

Notes on Anderson 1990

Navajo Aesthetics=Chapter 5

"4 Corners" region of the American Southwest=Arizona, New Mexico, Utah & Colorado, a desert environment

13th cen. they arrive as hunters & gatherers into the southwest from the northern plains, with the Pueblos already there for well over a 1,000 yrs. They came in as part of the Na-Dene language family (more recent emigrants from Siberia), along with the even more warlike Apache

Now the most populous North Amerindian group, well over 200,000 inhabiting over 25,000 square miles of reservation; living in individual round houses or hogans with matrilineal descent (important role for women) & matrilineal residence (women owning farm land or grazing rights)

Men hold sway in ceremonialism, in "sings"=ceremonies lasting up to 9 days, incorporating mythology (verbal art) with song & dance (performance art), (as in politics & warfare)=creation stories of the dawn Holy People, all-night singing, daytime prayers & chants & hair shampooing with yucca suds, directed by a singer & his assistants, hired by the family often for curing purposes, or for "prophylactic purposes", to maintain present health (shamans)

Sandpaintings=made during the "sings", in hogan floor, from ground pigments, including corn pollen & meal; the patient is seated in the middle of the completed painting for curative songs & chants, with the pigments from parts of the designs applied to their bodies ("art therapy") & then the painting is ceremonially destroyed (**ephemeral** art); modern "permanent" sand paintings, using glue, have intentional errors encoded in them, as they are permanent, therefore, **profane** (small sandpaintings are 3 feet in width representing 1 day's work, big ones are 25 feet across, requiring 40 assistants & much wealth! Both sandpaintings & weaving learned from the neighboring Pueblos

Weaving, a feminine art=originally utilitarian, now for "external audience"; remember bayeta cloth being taken apart for the colored yarn!

Silver smithing, most recent=in 19th century just bridles, learned from the Mexicans, but now done for export in jewelry

Hózhó=key ethnoaesthetic concept

World View=people in other cultures, more so the Navajo, live in different "phenomenal realities"; the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

4 generations of anthropologists have studied them! (unlike their neighbors, &

traditional enemies, the Pueblo Indians, they are not adverse to letting outsiders study them (up to 200 fieldworkers by 1980!).

Unlike the Sepik, their culture encourages ideas, a "philosophical bent", hence they will have an ethnoaesthetic vocabulary

Unique "pastoralist" Amerindian society (-for Western domesticates, save for the Guahibo Indians of Venezuela), based on hunting, sheep herding & corn-beans-squash horticulture