

receive such knowledge in trust. It is one of the saddest indictments of European influence that in some groups older custodians of oral knowledge may, and indeed do, choose to withhold such knowledge from the younger generations for fear that it may not be treated with the proper respect and value. The inroads of alcoholism and associated violence are deemed to be primary obstacles to the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next in modern times.

*The totemic landscape as icon.* For the first Australians land is clearly more than real estate. It is the living repository of ancestral beings and in a very real way it is their mother: that from which they were born and to which they will return in the endless cycle of birth, death and reincarnation. In a very real sense the land rights slogans “the land is our mother” and “we belong to the land” mean just that. It is for this reason that people seek to return to the land of their birth, particularly when death approaches. Just as the spirit child is believed to enter the mother at a specific site at the time of the first quickening of the foetus, so it is important to return to the same country (the preferred term) in order to return the spirit to its ancestral place at the time of death. One is literally treading on hallowed ground at all times, though some sites are recognized as being more ritually charged than others. The differentiating factor lies in the location of specific Dreaming paths and sites. For indigenous Australians the physical attributes of the environment do not have to be ritually invoked or somehow acted upon by human intervention to bring about their transformation or imbue them with spiritual connotations. Landscape features are icons of heroic beings or some manifestation of ancestral activity — tears, excreta, weapons or whatever.

The concept of totemism has been used to explain the relationship between people, spirit beings, and country (Berndt and Berndt, pp. 231-8; Strehlow). This refers not only to the particular anthropomorphic attributes of a given locality or species, but links the totem very directly and specifically with the individual who bears, or the kin or clan group which bears, its name and wholly identify with that locality or species. The bond that exists between people, land and species thus becomes even more personalized and intense. The person who belongs to the Kangaroo Dreaming is the kangaroo and the kangaroo is the person, group or collectivity. There is no disjunction. Rules of behavior and proper handling of the totemic species apply, one of the most