

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

1518.

**NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS AND
NATURE**

-A Cultural Interpretation

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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**Department of English
1999**

HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
ENGLANNIN KIELEN LAITOS

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North American Indians and Nature - A Cultural Interpretation

Pro Gradu-työ

Englantilainen filologia

Huhtikuu 1999

60 sivua + 2 liitettä

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on kuvata Pohjois-Amerikan intiaanien suhdetta ja asenteita heitä ympäröivään luontoon aikana ennen Eurooppalaisen kulttuurin tuloa Amerikan mantereelle. Tutkimuksen kantavana ajatuksena on että intiaanien luontosuhdetta määräsi paljolti heidän maailmankuvansa. Tavoitteena onkin kuvata intiaanien tapaa jäsentää maailmaansa ja tulkita heidän luontosuhdettaan suhteessa maailmankuvaan. Kulttuurin muodon yhteys taustalla vaikuttavaan ideologiseen ajatusmaailmaan tulee myös esille. Esimerkkinä tästä käsitellään intiaanien osallistumista esimerkiksi luontoa rasittavaan turkismetsästykseen, joka selkeästi oli ristiriidassa heidän perinteisten uskomustensa kanssa. Selitystä etsitäänkin ideologisesta ja materialistisesta muutoksesta, jonka Eurooppalaiset kolonialistit toivat mukanaan. Koska tutkimus on toteutettu kirjallisuuteen pohjautuen, on se luonteeltaan nimenomaan kuvaileva ja tulkitseva.

Tutkimuksen ensisijaisena materiaalina käytettiin intiaanien myyttejä ja muita tekstejä, sekä otteita puheista. Tarkastelun viitekehyksinä toimivat niin sanotun symbolisen antropologian ja relativismin näkökulmat kulttuuriin.

Intiaanien luontosuhde näyttää pohjautuvan heidän riippuvuuteensa heitä ympäröivästä luonnosta ja myös paljolti heidän maailmankuvaansa, jonka mukaan luonto oli voimakkaiden henkiolentojen asuinsija. Tästä johtuen luontoa täytyi kunnioittaa. Näyttää siltä että ennen Eurooppalaisen kulttuurin saapumista Amerikan mantereelle, intiaanien asenteet ja käyttäytyminen luontoa kohtaan todella vastasivat heidän maailmankuvaansa. Luontoa kunnioitettiin ja kaikki luonnon hyödyntämiseen liittyvä toiminta oli hyvin kontrolloitua. Luontoa kunnioittavan elämäntavan taustalla oli kuitenkin juuri intiaanien maailmankuva ja suuri riippuvuus luonnosta; ei niinkään mikään luonnonsuojelullinen ajatusmalli sellaisenaan. Intiaanien maailmankuva yksinkertaisesti konkretisoitui ekologisessa elämäntavassa. Jotta intiaanien ja luonnon välisen suhteen todellinen kuva ei romantisoituisi, ei sitä tule tulkita toisen kulttuuritaustan viitekehyksestä. Tämä on tärkeää siksi että kulttuurisella väärintulkinnalla voi olla monia kauaskantoisia poliittisia vaikutuksia. Tutkimuskohde näyttääkin tukevan symbolisen antropologian ja relativismin väitteitä kulttuurikontekstin huomioimisen tärkeydestä kulttuurisessa tulkinnassa.

Asiasanat: North-American Indians.nature.cultural interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the life of most people in modern western societies whirls around in a spiritual vacuum and conspicuous, even abusive, consumption of the environment and everything in it. Furthermore, the 20th century western mind has withdrawn itself from an awareness of nature; considering it to exist mainly for human use. Some people have grown tired of the lack of meaning in their lives and some have also become more and more aware of the deteriorating state into which the surrounding environment has fallen. These people search for change in their lives, and salvation, both for nature and for man, is often sought in the wisdom of various native peoples of the world. In this search, many people regard North American Indians as a group that lived ecologically and in harmony with the surrounding nature. A closer look, however, reveals that the relationship between Indians and nature was, in fact, very complex and heavily influenced by their belief system. The context behind the Indians' relationship with nature was very different than the context behind interaction with the environment today. This study will interpret the relationship between North American Indians and nature in days before the arrival of European culture to America. The major goal is to analyse this relationship, thus pointing out the importance of interpreting this matter in its own terms and context.

The hypothesis of this study rests on two assumptions. Many scholarly sources on the North American Indians stress the importance of realizing the different worldview behind the Indian ways of life in the modern western interpretation of their culture. Some understanding of the "native metaphysics" is definitely crucial for the proper understanding of the relationship between Indians and nature. According to *The Native North-American Almanac* (1994:593), for instance, the modern western notion of the relationship between Indians and the environment is often based on two historical myths; that Indians did not manipulate their environment and that they were the original conservationists, instinctively. Although the Indian way of life in general was ecological and protective toward nature, the native North Americans were not conservationists in the modern western sense of the word. Furthermore, although with great care, Indians did

manipulate their environment.

Today, conservationism often refers to attempts to avoid unnecessary destruction and waste of nature; for it to be available to future generations and for further economical benefits too. This often also involves help from modern technology. Indian motives for their balanced interaction with the environment were different. They were highly dependent on nature and this is one reason for their ecological behaviour and controlled use of the environment. Another important factor that must to be understood are the Indian religions, or "worldviews", their conception of the underlying logic and the guiding assumptions of their culture. If the role of worldview is neglected, the picture will end up distorted. Capps (ed. 1976:1), for instance, simply claims that native American beliefs and religions need to be reckoned with.

Indians were not instinctively acting in ecological ways only for the sake of avoiding deterioration of the environment and conserving it for future generations. Their interaction with the environment had to be in balance for them to survive, and also because of their worldview. Indian behaviour attempted to protect earth and its resources for the sake of people and of other species too. Indians believed the world and all life-forms in it were dwelling places of spirits, and therefore had to be treated with great care. Thus, rather than being a modern human-centered approach of managing natural resources, Indians had a life-centered approach attempting to protect all life for sake of life itself. Because of the Indian dependence on nature and of their worldview underlying this relationship, the whole context was very different from the modern western context of interaction with nature. I will try to describe and interpret the Indian perspective of their relationship with nature so the reader can see how it appeared to the Indians themselves. The first claim of this study is, thus, that in order to get a clear picture of the relationship between Indians and nature, some understanding of the Indian worldviews is needed. It must be pointed out, however, that this study is my interpretation and therefore only an outsider-view to the Indian worldviews and relationship with nature.

Secondly I argue that this relationship between Indians and nature reflects the claims of symbolic anthropology and cultural relativism. Symbolic anthropology

claims that each culture is meaningful in its own context. According to it, features of culture show the ideology of that culture "between the lines", so to say, and therefore culture and ideology interact. Accordingly, Indian worldview and beliefs can be seen reflected in Indians' interaction with nature. Closely related to this is the view of cultural relativism, stating that any custom or belief should be understood in its own cultural context. Each feature of a given culture reflects a distinctive worldview and therefore culture can not be interpreted in terms of another culture, at least not without cultural misinterpretations resulting. The Indians' relationship with nature, for example, may seem naïve or absurd from the modern western perspective. However, it was totally meaningful in its own context, reflecting the worldviews of Indians. The key to a proper understanding of this relationship is to see it in its own context and in its own time-context. All too often the modern western mind tends to forget this and assumes its standards to be the universal, from which perspective matters should be approached. Cultural misinterpretations may have far-reaching political consequences and may result in oppression of different kinds. The Indian relationship with nature and its misinterpretation by non-Indians also eventually resulted in forms of political oppression, as whites regarded Indians as unable to manage their land. In all cultural interpretation it is therefore very important to see also the native perspectives, and in order to do this, I will attempt to provide the reader with my interpretation of Indian mentality and metaphysics through description of these.

In order to see the native points of view, various Indian myths, quotations of speeches and other texts explaining the Indian way of life and traditions will be examined as the basis for this study. These reflect and describe the attitudes toward nature and thus the whole relationship with it. The texts also show the important role of worldview and beliefs in the shaping and realization of the Indian relationship with nature; why it took the forms it did.

Although there existed relationships of respect between traditional native Americans and nature, the Indian tribes were still humans using and shaping their environment according to their specific needs. For the most part, their use of environment was controlled and never turned into exploitation. There are exceptions, however, especially after the arrival of Europeans. For example,

certain tribes participated in the fur trade that almost extinguished some species from North America. This, however, involves one important factor that must be noted; historical change. Cultures change over time and this was also the case with Indian cultures. The above mentioned fur trade, for instance, is connected to the arrival of Europeans to America, with culture that would quite radically change the traditional Indian ways of life and ways of viewing their world. The European contact will be discussed as the reason for change in the Indian attitudes toward nature. It needs to be stressed, however, that the main focus of this study is on the so called traditional Indians in pre-contact times, and their relationship with nature.

In short, this is a two-level study. First, it will analyse the relationship between Indians and nature to show that the balance of this relationship was based on the Indian dependence on nature and understanding of the world. I thus hope to show this subject is more complex than what might appear at first glance. It is important also to understand that this is a cultural interpretation on this subject and not a biological one. This study bases its claims on Indian behaviour in their interaction with nature. Secondly, the subject of this study reflects the validity of the claims of symbolic anthropology on interaction between forms of culture and ideology, and of relativism on interpretation of cultures in their own terms. If the mental frame of another culture than that of the given one is used in cultural interpretation process, misinterpretations are probable. Because of the possible severe consequences of cultural misinterpretations, everything should be done to avoid them. Lastly, I will discuss whether the Indian "model" could be applied in today's search for balance with the environment.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Approach and Theory

The approach of this study is that of a descriptive interpretation of the relationship and attitudes of native North Americans toward nature. Because of practical reasons this study is based on literature. I will discuss the material in more detail in the following chapter. Because based on literature, the subject is observed from outside the culture(s) and there is no personal experience from the "field" to draw conclusions from. In this respect it is, using anthropological concepts, an etic-level study.

Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology (1991:91-93) defines etic-level data as referring to data "generated from a detached, 'scientific', perspective". In other words, the etic view is based on the categories of the observer. The opposite view of etic-level is that of emic-level, and this is defined as a view based on native knowledge; coming from inside the culture. According to the *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, this distinction between emic and etic is fairly recent, epitomizing, however, a debate over ethnographic knowledge and means of explaining cultural data. Whereas an etic account is better suited to derive data from statements of an observer and search for laws of general validity, emic accounts fit the goal of deriving data from an understanding of a native participant and giving an interpretation better. In most cases, however, the distinction between emic and etic is not an absolute one. Many studies include aspects of both. Because the aim of this study is to describe and interpret, and give an Indian perspective to this topic, here too the two approaches are fused. However, especially since I, as a white European, have no native insight in my personal use and because the basis of this study lies in literature, it is done from outside the culture and is thus an etic view. I have not done any fieldwork among Indian tribes that would give me personal experience-based knowledge about this subject. All in all, therefore, it is important to realize that this study is my interpretation of the relationship between Indians and nature. The question of emic/etic-level is important in the sense that it determines whose reality eventually

ends up depicted, thus including the aspect of objectivity. Furthermore, since literary accounts as such are always interpretations, it is also good to remember that, since based on literature, this study is an interpretation of interpretations. An interpretation, of course, includes the possibility of misinterpretation and also the possibility of not giving the right picture of its subject.

The main anthropological paradigm underlying this study is symbolic anthropology. It is always difficult to name just one paradigm since most of the time also other paradigms might be consulted for various aspects of the subject. If not in other ways, at least in the sense that often one paradigm includes aspects of older, perhaps now even discarded paradigms. New paradigms are built on the basis of older ones and they almost like "evolve", keeping parts that are found to be true from the older paradigms. This way new paradigms usually include "the best" of older paradigms. In any case, to name one, the paradigm of symbolic anthropology could be mentioned as the lens through which this topic is approached.

This paradigm of symbolic anthropology on the study of culture, as defined by Clifford Geertz, sees culture as a symbolic system in its own terms. Culture is seen as the surface expression of underlying ideological structures and principles (Geertz 1973:17). Thus, a given culture in its outer forms reflects the attitudes, values, principles and such matters of the people living in the culture in question. Using scientific concepts, symbolic anthropology sees moral and other evaluative aspects of culture called "ethos" to interact with cognitive existential aspects of culture called "worldview". According to Geertz (1973:127) and symbolic anthropology, there exists a meaningful relation between values and general order of existence. Therefore this interaction can be seen reflected in outer forms of culture; rites, and the way of life in general, give form to the ideology and beliefs of a culture. In them the underlying way of viewing the world formalizes itself. Because of this, outer forms of a culture, no matter how ridiculous or irrational they might appear to people of another culture, do have meaning to people living in a specific cultural surroundings. Geertz (1973:24) says: "The whole point of this semiotic approach to culture is to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can converse with them". In other

words, it aims to describe how people interpret their own life and what various forms of a given culture mean to the people living in it.

Since the aim of this study is to give an Indian perspective to this matter of attitudes and relationship toward nature, thus showing the "complete picture" and how it appeared to Indians themselves, relativism is another important concern. In short, relativism states that everything must be understood or judged in its own context. It claims that since cultures are based on different conceptions of morality and existence, they are incommensurable, ie. they can not be compared. An extreme form of relativism even claims that because of the different conceptual worlds underlying cultures, a person from one culture can never fully understand a person from another culture. This study does not accept this extreme form of relativism but agrees to a milder relativistic view, claiming that there exist certain universals that enable understanding and comparison between cultures to a certain extent (Latvala 1995). It must also be remembered here that these universals are not necessarily based on modern western thinking (Latvala 1995:186). The relevance of these views of cultural relativism to this study is that it should not be forgotten that different cultures operate on different conceptual worlds. Studying, for instance, the relationship between traditional Indians and nature through modern western concepts would give a false picture of this matter. There exists a huge gap in the way of thinking of traditional Indians and modern western people, and in order not to be led astray, this gap in thinking must be remembered. Ruth Benedict says:

They [cultures] differ from one another not only because one trait is present here and absent there, and because another trait is found in two regions in two different forms. They differ still more because they are oriented as wholes in different directions. They are travelling along different roads in pursuit of different ends, and these ends and these means in one society cannot be judged in terms of those of another society, because essentially they are incommensurable. (Benedict 1989:223.)

For example, whereas the modern western way of life appears to be primarily materialistic, based on property, the traditional Indian way of life appears to be primarily spiritual. This way these two aim at different ends and should not be "compared" with each other, or discussed about using the other culture's

conceptual world as the viewpoint. The different reality of a different culture can not be seen using concepts of another culture and therefore cultures should be interpreted regarding also the inhabitants' perspective. Aspects of culture are inseparable from their context. In order not to distort the picture, tunnel vision, concentrating only on one aspect that is first isolated and then analysed using alien mental frame of reference, must be avoided. This way the threat of cultural misinterpretations can be minimized. In study of cultures, a holistic view reckoning everything to exist in relation to something else, is the only view that can give valid information .

2.2 Material

The primary material of this study consist of various Indian texts. I will examine myths and speeches in order to see how they reflect the attitudes of Indians towards their surrounding environment. Myths depicted in this study are chosen from collections of Indian myths. The books *Poppamiehiä ja karhukansaa* (Wood 1987), *The Myths of the North American Indians* (Spence 1989), and *American Indian Mythology* (Marriott & Rachlin 1972) are collections of various Indian myths as depicted by the authors. The myths depicted in these collections are taken from different tribes of different culture areas. *The Fourth World of the Hopis* (Courlander 1971) tells the story of the Hopi Indians as preserved in their myths and legends.

Also, explanations of the Indian way of life and thinking are used to see how the Indians' relationship with nature is reflected in their everyday life, and what outer forms their beliefs take. Books of this kind are *The Sacret Pipe* (Brown 1989) which depicts the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux, and *The Soul of the Indian* (Eastman 1980) and *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt ed. 1988), which both describe the everyday life and worldviews of Indians. *Pumpkin Seed Point* (Waters 1985) depicts the Hopi Indian life and ideology but in more recent times. In an attempt to describe and interpret I will use also many direct quotations, especially from speeches. This is seen necessary since the Indian way of forming thoughts into speech as such, especially as regards the topic of nature, can be

seen to reflect the underlying attitudes toward it. The words of Indians' concerning nature usually show the utter feeling of reverence and unity they felt for it. Some of the quotations of speeches are taken from *Indian Oratory* (Vanderwerth 1989) which is a collection of famous Indian speeches by noted chieftains concerning various matters from various occasions, and some from Internet-pages handling facts about Indian life and including parts of speeches. Since much of the secondary material also includes quotations of Indian speeches, prayers etc., some direct quotations are taken also from the secondary material. It might be added that the Indian oratory is very eloquent and therefore a few words of warning are needed. Although words certainly reflect underlying feelings, the modern reader may easily get an over-romanticized picture from some of the quotations. Just as today a too "picturesque" way of speaking may be consciously avoided, Indian oratory attempted to be very eloquent and "visual", and it is good to bear this in mind.

These various texts and quotations are then discussed in light of secondary material, consisting of writings aiming to explain the Indian life and how they viewed their world. The secondary sources also account for various aspects of the Indian behaviour that aimed to keep up a balance in their interaction with the surrounding environment, and also attempt to give an Indian perspective on Indian life; to give an insight into it. Since much of the secondary material is also written by Indians or by people of Indian descent, the line between primary and secondary material is not so clear and sharp. Many of the books handle the same aspects of this matter.

The reason for the use of speeches and explanations of Indian life and worldview as primary material is that they obviously illuminate the relationship between Indians and environment. A few words might be said about the use of myths though, especially since Indian myths often refer to times long past when animals had human qualities and could speak with people (Hultkrantz 1980:30). To a modern western person they therefore may appear somewhat naïve, and their use may seem useless or odd. However, as pointed out by Malinowski (1971:18), Indians regarded myths as really having happened once in primeval times. This way they were seen as true depictions of historical happenings. Furthermore,

Malinowski (1971:19) mentions as functions of a myth that, for example, "it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man". Regarding these and adding to them the assertion of J. Bierhorst (1985:47) that myths of various tribes show that nature should be treated with respect, the use of myths in this study should also become quite justified. As "true", codifying stories they obviously play an important part in the shaping of Indian life, and since respect of nature is present in most nature-connected myths, we can claim that the Indians' relationship with nature was governed with respect toward it. The myths often warn against disrespectful treatment of nature and thus also sanction its use.

Indians adapted their ways of life to the environments in which they lived, and naturally, different ways of life resulted in different forms of cultures. Culture areas are separated from each other mainly according to the prevalent vegetation and sources of food. Because there is variation in Indian cultures, the primary material used has been selected to represent various culture areas. However, for practical reasons, all culture areas can not be presented separately and some discretion has to be made as to which material best shows the point of this study. Therefore, although material is selected to represent different ecology areas, some culture areas may be more present than others (see appendixes A and B on culture areas and tribes). In any case, the aim is to draw conclusions on a more general level and not to go into tribe-specific details. Various themes of myths also repeat themselves from tribe to tribe, varying in form of the myth with regional ecologies (Marriott & Rachlin 1972:34). For example, in areas where agriculture predominates, land and plants play a more important role in myths and beliefs than animals. Similarly, in hunting areas, animals were given the central role. It could be pointed out that in most cases, although one method of acquiring food might predominate, also other methods and ways of acquiring food were usually used. Some amount of hunting traditions for instance, can be found in all North-American cultures (Hultkrantz and Vorren ed. 1982:166). Since most myths are spread over the whole continent, differing slightly only in form in different areas, looking at least at one of these forms does give a hint of the ideas

and teachings underlying the myths.

2.3 Problems and Some Definitions of Concepts

Since concepts cause a great deal of misunderstanding it should be understood that the words "Indian" and "Native North American" are used interchangeably in this study; they both refer to the native American people living in the areas of the present United States and Canada. Another frequently repeated concept is that of "worldview" and this is used to refer to the understanding of cognitive and existential aspects of world; for example, how people see themselves in relation to nature, other people etc. The words "nature" and "environment" are also used interchangeably, both referring to the surrounding nature in the broadest sense; land, plants, animals and even inanimate objects of nature in it. Lastly, "Western" is used referring especially to Europeans and to non-Indians of the contemporary USA and Canada.

The biggest problem in this study probably concerns the generalization of claims about various Indian groups of North America. The Indians were by no means a heterogeneous group. There were numerous different tribes living in different culture areas; all with their own cultures and habits. Although there were huge differences, certain similarities can also be found. As regards attitudes toward nature especially, a single red line can be found among most tribes in most culture areas. Champagne (ed.1994:593) writes: "While spiritual beliefs regarding nature differ between Indian groups, certain common elements have influenced their relationship with the environment." More importantly, Barre Toelken (Capps ed. 1976:10) points out that although North American cultures varied, "one must start somewhere in an attempt to cope with the vast conceptual gulf which lies between Anglos in general and natives in general". Thus, the making of general observations is even a necessity, and, furthermore, there is evidence generalizations can be made without any greater distortions to the picture.

Another problem concerns objectivity. The emic/etic distinction has already been mentioned and also my own cultural background. It must also be pointed out that all people are the children of their culture. Although I naturally strive toward

objectivity, I still, at least unconsciously, use my own cultural understanding as the frame of reference in my interpretation. Thus, there is no such thing as objectivity. Everything is subjective to an extent.

The third major problem arises on the historical level. Cultures change and also the cultures of North America have done this over time. In the process of change, features of culture may change radically. It is therefore of great importance to stress that the focus of this study lies in the so called "traditional Indians" and their attitudes toward nature and relationship with it. This "traditional" Indian culture refers to the time as Indian cultures were shortly before and at the time of the arrival of Europeans to North America. This is the focus also because, when speaking of Indians in general, it is this Indian way of life that is usually thought of. Since Indian cultures were mainly oral, another quite practical reason for this focus is that there are no written records of most Indian cultures until from about this time. It is not until the Europeans began writing down material such as myths and rituals that there is documented material of these things. Since myths and stories were mainly passed down orally among Indians, there is, of course, no knowledge of how they may have changed in previous times.

In any case, historical change must be acknowledged. This problem is related to the ideas of relativism and symbolic anthropology in how they point out the importance of seeing the historical context of a feature of culture that is being studied. Since the main interest here lies on a general analytical level, however, historical change should not create any major problems.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN RELIGIONS

Native American religions were fairly simple in their overall form but highly complex in details. Beliefs of different tribes varied in details but the overall picture of their way of viewing the world shows similarities between different groups. K. Oksanen (1988:9) quotes Lame Deer to show the common basis for all Indian religions: "I think when it comes right down to it, all the Indian religions

somehow are part of the same belief, the same mystery. Our unity, it's in there". Since no detailed information on religion is necessary for the subject of this study, only a general outline of Indian religions will be presented in order to point out the gap in thinking from a modern western perspective. This outline shows the way Indians considered the whole universe to be "one" and connected, which was eventually also the ultimate "message" of their beliefs. Since the Indian worldview was one factor in the background of their relationship with nature, it is important to understand and reckon how very much it differed from forms of western Christian religion.

The word religion is, in fact, somewhat misleading. To Indians, "religion" was not separated from the rest of the life but permeated most aspects of everyday life (Hughes 1983:14). To Indians every activity included spiritual overtones. They did not have a religion in the sense of religion today and therefore the word "worldview", ie. the underlying logic and guiding assumptions of their culture (*Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology 1991*), would describe the Indian religion better. This worldview centered around complex spiritual concepts and it could be best described in modern concepts as animistic and pantheist, ie. it regarded everything as having a soul and one Creator of the universe to be represented and present in every object of the world around people.

The Indians did reckon one creator of all but they did not pay much attention to this divinity neither in cult nor in mythology. Indian religious perspective centered around a supernatural world of various gods and spirits, and the supernatural was seen to break through to the everyday world in forms of all living and inanimate beings (Hultkrantz 1980:14-15). "We [the Sioux] believed that the spirit pervades all creation and that all creature possesses a soul in some degree, though not necessarily a soul conscious of itself," says C. Eastman (1980:14). Because any object in this world could be a dwelling place of a powerful spirit, every action in interaction with the environment had to be taken with respect and great care. Furthermore, since Indians considered the world and all the things in it to have the same creator who was present in all, everything was regarded as sacred and equal. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce says: "All men were made by the same Great Spirit. They are all brothers. The Earth is the mother of

all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it"(Vanderwerth 1989:282). The Indians did not place themselves on a higher level in respect to the rest of creation. Everything had an equal right to exist. All forms and objects of this world were seen to be parts of the same "sacred" process of the world and therefore also mysteriously interrelated. Highwater (1981:188) quotes J. Epes Brown:"All forms under creation were understood to be mysteriously interrelated. Everything was as a relative to every other being or 'thing'. Thus, nothing existed in isolation..." The connectedness and interrelatedness of all is perhaps best captured in the words of Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux:

We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the fourlegged animals, and the winged peoples; and even more important, we should underst and that He is also above all these things and peoples. When we do understand all this deeply in our hearts, then we will fear, and love, and know the Great Spirit, and then we will be and act and live as He intends. (J.E.Brown ed.1989:xx.)

As can be seen, nature and its various parts played an important role in the Indian belief systems. In a way, Indian religions were religions of nature. Hultkrantz (1982:176) points out that since Indians were culturally so dependent on nature, there clearly is an environmental influence on religion. Humans were seen merely as participants in the complex natural world and its process, which put everything on the same level.

All was considered spiritual but some things, many natural phenomena for instance, were regarded as deities with more personal attributes and stronger power. These more person-like divinities of the practical religion were firmly grounded in the personal religious faith of Indians and usually they had the appearance of some nature being. Hultkrantz (1980:45) points out that often things like the sun or the moon may be separate divinities but at the same time, they may also be regarded as manifestations of a Supreme Being. For example, among the Oglala Lakota various gods, like the sun, moon, heaven and thunder, have distinct personalities and functions. Still, together they constitute a unity, known as "Wakan Tanka"; "the great mystery".

The beliefs of most tribes show some kind of opposing of powers of heaven and earth (Ryhänen 1987). Especially among agrarian tribes the Earth was given

feminine qualities, and Sky masculine qualities. Life was believed to be the result of interaction between the sky god and the earth goddess. The interaction the hunters believed to exist between the powers of earth and sky on the other hand, was on a more human level. Their mythology has sky/star people and earth people as the actors through which the interaction of these two powers take place (Ryhänen 1987). The most important aspect of this distinction between powers of earth and sky is the interaction seen between them that results in life. Considering earth as the mothering power from whom life grows, was certainly important in the formation of Indian attitudes toward the earth, for example. The other deities are numerous and also their importance and form varies from group to group. As was pointed out earlier, there is no need for this study to go any deeper into the complex details of the Indian deity concepts.

In order to understand the relationship between Indians and nature better, the most important aspects of the Indian worldview are the above mentioned connectedness, interrelatedness and equality of all, which result in feelings of reverence for every object of this world. Indians were not acting simply for the sake of reverence itself, though. Because of interrelatedness, Indians believed mistreatment or disrespectfulness toward nature could cause harm and illness, and this way Indians were merely being practical in their attempt to act according to their beliefs. This will be discussed in more detail in chapters to come.

One important feature connected to religion are beliefs concerning death. Beliefs about death varied a great deal among different tribes. Some groups believed in some kind of reincarnation and some in changing of worlds, in which life was considered to continue in a world of the dead. This was believed to be much like a copy of the world of the living (Hultkrantz 1980:134). In any case, generally speaking it can be said the Indians believed that death was not the end. In some form, life would continue. In fact, Indian cultures put emphasis on cyclical qualities; everything was believed to go in cycles, like cycles of nature. Things change but the changes follow a pattern. This way an end was seen also as a new beginning. The cyclic nature of Indian beliefs will also be discussed in more detail in what is to come.

4 INDIANS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATURE

4.1 Indians and Nature; an Overview

Though variation in belief systems of different Indian groups existed, certain common elements, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, can be found. Hughes (1983:6) remarks that: "In spite of the evident differences in tribal ways of life and mythologies, there is an impressive underlying agreement in their expressions of reverence for the earth, kinship with all forms of life, and harmony with nature". Indians regarded the natural world as containing spiritual powers in various forms (Champagne ed. 1994:593). Therefore, according to Indian views, the natural world, including humans, forms a complex system in which there is a powerful interrelationship between all animate and living. It must be pointed out that the Indian worldviews did not separate human and non-human, or animate or inanimate, with clear boundaries (Champagne 1994:593). For example, a single rock could well be regarded as an animate object. Wintu and many other tribes for example, saw form in general to be of shifting quality and relatively unimportant (Lee in Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:133). In any case, because everything in the world was considered as connected and spiritual, respect and keeping up a careful balance was crucial in interaction with the environment. After all, the environment was the dwelling place of spirits. The belief in the connectedness of all can be seen reflected, for instance, in the Plains Indians' smoking of pipe ceremony. J. E. Brown (Capps ed. 1976:32) explains that the act of smoking is actually a rite of communion. A man's breath is used to absorb the separateness of phenomena, represented by tobacco, within an ultimate unity, represented by fire. At the end of the ceremony the smokers all exclaim "We are all related". This way the smokers refer to the Indian experience of the self as part of others.

Indians believed careless or inappropriate use or treatment of the surrounding world would cause harm, for example, in forms of unfortunate happenings, bad luck and even death. This can be seen reflected in one Cheyenne myth, for instance, telling about fifty young men and a turtle (Marriott & Rachlin 1972:60-64). The fifty young men went out to hunt buffaloes. On this trip the men saw

something shining on the ground ahead and in hope of finding water they decided to go over and see what it was. On coming nearer the shining object the men found, to their amazement, it to be a huge water turtle. One of the men climbed on the turtle's back and soon all others, excluding the chief, were also on its back. The chief attempted to persuade the others to get down from the turtle's back and walk beside it like he himself did. This caused some debate among the men as to what should be done and eventually some decided to come down and walk. On trying that, they found they could not move; they were all stuck. Furthermore, it soon became evident there was a lake ahead and the turtle was heading right toward it. All attempts of the men to move and come down were futile and as the men were stuck on the turtle's back, they finally went into the lake with it and drowned. All that the chief could say to the men before the turtle dived, was that this happened because something wonderful was shown to them but they did not respect it. My summary of this myth shows well the Indians' belief on what could follow from improper treatment of nature, where powerful spirits exist in various forms. Therefore everything had to be treated with care.

In addition to being an attempt to live according to their worldview, Indian attempts to live in balance with the natural environment must also be seen economically. They lived close to nature and were completely dependent on it. Therefore mistakes in treatment of nature could be felt concretely as lack of food, for instance (Hughes 1983:5). Highwater (1981:143) says of the effect of this on the rest of the culture:

...primal peoples live among animals and vegetation constantly in close contact with the sources nourishment and death, understanding their environment and expressing their ideas and feelings in terms of the natural world, rather than some curiously unnatural idealization they have constructed about themselves in relation to the world .

Accordingly, Indian ways of life were in every respect finely tuned to fit the requirements and needs of the surrounding environment, and native Americans sought to preserve a careful balance with nature in order to survive.

The Indians saw themselves as playing only a small part in something greater, in which everything was equal. Despite respect in their attitude toward nature,

Indians did use their surrounding environment in order to survive. This seemed to them quite natural. For Indians, the only important thing to remember in this, was to keep up a certain "balance". Indians manipulated their environment only as much as was needed. Unthankful, or exploiting and unneeded uses of the environment were avoided. I will clarify this more in chapters to come. As long as no spirits were offended and the balance was kept, the use of environment was considered acceptable. Although some contradictory examples, which will be discussed later, do exist, the use of environment by Indians was for the most part done with great care and under strict control by the belief system. In a way, the belief systems were the major normative factor sanctioning the use of environment.

A blackfoot Indian once said: "A person should never walk so fast that the wind cannot blow away his footprints" (Hughes 1983:vii). This quotation reflects the Indian need to leave as little mark behind in this world as possible, and also the idea of stopping to see what nature has to teach. It appears Indians did indeed stop to learn from mother nature; they were skilled hunters, gatherers and cultivators. These skills were acquired by living with nature at first hand. Interesting in this connection is that Indians did not consider they had discovered the uses of things in nature by themselves. They regarded these uses to have been revealed to them by animals and spirits (Hughes 1983:79). Respect for animals and for nature came thus also from observation of them. Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Lakota explains:

Everything was possessed of personality, only differing with us in form. Knowledge was inherent in all things. The world was a library and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that shared, alike with us, the storms and blessings of earth. (Hughes 1983:80.)

With the world as their library, Indians studied it and objects in it carefully. Hughes (1983:80) says that "The Indian animistic view was in itself a way of understanding and relating to the phenomena experienced in nature, and it often demonstrated intuitive ecological understanding".

Hughes (1983:80-81) refers for example to the Indian habit of regarding the

processes of nature as cycles to represent a deep ecological understanding. Among most tribes, the circle was an important symbol and Black Elk explains the emphasis put on it:

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round...The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. (Neihardt ed. 1988:194-195.)

As can be seen, nature presented herself as "round" and it appeared logical to extend the roundness to other things by analogy. Indians extended these visible processes of nature to most things and viewed practically everything to happen in cycles. The cyclic aspect of their culture influenced even the Indian concept of time and change. To Indians, processes appeared to be like curves bending back toward their beginning. Everything was born, it lived and died, and the process began again. As later scientific findings would show, Indians indeed had an "intuitive ecological understanding"; it was not until much later that western science found out about concepts such as oxygen cycle, water cycle, recycling and so forth.

The mental conceptions and attitudes of Indians towards nature were totally different from the western ones. Highwater (1981:5-6) argues that what we call things, largely determines how these things are evaluated. He discusses the different mentality behind words and says that, for example, among the Blackfoot Indians, forest is regarded as the natural state of the world. The English word for forest, "wilderness", reflects certain attitudes of the western mental picture of the forest. Connotations of wild and dangerous are included in it. Similarly, the English word "Earth" includes mental images of soil and dirt, and other connotations of uncleanliness. Chief Luther Standing Bear's words reflect the different mentality:

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild'. Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and savage people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. (Hughes 1983:3.)

This quotation clearly points to the gap between mental pictures. Luther Standing Bear's speeches reflect native attitudes to land, showing the conceptual difference and its application to everyday life:

The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth. (<http://members.aol.com/pantheism0/indians.htm>)

Indeed, earth was considered to be a mother-entity and Indians sought a connection with her.

N. Scott Momaday (Capps ed. 1976:80-83) adds to the respect of nature also an aspect of appropriateness; knowing what is morally appropriate within the context of the relationship and circumstances. He claims the understanding of the appropriateness, what is the right way to act in a specific situation in interaction with nature, comes partly from the worldview and partly from a kind of racial memory. As an example of this "appropriate" behaviour reflecting respect, he refers to a Navajo story of a man who would not go hunting to feed his pregnant and hungry wife because it would be inappropriate to take life just when one is expecting the gift of it in form of a child. The aspect of appropriateness of the Indians' attitudes toward nature further reflects a different mental world and the native conception of nature as an element in which he or she exists. It also tells about the complexity of this relationship.

One further aspect reflecting Indian relationships with nature concerns their attitude toward waste. Indians tried to make the most of everything they took from nature and in most cases avoided waste to the last. D. Lee observes the Wintu attitude toward nature to be one of intimacy and mutual courtesy: "He kills a deer only when he needs it for his livelihood, and utilizes every part of it[...]Waste is abhorrent to him, not because he believes in the intrinsic virtue of

thrift, but because the deer had died for him"(Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:140). Indians obviously respected the way how the animal offered itself. Similarly, Krech (1981:88) quotes Wenzel to report in 1807 that Slavey "eat with as good appetite as if it was the most delicious food, any animal that they find that died either of wounds or sickness and which is already wasted by maggots". Although this latter example probably can not be generalized, it certainly speaks for the attempt to avoid waste.

This discussion should show that Indians lived close to nature. They were great observers of nature but also users of it. The Indian use of their natural surroundings and attitudes toward nature were characterized by feelings of respect, connectedness, balance and appropriateness. Their whole mental picture of this relationship differed completely from the non-Indian one. The major normative factor on the background of this relationship was the worldview which took form in a balanced interaction with nature.

4.2 Indians and Land

The Hopis, Zunis and many other tribes have a myth about "Emergence", telling that before coming to this world, the Indians lived successively in three previous worlds. At their arrival to the present world, they first asked permission from the guardian spirit of this world to live upon it. The guardian gave them his permission but at the same time ordered that they should establish certain annual ceremonies and told how they should move about the new land and migrate in it; they were not free to wander over it as they pleased. The myth obviously does not set man completely free in his use of the environment. Waters (1985:63-64) claims this myth to be ultimately a story of the evolution of consciousness which enabled man to distinguish himself from the rest of nature. Waters says, however, that through rites, as the myth told, man must observe and acknowledge "his arising from the one great origin of all life". People lived in a tight connection with their Mother Earth "from which they were born, and whose breast they were suckled, and to whose womb they were returned in a prenatal posture at death," and this should not be forgotten. Therefore, the practicing of rites would help to

keep up the connection with earth and prevent man from forgetting it.

The myths about emergence to this world reflect some Indian views about land. Indians believed land, like all else, was the gift of the Great Spirit and this way also a possible domain of powerful spirits. The Earth was seen to be a mother-entity; like a living organism. For example, in the spring, as plants are starting to grow, Pueblo Indians regarded the earth as tender and in need to be treated with special care. Therefore, in order to be more gentle, they removed the heels of their shoes and shoes from their horses' hooves (Hughes 1983:120). Similarly, in order to violate Mother Earth as little as possible, Indian farmers used digging sticks instead of plows. Even in areas where agriculture did not predominate, attitudes toward earth were like toward an earth goddess or a mother. Chief Smohalla of the Shahaptin Indians, living in the area of present state of Washington in the U.S., addressed the agent commissioned to persuade the Indians to cultivate the land in the 1880's in the following way:

You ask me to plow the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone. Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men. But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?(Hultkrantz 1980:54.)

As can be seen, attitudes toward land differed radically from the attitudes of the non-Indians. This quotation also reflects the way how Indian oratory is very eloquent and sometimes perhaps even a bit exaggerating. Therefore speeches should not be read too literally. None the less, previous examples and the quotation above reflect the underlying ideas and how land is given qualities characterizing it as an animate, almost human-like whole.

Hughes (1983:120) quotes Barre Tolken who once asked a Hopi Indian whether they really believed that if the ground was kicked with a foot, everything would be spoiled and nothing would grow. The Hopi Indian answered simply that he does not know what would happen but it surely would show what kind of a person the kicker is. This little encounter further reflects the Indian feeling of respect for earth and knowing the appropriate, ethically correct way to act.

Hughes (1983:18) goes to claim that the overall format of Indian ethics can be called protective and life-preserving. Forceful and unnecessary actions were not considered acceptable.

Land in Indian views was not to be owned. They felt that land is meant to be shared by all the living. Naturally land was used for hunting, gathering and cultivating but ownership of land was usually tribal. According to Hughes (1983:61), a statement like "We do not own land, we simply use it," is a characteristic Indian statement on this matter. Even though pieces of land were used by families or individuals, especially in culture areas where agriculture or cultivation predominated, areas used were considered to "belong" to the community. Furthermore, Indians regarded farming as a holy occupation and it was done with great care and feeling of respect for both plants and land. Many Indian methods of cultivating, for instance, were very ecological. To name just a few, fire was used to clear fields for planting, and also crop rotation was known. In using fire to clear fields, great care was taken and fires were carefully controlled so that no unneeded damage could take place. It appears that the Indian farming often even reduced the danger of erosion (Hughes 1983:76). In connection to farming, it might be mentioned that gathering of minerals also followed the pattern of respect and care. Since Mother Earth was seen as alive, so were the substances taken from her body. Indians believed that only limited amounts of mineral substances should be taken at a time, and when taken, thanks and apologies should be expressed. Potters gathering clay for instance thanked Mother Earth or "Clay Woman", who gave them her flesh (Hughes 1983:51-52).

Among Indians, especially in areas where living conditions were difficult, cooperation was common in all areas of life. Group interest predominated and competitive attitude was regarded antisocial (Hughes 1983:61). Therefore, sharing what was available was seen to be quite natural. This helped to reduce to the minimum, for example, the amount of waste. No one had more than was needed because the surplus was given to those who did not have enough. Exceptions to this exist and will be discussed later.

Land was important for Indians also in their sense of experiencing place. Joseph Epes Brown (Capps ed. 1976:29-30) says that nature was experienced

immediately, not abstracted:

...each being of nature, every particular form of the land, is experienced as the locus of qualitatively differentiated spirit-beings, whose individual and collective presence sanctifies and gives meaning to the land in all its details and contours. Thus it also gives meaning to the life of man who cannot conceive of himself apart from the land. (Brown in Capps ed. 1976:29-30.)

Nature and the environment were conceived as elements in which people exist and through which place, and even history, are experienced. Chief Seattle of the Suquamish and Duwamish tribes says:

Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people, and the very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to their footsteps than yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. (Vanderwerth 1989:121.)

Like the Hopi myth of the Emergence, the quotations above reflect the Indian views of oneness of all creation and views of everything as connected to the earth. Similar expressions can be found in some of the Plains Indians' rites. For instance, the so called "making of relatives" rite aims to establish a relationship on earth and a closer relationship with other people (Brown ed. 1989:101). Chief Seattle says in another speech:

...What befalls the earth, befalls all the sons of the earth. This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood which unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/1256/seattle.html>)

The way this quotation points out that man is ultimately dependent on earth certainly shows intuitive ecological understanding. Since living so close to nature and because of their dependence on it, Indians met the dependence of man on the environment in their everyday life. They also immediately saw and met the consequences of any possible mistreatments in their own lives. According to Hughes (1983:95), Indians apparently recognized even the desirability of keeping their population in balance with the carrying capacity of the land. He refers in this

to a Cherokee myth of animals worrying about people becoming too numerous and burdening Mother Earth.

As can be seen, Indians believed the earth to have animistic qualities and as a powerful spiritual entity, it was considered to be sacred. The concept of land certainly differed radically from the concept of land of whites. In fact, it was exactly disputes over land use that eventually created the major conflicts with the Europeans. This question of land once again reflects the gap between different worldviews. The European way of buying and owning land and their ways of using it were shocking to Indians. The paradox of this matter is that, because Indians did not respect property in the European sense and did not fence or plow the land, and because they often moved from place to place, whites thought the Indians had no proper sense of ownership or of the use of the land. Similarly, because whites bought and sold pieces of land and wounded it with plows, and moved on when they had taken what they wanted, Indians regarded whites as lacking love for the earth (Hughes 1983:63). A deeper understanding of the cultural reality and ideology of the other part would have been needed in this land issue by both Indians and Europeans. Especially it would have been necessary from the European side in their process of proceeding further westwards. Until the threat of losing their land, Indians were, for the most part, friendly toward Europeans. A better understanding of the Indian view on land might have saved people on both sides from violence, which eventually resulted from the process of colonizing America.

4.3 Indians and Plants

Long ago, among the Chippeways, there was a boy of fourteen who was due to have his initiation fast which is prescribed for all boys of his age. His mother prepared a remote little fasting-lodge where the boy went to have his ordeal. He meditated there on the goodness of the Great Spirit and prayed that some means to help his fellows would be revealed to him in a dream. On his third day of fasting the boy was weak and lay in a state between sleeping and waking when suddenly, there appeared to him a beautiful youth dressed in green robes and wearing green

plumes around his head. The youth told the boy his prayers had been heard and that the boy should rise and wrestle with him. They wrestled for some time and then the youth told the boy it was enough for that day and that he would return tomorrow for another contest. The same happened the day after and also on the fourth day, and although fasting, the boy grew stronger each time. On the third day, before leaving, the supernatural youth said to the boy that the next day the boy was destined to win him and he himself, the youth, would be killed as a consequence. He ordered the boy to strip off his garments and bury him where he has fallen. He also told the boy that the ground on the spot should be kept moist and clean, and that the spot should be covered with fresh earth once a month. He then promised that by obeying him, the boy would see him again, clothed in his green garments and plumes. Then he vanished. The following day the boy did as he was told; he threw the youth and buried him. Then he returned to his parents. According to the youth's advise the boy went to the burial spot every now and then and took care of it. In the autumn he was rewarded by seeing the green plumes rise above the earth, and he realized the friend of his dream had returned as the gift of the Great Spirit. My summary of this myth of the Maize Spirit (Spence 1989:180-182) on how the Chippeways received maize reflects the Indian belief that also plants were spiritual beings. Because of this, plants had to be handled with care and respect; whether gathering or cultivating. Hughes (1983:65) points out that maize plants, as can be seen from the myth above, were treated as holy people and raised with the care one would give to a baby.

In Indian views, plants were beings that had agreed on their own will to help mankind. Therefore, as sacrificing themselves, plants were considered to have earned a special respect. A Cherokee myth on the origin of medicine (Spence 1989:249-251) represents this. According to it, in the old days animals dwelled in amity with the human race and the two could communicate in a mutual language. In time, however, as the amount of people increased and as they invented lethal weapons that increased their killing of animals, the animal beings had to be crowded into forests and desert places. Eventually they grew so angry they decided to retaliate somehow. Councils of animals decided on various ways to retaliate for the disrespectful treatment of their race; for instance, diseases were

devised and named. When plants heard of this arrangement of the animals, they decided to frustrate their evil designs. Each plant down to the smallest grass and moss agreed to furnish a remedy for some named disease. This way medicine was created.

Specimens from the plant kingdom were used for many different purposes in various ways. The Indian knowledge of plants and their potentials, especially herbs, was extremely well-developed and sophisticated. Like domestic plants, also wild plants required respect. The gathering of plants was strictly guided by various ritualistic features. The first plant of the desired species the gatherers found was usually always left unpicked. So as not to hurt it, the plant was left with an offering of some kind and a song or a prayer expressing the human need was given to it. Indians believed the plant would carry the message of need to other plant people. Each species of plants had its own prayer. As other specimens of the desired species were found, apologies were given for picking them (Hughes 1983:50). The Navajos even believed gatherers should ask permission of medicine plants when picking them, or otherwise the medicine would not work. Usually, in gathering plants, if there was no need for the whole plant, only the needed parts were taken. Similarly, in gathering roots, Indians removed only a portion so that the plant could go on living. These practices reflect an attempt to respect all life and to avoid waste. Except for some special symbols or for medicine, the North American Indians did not even pick flowers. They saw flowers as fellow citizens who had the same right to live on Mother Earth as mankind itself.

The Mikasuki have another myth concerning the origin of maize (Marriott & Rachlin 1972:135-141). Briefly summarized, it tells about two boys living with their grandmother. Every day, the boys went hunting and the grandmother would then prepare a delicious meal for them. One day the boys announced they had grown tired of always eating meat, and on hearing this, the grandmother promised the boys to have part of the meal prepared as they would return. She said the meat the boys would bring from their hunting trip would be cooked to go with the prepared food, and that it would be the most delicious meal ever. The boys went hunting and, as promised, returned to taste the most delicious meal. They were completely charmed by this new food and to their questions about what the food

was called, the grandmother called it "corn". The same happened the following days and the boys only wondered where she got the corn from. The grandmother kept the origin of corn as secret, however. One day, the boys left hunting as usual but decided a little away from home that one would go and hunt and the other would hide to find where the corn came from. The younger brother hid himself in the orange grove nearby and eventually saw the grandmother go to the storehouse. He slipped through the grove and peeked through the open door into the storehouse. To his shock, he saw his grandmother rub her open palms down her sides. Wherever the hands passed, grits tumbled from her body on to a deerskin spread on the ground. The younger brother then left to catch his brother and on finding him, told what he had seen. This sickened the boys and in the evening, although the meal was delicious again, they could hardly eat. The grandmother soon realized that her secret had been revealed. She fell down to the floor almost without life. She told the boys that because her secret was now known, she must die. They begged her not to leave them and the grandmother promised them that although she would have to leave, she would always be with the boys. She also told exactly what the boys should do with her body. She was to be buried in the ground and covered with rich soil. The place was also to be fenced. She promised in spring plants would start to grow on the burial spot. Before she died, she also told how the grains should be stored and how corn should be planted. She said that as long as there was corn, she would be with the boys.

The Mikasukis believed that this was how they received corn and learned to garden. Especially interesting in this myth is the cannibalistic feature in it; the eating of the body of the grandmother and her eventual death that gives new life in form of plants. Just as the grandmother gave from herself, Indians believed plants and plant spirits sacrifice themselves for mankind, and for this they should be honoured. Secondly, death and springing up of new life as a consequence of it reflects the intuitive ecological understanding of the Indians; death is a prerequisite for new life. Indians saw nothing shocking in death; among most tribes it was not considered as an end but simply as a step in the cyclical processes of nature. "Only through the death of the parent seed can the living plant come

into being."(Marriott & Rachlin 1972:135.)

Because Indians considered trees as the most powerful and impressive plant people, they deserve to be mentioned separately. The bella Coola believed that long ago, trees and people were able to communicate with each other but men eventually lost that ability. Trees, however, still understand human speech, or so the Indians believe. Hughes (1983:49) quotes walking Buffalo, a Canadian Indian of the Stoney tribe:

Did you know that trees talk? Well they do. They talk to each other, and they'll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is white people don't listen. they never learned to listen to the Indians and I don't suppose they'll listen to other voices in nature. But I have learned a lot from trees: sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit. (Hughes 1983:49.)

Many tribes also believed that trees had immortal spirits and the power to help or hurt. Through the rustling of their leaves they could speak to the Great Spirit. The Iroquois myth I will summarize is about a brave man who once saved his wife and many of his tribe from a serious disease with the help of animals and trees. One winter many people of the tribe and the wife of a man called Nekumonta had fallen ill. The woman was dying and to save her, Nekumonta decided to go and seek a healing herb. He searched and searched, asking animals along the way for advise but no one could help him because they knew it was too early and the herbs had not risen above ground yet. Eventually Nekumonta was so tired and ill he lay on the ground and fell asleep. All the creatures of the forest came to watch him with pity because he had always treated them well and been good to them, and this they remembered. He had never slain an animal unless the killing was really necessary and he had always loved and protected the trees and the flowers. Their hearts were touched and they decided to try to help him. Together animals, plants and trees cried for the Great Manitou (Great Spirit) to help the man and the spirit heard their manifold whispering. In a dream, another way to save his wife and tribe was revealed to Nekumonta, and this he eventually did (Spence 1989:257-260). Apparently, Indians saw trees especially as being able to communicate with the Great Spirit through the rustling of their leaves.

As with the use of plants, rituals were important also in the use of trees.

Indians used wood for many purposes but this they did very carefully, so as to harm to trees as little as possible (Hughes 1983:53). Bark, for instance, was gathered with great care. Before taking anything from a tree, Indians expressed apologies and thanks, and often offered the tree tobacco. Black Elk tells how one had to proceed in getting willows to build a purification lodge: "...before you cut the willows remember to take to them a tobacco offering; and as you stand before them you should say: 'There are many kinds of trees, but it is you whom I have chosen to help me. I shall take you, but in your place there will be others!'" (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:23). Furthermore, trees would not be used if not absolutely necessary and for use as firewood, Indians preferred dead trees. Hopis preferred dead wood also as the material for making their ceremonial Kachina dolls, which Hopis believed to personify particular divinities. Waters (1985:79-80) describes an occasion of getting wood for material for making Kachinas and says that only after greeting and blessing two small spruce trees and placing prayer-feathers at their roots, were the trees cut down. The Hopis believed that spruce trees were the most powerful magnetic force of all trees; they have the power to bring clouds and moisture, and because of this "it is the spirits of the spruce, the clouds, and the rain who give this life to us..." (Waters 1985:80). Hence, the Hopis felt utter reverence for them.

As can be seen, Indians used wood. With methods and attitudes like those mentioned, no extensive damage was caused by the practices of Indians in forested areas. Some scholars have blamed the practices of Indians to be the cause of, for example, the deforestation of certain areas. This however, as Hughes (1983) argues, does not seem to be the case. In fact, Hughes (1983:57) goes to say that in forest areas, Indians were the "guardians" of the forest home.

One interesting belief involving trees is also the belief in the existence of a cosmic pillar. Many tribes perceived this pillar to have the form of a world tree and their cult system expressed it by the so-called sacred pole (Hultkrantz 1980:23). For instance, the Bella Coola imagined that on the western horizon there was a mighty pole supporting the sky and preventing the sun from falling down. They believed that the highest god himself erected this pole. The Delaware even considered the world tree to be the origin of people; in their view humans

sprouted on the branches of the world tree long ago (Hultkrantz 1980:25). Hultkrantz (1980:25) says that for Indians, the world tree was not merely a mythical concept linked to primordial cosmogony. It is also an expression of the divine being still keeping watch over the world, thus guaranteeing man's daily existence. Therefore, the tree is represented in the rituals of most tribes, where its function is to symbolize the cosmos, or the Supreme Being himself.

Also, since plants too were thought to be alive and have spirits, Indians had no reason to be vegetarians (Hughes 1983:49). Living involved some killing and this was unavoidable in order to stay alive. Indians saw this around them in nature and considered it therefore as natural.

4.4 Indians and Animals

The Indian view regarding everything in the world as related covered also the relationship between Indians and animals. Indians saw the animal kingdom, including even insects, to be on the same level as mankind. A Navajo myth of origin, for instance, tells how animals and people emerged to this world together from the underworld, where they previously lived (Hughes 1983:23). It thus acknowledges a common origin. In many other origin myths, animals are important also for the actual creation of this world. According to them, this world was originally covered with sea, and animals dived to get mud or a piece of land from the bottom of the sea. From this land was then created.

Animals in myths are generally very human-like. They also share a common language with mankind. Even marriages between men/women and animals are common in mythology. For instance, a Tlingit myth (Wood 1987:49-52) tells about a woman called Peesunt. Peesunt was the daughter of the chief of a tribe and one morning she, and some other girls, went out into the forest to get some blueberries. As the girls walked deeper into the forest, their voices got more quiet. They knew animals and especially bears hate noise. Peesunt, however, could not care less. She even started mocking bears. The others gazed around frightened but all seemed to be well. In the afternoon the girls had found so many berries they decided to head back home. Peesunt was the only one who wanted to stay a while

longer. She said the others could go and she would catch up with them in a while. After picking a few more berries, she left to catch up with her friends. She had almost caught up with them when the basket fell on the ground. All the berries spread on the ground and had to be gathered again and after doing this, she no longer could hear the voices of her friends. It was getting dark and Peesunt became frightened. All of a sudden there was a noise behind her and as she turned, she saw a man in a bearskin coming right toward her. The man asked Peesunt if she was lost and Peesunt told him what had happened. The man then said it was too late for Peesunt to return to her own home, but that she could come to his village not far away, and stay the night in there. They started walking and came to a house. As Peesunt entered, she saw a number of people sitting by a fire; all wearing bearskins. An old man greeted the young man and said that he seemed to have found what he went after. The people then informed Peesunt that she now had to marry the young man. Peesunt was shocked. After a while a little old lady came and explained to Peesunt that her mockery of bears had angered the chief of bears, who sent his nephew to get Peesunt to be captured. She then said Peesunt should always obey her husband and respect him or otherwise she would become a slave. She also said an attempt to escape would be useless.

After this, Peesunt lived with the bear people for a long time, and learned the ways of the bears. She even grew to love her husband but she still longed to return to her home. Back home, Peesunt's brothers still, after years, were certain that their sister was alive. They determinedly kept looking for her for they believed she was kept as prisoner by the bear people. Many bears were killed and Peesunt's husband decided to take Peesunt in the mountains, where she would not be found so easily. They started their journey and after reaching their new home, Peesunt gave birth to twins; children half bear, half human. One day Peesunt noticed four hunters far below, and on a closer look, realized they were her brothers. The brothers also saw Peesunt. The bear man, who had been sleeping, now woke up and told he had seen in a dream that the brothers would kill him. He now knew that would happen. He promised Peesunt not to hurt the hunters but insisted Peesunt to teach people to treat bears with respect. He also ordered some rituals that should be taken care of after killing bears. He then left and let himself

to be killed, thus sacrificing himself because he did not want to cause Peesunt worries by hurting her brothers. Peesunt returned home and taught people what the bear had ordered. She soon realized, however, she no longer was completely human. Often she did not care for the company of people. One day, she dressed her children and herself in bearskins and they turned into bears, travelling back into the mountains never to be seen again. Because of what she had taught, people of her tribe became great hunters.

As this myth also reflects, Indians believed animals, and some men and women too, had the ability to change their appearance. Animals could assume human forms and some humans animal forms. Among many tribes, outward appearance was only an incidental attribute of being; form was seen to be transient. Many Hopi myths (Courlander 1971), for instance, include several stories where transformations take place. These myths reflect the conception how animals were regarded as powerful human-like figures. Cheyennes and Arapahos even regarded bears as their ancestors; they believed bears were capable of sexual intercourse with human beings and therefore eating bear was an act of cannibalism (Marriott & Rachlin 1972:159). Indians often attributed to animals not only human qualities, but even more person-like qualities. Hallowell (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:159-160) tells of an Ojibwa Indian who encountered a bear and tried to shoot it. He missed and the bear started right at him. He pointed the gun at the bear when he remembered his father's words that bears always understand what they are told. He then told the bear that if it wanted to live, he should go away. The bear turned and left him there. This depiction of the encounter with a bear shows how Ojibwas, for instance, acted with some animals, but not all, in ways that assume the animal to understand them and to have volitional capacities as well. Animals were treated as if they were persons with whom interaction on the mental level is possible.

Indians believed that animals possess superior powers to men and as powerful spiritual beings, animals could help people or, if not treated correctly, hurt them. The Seneca, for instance, have a myth accounting for the origin of medicine (Spence 1989:230-232), which I will summarize. Once a man went into the woods on a hunting expedition and one night during this expedition he woke by a noise

of singing and drum beating. He looked around but could not see anything. The same happened the following night and this time, after some investigations, the man realized the presence of people since there was a rustling sound among the branches. The man heard a voice telling him that his investigations had resulted in him seeing and witnessing something sacred. For this he deserved to die. After some hesitation among the people present, however, the man was forgiven his curiosity and the people revealed to him the secret of medicine for wounds. The man learned to prepare this medicine and on his departure, he realized the people around him were not humans at all, but animals of different species. The animals fled into the forest and the man eventually returned to his home. This way, certain medicines were revealed to mankind as a gift by animals.

The Cree have a similar kind of myth about receiving gifts from animals (Spence 1989:190-193). According to it, a young brave went out to catch eagles. He had prepared the trap and sat there waiting. In the evening he suddenly heard drumming noises that stopped as it began to dawn. Next night, as he still waited for prey, the noises were there again. This time the man decided to follow the noises and he came to a lake. Since it was morning again, the drumming now stopped. The man sat there and prayed for better hunting luck. He had not caught anything. In the evening the drumming sound started again and the man saw countless animals swimming in the lake. Four days he sat there and then fell asleep. When he woke, he found himself in a lodge surrounded by many people, all of whom wore robes made of skins of various animals. These people were the animals the Indian had seen swimming in the water. They had now changed themselves into humans. From the back, a chief, a dog in the form of a man, appeared and told the young Indian his prayers had been heard. He gave his gift of power in the form of a dance, which would bring luck in war. Other animals also presented the young Indian with various powers. Owl gave his feathers, which would enable him to see in dark, buffalo gave him his power and endurance, and other animals followed with powers of all kinds. After receiving the gifts the Indian fell asleep and woke up on the shores of the lake. As he returned home, he taught the others the dance which would make them skillful in war and showed also the rest of his gifts. He then formed a Society of Young Dogs, which

practised the dance and obtained the benefits of that practise. As can be seen, gifts of animals came in various forms.

In Plains Indian religion, animals' gifts could be received also from practising the rite of lamenting, otherwise known as the vision quest. Lamenting was an ordeal of self-discipline, in which a special relationship was sought with the powers of nature. Lamenting involved several stages and it was important that every single step in many rituals was done the right way. As the lamenter then lamented alone in some lonely place, he or she received visions of different kinds. Often the visions might come in forms of animals or birds, giving the lamenter power. Some special words could also be expressed to the lamenter, thus revealing some universal secrets. Joseph Epes Brown (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:41) explains of the lamenting that "The Indian actually identifies himself with, or becomes, the quality or principle of the being or thing which comes to him in a vision...". Brown adds that some material form representing the animal or the object that appeared in the vision is always carried with the Indian so that the power received will never leave him.

As all the myths above reflect, animals could help humans if they wanted to. In order to earn their help, people had to treat animals with respect. Possible orders the animals gave to men along with their advise and gifts, had to be fulfilled and obeyed. Hughes (1983:78) quotes a story of an Oregon tribe to illustrate this. Once, a boy's quest for a guardian spirit resulted in him meeting a Great Elk. Great Elk gave the boy the skill to be a good hunter. He also strictly advised him never to kill more than was needed at one time. Soon the boy realized what good hunter he had become and started to violate Great Elk's command. He slaughtered herds of wildlife, including elk. The guardian spirit saw this and withdrew his protection. The boy lost his hunting ability and eventually starved to death. Neglect and ignorance of orders might thus result in punishments, or in losing the help of animals or even in death .

As was pointed out in connection with Indians' attitudes towards plants, native Americans saw killing to be a natural part of life in order to survive. Since everything in nature was spiritual, there was no reason for them to be vegetarians, for example. It was important not to offend the spirits in the process

of using nature and its various creations. Because of this Indians regarded hunting, like agriculture, as a holy occupation. Hunting was highly ritualized and the rituals had to be obeyed carefully. Rituals were necessary because Indians believed that creatures could not be killed unless they offered themselves willingly (Hughes 1983:25). The Hopis, for instance, have a myth about a boy who had to kill a deer in order to get one of its horns. In catching up with the deer the boy explained his situation and why he has to kill the deer. He apologized for this necessity and offered two prayer sticks as gifts. The deer thanked the boy and told him to do whatever had to be done (Courlander 1971:71). The killing, as in this case, was like a contract between the hunter and the hunted, to which they both agreed. The animal's consent was necessary for its killing and if rituals or apologies were neglected, animals might refuse to die for the hunter. Furthermore, neglect of rituals or mistreatment of animals might even lead to illness or death, or some other misfortune. Many tribes believed each animal to have a specific illness with which it could punish.

Indians considered various species of animals to have a chief of their own who demanded that his children be treated with great respect and care. Since killing an animal of a particular species damaged the power-balance of the chief of this species, the disharmony had to be balanced back to normal through the act of ritual (Hughes 1983:32). Therefore rituals were important. Apologies for killing were absolutely necessary, either to the animal as a spiritual being, or to the guardian spirit of animals in question. It varied according to circumstances as to which of these the apologies were addressed. Hultkrantz (1980:142-143) claims that among hunters, this "master of animals" appears to lie behind the development of "guardian spirit" concept of the individual hunter. This belief in a guardian spirit was known also as totemism (Spence 1989:80-81), and it too reflects the role of animals in the life of Indians.

Totemism meant that a tribe or a clan would regard itself as under the protection of a particular animal, symbolizing a particular quality. The qualities were characteristic of the animal's own qualities in nature; deer were characterized by swiftness, wild cat by stealth and so forth. The animal with which a tribe would identify itself, might have some natural qualities that the tribe wanted also

to possess. After the lapse of a few generations the tribe would then regard the animal whose qualities they believed to possess as their direct ancestors. The members of the animal species were then seen as their blood-relations and a tribe would never eat or hunt the animal whose form their totem bore. In practice, totemism also had far-reaching social consequences of tribal rules and customs which came to govern and sanction marriages and many other affairs of life.

The form and complexity of apologies given to an animal that was killed varied from tribe to tribe and depended also on the animal in question. It might vary from a very simple: "I have killed you because I need food. Do not be angry," (Hughes 1983:30) of the Papago Indians, to an apology chant of several stanzas among Navajos. Indians also treated the dead creature's body and its parts with great care, for they too might cause trouble if mistreated. The animal corpse might, for example, be carried in special bindings and when brought home, welcomes and offerings were given to it. Even the bones of the animal might end up placed in a shrine of some sort (Hughes 1983:31).

The Indian view of everything happening in cycles was present also in hunting and handling of the prey. Many tribes believed that the killed animals returned to their homes, from where they would return back later to be food again. For instance, in Northwest some tribes believed that salmon had simply removed their outer salmon robes and journeyed to their home undersea. If their flesh was not treated properly, the salmon would refuse to return (Hughes 1983:45). Some tribes even returned fishbones to water, so that the bones could swim back home.

Hughes (1983) points out that the Indian way of hunting involved several kinds of methods preventing hunting from turning into exploitation of the resources. For example, the principle of "do not take all" (Hughes 1983:34) can be found in the Indian practices. Apart from a few exceptions which will be discussed later, waste was avoided. Many Indian myths, for example, stress exactly the importance of taking only as much as is needed from nature and warn against wasteful use. Indians were often also very selective as to which particular animals were killed; pregnant or young animals were usually left alone. Furthermore, hunting of particular species was often limited to a certain season and avoided during breeding seasons. Many hunting tribes also used a special "single prey species"

principle. This concentrated the hunt on one species only, like in the Plains to buffalo, for instance. Thus, not all tribes hunted the same animals. Furthermore, the ethics of sharing in Indian societies also contributed to the avoidance waste, therefore preventing excessive hunting. Hunters did not kill only for themselves but for the tribe or clan as well. If there was food available, everybody had it, and if not, then all starved. Sharing was a rule among most tribes.

Native Americans treated nature and animals with respect because they depended on the ecosystems in which they lived. For them, hunting was one of the ways to feed the tribe (Hughes 1983:37), and the right kind of hunting methods guaranteed the continuance of the availability of food. Indians understood the dependence of people on nature, and believed nature to be dependent on powerful world of spirits (Vecsey 1988:xii). Therefore, for the proper understanding of this relationship, it is important to realize also the role of belief systems and worldviews. As the discussion and examples above show, the Indians' relationship with animals, and nature in general, was very different from the western one. The respect for animals, for instance the apologies given and other practices addressed to them in hunting, may appear naïve or incomprehensible to a non-Indian, especially from the modern perspective. However, the key to the understanding lies in the Indian worldview. Cultural analysis should not lose touch with the hard surfaces of life. Things need to be placed in comprehensible, meaningful frames, and not merely speculated upon (Geertz 1973:30). This opens the door to understand why, for example, on the Papago salt trip, great care was taken not to step off the trail. Some animals', or insects' house might be ruined, or they might even be killed, and the animal would become the enemy (Underhill in Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:46). Without understanding the underlying beliefs, behaviour like this may indeed appear strange. Understanding that the Indian worldview regarded everything as spiritual, is the exact key to the understanding of their relationship with nature. Understanding this also helps in overcoming the gap created by incommensurability of different cultures (Latvala 1995 and Benedict 1989). Since cultures aim at different ends, they should not be compared or analyzed in terms of another culture. I will discuss incommensurability more in 5.1.

4.5 Indians and Inanimate Objects of Nature

The Indian worldviews were animistic and the animistic potentiality was given to most things. This is not to say, however, as claimed by Dennis and Barbara Tedlock (eds. 1992:xxii), that everything was regarded as alive. The word "animistic" is therefore somewhat misleading. The different tribal ways of making distinctions between animate and inanimate were very complex and may, perhaps, remain forever alien to a non-Indian mind. Hallowell (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:147) refers to an encounter he had with an Ojibwa Indian, in which he, as an anthropologist, asked the Indian whether all stones around them were alive. The answer was: "No! But some are." This shows how everything is not regarded as animate after all, and also reflects the complexity of making this distinction. The Ojibwa language and its means of making the distinction between animate and inanimate are further discussed by Hallowell (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:146), who says that the Ojibwa language formally expresses this distinction. A closer look, however, reveals that the distinction between animate and inanimate is rather arbitrary and very puzzling from a naturalistic frame of reference and from the standpoint of common sense. The Ojibwa do not perceive stones in general as animate, but recognize potentialities for animation under certain circumstances. Furthermore, Hallowell (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:148) also refers to cases where stones have "moved". Although this may appear totally unbelievable at first, it may in fact reflect a kind of insight about nature and its objects. Hallowell (Tedlock & Tedlock 1992:174) refers to his notes and quotes N.W. Pirie on a more sophisticated framework of modern biological thought: "Life is not a thing, a philosophical entity: it is an attitude of mind towards what is being observed." Because of their worldview, Indians seem to have had an open mind towards phenomena in nature. Because spirits inhabited most things in the world, even unexpected things could happen. The same can not always be said of modern western science. Whereas seeing is not necessarily believing, believing usually enables seeing. In any case, this discussion should make clear the complexity of this matter. It is also further complicated by the fact that it varied from tribe to tribe.

The discussion in 4.2 showed that land as such was considered sacred and given animate attributes. As pointed out in the discussion above, land could also inhabit other separate local-bound spirits. The Iroquois, for example, have myths concerning stone giants (Spence 1989:228,254). These giants represented a malignant race of giants whose bodies were made of stone. Spence (1989:228) says these stone giant myths may reflect a fusion of the conception concerning a race of giants sprung from Mother Earth and of a belief that stones and rocks compose the earth's bony framework. Be it as it may, the stone giant myths reflect the possibility of stones being animate, even human-like beings. It seems that mountains and stones in general hold a unique position among sacred places in North America (Hultkrantz 1980:60). The Shoshoni, for instance, avoid pointing a finger at the Grand Tetons (mountain peaks on the border of Idaho and Wyoming) in fear of provoking the mountain spirits. Similarly, among the Dakota, "Inyan", meaning rocks, constitutes the oldest of all divinities. Probably because stones are the least variable material, they are regarded as the ancestral father of all things and all gods (Hultkrantz 1980:61).

In similar ways, animate qualities were attributed to various forces of nature like the winds, thunder, and even very abstract entities like light and darkness, heat and cold, and so forth (Spence 1989:80). Indians also regarded water, in all its multitude of forms, as being dwelled by the supernatural powers (Hultkrantz 1980:62). The mythology of Maidu and Wintun Indians of California even tell of fountain of youth. According to it, in times before death entered this world, humans could regain their youth by diving into the water of life. The belief in the life-giving power of water is found among most tribes of the Americas. There are, for example, numerous different rituals involving water, aiming to rejuvenate the vitality of men and women.

Because of the variety and complexity of the Indian belief systems concerning various spirits and deities, this matter of local-bound divinities will not be dealt with in more detail; we shall be satisfied in noting simply the possibility of animation in objects considered inanimate by modern western mind.

The Indian way of seeing the surrounding environment, or most of it, as animate, is well reflected in the Oglala Sioux prayer of honour for stones. In

gathering stones for the making of a sweat-lodge, the stones were addressed in the following way:

O ancient rocks, *Tunkayatakapaka*, you are now here with us; *Wakan Tanka* [the Great Spirit] has made the Earth, and has placed you next to Her. Upon you the generations will walk, and their steps shall not falter! O Rocks, you have neither eyes, nor mouth; you do not move, but receiving your sacred breath [the steam], our people will be long-winded as they walk the path of life; your breath is the very breath of life. (Brown ed. 1989:37.)

This reflects not only the belief in animate power in stones, but also the feeling of respect and gratitude the Indians felt for the use of even things like stones. Their view of themselves as one with nature was thus extended even to things the modern western mind would consider inanimate.

4.6 Attitudes of Indians Toward Fellowmen and War

As has been shown, the feeling of respect for all living underlies most Indian actions. Indian interaction with their fellowmen, however, does not always seem to reflect this the same way as their interaction with the rest of nature. For example, wars between tribes existed and often the Indian behaviour toward "enemies" may appear, at least from the modern perspective, brutal. The fierceness and the number of battles certainly varied between tribes and different groups. Often Indians considered warfare more like a great play or game, and the amount of killed remained relatively small. Among the Sioux, for instance, warfare was considered as an institution of the "Great Mystery". C. Eastman (1980:106) says that warfare was seen to develop the quality of manliness and its motive was chivalric. Also other Indian views to war existed, though. Contrary to European warfare, the aim of war among Indians appears not to be the desire for territorial aggrandizement or the overthrow of a brother nation. This seems logical regarding also the view of most tribes that land was not to be owned. Indians considered everyone to have an equal right to land and its use was collective in nature. Naturally, disputes over land existed, for example in agricultural areas, where families often had a definite block of land to use (Hughes 1983:61). The land was not considered their exclusive property, however, and disputes were

usually settled peacefully.

Some of the Indian treatment of their fellowmen that may appear brutal is partly explained by their understanding of world. For example scalping, the removal of a small part of skin from the top of head, was done, at least partly, to transfer the scalped man's power to the scalper. Indians regarded the scalp as a living spirit. Among some tribes, scalps were gathered also as visible proofs of the warrior's valour (Axtell 1981:213-214). In fact, there is some controversy over the matter of scalping and it has even been suggested that this practice was originally introduced by Europeans. It seems, however, that scalping in America was an Indian invention (Axtell 1981:30), but often European descriptions of scalping exaggerated the brutality of this practice. Furthermore, it was used also by Europeans.

The killing of non-combatants like women and children is another matter that appears very brutal. This is partly explained by the Indian view regarding a woman and children without a protector as pitiable cases. Furthermore, Indians believed that the spirit of the warrior would be more content if the wife and children were not left to suffer (Eastman 1980:107). Although European warriors were just as resourceful as the Indians in killing their enemy, most were sickened and could not understand the natives' postmortem desecration of the human body. For instance, if a pregnant woman was killed, even the embryo might be torn from her womb. This was done, at least partly, because Indians believed that even the embryo could be a potentially dangerous enemy (Axtell 1981:311). Some explanation for this rather mindless behaviour can, thus, be found in the Indian belief systems.

Furthermore, because Indians did not regard death as an end, dying was not such a great horror for them. As pointed out earlier, Indian cultures were cyclical in nature. Although beliefs varied as to what exactly comes after death, Indians regarded death at some level as a change of form or as a change of worlds. As noted, however, war and its ways varied between different groups and so did the amount of violence used. The arrival of Europeans with an aggressive culture and powerful arms changed the Indian warfare.

The Indian attitude toward Europeans appears at first to have been rather friendly but as it became apparent that the Indians were deprived of their culture

and of their lands, attitudes changed. For example, despite minor wars, the relations between Indians and early settlers of Virginia in the 17th century seem to have been peaceful on the whole (Spence 1989:29). Inability to comprehend each other's point of view and the dishonesty of white raiders resulted eventually in violence. Indians saw especially the European land greed as totally incomprehensible and unacceptable. Often Indians were driven away from areas taken and the conflicts between whites and Indians took place along the routes of white extension westwards (Spence 1989:31). Indians tried to find solutions to the conflict through negotiations but as the discussions failed and promises given from the European side were usually not kept, the only way for the Indians to defend their culture and land areas was the use of violence and a total change of attitudes toward Europeans.

Wars between Indian tribes and the white became more usual, and often Europeans were shocked by Indian practices of mutilation of wounded and dead in battlefields. As pointed out, however, Indian practices of this kind were not usually random mutilation but served certain beliefs (Axtell 1981). All in all, considering European warfare and the needless violence it involves, Indian warfare was not on the same level with it at all. The killing of Indians by Europeans and the mutilation of Indian corpses was much more mindless than in the Indian way to war. One thing reflecting the "humane" quality of the Indian cultures is that many white captives, taken in war or from raided settlements, were, in fact, charmed by the Indian way of life with its close connection to nature, and did not want to return to their old lives (Axtell 1981:49, 206). The captives were mainly women and children, who were not kept as prisoners. They were to live and move freely among Indians; the degree of freedom to move about depending on the captives willingness to acculturate to the Indian life (Axtell 1981:190). Variation between practices of different tribes existed, though, and some tribes did also torture their captives.

As the Indians considered everything connected and equal, it is somewhat surprising that violence and wars existed in the first place. As pointed out, however, wars were not wars in the European sense of the word; not until the arrival of Europeans to America. The European culture with its new values and

habits eventually changed also the motivations of Indians for warfare. Furthermore, Indians too were humans and, like any other people, disputes between individuals and groups were possible. All in all, however, Indian attitudes toward their fellowmen appear to have been fairly respectful. This is reflected in words of Black Elk:

The Six Grandfathers have placed in this world many things, all of which should be happy. Every little thing is sent for something, and in that thing there should be happiness and the power to make happy. Like the grasses showing tender faces to each other, thus we should do, for this was the wish of the Grandfathers of the world. (Neihardt ed. 1988:193.)

As the reference to "grass" shows, observance of nature revealed a kind of "model" for life .

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Reality and Its Interpretation

As the discussion above has shown, for most part the native Americans' attitudes toward and relationship with nature in times before the arrival of Europeans can be said to be characterized by utter respect for nature. Natural surroundings and all existing things were used and even altered to fit the needs of people, but the interaction Indians had with their environment was governed by principles aiming to preserve balance and harmony in this interaction. Indians used the environment but they did not generally abuse it. Although the Indian technology may seem primitive in contrast to the European, it certainly was effective and finely adjusted to the environment. If the Indians had wanted, they could have exploited their surroundings; it was not therefore the lack of technology that prevented exploitation of the environment (Hughes 1983:98).

The major factor governing and sanctioning this relationship with nature seems to be the worldview of the Indians that regarded nature and everything in it to be

a dwelling place of powerful spirits. Indians believed that mistreatment or disrespectfulness could lead to unwanted consequences in form of misluck, disease and so forth. Since the Indians lived close to nature and were almost totally dependent on it, there is also a practical and economical side to this; any miscalculations on the use of the environment would be immediately felt. The Indian conception of the relationship between people and the environment saw people as dependent on nature, and nature as dependent on spiritual beings. The Indian worldview and way of life therefore represented quite a logical and practical result of this conception of interrelatedness of people, nature and spirits. Seen in the right perspective, the Indian relationship with nature reflects the connection between surface expressions of culture and its underlying ideological principles, thus reflecting the claims of symbolic anthropology (Geertz 1973).

It appears that the Indian worldviews and belief systems were the major factors shaping and sanctioning the Indian behaviour, eventually resulting in an ecologically balanced way of life. The reasons Indians acted in ecological ways were mainly because they had to, in order to survive, and also the fact that they were simply acting according to their worldview. Any other kind of behaviour would have defied their belief system. It might be added, of course, that in the end, only the results are important. The modern western scientific mind is often so obsessed with finding reasons for "phenomena" that the actual meaning of the subject is lost in the process. To reassert, Indians interacted with nature in ecologically balanced ways but for reasons different than what modern western people often think. In order to see this relationship between native Americans and nature in the right perspective, it is of utmost importance to realize the gap between the different worldviews and different ways of thinking. Interpreting this relationship in terms of our own modern western culture, will result in a distorted picture, which can lead to further misinterpretations and have even political consequences. *The Native North-American Almanac* points out:

Because the relationship between American Indians and the natural world has been governed in part by spiritual belief system foreign to non-Indian Americans, a gap in understanding has created a romantization and manipulation of these views to suit the needs of the majority U.S. culture. By characterizing American Indians as having a unique

and unfathomable spiritual tie to nature, non-Indians can justify dehumanizing policies in which Indians may be viewed as locked into a primitive relationship with nature, unable to manage their lands in today's complex society, or as able to manage those lands only if they turn their backs on traditional religious beliefs.(Champagne ed. 1994:593.)

It is therefore of crucial importance to avoid interpreting features of a given culture in terms of another one. The aim of interpretation of cultures should always be the want to receive a realistic understanding of them. It is this that Geertz (1973:24) and his semiotic approach have emphasized; the aim should be to gain access to the conceptual world of the subject in order to see the meaning they see. It is this that helps in the process of overcoming incommensurability and adding to cultural understanding.

5.2 Exceptions

It must be pointed out that this study has made a lot of generalizations. Although Indians' relationship with nature was ecological in its overall frame, there was variation between tribes and probably even between individuals. Much of the tribal and individual variation cannot even be accounted for, since there are no records of them. Generally, Indians were tolerant of individual desires and each individual contribution to the group was appreciated. The use of sanctions against individuals was not common either. However, an Indian experienced himself primarily as a member of the family or the tribe (Hughes 1983:61), and therefore individual variation was less important than in the world of today.

Some Indian cultures represent striking exceptions to this general tendency of attempting to live in harmony with nature. The Kwaliutl Indians, living around the area of the northwestern part of present USA, show one of the most striking contradictions to the above mentioned general format. The Kwakiutl culture was highly material and competitive. First, great possessions were valued and they were strictly owned. Land was cut into pieces and owned. Particular fishing and hunting territories were considered somebody's property, over which that particular person had rights. The more important possessions were material possessions and some immaterial possessions like names, for instance. The

Kwakiutls considered names, myths, songs and such to belong to a person or a group of people, and thus to be owned by them. These possessions were owned by one individual at a time and he or she exclusively exercised rights over them. When the owner passed away, the possessions remained in the blood lineage. Apparently, possessions were used as currency of a complex monetary system which operated through collection of rates of interest (Benedict 1989:184). The Kwakiutl people took "loans" and the rates of interest were incredible. "Wealth was counted in the amount of property which the individual had out at interest," says Benedict (1989:184). Whereas, among most other tribes property was of no importance and competitive attitude was regarded malevolent, the Kwakiutl showed strong economic competitiveness of individuals which began at a very early age of children. Among the Kwakiutl, property was used to shame rivals and the aim of an individual was always to be superior to others. There were two ways how, for example, a chief could achieve the victory he sought. He could shame the rival by presenting him with more property than the other one could return with the required interest, or he could destroy property (Benedict 1989:193). The destruction of property took many forms and the most striking of them are the so called potlach feasts. These feasts were parties of consuming abundant amounts of property. For example, heaps of material possessions like canoes, blankets and such might be burned in the pursuit of consuming, and each detail of the ceremony expressed the will to be superior through consumption. The potlach ceremony and use of property to gain personal social privilege certainly contradicts the general features of Indian cultures. The factor making potlach ceremonies even possible, is the richness of nature in northwestern coast area. In a way, the potlach-ceremony reflects the abundance of the natural environment. However, competitiveness of their culture and its centeredness around property does not of course mean that the Kwakiutls differed from the general format of the relationship between Indians and nature in all respects.

Another striking case that does not fit the general model is the Indian participation in the fur trade. This hunting of animals for fur grew eventually to an extent which almost extinguished some animal species from North America. Similarly, some accusations have been made blaming the Plains Indians for hunting

the buffalo towards extinction. Although it is true that the hunting of the buffalo and of other animals was eventually massive, the Indians alone can not be blamed. It appears that the increase in hunting took place at around the time of the contact with Europeans, and the major cause for the exploiting hunt seems to lie in this contact (Martin 1978). Hughes (1983:42), for example, claims that the accusations that Indians hunted the buffalo to extinction are false. He says that until the white onslaught upon the Indian ecosystem, the Indians and buffalo lived in an ecological balance. According to him too, reasons for the extensive fur hunt can be found in the white influence on the Indian cultures. The materialistic tendencies and totally new and different worldview and ideology that came with this contact gradually changed the traditional Indian lifestyle and way of viewing the world. This can be seen reflected in the words of Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Lakota:

As yet I know of no species that was exterminated until the coming of the white man...The white man considered animal life just as he did the natural man life upon this continent as 'pests.' There is no word in the Lakota vocabulary with the English meaning of this word...Forests were mown down, the buffalo exterminated, the beaver driven to extinction and his wonderfully constructed dams dynamited...and the very birds of the air silenced...The white man has come to be the symbol of extinction for all things natural in this continent. Between him and the animal there is no rapport and they have learned to flee from his approach, for they cannot live on the same ground. (<http://members.aol.com/pantheism0/indians.htm>)

Also other exceptions to the general format of the Indians' balanced relationship with nature can be found. The Anasazi of Chaco Canyon are sometimes said to have helped in the deforestation of their environment (<http://members.aol.com/pantheism0/indians.htm>), and so forth; accusations blaming Indians for exploiting their environment can be found. Since they are important to this topic of describing the Indian relationship with nature and interpreting it only in the sense that they exist, we shall move on to discuss the European contact and its effect on the Indian worldview and way of life.

5.3 The Meaning of European Contact with Indians

The arrival of Europeans in America was a turning point in the history of the continent. The native Americans, first in South-America and then in the northern parts, were faced with a totally new culture which presented a whole new set of attitudes and values, and a whole new worldview in general. The newcomers possessed superior technology that enabled them to use force previously unseen on the American continent. Furthermore, they considered themselves superior in relation to native inhabitants and nature. The fact that it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that all native Americans of the USA were given citizenship, reflects this well. The native Americans were viewed as brutes who had to be civilized. Indeed, Europeans considered that the natives should be grateful for the bringing of civilization among them. The very first mistake the newcomers made was that they assumed their reality and their way of life to represent the most developed form. In fact, as the Europeans were soon to find out, especially in North America, native technology was in many respects far more practical and better suited for the existing environment than the European equivalent. One good example of this is clothing, which was finely tuned to suit the natural environment where the natives lived. The fancy European clothing did not often work in the demanding environment of North America, which was in many areas very different from the European one.

European cultures, however, would eventually conquer the native cultures. Oksanen (1988) has discussed "circle" and "square" as the mainlines of Indian and European cultures, respectively. She concludes that, whereas the holistic Indian worldview and cultures find expression in the circle, the linear European culture is reflected in the square. In practice this means that European cultures are aggressive in nature and can be characterized as masculine. The Indian circular thinking is more tolerant and adaptive and can be characterized as feminine. Therefore, in acculturating natives to the European culture, there was not so much resistance from the Indian side as there would have been, if the Indian cultures too had been "square". The stress on the circle and circularity of the Indian thinking are reflected in the words of Chief Seattle. Handling the treatment of natives and

the conquering of North America by Europeans, he claimed:

A few more moons. A few more winters-and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graves of a people-once more powerful and hopeful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man whose God walked and talked with him as friend with friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. (Vanderwerth 1989:121.)

Fortunately Indian descendants still do exist. This quotation does, however, show the close observance of cyclical processes of nature. This probably also influenced the Indian thinking to have "circle" as the main mode of their cultural understanding. The point is that change was seen as a natural part of life. The end of this quotation even acknowledges a relation between Indians and whites, seeing them merely as parts in the "process of the universe".

Although Indian cultures were adaptive, does not mean cultural resistance did not exist. However, because of the adaptability, Indians accepted the presence of Europeans and of European culture more easily. In many respects they also adapted themselves into it. Many aspects of their old culture and worldview were kept, some of it was influenced by European features and altered accordingly, and some aspects were completely changed or discarded. One of the native systems that changed radically as a consequence of the white contact, was the native belief system and thus also their relationship with nature.

Calvin Martin has presented a theory concerning especially the Indian participation in the exploitative hunting of animals for fur. Martin (1978:178) also points at the belief system as the main cause of the ecological behaviour of the Indians. Martin's theory claims, in short, that European disease, Christianity and the fur trade itself were responsible for the corruption of the Indians' relationship with nature (Martin 1978:65). The Indians were confused about the new diseases because their doctors, the shamans, were left helpless at the face of them. In consequence, the Indians started blaming animals for breaking "the deal" between people and animals; the deal by which animals could be hunted and would not punish people with disease as long as they were treated properly and with respect.

Animals, with their ability to give disease, were thus seen to punish men unduly. With this in mind, Indians saw the fur trade as a good channel of revenge. Furthermore, the old belief system was at times replaced by Christianity, which seemed to fit the new demands and the new material culture much better than the traditional Indian worldview. Thus, the main reason for the participation of Indians in the fur trade, according to Martin (1978), was the deterioration of the traditional religious belief system.

This theory has raised some debate; especially for its claim that Indians blamed animals for the new diseases and waged war against them in form of fur trade. B. G. Trigger (Krech ed. 1981:24), for instance, argues that the Hurons participated in the fur trade simply in order to make life easier. Through fur trade native peoples in general were able to get certain European goods, which considerably helped their everyday life. The breakdown of the traditional belief system was not therefore a response to new diseases, but rather a response to new economic developments (Krech ed.1981:28). Similarly, Krech (ed.1981:7) claims that materialistic explanations are the most likely explanations for why the Indians took part in the fur trade. C.M Hudson, Jr.(Krech ed. 1981:171) goes even to say that Indians participated in fur trade because it was necessary for their survival. Even though the Indians may have felt bad about slaughtering animals, they still did it because there was no other way. That was what the new situation required. Indians adapted to the new demands for their survival and their traditional worldview simply had to give way to these new demands. This, of course, touches on the relationship between culture and its features, and the underlying ideological principles; ideological change is inseparable from cultural change. Thus, adaptation to white contact appears to be the main factor causing the change in the relationship between Indians and nature.

5.4 A Model for Today?

Despite the change of the traditional worldview and acculturation of most Indians to the American "main" culture, traditional beliefs and attitudes still remained among some people. The traditional worldviews exist to an extent even today. It

was not until this century that non-Indian people really became interested in the Indian ways of viewing the world. Perhaps as a consequence of the increasing deterioration of the natural environment. The "white man" attempted to find ways to save himself from "his time of decay," which Chief Seattle, as quoted in the previous chapter, promised would eventually come. The modern search for salvation in the Indian environmental perspectives may, however, be futile. Hughes (1983:143) says the value of Indian environmental perspectives may be "in helping to develop a new style of life that incorporates care and reverence for nature and understands the limits that must be placed on human actions affecting the natural environment..." Bearing in mind, though, that the Indian environmental perspectives were based on totally different value systems and on worldviews radically different from the modern western one, the help they give may be of little use. Martin (1978:188) too says there is probably no salvation for today's environmentalists in the traditional Indian conception of nature. "The cosmic visions", as Martin puts it, are simply too different.

The value of this relationship may instead lie in how it shows the ecological way of life to be humanly possible. If Indians lived in balance with nature a long time ago, it should not be impossible with the technology of today. Although not to be applied today as such, the relationship between Indians and nature certainly serves as a good model and we certainly can learn from it. The question is ultimately whether people are willing to make the radical changes in their own attitudes and value systems that a more ecological and balanced way of life with the environment would require.

With the present state of affairs as regards the environment, change of some sort will be inevitable. The present exploitation of the world simply cannot go on for very much longer. In which direction the change will happen, depends largely on people themselves. We shall conclude this chapter with a Navajo chant reflecting their attitude towards nature. From the modern perspective, it can be seen to act also as a kind of plea for change in attitudes:

May I walk in beauty of abundant rainshowers,
May I walk in beauty of abundant vegetation,
May I walk in beauty;

With beauty before me, I walk,
With beauty behind me, I walk,
With beauty below me, I walk,
With beauty above me, I walk.
It is finished in beauty. (Hughes 1983:143.)

6 CONCLUSION

The traditional North American Indian way of life in general appears to have been ecological and in balance with nature. As hopefully this study has been able to point out, the major causes for this balanced way of life of the native Americans were their worldview and dependence on nature. The Indian worldview regarded nature as ultimately spiritual, and demanded respect for nature and keeping up of balance in order to avoid spiritual retribution. The Indians' relationship with nature is therefore more complex than it may first appear.

The white contact changed the Indian way of life thoroughly and this also affected the Indian worldview. Indians were simply forced to alter their behaviour and beliefs to fit the demands of the new circumstances. Indian interaction with nature and their attitudes toward it, were also changed in this process.

When this relationship between Indians and nature is separated from its proper context and interpreted in terms of modern western concepts and ideology, it serves as a good example of intercultural misinterpretation. The native American mind differs radically from the modern western one and as such they are incommensurable. In terms of cultural relativism, they strive toward different ends. The gap in thinking must be reckoned with. Only then will it be possible to understand Indians' attitudes toward nature, and why their relationship with nature took the form it did. This study reflects the necessity of seeing aspects of culture in their own contexts that give meaning to them, thus reflecting the claims of symbolic anthropology. Furthermore, the subject also shows the connection between the outer form of culture and its underlying ideology. As symbolic anthropology claims, these two interact and change in one affects also the other. The change in the Indian attitudes toward nature as a consequence of white

contact seems also to speak for this. Thus, the subject of this study fits the claims of symbolic anthropology and cultural relativism.

As such, the Indian environmental system of balance can probably not be transferred into today's world. At least, not without a fundamental change of beliefs and values. The two different worldviews, the traditional Indian and that of today's western world, are simply too incommensurable. The value of the Indian environmental perspectives may instead lie in the ways they show it is humanly possible to live a good life in harmony with nature. However, today's scientific research must not be interested only in reasons for why things exist or existed in forms of certain kind. Ultimately, it is the results that matter and in this case, important is the ecologically balanced Indian way of life that worked. Therefore, we certainly can learn from the Indians.

As further study, it might be interesting to examine the relationship between Indians and nature in more biological terms. As this study has shown, Indian way of life appears to have been balanced, as regards their behaviour and interaction with the environment. The goal of the more biological examination could be to study through quantitative, statistical methods, exactly how balanced the Indian interaction with the environment was.

Also, as discussed, understanding the "whole picture" is crucial in order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations that can create even severe political consequences. Another area of further study could therefore be to examine the kinds of consequences cultural misinterpretations have caused, in Indian life and in other cultures as well. Studying these might even help in the process of pointing out the mistreatments that many ethnic groups are struggling with today, and possibly, also be of valuable help in an attempt to overcome these mistreatments.

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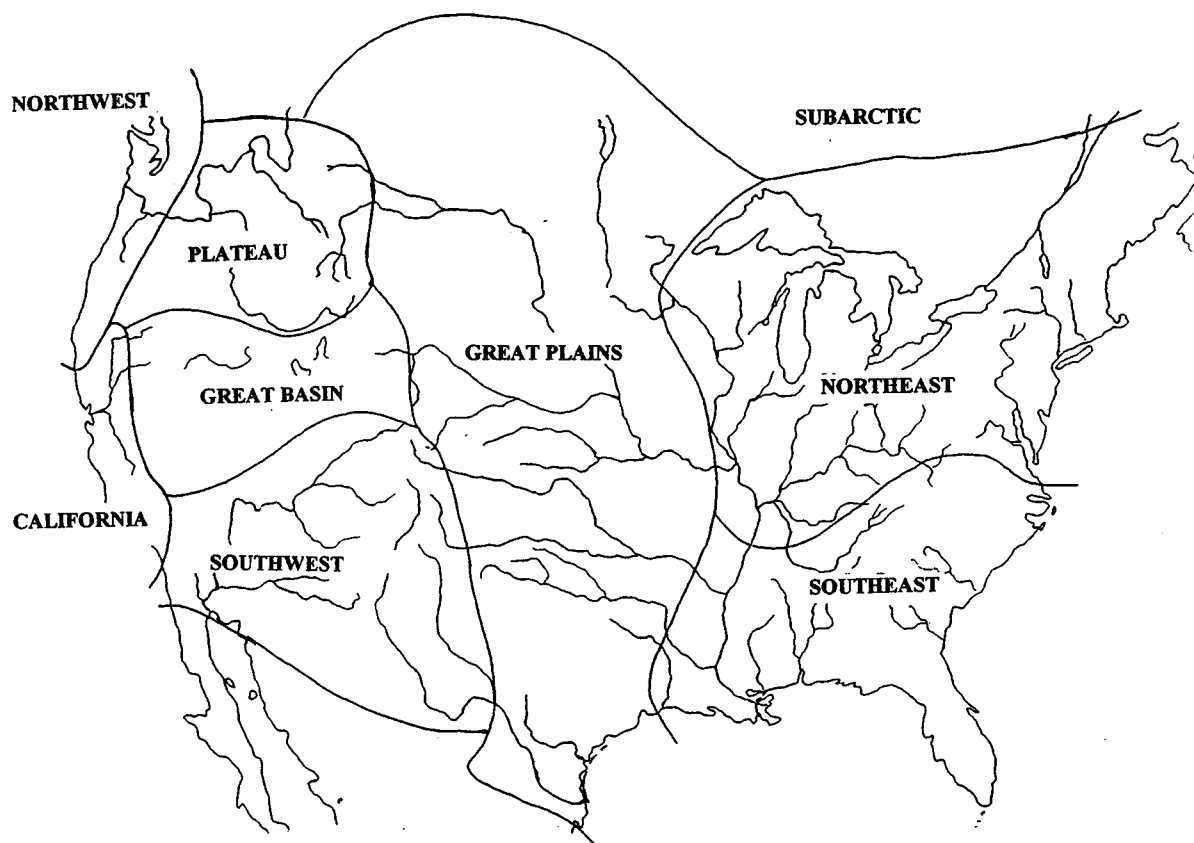
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APPENDICE A

INDIAN CULTURE AREAS

(Henriksson, Markku 1985. *Alkuperäiset Amerikkalaiset*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus. p.288)



APPENDICE B

MAIN TRIBES OF NORTH AMERICA

(Hultkrantz, Åke 1980. *The Religions of the American Indians*. London: University of California Press.)

