

CONVERSATIONS WITH CARLOS CASTANEDA – Carmina Fort

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Pere IV, 78 (Edif. Pedro IV), 4 planta, 5 puerta

08005 Barcelona – Spain

Tel. (93) 309 85 25 – Fax (93) 309 85 23

e-mail: obelisco@website.es

Castillo, 540

1414 Buenos Aires – Argentina

Tel y Fax: 771 43 82

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Contact, +(52) 1-722-312-3363, sales@sumocobre.com

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Prologue

Thirty years ago, a young Latin American immigrant, barely 25 years old, named Carlos Castaneda, student of anthropology and naturalized in the U.S. just a few months earlier, boarded a Greyhound bus with his friend Bill, headed for the Arizona desert.

It was the summer of 1960; the musical groups practiced in the garages of California to mark with their rhythms an epoch that still reverberates in the western world; the poets of the beat generation harmonized in their fight against the establishment; black was beautiful; black power; a utopia for protest; the Vietnam War that made cannon fodder of whites and blacks was still in its infancy; the hippies began to place flowers in their hair, to plant marijuana in their communes -others planted it in their gardens- and to burn sandalwood, which saturated their clothes and oriental beads. The works of Henry Miller were about to be permitted to be published in their own country, after a quarter century of prohibition.

The sinister McCarthy era was coming to its end; the middle-class youth, the restless of the United States society grabbed the moment in order to push the pendulum in exactly the opposite direction, and as well encountered certain restrictions to their newly acquired habits. The bus drivers were ordered to notify their passengers that it was prohibited to consume alcohol, or weed, inside of the buses.

Although Carlos Castaneda had smoked a little dope, his interest did not center on such a common substance. He was going on this hot day towards the Mexican frontier, as he had on other occasions, in order to request information about certain medicinal plants used by the Indians of the region, with the sole purpose of preparing a paper to widen his studies and help him in his desire to become a university professor.

He was, no doubt, low on funds.

While they were awaiting the return bus to Los Angeles at the Nogales bus depot, his friend, guide, and helper in that task, recognized an Indian, an expert in the use and properties of substances such as peyote and datura.

That old gaunt unperturbed Yaqui impressed Castaneda, who tried not to let himself be intimidated, and boldly applied his Latin spark, boasting of his knowledge, in reality superficial, about the subject, in the hopes of gaining the confidence of his informant. But this Indian was not just any sort of Indian, or gringo: with a simple look, he turned Carlos upon his own lie, until making him feel uncomfortable.

And when the Indian disappeared on the way to his bus, an invisible thread stretched between the dirt road and the air, white with the dust of the departing bus, uniting the lives of both forever.

Carlos deduced that he lived in Sonora; and he visited various times, and they became friends. But in spite of his insistence he could not steer the conversations towards the issue of hallucinogens. Finally the Yaqui confessed that he did possess certain knowledge, and that he had decided to take on Carlos as an apprentice. Carlos accepted. His first years of apprenticeship crystallized in the book titled *The Teachings of Don Juan*, of such unusual content that he had difficulty finding someone to publish it. Nevertheless, and against all predictions, that work made records in sales and enthusiasm. The

critics of the press did not hold back on their praise either.

From then on, on the bookshelves of anyplace inhabited by progressive types; in the communes or in the universities, there was no lack of *Don Juan*, a sort of *Emilio*, who aspired to teach an uncommon ethic, and to reveal another reality; “a separate reality”, invisible to the unprepared, but synchronous to our apparent world, in the words of Jung, and which all the while was grounded with greater solidness than quantum physics. Those pages were the crumbs that Castaneda left behind so that the lost masses would come to reencounter a “way with heart”.

And in that decade, inevitably worn thread-bare by its admirable postulates, the heart valued more than the intellect.

With his personal experiences, Castaneda cleared an intricate path to hope. Many there were who adopted him as a guide, and spoke of emulating his feats.

The energy that an individual receives, from one moment to the next, is his compensation. Never-the-less, not everyone arrives to this world equally equipped; the determination of birth, together with the goal to which every human being applies himself, makes the difference for oneself as to the various outcomes.

If we accept that chance does not exist, then we would have to agree upon the inevitability of certain occurrences, like the encounter of master and disciple.

The life of don Juan took place, as much as we know, between Mexico and the southwest United States. It was Castaneda who had to cross the continent, from the north, to reunite with don Juan, his pole star.

That kid, whom almost everyone took to be of Peruvian origins, except himself, who declared himself as a Brazilian, thanks to his rebelliousness, won a place in the magic history of this century.

When he got off the boat at the age of 15 in San Francisco, perhaps he was unaware, consciously at least, that ten years later a bus would take him to a strange destination: in front of the penetrating stare of an old Yaqui Indian that saw more than anyone could suspect.

It was the beginning of an unequal battle: Castaneda who was bent on becoming familiar with the hallucinogens that the pre-Columbian Indians had used, had to arm himself with patience and tact, which he lacked, in front of don Juan and his friends, who joked without pity about the formal anthropology student. There was a constant overturning of his pride, which took the form of a display of intelligence and a shield to his inferiority complex.

The books of Castaneda contain the archetypal ingredients capable to spark the interest of the most diverse groups of readers:

The crusader in search of the grail, guided by a teacher who behaves alternatively, like Merlin the protector, or the evil sorcerer that pushes him into unknown territory in order to vanquish the custodian dragons of reality.

The don Quixote type knight, beloved because in his determination to reach the glory of the inner world, he exposes himself to constant ridicule.

The tenacious deckhand, that by throwing himself voluntarily into the dangerous waters in search of the coveted treasure, tries to keep himself afloat on a sea of overwhelming perceptions that threaten to drown his psychological equilibrium.

The descriptions of his journey are of equal interest to the field anthropologist, to the

lover of adventure, to the mystic, to the eventual consumer of psychotropic substances, and to the one who enjoys humor, and to those who search for an intuitive truth. His works there is no lack of poetry, philosophy, or sincerity.

Castaneda insisted on expounding on the effects of the peyote in order to produce his report. He didn't want anything more or less. Don Juan provided himself for that, understanding that that boy, of modern western form, who had an "attitude" and fixed ideas, specifically needed a "crash treatment"; experiences that contrasted with his reduced tranquil rational world, and that would enable him to become the heir to his knowledge. Once and again, Castaneda made the trip from Los Angeles to locations near the Mexican boarder as vague to him, as is fake the name of his teacher that he presents to us: behind don Juan an identity is hidden that we will probably never know. And of little importance, when what we are after is not data, but rather answers to the enigma that assails us, in a universe which we confront without any absolute certainties.

The west was fascinated with *The teachings of don Juan*. What was transmitted there were ways of living; illuminating ways of living that related in attainable terms to a trustworthy man; not a charlatan, nor a visionary, nor an adventurer, nor someone marginal. They dealt with a model student, a respectable member of the community in body and soul. He had even become a naturalized citizen!

Anyone could recognize himself in him: ambitious, calculating and fibbing, (as much as his teacher), in order to achieve his ends.

And in addition, valiant; an absolutely necessary quality if what one intends to deal with is mystery.

So everybody believed him, and that put him in a dilemma: could he permit himself to be publicly praised of his achievements?; should he open his private doors to the anxious readers and the media? Or, to the contrary, should he follow the advice of his teacher in the sense of erasing his personal history, the anchor where the ego gets tied up. Castaneda made his choice: he declared himself the humble disciple of an Indian sorcerer, and refused to give personal leads and avoided any trace of vanity, an atypical attitude that made him even more admirable in the eyes of his followers. Millions of people signed up unconditionally to "Castanedaisim".

His books were awaited like evangelisms, being read with respect, and argued passionately. And all that more than twenty years ago.

Aside from the attractions already outlined, they were written in an easy, but not simple, prose. Which is completely the opposite of the postmodern pretentiousness of the elitist brotherhood, that cloak themselves in high vocabulary in order to hide the fact that they have nothing fresh, vital or original to offer.

While the majority of philosophers are limited to borrowing and dissertating, from their own limited perspectives, about what others have thought and written about over the centuries, Castaneda offers a "system of beliefs", that he himself applies to his daily life, a sincere intermediary of the mystery that came from the Toltec tradition who we know as don Juan Matus.

On attempting to fly, the fearful manage to grab one by the feet and pull them back down to the earth. Because in their pettiness they feel more comfortable if everyone crawls together; and it humiliates them that someone could contemplate them from a level inaccessible to them.

Machado said in reference to Castilla: “Wrapped in your tattered rags / your arrogant contempt is as much as you are ignored”.

There are individuals that fall into this definition. Their own arrogance is the weight that prevents them from rising up; but they avoid looking to the other side when somebody displays experience.

There are many who continue believing that Carlos Castaneda lived that which he writes about in his books; almost as many as now refuse to believe them.

During the conversations that I maintained with him, reflected in the following pages, it was left very clear to me that he placed respect to the memory of his master way above his own credibility: but never giving in to providing tangible proof of the existence of don Juan.

They will not forgive him.

The great part of the scientific community and the media stopped trying to pretend that he had specifically embarked upon that adventure only because he aspired to impart the scientific rigor in the protected halls of respected universities, not allowing it to become an irony; a definitive bad joke, wrapped up in the likes of don Juan.

Why did Castaneda get himself into that hornets nest? How easy it would have been to throw away the pen after writing *Don Juan!* That book turned him into a millionaire; it gave him prestige, it opened all the doors... and he decided to close them because he was set on telling the world not merely a careful and valiant field work, but rather all the initiation process that had followed after thirteen years.

Just thirteen years. Isn't it superstitious.

Because don Juan died in June of 1973, leaving to his disciple the heavy load of a tradition that confronted what was established.

It is one thing that an anthropology student would carry his enthusiasm for his work until handing himself over to the unknown effects of peyote: contemplating the brilliant inner fluids of a dog; play with him; drink from his dog dish, imitate his barks... all so naïve, so delicious, so deftly related in that first book. And quite another thing that the student would return against those who applauded him as one of their own, and counsel them that they should cast aside “self importance”, a symptom of self pity: that they should live like warriors, that they should be impeccable... and that it was that Indian sorcerer who had discovered The Truth, and not the professors, that had backed him up, believing that they had seen him as the vanguard of a new anthropology.

“The system of beliefs that I came to study have swallowed me up”, a confession in one of his books, was too strong to stomach.

If that kid presumed to be a sorcerer, and on top of that give vital ethical lessons to a proud and self-satisfied society, his place would be on the shadowy fringes of society. Castaneda did not pull his hair out or grit his teeth; he continued weaving books, eight have been published up until now, with threads pulled from his own life.

During the course of the conversations that we had in Los Angeles he announced to me that he would finalize the saga of don Juan with two new issues.

To the experts in the works of Castaneda it will be obvious that I am not it. I confess that I am just another author that because of her profession, has the opportunity to offer, from her own perspective, the daily dimension of that generally inaccessible man.

My interest in him came about from a vital identification; it had its origin in three

common words in the introduction of *The Teachings...*; Indians, southwest, Greyhound. When the seventies were at their end (literally – giving their final kick in the butt), I was living in the United States and I traveled by bus to those epic scenes looking for the truth about those Indians that had equally fascinated and terrified me since childhood in the movie theaters.

Between the physical majesty of Arizona and New Mexico, I discovered the tiny villages, the adobe homes, the great plazas, the delicious cuisine, the artist communes, a few hippies that still spread their index and middle fingers in the peace sign... and tons of Indians... trying to sell their artwork, getting drunk, refugees on the reserves... turning their backs on the whites, and on their own past.

Don Juan elevated himself above that fateful genocidal clash of the Spanish, so much as we know about it, or should know about it. America is an imaginary mountain, replete with treasures, a living enigma of the past. And only a few know the words “Open Sesame”. The contempt of five tarnished centuries. That same contempt fell back upon Castaneda when he defined himself as a sorcerer.

Next Christmas day, Carlos Castaneda will turn 55; he will continue his daily Kung-Fu practice, making jokes about his past and his future. Because he lives with intensity in a present in which he only yearns for the immense, idolized, and wise figure of don Juan. Oh that they could return to meet again!

Madrid, 1990

Introduction

In the summer of 1988 and during a trip to California I decided to determine what had become of Carlos Castaneda. A few diverse rumors were floating around about him; one of them was that he had died years before, in spite of new books of the don Juan cycle that were continuing to be published with his name.

His strange behavior for a famous writer, refusing to promote his books and his person with periodic appearances in the media, had given way within the only valid alternative conclusions to many: narcissism or death.

And although neither Castaneda nor his works could be considered conventional, there had to be some explanation as to his complete disappearance. Perhaps he got tired of the skepticism with which certain cultural circles were receiving his books?

Months before, upon investigating the tales about which he had published, I focused on one that dissected his biography and the four books that had been published up until that time; the author tried to ridicule Castaneda and maintained that don Juan only existed in his imagination.

His contradictory personal data, and his permanent refusal to give better details about himself or about his teacher, finally provoked the irritation of a good number of studious reporters and scientists that finally retracted the warm enthusiasm granted to the first books, for his literary and anthropological contributions, and they accused him of writing fiction, disguised as experience lived in the first person and with an ethno-anthropological varnish.

Too late. Thanks to that initial backing, his books were being sold throughout the world, and had become a myth; the students of the University of California in Irvine protested him, and they had him there in the early seventies, as an invited professor; his conferences registered massive attendance.

But since his last public appearances many years had passed. Where was Castaneda now? Did he hide himself in the Jungle, or in inaccessible mountains of Mexico?

The answer was much more simple. He was occupying his time in the motley city of Los Angeles, and it was there that I finally managed to know him, not because of my sagacity, but rather because he decided as much, on August 25th, 1988.

I Meeting

A fortunate circumstance permitted me to come into contact with someone who knew Castaneda. Barbara Robinson, custodian of the center of Spanish-American and Latin-American studies of the University of Southern California, had had lunch with him only a few months earlier. Kindly, she gave me the telephone number of his agent, a woman with a Latin name. When I asked for her at that number they responded that that person was no longer there and that they did not know who handled things for Castaneda. After a moment of discouragement I looked up the Writers Association. He wasn't a member. Finally I called his editor, Simon and Schuster in New York. Jennifer Covell of the promotions department gave the data of who answered as his agent: Jerome Ward, of Los Angeles. When I called, a secretary asked me to hold for a moment and returned with the answer that they no longer represented Mr. Castaneda.

Things were becoming more difficult than I had anticipated at first. In any case, there was still the editor. I called Jennifer Covell again, and I related to her all the steps I had taken up until then and she regretfully told me that the only way possible would be to write a letter, and they would send it to Los Angeles, to an address, naturally, that they couldn't give me. I only had a few more weeks stay in the U.S. and I doubted that that action would get results with such little time. I had no other choice. Only they sent mail to Castaneda, being that nobody ever knew where Castaneda might be. I had to believe her. I had read that at times he called his editor from a public phone saying that he was in a certain city, until an interruption from the operator revealed that he was in some other place.

Courteously, Jennifer offered to resend the letter to Los Angeles via urgent mail, if the envelope was written to her attention. What help! So I did it. But as I did not trust that it would arrive in the hands of Castaneda before my leaving. In addition to the location where he could find me in Los Angeles, I included my regular address in Madrid. I was staying in Santa Monica with family, and I waited impatiently for some news. I called Jennifer again, who assured me she had already sent my letter to Los Angeles. But in as much as the days were passing, I began to consider that it would be almost impossible to interview Castaneda during that trip. As such, I resigned myself, as have so many others, from doing a documentary about him.

On Wednesday, August 24th, around 9 pm, the phone rang and my sister got up to answer it; she quickly handed it to me and said, "It's Carlos Castaneda".

Although I feared that the connection could be interrupted, I decided to answer from my bedroom: I picked up the phone, and asked in Spanish, "Señor Castaneda?"

A suave voice, with a Latin-American accent, responded (in Spanish), "Yes. Are you Carmina?" Fantastic, it had all worked!

I thanked him for his call; I corroborated a few details of my letter, we chatted for a few minutes, always in Spanish, the only language that we were going to use, and it was he that took the initiative:

"So you want to interview me?", he asked in a friendly way.

"Yes, if you don't mind", I responded cautiously. I was still feeling a little perplexed to be talking with him and I was guarding the moment as if the bubble might burst.

“And when might it appear to you that we might meet?”, I asked, taking the initiative this time.

I tried to gain time in order to prepare the interview and I suggested, “The day after tomorrow?”.

“No, better tomorrow”, he decided. “I have to see my attorney at 10:30 in the morning. Could we meet at 3:30?”

“I won’t be able to before 4”, I said, “because I have a lunch date”.

The previous week I had arranged for Barbara Robinson to meet with me to tell me about Castaneda. It was on exactly the same day that I was going to know him.

The date and the time set, Castaneda showed his sense of humor by warning me, “That’s English time, not Latin time”, his voice betraying irony.

Now there was just to establish where the meeting would be.

“Where do you feel that we should be?”, I asked.

“I will go to where you are staying”, he said to my surprise. I had thought that he would make the date for some place where nobody would be able to recognize him.

When I tried to give him directions on how to arrive, he refused with the explanation, “I live two blocks from there. I know where it is.”

Before saying goodbye he never-the-less demanded a condition in which I recognized the elusive author.

“There can be no microphones or cameras”.

The next day I met with Barbara Robinson, an enchanting expert of Spanish culture, who reminisced of her stay in Madrid as a student, and of her getaways to Mexico. In respect to Castaneda, she stated that he expressed himself in perfect English, without any sign of accent. He had chatted with her for a few hours and he signed his latest book for her, now carefully guarded in a locked display, and even mentioned the possibility of donating the editions that would conserve his works, but on the other hand, he declined to commit himself to giving a conference at the university if it had to be scheduled much in advance. “When I might be in Los Angeles, I’ll call you and give the conference the next day.”, he had offered to Barbara.

“I can’t prepare it in such little time; just ten people would show up”, she protested.

Since then it had been six months and she had not seen Castaneda since then. When I told her that I was going to see him that same afternoon, she handed me her business card to give to him.

I passed through various well stocked bookstores on the purpose of buying his latest book. All the works of Castaneda were on the stands... all, except for the latest. The hard-cover edition was sold-out, and the soft-cover edition was not due out until the beginning of September. I couldn’t find it; the agreed upon hour was approaching and I returned to where I was staying.

At five minutes to four the phone rang. For a moment I thought that he had called to cancel the appointment. But no: Castaneda had just gotten lost.

“I confused Ocean Avenue with Ocean Park”, he explained. I’m on Wilshire Boulevard. How do I get there?

Fortunately he was very nearby.

Five minutes passed four when the reception announced that Carlos Castaneda had arrived. The television camera at the reception desk allowed one to see the visitor, but the

image was not very clear and had static. I awaited the elevator to arrive at the front door. Still in the door, we shook hands and I thanked him for coming. He had a big smile and a warm attitude. I next introduced him to my sister, to my daughter, and to one of my nieces; to each one bowing slightly and offering a few softly spoken words of courtesy while taking their hand.

We passed into the living room, he, dropping himself spontaneously into one of the sofas, and leaving to his side on the floor, his brown leather valise that he had been carrying. He appeared to be comfortable, in no way timid nor impatient.

He once again took the initiative by asking us how we came to be in the United States. He was familiar with Spain and began to tell about a few entertaining experiences that had happened to him there.

After a few minutes the girls announced that they were leaving. Castaneda stood up to say goodbye. His gestures were formal social norms; but at the same time he was at home, relaxed and loquacious.

He appeared to be in his early fifties; a little over 1.6 meters tall; he is thin, athletic, moves with agility; he has abundant, slightly curled, white hair, cut short with short bangs, like that of a Roman senator. His skin is yellowish; the eyes, big, dark, hazel, almost black; they moisten when he laughs. And he laughs often. The mouth is wide with thin lips; the nose, medium, somewhat bent down at the end. His Spanish is perfect, only anglicized in the pronunciation of the *erres*; he uses Mexican expressions and a few Argentine figures of speech, but he does not have any clearly defined accent. He was dressed in dark pants, a light colored short sleeve shirt without pockets, and athletic shoes.

He sprawled confidently on the sofa, although he often sat up and leaned to the edge in order to give emphasis to what he was saying. He used a lot of body language, especially to parody himself being serious in front of a funny don Juan.

“When I complained of his lack of respect towards me,” he explained, “and asking that he give me the same respect that I was trying to give to him...” he gets up and sets the scene: lowers his voice, frowns until his eyebrows are almost vertical, tightens the lips, and adopts a dignified posture, upright, and turns to one side as if don Juan were there, and places at that moment his re-vindications about respect, “...Don Juan falls to the floor, rolling around laughing at me,” he concludes, almost pleased, at having been the repeated object of mockery of that old Yaqui.

I noticed that he always cites don Juan, about every five minutes, and he does it with respect, and with an intense love and with great humility.

As well he exhibits a great capacity for histrionics, like that of don Juan in his books, when he was recalling his stay in Spain; affecting a castellan accent, and proclaiming himself, between chuckles “Sir Carlos of the Valley of the Horseshoe”.

A fun person Castaneda. And surprising. Without my asking any questions, he begins to speak of members of his family and of the group that he leads, interjecting all the while clarifying anecdotes, the most of which relating to his teacher.

For a long time I did not dare to enter into the theme for which we were meeting; being afraid that if I were too direct that I might lose his confidence. At last I asked permission to take a few notes. He divulged and detailed his place of birth, the name and city of origin of one of his grandmothers, how his paternal grandfather died, who raised him in

his first years; referring with much affection to a woman of his group...

In an attempt to contrast the data which had been published about him, I asked him how it came to be that a recognized North American magazine claimed that he was really born in 1925. He gave a laugh and responded, "Do I look like I was born in 1925 ?

"No", I admitted. And why not put the record straight, I asked him in which year and at what age he arrived in the United States; the date was the same as he had always insisted, and corresponded with his physical aspect. Despite the persistence of certain publications to make him ten years older.

We continued chatting for two hours; my sister excusing herself because she had to attend a dinner. Castaneda rapidly got up and said humbly, "I must leave as well. I don't want to be a bother."

We assured him that he was not in any way a bother and we pleaded with him to stay a little longer. He accepted, but on condition: "Ok, I'll stay until six".

We continued speaking, now about false or made up stories of which he was targeted; a few just representing funny anecdotes, but others with dramatic connotations: there are naïve ones who in their desire to meet with him, end up in bluffing with imagined stories. All this time we had been speaking in the formal "Usted", but now that we were alone, I asked if we could speak in the more casual (and less ambiguous) "Tu" form of speaking. I did not notice in him any sort of barriers on any sort of subject, and I ventured to ask that he comment on one of the aspects that had most captured my attention in his amazing books; the role of the "assemblage point"; as is called a position that exists in all human beings, of a variable location depending on individual circumstances, and which is key in order to experience other worlds, plains, or "separate realities".

Castaneda asked me to lend him the notepad and pen and he made a sketch to show me in which part of the body, more specifically of the aura, were the point was usually at; he would talk more about that later, as well with graphic help.

In a natural manner, he went from the abstract to the useful, and offered to show me an exercise for counteracting tiredness and regain energy: he got up, and with the legs slightly spread and bent, the waist relaxed and the arms hanging down, he swung them several times from one side to the other of the body without twisting the waist; the exercise rejuvenates the suprarenal glands above the kidneys, he explained, and has an immediate effect. To continue he enticed me to imitate him to be sure that I could do it myself; I got up and followed his instructions and for a few minutes we dedicated ourselves to "recharging the batteries". It is a very similar movement that children do at times when they appear bored; a game they do with their body where maybe they intuitively grasp key knowledge that we have forgotten about upon growing up.

The living room that we were in was getting dark; from which one could see the Pacific, already a violet hue, and the silhouette of the tall palm trees.

As when he arrived, I offered him something to drink, but he once more refused. Not even water.

I decided to try to determine why he had contacted me, when I know that there have been many people for many years who have tried unsuccessfully to locate him.

"It was an omen", he stated.

"An omen", I replied?

"Yes, an omen from the spirit. I was in the office of my attorney, and they put your letter

into my hand, which had arrived at that very moment.”

I did not see anything special about it, except for the coincidence, if we would want to put it that way, that the letter should arrive at the precise moment that he was there. Nevertheless, when I take into account the destiny that generally awaits the mail that he sent to him, I had to admit that the possibilities were quite slim that everything would unfold as it did.

“In the office of my attorney”, he explained, “is accumulating in sacks mail that arrives, packages and letters; but I usually don’t read it, or even open it. He clarified that he made that decision after years of having crazy people send him all types of “macabre objects”. He would open a letter, he remembered with displeasure, and feathers would fall out; others tea leaves; at times photos of nude girls or intimate wear.

Castaneda’s attention was also called to the fact, he said, that my letter was written in Spanish. In it, if one would want to trace my identity, there was reference to other works I did on earlier trips to the United States, like interview that I did ten years earlier with Isaac Azimov, and with Henry Miller, which his secretary was able to confirm. I cited the interview with Miller without taking into account that surely Castaneda knew him, being that his girlfriend, Anaïs Nin, according to what he wrote in the last volume of his diary, tried to help him publish his first book: “UCLA said first that they would not publish the book by Carlos Castaneda *The Teachings of don Juan*. It was not sufficiently “academic”. I brought it to Gunther (Gunther Stuhlmann, editor of the Daily). I was about to find an editor when UCLA changed their decision.”

The circumstance that the answering machine was not connected when Castaneda called me was definitive, he assured me. “I don’t speak with machines. If there is an answering machine, I hang up.”

He is equally strict in other aspects. He told me how he had once called a French girl that had written to him. Unfortunately for her, she wasn’t home, and it was her mother who answered, begging him to call another number.

“I never called again”, he concluded.

In other words, if the contact attempt on which one has placed their attention does not come out well from the start, there is no deal. And there is yet one more test to pass.

“Even though I would be with a person, if I do not like that person”, he emphasized, “I turn around and leave.”

At eight thirty my daughter and niece returned; they turned on the lights. Once more we greet, and we all get up to say goodbye.

Time had flown by. I did not believe that I had enough data to write an interview, it had rather been more like an enjoyable and broad monolog.

When I was all prepared to never see him again, he surprised me again by inviting me to lunch with him the next day.

“It is a restaurant where they have very fresh fish; but we should go early because it gets crowded quickly”, he warned.

Naturally I accepted, and we agreed that he would come by to pick me up at eleven thirty. At that moment my sister arrived, along with her husband and a friend of theirs, from a trip to the city where they had dined. We chatted for a few minutes in english while standing. My brother-in-law, who had to watch his waistline, asked him with admiration how he maintained himself in such good form.

Castaneda responded modestly: “You will see, it is what we make of ourselves,” he said in the plural, “a very frugal life.”

Everybody shook hands, and I accompanied him to the elevator. Before pushing the button, he reminded me of the appointment the next day with a smile.

That custom of his of acting on hunches must have provoked towards him not just a small amount of frustration. People who had written to him repeatedly, that had arrived at his conferences, or even to his office in the university in order to ask him a moment of his time, had not been able to deal with his evasive maneuvers, like: “I can’t, I’m going to Mexico City right now.”...above all, if hours later they cross paths with him in an elevator.

When the harassment made things unbearable for him, he surrounded himself with anonymity, including another name, according to what he told me in our chat.

II Tracing his Personal History

(Note – In the original Spanish version the author repeatedly uses the present tense in the following narration, something more common to many Spanish writing styles. The text, which is obviously of the past tense, is more often translated here as the past tense, more in accordance with English writing style, the present tense just being selectively retained where the author might have desired to place the reader more in the scene.)

At eleven o'clock exactly, the reception desk announced that Castaneda had arrived. Like the day before, he announced himself by his own name, and I came down to meet him.

He was dressed in a Prince of Wales style suit and tie, and behaved genteel.

He had come in a cream colored truck, that surely he used for driving the dirt roads of Mexico.

He opened the door for me, walked around and opened the other, and I noticed how he took off his jacket and tie, and placed them behind the seat before sitting down. His attitude had changed; he was serious and appeared irritated.

Although it was already warm enough at this hour in Santa Monica to want to make oneself comfortable, he acted as if he were stripping himself of an uncomfortable costume.

He stayed quiet for a few minutes, concentrating in changing lanes. While heading south on Ocean Avenue, he began to explain in a deliberate tone what had just happened to him, causing his momentary displeasure.

He had had a meeting in the office of his attorney with a film producer, because he was going to grant the rights of his books for the making of a film, but he did not want to know anything about the script or of the locations of the exterior shots. The producer demanded that it should be Castaneda himself who would point out the places where his meetings and experiences with don Juan transpired.

"I told him that everything is in the books," exclaimed Castaneda, "but the producer was determined to say things such as: "If I am going to place my money...". He appeared pained to remember it. "Finally, I kept myself quiet in order not to say something unpleasant to this man; and my attorney continued with the negotiations."

I remembered, but I don't remember who said it, that fifteen years earlier, that he had declared to a magazine that he would never grant the rights of his books to the cinema, refusing substantial offers, because "I don't want to see Anthony Quinn doing don Juan." Ignoring what had induced his change of opinion, I made an indiscreet question:

"It is because you need the money?"

He looked at me with an expressionless look and responded:

"No, no." The subject appeared finished.

It is possible that the ceding of rights might have come, given to the fact that the editor who publishes all of his books in the United States, Simon & Schuster, is part of the holdings that controls the film producer Paramount.

We continue driving next to the ocean.

Within a few minutes, Castaneda returned to being the fun and witty guy of the day

before. He begins to compare the people that he had seen that morning with the prototypes that don Juan had described to him.

“Those who take themselves very seriously and believe that they know everything are ‘farts’. The smiling and conciliatory ones (and there was one like that in the meeting as well, he said) are ass kissers.”

“And those who don’t fit into either one of those categories,” I ask intrigued?

“Those who are still thinking about which of the two categories that fit them, they are nothing.”

“But then there is no hope for anybody!” I protested.

“No!” he responded contentedly. And he explains how he behaves himself in front of one of those models: “When I know someone very square, an authentic ‘fart’, I don’t even approach him.”

“Not even to try to help him?” I inquire, faced with a panorama so disheartening.

“I don’t cross his path,” he assured me. “I leave him to one side and I go to the other way.”

He continued to explain various supporting anecdotes by don Juan, until he parked in front of the restaurant.

He searched for some coins for the parking meter, and we entered the restaurant.

It was called Fish & Co.. It was large, with distinct levels and environments, and filled with large plants, some of them hanging. The name and high ceiling suggested that it was a commercial exchange in years gone by. There was no doubt that the restaurant was very popular. It was barely noon and already many tables were occupied. We were conducted to one, not far from the entrance, in front of the cash register. A young woman brought the menu, which I barely had time to look at because Castaneda recommended to me one particular fish, grilled, which it appeared that they prepared very well there. To drink, he ordered water. He was seated facing the door. Once in a while he looked aside to observe those that entered.

Through all kinds of questions, he focused on knowing who he was with. But now and then, as an answer, or spontaneously, he told of aspects of his own biography.

He was born on December 25th in 1935 in a small pueblo called Juquery (it is the name of a shade tree), near Sao Paulo, Brazil. His mother was at that time 15 years old and his father 17. A sister of his mother raised him (at one point he referred to an aunt Angela, but I do not know if it is the same person), but she died when he was 6 years old.

“I believed that she was my real mother”, he confessed.

So is explained his enigmatic answer to a reporter that left apparent the inaccuracy of the data he had provided, reporting that the mother of Castaneda had died when he was 25 years old, and not 6. One’s feelings about one’s own mother do not depend on biology or time. Heredity as a system has nothing to do with feelings.

He himself had written that he had never loved his mother.

Towards his father, whom he describes as of weak character, he maintained an ambivalence somewhere between compassion and dislike.

After living a short period with his progenitors, he went to live with his paternal grandparents. He remembers with affection “a very big and ugly grandmother”.

“She was called Noha” he said, supervising how I wrote the name, and continued, “She was Turkish and came from Salonica.

As well he extended himself about the personality of his grandfather. Although it appeared to be with distaste, how he had attempted to oblige him, just being seven or eight years old, to demonstrate his manly hood by seducing, before any other kid could get to her first, the daughter of the town banker. He spoke of him indignantly.

“It is as if a little girl were raped by her grandfather.”

And his revenge, if one could call it that, consisted in ridiculing the final moments of that grandfather, who was over eighty years old.

“He died believing that he was making love. Get this! He died making love with a blanket!”

His manner and tone of voice were disparaging.

Never-the-less, to describe his own personality he offered an example given by that unavoidable grandfather, witness of his childhood, who analyzed the methods that each one of his grandchildren would enter a room in accordance with their personal values. He spoke of the distinct systems that they might employ, depending on their respective characters, and when he came to Carlos, he assured, “He could enter, even if he had to climb in through the window.”

Castaneda referred to that homage to his tenacity with satisfaction. For what he has related in his books, he was a rebellious and aggressive child that poured out his own family frustrations on others.

“I have had a difficult life”, he commented, without a trace of self-pity.

His zeal to overcome, offset the difficulties that he had to confront, among them, the period of uprooting himself from his family and his country.

He was sent to a boarding school in Buenos Aires, and later to the United States. He arrived in San Francisco in 1951 at the age of 15. He lived with an adoptive family while he completed his high school at Hollywood High, where he came to know Bill, the friend who presented him to don Juan in the Greyhound bus station of Nogales, Arizona.

Between 1955 and 1959 he attended various courses at the City College of Los Angeles: Creative Literature, Journalism, and Psychology. At the same time, he worked as a helper to a psychoanalyst classifying hundreds of magnetic tape recordings recorded in the course of the therapy sessions.

“There were about four thousand”, he remembered, and upon listening to the cries and the complaints, I discovered that they were reflecting all of my fears and suffering.

An experience that perhaps he saved, to bring forth a long and painful process of reconciling himself with a precarious and changing past, that had left him in profound turns of life.

His therapy was, it appears, to apply himself diligently to his studies.

In 1959, the same year that he became a U.S. citizen, he legally adopted the maternal name of Castaneda, and not the paternal, Aranha, and enrolled in the University of California Los Angeles, UCLA, graduating in Anthropology three years later.

Some of his professors have recorded what they thought of him:

“He was a born genius.”

And as well,

“Carlos was the type of student that a professor hopes to encounter.”

He continued attending that university, being intermittently enrolled until 1971. He obtained his master degree with his first book, *The teachings of don Juan*, published in

1968; in 1973 the doctorate degree was granted to him for his third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, which had appeared on book shelves one year before.

In respect to his intimate life, he told of a few aspects, but before continuing he warned me: "This is only for you."

Among the various anecdotes that have been collected, he remembers one that he begins to tell with a prankish expression: one afternoon he met a friend in the university cafeteria that was accompanied by a gorgeous Nordic girl. He sat down with them and after a short time had passed, his friend had to leave, and he remained chatting with the girl. He liked her a lot, and after a few hours they both decided to continue their relation in private.

When he was already in the apartment of the girl, Castaneda discovered that the Nordic girl... was in fact a Nordic guy.

"I dressed myself and left running away from there.", he remembered between laughter.

When I called my friend in order to reprimand him for what he had done to me, he was so amused with the joke, he laughed so violently, that they had to take him to the hospital.

Certain data has been published about his personal relations, apparently documented, that neither did he tell me, nor did I see the necessity to ask him about.

For example, it is said that in 1960, in Mexico, he married a North American woman fifteen years older than him. Apparently, the cohabitation only lasted a few months, although they remained friends and didn't ask for divorce until 1973.

According to Castaneda, don Juan recriminated him that he was searching the world for love, and was enslaved by opinion of others.

"Do you like me? Do you love me?" he would parody his apprentice, with a tremulous voice and supplicant attitude. To continue, he made a gesture of refusal and said, "I don't have friends; don Juan wanted us to place our sense of self by ourselves, since everything comes to one in a state of solitude."

Never the less, later he would say that Harold Garfinkel, cofounder of ethnomethodology and professor of sociology at UCLA, continued to be one of the most important people in his life. That relation has lasted more than twenty five years, and without doubt was vital. It was the professor Garfinkel, who with his criticism and encouragement, impelled him to rewrite *The teachings of don Juan*. It is as well the history of a loyalty, being that so many have wanted to investigate into the life and work of Castaneda, resorting to Garfinkel, and have come up against a wall of restraint.

Another unclear point in the biography of Castaneda has to do with certain studies foreign to anthropology. He stated on certain occasions that he had studied art in Milan. However the investigators of his life deny that it is true, and assure that in reality he studied painting and sculpture in Lima, being that they attribute Peruvian origin to him.

"I don't know why they want to believe that I was born in Peru", he exclaimed perplexed.

And he joked "Maybe they want to find that I was descendent from majestic Indians."

In any case, he assured that he really went to Milan, and he cited the name of his professor and described how he walked among his students, directing towards them words of approval. Don Juan would be the giver of his grief for having failed in his artistic aspirations.

I wanted to return to his broken childhood and began by saying, "and so your mother, Susana Castaneda...". I shut up when I saw his expression of displeasure.

"No, no", he said cutting me off coldly. That was invented by a magazine because they

had to fill in data in order to complete their story.

We switched to a less conflictive subject, relating to his aura of being a mysterious person.

“Don Juan asked me to make a sacrifice in order to erase my personal history, that I distance myself from the persons and surroundings that were familiar to me; that I should disappear for a time, without leaving a trace, and that I should put myself in an unpleasant location, the more unpleasant the better.” He explained that he called his friends to tell them that he was leaving, without telling them where or why. He rented an apartment in a run-down building of North Hollywood, in the barrio where he lived when he arrived to the country.

“It was depressing” he remembered. The carpet was full of stains and the wallpapered walls were damaged.

He stayed there two months, before moving to a more comfortable location, but always distanced from his habitual environments and relations.

“And what became of the friends?”, I asked.

“When I called them back they said that it had been a betrayal to just disappear like that, and they blamed me for having returned while I was still a famous author, which they interpreted as an act of pride”, he lamented perplexed.

“Don Juan warned you that, ‘The normal behavior in the daily life is routine, and that which alters that routine causes an unusual effect in all beings.’

“To open oneself to insults, and to the unusual, is to dethrone the feeling of the vanquishing ego.”, the apprentice should repeat now, which justifies as a necessity, not just whim, the task of erasing personal history. In order to be able to enter and leave in other worlds like a weasel, one does not have to draw attention. The more identifiable or known that one is, the more restricted is one's own liberty. If little by little we create a fog around us, we will not be pigeonholed, and we will have more liberty in order to change. That is one of the reasons why I avoid the tape recording and photo cameras.”

A young maitre de approached the table to see if everything was all right. The waitress that attended us asked if we would be having dessert. Castaneda only wanted a tea with honey. I asked for coffee. At that moment I did not know that it was one of his controlled vices. I would see him cede to that temptation a couple of times.

When they brought the bill he pulled out his credit card. The bill was on the table for several minutes after he had signed it, but I did not look at it to determine the name.

We left the restaurant and got into the truck. It had gotten very hot.

While we drove to where I was staying, I commented that I had not been able to find his latest book because they were all sold out.

“I'll give you one”, he offered at once.

We arrived in front of my lodging. He parked, and we continued talking.

“Do you remember when you were last interviewed”, I asked?

“I believe that it was in 1982. A girl for the daily, *Clarín*, asked me, and I like Buenos Aires so much that I decided to grant it to her.” He spoke a little more about the beauty of that city, appearing content, but his expression hardened upon adding, “And later it happened to be published in the United States, and in English. I had to put up with people writing to me with words like, ‘You said in your interview...’.

Castaneda had been betrayed various times. It has been written that a colleague of his

from the university made himself a copy of the manuscript of *Journey to Ixtlan* and, together with a few notes taken in a lecture about shamanism given by Castaneda himself, he sent it to a magazine. But in spite of that, and of other unpleasant experiences, it doesn't appear that he has become a distrusting person, just cautious. One can see in him the influence of the reflection that don Juan had made, "A warrior is like a pirate that has no scruples in taking and using whatever thing he needs. Only that the warrior is not hurt or offended when he himself is used or taken advantage of."

In as much as we were meeting, naturally the information continued growing, until I decided that an interview was not sufficient, in scope and permanence, to record those meetings. Castaneda authorized me to write a book, but at no time did he ask what would be the focus, or what impressions or data I was going to include. It did not matter to him what image of himself could be projected, the outside opinion.

"I do not have ego", he would comment on occasion. "I act impeccably and I don't worry about what is said of me."

We continued talking there more than an hour. The cab of the truck was like a sauna. The sun was falling straight down and not a wisp of breeze entered through the lowered windows. The tropical flowers in the planted areas appeared wilted.

I suggested that we continue the conversation on the boardwalk, on the other side of the avenue, where there are palm trees, benches, and a lawn. It ran for several kilometers next to the sea, at a rather high elevation, retained by the palisades.

Castaneda told about how at one time he used to sit in those places and meditate watching the ocean. Surely when he was a neighbor of the area, like he had commented in his first phone call.

"But one day", he remembered with a displeased expression, "several Indians who knew me from Mexico sat on the bench where I was, and I never returned."

All of a sudden he appeared to remember something and said that he had to leave, but assured that he would call me so that we could meet in the afternoon, after lunch. I took advantage of the free time and came down to the swimming pool of the building with my daughter Barbara. From there one sees the street, and only a few glass doors separate it from the reception area.

After a few minutes I hear the voice of Castaneda. Surprised, I jump from the chase lounge, open the door, and ask him to enter the swimming area. He greets Barbara, who is in the water, with a nod, and hands me his latest book, in English.

The same book he had translated to Spanish himself, which he was in the process of editing. He had offered to leave me the manuscript, but he said that he couldn't find it, and adds, "You wouldn't have had the time to read it anyhow."

"I suppose that that's how it goes. Today is Friday and as you know, I am leaving the country next Wednesday."

I don't know where he had gotten the book. Not more than a half hour had passed since we had said goodbye. He had two homes, one in Malibu and the other in Westwood, both equally far from Santa Monica.

"We'll see each other later?", I remind him.

"We won't be able to meet later because I have to go to Sonora," he explains. "I am going to meet up with a few Indians that knew don Juan as well."

He appeared to be rushed and took off in a hurry, but repeated to me before leaving, that I

should call to arrange the next meeting.

However, I would not speak to him by telephone again. It would be a woman of his group who would arrange our meetings from then on.

III The Nagual and his Group

The next day I received a call from Florinda Donner. Castaneda frequently spoke fondly of her: "She is so small and ugly, but fearless."

When I asked him if she was his "compañera" he responded with an affirmative movement of his head. At that moment I did not notice that we were giving different interpretations to the word "compañera".

Florinda has a discreet and educated voice, in reference to the fact that she was born in Venezuela and has lived a long time in the United States, although the English has not affected her Castellan in the least. She says that in Los Angeles her life is limited because she does not know how to drive.

When I asked about the trip that Castaneda had planned, to which he referred to the afternoon before, then the reason for her call became clear.

"It's that the Indians from Sonora have finally arrived in Los Angeles, and we can't leave them alone."

She told me that Castaneda and her would come to pick me up on Monday in order to take me to lunch.

With that change in plans I did not know if I should carry the question that I had prepared in order to interview him, and I shared my doubts with Florinda.

"Sure, bring the question because it will help you avoid getting side-tracked", was her encouraging answer.

I couldn't control my curiosity about a theme that I consider to be of great importance, and when we were about to say goodbye, I asked, "Did you know don Juan?"

"Yes, I knew him twenty years ago", she responded concisely.

So I am going to have the privilege to meet with two persons simultaneously that knew don Juan.

Precisely, one of the accusations that has always been made towards Castaneda is that he only has his own testimony to accredit the existence of the Yaqui teacher; accusations that he has defended, until becoming bored of doing so. "The idea that I invented a person like don Juan is inconceivable. He is an unlikely sort of person that my European intellectual tradition would have made up. The truth is much stranger. I don't believe anything. I am just an informant."

It would have been very easy to demonstrate the authenticity of don Juan by presenting Florinda to the skeptics, but he never did that.

On Monday, at one o'clock on the dot, the arranged hour, I was advised by the reception desk that Florinda Donner had arrived.

I found her sitting in an armchair of the waiting room, and her appearance left me very surprised. I automatically thought "Liar Castaneda".

Florinda is of a fragile appearance, almost androgynous. She is a little over 1.5 meters tall. Her hair is golden blonde that she wears very short, and small and expressive light blue eyes. The result is attractive and unsettling. The combination of her features give her a great similarity to Bibi Anderson, a regular actress in Bergman films. She appeared about 30, but she had to be more like 40, if she knew don Juan twenty years earlier. Later

data confirmed this calculation. She dressed in sports clothes, white pants, yellow shirt, and sandals.

She got up, we greeted, and she kissed me on the cheeks.

I looked around for Castaneda, and Florinda clarified, "He's waiting outside".

We walked out of the building and I saw Castaneda walking towards us on the recently watered grass.

We stayed there a few minutes deciding where we should go. Courteously, Castaneda asked me if I would like to eat, and I suggested something light, like a small salad... However they had already chosen an appropriate establishment, for its gastronomy and its location, which they were sure that I would like. They were going to take me to a Cuban restaurant.

I followed them towards the vehicle, which in that occasion was not the truck, but rather a spacious brown ford. Florinda sat behind and I beside Castaneda, who began to drive towards Wilshire Boulevard.

Both asked me questions about my activities and came around to bring up the theme once more of routines, and the need to break them.

It was very easy being with them. Florinda surprised me by handing me the manuscript, that he had not found, of the translation to Spanish of the last book: three hundred and fifty four loose pages, numbered from the fourth onward, written double spaced on a conventional typewriter, and bound by an elastic (rubber band?).

Remembering the comment of Castaneda, I advised them, "But I am not going to have time to read it before leaving."

"We know", said Florinda, "but you can hang on to it."

After twenty minutes we arrived at the Cuban restaurant. It was of a casual style, and although only half of the tables were occupied, the ambiance was noisy.

We decided to sit to the back, next to the glass door, where there was almost nobody, and we would be able to talk more comfortably.

Florinda and I sat next to each other, with our backs to the door, and Castaneda, in front of me.

A young waiter approached the table. He recognized them and asked them in a friendly way in Spanish, "How are you?". Castaneda and Florinda appeared at ease there. Without doubt they were regular clients there.

The menu was written on a blackboard that hung on the wall. As experts, they ordered for the three, carne mechada (meat wrapped and cooked in bacon) with potatoes. It was served on one plate for all, with small individual dishes of pinto beans.

Castaneda wanted hot tea with his lunch. The waiter said that they didn't have any, but he insisted.

"Ask for it in the kitchen. They've brought it to me other times."

They actually brought him the tea. He knows well how the establishment works.

Florinda asked for a Coca-Cola. When they served her, she looked at me and said, almost in an apologetic manner, pointing to the drink, "It's my vice."

For several minutes both enthusiastically devoted themselves to the delicious lunch.

"We only come to Los Angeles to eat", joked Castaneda, who helped himself to a portion of fried platanos (bananas), which we had not taken seconds on.

"We don't like to cook", said Florinda.

“Nor clean”, he added.

Florinda did not want dessert. I asked for a cappuccino. Castaneda vacillated, but ended up asking for another for himself.

They told me then about their little gastronomical vices.

“My brother had coffee plantations in Venezuela”, related Florinda, “so that I was accustomed to drinking good coffee. When I arrive to the United States, I found that it was so bad that it was no problem leaving it behind.

The motives that obliged her were clear.

By what she explained next, and above all how she explained it, it must have been much more difficult for her to dispense with chocolate.

“I ate it three times a day”, she remembers. I would place it like such, between two pieces of bread, or I would place a small chunk on my tongue and take a sip of coffee.” She describes the experience as if she were living it in that moment, with gestures and expressions of delight.

Castaneda confirms, “I have to keep an eye on her that she doesn’t eat chocolate because she gets pimples.”, and looking at her with a loving gaze he says, “She’s a sick beast.”

Florinda, bashfully gives a naughty smile and reveals that it is not only her that has temptations. “I have to watch him to keep him from drinking coffee because it is bad for him.

Castaneda happily admits that it is true.

The didn’t appear worried by this war against the appetites.

To the contrary, Castaneda as well placed an order for a few bollitos de mantequilla (not sure, small butter-breads, perhaps sweet cakes), which arrive to the table still steaming. He takes one, breaks it in half, and dips it in his cappuccino. He is totally concentrated in the operation.

“What was don Juan like?”, I ask Florinda.

“He was very old, but he had the strength of a twenty year old.”

Upon hearing the name of don Juan, Castaneda looks up quickly from the cappuccino and affirms, “He had the strength of a young man.”

For a few minutes they interrupt each other in order to praise the abilities of don Juan, and to emphasize their affection.

“Florinda was his favorite,” Castaneda assures with satisfaction.

“He would carry me like this, under the arm,” explained Florinda, arching her right arm as if she were carrying a bale of hay.

“He would carry her from one place to the other like a little girl,” he interrupted, amused.

“And you knew him twenty years ago,” I insisted, looking to Florinda to expand on the data of that unknown relation.

“Yes,” she responds, and adds rapidly, but I am not going to tell you any more because then you would know what my age is.

At that moment I knew practically nothing about her, but I had to respect her incisive decision to guard her past. Only the jokes that Castaneda made gave me any clue.

“It was I who cut her hair,” he assures between laughs, stretching his arm out across the table in order to touch the head of Florinda, who pulls away with a playful expression, “and it remains like that, pointed, because her nazi tendencies are coming out.”

They confirm that that Florinda’s family are of German origin, but I did not ask how

much time that they have been living in Venezuela.

Later they would give me a book written by her. When I read it I discovered her strong personality, her integrity, and many other points in common with Castaneda.

She is an anthropologist as well, and obtained her doctorate for her investigation of the curative practices of the indigenous people. She is a United States citizen and it was probably in UCLA where she studied and where she met Castaneda. He must have presented her to don Juan around 1968, when *The teachings...* was published, the date coinciding with the twenty years that, according to what he told me, he has known her. But Florinda only remained some time next to the Yaqui master. In her fascinating book titled *Shabono*, that gathers together her experiences of a year, in the late seventies, among a tribe of Indians in the Amazon jungle. She tells one of the members that she had known ten years earlier a shaman, in the text he is called Juan Caridad (John Charity), of whom she left because he caused her fear, and he still provoked dreams in her in which he would appear, and the next day she told him a detailed account of it's content. She stayed two years in Venezuela doing field work, and later returned to the United States, with material for her thesis, and her impressive experiences in the jungle, beautifully reflected in that book. She wrote it in english, as Castaneda wrote his, and published it in 1982 in the United States with an extolling commentary on the book cover by Castaneda himself. At it's time it received high acclaim and was translated into a dozen languages.

Few know that Florinda and Castaneda share a past, a present and, by comments of his, an in dissolvable future project.

"She is the beginning and end of everything," he says assuredly.

Faced with this claim, Florinda looks down timidly.

She doesn't deny it, like she would with other issues in which he includes her.

In the restaurant he referred to her a couple of times calling her "Gina," probably a nickname.

Castaneda had me understand at another time that theirs is not a conventional relationship, of mates.

The energy of both appear to be complementary and indispensable in order to achieve what he calls the "liberation".

Never the less, there are those who consider their relation to be conventional.

"My dentist calls me Mrs. Castaneda," she says amused, "and we let them think what they will think. It's all the same to us."

I return to draw upon the theme of friendships, and I ask Florinda, "Castaneda has told me that he doesn't have friends. Neither do you?"

"The friends want to be able to go to your house," she responds, "and call you on the phone. They get upset if they know that you have been in the city and that you have not made contact with them."

We had finished eating. Castaneda paid the bill in cash, and we got up to leave. While we were almost at the door, he asked if we had to use the restroom.

"Why do you want to know?" asked Florinda.

It is that now we are going to a park, and it will be difficult to find a place there," he clarified.

We returned to the car and sat ourselves as before. Castaneda is a driver respectful of the

traffic lights and not at all aggressive with the other drivers. His good reflexes permit him to concentrate on the conversation and look once in a while at the person to whom he is conversing.

In a few minutes he stops in a parking lot, in front of a wood sign with the name Rancho Park. It is an enormous extension of irregular meadows covered thinly by grass, and specked by a few trees. There are rustic camping type tables and benches, and a few modest sports amenities. In the distance a group of children clearly stand out with distinctly colored clothes, doing gymnastics following the movements of their instructor. The wind carries some laughter. Two young people play on one of the tennis courts. It is cool there.

Castaneda warns that we leave nothing in the car to be robbed and he checks that all of the doors are locked. We had hardly walked a few steps when he stops and begins to look around and confesses that he needs to go to the restroom. Florinda muses, "He asks us, and now it is he that needs to. So, it is not going to be easy here."

Castaneda is very concentrated and does not respond to the joke. He goes to one of the dressing rooms, but comes out at once commenting, "They don't have any."

He walks around the building and at last finds a sign. Florinda and I wait.

All is well next to her. She is placid, somewhat reserved but not introverted, and appears to be at ease listening. Completely the opposite with him, who hardly can maintain silence.

Castaneda approaches us content. Now we have to sit somewhere so that I can do the interview.

Between the dressing rooms and the tennis court there is a small terrace of a kiosk, which is accessed by three or four steps. We sit at one of the white circular plastic tables. I have the sun to my face. I don't want to protect me with the sunglasses, since Castaneda is not wearing them and I am going to be looking at him. In a few minutes the reflection on the table and my papers make my eyes water. We move to another table in the shade, but at once we find that there is a cold draft there. We need to leave to another area.

Castaneda places himself between us, takes us by the arms, and we walk off into the meadow. He suggests that we roll (or tumble) on the grass. He tries, but it must have been watered not long before and it is moist. Finally, one of the camp tables appears to suit our needs, it is between the sun and shade, at the foot of a tree. Castaneda notices that over the wrinkled surface there are colored remains of paint that shine under the light, and exclaims, "How beautiful!"

They sit next to each other in front of me. The benches don't have backs and are united to the planks that make the table. Before beginning a few reflections occur to me.

Castaneda had written that the nagual is he that guides other sorcerers. Don Juan clarified that a sorcerer is simply a man of knowledge, who knows and uses deftly the cosmic energy.

In all of the epochs there have been initiates, with the heretics as a shield in order to avoid the distorting and egoistic vulgarization of their knowledge, and as well certain individuals capable of realizing certain phenomenon about themselves or about the surroundings. To them one alludes with distinct terms or categories, according to the societies and the times, magicians, curers, seers, witches, mediums, astrologers, fakirs, alchemists... and of course, sorcerers, the most serious accusation which one could cast

on any human being for the last few centuries.

But one does not need to go so far back. Breaking a mirror or seeing a black cat is still an omen of bad luck for many living in the twentieth century. Some counteract the reference to undesired issues by putting their hand on a piece of wood. Other cannot not allow that salt be spilled in their presence, that scissors be left open, to hear the howl of a dog or the mention of a reptile. He that avoids passing under a ladder, just in case, possibly boards an airplane with out fear... just as long as it is not on Tuesday, or Friday the 13th.

Furthermore, palmistry, tarot, the reading of tea leaves, or of coffee, are flourishing businesses, and astrology, more of less commonplace, is included in all sorts of publications, including those that proclaim themselves as being rational.

There are those who won't leave home before having thrown the three coins in the air which draw a mystical answer from the "I Ching". Protecting oneself from the evil eye with all types of fetishes is more common than is perhaps believed.

Superstition? The ancestor that walks with us?

If sorcery is simply, "the knowledge and capable use of energy," and ourselves, equal with the rest of the cosmos, we are made of that energy. We are all potentially sorcerers, or men of knowledge.

Perhaps that is why Pittacus advised, "Know yourself and you will know the universe and the gods."

And that is what don Juan wanted to inculcar on his apprentice, who turned him into, by way of his books, probably the most well known sorcerer of the western world, if we exclude the brothers Aaron and Moses.

I began the interview by asking Castaneda, "Are you now the nagual, the guide?"

"Yes, I am the nagual." he affirmed without hesitation.

"Could you summarize the qualities and attitudes that a nagual has?"

"A nagual has to be pitiless. For example, one may love without expecting return and at the same time have the coldness that comes of not asking for anything. We believe that we love too much because we beg and cry... it gives us the impression that we love, but it is not true. It is a posture of the ego.

"Given that the power of the brujo can affect others, what standards of behavior does he impose on himself?"

"The standard of impeccability."

"But don Juan did not act openly when you knew him."

"The spirit placed me within the reach of don Juan. He had his omens and it was up to him to convince me. In his case he was forced to be relentless. If the spirit demands an action of the sorcerer, that is what he does," he concludes assuredly.

That is to say, that in that scenario, one dispenses with the specific will of the chosen, although the teacher does not act with egoist ends, given that he is going to transmit his knowledge in exchange for nothing... or everything, but in a spiritual sense. Don Juan obtained nothing from Castaneda, and needed nothing from him, except that he present himself to secede him. He was limited to complete a command and the witness came by. Two spokes of the same wheel. How many more are necessary?

"An ancient vedic text says, "The seven charkas, the seven plains, the seven ways, and the seven elements, will show you that the rim does not know the axle, although it is united with it. The spoke gives a sense of the void and the axel does not know it's center. Never

the less, the wheel continues rotating around. That is how, the life does not know being, and the brain does not know the mind. When the only point from which the wheel may know the center is that which is in contact with the ground.”

“So don Juan had an omen, and he chose you,” I proceeded.

“I had the adequate energy to embark on that journey. I did not know that he used the expression only as a metaphor. A concrete energetic transformation is required of the luminous egg,” he continued, “that demands that one knows and makes real what a sorcerer knows.”

“Can the sorcerer be mistaken and give power to someone who is not going to use it adequately?”

“The sorcerer does not make mistakes, and only teaches to whom is worthy.”

“Once one has mastered apprenticeship, what is the task of the sorcerer?”

“It consists in making understandable an age old knowledge. He must enter into silent knowledge and translate it into terminology of the reason.” And he warns, “But he has to have a predisposition for the one who is to receive the information, otherwise we would be seen as fakes.”

I commented to him about the cover story of *Time* magazine dedicated to him of March 5th, 1973.

“From then on,” he affirmed, “in the East they will not come to need my books.”

“Don’t mock *Time* with impunity,” Florinda interjected.

“If you thought that it could have compromised you, why did you allow them to interview you”?

“They had been insisting for a long time. Then don Juan told me that I should accept, in order to erase once and for all, all of my personal history.”

I took advantage of the moment to return to an issue that I had not personally given up.

“So why did you allow them to take photos, and not me”?

“Because they put on a lot of pressure.” he responded.

In any case, he only allowed them to take partial photos of him, in the university library. The story also included his graduation photo.

“What personal and social implications is there to being a sorcerer”?

“From the personal point of view, it is a total dedication, without side-tracks, to the premises of sorcery. In the social sense, the sorcerer behaves so vigilantly that nobody notices what he is, or at least those who would want to say so. In the sorcerer there is an absence of thoughts, desires, and he acts according to the circumstances,” he concluded. The afternoon grew late and it began to get cold. Carlos was wearing a light cloth hunting jacket. He removed it and insisted that Florinda use it with her feet on the bench, and her body bent with her arms around her legs. It did not stay and Castaneda hung it on her again. Now and then he rubbed the groins, in a very careful manner.

Florinda and he behaved as equals. Castaneda spoke in his books of the nagual women. Is Florinda one? I did not dare ask.

“Who is your group composed of, besides Florinda?”

“Ana, Juana, Muni, y Nuri,” he appeared pleased to say.

He spoke of the four with admiration and a half smile. He concluded the analysis of each of their respective personalities with expressions like “machísima” (very macho female), or “bravísima” (very courageous). And referring to the uncontrollable character of one of

them he called her affectionately “pendeja” (good for nothing).

“All of them are young and only one of them knew don Juan, as a girl.”

“Compared to what you cite in your books, it’s a very small group, is it not”?

“Don Juan’s group”, Castaneda remembers, “was sixteen, including himself. The number has to be in multiples of four. Four being the minimum and eight the most effective.”

“Why eight”?

“One needs eight people to establish a consensus that would be foreign to the individuality. Eight is the number that breaks the individual because eight makes the human material.”

At that moment I could not remember the quote and I could not comment on the curious numerological parallel with the *Bhagavad Gita*, Vedic text. In the fourth verse of the seventh chapter called “The yoga of discernment”, Krishna says to Arjuna, “Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect, and ego are the eight categories of my lower nature.”

“Your group adds up to six, and it is not a multiple of four to arrive at the effective number. What repercussions does this circumstance have for your group”?

“That is one of the difficulties that we have to face to become free,” he says discouraged, and adds, “We need two other people.”

“Why don’t you search for them”?

“Because nobody wants to step forward!”, he complains indignantly.

Castaneda indeed put it that way, trusting completely don Juan, who assured him that he would see the energy and so discover the apprentice that he was looking for.

“Can you see, like don Juan, the energy of people or of things”?

“Yes,” he responds categorically. “I see energy.”

Although it has already been explained in his books, I question him more about the subject.

“What is that energy like”?

“It is as if it were made of long filaments of light.”

“How is it different from one person to another”?

“The stronger the energy of the individual, the thicker, compact, and brilliant are those filaments.”

“Is it concentrated on some fixed point of the body”?

“It rises up from the feet. The higher it is, the greater the physical capacity and evolved is the individual.

“Is the process like the “kundalini”, an energy that is contained in the base of the spinal column”?

“I don’t know.”

“Of all the people that you have known, who has the energy at the highest position”?

“Don Juan, who managed to elevate it up to the neck,” he remembers with admiration.

Perhaps it is through his capacity to “see” who Castaneda chooses, at a first glance, if he should approach or not someone with whom a “blind date” has been arranged.

I returned to an issue that relates to his present group. If the five women the compose it were not disciples of don Juan, and except for two did not even know him, Castaneda is then who has to initiate them into sorcery.

“Are you the teacher of other apprentices”?

“No,” he responded sincerely. “I can be a nagual, but not a teacher. I don’t have the

required qualities.”

“But don Juan maintained that the nagual is as well a teacher,” I insisted.

“Even if I were to live more years than he lived,” he said with conviction, “I will never be able to come to be like don Juan.”

His certainty perhaps comes endorsed by that which his teacher told him twenty years before, “I know that I will not have time to teach you all that I want to. I will have only enough time to put you on the path, and I trust that you will search in the same way that I searched.”

“When did don Juan die”?

“He left in 1973.”

“Did you take charge of the group after his death”?

“No. Doña Florinda, the companion of don Juan, remained guiding us until she herself left.”

“When did it happen of doña Florinda”?

“In 1985. Florinda,” and he gestures to Florinda Donner, “gave herself the name in her memory.”

Now I understood why during the lunch Castaneda made reference to her occasionally as “Gina”. That is probably her authentic personal name, until she dedicated herself to the change.

Florinda Donner already signed her book with her adoptive name, published three years before doña Florinda would die. The change of name while the companion of don Juan was still living, more suggests a sign of community, rather than a memory of the absent. Florinda remained little time at the side of don Juan. In spite of that, and judging by the respect and complicity with which Castaneda treated her, both appeared to share the dedication, “to the premises of sorcery”. But Castaneda could not initiate her, given that he himself declared that he was not a teacher. The explanation perhaps would be that the fragile and discreet Florinda Donner was apprenticed to doña Florinda, who imparted at one time her knowledge to Castaneda himself.

That ancient woman had to have been nagual and teacher of the group during twelve years.

In the park one could no longer see a soul. It was five. The moisture of the environment intensified the cold.

“We should leave,” proposed Castaneda.

“In as much as the Indians from Sonora are still at the house,” explained Florinda, “and we don’t want to leave them alone for too long.”

I put away my notes. The material was insufficient. And no possibility had been mentioned of another meeting. I walk from the park, and tell them that I had prepared many more questions than had been possible to ask.

“You may continue in the car,” pointed out Castaneda.

Florinda intervened with a surprise offer.

“We are going to give you our address. Write to us the questions that you need, and I will send you the typed answers.”

She did not clarify if he would dictate them to her, or if it would be she herself that would answer.

I did not know if Florinda had discussed giving his address with Castaneda, she had to

have done it before our meeting today, given that at no moment had we been alone. Now in the car, Castaneda returns down the street by which we had arrived at the park. I prepared my notes, but before continuing the interview I thanked them that they had allowed me to know them, and the ability that they had given me to do my work. Then I received another version of why they chose my letter. “Since the last time that we had passed by the attorneys office, various sacks of mail had accumulated,” said Florida. “We put them in front of us, and decided to open just one letter, and that which we grabbed was yours.” There was a pregnant silence. Castaneda looks ahead and doesn’t say a word. I doubt whether I should ask them to clarify which is the authentic version, but I manage to hold back my curiosity. I would not return to speak of that.

IV The Memory of don Juan

The Indians that they had lodged in their home limited their movements. They were two men and a woman, who, as Castaneda already explained to me, when he thought that he had to go to Sonora, frequently visited don Juan.

“And you have to take care of them?” I asked.

“It is that now they come to him,” explained Florinda indicating to Castaneda, “as their nagual.”

“I have proposed to them, to enroll them in night school in order to learn english and other things,” Castaneda relates in an annoyed tone, “so that they may become cultivated.”

“But they want to pass on directly to the practices of sorcery,” adds Florinda in a resigned manner.

“They offered themselves to be my chauffer, to cook, or to iron my pants,” he continued.

“And I tell them that I don’t need a chauffer or a butler. Stupid Indians!” he exclaimed indignantly.

“Why would don Juan want his apprentices to have an intellectual preparation?” I inquired.

“Because the intellect is the only thing that can place a secure backup against the inevitable onslaught of the unknown, against the fear of the unknown,” Castaneda responded. “The intellect,” he continued, “is the only thing that can consul the sorcerer. The counsel does not come to the sorcerer from the fire, or from the feelings. It is the intellect that saves him.”

Castaneda and Florinda fulfill the requirements. Another women of the group was preparing her doctoral thesis in History at the University of Los Angeles at that time.

“Did don Juan influence your tendencies or your pursuits?” I asked Castaneda.

“My relation with don Juan did not set me apart from that which interested me. I feel today the same passion for the academic world as when I began to move within it.” he responds firmly.

Without doubt it must have been painful to him that because of the controversy generated by his books, most of his colleagues treated him as a charlatan, marginalizing him from that world to which, as he declared, he continues to emotionally relate to.

His unconditional Harold Garfinkle was surely his consul and his refuge, as he had been his mentor, when universities and publications refused him the bread and salt of anthropology. He had gone too far, and upon unorthodox roads.

For as much as he recounts, it was not easy.

“At a certain time in my apprenticeship, I felt great depression. I was clouded by terror, sadness, and by suicidal thoughts. Then don Juan warned me that that state came about as one of the tricks of the reason to regain control. The will is the voice of the body.”

Without doubt he needed a great deal to overcome the absence of his teacher, who was born in 1891 and died, according to Castaneda, in 1973, although he employed a different verb for the passing.

“You say that don Juan ‘left‘ in 1973. In what month?”

“In June,” he specifies.

“Did you know that it was going to happen?”

“He decided the moment to leave.”

“How did it happen?”

“He was surrounded by his sorcerers and, all of a sudden, he changed into light and ‘disappeared’, together with all the others,” he says with an expression of amazement, and at the same time as he raises both arms.

“And doña Florinda?”

“The same!” he exclaims. “She as well disappeared with her group, changed into light. But first, she and her witches gave to Florinda all of their jewelry and power objects.”

“They gave me their necklaces, their bracelets,” intervenes Florinda excitedly, “and other things that they used.” She made sure to clarify that they were not valuable objects, but rather of power.

This particular event appears to confirm to Florinda Donner as inheritor of the companionship of don Juan.

Castaneda is now driving down tree lined streets with cottages tucked away in the vegetation, and parks to the left, in front of one on the corner. We are in Westwood.

Florinda and I say goodbye. I don’t know if I will be seeing her again.

When she already has the door open and is about to leave, she remembers something and says to me, “Tomorrow we will give you the books.” Referring to those of Castaneda, who offered to provide them to me. “Right now I can’t search for them,” she excuses herself, “because I have to occupy myself with the Indians.”

“As well we are going to give her your book, eh?” he decides, waiting her approval.

Florinda agrees timidly, leaves the care, and walks a short distance over the lawn to the house and turns to wave. Before she enters the home, Castaneda starts the motor.

I couldn’t leave the subject of the circumstances of don Juan’s death.

“So he left like that?”

“Yes. He changed plains and stopped being accessible,” he stated.

“How did his absence affect you?” In some of his books he has described the emptiness that he felt, but did not mention if the feelings continued.

“My only consolation is that don Juan is free,” he responds with a touch of nostalgia.

“Although he doubted at times if he would ever be able to achieve it.”

I returned to times that should feel more pleasant to him.

“In what way were you in touch with him?”

“Don Juan came to Los Angeles as well.”

“Did he speak English?”

“He spoke perfect English. He was an American Indian, an Indian from Yuma!” he clarified indignantly for the doubt. “He was fluent in various native tongues,” he added, “besides Spanish.”

“How was he physically?”

“He had a very elegant figure. He was tall and thin. He wore silk shirts, and had his suits custom made. He teased me because I wore factory clothes off the rack.”

“At the end of your first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, you say that in 1965 you voluntarily left behind your apprenticeship. Why?”

“I didn’t leave it behind,” he protested. “I put it to one side. Don Juan had been giving me

information to my left side, and I had to let it settle in.”

Castaneda had explained in his books that the teaching for the right side took place in daily life, while for the left side a heightened state of awareness is required, that don Juan himself provoked on his unsuspecting apprentice through a violent slap between the shoulder blades.

The four prior years of apprenticeship, up until 1965 perhaps carried him to the limits of his psychological resistance, making him abandon it. In fact, at the beginning of his second book he excuses himself in front of don Juan for having left the apprenticeship because of fear.

Until that moment, and for some time more, don Juan had been having him take drugs, although he did not utilize that system with his other students.

“Why were you the only one that he made take drugs?”

“I was so terribly concrete... I couldn't be changed, and he had to provoke forced movements on another level, hallucinations that I would not be able to explain, and alter my rationality.

The immediate result was panic, although as that is habitual in him, in an interview granted to Sam Keen and published in the early seventies in *Psychology Today*, he denies blame to his teacher, and assumes all the responsibility.

“Don Juan only utilized the psychotropic plants during the middle period of my apprenticeship because I was so stupid, sophisticated and conceited... I was insisting in my description of the world as if I were the only truth. The psychotropics destroyed my dogmatic certainty, but in exchange I paid a high price. My body became weak and I needed many months to recover. I suffered from anxiety and I was functioning at a very low level. If I had behaved as a warrior and accepted the responsibility, it would not have been necessary to take them.”

Castaneda, of whom one of his professors had interested him in shamanism, had declared that when he knew don Juan, he was searching for information about medicinal plants, with the objective of preparing a short essay that would facilitate his entrance into Graduate School, in so much that he aspired to become a professor.

In reference to other drugs, as many as there were in the seventies, he assured, “I have never taken LSD.”

But, in what psychic state was Castaneda at that time?

“When I knew don Juan,” he remembered in the same interview with Sam Keen, “I possessed very little personal power. I had been living a very eccentric life... Apparently he was aggressive and conceited, but inwardly, he was indecisive and unsure. Like the majority of the intellectuals, I felt protected, although I didn't go anywhere. I was always observing myself and speaking to myself. Rarely did I detain the internal dialog.

I return to this theme.

“Don Juan said that in order to think well, one has to stop thinking.”

“Yes, one has to leave the world of habitual thoughts, that are only reaffirmations of yourself.”

The Yaqui teacher was of the opinion that the decent of the spirit happens only when we cut our internal dialog, and he lamented how nobody wants to be free.

“Do you believe that it is the fear of losing the state of habitual consciousness which impedes us from cutting that internal dialog?”

“When one vanquishes fear is when one glimpses liberty, in place of focusing on complementing oneself from within.”

As well he insisted that don Juan was a man who deferred to silent knowledge, instead of the rational world.

“The cosmic forces, the silent knowledge, present us with a world of demons, while the rational gives us tranquility. But the tranquility of the everyday world can no longer continue sustaining us. Don Juan insisted that one had to return to silent knowledge, but now with less fear, having already returned with one of the trophies obtained upon returning from the hell to which we had descended, the understanding.”

“If other aspects of reality exist, does one need to be a very special individual to capture them?”

“People have a profound sense of magic, but the act of being rational constitutes a handicap.”

“Why?”

“The daily world is so extraordinary powerful that it does not permit us exits. It teaches us from very early on, the importance of the person, not for being total, but rather only the social person. That obsession does not allow us to leave.”

“Is it like that for everyone?”

“The years that pass in that type of practice eradicate the magic, and then only the personal I, and the stupidities exist.”

“Don Juan accused you of disguising pleasing yourself as independence, and felt that self-importance hid self-pity.”

“A state of extraordinary laziness, that appears to be the reference point of all of us, we transform into ideas of personal liberty so that nobody will bother us, and we argue a total integrity, which is a lie, and represents a barrier that does not permit us liberty,” he concluded in a decisive tone.

Don Juan made reference to ‘not doing’, a Taoist concept which Castaneda spoke of briefly.

“Do other philosophies or oriental disciplines interest you?” I was curious.

“I do kung-fu,” he responded.

“Ah, that is how you maintain yourself so well.”

“Sure it maintains me in good form, but only because I practice it every day!” he exclaimed.

Through Florinda I would know that Castaneda not only does kung-fu, but that he is a master of kung-fu.

A few months later, I note in the dedication of his second to last book, *El Fuego Interior (The Fire from Within)*, “I want to express my admiration and gratitude to a masterful teacher, H.Y. Lee, for helping me to restore my energy, and for teaching me an alternate way to plenitude and well-being.”

Was it Lee, as it is commonly spelled in english, for the Chinese name Li, the teacher that taught him kung fu?

From the martial arts we passed to yoga, a discipline as extensive as it is mystified. Castaneda told how once he was invited to one of those luxurious centers located in California.

“I sat next to the principal guide, not knowing what to say to him. Once in a while he

would turn to me and make some sort of comment like, “and so, do you like California?” He gave a laugh and continued, “To see me off, one of the followers splashed me, with what seemed to be some type of hyssop, with a liquid that I believe was urine from the master, because everything that comes from his body is considered sacred. You know that?”

Since we were already on these themes, “What is your opinion about the theory of reincarnation?”

His rejection is virulent.

“Don Juan had done the calculation that in only one thousand years each one of us would have needed to have had some twenty million ancestors. Four grandparents, eight great grandparents, 16 great great grandparents, etcetera.” He raises his voice, and accuses, “The pride of man makes him believe himself better than the animals. It made quite a stir when it was found out that man passes through all the phases of animal life during gestation. The monkey as well does so, including passing up man to become a monkey,” he concludes with an indignant attitude, that deters pursuing more details about the theme.

Any orthodox materialist would subscribe to what Castaneda had just said, but it would result contradictory at the same time to accept that the individual goes after the death to another place (“a change of plain and no longer is accessible”), which he refers to presently and congratulates him on that state (“My only consolation is that don Juan is free”), and that this gratifying possibility is not within the reach of everyone (“although at times he doubted that he was going to achieve it”). As such he believes in a selective liberation, based on the peculiarities of the individual.

The orthodox materialist would not admit either that upon the disappearance of the body that an energy survives, with the consciousness of the individual that goes, or ‘flies’, to other plains in search of liberty.

Never the less, Castaneda maintains in his books that the eagle, the symbol of the spirit, or cosmic force, devours the aspirants, or lets them pass.

“The spirit is impeccable, and the brujo imitates that impeccability,” he has written as well.

But according to his explanations, not everyone can become a brujo. Only those who already were born with a “concrete type of form of the luminous egg,” and the necessary intellectual capacity to make possible “the understanding” in order to give them cover from the “onslaughts of energy.”

Does the spirit act capriciously, giving to some and excluding others from the capacities and concrete types of form that would enable or make difficult their eternal liberation?” In reference to the laws of the Universe, Einstein said, “God does not play dice.” It would be troublesome with what that would have to do with man, depending on his destiny of how he would fall on the gambling table, sorcerer or “fart”.

“At times you have referred to energy, saying that we make bad use of it. In what sense?”

“Giving into passion, wasting the energy that could be utilized in the way of the warrior, is lamentable”

“But according to the anecdote of the Nordic transvestite that you told me, you as well were used to wasting it. What induced you to change your conduct?”

“Don Juan told me that we come into the world with a specific quantity of energy that is

determined by the conditions into which we have been engendered. If the sex act was boring, without orgasm, the new being will have a weak energy. Take for example my own case. My mother was 15 years old and her relation with my father took place behind a door. She was not even aware of it. That is why don Juan warned me to not waste my sexual energy. The sex act," he continues in a didactic tone, "has a tremendous importance. It consumes a great amount of energy and that act for the procreation. One should not waste it in such a banal form."

There are other aspects related to procreation that he explained to me as well.

"The child comes forth from our own energy, and in the luminous egg that we are, one can observe the existence of as many dark patches as children that the person has had. When we take into account that children cause damage, really we are concerned about the energy that we have ceded to them," and he assures, "One should not hug their children face to face, because we are weakened in our unconscious desire to recuperate that energy, in order to become complete."

"Does that ceding of energy only affect the woman?"

"No. The repercussion is equal for the father as for the mother."

When Castaneda asked don Juan if women can be warriors, he responded, "Of course they can, and they are even better equipped than men for the path of knowledge. Men are only a little more resilient. But I should say that, all told, that women have a slight advantage."

I asked his apprentice his opinion about the subject.

"The woman is more fluid," Castaneda clarified, "since from the moment of birth the rigidity is not permitted. She is an object for the service and pleasure of man. Upon changing into a sex object she acquires that fluidity. Being a slave locates her in a situation of necessity, but he impedes her to develop other goals than serving the man, if he is determined," he concludes.

Castaneda concedes then, to the woman less will in order to attain spiritual goals, although he speaks with respect and fondness, in his books, and beyond them, of Carol, the nagual woman with whom he shared for a time, the leadership of the group, and who displayed great determination and initiative in her conduct.

He himself has stated that doña Florinda not only complemented the initiation of some disciples of don Juan, but furthermore had her own group, and until her death concerned herself as well with that of Castaneda. On the other hand, the prominent position that Florinda Donner apparently occupied in that tiny community, revealed the absence of discrimination in the line of sorcery practiced by don Juan, who assured his apprentices that they were remaking, a bridge between the new and ancient seers, dating back to very ancient times.

As if already like habit, Castaneda parked in front of my lodging, but continued chatting. It appeared that the moment had arrived to back-track about the transcendental aspects of don Juan that his apprentice has come explain. He is going to tell me a clarifying anecdote about the cunning character of his teacher.

"When I went into the desert or mountains with don Juan, although I would be gasping to keep up with his pace, I would ask him if we could stop for a minute so that I could light up a cigarette. While I would take a few drags, hardly being able to breath, don Juan would laugh at me. I was so deeply rooted in the vice that I had come to be smoking three

packs a day. One day he told me,” continued Castaneda with a comical expression, “that we were going to pass a few days in the desert, and he counseled me to carry all of the cigarettes that I would need, since we were not going to pass through inhabited zones. He added that they should be well wrapped, so that the coyotes would not destroy them during the night. As such I packaged forty or fifty packs in aluminum foil. When night came, we slept on the ground, and when I woke up I found out that my cigarettes had disappeared. Don Juan commented that surely the coyotes had dragged away the bag that they were in, and that we should be able to find them tangled up in the surrounding brush. We searched for hours, but there was no finding them. I began to feel very nervous, with an uncontrollable desire to smoke. On seeing my condition, don Juan decided that we should go to a small village not far away, to see if we would find some type of tobacco, but they didn’t have any. We left there, walked a while, and all of a sudden he stopped to analyze our position, saying, ‘If we continue to the north eight hundred miles, we will arrive at the United States. If we go the west we will find the Pacific, to the east the Gulf, and to the south, Mexico City.’ I was indignant,” Castaneda remembers between laughs. “Don Juan took off walking, but every few minutes he stopped, and retraced his steps, observing the surroundings. I thought to myself, ‘This stupid Indian does not know how to get out of here, that senile Indian has gotten us lost.’ So we walked for several days, until don Juan finally managed to find the way and we returned to his house. By then, I had lost the smoking habit. Later I determined that during all of those days we had been in the same zone, doing circles. Even today,” confesses Castaneda, “I only use shirts without pockets, because that is where I was used to carrying the pack.” He feels the left part of the shirt with a certain nostalgia and chuckles.

No doubt don Juan used drastic means, as is shown in the books of Castaneda.

“Why did don Juan say that one must teach mankind, now more than ever, to connect inward? Is it because mankind has attained a major level of intellectual development?”

“What are you saying!” he exclaims. “It is because now we are indeed bankrupt. We are,” he continues irately, “in the middle of a battle between the two superpowers, that is going to destroy humanity. They have already opened up a hole in the ozone. And do you believe that they are going to patch it up? Are they going to set aside their enormous expenditures on defense in order to repair the Earth? More than anything,” he concludes in a firm tone, “mankind needs the help of magic.”

A few minutes later he asked me what time it was.

“It’s six,” I responded.

“I have to get going. I’ll call you later to tell you what hour we will meet tomorrow.”

“You know that I am leaving the day after tomorrow,” I let him know.

“Don’t worry. We will meet in the morning and I will bring you the books,” he says calmly.

V Travels

I review my notes in order to know more precisely the aspects that require more detail, or questions that still have not been suggested. In view of the proven fact that with Castaneda it becomes a vain attempt to stay on a single topic for very long, I have grouped into several themes the information that has been stirred up, which jumps from one theme to another, changes from the most serious, to laughter, and mixes the divine with the human, spoken in a way that could not be surpassed.

Coinciding with the descriptions that others have given of him, he is intelligent, sympathetic, and has great charisma.

However, that security and joy of living that he shows today came crashing down when don Juan disappeared. By what he has told me, the following years were not easy, and although he would find counsel in the fact that his master was free, he experienced a certain orphan-hood that impelled him to search, if not for an impossible substitute, people with the same concerns.

“After the death of don Juan,” he remembers, without stating when, “I decided to travel around the world. I went everywhere, and got to know everyone who said that they were initiates, but I didn’t find anyone worthwhile.”

“You didn’t find anyone?” I asked incredulously.

“At least I didn’t find anyone who was worthwhile,” he repeats.

“But surely there would have to be other persons, and not only in Asia, where there is more tradition, but also in Europe itself...”

“What’s in Spain?” he interrupts disparagingly, and answers his own question.

“Spaniards!” “What’s in Italy? Italians!”

So Castaneda returned to America, where notwithstanding he appeared to debate within himself a conflict of racial or cultural ‘mestizo-ness’, judging by the comment that he made during the lunch, looking at Florinda and I.

“You have it so easy, because you are Europeans.”

A surprising reflection, given that he has always put forth the image of his own western roots, but conforming with the impression that Anaïs Nin upon knowing him, reflected in her diary; “Deena brought Castaneda to dinner. He was fascinating. A mix of the primitive and the academic. Anthropologist. He denies his Indian blood. He feels schizophrenic, divided.” In spite of everything, Castaneda is not indifferent to Europe. “Florinda and I go frequently, above all to Italy,” he says with a smile. As if one of his grandparents were Italian.

“To some city in particular?”

“We like Rome a lot. Whenever we are there we meet with Fellini, who is our friend. I tell him,” confides Castaneda, ‘At your age you should leave behind the passion. Don’t waste your energy on that. Interest yourself in other things.’ But he pays no mind. He says that he can’t live if he is not in love.”

“And you always see him in Rome?”

“As well we meet in Los Angeles,” says Castaneda. “Once he showed up with a young roman boy, because, he told us, the journey was very long and meanwhile he wanted to enjoy the beauty.”

“Do you understand Italian?” I asked, remembering his rebuttal that he indeed studied in Milan.

“My Italian is very colloquial,” he assured, “I don’t know enough to get down to the nitty gritty. We speak with Fellini in English.”

Federico Fellini declared towards the end of 1989, that in 1985 he went to Los Angeles with the project of making a film based on the saga of don Juan. Castaneda had agreed to accompany him to Mexico, but later changed his mind. Fellini went to Mexico with his equipment, and from that experience suggested the script for a comedy titled “Viaje a Tulum”, with drawings by Manara.

In 1980, Castaneda visited Spain, passing through Madrid and other cities. His most vivid memories appear to center around various parties where people attended whose behavior surprised him.

“When night came they became crazy!” he remembers amused, referring to the non-orthodox conduct and sexual tendencies. “But, according to the hosts, the next day everyone returns to normal and change into serious executives, with suit and briefcase.”

From his experiences among those people comes his recurring joke parodying the castellano accent and a haughty attitude claiming for himself an aristocratic name: “don Carlos del Valle y de la Herradura” (Sir Carlos of the Valley and of the Horseshoe)

“What impression did you have of the country?”

“Spain is a difficult society,” he reflected, “I noted many social differences.”

“Have you returned since that time?”

“Yes. In 1985, doña Florinda left so suddenly, we decided to leave for a season. We did not know very well where we wanted to go. We just craved to get away.”

He explained that the group, that up until that point was drawn together around doña Florinda, disintegrated. Those that accepted the leadership of Castaneda, headed with him to the airport.

“And you didn’t have any fixed itinerary or destiny?”

“No! In the airport we asked which was the first flight out of the country. The lady at the information desk said, ‘To where?’ We answered that it did not matter,” continued Castaneda. “The girl was very surprised and informed us that there was one to South Korea, but we no longer had time to take it. I asked here what was the following, and she answered, ‘The next flight is to Helsinki.’ So we bought the tickets and boarded the plane.”

“And you went to Helsinki?”

“Yes. When we arrived it was frighteningly cold,” he remembers with a smile.

“Did you stay there very long?”

“We traveled throughout Scandinavia, until we got tired of the cold and decided to look for climates more temperate. Finally we arrived at Barcelona.”

In that city, Castaneda explains that he began to feel sharp pains originating from a hernia that he believed he had caused a few weeks earlier upon making a sudden movement during the “disappearance” of doña Florinda. His health became worse and he decided to submit himself to an urgent treatment.

“The surgeon,” he remembers amusedly, “told me that it was quite likely that I would not survive the operation. He asked me to go for a comprehensive diagnosis before the uncomfortable situation that I could create for him if I insisted that he operate on me,

being that in the case of my death he would be obliged to fill out a whole series of forms. In sextuplet!” Between laughs, he says with a touch of irony that he took stock of the complications that he was going to provoke and returned rapidly to the United States where he checked into a clinic. “The nurse, a young black man, was shaving my pubic hair,” he continues, “and asks me, ‘What is it?’ I respond to him, ‘A hernia.’ ‘Well, it looks to me like cancer,’ he replied.” Now, Castaneda was laughing so hard that it was making him cry. He dried his tears and continued the story of his misadventure. Now in the surgery room, the surgeons aid, a gay kid, grabs me from behind to lift me up to the operating table and says calmly, “Don’t worry, it won’t hurt a bit.”

The experience, as much as the story, would fit perfectly in a comedy, although even if it were a ‘D’ it would be considered exaggerated.

About the topic, I remember don Juan said, “Illness is a lack of harmony between the body and it’s world. The body is consciousness and should be dealt with impeccably.” I suppose that the daily practice of martial arts has an objective to maintain harmony. As well Florinda is familiar with them. In her book she tells how she has been practicing Karate for several years, and practices archery in college, and held a demonstration of her abilities in front of the Indians that lived in the jungle.

Castaneda and Florinda traveled then frequently. At times for pleasure and at other times for editorial reasons, but given the characteristics of his personality, this obligation probably did not take away, but rather added interest to the outings. As I already found out at the beginning of my search, it does not appear that the literary agents remain for very long, and taking into account his extreme curiosity, it is logical that he would prefer to personally take care of his affairs, which has permitted him without doubt to know many of his editors.

But in addition to the occasional stays in Italy and other countries, Castaneda has dwelt, for reasons I know not, at least a long season not only out side of the United States, but as well separated from some of his routine work. For example, in relation to the translation to Spanish of some of his books, he told me in passing that he lived three years in Guatemala, which impeded him from supervising the work.

In early October, just some five weeks after we met, they thought about going to Argentina with the intent of the publication in that country the last book of Castaneda. And once more they surprised me by pointing out the possibility of visiting me afterwards in Spain. Naturally, and in accord with his habits or lack of them, they did not fix a date. They still might arrive, although it is difficult to forecast the movements of Castaneda. Judging by what he himself declared to Sam Keen in the interview in the early seventies that I cited earlier:

“I live in Los Angeles and I have found the way to use that world in order to meet my needs. The life without routines in a routine world is a total challenge, but one can do it.” And he remembered, “I was a routine person before, but in 1965 I began to change my habits. I would write during the quiet hours of the night and would sleep and eat when I would feel the necessity. Now I have dismantled many of my habitual forms of behaving, and in little time I will be unpredictable and surprising, even to myself.”

To that liberty of movement, that he vindicates and puts into practice without feeling the need of giving explanations, is added his refusal to acquire any commitment in time, as was already proven in his meeting with Barbara Robinson, upon refusing to give a

conference if he had to fix the date more than one day in advance. That is why his comment does not seem strange to me, about what he had heard a traveling scientist say in the United States.

“That man assured that he had noted in his calendar that visit since October. Imagine, how important!” He pronounces the last word sarcastically, dragging the eRRe, and pauses, almost for himself. “Planning something almost one year in advance, when we don’t even know if we are going to be alive then. What stupidity!” appearing aghast in light of this binding willfulness.

I associate his criticism with what don Juan was used to telling him in order to make him give up certain attitudes: “Self-importance disguises self-pity.”

Long past are the times when Castaneda was forced to keep a strict academic schedule or work. His economic means and his inner intellectual independence and vitality have permitted him to liberate himself from all activities foreign to his own desires and interests. Only the Indians from Sonora, with their undisciplined aspirations appear to represent an obstacle to his liberty of action, and by his reactions I figure out that this circumstance runs against him.

On Monday, almost at nine o’clock at night, Florinda called me.

“We are not going to be able to see you tomorrow morning. The Indians from Sonora want to “dream”, she says with the same tone of resignation that she has utilized again to make reference to their stubborn attitudes.

She asks me if I know what ‘dreaming’ is. I respond that, yes, I have already read about it in some of the works of Castaneda. But I did not try to go more deeply into it so as to not sound indiscreet. In that sense, I took more precautions with Florinda than with Castaneda. However, Castaneda himself would talk to me a few hours later about his experiences in those practices that the group realizes in an everyday manner.

“He will pick you up at three, and will bring you the books,” Florinda announces. Only then I realize that at no moment, neither in her presence, nor by telephone, has she referred to him as ‘Carlos’ or as ‘Castaneda’. She uses solely the pronoun, while Castaneda calls her by her name almost as much as he does of don Juan.

“Aren’t you going to come?” I ask, a little let down.

“No. It’s that I can’t leave the Indians alone.”

“Because if we can’t meet again, what with the interview and the preparation for my journey,” I justify myself, “Could you give me your address, or could he tomorrow?”

“No. Write it down right now because it is sure that he will forget to give it to you.”

Florinda has the nagual fairly demystified. She begins to give me a P.O. box, but is not sure about the number and asks me to wait a moment for her to verify it. It looks like they don’t give it out very often. She returns and I repeat what I have written, and then I see that the P.O. box is in her name. “How difficult it is to pin down Castaneda!” I think to myself.

When Florinda told me that they were going to give me their address, I remember that Castaneda approved of the idea to say, “You write to me, and I will call you.”

Although it is Florinda who has coordinated our meetings during those days, and because of that I have deduced that Castaneda avoids using the telephone, and that ultimately it was he who made the call of contact, so that I would not doubt that he would follow through on his offer.

On the other hand, from my personal experience it is magnificent that I did not fall back on his prophetic warning, “in little time I will be unpredictable and surprising, even to myself.”

I would know later that some of his editors in Europe, after being provided with a direct number to talk with him in Los Angeles, and having received his long-distance calls, and as well from Florida, had completely lost contact without there having been any reason. At the number that Castaneda himself gave to them, the people would swear that they do not know those two people, and the various telex and letters sent in later years have received no reply.

But at that moment I was outside of any worry. I had another appointment with him for the following day, an address to keep in contact, and our meetings were going to be interrupted only because I would be leaving, not because he would have disappeared without leaving a trace, like he had done at other times.

The capacities apply according to the environment in which one lives. Don Juan prevailed in the desert and the mountains, and so he could use its flora and fauna and also become lost from the corner of one's eye. Castaneda is an urbanite who thoroughly knows western society, which has permitted him to reveal his convictions, to fulfill his needs, and finally to erase his tracks. But to obtain that came at a price. There were times in which he was dangerously vulnerable in front of the onslaught of his followers and detractors. He was the nexus of an unsuspected magical world. His books unveiled that Mexico not only represented tourism and cheap labor. As a consequence, many North Americans felt strengthened by the hope in something more than the comforts of their consumer society. But others saw that their values and beliefs, that were based on supposed economic and spiritual superiority, threatened, with respect to the neighbors to the south. And in the middle of all of that, Carlos Castaneda, symbol of the counterculture, was provoking with his declarations and attitudes, angry or enthusiastic reactions. He was sowing in his path debate, and was being forced, without intending to, to take an intellectual posture. Did don Juan exist? Did he deal with a super-sorcery? And who was, and where did he come from, that kid who had upset the anthropology community and had given flight to the imagination of millions of people?

VI Under an Assumed Name

At three o'clock on the dot, Castaneda announced himself at the reception desk and I came down to meet him. He is smiling, we greet, and we walk outside. I look for the brown car and find once more the truck. Only if there are too many people for the truck it appears, that he decides to use the car. When we are seated, he ponders a moment and asks himself out loud, "Where can we go?"

As his time is occupied by the visit of the three from Sonora, I suggest that in order to avoid delays that we cross the street and continue the interview there. Then I remember the episode of the Indians that recognized him when he was seated on a bench. He starts driving and proposes, "Should we go to the same park as yesterday? It is a pleasant place. We will be relaxed."

It is a long drive, and although I was planning to continue with my questions, he begins to tell me stories and anecdotes that are neither reflected in the studies dedicated to him, nor in interviews that he has granted, perhaps because those experiences date to years that already have "passed clandestinely" with a new name, or because he has always maintained publicly, because of the philosophy that don Juan transmitted to him, a humble attitude before the phenomenon of his fame, along with the desire to preserve his non-literary life. It is not easy to erase personal history if at the same time one is giving leads to reconstruct it.

But these are calmer times and it appears that he enjoys sharing that which amuses him. "For several years," he remembers, "I lived legally as Joe Cortes. I had that name on my drivers license, my social security card... all of my documents."

He did not clarify why he made such a drastic decision, although it is logical to think that his authentic identity must not have been comfortable to him. He had become a myth, pursued by the media, by readers who wanted to become his apprentices, and bothered by people who blamed him that his first books had encouraged the use of drugs. It was his disappearance, no doubt, that fed the rumor that he had died. Few must have known of the "birth" of Joe Cortes, that balanced the demographic equilibrium and permitted Castaneda continue on his own way.

"I am going to tell you a story," he announced. "Apparently I had to pass some test. Florinda told me that the spirit demanded it. So I decided to work as a cook in Arizona, a very racist state," he notes. "I showed up in a cafeteria, and they asked me if I knew 'egg cooking'. Imagine! Cooking eggs!" He laughs at the translated term. "As I did not know 'egg cooking', I passed three months learning it and finally obtained employment in a cafeteria in charge of the kitchen and of the restaurant. A girl worked there as a waitress that was obsessed with meeting Castaneda. I told her, "And you, why do you want to meet that idiot?" The girl lamented me and answered me with great patience, 'You don't understand Joe. You are illiterate.' Joe breaks into laughter, he still to this day enjoys that mistake. "One very hot day," he remembers, "a white luxury car parks near the cafeteria, a limousine or something like that. Inside, a man was taking notes. Then the girl thought, 'who could be here on a day like today, taking notes, but Castaneda?' So she approaches the car and attempts to speak with him. And do you know what that man did?" he asks

me scandalized. "He throws her out yelling 'Fuck You!' and adds his own version in Spanish, 'Go to Hell!'" Like other times he laughs until tears are running down his face. He dries them and continues with the story. "The girl as well had tears when she returned to the establishment. She began crying," he remembers, between sadistic-ness and tenderness. "I assured her that he had refused her only because she was fat. She hugged me, lamenting about her physical condition, while I tried to console her saying, "You're stupid. You should think nothing of it."

"Did you tell her who you were?" I asked.

"I couldn't," he responded.

"How did all that end?"

"After a short time, Florinda considered that the spirit had liberated me from the test. I thought that I should stay a few days until they found another person to take my place, but Florinda said that nobody was waiting for me when I arrived and so for that nothing would come of me leaving without notice. I left without notice. As to that girl," he concluded, "she was finally and without knowing it, in the arms of Castaneda."

He did not say it as if he were a Valentino, but rather in the sense that the girl, even though she was not aware of it, fulfilled her wish.

The story seemed to me more twisted than grotesque. I suppose that if that girl were to read these lines that she would feel comforted... or perhaps as the fool for her lack of sense. She was searching for the sorcerer Castaneda in the frontier populations of Arizona, and was not capable of detecting him in the identity of an ignorant Chicano. However, based on what his name represented, Castaneda could have been an authentic Valentino, judging by another of his anecdotes.

"One day, upon entering the building where my attorney has his office, I crossed paths with a young woman that was leaving with an angry disposition. When I arrived to the office, my attorney asked me, 'Did you see a girl leave just now?' 'Yes,' I answered him, 'I just crossed paths with her and she appeared upset.' 'Because she has come to sue you,' he continued, 'because she says that you have been sleeping with her with the hoax of initiating her into sorcery and that you have not fulfilled your end of the promise.'"

Castaneda is serious while he remembers the situation. "I assured my attorney," he proceeded, "that that was the first time that I had seen her and that I in no way knew her. All of a sudden the girl returned to the office and my attorney asked her, pointing to me, 'Do you know this man?' The girl responded that she had never seen me before, and then he enlightened her, 'Because this is Carlos Castaneda.' 'Somebody had been passing himself off as me,'" he concluded.

Other stories of a certain vein show that that was not, in the least, an isolated case of identity theft.

During our first meeting I noted one of them.

"Me and my friends like to play practical jokes on each other."

At that time he has still not told me that he lacked friends. I suppose that his relations have been changing, before and after becoming a famous author, the condition on which the following episode is based.

"We recorded in a notebook," he relates, "what bothered us the most about some of the people that we knew. One night, we went to visit a psychiatrist that hated for people to show up unannounced. In spite of the fact that it was about eleven, we did not manage to

bother him because he was having a party and the house was full of people. When he saw me he said, 'Come on in. I am going to introduce you to someone.' It was a person," Castaneda remembers, "who was tall and serious, dressed in white clothes, signing my books as if he were the author. The psychiatrist introduced us, me with a different name and at once left us alone. Then that man," he continues, "began to ask me, 'Have you read my books?' 'Yes, all of them.'" Castaneda speaks in an arrogant tone for the questions, and humble for the answers. "And do you understand them?" continues the person. "Yes, I believe so," responds Castaneda, painting the scene by pointing in my direction. "He pointed to me, with his finger," he clarifies irritated. Perhaps with the intention to capture the intensity of that moment, Castaneda repeats the questions, and after each one of them he smacks his tongue, imitating a gun shot, while he moves his index finger from vertical to horizontal, like an improvised pistol. Never the less, he even had the courtesy to tell him, "Well I have been very pleased to have met you, Mr. Castaneda."

And that role-player corrected him, "Doctor Castaneda." The real doctor Castaneda did not finish the story, but I suppose that he allowed the impostor finish his night of glory. I imagine the inner conflict that must have occurred to him, that any person could pass himself off as him, commit atrocities, as in the case of the girl deceived by a guileless person, or adopting attitudes in which he did not recognize himself, like the arrogance of the individual that was playing Castaneda. That risk is the price that one pays for living anonymously.

For years he hid himself under another identity. But he not only removed his name from circulation, but also his physical form. Today he moves tranquilly because few can recognize him. The rest have to remember how he was many years before. So he gives classes, conferences, some infrequent interviews. He doesn't wish to hide himself, but neither be totally biographically or physically identified, although at times he can't avoid that one of his students take out some small device and take a photo.

When Castaneda evaporated, he left the field free to all the masqueraders of a society that adopted his identity until the moment of truth. And by what he tells me, they did not only take his place to sign books or conquest girls, but in acts of purely economic motives.

"There are many that have sent to my editor hotel and restaurant bills, pretending that it was I who sent them. But my editor does not pay them because he knows that I don't do that."

It appears that the tranquility of not being recognized compensates him of all those complications.

Another anecdote, told on the evening in the park that we were now driving to, connected to the previous story and made clear the reasons of his insistent changing of editors. That which has been representing him at a given moment, had a surprise waiting for an undisclosed day.

"My agent had received an offer where they would pay me one million dollars in exchange for appearing on television advertising a credit card." Something very easy for him, who quickly sets the scene of the ad. "I only have to say, 'Hi, My name is Carlos Castaneda and I also use thecard.'" He mentions a world known name, and at the same time makes a motion of pulling it out of his inside jacket pocket and shows it with a smile of satisfaction to the imaginary camera, which in this case is me.

"And what did you do?" I asked.

“He already had the contract in his office, and everything was ready to be signed... When I told him that I was going to refuse to do such a thing, he lost all hope,” he remembers. “He pulled out his hair.” He was not speaking figuratively, making the motion of pulling out a lock of hair.

“It’s logical,” Florinda interjects. “Imagine, the poor man was losing a hundred thousand dollars of his commission.

They didn’t tell me the name of the agent, poorer that day, but it is sure that he has not forgotten the name of Castaneda.

It appears logical that that association did not finish well. The deception of the agent by the “inconsiderate” refusal of the one he represents had to have been similar to the incomprehensible Castaneda, for years trying to pass unnoticed in order to “be able to enter and leave different worlds like a weasel,” refusing to be photographed by the media, and at last changing his name... and his agent was under the impression that he would come out on national television.

There are other cases, that as well are in reference to the interview on the previous day, in which it is said that he had caused deception, without doing anything, except with his presence.

“I had been invited to a party,” he remembers. “Before arriving somebody had been praising me. He said that I had dignified the age old culture of the Indians and their spiritual practices. He placed me on the level of a hero, the defender of the despised Indians,” he solemnly emphasizes. “But when I arrive that person was so disillusioned by my physical condition that he ignored me. He did not speak a word to me all night.”

“Don’t make a deal of it,” Florinda cuts him off. “It’s not so.”

I suppose that she was present and her interpretation of the facts were different.

“Yes, yes,” insists Castaneda. “He suffered a let-down and he did not speak to me all that night. Perhaps he was expecting someone tall and majestic.”

Florinda continues disagreeing and shaking her head ‘no’.

To back up his point of view, Castaneda sews the thread of another anecdote.

“One day, I was walking by a fence near UCLA, when a young man that knew me yelled at a girl that he had parted from just a minute before. ‘Hey! That is Carlos Castaneda!’ The girl looked at me, and turned to her friend and said, ‘It must be a joke!’” Castaneda concludes with a laugh.

That experience he had already told years earlier in an interview.

Without doubt he concedes a certain importance to the physical theme, and not just for having unnecessarily bourn the credit of being snubbed in the past supposedly for his appearance. When he spoke to me of Florinda, he described her as tiny and very ugly. He was joking, but about the physical nature.

On the other hand, upon referring to a woman that was, and in some ways still is, bound, her beauty shines. At times he has identified tallness with dignity or majesty. It could be that, effectively, his body type would have been taken as a handicap in a world of stereotypes, where appearance is more important than what is within. But judging by the difference of opinion that Florinda displayed, it is possible as well that Castaneda might feel somewhat vulnerable.

Or perhaps he continues working on a task that don Juan had encouraged.

“One day,” he commented on the afternoon in which we first had met, “don Juan asked

me to write that which I did not like about myself. After thinking about it, I wrote down a series of aspects like, 'I give the form and tone of pretended transcendence.' 'I am inconsiderate of others.' 'I am too unreliable.' When he saw what I wrote, don Juan laughed at me saying, "How stupid this all is! What you don't like about yourself is that you are ugly! That you are short and ugly!"

It could be that he is still fighting against the little pieces of ego that his teacher did not destroy, surely for lack of time.

Joe Cortes must have provided a respite for Carlos Castaneda, who was enjoying all of the acquired privileges, and at the same time avoiding the inconveniences of popularity. He did not have to make up pretexts in order to deftly avoid undesired commitments, nor worry about the effect that it could cause on others, nor defend himself in front of the indiscreet or the obsessive. At the root of it, he enjoyed his secret life, which placed him in an advantageous position in respect to almost everyone.

"One day I was visiting a friend in his home," he remembers, "in south Arizona, almost on the boarder. A man and a woman arrived to speak with him. They passed inside the home and I stayed in the garden working the earth. When they came out, my friend yelled at me in Spanish, 'I told you not to do it like that!' I answered, as well in Spanish," and he imitates the voice of an illiterate Chicano, "Well I am only doooooing it like you told me tooooo." 'I warned you that you should not place that dirt there!' he continued scolding me, while I, on my knees, with my hands dirty and my head hung down, insisted on defending my work in front of the supposed boss. The scene started to look ugly to the visitors, who saw themselves off in a hurry. And do you know who they were?" he asked with a naughty look.

"No," I responded with much curiosity.

"They represented a television chain," clarifies Castaneda in a triumphal voice, "and they had gone to speak with my friend because they were... searching for Castaneda."

The need had changed into a game. Situations that he could have avoided or resolved without deceit, served to test his capacity as an actor, to take control of, alone or with help, of his *happenings*.

Disguising his identity while under the very noses of those who would want to find him was at the root of the game. I suppose that he no longer practices those pranks. In his quality of being the nagual he has less time and more responsibilities. He maintains a sense of humor, but not for giving himself into "pranks" invented by others, but for those that set an example.

"A few days ago," he tells, "an organization sent to the office of my attorney, a letter in which they were asking authorization to include my name on a list of foreigners that had triumphed in the United States. And what should you do about that?" he asks, serious and disparaging, while I waited for him to tell me. "You can tear it up," he concludes.

In spite of arriving in the country as a child, of being a citizen and writing in english, he continues to be considered as a foreigner. He does not like that.

We have arrived at the park. He locks the doors of the truck, and leaves inside a brown paper grocery bag. I have had it in front of my feet during the whole journey, but I don't know what is inside. In any case we are not going to go very far.

We walked a few steps and found a bench under a giant pine tree, although it is in a shady area and a rather cool breeze is blowing, we don't have very much time to run around,

and we agree that we will be fine there. Castaneda seats himself straddling the bench, and I prepare my papers to continue the interview.

The reason that he had become a celebrity, and that I was there, is his literary production, so then other questions became obvious and at the moment I managed to center on that theme.

VII Books

During his apprenticeship, Castaneda took notes continuously, obsessively, and in conditions more than adverse. He took them in Spanish, and in the night he translated them to English. At first he did it discreetly, at times without taking the notebook from his pocket, with the ability of a juggler, that led don Juan to think that he was entering into another than intellectual activity. When the old Yaqui permitted him to write his notes openly, Castaneda drew jokes from him, from don Genero, and from the others, that did not understand of what use they would serve him.

But don Juan knew what he was doing, changing Carlitos into the future nagual, so he gave him some slack. Carlitos, for his part, believed that he was dragging out invaluable information from those Indians, in order to complete his essay about medicinal plants. But at a certain moment, upon discovering that the passion of Castaneda for leaving a written record of all of his experiences did not cease, don Juan suggested to him that he write a book with all the accumulated information; a remedy so that he would be liberated from the obsession, like how he had managed to free him from the vice of smoking, although he did not know then, that writing was going to produce in him an addiction impossible to eradicate. That was the beginning of a celebrated literary career.

But before that undertaking, Castaneda resisted. He was not an author. His ambition centered on the scientific field within the academic structure. Don Juan tranquilized him by assuring him that one did not have to believe, but rather just record the firsthand experience. *See it in dreams*. It would not be a literary work, but rather one of sorcery. In spite of the fact that he was playing with an advantage, the task did not prove easy. Professor Harold Garfinkle did not consent to lower the standard. He showed his affection by forcing him with his criticism and suggestions to improve the manuscript. Castaneda rewrote *The Teachings of Don Juan* three times, before receiving a definitive approval. The book was published in 1968, a mythical year in America and in Europe. Drugs and the search for social alternatives and existentialism constituted the basic pillar of the counterculture. *The Teachings...* quickly became a symbol of that movement and, consequently, an unexpected success in sales. Castaneda had written the correct theme, and at the correct moment, and in the correct country.

When he returned to visit don Juan, whom he had not seen in almost three years, he brought him the book. The master Yaqui flipped the pages, and caressed it in a sign of approval, but he did not accept that it be left with him.

The enormous respect that Castaneda professes to his teacher forces him to be sincere. So in the second page of *Tales of Power*, there is a reference to the reaction that don Juan had when in the autumn of 1971 he went to see him and tried to speak to him about his second book, *A Separate Reality*, published a few months before. This is the described scene, as always in the first person, by Castaneda:

“I have finished writing a book,” I said.

“He gave me a long and strange look that produced an itching in the pit of my stomach..... I wanted to talk about my book but he made a gesture that indicated that he did not want me to say anything about it.”

Was he dis-authorizing with this subtle attitude, the continuation of an activity suggested

as a device, and not as an end? In any case, Castaneda published in the life of his master, a third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, in 1972. He followed with *Tales of Power*, in 1974; *The Second Ring of Power*, in 1977; *The Eagle's Gift*, in 1981; *The Fire from Within*, in 1984; and, the last book up until now, *The Silent Knowledge*, published in 1987 with the title of *The Power of Silence*.

When I asked Castaneda why the title of the book that was published in English was different from that which appeared on the manuscript of the translation to Spanish, he clarified in a sarcastic tone.

"It's that the editor decided to give it that other title because, according to him, it gives it more impact, makes it more commercial."

It does not appear that it should have been necessary in the case of Castaneda, with loyal followers, some for more than twenty years, and that like him, today comb gray hairs. People that read and reread passionately the tale of his experiences, perhaps with the hope of coming to experience them.

Never the less, his books rarely can substitute for the master, who according to how Castaneda himself describes, not only directs and strictly supervises the inroads of the disciple into states of consciousness that could alter his mental stability, but also induce a change of his conduct in the daily world.

Don Juan himself, besides stating that nobody needs someone to teach them sorcery because there is nothing to teach, added, "What we need is a teacher that would convince us that an incalculable power exists within our reach."

And Castaneda arrived to that conviction not through concepts he read, and not even that he listened to spoken out loud, but by means of experiences and under the strict guidance of don Juan.

He had that privilege. His followers would like to retrace as well the way of the warrior, but they don't have a master, just a few hundred pages. Perhaps they suppose that other possibilities will approach those that have opened in the reason an opening for the intuition. A mystic maxim says that when the disciple is prepared, then the master appears.

In one of the *Upanishads*, texts that form part of the *Vedas*, is explained lyrically the master-disciple relation. "That body that is yours, some compare it to a field. For that he that knows it will be called the Knower of the Field. Only as such will he be able to determine the seed, and administer the adequate water in order to produce the best of all the fruits."

We know the impact on the public that his first book had. But, how did this success echo in Castaneda?

"It made me more evasive," he responds without hesitation.

All of his works had been written years after the events that they contain, without apparently, the passing of time having subtracted the freshness, detail or intensity of his experiences. He maintains that he only rewrote the first book. The rest came out from a single shot. Although don Juan had indicated to him the technique to follow, it appears that he couldn't apply it at first, and had to resort to elaboration more than re-creating. Just by hearing him confirm that which has been written about the basic theme, I asked him, "How were you able to systemize and reconstruct conversations and teachings?"

"The more force that the text has, the closer one is to what is seen. This is obtained by

placing the assemblage point connected with the position that was had when the experience was lived.” Perhaps he considered that the explanation seemed too abstract. He stood up in a jump and stepped three or four steps forward and said, “Look, I am going to show you.”

I left my papers on the bench, and placed myself next to him and saw that he was drawing with the edge of one of his solid sports shoes a oval figure in the moist earth. It is the same drawing that he made in my notebook the afternoon that we first met. A squirrel walked in front of us, tranquilly secure, and set out to search for hidden food a little farther, ignoring our presence.

Castaneda picks a small green button up from the ground, that must have fallen off of the jacket of one of the children that visit the park, and placed it on the right edge of the figure and clarifies, “Imagine that this is the assemblage point,” and he looks at me to be sure that I am following his explanation.

“Agreed,” I respond with interest.

To continue, he takes a handful of dry pine needles, places some on top of the button, and spreads the rest towards the inside of the figure.

“Let’s suppose that this,” he says, squatting and brushing the pine needles with his fingers, “are fields of energy. When the assemblage point is displaced towards the interior of the luminous egg,” he accompanies his words with action, and moves the green button towards the inside of the figure, “one has access to other worlds, other fields of energy. These vary depending on how deep the assemblage point has sunk and has lit them up. This is how one has unusual perceptions.

We have the circle of Da Vinci, containing the figure of the man, the semi ovoid form of the aedicula that exists in some churches attributed to the Knights Templar. Myths like the primordial egg or of those to whom Leda gives birth after being impregnated by Zeus while in the form of a swan...

In a passionate essay (Consciencia-Energía, Taurus), the French cardiologist Therese Brosse emphasizes that, “...In the Soviet Union, an electrical apparatus has enabled the energetic channels of acupuncture to be located, as well as the specific points prone to favor the production of parapsychic phenomenon, that as such interfere with mental activity and its energetic potential.”

That discovery is said to be related to the phenomenon called “Kirlian Effect.”

Photographing an organism placed in a high frequency electrical field, whereby the appearance of a “body-energy-bio-plasmic” is observed, that can be examined by the electron microscope. This field of energies appears polarized and given with structurizing power. It reproduces the complete organism (a leaf, in this case) and remains intact although there is an intervention of a partial amputation. Sensitive to colors and meteorological variations, it appears linked to the Universe and serves to support telepathy and all the PSI effects in general. This bio-plasmic body adopts a pathological aspect in case of upset in psychosomatic functions, that can be visualized even before the appearance of the organic illness.

Of this form, engendered by the “Energy-Consciousness”, we are nothing other than that energy. All the works agree with this. But this energy is as well “Consciousness”. The Tradition tells us, “energy does not exist that is not consciousness.”

Thus, the limit of the human being, like that of the animals, plants or minerals, can not be

in it's skin, but in that aura or surrounding. There are known cases of people who have continued to feel pain in the place that was occupied by a body member, or part of it, after it had been amputated.

On the other hand, experiments based on body language show that certain practically imperceptible movements made by physically close people, affect and even determine our own gestures. Perhaps that which has come to be interpreted as "mimetic" phenomenon are in fact "osmotic".

Castaneda has written that all people have that assemblage point, or connection with cosmic energy. He manipulates it, among other tasks, in order to remember the experiences that are later reflected in his works.

However, and judging by the forward that Castaneda includes at the beginning of his latest book, he cannot always apply that method. It appears, that certain experiences require some time to settle in, before they come to the surface. That is the object of my next question.

"In the introduction of *The Power of Silence*, you say that you still have not described, because until now it has been impossible for you to think in a coherent manner about it, 'the art of stalking' and 'the mastery of intent'..."

"They will be two more books," he quickly responds, "and so I will finish my debit with don Juan.

I did not know that he had this type of debit with don Juan. The cycle with arrive then, to it's end, with the tenth book, although it is difficult to say for sure, since he already said after publishing *Journey to Ixtlan*, perhaps demoralized by the recent disappearance of don Juan, that that would be his last incursion into the theme. That was the time when he cuttingly refused the possibility of ceding the film rights of his works. Surprisingly and unexpectedly, after confirming to me that he planned to write those two books, he added, "Later I will write about other experiences."

His readers can rest easy. Castaneda will continue with them. It does not appear that for the moment that he is going to change plains. However in the evening he had made a strange comment.

We were with Florinda, in that same park, and I gave him the card of Barbara Robinson and at the same time transmitted her message to him.

"I hope that you call her, and that, like you offered, you give their center the editions of your books."

Castaneda took the card, and looked with the smile of an accomplice at Florinda and announced, "They will be given, when we leave, eh?"

That, "we leave", said in a joyful tone, did not appear to me to correspond to momentary trip. Where were they planning to go to?

Castaneda had lived in other countries, at times for long periods, and still not cutting himself loose from those editions that, as I was going to find out, had for him a high value. If he was thinking of giving them up, and he had already considered the idea, perhaps it was because he was not going to return. In any case, and although he answered my question as such, his was a reflection out loud directed towards Florinda, who lowered her head and gave an affirmative nod. Whatever was their destination, they had the journey well planned. I left the mysterious relocation to be their secret.

From the bench, the oval figure of the little button and the pine needles appeared like the

work of a child, or of an extraterrestrial.

“How many editions of your works do you have?” I asked.

“Two hundred fifty seven,” he responds precisely.

I decide to round the number and mention it to him while I am writing. “To make it more simple, I will put down that you have more than two hundred fifty.”

“Two hundred fifty seven,” he repeats obstinately.

Obviously, he would prefer that I put the exact number.

“How many editions of your books have been sold up until now?” I continued.

“Not including the last, eight million copies, just in the United States.” And he adds a comment of which one must come to the conclusion that it is impossible to calculate the true circulation of his work. “Years ago they told me that in China my books are circulating clandestinely, photocopied,” he smiles as he remembers.

I suppose that in that case, losing the copyrights is a trivial question if one compares it to the satisfaction that his philosophy has penetrated to the land of Lao-Tsé. I imagine the risks looming over those curious Chinese, still with the “Band of the four”, lashing out against the revolutionary impurity, just to pass a hidden moment of the initiatory misadventures of the apprentice of don Juan. The collection of those misadventures constitutes for many people around the world the new *Red Book*, only in various volumes, and more enjoyable than that of Mao. Also a fanaticism was awakened in its time that some considered undesirable. Thousands of young people from the United States crossed the frontier and threw themselves enthusiastically into combing certain areas of Mexico in the hope of finding don Juan. The avalanche had as a consequence, that the authorities in that country, in foresight that the Spanish translation would mobilize its own citizens, prohibited for several years the Mexican edition of the cycle, and which did not begin to be published until 1974, when don Juan had already died. *The Teachings...* appeared with an impassioned prologue by Octavio Paz.

Seated without concern on the bench in Rancho Park, the one responsible for all of that mess, responded in a friendly manner to the questions, although, in keeping with his manner, he took advantage of the slightest opportunity to carry the conversation towards places that in that moment interested him more. Once in a while he looked tolerantly at the questionnaire, notices my gesture, and says understandingly, “continue, continue.” Before continuing with the theme of the books, I decide to ask him about other aspects of energy, earthly and spiritual.

“According to what you have written, in the past it was discovered that the earth “feels” and that in it exist places qualified for the initiation.”

“There are energetic junctions that are more dense,” he responds, “somewhat special, while there are other places that are more tenuous. The sorcerers, using the body as an unleashed organism, came to experience those places more energetically charged, and to use them for positive effect.” He gives an example. “Don Juan had, like cats that never sleep in a negative location, the custom of searching for those places.”

The quality that Castaneda attributes to cats perhaps explains why the ancient Egyptians took those animals as sacred. As it is known, their mummified bodies are buried next to important persons. A sure guide in the hazardous crossing to the other world.

And from the earth we pass to the heavens.

“How is man affected by the heavenly bodies?”

“Sorcerers are affected by the attractive force that create the enormous celestial bodies, capable to capture the consciousness, and transport them to unusual places.”

“What is your opinion of the zodiacal signs and of the interpretations made of them?”

“The signs are generally very vague and arbitrary categories that we have not been able to classify in depth,” and he spontaneously added, “I know the heavens of the northern hemisphere perfectly, by I know absolutely nothing of those of the southern hemisphere.” He appeared very interested in the theme. He names some constellations and the hours that they can be seen... but I soon come to find out that his knowledge is not because of a mere hobby, but rather as a result of a clear intent to identify.

In the shady area of the park it began to feel a little cold. Except for the five or ten minutes that we were next to the “luminous egg”, we had not moved from the bench. The wind had become persistent and bothersome. The squirrel was no longer in sight. Castaneda appeared preoccupied about the time and proposed, “Shall we go?”

I had to agree. We got up, and while I was putting away my papers, he stretched voluptuously.

In anticipation that he would drive me directly to my lodging, I suggested, “Should we have a cappuccino to get warm?”

He happily accepts, and enriches the proposal. “Very well. I am going to take you to a place that I know.”

When we begin to walk back the few meters that separate us from the parking lot, he suddenly grabs me by the arm and exclaims smiling, “You and I understand each other very well!”

With him, that is easy. What is difficult is overcoming the strict rules that apply.

When I sat down in the truck I stepped on the paper bag. I worried about if I had damaged something inside and Castaneda said, “Open it. It’s for you.”

I leaned over, opened the bag and determined that inside are all of his books, in english. “Take them with you later,” he adds.

I have always been intrigued by the love that, according to Castaneda, don Juan shows towards poetry, and I comment, “Don Juan thought that poets are closer to the spirit, in an intuitive manner, than the common man.

“Poets,” he responds openly, “although they don’t understand the life of the warrior, they long for it.”

In one of his books it tells that he and Carol, the female nagual, took turns reading to don Juan works of the Spanish speaking poets. Castaneda had told me that don Juan, being an American Indian, knew english perfectly.

Maybe that is why the following comment that he makes leaves me a little confused.

“Don Juan would have me translate the poems for him. The work was difficult for me but it helped me a lot as well.”

Before I could ask what language he would translate them to, presumably Spanish, Castaneda began to explain that each language comes united with certain determined qualities, and that not all serve to express certain feelings or states, and added categorically, “For example, French is no good for poetry.”

“I don’t agree,” I told him. But we couldn’t delve into the subject because we just had come to stop at a gas station.

It was hot there and he took off his sports jacket, and left it on the back of the seat, and

then filled his tank with the self-service system. We had rolled down the windows, and now drove down one of the streets that cut across the avenues. I wait a few minutes and return to the task, with the threat of reciting him a poem in French.

“You know French?” he asks surprised, and I deduce that for him it is not a very familiar language.

I explained that I lived in Paris, the key name of the tragic poem by Cesar Vallejo that Castaneda included in *Tales of Power* and that said in its first verses, “I will die in Paris in the rain, on a day that I already remember. I will die in Paris, and I do not run. Maybe on a Thursday, like today, in the autumn.

He said nothing, and likewise I ignore if he knows, or not, the language that he judges to be inadequate for poetry. Neither did I try to find out if he knows Portuguese, a question that might be considered as contentious. I decide to translate the poem to Spanish.

“It is by Jacques Prevert, and very short,” I assure him. It is called *Alicante*. “An orange on the table. Your dress on the rug and you on my bed. Sweet present of the present. Freshness of the night. Warmth of my life.”

Although the content suggests waste, very likely lower, of the sexual energy, Castaneda quickly responds, “Don Juan would have liked it.”

It is very possible that would have. Several months after that afternoon I would come to find out in one of the books of the cycle the description of the type of poem that don Juan liked; “compact, short, composed of sharp images, precise and simple.”

But his apprentice does not say if he likes it or not. In this theme, like in all the others, he prefers to place himself in the skin of his teacher. His loyalty to the memory is impressive. If it is difficult to believe in the existence of a being so peculiar as don Juan, it is even more difficult to not believe it after being a few hours with Castaneda.

Never the less, that is exactly what he is accused of. Of having invented don Juan, too intellectual and poetic to be an Indian. But at the beginning there was not skepticism, but rather enthusiasm.

“Why does the praise of your first books turn into destructive criticism, and even into clear rejection?”

“In the beginning,” he says with a serious expression, “those who praised my books believed that I was speaking about them,” and continues explaining the cross he has to bear. “I spoke in libraries and universities, but said things that provoked hostility. I spoke of eradicating the ego, of overcoming egomania.”

“So then, when I began to become intimately and publicly identified with another way of living and of thinking, I stopped being the infiltrating accomplice that reinforced with his behavior the society to which he belonged.” (“..the system of beliefs that I wanted to study have devoured me...”, he would confess years later in the introduction of *The Eagle's Gift*.)

And he concludes his explanation referring to himself in the third person. “Castaneda was dangerous because he spoke of destroying a structure of behavior.”

They could not take back the doctorate, but they took back the credibility.

Now it does not appear to matter to him. He maintained the serious expression exactly the time that his analysis lasted. The smile returns, and he quits himself of the memory, like a butterfly discards a now useless cocoon.

I am curious about the reason that compelled him to personally translate, and for the first

time, one of his works. An apparently unnecessary and unexplainable task for someone, like him, who is short on time and still has to “remember” and write two new books about don Juan, in addition to other experiences foreign to his apprenticeship. The afternoon before, when I asked him about the manuscript that he had just given me, Castaneda explained to me something about the translation process.

“It was very difficult,” he revealed, and pointed to Florinda, adding, “The two of us did it.”

Florinda shook her head and cut him off, “No, no, I only gave my opinion about a few details. It was he who translated it.”

I believe Florinda. I have found out only too well that she only stays quiet if she agrees with what he says. Otherwise, she vehemently denies it. And neither in this case did she allow the generosity of Castaneda to run against the truth.

I am almost sure that Florinda would prefer to not lie, while Castaneda does not appear to have those scruples, surely given wing by a reflection of don Juan, “When one does not have personal history, nothing that one says can be taken as a lie.”

I remembered once more the contradictory versions of why they contacted me, and I tended to that of Florinda, that among all of the accumulated letters in the sacks, they decided to choose one. To Castaneda perhaps it appeared to him as an inadequate explanation, that we had met as a result of that game... although the outcome was chosen by the spirit. I find the method he chose very curious in fact, which instead of a rational system, where a reporter would have had little chance.

Castaneda parked the truck next to the sidewalk. As usual he checked that the doors were locked, and announced to me, “Let’s go to a French bakery that is very good.”

We were at Mountain Avenue, almost on the corner of 15th street. (Pasadena) We walked a few blocks west and arrived at a tiny bakery. Almost all the space is occupied by glass display cabinets full of delicious sweets. There were a few clients in front of us, and while they were being attended to, Castaneda asked me, “What would you like?”

I have a look and decide on a nut tart. He knew in advance what he was going to have because as soon as his turn came he asked for brioches... four! The salesperson went to look for them, and Castaneda, seeming that he knows the subject, comments, “They are very good here.”

With the precious merchandise we retrace our steps and enter a self-service café where there are three or four small tables lined up next to a wide window. The location is pleasant and relaxing. We ask for cappuccinos from the bar and sit down while they are being prepared, and I insist in finding out why he has decided to personally translate his latest book.

“I have always reserved the right to supervise the Spanish translations of my books,” he explained. “When I returned from Guatemala,” as I have already mentioned, he lived there for three years, “I revised the translations that had been made in my absence, and I did not agree with some of them.”

“In what sense?”

“Well, for example, one sentence, in which I had written, ‘she had a muscular butt’, had been translated to,” he complains indignantly, “ ‘she had a beautiful butt’ ”.

I don’t know if he will do the translation of the upcoming books, but his preoccupation that what he had wanted to say is respected, is evident. And he is so careful in this aspect,

that in order to assure the result, he does not hesitate to do the work, although, according to his own words, it was difficult for him.

The cappuccinos don't arrive. The lad that took the order appears to have little experience. Castaneda gets up to complain, and in little time returns with them and a pair of red napkins. He takes a brioche from the bag, breaks it in half, and begins to dip it in the cappuccino.

Although I had brought my notebook and questionnaire in order to continue with the questions, when I saw the expression of gluttonous pleasure I felt incapable of interrupting him. We were quiet for a while, concentrating on the snack; once in a while looking up and looking at the people that came in and left the shop, or who walked in front of the window. More than watching, he observes, as if he wanted to capture everything that was happening around him.

His attitude brings to me the memory of an aspect of the philosophy of don Juan, in which Castaneda himself ratifies: "For me, the way of living, the way with heart, is not introspection or mystic transcendence, but rather being in the world. This world is the hunting ground of the warrior."

The manner in which he scrutinizes, perhaps in search of possible prey, and some should fall, should the metaphor serve, on his serpents tongue.

"Do you see that woman with her back to us?" nodding towards a woman working at the bar. She is about 1.8 meters, is very thin, without apparent feminine form, dressed in pants, and has short hair. "She looks like a boy, but notice her face. She looks like she is fifty years old!" he exclaims.

Castaneda has eaten two brioches, and attacks the third, of which he only takes half, and guards the rest in the package, where the other is. Satisfied, he looks again towards the bar and comments, "That woman has dyed hair." She turns directly towards me and I see a red-head with long hair. "The natural color is not so uniform," he concludes assuredly.

In order to be a warrior to Castaneda, is to be something somewhat uncommon.

I asked myself how the women who form his group react to his criticisms; if they are as direct as Florinda, it must be a difficult task for him.

VIII Current Life

“Have you finished?” he asks.

I answer affirmatively and we get up. Castaneda picks up the package of brioches and we leave the coffee shop.

I don't know if he is taking them to Florinda, or if he will finish them himself. What calls my attention is his sense of frugality. Perhaps it is the memory of difficult times, that impels him to save the half brioche.

Upon crossing a street light to arrive at the block where the truck is parked, he takes me delicately by the elbow. His exquisite manners contrast with his frequent dire expressions, that clearly he enjoys, and neither does he hold back on crude sexual references, and continues without reserve his critiques of the feminine element.

A woman that must be in her seventies is coming towards us and is dressed in a juvenile pleated miniskirt. On passing us I see that Castaneda is looking at her from top to bottom, and it occurs to me that perhaps he is looking at her energy. But it is not so.

“The clothes that she is wearing are not correct for her age,” he comment maliciously.

We arrive at the vehicle. He opens my door and lowers the window, because it is very hot. He then opens his side, and places over the back of the bench seat the sports coat and the package with the brioches, that he passes behind the seat. And so it is.

Now we are going to retrace straight to the ocean. Although I don't want to appear indiscreet, I decide to pose certain questions, because in all these days he has demonstrated his capacity to protect himself from unwanted questions.

“Where do you and your group live?”

“In central Mexico, in a plateau of the mountainous zone,” he responds.

In relation with the theme of the meeting, when they commented during the lunch in the Cuban restaurant, that they only came to Los Angeles to eat, I seemed to understand that each one was living in a home, and that those cannot be too far apart, since Florinda does not know how to drive.

That voluntary physical distance perhaps would have to do with what they told me in relation to energy. They both maintain that when people are concentrated in a mass, the energy of their respective “luminous eggs” winds up around themselves for lack of space and that makes them act collectively. The leaders would be those that manage to locate their energy above the level of the rest, and Castaneda pointed out with a roguish gesture, “That is why it is not good to sleep with anybody.”

“What activities do you have with your group?” I continued.

“We come together everyday for *dreaming*.”

“And what do you *dream*?”

“We go to a place that is a type of astronomic observatory, with the cupola open, and we lay down face up and we watch a planet cross. It must be immense, because it takes a very long time to cross completely,” he tells emotionally.

That is why he investigates the skies of the northern hemisphere, to see if the places that they *visit* in *dreams*, are discovered in the vigil.

Given that the members of the group unite daily, I suppose that for the present the alternate their stays between Mexico and Los Angeles, at least until the young woman

that is preparing a doctorate in this city is finished.

I imagine Castaneda in his home in Malibu, sweeping the skies with a telescope and a sky chart in hand.

His followers do not imagine some of the pastimes that he is given to.

Just earlier he was telling me, in one of those deviations that he is used to meting into a conversations, about his relation with people of the film industry.

“I have a neighbor, an young woman, that is an actress. We are very good friends and she tells me her romantic problems. She is always doubting if she should stay with one guy or another. Once in a while she proposes to me that I should be her lover, and I respond that I will accept if in exchange she definitively leaves all the others behind. Then she asks me for ‘time to think about it,’ and I tell her,” he continues with a naughty look, “that she has ten minutes to decide. She protests, “I can’t make that kind of decision in ten minutes and, naturally, she does not decide. Sometimes we remain chatting until five in the morning,” he continues, without citing at any time the name of the confused actress.

At his own cost, or at someone else’s, he manages to enjoy all the situations, in the present moment, or analyze them with perspective, exorcizing them of bothersome baggage. That attitude has to do without doubt, with the reflection that was made years earlier about how ephemeral is our stay here.

“If there is no way to know if we are disposed of one more minute of life, then we have to live every moment as if it were the last. Every act is the final battle of the warrior. That is why one must always act impeccably. Nothing can be left hanging. This concept was very liberating to me. I employed my time to lament to myself about what I did yesterday, eluding the decisions that I need to make today.”

One could already make out the sea, and I knew that he would have to go at once to supervise the Indians.

I did not approach the political aspect, although I had one definitive reference. He treats the two superpowers impartially. He judges them as war-mongers, a danger for humanity, and responsible of having put a hole in the ozone of the planet. And many years before, when the ozone was intact, or when we did not know that it existed, Castaneda was saying, “I was born in Latin-American, where the intellectuals are constantly speaking of political and social revolutions, and where they shoot mountains of bombs. But the revolution has not changed much. Never the less, to quit smoking, stop anxiety, or internal dialog, one has to make oneself as new. That is where the real reform takes place. Our first concern should be with ourselves. I can only concern myself about my fellow man if I am at the zenith of my force, not depressed. Any sort of revolution should start here, in this body. I can change things, but only from the inside of a body that is impeccably in tune with this mysterious world. For me, the true challenge consists in the art of changing oneself into a warrior, because that, as don Juan said, is the only way to balance the terror of being a man, with the wonder of being a man.”

This man, who passes his life among women, parked for the last time in front of my place. We chatted a few minutes, and I suppose that he was aware of my uneasiness, since he said, “Now I need to go, but I will call you this night to answer the questions that remain.”

Perhaps he remembers his own battle, always leaning to the task with a notebook, trying to determine everything possible about don Juan and his techniques.

“Don’t forget the books,” he warns.

I open the package and pull them out.

“You have already given me this one,” I say, and place his latest book on the splash guard. Amongst the others I see that of Florinda. I open it, and I read out loud the strange dedication.

“To the five-legged spider that carries me on it’s back.”

“They are things of Florinda,” he says humbly. “It is that my first last name is Aranha, which means spider,” he clarifies.

They have their games and the key to unravel them. I put the books back in the bag, and without wanting to take the one that I had placed apart as well. When I become aware, and I am going to leave it, he says, “Take it.”

“Ok, could you sign it?”

“I’m not very good at signing books,” he warns upon taking it.

With a black ballpoint pen he writes in english a few words and the date, August 30th, 1988.

At nine o’clock at night, Florinda calls me on the telephone.

“It is that he had to leave and he is not going to be able to speak with you today. What time are you leaving tomorrow?” she wanted to know.

“I will be leaving here before eleven, and I still have to pack my luggage. There is no more time, I regret.”

Then she offers me once more, “Write with the questions that you want to ask, and I will type the answers to you.”

Once again we say goodbye and she wishes me a good journey.

From that moment on I will have no more information. What only remains then, is to put the notes in order, rewrite those that I had scribbled while we were driving, and write everything that I remember of Castaneda, for example, how was our goodbye.

After a kiss goodbye, and wishing each other a “take care”, I got out of the truck, closed the door, and he leaned towards me through the open window to have a final look. All of a sudden he appeared to remember that he has things he must do and says, “What time is it?”

I have not seen him use a watch and he has asked me that many times.

“Five thirty,” I respond.

I couldn’t help but throw a jest his way that perhaps encompasses other repressed comments that I had during our conversations. “How can it be that a sorcerer asks what time it is?”

As an only answer, he smiles, puts the truck in drive, and throws me a kiss and disappears down Ocean Avenue.

I was sure that we would meet again soon, that in the future we would delve more deeply into aspects that we had only been dealing with in passing, for lack of time.

I had forgotten that which don Juan had said to his apprentice on more than one occasion, “The future is no more than a way of talking. For the sorcerer, there only exists the here and now.”