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Play, Role Reversal and Humor: Symbolic Elements of a Tewa Pueblo Navajo Dance

Jill Drayson Sweet

The Tewa Indians of the San Ildefonso Pueblo perform the Navajo Dance which is a parody of their Navajo neighbors. This dance event involves ritual play, humor, and sex role reversals; it also dramatizes the Pueblo Indian's stereotype of the Navajo. In this paper, I will first describe the dance event as performed on April 28, 1974, and analyze some of the symbolic elements of the event. I will then argue that the Navajo Dance is one way that Pueblo Indians deal with their ambivalent and contradictory friend/enemy relationships with the Navajo.

The Village of San Ildefonso

San Ildefonso is one of twenty Pueblo Indian groups found today in New Mexico and Arizona. It is a Tewa speaking, 119,305 acre pueblo located 22 miles northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico near the east bank of the Rio Grande River and south of Black Mesa. The Tewa name for the village is “powhoge,” meaning “where the water cuts down through” (Whitman 1947:3).

The Dance

The village has a Catholic Church (completed in 1968 to replace two earlier churches built in 1904 and 1706), as well as three kivas (Pueblo ceremonial buildings) and two plazas. Each plaza includes a stone shrine which is covered with cornmeal and feathers during dances. A block of houses separated the two plazas until 1964 (Kurath 1969:31) when they were demolished in an effort to alleviate internal political dissension which nearly split the village between 1918 and 1930 (Whitman 1947:5–6, 9–13).

The Navajo Dance at San Ildefonso in 1974 was held in the south plaza of the pueblo. It was performed exclusively by 40 women, half of whom were dressed as Navajo men and half as Navajo women. An audience of about 200 Indians and 12 Anglos watched the dance which began shortly after 10:00 a.m. Mass and continued until 5:00 p.m.

Dancers wore traditional Navajo clothing including velveteen shirts and long full skirts or loose trousers. In

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addition, many wore sunglasses, silver and turquoise jewelry, and carried Navajo blankets over an arm or shoulder. “Women” held an ear of corn in each hand and had their hair tied back with yarn. The “men” wore mustaches, beards, Western hats, and boots or moccasins. The dancers sang as they danced to the accompaniment of one woman drummer who was also dressed in the traditional female Navajo fashion. In addition, each “man” shook a rattle throughout the dance. The songs contained some humorous English and Navajo phrases such as:

I don’t care if you’ve been married sixteen times before, I’ll get you anyway
I’ll treat you better than the one before.
Ya’at’eeth, ya’at’eeth, I’m a Navajo.

Next to the round kiva some women in Navajo garb sat by a mock campsite. There was a pot over a fire, a tethered horse, a tent, and a truck decorated with flowers and the words, “Indian Flower Power.” Two of the women at the campsite held Navajo cradleboards containing dolls. During the dance these dolls were handed to a Pueblo man who rocked them, making the audience laugh.

Throughout the event, dancers would present rugs, blankets, jewelry, and the ears of corn which they held to members of the audience. While these gifts were handed out, the dancers would say, “Hellooo, I haven’t seen you in so long, got anything to trade? We’re from Ganado.” (Ganado is a town largely populated by Navajos.) Members of the village who were not dancing placed bundles of food and goods by the stone shrine. The dancers carried these off to the kiva at the conclusion of a dance set. Around 3:00 p.m. some villagers threw food to the people in the audience who scrambled for the goods.  

During the lunch break, Pueblo men dressed as women carried food to the dancers in the kiva. One such figure wore a wig, pink hat, high heels, a dress, and a mink coat, in imitation of a wealthy Anglo tourist. Two of the “Navajo” women carried their “Navajo babies” in the cradleboards to the “Anglo woman” in the pink hat, who smiled and nodded with admiration.

The dance itself had several distinct sections and included some pantomime. There were ten dance sets, each approximately 20 minutes in length. Each set began with the dancers singing in Tewa while leisurely walking four abreast from the kiva to the plaza. This was not a stylized walk, but relaxed with comfortable stride lengths. As they progressed, those dressed as men sounded their rattles with short downward motions accenting the beat of the drum. During each entrance, the dancers positioned themselves in two parallel lines and traveled down these lines from the west to the east turning inward and pairing up at the end of the line to then reverse their direction and travel from east to west in couples (see figure 1). After reaching the end of the line the couples split into their two respective lines again to repeat the west-east traveling. Four or five couples could be traveling east to west between the two parallel lines at any one time. As a variation of this line dance, the couples sometimes traveled in a slight zig-zag floor pattern down the line.

The dancers held their torsos erect and as one unit, arms contracted three degrees (see Hutchinson 1970) or to a near 90° angle, and elbows usually positioned four to five inches out from the torso. They traveled with a simple alternation from right to left with an accent on the right. The legs contracted only one degree, lifting no more than three inches from the ground. The dancer rarely progressed more than six inches per alternation.

The quality of movement was similar to that found in other Pueblo dances. To employ terms and concepts from Effort-Shape (see Dell 1970), the dancers displayed a tendency toward “light,” “bound,” “direct” and “sudden” movements. The reach space could be described as “medium” since the limbs moved in space fairly close to the center of the body. The arms and legs were never fully extended to the limits of the dancer’s “kinesphere.” Most gestures were “arc-like” rather than “spoke-like.” In other words, the path of gestures moved through space in a flat arc rather than in a straight line. This was particularly obvious in the arm movements which made flat and parallel arcs from side to side with each step. The Pueblo dancers’ movements, in relation to the environment, appeared to be closer to the shaping concepts of “narrowing,” “shrinking,” “retreating,” and “sinking.”

The line dance pattern, body attitude, steps, gestures and movement qualities described above are typical of most Pueblo dances. In other words, the Pueblos, in their parody of the Navajo, retain Pueblo movement style and form while “acting out” their stereotypes of Navajo behavior.

During some sets, the line dance was repeated a second time before the dancers walked back to the kiva. During other sets, after the first line dance, four dancers broke from the Pueblo line dance form and performed the Navajo Yeibichai Dance as the rest of the dancers sang, or the entire group executed a Navajo Round Dance.

The Yeibichai Dance is part of the Navajo Night Way, a ceremony involving the initiation of boys and girls, ages 7–12 (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1956:145–156). This ceremony occurs after the first killing frost in November or December. Performed by the San Ildefonso Indians, the Yeibichai involved two “male” dancers taking small short running steps forward and back, opposite two “female” dancers who also ran forward and back. Each “female” dancer carried a trident covered with ribbons. Periodically the dancers crossed by each other as they changed sides with small traveling leaps, close to the ground, alternating right and left. They then continued the running pattern forward and back. A Navajo consultant who later observed footage of this segment of the San Ildefonso Navajo Dance claimed that the Yeibichai Dance was correctly performed.

The Navajo Round Dance, a simple counterclockwise circle dance, is considered a social dance often performed at pan-Indian pow-wows. The group forms a large circle. All dancers step to the right on the right foot, then move the left foot next to the right, taking weight on both feet before repeating the motion of the right foot. The Round Dance at San Ildefonso, another departure from the Pueblo line dance form, was held during the ninth dance set and Pueblo men from the audience were “drafted” to join the circle.

During the fifth line dance a jug was passed down the line; each dancer took a gulp and thereafter some staggered backwards as if drunk. Also, “couples” occasionally left the line to dance in the waltz position or to have their picture
taken by a friend. These antics caused the Pueblo audience to laugh uproariously because, as will be discussed later, they consider such actions typical of the Navajo but improper for the Pueblo.

Pueblo and Navajo Relations

In order to better understand this parodical dance, I will now summarize the historical and ethnographic literature on (1) general differences between Pueblo and Navajo culture, (2) Navajo/Pueblo culture contact, (3) the effects of the Spanish upon Pueblo/Navajo relations and (4) attitudes of Pueblos and Navajos towards each other. Each of these four areas will be considered and then related to a symbolic analysis of the San Ildefonso Navajo Dance.

Navajo and Pueblo culture contrast in several significant ways. First, there is a difference in language. Pueblos speak Tewa, Tiwa, Towa, Hopi, Zuni, or Keresan while Navajos are Athapaskan speakers. Second, Navajos were originally organized into roaming bands while Pueblos lived in compact villages and practiced intensive irrigation and dry farming. Third, there is a basic distinction between the looser, simpler social and ceremonial organization of the Navajo and the more elaborate and structured organization of the Pueblos. Fourth, at the time of Spanish contact, there were an estimated 40,000 Pueblo Indians compared to 15,000 Navajos (Spicer 1962:14). And finally, while the movement and body attitude are very similar, there are differences in the dance practices of each group. First, although both Pueblo and Navajo dances are performed for fertility and blessing of the community as a whole, Navajo dance focuses on the individual as well. For example, many Navajo dances are held because an individual is ill and has requested a curing ritual, or an individual is participating in a puberty rite. Second, Navajo dances can occur at any of the scattered settlements, while Pueblo dances are usually held only in the village plazas or kivas. Third, Navajo dance dates are more variable while most Pueblo dances are more specifically tied to their agricultural and ceremonial calendars. Finally, there are many Navajo ceremonies which do not involve dancing, but Pueblo Indians rarely gather for an event without public dancing.

Early historic records indicate that the Navajo roamed extensively in what is now Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. Today the Navajo reservation includes 24,000 sq. miles and extends south from the San Juan River of southern Utah almost to Interstate 40. It reaches west from Farmington, New Mexico, to the junction of the Colorado and San Juan rivers. This area surrounds the Hopi pueblos in Arizona. In addition there are Navajo lands adjacent to Zuni pueblo and Laguna pueblo. The closeness in proximity has permitted both positive friendly and warlike antagonistic contact between the Pueblos and Navajos. The former involves trade, borrowing techniques in industry and ceremony, intermarriage, and alliances against the Spanish. The latter includes raiding, reprisals, and the forceful taking of hostages for the Southwest slave trade.

During the initial contact, referred to as the Dinétah Phase, it is generally accepted by anthropologists that Navajos adopted Pueblo agricultural practices and rituals, and possibly close-coiled basketry. The Navajo may have
Drummer and a few dancers pause after the second set.

also adopted Pueblo weaving, some forms of architecture, religious paraphernalia, clans, origin myths, and rituals during the Gobernador phase which occurred after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt when many Pueblos fled from the Spanish to live with Navajos (Hester 1962:70, 90).

Another Pueblo migration to Navajo lands occurred in 1692 as a result of de Vargas' reconquest of New Mexico (Spicer 1962:211). For more than a generation these Pueblos lived peacefully and intermarried with the Navajos. Later some returned to their Rio Grande area homeland. Drought and famine in Pueblo lands also caused them to live with Navajos in Canyon de Chelly during the eighteenth century (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1956:6).

Navajos also have fled to the Pueblos at various times. During the 1858 United States/Navajo war, led by Major Brooks, several families tried to live with the Zunis, but they were refused (Reeve n.d.:65). Nevertheless, many Navajos were accepted and lived at Jemez at various times, and in 1819 a group of Navajos settled very close to the Hopi villages (Van Valkenburg 1974:210).

Early trade relations established often at Taos, a trading center for Navajos, Apaches, Comanches and Pueblos, also promoted contact. Articles traded included rugs, silver, corn, fruit, gourds, reeds, skins, and woven clothing. In addition, there was a common sanctuary on the slopes of Tsikoma where the Navajos and Pueblos never fought (Ortiz, personal communication).

Besides trading goods, sometimes Navajos would receive wheat or corn from the Pueblos in payment for their labor. During the corn harvest, Navajo women would husk corn and during the wheat harvest Navajo men would help cut the wheat and provide the horses needed for threshing it. Often these Navajo workers stayed with Pueblo friends and attended the Pueblo feast days following the harvest (Sando 1976:37).

All the contacts mentioned thus far have been peaceful exchanges. However, fighting between Navajos and Pueblos was also a regular occurrence. Even at the Pueblo village of Jemez, where Pueblo/Navajo friendships were most common, there is a history of battles.

Some early raids at the village of San Ildefonso have been recorded. In 1705, after the Pueblo Revolt, two large Navajo parties raided the corrals of Santa Clara, San Juan and San Ildefonso. Captain Roqued de Madrid organized the Pueblos to retaliate (McNitt 1972:19–20). Eight years later documents of the Juan Ygnacio Flores Mogollon administration report that after Navajos again descended on the herds of San Ildefonso, Captain Cristobal de la Serna took 150 Pueblos and 70 Spanish to attack the Navajo and regain the livestock (Jones 1966:86). Governor Mendinueta also reported Navajo raids on San Ildefonso in 1775 (Thomas 1940:45–46). In the late 1840s the governor of San Ildefonso expressed complaints of continued Navajo raids (McNitt 1972:155).

Although Pueblo/Navajo warfare in prehistoric times suggests that it was a relatively rare activity, the historic documents from 1582 to 1824 frequently mention raids and battles such as those at San Ildefonso (Hester 1962:26). This increase, after contact with the Spanish, can be explained by several factors.

One factor involves the changing economy of the Navajos. Sheep became more important and horses contributed to
The audience laughs as a “Navajo baby” is handed to a Pueblo man.

the Navajo’s mobility, making raiding easier. Another factor is the Spanish policy of pitting one tribe against another (Forbes 1960:282) especially in the Spanish-inspired slave trade (Bailey 1973). This slave trade presented additional profits for Navajo, Apache, and Pueblo raiders and caused a shortage of women in some of these groups, making it necessary for them to take in turn brides from another group (McNitt 1972:12).

After contact with the Spanish there were instances of Pueblos aiding the Spanish against the Navajos, Pueblos aiding the Navajos against the Spanish, Navajos aiding the Spanish against the Pueblos, and Spanish, Navajos, and Pueblos aiding each other against the Apaches or Utes.

Thus it appears that Navajos and Pueblos experienced ambivalent friend/enemy relationships throughout history. How do Pueblos feel about Navajos? The answer to this question can be partially inferred from historical statements, consultants’ comments, and public actions.

Bandelier recorded some contradicting statements made by Pueblos about Navajos. A Cochiti man, Jose Hilario, told him that Navajos were “treacherous and cowardly” (Lange and Riley 1966:159). However, another Pueblo man, Juan Jose Montoya, stated that the Navajos were once feared but now (1880s) they were “peaceable and very honest” (ibid. 1966:139). In addition, Hopi and Zuni Pueblos have complained that Navajos “stole” curing information by intruding on their ceremonies (Underhill 1956:65).

Vogt (1955:828) describes Pueblo attitudes toward Navajos during the Laguna Pueblo fiesta:

It is significant that this [small room next to the meeting house] is defined by every cultural group as a “Navajo jail,” for everyone expects the Navajos to get drunk, be put in jail for the night, and to be tried and fined $10-20 by the Laguna Tribal Council. Other groups get drunk but more Navajos are arrested. . . .

In conclusion, Vogt (1955:833) states that although there are some long established “guest-friend” relationships between particular Navajo and Pueblo families, “Navajos are viewed as still being ‘wild Indians’ who live back in the woods and whose presence at the fiesta is valued mainly as a source of economic profit.”

Pueblos regard Navajo sheep herding as degrading work. Consequently, they have not raised sheep as much as the Navajo have. In contrast the Pueblos have always thought of themselves primarily as farmers (Ortiz, personal communication).

One Zuni Pueblo informant stated that one year Navajos were asked to dance at the Shalako ceremony in return for payment. The following year the Zunis asked the Navajos to dance again, but the Navajos wanted more money than the previous year. The Zunis felt the demand was too high, so they performed as Navajos themselves, and have ever since during some of the Shalako dances.

In a public out-house not far from the Hopi Pueblo villages, I discovered some revealing Hopi graffiti scrawled on the walls. All the comments were derogatory statements about Navajo women as sexual partners. Navajos tend to be the butt of many Pueblo jokes. However, one young Hopi
informant stated that Navajos were good people, and he had many Navajo friends.

In casual conversation one Santo Domingo Pueblo Indian described Navajos as “lazy people who drink too much, lie, steal, beg, are shrewd traders, and make poor spouses.” This Pueblo Indian also insulted a young Santo Domingo man by saying that he would marry a Navajo.

Political friction between Navajos and Pueblos is best exemplified by the recent court battles over land settlements in the Hopi region. These battles suggest an acute competition for resources between the Hopi and the Navajos. One Pueblo Indian from Laguna fearfully referred to this Navajo/Hopi fight for land as an indication of the Navajo’s increase in political and economic power.

The ethnographic data concur with the historical record and suggest conflicting friend/enemy attitudes between the Navajo and Pueblo Indians. There appear to be both positive and negative attitudes which have even caused factionalism within the Navajo and Pueblo groups (Brugge 1969: 198).

Symbolic and Social Implications of the Dance

Within the historic and ethnographic context presented above, the symbolic and social implications of the San Ildefonso Navajo Dance will first be considered generally as a publicly displayed symbolic system. Then it will be analyzed more specifically as (1) play, (2) an expression of inversion and sex role reversals, and (3) a form of humor for social control and boundary maintenance. In conclusion, the Navajo Dance will be viewed as a way for Pueblos to deal with an ambiguous category in their conceptual order of the world.

A Symbolic System

Dance movements, costumes, music and paraphernalia are all parts of a symbolic system which can communicate many levels of meaning. These meanings are often communicated on a day when ordinary work activities and routines are interrupted. In this way, dance messages are framed as “out-of-the-ordinary,” attract the attention of participants and observers, and serve as a powerful way for a people to display their beliefs and attitudes about the world. Three related ways in which the Navajo Dance symbolically and powerfully displays Pueblo beliefs and attitudes are through play, inversion, and humor.

Play

Play is an experiential process and context for activities which can combine both social constraints and spontaneous behavior (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett 1971). In play,
A "Navajo couple" leaves the dance line to pose for a photograph taken by a Pueblo man from the audience.

experiencing the process is often more important than the goal (Miller 1973). This process is sometimes a "release of abundant energy" or what is considered "fun" (Loizos 1967).

A license for creativity makes play an important aspect of human social behavior since players have more freedom from social constraints. Boundaries and social rules can be tested. Play can involve frivolity to communicate serious moral messages (Schechner 1973) and question social aspects of life. The creative social questioning of play is basic to Huizinga’s (1955) claim that play is necessary and is an important device for symbolically "stepping out" from ordinary life into another realm of reality.

There are many kinds of play activities practiced by humans and other animals. In dance, play is often the "make-believe" type, or that which enables the individual to act out aspects of life while bearing a relationship to something or someone else. This kind of play permits dancers to "combine pieces of behavior that would have no basis for juxtaposition in a utilitarian framework" (Miller 1973). In this type of "role-playing" selected characteristics of the model for the make-believe play are re-ordered, exaggerated, repeated, magnified (Loizos 1967 and Miller 1973), diminished or ignored. In make-believe play the dancers can experience novel roles and situations.

The Navajo Dance involves make-believe role-playing. The Pueblo dancers are temporarily "playing" at being Navajos. While the dance has a traditional structure, there is considerable opportunity for creative and spontaneous action. For example, the mock trading, the responses to drinking from a jug, or the posing for photographs are handled differently by individual dancers. The individual also has a choice of costume details such as types of hats, mustaches, or sunglasses.

In the Navajo Dance play is also found in a juxtaposition of Pueblo and Navajo symbols. For example, the Navajo campsite and Navajo activities of trading, social dancing, and drinking alcohol are juxtaposed to Pueblo symbols such as the kiva, dance plaza, corn symbols, and the Pueblo dance form itself. On the other hand, a sacred Navajo dance, the Yeibichai, is performed by the Pueblo Indians at a time when it would not normally be performed by the Navajos and as a part of a less serious type of Pueblo dance event. The playful juxtaposition is exemplified as the symbols of Navajo culture are brought into the Pueblo dance realm.

"Serious moral messages" are communicated in the Navajo Dance since play is also a way in which events of history can be looked at objectively by "stepping back" from that history (Cox 1969). The Navajo Dance permits the Pueblos to consider their past and current feeling towards Navajos who have had a profound effect upon their history. By dressing up like Navajos, singing Navajo phrases, pretending to bargain, setting up a campsite, performing two Navajo dances (the Yeibichai and Round Dance), years...
Inversion

The act of inversion is common to cultures around the world and is a specific aspect of the type of play found in the Navajo Dance. Through inversions “normal” behavior is replaced by its opposite and temporarily provides an alternative to accepted cultural norms. This type of play is therefore a form of “reversibility testing” and a “pantomime in the capacity to think in terms of reversals” (Sutton-Smith 1977) or opposites.

One type of inversion which has caught the attention of several anthropologists (Gluckman 1963, 1965; Norbeck 1963; Beidelman 1966; Rigby 1968; and Ortiz 1972) is that of sex-role reversals or transvestism. The classic investigation of this type of inversion was contributed by Max Gluckman (1963, 1965) who saw sex-role inversion in African societies as a protest against the established order. Gluckman argued that these “rituals of rebellion” occurred only in stable social organizations. They were not seen as actual efforts to change the social system, but rather as steam valve devices which permitted the social system to maintain itself.

In Rigby’s (1968) study of Gogo rituals, he found that often when unfortunate events occur, the restoration of a desirable ritual state is sought by first reversing time, and then “re-reversing” it back to the correct state. This reversal involves sex-role change. Married women dress and act like men by carrying weapons, behaving aggressively and singing lewd songs. Rigby concludes that the dance by the women is a primary method for correcting a bad state of affairs within the community (ibid. 1968:159).

Sex-role reversals are found in the San Ildefonso Navajo Dance. The women dress as Navajos, half of them as “men,” and the village men dress as women carrying food to the dancers at noon, and the man rocks the baby. All are clear examples. In normal Pueblo life women do not dress as men, men do not dress like women, men do not carry food to the dancers, and men are not responsible for rocking infants. Therefore, the dance permits a temporary suspension of some social rules. Participants experience roles normally prohibited to them.

Humor

During all the rehearsals and the other antics of play the Pueblo audience laughed uproariously. In fact, humor and its response of laughter is an important aspect of the Navajo Dance. Play in general, and inversions in particular, led to humor because of the elements of unexpectedness and incongruity. To see two Pueblo Indian women dressed as Navajos, one like a Navajo man, posing for a photo is not usual in Pueblo life. It is not usual for “Navajos” to be walking out of a Pueblo kiva or to be dancing in a Pueblo dance plaza.

Humor can also be found in parody as a type of ridicule and a mechanism of social control (Bricker 1973). This type of humor is evident in the Navajo Dance and involves a ritualized transgression of a people’s boundaries or their conceptual order, classification or categorization of the world. In other words, although people create social norms and establish a conceptual order to their world, an event like the Navajo Dance symbolically disrupts this order through play and inversion. Douglas (1966:94) suggests that people do this because “. . . though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power.” In other words, there is danger in destroying the conceptual and social order by transgressing established boundaries, however, there is also potential for creative power in this transgression. Play and inversions can harness this power by overstepping categorical margins, and in the case of the Navajo Dance this power may be harnessed to overcome a fear of domination by the Navajo.

The categories and boundaries of San Ildefonso group membership are maintained and defined in the Navajo Dance by demonstrating that the Navajos are different and do not belong to this Pueblo group. The Pueblos play with and transgress normal boundaries by dramatizing their stereotype of the Navajo. For example, some Pueblos often say the Navajos are always getting divorced and the song lyrics (“I’ll marry you anyway”) suggest this stereotype. Although alcoholism is also a problem in many pueblos, some Pueblos criticize Navajos for drinking too much, and the drinking pantomime refers to this criticism. Navajos are also said to take on too many of the “White man’s” ways, and the use of cowboy hats and sunglasses exemplifies this. With regard to the latter, some Pueblos consider sunglasses as a crutch for Anglos who are not strong enough to “take the sun.” Also Pueblos do not dance in couples, finding this practice silly, and some criticize the Navajos for adopting this dance form. I have heard a few Pueblos say that Navajos are “backwards” and perhaps the use of the cradleboard in the dance is symbolic of this backwardness since this practice is no longer employed by most Pueblos. Finally, Pueblos have no traditional dances in which women dress men to dance, and this is also laughed at as a strange Navajo practice.

In short, through parody the Pueblo women ridicule and laugh at the Navajo by selecting several symbolic actions for the dance and through these actions the dancers portray the antithesis of appropriate Pueblo behaviour. The dance communicates that the Navajos treat marriage too lightly, drink too much, and while they are backwards in some ways, they have also taken on too many of the ways of middle class American society. The dance transgresses Pueblo boundaries of behavior in order to say, “Navajos are not like ‘us’ and we should not be like ‘them’.”

Summary and Conclusions

The elements of ritual play, inversion and humor have now been discussed. The Navajo Dance was viewed as an event which presents what is non-Pueblo behavior, and thereby reinforces what is (or should be) Pueblo behavior. In other words, Pueblo Indians are not supposed to drink or get divorced; Pueblos are supposed to be farmers, not wandering herdsmen; and Pueblos do not dance in male/female couples or draft men to participate. Pueblos that deviate from these norms are subject to gossip and are sometimes ostracized. And while Pueblo dances often involve imitations of other outside groups, and even in this dance an Anglo tourist is included in the parody, the main focus of this event is on the Navajo form of non-Pueblo behavior.

In conclusion I would suggest another important function of the Navajo Dance which has its basis in the historic
relationships between the Navajo and the Pueblo. That is, the Navajo Dance is a device for the Pueblo Indians to categorize and consider conceptually the Navajos.

Because of the contrasts in many aspects of history and their respective ways of life, the Navajos are anomalous people to the Pueblos. They are Indians but not Pueblo, and therefore not quite "normal." They are humans but very different and from the periphery of the Pueblo world. Leach (1964) and Douglas (1966) argue that anomalies in cultures are considered dangerous by that culture and must be dealt with in some way. Douglas (1966:38–39) states:

Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions . . . we find in any culture . . . various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events.

Douglas' use of the word 'ambiguous' in the above quotation points to a relationship between the symbolism in the dance and the historic contacts between Pueblos and Navajos. The Navajos present the Pueblo with many contradictions. At times they were friends, and at times enemies. In this way the Navajo caused ambiguity in the Pueblo classification system because they refused to "stay put" in one category.

Thus, the anomalous and ambiguous Navajo is disruptive to the Pueblos' ideal conceptions of order. By inversion and ritual play the disrupted conceptual order is exaggerated and reversed so that a semblance of Pueblo order can then be temporarily restored. As Douglas states, "It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created" (Douglas 1966:4).

The Navajo Dance, with the various aspects of ritual play, permits the Pueblos to "step back" and consider a threatening and ambiguous category, i.e., the Navajos. It also enables them to celebrate the power inherent in the dangerous boundaries of their world. The Pueblos can creatively make statements about what is Pueblo and what is not. These statements can be framed in a way that promotes laughter rather than fear.

In sum, what I have suggested here is that the San Ildefonso Navajo Dance is one way in which Pueblos confront an ambiguous aspect of their past and present world order. It is a way to symbolically mediate the oppositions between the in-group and the out-group. At the same time, the dance event reinforces Pueblo social norms and allows participants to creatively experience roles and activities different from those of everyday Pueblo life.

NOTES

1. San Ildefonso is not the only pueblo where the Navajo Dance is performed. There is photographic and ethnographic evidence of Navajo dances performed at Zuni as early as 1870 (McNitt 1972). Ortiz has described a Hopi version of the Navajo Dance (Ortiz 1972:169), and I have witnessed other Navajo dances at San Felipe and Santo Domingo pueblos.

2. Traditionally the Navajo Dance was held near the vernal equinox (Ortiz 1972:169). This may now be altered in some cases to accommodate the Catholic priests who encourage abstinence from dancing during Lent. Ortiz states that the Navajo Dance was often held after a shinny game (similar to soccer) between the married and unmarried women. The losers would then put on the dance (Ortiz 1972:169). This, however, was not the case during the 1974 San Ildefonso version since both married and unmarried women performed the dance.

3. The twenty Pueblo Indian groups differ in language and location. They include seven Keresan speaking groups (Acoma, Cochiti, Laguna, San Felipe, Santa Ana, Santo Domingo, Zia), six Tewa speaking groups (Nambe, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, San Juan, Santa Clara, Tesuque), four Tiwa speaking groups (Isleta, Picuris, Sandia, Taos), and one Towa speaking group (Jemez), and the Hopi and Zuni groups. Although there are many differences between individual Pueblo villages, these differences are necessarily ignored when one writes about Pueblos in general. Due to lack of sufficient historical and ethnographic data on a single village such as San Ildefonso, I will consider the available data from all the villages.

4. The audience included twelve non-Indians and approximately two hundred Pueblo Indians from San Ildefonso and neighboring Pueblo villages. I could not see any Navajos in the audience; however, it is not always easy to distinguish the Navajo from the Pueblo Indian out of traditional garb.

5. It should be noted that play, inversion and humor are also common elements in many other Pueblo dances. In fact, the Navajo are also impersonated in some masked Katsina dances at various Pueblos.
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