

Seventies Dreams and 21st Century Realities: The Emergence of 2012 Mythology

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Abstract – Did the ancient Maya know what was in store for the world of the 21st century? Was there something they knew—yet to be revealed—about the fate of humankind? An affirmative answer is at the heart of what has come to be known as the “2012 phenomenon”³—a polythetic set of romantic beliefs that derive from eclectic assertions about the ancient Maya calendar woven into a diffuse mythology with specific relevance to contemporary issues. It offers to some a new mythology for our time to allay the angst that accompanies rapid technological, social, political, and environmental change and provide motivation for action, both internal (in a psychological or spiritual sense) and external (in a social and political sense). It has gained momentum because of its significant tie-ins with pop culture and the mysteries of UFOs, ETs, magic, and metaphysics. This paper includes the fullest historical account so far of the emergence of the 2012 phenomenon.

Keywords: 2012 phenomenon – Maya calendar – pop culture – mythology – Frank Waters – Terence McKenna – José Argüelles

Träume der Siebziger und die Wirklichkeit des 21. Jahrhunderts. Ursprünge und Entwicklungen der 2012-Mythologie

Zusammenfassung – Wussten die alten Maya bereits, was die Zukunft der Welt des 21. Jahrhunderts vorbehalten würde? Hatten sie – dann noch zu offenbarende – Kenntnisse über das künftige

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 - 3 Sitler (2006) was the first to use and define the term “2012 phenomenon.”

Schicksal der Menschheit? Bejahende Antworten auf diese Fragen stehen im Mittelpunkt dessen, was inzwischen als „Phänomen 2012“ bekannt geworden ist: eine vielschichtige Garnitur romantischer Glaubenshaltungen, die eklektischen Beteuerungen über den antiken Mayakalender entstammen und die zu einer diffusen Mythologie mit besonderer Bedeutung für zeitgenössische Probleme verwoben sind. Diese neue Mythologie für unsere Zeit soll die Ängste beschwichtigen, die mit rapidem technologischen, sozialen, politischen und umweltbezogenen Wandlungen einhergehen, und – sowohl intern (in einem psychologischen oder spirituellen Sinn) als auch extern (in sozialer und politischer Hinsicht) – zu eigenem Handeln anregen. Wegen ihrer einflussreichen Verquickungen mit der populären Kultur ebenso wie mit den angeblichen Mysterien von UFOs, Außerirdischen, Magie und Metaphysik hat diese Mythologie beträchtlich an Boden gewonnen. Der vorliegende Aufsatz bietet die bisher wohl umfassendste Darstellung der historischen Entwicklung des Phänomens 2012.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Phänomen 2012 – Mayakalender – Popkultur – Mythologie – Frank Waters – Terence McKenna – José Argüelles

Introduction

It is possible to discern two principal branches of 2012-related prophecy, one literal and the other poetic. The literal branch is characterized by a preoccupation with physical disasters⁴, such as global warming, shifts of the earth's poles (either magnetic or geographical), solar flares, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, the impact of an errant comet or meteor, a near pass by an imagined celestial body (Planet X or Nibiru), or some combination of these (Stray, 2005; Joseph, 2007). These “earth changes,” a phrase taken from the work of psychic Edgar Cayce (Cayce, 1980), are cyclical and their mythology references past catastrophes such as the sinking of continents (Atlantis and Lemuria) and the destruction of ancient civilizations (either legendary or archaeological). The poetic branch emphasizes a metaphysical shift, often identified as a “transformation of consciousness,” that will include widespread acknowledgment of a Theosophical and/or perennialist reality, one in which the scientific establishment lowers its defenses to embrace timeless truths that were revealed long ago, in what Eliade (1958) referred to as *in illo tempore*—a remote time “before ‘history’ began” countless aeons ago when humans were

4 New Age guru J.Z. Knight claims that Ramtha, a 35,000-year-old warrior from Lemuria who she channels, is also predicting world cataclysm in 2012. There has already been 2012-related violence, including a recent incident in South Africa in which police officers and two members of the Ramtha School of Enlightenment were shot (Smith, 2011) and Bugarach, France, has drawn a massive influx of believers and the mayor has asked for military support come December 2012 (Samuel, 2010). A French organization that monitors extremist groups fears mass suicides (Clifford, 2011). The Universal Knowledge sect in Queensland, Australia, led by Natasha Lakaev, is just one of many other religious groups focusing on 2012 (Bachelard, 2010).

as gods—and to accept those universal truths that lie at the heart of all religious and spiritual wisdom. The coming “apocalypse” (from the Greek for “unveiling”) may be physical—as represented by an assertion of the significance of an actual “alignment” of the winter solstice sun with the center of the Milky Way galaxy (the “galactic center”) on December 21, 2012—but it is thought to herald a metaphysical phenomenon whose reality was understood by the ancient Maya but remains unknown or rejected by Western science and its authorities

Common to both views is the assertion that, regardless of its nature, what happens in 2012 will bring about a “New Age.” This essay is less concerned with the literal branch than with the poetic one. The 2012 phenomenon has a definite purpose. New Age author Marilyn Ferguson (1980: 87) refers to a collection of “triggers” as “psychotechnologies—systems for a deliberate change in consciousness.” These include meditation, sensory deprivation, biofeedback, hypnosis, yoga, astrology, Tarot, and other New Age practices that help individuals to adopt an attitude open to metaphysical experiences and effect a deliberate change in consciousness. The use of pseudoscience and even pseudoscientific use of scientific concepts and jargon (“vibrations,” “quantum,” “galactic,” etc.) is also a psychotechnology. Another trigger is an ability to overcome cognitive dissonance (a sense of discomfort that comes with the recognition that one holds beliefs that are contradictory to one another), a concept elaborated upon by Leon Festinger in *When Prophecy Fails* (Festinger, 1956), his classic study of a 1950s UFO-inspired New Religious Movement (NRM).⁵ The presumed “advanced technology” of the ancient Maya calendar stands in stark contrast to the poverty of the living Maya and persistent misinterpretations of a violent culture of heart sacrifice. A sustained, contributing factor is the assertion that the “mysterious” Maya just “disappeared.” Racism and flawed perceptions of both ancient and living Maya culture provoke cognitive dissonance when there is a realization—often with the sense of a spiritual revelation—that an internalized reality of an indigenous culture as savage, violent, or “backward” cannot possibly be reconciled in the face of evidence for their “superior” technology. The revelation frequently takes the form of a belief that there must have been a decline from an ancient, highly sophisticated, superior knowledge to contemporary decadence, accompanied by the sense that our own culture has been similarly debased. This provokes cognitive dissonance and revelations at another level: What is taught in universities cannot possibly be the “real” story, scientists and scholars who reject the pseudoscientific “truths” about the ancient Maya must be not only cold and lacking in sensitivity but duped or actively deceitful, and the individuals who accept the new explanations and narratives—the 2012 mythology—are deep, insightful, awake, and truthful. Acceptance of revised beliefs about the ancient Maya becomes a path to spiritual enlightenment.

5 Also see Stone (2000), a recent anthology of scholarship on failed prophecies that provides important updates to Festinger’s original thesis.

The 2012 phenomenon can be analyzed as a cultural meme, an artifact that, like other elements of culture, has a specific history of invention, survival, persistence, and use. Dawkins (1976) introduced the term “meme” to represent the ideational equivalent to a gene. Like genes, memes appear and survive in response to selective pressures and are replicated under favorable conditions. This results in survival of memes that are adaptive and the extinction of those that are maladaptive. The “2012 meme,” characterized by the association of the end of the 13th baktun and a 5125.37-year⁶ cycle with prophecies of Armageddon or apocalypse, has a specific history whose lineage can be traced. It was created in 1966, in the context of Cold War fears, and most of the elements of 2012-related mythology can be construed as a hallucinogen-inspired legacy of the Sixties (which were rife with other apocalyptic visions, including the baleful mythology of cult leader Charles Manson). However, the constituent elements of Mayanism have an even older history. In examining this, we can gain insight into what sustains beliefs that have resulted (as of February 2012) in over 2,000 books discussing the millennial relevance of 2012. Notably, only four of these have been full treatises by academic scholars (Aveni, 2009; Van Stone, 2010; Restall & Solari, 2011; and Stuart, 2011).

In the history of Maya scholarship, esoteric studies begin with theories for the origins of Mesoamerican civilization in ancient Israel, Egypt, Tibet, or even the lost continent of Atlantis. The Bible was the original authoritative reference on the ancient past for most of Western civilization. It was augmented by increasing attention to Classical writers, such as Plato, and an ever-expanding, increasingly eclectic and esoteric collection of sources ranging from Sanskrit texts to divine revelations and documents obtained through mediumship and channeling. It has grown to include theories about ancient contact with extraterrestrial and/or supernatural intelligence, either in a common material universe or across multiple dimensions and parallel universes as revealed by practices ranging from spontaneous visions and communication with supernaturals to psychedelically induced inner journeys.

Rather than evaluate whether assertion of beliefs about 2012 are “true” or not, it may be worthwhile to consider them as one would a religious phenomenon, what Lewis & Hammer (2007) identify as “the invention of sacred tradition.” Another interesting phenomenon is that, in many cases, a Western “invention of sacred tradition” that is falsely claimed to have originated with another culture will actually filter back into the culture from which it was originally appropriated (in this case the Maya) as an “authentic” creation of that culture, a hermeneutic feedback loop, known in the discipline of Religious Studies as the “pizza effect” (Bharati,

6 A cycle most accurately described from an ancient Maya perspective as a count of 1,872,000 *days*.

1970).⁷ Though theories about the significance of 2012 were developed by “white men” in a modern context, a small minority of contemporary Maya have become familiar with the prophecies attributed to their culture and have taken them back on board as “original” prophecies. These individuals, among them Hunbatz Men (Yucatec) and Don Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlaj (K’iche’), have affirmed, legitimated, and extended Western “stigmatized knowledge” (Barkun, 2003) recast as traditional Maya beliefs.

Origins

The history of the 2012 phenomenon has been detailed in two recent articles (Hoopes, 2011a, 2011b). For this reason, only a brief summary is given here. Speculation about the ancient Maya has been rampant ever since their initial encounter by Columbus who, in 1502, was compiling a *Libro de profecias* to explain how his discoveries would initiate a sequence of events resulting in the Second Coming of the Messiah (Columbus & Rusconi, 1997). Apocalyptic themes were common in post-Contact documents, among them the *Books of Chilam Balam* and the *Popol Vuh*, and it seems likely that all Maya end-times prophecies may be the result of syncretism. The basic workings of the Maya calendar, known as the Long Count, were understood as early as 1897, when Joseph Goodman produced a thorough explication that included recognition of basic units of *bak’tuns* (144,000 days), *k’atuns* (7,200 days), *tuns* (360 days), *uinals* (20 days), and *k’ins* (1 day). These were used to count days consecutively from a beginning point expressed by scholarly convention as a series of five numbers followed by a count on a 260-day cycle (the *tzolk’in*) and a 365-day cycle (the *haab*) (i.e. 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K’ank’in). Goodman thought that the Maya calendar was built around consecutive Great Cycles of 13 bak’tuns each and hypothesized that the termination of each of these would have been considered a significant event. He also successfully correlated the Long Count with the Gregorian calendar.

Although Ernst Förstemann (1906) did *not* link the event to the end of 13 bak’tuns in his commentary on the last pages of the Dresden Codex, he did find what he interpreted as evidence for belief in a Great Flood representing “destruction,” “apocalypse,” and “the end of the world.” This notion was further elaborated upon by Sylvanus Morley (1915, 1946) to a universal destruction of the world and a “final all-engulfing cataclysm.” Michael Coe was the first scholar to tie the correlation of a future Long Count date to a universal event. He noted parallels between Mesoamerican and “Oriental” religions, including similar concepts of eras or *kalpas*. He noted that the Aztecs believed the universe had passed through four previous eras and

⁷ This is in reference to the history of pizza. Briefly, pizza, as we consider it today, was invented in America, but eventually came to be considered (even by many Italians) to be an “authentic” Italian creation.

that we were now in the fifth, destined “to be destroyed by earthquakes” (Coe, 1966: 149). Coe claimed, “[t]here is a suggestion that each of these [eras] measured 13 baktuns [...] and that Armageddon would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world and all creation on the final day of the thirteenth” and that “our present universe would have been created in 3113 BC, to be annihilated on December 24, AD 2011, when the Great Cycle of the Long Count reaches completion” (Coe, 1966: 149). The shift from the catastrophic flood of Förstemann and Morley to earthquakes, a fate predicted in the 1558 Aztec document *La Leyenda de los Soles*, reflects Coe’s beliefs about congruence in Aztec and Maya eschatology. Coe was undoubtedly playing on Cold War fears to grab the attention of his readers, hence his use of the term “Armageddon.” However, what he neglected to anticipate was how his reference to a universal “annihilation” would be interpreted in esoteric and counterculture circles that had already associated the ancient Maya with the lost continent of Atlantis, ancient wisdom, and perennialist beliefs.

Dec. 24, 2011—A Date Repeated—Following the Path of Coe’s Error

Between the publication of Coe’s book in 1966 and 1975, there appears to have been little or no interest in pursuing 2012 (or 2011) as a date of any significance. However, in 1975 four books were published (and a television show released), separately drawing different and varying degrees of attention to the year 2012/2011. The books were *Mexico Mystique* (Waters, 1975), *The Invisible Landscape* (McKenna & McKenna, 1975), and *The Transformative Vision* (Argüelles, 1975). The television show was *The Outer Space Connection* (Landsburg, 1975) which was accompanied by a book of the same title (Landsburg & Landsburg, 1975). Each contributed to a cultural phenomenon more varied in scope than any of the individual authors could possibly have imagined. The books all suggested that the “end” of the Great Cycle of the Maya calendar would be accompanied by a significant metaphysical shift in consciousness, a “visionary” experience that for the McKennas and Argüelles was explicitly linked to the use of psychedelic substances. For Waters and the Landsburgs, it was also tied to anticipation of extraterrestrial visitations in accordance with Hopi and Maya prophecies, respectively.

The first countercultural appropriation of Coe’s interpretation of the Long Count tied it to pseudoscientific speculation about extraterrestrial intelligence. In 1973, producer Alan Landsburg⁸ adapted German director Harald Reinl’s film *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*—based on Erich von Däniken’s book of the same name⁹—for an American television audience. He hired

8 Among Landsburg’s later notable television productions was the early reality show *That’s Incredible!*, which featured reenactments and purported tests of claims about paranormal phenomena.

9 Published in the U.K. and the U.S. as *Chariots of the Gods? Memories of the Future—Unsolved Mysteries of the Past* (Däniken, 1969).

Rod Serling, creator and host of *The Twilight Zone*, to narrate *In Search of Ancient Astronauts*.¹⁰ It was a tremendous commercial success. Landsburg subsequently produced two related programs in 1975: *In Search of Ancient Mysteries* and *The Outer Space Connection*. Both were also narrated by Serling and accompanied by mass-market paperbacks of the same titles. The third of these films echoed Coe's erroneous date and played upon von Däniken's theories, concluding:

We know the Mayans left a calendar, one that stretches back more than 90 million years, long before civilized man walked the Earth, and forward in time to a day that will mark the close of a crucial cycle. An inscription tells us that the modern period will end December 24, 2011 A.D. We may presume that they were computing the length of a space voyage and marking the exact date of return [...] Christmas Eve, 2011 A.D. On that day they may return to seek the fate of the colony left on Earth" (Landsburg, 1975).

The book confirms Coe as the source of the date (Landsburg & Landsburg, 1975: 164). Landsburg's shows were not only aired on network TV (at a time when there were only three major networks), they were also produced in 16 mm versions for distribution to schools. Together, the programs and trade paperback books linked the concept of the Maya calendar "end date" and extraterrestrial visitations in the minds of millions. They also fostered a market for more of the same.

The Syncretic World of Frank Waters

In 1970, the Rockefeller Foundation had supported Frank Waters—best known as a novelist and non-academic ethnographer of Native Americans—to undertake humanistic research in Mexico on ancient Mesoamerican cultures. His resulting book, *Mexico Mystique* (Waters, 1975), presents a view of Mesoamerican history that was directly counter to academic interpretations of the time.¹¹ It also introduced elements that subsequently influenced José Argüelles and eventually became core components of later 2012 theories (Hammer, 2001: 245). Waters cited Coe's assertion that a Maya "Great Cycle" lasted 13 baktuns and emphasized that one of these cycles would conclude on December 24, 2011 (Coe's erroneous date). He even made this date the focus of both astronomical and astrological analysis. Although Waters died in 1995, his contributions to the 2012 phenomenon were central.

Waters, who attributed his interest in indigenous culture to the fact that his father was part Cheyenne, had written about Native American spirituality since the 1940s. His most well-

¹⁰ Upon Serling's death, Leonard Nimoy, of Star Trek fame, became host of the series.

¹¹ It also apparently went unnoticed by academic Mesoamerican specialists. Michael Coe, for example, confessed to one of the authors (Hoopes) that he had never heard of the book until recently and did not even recall ever having seen it reviewed or cited.

known work was *Book of the Hopi* (Waters, 1963), which, according to religious historian Philip Jenkins, “exercised a vast influence over the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s [...] as familiar a fixture of student dorm rooms as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or Jack Kerouac’s beatnik odyssey, *On the Road*” (Jenkins, 2004: 138). *Book of the Hopi*, written with the help of Hopi elder Oswald White Bear Fredericks, outlines basic Hopi beliefs and practices. It also includes, at the end, a section titled “Hopi Prophecies” (Waters, 1963: 408-409).

In *Mexico Mystique*, Waters (1975: 76) echoes Mormon teachings that assert Native Americans were descendants of ancient Israelites. He also cites esoteric writers such as Helena Blavatsky, Edgar Cayce, Ignatius Donnelly, Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, and Augustus Le Plongeon as supporting interpretations that the Maya, among others, had travelled between Atlantis and the Americas (and from Lemuria before that). He asserts spiritual parallels among many cultures. However, rather than seeing them in a perennialist vein as having come from a source of eternal wisdom accessible to all, Waters suggests historical chains of transmission and diffusion requiring travels and migrations of ancient cultures, especially direct connections between the ancient Maya at Palenque, Chiapas and the Hopi villages in Arizona.

Although these elements were already present in Waters’ previous works, *Mexico Mystique* combined them with interpretations of the Maya Long Count and emphasized 2011 as a prophesied time of great change. Significantly, Waters invoked de Santillana and von Dechend’s *Hamlet’s Mill* (1969)¹² and the precession of the equinoxes, asserting it was “undoubtable” that “civilizations whose achievements equaled or exceeded those of our own today existed in antiquity [and that they] must have appeared and disappeared in rhythmic intervals in tune with astronomical cycles” (Waters, 1975: 78). Waters invoked astrology, suggesting that “If we grant that [...] Earth is not isolated from the solar system and the greater universe [...] we can readily accept [...] that the changing configurations of the heavenly bodies exercise different influences upon Earth” (Waters, 1975: 84, emphases added) and asserting that the rise and fall of civilizations and the “prototypes of man” ebb and flow along with astrological transitions, such as that from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius (Waters, 1975: 257). He noted that five Great Cycles of 13 bak’tuns would correspond to the approximately 26,000 years of a complete precession. Maya mythology described how “four previous worlds have been destroyed, the present being the fifth.” Invoking the Five Suns mythology of the Aztecs, Waters asserted the ancient Mexicans believed that “a catastrophe would completely destroy the world” (Waters, 1975: 257) at the end of each cycle. He was unclear about whether this would be a physical catastrophe, a metaphysical catastrophe, or both, though he implies that prophecies of physical destruction can also be interpreted, poetically, as spiritual events (similar to the recent post-rape hermeneutics of Harold Camping) (Daily Mail Reporter, 2011).

12 A work panned by critics for its excessive unfounded speculation.

Waters was heavily influenced by occult and esoteric beliefs.¹³ Although he contributed to promoting “fringe” beliefs about the lost continent of Atlantis, he did make a cogent observation about myth and “psychological reality,” noting:

However true these beliefs may be, the role of Atlantis in world mythology cannot be ignored or politely side-stepped [...] The myth of Atlantis has about it something so compelling that it has endured for over twenty-five hundred years. Some three thousand books have been written about it, comprising an established Atlanteanology. If its physical reality has not been established, the myth about it is a psychological reality of prime significance (Waters, 1975: 106).

In his sense, a “psychological reality” is something that becomes “true” because people accept it as such and are influenced by it in the context of a compelling will to believe. Philip Jenkins also notes:

When a text becomes a major best seller—such as Frank Waters’s *Book of the Hopi*, Carlos Castaneda’s *Teachings of Don Juan*, or Lynn Andrews’s *Medicine Woman*—it succeeds because the author is offering an interpretation that people want to hear at a particular time (Jenkins, 2004: 7).

If enough people believe something to be “true,” does that make it a reality? Why are some myths especially appealing in the context of a given zeitgeist? What people find in such stories and how they view them depends as much upon what they bring to them and what questions they ask—or avoid asking—as it comes from the content of the material itself. If personal experience reveals that perceptions of the world can be substantially altered, this lays the foundation for accepting alternative “truths.” The legacy of psychedelics, especially powerful hallucinogens such as psilocybin, LSD, and DMT, was a subculture that had been primed to accept alternative truths.

Terence McKenna, The Mushroom and the Timewave

Although Waters, who had been born in 1902 and had come of age in the heyday of the Taos art colony in the 1920s, represented the “old guard” of American occult writers, the zeitgeist was also manifest in younger counterculture circles. Divinatory practices such as astrology,

13 It is worth noting that Waters was strongly influenced by the teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff, introduced to him by Mabel Dodge Luhan. Waters became a prominent figure in the circles surrounding Luhan in Taos, New Mexico, and it is notable, relative to the level of psychedelic influence among later 2012 proponents, that following an observation of a “bad trip” in New York in 1914 Luhan became an outspoken critic of peyote use and tried to ban its use in her private circles (Jenkins, 2004: 96, 139, 141).

Tarot, and the *I Ching* (Pinyin: Yi Jing), the ancient Chinese divinatory “Book of Changes” (Wilhelm and Baynes 1950), had experienced a revival in the late 1960s. As Waters had emphasized astrology, psychedelic enthusiast Terence McKenna found “truth” in the *I Ching*. McKenna claims that during a 1971 trip to the Amazon in search of new psychedelics he had a vision accompanied by voices that led him to a mathematical examination of the *I Ching* and the creation of a chart—later converted into a computer program—that generated what he called “Timewave Zero.” By analyzing the 64 hexagrams of the King Wen sequence of the *I Ching* in an unorthodox fashion, McKenna claimed to have gained new insights into both its origins and its divinatory capabilities. The latter resulted in a model predicting an “eschaton” or culmination of “increasing novelty” in 2012.

McKenna said that his inspiration to create Timewave Zero came from experiments he and his brother Dennis undertook with psilocybin-containing mushrooms (*Psilocybe cubensis*) near Putumayo, Colombia, a region they sought out as the same one in which William S. Burroughs (1963) had used the hallucinogenic *yagé* (*ayahuasca*) in 1953. McKenna claims to have been prodded by a voice in his head. “The voice was saying, *this is the fractal map of all of space and time*” (McKenna, 1985, original emphasis). More specifically, the voice informed him that the Timewave was a quantified graph of changes in the amount of “novelty” in the universe. This “map of time” was both linear and teleological. “The notion was that this hierarchical calendar is not an eternal calendar. It’s a calendar with a built in closure” (1985).

The Invisible Landscape (McKenna & McKenna, 1975) documented the creation and philosophical background of the Timewave. In *Cosmic Trigger* (1977), counterculture author Robert Anton Wilson devoted several pages to a concise summary:

The McKennas regard our universe as a hologram, every part contains the information of the whole [...] There are 64 time-scales in the hologram of our universe [derived from the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching*] [...] The action of psychedelics, in the model, opens the quantum information system [...] Within the McKenna theory, all of the 64 time-scales peak together [...] There is] a 4,300-year cycle from urbanization to the dawn of modern science; a 384-year cycle in which science has caused more upsurge of novelty than in that 4,300 year cycle; a 67-year cycle [...] in which there will be more acceleration than there was between Galileo and Hiroshima; a 384 day cycle in 2011-2012 when there will be more transformations than in all previous cycles; a 6 day cycle [...] and so on, down to a grand climax (Wilson, 1977: 216-8).

The initial version of the Timewave was based upon events that were significant in Terence McKenna’s own life. For example, the initial end-date of the Timewave was set for his own birthday (November 16, 1971) which came and went without incident. It was later adjusted to the date of his mother’s death. Although he would eventually push the date forty years further

into the future, McKenna clearly felt the eschaton to be imminent. Modifications of his model used other significant “end dates” until he eventually hit upon December 21, 2012. These others included a close pass by the Earth of Comet Kohoutek in 1973, an event that also provoked other millenarian speculation (Dennis McKenna, personal communication). By 1975, McKenna had settled on the August 6, 1945 date of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima as the pivotal moment¹⁴ that initiated the final 67-year period leading up to the conclusion of the Timewave in November 2012. Approximately ten years later, apparently after becoming aware of Robert Sharer’s Gregorian correlation of 13.0.0.0.0 (Morley, 1983), he changed the end-date to coincide with the expected conclusion of the Long Count on the northern hemisphere’s winter solstice in 2012.¹⁵

Getting It Right: Confusion Over the Maya “End Times” Date

The Maya Long Count Date of 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K’ank’in had been remarked upon by scholars long before Coe, but it was not until 1983 that the Gregorian correlation of December 21, 2012 appeared in print. The very first appearance of the Long Count date (without its Gregorian correlation) was in *Biologia Centrali-Americana* (Goodman, 1897). Astronomer Maude Makemson (1951) fortuitously derived the correct Long Count date from an erroneous translation of a prophecy in the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin, even associating it with end-of-the-world prophecies, but she assigned it an incorrect Gregorian correlation in the year 1752. Her book therefore introduced the date to a general audience in the context of further confusion. At the time Coe was writing in the 1960s, no ancient inscription of this date had been found. That changed in 1978, with the discovery, partial decipherment, and initial publication of the fragmentary Tortuguero Monument 6.¹⁶ The first references to this inscription were

14 A date that had been earlier identified by Tony Shearer (1975: 154) as one linked to significant cycles, Shearer writes, “[t]en years and three days /After /We entered /The Ninth Hell, /On August 6, 1945 /The first /Atom bomb was dropped /On /Hiroshima, Japan.” According to Shearer (1971: 153), the “Ninth Hell” began on August 3, 1935 with Hitler’s denunciation of the Treaty of Versailles. In addition, Argüelles dates many of his writings using the notation “AH” as a dating scheme to signify the number of years After Hiroshima. Worries about nuclear war play a very significant role in the development of the “2012 phenomenon”.

15 Once the Timewave had been written into a computer program McKenna used it as the basis for a counseling service which he called Anamnesis (in homage to Plato’s concept that souls are born with complete access to eternal knowledge, forgotten in the incarnation process, which can be recollected given the proper catalyst). Instead of using the Timewave to look at the whole of history, McKenna would use it to look at a single individual’s life from birth. “It’s like I’ve invented a one-term kind of astrology. It only talks about novelty [...] It doesn’t, in any given situation, define what will happen. It only defines the level of novelty that must be fulfilled by whatever happens.” (McKenna, 1983, Syntax)

16 This fragmentary monument, from a now-destroyed site in Chiapas, Mexico, is the only known

published by German archaeologist Berthold Reise (1978, 1980). Another appeared in Linda Schele's doctoral dissertation, published as *Maya Glyphs: The Verbs* (Schele, 1982: 80). However, she erroneously recorded the date as "13.0.0.0.0 1 Ahau 3 Kankin" (instead of 4 Ajaw)¹⁷ and did not provide any Gregorian correlation. The fact that neither of these expert Mayanists considered the inscription to be an earth-shattering discovery is testimony to the fact that the Maya calendar "end date" was not thought by Mayanists to be of great significance either within or outside of the arcane worlds of archaeology and epigraphy.

The first correlation of 13.0.0.0.0 as December 21, 2012 was calculated and published by archaeologist Robert Sharer of the University of Pennsylvania in Table B.2 of the 4th revised edition of Morley's classic *The Ancient Maya* in 1983.¹⁸ It was accompanied by information on how the correlation had been derived. An appendix preceding the table provides detailed instructions for calculating Gregorian equivalents of Long Count dates using the Goodman-Martínez-Thompson (GMT) correlation constant (1983: 598-599).¹⁹ Unlike others,²⁰ Sharer did not use the modified "GMT-2" correlation proposed by Yale epigrapher Floyd Lounsbury, which added two days to the standard GMT (and would have led to the correlation of December 23, 2012). Sharer has explained that he extended the table to 13.0.0.0.0 because: 1) Morley had not explained why he had ended it at 12.5.0.0.0, 2) Sharer felt it should be taken to the completion of 13 Bak'tun, and 3) Sharer thought it would be interesting to have a correlation given the date's significance to the ancient Maya—as he and others understood at the time—to

ancient Maya inscription to record the date 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in. The poor condition of the monument has made the full passage difficult to decipher, especially given destruction of key verbs. Gronemeyer & MacLeod (2011) have offered a decipherment that suggests a ceremony in which the figure of a Maya deity is dressed and displayed. There is no mention of world destruction. Popular awareness of the monument did not come about until 2006, and this single reference in Maya writing to the closing of the 13th baktun is conspicuously absent from the prior 2012 literature. This means that essentially the entirety of 2012 speculation was developed prior to awareness of any actual Maya mention of the date.

- 17 Note the changes in orthographic conventions for *tzolk'in* day names.
- 18 The first two editions of *The Ancient Maya* had been written by Morley. The 3rd edition (1956) had been revised by George Brainerd and the 4th (1983) by Robert Sharer. With the 5th edition (1994), the revisions had become so substantial that Morley's name was removed and Sharer's appeared as author. The 6th edition (2006) lists the author as Sharer "with Loa Traxler." The December 21, 2012 correlation was the last date that appeared in the revised table of Long Count date in each edition beginning with the 4th. In the 3rd edition, the table only provided *k'atun* correlations to 12.5.0.0.0 (April 14, 1717).
- 19 This employs a correlation constant of Julian day number (JDN) 584283 rather than 584285. This choice was based on the opinions of several Mayanist colleagues that included Peter Mathews but not Lounsbury, Coe, or Schele (Sharer, personal communication, 2011).
- 20 Including epigraphers Lounsbury, Schele, Mathews, and Stuart.

be the “end of an era.” Sharer thought that a new cycle would begin after December 21, 2012 as part of an “endless repetition of 13 bak’tuns” (Sharer, personal communication, 2011).

Thus, by 1983, an authoritative correlation was in print that placed the “end” of a 13-bak’tun cycle on a date corresponding to the northern hemisphere’s winter solstice in 2012. Thanks to the earlier speculation by Waters, the McKennas, and Argüelles, this date soon gained deep significance in astrologically influenced circles.

The Ojai Meeting – 1985 – A Coming Together

The change of focus in the purported “end time” date of the eschaton from Coe’s date of December 24, 2011 to December 21, 2012 was cemented into the countercultural narrative as a result of a meeting between Terence McKenna and Argüelles early in 1985. Neither of them had given significant attention to 2012 in their 1975 books. Furthermore, each had noted the year only and not the specific day despite the fact that the Maya calendar focuses on a count of *days*, not *years*. (As noted above, Waters *had* emphasized the astrological significance of the specific day in spite of an erroneous correlation.)

Almost immediately following the publication of Sharer’s extended table, McKenna mentions having heard that the November 2012 eschaton date he had settled on for his Timewave was in close proximity to the end of the Long Count.²¹ It does not appear as early in Argüelles’ writings. Although he had mentioned both the Long Count and the *year* 2012 in *The Transformative Vision* (Argüelles, 1975: 304), a specific *day* does not appear in his writings until after he met with McKenna at the Ojai Institute in April 1985 in the context of a meeting organized by Joan Halifax. It appears to be at this meeting that Argüelles’ attention was directed back to the Long Count and the specific date of December 21, 2012.²²

This is not how it is related in reconstructed histories, which claim an earlier awareness. A recent biography (more aptly a “hagiography”) of Argüelles written by his fourth wife and recent widow Stephanie South gives the impression that a commitment to 2012 had been a consistent part of his message from the start. South asserts that *The Transformative Vision* “describes the

21 For instance, see Abraham & McKenna, *Dynamics of Hyperspace* (1983) and McKenna, *Syntax of Psychedelic Time* (1983). It is not clear exactly how McKenna learned about the Long Count. In a 1986 recording, he says that he is not sure who told him about it but speculates that it may have been Henry Munn. (McKenna, 1986) Married to the niece of a Mazatecan shaman and a pioneer in the field of ethnopoetics, Munn was influential upon the original McKenna thesis in his own right with his 1973 article “The Mushrooms of Language,” which talked about how psilocybin mushrooms “speak.”

22 This is contrary to the speculation in Sacha Defesche’s Masters thesis that it was McKenna who acquired knowledge of the Long Count from Argüelles at the 1985 Ojai meeting (Defesche, 2007).

period between 1987 and 2012 as the “interchange of tinctures,” when the oroborus (serpent) bites its tail, releasing its poison in order to heal itself” (South, 2009: 153). However, this is incorrect. All that Argüelles actually wrote (at the conclusion of a long endnote) was that “attention should also be drawn to the fact that a larger 5,125-year cycle which began in 3113 B.C. will draw to an end in A.D. 2012” (Argüelles, 1975: 304). A chronological chart at the end of the book (“A map of the later Kali Yuga-The Fourth World-The Iron Age-the Fifth Sun”) does not even include 2012 and instead shows the “interchange of tinctures” as the period between 1987 and 2039 (Argüelles, 1975: 298–301). South also claims that Argüelles’ unpublished work *The Art Planet Chronicles*²³ is “a futuristic visionary piece that considers the years between 1987 and 2012 as the time of the Great Dislocation” (South, 2009: 186). However, it does not mention either of these dates. South’s claims appear to be a strategy of “the invention of sacred tradition,” making it appear that Argüelles’ emphasis on 2012 existed for more than a decade before it moved to the fore in 1987.

Earth Ascending, published in June 1984, contains no reference to 2012 and mentions 1987 only once, in the fine-print of an appendix, as the “fateful year” in which “a genuinely planetary art came into existence” (Argüelles, 1984a: 147). In December 1984, Argüelles completed *Earth Shaman: The Voyage Beyond History*²⁴, a work that focuses entirely on August 16-17, 1987—the dates of the Harmonic Convergence—but makes no mention of either 2012 or the Long Count. In it, the Harmonic Convergence is described as an “all encompassing cyclically climatic event” (Argüelles, 1984b: 7). His first awareness of December 21, 2012 appears to have happened four months later.

In April 1985, Halifax sponsored a conference called the “Council of Quetzalcoatl” at the Ojai Foundation—a retreat for counterculture visionaries. The main presenters were Terence Mc Kenna, José & Lloydine Argüelles, Peter Balin,²⁵ and Harley “Swiftdeer” Reagan.²⁶ The pur-

23 Now available on his website (www.lawoftime.org).

24 It was during the writing of this that Argüelles reportedly “channeled” the term “Harmonic Convergence” (South, 2009: 205-6).

25 Balin had created a Maya-based tarot deck in the late 1970s and, curiously, the book that accompanied this “Xultun Tarot” (*The Flight of the Feathered Serpent*) lists the concluding date of the Long Count as December 21, 2011. Waters’ *Mexico Mystique* appears in the bibliography and Balin follows him in suggesting destruction by earthquakes, but enigmatically claims that “the Maya believed most of the destruction will take place between December 21, 2011, and June 6th, 2012” when there will be a Venus transit. “This sign from the planet Venus,” Balin tells us, “will usher in the new sun, the sixth creation, known by the Mayas as consciousness. Not a bad description of astrology’s age of Aquarius, is it?” (Balin, 1978: 29)

26 References to a “Council of Quetzalcoatl” had first appeared in Tony Shearer’s *Lord of the Dawn* (1971: 77, 93-94), in which he noted that a prophecy on “Sacred Tablets” held and guarded by the council

pose of the “council” was to look at prophecies coming from the North American continent (Barbara Smith, personal communication).

McKenna’s presentation explicitly noted that “the Long Count of the Maya, the calendar of which you have heard so much, contains thirteen baktuns [...] The end of baktun thirteen is *the winter solstice of 2012*,²⁷ thirty-four days later than the date that I reached through this series of involvement with the I Ching” (McKenna, 1985, emphasis added). It seems likely that McKenna had learned of Sharer’s correlation and that it was he who brought it to the attention of Argüelles, who later noted:

It was following a gathering at the neo-shamanic think-tank, the Ojai Foundation, in April 1985, entitled the Council of Quetzalcoatl, that the presence of the phenomenon I now call the Mayan Factor finally asserted itself to me [...] My meeting with Terence McKenna [...] contributed greatly to this understanding of the Mayan Factor [...] By the summer of 1985, I was certain that the code behind the Great Cycle [of the Long Count] was a key to unlocking the meaning of our own history—and current dilemma. So it was that I threw myself with renewed abandon into the Mayan Factor (Argüelles, 1987: 40-1).

Argüelles quickly wrote up a manuscript that discussed the significance of both August 16-17, 1987 (the “Harmonic Convergence”) and December 21, 2012. In 1985, he presented it to Richard Grossinger at North Atlantic Books with hopes of getting it published. Grossinger was not impressed and declined the manuscript (Grossinger, 2010: 12-15). However, *The Mayan Factor* (1987) was immediately picked up by Barbara and Gerry Clow of Bear & Company, who recognized its immediate relevance and marketability. A television mini-series based on Shirley MacLaine’s *Out on a Limb* (1986), a bestselling personal account of her New Age awakening, had been a commercial success in January 1987. This helped create a ready audience for the Harmonic Convergence and insured the ongoing success of the Bear & Co. imprint (which merged with Inner Traditions in 2000). It has become the leading independent publisher of popular books on 2012 and Native American prophecy, with over thirty books discussing 2012 (including titles by John Major Jenkins, Carl Johan Calleman, at least six by Barbara Hand Clow herself, and several other by Argüelles).

Although none of their books have been as popular or influential as those published by Bear & Co., North Atlantic Books has recently emerged as a distant second in the industry, with over

“predicted the future/ Of/ The entire continent.” Others who participated were Ralph Abraham, Francis Huxley, Adele Getty, Barbara Smith, and Kathleen Harrison (McKenna, 1985).

27 In remarking on this, McKenna preceded the first mention of this correspondence in print by Edmonson (1988: 119), who attributed Victoria Bricker with making this observation to him (although the significance of the date would have been apparent to anyone familiar with the winter solstice date and Sharer’s correlation).

twenty 2012-related books in their catalog (among their various imprints). In February 2011, North Atlantic Books announced a new imprint titled Evolver Editions, for which the acquisitions editor is Daniel Pinchbeck, author of *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl* (2006). One of its first titles is Argüelles' posthumously published *Manifesto for the Noosphere* (2011).

McKenna and Argüelles—A Divergence of Interpretation

An aspect of McKenna's theory that is usually overlooked and that distinguishes him from the majority of other primary contributors to the "2012 phenomenon" is what might be called the transhumanist stream of 2012. McKenna's interpretation was tied directly to his psychedelic experiences. The belief that both he and the Maya had consumed psilocybin²⁸ and that this substance provided access to hidden knowledge appeared a confirmation that this end-date was holographically encoded into the matrix of reality and accessible to anyone who employed the proper techniques. Central to his thought is a "technophilia" that strongly contrasts with Argüelles' asserted (but not demonstrated) "technophobia."²⁹ Where Argüelles' future utopia (as described in 1987) requires a dismantling of the "technosphere" and a return to 'nature,' McKenna's utopian vision for 2012 is a "forward escape" that *depends* on human technological innovation:

This is what the human function is, I think, is, *through* Technos, to eliminate the distinction between mind and matter: To free us into the imagination. That's where we're going when the novelty wave runs to zero and we are released into this transhistorical space. And it will not be miraculous. It will be created by us, through us, through a number of disciplines, technologies, ideas, and innate abilities that we cannot currently hope to do more than glimpse because we are so far back in the historical continuum from where this thing is going to happen in 2012 (McKenna, 1985).

McKenna himself made sure to specifically distinguish his view from Argüelles':

The mushroom has said, many times, "no big deal; this is what it's like when a species prepares to depart for the stars. There's nothing wrong with H-Bombs and supercolliders; this is all part of the narrow neck. Monkeys don't go to the stars and you must go through

28 An assertion that to this day remains only indirectly supported, despite incorrect assertions by Furst (1972: x) attributed to Coe's graduate students regarding mushroom use by contemporary Chol Maya at Palenque.

29 As someone who embraced computers and other technology in the production of his publications and artwork, Argüelles was not entirely a Luddite, but ultimately described the development of technology by humans to be an aberration, corrupting humanity from the rest of nature.

the monkey net to find yourself on the other side.” But, I’m not talking about a historical transformation in quite the same way that, I think, José and, perhaps, Peter [Balin] were indicating. I’m talking about a change in physics, not a change in the human heart or the human political structure. I’m talking about the collapse of the entire spacetime continuum as a necessary consequence of the laws under which it operates (McKenna, 1985).³⁰

In contrast, Argüelles tells us:

It is heretical to voice the thought that the sensory awakenedness of the aborigine is preferable to twentieth-century technological comfort [...] [T]he trap of technological development lies in our creating an environment in which all we receive is the limited frequency feedback of our own artificially devised improvements [...] akin to a caged animal suffocating on the toxic residue of its own waste products (1987: 149-50).

Notice that McKenna expects technology to “free us into the imagination” where Argüelles fears that technology will “trap” us in our own imaginations. Argüelles’ vision sees “pre-history” as “pre-technological,” “history” as “technological,” and “post-history” (after 2012) as “post-technological” (1987: 150). Where Argüelles sees the accumulation of technology as the source of humanity’s problems and seeks a “path beyond technology”³¹, McKenna sees technological advance as the ultimate and inevitable source of humanity’s salvation. These two positions define very different ways of relating to contemporary reality.

Misrepresentations in the Promotion of 2012

While many aspects of the development of the “2012 phenomenon” might be chalked up to well-intentioned misunderstandings or even naiveté and arrogance, there are also examples of what appear to be intentional misrepresentations of facts in order to manipulate messages. A common technique has been to change the message between printings of a book. For instance, in the original edition of Bob Frissell’s book *Nothing in This Book is True but It’s*

30 It is worth noting that McKenna is never entirely clear on exactly what he expects to happen. One frequent hypothesis that he presents is the discovery of time travel.

31 The full title of his best-selling book is *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology*, in which he tells us that “our own bodies are the best and most sophisticated technology there is—we are the path beyond technology.” For Argüelles this means the embodied technology of psychic communication that has been overshadowed by artificial human technology (1987: 173).

Exactly How Things Are, following a series of prophecies culminating in a pole shift, we are told, “From 1998 to approximately 2000 we will most likely have experienced all of these events” (Frissell, 1994: 16). When the book was reprinted in 2002, the same page read “Sometime between now and 2012 we will most likely have experienced all of these events” (Frissell, 2002: 16). The McKennas also used this technique between the 1975 and 1994 editions of *The Invisible Landscape* to change citations of “2012” to “December 22, 2012” and to make the Long Count appear more central to the Timewave theory than was originally the case.

Some changes are the result of careless and sloppy scholarship. For example, Graham Hancock in *Fingerprints of the Gods* (1995) uses the date December 23, 2012 for the end of the Long Count, which he takes from Coe’s epilogue to *Breaking the Maya Code* (1992). Although Coe’s allusion is to floods, Hancock suggests it was a day the Maya thought would bring world destruction by earthquakes³² (Hancock, 1995: 100, 161). He then tells us that a specific alignment astrologically “charted [for] the Mayan date of the end of the Fifth Sun [...] can only occur once in 45,200 years” (1995: 231) using the calculation made by astrologer Roberta Sklower for the position of the planets on December 24, 2011 in Waters’ *Mexico Mystique*.³³

Despite what many of the prophets of 2012 say, “truth” is an elusive goal. They fail to achieve accuracy or consistency and often appear to bank on the hope that readers simply will not check them on their facts. The concern is with mythmaking, not objective reality. Misrepresentation has a long history in occult and esoteric literature. In his biting critique of Blavatsky, Solovyov (2011 [1895]) wryly noted the irony of HPB’s motto, “There is no religion higher than truth,” by pointing out that she would say this even in the midst of active deception.

2012 Scholarship—Updates & Corrections

In a recent article based largely upon the M.A. thesis of his student Sacha Defesche (2007), Wouter Hanegraaff (2010: 292) identifies Terence McKenna’s Timewave theory as the “the very origin of the widespread contemporary movement of New Age millenarianism.” Describing the McKenna brothers’ 1971 “experiment” at La Chorrera (Hanegraaff, 2010: 302), he identifies Terence McKenna’s inspiration as the result of “channeling,” citing references to a voice in his head that kept reminding him of significant events and dates. Hanegraaff (2010: 307) also documents the logical flaws in the Timewave, noting “its conclusion (we are at the end of the cycle) was actually the premise on which the whole reasoning was based!” However, although

32 In this he echos Waters (1975) and Tompkins (1976).

33 Regarding the astrological association, Hancock lists both Waters (1975) and Tompkins (1976) as sources. In either case, it would have been impossible for Hancock to have co-opted this astrological account without knowing that it only applied to the date Dec. 24, 2011 and not Dec. 23, 2012.

he identifies *The Mayan Factor* (1987) as the original connection between the Maya calendar and 2012 and—citing Defesche—rightly points out the significance of McKenna’s meeting with Argüelles in 1985, Hanegraaff neglects to acknowledge its earlier history. Hanegraaff’s (2010: 308) emphasis on “the first ever mention of 2012” overlooks the significant antecedents in the work of Coe and Waters, neither of whom he cites.

Hanegraaff also mistakenly concludes that McKenna’s “theory met its intellectual Waterloo, well before the arrival of 2012.”

If McKenna’s “eschaton” Timewave has not stood the test of science, McKenna himself certainly passed the test of scientific integrity: it is no small feat of heroism to accept proof that most of one’s life work has been based on a mistake [...] declared dead by its inventor (Hanegraaff, 2010: 311).

He bases this assertion on a 1996 document by mathematician Matthew Watkins who presented what McKenna called the “Watkins Objection” to Timewave Zero, which demonstrates arbitrary designations in the original math. However, Hanegraaff neglects to acknowledge the “Sheliak Clarification,” McKenna’s term for John Sheliak’s version of the software called Timewave 2.0³⁴ (Watkins, 2010) which revived McKenna’s faith in his model. In fact, McKenna’s lectures up to his death in 2000 clearly indicate that he never abandoned his belief in the veracity of the Timewave. In a 1999 National Public Radio (NPR) interview one year prior to McKenna’s death and three years after Watkins’ objection, a caller asked him if he was still sticking with the 2012 date. He replied, “Yes, it’s nice now to have it all to myself since everyone is rushing the gun and piling onto Y2K” (McKenna, 1999).

Conclusion

The 2012 phenomenon can be analyzed as a body of myth. It has a specific history that can be identified and traced. The earliest European encounter with Mayas happened in the context of millenarian prophecies. In 1966, an idiosyncratic reference to Armageddon and the “annihilation of the universe” in association with the supposed end of a Great Cycle on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K’an’k’in in a college textbook was soon associated with various esoteric and speculative realms of scholarship. The core mythology of the “eschaton” and “transformation of consciousness” coalesced in 1985 with a meeting between two powerful personalities—McKenna and Argüelles—whose involvements with psychedelics and counterculture brought them audiences steeped in New Age lore. December 21, 2012 became the new “dawning of the Age of

³⁴ Also see Meyer (2010) for a further attempt at refuting the fatality of the “Watkins Objection” to the Timewave by one of its software programmers.

Aquarius.” Their ideas were promoted successively by Jenkins (1998) and by Pinchbeck (2002, 2006), each of whom added new elements to the mythology (Jenkins an idiosyncratic interpretation of Maya iconography as archetypal “perennial” mythology and Pinchbeck an urgency of psychedelic revelation and environmental consciousness). Collectively, they inspired a mass outpouring of “fringe,” pseudoscientific speculation, and metaphysical self-help activism.

In writing about his method for analyzing the I Ching, McKenna noted:

I concentrated entirely on the I Ching as a prehistorical artifact. I unburdened myself completely from the necessity to be a Sinologist by concentrating on the I Ching as it existed in the Pre-Han period [...] All the commentaries on the I Ching, all the exegesis, is Han or Post-Han (McKenna, 1985).

The hermeneutic technique of “unburdening” oneself from the need to be an expert by adopting an idiosyncratic analytical technique supposedly immune to literary scholarship is one also employed by John Major Jenkins (1998) in claiming that iconography on Maya monuments (especially at the site of Izapa) can only be analyzed “archetypally” based on the insights of an assumed “perennial wisdom tradition.” In both cases, there is an assumption of a pure truth (or insight into the nature of reality) attained prior to cultural dilution, corruption, and textual exegesis. When the burdens of academic training and scholarship are set aside, fertile imaginations and fringe ideas are given free-reign.

Philip Jenkins notes “Ironically, since much of the appeal of Native religion is its supposedly ancient, timeless quality, many of the symbols and themes of the new synthesis are very new indeed, and their origins can be traced back no more than a few decades” (Jenkins, 2004: 5). The newness of the synthesis of 2012-related thought is especially underscored by the fact that the acceptance of 2012 thought by contemporary Maya (the “pizza effect”) includes the recasting of ideas about Atlantis, ETs, and crystal skulls resymbolized in an indigenous context.

The 2012 meme is gaining ever more spreading power due to Roland Emmerich’s popular film, an ever-increasing book publication rate, a vast number of websites, countless TV documentaries, independent feature films, and a never-ending stream of videos on YouTube. As an even more diverse variety of alternative media sources continue to develop, 2012 seems to get its foot in the door of each of them.³⁵ As the mythology becomes more and more popular, as it becomes increasingly embedded in people’s worldviews, it is essential to consider it in a critical light. This does not just mean debunking false claims, but examining it as one would critically examine any other historic, religious, or cultural phenomenon. The most fruitful approach may be to view it as a fertile collection of beliefs from which new religious movements are

35 For instance, there are several 2012-related iPhone apps.

emerging. While they have yet to take clear form or precipitate recognizable leaders, they will undoubtedly be with us well after the long-anticipated date has passed.

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