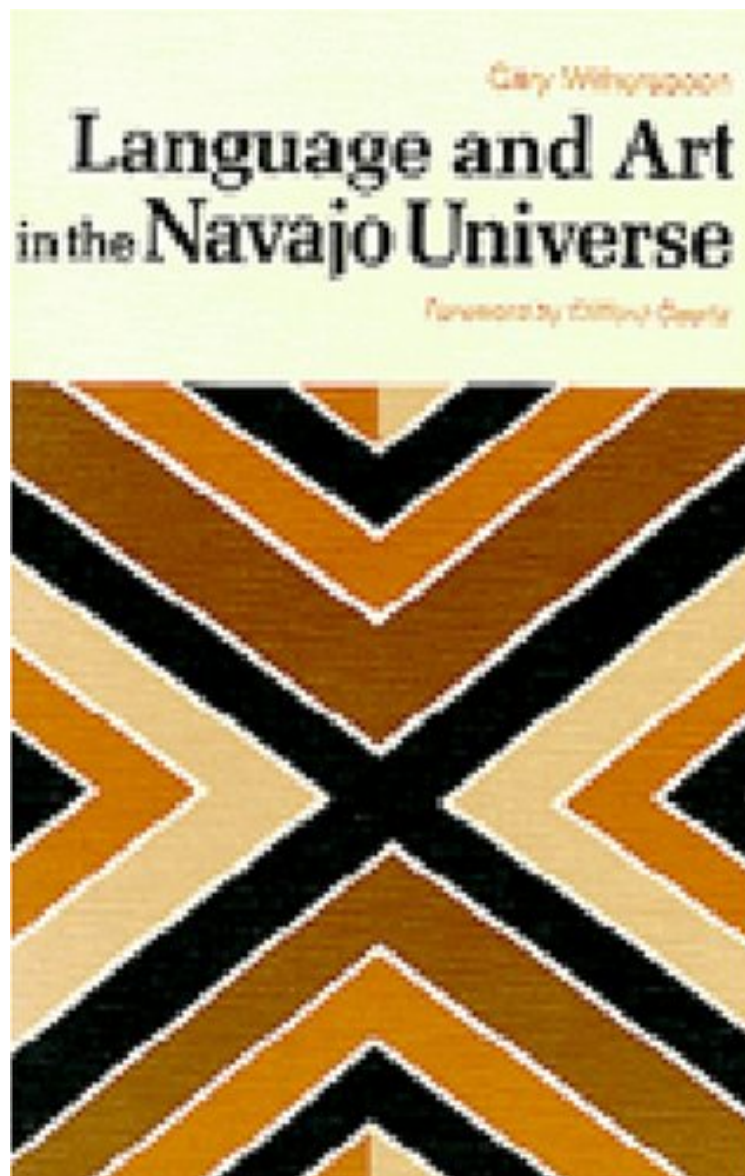


(Free) Language and Art in the Navajo Universe

Language and Art in the Navajo Universe

Gary Witherspoon

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Gary Witherspoon : Language and Art in the Navajo Universe before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Language and Art in the Navajo Universe:

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review helpful. a phenomenal book

By kaioatey Witherspoon, a professor at the Univ. of Michigan, uses language as an entry way into a world-view and a way of Being that is totally alien to many if not most, Anglos. The Navajo universe was created and organized through language as the thought, conceived by Holy Beings, was projected onto the primordial unordered substance through the compulsive power of speech and song. Language then, is an energetic medium that affects the very entrails of reality. Thought then, for a Navajo, is a creative tool for ordering reality. That's why the ability to speak eloquently, and think beautiful creative thoughts, is highly praised. A child acquires human status only after it has started to speak. In this book i've found excellent descriptions of the Blessingway ceremony and various other curing rites (designed to recreate the world through myth, song, prayer and language). This includes the best (by far) explanation of the famous Navajo phrase "sa'ah naaghahii bik'eh hozho" that Navajos use to refer to a "beautiful, pleasant and healthy environment". The phrase which represent a maelstrom of meanings is firmly rooted into Navajo mythology and thus often considered untranslatable. Moreover, Clyde Kluckhohn (the 'grandfather of Navajo anthropology) often says that English lacks terms that have simultaneously moral and aesthetic meanings and hence cannot be used to comprehend Navajos. Witherspoon tells us that the principal verb in the Navajo language is not "to be" like in many other languages (including ours); "to be" is of minor importance in Navajo. Instead, the Navajo language contains some 356,200 distinct conjugations of the verb "to go", reflecting emphasis on movement and change. Movement, song, speech and life are, for a Navajo, inseparably linked. What does such ordering of the world - in terms of change and movement, instead of the emphasis on the "self" - mean for the Navajo sense of being in the world? W. explains it all in this fascinating, hard-to-put-down book. The book includes much analysis of genealogical terms and their relationships based on sex, generation, relative age and relative distance. Being born into a clan fixes the social context of the person clearly, precisely and unalterably while the language terms used to negotiate the social and spiritual interactions change depending on the context (the brilliant discussion of k'e terms in Chapter 3). In other words, the Navajo language is analyzed and investigated by W. as an organic aspect of a culture, its evolution and its mythos. This is cultural anthropology linguistics at its best. A few quotes to get the sense of the book (P.151): "For the Navajo, beauty is not so much in the eye of the beholder as it is in the mind of its creator and in creator's relationship to the created. The Navajo does not look for beauty; he generates it within himself and projects it onto the universe. Beauty is a creation of thought....[...]..the Navajo experience beauty primarily through expression and creation, not through perception and preservation. In the Western world beauty as a quality of things to be perceived is, in essence, static; to the Navajo, however, beauty is an essential condition of man's life and is dynamic. It is not in things so much as it is in the dynamic relationships among things and between man and things. Man experiences beauty by creating it. With regard to the two different views of art it is not surprising that Navajo society is one of artists (art creators) while Anglo society consists primarily of nonartists who view art (art consumers). The Navajo find it incomprehensible that we have more art critics than we have artists, and more art collectors than we have art creators (sic!). Nearly all Navajo's are artists and spend a large part of their time in artistic creation. All Navajos are singers and most Navajos have composed many songs." A healthy respect for language, its relationship to thought and natural environment also allows for intimacy between man and Earth. Witherspoon writes: "Four times I observed the rain ceremony performed on days with clear skies, and each time it rained within 12 hours of the conclusion of the rite, which lasted only a few hours. Only once, however, was the rain significant enough to be of some help" and so on. very cool. very informative. The book is prefaced by no other than Clifford Geertz! One conclusion reached by GW is that Navajo art and thought have much to offer contemporary philosophy, art and spirituality and to our understanding of connections between mental and physical phenomena. by looking into the symbolic dimensions of language we dive directly into the primordial origin of thought and its relationship to reality, to what is real. Witherspoon knows this presents it beautifully. highly recommended.

Studies Navajo culture as reflected in its art and use of language