

EZLN: Them and Us VI: The Gaze 4

February 15, 2013

Them and Us VI.

The Gaze 4.

4. To look and communicate.

I'm going to tell you something very secret, but don't go spreading it around...or, go ahead, spread it around, it's up to you.

In the early days of our uprising, after the ceasefire, there was a lot of talk about the *eezeelen*. There was, of course, all of the media paraphernalia that the right usually uses to impose silence and blood. Some of the arguments that they used then are the same ones that they use now, which shows how dated the right actually is and how stagnant their thinking. But this is not what we are going to talk about here, nor are we going to talk about the press.

Okay, now I will tell you that back then, they began to say that the EZLN was the first guerilla group of the 21st century (yes, we who still used a digging stick to sow the land, things like teams of oxen – no offense intended – we had heard people talk about, and tractors we only knew from photographs); that Supmarcos was a cyber guerrilla who, from the Lacandón Jungle, would send into cyberspace the Zapatista comunicués that would circle the world; and who could count on satellite communications to coordinate the subversive actions that were taking place all over the world.

Yes, that's what they said, but...*compas*, even on the eve of the uprising our "Zapatista cyber power" was one of those computers that used big floppy disks and had a DOS operating system version –1.1. We learned how to use it from one of those tutorials, I don't know if they still exist, that told you which key to press and when you pressed the right one, a voice with an accent from Madrid said, "Very Good!" and if you did something wrong it would say "Very bad, you idiot, try again!" Besides using it to play Pacman, we used it to write the "First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle," which we reproduced on one of those old dot matrix printers that made more noise than a machine gun. The paper was from a roll that jammed every time we printed, but we had carbon paper and managed to print as many as two every few hours. We made a shitload of copies, I think like 100. We distributed them to the five command groups, which, a few hours later would take seven municipal seats in the southeastern part of the state of Chiapas. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, which was the municipality I was assigned to take, they surrendered the plaza to our forces and we used *masquinteip* [aka *masking tape*] (as they say) to put up our 15 copies of the Declaration. Yes, I know that it doesn't add up, we should have had 20 copies, who knows what happened to the other five.

Well, when we left San Cristóbal in the early morning hours of January 2, 1994, the damp fog that covered our retreat dislodged the proclamations from the cold walls of the magnificent colonial city and some lay strewn in the streets.

Years later someone told me that anonymous hands had torn some of those declarations from the walls and guarded them jealously.

And soon the Dialogues at the Cathedral followed. At that time, I had one of those light, portable computers (it weighed six kilos without the battery), made by HandMeDown Inc., with 128 ram, that is to say 128 kilobytes of *ram*, a hard disk with 10 megabites, so as you can imagine it could hold *everything*, and a processor that was so fast that you could turn it on, go make coffee, come back, and you could still reheat the coffee, 7 x 7 times, before you could start to write. What a fantastic machine. In the mountains, to get it to work, we used a converter attached to a car battery. Afterwards, our Zapatista advanced technology department designed a device that would let the computer run on D batteries, but the device weighed more than the computer and, I suspect had something to do with the PC expiring in a sudden flash, with a ton of smoke, which kept the mosquitos away for three days. What about the satellite telephone that the Sup used to communicate with “*international terrorism?*” It was a walkie-talkie with a reach of some 400 meters, max, on flat land (there are probably still photos floating around out there of the “cyber guerrilla” ha!). And you think we had internet? In February of 1995, when the federal government was pursuing us (and not exactly for an interview), the portable PC was thrown into the first stream that we crossed. After that we wrote our communiqués on a mechanical typewriter lent to us by the *ejidal* commissioner of one of the communities that took us in.

This was the powerful and advanced technology that we had, the “cyber guerillas of the 21st Century.”

I am really sorry if, in addition to my own already battered ego, this destroys some of the illusions that were created out there. But it was just like I am telling you now.

Anyway, later we learned that...

A young student in Texas, USA, maybe a “*nerd*” [original English] (or however you say it), created a web page and simply named it “*ezln*.” This was the first webpage of the EZLN. And this *compa* started to “put up” all of the communiqués and letters made public in the press on that site. People from other parts of the world who had found out about the uprising through photos, recorded video images, or in the newspaper, went to that site to find our word.

And we never knew this *compa*, or maybe we did.

Maybe he came one time to Zapatista lands, as others did. If he came, he never said “I’m the one who made the *ezln* webpage,” or “thanks to me, people know about you all over the world,” nor did he say, “I came so that you could thank me and honor me.”

He could have done this, and the thanks would have been minimal, but he didn’t.

And you may not know this, but there are people like that. Good people who do things without asking for anything in return, “without making a fuss,” as we Zapatistas say.

And so the world kept turning. *Compas* arrived who knew something about computers, and soon they started other webpages, and we got things to the way that they are now, that is, with this damned server that doesn't work like it should, even though we sing “*la del moño colorado*” to it and dance to the rhythm of cumbia-corrido-ranchera-norteña-tropical-ska-rap-punk-rock-folk ballad.

Also without making a fuss, we thanked this *compa*: may the first or supreme gods or god that he believes in, or doubts, or doesn't believe in, bless him.

We don't know what became of this *compa*. Maybe he is part of Anonymous. Maybe he continues surfing the web, looking for a noble cause to support. Maybe he is despised for his appearance, maybe he is different, maybe his neighbors and colleagues from work and school look down on him.

Or maybe he is a regular person, one more of the millions who walk the earth with no one noticing them, with no one looking at them.

And maybe he will somehow read what I am recounting to you, and read what we now write to him:

“Compa, here now there are schools where before only ignorance grew; there is food, not much, but it is dignified, in a place where before hunger was the only guest at the table; and now there is relief where before the only medicine for pain was death. I don't know if you expected this. Maybe you already knew. Maybe you saw some future in those words that you relaunched into cyberspace. Or maybe you didn't, maybe you only did what you did because you felt that it was your duty. And duty, we Zapatistas know well, is the only kind of slavery that one willingly embraces.

We learned. And I don't mean that we learned the importance of communication, or the knowledge of the various sciences and techniques of information. For example, other than Durito, none of us has been able to figure out how to successfully tweet. Faced with the 140 character limit, not only am I useless, so dependent am I on commas, (parentheses), ellipses...but time after time, by the end, I've run out of characters. I think it improbable that I will ever be able to do it. Durito, for example, has proposed a communiqué that complies with the character limit of a tweet and it says:

123456789 123456789 123456789 123456789 123456789 123456789 123456789 123456789
123456789 123456789 123456789 123456789 1234567890

But the problem is that the code to decipher this communiqué occupies the equivalent of the 7 tomes of the encyclopedia of “Differences” that humanity has been writing since it began its sorrowful walk on this earth, and whose publication has been vetoed by Power.

No, what we have learned is that there are people out there, near and far, who we do not know, who perhaps do not know us, who are compas. And they are compas not because they have participated in some march of support, or because they have visited a Zapatista community, or because they wear a red bandana on their neck, or because they have signed a petition, or because they have signed a letter of affiliation, or because they have a membership card, or however you say that.

They are compas because we Zapatistas know that just as there are many worlds in this world that we inhabit, there are also many forms, modes, times, and places to struggle against the beast, without asking, nor hoping, for anything in exchange.

We send you a hug, compa, wherever you may be. I am sure that you can, by now, answer the question that one asks oneself when they begin walking: “will it be worth it?”

*Maybe you will hear that in a community or in a barracks there is a Zapatista computer room called “**him**,” like that, in lowercase. And maybe you will hear that some of our guests came upon this room, noticed the sign, and asked who “him” was. And that we answered: “we don’t know, but he does.”*

OK, take care, and yes, it was worth it, I think.

From etc. etc.

We Zapatistas of the eezeelen dot com dot org dot net or dot whatever you call it.”

*_*_*

And this is all to say that, as you may have already noticed, we have a lot of faith in the free and/or libertarian media, or whatever you call it, and in the people, groups, collectives, and organizations who have their own means of communication. Also people, groups, collectives, organizations who have their own webpages, their blogs, or whatever you call it, who provide a space for our word, and now, the music and images that accompany it. And also people and groups who maybe don’t even have a computer, but nevertheless who through talking, or flyer-ing, or making a newspaper-mural, or making graffiti on a wall or in a notebook or on public transport, or in a play, a video, school homework, a song, a dance, a poem, a canvas, a book, or a letter, spread the words that our collective heart has written.

If they don’t belong to us, if they aren’t an organic part of us, if we don’t give them orders, if we don’t tell them what to do, if they are autonomous, independent, free (that is to say if they govern themselves), or however you say that, why do they do it?

Maybe they think that everyone has a right to information, and that everyone is responsible for what they do or don’t do with this information. Maybe it is because they are in solidarity with and have a

commitment to support those who also struggle, even if by other means. Maybe it is because they feel it is their duty.

Or maybe it is because of all of this and more.

They themselves must know. And they probably have it written there, on their webpage, on their blog, in the declaration of their principles, in their flyer, in their song, on their wall, in their notebook, in their heart.

That is, I am talking about those who communicate among themselves and with others that which we feel in our hearts; that is to say, they listen. Those who look at us, and look at themselves thinking about us, and make themselves a bridge and then discover that these words that they write, sing, repeat, transform, do not belong to the Zapatistas, that they never did, that those words belong to you, they belong to everybody and to nobody, and that they are part of a larger whole, and who knows where that larger whole may be, and so you discover or confirm that when you look at us looking at ourselves looking at you, you are touching and talking about something bigger, something for which there is no alphabet yet, and that through this process you aren't joining a group, collective, organization, sect, religion, or whatever you may call it, but rather that you are understanding that the passage to humanity today is called "rebellion."

Maybe before you "click" on your decision to put our words on your sites, you ask "will it be worth it?" Maybe you ask yourself if you won't in fact be supporting Marcos' stay on a European beach, enjoying the lovely climate of those calendars in those geographies. Maybe you ask yourselves if you aren't serving a creation of "the beast" to deceive and simulate rebellion. Maybe you tell yourselves that it is our job, as Zapatistas, to answer this question of "will it be worth it?" and by clicking on the computer, the spray, the pencil, the guitar, the cd, the camera, you are committing us, the Zapatistas, to respond to that question with a "yes." And so you "click" on "upload" or "post" or "load," or you play the initial chord, or make the first step-color-verse, or whatever you call it.

And maybe you don't know, although I think it is obvious, that you're giving us a hand, as they say. And I'm not saying this because our webpage crashes sometimes, as if it were in a "slam," and upon hurling itself into the void there was no friendly hand to break the fall, which if it is on cement, will hurt regardless of your calendar and geography. I point this out because on the other side of our word, there are many who do not agree with us and openly express it; there is another much greater number who are not in agreement and don't even bother to say anything; there are a few who are in agreement and who openly express that; there are a few more who are in agreement but don't say it; and then there is the immense majority, who haven't even heard about the debate. It is to this last group that we want to speak, that is to say, to look, that is to say, to listen.

Compas, thank you. We know. But we are sure that, even if we did not know it, you would. And it is exactly this, we Zapatistas think, that is what changing the world is about.

(To be continued...)

From whatever corner, of whatever world.

SupMarcos.

Planet Earth

February 2013

P.S. Yes, maybe there is, in that letter to him, a hint for the next password.

P.S. THAT UNNECESSARILY CLARIFIES: We don't have an account on twitter or facebook, nor an email, a telephone number, or a mailing address. That information that appears on the webpage is for the webpage, and those *compas* support us and send us what they receive, just as they send off what we send them. As for the rest, we are against copyright, so anyone can have their twitter, facebook, or whatever you call it, and use our names, although of course, they aren't us and don't represent us. But, as people tell me, the majority of these people make clear that they aren't who they supposedly are. And the truth is that we get a big kick out of imagining the number of insults and not-so-nice go-to-hells that they have received and will receive, originally directed at the eezeelen and/or the person who writes these lines.

Watch and listen to the videos that accompany this text.

From Japan, the song and choreography "[Ya Basta](#)," by Pepe Hasegawa. It was purportedly performed at the prefecture of Nagano, Japan, in 2010. To be honest, I don't know exactly what the lyrics say, I just hope they aren't not-so-nice go-to-hells.

From Sweden, ska by the group Ska'n'ska, from Estocalmo. The song is called "[Ya Basta](#)" and it is part of their album "Gunshot Fanfare."

From Sicily, Italy, the group Skaramazia with the song, "[Para no olvidar](#)," part of the album, "La Lucha Sigue,"

From France – the track "[EZLN](#)" by the ska group Ya Basta. From the album "Lucha y fiesta."