

ART HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER

THE RELATION OF NAVAJO AESTHETICS
AND WORLD VIEW:
SOME EXAMPLES

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The concept of art as a category or categories separate from other areas of life is a construct of European society. For the traditional Navajo, art is not a separate category, but the aesthetic component throughout Navajo life, forming a matrix of channels of communication in the social setting, reinforcing the function of the activity at hand. In this paper we will look at specific examples of traditional Navajo art, as defined above, that are inseparably bound not only to one another, but to the traditional Navajo world view as well. In doing so we can come to understand why Navajo art has the various characteristics it does and how artwork of the Navajo can become storehouses for the meaning of Navajo world view.

This paper is intended not only as an assimilation of a broad range of detailed literature but also as a brief source of information on Navajo art. To be discussed in this paper is first a theoretical basis for the connection of Navajo art and world view; second the Navajo world view itself; third a specific myth with its ceremonial drama, poetry, and paintings; fourth the general relationship of these acts to the traditional world view of the Navajo; and finally some changes in the Navajo world and some implications for European culture.

The idea that traditional Navajo art is connected to the Navajo world view through use in ceremonial contexts finds support in the work of Clifford Geertz(1973:87-90). It is Geertz's paradigm that sacred symbols, both linguistic and non-linguistic, function to synthesize a people's ethos (its morals, aesthetic style, mood, tone, character, and quality of life) with their world view (the picture they have of the way things in actuality are, or ideas of order). In belief and practice (ritual) a group's ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to be appropriate to the state of affairs described by the world view. Belief and practice objectivizes moral and aesthetic preferences by depicting them as imposed conditions by the world or "reality". Beliefs of world view are supported by invoking, through ritual experience, deeply held feelings of morality and aesthetics as experiential evidence for truth.

Religious symbols merge lifestyle (ethos) and specific, implicit metaphysics (world view), sustaining each with the borrowed authority of the other. By placing physical acts in an "ultimate" context, ritual is made extremely socially powerful. It alters the world presented to common sense, allowing only those moods and motivations induced by religious practice seem sensible. Through this immediate and physical connection with the ultimate, a person is changed and so is the common sense world.

Obviously, to understand the connection between Navajo world view and art, it helps to have some idea of the nature

of the traditional Navajo world view. Pinxten (1983:16) begins his description of this world view by stating that "the Navajo seem to stress [general] process rather than substance, and cohesion rather than segmentability of reality." The general attitude to things here is that they are a series of energetic events persisting through general change. Stressing the Navajo concern with events and motion, Witherspoon, perhaps the most insightful of current researchers on the Navajo, sees as implicit throughout all of Navajo culture an underlying creative synthesis of active and static phenomena. All things can be understood by the Navajo by placing them in one or the other category. The cohesive, general processes that Pinxten refers to above are seen by Navajo's as either active or static in nature. In fact, according to Witherspoon (1977:179), "The primary metaphysical assumption on which the Navajo view of the world is built is the opposition between active and static phenomena . . ." "This dualism constitutes the metaphysical foundation and ideological foundation for Navajo ideas concerning the nature of thought and speech, knowledge and language, and world and element." Resulting is the Navajo doctrine of the compulsive power of language and ritual. This dualism of active and static is reflected in much of Navajo art.

Associated with concepts of static and active phenomena is an emphasis on motion and control. The two forms of control are speech (the outer form of control) and thought

(the inner form). The means of control is ritual ceremony. The goal of ritual ceremony is the creation of form, order, harmony, and beauty. The Navajo's first create this order in their minds, through ritual symbols which are both linguistic and non-linguistic, so as to produce harmonious relations in their world.

Along with the emphasis on control, the Navajo are concerned with three other principles above all others. These are an emphasis on activity and creativity, an emphasis on balance and an emphasis on beauty and harmony (Witherspoon, 1977:181). The emphasis on control discussed above, is based on the fact that Navajos characterize their world as in a constant state of movements in space and transformations of states of being through time, none inherently good or evil. All powers of motion that can be controlled by humans are good, while all powers outside the control of man are dangerous and potentially evil. These ideas are embodied in everyday life by an avoidance of excess, because this implies a lack of control, and by an attempt to keep intense emotions under control. The Navajo turn to ritual control when their world is disturbed by evil and disorder.

There is also an emphasis on balance and completion. For example, Navajo aesthetic and metaphysical thought are balanced by an orientation to pragmatism and lightmindedness. Art and learning are directed toward those useful activities (e.g. sandpainting and recitals of

mythology) that contribute toward harmony, order, health, and beauty (Witherspoon, 1977:188). The Navajo conceive of the universe as a place that is complete in its creation and closed to further additions or subtractions (Pinxten, 1983:36). The Navajo view the universe as an all-inclusive unit in which all elements are interrelated in an orderly but delicate balance governed by a general principle of reciprocity. Any single element or entity in the Navajo world enters into relationships with something else. As a consequence any human action involving one aspect of the world has a certain impact on other aspects, eventually on the whole creation (Pinxten, 1983:36). Ideas of ceremonial reciprocity between supernaturals and humans stem from these metaphysical assumptions of completeness, and is especially important to the Navajo. Because of the essential completeness of the world the Navajo see ritual reciprocity, through identification of supernatural with humans, as an inevitable, mechanistic event.

An emphasis on beauty and harmony is exemplified by an avoidance on the part of the Navajo of impassioned confrontation between social groups. This creates an environment infused with harmony. Through social ritual ceremony, Navajos can identify themselves with the "Holy People" and so incorporate themselves with harmonic beauty (Witherspoon, 1977:191-194). "Hózhó", explains Witherspoon (1977:151), "is the Navajo concept of beauty or beautiful conditions". But beauty is not separated from good, health,

happiness, perfection, harmony, normality, success, well being or order. It is not a fragmented quality but a normal pattern of nature and experience. In fact, the word Hozho can be separated into two parts, the prefix "Hó" is used to talk about space, area, or place. It also refers to the general rather than the specific, wholes, the indefinite, or the infinite. The suffix "zhó" refers to the positive ideas referred to above. So "Hózhó" refers to a positive or ideal environment which is all-inclusive. To Witherspoon (1977:151-154), the Navajo attitude toward beauty is based on a lack of a mind-body dualism. Art is not separated from everyday life. Beauty is not "out there" or "in the eye of the beholder", but is found in an intimate relationship with beauty itself, manifested by natural phenomena. For the European, beauty is a quality of things to be perceived, but for the Navajo, beauty is an essential condition of a person's life found in his dynamic relationship among things. For example, the aesthetic value of a sandpainting is found in its creation and use (its relation to humans), rather than in a way of experiencing the work as a thing to be experienced as a separate entity, set off from the person, to be preserved, manipulated, accumulated, or resold at a higher price. In contrast to white society, where it is unusual to be an artist, most Navajos are "artists" in some way or another, be it weaving, sandpainting, or even an intensity of aesthetic sense in everyday activities. This is because the Navajo aesthetic is based on a complex

cosmological transformation of experience and so fills life with beauty and aesthetic value. Unlike European culture, where a person is separated from the world, the Navajo implicitly see mind, body, emotion, and biology as connected. Navajo aesthetics and culture is based on a unity of experience. The Navajo stress movement and motion in their conception of the world, and the experience of beauty is dynamic and flowing. Characteristic themes found in Navajo art reflect this emphasis on the part of the Navajo and these themes will be exemplified below by Navajo paintings, song and ritual structure.

Much of the basis of Navajo culture is not explicitly known to them in the terms above but is implied in mythological terms. The Navajo view on the universe, the earth, the nature of man and the supernaturals, disease, curing and ethics are reasoned from a mythological standpoint. Each ceremony in the Navajo religion has a mythological basis. Human acts are identified with supernatural explanations and activities, tied together by a complex of symbols and symbolic acts (Reichard, 1950:3-4).

Navajo mythology predominantly concerns stories of creation. At this point one specific myth will be briefly outlined so as to show the structure myth gives to ceremonial activities. This description of the myth of Blessingway is excerpted from Wheelwright (1942:165-172). The myth begins in a dark world, lighted by either black or red light, which is populated by an assortment of gods and

prototypes of humans. These pass upwards into a second blue world, where is created stars, animals, humans in the form they have now, and other natural items. Later, the myth tells how all of these creatures pass up to the third or yellow world and then, to escape a flood, all of these creations emerge into this world. This world is seen to be colored by a light made up of a combination of the light of the tree previous worlds. At this point, various ceremonies, prayers, and sandpaintings are taught to humans by the gods, or Holy People. In each of the previous worlds, the actions of Holy People or humans caused a catastrophe, leading to the abandonment of one of the underworlds for another. Now, in the fourth world, ceremonial activities are expected to keep order. The origin of the paintings used in Blessingway are explained from the same mythological reasoning. It is said (Wheelwright, 1942:165-172) that the earth people had the chants and prayers belonging to Blessingway, but, because they had no paintings to guide them, they constantly made mistakes. Both the designs and techniques for drypaintings were handed down to humans from the Holy People. For instance, the "cornstalk" painting (figure 4) was shown to humans by White Shell Woman. She took the humans to a cornfield, made her footprints by walking through yellow pollen, and sat herself beneath a cornstalk she had planted in the center of the cornfield. She said chants and prayers, and when she had finished, a bluebird, symbol of

happiness and harmony, perched upon the flower tassel of the corn and sang. The "cloud house" painting (figure 5) is said to have been first made by White Shell Woman the day after the cornstalk painting was made. She made the painting of her house in the clouds after praying and chanting, then entered the painting and washed herself. Because of this mythical connection, the sandpaintings of the Navajo are seen as the component that ensures accuracy for the other activities of the ceremony, which follow the actions of the Holy People and is therefore of extreme importance.

The Blessingway ceremony concerns itself with the "path of life", or the various events occurring to people in their lifetime. Appropriately, Blessingway mythology retraces events in the creation stories which involve movement from world to world and within each world. And so, during each ceremony in the Blessingway ceremonial, the patient and others walk onto sandpaintings depicting certain mythical travels or adventures.

There are over fifty Navajo ceremonials which fit into two broad categories: Evilway and Blessingway. Evilway ceremonials deal with the extraction or soothing of evil effects, while Blessingway ceremonials have to do with the restoration or maintenance of *hózhó*. Literature varies on categorical descriptions, but Blessingway and Beautyway, along with many others, are examples of ceremonials within the Blessingway ceremonial system. Each ceremonial is made

up of many component ceremonies. In the Blessingway ceremonial, for example, there is the bath ceremony. The bath ceremony includes many rites, such as the sandpainting, chants or prayer, and washing hair. Individual rituals and ceremonies may also be extracted from Blessingway and used independently from the larger ceremonial to prepare for another ceremonial altogether, for example. So "Blessingway" refers to a general category of ceremonials, to a particular ceremonial, or to specific rituals from the ceremonial. The Blessingway ceremonial is said to control all other ceremonials, be they Blessingway or Evilway in general type, because of the historical precedence given to Blessingway in mythology. It originated just after the emergence of humans into this world. Because of this importance, Blessingway is seen by many to be the "backbone" of the Navajo religion (Wyman, 1970:26).

"Hózhónjǐ" is the Navajo word that has been translated as "Blessingway" and can be understood by breaking the word into its two component parts. The stem "hózhó" implies wholeness, harmony, all that is good, well-being, order, or beauty. "ǐ" expresses side, manner, direction, or way (Wyman, 1970:7). Although hózhó is usually translated as beauty, the term hózhónjǐ was originally translated by Franciscan Monk Father Berard Haile as "Blessingway", perhaps showing a strong cultural bias that goodness is bestowed from above rather than created by man. The term

generally refers to a creative and symbiotic relationship of man and nature resulting in the Navajo ideal of harmony.

Blessingway's central concepts are "sa'ah naagháii bikeh hózhó". These concepts are in almost every song, prayer, and ceremony of the Navajo and they contain most of the important concepts and meanings that pervade the Navajo sacred and secular world. A Navajo uses this concept to express his health, happiness, the beauty of something, and the harmony of his relation to others. Sa'ah, as Witherspoon explains (1977: 21-23), "expresses the Navajo concern for and emphasis upon life and their attitude toward death and old age ". Naagháii refers to "the continual reoccurrence of life cycles and restoration". Bik'eh means "according to, or by its decree". Finally, hózhó, the meaning of which has been discussed previously. Witherspoon (1977:25) sums this all up: "The goal of Navajo life in this world is to live to maturity in the condition described as hózhó, and to die of old age, the end result of which incorporates one into the universal beauty, harmony, and happiness described as sa'ah naagháii bik'eh hózhó"(1977:25).

Speaking from mythological reasoning, Sa'ah Naghái represents the "inner form" of the earth and also thought, while Bik'eh Hózhó represents the "outer form" of the earth and also speech. Sa 'ah Naghái and Bik 'eh hózhó are the central animating powers of the universe, producing a world described by hózhó. All things have inner forms and outer

forms which must harmonize and unify with Sa'ah Nagháii and Bik'eh Hózhó to achieve well-being.

According to Kaplan and Johnson (Kiev, 1964:203-229), the Navajo conceive of disorders and disease as the outcome of specific behaviors ranging from incest to piercing babies' ears. These behaviors are thus labeled as culturally undesirable for the sake of social order. There are four distinct patterns of psychopathology recognized by the Navajo. The European category of schizophrenia is the first, then the three main Navajo categories of "moth craziness", "ghost craziness", and "crazy violence". Schizophrenia is treated only by Whites. The symptoms of moth craziness suggest epilepsy to Europeans, but the Navajo believe it to be caused by incest. In such a case, a mythical moth finds its way into a person and causes him to act strangely, often throwing himself into a fire. Seizures, however, are the most common symptoms. Ghost sickness is associated with the influence of evil power and witches. Symptoms are fainting, delirium, bad dreams, feelings of terror, weakness, danger, confusion, loss of appetite, feelings of suffocation or dizziness. Ghost sickness is thought to be caused by a witch's power or when a ghost comes into the victim and takes over, causing symptoms. Crazy violence is the most prevalent, but least understood, of the Navajo disorders. Its symptoms are often confused with drunkenness, accompanied by violent assaults or sometimes suicidal actions. The "victim" usually does not

remember his actions. While the Navajo treat moth sickness and ghost sickness with ceremonials, there is not a ceremonial for crazy violence. The usual "treatment" is to constrain a person in jail while the family pays restitution. To the extent that everyone believes the problem as defined by the "diagnostician" (discussed below), the cure is directed toward this definition. When the ceremony works, there is a general reaffirmation of the solidarity of the community with the patient.

The goal of Navajo ceremonials is to restore hózhó through the reenactment of mythical events in drama, prayer, song, and sand painting. During a ceremony, the patient is identified with the good power of deities. For example, the paintings of the Navajo ceremonials allow the patient to reenact the myth in the same space in which he lives, actualizing the identification in the ceremonial. This identification reciprocally neutralizes the negative state and restores one to harmony (Witherspoon, 1977:25). For instance, a patient with swollen or painful joints would be advised to have a Beautyway "sung over" her, because the heroine of that myth had a similar problem. Through the reenactment of the actions of a Holy Person in a myth, a patient restores hózhó to his or her life, as do the Holy People, who are themselves the ultimate in harmonious living.

While the Navajo reason the success of their ceremonies from a mythic viewpoint (failure is seen as resulting from

human error), Jungian analyst Donald Sandner (1978:60-61) sees the whole process as symbolic healing, not unlike some modern psychotherapy. The singer, trained in manipulation of meaningful symbols, integrates health and well being into a meaningful human experience, bringing the patient into harmony with his own physical and cultural environment. Geertz's description of the Navajo curing rites differs somewhat from Sandner's. Geertz gives more emphasis to the function of ritual. The rituals provide a mode of action through which human suffering "can be expressed, being expressed understood, and being understood, endured." (1973:104-105). What is important about the above views of the Navajo ritual process is not, of course, which is correct, but how they help us to understand the Navajo culture from our own varying and shifting viewpoints.

Participants in a Blessingway ceremonial, or "sing", are the diagnostician, the singer or medicine man, the patient, onlookers, friends, and assistants, all of whom participate in various capacities. In the case of a ceremonial to be used as a "cure", the diagnostician interviews the patient to determine the problem and to recommend a ceremonial. During this interview the diagnostician places himself in a trance-like state to determine the source, cause, or location of the problem. Some gaze into crystal, some look at the stars, but most kneel over the patient as he lies on the floor. Raising his hands over the patient's body, the diagnostician moves them

lengthwise along the patient a few inches in the air. At various points, the diagnostician's hands begin to tremble, revealing the location and nature of the problem.

According to Kluckhohn and Wyman (1940:15-25), the singer is a person, almost always male, who specializes in the knowledge of the mythology and ceremonial procedures. This knowledge is gained through an apprenticeship, lasting some years, with another experienced singer. There is a difference of opinion as to the degree of knowledge needed to be called a singer, but a singer usually knows between one and seven ceremonials all the way through. The length of one typical ceremonial has been likened to the Iliad. So, many singers specialize in particular parts of ceremonials and may increase their knowledge to include parts of twelve or more ceremonials. As far as his duties go, a singer directs the ceremonial but others also add ideas to ensure accuracy. Everyone contributes knowledge and suggestions to assure perfection by consensus. The actual working together of people is part of the whole ceremony, part of the harmony sought (Hatcher, 1967:27).

The patient, or "one-sung-over", is the person in need of a restoration of hózhó or simply a maintenance of hózhó. Usually, relatives act as go-betweens, arranging for diagnosis and ceremonial. There need be no blood relations or gender restrictions for others to look on or participate in the ceremonial. All are selected for practical reasons

only: availability, knowledge of procedures, friendship, and willingness to help (Kluckhohn and Wyman, 1941:22).

While many other Navajo ceremonials require a large number of various items of equipment, Blessingway singers see as essential only the mountain soil bundle and dry painting equipment, if there are to be paintings (Wyman, 1970:104). According to mythological precedent, the bundle contains soil from six sacred mountains in the Navajo area. To an individual singer, it is his "medicine" and the source of blessings. It can produce comfort, tranquility, and happiness. The bundle assures a harmonious relationship with the "Yei" or Holy People who stand within the six mountains (Wyman, 1970:21-31). Sandpainting or dry painting equipment is usually provided by a member of the patient's family (Kluckhohn and Wyman, 1940:45). The "pigments" are made from grinding rocks from the area and, in the case of black, by crushing burnt hard oak. These pigments are used on the smoothed sand floor of the hogan, if a sand painting is to be made (Joe, 1978:6). The three basic sand colors are obtained by crushing and grinding red, white and yellow native sandstone. Blue is made from charred root of rock oak ground with white sand, and black is made from grinding charcoal with dark sand. All of these "paints" are stored on bark slabs (Newcomb, 1968:4). For Blessingway ceremonials, however, drypaintings are usually made, which differ from sandpaintings in that no sand is used. Instead, the designs are made with cornmeal, corn and other plant

pollens, powdered flower petals, and charcoal on buckskins, cloth or floor. The word "sandpainting" is acceptable as a generic reference to Navajo floor paintings.

The location of the ceremonial is usually in a hogan, the Navajo house. The first hogan was built in myth (Wheelwright, 1942:51-125) and reflects and reinforces the Navajo model of their universe (Wyman, 1970:16). The hogan is usually circular or octagonal in shape, and placement of ritual objects and sequences of ritual events can support the idea that the hogan corresponds to a "map" of the Navajo universe (Lamphere, 1969:286-287). Ritual actions such as walking on a sandpainting, occur in a clockwise sequence, or sunward, beginning in the east near the door (see figure 1). The sandpainting is placed at the center of the hogan, the patient near the far west wall, the singer near the southwest wall, the fire is just to the east of the painting, male participants along the south wall, and female participants along the north wall (Lamphere, 1969:288).

Events within Blessingway ceremonials, and versions of the myth upon which the ceremony is based, varies from singer to singer. The following ceremony is described by Wyman (1970:104-106), Kluckhohn and Wyman (1940:76-108), and Wheelwright (1942:171-172). This ceremony lasts two nights, (the norm being four nights), beginning at sunset one day and continuing to dawn the second day after that. In life, as in myth, whenever a Blessingway ceremonial is planned, certain persons put the hogan in order. Orderliness and

centeredness is the concern of this activity. The hogan is the center of happiness, health, and tranquility. Most Blessingway ceremonies take place in a hogan and begin with hogan songs. At this point, the singer takes pinches of pollen and sprinkles pollen on all those present. He then sprinkles pollen onto the guardian symbols, if there are any at this point, and motions as if to throw pollen through the hole in the roof. There is a low prayer chanted throughout (Newcomb, 1968:4).

After the hogan has been practically and ceremonially prepared, the first ritual is the consecration of the hogan with cornmeal. Then the singer applies corn pollen to the patient's body as a benediction. Next is a long recital of prayers, sometimes accompanied by singing by all present, and the application of the singer's bundle to the patient's body, as well as to the participants. Also, the patient may hold up the bundle while singing or praying. In some ceremonies a drypainting or sandpainting is made at this point by all present, as is usual (see figure 2). The painting begins in the center of the pre-determined design and moves outward from there. The painters move out from the center, and add other elements to the east, south, west, and north, as well as in intermediate directions (Newcomb, 1968:5). The singer, upon completion of the drypainting, applies corn pollen used for the footprints in the painting to the bodies of all present in order to "keep you safe on your journey". There is a short communal pollen prayer

before everyone disbands for the evening. The drypainting is then disposed of since the painting has absorbed disharmony.

The next morning begins with prayers, and later the bath ritual, which takes place along with prayers and songs. The bath ritual is held on a drypainting, or a sandpainting in other ceremonies (see figure 3). The patient enters the painting from the east, undressed, following the white cornmeal tracks and sits himself upon the white cornmeal circle, facing east. Suds are made from soapweed and cactus and used to cleanse the patient. The singer chants a certain number of prayers, then walks onto the painting and stands beside the patient. The singer then applies cornmeal to the patient, the patient dresses, and then pollen is applied to the patient. Then the painting is disposed of.

There is a break at midday for eating and resting after which another painting is made (see figure 4). The patient enters the painting from the east, followed by the participants and singer who erases the trail behind him. Everyone follows the pollen tracks, then a line of white around to the flower tassel at the top of the corn upon which the patient sits. Often there is sand or pollen applied to the patient here. There is singing and praying accompanying each of these acts. At the end of this ceremony, this drypainting is also disposed of and another is started for the evening ceremony.

The final night is taken up with singing, alternating with prayer. The patient holds the mountain soil bundle. The bundle is also applied to everyone present. By this time, the last drypainting is completed (see figure 5). Depending on the painting iconography, the patient and others enter the painting as before and apply the materials to their bodies. In the painting illustrated here, the patient enters alone from the east, following the yellow tracks on a white cornmeal trail around the cloud house - stopping to greet the center from each of the four directions - steps into the cloud house and sits on a half circle of white cornmeal. The patient washes himself as in the bath ceremony. Prayers, songs, and the application of the painting and other materials take place until dawn. At dawn, the patient leaves the hogan to "breathe in the dawn" four times while twelve holy early morning songs are sung. The final painting may be left in the hogan to become part of the floor or the patient may sleep on it for four nights, after which it is disposed of outside.

The painting of the Place of Emergence used at the beginning of the Blessingway ceremonial (figure 1) and the painting used for the bath ceremony (figure 2) are common to most ceremonials. Although specific iconography varies, of course, the subject remains the same. In the painting of the Place of Emergence the circle in the center is the hole through which the people climbed up to the present world. The ladder used to climb up points to the east. The

footprints are those of the people going to the four directions; white tracks to the east and west, the yellow tracks to the north and south. The triangles are cloud symbols. In the bath ceremonial painting, the yellow outside line is the symbol of the hogan, with the opening to the east. The white circle west of center is where the patient sits. The red circle in the center is where the fire is built. The paintings of the cornstalk (figure 3) and the cloud house (figure 4) are unique to this version of Blessingway. In the cornstalk painting the enclosure around the white cornstalk represents a cornfield, which the Navajo speak of as the hogan, or house, of the corn. The leaves and ears are blue, and the silk is red and yellow. The door opens to the east, where four yellow footsteps enter on the white cornmeal trail. In the cloud house painting, the cloud house is the square form in the center of the design. The white half circle shape, surrounded by yellow, is where the patient sits. The white full circle, also bounded by yellow, is the location of the medicine basket (basket of suds), and the yellow cross marks show placement of the patient's hands and knees (Wheelwright, 1942:197-201).

Since the sandpaintings are made from the center outwards, the overall shape or format is not something one begins with, but what one ends up with, and the general form is a matter of indifference (Hatcher, 1967:53-57). This may account for the range of versions of sandpaintings on different parts of the reservation. Shape seems to be

related to size. In general, smaller paintings are irregular, while larger paintings are usually surrounded by "encircling guardians" and tend to be round, square or rectangular. Each painting is based upon a myth, and depending on that myth the general arrangement of elements is determined. If a painting has its elements arranged in a row or line, the myth probably concerns travel of some sort (active) and the shape will usually be rectangular (see figure 4). Radial arrangements of elements are often found within round or square paintings and often concern a part of a myth relating to sedentary (static) subject matter (see figure 5). The relation of mythical action and shape can be reversed, however, (see figures 2 and 3 for variations). Figure 2 is a sandpainting with paths in it but, since the myth relates how humans emerged and then scattered in the four directions, it is a radial design. In the end, Navajo sandpaintings are often extremely complex and vary widely in design, but there are two main structuring ideas: those aligned to the cardinal directions and those developed upon a linear or pathway idea.

The dynamic symmetry of Navajo sandpaintings in general implies movement, activity, and vitality, always held under control, which are all hallmarks of the Navajo world view (Witherspoon, 1977:170-171). Pinxten (1983:21-23) argues that the composition of the paintings (radial), the placement of the paintings within the hogan (at the center), and the placement of the patient on the painting (on the

center or axis), all reflect the Navajo notion of order, organization, and orientation. The center is considered the main point of reference throughout daily activities, taking up an important position in the Navajo way of dealing with the world. "Mirrored" or bilateral symmetry is rare in Navajo arts (Hatcher 1967:74-76). Navajos achieve balance by creating a repeating tension between static and active symbols. This repetition of tensions, along with a repetition of pictorial elements and empty spaces, create the rhythm in so many Navajo sandpaintings and songs. Repetition can be associated with Navajo ideas of movement and oppositions of active and static phenomena, and by implication balance, control, completeness, and harmony. Variation in Navajo arts serve to enhance repetition rather than conceal it. Whole categories of Navajo conceptions, such as those including gender or color, are seen as being repetitive, opposing tensions, and therefore, harmonious in their interrelationships. As can be seen in figure 6, the cardinal directions are associated with opposing symbols in the categories of sex, time of day, color, and most importantly, static and active. Movement and activity is expressed by the successive alternation of these static and active symbols. Linear movement, for example, follows the pattern of static-active-static-active. Figure 2 is an example of linear movement. The paths that lead to the four directions from the center are colored white (tracks to the east and west) and yellow (tracks to the north and south).

When viewed in sunwise or clockwise order, these color categories create a repetition of static-active-static-active symbols. Cyclical movement follows the pattern of static-active-active-static and is mainly found in ritual where control and normality is emphasized. In this way, Navajo sandpaintings utilize dynamic symmetry rather than a static, bilateral symmetry. Static symmetry is absolute balance while dynamic symmetry expresses motion and energy created by oppositions and contrasts.

These oppositions of active and static phenomena to create a symmetry or harmony does not happen only in Navajo sandpaintings, but also in many other Navajo arts such as poetry or song as can be seen in these lines from Blessingway:

Earth's feet have become my feet

by means of these I shall live on.

Earth's legs have become my legs

by means of these I shall live on.

Earth's body has become my body

by means of these I shall live on.

Earth's mind has become my mind

by means of these I shall live on.

Earth's voice has become my voice

by means of this I shall live on.

Earth's headplume has become my headplume

by means of this I shall live on.

The cordlike extension from the top of its head

is cord-like from the top of my head
as by means of this I shall live on.
There are mountains encircling it and
Hózhó extends up their slopes,
by means of these it will be hózhó as I shall
live on.

Sa'ah Naagháii Bik'eh Hózhó I shall be,
Before me it will be hózhó as I live on,
Behind me it will be hózhó as I live on,
Below me it will be hózhó as I live on,
Above me it will be hózhó as I live on.

Hózhó has been restored.

Hózhó has been restored.

Hózhó has been restored.

Hózhó has been restored.

(Witherspoon, 1977:26-27)

Notice that the first half of the passage is composed of eight lines, each split into two or more parts. The first part of each line is different from pair to pair, the second part of each line remaining the same from pair to pair. The rest of the passage can be divided into two parts, the first set of lines being different from one another, the second set of lines being identical to one another. The first eight lines can be seen as an example of a repetitive juxtaposition of active and static phenomena. The last two sections can be seen as first active and then static. The whole passage is structured on an active-static-active-

static rhythm.

Color is a symbolic base for ceremonial language. The juxtaposition of color as active or static phenomena in paintings have already been discussed. Color is also considered to be a dimension of light, since, by mythological reasoning, the sun combines the colors of the three previous underworlds - black (or red), blue and yellow- into light of daytime. Night is in fact seen as chaotic, but the return of the sun every morning is seen as a return to order. Appropriately, the traditional Blessingway ends at the dawn following the fourth night of ceremonies with the patient now harmonious with the world, greeting the ordered light of day. The whole structure of the Blessingway ceremonial exemplifies the Navajo structure of oppositions between active and static. The ceremonial is organized on the occurrences in the three underworlds plus the present world. These colors appear in the myth in the order of black, blue, yellow, and finally daylight. This structure can also be seen as a cyclical repetition of static-active-active-static (since the last step of the ceremony is associated with dawn or east), another example of Navajo use of dynamic symmetry, brought about by the juxtaposition of opposing symbols, in artistic organization.

Patterns of classification of sex, color, direction, and qualities of light, all reflect the basic metaphysical distinction between the active and static dimensions of reality. This basic distinction has provided an organizing

principle upon which much of the symbolic classification of the world is built. The language of ceremony, no matter what symbolic base is used (linguistic or non-linguistic), tells us that the Navajo classification of the world can be seen in Navajo art. This classification is built upon the single metaphysical assumption of opposing natural phenomena. There is a basic duality in the Navajo world of the active and static. All things and concepts can be placed in one or the other category, but it is the synthesis of these modes, realized through aesthetic sense and activity, that leads to the ideal of *hózhó*.

Presently, the Navajo culture is very possibly disintegrating, despite attempts to preserve it. Problems from addiction to drugs of different sorts to the overuse of the natural resources both by white industry and the Navajo are well known. Religious affiliation, for instance, has changed radically. As of 1978, 49.7% of the Navajo were of Christian affiliation, 23.6% traditional Navajo religion, 8.9% Native American Church, and 17.8% were affiliated with more than one religion, usually traditional Navajo and Christianity (Parezo, 1983:216). The ceremonials are dwindling as a result, both in number - Sandner (1978:58) reports that ten ceremonials are commonly requested now comparing to thirty-five in the past - and in the length of ceremonials, dwindling from a norm of five or nine nights to two nights (Sandner, 1978:58). As a result, the repertoire of myth, songs, prayers and painting designs is diminishing.

Although some hogans are still used for ceremonies, a general shift to white housing also threatens the traditional Navajo world view, since the hogan is built upon and reinforces a model of their universe. Wyman (1970:16) goes so far as to imply that if the hogan goes, so will the Navajo religion.

The change of sandpaintings from religious act to commercial object, for example, perpetuates the loss of meaning of the ritual complex and aids in the disintegration of Navajo religion and culture. Navajos were upset at first violations of taboos against permanent sandpaintings for use outside the ceremony. There was fear of supernatural repercussions because of a lack of reciprocity on the part of the painter who summons the Holy People by their likenesses. Misuse of paintings was believed to cause blindness, insanity, paralysis, or crippling (Parezo, 1983:63). But there is tremendous pressure on the Navajo to supply a huge art and tourist industry with permanent paintings, and so the meaning of the paintings is shifting from that of a religious act to commercial art. In response to criticism, and to ease their own anxieties of supernatural sanctions, Navajo painters have altered their designs to a greater or lesser degree. Since there is a belief that ceremonial sand paintings should be exactly as the gods described them, these alterations provided some painters with a rationalization allowing them to break with taboo (Parezo, 1983:75). Designs are simplified, mistakenly

or intentionally inauthentic, direction or colors are changed, new elements are added and benevolent beings are depicted (Parezo, 1983:82-86). Also, as a result of this intentional inauthenticity, the subjects are changing to include anything from landscapes to portraits of Jesus Christ (Parezo, 1983:94-99). As Geertz's ideas on religion, ethos and world view, described earlier, tells us, this use of sandpaintings aids in fragmenting the elements of Navajo religion, rather than fusing them.

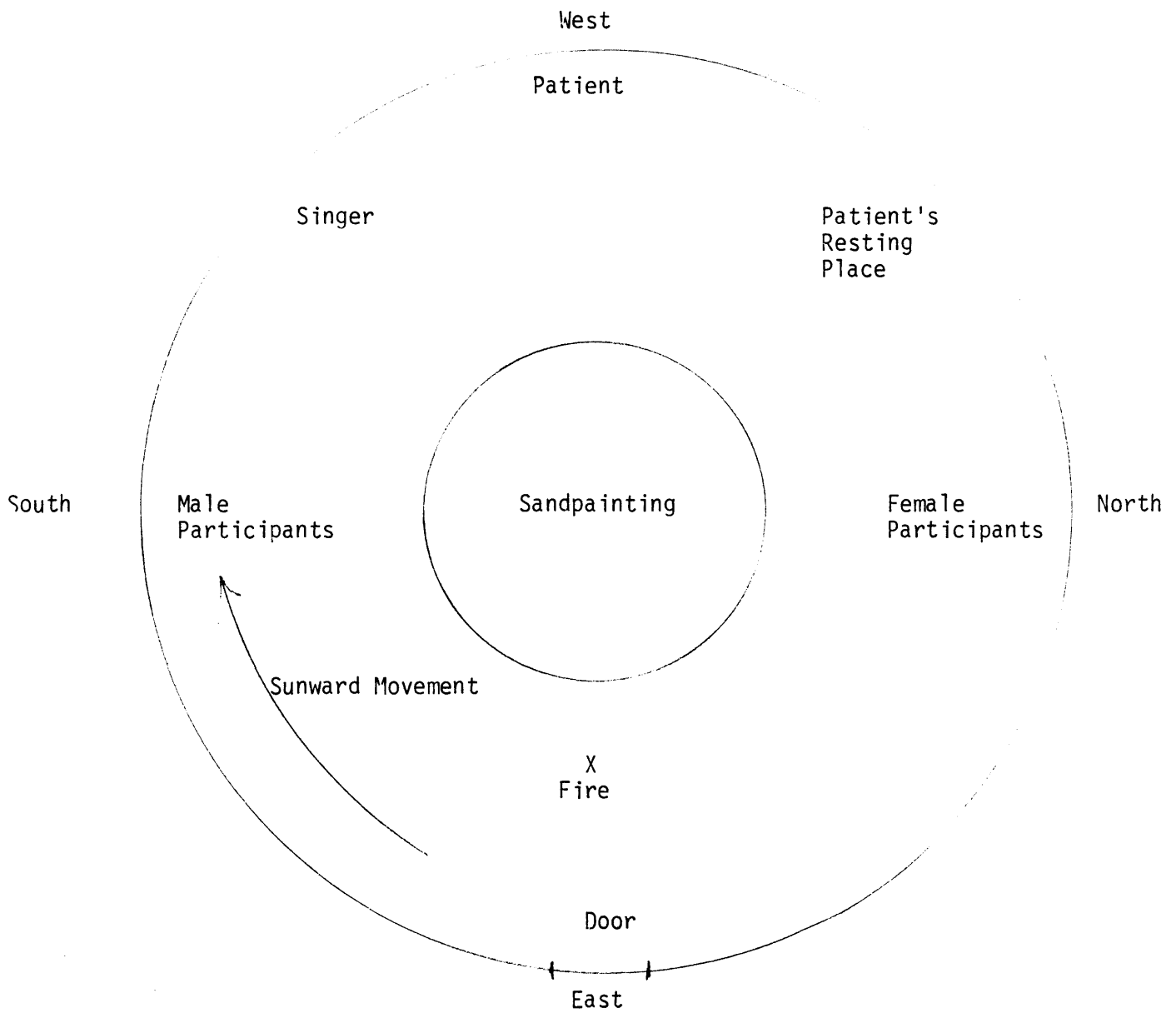


Figure 1. Diagram Of Hogan.
Adapted from Lamphere (1969:288).

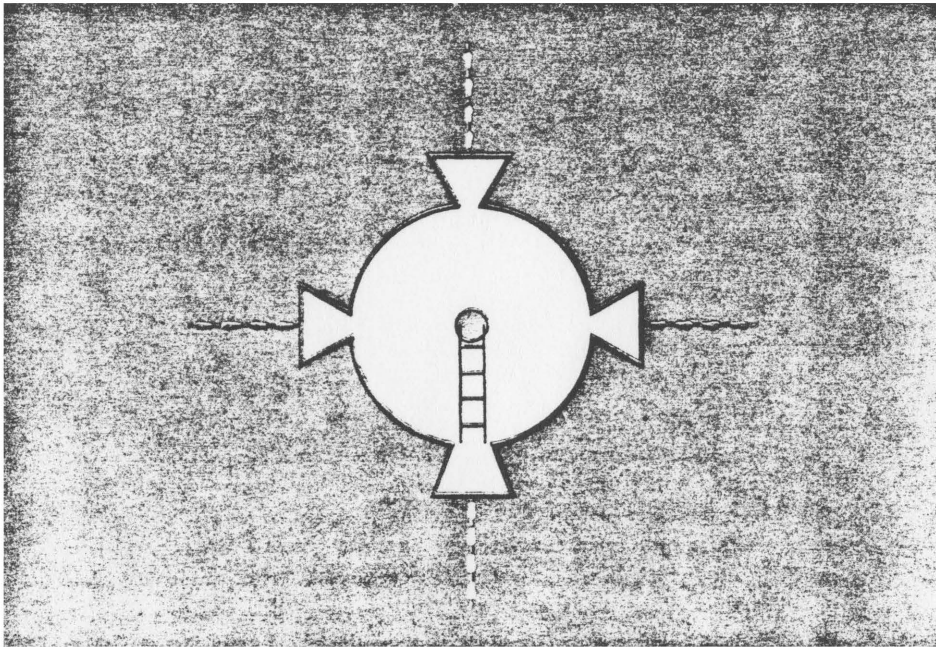


Figure 2

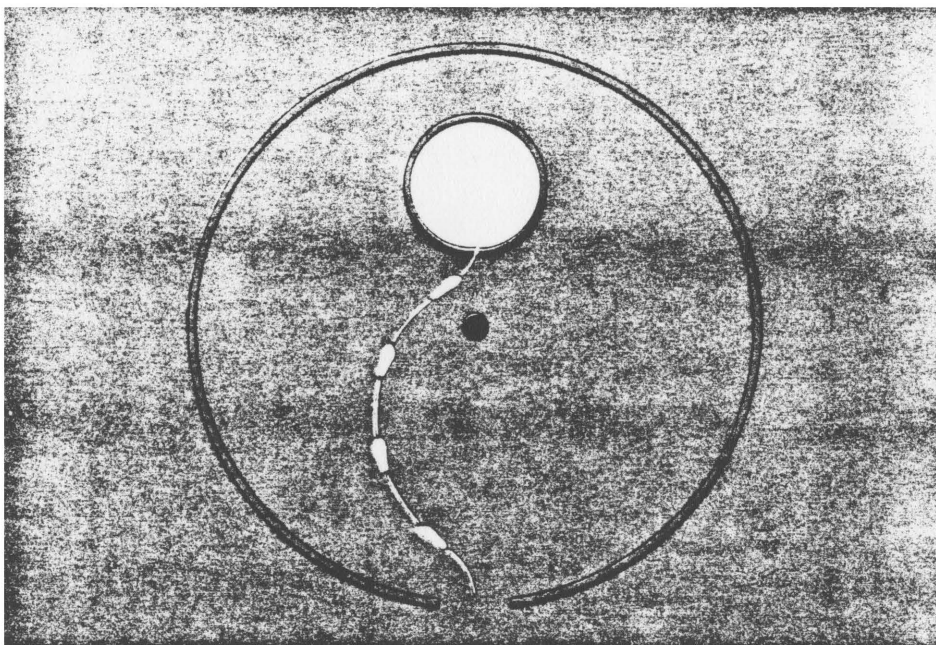


Figure 3

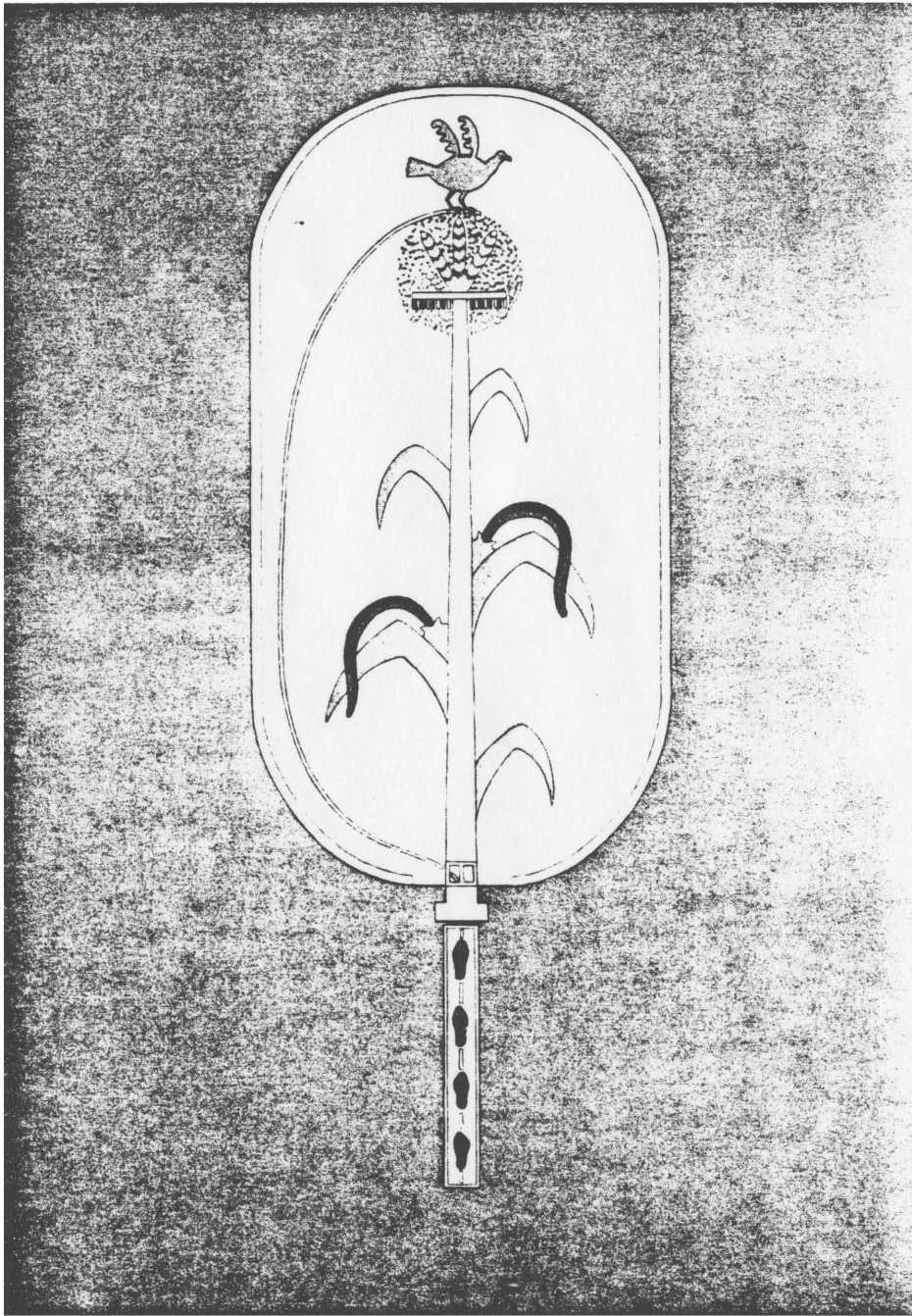


Figure 4

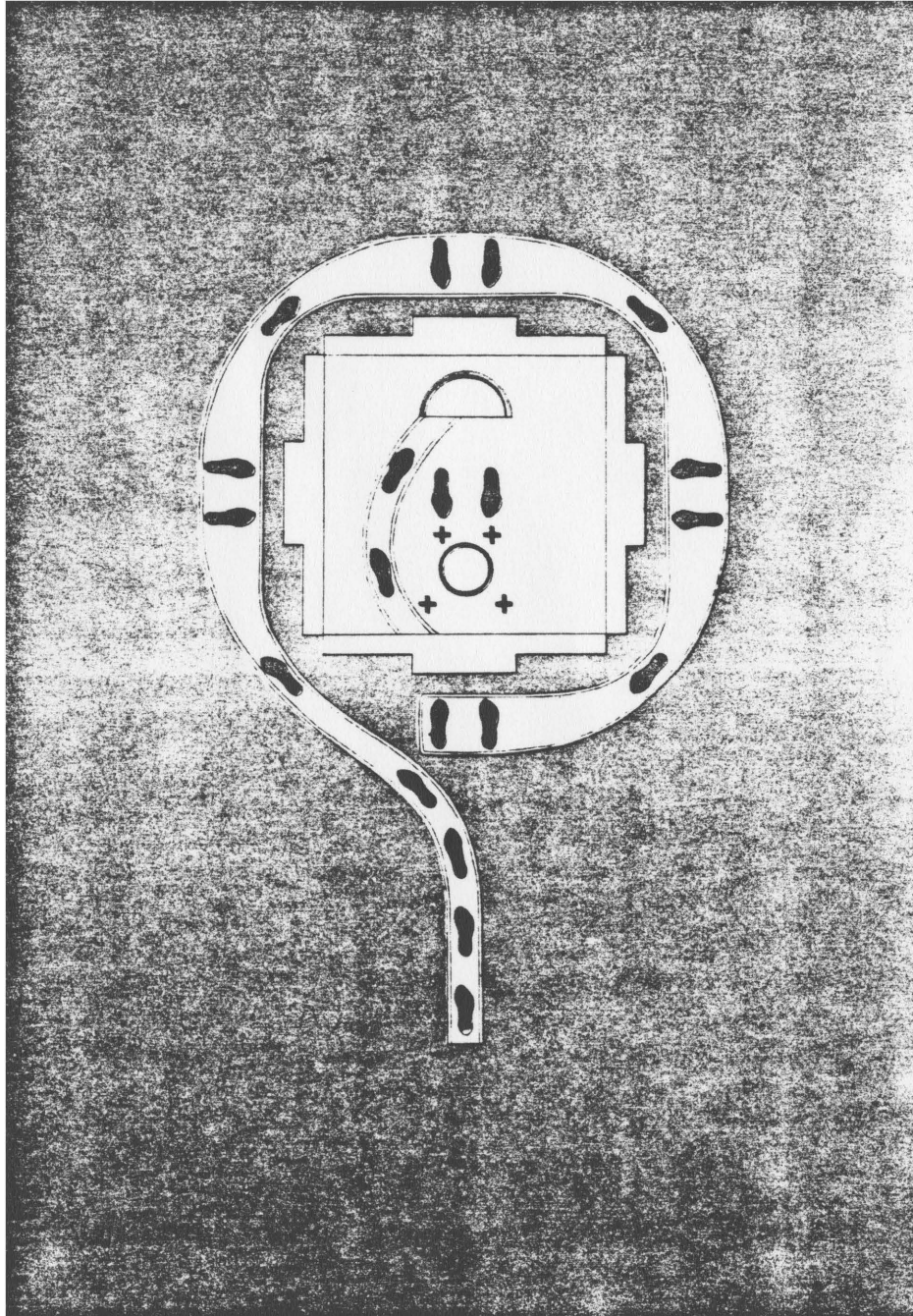


Figure 5
All illustrations adapted from Wheelwright (1942:197-201).

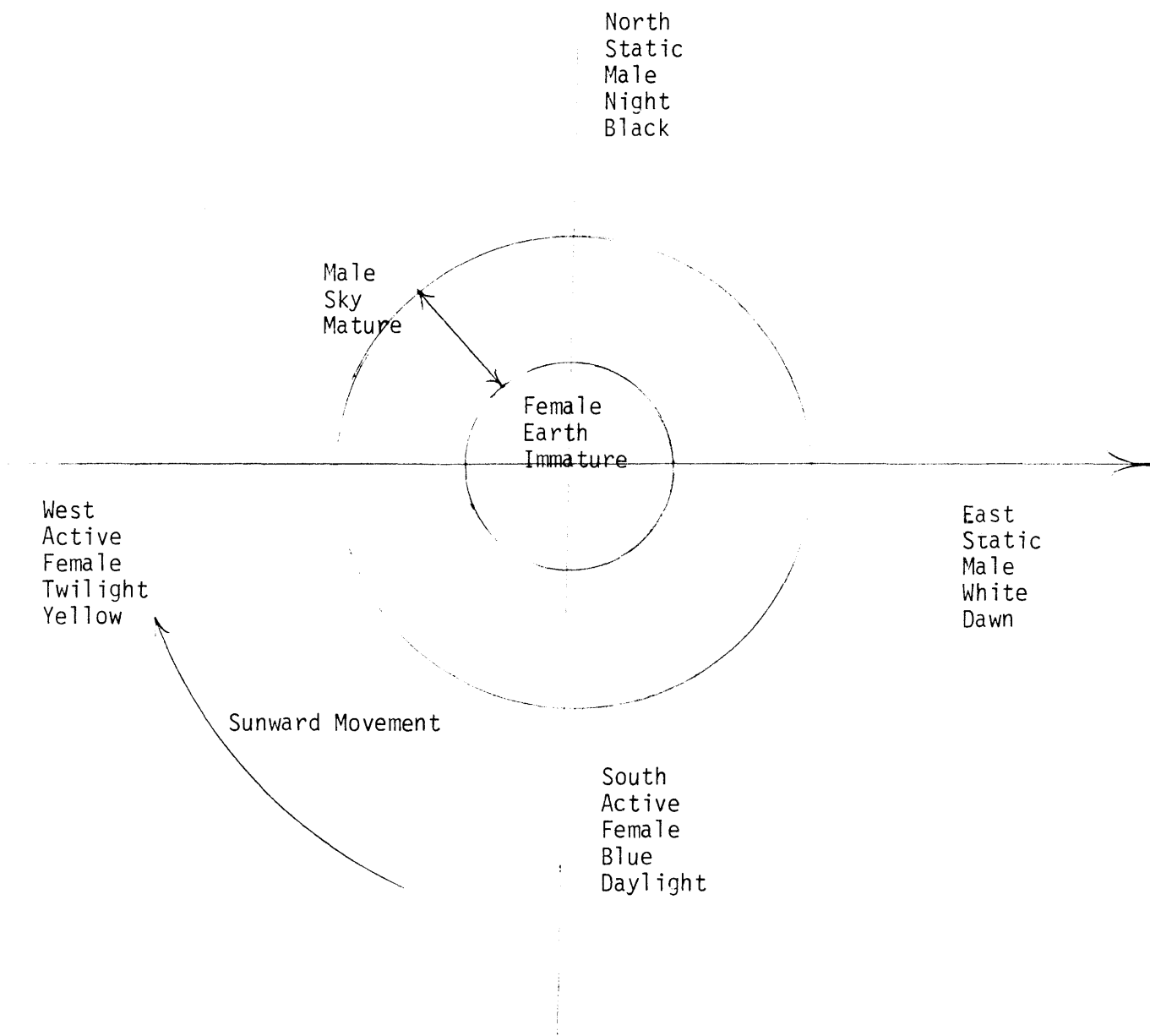


Figure 6.
Adapted from Witherspoon (1977:159).

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