos, 1988

- Two day dance with 8 performers in two groups:
  - Santiagos
    - **El señor Santiago caballero**: Sir St. James the Knight, wearing a wooden white horse
    - **Santiagos (5)**: soldiers of St. James wearing carved bright red masks with golden eyes, eyebrows, and mustaches on top of their heads, facing upwards. Some carry small wooden shields with a red face surrounded by golden rays on a sky-blue background
  - Pilatos
    - **El rey pilato**: Pontius Pilate, wearing a pink mask with a painted black beard, red cheeks, and a red nose tip over his face
    - **Pilato**: dressed similarly to El rey pilato and acted the part of a clown or villain

- Ends when el rey pilato dies at the hands of el señor santiago
Danza de los santiagos, 1988

- Pablo Huerta Ramir:
  - The santiagos represent the sun, they are “looking at the sun.”
  - The pilatos are “a less powerful sun.”

Santiagos
Danza de los santiagos, 1988

Cuetzalan “El rey Pilato”

Santiago mask from Puebla
Danza de los santiagos, 1988

• Text
  – “The dance is said to recall the legendary appearances of Santiago, charging into battle on his white horse to lead Spanish forces to miraculous victory over Moors and Aztecs.” – Max Harris
  – St. James defeating Pontius Pilate

• Subtext
  – Christian-themed, miraculous figures of the sun defeating a lesser sun: Spaniard / conquistador / Santiago
Theater and Dance

Danza de las plumas
Oaxaca 1994
Danza de las plumas, 1994

- 8 hour series of 41 dances recounting the defeat of Motecuhzoma by Cortes
  - La Malinche: 2 parts
    - La Malinche, Motecuhzoma’s wife
    - Doña Maria, convert to Christianity
  - Motecuhzoma
    - Historical figure
    - Messiah-like figure
  - Negritos
    - “Spanish” negrito and “indigenous” negrito act as clowns who pantomime the drama
  - Spanish soldiers
    - All played by young boys, and the smallest named “Cortesito”
    - Drab, dark costume, marching steps
  - Indigenous soldiers
    - All played by adult men
    - Elaborate, fanciful costumes with complicated, acrobatic dances
Danza de las plumas, 1994

- Dissonance between the official text and the visual performance
- The adult “Aztecs” visually dominate the dance, in size, skill, and costume over the “Spanish” children in their drab costumes and simple marching dances.
- 1896, Frederick Starr: “In dress and armament, the white men...present a truly ridiculous appearance.”
- 1922, Frances Toor: “Motecuhzoma and his captains looked and danced like gods [but Cortes] was accompanied by a lot of small boys, stiffly dressed in blue uniforms...[Although] Cortes and Christianity conquered, the Conquest was a lie.”

- Comic scenes
  - Motecuhzoma ignores Cortes during their first “meeting,” and Cortes spends the dance comically and futilely chasing him, preaching of Spanish law and Catholicism to no avail.
  - During the battle dances, the children Spaniards are repeatedly unable to hold pace with the adult Aztec dancers, returning to rest on their benches.
Danza de las plumas, 1994

• Official ending
  – Official text ends with the capture and surrender of Motecuhzoma.

• Subversion
  – Then Motecuhzoma and his soldiers replaced his headdress and returned to his throne.

• 2 unofficial final dances
  – Exuberant dance by Malinche and Marina, where Marina leaves Cortes and returns to Motecuhzoma at his throne
  – Negrito dance: The indigenous negrito presses the Spanish negrito to the ground with a chair and suffocates him as he thrashes until he is finally still
Danza de las plumas, 1994

- **Text**
  - Defeat of Motecuhzoma by Cortes

- **Subtext**
  - Contact zone
  - Spanish depicted like drab, weak children
  - Aztecs depicted as powerful, glorious warriors
  - Messiah-like Motecuhzoma returns
  - Dona Marina returns
  - Spanish are ‘snuffed out’