# Go Up Into the Gaps
# The Play of Native American Religions[1]

2009

## Sam Gill

It was a dark and misty winter afternoon. As I crested the hill east of Zuni the familiar sights of Corn Mountain to the south and Zuni village nestled in the valley below greeted me. I thought of Frank Hamilton Cushing's description of Zuni as it first appeared to him in 1879:

> Below and beyond me was suddenly revealed a great red and yellow sandplain. . . . To the left, a mile or two away, crowning numberless red foot-hills, rose a huge rock-mountain, a thousand feet high and at least two miles in length along its flat top, which showed, even in the distance, fanciful chiselings by wind, sand, and weather. . . .
>
> Out from the middle of the rock-wall . . . flowed a little rivulet. Emerging from a succession of low mounds beneath me, it wound, like a long whip-lash or the track of an earth-worm, westward through the middle of the sandy plain and out almost to the horizon, where . . . it was lost in the southern shadows of a terraced hill.
>
> Down behind this hill the sun was sinking, transforming it into a jagged pyramid of silhouette, crowned with a brilliant halo, whence a seeming midnight aurora burst forth through broken clouds, bordering each misty blue island with crimson and gold, then blazing upward in widening lines of light, as if to repeat in the high heavens its earthly splendor.
>
> A banner of smoke, as though fed from a thousand crater-fires, balanced over this seeming volcano, floating off, in many a circle and surge, on the evening breeze. But I did not realize that this hill, so strange and picturesque, was a city of the habitations of men, until I saw, on the topmost terrace, little specks of black and red moving about against the sky. It seemed still a little island of mesas, one upon the other, smaller and smaller, reared from a sea of sand, in mock rivalry of the surrounding grander mesas of Nature's rearing.[2]

---



[2]Frank Hamilton Cushing, "My Adventures in Zuni" *Century Illustrated Magazine* 25(1882). Reprinted in Jesse Green, ed. *Zuni: Selected Writings of Frank Hamilton Cushing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 1979), pp. 47-8.

It is now more than a century later and everything appears the same. Perhaps, I thought, this scene is little different from that seen by Fray Marcos de Niza in May of 1539 when he made the first European contact with native peoples in what we now know as North America. Zuni is on an ancient road traveled by many. Coming here is like traveling back nearly half a millennium. Zuni is fitting to be preserved as did Aldous Huxley in *A Brave New World*. I began to look forward to seeing religious events out of the past.

But wait! I was brought out of this foolish romantic reverie by a traffic jam. Sitting in my car. Waiting. I felt irritated. I was eager to get to the village. What might I be missing? It would be my first time to experience Shalako. I had read so much about Shalako, a grand ceremonial affair, one of Zuni's most important, occurring early each December. What could be holding up traffic in so remote and ancient a place? Seeing the flashing lights of a police car I concluded it must be an accident. Surely traffic would soon move along. The police car moved very slowly parallel to the line of traffic. Why so slow? As it approached me I could finally see. The police car was escorting a small troupe of Zuni figures along the highway. At the head of the group was a Shalako, a twelve-foot tall feather-topped, bird-headed, beautifully costumed figure. Slowly the procession passed and I was able to move along, park, get a quick bowl of chili, and prepare myself for a magical night at Zuni. Well a little has changed since Cushing's day.

Some years before, I sat atop a pueblo in the Hopi village of Hotteville. The occasion was Niman, the home dance. This stately early August event marks the closing of the kachina season that begins in December. Kachinas, messenger spirits, appear as masked dancers for the last time before returning to their homes in the San Francisco Peaks some ninety miles to the west, easily seen on this brilliant hot day. The sounds—clack, jingle, clack, jingle—announced their arrival. As they entered the village plaza I recognized them as my favorite, Angak'china, the long hair kachina. To me, their beauty is somehow in their simplicity. Oh they are elaborate enough with feathers and jewelry, kilts and sashes. But their faces are simple—a small turquois rectangle with simple markings for mouth and eyes—set against long hair flowing from the crown of the head nearly to the waist in front and back. They brought gifts of food. They brought dolls for the children. Their dancing brought life and happiness to everyone. I could feel their power then. As I remember them I feel that power now.

Then there was the time, I've forgotten the year, I visited the Franciscan Fathers at St. Michael's near Window Rock on the Navajo Reservation. I enjoyed the hospitality of the Fathers, though awestruck by the sheer fact that I was walking the same grounds, sleeping under the same roof, where Father Berard Haile had lived so many years of his life. He was a sensitive and insightful friend to Navajos, a devoted inquirer about their religion, though he never participated in nor even directly observed their rituals. The second or third day I was there, after an appropriate time for us all to get acquainted, I was asked if I wanted to see the Navajo ritual art collection. It was not a public display. I felt honored. Once in the little room burgeoning with shelves, cabinets, and drawers I was enthralled by the marvelous things about me. We talked easily of these things. I was

invited to look at a set of Navajo *ye'ii* masks kept in a drawer. As the drawer glided open, suddenly it came to me. I knew these masks. They had been given as a set to Father Berard by the family of a deceased singer, or medicine man, who feared, because of their power, to keep them. Father Berard had studied and photographed these very masks in the preparation of his book *Head and Face Masks of the Navajo* (1947). I gazed on the familiar empty buckskin bag-shaped masks. Compared with masks made by most other Native Americans these seem so crude. They are not beautiful, yet they are haunting. I don't know whether it was because I know how powerful Navajos consider these masks or that Father Berard had been involved with them, but I couldn't bring myself to touch them, or even to look long upon them. These same strangely ambivalent feelings returned when, some years later, I was shown two Navajo masks by an art dealer in Chicago.

Masks worn, masks performed, are captivating. They take hold of us. They mesmerize. Their power is both that of beauty and that of darkness. We are attracted, fascinated by masking, yet somehow they also frighten. What is this power? How might we appreciate it even if we know we'll never be able to understand it?

It may at first seem incompatible, perhaps even inappropriate, but I want to show that the power, indeed the very nature, of masking can be illuminated if seen as a kind of play. It is not theatre that I have centrally in mind, though that too is germane. What I have in mind is a way of structuring things, a kind of vitalizing organization. Play is a complex subject, discussed by many over a long period of time. For the present purposes I will present play as did Friedrich Schiller in his classic philosophy of aesthetics *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* published in 1793. I have elsewhere discussed play across the broader history of its development.[3]

Schiller's Aesthetic Letters argue for the importance of aesthetic education, proposing that aesthetic education is essential to the realization of human potential. Foundational to his argument is Schiller's description of the two forces or impulses that drive human action, that define the human character. Schiller describes these two opposing forces in various ways. Analyzing the age in which he lived, heavily influenced by the French Revolution, Schiller felt that culture tended to bifurcate the individual placing him or her at odds within himself or herself with detrimental results

> either as savage, when feeling predominates over principle; or as barbarian when principle destroys feeling. The savage despises Civilization, and acknowledges Nature as his sovereign mistress. The barbarian derides and dishonors Nature, but, more contemptible than the savage, as often as not continues to be the slave of his slave.(IV.6)[4]

---

[3] See Sam Gill, "The Powerful Play Goes On: Friederich Schiller to Jacques Derridaq" 2009 www.Sam-Gill.com

[4] All references to Schiller's letters will be made in the text referring to Letter and paragraph. The source is *Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of man in a Series of Letters*, edited and translated by E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967).

Schiller felt that his "age is, in fact, moving along both these false roads, and has fallen prey, on the one hand, to coarseness, on the other, to enervation and perversity. From this twofold swaying it [the age] is to be brought back by means of beauty."(X.1)

These forces operate not only within culture, but within the individual in the terms of "person" and "condition," that is, the self and its determination, being and becoming, endurance and change. These forces constitute

> two contrary challenges to man, the two fundamental laws of his sensuo-rational nature. The first insists upon absolute reality: he is to turn everything which is mere form into world, and make all his potentialities fully manifest. The second insists upon absolute formality: he is to destroy everything in himself which is mere world, and bring harmony into his changes. In other words, he is to externalize all that is within him, and give form to all that is outside him.(XI.9)

Schiller formalizes these forces in terms of drives or impulses: the sensuous drive (*sinnliche Treib*) and the formal drive (*Formtreib*). The sensuous drive proceeds from the sensual and physical aspect of human existence. It is concerned with physical place in time and space. Whenever this drive acts exclusively, one is but "a unit of quantity, an occupied moment of time"(XII.2). There is no person, no enduring form, only the moment of sensation. The formal drive proceeds from the rational nature and strives to set the human at liberty from the flux of change and sensation. It strives to embrace the wholeness of time and space, seeking eternity to the annulment of temporal change, of determining event. Yet, when this impulse dominates, the human entity loses individuality becoming an idea, a species. Humans are no more in time, they have become time.(XII)

Schiller holds that neither impulse is dispensable, yet both require restriction and moderation.(XIII) Indeed, one reaches perfection through

> a reciprocal action between the two drives, reciprocal action of such a kind that the activity of the one both gives rise to, and sets limits to, the activity of the other, and in which each in itself achieves its highest manifestation precisely by reason of the other being active.(XIV.1)

One cannot achieve this fullness so long as only one of these two impulses is exclusively satisfied or both alternately. Schiller argues that one gains a "complete intuition of his human nature," a "vision [that] would serve him as a symbol of his accomplished destiny," when these drives are conjoined in a third drive, that is, an experience in which "he were to be at once conscious of his freedom and sensible of his existence, were, at one and the same time, to feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind."(XIV.2)

Remarkably, in his attempt to give clarity to this combination of impulses, Schiller turns to the language of play, calling "that drive . . . in which both the others work in concert"(XIV.3) the "play

drive (*spieltrieb*)," begging his reader patience with the term until he might justify its appropriateness. This third drive is

directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity. … The play-drive, in consequence, as the one in which both the others act in concert, will exert upon the psyche at once a moral and a physical constraint; it will, therefore, since it annuls all contingency, annul all constraint too, and set man free both physically and morally.(XIV.3 and 5)

Whereas the object of the sense drive is "life" and the object of the form drive is "form," the object of the play drive, to Schiller's understanding, is "living form," a concept that denotes aesthetic qualities, that is, "Beauty." Living form, beauty in Schiller's reckoning, is the consummation of humanity. He pronounces: "With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play. … Man only plays when he is in the full sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays."(XV.8 and 9)

Taking inspiration from Schiller, we may suggest that play refers to the principles or grammars that characterize structures, a set of structuring principles, a metastructure. This is, I believe, what Derrida refers to as "structurality."[5] Play denotes the principles in which structural oppositions, even structural anomalies, may at once be held together without reconciliation or reduction. It is not the simple alternation of taking turns, but a momentary focus on one structural element that reveals the power and dynamics of the opposing elements. Schiller thought of it in the dynamic terms of reciprocity and oscillation.

A mere game may be thought of as a set of relationships and activities prescribed by a set of rules, often including the designation of a space and the definition of an objective. Games, in general, may be designated as a particular kind of activity. But one may also think of game as the designation of a state of mind, a mental strategy, or an attitude. The word "game" is sometimes even used as a verb, though I think it a remarkably inelegant one, as in such phrases as "to game a situation." The play of a game is a result of a grammar of interaction as specified in the terms of rules and objectives. Common to the rules of a game is a description of "the play." A game "in play" subjugates its goal or objective to the holding together of opposing forces, an oscillation or back and forth movement among them, without resolution. There is no play when this principle fails or ceases to be operative, that is, the play of the game is over. Play is not game; game is not play. Game is played. There is the play of the game.

[5] The word "structurality" is an abstract noun denoting the state, condition, or quality of having the character of structure. Having come to believe that play is not best understood as a thing, experience, state of mind, or kind of activity but rather as a particular kind of condition of a thing, an experience, a state of mind, or activity, it requires this peculiar sort of nondesignation.

Considering game in terms of Schiller's form and sense drives, the rules to a game are at one polar position in this continuum. Here there is no play, only the potential for play. At the opposite pole, there are no rules, no boundaries, no definition, and therefore no game. Game play arises in the oscillating interaction between these poles.

A further clarification can be made here of Schiller's formal and sensuous drives. The rules and procedures that define a game may be thought of as their formal dimension while the raw physical actions of the game, its sensual dimension. The play of the game is achieved in the way that the rules both make possible, yet restrict, the sensual aspect of the game, that is, the range of allowable raw physical action, while at the same time, the physical actions (the sensual drive) give life and application to the rules. There is no play of the game if either the formal or sensual dimensions is missing.

While mere games are played; they do not hold play exclusively. This is what Schiller acknowledged in his use of the term play to identify the third drive. We see the characteristics of play echoed in the phrasing by which Schiller elaborated the play impulse.

> the play-drive, in consequence, as the one in which both the others act in concert, will exert upon the psyche at once a moral and a physical constraint;(XIV.5)
>
> it is precisely play and play alone, which of all men's states and conditions is the one which makes him whole and unfolds both sides of his nature at once;(XV.7)
>
> the utmost that experience can achieve will consist of an oscillation between the two principles, in which now reality, now form, will predominate. Beauty as Idea, therefore, can never be other than one and indivisible, since there can never be more than one point of equilibrium; whereas beauty in experience will be eternally twofold, because oscillation can disturb the equilibrium in twofold fashion, including it now to the one side, now to the other.(XVI.1)

Schiller argued that when the sense and form impulses are interrelated/integrated in play, at least the idea of human perfection—the aesthetic—may emerge though not as the direct object. The whole series of letters is intent on showing that, through the playful engagement of the conflicting and potentially destructive impulses, human beings achieve their potential. Hence, "With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play."

This discussion of Schiller's understanding of play has, of course, been taken with the expectation that it will provide insight into Native American masking and Native American religions generally. Let's now see.

If anything distinguishes a mask as an object it is that it is a rigid sculpted face. It is like a face in form only—it has facial features, but it has no facial sensuality. Notably most masks are self-

consciously false; that is, mask makers appear to take every opportunity to avoid making a mask that might be mistaken for a living face.

But a mask without a masker, the one who bears the mask, is inanimate, a piece of sculpture, an unused prop. Such objects are often used as wall decorations. Masking, as a ritual and cultural activity, is always the conjunction of the two—the mask and the masker. I would want to argue that at the most basic definitional level the concept "mask" requires the conjunction of these two elements. Even the English word “mask” holds this structurality. The word mask may as a verb mean “to mask,” yet it may also be a noun referring to the physical object. There is a double nature necessary to the very idea "mask." It is not a doubling that is eventually resolved, but is ever at play.

This simple observation of the double nature of masking when conjoined with the theory of play we have developed, based on Schiller, immediately begins to suggest interpretive possibilities.

A mask as an object, rigid and fixed, and artificial in form, presents the eternal and universal idea of a given figure, the figure the mask presents. Apart from the masked presentation this figure has no physical, no sensuous nature, but rather pure form, idea, or concept. Hence the masking presents rather than represents. The masker, apart from a mask, is a living breathing sentient being. As a human being, he or she is, in Schiller's terms, realizes him or herself in the interplay of sensuous and formal impulses. Yet, as masker, the formal drive of the masker is made subsidiary to the sensuous self. By donning a mask one gives up the form that identifies the human individual. The formal character of the masker is coincident with the being presented in the mask. Masking does however heighten some aspects of human sensuality. Behind the mask a human masker is, in one sense, reduced in the direction of his pure sensuality. The mask at once limits and controls the sensual perceptual faculties that distinguish the nature of the masker as a human being. The masker's vision is impaired, as are his or her senses of hearing, touch, as are his or her abilities to communicate through speech and facial expression. But as the masker's sensual faculties are impaired he or she provides a sensuality, a living existence, to an otherwise lifeless form, the mask. This sensual element tempers the pure formality and changlessness apparent in the mask by bringing it into concrete actions in a specific time and place. Both mask and masker must exist. Each must exert its nature upon the other. Masking then brings to the pure form of deity, spirit, or concept sentient, sensual, and physical existence, while at the same time stripping the human masker of his or her own formal self only to engage his or her with another form.

The mask and the actions of masking are a field of play. The gap between the entity presented through masking and the human being underlying the presentation is a field of play, a field in which the figure presented comes into physical being, a field in which humans come to know through experience, from the inside out, the spirits and deities on whom their lives and world

depend. In this play between the two, something emerges, comes to life, that is much greater than either one separately or even by the simple addition of the two.[6]

Schiller wrote that perfection is achieved through a reciprocal action between the two drives, reciprocal action of such a kind that the one both gives rise to, and sets limits to, the activity of the other, and in which each in itself achieves its highest manifestation precisely by reason of the other being active. If a spirit, a deity, a mythic figure is formalized in a mask, the represented entity becomes manifest, comes to life, through the interplay with the sentient human masker. Any human may contemplate and study the forms of the spirits, gods, and mythic figures—forms often homologous with the very order of the universe—but in the activity of masking a human being actually manifests these figures, stands inside of them, giving them sensual existence. The masker fills up and comes to know the form represented by the mask, a feeling experiential kind of knowing.

Masking is a remarkable example of what Schiller recognized as the experience of play. He called it "living form," a term that would serve well as a synonym for masking. And to continue to follow Schiller, it was "living form" that he used as the basis for his understanding of "Beauty." It is the working in concert of the sensual and formal drives that gives rise to the play drive and hence to beauty. This conjunction is also necessary in masking. If the masker does not know the figure whose face he or she is bearing; if the masker refuses to yield his or her personal identity to play the mask (though this is unbelievably difficult to do); the masking is likely to appear false, awkward, anomalous—the sensual aspect of the masking prevails over the formal. If the mask as a form, as an ideal, so overwhelms the masker as to render him or her lifeless, unable to act, stricken under the weight of the idea that must be made manifest, the masking fails; it is but a tableau. Here the formal aspect of the masking prevails over the sensual. It is only in the oscillation, the vitalizing reciprocal engagement of the mask and masker, the formal and the sensuous, that masking achieves "living form," that masking becomes beautiful, manifests beauty.

Entrainment is perhaps another way to describe this working together that yields living form. When two people walk together, in a short time they will begin to match strides. When a number of people are hammering together, they will fall into a hammered rhythm.[7] This is entrainment and it occurs with masking as well. Once in costume, masked, and in the masking events, the masker's actions are entrained with the character of the masked entity, as it is understood by the whole masking community. When entrainment occurs in masking, the entity presented by the masking comes to life and the maskers achieve experiential knowledge of this entity. This is "living form;" this is beauty.

---

[6] For a larger and more profound consideration of the gap of play see my discussion of “pure depth” and “self-othering” in *Body, Brain, Movement* 2009 www.Sam-Gill.com Lecture 11: “Emotion, Depth, and Flesh—Part I: Dancing as Pure Depth” and “Dancing as Making” 2009 www.Sam-Gill.com.

[7] I experienced this entrainment personally when I visited a black smithy in Bamako Mali.

Isn't this a wonderful understanding of masking? With this understanding of masking let's head back to Zuni at the time of Shalako. Late that December afternoon crowds gathered along the Zuni River at a place where a bridge had been constructed of mud and stone. In time a procession of masked figures, called the Council of the Gods, crossed the bridge and entered the village. Leading the group was a young figure carrying a fire brand, Shulaawisi, the fire god. His mask and body were painted black with blotches of light colored dots all over. Next came Sayatasha and Hututu, the Rain Gods of the North and South. Two yucca-carrying whippers, Salimopiya, came last. The group proceeded to six locations in Zuni Village where holes had been dug, representing the six directions. At each hole the group deposited prayer plumes and sprinkled corn meal. These rites blessed the village, bringing it into correspondence with the order of the whole world into correspondence with myth and history. The procession ended at one of the Shalako houses prepared for this event. Here Sayatasha faced Hututu and called "Hu-u-u." Hututu responded "Hu-tu-tu, Hu-tu-tu." Then the group entered the house.

Later that evening I stood, ankle deep in cold mud, for hours outside this house enthralled by what I was seeing and hearing. Inside this Shalako house was a long rectangular room. On one end was an altar and a place designated for singers and drummers. Many Zuni people had gathered in the large open portion of the room sitting on chairs and benches. A dance corridor remained open along one long interior side of the room. It was along this dance corridor sitting on benches that the Council of the Gods took its position.

With their masks propped atop their heads, now strangely human, members of the Council began to chant in unison. This rhythmic flow of speech continued hour after hour throughout the evening. Not only was this most wonderful, but amazingly the Council shared the house with a pair of Shalako dancers who were performing their own, yet different, chant. Two groups, occupying the same space, chanting different words, hour upon hour. The overlapping sounds, in a language I did not understand, were enchanting. I couldn't seem to stop watching and listening.

Near midnight, the chanting complete, all took a break from the ritual intensity to eat and to rest. Finally the dancing began featuring the wonderful swooping dances of the Shalako. The Koyemshi, a troupe of mud-head clowns, performed their buffoonery in another house.

The complexity of Shalako is daunting and so much is transparent to this single all night performance. Shalako is actually a many day performance culminating nearly a year of extensive preparation. The members of the Council of the Gods spend much of their time for a year enacting the responsibilities of their offices. Shalako requires the building, or at least the refurbishing, of six to eight dwellings in which to house the event. And Shalako is but one of many Zuni masking rituals performed throughout the year.

Confining our attention to but one figure, Sayatasha, we may begin to appreciate more deeply the play of masking. Around the time of the winter solstice, shortly after Shalako is performed, the members of the Council of the Gods who will serve the following year are chosen. After these men are chosen they make offerings to the ancestors at the river, a first performance of the ritual acts

they will conduct daily until they perform Shalako almost a year later. Every night they meet to discuss aspects of Shalako and late at night they learn the prayers they will recite during Shalako. Every morning they arise before dawn and prepare to offer prayer meal to the rising sun. Each month at the time of the full moon they offer prayersticks to shrines and at the new moon they travel many miles to plant prayersticks at springs in the mountains south of Zuni.

The Zuni man who will portray Sayatasha, the leader of the Council, is called by the title Sayatasha Mosona and in all that he does during this year he must act in an exemplary manner. He must work hard physically, socially, mentally, and religiously. He is responsible for the Zuni religious calendar, reckoned primarily by the position of the moon. Sayatasha Mosona must notify all parties at the appropriate time to prepare for ceremonial occasions. This man must even walk like Sayatasha, a gait that is ponderous, with exaggerated strides. Sayatasha walks slowly poising each foot in the air momentarily before bringing it heavily to the ground. Like the Rain Priest he will portray, this Zuni man is sought out for counsel and pointed to as an exemplar of Zuni life ways.

The Sayatasha mask and costume are elaborate. To examine the appearance of Sayatasha reveals the many attributes of Zuni culture and religion that are brought into play in his masking. Sayatasha is both Rain Priest of the North and Bow Priest. He is the Chief of the Kachina Village which lays beneath a lake two days walk to the west of Zuni, the home of Kachinas and the home of the dead. This remarkable figure, who appears but one time each year at Zuni on this Shalako night, is thus associated with both agriculture and hunting, with both life and death, with both the human Zuni world and the world of kachinas and the dead. The mask and costume reflect the conjunction and interplay of these associations.

The mask is bell jar shaped. Atop the head are downy feathers, bluejay feathers, and feathers of summer birds all fastened to a prayerstick attached to the head, a designation of a Rain Priest. Sayatasha means "Long Horn," a name he is sometimes called when Zunis use English. This designation refers to his distinguishing feature of a single long horn extending outward from the right side of his head. This horn is for long life. A large flat "ear" extends outward from the head on the left. The right eye is a short slit, short according to Zuni reckoning for witches that their lives be short; the left eye corresponds with a long line that extends outward into the "ear," long so that the lives of good people will be long. Black goat hair hangs from the horn and over the forehead. A white cotton thread hangs down behind. The face is painted turquoise. The elkskin collar is stuffed with wool.

Sayatasha wears a white cotton shirt cut full over which he wears an embroidered white blanket fastened on the right side. He wears a white cotton dance kilt with a blue band, an embroidered sash, a red women's belt, fringed white buckskin leggings, and blue dance moccasins. The cotton dance kilt and shirt and the dance moccasins are those of a Rain Priest and are associated with bringing rain. He carries a fawn-skin quiver over his right shoulder. He wears many necklaces and bracelets. In his right hand he carries a deer scapulae rattle and in his left a bow and arrow

and many prayersticks. The quiver, bow and arrows, prayersticks, and rattle identify Sayatasha as a hunter and warrior.

Though this is but a superficial consideration of a single figure in the complex Shalako rituals placed loosely in his cultural and religious contexts, it is clear that Sayatasha is not merely a man wearing a mask and costume. Sayatasha is a field of play, a field in which a particular Zuni man has practiced and played almost constantly for a year. It is the contrasting and even contradictory aspects which, when brought together in this masking, initiate a play that has the potential to produce a living form, to be experienced as beauty.

Sayatasha is at once Sayatasha and Sayatasha Mosona: spirit and human, eternal and mortal, form and sense, of the domain of the dead and of the living. Sayatasha is at once Rain Priest and Bow Priest; at once hunter and warrior; bringer of rain and long life, controller of weather, while at the same time killer of witches, protector, deer hunter, and killer of enemies.

Indwelling Sayatasha's form is for a Zuni man an entry into Zuni philosophy and belief, but it is also to bear the responsibility and to be the vehicle for transforming these formal aspects of Zuni religious life into the experience and history of the Zuni people. Masking Sayatasha is, through play, to bring into concert many pairs of mutually exclusive attributes that constitute Zuni reality. The play does not resolve these attributes into unity; the play demonstrates that Zuni religious culture is given vitality in the interaction among these forever opposing and contrasting values and attributes.

Other masking examples will be useful, but first I want to comment on how I see this notion of play as characterizing much of Native American religious experience. To focus on the play of Native American religious action is to articulate the dynamics of what Jonathan Z. Smith meant when he said, "it is precisely the juxtaposition, the incongruity between the expectation and the actuality that serves as a vehicle for religious experience."[8] When we think of religions, especially Native American religions, we tend to think of principles like balance, harmony, centeredness, piety, respect for the earth, kinship with the animals and plants. What we often fail to realize is that such a religion would scarcely be either alive or real. What we fail to see is that religion generally, and most certainly Native American religions, is a process of manipulation and negotiation and application. It is a process of play in which the many formal dimensions of tradition are strapped on like masks and made to dance and have presence in an ever changing and always demanding world. It is interplay in this gap that gives life to any religious tradition and it is the extraordinary playfulness of Native American religions that makes them exemplary among religions.

---

[8]Jonathan Z. Smith, "Map is Not Territory," in *Map is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

I am not speaking simply of using police cars as escorts for the Zuni Shalako. While I'd argue that Zuni Shalako is constantly a process of application, Native American masking events illustrate this playful dynamics.

For a number of years I lived in Tempe, Arizona, just three miles from the Yaqui village, Guadelupe. Every year during the season of Lent I would drop by Guadelupe now and then to observe the various events of their Easter celebration. The Yaqui people lived for centuries in Sonora Mexico before many were forcibly displaced. Some established communities in Arizona. Their history is remarkable. Yaquis effectively maintained separation from the Spanish for nearly a century after the first contact in 1533. After shunning Spanish influence for nearly a century, suddenly, it would seem, early in the 17th century they requested missionaries be sent to them. The Jesuits arrived in 1617 and in two years the Yaquis had undergone remarkable transformation in their cultural and religious lives. They became Christian at that time, but in their own way. For one hundred fifty years they allowed missionaries to live among them, but finally in 1767 they found Mexican pressure so great that they expelled the missionaries. More than a century followed during which the Yaquis enjoyed an autonomous existence. However, though they fought gallantly, in 1887 they were overcome by Mexican troops and dispersed far and wide.

In time, having formed communities near Tucson and Phoenix, some of the Yaquis began to revive their cultural and religious practices, especially Easter. The whole season of Lent is filled with ritual and ceremony centered on the small Yaqui church in Guadelupe, standing in the shadow of the larger Catholic mission church just to the north of it. I'll not describe the complex of events enacted throughout the whole Easter season, only those of the climactic day, Easter Saturday.

During Easter week the attention of Guadelupe is focused on the Yaqui church and the plaza which extends to the east in front of it. Many of the events—the processions around the way of the cross, the capture and crucifixion of Christ, the control of the church by the evil Chapayekas—are somber and heavy in tone. Yet adjoining the plaza in the area in front of the Catholic mission church, a carnival with rides and booths seems to foreshadow and presage the coming victory and its celebration in fiesta.

Easter Saturday is the dramatic climax of this old struggle between good and evil. Early Saturday morning the fearful evil Chapayekas who have captured and crucified Christ and taken over the church, leave this domain and in procession escort an effigy of their leader, Judas, into the plaza and affix it to a large cross. They retire to the fringes of the village. Throughout the morning people from the community gather. Many Yaquis approach the anti-Christ to affix a token of penance to him, usually a scarf.

Pascola dancers, with their small masks on the sides or backs of their heads, mingle among the crowds with coffee cans receiving donations as a man, speaking alternately in Yaqui, Spanish, and English, informs the visitors about what is happening and repeatedly asks for donations. Vendors sell food and drinks. There is an air of expectation. Late in the morning the Maestro, or leader of

the Yaqui church, along with a small group of worshippers carrying a cross appear in the plaza and begin a worship service read from a Yaqui book of worship. The group proceeds slowly in the direction of the church. Once they reach the church they enter followed by many women and children. A curtain is drawn across the door.

At the east end of the plaza appear black garbed pilates, representing soldiers. In two lines, one formed on each side of the plaza, they march slowly forward to a drum beat with an occasional eerie flute melody. The Chapayekas follow, prancing and playing, firing toy cap guns and clacking their wooden daggers on their wooden swords. They often stop to wiggle their hips to awaken their belts of horn rattles. The long bands of cocoon rattles wrapped about their ankles emphasize in sound their every step.

The masks of the Chapayekas are wild and colorful. Many look something like cow heads, but others clearly represent stereotypic images particularly of ethnic peoples: a yellow-faced Chinaman with pigtail; a red-faced, big-nosed, cigar store Indian with long braided black hair. European Americans are not always absent from masked representation. At the end of the Nixon era one Chapayeka was an unquestionable representation of Richard Nixon. Chapayekas are a strange mixture of fearfulness and humor.

This huge procession of perhaps a hundred men march forward into the plaza. Then retreat. Again and again. On each advance they move closer to the church. Finally, at mid plaza, the lines stop moving. They wait in silent readiness. Suddenly the church bell begins rapidly tolling. Simultaneously the lines of Pilates and Chapayekas rush noisily toward the church. As they approach the church the curtain covering the door flies open and the Pascolas along with many women and children rush out filling the area immediately in front of the church. They are armed with hands full of flower petals and green leaves. As the evil ones approach they are pelted with flowers and leaves, the transformed blood of Christ. Repelled, the Chapayekas return to their positions mid plaza and reassemble for another attack.

As the women and children return to the church, some of the Chapayekas, those newest to this role, fall to the ground in the area around Judas. They crawl forward. There, met by their family sponsors, they remove their masks under the protection of a blanket or an overcoat. They leave their masks and their daggers and swords at the feet of the Judas effigy. With unmasked heads covered, the sponsors rush these maskers at a full run to the church where they are rededicated to Christ. Other sponsors approach the remaining Chapayekas who remove some aspects of their costumes--rattles, blankets, sandals, an apparent sign of their loss of power.

Quiet returns. Once again the bell rings. The second attack is launched. Again the women and children are successful with their flowers in repelling the onslaught. Other Chapayekas give up their masks. Those remaining remove even more of their costumes.

One final attack is carried out. On its failure even the last of the Chapayekas remove their masks and are rushed to the church.

The huge straw-stuffed Judas figure is now surrounded by Chapayeka masks. The swords and daggers are all propped in a line around this figure.

As the last of the head-covered figures reaches the church, the Judas effigy surrounded by the masks and boxes of debris generated by all these events is set afire. It is quickly an inferno.

Simultaneously, a troupe of Matachini Dancers enters the plaza and begins to dance and the Pascolas joined by a Deer Dancer appear with their musicians immediately in front of the church. It is fiesta time.

There is really so much to be considered in terms of the play of the Yaqui masking on this occasion. There is the play of the past and the present. The ancient Pascola masks, likely representing animals, which predate contact, appear in the same event as the Chapayeka representations of contemporary stereotypes. The Yaquis seem masterful at playing the past and the future in the same plaza.

Other Yaqui masking features are of special interest to me. The men who mask the Chapayekas comprehend the power of the mask. It is a power that threatens to overwhelm the masker with the character and attributes that the mask presents. In recognition of this power and as protection against it, the masker wears a rosary about his neck. All the time that the mask is on his head, he places the cross of the rosary in his mouth. Constantly he must pray or say the name "Jesus." This is his protection.

From my discussion of masking in terms of play, this practice is telling. The Yaqui masker, by carrying a rosary cross in his mouth, is demonstrating a determination to maintain that masking is and must be a double identity. Indeed those who portray Chapayekas often talk of the difficulty, but necessity, of having to act in two ways at once. The masker is not the entity presented by the mask, yet clearly the masker is that entity for the Chapayeka cannot exist without the masker. The mask form is understood as a powerful presence, expecially when enlivened through masking. This conjunction of form (the idea of evil) and sense (the religious Yaqui) must remain at play. Each one both limits and makes possible the existence of the other. If kept in a playful relationship, what emerges is living form, beauty. Another very moving aspect of this event is when the maskers remove their masks and are rushed with their heads covered to the church. It is as though the masker, once free of the Chapayeka mask, is pure sense, that is, formless, a moment of sensation. Certainly with head covered he is faceless, he has no identity. He must be rushed to the church, the opposite pole from the Judas effigy and the Chapayeka mask, to acquire another form, this one in the image of Christ and the good.

Finally, in its annual enactment of the Easter pageantry, the Yaqui demonstrate the importance of this play between good and evil. Every Easter good is victorious. That much is certain. But what makes this victory powerful correlates directly with the presence of evil. If the evil is not powerfully present, how can the victory of good have meaning? And, of course, the struggle continues year after year.

There is one final example of masking that may further illustrate how Native Americans commonly see the double nature of masking, the double nature that I am articulating in terms of play. Hopi children are carefully protected against seeing the masked kachinas, spirit messengers, without their masks as they are guarded against seeing masks not in use. They understand the kachinas to be exactly what they appear to be, spirit beings who come to Hopi bringing rain, food, and life. At the age of eight to ten, children are initiated into the Kachina Cult and thereupon formally begin their active religious lives.

The climactic event of this initiation rite is when the children are invited into a kiva, or ceremonial chamber, to witness a dance they have never before been permitted to see. The kachinas enter the kiva climbing down a ladder extending into the kiva from a rooftop hatchway. As the kachinas appear they come without masks. The children suddenly recognize their male relatives and neighbors. Many experience this event as a horrible disenchantment. They feel the adults have lied to them and they wonder whether they will ever be able to trust them again. In a short time, of course, all of these children are involved in the practice of Hopi religion. The boys will soon begin to be maskers themselves.

What is remarkable from the perspective that I have been developing is that this disenchantment is structurally parallel to a demonstration that the mask and masker must always be understood as a field of interacting play. It is difficult to imagine how the distinction between masker and masked identity could be more dramatically established than in this initiation event. All the more remarkable is that by conjoining this revelation with the initiation of the formal religious life, it must be concluded that the Hopi recognize the religious importance of the play between mask and masker. Though the children feel they have lost something of the truth; they will soon experience that it is in this field of play, in the gap between mask and masker, that Hopi religious life is experienced, that they will come to know by the experience of being them the kachinas.

What then is the significance of seeing Native American religions at play? While I have illustrated the play of Native American religions primarily through ritual masking activities, I think the dynamic structurality, as teased out of Schiller's view, pervades Native American religions and has done so throughout their long histories. Native American religions are vital, are alive—Native American religions are meaningful and powerful—to the extent they play among the many disparate, conflicting, and mutually exclusive forces.

We are accustomed to various metaphors to describe the character of Native American religions. Harmony, as it occurs in music, may be a better metaphor than balance, though both are so often used. Musical harmony requires the interplay of wave patterns that modify one another to produce a whole array of overtones. Harmony occurs through the interplay of separate yet interacting vibrations, not through their resolution into a single tone. Sound is always in process, always coming into being and passing away, always creatively interacting with other sounds. Sound is oscillation, movement. Sound is impossible to freeze or to stop without loosing it all together. Various notes when played together, interact, create harmonics, produce living form, or beauty as Schiller put it, but only because there are gaps, differences, between the tones that are

made to interact. It is in these gaps that not only Native American religions, but all religions, exist. Only here in these gaps is there the potential for play, for movement, for vitality.

Indeed, the notion of gaps suggests an even more provocative metaphor that opens us to the dynamics and vitality of Native American religions. So where, beside maskings, are these gaps to be found? Mythology and ritual, by their natures, create gaps. They are distinguished by their being at once apart from what seems necessary to life and the basis for all of reality, essential to a meaningful life. Many views of mythology and ritual understand them as guidebooks, charters, or paradigms for proper living. In this view the religious objective is to diminish the gap between life and these religious forms. Any disparity between the two is somehow a human failing. I think it is much more fruitful to see mythology and ritual as, even by their natures, forms that create gaps. To acknowledge the very character that distinguishes myth and ritual is at once to acknowledge a gap between them and life as lived. Again we have echoes of Schiller's distinction between the formal and the sensuous. The gap created between myth and the physical world, between ritual and non-ritual life affords human beings the playground in which they may play out their destinies. To close the gap, to live in myth, to make every act a ritual act, is tantamount to destroying human life altogether, certainly it would be the end of religion.

While I believe that to view religion from the perspective of play I have here developed may serve to illuminate the religious vitality of all human beings, there are many signs that Native Americans have very playful religions. Among the religions of the world, few have so elaborate or extensive a use of masking. Native Americans incorporate, in some of their most important religious ceremonials, the performances of clowns. The story traditions about fools and tricksters are widely understood as essential to the proper development of life. The ritual arts are rarely confused with the fine arts, though in form they may be indistinguishable.

The religious value of ritual art forms is assured in widespread practices of destroying ritual art in its use or after it has served its purpose. Navajos never keep sandpaintings nor even allow them to be photographed. Pueblos whitewash and repaint kiva walls, so richly decorated every season with murals. Yaquis burn the Chapayeka masks. Ritual masks are carefully stored by the Pueblos and in some cultures, the Seneca for example, masks are fed and considered to be alive. Pipes are disassembled and kept in bundles. Of course, many Native American cultures have developed craft arts that parallel these ritual arts, but most make very clear distinctions between objects made for sale as crafts and authentic ritual art forms. Such acts assure that form does not appear alone, but that it is always conjoined with the sensuous. It is in the interplay that these objects are religiously powerful, that they become truly beautiful.

Native American religions are distinguished in a playful celebration of the gaps, whose spirit and vitality is so nicely caught in a wonderful passage by Annie Dillard:

> Ezekiel excoriates false prophets as those who have "not gone up into the gaps." The gaps are the thing. The gaps are the spirit's one home, the altitudes and latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blind man

unbound. The gaps are the clefts in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery. Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock--more than a maple--a universe. This is how you spend this afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you.[9]

[9]Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).