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Studies in American Indian Literatures, Volume 22, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp. 49-75 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: 10.1353/ail.0.0125

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In her 1990 article “Videomakers and Basketmakers,” Leslie Marmon Silko declares, “In Victor Masayesva’s hands, video is made to serve Hopi consciousness and to see with Hopi eyes” (Silko, “Videomakers” 73). This Hopi “consciousness” is reflected in his films’ content, which feature traditional basket making, weaving, and the planting, harvesting, and storing of corn, the most sacred essence in the Hopi worldview. Just as significant, however, is Masayesva’s style and point of view, which reflect the Hopis’ historic suspicion of visual representation. The Hopis have long been exploited through photography and film, and Masayesva’s films reflect his nation’s profound ambivalence toward filmmaking. Unfortunately, his ambivalence and privileging of Hopi audiences over non-Hopi viewers has led to limited critical interest in Masayesva’s films. However, the very thing that limits critical interest is precisely what makes his films worthy of study; his films openly expose the politics associated with American Indian filmmaking. The fact that Masayesva openly addresses his ambivalence toward film indicates his self-reflexivity and willingness to engage his viewers in an extended inquiry into the strengths and limitations of the art of the camera. By acknowledging his own ambivalence, Masayesva encourages his viewers to engage in a multifaceted dialogue about representation, the role of the viewer, and the possibilities and dangers of storytelling through film. This reflexivity indicates both Masayesva’s critique of and complicity in the politics associated with visual representation. I hope to prove that his skepticism toward the camera, while challenging for viewers, ultimately reflects and contributes to Hopi sovereignty.
CAMERAS IN HOPI LAND

In his introduction to *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images* (1983), Masayesva, who began his career as a still photographer, discusses his own ambivalence toward the camera. He describes how the subject of one of his photographs called him a *Kwikwilyaqa*, a spiritual kacina that uses “buffoonery, burlesque” to make social commentary (“KWIKWILYAQA” 11). While he initially laughed at the similarity between his head under the camera’s focusing cloth and the blanket the kacina wears over his head, “[l]ater came the sober realization that he might have meant *Kwikwilyaqa* in the perspective of what this being does: he duplicates” (11). Masayesva is all too aware of the danger of “duplicating” mainstream American culture, of using Euroamerican tools and ways of seeing to explore the Hopi worldview, especially since the camera, the ultimate tool for reflecting the mainstream viewpoint, has long been an instrument of imperialism.

The Hopis were one of the earliest tribes to be photographed and filmed by non-Natives. After gaining control of Hopi land at the end of the Mexican-American War, the U.S. government began to survey the land for the building of a transcontinental railroad; the accompanying survey photographer was to record the land, waterways, and the “Indians future travelers might encounter” (*Photographers* 15). The Hopis were perceived by these mid-nineteenth-century photographers as objects to be recorded for future tourists. They, the land, and even their culture were to be controlled, catalogued, and owned.³ This initial objectification through tourist photography was soon followed by ethnographic photographs taken by John K. Hiller, Edward S. Curtis, Joseph Mora, and others in an attempt to collect information on a people they judged incapable of recording their own histories. Photographers like Heinrich Voth and Adam Clark Vroman soon began intrusively photographing private Hopi ceremonies. When the Hopis began to protest, these men resorted to sneaking cameras into kivas, private ceremonial rooms that only the initiated may enter (Graulich 82). As James Riding In notes, early photographs of American Indians “illustrate the schizophrenia of
U.S. society towards Native people,” as they depict American Indians as uncouth, backward, and unchanging while simultaneously reflecting a desire to preserve and possess elements of these cultures before they “vanish” (52). Simon Ortiz describes how the stereotype of the “Vanishing Indian” was used to elide the very real way that U.S. policies led to American Indian deaths: “Real and actual Indian peoples and their cultures vanished into an image designed, constructed, and manufactured in that era . . . when the United States began aggressively to flex its powerful imperial muscles” (4).

The camera, through its ability to widely disseminate images to the public, became the means of spreading the destructive “Vanishing Indian” stereotype, a stereotype that masked the United States’ imperialism.

Linda Hutcheon points out how the “photographic semblance of eternal, universal Truth and innocent, uncomplicated pleasure is what always potentially links the medium to institutional power; it seems to reproduce so easily those grand narratives of our culture” (119). Far from being “universal” and “innocent,” early images of American Indians construct “information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful” (123). In an attempt to consolidate an image of a socially powerful America, American Indians and their cultures were presented as “vanishing,” leaving Euroamericans the rightful inheritors of this continent and its history. To construct this image, early photographs tried to limit any evidence of the continuation of Native cultures; they often decontextualized their subjects, photographing them alone, removed from their tribal contexts and families, as children are direct evidence of survival and continuation. Vine Deloria Jr. points out how photography was “a weapon in the final skirmishes of cultural warfare in which the natives of North America could be properly and finally embedded in their place in the cultural evolutionary decline” (11). To enact this “evolutionary decline,” photographers like Edward Curtis removed all traces of change and adaptation, providing their American Indian subjects with inaccurate and inappropriate costumes and placing them in highly stylized poses that satisfied the romantic fantasies of Euroamericans. Anne Makepeace
describes contemporary Hopi women’s laughter over a Curtis photo of Hopi girls grinding cornmeal. The women point out that “the girls would not have worn their wedding dresses for this messy task, and they certainly wouldn’t have been getting married and grinding meal all on the same day” (11). The false stereotypes and Euroamerican voyeurism of early photographs continued into the era of film, which was perceived as furthering the documentary ethnography of photography and museum displays. At an early age Masayesva refused the stereotypes embedded in these representational traditions; he “vowed never to be a portraitist in the manner of Edward Curtis and the many more recent photographers for tourist magazines that featured Indians posing in native costumes. Those images represented the epitome of stereotyping to me” (Husk of Time 5). In contrast to early photographs’ and films’ isolated, decontextualized subjects—a practice Masayesva notes continues in current tourism images—Masayesva’s photographs and films seek to portray the Hopi people within their tribal context.

A comparison between Masayesva’s first film Hopiit (1981) and the silent educational film series The Vanishing Indian (1920s) demonstrates not only the radical difference between Hopi self-representation and non-Native portrayals of the Hopis but also why Masayesva seeks to appropriate the power of the camera for himself and his nation. Little is known about The Vanishing Indian’s production in the 1920s. The film series’ trailer announces that it is the “greatest collection of character pictures of Indian life ever taken of the Seminoles, Hopi, Apache, Navajo, Ute, Blackfoot, Crows, Flathead, Sioux, all the Southwest Pueblo Indians and many other famous tribes,” collected, as the title announces, because these peoples are in the process of “vanishing.” However, the film series was never completed, and the bulk of the remaining footage highlights southwestern tribes, including the Hopis, made “famous” by the many ethnographic photos and films already in existence at the time. The Vanishing Indian depicts Hopi “Squaws” cooking and making pottery and baskets and Hopi men shooting arrows at a target. What is especially striking about the representation of the Hopis in The Vanishing Indian is the camera’s placement. It is usually placed above
its subjects, literally and symbolically looking down at them. The film alternates between wide shots that show its subjects at a remove and close-ups of its subjects’ fragmented body parts, never showing a close-up of faces that might indicate their humanity. Laura Mulvey argues that cinema audiences derive pleasure from “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (8). In order to objectify its subjects, film makes the “body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups . . . the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look” (14). *The Vanishing Indian*’s camera placement and use of fragmentation renders Hopi bodies as objects for Euroamerican viewers’ voyeurism.

To complete this objectification, *The Vanishing Indian* only depicts its subjects looking away from the camera. Whenever one of the Hopis stares directly into the camera, asserting his or her right to gaze back at viewers, the camera quickly cuts away. For example, the scene of the men shooting arrows is filmed entirely in wide angles, indicating a detachment from what is being shown. When one man looks directly at the camera, raising his arm to gesture where his arrow landed, the camera quickly cuts away to a shot of the men’s backs, apparently to avoid another direct gaze. However, the Hopi men begin to stare directly at the camera as they take turns shooting; one man even smiles at the camera, so the film is forced repeatedly and rapidly to cut to the men’s backs in an attempt to control these men’s desire to assert their subjectivity in the film. In *Fugitive Poses* (1998), Gerald Vizenor claims that “the eyes are a tacit presence” that resists the way the camera tries to reduce American Indians to silent objects (156). He argues, “The eyes in a photograph are the secret mirrors of a private presence,” since they contain “stories of resistance, and traces of native survivance” (158, 160). Survivance, according to Vizenor, is “more than survival”; it refers to an active, enduring presence that demands sovereignty and repudiates “dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (15). By refusing the dominated object status associated with the camera’s placement in *The Vanishing Indian*, these Hopi men assert their subjectivity and mutual right to return the gaze. They also disrupt the camera’s voyeurism. Mulvey argues that film audiences only experience pleasure if they perceive
distance between themselves and the objects on the screen, making “the conscious aim” of film “always to eliminate camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience” (17). In The Vanishing Indian this distance is created by the film’s attempts to render the Hopis not only as objects but also as anachronisms, holdovers from the past that are in the process of “vanishing.” By looking directly into the camera, the Hopi men portrayed rupture the supposed cinematic and temporal distance between themselves and the audience, disrupting their viewers’ voyeuristic pleasure.

Like The Vanishing Indian, Masayesva’s first film Hopiit also includes a scene of target practice. However, Masayesva’s film appropriates this ethnographic film trope and revises it to express a Hopi consciousness. Hopiit depicts a group of young boys shooting arrows, thus visually asserting the continuance of the Hopi people and culture, despite The Vanishing Indian’s predictions of their imminent end. In Hopiit, the camera is eye-level with the boys. While the scene begins with a wide-angle shot of them shooting at a target, this shot is quickly replaced with close-ups of the boys’ faces as they play. The boys begin to charge at the camera, shooting arrows near the cameraman’s feet. Instead of cutting away, this scene continues, showing the boys as they cheer, celebrating their shots and jumping directly toward the camera. This scene depicts the boys’ pleasure in close-up, allowing them to gaze directly at the camera. Masayesva’s use of close-ups here and the boys’ inclusion of the cameraman and camera in their game reflect an intimacy with its subjects that differs from the detached, wide-angle, ethnographic depictions in The Vanishing Indian. Hopiit also allows its subjects to express their cultural ambivalence toward the camera—they are, in fact, shooting arrows at the cameraman. Instead of working to hide the camera’s presence, Hopiit allows it to become part of the content of the film, acknowledging and disrupting the voyeurism historically associated with viewing Hopis on film. Despite their distinct differences, the striking similarity between Hopiit and The Vanishing Indian is that the Hopis being filmed continually assert their subjectivity and resistance to the gaze by staring directly at the camera.

The Vanishing Indian does indeed portray the Hopis in a time
of transition, albeit not the “vanishing” it asserts. Instead, the film is evidence of the Hopis’ changing relationship to the camera. The women and men depicted have agreed to be filmed, but by the end of the film, they seem to be trying to take control of the camera, talking and gesturing to the cameraman before he can cut away. Leslie Marmon Silko describes how the Pueblos, including the Hopis, were initially tolerant of the camera: “The Pueblo people did not fear or hate cameras or the photographic image” (“Videomakers” 72). However, they soon “objected to the intrusive vulgarity of the white men who gazed through the lens,” “learn[ing] from experience that most white people attending sacred dances were cheap voyeurs who had no reverence for the spiritual” (“Videomakers” 72). By 1915, photographing and filming ceremonies had been banned in most villages because of the intrusiveness and voyeurism of the cameramen and also because of the Hopis’ fear that the images could be used as evidence that they were practicing a religion that had been outlawed by the U.S. government.9 Because of repeated abuse, this ban was later extended to the current prohibitions against all “picture-taking, video recording, audio recording, sketching, and note-taking” (Hopi Tribe Cultural Preservation Office). By 1995, these restrictions were extended to all representations of the Hopis, including those by academics and documentary filmmakers.10 These restrictions do not so much express exclusiveness as an assertion of sovereignty, of the Hopis’ right to control their own images.11

Masayesva’s decision to become a photographer and filmmaker reflects this desire for self-representation as well as suspicion of it. In Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images Masayesva writes, “As Hopi photographers we are indeed in a dangerous time. The camera which is available to us is a weapon that will violate the silences and secrets so essential to our group survival” (10). However, Masayesva argues, if the camera is used within Hopi traditions and “cultural conscience,” it can also be “something that sustains, enriches, and adds to our spiritual well-being” (11). Masayesva’s films refute the inaccurate, noncontextualized images of the Hopis, using the camera as a powerful “weapon” against false stereotypes. However, precisely because the camera is a weapon, Masayesva’s films, especially Itam Hakim,
Hopit, continue to reflect ambivalence about the dangers associated with their medium.

Language

Masayesva’s most well-known film, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (*We, Someone, the Hopi*; 1984), is a documentary created in recognition of the Hopi Tricentennial, the commemoration of the Hopi and Pueblo revolt against Spanish rule in 1680. The film’s dedication not only marks this event, but it also contextualizes the film itself within the Hopi tradition of resistance to imperialism. In the film, the Hopi storyteller Ross Macaya recounts oral stories of Emergence, Bow Clan Migration, Spanish Conquest, the Pueblo Revolt, and a Hopi Prophecy to a group of young children. Macaya’s voice, speaking in Hopi, is played over a Hopi context: images of Hopi land and traditional activities. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* ends with Macaya stating, “These stories are going to be put down so the children will remember them. The children will be seeing this and improving on it. This is what will happen. This will not end anywhere.” Despite Macaya’s assertion that filmmaking will allow for “remembering” and thus the continuance of Hopi tradition and oral history, the film expresses profound ambivalence about whether filmmaking is the correct medium for oral storytelling.

Part of *Itam Hakim, Hopiit’s* ambivalence is associated with the role of Indigenous languages. The film expresses apprehension about whether these oral stories should be recorded in Hopi or English. Although he originally filmed *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* entirely in Hopi for a Hopi audience, Masayesva created a later version of the film that includes a voiceover translating Macaya’s words into English. Critics argue that the inclusion of English reflects a desire to reach non-Hopi viewers (see Bahn-Coblans 42; Leuthold 121; Weatherford and Masayesva 50). However, I assert that it also acknowledges the decline of Hopi language skills in younger generations. In his essay, “It Shall Not End Anywhere,” whose title deliberately refers to the ending of *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*, Masayesva describes “the dilemma facing every Native American language preservation project . . .
maintaining an oral tradition” (91). Masayesva forcefully asserts that Indigenous languages and oral traditions are “the expressions of a tribe’s sovereignty” (92). However, he also expresses ambivalence about whether the Hopis should try to preserve the language they are losing.¹² Masayesva argues that attempts like his own to preserve the Hopi language, while well meaning, resist the traditional Hopi acceptance of change. He writes, “It is as if we had even lost the will to let things go, whether it be rituals, ceremonies, songs, or language” (94). Masayesva’s ambivalence toward language preservation reflects a Hopi-specific worldview. The Hopis have many prophecies predicting the end of their world. Masayesva describes the numerous “predictions that our songbirds would leave us, fathers would turn weapons on their children and children wreak violence on innocents . . . that our language would leave our tongues and the rain clouds would abandon us” (Husk of Time 64). He notes, “all this had been planned and consecrated” (Husk of Time 64). Masayesva’s ambivalence toward preserving the Hopi language reflects a general Hopi ambivalence toward affecting a future already “planned and consecrated.”

Not surprisingly, this ambivalence also surrounds the use of “mechanical proxies”—such as tape recorders and video cameras—that are necessary to record and preserve Indigenous languages. Masayesva argues, “Each new medium of conveyance, whether it be the English language, video, film, theatre, music and song, each and every one poses a tremendous challenge to the tribal person” (“It Shall” 94). He warns, “There are numerous examples of dead ends, superficial, lifeless, irresponsible, harmful and unaccountable derivations of tribal experience . . . [that] stand out and caution us against more recordings” (95). Masayesva is suspicious of “lifeless” mechanical recordings that might help to bring about the predicted end of Hopi culture. Despite his concerns, he ultimately argues that language preservation through film is possible as long as it acknowledges “accountability” to the “sources of experience that inspired the original tribal community” (95).

Itam Hakim, Hopiit’s use of Hopi and English languages expresses both accountability and ambiguity. While the film’s English voice-
over will allow younger generations, the “children” Macaya refers to, to better comprehend the oral stories, it also allows non-Hopis access to the traditional “sources of experience”—the stories, ceremonies, and prophecies recounted in the film. To avoid voyeuristic appropriation and consumption of these oral sources, Masayesva carefully develops strategies to limit the non-Hopi audience’s access to them. The film often shows the viewer images (such as eagles, corn, and dancers) without providing any direct context, expressing an expectation that the viewer is already familiar with their cultural significance. Echoing Macaya, Masayesva assumes that the viewer, like the children, “will be seeing this and improving on it,” using their own knowledge to interpret the significance of the images (*Itam Hakim, Hopiit*). This strategy reflects the function of a traditional storytelling audience, to fill in missing and implied information. However, it also limits non-Hopis’ access to the cultural significance of these images and their relationship to ceremonial life.

The film continually asserts the importance of oral storytelling. It opens with Macaya recounting personal stories of his youth in Hopi, followed after a minute by the English translation. He is then joined by a group of young children. While the children are first shown in a wide-angle shot that includes an outhouse and surrounding land, the camera soon pulls in closer, interspersing shots of Macaya with images of the children in three-quarter shots, medium close-ups, close-ups, and then extreme close-ups. The tightening focus on the children’s images encourages viewers gradually to focus more attention on them, reinforcing the significance of oral storytelling. While the film initially shows the children playing, whispering among themselves, and looking distracted, as the camera angles tighten and Macaya begins telling the story of Hopi Emergence, viewers are shown extreme close-ups of the children’s faces, increasingly rapt with attention. These opening images position the audience with the children hearing the tales, encouraging them to identify with and mimic the children’s increasing interest in the oral stories.

While the film obligingly offers an English voiceover for the emergence story, certain images are left untranslated. For example, when describing the first Hopis’ emergence through the center of a
bamboo reed, the film shows viewers a bright moon in a dark sky as clouds gradually pass over its surface. The contrast of dark and light creates a shift in point of view; viewers feel like they are on the surface of the earth looking up at the moon, and in the next moment they feel like they are below the surface of the earth looking up through a dark hole at a brightly lit sky. Sonja Bahn-Coblans questions whether this is an “an image of the 'sípapu,’ (for those who do not know, the hole in the Hopi kiva symbolizing the emergence hole)” (55). The important thing to note here is that “those who do not know” about the kivas are not intended to know; the uninitiated are given no clues in English as to how to interpret this image. By refusing to translate this and later scenes, the film limits the non-Hopi audience’s access to and consumption of the stories.13

The film refuses to include English translations in other key places; the most telling is the description of the religious practices of the Bow Clan. When describing the Bow Clan meeting the Bear Clan in the first Hopi settlement at Oraibi, the English translation recounts the Bear Chief asking, “Do you have a dance or ceremony to bring to my village?” This scene dissolves into a wide-angle shot of several antlered deer grazing in a clearing as the English voiceover translates Macaya saying, “It was true that the Bow Clan, Awata, practiced the Ahl religion. From the beginning they carried their sacred bundles on antler racks and this they now put down near the rock called Oraibi, west of the village.” Macaya then continues speaking for a full minute in Hopi, unaccompanied by an English translation. Non-Hopi viewers are left hearing the untranslated Hopi and seeing the backs of the antlered deer as they head toward and eventually disappear into the forest. After a full minute of only Hopi speech, the English translation finally reports, “Today, they bring offerings to this rock, alongside of Oraibi rock.” This scene is telling for two reasons. First, Masayesva has chosen not to show the ceremony being described; Itam Hakim, Hopiit asserts that this ceremony is not to be casually consumed by an uninitiated viewer. By refusing to translate this ceremony visually (through actual images of offerings being brought to this rock) or linguistically, the film preserves the secrecy and dignity of this ceremony. Second, the image of the deer with
their backs to the viewer represents the spiritual significance of the
deer to this ceremony, while also acting as a metaphor for the way
the uninitiated viewer only experiences a brief glimpse of the Hopi
religion. Non-Hopi viewers are confronted with their uninitiated
status and the film’s refusal to offer them a privileged, initiated per-
spective. Joanna Hearne argues, “Masayesva’s belief in accountabil-
ity and restraint in filmmaking leads him away from Hollywood and
documentary practices intent on answering questions and revealing
information” (326). In a conventional documentary, a Native infor-
ment provides all necessary contextual information, including tribal
secrets. While *Itam Hakim, Hopiiit* does not deploy these conven-
tional techniques, the film could, paradoxically, be seen as providing
the necessary contextual information—silence. The film’s aesthetics
shift viewers’ focus away from revealing tribal secrets toward assert-
ring respect for those secrets. In this way, *Itam Hakim, Hopiiit* teaches
viewers the value of silence in the Hopi worldview.

In an interview with Fatimah Tobing Rony, Masayesva asserts the
importance of respecting tribal and clan secrets. He says,

I know I’ll never know what that society knows, because I’m
not a member or because I’m born into a certain clan. I’m not
going to break down the walls to get that information. I’ve
grown up accepting my limitations. And that’s hard for people
who want to know everything, to dig into it, to dissect it, to
see what it looks like. (Rony, “Victor” 25)

Here, the desire to have access to privileged information is likened
to “break[ing] down” and “dissect[ing]” it, gaining information only
through detached destruction. This desire to “want to know every-
thing” is not a traditional Hopi trait. In *Hopi Photographers/Hopi
Images* Masayesva writes, “Hopis are very private, often secretive
people who understand the value of silence. . . . As a Hopi, you can-
not violate the silences, just as you would not intrude on ceremony”
(10). According to Masayesva, the desire to “know everything” is not
only violent and destructive but also a violation of sacred belief. By
likening it to intruding on a ceremony, Masayesva asserts the legiti-
macy of silence in Hopi religion and knowledge. He also indirectly
refers to the way early non-Native filmmakers and photographers intruded on ceremonies, seeking images of the ceremonies, secret knowledge, and even “changes in the ceremonies to make them more photogenic” (Lippard 29).

Masayesva could have chosen to ignore the ceremony altogether, leaving non-Hopi viewers unaware of their missing knowledge. However, rather than risk the cultural importance of the ceremony being lost, Masayesva decides to describe it in Hopi without portraying it. This decision represents the diversity of the film’s three distinct audiences: members of the Hopi Bow Clan, Hopis in other clans, and non-Hopis. The Web site for the Hopi Tribe’s Cultural Preservation Office describes how “the Hopi learn only the story of their clan,” as each story “is more than enough to consider and meditate upon during a lifetime.” By alluding to the Bow Clan ceremony, the film prompts its Hopi viewers to meditate upon its cultural importance. When the image of the deer cuts to a wide-angle shot of Hopi land with large, dark rain clouds, Hopi viewers are prompted to consider how this ceremony calls the ancestors, who appear in the form of rain clouds. Unlike early films such as The Vanishing Indian, Itam Hakim, Hopiit does not depict extreme wide-angle shots of empty landscapes that document the pristine land once the American Indians have successfully “vanished.” Instead, when the film employs extreme wide-angle shots of land, they always either include a human figure or, as in the scene described above, depict the ancestors’ presence as rain clouds. By continually asserting Hopi presence on this land, Masayesva resists the dangers of the camera’s historic connection to imperialism.14

The effect of Masayesva’s decision to limit non-Hopi access, according to Bahn-Coblans, is that the “non-Native cannot help feeling that the subtitles do not even offer half of what is actually told” (55).15 Mainstream audiences used to consuming images of American Indians and their ceremonies on screen are bound, like Bahn-Coblans, to feel “somewhat dissatisfied” (56). The lack of a full English translation highlights non-Hopis’ distance from these stories and images, forcing them to become aware of their lack of knowledge of the Hopi language and culture. This lack of translation also
calls attention to Masayesva’s decision to limit non-Hopi access and to privilege Hopi-to-Hopi communication over translation for non-Hopi audiences. The film’s lack of complete translation denies viewers the privileged “insider” status and viewpoint traditionally associated with the camera. According to Mulvey, viewers derive pleasure from film’s “illusion of looking in on a private world” (9). By calling attention to the voyeurism historically associated with filmmaking, Itam Hakim, Hopiit urges its audience to consider the issues surrounding cultural translation in American Indian film.

**CONTEXT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Immediately after tackling the issue of cultural and linguistic translation, the film addresses the related issue of nostalgia in visual representation. After alluding to the Bow Clan ceremony, the film strategically includes sepia photographs of the Wuwuchim ceremony taken between 1893 and 1906 by two non-Native photographers, Heinrich Voth and Joseph Mora. In *Husk of Time* (2006), Masayesva critiques photographers’ use of sepia prints:

> Sepia resonates in the minds of non-Indians viewing photographs of Native Americans because it creates a buffer where nostalgia blossoms and dulls the ache resulting from misplaced responsibility for another human race. Sepia removes the subject from this world, and when the subject is safely removed, so is the non-Indian’s accountability. (8)

Masayesva’s critique of the nostalgia surrounding sepia photographs seems aligned with other American Indian thinkers who condemn early photographs of American Indians. In 1982 Vine Deloria Jr. critiqued the way images of American Indians in early photos by Edward Curtis were “well received by the Indian community” as an “opportunity to universalize the nobility and wisdom suggested there” (12). Gerald Vizenor explains why these images should never be accepted by American Indians: “Natives are the eternal fugitives of the camera; the decorated poses, captured and compared, are the public evidence of dominance, not the private stories of survivance” (157).
While Masayesva’s published observations clearly seem aligned with those of Deloria and Vizenor, his use of archival photographs in *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* presents a far more complex response to these early images, one that seeks to discuss the “private stories of surviv-ance” that Vizenor feels are inaccessible through film. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*’s use of sepia photographs reflects more recent American Indian critical responses to archival photos. Lucy Lippard’s *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans* (1992), Anne Makepeace’s *Edward S. Curtis: Coming to Light* (2001), and Simon Ortiz’s *Beyond the Reach of Time and Change* (2004) all include essays by American Indians that seek to “crack” these archival photographs’ surfaces, “breaking them open to get at the living content that has been erased from our history books” (Lippard 15). The essays included in these collections seek to provide the names, personal histories, and tribal contexts for the American Indians who appear in these photos, using their images to connect to tribal and family histories. Geary Hobson writes, “Such photographs taken during the Vanishing American era provide . . . important visual and factual linkages . . . to their descendants who are anything but vanished” (114). Many of these writers describe the pleasure of encountering their relatives for the first time in these photographs. Masayesva himself claims, “I wouldn’t know my grandfather if not for photography, because I never met him and I saw him in a [photograph of] a Snake Dance. So, that’s how I met him” (qtd. in Rony, *The Third Eye* 213). It is ironic that this familial connection was created through the problematic medium of photographs of ceremonies, especially this particular ceremony. Snake Dance images were highly sought after by Euroamericans, who fetishized the Hopis’ relationship to snakes, leading to many intrusive violations of the ceremony and the eventual 1915 ban against photographing and filming ceremonies. However, Lucy Lippard suggests that uncovering the personal stories and tribal contexts behind these early photographs plays a “significant role” in the American Indian “struggle at all social levels to be recognized as active subjects rather than passive objects” (15). Masayesva’s decision to include early photographs in *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* reflects this struggle for recognition. I believe he includes archival photo-
graphs to indict them, showing both their limited accuracy and their lack of “accountability.” He also, in a sense, reclaims them for Hopi use by disrupting the “nostalgia” surrounding them, using them instead to show a more complex portrayal of early-twentieth-century Hopis and their experiences with the camera. By appropriating the very photographs created by intrusive, voyeuristic non-Natives, Masayesva fully claims the power of the camera.

*Itam Hakim, Hopiit* teaches its viewers to consider the larger tribal context surrounding photographs of ceremonies. The first archival photo that appears in the film is a close-up of the backs of two horned priests and four Hopis wearing ceremonial outfits. As with the deer, this focus on the Hopis’ backs indicates ambivalence toward showing any images of the ceremony. The film cuts to a second photograph, zooming in to a close-up of dancers until the image appears grainy and unclear. These photographs highlight the viewer’s status as either initiated or uninitiated; because viewers are not given any context for understanding these images, no tribal secrets are revealed. As with the oral tradition, Hopi viewers can supply the necessary context, while non-Hopi viewers are forced to acknowledge their “outsider” status. The cinematic technique Masayesva uses to explore the photographs further reinforces the importance of context. This technique (which is now termed the “Ken Burns Effect” despite the fact that Masayesva and Burns both began to use the technique independently in the early 1980s) uses slow pans and zooms to focus on areas of interest in still photographs embedded in a film. In this case, Masayesva zooms in on the upper-left-hand corner of a photo to highlight a group of Hopi audience members watching the ceremony from above on a rock. By focusing on the audience members rather than on the dancers who are placed in the center of the photograph, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* highlights the important role the audience plays in ceremonies.

By zooming in on a part of the photo that one might have missed in an initial viewing, the film also asks its viewers to consider the politics behind the camera—how the camera’s framing and choice of subject encourages particular readings over others, while missing or ignoring other types of information. To reinforce this point,
the next shot depicts a close-up of a third archival photograph that depicts two horned priests wearing antlers and deer skins, then cuts to a close-up of the bottom of the photo, highlighting the priests’ shoes. The close-up of the priests’ feet shows viewers their nontraditional, manufactured boots, evidence of mainstream influence that photographers like Edward Curtis worked hard to conceal. Lucy Lippard describes how Curtis “erased unwelcome signs of modernity” that challenged the static, “Vanishing Indian” stereotype, often traveling with “wigs (for those who now had white man’s haircuts), ‘primitive’ clothes, and other out-of-date trappings” (25). Buyers of Curtis’s photographs saw these signs of change and adaptation as “anachronisms” that “destroy the time-honored distance between Them and Us” (27). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* disrupts the false stereotype that the Hopis exist anachronistically. By zooming in on the priests’ boots, Masayesva urges his viewers to confront the effects of mainstream culture on early-twentieth-century Hopis. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* uses archival photographs to contextualize Hopi consciousness historically, to document a people who were able to maintain their ceremonial life alongside mainstream influence. At the same time, by exposing how this historical understanding of the Hopis can only be perceived by analyzing the margins, rather than the chosen subjects, of these photos, the film demonstrates the origins of the Hopi suspicion of the camera.

The photographs I have been discussing are accompanied in the film by Macaya’s Hopi-language commentary, with no English translation. Viewers are left to supply their own context for the photos and ceremony depicted. Only after a full minute does the film provide a brief English voiceover, obviously only a partial translation of Macaya’s long narrative. The voiceover merely states, “Only the Ahl priests are allowed there. Their offerings are meant for Alosaka, for they are left outside the village.” By translating that which explains the secrecy of the ceremony—“Only the Ahl priests are allowed there”—but not providing any other context for understanding Alosaka, the film reinforces the importance of ceremonial secrecy to its viewers. Macaya continues to speak in untranslated Hopi for another thirty seconds as the camera shows viewers a fourth and
fifth archival photo portraying a priest making offerings. By refusing to translate these ceremonial images linguistically or contextually, Masayesva reclaims them for a Hopi audience. By only showing photographs that were shot outside as opposed to within the ceremonial kivas, Masayesva refuses to duplicate the early photographers’ intrusiveness and voyeurism, choosing instead to only show what the uninitiated may witness. Paradoxically, the film can only affirm the incompleteness of visual representations of the Hopis by showing its own incompleteness as a film. It thus calls attention to the limits of still and moving film adequately to depict the significance of the Hopi ceremonies and worldview.

The limitations of film are most fully articulated in Itam Hakim, Hopiiit’s treatment of its last sepia-toned image. This last photograph initially appears blurry; Masayesva uses racking, refocusing the image to reveal a close-up of a sepia-colored drum. This image dissolves into another sepia-toned image, this time a close-up of two pairs of bare, raised feet. The film then cuts to a medium close-up of a sepia-toned man’s midsection. His suspenders, striped button-up shirt, and trousers fill the center of the screen. The film then pans from left to right, revealing how this man is connected to a series of other men. All the other men are bare-chested and holding hands. Finally, the film cuts to a larger image, an archival photograph of a ceremony shot in wide angle that contains all three close-ups. By demonstrating how all three images come from the same photograph, the film shows viewers that all photos only provide fragments, an incomplete picture that is unknowable and meaningless unless placed in a larger context. Through the microcosm of this one photograph, Masayesva seeks to demonstrate the limited accuracy of photography and even film.

The camera proceeds to pan from left to right, first lingering for ten seconds on the left-most dancer, who is dressed in the striped shirt, trousers, and suspenders, before panning over the other dancers’ images. Finally, the film comes to rest on the right-most dancer, who appears older and is bare-chested, barefoot, and dressed in a traditional dancer’s costume. The film zooms in on this dancer, lingering for fifteen seconds on his face, which is almost entirely obscured
by his hair, demonstrating again the inability of photographs to represent the Hopis fully and accurately. By panning from the more assimilated-looking, younger dancer to the older, more traditionally dressed dancer, the film suggests that this photograph is compelling, not because it documents a ceremony, but because of the way it documents the Hopis in a time of transition. The Wuwuchim ceremony depicted here joins men to each other literally through their linked hands and spiritually through the ceremony, which also connects them to the Hopis’ ceremonial cycle. By zooming in and lingering on the dancers in the photos’ margins, whose clothing reflects different generational responses to mainstream influence, the film demonstrates how this image documents both these men’s tribal connection and the mainstream forces that threaten that connection. The film’s use of close-ups, zooming, and panning makes viewers conscious of the significance of this photo’s larger historic context. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* teaches its viewers to look beyond the historic voyeurism of the camera’s gaze that positions these men as “Other” and outside of time, toward the temporal story this photograph tells about early-twentieth-century Hopis and the struggles they faced to maintain ceremonial life under the pressures of assimilation.

The film’s use of racking in the beginning of this scene foreshadows the way it plans to refocus its viewers’ perspective in the scene to come. Its treatment of this photograph seeks to disrupt viewers’ familiar expectations regarding archival photos, whether those expectations are nostalgic fantasies of the “Other” or negative critiques of photography’s colonialist impulses. Instead, by refocusing on images contained in the margins of the photo, the film disrupts the photograph’s own impulse toward generalization and abstraction, redirecting viewers to the intimate and potentially painful stories being told there. By placing this photograph and its story within a larger tribal context, the film teaches viewers new ways to read archival images and creates new ways to interact with these images. While the photograph’s wide-angle abstraction positions the viewer as an alienated, yet privileged spectator of a ceremony, the film’s close-ups and pans of this same image’s margins reposition the viewer as a witness of the intimacy among men, land, and
ceremony. Hopi viewers of the film are thus freed to identify with the tension between older, more traditional and younger, more assimilated Hopis, and also with the ceremony that manages to keep them together despite this tension. In this way, the film uses an archival photograph to strengthen Hopi ceremonial life, as indicated by the photograph’s final dissolve into a close-up of Macaya, who has been singing the (untranslated) Wuwuchim ceremonial song in a voiceover the entire scene. The privileging of dissolves over cuts throughout this scene symbolically demonstrates the continuity among all of the images shown: a continuity among the men in the photograph, despite encroaching mainstream culture, as well as a continuity between the past depicted and the present, because Macaya still knows the ceremonial song. Masayesva’s filmmaking aesthetics—using racking, close-ups, zooming, panning, and dissolves to explore these still images—presents a more intimate, Hopi-centered gaze than is traditionally found in photographs and film. *Itam Hakim, Hopii* uses these techniques to reposition the Hopis’ relationship to the camera, reclaiming archival images to expose the complex histories they contain.

**VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY**

By drawing viewers’ attention to the politics of the camera—what is shown or not shown, what is highlighted or marginalized—the film asks its viewers to consider the role of “accountability” in photography and filmmaking. Masayesva could have encouraged his viewers’ dedication to ceremonial life without using the archival photos, but his use of them indicates his film’s implication in the tradition from which it emerges. The ambivalent use of archival photographs in the film indicates Masayesva’s awareness that the camera carries risks of repeating the dominant gaze. The ending of his film *Imagining Indians* (1992) contains similar misgivings when a woman frustrated with stereotypical images of American Indians in drawings, photographs, and film uses a dentist’s drill to carve up the film’s lens before dashing the camera to the floor. In an interview with Fatimah Rony, Masayesva claims that this ending was “really a composite pro-
cess to let people know there were a lot of cracks in the seams. It was about imagining Indians, and I was part of that imagining. And I wasn’t trying to absolve myself. . . . I was implicating myself” (Rony, “Victor” 31). Itam Hakim, Hopit’s use of archival photographs of ceremonies, photographs that have since been banned on the reservation, suggests a similar self-implication, as well as an awareness of how the “cracks in the seams” could be used to strengthen traditional Hopi life.

The use of archival photos suggests that Masayesva seeks to create a useful dialogue between such images and his own. Masayesva carefully selects the photos that appear in the film, refusing to include these photographers’ more voyeuristic photos of the Snake Dance, katsinas, or nonpublic ceremonies held within the kivas. The photos he does choose provide familiar examples of how American Indian ceremonies were typically photographed: wide-angle shots of costumed dancers, holding unexplained implements, with either no background audience or one that is deliberately marginalized or blurred. Linda Hutcheon describes how using photographs of “commonplace” images is useful for their critics “because of their pre-existing meanings” (125). She suggests that disrupting images that are “culturally understandable and accessible” to a wider audience can sometimes provide the best means for critique (125). By choosing such “familiar” photographic tropes and then exploring the “unfamiliar” in their margins, Masayesva seeks to upset any notion of romantic abstraction or nostalgia in these photographs. By placing these photos back into a Hopi context, especially one that continues to struggle with the issues represented in the photos’ margins, the film demonstrates the way archival images of American Indians can be reclaimed through accountable use.18

This accountability does not require avoiding the camera. Instead, it demands that images be located within a tribally specific context and that the risks involved be acknowledged. In an interview with Fatimah Rony, Masayesva states,

I understand the risks I’m taking. But beyond that it’s not as separate as you might think. . . . Our communication is mostly visually transmitted, whether it’s in ceremonies, rituals where
we reenact our histories, how we came to be and why we are set up the way we are. That’s how our information is transmitted besides our oral histories. (Rony, “Victor” 23)

The camera can be perceived as updating and continuing a traditional Hopi way of transmitting information. In *Husk of Time*, Masayesva asserts that “traditionalism never grows old. It resurfaces in changing contexts, or it reshapes present contexts,” always proving useful because it contains “knowledge of differing contexts” (56). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* presents its viewers with a flexible form of traditionalism, in which film, despite its risks, is able to transmit Hopi stories, language, and images to a younger generation. In doing so, Masayesva suggests that it achieves a form of ritual. In *Hopi Photographers*, he writes, “I believe we would not be far from the mark if we were to take photography as ceremony, as ritual, something that sustains, enriches, and adds to our spiritual well-being” (11). In her preface to Lippard’s *Partial Recall*, Silko argues, “At Hopi, thoughtful action of any sort becomes worship; devoted attentiveness becomes worship” (10). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*’s careful balancing of multiple audiences, limiting of non-Hopi access to information, and repositioning of archival photographs are all acts of devotion that attempt to strengthen traditional Hopi life. In his 1991 speech at the Two Rivers Film and Video Festival, Masayesva claims that “there is such a thing as an Indian [filmmaking] aesthetic, and it begins in the sacred” (qtd. in Leuthold 1). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* represents one such attempt to recontextualize sacred oral stories and traditions in a medium that has been reclaimed by Hopi aesthetics.

In *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens* (2001), Beverly Singer asserts that American Indian filmmaking is “intended to demonstrate how film and video visualize healing from the ruptures of our history” by “help[ing] to reverse the devastating effects of assimilationist educational policies that coerced a sense of inferiority in us” (9). By resisting the stereotype of the “Vanishing Indian” that positions historic and contemporary American Indians as anachronisms, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* demonstrates how present-day Hopis can draw strength from images of past Hopis’ efforts to maintain ceremonial life in the face of mainstream pressures to assimilate. Further, by
reclaiming these archival images and showing their usefulness for contemporary Hopis, the film urges Hopis to begin to “heal from the ruptures” caused by their historic exploitation through photography and film. While the film acknowledges the camera’s historic connection to imperialism, it demonstrates how it can be disrupted and appropriated in the interest of contemporary Hopis.

By appropriating the camera, long associated with colonial dominance, Masayesva seeks to decolonize images of the Hopis. He effectively appropriates the camera in the interest of sovereignty. Beverly Singer writes, “telling our own stories is deeply connected to being self-determined. . . . It is part of a social movement that I call ‘cultural sovereignty’” (2). She argues that Native-centered films “are helping to reconnect us with very old relationships and traditions” that “help revive storytelling and restore the old foundation” (2). The ability to wrest stereotypical images of Hopi ceremonies from their imperialist framework helps to revive and maintain the stories and ceremonies, which are essential for tribal sovereignty. Quoting Seneca elder John Mohawk, Jace Weaver writes, “‘If you want to be sovereign, you have to act sovereign.’ ‘Thinking sovereign’ is a necessary precondition” (70). Victor Masayesva’s Itam Hakim, Hopiit seeks not only to present an image of cultural and visual sovereignty but also to prompt “thinking sovereign” in its viewers, Hopi and non-Hopi alike. By encouraging viewers to acknowledge and resist the historic imperialism and voyeurism of the camera’s gaze, Masayesva urges viewers to adopt a Hopi consciousness that values the connection among images, stories, and silences.

NOTES

I am indebted to Victor Masayesva Jr. for his support of this article and for his powerful films, that teach us to see differently. I am also grateful to Joanna Hearne for her generous sharing of resources and to Christopher Pizzino and the anonymous SAIL reviewers for their invaluable feedback on earlier versions of this article.

1. Dennis Wall and Virgil Masayesva write, “For the people of the mesas corn is sustenance, ceremonial object, prayer offering, symbol, and sentient being unto itself. Corn is the Mother in the truest sense—the people take
in the corn and the corn becomes their flesh, as mother’s milk becomes the flesh of the child. . . . The connection between the people and the corn is pervasive and deeply sacred” (2).

2. As my works cited page indicates, Masayesva’s films have received some critical attention. However, this attention is limited, and many of the articles referenced are brief or analyze his films alongside other better-known American Indian films.

3. Railroad tourist pamphlets at the time declare, long “before the Pilgrims landed upon the shores of New England . . . the great Southwest was peopled by a race who enjoyed a high degree of civilization,” a civilization that is “more picturesque than the Swiss, Irish, Serbian, or Russian peasants” (see Graulich 81). These tourist pamphlets, with their accompanying photographs, describe how the earliest histories and cultures in the Americas could be accessed and appropriated by Euroamericans.

4. Vine Deloria Jr. argues that Edward Curtis’s photographs of American Indians “relate less to the reality of Indians than we would like and testify to less precise aspects of the American experience—the history we would like to have possessed” (13).

5. See Rony, The Third Eye, chapter 3.

6. Copies of the incomplete film series can be found at the Smithsonian and Library of Congress.

7. In The Vanishing Indian, Hopi women are inaccurately shown performing these duties in isolation (instead of within the context of other women) and outside of the home, an inaccurate practice that allowed early filmmakers to use available sunlight. The film shows these women beginning the work process, and then the camera quickly cuts to the finished product. The film assumes that its non-Native viewers would have no desire to make the products themselves, merely to voyeuristically consume the image of women laborers. Masayesva’s first film, Hopiit, depicts women differently, showing five women indoors talking and laughing as they weave baskets; it provides long close-ups of the basket makers’ hands so that viewers can see exactly how to weave reeds into a basket.

8. Lucy Lippard makes a similar claim when she writes, “even when the photographer is focusing on activity rather than person, even when faces are resistant and ‘expressionless,’ the eyes cannot be veiled and humanity asserts itself” (16).

9. This fear was justified. Lucy Lippard points out how the 1910 ban against photography was a result of a trip to Washington DC where photos of Hopi ceremonies were used in a congressional hearing to discredit their religion (29).
10. Following Hopi research protocols, I contacted Terry Morgart at the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office prior to publishing this article. The preservation office agreed to its publication, pending approval by Victor Masayesva Jr., which was given via e-mail communication on September 4, 2008.

11. In fact, Peter Whiteley suggests that restricting access to Hopi culture and ritual runs counter to principles that encourage the Hopi “to spread the beneficial effects of their teachings.” He quotes former tribal chairman, Abbott Sekaquaptewa, saying that he supports research on the Hopi “so long as it enhances their lives, their understanding” (29).

12. Masayesva writes, “severed from our agricultural roots, we are left with the shell of a language used primarily for the adornment of ceremony. . . . Now when we record our language, we have begun the post-mortem, reserving and stacking the words in which one now sees imprinted paleolithic bookshelves which accumulate sediment” (“It Shall” 93–94). This statement questions the very desire to record the “shell” of a language that has become as removed from its culture and land as the “paleolithic” period.

13. As a non-Hopi speaker following Hopi research protocols, I have not quoted from sources that translate Hopi songs and ceremonies into English.

14. The opening scene to Masayesva’s *Imagining Indians* (1992) humorously pokes fun at this Hollywood convention. The film opens with a wide-angle shot of Monument Valley, a staple of early Hollywood westerns. An off-camera director quickly shouts “cut” because his stereotypical image of an empty western landscape is disrupted when an American Indian is shown walking out from behind a group of bushes.

15. A few critics like Bahn-Coblans inaccurately refer to the English voiceover as “subtitles.”

16. Masayesva is not alone in his complex desire to negotiate Joseph Mora’s photographs of the Hopi. Ramona Sakiestewa describes Mora’s photos as a “tremendous legacy to the Hopi people” (75). She argues that Mora’s devoted attention to physical detail and willingness to allow the Hopi to clothe themselves as they saw fit demonstrates “his genuine relationship to Hopis as individuals rather than as inanimate objects or subject matter” (74).

17. Ken Burns credits filmmaker Jerome Liebling for teaching him the effect. See Kennedy.

18. In his speech at the Two Rivers Film and Video Festival, Masayesva asserts, “A Native filmmaker has . . . accountability built into him. The white man doesn’t have that. That’s the single big distinction. Accountability as an individual, as a clan, as a tribal, as a family member” (qtd. in Leuthold 1).
WORKS CITED


*The Vanishing Indian*. Sioux Super Films, 1920s. Film.