

# The Perception of the Environment

Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill

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## Chapter Eight

# Ancestry, generation, substance, memory, land

### INTRODUCTION

'Indigenous or aboriginal peoples', according to a recent United Nations document, 'are so-called because they were living on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere' (United Nations 1997: 3). At the time of colonisation, they were the original inhabitants. This is no guarantee, of course, that their forbears had not, during some earlier wave of population movement, displaced a yet earlier people, nor is it to deny that people of settler origin might develop deep and lasting attachments to the land. But these possibilities raise some awkward questions. Does not the conflation of the two terms, indigenous and aboriginal, merely perpetuate a thoroughly Eurocentric image of the precolonial world as a mosaic of cultures and territories that was already fixed in perpetuity before history began? And is it reasonable to withhold indigenous status from persons who were born and raised in a country, among people who likewise have a lifelong familiarity with it, on no other grounds than that many generations previously, their ancestors had arrived from somewhere else?<sup>1</sup> Behind both questions is a more fundamental issue about what it actually means to be an 'original inhabitant'. Suppose – as is widely the case – that the people who were already living on the land when the settlers arrived are no longer alive today. On what grounds can contemporary generations partake of the 'originality' of their predecessors?

In the official organs of the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), this question is answered in terms of *descent*. Thus the document cited above goes on to explain, in the same passage, that indigenous peoples 'are the descendants – according to one definition – of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived'.<sup>2</sup> This answer, however, introduces paradoxes of its own. For the descendants of these prior inhabitants of the country need no longer live there. Indeed in many cases a substantial majority do not. The very idea that originality can be passed on by descent, along chains of genealogical connection, seems to imply that it is a property of persons that can be transmitted, rather like a legacy or endowment, independently of their habitation of the land. On the other hand, this very habitation is claimed as the root source of aboriginal identity. How, then, can an identity that lies in people's belonging to the land reappear as a property that belongs to them? There is a profound contradiction here, which it is my purpose in this article to explore. It turns, as I shall argue, on the interpretation of five terms that have been central to the debate on indigenous peoples, as conducted by academics, policy-makers and representative organisations of the peoples themselves. They are: ancestry, generation, substance, memory and land.

I aim to show that the meanings of these terms are linked, within this debate, by way of their common grounding in what I shall call the 'genealogical model'. I begin by spelling out this model, and the assumptions it entails: that original ancestry lies at the point where history rises from an ahistorical substrate of 'nature'; that the generation of persons involves the transmission of biogenetic substance prior to their life in the world; that ancestral experience can be passed on as the stuff of cultural memory, enshrined in language and tradition; and that the land is merely a surface to be occupied, serving to support its inhabitants rather than to bring them into being. I go on to argue that the genealogical model fundamentally misrepresents the ways in which the peoples whom *we* class as indigenous – that is, who are regarded as such from a sympathetic, anthropologically informed perspective – actually constitute their identity, knowledgeability, and the environments in which they live. I suggest an alternative, relational approach to interpreting the five key terms which is more consonant with these people's lived experience of inhabiting the land. In this approach, both cultural knowledge and bodily substance are seen to undergo continuous generation in the context of an ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings – human and non-human – that dwell therein. I conclude that it is in confronting the need to articulate their experience in an idiom compatible with the dominant discourses of the state that people are led to lay claim to indigenous status, in terms that nevertheless systematically invert their own understandings.

Before proceeding further I should enter two qualifications. First, it may reasonably be objected that formal attempts to define the indigenous can only be understood in the political context of peoples' struggles, against the odds, to restore their security, dignity, well-being and self-esteem after years of marginalisation and oppression. The intent and meaning of any definition, in other words, must lie in the effort to reconfigure the relations between a historically disadvantaged and numerically under-represented minority and the encompassing nation state (Saugestad 1998: 31). To focus exclusively on criteria of eligibility – let alone on one particular criterion, that of descent – in isolation from the contexts of their application, surely misses the point. My response to this objection is simply to stress that what follows is not intended as a contribution to the analysis of the relations between indigenous minorities and nation states. Rather, I take one particular definition of indigenous status, formulated by the ILO, as an example of a way of thinking about what it means to be indigenous which, I believe, is symptomatic of more fundamental patterns of thought. It is these underlying patterns that I aim to explore. To observe that people face a genuine dilemma in articulating their aspirations within the hegemonic discourse of their erstwhile oppressors is not to question the worth or the integrity of their political project. They may indeed have no alternative.

The second qualification concerns the connection between the genealogical model and the troublesome notion of modern or Western thought. The examples on which I draw come predominantly from studies of hunting and gathering societies. In such societies, people are rarely concerned with tracing paths of genealogical ancestry and descent. Yet we know from ethnography that in a great many agricultural and pastoral societies, the narration of such paths is a major preoccupation. Do agriculturalists and pastoralists, then, operate with a genealogical model? Is this, to revert to an older anthropological terminology, what distinguishes 'tribal' from 'band-level' societies? By and large, I think not. As a first hypothesis, I would suggest that genealogical thinking in agricultural and pastoral societies is carried on within the context of a relational approach to the generation of knowledge and substance. That is to say, it is embedded in life-historical narratives of the deeds of predecessors, of their movements and emplacements, and of their interventions

– oftentimes from beyond the grave – in the lives of successors. The genealogical model turns this logic on its head. Here, genealogical connection becomes the context both for thinking about relationships and for their enactment, rather than vice versa. Such a model is indeed characteristic of Western modernity. But I would hesitate to attribute it exclusively to the modernist episteme. Modern thought cannot have sprung, fully fashioned, from nowhere, but must owe something to more deep-seated and enduring forms of consciousness. As a second hypothesis, I would suggest that the genealogical model is an aspect of just such a form and that it belongs, in this respect, with the generative conditions for modernity rather than with modernity *per se*. To test either of the aforementioned hypotheses, however, would call for a major investigation that lies well beyond the scope of the present chapter.

## THE GENEALOGICAL MODEL

### *Ancestry*

One of the most potent images in the intellectual history of the Western world has been that of the tree (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 18). We use tree diagrams to represent hierarchies of control, schemes of taxonomic division, and above all, chains of genealogical connection. It is the tree as genealogy that specifically concerns me here. Early drawings of such trees in the Western tradition draw copiously on Biblical imagery, depicting the family of man as so many branches radiating from a trunk whose roots are planted firmly in the land. Here, at the base of the trunk, lies the autochthonous Adam, the first man – who, as St Paul declared in his Epistle to the Corinthians, is unequivocally ‘earthy’. Despite the revolution wrought by evolutionary theory in our conceptions of time and of humankind’s place in nature, this basic picture has remained little changed (Bouquet 1995: 42–3). Thus Alfred Kroeber, in his *Anthropology* of 1948, used the Biblical figure of the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’, rooted in the Garden of Eden, to illustrate his view of the history of human culture as a tree whose branches – unlike those of its neighbour, the ‘tree of life’ – could grow together as well as split apart (see Figure 8.1). Contemporary palaeo-anthropologists continue to delve in the earth for human origins, and while the earliest ancestors of man are no longer thought to have been specially created but rather to have arisen by way of an evolutionary phylogeny that is itself depicted as a vast genealogical tree, they remain uniquely placed at the roots of history: in possession of the full suite of human capacities, yet still committed – like all other creatures – to a life wholly confined within the natural world.

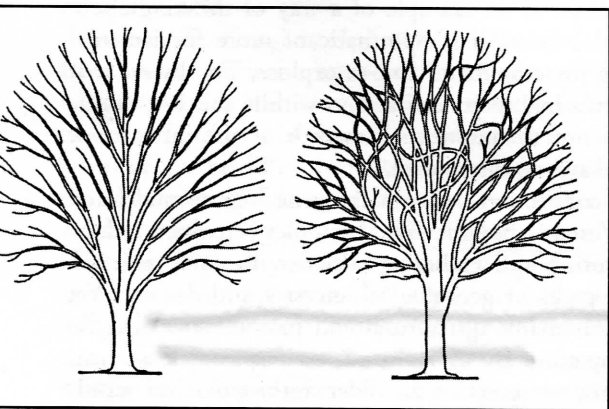


Figure 8.1 ‘The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – that is, of human culture’.

Reproduced from *Anthropology* by A. L. Kroeber, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948, p. 260.

Almost invariably, these ancestors are portrayed as hunter-gatherers. Like the earthy Adam, they are supposed

to remain *of* the land, as opposed to cultivators who, having broken through the bounds of nature and 'branched out' over the territories of the globe, proceed to settle *upon* it. This opposition, between people *of and on the* land, continues to inform public awareness, in the West, of the difference between indigenous people and colonists. The former are seen to embody, in their present way of life, the ancestral condition of those who were 'there first', at the point where history began. Concern for the heritage of indigenous peoples is thus tempered by a perception that they, in turn, represent an essential part of the heritage of global humanity. Their place is understood to lie at the foot of the tree of human culture. As culture rises from the land, branching out into its many lines, so history rises up from the ground of nature. That history, however, is conceived as one of colonisation. In the popular conception, colonists – by the very fact of their occupation of the land – inevitably establish their domination over indigenes, just as culture is bound to dominate nature. Land is there to be occupied, but does not itself contribute to the constitution of its occupants. It therefore lies outside of history.

How, then, is the connection established between ancestral humans and contemporary indigenes? The answer, as we have already seen, is generally couched in the idiom of descent. Present-day indigenous people, it is supposed, are in some sense 'the same' as the people who were there at the very beginning, because the former are descended from the latter. There is, however, a striking contrast between the image of the tree, 'rising up', and that of descent as 'going down', and it is probably no accident that images of the first kind tend to dominate in progressivist accounts of the advance of human civilisation, whereas images of the latter kind appear in more relativistic accounts of the continuity and diversification of local tradition. Certainly, ever since W. H. R. Rivers introduced what he called the 'genealogical method' into anthropological inquiry, it has been conventional to upend the tree, placing its roots at the top (Bouquet 1995: 42–3; 1996). The effect of this inversion, however, is to erase the image of the tree as a living, growing entity, branching out along its many boughs and shoots, and to replace it with an abstract, dendritic geometry of points and lines, in which every point represents a person, and every line a genealogical connection. Thus a vertical line connecting two points, A and B, stands for the proposition, 'person B is descended from person A'.<sup>3</sup> My question, which goes to the heart of anthropological studies of kinship, is: what, exactly, is implied by this line? Or to rephrase the question in negative terms, what does it leave out?

### *Generation*

To begin with the positive part of the answer: the implication is that the essential or substantive components of personhood are 'handed on', fully-formed, as an endowment from predecessors. Their origins, in other words, lie in the completed past, rather than in the present lives of recipients. From this it follows that the practical activities of people in the course of their lives – in relating to others, making artefacts and inhabiting the land – are not themselves generative of personhood but are rather ways of bringing already established personal identities into play. And this, in turn, answers our question in its negative formulation. For if the essential elements of personhood are given by virtue of genealogical connection, independently of the situational contexts of human activity, then a person's location on a genealogical chart – in which every line is a link in a chain of descent – says nothing about his or her actual placement in the world.<sup>4</sup> As every person in the chain is but an intermediary, passing on to successors the rudiments of being

received from predecessors, what each does in his or her life – though it may influence the possibility of transmission – has no bearing on its content. The circumstances of your existence could affect whether you have many, few or no descendants, but not what you pass on to them. A genealogy therefore presents a history of persons in the very peculiar form of a history of relatedness, which unfolds without regard to people's *relationships* – that is to their experience of involvement, in perception and action, with their human and non-human environments. I shall return to the distinction between relatedness and relationship, since it is critical for my argument.

What we have just discovered, cleverly concealed behind the apparently innocent graph of the line of descent, is an assumption that persons are brought into being – that is, generated – independently and in advance of their entry into the lifeworld, through the bestowal of a set of ready-made attributes from their antecedents. This assumption lies at the very core of the genealogical model, and all its remaining features can be derived from it. In particular, it implies that the generation of persons is not a life process. On the contrary, life and growth are conceived as the enactment of identities, or the realisation of potentials, that are already in place. It is descent, the passing down of the components of being underwriting one life-cycle to the site of inauguration of another, that generates persons. Thus the genealogical model, in separating out the generation of persons from their life in the world, also splits the descent-line from the life-line. In so doing it establishes the conventional notion of the *generation*, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'offspring of the same parent regarded as a step in a line of descent from an ancestor'. Whereas life goes on within each generation, descent crosses from one generation to the next in a cumulative, step-by-step sequence (Figure 8.2).

With each new generation, those preceding it regress ever further into the past. Life, however, is lived in the present. Thus the present is set over against the past along the lines of generational succession and replacement. The confinement of life to the present leaves the past lifeless or extinct. Philippe Descola catches the essence of this view, so characteristic of modernity, in his observation that 'the present exists for us only thanks to the inexorable abolition of the past from which it proceeds' (1996b: 226). The idea

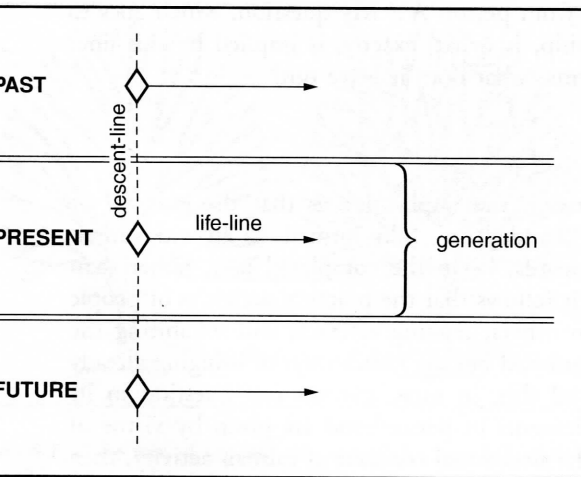


Figure 8.2 The relation between descent-line, life-line and generation, according to the genealogical model.

of the past as an age that is spent, and that has no further part to play in what is to come, is one of the hallmarks of genealogical thinking. But in separating the descent-line from the life-line, the genealogical model also divorces time from being. The events that follow one another along a line of descent, like beads on a string, do not take place in the lives of persons, they *are* persons. The existence of each is collapsed into the moment of the event it represents. And these events, in turn, are suspended in a time that is abstract and chronological (Ingold 1986b: 128–9). The same logic that maps being upon the plane of the present also stretches time to eternity, yielding the classic dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony.

Arrayed diachronically in linear sequence, reaching back to 'time immemorial', persons of the past are removed from their present descendants by a distance measured out in generations.

### Substance

Now it is commonly supposed that the total endowment a person-to-be receives, by way of descent, can be divided into two components, respectively material and ideational. The first comprises the ingredients of bodily substance; the second the contents of cultural memory. It was once customary to speak of the former in terms of kinds – or colours – of 'blood', a usage preserved in the technical concept of consanguineal kinship (connection based on 'shared blood') as well as in a multitude of expressions of everyday currency in the Western world (Schneider 1968: 23–5, Bouquet 1993: 17–21). Nowadays, one is as likely to hear it said of some feature of a person that it is 'in the genes' as to be told that it is 'in the blood'. But the sense of such pronouncements has hardly been altered by the substitution of genetic for sanguinary metaphors. If anything, the science of genetics has not so much challenged as taken on board – and in turn lent authority to – the founding principles of the genealogical model, namely that persons embody certain attributes of appearance, temperament and mentality by virtue of their ancestry, and that these are passed on in a form that is unaffected by the circumstances or achievements of their life in the world. These principles underly the belief, for example, in a species-wide human nature which has come down to us more or less unchanged from its evolutionary origins in the Pleistocene era, while remaining immune to the upheavals of history (see Chapter Twenty-one).

Where, however, the very same principles are adduced to justify a narrower claim to ethnic distinctiveness, based on the assertion of common descent from an 'original' ancestral population, the claim is bound to take on implicitly – if not explicitly – racial overtones. This should come as no surprise, since the concepts of race and of generation, in the specific sense of procreation implied by the genealogical model, are etymologically linked, both derived from the Latin *generare*, 'to beget' (Wolf 1994: 1). All attempts to ascribe indigenous identity on the criterion of descent have been plagued by the problem of miscegenation, and by concern over the degrees of racial impurity to which this is perceived to give rise. What proportion of colonists can one number among one's ancestors while yet qualifying as an indigenous person? If indigenous people are marked out by their common possession of an ancestral essence, how can some persons claim to be more indigenous than others? In practice, efforts to accommodate the real complexities of genealogical connection within essentialist categorisations based on the sharing of substance through descent have invariably led to the endless ramification of ever finer lines of discrimination and exclusion whose imposition – which may have real consequences for those affected in terms of access to resources and arenas of decision-making – appears increasingly arbitrary.

### Memory

Turning from the transmitted component of bodily substance to the ideational component of cultural memory, we find the assumptions of the genealogical model replicated, once again, in an approach to culture as a corpus of traditional wisdom, handed down as a legacy from the past, and which is applied or expressed, rather than actually

generated, in the contexts of present activity. This approach has venerable anthropological antecedents, and continues to inform much contemporary discussion. Culture, it is commonly said, consists of 'what one needs to know in order to behave as a functioning member of one's society'.<sup>5</sup> Notice how, in this view, the acquisition of cultural knowledge is clearly distinguished from the practicalities of its use that come under the rubric of 'functioning'. What divides acquisition from functioning is none other than the division, inherent in the genealogical model, between the generation of persons and their life in the world. As the descent-line is split off from the life-line, so the intergenerational transmission of knowledge is distinguished from environmentally situated experience. And in psychology as in biology, mainstream science has incorporated the principles of the model into its own conceptual frame. Thus a distinction is posited between 'social learning', by which information is copied into the head of the novice, and 'individual learning', born of the experience of putting it into practice (I return to this distinction in Chapter Twenty-one, pp. 386–7). The former takes place *across* generations; the latter is confined *within* each generation. A glance at Figure 8.2 reveals the congruence between these concepts and the terms of the genealogical model.

What does all this imply about memory? If culture is taken to consist of a body of acquired information that is available for transmission independently of the contexts of its application in the world, then memory must be something like an inner cabinet of the mind, in which this information is stored and preserved from the vagaries of everyday life. Whatever people do, or wherever they go, they carry the contents of memory with them. It is an encyclopaedic resource on which they can continually draw for guidance on how to proceed in a manner appropriate to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Remembering, then is a matter of retrieving from storage – or 'calling up' – items of information relevant to the situation at hand. Critically, this implies that objects of memory pre-exist, and are imported into, the contexts of remembering. They are already present, in some representational form, within the native mind. Thus, far from bringing memories *into* being, remembering serves to bring *out*, or to disclose, knowledge that has been there from the start. In short, from the perspective of the genealogical model, remembering is no more generative of the contents of memory than is life activity generative of the person. And this, in turn, means that if people share memories, it is not because of their mutual involvement in joint activity within a certain environment, but because their knowledge has come down to them from the same ancestral source, along the lines of common descent. They are bound by an identity not only of bodily substance but also of cultural tradition – by both inheritance and heritage.

### *Land*

If the sharing of substance and memory by dint of common descent is what makes people the same, then what makes them different? Here I want to argue that one of the key entailments of the genealogical model is that *difference is rendered as diversity*. That is to say, the model leads us to compare individuals in terms of such qualities as they may possess, by virtue of their essential natures, irrespective of their positioning *vis-à-vis* one another in the world. Diversity is the measure of difference as construed within a comparative project of this kind, one that presumes a world already divided into discrete, unit entities – 'things-in-themselves' – which may then be grouped into classes of progressively higher order on the basis of perceived likeness. This classificatory exercise gives rise to the familiar tree-diagrams of taxonomy, with their roots in the highest, most inclusive levels



and branches reaching out into lower levels of ever finer discrimination. Where it is further supposed that every individual derives the specifications of its essential nature by *descent*, then the taxonomic tree readily translates into a genealogical one.

To be sure, the translation is not perfect – a fact that has ignited fierce and still unresolved controversies among scholars engaged in the reconstruction of both evolutionary phylogenies and cultural (especially philological) histories. These controversies need not detain us here:<sup>6</sup> they have to do with the method of reconstruction but do not touch the more fundamental assumption that difference arises from the accumulation of minor variations along lines of descent in the content of transmitted information, whether biogenetic or cultural, due to errors in the process of intergenerational transcription. In genetics these errors are known as mutations; analogous forms of miscopying have often been suggested for the histories of language and culture. Assuming, then, that difference increases with genealogical distance, we might reasonably conclude that one indigenous person is more like another from the same ethnic group than a colonist whose ancestors came from elsewhere, but more like the latter – who is, after all, a fellow human being – than, say, a chimpanzee. But these similarities and differences have absolutely nothing to do with the life-histories of the individuals whom we are comparing: where they have lived, what they have done, or whether they share any experiences in common. Their source, in other words, lies not in current fields of relationship but in past histories of relatedness.

Now as we have already seen, a person's position within such a history – that is, their *genealogical* position – is fixed quite independently of their position and involvement in the lifeworld. It follows that the difference between the indigenous person and the colonist, insofar as it is attributable to descent, does not reflect their respective modalities of habitation of the land. Indeed the land, conceived in its broadest sense as a field of dwelling for beings of all kinds, human and non-human, simply has no place at all within a genealogically inspired conception of biocultural diversity. If each and every individual is constituted by the sum total of bodily substance and cultural knowledge received down the line from ancestors, then the land itself can be no more than a kind of stage upon which is enacted a historical pageant consisting of the succession of generations. At no point does it enter directly into the constitution of persons – with one exception, namely at the mythical point of autochthonous origin. And this takes us back to the question of ancestry.

The genealogical model, it seems, presents us with a stark choice. Either we grant indigenous peoples their historicity, in which case their existence is disconnected from the land, or we allow that their lives are embedded in the land, in which case their historicity is collapsed into an imaginary point of origin. In the first option, an original connection to the land is converted into an object of memory that is handed down as a heritable attribute of individuals without further regard to its source. In the second, it is as though indigenous people lived in suspended animation in a prehistoric world of unadulterated nature which the rest of humanity has long since left behind. Land and history, in short, figure as mutually exclusive alternatives. For indigenous people themselves, by contrast, it is in their relationships with the land, in the very business of dwelling, that their history unfolds. Both the land and the living beings who inhabit it are caught up in the same, ongoing historical process. To comprehend this process, we need a different, relational model, and it is to this that I now turn.

## THE RELATIONAL MODEL

*Ancestry*

'We're tired of trees', sigh Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in a moment of exasperation. 'They've made us suffer too much' (1988: 15). In place of the arborescent, dendritic imagery of the genealogical model they offer an alternative figure, that of the *rhizome*. This is to be envisaged as a dense and tangled cluster of interlaced threads or filaments, any point in which can be connected to any other. Whether the image is botanically accurate need not concern us here.<sup>7</sup> It has the virtue of giving us a way of beginning to think about persons, relationships and land that gets away from the static, decontextualising linearity of the genealogical model, and allows us to conceive of a world in movement, wherein every part or region enfolds, in its growth, its relations with all the others. 'The rhizome', as Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly insist, 'is an antigenealogy' (1988: 11, 21). To put it more positively, it is a progeneration, a continually ravelling and unravelling relational manifold. I believe that a relational model, with the *rhizome* rather than the tree as its core image, better conveys the sense that so-called indigenous people have of themselves and of their place in the world. In what follows, I review the five terms of my earlier discussion – ancestry, generation, substance, memory, land – in the light of this alternative model. To begin with the first, our question is: what is the meaning of ancestry in a rhizomatic world where the rudiments of being are not transmitted along arboreal lines of genealogical connection?

Part of the difficulty we have in addressing this question lies in the sheer multiplicity of possible answers. Here I suggest just four. Ancestors can be ordinary humans who lived in the past, or spirit inhabitants of the landscape, or mythic other-than-human characters, or original creator beings. As an illustration of the first possibility, consider the following passage in which Signe Howell describes the myriad signs that the Chewong of Malaysia discern as they move around in their jungle environment. 'These may be paths made by animals, a fruit tree planted by an ancestor, stones which are inhabited by potentially harmful beings, fallen tree-trunks, the place where an event in a particular myth took place, etc.' (1996: 132). The ancestor mentioned in this passage was an ordinary human predecessor whose activity, in this case of planting a tree, left an enduring token in the landscape. But his contribution to successors was not to hand anything down by way of substance or memory (thereby converting 'successors' into 'descendants'); it was rather to play a small part, along with the innumerable other beings – human, animal, spiritual – that have inhabited the forest at one time or another, in creating the environment in which people now live, and from which they draw their sense of being. Passing by the fruit tree, contemporary Chewong may be reminded of the ancestor's erstwhile presence and deeds, but it is in such acts of remembrance, not in any transmitted endowment carried in their bodies and minds, that he lives on.

The second possibility may be illustrated by means of an example from Nurit Bird-David's account of the Nayaka of Tamil Nadu, South India. 'Nayaka refer', she reports, 'to the spirits that inhabit hills, rivers, and rocks in the forest and to the spirits of their immediate forefathers alike as *dod appa* ("big father") and *dod awa* ("big mother")' (1990: 190, see also Chapter Three, pp. 43–4). For anthropological analysts primed with the genealogical model of kinship, such usages have caused no end of trouble. Surely, it is argued, people cannot really be descended from beings embodied in features of the landscape, as they are from their own forefathers. Classically, anomalies of this kind have been

dealt with by constructing a special category of 'fictive kinship' which is modelled on, but nevertheless fundamentally distinct from, the 'real' kinship founded in genealogical connection. But the people themselves, for whom there is no anomaly, are telling us something quite different. It is that the role of parents is not, as the genealogical model implies, to pass on to their offspring the essential specifications of personhood in advance of their entry into the lifeworld, but rather – by their presence, their activities and the nurturance they provide – to establish the necessary conditions in the environment for their children's growth and development. This is what kinship is all about. And since the spirit inhabitants of the land contribute to human well-being equally, and on the same footing, as do human forbears, providing both food, guidance and security, they too can be 'big' fathers and mothers. As such, they are ancestors of a sort, albeit ones that are alive and active in the present.<sup>8</sup>

For an illustration of the third possibility, we can return to A. Irving Hallowell's ethnography of the Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba, which I have already considered at length in Chapter Six. The characters of Ojibwa myths are known collectively by a term, *ätiso'kanak*, that translates as 'our grandfathers'. They include the Sun, the Four Winds, and the 'masters' of various animal species. Despite their mythic status, these 'other-than-human' characters are entirely real in Ojibwa experience. They are regarded, according to Hallowell, 'as living entities who have existed from time immemorial. While there is genesis through birth and temporary or permanent form-shifting through transformation, there is no outright creation' (1960: 27). In other words, the other-than-human grandfathers have been there all along, living a parallel existence to ordinary humans with whom they may enter into close and, for the latter, lifelong relationships. Just like human grandfathers, they are a source of protection, and especially of wisdom. But this wisdom, gained above all through dream experience, takes the form not of knowledge that is 'passed down' but of a heightened perceptual awareness that reveals the world of one's waking life in a new or enriched light. Crucially, Ojibwa make no more claim to be descended from their grandfathers than do Nayaka to be descended from the spirits of the landscape. Grandfathers are ancestors because they were there before you, and because they guide you through the world. In that sense you follow them. But you are not descended from them.

The fourth and final possibility is most fully elaborated in the ethnography of Aboriginal Australia. The ancestors celebrated in Aboriginal myth and ceremony were creator beings who, in their world-forming activities, roamed across the face of the earth, emerging onto the surface here, going 'back in' there, and travelling from place to place – though in no particular direction – in between. The landscape itself is a reticulate maze of criss-crossing lines of ancestral travel, with the most significant localities at its nodal points. Localities identified by particular landscape features – hills, rocks, gullies, waterholes and so on – embody the ancestors' powers of creativity and movement in a congealed form. It is these powers, in turn, that engender living persons. Through conception, birth or long-term residence a person incorporates the essence of a locality into his or her own being, even to the extent of substantial identity. A nice illustration of the point comes from Nancy Munn's (1970) study of the Pitjantjatjara of the Australian Western Desert. On the subject of birthmarks – which are called *djuguridja*, 'of or pertaining to the ancestors' – Munn recalls one woman explaining that a mark on her body was also to be found on a particular ancestral rock at her birthplace. 'The rock was the transformed body of the ancestor lying down and the marking was originally his hair' (Munn 1970: 146). In this case there is indeed a bond of substance between the ancestor and the living person, but it is not

one of descent. Following Munn, it might better be described as a kind of reverse metamorphosis, in which the subject-turned-object (the ancestor transformed into the rock in the Dreaming) becomes an object-turned-subject (the rock imprinting upon the body of the living person at birth).

Now if there is one thing that our four examples have in common, it is that in no case can the connections between ancestors and living people be described in terms of a dendritic geometry of points and lines. Indeed there are no points as such. Every being is instantiated in the world as the line of its own movement and activity: not a movement from point to point, as though the life-course were already laid out as the route between them, but a continual 'moving around', or coming and going. Significant moments – births, deaths, encounters with animals or spirits, coming out of the ground or going back in – are constituted *within* this movement, where the life-lines of different beings cross, interpenetrate, appear or disappear (only, perhaps, to reappear at some other moment). Try to depict the relations between beings, ancestral and living, in the form of a tree, and its boughs would intertwine, grow together as well as split apart, in a profusion of cross-cutting connections. Indeed our tree, comprehensively entangled in such transverse ties, would cease to look like a tree at all, and take on all the appearance of a rhizome! As Deleuze and Guattari observe, 'transversal communications between different lines scramble the genealogical trees' (1988: 11).<sup>9</sup> Our next task is to examine the implications of this rhizomatic view for the concept of generation.

### *Generation*

We have seen that the genealogical model collapses the life of each person into a single point, which is connected to other such points by lines of descent. A relational model presents us with precisely the opposite picture. There are no lines of descent linking successive 'generations' of persons. Rather, persons are continually coming into being – that is, undergoing generation – in the course of life itself. To put it in a nutshell: whereas in the genealogical model life is encompassed within generations, in the relational model generation is encompassed within the process of life. But this also entails a radically different conception of the person. According to the genealogical model, every person is a substantive entity, whose particular make-up is a function of biogenetic and cultural specifications received from predecessors, prior to its involvement with other entities of like or unlike kinds. By contrast, the relational model situates the person in the lifeworld from the very start, as a locus of self-organising activity: not a generated entity but a site where generation is going on.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps no-one has expressed the point better than a Cree man from the James Bay region, who, as will be recalled from Chapter Three (p. 51), explained to the ethnographer, Colin Scott, that to be a person is to live, and that life (*pimaatisiwin*) is a process of 'continuous birth' (Scott 1996: 73).

This, too, is what I had in mind in positively redescribing the antigenealogical, rhizomatic character of the lifeworld as *progenerative*. Entailed here is a distinction between pro-generation and procreation. The latter term captures the sense of begetting implied when we say that one being is descended from another. It suggests a one-off event: the making of something absolutely new out of elements derived from immediate antecedents. By progeneration, in contrast, I refer to the continual unfolding of an entire field of relationships within which different beings emerge with their particular forms, capacities and dispositions. Consider, for example, the relations between human hunters and their animal prey. Thinking genealogically, one would suppose that as humans beget humans, so moose

(say) beget moose – so long as hunters leave sufficient animals alive to ensure their procreative replacement. Not so, however, for the Rock Cree of northern Manitoba, whose understanding of human–animal relations has been richly documented by Robert Brightman (1993). Cree say that moose present themselves willingly to be killed by hunters, and in that way contribute actively to the production of human existence. But conversely, hunters, in their treatment of kills in consumption and disposal of the remains, bring it about that the vitality of animals is restored, and so contribute to the production of animal existence. As Brightman explains, ‘hunter and prey successively renew each other’s lives, and, indeed, each seems to realize its innate nature in the transaction, the hunter as supplicant and the animal as benefactor’ (1993: 188).

Here, hunting – including acts of killing, consumption and disposal – is the very epitome of progeneration. In the unfolding of the relation between hunters and prey both humans and animals undergo a kind of perpetual rebirth, each enfolding into its inner constitution the principle of its relationship to the other. Actual events of birth and death, therefore, are merely moments in the progenerative process, points of transition in the circulation of life. Once again, this conclusion stands in stark contrast to the images of life and death evoked by the genealogical model. For according to this model, as we have seen, life does not cross generations, but is expended in the present, in the procreative project of forwarding the elements needed to get it restarted in the future.<sup>11</sup> In each successive generation, the life-cycle begins at the point of conception and ends at death. When a person dies his or her life is over, finished. With a relational model, by contrast, life does not start or stop. To borrow a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari, it is a matter of ‘coming and going rather than starting and finishing’ (1988: 25). Particular persons may come and go, but the life process continues. All of existence is suspended in this process. Animals come when, following the successful hunt, they enter the human community, they go again with the eventual disposal of the remains. But the animal that has gone has not ceased to be: it still exists, albeit in another form. And for this reason, there is always the possibility of its return. As one Cree hunter told Brightman, ‘they say it just comes up again and again’ (1988: 240).

What goes for animals also goes for human beings. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the relational model tends to be associated with ideas of reincarnation and cyclical rebirth. When an old person dies, it does not mark the end of a generation, which will henceforth recede ever further into the past as it is buried under layer after layer of new people. The fact that deceased persons are no longer present does not mean that they belong to a past that has been irrevocably left behind, but rather that they have departed from the living, along a path that takes them to what is often conceived as another land. Co-presence may be temporally bounded, but existence is not. Or to put it in another way, the past may be absent from the present but is not extinguished by it. Death punctuates, but does not terminate, life. Writing of the Yup’ik Eskimos of Alaska, Ann Fienup-Riordan notes that ‘death as a final exit had no place in [their] system of cosmological reproduction . . . Birth into the land of the dead was ultimately the source of continuing life’ (1994: 250). Thus, far from calling for the replacement of one generation by another, death affirms the continuity of the progenerative process. Life is not compacted, as the genealogical model implies, into a linear sequence of procreative moments suspended in time, but is itself intrinsically temporal. As the philosopher Henri Bergson wrote, ‘wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed’ (1911: 17). And the life of every being, as it unfolds, contributes at once to the progeneration of the future and to the regeneration of the past.

*Substance*

I have suggested that from a relational perspective, persons should be understood not as procreated entities, connected to one another along lines of genealogical connection or *relatedness*, but rather as centres of progenerative activity variously positioned within an all-encompassing field of *relationships*. Every such centre, as Rom Harré puts it, is 'a site from which a person perceives the world and a place from which to act' (1998: 3). It is from their emplacement in the world that people draw not just their perceptual orientations but the very substance of their being. Conversely, through their actions, they contribute to the substantive make-up of others. Such contributions are given and received throughout life, in the context of a person's ongoing relationships with human and non-human components of the environment. Thus, far from having their constitution specified in advance, as the genealogical model implies, persons undergo histories of continuous change and development. In a word, they *grow*. Indeed more than that, they are *grown*. By this I mean that growth is to be understood not merely as the autonomous realisation of pre-specified developmental potentials, but as the generation of being within what could be called a sphere of nurture.<sup>12</sup> It is the role of ancestors, as our earlier examples demonstrated, to establish this sphere by way of their presence and their activity, rather than to pass on the rudiments of being *per se*. That is to say, ancestors grow their successors, although the latter are not literally descended from them. But this nurturing role is not limited to ancestors: ordinary living persons, too, contribute reciprocally to the conditions of each other's growth as embodied beings. It is in these contributions, as we have seen, that their kinship consists.

Now while each person is at the centre of their own field of perception and action, the position of this centre is not fixed but moves relative to others. As it does so, it lays a trail. Every trail, however erratic and circuitous, is a kind of life-line, a trajectory of growth. This image of life as a trail or path is ubiquitous among peoples whose existential orientations are founded in the practices of hunting and gathering, and in the modes of environmental perception these entail. Persons are identified and characterised not by the substantive attributes they carry into the life process, but by the kinds of paths they leave. Beings of extraordinary power, such as the world-shaping ancestors of Australian Aboriginal cosmology or the other-than-human persons of the Ojibwa, can be recognised from their unusual paths which can, for example, leave indelible impressions on the landscape or even disappear underground. In the world of the Yup'ik Eskimos, one class of extraordinary persons, the *tenguirayulit*, are so fleet of foot that they can literally take off, leaving a trail of wind-blown snow in the trees (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 80). While the paths of ordinary human beings and other terrestrial animals remain on ground level, even plants deposit trails in the form of roots and runners in the wake of their advancing tips. Batek women from Pahang, Malaysia, say that the roots of wild tubers 'walk', as humans and other animals do (Lye 1997: 159). This may seem an odd idea to us, but only because we think of walking as the spatiotemporal displacement of already completed beings from one point to another, rather than as the movement of their substantive formation within an environment. Both plants and people, we could say, 'issue forth' along lines of growth, and both exist as the sum of their trails (see Wagner 1986: 21).

Putting together all the trails of all the different beings that have inhabited a country – human, animal and plant, ordinary and extraordinary – the result would be a dense mass of intersecting pathways, resembling nothing so much as a rhizome. This is not to rule out the possibility that particular growth configurations may be dendritic in form.

After all, among hunters and gatherers who inhabit a forest environment, some of the most important persons can be trees! This is beautifully demonstrated in Tuck Po Lye's recent study of the Batek, to which I referred a moment ago. For the Batek, trees are people. They possess agency and sociality. They can be both nurturing and protective, and dangerous (Lye 1997: 156–63). But of course there is a world of difference between the real, living tree in the forest and the abstract tree of the genealogical model. For the former is caught up in a dense network of entanglements with the vegetation that clings to it, the animals that forage and nest in it, and the humans that live under it. In short, the tree is but one part of that vast rhizome that is the forest as a whole. Only when it is abstracted from these rhizomatic entanglements does it appear in its 'pure', dendritic form.

I have already shown that a person's genealogical position is fixed independently of their location in the lifeworld. By contrast, every position in the total network of trails or life-lines is itself an emplacement. Lye draws explicitly on the 'rhizomatic epistemology' of Deleuze and Guattari to explain how, for the Batek, places are constituted as nodes in the endless comings and goings of people, each characterised by its particular assemblage of relations, and connected to all the others both socially and physically. 'Important place-names, trails and familiar campsites, like the roots of a rhizome, integrate diverse elements of the forest and serve as passageways for the ongoing experiences of people' (1997: 166). Among hunters and gatherers generally, the most significant places are where the paths of different beings intersect, or perhaps merge for a while before diverging again. It is here that exchanges of substance occur, for example in episodes of hunting, where the trails of human and animal cross and from which each leaves bearing something of the substance of the other, or of gathering, where people pick and consume the fruit of a tree once planted by an ancestor. Among themselves human persons exchange substance through feeding and being fed, in the nurturance and sharing that characterises the everyday life of a camp – which may be envisaged, in turn, as a place upon which the trails of many people temporarily converge.

Once again, this relational understanding inverts the genealogical model. Instead of thinking of substance as passing along a line of transmission connecting lives that – confined within their respective generations – proceed in parallel but never join, persons are conceived as passing along lines of movement and exchanging substance at the places where their respective paths cross or commingle. 'Throughout their lives', as Bird-David puts it, persons 'perpetually coalesce with, and depart from, each other' (1994: 597).<sup>13</sup> I have attempted to depict the contrast schematically in Figure 8.3; however in limiting the picture to a mutually constitutive encounter between two persons, A and B, it has been drastically oversimplified. In reality, as Fienup-Riordan says for the Yup'ik, 'the variety of persons and creatures that one might encounter in one's path is immense' (1994: 87). All of these beings may further one's growth and development, not only through contributions of substance, but also by way of the experiences they afford.

Thus the contrast shown in Figure 8.3 applies just as well to the growth of knowledge as to that of bodily substance. Knowledge, from a relational point of view, is not merely applied but generated in the course of lived experience, through a series of encounters in which the contribution of other persons is to orient one's attention – whether by means of revelation, demonstration or ostention – along the same lines as their own, so that one can begin to apprehend the world for oneself in the ways, and from the positions, that they do. In every such encounter, each party enters into the experience of the other and makes that experience his or her own as well. One shares in the process of knowing, rather

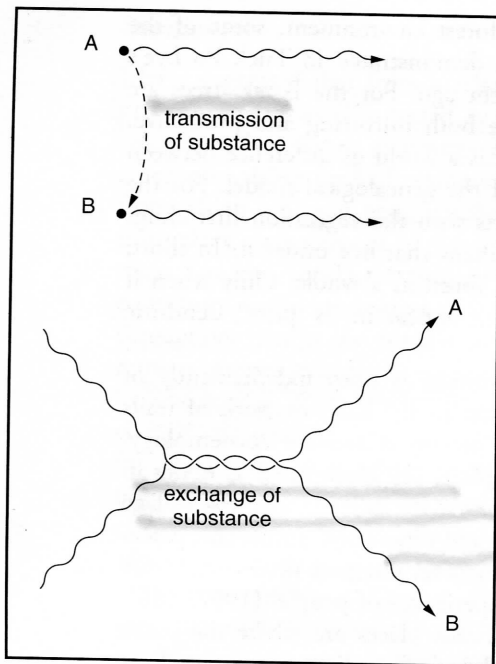


Figure 8.3 Schematic contrast between the transmission of substance according to the genealogical model, and the exchange of substance according to the relational model. For simplicity, the diagram depicts only two persons, A and B.

than taking on board a pre-established body of knowledge. Indeed in this education of attention, nothing, strictly speaking, is 'handed down' at all. The growth and development of the person, in short, is to be understood relationally as a *movement along a way of life*, conceived not as the enactment of a corpus of rules and principles (or a 'culture') received from predecessors, but as the *negotiation of a path through the world* (see Chapter Thirteen).

### Memory

With this, we are led to pose a question about memory not unlike the one posed earlier, about ancestry. There we asked: what is the meaning of ancestry in a lifeworld where the elements of a person's substantive make-up are not passed on along lines of descent? The question that concerns us now is: what is the meaning of memory in a world of experience where the rudiments of knowledge are not handed down along analogous lines of cultural transmission? A large part of the answer hinges on our understanding of language. For according to the genealogical model, it is above all thanks to language that the concepts and values of a culture are transmitted from one generation to the next. Not only does this presuppose that cultural knowledge exists

in the form of a corpus of transmissible, context-free representations; it also implies that the words of language take their meanings from their attachments to these representations, quite apart from the situations of their utterance in speech. The purpose of speaking, then, is to render explicit, or publicly accessible, meanings that would otherwise remain confined within the interiority of the mind – nevertheless only to those who share the language and are therefore in a position to decode the messages conveyed therein.<sup>14</sup> It follows that the loss of a language inevitably leads to the loss of the knowledge expressed in it, which will die out with the last generation of speakers. Much concern over the disappearance of indigenous languages is fuelled by a fear that with them will go traditions that have been handed down from time immemorial, severing once and for all the increasingly tenuous threads that connect present humanity to its ancestral past.

If, however, as the relational model implies, the source of cultural knowledge lies not in the heads of predecessors but in the world that they point out to you – if, that is, one learns by discovery while following in the *path* of an ancestor – then words, too, must gather their meanings from the contexts in which they are uttered. Moving together along a trail or encamped at a particular place, companions draw each other's attention, through speech and gesture, to salient features of their shared environment. Every word, spoken in context, condenses a history of past usage into a focus that illuminates some aspect of the world. Words, in this sense, are instruments of perception much as tools are instruments of action. Both conduct a skilled and sensuous engagement with the environment that is sharpened and enriched through previous experience. The clumsiness of the novice



in handling unfamiliar tools is matched, as every anthropological fieldworker knows, only by his incomprehension of spoken words. What the novice lacks, however, and the knowledgeable hand possesses, is not a scheme of conceptual representations for organising the data of experience but rather the perceptual sensitivity that enables him to discern, and continually to respond to, those subtle variations in the environment whose detection is essential to the accomplishment of ongoing activity. From this point of view, and contrary to the tenets of the genealogical model, speech is not so much the articulation of representations as the embodiment of *feeling*. It is a way, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty once put it, 'for the human body to sing the world's praises and in the last resort to live it' (1962: 187). I return to this point in Chapter Twenty-three (pp. 408–10).

But to live the world is also to inhabit it. Thus a way of speaking is, in itself, a way of living in the land. Far from serving as a common currency for the exchange of otherwise private mental representations, language celebrates an embodied knowledge of the world that is already shared thanks to people's mutual involvement in the tasks of habitation. It is not, then, language *per se* that ensures the continuity of tradition. Rather, it is the tradition of living in the land that ensures the continuity of language. Conversely, to remove a community of speakers from the land is to cut the language adrift from its generative source of meaning, leaving it as the vestige of a form of life that has long since been overtaken by its representation as an *object* of memory. In this regard, the assumptions of the genealogical model have had fateful consequences for the peoples it construes as indigenous. For so long as it is supposed that the language, and the traditions encoded therein, can be passed along like a relay baton from generation to generation, it appears to make no difference *where* the people are. On these grounds, administrations have often seen no principled objection to moving their 'indigenous' peoples off the land, or greatly restricting their access, whether in the interests of industrial development or wildlife conservation. It did not occur to them that such displacement might rupture the continuity of tradition or cut the people off from their pasts.

I have already shown that traditional knowledge, in the genealogical conception, comprises an inventory of transmitted items that are stored in memory, from which they may be accessed as required, and expressed in speech or practice. From a relational perspective, by contrast, knowledge subsists in practical activities themselves, including activities of speaking. And just as to follow a path is to remember the way, so to engage in any practice is, at the same time, to remember how it is done. Thus hunters and gatherers, following in the paths of their ancestors as they make their way through the terrain, remember as they go along. The important thing, so far as they are concerned, is that the process should keep on going, not that it should yield precise replicas of past performance. Indeed 'keeping it going' may involve a good measure of creative improvisation. A skill well remembered is one that is flexibly responsive to ever-variable environmental conditions. Thus there is no opposition, in the terms of the relational model, between continuity and change. Change is simply what we observe if we sample a continuous process at a number of fixed points, separated in time. The growth of an organism, for example, is continuous, but if we compare its appearance at different times it will appear to have changed. So too, the growth of knowledge, conceived relationally, is an aspect of the growth of persons, in the contexts of their involvement with one another and with the environment. Just because people are doing things differently now, compared with the way they did them at some time in the past, does not mean that there has been a rupture of tradition or a failure of memory. What would really break the continuity, however, would be if people were forcibly constrained to replicate a pattern fixed by

genealogical descent, or to 'traditionalize the traditional', as Bjørn Bjerkli has nicely put it (1996: 18). The effect would be similar to that of a needle becoming stuck in the groove of a record. One could not keep the music going.

We are now in a better position to answer the question I posed at the start of this section. For if knowledge is not received from predecessors in advance of its application in the world, then objects of memory cannot pre-exist acts of remembering. Nor can such acts be understood as purely cognitive operations, of calling up representations already installed within the mind. On the contrary, it is through the activity of remembering that memories are *forged*. This activity, moreover, is tantamount to the movement of the person through the world. Memories, then, are generated along the paths of movement that each person lays down in the course of his or her life. Earlier, I pointed out that in the terms of the relational model, the progeneration of the future is also a regeneration of the past. Another way of putting this would be to say that the growth of knowledge is, at one and the same time, the production of memory. Journeying forward along a path or trail, one is also taken back to places imbued with the presence of ancestors. 'Trails', as Lye observes in her study of the Batek, 'are routes to remembrance just as they are routes to knowledge'. She recalls one Batek man pointing out a particular trail to her. 'That', he is reported to have said, 'is a trail of the old people. So when people feel *ha?ip* [longing] for the old people, they come back here and use the trail so that they can remember the old people' (Lye 1997: 149).

One more example, from the other side of the world, may be drawn from Richard Nelson's study of the Koyukon of Alaska (Nelson 1983: 243). He describes how he was taken by an old woman to see a place in the forest where, long ago, the late Chief Henry and his wife Bessie had their fishing camp. Looking closely, one could make out dark bands on the birch trees, where the bark had been removed from which Bessie used to make baskets, and axe marks on the rotting stumps of trees that Chief Henry had felled. Examining these signs, which an untrained eye would have passed over completely, Nelson's companion began to talk a little sadly about the deceased couple and their activities. She spoke of the skill and sensitivity that enabled Chief Henry to select wood with the best grain for making sleds or snowshoes, or Bessie to weave excellent baskets from birchbark. Yet this same sensitivity, grounded in an intimate familiarity with the country and its inhabitants, also enabled the old woman, in her turn, to recognise the signs of the couple's erstwhile presence in an otherwise featureless and overgrown patch of forest. Memories may be *forged with words, and artefacts with tools*; both, however, are the fruits of a certain way of living in the land. For the old woman this way of life was not just an *object* of memory, represented and passed down in oral tradition, but also a *practice of remembering*, embedded in the perception of the environment.

### *Land*

What, then, given this relational view of growth and remembrance, makes people more or less the same or different? Not their genealogical proximity as determined by a past history of relatedness, but the extent to which their own life-histories are intertwined through the shared experience of inhabiting particular places and following particular paths in an environment. Common involvement in spheres of nurture, rather than any principle of shared descent, creates likeness. Persons, as we have seen, are to be understood from this perspective not as preconstituted – or procreated – entities, but rather as loci of growth, of the progenerative unfolding of the entire field of relationships within which

each comes into being. The source of their differentiation is to be found in this unfolding. There is no room, within such a view, for the kind of classificatory project that groups individuals on the basis of whatever intrinsic characteristics they might happen to possess, by virtue of their biogenetic inheritance or cultural heritage, irrespective of their life in the world. Thus ethnic and racial classifications are as foreign to relational thinking as are the genealogically conceived taxonomies devised by biologists for the classification of living things. It is not by their inner attributes that persons or organisms are identified, but by their positions *vis-à-vis* one another in the relational field (Ingold 1993a: 229). The relational model, in short, renders difference not as diversity but as positionality.<sup>15</sup>

The idea of a field of relationships may seem highly abstract, far removed from the reality of entities and events 'on the ground'. Yet it is the very dominance of the genealogical model in our thinking, I would argue, that leads us to suppose that things exist, in the real world, independently of their relations. The relational model overturns this understanding. To exist, it asserts, is already to be positioned in a certain environment and committed to the relationships this entails. Reality, then, is relational through and through. The relational field is no abstraction but the very ground from which things grow, and take on the forms they do. Another word for this ground is *land*. Up to now I have spoken of beings of various kinds as 'inhabiting' the land. This should not be taken to imply mere occupancy, as though inhabitants, already endowed by descent with the attributes of substance and memory that make them what they are, were slotted into place like pegs on a peg-board. Positions in the land are no more laid out in advance for persons to occupy, than are persons specified prior to taking them up. Rather, to inhabit the land is to draw it to a particular focus, and in so doing to constitute a place. As a locus of personal growth and development, however, every such place forms the centre of a sphere of nurture. Thus the generation of persons within spheres of nurture, and of places in the land, are not separate processes but one and the same. In the relational model, as Leach has put it, 'kinship is geography' (Leach 1997: 36).

All this has implications for our ideas about permanence and replacement. Recall that according to the genealogical model, life is encompassed within generations. Every organism comes with its allotted lifespan, and has eventually to make way for copies of itself if its kind is to continue. Life, in short, is conceived as but a means to the end of procreative replacement. The land, by contrast, since it is supposed to contain or support living things, cannot itself be alive. For if every form of life exists upon the land, then the land must be inanimate. It does not, therefore, have to be replaced; it is simply, and permanently *there*, an enduring surface over which generation after generation of individuals pass like cohorts on the march. The relational model, on the other hand, does not counterpose the land to its inhabitants along the axis of a dichotomy between the animate and the inanimate. A founding premise of the model is that life, rather than being an internal property of persons and things, is immanent in the relations between them. It follows that the land, comprised by these relations, is itself imbued with the vitality that animates its inhabitants. The important thing is to ensure that this vitality never 'dries up'. As hunters and gatherers have explained to their ethnographers, with remarkable consistency, it is essential to 'look after' or care for the land, to maintain in good order the relationships it embodies; only then can the land, reciprocally, continue to grow and nurture those who dwell therein.

This perspective gives us a view of the land quite unlike the inert and timeless, two-dimensional substrate of the genealogical model. It figures rather as an immense tangle of interlaced trails – an all-encompassing rhizome – which is continually ravelling here, and

unravelling there, as the beings of which it is composed grow, or 'issue forth', along the lines of their relationships. I have referred to this ravelling and unravelling as a process of progeneration. Every being, in the course of its life history, works in the first place to keep the progenerative process going rather than to secure its own procreative replacement. Thus there is no opposition, here, between history and land. Both carry the same intrinsic temporality. Woven like a tapestry from the lives of its inhabitants, the land is not so much a stage for the enactment of history, or a surface on which it is inscribed, as *history congealed*. And just as kinship is geography, so the lives of persons and the histories of their relationships can be traced in the textures of the land.

## CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples regard all products of the human mind and heart as interrelated, and as flowing from the same source: the relationships between the people and their land, their kinship with the other living creatures that share the land, and with the spirit world. Since the ultimate source of knowledge and creativity is the land itself, all of the art and science of a specific people are manifestations of the same underlying relationships, and can be considered as manifestations of the people as a whole.

So writes Erica-Irene Daes on behalf of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which was established in 1982, under the auspices of the United Nations, to hear the views of the representatives of such populations on the issue of the protection of their collective 'heritage' (Daes 1997: 3). In this passage she offers a cogent and succinct restatement of the relational perspective. Yet it also contradicts, point by point, the 'official' definition of what it means to be indigenous, with which I began. To recapitulate: this definition classifies as indigenous the descendants of people who were already inhabiting some country or region at the time when colonists arrived from elsewhere. The axiom, formulated so clearly by Daes, that indigenous peoples draw their being from their relationships with the land, is here brushed aside in favour of a claim based purely and simply on proof of prior presence, judged in terms of a linear concept of time and history.

The fact that a certain region was home to a population of human beings prior to its colonial settlement tells us nothing about how these 'original inhabitants' understood their relationships to the land. They may of course have felt themselves to have been connected to other components of the lifeworld in the way the relational model suggests. But for contemporary people to claim indigenous status on the criterion of *descent* from this ancestral population is tantamount to an admission that for them, 'living in the land' is no more than a distant memory. For the principle of descent implies, as we have seen, that people do *not* draw their substance and knowledge from the land, or from their relationships with it, but rather from their immediate genealogical antecedents. At the same time it rules out the possibility of any real kinship with other creatures that share the land, and reduces the activity of dwelling to mere occupancy. In short, the appeal to descent as a basis on which to ascribe indigenous identity contravenes those very understandings that for the indigenous groups themselves, are most fundamental to their way of life. Indeed it seems that a sense of being founded on people's relationships to the land is bound to be compromised by its articulation in terms of a model that treats these relationships as no more than epiphenomena of genealogically transmitted, biogenetic and cultural attributes.

To describe indigenous people as those who were 'there first' is to situate them within a history conceived as a narrative of colonial conquest and state formation. It is a designation, as André Bétéille comments, that 'acquires substance when there are other populations in the same region that can reasonably be described as settlers or aliens' (1998: 188). In the eyes of the settlers who went on to take possession of their lands, these earlier inhabitants may well have seemed like archetypal 'natives'. In a sense, then, the official definition of indigenous status faithfully reflects the self-perception of the non-indigenous populations of nation states, as descendants of settlers who founded the nations they represent on alien soil. In these terms, contemporary indigenes are descendants of the colonially dispossessed. Indeed the categorical opposition of indigenous and non-indigenous populations, conceived respectively as the descendants of natives and settlers, is itself a construction of colonialism. For the genealogical model is fundamentally a colonial model, with its notion of the land as a surface to be occupied, of the lifeworld as a country to which people can move in order to take up residence, bringing their endowments of heritable substance and knowledge with them, and of generation as serial replacement, such that the present takes over from, and extinguishes, the past.

To conclude: we are left with the question of why people should feel the need to articulate claims to indigenous status in terms that, by their own accounts, are incompatible with their experience and understanding of the world. The answer, I believe, is that these people are compelled to operate in a modern-day political context in which they are also citizens of nation states. The genealogical model is deeply implicated in the discourse of the state: indeed it is the principal source of legitimation for the state's sovereign entitlement to defend and administer its territory in the name of the nation. For the state, the land belongs to the national heritage, and is held in trust by each generation of citizens on behalf of their descendants. If it is by appeal to common heritage that the citizens of the state are made to appear the same – that is, to share a national identity – then only by stressing their separate heritage can encapsulated groups express their difference. The construction of indigenous status upon the principle of descent is thus, as I have argued elsewhere, 'a product of the representation of difference in the discourse of homogeneity' (Ingold 1993a: 218). In this construction, the very relationships within which persons are positioned and from which they derive their identity and belonging are recast as the outward expressions of inner, inherited properties or attributes that *belong to them*. It is in the attempt to recover a lost or threatened sense of relational identity in attributional terms that people come to define themselves, and to be defined by others, as 'indigenous'.