

## Bounded Space

### I. The Four Directions

The fact that the Four Directions have some symbolic importance to the Native Americans is commonly known. What those directions symbolize is not always very clear. There is a general notion of the Directions that seems to grant them a somewhat amorphous character: that is, that the Directions, themselves, are "sacred" and, therefore, out of the stream of ordinary understanding. The fact that, in most instances, there are actually six directions considered sacred is not so generally known. Aside from the East, West, North, South Directions, included also are Up and Down. The six-directional grid is to be seen from the position of a particular viewer. The viewer in this grid is, in actuality, positioned at the "center of the universe." This is not, however, an egocentric interpretation: the viewer is only a small aspect of the entire directional system.

My claim here is that the Four Directions have a very definite significance that, in turn, serves to lend meaning to the addition of the other two directions.

Most known North American indigenous groups have a very definite sense of place. The "sense of place" is distinguished by the fact that there are very explicit boundaries to which the people can point in order to describe their "home" or "place." The sense of place is a sense of *bounded space*. The fact that the Native American sense of place is characterized by very definite boundaries is important to understanding the sanctity accorded to the Four Directions.

When the Europeans arrived in North America there were hundreds of very diverse and distinct groups of indigenous peoples. There were also hundreds of languages spoken by the various groups. In order for the diversity of peoples to have survived the thousands of years of occupancy on this continent, there had to be some "mechanism" to allow the persistence of diversity.

Today, each Native group knows the boundaries, or former bound-

aries, of its homeland. Many indigenous groups have been displaced from their original homelands, but the memory of the traditional home is not forgotten. "Home," in a Native American sense, is much broader than that of the nonindigenous Americans. In my own case, my father could point to our former boundaries: to the North was the Arkansas River (present-day Pueblo, Colorado); to the East were the plains of eastern Colorado where the people could go only so far as it took to find the buffalo; the people's "ground" extended as far South as Taos Mountain; and to the West, only so far as the homeland of Utes began (approximately Pagosa Springs, Colorado). These directions and places would, today, be equivalent to pointing out the town in which one lived.

The recognition of the home area was accompanied by another awareness: that beyond the larger home area was the home area of other groups. To the North and East there were various "Plains Indians," to the South, the Pueblos; and to the West, the Utes. The home area also included various and related groups of "Apaches."

It appears to me that the sense of bounded space is the source of the granting of sanctity to the "Four Directions." There were boundaries that delineated the "proper" space in which a specific group could comfortably range. Within those boundaries there were other boundaries that signified "home" to smaller clans within the larger group. To go beyond the designated boundaries was to encroach on the homeland of others, to *trespass* on the rightful spaces of others.

The Four Directions may not have been, in origin, amorphous religious principles. The recognition of the existence of boundaries may derive from recognition that all people have a "right" to a specific home ground. The "mechanism" for the maintenance of the continued diversity of peoples on the North American continent could well stem from this very sense of bounded space that survives intact even to this day, five hundred years after the disruptions created by the European colonists.

The sense of existing within specific boundaries is not easily acknowledged by many European peoples; they do, nonetheless, tend to occupy bounded spaces. There are within the European group many distinct groups: French, German, English, and so on. The majority of wars fought on the European continent have been based on the trespassing of one group on the "homeland" of another. The reluctance of Europeans, in general, to acknowledge the existence of peoples as distinct groups may be

the result of a mythology—the story of Adam and Eve—that is at odds with the actual existential circumstances of human beings.

Today it is common to hear Europeans and their colonial “modern” descendants speak with disdain about “petty nationalisms,” as though the sense of a people as a distinct group is somewhat anachronistic. The fact that people cling to their national language, traditions, and beliefs, as well as to bloodlines, geography, and history, is seen as merely stubbornness. It seems forgotten that one of the “advances” made by Europeans in breaking away from the dogmatic authority of the one and “universal” church was the use of local languages for written matter. Dante, for example, wrote in Italian rather than Latin. The invention of printing led to translations from the Latin of the upper classes into the languages of the various groups throughout Europe. This “national” self-assertion was a threat to the dominance of the Catholic Church. Today, the contemporary United Nations organization recognizes the existence of diverse peoples and their right to “self-determination.” The UN Charter forbids the elimination of diverse peoples through what is called “cultural genocide.” It is not uncommon, however, despite the willing membership of European or “Western” groups in the UN to hear the impassioned plea (usually from a Westerner) for a “One World, One People” outlook.

One of the primary differences between Europeans and Native Americans consists of the recognition, by the Native American, that human beings occupy specific locations that are their “rightful homes.” The Native American view is not, however, simply an “instinct” of territoriality. It is commonly known that the Native American found the concept of holding ownership of parts of the Earth quite alien. They did not think of their homelands as something they owned but instead as something that they belonged to. They thought of themselves as being “created” for one specific part of the planet. In an extension of this view they also included in their belief systems the idea that other peoples, those unlike themselves, were also “created” for their own places. Each group was viewed as having a set of “truths” that pertained to their own unique circumstances and locales.

An awareness of belonging to a specific place carries with it numerous ramifications that have not been thoroughly explored. The idea of being a part of a bounded space becomes the ground upon which a very intimate knowledge and understanding of the homeland is acquired. The people’s goal is to adapt to the place that they see as, not only a home, but an

extension of themselves as people. An awareness of the resources available within the bounded area becomes the means of survival. There is not an indigenous American group that did not develop rules for the use and management of those resources. The use and management of resources—rules for hunting, an awareness of proper planting and gathering seasons, an awareness of community in the sharing out of resource availability—is also accompanied by an awareness of how the numbers of the group affect the resources of the area. The need to control one’s population is necessary when the world one inhabits is seen as consisting of bounded space. The entirety of the world is not at their disposal. Moving to another place in search of accessible resources is not an easy option—someone else occupies the other places.

The world is not a world of scarcity but of fertility and abundance. Human beings are not viewed as competitive animals who consume an area and move on to another to continue the practice of “take and leave.” Each group recites the history of their group within a certain bounded area that has been “home” for hundreds of generations, or, as many say, “forever.” They see themselves as having “emerged” into a specific area and as having a responsibility to that area—they are a “natural” part of the area.

The various “territorial wars” between groups can be ascribed to the coming of the European: as the Europeans displaced Native groups, the groups found themselves driven into territories of others who, in turn, displaced other groups. Enmity was not always the only solution. Alliances were formed, or a people assimilated into the cultural mores of the other groups—both became possible solutions to untenable circumstances. The fact that “home” groups were sufficiently accommodating and understanding to the needs of newly appearing groups is borne out by the reception that Europeans received from indigenous groups when they first arrived. It was the Native American who showed them what to eat and how to harvest the foodstuffs that indigenous peoples had “engineered”—they also seem to have granted the newcomers places to which they might adapt themselves. The lack of cooperation and the idea of accumulation of lands that came to be exhibited by the European was an alien concept among the Native groups. Given the incompatibility of worldviews between indigenous and European peoples, alienation between the two became inevitable.

How relevant is the view of bounded space for today's world? If one looks at a map of the world and traces the expansion of European peoples and their descendants, one sees a tremendous disruption of "natural boundaries." The "Age of Discovery" ends with the populations of Europe in control of three entire continents—North and South America and Australia. There are serious inroads into other continents as well. No other population has equaled the movement of the Europeans. We are taught that the "swarm" of peoples is a simple matter of "might makes right." We are told also that it is "natural" for a people to scour the planet in search of needed resources—so long, that is, as the people doing the scouring are ourselves. The inhabitants of the "developed" world have a "right" to go where they please, regardless of the desires of the inhabitants of other occupied areas. The entirety of the planet's resources goes "naturally" to those with the desire and capacity to mine the surface and depths of the Earth.

The actions toward others are justified under the guise of "bringing democracy" and "modernity" to the world's peoples. We ignore the fact that once self-sufficient groups, anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters of the world's people, now suffer from malnutrition and disruption because of the elimination of ancient means of adapting to specific areas.

The relevance of the Native American perspective of seeing humans as "made for" specific areas is as important today as it ever was. There has always been trade among peoples. On the North American continent, the trade routes of Native peoples can be traced through objects found in ancient sites: coral in the southwestern United States; turquoise where none is native to the area; copper beads from the Great Lakes region are found in areas far from the waters; agricultural products, corn, beans, and squash, are found throughout the region and none of them are "natural" products gathered from the Earth. No traces can be found of populations harnessed by others for the sake of producing "goods" for the needs of others. Surplus in one area becomes the tradestuff in others. North American peoples seem not to have been "contaminated" with the germ of thinking themselves "owners" of the world. One of the highest values held by North American native groups is respect for the other as other, with all of the rights and privileges one holds for one's own.

There is something lacking in a people who do not recognize boundaries: there is no intimacy developed between a people and their homeland. There is, instead, an obsession over ownership that is easily given up

in the name of profit or a better deal elsewhere. There is no need to consider the effect of too many people in a specific area, no need to consider the "carrying capacity" of a particular land base. There is no need to consider the biological ties between a people and their land base; "natural" immunities to a place can be acquired through medical technology. The movement of individuals from one area to another is seen as "natural"—an idea that is prevalent in a people who all came from someplace else.

Yet there is a sense of place in the hearts of immigrant "Americans," though some would argue that it is less the place that holds their hearts than the ideals that they share, one of them being the ideal of unrestricted movement and occupation. But, overall, the place that is called "America" is viewed largely as an "open space"—available to all.

This idea was brought home to me in a rather strange manner: I worked for a program to help youth avoid becoming gang members in a city. An important part of the program was teaching the youth the consequences of their actions on their own neighborhoods, teaching them that there was a responsibility that accompanied occupation of a place. Most of the youth were immigrants. They balked at the talk of responsibility to a place. "This is a *free* country," one of them reminded me. "Anyone can come here and do as they please." One need only "pay taxes" and avoid breaking the laws. "That's what everyone else did—they all came here from someplace else to do what they wanted." "It's a *free* country," which sounded oddly enough like "free pizza." Boundaries and borders were minor irrelevancies. That, in their estimation, was the attitude of the other "Americans" who came here from throughout the world. These youths were simply the latest arrivals in a long exodus from overpopulated and wasted lands—they had as much "right" to be here as anyone else. America as the world's "commons": *Free Pizza! Free Country!*

"We can go anywhere we like," chimed one student. "Except," said another, "for the Indians." They all agreed that the Indians, as original inhabitants, had a particular claim to the land. "It was theirs." "We can't go to the places where they live." Can I go to Vietnam, I asked? Or Mexico, or China? Places where they had come from? "Yeah, you can go there," they agreed, "but not to *live* there." Those places *belonged* to someone else.

The sacredness of their own "four directions" was inviolable. To be an "American" was to give up the sense of belonging and being of a place. Was their membership in a gang, specifically a gang defined by ethnicity, a

substitute for being-of-a-place, I asked? “Yeah, man,” they agreed, “we’re brothers.” “*We have to take care of one another.*” How much more strongly could I have put it? To feel the sense of place, of a bounded and definite space, involves a sense of *relationship* with that place, of a very specific *responsibility* toward that place, as a unified whole—people and place together.

Without a sense of bounded space, there is no sacredness accorded to one’s own space or place; one is not standing “in the center of the universe” looking out onto definite boundaries that define who and what one becomes. And if one grants no sacredness to one’s own space and place, there is certainly no recognition of the sacredness of other peoples’ places. The “modern” perspective has no sense of bounded space. This view, like that of the potential gang members in an American city, is a perspective of a “free” planet. ‘Free’ for the taking. No responsibilities attached.

## II. A Sense of Place

When the language that once was familiar is gone, when the rituals that created meaning and continuity are no longer practiced, what is left? These are the questions that plague me after reading yet one more plaintive wail that passes as poetry or literature offered under the label “Native American.”

I know that not all such literary attempts fit in the category I have reserved for them. My friends and I used to discuss the state of Native American literature: “It’s all about, ‘I got drunk—rolled over my baby and it died—and I’m just miserable—’cuz I’m Indian,’ kind of stuff,” said my friend Eddie. If it was that bad being “Indian,” who would still be around to want to be “Indian”? We decided that there was more to being Indian than what we called “Dead Baby poetry.” What that “more” was, wasn’t easy to focus on.

Most of what is written by and about Native Americans is all too real. We do suffer from a low life expectancy, a high suicide rate, and an equally high rate of poverty. Most Native Americans also are too easily identifiable, physically, to deny their heritage in order to assimilate into the mainstream. On the other hand, there weren’t that many Native Americans we knew

who would deny that they were Native American. Why was that? we asked. Why do we persist in an identity that has endured despite hundreds of years of enforced assimilation? Is there something good about who we are?

“There must be!” laughed another friend. “Look at all ’em white folks tryin’ to be Indian!” Why would these various people *want to be Indian*? I thought of signs that I encountered when I was a teenager: “No Mexicans—No Dogs—No Indians.” I thought of John Wayne when he went after all those “injuns” who impeded the way across the West of all those fine and upstanding white settlers. I thought of those carved and painted wooden Indian statues that still are displayed in “Western” shops. If that was the image of the Indian that the White World gave me as I was growing up, what was there about being Indian that the “wannabees” wanted so desperately?

On the surface, that question turned out not to be so difficult to answer. “You people are so mystical-spiritual-etc.” Every White person *knows* about how Indians believe in “the brotherhood of all things” and in “balance” and “harmony” and all that good stuff that White folks profess to be after. They all thought we still had something left that they hadn’t gotten from us yet. Maybe we did.

But if we did, it wasn’t what they were after—except, perhaps, as a means to use in eradicating us from the face of the earth. Think how much easier it would be for “Indian experts” to say definitively what we were all about if no real indigenous persons existed to raise uncomfortable objections to white portrayals of indigenous groups: look at the mileage (and research grants) milked from “the mystery of the Anasazi.”

What was left, after many indigenous persons had lost their native languages and no longer adhered to ritual in daily life, was a set of values instilled in childhood and reinforced by the Native communities. They served to ward off the assimilation attempts of educators, government officials, and missionaries. It seems, in talking with Native persons throughout North America, that there is something “pan-Indian” that has escaped the efforts of White America to rub out the final evidence of the real “winning” of the West.

There is, from the farthest north of Alaska to the tip of South America, a sense Native people have of belonging to the Earth—that, unlike the new, European Americans, they are made for the Earth; the Earth is not made for them. This view is expressed by the idea of the “Mother Earth,” but the

Euro-American tends to misunderstand this in an anthropomorphic sense, thinking that there is a "goddess" that all Native Americans worship. The term 'Mother Earth' doesn't refer to a goddess. It refers to the Earth, the planet, with all of its rocks, volcanoes, streams, and oceans. It is a term laden with recognition of human dependence on the planet's many gifts. It is laden also with a sense of the fragility of the circumstances that make humans possible. There are personifications of the Earth as Mother—many indigenous groups have equivalents of "White Buffalo Woman," an anthropomorphic "spirit" who brings the people knowledge or foodstuff. White Buffalo Woman, however, lies in the realm of myth, legend, or religion. The idea, or definition, of the Earth as the producer of life and the conditions for life's existence lies in the realm of what is real to Native people. Offerings may be made to the idea of White Buffalo Woman, but Native existence for thousands of years depended on knowing common practices that allowed groups to survive in specific areas within the boundaries of resource availability.

Most North American indigenous groups are mistakenly described as nomadic. We are led to believe that the various groups simply wandered about the countryside picking what they needed, as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If any groups did not fit the "wandering" mold, it was explained that they had "discovered" agriculture and had, therefore, to "give up" the nomadic lifestyle. The truth of the matter is that all indigenous peoples have a very strong sense of identity and that identity includes a sense of belonging in a very specific space. They had, and do have, a very strong sense of *bounded* space. "I," in the sense of myself as a specific kind of person, do not extend beyond certain boundaries.

Thus, not only do indigenous groups have a sense of belonging to the Earth, but a sense that they belong in a very small part of that whole Earth. Beyond their boundaries exist other groups who are equally endowed with a sense of themselves as being in bounded space. The fact that many groups did move seems rare enough to be granted the status of legend. The "journey" usually took place "in another world—before we emerged into this one." The lost bounded space is recreated within other bounded spaces.

The concept of existing within very definite boundaries has been given very little attention by researchers—yet this notion gives sense to the idea that indigenous peoples were "conservationists." If a group must exist with

certain boundaries, then there is an incentive to use its resources with care, to maintain a sustainable population. It is no wonder that a sense of balance and harmony were important to Native groups. An anecdote concerning this notion of a sustainable use of resources was related to me by a friend at the Taos Pueblo. She said that the government had sent a troupe of agricultural experts to her village to teach them how to get better crops from their land. Taos is one of the oldest of the Rio Grande pueblos and may date back to AD 900. The village officials informed the experts that the people had farmed that ground for all of that time. "How long," they asked the officials, "have you been farming your land?" "Maybe," the villager informed the experts, "you better send your farmers here so that we can teach them how we did it."

A people that has no sense of bounded spaces can scarcely be expected to "discover" the notion of boundaries. I have never read any research done on this topic, nor are there any papers being written on the effects of having such a "value" and how it affects cultural practices. The fact that a sense of bounded space can be destroyed by an excess of population is certainly a source of values that affect child-rearing practices. Young persons were encouraged to be physically active—to "not get too fat too soon." The idea was that body fat had something to do with early puberty, which, of course, had something to do with population growth within the group. "If you let your daughter get fat, she'll hit puberty before she can deal with it—you'll have problems with that girl." Recent gynecological research bears this out, as well as the notion that early puberty leads to later onset of menopause. No indigenous group could afford to deal with extended breeding times. There were other "values" of the community that conveyed disapproval of late pregnancies: "She thinks she's a young girl," was said derisively of a pregnant woman in her early thirties. Large numbers of children were not common among Native peoples. Those couples who did seem unusually fertile were either ridiculed or ended up "sharing" their offspring with other members of the community who were less fortunate. The children were not "given away" but ended up with two sets of parents: the birth parents, who were known to all, and the "raising parents" who were "mother" and "father." The shared offspring created even more bonds within a community.

The sense of community in a Native setting is not clearly understood by non-Native researchers. A community, as usually seen by a researcher,

consists of either a "tribe" or a "clan." Focus is, in other words, on the persons in a group; it seldom takes into account the land area that the community occupies. Within, for example, the land area of a particular related group of people there will be specific areas that specific "clans" will see not as their property but as themselves. My father's family, for example, had come to identify themselves with a specific area that surrounded a natural spring and creek: Romero Spring and Romero Creek in the border area of eastern Colorado and New Mexico. The people identified themselves with the area they occupied and marked its proximity to other "safe" havens: the Picuris and Taos pueblos to the south and southeast with whom the people had ties owing to trading practices and marriage ties.

The "Romeros" were Apaches and, in the eyes of the church-dominated Spanish village system, defined as "nomads." Their lifestyle of combined farming in specific areas and the hunting of the buffalo that had been accessible in the eastern portions of their land base led to accompanying practices of trade: buffalo products for the pottery and products of the less "nomadic" pueblos of Taos and Picuris. The "nomads," however, had a sense of very definite boundaries beyond which "they ceased to be." They certainly had a sense of the area that was "home."

Euro-Americans also have a sense of place. Their homes are spaces that cannot be violated. If I walk in front of someone's home I make the proprietor uncomfortable; if I walk onto his yard, he comes out to confront me; but if I walk up onto his porch and make myself comfortable, I have become a definite threat. The sense of having personal space violated is very strong among most life forms. How that personal space is defined varies from group to group.

For the Native American the boundary of his home is simply larger than that of the Euro-American. Correspondingly, the sense of personal space is very different. A joke told to me by a Pueblo friend may not carry very well among those with a different sense of personal space, but I recount it just the same to make my point: some Pueblo people, driving through the Navajo reservation, are awed by the sparseness of the area. Then they spot two hohgans within a few miles of each other. "Must be a mother and a daughter," says one Pueblo to another and they laugh. The "joke" lies in the fact that the "sparseness" that overwhelms the Pueblo people is in relation to habitations and not the appearance of the land-

scape; they, after all, are peoples who represent at least two dozen different groups strung about the banks of the Rio Grande all within an area of about 150 miles from north to south. Their own numbers do not exceed those of the Navajo, but they tend to live in small villages occupied by many related peoples. The punch line of the joke is based on a characteristic of many southwestern Native people—they tend to be matrilineal. The closest possible relationship in this system is between a mother and her daughters. The Pueblos recognize the different sense of personal space between themselves and the Navajo while at the same time granting recognition of shared values between the peoples. Which is why their comments are a "joke" rather than an act of derision.

While the recognition of the importance of having "a sense of place" is now common among those Americans trying to create what they call 'environmental ethics,' the use of supposed Native American perspectives to strengthen this argument is based on a lack of understanding of the true sense that Native Americans have of "place." In comparison to the Native American perspective on "place," the Euro-American's view seems somewhat *amorphous*. It is not only Native Americans that have a sense of place that is very specific; most indigenous peoples have a similar concept of bounded space. Their "place" is the foundation of cultural mooring and values; it is not simply "the environment" that they accidentally "occupy"—they are the children of that place. There is no such artificial distinction between themselves and some alien "other" that is termed "nature." The lack of a sense of boundaries is what makes the Euro-American sense of place "amorphous" and unique.

Recognition of a people's own boundaries is an equal recognition of the bounded spaces of other peoples. The Euro-American lacks this sense of bounded space. He can tomorrow—given the resources—buy himself a ticket to any part of the planet and suddenly appear in the "yard" of other persons. He has a "right" to go anywhere he pleases because he is "free." This "freedom" is interpreted by the indigenous person, who has a different sense of space, as merely "lack of attachment." A people without a sense of boundaries for themselves can certainly not recognize the sense of boundaries of others.

The entire concept of "international law" as it developed in the European sensibility was a direct means of justifying the intrusion of Europeans into the bounded spaces of people unlike themselves. The Spaniards

and the Catholic Church had to confront this issue shortly after their intrusion into occupied territories of the American continents. Their justification was that they had a "duty" to spread the word of Christianity—throughout the entire planet—and having spread that word they then had the "right" to "protect" the converts to Christianity in what otherwise might be seen as "foreign" lands. On the part of the Europeans, they were engaging in acts of "discovery" fueled by the notion that their god had given them the entire planet. They fought wars with China and Japan over their "right" to enter those countries.

When those in search of a new relationship with the land turn to Native Americans, there is a failure to take into account the sense of bounded space. What follows from this incomplete understanding is a rejection of Native American notions based on the claim that they were not "conservationists"—that they merely used up the land and resources and then moved on. This dismissal is, after all, consistent with the view of the Native American as a homeless nomad. The nomad status allows the justification of "taking" land—it didn't "belong" to anyone in the usual European sense of proprietorship.

There is no denying that moves did occur among indigenous people. Their histories and legends are full of stories of migrations. The migrations were few enough, however, to merit retelling. The Pueblo people have legends of having come from an area farther north than their present occupations. In their own versions there is no "mystery of the Anasazi"—they simply moved south. The reasons given range from an attempt to seek more fertile grounds to the idea that the population grew too great in one area and the people began to fight among themselves, so they decided to disperse and live from then on in smaller, more manageable communities. We have to remember that these moves took place over at least a hundred years and happened perhaps a thousand years before the current telling of the stories. They were not moves undertaken simply because the game moved away one year. They were moves of tremendous import and trauma.

Another ramification of the need for indigenous peoples to "ground" themselves in specific places is the creation of "emergence" myths that relocate the people into their present situations. I grew up believing that the Apache of northeastern New Mexico and eastern Colorado "emerged" from the Mother out of the lake atop Taos Mountain. There were no

stories of having come to the area from someplace else. There was a good explanation for the fact that they no longer occupied the area around Folsom and Raton, New Mexico: the White men came. A retreat to the hills was a logical act, but the move was still within their historical boundaries of what the Spaniards labeled "Apacheria" on their maps of the area northeast of Taos and Santa Fe. The need to identify with a specific area is very strong among indigenous groups. Even today, when Indians displaced from the southeastern United States to "Indian" territory in Oklahoma visit their original homelands, they begin by pointing to the known place markers. The visits, as well as the pointing out of known boundaries, are a means of reasserting—not ownership—but identity. It is the hills or lack of them that grant identity to a people. The people of the deeply wooded forests will not be the "same" people as those of the broad expanses of southern Wyoming.

Bounded space has ramifications that cannot fully be brought out by any but the indigenous person who is brought up with that sense of space. As a child I had never visited the Taos pueblo village. I knew no one there. I had no "right" simply to show up on their doorstep. My father had spent part of his childhood on the Taos grounds and pointed out the cottonwoods that he had planted with his father to serve as windbreaks, but the government bought out the non-Taos Natives with offers of land across the river on the "Spanish" side and my father's family moved there. Now there was a fence between my father and the home he knew as a child. We didn't even approach the fence. We no longer had a right to be there.

The sense of the extended personal space that protects identity is well practiced by the indigenous and mixed-breed populations in northern New Mexico to this day. There are well-delineated lines of where the "Hispanics" live and what is "Indian" territory. Even with the many intermarriages among the two peoples, the sense of "what is what" is clearly recognized. My cousin who married a man from Nambe (a pueblo south of Taos) has become Nambe; her children are Nambe even though part of her family maintains a "Hispanic" identity. The two peoples have lived side by side for centuries. During that time many intermarriages have taken place, yet, there are still in existence two very distinct peoples in the Taos area. There is no sense here of the "melting pot theory." There is, however, a tremendous respect between the people.

Into this clearly delineated social arrangement, the Anglo-American

has made an appearance. He has no sense of place to match that of the previous residents, but he does have a sense of needing to belong. He decorates himself with Indian jewelry and salts his speech with hispanisms of the area: "Nice day, no?" and "Bueno'bye" (for goodbye). He fails to catch an inkling that it is *place* that is missing from his attempts to fit in—this, despite the fact that the Anglo owns most of the property surrounding the federally protected Indian ground. He may *like* his new place better than any other place on earth, but he is just as comfortable in San Francisco or New York City because he carries his identity with him. The others suffer from a permanent case of homesickness when they leave the area. Homesickness is accompanied by an insecurity about identity that only trips home can alleviate. The sense of home is not the culture, not the food, not even the many relatives. It is the place: the look of early morning; the smell of the juniper; the particular expected temperature for the kind of day it is, for the time of year it is; the mountains being in the right place. There is an assurance of being in the right place and being recognized by others as "not a stranger" even if they do not know who you are.

The sense of one's self as a being of a particular place is what goes into being a Native American. It is part of the person and the culture that escapes notice by the researchers eager to depict the Native American. At the same time, these values are comforting factors in being who we are. It is more rational to recognize that we are part of a whole and that we are dependent upon the Earth for our continued existence. We are not "stewards" of the Earth and certainly not "overlords"—we are dependent, perhaps chance creatures on a living planet. We are not separate from her—there is no such thing as an alien 'nature' existing outside ourselves that must be conquered or tamed. We, as human creatures—I, as an individual—are part of the Earth, of the Mother.

Beyond the loss of language, the loss of daily ritual practice, and beyond "Dead Baby poetry," what the Native American has not lost is a sense of place.

## Biodiversity: The Human Factor

Biodiversity is a term drawn from the sciences to indicate a recently acknowledged phenomenon: a healthy ecosystem is one that exhibits a high degree of diversity. A wheat field extending for hundreds of acres, for example, is not biodiverse. A local, intact, wooded area with a variety of creatures as well as a variety of vegetation would be an example of a biologically diverse and healthy ecosystem.

The term applied to a system that lacks this diversity is *monocultural*. A monocultural system like the wheat field excludes all other types of life forms. This type of a system is also subject to the vagaries of whatever invasive life form might seek to compete with the wheat field. In a healthy ecosystem that displays a great degree of diversity, an invasive life form, say a virus or fungus, is unlikely to be able to destroy the entire system. Only some of a healthy system's many life forms will be attacked: the others will survive. This survival allows that the conditions, which were conducive to the appearance of the now decimated life form, can continue and may provide for the future reappearance of the destroyed form.

A biologically diverse system displays another factor that is missing from the monocultural system: the various life forms eventually reach a dynamic, life-enhancing interrelation within their ecosystem.

There are few scientists today who will deny the significance of biodiversity: there are, however, few that have thus far made the analogy between human social groupings and the part such groups play in maintaining the health of an ecosystem. The fact that such an analogy has not been drawn is the result of some very basic assumptions about the nature of human beings.

### Human Adaptability

One such assumption is that humans are not really part of "nature." Humans are accepted as having evolved from nature, but, because of their supposed uniqueness as self-aware creatures, they are seen to be something over and above nature. Humans, then, by virtue of their superior

self  
stump  
about  
re: di  
of 6