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ABORIGINAL DREAMING

by Paul Faulstich

PART I

HAWK HUNTING

In the Dreamtime we were one. We were fed by wild meat.

Rock hole and tree

We lived in these lands.

And deep in the thunder earth.

We floated through the sky

With hawk power

And glided through the earth as makers.

Today I walked through my country.

My country

I walked with the taste of dust in my mouth.

I floated through the sky

With hawk power.

For in the Dreamtime we are one.

The Central Desert of Australia. To the Aborigines the landscape is rich with sacred history and tribal traditions. Photo by Paul Faulstich.

PART II

The earth is the very substance of Australian Aboriginal life. The importance of this sense of place in Aboriginal life cannot be overstated. An intimate knowledge of the environment and geography was, and is, important to survival within a hunting and gathering context. Aboriginal religion is likewise intertwined with the natural features of the landscape. The earth, with its mythological places, animals, and soils, is revered by Aboriginal peoples.

The Aborigines tell of a time when the earth was made and the animals did not exist in their present forms. Mythological creatures inhabited the landscape, and with their special powers they transformed the earth and created the features of the landscape that exist today. When their completion was finished, they changed into intangible spiritual beings, and for this day and ever after in special places within the landscape, this mythological period, known as the Dreamtime, is interpreted as an embodiment of Aboriginal religion and philosophy.

The notion of the Dreamtime is found among Aboriginal tribes across Australia. Generally, Dreaming does not refer to an ordinary dream experience, but rather it is a metaphorical concept with a strong influence on the way Aborigines understand the natural environment and supernatural beings. Through the Dreamtime, all things are related in a system that links, mythically and symbolically, the temporal with the eternal, the past with the present, and the human with the non-human.

The Dreamtime permeates all aspects of Aboriginal life, from the sacred arts and rituals that celebrate the spirit of ancestors and the future of future generations, to the daily activities of hunting, gathering, and fishing.

George Sessions is a professor of philosophy at Sierra College, co-author of Deep Ecology, a mountaineer in the High Sierra with several first ascents, and an ecological politician. His work on ecological democracy and the promotion of deep ecology is widely respected by the Aboriginal community. His book, "The Aborigines and the Dreamtime," is a pivotal text in the study of Aboriginal culture and philosophy.

The trip to Waite Creek might last three hours, depending on how many ducks (so it seems) Aborigines are canned into my Holden HQ Stationwagon, and whether or not the journey is of great import to the ecological integrity of the site. The trip would likely be that it is one of the Aborigines will spot a kangaroo or a bush turkey. The view is... But aboriginals help to looking straight down the sky tracks that proceed our tank into the cosmos. These people don't "be" animals, they smell them, or sense them, or magically "see" them when one is near. As I learned long ago, the faster you go the harder it is to know. To know anything takes time, So I drew across this expanse of desert. The red dirt billows from behind the car forming a dirt curtain that divides the desert in two. Perhaps we'll get through this without the opportunity to shoot at — to kill — anything. So I speed over the ruts and rhinoceros toward some mythical place.

In Aboriginal Australia the rangers have replaced the boomerang and spear, and the automobile has almost replaced walking. You often have to travel for 50 or 60 miles before you spot a turkey or kangaroo. They don't stand much chance against "civilized" technology. Before the Aborigines were forced into European ways there was no need to distinguish between animals and humans. The rangers were not considered "them." There was no winner or loser, just players.

Death by spear — that's the way I would want to go if I were a kangaroo. To feel that hand-hewn stone rip into my flesh. And to be eaten — open, examined, played with, burned, and consumed. My meat would be used to carry the burden of Aboriginal existence. Perhaps a bone of mine would be cleaned and carried inside the aboriginal's slabby dugout, to be used for its sacred purpose only when no more was available. But those days are over. The kangaroos are dying out, victims of the automobile and rifle. The Aborigines too are dying out, not because of the automobile or rifles (necessarily). Here there are other forces at work — materialism, greed, and power. Erupted from their land, which is their blood and their life, they have become strangers in a world that suffocates them. They are hopeless, but not without hope. They will not go away, we must send them help; we don't tax them; we don't send them a check. We already send them a check every fortnight; we don't tax them; we don't build them houses which they don't even live in. We are on their land, but we are not clear how this is to serve as a "model society" for the rest of America.

We floated through the sky with hawk power. We were fed by wild meat.

We lived in these lands.

And deep in the thunder earth.

We floated through the sky.

With hawk power.

For in the Dreamtime we are one.

The Central Desert of Australia. To the Aborigines the landscape is rich with sacred history and tribal traditions. Photo by Paul Faulstich.

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