

# The Hopi Clown Ceremony (*Tsukulalwa*)

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Images of kachinas and clowns are found throughout books, journals, and magazines that celebrate the arts of American Indian peoples, including the Hopi. As familiar as we are with these visual images, for the most part they are one-dimensional and suggest little of their meaningful contexts in Hopi thought and ritual. There are other more subtle contexts that contribute to the meaning of *tsukulalwa* (clowning), including the plaza in which the ceremony is performed and the events the clowns address through their humor. This article provides an introduction to the narrative and ritual contexts of the clown ceremony and considers the changing historical circumstances of clowning.<sup>1</sup>

Here in the spring and early summer the katsinas (*katsinam*) come to the Hopi villages as “messengers” to receive the prayers and prayer offerings of the Hopi people in complex two-day ritual performances called katsina dances (*katsintithu*) and to reciprocate with food and assurances that their prayers have been heard.<sup>2</sup> These masked figures are the spirits of the ancestors and the spiritual essence of all things and beings within the Hopi world. As intermediaries, they not only carry human prayers to the gods, but also they return as rain for the corn plants that sustain Hopi life. The *katsinam* are spoken of as “beautiful beings” for they are the embodiment of the Hopi way (*hopi*): “*Katsina soosok qatsit yuwsita*, katsinas wear all things of life.”<sup>3</sup>

Clowns (*tsukshut*) participate in a ritual drama called *tsukulalwa* during these katsina ceremonies. In their being and behavior the *tsukshut* are the opposite of the katsinas. The *katsinam* embody the colors of the cardinal directions and the six varieties of Hopi corn—a form of “chromatic prayer,” while the *tsukshut* are “earth-colored” and wear strips of cast-off clothing and corn husks in their hair. More importantly, the clowns “depict life as it should not be,” that is, behavior that is *qahopi* (bad, misbehaving, nonconforming). Although they are clowns, these *tsukshut* are also priests whose role is sacred and serious.

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The following is an account of the clown ceremony as it was performed in the villages of the Hopi Third Mesa in the early 1970s and as it continues to be performed today.<sup>4</sup> The clowns of the First and Second Mesas differ in appearance as do aspects of the ritual drama in which they participate.<sup>5</sup> In the years following the research on which this article is based, Hopi linguist Emory Sekaquaptewa and poet Ramson Lomatewama each wrote insightful accounts of clowning on Third Mesa, and the ceremony was also the subject of a dissertation by German anthropologist Hans-Ulrich Sanner.<sup>6</sup>

As an introduction it is helpful to draw on Sanner's summary of his work on *tsukulalwa*: "The overall clown ceremony follows a traditional pattern of dramatic ritual development that reflects and enacts a central conception of Hopi philosophy: the life cycle of the people from a paradise-like beginning to a stage of utmost corruption and decadence that will inevitably lead to supernatural punishment and a renewal of life. According to Hopi eschatology, this has happened several times before, and it will happen again, perhaps soon."<sup>7</sup> Intertwined with the traditional drama of the *tsukulalwa* are carefully planned skits, "farcical morality plays," performed by *piptuqam* (sometimes defined as "arrivals") that reflect problems in Hopi society. A *piptuqa* is a katsina skit actor, one who visits the clowns in the plaza. Although the skits of *piptuqam* are planned, much of clowning is creative and spontaneous as when *tsukulalwa* regard individuals in the plaza as *piptuqam*, for example, asking several albino Hopi children they discover, "Are you *Pahaanas* [Anglos]?" or asking a bearded, white-robed hippie who just entered, "Are you Jesus? Are you here to save us?" As Lomatewama notes, "The clowns' antics in the plaza can range from slapstick to seriousness, from G-rated to XXX-rated material."<sup>8</sup> By presenting what is *qahopi* in a humorous manner, the clowns and their "instruments," the *piptuqam*, bring the judgment of laughter on unacceptable behavior and in doing so sustain an ethical consensus.<sup>9</sup>

### THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT

The clown ceremony brings the microcosm of the present within the macrocosm of the Hopi philosophy of history. In a brief period of time and in an abbreviated form, the *tsukulalwa* recalls the events of the Hopi emergence narrative and relates what Edmund Leach called the "time-now of experience" to the "time-then of myth."<sup>10</sup>

Hopi narratives of the past include the emergence narrative, clan migration narratives, and narratives that explain the presence of ruins in the region surrounding the Hopi villages. The emergence narratives record events prior to and including the emergence of the Hopi and other peoples on the earth's surface.<sup>11</sup> Clan migration narratives describe the movements of the various clans at the emergence from the lower world to the village of Oraibi (or some other place considered as a center).

One version of the emergence narrative begins:

A very long time ago they were living down below. Everything was good there at that time. That way of living was good down there. Everything was good, everything grew well; it rained all the time, everything was blossoming. That is the way it was, but by and by it became different. The chiefs commenced to do bad. Then it stopped raining and they only had very small crops and the winds began to blow. People became sick. By and by . . . the people participated in this. They, too, began to talk bad and to be bad. . . . The chiefs . . . became angry and they planned to do something to the people, to take revenge on them. They began to think of escaping. So a few of the chiefs met once and thought and talked about the matter.<sup>12</sup>

Another version begins bluntly, "In the Underworld all the people were fools [*qahopi*]. . . . All was confusion, and the chief was unhappy."<sup>13</sup>

Life had reached a stage of decadence and corruption. So the *mongwi*, "leaders," came together to see what could be done. . . . They decided that to regain a pure life, they would have to leave this place. They would make sure that *popwaqt*, "witches" or "evil-doers" among the people, who had caused the world's corruption, could not follow. The sky, they knew, was a dome that covered the earth. Up above the domed arch, on its "roof," they had heard the tread of footsteps. So, they reasoned, there must be another world above this one. Perhaps the being who made the footsteps would give them permission to come and live there. In this way they would escape the evil of the world below.<sup>14</sup>

Once on the earth's surface, the Hopis eventually meet Maasaw who says to them, "You . . . are strong of heart. Look in the valleys, the rocks and the woods, and you will find my footsteps there. All this is mine, but by your courage you have won it. All this I give [to] you, all this is yours forever."<sup>15</sup>

Moving from world to world, as in the emergence narrative, or from place to place, as in the clan migration narratives, the people seek to escape evil and begin life anew. The same perspective is found in the ruins narrative as well. In these the teller implicitly or explicitly likens the circumstances of the past to those of the present. In an account of the destruction of Awat'ovi, Ta'palo, the chief of Awat'ovi, calls on other villages to destroy his own people who were "out of control." Ta'palo says, "The same thing took place when we still lived in the underworld. Now I want my village erased from the surface of the earth. It will disappear completely."<sup>16</sup> These narratives define what it is to be *hopi* (one who adheres to the Hopi way of life) by considering the consequences of behavior that is *qahopi* (bad behavior) or *qahopqatsi* (a bad way of life). The stories are powerfully tied to ruins whose physical reality the narratives seek to explain. They are part of a chain of memories and, consequently, historically important, but they are also part of a body of knowledge in which the remembered past has ethical meaning for the present.

## THE CLOWN CEREMONY

*Tsukulalwa* takes place in the context of a katsina dance (*katsintihu*). In a predawn appearance in the village plaza (*tivongyapave*) the *katsinum* are heard singing, and they are greeted by the *katsinam na'am'iw* (the father of the katsinas), who invites the dancers to return during the day to sing, dance, and make the people's hearts glad.<sup>17</sup> So it is that throughout the two-day duration of the dances, the *katsinam* are led to the plaza, ideally four times before lunch and four times after (but often six to eight times).

While attention focuses on the dancing of the *katsinam*, the men who have been asked to play the role of *tsukshut* enter a kiva nearby. Their attire—shreds of a woman's black dress to be tied at their wrists and knees, sheep's hoofs rattles to be worn at their ankles, an old pair of shoes, and breech cloth—can be carried easily in a paper bag. Each man covers his body, face, and hair with earth-colored mud, ties his hair into two upward-pointing queues, and, with soot, paints spots on his eyebrows and above the upper lip and paints crescents below his eyes and mouth. Finally, each man dons a bandolier of food (*nithya*, bag lunch). The chief clown (*tsukumongwi*) goes to the clan house of the clan (Eagle) that owns the clown ceremony and invites the clown youth (*tsukutiyo*) and clown maiden (*tsukumana*), who are the spiritual ancestors, to attend to their activities and then lays a prayer-meal path in the direction of the plaza. The men play the role of the clown youth while the chief clown carries a cloth doll (*tsukumana*), whose face is painted like a *tsuku*, in a cloth around his waist.

When all is ready the *tsukshut* offer a prayer at the foot of the kiva ladder and then make their way behind the houses that define the plaza.<sup>18</sup> The clowns climb to the flat roof tops and move to the edge of a house overlooking the dancing *katsinam*. The chief clown calls out "yaahahay!" four times. Significantly, it is noon. The sun is at its zenith, its highest point, and Hopis see a correspondence in the decline of the sun during the afternoon and the moral decline of clowns in the events that follow.<sup>19</sup> The commotion of their arrival commands attention, and the clowns now make one of the few formal statements associated with their role: "Look down there. There is the light of blossoms, of flowers, down there. Everything is bountiful and beautiful—*siitalawva*, the light of life or flowers in bloom [a portent of happiness and prosperity]. How can we get down there, it is so precipitous?"

The *tsukshut* then descend (an inversion of the Hopi's own emergence account) into the plaza ("this world") by a variety of unorthodox methods—for example, upside down on a rope or by "parachute" (that is, by jumping with a borrowed umbrella in hand). Once down they set about investigating this "beautiful" place—eating scraps of food, refuse, and other debris they find and examining the flowers on women's shawls. Before long they stumble (literally) into the *katsinam* while doing a one-footed dance and realize the presence of these "beautiful creatures." Immediately and greedily they attempt to "own" as many as possible shouting, "This many are mine! This many are mine!" as they race around the *katsinam* with outstretched arms. As the *katsinam* finish their song and move to the third and final position on

their circuit of the dance plaza, the clowns make a prayer-meal path for the *katsinam* to follow and make prayer-meal offerings to them.

When the *katsinam* have finished dancing, the father of the *katsinas* invites them to rest and to return to sing again, and he begins to make a prayer-meal path to their resting place (*katsinki*) outside the village. The clowns prevent them from leaving and start looking for their "leader" (*mongwi*). Beginning with the chief clown, each clown addresses the *katsinam*, "Are you the leader? Are you the leader?" (*Ya um mongwi?*) When they reach the *kukuyuqa* (song leader), he shakes his rattle affirmatively. Each clown then says, "I, too, am the leader!" The clowns then tell the *katsinam* to bring "lots of piki" and other food, cars, and beautiful women.

The *katsinam* are finally permitted to depart under a shower of prayer-meal offerings and the *tsukskut* wander to the opposite end of the plaza where a small evergreen tree had been placed at the time of the predawn dance. The clown maiden doll (*tsukumana*) carried by the chief clown is placed at the base of the tree and the other clowns place their bandoliers of food there saying, "This is what will sustain our mortal life." The plaza is now the clowns' world—a microcosm—in which they set about building a house, a house of ashes and other incongruous elements.

When the men are invited to play the roles of the *tsukskut*, they are told, "You have been chosen to go to the plaza to eat there." As they busy themselves with imaginary televisions and picture windows, their aunts bring them clothes and boxes filled with food. In a prayer ceremony expressing the need for life-sustaining rain and corn, the clowns are presented with an abundance of food, which they greedily consume and waste.

The *katsinam* return and dance, and the *tsukskut* make prayer offerings to the dancers. The *katsinas* leave again, and throughout the afternoon, between the dances of the *katsinam*, a second kind of figure appears: the *piptuqa*. These "arrivals" or "visitors" are masked individuals or groups who come to the plaza to illustrate to the *tsukskut*—by means of "plays within the play"—behavior that is *qahopi*. Because most of these skits deal with current concerns in Hopi society, the *piptuqam* wear masks, clothing, and, on occasion, nametags representing an Anglo tourist, Bureau of Indian Affairs official, teacher, anthropologist, Hopi alcoholic, adulterer, and named individuals, for example, traditionalist spokesman Thomas Banyacya and affluent artist Charles Loloma. Once a skit is completed the chief clown gives the *piptuqam* a prayer-meal offering and says, "We want you to take the message so that before long they (the cloud people) may bring forth their blessings for us, that we may have rain." The *piptukum* are also *katsinam*, although of a "lesser order."

At first the clowns do not notice the *piptuqam*. When they do, they become curious and strike up a conversation saying, "Who are you? What is the purpose of your visit?" The *piptuqam* then divulge their identities, why they are there, and then act out a skit. The skit is intended for the *tsukskut*, but, in the words of one Hopi, "it shows the public their mistakes, the kinds of things they've neglected to do, the kind of life they are leading, or the liberties they have taken. It shows their excesses." Often when they appear to the

*tsukskut*, the *piptuqam* say, "You remember you did this," or "You also did that," addressing the "you" to all those in attendance.

In his analysis of ritual metaphors, Emory Sekaquaptewa writes, "Hopi *katsina* songs, one component of these performances, focus almost wholly on rain and the practices of life that put the gift of rainfall to its most fulfilling use." He notes that most *katsina* songs include "the phrases *Uma naawuwayani*, 'You will reflect back,' or *Ura hisato*, 'You remember when,' followed by a reminder of the good life when rains came and the landscape was lush with blooming plants." He continues, "Implicit in these reminders is the message that this good life was the result of adhering to the Hopi way of life."<sup>21</sup> Although the *katsina* songs reference a "past perfect time," the *tsukskut* and the *piptuqa* illustrate in their being and behavior the imperfections of the present time and its consequences.

A member of the Eagle clan recalled the following five examples of skits performed by the *piptuqam* in 1971.<sup>22</sup> The humor here is planned and spontaneous, verbal and visual, and relies on shared knowledge of received traditions or current problems within Hopi society. At the same time, many skits affirm Hopi identity compared to other cultures, including the Navajo.

1. Most skits are humorous and evoke laughter but some, as the first skit illustrates, are serious. A Sotuqnongu *katsina*, its mask and clothing worn and moth-eaten, enters the plaza, and, upon questioning by the *tsukskut*, he tells them his problem: "You have not been faithful in your prayer offerings. It's been a long time since you've seen fit to make the proper ritual offerings. Now my crown of eagle feathers has decayed away so there's nothing left but a stick on my head. You are straying from your ritual duties and so you'll not receive the blessings for which prayer offerings are made. You've forgotten your duties. You're only out for a good time, for amusement."<sup>23</sup> Then he departs.
2. This second skit conveys something of the temporal and political nature of behavior deemed to be *qahopi*. In this instance, all Hopis will laugh at the incongruity between perception and reality; for many there will also be an implicit reminder of what it is to be *hopi*. Two *piptuqam* enter the plaza, an old Hopi woman leading an old Hopi man with a stick in the manner in which the blind are led. They make their way to where the clowns are eating and stuff some food in their masks. The old woman yells at the old man as do the clowns, and the audience is led to conclude that he is blind and deaf. When the *tsukskut* ask him questions, he just stares at them. Finally, a little Koyemsi ("Mudhead") *katsina* (Koyemsihoya) comes into the plaza, approaches the old man, and whispers in his ear. Immediately, the old man jumps up and runs out of the plaza. The old woman explains, "His welfare check just arrived." With that, she departs.

Not all clown behavior is concerned to make an explicit ethical point. Some is simply humorous, a contrast to the seriousness of the *katsina* ceremony. Humor—especially in the *tsukulalwa*—is enormously complex. It often derives not so much from the subject matter as from how the subject matter is

presented. Hopi men and women, young and old, or Hopis who live on or off the reservation do not perceive all the skits of *piptuqam* in the same way.

3. There is a Hopi popular belief that crickets cause cracks in the walls of houses and in the sandstone of the mesas on which their villages are located. Moreover, there is a saying, "If you have crickets in the house, it will cause your walls to crack." With this shared knowledge in mind, the humor of the following skit is more apparent. The *tsukshut* got into an argument regarding the condition of their "house" and accused each other of having a "bad heart" and being bad housekeepers. Then two cricket *piptuqam* came into the plaza wearing carpenter's overalls and carrying a toolbox between them with a variety of carpenter's tools. They had whistles inside their masks and made cricket chirps as they moved from house to house around the plaza. They measured the walls, felt them, hit them with their chisels, and then blew on their whistles. They found many cracks in the process. Eventually they came to the clowns' "house," which on this occasion had one log wall and three "walls" of ashes. The crickets got out some tools, including a saw and an ax, and began to saw and chop on the log. The *tsukshut* began to wonder and backtracked to the other houses in the plaza. They blamed the crickets for all the cracks and then repeated the saying regarding crickets in the house. The *tsukshut* then chased after the crickets, took their tools away, tore off their overalls, and tossed mud and water on them.
4. A frequent "visitor" to the *tsukshut*, Kwikwilyaqa, the "imitator katsina," has black-and-white striped conical eyes and a nose and a wig of cedar bark. Kwikwilyaqa can echo every spoken word, seemingly regardless of language, repeat lengthy speeches, and mimic the actions and gestures of the person before him. On one occasion, copying a *tsuku* who touched his mud-covered head with a firebrand, Kwikwilyaqa started a fire on his cedar-bark wig (cedar bark being favorite tinder) and ran smoldering from the plaza. On another occasion, the *tsukshut* discuss a phonograph one of their numbers had brought into the plaza. One says it's a fake, that it can't reproduce a human voice. They wonder what is inside, but before they investigate further some *piptuqam* appear with a large box. This, too, is a phonograph. After a lengthy discussion they decide to test it. They wind it up (or pretend to do so), and one of the clowns gives a long, elaborate speech recounting several exploits of a sexual nature. Finally the box is given its chance, and it does a remarkably good job in repeating the lengthy speech. The clowns' curiosity has now been pushed to its limit, and they tear the box open only to find Kwikwilyaqa inside.
5. Alcoholism has become the most significant disease related to social and cultural factors. There is much gossip about families who leave small children for weeks at a time, Hopi women who work off-reservation and have drinks before returning home in the evenings, and Hopis hitchhiking to Winslow for beer or wine. While the *tsukshut* ate lunch, three small Ute *piptuqam* children, barefoot and wearing gunnysacks, enter. Their "father" enters shortly after with a hoe in his hand. The Utes wander to where the

clowns are eating. The *tsukshut* invite them to eat, and both the children and their father tell the clowns that their mother started drinking and left them. The father said, "I don't understand. I tried to provide for her and for them by weaving and farming. But she ran off." Throughout each recitation the clowns wailed loudly and caused much laughter by their exaggerated response. As the *piptuqam* started to leave, the clowns said, "we have the same trouble here" and gave each of them prayer meal.

Throughout the afternoon of the first day and most of the second, the *piptuqam* continue to appear to the *tsukshut*. At the same time, various warning figures—*kipok katsinam* (raider or warrior katsinas)—led by the owl (Mongwu) katsina arrive in quick succession at the entrances to the plaza and give ominous calls and warnings. Each of these *katsinam*—as many as ten or more different figures—has a distinct mask, attire, dance step, and circuit around the plaza. Many appear in pairs with synchronized movements and calls (for example, Eewiro, a warrior katsina). Others like the crow (Angwushahay'i, a katsina considered a *totokswuuti*, or wildcat woman, because she encourages the whipper katsinas), wolf (Kwewkatsin), Tsorposyaqahontaqa (the name refers to the turquoise that dangles above the nose), and several ogres move slowly around the dance area addressing warnings and threatening gestures to the audience as well as the *tsukshut*.

The warnings to the *tsukshut* increase in number and frequency. As these take place, the chief clown is seen meeting with the owl and passing a turquoise necklace to him. Toward the midafternoon of the second day a lull falls over the plaza between dances by the *katsinam*. The *kipok katsinum* and various warrior *katsinam* gather their forces in a nearby kiva and then swarm into the plaza—yucca whips in hand—to punish the *tsukshut*. The *kipok katsinum* first tear the clown's house apart and toss the *tsukumana* into the audience. The clowns hide, but—with the exception of the chief clown—they are quickly discovered, articles of their clothing are torn off, and they are tied in a heap with the black strips of cloth that had been around their waists and knees. The chief clown is then found and tossed on the heap. Buckets of water appear from the plaza-side houses, and the clowns are drenched and whipped by the *kipok katsinum*. As they untangle themselves the clowns discover the chief clown is free, and they accuse him of betraying them by bribing the owl to lessen his punishment. The most significant aspect of this punishment is that the "clowns" have been washed clean, all of the "earth color" has disappeared, and the painted smiles are gone from their faces. They are, in a sense, no longer *tsukshut*, no longer *qahopi*—they are "just plain Hopis." However, they have not yet confessed their wrongs, something they must do if they are to receive the blessings of the *katsinam*.

The *kipok katsinam* return, carrying boxes and sacks of food, but the clowns—setting aside their grievance with the chief clown—hide among the women seated around the plaza where the warrior *katsinam* seek them out. As Sanner has pointed out, "The gifts the *kipok katsinam* have brought for the clowns are considered blessings. But in order to earn and truly deserve them, each clown must first make a confession." The warrior *katsinam* then lead the

clowns, one at a time, to the end of a double line formed by the *kipok katsinam*. The clown asks "What shall I do?" and the warrior kachina tells him, "You shall sing!" The clown then "sings" (tells a story) in exchange for a pile of food assigned to him by the warrior *katsinam*. He does this, holding his hands up to his breast and making some sidelong hops toward the food pile with his feet close together. As he hops, he shouts out, "aa ii, aa ii, attend to this true story!" Then he tells the story, pointing at someone of his own kin, exposing some real or imaginary weakness by means of word play or a pun.<sup>24</sup>

The clown ceremony is concerned with life from an age of innocence to an age of awareness. At the end the clowns are punished, the paint that made them *tsukshut* is destroyed, and they escape—renewed through the laughter they have evoked—from the corrupt world they and the *piptuqam* have created in the plaza. The judgment of laughter on what is *qahopi* is also an affirmation of what is *hopi*.

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

In his account of the *tsukulalwa* Ransom Lomatewama concludes that "the clowns are mirrors": they reflect not only life as it should not be but also "life as it is, particularly its choices and consequences."<sup>25</sup> The *tsukshut* respond, in part, to situations and events that are localized in space and time, and therefore the historical context is significant for understanding certain clown humor. During the past two centuries many aspects of Hopi culture and society have undergone significant changes—changes that are reflected in historical accounts of clowning.

With the annexation of Hopitutskwa (Hopi land) as a part of the land acquired by the United States in 1848 following the Mexican War, a number of military expeditions reached the Hopi mesas. On 1 April 1852 Dr. P. S. G. Ten Broeck, surgeon in the US Army stationed in New Mexico, attended a katsina dance in the First Mesa village of Sichomovi and wrote the first description of part of the *tsukulalwa*:

As appendages to the feast, they had clowns who served . . . to amuse the spectators while the dancers were away. [They were dressed] in breech-clouts, having some comical daubs of paint on their faces and persons . . . and were amusing themselves by attempts at dancing, singing, and running races, when they were attacked by a huge grizzly bear (or rather a fellow in the skin of one), which, after a long pursuit and many hard fights, they brought to bay and killed. They then immediately opened him and took from out of his body a quantity of guaves, green corn, etc., which his bearship had undoubtedly appropriated from the refreshments provided for the clowns.<sup>26</sup>

In 1892 and 1893 Alexander M. Stephen wrote detailed descriptions of several katsina dances, including parts of the clown ceremony.<sup>27</sup> In the forty years between Ten Broeck's visit and Stephen's employment as an ethnologist with the Hemenway Southwestern Archaeological Expedition a number of

events took place that are reflected in his accounts of the skits of the *piptuqam*. The Hopi were overrun with missionaries, anthropologists, agents and other government officials, traders, and tourists, many of whom brought alcohol with them, engaged in prostitution, and forced American-style schooling on Hopi children. There appears to be a significant shift in Hopi ritual humor during the second half of the nineteenth century from a concern with *internal* boundaries—especially gender relations and/or the rights and obligations of kinship—to more of a concern with *external* boundaries—maintaining Hopi cultural identity in the context of an increasingly pervasive dominant culture.

Stephen was employed by J. Walter Fewkes in September 1891 to record the Maraw and Wuwtsim ceremonies at Walpi as a part of the work of the Hemenway expedition. Until his death in April 1894, Stephen worked day and night to record Hopi and social ceremonial life, including elements of the *tsukulalwa* (for example, time and mode of entry, ash house, warnings, and punishment). Although Stephen wrote that the clowns performed “as usual” and “according to custom,” it is clear from his field notes that he did not understand that the elements were part of a dramatic whole. “What is the meaning of this begging? What of this gluttony,” he asked, “the house, etc.?”<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, his detailed accounts reveal the changing world reflected—albeit distorted by the creativity of humor—in the clown’s mirror.

Americans—or rather “grotesques” of them, as Stephen called the *piptuqam*—appeared in a series of skits in a katsina dance in April 1893. In the first, the clowns give a “stranger” two bottles that contain “very dilute coffee to simulate whiskey.” The stranger began to praise the drink, “saying that the Americans were fond of it, drank it and got happy, until they staggered, grew dizzy, and fell down; that the Navajo had lots of it which they bought from the American. . . . [There was] much more of this mild satire on whisky drinking, but in the uproar I could not follow.” This was followed by “a very good burlesque of an American visitor” and several *piptuqam*, males and females:

[The American visitor] shook hands very effusively with the Pi’ptu maids, and when they asked him for paper money notes, he generously scribbled them. But when the Pi’ptu men asked him for anything he abruptly said, “Get out!” and pushed past them. The Pi’ptu maids brought him “dolls” [*tithu*, katsina doll] and these he eagerly bought and gave them generous prices for them, the other Pi’ptu holding up the American paper money and calling out the amount it was for, etc. The American put his hand in the basket and brought out a lot of imitation candy, moist nodules of meal pressed into about the size of almonds and stained with bright pigment; these he threw about for the Pi’ptu to scramble for.<sup>29</sup>

After this “American visitor” left, “another well made-up American came in carrying a camp chair, one hand thrust into his overcoat pocket and swinging the chair in the other.” This “eager sight-seer” looked up at the terraces and in doors and windows. Reaching one open doorway, he dropped that character

and became "a store keeper." "Presently he made overtures to one of the Pi'ptu women and he took her inside, and she came out with an armful of prints. 'Ho,' said her husband, 'there has been *chomni*, etc.,' and thereupon he fells her for infidelity, and some of the other Pi'ptu take her part and a general row ensues."<sup>30</sup> A few weeks later Stephen recorded, "Between dances ten and eleven, three grotesques came in. Two of these and the six clowns stood in a row and the other grotesque in American clothes and carrying a cane under his arm and a book in his hand burlesqued schooling."<sup>31</sup>

Several of the skits performed by the *piptuqam* concerned neighboring tribal groups. In these, to be Hopi (*hopi*) is not only a matter of ethics, it is also a matter of identity, an answer to the even more basic question of who are we? To be Hopi is not to be Apache, Paiute, or Navajo. For example, Stephen portrays "a dilapidated old Apache with an old Harper Ferry musket and an old horse pistol, red and blue chevrons on face, red on body, old white hat, old pair of overalls and torn moccasins, [who] speaks in Apache and sings an Apache song" and gets into a "general row with all the clowns" and elsewhere described "a band representing Pah Utes . . . carrying bows and arrows, rabbits, etc. They want to trade."<sup>32</sup> More often, however, Navajo were the subject of humorous reflection. While the *katsinum* were singing, Stephen writes:

A burlesque Navajo comes into the court, mimicking a Navajo riding on horseback, the horse being a rolled up sheepskin fastened between his legs, a bridle made fast to one end. Whip in hand, he come in cantering down and around the line of kachina, passing round them two or three times. His make-up as a Navajo is very good indeed, and he wears a silk turban pulled well over the brow of his grotesque mask, just as a swashbuckler scalawag among the Navajo has the fashion of doing. As he passes by an elderly man, here and there, he pulls up his "horse" and inquires in pantomime as to water or for some distant place, all this pantomime very graphic, and when he passes a Chuku he gives him a cut with his whip and they of course fall over or dance around in comic pain and lamentations.<sup>33</sup>

Stephen worked at Thomas V. Keam's trading post for ten years before joining the Hemenway expedition. He learned Navajo and wrote accounts of Navajo ceremonies, and when a Navajo curing ceremony was burlesqued during a Tasapkatsina (Navajo *katsina*) dance in the spring of 1893 Stephen provided a richly detailed account. The *piptuqam*, representing a Navajo medicine man (singer, *hataali*) and his wife, entered:

This Navajo song man [carrying] an old pouch, representing the fetich pouch, with a bundle of eagle feathers projecting from it . . . walked with a staff like an old man, passed down the line of singing kachina, occasionally touching one as if in wonder and walked down the court as if all were quite strange to him. He soon spies the clowns . . . and tells them he is a song man and has brought his medicine with

him. His speech is in Navajo and most of the clowns converse with him in the same tongue. Two of the clowns say that they are ailing, have pains in their belly and limbs. [A fee is agreed to.] The song man . . . takes off his medicine pouch and produces the small chanter's rattle which he elevates, shaking it and beginning his song which is a faithful imitation of the chanter's song.

After a number of ritual acts, the Navajo "blows away the malign influence." Meanwhile, Stephen notes, the spectators have "followed his proceeding with much interest and amusement." He continues:

[The song man] then made his patients lie down flat on their bellies and, stripping off their breech cloth . . . gets a handful of grass pulp and slaps it on the anus, and then pretends to insert an eagle feather in the anus, really thrusts the quill between the legs, leaving the feather upright. The other clowns then ask to be treated, and he causes all of them to lie down side by side on their bellies and treats them with the grass pulp and feather, and all the people shout with laughter. And it is assuredly a most absurd spectacle, especially when one considers that of the six clowns, four of them are of the principal men of the mesa—Sun chief, Snake chief, Kachina father, [and] Horn kiva chief. . . . The chanter then gathers up his fetishes, slings his medicine pouch and gives his wife the rifle [the fee], bell and blanket to carry, and makes off leisurely. . . . But before leaving, the clowns all give him a pinch of meal and their thanks.<sup>34</sup>

Many skits recorded by Stephen involved burlesques of the *katsinam*, including the Wawarkatsina (running katsina), and several identified by him as "Dog kachina," "Rabbit kachina" (who came hopping into the plaza), "Picho'ti (Pig) kachina" (its body stuffed with various objects including Navajo blankets, bridle and lariat, and a suit of white man's clothes), "Dawn kachina," and others who are often mistreated by the *tsukshut* and stripped of all their attire except their masks.<sup>35</sup> Stephen also recorded an elaborate parody of a Hopi wedding ceremony punctuated with a great deal of what Stephen termed "pornographic display" that resulted in "an uproar of shouts and laughter."<sup>36</sup>

Over the course of the next half century there are few accounts of the *tsukshut* and *piptuqam*. Hopi sensitivity to the presence of Anglos, especially government officials, is noted in a skit recalled in the 1930s by Don Talayesva:

While we [the *tsukshut*] were eating, we saw the old Katcina "lady" [a *piptuqa*] coming with a flat rock on her shoulder. Upon it was carved an old-fashioned Hopi checker game. She challenged us to play, and promised that in case we won she would reward us with her favors. The game started and she beat us again and again. We played until we had lost everything except our hair and loin cloths. Then the old

Katcina won our hair; but when she drew shears from her bosom to clip it, our aunts rushed into the plaza, took them from her, and saved us. The old lady warned us that if she won again, she would take our loincloths. We played and lost. She grabbed my G-string to snatch it off. I looked around for government employees and saw the school principal watching us with a frown on his face. I whispered, "Stop, there is the principal, and he looks cross." The old Katcina replied in an undertone, "That doggone white man should stay away if he can't stand it." "She" let go my G-string and said, "Well, we will have race. If you win, you may do what you please with me; but if I win, I surely shall have your loincloth." We agreed to race, but were afraid that the white man would spoil that too.<sup>37</sup>

In his *Hopi Bibliography* W. David Laird lists more than 150 accounts of the snake/antelope ceremonies written since a former Hopi agent, William R. Mateer, published the first account in 1879.<sup>38</sup> Hundreds of photographs were taken between 1885 and the prohibition of photography in 1915. Edward Kennard describes "a take-off of the behavior of the swarms of tourists who invade the villages for the Snake Dance every year," which he witnessed in the 1930s:

First several clowns [that is, *piptuquam*] ran into the plaza carrying small black boxes, and then proceeded to "take pictures" of everything in sight and from every imaginable angle. They even dragged people out of their houses and made them assume ridiculous poses. Then they settled themselves on the housetops, removed their shirts, and exhibited all the manifestations of restlessness seen on such occasions. Finally, a clown [*piptuqa*] entered at the far end of the plaza and immediately called in a loud voice to another sitting at the opposite end. They carried on a conversation in English at the top of their lungs. The new arrival strode across the plaza, made a great fuss as he clambered up the ladder, and then they indulged in a great deal of hand shaking and back slapping.<sup>39</sup>

By way of summary, in this article I have related the narratives of the events of emergence and the dramatic performance of the *tsukulalwa* to the Hopi philosophy of history. Hopis refuse to separate the remembered past from its ethical meaning for the present, and in the clown ceremony past and present are brought together in the communal judgment of laughter. Although the structure of the ceremony seems much the same during the past century, the content began to change during the second half of the nineteenth century as the *tsukshut* and the *piptuquam* confronted the many kinds of behavior introduced by an increasingly pervasive dominant culture not in accordance with *hopiiqatsi*—the Hopi way of life.

### Acknowledgments

I dedicate this article to the memory of Emory and Abbott Sekaquaptewa whose scholarship and political leadership did much to preserve and sustain Hopi language and culture. I appreciate greatly the contributions both men made to my understanding of the *tsukulalwa*. Alfonso Ortiz, Hans-Ulrich "Ulli" Sanner, and Mischa Titiev generously shared their perspectives on clowning with me. Finally, my thanks go to Ralph Selina for his friendship. I will never forget the long line of extension cords that led one spring day from his daughter's house to a kiva in Shungopavi and her assurance I would find him and a vacuum cleaner at the end.

### NOTES

1. The Hopi people live on or near the southern escarpment of Black Mesa in northeastern Arizona on a reservation surrounded by that of their neighbors, the Navajo. Traditionally, Hopis were farmers who pursued a life based on corn agriculture and who supplemented their diet with small game. Today, Hopis farm, raise cattle, and engage in a variety of occupations on and off reservation. As the westernmost Puebloan people, the Hopis live in thirteen villages on three finger-like projections south from Black Mesa and to the west along Moencopi Wash. There are three villages on First Mesa—Walpi, Sichumovi, and the Tewa-speaking village of Hano—and the modern community, Polacca, which has spread at the base of the narrow mesa. Second Mesa includes the villages of Shipaulovi and Mishongnovi, which occupy small, isolated promontories, and the large village of Shungopavi. Prior to the twentieth century, Oraibi was the only Third Mesa village. A factional split in 1906 and further dissension led to the development of Hotevilla, Bacabi, and New Oraibi (Kykotsmovi). Forty miles to the west, a summer farming village expanded and divided to form Lower and Upper Moencopi. By mid-twentieth century, rapid culture change affected all aspects of Hopi life, although the rate of change was more marked in some villages than others.

2. The Hopi ritual calendar consists of a diverse and complex cycle of ritual performances. Between the summer and winter solstices, there are a number of ceremonies (*wiimi*, sing.; *wiwimi*, pl.) including those of the snake and antelope societies and, in alternate years, those of the flute societies, as well as the dances of three women's societies (Lakon, Maraw, and Owaqol) and the ceremonies of the "manhood initiation" societies (Wuwtsim). In Hopi thought, each clan and each religious society was welcomed to become a part of a village only on the assurance it would make a contribution to sustaining the life and common good of the community. Jesse Walter Fewkes, an early student of the Hopi, tells of the beginning of the flute ceremony: "As the Flute chief and his followers approached [the edge of the village], the Bear chief challenged him, demanding 'Who are you? Whence have you come?' The Flute chief responded that they were kindred and knew the songs necessary to bring rain." Through prayers and prayer offerings, these ceremonies are concerned with creating and maintaining "a place to make life." The ceremonies that occur between the winter solstice and the summer solstice, differ in that they are "masked dances," and although "this worldly" priests (*wimkyá*, sing.; *wiwimkyam*, pl.: initiated members of an adult

religious society) attend to the masked figures, it is the “other worldly” *katsinam* who are central. Jesse Walter Fewkes, “Tusayan Migration Traditions,” *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* 19 (1900): 592.

3. Emory Sekaquaptewa emphasizes “it is the *katsinas* that are the rain, not that they bring the rain,” and “the *katsinas* arrive in performance as rain and are themselves metaphors for the clouds that arrive in performance as rain.” Emory Sekaquaptewa and Dorothy Washburn, “They Go Along Singing: Reconstructing the Hopi Past from Ritual Metaphors in Song and Image,” *American Antiquity* 69 (2004): 457–86.

4. This article describes the clown ceremony as performed in the Hopi Third Mesa villages and at Moencopi in 1969, 1970, 1971, and 1977. The fieldwork served as the basis for the author’s “The Hopi Ritual Clown: Life as It Should Not Be” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1972).

5. For a detailed account of variations in the appearance of the *tsuku* and other Hopi “clowns” as well as the *piptuqa*, see Barton Wright, *Clowns of the Hopi: Tradition Keepers and Delight Makers* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing, 1994). On several occasions, Alexander M. Stephen described various clowns on First Mesa as well as the *piptuqam* who he defined as “impromptu personators” and “grotesques.” Alexander M. Stephen, in *The Hopi Journal of Alexander M. Stephen*, ed. Elsie Clews Parsons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 330–31, 370, 402.

6. Emory Sekaquaptewa, “One More Smile for a Hopi Clown,” in *The South Corner of Time: Hopi Navajo Papago Yaqui Tribal Literature*, ed. Larry Evers (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 14–17; Ransom Lomatewama, “A Hopi Mirror,” *Native Peoples: The Journal of the Heard Museum* 1 (Summer 1988): 8–13; Hans-Ulrich Sanner, “Tsukulalwa: Die Clownzeremonie der Hopi als Spiegel ihrer Kultur im Wandel” (PhD diss., University of Frankfurt, 1993).

7. Hans-Ulrich Sanner, “Another Home Run for the Black Sox’: Humor and Creativity in Hopi Ritual Clown Songs,” in *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*, ed. Arnold Krupat (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 151.

8. Lomatewama, “A Hopi Mirror,” 11.

9. The concept of “ethical consensus” is developed in Hans-Ulrich Sanner, “‘Kachina Coding’: Ritual Humor as Ritual Metacommunication,” *Native American Studies* 9 (1995): 9–14.

10. Edmund Leach, “Vico and Levi-Strauss on the Origins of Humanity,” in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 311. Just as the *katsina* songs refer “not only to this past perfect beautiful life but also the actions necessary to achieve this life that must be constantly undertaken.” Sekaquaptewa and Washburn, “They Go Along Singing,” 465.

11. Another significant context of the *katsina* dance and the clown ceremony is architectural. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a Hopi village consisted of a series of multistoried, terraced structures, each containing a number of living units, which were arranged in low rows or irregularly around the *kiisonvi*, a central plaza. The *kiihu*, the individual matrilineal/matrilocal residence, was a rectangular structure constructed of sandstone and adobe mud. The kiva, a semisubterranean religious structure constructed of similar materials and built in the form of a rectangular keyhole, was located in the plaza, in the broad streets, and/or at the ends of the house blocks.

The metaphors in terms of which Hopis perceive, experience, and describe their traditional architecture derive largely from their worldview. Hopi cosmology includes the notion of the evolution of mankind through four worlds, with final emergence of the Hopi in the Grand Canyon by way of the *sipaapuni*, an opening (hatchway) from the underworld below. In Hopi thought, the architecture of the kiva—through the *sipaapuni*, an opening in the floor, and the levels of the floors—replicate this account. The ladders that stood against the doorless first-floor exterior of the traditional *kiihu* or extended above the entrance to the kiva remind Hopis of the trees their ancestors climbed at the emergence. For Hopis, the *sipaapuni* is the first component of a village to be constructed, and the houses that form the plaza are built around it. The *sipaapuni* is a symbolic medium of exchange and communication between the upper world of the living and the lower world of the spirits—between life and life after this life. From this conception, the levels of the kiva, the tall ladders, the architecture of this world, and the architecture of their cosmology correspond and complement each other. Although culture change has affected all aspects of Hopi life, the central plaza remains the focal point of the ritual calendar. See also n. 17.

12. H. R. Voth, *The Traditions of the Hopi* (Chicago: Field Columbian Museum, 1905), 16.

13. Alexander M. Stephen, "Hopi Tales," ed. Elsie Clews Parsons, *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 42 (1929): 3.

14. Peter Whiteley, *Bacavi: Journey to Reed Springs* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1988), 7.

15. Jeremiah Sullivan, untitled manuscript, ca. 1886, MS.5.291, Los Angeles, Southwest Museum. In 1883 Sullivan indicated that the Hopis called their land Maasawtutskwa, Maasaw's land, see H. F. C. ten Kate, in *Travels and Researches in Native North America, 1882–1883*, ed. P. Hovens, W. J. Orr, and L. A. Hieb (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 256, 268n47. Today Hopis distinguish between *tutskwa* (land as a geopolitical construct) and Hopitutskwa (Hopi land, a religious concept). Maasaw is the god of the earth's surface and of death.

16. Ekkehart Malotki, ed., *Hopi Tales of Destruction*, narrated by Michael Lomatuway'ma, Lorena Lomatuway'ma, and Sidney Namingha Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 182. The destruction of Awat'ovi in 1700 and its narrative reconstruction may be viewed also as involving a self-transformation of Hopi identity and society. See Peter Whiteley, "Re-imagining Awat'ovi," in *Archaeologies of the Pueblo Revolt: Identity, Meaning, and Renewal in the Pueblo World*, ed. Robert W. Preucel (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 147–66. The phrase "narrated by" is what is used by the editor (Malotki) on this book's title page.

17. According to Emory Sekaquaptewa, "Hopi use the compound form *ivongyapave*, literally 'their dance,' *tiiva* (*ti-*), + 'display,' *pongya* (-*vongya*), + 'at the place of (-ve) or, as we know it, 'their plaza,' to convey the idea that song as well as dance and all the associated activities and paraphernalia in these public performances function as an integrated complex." Sekaquaptewa and Washburn, "They Go Along Singing," 461.

18. In his autobiography, Don Talayesva recounts his experience as the chief clown and says, "When the Katcinas returned to the plaza at about noon, I stepped to the foot of the ladder and said, 'My partners, let us go over there with happy hearts. If we are lucky some of the people will smile upon us. We will put our hearts together, praying to the Six-Point-Cloud-People for rain.'" Don C. Talayesva, in *Sun Chief: The*

*Autobiography of a Hopi Indian*, ed. Leo W. Simmons (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1942), 187.

19. A similar account of the arrival of the *tsukskut* is given in Sekaquaptewa, "One More Smile for a Hopi Clown," 7. Emory Sekaquaptewa's emphasis on "destiny" reflects a more apocalyptic understanding of the emergence narrative among Third Mesa Hopi.

20. For an account of a more lengthy and creative exchange between the *tsukskut* and the Kukuynaqa (song-leader), see Sanner, "Kachina Coding," 10–11.

21. Sekaquaptewa and Washburn, "They Go Along Singing," 459.

22. Abbott Sekaquaptewa, the Hopi tribal chairman, narrated these skits and gave direction to the research presented in this article. In contrast to his brother, see n. 19 above, Abbott Sekaquaptewa emphasized the importance of the *piptuqam* and the immediate moral consensus they achieved through humor and, I will add, the *communitas* of shared laughter.

23. A katsina may also appear as a *piptuqam* and as such is able to speak the human language.

24. Sanner, "Another Home Run," 156–66, provides a detailed analysis of four *tsukutatawi*. Stephen noted a clown who "told of an Oraibi who copulated with his wife with a big cannon, the wife giving birth to young firearms." Stephen, *Hopi Journal*, 480.

25. Lomatewama, "A Hopi Mirror," 12.

26. Quoted in Thomas Donaldson, *Moqui Pueblo Indians of Arizona and Pueblo Indians of New Mexico: Extra Census Bulletin* (Washington, DC: US Census Printing Office, 1893), 26.

27. Alexander Middleton Stephen (1846–94) was born in Scotland and served in the New York Infantry during the Civil War. After that little is known of his whereabouts until he arrives at Keams Canyon in April 1879. At the time of the 1880 census Stephen listed his occupations as explorer and prospector. Between 1880 and his death in 1894, Stephen was a boarder, clerk in charge, and postmaster at the trading post of Thomas V. Keam. He learned Navajo, shared his knowledge of Navajo social and ceremonial life with Washington Matthews, provided Cosmos Mindeleff with a rich account of Navajo vernacular architecture, and published eight articles on the Navajo. He assisted Keam in marketing a large collection of ancestral and historic Hopi pottery through "Catalogue of Keam's Canon Collection of Relics of the Ancient Builders of the Southwestern Table Lands" (1884). During the field season 1887–88 Stephen was employed by the Bureau of [American] Ethnology and contributed to Victor Mindeleff's study of the architecture of Tusayan (Hopi land). In 1891 he joined the second Hemenway Southwestern Archaeological Expedition and assisted Jesse Walter Fewkes in developing the basis of what Stephen hoped would be a comprehensive study of the Hopi. Stephen was well versed in the social evolutionary theory of Lewis Henry Morgan, the dominant theoretical position of the Bureau of [American] Ethnology. For the most part his field notes are those of a natural scientist, and this partly accounts for his easy collaboration with Fewkes. As is clear from the descriptions of the *tsukskut* and *piptuqam* on First Mesa quoted in this article, Stephen's notebooks are precise in their accounts of observable behavior—of who did what and when, and exact in their description of material culture—of shape, color, and use. Although in his last letter to Fewkes he wrote of his interest in "the misty places and their meanings,"

the mainstays of Stephen's approach were in collecting, describing (often seeking the scientific term for flora and fauna), classifying, and, as occasion demanded, venturing into developmental and evolutionary frameworks. At the same time, his theoretical and methodological approach contrasts with that of his contemporary and frequent companion, Jeremiah Sullivan (1851–1916), who lived in the Hopi First Mesa village of Sichumovi for nearly seven years (1881–87). Although Stephen described the observable behavior and material aspects of Hopi culture, Sullivan recorded the conceptual and moral, locating practices in the context of Hopi thought. Unfortunately, Sullivan left no account of the *tsukulalwa*.

28. Stephen, *Hopi Journal*, 490.
29. *Ibid.*, 367.
30. *Ibid.*, 368. The Hopi word (Third Mesa dialect) for copulate is *tsuugi*. Stephen records a number of skits in which laughter is created by sexual horseplay, including simulated copulation. See pp. 329–31, 366, 369, 385, 402–3, 459, 480, 491, 555.
31. *Ibid.*, 385. Stephen does not describe the nature of the "burlesque."
32. *Ibid.*, 169.
33. *Ibid.*, 330.
34. *Ibid.*, 383–85.
35. *Ibid.*, 169, 402, 452, 455–56, 555.
36. *Ibid.*, 329–31.
37. Talayesva, *Sun Chief*, 189–90.
38. W. David Laird, *Hopi Bibliography* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977).
39. Edwin Earle, *Hopi Kachinas*, text by Edward Kennard, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1971), 38.



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