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The Return of Moctezuma: Oaxaca's "Danza de la Pluma" and New Mexico's "Danza de los Matachines"

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# The Return of Moctezuma

## Oaxaca's *Danza de la Pluma* and New Mexico's *Danza de los Matachines*

*Max Harris*

The most common theme of traditional folk performances in Mesoamerica is that of conquest and reconquest. Given the history of the region, this is hardly surprising. As Nathan Wachtel has aptly observed:

The trauma of the Conquest still reaches the Indians of the twentieth century; the past remains deeply imprinted on present mental structures. The persistence in the collective consciousness of a shock felt more than four hundred years ago is demonstrated by present-day Indian folklore. (1977:33)

Specifically, Wachtel has in mind the widespread folk dramatizations of the Spanish conquest of indigenous America.

But the Spanish, too, brought with them to the Americas their own trauma of invasion and armed resistance. For nearly 750 years, Moors had occupied parts of Spain. The year 1492 was not only the time when Columbus landed in the Americas; it was also the year in which the Spanish forces conquered the last Moorish stronghold of Granada. The intermittent Spanish *reconquista* may have been the theme of festive drama since as early as 1150 (Alford 1937:221–22), and both the small-scale *danzas de moros y cristianos* and the large-scale *fiestas de moros y cristianos* were brought to the Americas by the conquistadors (Warman Gryj 1972; Harris 1994). The American folk performances to which Wachtel refers are, at least in part, an adaptation of the Spanish tradition. While in many cases the two sides that engage in mock combat in Mesoamerica still represent Moors and Christians, in others they dress as Aztecs and Spaniards or, in a reference to the French invasion of Mexico in 1862, as French and Mexican armies (Gilmour 1943:25–28; Harris 1993:108–19).

But the theme of Moors and Christians cut two ways in the New World. For the Spanish colonists, it offered an opportunity to celebrate the victory of Christians over “heathens” and to draw parallels, favorable to Christianity, between the defeat of the Moors and the defeat of the Mexicans. For the indigenous Mexican performers, the fact that the Spaniards finally drove out the invading Moors suggested instead the dramatization of a future reconquest of

Mexico by indigenous forces. Thus, in an elaborate fiesta de moros y cristianos staged in Tlaxcala in 1539, the defeated Sultan of Babylon represented both the leader of the mixed army of Turks, Moors, and Jews that opposed the Christians and, more discreetly, Hernan Cortés vanquished by an army of Christianized Indians (Harris 1993:82–92). And, in a *danza de los santiagos* that I saw in Cuetzalán, Puebla, in 1988, the victorious Christian *santiagos* (soldiers of St. James) wore masks that identified them with indigenous warriors of the Sun, and the defeated *pilatos*, named after the “heathen” Pontius Pilate, wore pale-faced masks that clearly linked them to the Spanish conquistadors (Harris 1993:99–107). The same performance, in other words, could—and in its modern descendants, still can—be read two ways, as both a triumph of Spanish Catholicism and a future indigenous defeat of the conquistadors and their successors.

This simultaneous performance of two conflicting narratives, one endorsing the conquest and the other reversing it, will not come as a surprise to those who have read James Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990). In his study of unbalanced power relationships, Scott draws a distinction between “public” and “hidden transcripts” that is eminently applicable to many folk performances. While the public transcript, according to Scott, records what may be said openly by the powerful and the subordinate alike, the hidden transcripts of the two groups generally contain what each may say only in the absence of the other. Thus, the hidden transcript of the subordinate group “represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant,” and that of the powerful represents “the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed” (xii). But Scott also recognizes the “tremendous desire and will” (164) of subordinate groups to express publicly the message of the hidden transcript, and therefore describes, too, “the manifold strategies by which subordinate groups manage to insinuate their resistance, in disguised forms, into the public transcript” (136). The condition of the hidden transcript’s public expression, he adds, “is that it be sufficiently indirect and garbled that it is capable of two readings, one of which is innocuous” (157). The Mesoamerican folk dramatizations of conquest and reconquest are a splendid example of an “innocuous” public transcript of subordination (the celebration of the Spanish conquest) into which the indigenous performers insinuate a hidden transcript of resistance (the reconquest of their homeland by indigenous forces).

In this article, I will illustrate this interplay of public and hidden transcripts by way of a study of two traditional dances, Oaxaca’s *danza de la pluma* and New Mexico’s *danza de los matachines*. The public transcript of the former represents the conquest of Moctezuma and his soldiers by the army of Cortés, such that the dance is sometimes called simply *la danza de la conquista*. The hidden transcript reverses the outcome. The public transcript of the latter is generally understood, when it is danced in the Hispanic pueblos of New Mexico, to dramatize the conversion of Moctezuma to Christianity. The hidden transcript, as one would expect, is more apparent in the Native American pueblos. There, although the public transcript remains officially intact, the dance may also be read as a promise of Moctezuma’s final victory over the invaders.

In August 1993, I saw several performances of the *danza de los matachines* in the Hispanic pueblo of Bernalillo, New Mexico. A year later, in July 1994, I saw the epic, eight-hour *danza de la pluma* performed twice in its entirety and twice in an abbreviated version in the village of Teotitlán del Valle, some 15 miles west of the state capital of Oaxaca. And, over the 1994 Christmas season, I saw the *danza de los matachines* in the Native American pueblos of Picuris, San Juan, and Santa Clara, New Mexico. Whether the two dances are, as most scholars assume (e.g., Parsons 1936:258; Kurath 1949), American variants of

the Spanish danza de los moros y cristianos or, as Adrian Treviño and Barbara Gilles (1994) argue, derived from a common prehispanic source, is incidental to my discussion here. Both dances in their present form certainly belong to the broad Mesoamerican tradition of folk dramatizations of conquest and reconquest and both offer a "public" Catholic reading and a "hidden" indigenous reading of the armed encounter between native and invading forces.

### *Moctezuma and Malinche*

Moctezuma, or *la monarca*, is one of two central characters in both dances. The other is La Malinche. Any serious attempt to reckon with the hidden transcripts of the dances must begin with the link between these two characters. Most observers (e.g., Gilmoor 1943:18-24; Cordry 1980:34) mistakenly

1. *Malinche, Moctezuma, and Doña Marina* dance in *la danza de la pluma*, Teotitlán del Valle, Mexico, July 1994. (Photo by Max Harris)



assume that Moctezuma represents only the Aztec emperor who opposed Cortés and that the Malinche of the dance corresponds to the Malinche of the European narrative of the conquest. Otherwise known by her baptismal name of Doña Marina, the latter was Cortés's indigenous mistress and translator. The public transcript then yields a Moctezuma who, in the *danza de la pluma*, is defeated by Cortés and, in the *danza de los matachines*, is converted to Christianity. Malinche, according to this reading, is the first indigenous convert to Christianity, instrumental in the subsequent defeat and conversion of Moctezuma. But, just as the masks in the *danza de los santiagos* discreetly signal the presence of a hidden transcript, so does Malinche in the *danza de la pluma* and the *danza de los matachines*, for there Malinche is openly identified by the *danzantes* not as the companion of Cortés but as the "wife" (Gilmoor 1943:18) or "daughter" (Augur 1954:71; Harris 1994:158) of Moctezuma. Such "variation" prompted Frances Gilmoor to remark that "this play takes liberties with history" (1943:18); Scott might point out instead that a "garbled" and therefore "innocuous" public transcript is a necessary cover for a coherent hidden transcript. The hidden transcript, in this instance, knows full well that, in indigenous Mesoamerican folklore, Moctezuma is the name both of a past ruler and of a "messiahlike figure" who will "defeat the Spanish and initiate a new Indian hegemony" (Gillespie 1989:166, 201), and that Malinche is commonly his "wife" or "daughter" (Harris 1996).

Evidence for this popular understanding of Moctezuma and Malinche is plentiful. Victoria Bricker, for example, writes of an armed rebellion in highland Chiapas in 1712, in which the summons to resist the colonial regime included the assurance that "the Emperor Montezuma was being resuscitated and would help the Indians defeat the Spaniards" (1981:60). She notes, too, that, in 1761, Jacinto Uc, the leader of an indigenous rebellion in Yucatan, added to his own name those of Moctezuma and of Canek, the last Maya king. The official report of the rebellion states that he was crowned "Re Jacinto Uc Canek, Chichán Motzuma, which in translation means King Jacinto Uc Canek, Little Montezuma" (Bricker 1981:73). In 1900, Frederick Starr came across Otomí in the Sierra de Puebla who "believe that Montezuma is to come again. Meantime, from him come health, crops, and all good things." Each year, a feast is "given in his honor, of which he is believed to partake" (Starr 1908:250). And, in 1835, Ignacio Zuñiga identified a dance in Sonora as a dramatization of "the passage of the Aztecs, and the coming of Moctezuma, whom they await as the Jews await the Messiah" (1835:7; translated by Johnson 1971:182).

Malinche's link to Moctezuma is also a long-standing one. In Guatemala City, in 1608, a spectacular nighttime masquerade included clergy dressed as "Indians, Turks, Spaniards, and Moors." Among those singled out for the richness of their costumes were "Moctezuma and La Malinche" (Juarros [1818] 1981:398–400). More recently, Frances Toor noted that, in the *danza de la pluma*, "Malinche [...] does a solo dance with Moctezuma and seems to be his companion rather than Cortés" (1947:347). Gilmoor, too, found to her surprise that, in *la danza de la conquista*, "Malinche is the name given to Moctezuma's wife" (1943:18).

Similar legends abound among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. Several writers have recorded the conviction of the natives of Pecos and Jemez Pueblos that Moctezuma will "return to deliver his people from the yoke of the Spaniards" (Gregg [1884] 1954:188–89; cf., Weigle and White 1988:70–73; Parmentier 1979:619). According to Noël Dumarest, the people of Cochiti Pueblo, too, believe that Montezuma has a "divine mission" of "working miracles," and that "one day he is to reappear in the world and to deliver his people from the yoke of their conquerors." Dumarest also notes that

Montezuma has a consort: "Malinche, the wife of Montezuma, had the same power of working miracles" (1919:229-30; cf., Benedict 1931:191-92). In a similar vein, Teresa VanEtten has recorded the story, which she first heard in San Juan Pueblo, of Montezuma asking the people to dance los matachines in his memory. "His people," she was told, "still look to the east when they dance. They hold their hands up, looking to the east, and wait for Montezuma's return." In this version, too, Montezuma has a beautiful wife, Malinche, and together they rule "the Indian people" (1985:53-60).

With this in mind, we are ready to look more closely at the dances themselves. We will begin with the longer and in some ways more accessible of the two, the *danza de la pluma*.

### *La danza de la pluma*

The *danza de la pluma* is performed in several villages in Oaxaca. Some observers (e.g., Martínez Vigil 1995) believe that it originated in the 16th century in Cuilapán, a few miles south of the city of Oaxaca. It is still performed there each year on and around the *fiesta del santiago* (25 July) (Sleight 1988:126-31). But the most impressive version of the dance in recent years has been that of the village of Teotitlán del Valle, where it is performed for at least three fiestas a year, including *la fiesta de la preciosa sangre* (the festival of the precious blood of Christ) during the week of the first Wednesday in July. It was at this fiesta that I saw the dance in 1994.

The fiesta began in earnest on Monday afternoon. Shortly after 4:00 P.M., women and girls in traditional dress (white, embroidered *huipiles* or blouses; crimson, calf-length skirts; and red sashes at the waist) began to gather in the large courtyard in front of the church. Each brought a *canasta de flores*: a bamboo frame decorated with flowers, colored crepe paper, beads, and other ornaments, all surrounding a large religious poster mounted on cardboard. The posters featured a variety of subjects, including the Virgin of Guadalupe and, as befitted this particular fiesta, the crucified Christ with a stream of blood flowing from his side. Set upright on the pavement, each *canasta* was quite tall enough to hide its bearer. Also milling about the courtyard was a contingent of small boys carrying bulrushes, plantain leaves, and various emblems mounted on poles. A stuffed toy lamb impaled on one of the poles referred to the Christ, but many of the other emblems seemed to have only decorative significance. And, waiting under the arches to the south of the church door were two globular banners of white cloth (cf., Starr 1908:17-19) stretched over a spherical bamboo frame some ten feet in diameter, on which were painted pictures of Christ crucified, the Virgin, the sun, and the moon. These, too, were mounted on poles.

At about 4:45 P.M., a brass band arrived leading the dancers. Cortés was represented by a middle-aged man, the *maestro* of the entire troupe, and his second-in-command (Pedro de Alvarado) by a boy of about 13 years of age, but the rest of the Spanish *soldados* were all played by small boys. The conquistadors wore black uniforms trimmed with gold braid, and each carried a sword and a toy rifle. Cortés, Alvarado, and the smallest soldado of all, known as the *Cortesito* (little Cortés), wore white plumes in their hats. Cortés and the *Cortesito* also wore sashes across their chests in the Spanish colors of yellow and orange. One of the young *soldados* carried a Spanish flag; another held aloft a banner portraying the Virgin.

Moctezuma, too, was played by a middle-aged man, perhaps in his late forties, and his soldiers were all represented by young men in their late teens or twenties. The Indians wore brightly colored shirts, mail breastplates made of old Spanish dollars "to suggest sun disks" (Augur 1954:70), and white cotton



2. The women in the procession of the Fiesta de la Preciosa Sangre hold their huge canastas on top of their heads. Teotitlán del Valle, Mexico, July 1994.  
(Photo by Max Harris)

trousers trimmed at the knees and ankles with the Mexican national colors of green and orange. A long, colored scarf hung from each elbow, and another, fully opened to display its design, stretched down the dancer's back to his waist. Some wore, over this scarf, a loose banner displaying the crucified Christ or the Virgin of Guadalupe. Each dancer carried, in his right hand, a *sonaja* (rattle) made of a small gourd attached to a handle made of wood or a deer's hoof, and, in his left hand, a small, colorfully painted wooden *palma* (fan), which would serve as a token shield in the mock battles with the Spaniards. The most splendid element of each Indian's costume, however, was an enormous, circular headdress, about three feet in radius, made of thousands of soft downy feathers in radiating tiers, some white but the others dyed an extraordinary variety of colors. Amidst the feathers were small, circular mirrors

that reflected the sun and, when the dancers were in motion, scattered light in swirling patterns across the playing area.

Moctezuma was accompanied by two girls of about seven or eight years of age. To his right, wearing a multicolored dress and a small feathered headdress shaped like a single slice rather than a full circle, was La Malinche. To Moctezuma's left, wearing a crimson dress bordered in yellow and a Spanish-style hat, was Doña Marina. In *la danza de la pluma*, despite the mistaken notion of some observers (e.g., Starr 1896:166; Cohen 1993:152–53) that both girls represent "Malinches," Malinche and Doña Marina are clearly distinguished. Malinche, in indigenous dress, represents Moctezuma's wife and remains with him throughout. Doña Marina, in Spanish costume, begins with Moctezuma, but transfers to the Spanish side halfway through the dance. She is also known by the Indian name of Sehuapila, derived, according to Gilmoor, "from the Nahuatl *cihua*, 'woman,' and *pilli*, 'noble'" (1983:104).

Finally, there were two *negritos*, so named because of their black wooden masks, shaped like the face of a boar, with a protruding snout painted red at the nostrils, and two large, white tusks. The negritos wore white, long-sleeved shirts, colored vests, trousers, and soft, fringed hats. One negrito, linked to the Spaniards, wore red, yellow, and black. The other, linked to the Indians, wore red, yellow, and green. The recognition of this small distinction in identity would, in the end, prove crucial to my discernment of the hidden transcript. Both negritos carried whips. To call such characters "clowns," as Elsie Clews



3. Cortés was represented by a middle-aged man, the maestro of the entire troupe, in the July 1994 *danza de la pluma*. (Photo by Max Harris)



4. The two negritos are so named because of their black wooden masks, which are shaped like the face of a boar, with a protruding snout and two tusks. *La danza de la pluma*, Teotitlán del Valle. (Photo by Max Harris)



5. The sixteen Indian danzantes face one another in two parallel lines stretching across the dance space from the seated Moctezuma. July 1994, Teotitlán del Valle, Mexico. (Photo by Max Harris)

Parsons (1936:252) and many others do, can be misleading. Although, in the manner of "sacred clowns" throughout Mesoamerica, they do engage in mimicry of the dancers and in other comic antics, they are also required to monitor the dance: straightening the dancers' costumes, clearing the dance floor of even the slightest debris, and moving stage properties. One spectator explained the role of the negritos to me with the Zapotec word *camb*, derived from the Spanish *ayudante de campo*, "aide-de-camp" (cf., Parsons 1936:258, "compos"). The negritos, he said, were the dancers' "ayudantes."

Shortly after 5:00 P.M., a procession formed and left the churchyard to wend its way through the village streets. At the head of the parade was a man launching handheld rockets, whose fuses he lit with a smoldering log. He was followed by two musicians, one playing a small drum, the other a short pipe. Then came the boys with their rushes and mounted emblems, a brass and wind band of some 30 men, and the first of the two spherical banners. Next were the women, 250 or more in two parallel lines, their huge canastas now held with upraised hands on top of their heads. Some of the women were barefoot; most wore sandals; many sweated profusely under the weight of the canastas. A second band of musicians followed, and then came the conquistadors, an army of 16 little boys led by the adolescent Alvarado and middle-aged Cortés. Behind them were Moctezuma's 16 danzantes, in two parallel lines, followed three abreast by Malinche, Moctezuma, and Doña Marina. Bringing up the rear was the second of the globular banners, stopping every so often, because of its weight, to change bearers. A small crowd followed the procession. Many other villagers lined the streets to watch. The procession returned to the churchyard at about 6:30 P.M. and, I was told, formed up again at 8:00 P.M. to follow the same route in reverse. By then, I had caught the last bus back to Oaxaca for the night. This procession, in which the dancers took part but did not dance, constituted the *convite* or "invitation" to the fiesta.

The danza was performed for the first time, albeit in an abbreviated version, the next day (Tuesday). Beginning at about 4:00 P.M., the dancers traced the narrative of the conquest for approximately four hours, and then stopped for the night. On Wednesday, the day of the fiesta de la preciosa sangre itself, the dance was presented in its entirety, beginning in bright sunshine shortly before noon and ending after eight o'clock at night under artificial lights strung across the churchyard. Thursday was a day of rest, and then the entire three-

day sequence was repeated: procession (Friday), partial performance (Saturday), and complete version (Sunday).

Earlier accounts of the dance had prepared me for some elements of the hidden transcript. When Starr, in 1896, saw a *danza de la conquista* at Juquila, 75 miles west of the city of Oaxaca, he remarked on the difference between the fine costumes of the Indians and the plain ones of the Spaniards. "In dress and armament," he wrote, "the white men [...] present a truly ridiculous appearance" (1896:167). Toor, who saw the *danza de la pluma* in 1925 at Zaachila, about ten miles south of Oaxaca, was sure that this contrast was intended to disparage the Spaniards. "Moctezuma and his captains," she observed, "looked and danced like gods," but Cortés "was accompanied by a lot of small boys, stiffly dressed in blue uniforms." Although "Cortés and Christianity conquered," Toor concluded, "the Conquest was a lie." Aesthetic victory clearly belonged to the Indians (1926:5-6).

It is not simply a matter of Moctezuma and his men having the better costumes. They also, as Toor noticed, have the better dance steps. While Moctezuma and his courtiers engage in elaborate whirling dances, leaping high in the air, kneeling, and circling, Cortés and the Spaniards never break into anything more complicated than a march. The Aztecs, too, hold the playing area for a greater proportion of the time, while the Spaniards spend much of the dance seated quietly on a wooden bench near the church door. The disparity of ages is also significant. The 16th-century Spanish justification for the conquest of the New World depended, in part, on the notion that the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas were like children and needed the civilizing government of mature Europeans. For the Indian performers to assign all the Spanish roles but that of Cortés himself to children is quietly to reverse this argument.

Some observers have even suggested that Moctezuma might occasionally gain the military victory. Gilmoor (1983:104-05) cites a text from Cuilapán (Loubat 1900) which "ends with the defeat of the Spaniards," but she then reasons that the text "must have been missing the last page or two." Parsons (1936:256) reports that in the *danza de la pluma* that she saw at Santa Ana del Valle, a village about three miles north of Tlacolula, "the usual order" of victory was reversed. "Having Montezuma get the better of Cortés was an innovation of a nationalistic 'revolutionary' character," she explains. And Jeffrey Cohen, who saw the *danza de la pluma* in Teotitlán del Valle in 1986, states that

Cortez's triumph is short lived. In the last act of the dance Moctezuma is resurrected. Dancing a final time the Spaniards and the Aztecs battle again. In the end it is Cortez who is vanquished. [Doña Marina] rejoins Moctezuma and the *danzantes* dance as a group in the open plaza. With pre-contact order restored the dance comes to an end. (1993:150; 1994)

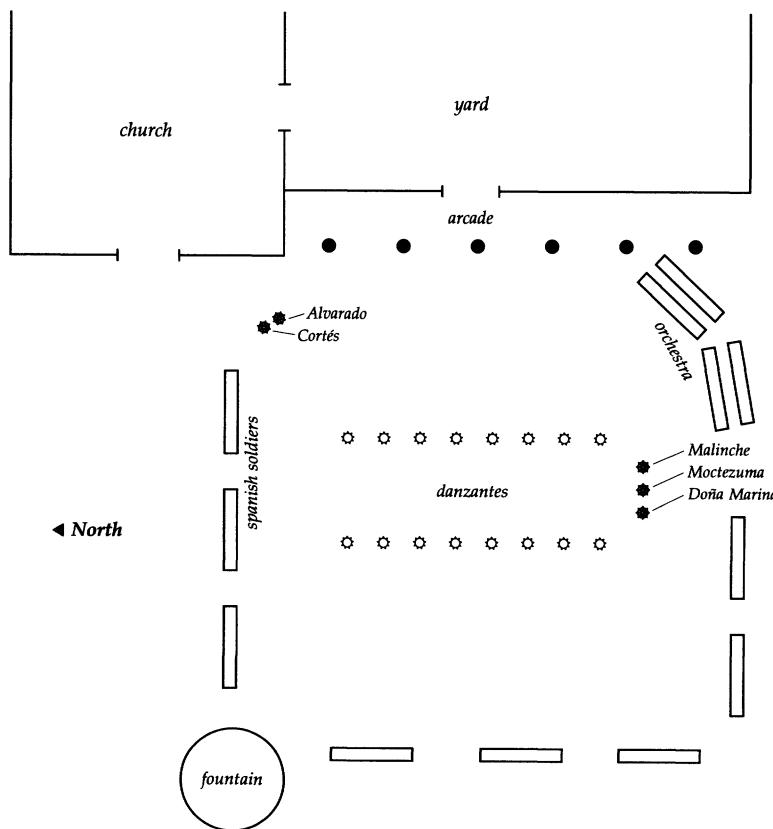
Cohen understands Moctezuma's resurrection to speak to the tension between the nation-state of Mexico, "symbolized by Cortez and his men," and the local Zapotec community, represented by the Aztecs:

The finale of the dance and the banishment of Cortez are a metaphor through which the people of Teotitlán del Valle construct an alternative world. This is not a world where the Indian is subordinate to Mestizo, nor is it a place where Indians are thought of as relics of an indigenous, ancient past. Generated from the success of the *danzantes*, this new world is Zapotec, with Teotitlán del Valle as its center. The Mexican state (signified by Cortez and his men) is—at least for a moment—banished. The world is purified and returned to its indigenous glory. (1993:150)

This may well be the case. Folk theatre is remarkably flexible in its ability to sustain multiple historical (and prophetic) referents in a single action. But, if I am correct, the Zapotec vision of "an alternative world" draws heavily on native expectations that Moctezuma will return to initiate a new cycle of indigenous rule. Indeed, I would suggest that it is this messianic expectation arising out of the narrative of the conquest that is the fundamental vision of the dance, and that any particular application to the relationship between the local community and the state, although pertinent, is secondary.

As for me, I saw neither resurrection nor overt indigenous victory. Indeed, nothing that I had read prepared me for the brief but, once spotted, unmistakable way in which Moctezuma's victory was finally signaled. The oblique signaling of the victor's identity, however, must follow a reading of the dance as a whole.

The "dance floor" was a square whose sides measured about 100 feet (plate 6). It was delineated to the east by part of the church facade and an adjacent arcade, from which one entered the enclosed yard where the dancers ate their food and massaged their muscles when not involved in the action. The other three sides were marked off by long wooden benches. As the dance began, Cortés sat in a chair at the northeast corner of the playing area, just outside the church door. His diminutive soldiers occupied the bench nearest him. Moctezuma sat on a wooden throne to the south of the dance floor, flanked by Malinche and Doña Marina, each on her own throne. The 16 Indian danzantes faced one another in two parallel lines stretching across the dance floor from the seated Moctezuma. Although the Spanish costumes never varied, Moctezuma and his court alternated dress from one day to the next. One day, the men's white cotton pants were trimmed in the Mexican national col-



6. Diagram of the dance space for *la danza de la pluma*, Teotitlán del Valle, Mexico.

ors and, the next day, in a more elaborate, indigenous design. Malinche and Marina each wore three different dresses, of similar designs but different colors, over the course of the fiesta.

The members of the orchestra (*sinfonía*) sat on benches in the shade of a large tree at the southeast corner of the dance floor. Between them, the 28 musicians played two bass tubas, two baritone tubas, a French horn, three trombones, five trumpets, five saxophones, seven clarinets, a bass drum, a pair of cymbals, and a kettle drum. Such an orchestra, I was told, had at the end of the 19th century replaced the indigenous *teponaztli* (drum) and flute that previously accompanied the danza de la pluma (c.f., Thomson 1994). According to a typed list pegged to the rim of the bass drum, the danza de la pluma consisted of 41 distinct *bailes*. (In Mexico, both “danza” and “baile” translate the English word “dance.” “Danza” here refers to the narrative ritual as a whole, and “baile” to the music [waltz, polka, schottisch, jota, zandunga, etc.] to which each episode was danced. I have reproduced the list of bailes in the box on page 117 and, in the account which follows, will refer to the bailes with parenthetical numbers.)

During the first two bailes (1–2), Cortés marched to and fro in front of his soldiers, encouraging them for the task ahead. They were understood to be still in Spain. The next four bailes (3–6) featured Moctezuma and his court. Starr had noted that the early part of the danza de la conquista “represented the life of the Indians before the Conquest—Montezuma in his court, with the amusements celebrated for his entertainment” (1908:30). This was, I take it, the intent of these bailes. The most elaborate was a *schottis* (5), lasting a full 15 minutes, during which Moctezuma, Malinche, and Marina advanced, rotating around one another, between the lines of courtiers, while the courtiers, jumping, kneeling, and whirling, formed squares and circles, which then developed into lines that wove complex patterns lengthwise and sideways across the dance floor. During the *descante primero* (6), Moctezuma addressed his army, much as Cortés had done earlier. Meanwhile, the negritos flirted with foreign tourists and improvised comic routines with the still unoccupied wooden benches. When fireworks exploded, they pretended to have been shot, writhing on the ground in mock death throes.

The simple drumbeat of the *marcha de tarola* (7) accompanied Spanish speeches. Each small boy marched stiffly up to Cortés to deliver his declaration of allegiance and his boast of success. Moctezuma and his followers, too, spoke of liberty and of defending “*la patria*” (8). Then, to a *marcha alegre* (9), the Indians danced and the Spaniards marched in single file around the perimeter of the dance floor, four times veering off to cross the center of the square in opposite directions, clashing Spanish swords and Indian shields as they passed. The negritos followed, one at the end of each file, striking whips as they passed one another. Next came the first “meeting” (*encuentro*) of Moctezuma and Cortés. For this, the Indians formed a series of rectangles on the dance floor, around which Moctezuma walked, flanked by Malinche and Marina. Cortés pursued them, speaking of the Spanish law and the Catholic religion to which he was going to subject the Aztecs, but never quite catching up with his opponent. This encounter, in which Cortés threatened and chased but never actually met Moctezuma, clearly had a comic dimension. Imperial European rhetoric was being juxtaposed to indigenous dignity and quietly mocked.

Such dissonance between speech and action is typical of the interplay between public and hidden transcripts in Mesoamerican folk performance. While the public transcript is inscribed in the text that dictates speech, the hidden transcript is generally encoded in the visual elements of the performance. The disparity of ages and costumes, the aesthetic dominance of the dance floor by the Aztecs, and the failure of the hectoring Cortés to catch the silent Moctezuma

## Lista de bailes para la Danza de la Pluma 1993-1995

1. Himno de Cortes para canto menor 4 versos.
2. Eslua por Hernan Cortes y se repite canto menor.
3. Canto menor para Moctezuma, despues rejistro, y se repite cantomenor.
4. Espacio 4 veces.
5. Schottis en conjunto 2 veces completo.
6. Descante 1º 4 veces.
7. Marcha de Tarola para cada soldado para relaciones.
8. Relacion de los danzantes.
9. Marcha alegre.
10. Encuentro de Moctezuma y Hernan Cortes y sus relaciones.
11. Himno sencillo 4 veces.
12. Madre del Cordero Jota Española.
13. Schottis para 4 reyes.
14. Repite descante 1º para cada 2 danzantes.
15. Descante 2º 4 veces.
16. Marcha de Tarola para acercante al palacio.
17. Himno de Cortes 4 veces completo.
18. Rosita vals 4 veces.
19. Repite schottis para 4 reyes.
20. Himno sencillo 4 veces.
21. Vals sencillo el conjunto elisa.
22. La Zandunga.
23. Marcha J. P. C. Paso redoblado.
24. Marcha de Tarola para cada soldado.
25. Schottis para 2 capitanes.
26. Relacion y repite schottis 2 capitanes.
27. Marcha de Tarola para Alvarado y se repite.
28. Una parte de himno de Cortes para canta menor para Marina.
29. Cuadrillas la primavera.
30. Himno grande.
31. Schottis por 2 Teotil.
32. Repite schottis por 2 Teotil.
33. Vals de Numero Amelia.
34. Marcha Combinada con himno 4 veces para 1ª guerra.
35. Vals solo teotil canta y no llores.
36. Marcha Alegre.
37. Marcha funebre preso Cortes con relaciones.
38. Polka Aurora de 95.
39. Danzas Oaxaqueñas.
40. Marcha Alegre.
41. Marcha Funebre preso Moctezuma con relaciones.



7. *In la danza de la pluma, the Spaniards (played by young boys) spend much of their time seated quietly on a wooden bench near the church door.*  
*(Photo by Max Harris)*

are all signs that stand apart from the prescribed speeches. In the danza de la pluma, as in so many Mexican dances, the dialog was delivered *sotto voce* (in Spanish) and was only audible at close quarters. It made no difference. The local audience knew the gist of the story, and the hidden transcript, with which their sympathies lay, was being played out not in verbal but in visual signs.

More indigenous bailes followed: a *himno sencillo* (11) involving all the Indian dancers; a lively *jota española* (12) danced with castanets and twirling skirts and petticoats by Malinche and Marina between the lines of danzantes; and a schottis (13) that began with a lilting clarinet solo and was danced by four "kings" (*reyes*) of Moctezuma's court. Then Malinche removed Moctezuma's *corona* (crown or headdress), and the three thrones were moved to the center of the dance floor. There, in his "palace," Moctezuma "fell asleep" (14) and in his dreams saw fearful omens. The dancers begged him to wake and to be strong. "If you lose, señor," they told him, "we will lose, too." Finally (15), they formed a defensive circle around him. By this time, the dance had been in progress for nearly two hours.

Next, to a *marcha de tarola* (16), Cortés and his soldiers advanced on Moctezuma's "palace" from one side of the dance floor after another, stopping each time at the circle of danzantes and firing their toy rifles. After the last advance, Cortés and Alvarado demanded Moctezuma's submission. Then, Cortés performed his most elegant baile (17), a slow march from one corner of the dance floor to the next, alternately approaching and withdrawing from the circle of Indians in the middle of the dance floor. At each corner, he stood on a chair—placed there by the Spanish negrito—raised his sword, and announced imperiously that he was awaiting Moctezuma's surrender. Cortés's tour of the dance floor completed, the Spanish troops closed in on the palace, completely surrounding the Aztecs. The concentric circles of Indians and conquistadors be-

gan to move anticlockwise, increasing speed as they went. Mesoamerican ritual dancers circle in “a counterclockwise, that is, sunwise, direction,” corresponding to the movement of the sun around calendric representations of the four cardinal points (Markman and Markman 1989:123). Soon the outer circle of short-legged Spaniards were unable to keep up with the inner circle of adult Aztecs, and the aspiring conquistadors peeled off to return to their bench by the church door. Once again, as with the comic encounter of Cortés and Moctezuma, the movement of the dancers had belied the text. In this instance, the sacred motion of the Aztecs in the anticlockwise direction of the sun’s trajectory had sufficed to repel the Spaniards; the image of little boys effortlessly outraced by grown men had added a comic dimension to the scene.

As the afternoon wore on, the crowd, sparse at first, began to thicken. Village elders were seated on benches in front of the arcade, and baskets of fruit began to arrive, placed first at the elders’ feet and then distributed, along with beer and *mezcal* (a fermented drink made from the juice of the agave cactus), to friends in the audience. The negritos brought water to the dancers and went through a slapstick routine with the water bucket and the ladle. Two more bailes were performed by Moctezuma’s court: a *vals* (18), in which the danzantes waltzed anticlockwise around Doña Marina, and a repeat of the schottis for four kings (19). Then the thrones of Moctezuma and the two royal women were returned to the south end of the dance floor.

On Sunday, I climbed the tightly spiraled stone staircase inside the bell tower to watch the dancers from the church roof, whence I could discern more clearly the complex patterns (squares, stars, circles, and criss-crossing lines) formed by the danzantes. Occasionally, they paused to let the wind, which blew against their tall headdresses, die down before they attempted one of the more difficult routines. Moctezuma, his strength regained, danced two solo bailes (20–21) between the rows of danzantes. A *zandunga* (22) followed, in which the whirling and interweaving of the whole court alternated with a lively duet by Malinche and Marina. Then the Spaniards once again marched (23) in pursuit of the Indians, always crossing the center of the dance floor just too late to catch the Indians who danced away before the soldiers arrived.

Left, for once, in possession of the dance floor, the boy soldiers again pledged their valor (24), but resorted to what was described to me as a “trick.” Alvarado and the Cortesito approached two of Moctezuma’s captains, who were dancing a schottis (25). The *capitanes* graciously escorted the Spanish embassy to Moctezuma, and, after some negotiation, Doña Marina left with the Spaniards (26–27). Holding a cross and a Spanish flag, she was taken to Cortés, where she was introduced by her indigenous name, “the beautiful Sehuapila,” and seated next to the Spanish leader. In exchange for Marina’s “conversion” and her agreement to help the Spaniards, the Indians believed they had received a promise of peace. But Cortés had not given his word—he had tricked Moctezuma by sending the Cortesito instead—and so he announced, “Tomorrow we march on Tenochtitlán” (28).

Believing themselves to be safe from attack, the Indians danced perhaps their most beautiful sequence of bailes: a quadrille (29), an *himno grande* (30), a schottis (31–32), and a waltz (33), together lasting over an hour. The watching crowd had grown by now to about 15 hundred, and the lanes leading to the churchyard were packed with vendors selling bottled drinks and *licuados*, fruit, baked *tamales*, candies, and piles of cream cakes swarming with wasps. From time to time, one of the negritos would wipe the face of a woman in the crowd and then try to wipe a man’s face with the same handkerchief. Everybody laughed. Although Parsons (1936:255) complained that “nobody would tell me [...] the meaning of [this] joke,” it was explained to me as a disclosure of concealed sexual desire or liaison.

8. At the end of the "First War" of la danza de la pluma in Teotitlán del Valle, Indians and conquistadors form a circle, in which each Indian faces a conquistador. The latter yields his sword and rifle, signifying submission. (Photo by Max Harris)



9. Using his whip as a rope, the Indian negrito captures his Spanish counterpart. July 1994. (Photo by Max Harris)



As the sun set over the village, lights were strung over the churchyard, and the "first war" was staged (34). Lines of tiny soldiers advanced on adult Indians—the latter's stature almost doubled by their headdresses—and clashed sword against shield. Cortés and Moctezuma, too, fought a stylized duet. Cortés and his soldiers then "entered the city," lined up behind Moctezuma's throne, and watched the Indians dance a waltz (35). Another battle followed (36), during which Cortés suffered his first military defeat. Indians and conquistadors formed a circle, in which each Indian was paired with and faced a conquistador. The

latter yielded his sword and rifle, signifying submission (37). This represented, I was told, the “*noche triste*,” when Cortés’s forces were driven from Tenochtitlán with much loss of life. Meanwhile, the negritos, outside the circle, enacted their own version of Spanish defeat: using his whip as a rope, the Indian negrito captured his Spanish counterpart, unmasked him, and displayed him in defeat to the crowd. In celebration of their victory, the Indians danced a polka (38) and some traditional *danzas Oaxaqueñas* (39). But their triumph was short-lived. The war began again (40), and, in the last baile of the official list, the circle of defeat was repeated (41). But, this time, the Indians were disarmed, kneeling before and surrendering their headdresses to the Spaniards. The Spanish negrito captured and paraded his Indian counterpart in defeat.

On Wednesday, I had left at this point, persuaded that the narrative of the dance ended in military victory for the Spaniards. But I was puzzled, for inquiries about the nature of this victory yielded ambivalent answers. One group of older men watching the dance assured me that Moctezuma won, but a younger man, who claimed to have danced the role of Moctezuma for three years, insisted that victory lay with Cortés. When I asked the dancers playing Cortés and Moctezuma, each asserted confidently (and in the other’s absence) that his character was the victor. But, on Sunday, after the final funeral march for the capture of Moctezuma (41), I was advised not to leave, for there would be two more bailes that were not included in the “public transcript” pegged to the sinfonía’s bass drum.

Moctezuma and his soldiers replaced their headdresses. Moctezuma returned to his throne, and Malinche sat beside him. Spanish soldiers and indigenous warriors together formed two parallel lines stretching away from Moctezuma across the dance floor. The first of the two unofficial bailes was a joyous sequence of *petenera*, *paloma*, and *jarabe*, performed by Malinche and Marina, at the end of which Marina returned to Moctezuma and sat beside the restored Aztec monarch. She had returned from Cortés to her indigenous origins. The baile itself was explained to me variously as representing “reconciliation” or “joy.”

The final and thematically conclusive baile was a *danza de los negritos*. Parsons had mentioned such a closing dance in Santa Ana del Valle (“Mock dance with kerchief by the two Negritos. This is the *finale*, and the audience scatters” [1936:256]), but had assigned it no meaning. What I saw was quite clear as to its intent. Between the two lines of Indians and Spaniards, the negritos engaged in a brief comic mime involving chairs and bandannas. It ended with the Indian negrito suffocating his Spanish counterpart by pressing him hard against the ground with a chair. The Spanish negrito imitated death throes and lay still. The final image of the entire eight-hour *danza de la pluma*, therefore, was one of Spanish defeat.

The ready intelligibility of the *danza de los negritos* built on much that had gone before. We had learned, for example, to read the sign of death throes early in the afternoon when the negritos had comically responded to the explosion of firecrackers with the same enacted sign. We had learned, too, during the course of the performance, to associate one negrito with the Spanish army and the other with the Aztecs. And, finally, we had seen the negritos visually summarize the outcome of the two previous “wars” between Spaniards and Aztecs in their own enacted relationships as captor and captive. Whereas before we had read the visual summary of the negritos in light of the more prominent action of those playing the armies of Cortés and Moctezuma, we were now meant to infer, from the action of the negritos alone, an unseen, third and decisive war between Cortés and Moctezuma. We were being asked to imagine, in other words, an episode (the final defeat of Cortés) whose direct enactment the public transcript could not tolerate but to whose absence the negritos could allude.

While the performers, then, did not directly enact the resurrection of Moctezuma, as they had when Cohen saw the dance, they no less clearly signaled, in the two unlisted bailes, the Aztec king's restoration to his throne and his ensuing triumph over invading forces. This was not a rewriting of 16th-century history, for the Zapotecs do not believe that Moctezuma rose from the dead and defeated the historical Cortés. Nor was it primarily—although it may have been so subordinately—a reflection of contemporary politics. Rather, I am persuaded, it was first a declaration of faith in the promise of Moctezuma's return and the consequent emancipation of "his people" from outside domination. That such a faith should be enacted in bailes pointedly omitted from the official list of dances is, of course, entirely consistent with Scott's understanding of the relationship between public and hidden transcripts.

### *La danza de los matachines*

The danza de los matachines is the only ritual dance performed in both Hispanic and Native American communities in New Mexico. In the Hispanic communities, such as Alcalde (Parsons 1929:218–19), Arroyo Seco (Rodríguez 1994), and Bernalillo (Sinclair 1980:62–66), the dance appears to be understood only in terms of its public transcript, according to which it dramatizes, in general, "the triumph of good over evil, Christianity over paganism" (Kloepfel 1968:7) and, in particular, the conversion of Moctezuma (Champe 1983:84). In the Native American pueblos, although the public transcript officially remains intact and the performance of the dance is embedded in the liturgical calendar of the Church and its accompanying ritual, a hidden transcript of indigenous resistance emerges. For there the dance may also be read as a dramatized victory of indigenous "ghost warriors," led by the messianic Moctezuma, over intrusive "foreign cultures" (Treviño and Gilles 1991:15). In both cases, as Sylvia Rodríguez has shown in the case of the Taos and Arroyo Seco matachines, particular performances also make reference to local politics and ethnic relationships (Rodríguez 1991, 1994).

A single performance lasting between half an hour (in Santa Clara Pueblo) and an hour (in Bernalillo and San Juan Pueblo), the danza de los matachines is shorter than the danza de la pluma. Several performances may be given in a single day. Common to all versions is a cast of characters consisting of the *monarca*, who is said to represent Moctezuma; 10 to 14 *danzantes*, who represent his "soldiers"; Malinche; an *abuelo* (grandfather or ancestor); and a *toro* (bull). The *monarca*, and each *danzante*, carries a gourd rattle and a painted wooden, three-pronged fan (*palma*). The most distinctive features of each costume are a long cape of variegated colored ribbons and a headdress (*cupil*) shaped like a bishop's miter and, in many of the Native American pueblos, decorated with eagle feathers. In San Ildefonso and Picuris Pueblos, the headdresses are more rounded and, in the *monarca*'s case, topped with a small cross. In Bernalillo, Moctezuma wears a headdress (*corona*) shaped like a turban and adorned with clusters of paper flowers. Malinche is ordinarily played by a young girl in a white, First Communion dress; in Santa Clara Pueblo, where the dance is accompanied by native drums rather than the more common Hispanic guitar and fiddle, she wears native dress. The *abuelo* carries a whip, usually wears a mask, and is sometimes accompanied by a second *abuelo* or *abuela* (grandmother), the latter played by a man in woman's clothing. The *abuelos'* office is much like that of the *negritos* in the danza de la pluma: they clear the dance floor, check the dancers' costumes, and, in varying degrees, provide a comic counterpoint to the main action. At certain points, they play a crucial role in the dance's narrative. Finally, the *toro* wears a bull's headpiece and, in the manner of other Pueblo animal dancers, leans forward on two sticks to

represent the bull's front legs. There is no Cortés and there are no Spanish soldiers in the danza de los matachines, unless, as many believe (e.g., Morrison 1992:23), they are jointly and obliquely represented by the bull. Reference to the Spanish conquest is thus more indirect than it is in the danza de la pluma.

I first saw the danza de los matachines in Bernalillo, where it is danced each year during the *fiesta de San Lorenzo*, 9–11 August. The community believes that the fiesta was instituted in 1693 to celebrate the return of Spanish settlers to the area after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. San Lorenzo, it is said, was chosen as patron saint of the community because he had enabled so many of the settlers to escape with their lives when the Pueblo Revolt broke out on his feast day (10 August). The year that I saw the dance (1993) marked the 300th anniversary of the fiesta.



10. In Bernalillo, New Mexico, Malinche, wearing a First Communion dress, fights the bull in la danza de los matachines, August 1993. (Photo by Max Harris)



11. In Santa Clara Pueblo's danza de los matachines, Malinche wears native dress. 25 December 1994. (Photo by Max Harris)

The community's two sacred images of San Lorenzo had spent the previous year on a temporary shrine at one end of the living room of the *mayordomos presentes* (current stewards of the images). Brief prayers and songs had been offered to the saints on each of the nine evenings preceding the fiesta, and after the final novena on 8 August, the dancers had shared final instructions and a meal in which I, too, was invited to take part. At 3:00 P.M. on the afternoon of 9 August, the matachines opened the fiesta by dancing in the street outside the mayordomos' home. Two teams danced simultaneously, each with a single *monarca*, *abuelo*, and *toro*, two alternating *Malinches*, and fourteen *danzantes*, of whom four were designated *capitanes* (captains). The Moctezumas were dressed in white pants and shirts and a predominantly red corona. The *danzantes* wore black pants and white shirts. Their cupiles, from which hung black fringes that covered their faces, were decorated with pictures of Jesus, Mary, the martyrdom of San Lorenzo, or other religious icons. One, of an angel watching two children crossing a bridge, was explained to me by its wearer as a memorial to two babies whose loss his sister-in-law was still grieving. Some of the *danzantes*, in an innovation not yet accepted in the Native American pueblos, were women. The *abuelos*, dressed in black, were not masked. The *toros* were young men in black pants, red shirts, and bulls' heads. The *Malinches*, all in white, were about eight or nine years old. The musicians (two violinists and six guitarists) sat under the shade of a canopy to one side of the street.

The Bernalillo danza de los matachines consists of nine "dances" or "tunes," listed, together with explanations based on the "personal interpretations" of a former maestro of the troupe, Richard Kloepel (1968:8), in a souvenir program printed for the 1993 fiesta. (See the box on page 125. Subsequent parenthetical numbers in the text refer to this list and, after the virgule, to the corresponding sequence in Flavia Waters Champe's [1983:28–82] detailed annotation of the choreography and music of the San Ildefonso matachines dance.) The opening *marcha* (1/entrance) brought the dancers from the mayordomos' yard to the street. In the *cruzada* (2/2:3:b), the two lines of *danzantes* interwove, periodically forming a cross, a movement interpreted by the public transcript of the Bernalillo program, in Catholic terms, as "the sign of the cross." *La cambiada* (3/2:1) required each dancer, in turn, to change positions with the dancer at the far end of the opposite line. Kloepel (1968:8) explains this sequence as "Montezuma leading his people" and "the first signs of trouble." Like the early bailes of the danza de la pluma, it is presumably understood to represent the activity of the Aztecs before and in response to the arrival of the Spaniards.

The Bernalillo narrative takes a confusing turn with the next dance, *la malinche/la vuelta* (4:1:2–3). Misled by the identical names of Cortés's indigenous mistress and Moctezuma's mythical daughter, Kloepel (1968:8) interprets the dance as "Malinche's movements between the [Spanish] troops and her people, carrying messages undeterred" and "the betrayal of her father, Montezuma, in favor of Cortez." Since neither Cortés nor the Spanish troops are represented, it is hard to imagine how Malinche's actions can be said to denote such a negotiation and betrayal, but the Catholic public transcript of Bernalillo requires it. As we shall see, Treviño and Gilles, reading the dance from a Native American perspective, assign this sequence an entirely different meaning. In any case, in Bernalillo, the *abuelo* escorted Malinche in and out of the rows of *danzantes* until she reached Moctezuma. Since both teams were dancing simultaneously, there was a kind of mirror image when the two *Malinches*, each led by an *abuelo*, independently arrived at the two *monarcas* seated side by side under the musicians' canopy. As the *abuelos* watched, each Malinche and *monarca* extended his or her right hand and circled it in alter-

## Bailes para la danza de la pluma de Bernalillo

The nine “tunes” or “dances” of the Bernalillo danza de los matachines, together with explanations based on the “personal interpretations” of Richard Kloepel (1968:8), a former maestro of the troupe, as printed in the program for 1993.

1. La Marcha - The entrance.
2. La Cruzada - The sign of the cross to begin.
3. La Cambiada - Montezuma leading his people.
4. La Malinche/La Vuelta - Malinche begins the conversion of the Aztec people and her father; Montezuma’s struggle between Paganism and Christianity.
5. La Toreada del Toro - The fighting of the bull: Christianity vs. Paganism.
6. La Cruzada - The sign of the cross as good overcomes evil.
7. La Tendida - Dance of celebration.
8. La Patadita/La Promesa - The promise of the Aztec people and their commitment to Christianity. This is also the dance used by the community to complete their Promesa and give honor to their Patron, San Lorenzo.
9. La Corrida - The triumphant procession of the Aztec people. It is also the procession dance to lead San Lorenzo through the streets of Bernalillo.

nating directions over and under the other’s hand. According to the program, Malinche thereby began “the conversion of the Aztec people and her father.” There followed what Champe calls “the pantomime of the ‘struggle forward,’” during which the monarca, now risen from his chair, moved slowly from one end of the line of danzantes to the other, lunging forward with one foot, and dragging the other to join it, while the abuelo massaged his knees. Champe speculates that this is intended “to symbolize Montezuma’s struggle to accept Christianity” (1983:84).

Then the bull, who until now had stayed outside the lines of dancers, periodically charging the abuelo or being caught unawares by the snapped tip of the latter’s whip, intervened (5/2:2b-c). In danced combat, he confronted, in turn, the monarca, Malinche, the four captains, and the abuelo. Finally, the abuelo drew a pistol and shot the bull dead. This represented, according to John Sinclair’s version of the public transcript, “the victory of good over evil, Christianity over paganism, Spain over Africa [the Moors]” (1980:65). It was followed by a second version of the cruzada (6), joyously “celebrating the conquest” (Kloepel 1968:8); by *la tendida* (7/3:3), “a ballad demonstrating happiness or rejoicing” (Kloepel 1968:8); and *la patadita* (8/3:1), representing, according to the program, the commitment to Christianity of both the Aztecs and the residents of Bernalillo, many of whom join the dance at this point. With this, for the time being, the dance had concluded.

Two hours later, the final episode of the dance—the *corrida* (9)—was played out, as the matachines danced at the head of a religious procession in which the images of San Lorenzo were carried from the house of the mayordomos to the parish church. Pilgrims followed, crowds lined the street, and the abuelos made sure that no tourists, in their eagerness to take photographs, dishonored

12. *La danza de los matachines* in Bernalillo, New Mexico, ends with the matachines dancing through the streets, leading a religious procession in which images of San Lorenzo are carried to the parish church. (Photo by Max Harris)



the saint by running in front of the procession. Two official guards (*rifles*) punctuated the prayers and singing from time to time by firing their rifles into the air. The procession is variously explained as “the triumphant march of Malinche after having accomplished her mission” (Kloepel 1968:8) and, in the program, as “the triumphant procession of the [converted] Aztec people.”

The Catholic interpretation of the dance was reinforced the next morning (10 August) at the fiesta mass, in which the matachines, in full regalia, took an honored part. The danzantes lined the aisles, one at the end of each pew. The collection was taken by the toros and abuelos, and the bread and wine were brought up the central aisle by the Malinches, escorted by the monarcas. Together the Malinches and Moctezumas passed beneath a row of arches formed by the danzantes’ palmas. The priest named all those who were taking part in the dance, and the congregation applauded. The converted Aztecs now participated in the Catholic mass. Afterwards, the matachines danced again in front of a procession returning the images of San Lorenzo to the mayordomos’ house. In the afternoon, the entire dance was repeated and a final procession bore the images to their new home in the house of the *mayordomos entrantes* (new stewards). There, the next day (11 August), the matachines performed a final, abbreviated version of their dance, selecting only the joyous tunes of celebration. The Malinches were still in full costume, but the others wore headdresses, fiesta T-shirts, and blue jeans. At a meal afterwards at the house of the new mayordomos, the four Malinches gave a fine, impromptu rendition of Michael Jackson’s 1972 hit “Rockin’ Robin,” and one of the Moctezumas confessed to me that the meaning of the dance was difficult to ascertain and that “we need to do more research.”

Two scholars who have conducted extensive research into the history and meaning of the danza de los matachines are Adrian Treviño and Barbara Gilles. Resisting the prevailing notion that the dance was introduced to the Americas by the Spanish, Treviño and Gilles (1994) instead trace the history of the danza de los matachines to prehispanic dances, known variously as *toncontin* or *netotiliztli*, in which the Aztecs celebrated military victories over rival tribes. In particular, they refer to what John Bierhorst has called “the Aztec ghost-song ritual”:

The Aztec ghost-song may be described as a musical performance in which warrior-singers summon the ghosts of ancestors in order to swell their ranks and overwhelm their enemies. In the more elaborate ex-

amples the full ritual seems to have assumed the proportions of a mock battle, where singing, dancing, and drumming were equated with martial deeds. In response to the music, ghost warriors from paradise, led by ancestor kings, supposedly came "scattering," "raining," "flying," or "whirling" to earth. (Bierhorst 1985:3-4)

Treviño and Gilles read the *danza de los matachines* as a dramatized victory of indigenous ghost warriors, led by Moctezuma and Malinche, over intrusive "foreign cultures" (1991:15).

Not only does Treviño and Gilles' reading make better sense of the several elements of the dance than does the Catholic public transcript prevailing in Bernalillo, but it also alerts us to the dance's hidden transcript of resistance. Moreover, it explains the matachines' continued popularity amongst the Pueblo Indians, who can no more be expected to "celebrate the conquest" than can the Zapotec feather dancers of Teotitlán del Valle. And, it accords with the "Indian tradition" reported by Dumarest that "this dance was instituted by Montezuma that the descendants of his race might have the pleasure of mocking their conquerors" (1919:86). A dance whose public transcript appeals to the Catholic faith of the conquistadors' descendants while simultaneously enacting a hidden transcript in which Moctezuma rises from the dead to lead indigenous ghost warriors to victory over those descendants is a splendid vehicle for discreet mockery of the Indians' conquerors. One suspects that the "christianized Indians," who, as Treviño and Gilles suggest (1991:7), must have taught their Spanish masters in Bernalillo to dance the *danza de los matachines* on the anniversary of the Pueblo Revolt, were celebrating not so much the survival of the settlers as the temporary success of the revolt.

Over the Christmas season in 1994, I saw the *danza de los matachines* in three pueblos. Rather than follow the activities throughout the holiday in a

13. *Moctezuma, Malinche, and an abuelo lead the matachines in their opening dance in Picuris Pueblo's danza de los matachines, 24 December 1994. (Photo by Max Harris)*



single pueblo, I traveled from one to another to see several variations of the dance. I was in Picuris Pueblo on the afternoon of Christmas Eve; in San Juan Pueblo for a firelight procession led by the matachines after vespers on Christmas Eve, and again for two performances of the dance the following morning; and in Santa Clara on Christmas afternoon. There were minor varieties in costume and personnel among the three pueblos. In Picuris, the two abuelos wore store-bought rubber masks and were accompanied by an abuela who made suggestive movements to men in the crowd. In San Juan, the abuelos wore elaborate leather masks that covered the entire head (see also Champe 1983:91) and were similar to those worn by their namesakes in the Turtle Dance the next day (c.f., Parsons 1929:182; Dumarest 1919:fig. 2). One remarked laconically to an Anglo tourist in a garish cap, "I like your hat!" In Picuris, the bull was played by a man, whereas in San Juan and Santa Clara, he was played by a young boy. In Santa Clara, Malinche wore native dress; in Picuris and San Juan, she wore a white First Communion dress. The order of the "dances" also showed minor variations, but for the most part it was closer to that recorded by Champe in San Ildefonso (1983:21–82) than to that in Bernalillo. I will describe the dance as I saw it in San Juan Pueblo.

The San Juan team consisted of the *monanka* or Moctezuma, Malinche, ten *danzantes*, two abuelos, and the *toro*. As well as his bull's head and hide, the *toro* wore a sweatshirt with the word SAINTS emblazoned across the front. I suspect the choice was not accidental. In Jemez Pueblo, in 1993, I had seen Dallas Cowboys T-shirts worn in performance to connote U.S. military aggression (Harris 1994:156), and I suspect that the New Orleans Saints sweatshirt was chosen in this instance to link the *toro* with the religious pretensions of the conquistadors and their descendants.

The performance began with Moctezuma, Malinche, and the *danzantes* dancing the routine that Champe calls "El Monarca" (1983:1:1). After several minutes, Moctezuma moved backwards between the two rows of dancers, and each pair of dancers knelt as he passed. While the dancers remained in a kneeling position, an abuelo escorted Moctezuma to a chair at the far end of the rows. "When the time comes for Moctezuma to leave the physical world," Treviño and Gilles write, he is led "out of the dance area and to a place of honor in the spirit realm" by the abuelo, who represents not, as the word is usually translated, "a grandfather" but "a guardian ancestor spirit" (1991:11). The chair denoted Moctezuma's place of honor, and the kneeling position of the *danzantes* appeared to signal the death of his warriors. I take this phase of the dance to represent, in a highly compressed form, the entire period covered by the public transcript of the *danza de la pluma*: the life of the Indians before the arrival of the Europeans and the subsequent death in battle of Moctezuma and his soldiers. What followed concerned his resurrection.

Malinche wove her way through one line of *danzantes* after the other. "As the queen of the spirit realm," according to Treviño and Gilles (1991:12), Malinche was thus purifying and uniting the warrior spirits who had died honorably in battle. When she approached the seated Moctezuma, the entire drama focused briefly on the small space around the *monanka*'s chair, where "the circling motion of La Malinche's extended arm [brought] Moctezuma back to life" (Treviño and Gilles 1991:13). Rising from his chair, Moctezuma moved with difficulty between the rows of kneeling warriors. One of the abuelos massaged his legs. Several times, too, the abuelo coiled his whip on the ground like a snake and then held it under Moctezuma's foot, thereby hastening the *monanka*'s recovery. Nothing suggested the religious conversion that Champe sees in this episode. Treviño and Gilles offer a much more persuasive explanation:

Montezuma arises and begins the journey back to the world of substance. He slowly stretches his legs and makes cautious steps, trying to regain control of his physical self. He has been in the spirit realm for a long time. El abuelo rubs Montezuma's legs to reduce the stiffness. (1991:14)

Finally, the revived Moctezuma called on the ghost warriors to join him in battle. Two by two, the *danzantes* rose from their kneeling position to perform "the whirling motion that indicates travel between the spirit world and the world of substance" (Treviño and Gilles 1991:14).

At this point in San Juan, the *matachines* danced the *cruzada* and *cambiada* sequences that in Bernalillo had preceded the death and resurrection of Moctezuma. The Picuris and Santa Clara teams omitted the *cambiada* and postponed the *cruzada* until after the death of the *toro*. Treviño and Gilles understand these two episodes to represent Moctezuma leading the Aztecs "down the path towards Tenochtitlán, [...] the home of the Aztec empire." During this migration, Moctezuma teaches his people "skills and knowledge that [will] allow the native people to thrive" (1991:10–11). Depending on their place in the dance, the *cruzada* and *cambiada* can represent the original establishment of Aztec hegemony or its final reinstatement under the messianic emperor.

Then, in San Juan Pueblo, came the most striking episode. The bull, who until now had only occasionally skirmished to one side with the *abuelos*, was led into the playing area itself. In turn, he confronted Moctezuma, Malinche, and each of the ghost warriors. The battles were brief and stylized: the bull danced between the rows of dancers, passing his opponent with a brief toss of his head, while his adversary waved his *palma* or, in Malinche's case, her handkerchief. The two then repeated the pass in the opposite direction. When the last dancer had fought the bull, a small boy standing with the musi-



14. The kneeling position of the *danzantes* appears to signal the death of Moctezuma's warriors in *la danza de los matachines* in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, 25 December 1994. (Photo by Max Harris)

cians beat a drum roll, and an official fired a rifle into the air. The abuelos gave chase to the bull, finally capturing him with their whips. They laid the bull down on his back and covered him, from his neck to his knees, with a sheet. One of the abuelos produced a plastic laser sword, which emitted electronic beeps. While the other abuelo lifted the bull's legs, the one armed with the toy laser crawled head first between the bull's legs under the sheet. There the abuelo pretended to perform surgery, from which he finally emerged with two large nuts which he displayed triumphantly to the crowd. The bull, representing Cortés, the conquistadors, and all aggressive intrusions into the Native American world, had been castrated. It was a humorous, but nonetheless very powerful, image of the defeat of what Treviño and Gilles call "the more oppressive elements of the foreign cultures" (1991:15).

In Santa Clara, in keeping with the minimalist character of the performance, the castration was very briefly represented by a tug by the abuelo on the clapper of the bell that the toro wore around his waist. The bull is also castrated in Taos Pueblo (Rodríguez 1991:240) and nearby Arroyo Seco (Rodríguez 1994:257). In San Juan, during the second performance of the

15. In Picuris Pueblo, Malinche brings Moctezuma back to life with the circling motion of her extended arm. (Photo by Max Harris)



day, the abuelo hung a “Bull for Sale” sign around the toro’s neck after the castration and led him around the crowd, collecting money in a hat borrowed from a woman tourist. Marketing the captured enemy to the new invaders (tourists) was a nice emblematic reversal of the economic exploitation Native Americans have so often suffered in the past at the hands of their conquerors.

The final episode in each of the pueblos was a joyous dance in which Moctezuma, Malinche, and the warriors celebrated their victory. Although the fiesta had begun with vespers in the Catholic church, the dance itself had offered no hint of indigenous conversion to Christianity. Rather, the defining moment of the dance had been the castration of the small boy, dressed as a bull, who represented the conquering “saints” of Spanish and Anglo cultures. It was thus an apt prelude to the performance, the next day, of the pueblo’s “most important public ritual,” the Turtle Dance (Sweet 1985:42; c.f., Parsons 1929:179–85). The matachines dance in San Juan may well be read, therefore, not as a celebration of conversion to Christianity but as a cleansing of the pueblo by the victory of Moctezuma and his ghost warriors for the subsequent unimpeded performance of pre-Christian ritual.

### Conclusion

The danza de la pluma and the danza de los matachines are both ritual representations of what Wachtel called “the trauma of the Conquest” (1977:33). The public transcript of each dance narrates in a manner flattering to the conquerors and their descendants the triumph of Spanish Catholicism. The Hispanic Catholics of Bernalillo have accepted this public transcript as the true and only meaning of the danza de los matachines. But the Zapotecs of Teotitlán have insinuated into the danza de la pluma a hidden transcript, evident only in performance, in which the Indians gain both a clear aesthetic victory and a more discreet military victory. In the Native American pueblos of New Mexico, the matachines dance retains a thin veneer of its Catholic public transcript but displays more confidently, albeit without textual explanation, the hidden transcript of indigenous victory.

The hidden transcript depends, in both cases, on visual signs, such as the age of boys playing Cortés’s soldiers, the unlisted danza de los negritos, and the castration of the toro. Like the masks in the danza de los santiagos, these are not marked in an official text. The hidden transcript relies, too, on an ambiguity of named signs. Moctezuma suggests to the outside observer the Aztec emperor defeated by Cortés. Malinche recalls Cortés’s indigenous mistress, reputedly the first convert to Christianity and, by virtue of her skills as a translator, a key player in the conquest of Mexico. Their presence in the dances easily leads outsiders, experienced scholars among them, to the conclusion that the dances are about the triumph of Christianity. But the same names identify for the native dancers a semidivine messianic ruler and his female companion. According to a myth common to indigenous peoples across Mesoamerica, Moctezuma and Malinche will lead their people in a final triumph over foreign invaders and into an era of peace and prosperity. The names that guarantee the public transcript are simultaneously the signs that define the hidden transcript. Such, in this instance, is the sophistication of traditional folk performance.

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