

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 – engl. VII

2/13 – 2/21/2008

Tuba City – Window Rock, Arizona

Window Rock, Arizona, at the border between Arizona and New Mexico. I am sitting in the library, adjacent to the Navajo museum, a big, modern building – Native-American style and futuristic architecture are combined. Around the building gigantic orange-reddish sandstone rocks tower up into the dull, yellowish-grey winter sky – like silent, giant guards. Thanks to the helpful librarian I can use a computer that doesn't stop after the 60 minutes that are usually conceded to the library users.

Thinking at the past week I experience deep awe, like after a long, deep, mysterious dream. I was hiking through the land of the Hopis, the Apaches, the Navajos – vast, wild landscapes, long uphill stretches, up to the next „mesa“, the next plateau, then down again into the next basin. During the first half of this week I was in the grip of rampageous winter weather – I didn't expect such snowstorms in these desert areas. The connection with friends worked by telepathy, no service available for my cellular phone, no computers; and now I am again in a comfortable, warm room, well nourished, washed, shaved, happy to paint some of the images of this dream week with words, knowing that words are too pale to express what I experienced.

2/13 – 2/15/2008

Tuba City – Hotevilla

Just before I leave Debbie's hospitable family, Dorothy, Richard, Michael – the neighborhood is mourning the death of one of the last Co-Talkers. Navajo men encoded with their Navajo language the radio communication of the US Army in the South Pacific during the second World War. The Japanese never succeeded to crack this secret code. The Co-Talkers were seen as heroes and were highly respected for this achievement.

When I begin the 45-mile walk to Hotevilla the weather is still dry. When I put my tent the first snow flakes start to fall. In the morning I pack up my tent in the snow flurry. During the whole day I am trudging against the snowstorm – the snowflakes are driving horizontally across the street. In the evening I put the wet tent again in the blizzard, and the next morning it's not yet over, the wet and cold drudgery again. Cold hands, wet gloves – that's the only part I suffer from; and that I don't have any equipment to warm up drinks and food. The water temperature is near the freezing point. Otherwise I feel quite warm, during the walk, and in the tent wrapped in the fantastic sleeping bag. When I wake up in the morning the interior of the tent is sparkling like a crystal hall – waking up in a spacious crystal druse: My body heat has caused condensed water that turns my modest house into a glittering palace.

More and more the snow is covering the road – an advantage because the number of cars passing decreases considerably, and those who pass drive very slowly. Again and again drivers stop and want to give me a ride; among them also Fred Kootswatewa, a Hopi man from Hotevilla who offers me a drink and invites me to his home, after my arrival there. I meet also two men staggering through the snow. Finally a driver stops and gives them a ride on his open truck.

The winter simplifies the landscape so much: White, grey, in many shades, the only contrast: the dark juniper trees and some yellow grass fascicles that are not yet hidden beneath the white cover.

2/15 – 2/17/2008

Hotevilla

The sky clears up and the snowfall stops when I climb up the steep road to the first „mesa“, the plateau of Hotevilla. I leave the main road 264 and enter the village. When I walk towards the big water tower in the center of town the sun breaks through the heavy, dark clouds that are still lingering above the first mesa. The generous precipitation is a bliss for this dry area; and at the same time the warm sunlight turns the dirt roads very quickly into deep layers of wet chocolate brown mud. If I imagine this mud is „mousse au chocolat“ I actually start to like it...

First of all I buy food, water and milk in the General Store. Then I look for the house of Fred. It's warm inside – what a bliss! But the house is small, and there are already guests who came in order to attend the „Bean Dance“ ceremony. I can take a shower, and wash my cloths. I can also dry the tent and the other wet things on the porch in the warm sunlight. Fred offers me to stay with his brother Mark. But I prefer to take shelter in Debby's house. She has drawn a plan how I can find it; and I find it easily because it's the only house with a solar pannel on a pole that follows the sun during the day. The house is still in construction, with no water: But I feel well there, in the ground level room with a sandstone floor – the stone coming from Ashfork where I stayed for a night in a motel next to the big flagstone storage place some weeks ago.

The ceremony starts on Saturday morning. After six o'clock people leave their homes. They want to witness the arrival of the „Craw Mother“. She brings fresh bean sprouts as symbols for the beginning sowing season and for fertility.

At six o'clock I am standing at the fork in the road where the „Craw Mother“ is expected to come. More and more people leave their houses – fragrant juniper smoke is in the air. There are only a few foreign guests, all of them people who respect this ancient tradition. Nobody takes pictures, nobody makes films, nobody asks what this ceremony is all about. I join two couples, one from California, one from New Mexico, who are familiar with the ceremony and who can advise me where to stand and what to do.

It's still dark. The storm has left completely now – stars sparkling, no clouds anymore. Slowly the sky gets lighter and lighter above the slightly declining road. The naked trees form a fine and hard silhouette in front of the growing light. Colors appear, purple, yellow, orange. Suddenly a

silent motion comes into the waiting crowd. In front of the morning sky the outline of a mysterious Wayan-Kulit figure becomes visible. Two wings frame its head. The „Crow Mother“ approaches us, slowly, staggering with caution, waiting again, the two wings waving in front of the colorful morning background. The figure seems to be much bigger than it is in reality. It becomes now visible in the dawn why she is waiting, again and again: Women, men approach her, one by one. They remain silent in front of her for a moment, humble. They strew a handful of coarse-grained white corn flour towards the Crow Mother. Afterwards they take a bean sprout from a flat basket that the Crow Mother holds on her arms, and they go back to their houses - the fruit of the old crop as an offering, the sprout of the new sowing as a symbol for the fertility they are praying for.

Now the Crow Mother is slowly passing. Details can be seen. Between the wings there is a pale green mask. She wears a traditional Hopi cape. In the middle of the village, on the ceremonial square, she pauses and starts to sing, a long, repetitive, simple and at the same time beautifully modulated song, U-sounds, towards the Sun, just before and during sunrise.

I recognize Debby among the people who are watching on the square, in front of the house of her aunt Blanche. She is surrounded by many relatives of the Coyote clan, nieces, nephews. She invites me to her aunt's house. I get to know some members of her clan. What a treat to be warmed up by this family and by the warm stove. I spend the whole day with them. Again and again new dishes are offered. Lanne, a cute and clever 8 year old niece, looks at children books. She plays with a girl-friend for hours. She doesn't need toys. She can enjoy little things. There is a small feather from my sleeping bag that has been caught in the texture of my sweater. The two girls throw this little feather into the air. They follow it; they run after it. They try to catch it again, rejoicing with pleasure and laughter. Other children form mountain ridges and valleys out of the sand in front of the house. Some people are standing or sitting on the roofs. Adolescents are flirting with each other. Everybody waits for the next part of the ceremony that is expected around noon, the cortege of the Katsinam. Again and again beautiful black hair is lighting up in the sunlight.

The Hopi *katsinam* are benevolent spirit beings, who visit the Hopi for about half of every year. According to Hopi tradition, the katsinam once visited in person, but now come as clouds down from the mountains or up from the earth. They begin arriving in late December, at the winter solstice. Masked and costumed Hopi men assume their powers and prestige in ceremonies and dances held until the katsinam depart in July. Though only men can be katsinam, women and children play important roles as their audience; all Hopi men and women belong to the Katsina Society.

Hopi katsinam can be male or female, and represent plants, animals, insects, human qualities, the creative force of the sun, and even death. Some are demons who frighten children into behaving properly; most are clan ancestors and beneficent beings. They are messengers who accept Hopi gifts and prayers for health, fertility, and rain and carry them back to the gods. Their role as rainmakers is particularly important to the Hopi, whose agriculture in the high, arid desert of northeastern Arizona has always been precarious.

Several times the cortege of the katsinam circles through the village: A variety of masks, feathered head-dresses, furs, turtle shells attached to the legs, colorful traditional costumes or painted skin. They beat the drum, they dance, they sing, they bring katsina dolls, sweets and other gifts to children. Some wild katsinam are rubbing their hands with grease and soot. They pick a victim out of the crowd for a foot-race, mostly younger people. If they catch them they blacken their face. Later I learn that they have also considered to choose me for such a race. But one of the katsinam protected me. He argued that if I fall and sprain my ankle I couldn't make it to Boston. I am glad, not I that I fear the injury; but the cleaning procedure with cold water...

The culmination of the ceremony happens during the night. The dancers meet in the kivas. People enter these sacred rooms on broad ladders from the rooftop of the kiva building. In these kivas the dances are celebrated until the morning.

I approach a kiva too early, at midnight – the dancers are still preparing for the dances. They send me away and tell me to come back later. At two o'clock time has come. The uprights of the ladder and the smoking stovepipe point to the sparkling stars. Orion stretches a canopy over the village. The moon lightens up the plains between the mesa and the hills near the Grand Canyon in the west. The village is lying at the edge of the plateau, near the cliff, like a smoking offering on a ceremonial tray. Dogs howl in the nightly frost. The katsinam speak with highly pitched voices, joking and laughing before they enter the kiva. Then everybody disappears in this belly like building, one by one, climbing down the ladder. And then opening rhythmic dancing sounds can be heard, the drum, the songs, from the deep, light, warm depth of the kiva. The beautifully decorated dancers move as a circle. The dances, the songs are repetitive, trance enhancing. Subtle nuances of the rhythm and the sounds are carried out together, like one organism. I am stranger; and at the same time I feel some kind of deep familiarity, connected at a deep level, a hunch of connectedness that has survived and lives on – in spite of the time, in spite of the horror that indigenous people went through and still face today, a connectedness that is celebrated here in the night in these warm kivas, in a cold night, in the heartland of the Hopis.

2/17 –2/21/2008

Hotevilla – Window Rock

Three gifts accompany me on my next stretch of the journey: Omaw, one of the brothers of Debby, gives me some Hopi energy snacks: It's sweet blue corn dough wrapped in corn straw and tied together with grass strings - delicious and 100 % compost. Mark, Fred's brother brings me a special heart stone and a small calabash fruit before I leave; and a Hopi man from the SUN-Clan gives me white coarse-grained corn flour as an offering to the sun. Every morning after my sun greeting Yoga exercise I strew some flour towards the sun, as a small gift of gratitude that it bestows on me again light, warmth food, everything.

The snowstorm on my way to Hotevilla convinces me to choose a new route. I have planned to walk towards the North and cross the Rocky Mountains. But there is still so much snow there, and new winter storms are announced. I also see the nice and warm colors of high temperatures

in the south on the weather maps. Therefore I decide to stay in the south for a while. I will cross New Mexico, a part of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee and walk along the Appalachian mountains through Virginia towards Washington D.C.

During the last few days I enjoyed to make big stretches, around 35 miles a day. Uphill, downhill, from mesa to mesa, through canyons, across plains with salmon like clouds that make the curvature of the earth more visible. And for a long time I can still see Humphrey's Peak in the southwest, the highest mountain in Arizona (12'633 feet).

I camp along the road, mostly behind some pine trees, once on the parking lot of a Mormon church in Ganado. Nancy and Thierry Robrecht allow me to camp there because the ground has been so wet and muddy because of the melting snow. Thierry also informs the Navajo Times in Window Rock about my trip; and when I sit next to the road and eat a cliff bar a car stops and Cindy Yurth makes an interview about the SUNwalk for the local newspaper. Again and again drivers stop and offer me a ride. An elder lady stops and gives me a huge sandwich and a bottle of mineral water – she arrives just in the right moment when I am hungry; and the coyote and the ravens will be happy too because I leave them the meat part. In the store of Polacca, Lorena, an Apache Indian woman, approaches me. She has seen me already in Tuba City: "I had a daughter who died at the age of 17. Her name was Shundeen – that means sunshine. I was touched when I saw the sun flag on your cart." It turns out that she is traveling with the sister of Mark and Fred Kootswatewa.

I took up an idea of Allen: Asking people who offer me something whether I can do something for them, e.g. praying for them. Most of the people ask me to pray for their health and for the health of their beloved ones.

Yesterday there was the eclipse of the moon. The warm red color is reflected in the color of the bizarre rocks here in Window Rock. What a unique, wonderful world!