

Ton Lemaire

THE AMERICAN INDIAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE - A WAY OUT
OF OUR ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS?*)

1. Introduction

In this essay I intend to examine the extent to which the attitude of Indians towards nature differs from the Western attitude, and the significance an "Indian consciousness of nature" could possibly have for industrial societies (both in Europe and Northern America) which are becoming increasingly aware of their "environmental problem" - or rather, their environmental crisis.

The historical conditions for a fresh look at and a reappraisal of relationships with nature which differ from the modern Western ones were created by the rising consciousness of the ecological crisis in certain circles in the industrialized West. In the United States the environmental movement (re)discovered the value of the traditional attitude of the Indians. The technologically most advanced society in the world is in a unique position: within its borders, in reservations distributed all over the country, (fragments) of societies survive whose relationship with nature has non-Western, pre-industrial roots. Those who criticized the biological destructiveness of the metropolitan economy could draw their inspiration from the "ecological wisdom" of the first Americans who now live on the periphery of the nation. The future of the American continent, once subjugated by Europeans, seemed to depend on a return to the old Indian feeling of respect for "Mother Earth". The question is to what extent industrial society should be inspired by the Indian relationship with nature - if it exists - or to what extent this would be a new episode in the long tradition of *idealizing* the Indian - as a "savage ecologist", this time (1).

2. The Indian consciousness of nature

A characterization of the traditional attitude of Indians towards nature is an abstraction and a (re)construction. In the first place, "Indian" as such is

*) Zuerst erschienen in Achterberg, W. und Zweers, W. (Hrsg.): *Milieu-crisis en filosofie. Ekologische Uitgeverij, Amsterdam 1984. Ins Englische übersetzt von Paul Hesp.*

an *abstraction*, for there are - were, rather - in fact hundreds of highly dissimilar Indian societies which in the past paid more attention to what separated them than to what united them. "Indian", in distinction to Western or European, is therefore a generic term, formulated by Europeans to indicate what in their eyes those diverse Indian cultures had in common - a term which would later be adopted by the Indians themselves. Secondly, an Indian philosophy of nature must be *reconstructed* because it is inextricably an element in Indian religion and mythology, Indian ceremonies, etcetera - in other words, it is embedded in concepts, attitudes and behaviour which have a wider significance. And all this is part of an oral tradition which has only been recorded recently and from secondary sources. Keeping these methodological reservations in mind, I will now try to outline some essential characteristics of the traditional attitude of Indians towards nature, as manifested by their former way of life and by their own declarations (2).

The essential characteristic of this attitude is an overpowering feeling of union and kinship with both living and "dead" nature. All of nature was considered to be animated and holy; the "Great Spirit" manifested itself in everything. Man, incorporated in that both natural and sacred order, an order in which everything is interconnected, was part of a cosmic whole. A "symbiosis" which was both practical and spiritual united man with the rest of the universe, and especially with plants and animals. This implied a reciprocal relationship with these beings, with mutual obligations and mutual respect. Hunting did not conflict with these principles. Indians never killed an animal without expressing their respect for the creature they knew to be a relative, or without ceremonies in honour of the species. Hunting thus did not break the bonds of communication between man and the rest of nature, where man and animal were more or less equal members of one community, animated by the presence of the Great Spirit. Thus, the character of the man-animal relationship tended to preclude the unnecessary killing of game. Indians did not experience a landscape as a neutral space - it was imbued with the spirit of sacred places: mountains, trees and waters. Indian geography therefore was a *mythical* geography expressing the spiritual union of the people with their land. Earth was felt to be "Mother Earth", in which the human being was rooted, his origin to which he would return. Cosmos and society were, in short, not opposed to each other, not two separate spheres. The famous - and possibly fatal - distinction the Greeks made between "physis" and "nomos" would be unthinkable for Indians. Their

cosmos was at once a natural, sacral and moral order. Their universe was meaningful, "... a system of moral consequences" (Redfield 1962, p. 106) for man, not an indifferent system.

The quotation was taken from a book in which the anthropologist Redfield attempts to distinguish in a somewhat paradigmatic way between the *Weltanschauung* of "primitive" cultures and of "civilization". The Indian attitude was not unique: the Indian world concept was a variant of an archaic cosmology or mythology which has served humanity throughout the world during the longer part of its existence. It was only replaced by a totally different *Weltanschauung* after the Urban Revolution, in particular after the rise of Jewish monotheism and the Greek Enlightenment.

3. The European invasion of the American "wilderness"

Almost inevitably, the penetration of Europeans in the New World led to a tragic clash between, on the one side, Indian cultures which retained the archaic, spiritual attitude towards the land and on the other a culture which through Judaism and Christianity had already "de-spiritualized" its own space and favoured an all-seeing, distant god and would, at the threshold of the modern age, soon continue the further "disenchantment" of the world (3). The result of this confrontation is known: the Europeans quickly overran the Indian societies, committing large-scale genocide and bringing destruction to the American continent in its wake. In short, it was the invasion, by a continent believing in Progress, realizing its emergent dynamism in a continent rooting in "Mother Earth".

For the penetrating Whites, the earth was not sacred, rocks were dead things and trees and animals were created to serve mankind. The contrast between the Indian and the European attitude becomes nowhere more tragically obvious than on the many occasions when Whites initiated land purchase negotiations with Indians. Mutual incomprehension and misunderstandings manifested themselves during these negotiations as a result of different, totally incompatible *world views*. For one party, land was a commodity to be exchanged for money like any other product; for the other it was the sacred, spiritual basis of existence. Many of the flamboyant speeches of Indians, often chiefs, expressing incomprehension and indignation at the proposal of the white man to buy their land - how *could* one possibly trade Mother Nature herself? (4) - date back to that period. If those Indians' prose looks poetic to us now, it proves above all how prosaic our own relationship with the earth has become!

It is highly revealing that the white invaders considered the American continent to be "virgin" land or a "wilderness" to be conquered and cultivated. From the start, White acting and thinking was dominated by the basic contradiction between wilderness and civilization (and/or wilderness and Christianity). The concept of "wilderness", with its connotation of useless, rank growth and worthless space could only arise in a society which itself had become alienated from nature and based its supposed progress on subjugation and control. Appropriating the New World was considered to be and legitimized as a beneficial transformation of the American wilderness by Western civilization, as rendering fallow land productive, as lightening the darkness. The "frontier" and its mythology, the westward shift of the border between the so-called wilderness and the advancing Christian civilization has played a major role in the history of the United States: the conquest and domestication of the American wilds has quasi become a Book of Genesis of US society (5).

Treating the New World as a wilderness, the Whites, on at least three levels, misunderstood the continent's reality (both actually and ideologically) and subordinated it to the dynamics of Western society:

1. There was an implicit refusal to recognize the Indian presence in the New World as a human - let alone equal - form of interaction with nature, as a unique, humane mode of production and settlement. America was not a virgin or empty continent at all: it had been populated for millenia by countless Indian tribes which had left their traces in the landscape. The disdain for Indian ways of life and the Indian relationship with nature also resulted in an underestimation of New World population densities - and thus could America be represented as virtually "empty", waiting for white settlers. Even pre-Columbian population estimates are not free from ideological distortions resulting from the crude wilderness/civilization concept (6).
2. The Indians themselves were therefore considered to be part of nature, of the wilderness. They were seen as "savages", as "primitives" - not as people of a different culture, with a unique, valuable attitude towards nature, and entitled to their share of it.
3. Finally, both American nature and its inhabitants were regarded as something to be tamed and civilized, "wilderness" being *worthless* in the eyes of white man, to be given value through labour and civilization. The great work of cultivating and civilizing this wilderness and these "savages" negated and destroyed primeval America.

It is tempting to interpret this invasion of the New World by the old - euphemistically called a "meeting of civilizations" - as being part of the deployment of capitalism which in its early dynamism clashes with pre-capitalist modes of production which are inevitably pushed aside, destroyed or - if necessary - incorporated (7). In its search for land, raw materials and markets, the emerging capitalist mode of production discovered and soon appropriated unknown continents. The above mentioned "wilderness/civilization" concept then is nothing but the ideological form (the rationalization or legitimation) which the penetrating capitalist mode of production used to justify the appropriation of the American continent and to eliminate the non-capitalist Indian modes, whose object was subsistence, not commodity production and exchange as yet. The Indians' view of this process is represented by the compelling statement of Luther Standing Bear (8): American nature was turned into a wilderness by Western civilization.

Only when the United States had domesticated what it considered to be wilderness did a consciousness of the significance of what was being lost arise in certain circles. The *revaluation* of the wilderness started with the writings of, among others, Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman and with the American landscape painters of the first half of the 19th century. During the sixties of the present century, the rise of the environmental movement marked a new phase in the revaluation of the wilderness. In both cases, misgivings about civilization and manifest tensions in society played a role, and the revaluation of the wilderness also created the conditions for a revaluation of its original inhabitants: the Indians. Capitalism is apparently unable to appropriate the wilderness without at the same time creating people who deplore the price which is paid and who are aware - in a realistic or unrealistic way - of the value of the wilderness and of the people who lived there.

4. "Indian ecology" demystified?

During the last decades, critics of capitalism and industrial, technocratic society have drawn attention to Indian societies. Their modest mode of production is seen to avoid the unrestrained destruction and mutilation by modern Western society and to maintain an ecological balance where the latter seems headed for an environmental disaster. In the descendants of the original inhabitants of America, whose way of life was seen under a new light, the environmental movement in the US found a natural ally in its criticism of the ecological imprudence of Western society. After all, the

Indians seemed to have populated America and to have lived there for thousands of years *without* causing any damage worth mentioning to flora and fauna. Their bonds with American nature had been sanctioned from the beginning in their mythology and cosmology, expressing the symbiosis of man and animal in the New World. On the other hand, the Whites who entered it possessed a worldview and a religion which took shape in a different ecosystem, without affinity with America.

This image of the Indian attitude which seems to be so ecologically sound in all respect deserves some fundamental criticism. First, common sense tells us that the Indians' modesty resulted from the limitations of their tools. Marxists would say that a society with undeveloped forces of production and hence with a limited hold on nature necessarily develops an image of nature as being something higher, sacral, larger than man. Marx, as we know, considered all mythology to be an illusory form of control over nature which would disappear spontaneously when the development of the forces of production would actually allow human control over nature. From that perspective, the Indian worship of "Mother Nature" is nothing but an ideological translation of a factual impotence vis-à-vis the earth. Therefore the past superiority of Indians in maintaining the ecological balance is less a consequence of their "land ethic" and their noble consciousness of nature as of the ineffectiveness of their tools and the limits of their production. There is no merit in preserving nature when mankind's real hold on nature is still so marginal.

Secondly, we must take account of a possible discrepancy between the man-nature relationship formulated in Indian mythology and functioning as a social norm, and the actual behaviour of individuals with regard to plants and animals (*a fortiori* this also holds true for the situation among present-day Indians - see section 5). When focusing on the actual behaviour of Indian societies in history, not on their ideology, some much-discussed historical facts discredit the supposedly ecologically responsible behaviour of Indians.

First, there is the matter of "prehistoric overkill" in North America at the end of the Paleistocene. Around 10,000 BC several large game species in the northern part of America died out more or less simultaneously, among them the bison (not the same as the present species), the mammoth and the mastodon. It is quite possible that their extinction is connected with the major climatological changes at the end of the last Ice Age, but there are indications that over-hunting by paleo-Indians has at least been an additional

factor. Archeologists have pointed out that major improvements of arrows and spears took place at the time, that fire was probably used and that several sites have been excavated where prehistoric Indians have killed buffaloes by the hundred after chasing them over the edge of a cliff. The arrival of the Indians in America - a continent where man has only penetrated very recently, from an archeological point of view - would have been fatal for the large herds of wild animals which were not familiar with the presence of human beings. The growth of the early hunter and gatherer population would have put heavy pressure on America's megafauna, and the wasteful hunting methods would have been the final blow for species which were endangered by climatological change already. The early hunter, far from being a modest element in nature and a partner of the animals he hunted, would have behaved like a "superpredator".

A similar method - chasing whole herds into a chasm, killing more animals than necessary - was used in hunting buffalo in historic times. The use of rifle and horse from the late 17th century onwards - which caused several predominantly agricultural tribes to switch to buffalo hunting - would have intensified buffalo hunting (according to others it would have become more selective). The animal near-extinction at the end of the last century therefore would not only have been the consequence of mass slaughter by Whites, but also of increased Prairie-Indian predation (9).

Finally, there is the hunting of furry animals, beavers especially, in the Northeast of the present US and throughout most of Canada. It is a fact that Indian tribes in these regions participated in large-scale beaver hunting in exchange for European goods, resulting in the extinction of the animal in many areas as early as the 17th century. This is of course a consequence of the penetration of America by the European market economy, with its demand for furs, beaver skins especially, causing tribes that originally hunted only for subsistence to hunt for goods or money. The amazing thing which needs explanation, however (even if C. Martin's ingenious theory (10) is accepted) is that the traditional Indian's respect for wild animals - based on the concept of a kind of holy contract with mutual obligations between man and animal - provided so little *resistance* against the adoption of a (European) business attitude towards the animal world. The image of the Indian hunter whose spiritual union with the cosmos kept him from killing more animals than strictly needed for survival and who retained a permanent ecological balance with his environment, is tarnished by these examples. Have critics of industrial society been tempted to idealize and mystify hunters and gatherers in general, and Indian societies in particular?

5. Ecology and ideology

We cannot avoid the issue of the degree to which "Indian ecology" might be an ideology. A study of the history of White interpretations and views of Indians reveals that these always arise in conjunction with the vicissitudes, contradictions and general state of Western civilization since the early modern period (cf. Berkhofer 1979). Just as the popularity of Castaneda's books is related to the "counter culture"'s need for a mode of consciousness transcending conventional Western consciousness, the Indian ecologist could turn out to be a construction of those groups who have become frustrated by the industrial society of the 1970's. The Indian as a wise ecologist, in short, could be no more than a recent feature of the *history of perception* of the Indian in the West, instead of a perceptual breakthrough. The concept of "Indian ecology" would then be a counter-ideology to the ideology of industrial society. The matter becomes even more complicated when we realize that ideological distortion does not only come from Western society, but also from the side of the *present-day Indians* who pretend to have a different and better attitude towards nature.

The attitude and mentality of present-day Indians cannot simply be equated with those of their ancestors living at the time of the discovery of America by Europeans. When the last tribes were "pacified" and relegated to reservations in the course of the 19th century - the definite destruction of their economy and a heavy blow to their ideology and world view - the original way of life had already been influenced and disturbed by Western products, institutions and ideas. After more than a century of life on reservations and attempts by the US government (through the Bureau of Indian Affairs) to Americanize them, Indians can hardly *not* be alienated from their own culture and tradition. Nevertheless, a powerful movement has arisen during the past 15 years, especially among young US Indians, searching for a new identity. It is in the process of rediscovering and reappraising the characteristics of a specific "Indian identity". An important element in this process is the emphasis on Indian religion and spirituality and hence also on the specific Indian attitude towards nature, with its sense of union with the world of plants and animals, and its consciousness of being part of a vast cosmic whole imbued with the Great Spirit.

We should realize that the majority of those who now advance these ideas have long become alienated from the traditional way of life - they often live in towns and have become far too Americanized to be directly nurtured by the traditional Indian land ethic, if it ever existed. Consciously wishing to

revive a tradition presupposes a *break* in the tradition - and the continuity of Indian cultures has been broken since the colonization of America. The break being the result of the presence of the White way of life, attempts to revive the tradition will almost inevitably be influenced by it. This is proved by the fact that present-day Indians use anthropological, archeological and linguistic findings on the history of their culture, and by their (re)construction of Indian history and culture to distinguish themselves from the surrounding US society. They tend to idealize their past, to present it as a sort of "Golden Age", lost at the arrival of the white man, and to use their "Mother Earth" concept as a sort of counterideology against industrial society. Which of course does not mean that their texts and pronouncements on their own culture and history do not deserve the greatest attention (12): rewriting Indian history is a vital element in the present growth of Indian self-consciousness and in the effort to postulate and maintain the Indian individuality vis-à-vis US society. But we should realize that theirs is an *interpretation* of Indian history and of the original Indian attitude towards nature. In short, a clear distinction must be made between:

- a) the Indian attitude towards nature in the past;
- b) the present Indian attitude;
- c) the image present-day Indians have of their past attitude;
- d) the image present-day Indians have of their present attitude.

With regard to the last point, it may be suspected that a discrepancy could exist between ideology and the actual attitude (just as in the past, possibly). I have acquired a strong impression (13) that by far the larger part of the North American Indians has been Americanized to the extent of no longer expressing the traditional respect for Mother Nature in everyday life. After all, the *material* basis for this respect - the non-capitalist mode of production - has disappeared or been heavily undermined almost everywhere. Dependent on and surrounded by capitalist forces and relations of production, they have without perceiving it come to share the Western indifference to nature. Movements like the American Indian Movement (AIM) (14) nevertheless try to revive the Indian's particular relationship with an appeal to the traditional Indian bonds with the universe. They thus use the "Mother Nature" concept and its connotations as a more or less consciously ideological element in resisting the influence of the industrial society which surrounds them. This element in the ideology of the Indian movement has probably been reinforced or inspired by the US environmental movement. Indians in the US thus respond to the environmental crisis and the

environmental struggle among non-Indians by reverting to their old spiritual relationship with the environment.

A *convergence* between the ecological movement among "Western natives" - which is a critique of industrial society - and the revival of ecological consciousness among native Indians does not seem far-fetched: both resist the objectifying and destructive attitude towards nature on which modern Western civilization is based - the one group from within, the other from the periphery. Tragically, however, there is in both cases an *incongruence* between ecological consciousness and the character of the mode of production. For the present-day Indians, as pointed out, nurture a "land ethic" which is no longer supported by the substructure of an "Indian" mode of production, and we are developing an ecological consciousness which is not yet supported by actual changes in the "industrial" mode of production.

6. The convergence of Indian traditionalism and the environmental movement

The point raised above with regard to the relationship between ecology and ideology are not meant to discredit the ecological movement in the Western metropolises or to raise doubts about the ecological consciousness of the recent Indian movement. Rather, the intention is to prevent or criticize a wholesale idealization of "Indian ecology" by both Westerners and Indians. Therefore the historical and social *preconditions* of our image of the Indian, of the self-image of present Indians and of our self-image with regard to the man/nature relationship have been examined. These must all be seen in relation to the (history of) modern Western industrial society, the concrete *historical reality* which has formed us Westerners, has uprooted the traditional Indian societies and has finally stimulated a reappraisal of Indian tradition and a critique of Western society among a number of people.

An important role in the issue is played by the attempts of North American society to seize the areas still in Indian hands - the reservations. This is a result of the enormous demand for energy in a highly developed technical-industrial society: it has been shown that more than half of the mineral reserves in the US, including those of uranium, are to be found in Indian territory. After the US government took away most Indian tribal lands for agricultural and stockraising purposes in the last century, driving away the Indians to territories which were at the time "worthless" for Whites, a new attempt is made to incorporate that "wilderness" by taking or buying it from the Indians.

This new pressure on Indian land is the final attack on Indian ways of

life and Indian ways of living with nature. The conflict which arose when the New World was conquered now comes to a head: the parties are on the one hand a culture based on the ruthless appropriation and control of nature and landscape (which are, so to speak, *consumed* as raw materials for what it considers progress), and on the other a culture attempting to preserve a symbiotic and spiritual relationship with nature and landscape.

At present, traditionalist Indians all over the US (15) thus try to defend their land not only because they are the legal owners but also in the name of their own specific relationship - idealized or not - with the land. Once again, land is more than an incidental, exchangeable material basis of life for the Indian: it is "Mother Earth", inextricably bound up with life as part of a *holy landscape* full of places with spirits which influence its course. On the basis of a revived *pre-industrial* attitude towards nature these Indians posit an *anti-industrialism* which partly coincides with forms of social criticism of White dissidents. There is thus in the US a peculiar convergence and coincidence of ecologically founded criticism of modern society and criticism founded on traditional, religious grounds, both resisting the attempts to conquer the last people and natural areas which have not been completely appropriated by capitalism and industrial society. American Indians want to preserve the same places in the landscape which Americans want to protect against the levelling and - ecologically speaking - impoverishing effects of industrial society, because they are considered holy in the traditional cosmology of the Indian people.

7. *Mythology and ecology: the dialectics of history*

The last formulation is intended to indicate both the similarities and the differences between Indian revival and American (and European) social criticism, two types of resistance against the expansion of industrial society. It is understandable that some turn to the Indian as a kind of spiritual leader, who seems to anticipate ecological principles in this tradition which modern society has to *rediscover* labouriously and after much destruction of nature.

Although some white environmentalists have cast the Indian in the role of a spiritual leader, I agree in part with Martin who called the Indian a "miscast ecologist" (Martin 1981). I share Martin's secpis with regard to the idea that - after centuries of Christianity and Cartesianism - it would be possible for us to revert to a life based on a "land ethic", that is a mythic cosmology and a spiritual union with our landscape. *Returning* to an Indian

type of respect for "Mother Earth" cannot be done by us: after all, it was "... not just a land ethic, but a comprehensive way of life" (Martin 1981, p. 147). Attempting to acquire an Indian attitude towards nature would only make sense for a Westerner if this is attended and supported by a change in our way of life, that is, in our mode of production. Otherwise it would only be an illusory, ideological transformation of our world view, condemning us to impotent sectarianism like - unfortunately - the presentday Indians whose fragments of a world view are not supported by a functioning non-industrial mode of production. Given the centuries of de-spiritualization and disenchantment of nature, given the distinction between "physis" and "nomos" and given, finally, the transition from mythos to logos, the adoption of an Indian consciousness of nature can only result in a "romantic" enclave within the bounds of industrial/capitalist society, not in its transformation.

Christianity, rationality and technology have *alienated* us from a possible "Indian bond" with nature; in our own tradition only vague elements of a primordial consciousness of nature remain. Therefore, a truly radical change of our way of life cannot be expected to result from a return to our origins, nor from an identification with the ways in which other people - the Indians, e.g. - have experienced nature. In both cases, that would mean a far too naive negation of history, an inadequate consciousness of its irreversibility. *Our history*, in short, *blocks* a return to a cosmic mythology. The *genii loci* have long been chased from the landscape and only poetic minds are occasionally capable of briefly experiencing the lost spirit of cosmic feeling in the stark space which is left to us.

Yet, what history obstructs on the one hand, is set free on the other: due to the environmental crisis, industrial society is being forced to realize the incompatibility of its mode of production with the "economy" of nature - in a language it understands and respects and which therefore presupposes rationalization, separation and alienation. Ecology as a science is, after all, a product of the Western natural sciences; within a mechanized worldview it represents the laborious *reconquest* of the idea of an all-embracing bond with all elements of nature - the return, in the rational language of the natural sciences, of the old consciousness of mutual dependence of all living creatures. Ecology as a science rediscovers the possible ecological function of mythic cosmology: reason appears to be forced to recognize the wisdom of the myth. But rediscovery and recognition, presupposing the separation of mythos and logos, of "physis" and "nomos", do not reunite them! We may consciously regret these separations, and rationally recognize the dangers

and alienation resulting from our rationality; but the far-reaching consequences cannot simply be undone.

The historical constellation in the US makes it possible for Whites who have become aware of the dangers of rationalization in their society and history to join hands with those Indians who, on the basis of reminiscences of their own mythic cosmology, resist the threats posed by the consequences of rationality and of the technology of White society around them. But in both cases the only realistic base for change is a thorough transformation of capitalist/industrial society itself, with the means and forces produced by its own history and experience. Without such a transformation of American society around them, the Indians, in their quest for their original way of life in the changing landscape of their ancestors, are also doomed to remain an ambiguous and powerless enclave.

Contributing to a future "post-industrial" society which will permit a totally different, non-destructive attitude towards nature, the character of which we can only vaguely imagine, does not depend on any kind of idealized Indian past. But I differ from Martin's disillusioned point of view in believing that the memory of societies for which nature was not the opposite of civilization remains a source of inspiration. Those societies may not have embodied the Golden Age which some Whites and Indians have sought, and they may not always have been in perfect balance with their environment, but at least they were not driven by the desire to appropriate nature as if it were a thing, and man was not their measure of everything (16).

Notes

- (1) This essay only sketches the situation in the US (applicable, to an extent, to Canada) because - as compared with Latin America - the ecological movement among Whites is strongest there, and the traditionalist Indian movement uses ecological motives very frequently and the number of texts they produced on their situation is largest.
- (2) Of course the epistemological difficulties in reconstructing Indian cultures and in Indian worldview are far greater than can be described here. I will return to the question in a different context in section 4. See also Lemaire 1983, pp.88ff. and 101ff.
- (3) There is disagreement on the degree to which Judaism and Christianity influenced the Western attitude towards nature and on the interpretation of both as being rather inimical to nature. In my opinion, the demystification of nature begins with Judaism, and this must be deplored both from point of view of ecology and of Indian cosmology. An Indian view may be found in Deloria 1973.
- (4) See a.o. McLuhan 1973, Chief Seattle 1979 and Vogel 1974.
- (5) See Berkhofer, Billington 1981, Nash 1973 and Smith 1970.
- (6) A critical review of estimates of the original population of the New World may be found in Jennings 1976, ch. 2.

- (7) Wolf 1982, ch. 5 and 6 is a recent example of this perspective.
- (8) "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 beautiful and we were surrounded with the blessing of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the East came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families that we loved was it 'wild' for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the 'Wild West' began."
- (9) See Baird Callicott 1982 and Martin 1982 for reviews of this problem and references; a review in the framework of global prehistory is given by Cohen 1977.
- (10) In his much-debated and speculative theory of Indian participation in the fur trade and (therefore) in the extermination of the beaver, Martin (1982) states that Indians felt that their repudiation of mutual obligations and respect towards game was warranted by the epidemic diseases which decimated the Indian population after the arrival of the white man, and which were interpreted as an animal plot. As the animals had obviously broken their contract with humanity, the Indians started what amounted to a war of extermination against them.
- (11) This elements may be found in almost all texts - see e.g. Deere, Means 1980, Scott Momaday 1978 (cf. also note 12).
- (12) "A basic call ..." 1977, Durham 1977, D'Arcy McNickle 1975, Deloria 1969, 1970, Highwater 1981, Means 1980 and Mohawk 1979 represent Indian interpretations of Indian culture and history. Articles on the topics are regularly published in the magazine *Akwesasne Notes*, published by New York State Mohawks.
- (13) This section is partly based on my own observations during a visit of several months to the US, when I visited a number of Indian reservations (mainly Sioux and Navaho) and on a conversation with Deloria (Tucson 16 Sept. 1983) who said to me that modern Indians may well try to recapture the idea of "Mother Earth", but that they are already too Americanized.
- (14) AIM is one of the most radical and influential movements of militant Indians, with an especially strong representation among Sioux. During a visit of several days to Yeelow Thunder Camp in South Dakota - a symbolic occupation by young Indians, mostly AIM members, of the Black Hills, the holy mountains of the Sioux - I could witness how difficult it was for these people to disengage themselves from the influence of consumer society, even though they brought their old ceremonies back to life again and the "mother Earth" notion has undergone a strong revival. Means, one of the AIM leaders and a regular visitor to the camp, admitted during a conversation that there was still a discrepancy between behaviour and "ideology". He stated that "decolonization" would be a long process for people who had experienced the alienation of reservation life for centuries.
- (15) In several reservations there is disagreement between Indians who would permit the exploitation of resources against payment and those who fundamentally oppose ceding territory for commercial reasons.
- (16) After having relativized the idealization of Indian ecology in section 4, I remain of the opinion that before their contact with Europeans, Indian society globally speaking had a more sensible, moderate and less destructive relationship with nature than modern Western society; I am however aware of the difficulties of reconstructing the original character of Indian cultures.

Bibliography

- Baird Callicott, J., Traditional American Indian and Western European Attitudes towards Nature: an Overview, in: Environmental Ethics, vol. 4, 4, 1982, p. 293 - 319.
- Berkhofer, R. F. jr., The White Man's Indian, images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present, Vintage, New York, 1979.
- Billington, R. A., Land of Savagery, Land of Promise, the European Image of the American Frontier, Norton, New York/London, 1981.
- Cohen, M. N., The food Crisis in prehistory, overpopulation and the origins of agriculture, Yale Un. Press, New Haven/London 1977.
- Deere, Ph., Life within the Circle, Vertaald en uitgegeven door Nanai, z.j.
- D'Arcy McNickle, They came here first, the epic of the american Indian, Harper & Row, New York, 1975 (1949).
- Deloria, V. jr., Custer died for your sins, and Indian Manifesto, Avon, New York, 1969.
- Deloria, V. jr., We talk, you listen, new tribes, new turf, New York, 1970.
- Deloria, V. jr., God is red, New York 1973.
- Durham, J., La culture indienne américaine, traditionalisme et spiritualisme dans la lutte révolutionnaire, in: Nations indiennes, nations souveraines, Ed. J. F. Graugnard, E. Patrouilleau & S. Eimeo a Ra, Maspéro, Paris, 1977, p. 244 - 265.
- Highwater, J., The Primal Mind, vision and reality in Indian America, New York, 1981.
- Jennings, F., The Invasion of America, Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest, Norton, New York, 1976 (1975).
- Lemaire, T., De Indiaan in ons bewustzijn. Syllabus Kultuurfilosofie, Nijmegen, 1983.
- Martin, C., Keepers of the Game. Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur trade. Daarin als Epilogue: The Indian and the Ecology Movement, Un. of California Press, Berkeley etc., 1982 (1978).
- Martin, C., The American Indian as miscast ecologist, in: Ecological Consciousness, essays from the Earthday X. Colloquium (1980), Ed. by Schultz & Donald Hughes, Un. Press of America, Washington D.C., 1981, p. 137 - 148.
- McLuhan, T. C., Touch the Earth, 1971.
- Means, R., Marxism is a european tradition, in: Akwesasne Notes, vol. 12, 3, p. 17 - 19, Grotendeels identieke versie (Ned.), in: Tribaal, jrg. 1, 1 (maart 1982), p. 2 - 4; German translation in: Unter dem Pflaster liegt der Strand, Karin Kramer V., Berlin (hrsg. P. Duerr), Band 10, p. 7 - 24.
- Mohawk, J., Native People and the right to survive, in: Akwesasne Notes, Vol. 11, 2, 1979, S. 4 - 6.
- Nash, R., Wilderness and the American Mind. Yale Un. Press, New Haven/ London, 1973 (1867).
- Redfield, R., The Primitive World and Its Transformations. Cornell University Press, Ithaca (N.Y.), 1962 (1953).
- Scott Momaday, N., The World of the American Indian, National Geographic Society 1974, p. 11 - 26.
- Seattle, opperhoofd, Seattle's toespraak, Kairos, Soest 1984 (Chief Seattle's address, 1855).
- Smith, H. N., Virgin Land, the American West as Symbol and Myth. Harvard Un. Press, Cambridge (Mass.)/London, 1970 (1950).
- Vogel, V. J. (ed.), This country was ours, a documentary history of the american Indian. Harper & Row, New York etc., 1974 (1972).

- Wolf, E. R., Europe and the People without History. Un. of California Press, Berkeley etc., 1982.
- (anoniem), Irokees Manifest, A basic call to consciousness: the Hau de no sau nee address to the Western World, Geneva 1977/Rossevelt town (N.Y.), Akwesasne, 1978.

Ton Lemaire
Catholic University Nijmegen
Comeniuslaan 4
Nijmegen
Niederlande