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Secularism Exhausted?:
Non-Indigenous Postcolonial Discourses and the
question of Aboriginal Religion

By

Darren Drake, BA (Honours).

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts.

Deakin University       April 2002.
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Introduction

The European mind is preoccupied with ‘myths and legends’ which are found in all countries of the world. The Aboriginal people, however, think that what we call Aboriginal mythology is simply literal truth.


Outline of the Research Problem

Eurocentric intellectual frameworks tend to misrepresent Indigenous Australian cultural Law. I argue in this thesis that Non-Indigenous Australian representations of ‘Aboriginal religion’ are often incomplete due to difficulties in the translation of ‘Law’, ‘Society’, and ‘Spirit’ and ‘Truth’ between cultures. I analyse how postcolonial literary and cultural theory both hinders and assists in addressing the problem of representations of Aboriginal Australian sacred culture in modern Australian society.

This thesis examines the work of selected European cultural theorists by studying the work of Foucault, Geertz, Durkheim, Freud, and Thomas as a preliminary gambit to create the groundwork for an analysis of new discourses on Indigenous Australian culture. Recent writers who address ‘Aboriginal religion’ using post-colonial critical theories, such as Tacey, Muecke, Gelder and Jacobs, contribute to ways forward in reconciliation issues in light of cultural theory performed/prosecuted by European writers.

In problematising some literary representations of Indigenous Australian culture I found it necessary to undertake an interdisciplinary investigative procedure. I believe that an expanded disciplinary study of Aboriginal religion is essential if postcolonial discourses of the sacred are to have a productive future. Comparative literary criticism and cultural studies contribute alongside philosophy, psychology, and anthropology to a wider understanding of Indigenous Australian Spiritual-Life experiences or cultural Law(s).

Terminology used in this thesis

The use of the phrase ‘Indigenous Australian cultural Law’ in this thesis is designed to problematise the notion of Aboriginal lore as a psychological history of legends about a prehistoric way of thinking. I argue that Frazer (1911-1915), Durkheim (1915), Freud (c. 1922), Malinowski (1926), Baldwin Spencer (1927) developed

sociological and psychological notions about so-called ‘primitive’ people that generally denied that Indigenous people had any organised religion. ‘Primitive’ people were once seen as mirrors of a pre-modern European world.

Recently Non-Indigenous research in Indigenous Australian culture has focussed on ‘Aboriginal dreamtime’, religious business, and Indigenous Australian Law and Reconciliation debates. Cultural Law refers to the local knowledge that binds a particular Aboriginal community to the land. Such ‘Law’ is exceedingly complex and is what Patrick Dodson calls, ‘a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths which govern the whole of life’ in a localised community setting. As a Non-Indigenous writer myself, it is impossible to make truth-claims about what any geographically localised Aboriginal community knows as cultural or tribal Law.

Postcolonial revisioning applies to a variety of accepted terms and concepts in this thesis. The term ‘Eurocentric’ refers to a dominant ideology that projects Eurocentred models of philosophy and society as the norm or the benchmark by which all other concepts should be measured. I believe that this colonialist attitude continues to subtly penetrate many ‘Euro-Australian’ ways of thinking and affects Non-Indigenous relations with Indigenous Australians. The terms ‘European’ or ‘Western’ culture I have identified with ‘Non-Indigenous’ thinkers, communities, and modern society in Australia. I have endeavoured to use the term ‘Indigenous Australian’ instead of ‘Aboriginal Australian’ simply because the Indigenous Australians that I have spoken with prefer the word ‘Indigenous’ due to the classical and derogatory use of the term ‘Aboriginal’ by colonialist thinkers. ‘Indigenous Australian’ also implies ‘First Peoples (Nations) of Australia’ which further indicates that Australia has a long established ‘black’ cultural history.

This thesis uses terms such as ‘white’, ‘Western’, ‘Eurocentric’, and ‘Imperialistic’, ‘Euro-rationality’, ‘Euro-unconsciousness’, ‘Euro-Australian’ in an attempt to identify how “a fairly uniform set of beliefs about society, property, government, and religion” were adopted and promoted by colonial governments and their accompanying social structures, and how such beliefs continue to manifest as part of an Australian identity today. As David Peat has noted in Western-world cultures such as North America the term:

Western... refers to a certain worldview that has come to dominate the globe, both economically and through science and technology. Western sets of values are often

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6 See particularly, Anna Voigt, and Drury, Neville, 1997 Wisdom of the earth: the living legacy of the Aboriginal dreamtime, Simon & Schuster, East Roseville, NSW; and Colin Dean, 1996 The Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime (An account of its History, Cosmogenesis, Cosmology and Ontology), Gamahauter Press, Geelong West, Victoria.
10 See Towards 2000 small section on the use of the word ‘Aboriginal’.
adopted by people of other races who have grown up in North America, passed through its school system and entered the workforce. The other term, *European*, is used to denote the historical origins of a scientific, philosophical, and political worldview that evolved within Europe. European is also used for the family of languages that expresses that particular worldview.13

Those readers who are of Indigenous ancestry, those readers who are neither ‘white’ nor of European ancestry, or alternatively who are Non-Indigenous, who do not choose to subscribe to worldviews and value systems that I have called Western, should not feel constrained by the apparently oppositional forces within the text. The divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural knowledge are an arbitrary distinction often invented by scholars for the sake of creating ideas about paradigm shifts in thinking about culture. Those thinkers I admire do not subscribe to these binarisms. They promote cross-cultural awareness in such a manner so as to move between different ways of being and seeing, learning to shift consciousness as a reflection of increased flexibility and sensitivity to self and other awarenesses.

**Doubleconsciousness**

This thesis often employs W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion of ‘double-consciousness’,14 in which his life-story signifies two cultural experiences: Afro-American and Euro-American. Knowledge of both Western and Aboriginal cultural experiences is similarly apparent among Indigenous Australian informants.15 Double-consciousness occurs when someone enters into another mindset. I believe that this kind of plural experience enables cross-cultural communication. This thesis argues that double-consciousness describes a person’s ability ‘to think outside the square’; and experience two or more cultural viewpoints. This two-ness of cultural experience is noticeable in the work of DuBois (1901) and Fanon (1967).16 In determining national identities of African diasporas in the Western hemisphere, Paul Gilroy (1993) has argued that:

DuBois’s concept of double-consciousness...is only the best-known resolution of a familiar problem... How has this doubleness, what Richard Wright calls the dreadful objectivity which follows from being both inside and outside the West, affected the conduct of political movements against racial oppression and towards black autonomy? Are the inescapable pluralities involved in the movements of black peoples... ever to be synchronized?17

The plurality of consciousness that Gilroy suggests is typical of marginalised and oppressed Africans in exile is applicable to Indigenous Australians who have experienced life both inside and outside Euro-Australian modern society. Gelder and Jacobs (1998) argue that the Aboriginal sacred is represented as both inside and outside modern (secular) society. However, double-consciousness is a way of thinking that may enable Non-Indigenous thinkers to more usefully enter into reconciliation

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debates. Jane Elliot's psychological work in *Blue Eyed* is useful in showing Euro-Australians how racism is learnt and unwittingly perpetuated, which I claim is an experimental psychological form of double-conscious and cross-cultural experience. Similarly, I believe that reconciliation debates can usefully employ Non-Indigenous double-conscious experiences of Aboriginal religion. For I understand that the way forward in reconciliation is not simply *tolerance* of Aboriginal culture, but Non-Indigenous respect for Aboriginal Law as a profoundly valuable *belief-system* in modern Australian society. A deeper insight into reconciliation depends, to some extent, on learning how to transform experiences of cultural alienation as different yet equal dimensions of modern social networks.

I have borrowed from Said's *Orientalism* (1978) the notion of a 'discourse' (which he derived from Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1966)), and his sense of crossing borders to avoid the stereotypes of binary opposition in postcolonial arguments. The binary opposition created in this thesis is used similarly for the sake of argument. Aboriginal religion and Non-Indigenous Australian modern society are not intended to be at odds in the analysis of Australian culture offered here. The relationship between colonising Europeans and colonised Indigenous people in Australia has developed many hybrid forms of identity and knowledge over many years. There are urban-Indigenous families and Europeans fascinated with tribal cultural Law. Crossing arbitrary cultural boundaries is a critical technique used by Said in *Orientalism*, which I have found useful in attempts to enter into the mindset of both Euro-Australian and Indigenous Australian ways of thinking.

There is even a tendency in this thesis to argue from/for an Indigeno-centric perspective, as if Aboriginal religions hold key ideas to repositioning Euro-Australian social settings. However, I concede that this is a utopian viewpoint — both European and Indigenous nation-state ideals are recognisable in a modern society's postmodern condition of permanent change. Furthermore, I have not adequately covered the depth of cultural diversity in Australia by using the term 'Euro-Australian'. There are people in Australia who have emigrated from every continent and island-home in the world, not simply Europe. Even so, 'Non-Indigenous' life experience is a generalisation that represents people who have arrived in Australia during the colonial and postcolonial period. Indigenous Australians are the First Nations people, ancient communities who have lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years. The task of talking about Aboriginal religion in modern society is further complicated by moving among conflicting theories, cross-classifying theoretical frameworks and different methodologies; and, by my being, with respect to some of the subject matter, a well-intentioned and respectful outsider.

**Summary of Thesis**
In Chapter 1, I claim that postcolonial anthropology is a discourse that applies postcolonial social theory to anthropological methodologies. In using the term 'postcolonial anthropology' I do not intend to critique the whole field of anthropology and its methods. It is necessary to start by applying postcolonial theory to what I call

---

18 *Blue eyed* [videorecording], 1997 [c. 1996] director of photography Waldemar Hauschild; written and directed by Gerram Verhaag in cooperation with Jane Elliott, Deenral Filmproduction, Loganholme, Queensland.

colonialist anthropologies so as to open up an interdisciplinary appreciation of how Indigenous Australian peoples have been studied and categorised.

Clifford Geertz's 'interpretive anthropology' describes numerous localised qualities that disallow universalisable anthropological theories. He offers interpretive anthropology as a combination of the methods of compounded literary signifiers and anthropological research subjects. Geertz's method illustrates a poststructural sense of the anthropologist as disturbing observer and the (Indigenous) research subject as far more complex than anthropologists have previously admitted.

Nicholas Thomas proposes an interdisciplinary anthropology that shows how modern Indigenous cultures have evolved over vast tracts of time. He advocates an expansion to predominantly sociological methods of 'anthropological interest' to include studies of Indigenous histories and archaeology in order to expand structural and functional knowledge of prehistorical and modern Indigenous societies. I argue that Thomas's anthropological vision is limited because it does not consider the long-term survival of ancestor spirits that remain connected to sacred sites and community settings over time.

In Chapter 2, I argue that Foucault's critique of the 'facile solutions of anthropology' deconstructs Western philosophical concepts of humanity. In The Order of Things (1970) Foucault argued that 'the facile solutions of anthropology' are incomplete because such conclusions are mistakenly over-reliant on what he calls 'the episteme of Western culture'. Fields of evaluation like history, classical science, classification of species, and 'human sciences' are products of totalising Western knowledge-systems that have often precluded non-European or Other orders of knowledge. Foucault's argument is a useful literary, philosophical and anthropological contribution that expands the methods of what Thomas called (in Chapter One) 'anthropological interest'.

I think that David Turnbull and Max Charlesworth are writers that indicate helpful ways of approaching Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge from a Non-Indigenous perspective. Turnbull proposes a joint-rationality that recognises philosophical equality and vitality in both (Western) Scientific and Indigenous knowledge. Charlesworth speaks of the paucity of religious thinkers who have investigated 'Aboriginal religion'. It has been reported that when one is made an initiated member of Indigenous Australian cultural Law a different set of secret-sacred life experiences take place. These secret-sacred experiences are different in comparison with those held by most Non-Indigenous Australian experiences of the Aboriginal sacred. Non-Indigenous Australian exponents of 'Indigeneity' and Aboriginal Australian exponents of 'Indigeneity' write and speak from different cultural experiences.

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Foucault's re-evaluation of scientific and human discourses can be extended to the representations of Indigenous people in Australia. Turnbull argues that a joint rationality set up between Scientific and Indigenous knowledges 'can work together but without the notion of a single transcendental rationality' (an ontology that those encultured in the Western scientific tradition have struggled with). Turnbull's comparative explorations of the sociology of Scientific and Indigenous knowledge indicate joint solutions that can be valuable in reconciliation debates.

While Western 'scientific' and 'religious' thinking are different ways of classifying experience, nonetheless such systems of knowing the world are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Turnbull's suggestion of a joint-rationality between Scientific and Indigenous knowledge recognises equally useful thought processes. There is no sense that one method of thinking is better than the other, or that one should replace the other. Rather, I think that joint-rationality suggests both methods are to be used, side-by-side.

Max Charlesworth and Tony Swain speak of Indigenous Australian cultural Law as an epistemology that is distinguishable from, yet on a par with, Western knowledge systems. Charlesworth, and Swain, in separate accounts, have demonstrated ways of (Non-Indigenous) 'religious thinking' that are helpful when considering the tenets of Indigenous Australian cultural Law(s).

Lastly in Chapter 2, Non-Indigenous and Aboriginal Australian formulations of 'Indigeneity' are differentiated as separate forms of postcolonial cultural experience.

In Chapter 3, the Eurocentric concept of 'the primitive' is considered in reference to how 'the modern Aboriginal sacred' is talked about in what Gelder and Jacobs call 'modern Australian (secular) society'. In Durkheim's sociological anthropology and Freud's psychology, 'Aboriginal religion' is used as an example of prehistoric, uncivilised 'magical' thinking that has shaped early European society and culture. Colonialist anthropology extends the idea that Eurocentric philosophy of humanity is universalisable. Both Durkheim and Freud build grand theories of the human mind, with so-called 'primitive religion' seen by these writers as a formative aspect of modern society. These writers are sensitive to the social cohesion brought about by religious experience in Aboriginal Australian cultures, though their psychological and sociological theories tend to be Eurocentric, all-encompassing, and secular. Indigenous Australian spiritual perception can be located in many traditional Indigenous cultural Laws and suggest cultural paradigms other than colonialist formulations of modern society. Gelder and Jacobs argue that Indigenous Australians are seen as out of place (pre-modern or postmodern) in modern Australian society. I argue that such Non-Indigenous Australian concepts of society, psychology, and

24 Sigmund Freud, 1946 Totem and Taboo: resemblances between the psychic lives of savages and neurotics, authorised translation with an introduction by A.A. Brill, Random House, NY.
spiritual forces that imply a non-secular order are inaccurate representations of Indigenous Australian sacred Law.

Chapter 4 explores David Tacey’s claim that Non-Indigenous Australians have a repressed ‘Indigenous’ unconsciousness that is not well represented in modern Australian (secular) society. Tacey generalises a theory about ‘the Australian psyche’ to reformulate an ego-driven national identity balanced by a correlative knowledge of its unconscious impulses. I argue that Tacey’s proposed Non-Indigenous ‘Indigeneity’ misappropriates Aboriginal culture as a ‘primitive’ archetypal form of the Jungian collective unconsciousness.

Chapter 5 examines Stephen Muecke’s cultural analysis of Euro-Australian and Indigenous representations of society. He utilises postmodern and postcolonial studies related to Australia to erase some traditional intellectual and geographical boundaries in Euro-Australian culture. He explains that other cultures, like Indigenous Australians, hold a different worldview that may assist in the re-evaluation of the basic premises of Euro-Australian society, psychology, and spirituality. He moves between two cultures without concretising a reconciliation process, content to deconstruct Eurocentric philosophies that are applied to cultural studies conducted among Indigenous Australians. Muecke is wary of pursuing ‘authentic’ Australian desert experiences, and he reveals numerous difficulties in cross-cultural translation processes.

I argue in Chapter 5 that Tacey and Muecke are spiritually mindful Non-Indigenous writers, who represent Indigenous Australian cultural Law by constructing descriptions of Non-Indigenous and Indigenous spiritual encounters in Australia. Both writers provide descriptions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous unconscious and/or spiritual perceptions that move back and forth between the two arbitrarily defined cultural settings (Indigenous and Non-Indigenous) in an attempt to find a middle ground of meaning, e.g., the spirit of Australia, the source of ‘our’ Australian homeland. Both Tacey and Muecke explore two worlds of meaning in their own conceived Australian cultural texts. One world often describes Euro-Australian attitudes; the other world is inspired by and refers to their understanding of Indigenous Australian peoples.

An appreciation of Indigenous Australian cultural Law depends on the development of joint (Non-Indigenous and Indigenous) discourses in spirituality. The point of investigating European and modern cultural theorists on Aboriginal religion is to re-examine the representations of Aboriginal religion and to demonstrate a difference between Euro-Australian and Indigenous Australian perceptions of cultural Law. I contend that Non-Indigenous reception and ethical understanding of Aboriginal religion as a binding social contract of Indigenous cultural Law is useful in reconciliation debates.

In brief, by problematising and analysing the strengths and weaknesses of some analysts of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous religions in Australia, this thesis aims to contribute to the Reconciliation debate and to highlight the need for such a debate to confront centrally and forcefully claims made about the Aboriginal sacred.
Chapter 1

Representations of Aboriginal Religion in a Modernising Society

There are a number of indications that the ‘colonisation’ of Indigenous Australian minds and their localised cultural Laws is an ongoing process in modern societies. In my discourse formation, postcolonial anthropology sets out to intercede in colonialist anthropological discourses. Colonialist anthropologies are characterised by the claim that they approximate totalised understanding of Indigenous Australian cultural Law, inevitably a biased and inaccurate conclusion.

In this study, I will examine Penny Van Toorn’s critical analysis of a hybrid cultural text; a Christian-Awabakal Gospel. Her description and critique of this text shows how a translation of Indigenous cultural information into a Euro-Christian literature has created a spiritual discourse with inextricable elements of both European and Indigenous Australian religious experience. I believe that many anthropological records of Indigenous cultural Laws are similarly acts of translation composed of both European and Indigenous philosophies of culture and spiritual experience.

I intend to describe selected key traditional anthropological discourses, past and present, as well as modern cultural theorists and will mount a critique of their complex methodologies. Modern anthropologists have suggested new methods in the analysis of anthropological research subjects. I argue that Clifford Geertz’s interpretive anthropology combines postcolonial literary deconstructive methods with anthropology; while Nicholas Thomas’ proposed use of historical and archaeological methods in anthropology is both useful and problematic. Both anthropologists have developed discourses after-the-fact of colonisation of so-called ‘third-world nations’ — Geertz’s method interrupts globalising theories of culture derived from local accounts; Thomas suggests that many Indigenous cultures have undergone historical transformations which impact on their modern lifestyles. Their interdisciplinary methods represent forms of what I claim is ‘postcolonial anthropology’.

What do I mean by the term ‘postcolonial anthropology’?
In one sense, my use of the term ‘Postcolonial Anthropology’ refers to a range of textual strategies that postcolonial theorists and anthropologists have used in the formulation of their personal view of cultures, in this case Indigenous Australian cultures. Postcolonial cultural theorists, such as Said, and postmodern social theorists, such as Foucault and Derrida, underpin the deconstructive theoretical approach I have taken towards interpreting anthropological discourses that speak of Indigenous Australians.

One aspect of the postcolonial anthropological discourse I am proposing employs strategies that review colonalist anthropological theories, such as sociological theories of religion found in Emile Durkheim’s The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1915). Durkheim’s sociology of religion implicitly perpetuates European philosophies of society and law. His theoretical reading of early ethnographic and anthropological accounts of Aboriginal Australians secularises the religious life experiences of Aboriginal peoples. Secular accounts of religion appear to privilege scientific thinking as more efficient than religious thinking in modern society. European models of industry, progress, economy and knowledge of social
structures dominate secular accounts of modern society, which effectively marginalises Indigenous cultural Law(s). A closer reading of colonialist anthropology or Eurocentric ethnographic frameworks in relation to Durkheim will be explored in Chapter Three.

Postcolonial anthropology is also utilised to show how modern anthropological and cultural methods that have cast aside out-of-date Eurocentric social and religious frameworks are still dependent on the cultural writer’s life experience and cultural point of view. There is the danger that in overhauling the writings that denied Indigenous people their ‘religious life’, the modern Non-Indigenous writer will record living Indigenous spiritualities that are inauthentic. However, the secret-sacred nature of many (if not all) localised Indigenous Australian cultural Laws precludes a plain-speaking account of Indigenous spiritual life in its entirety. Postcolonial anthropology could in this case appear to be complicated guesswork performed by academics about the specific cultural knowledges and practices that many Indigenous people identify and live with.

‘Literary studies’ in recent times has developed accounts of Indigenous traditional cultural Law that expand notions of literature into other disciplinary boundaries. As Brian Edwards has noted:

Postcolonialism and postcolonial studies do not signify a neatly prescribed field or set of agreed strategies but, rather, a cross-disciplinary interest in cultural and political identity in relationships between races and nations, imperialism, colonisation, and post-independence movements together with the signifying systems, pageantry, symbolism, practices and modes of language characterising these relationships. Involving history, politics, philosophy, anthropology, economics and sociology, as well as literature, the ‘field’ is huge and it is changing.

My use of the term ‘postcolonial anthropology’ draws on Edwards’ interdisciplinary perspective on postcolonial studies. Part of Edwards’ argument describes the field of postcolonial studies engaged in cross-disciplinary strategies that involve history, politics, philosophy, anthropology, symbolism and modes of language. Thus I intend to apply postcolonial literary theory to anthropological discourses that denote Indigenous Australian mythology, ceremony, symbolism, language, and cultural Law.

Critical self-scrutiny within those first world nations that assumed the rightness of their international expansion involves the assessment of Non-Indigenous investigative methodologies that have been applied to Indigenous Australians. New ways of operating in anthropological, philosophical, cultural and literary discourses is provided by postcolonial studies. Such cross-disciplinary theoretical discourse opens up the specialisation of disciplines to investigate new ways of talking about Indigenous Australian Spiritualities. I assume that a spiritual awareness underpins all traditional Indigenous Australian cultural Law(s) in its varieties of expression found with each localised Indigenous community.

The recognition of Indigenous Australian spiritual perceptions and cultural Laws involves Indigenous people negotiating for the recognition of their human rights and

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Indigenous identities in a modern Australian society. Nationalist and imperialist agendas constructed by perpetuation of Euro-Australian standards of living marginalise Indigenous identity formations and continue the colonising effects of the British Empire. What Mulhern sees as the European home can be usefully applied to an understanding of modern Indigenous Australian identity formations and cultural homelands.

With this in mind we can see how inappropriate colonialisit (or secularising) forms of anthropology, ethnography, and literature are in ‘capturing’ Indigenous Australian spirituality. Postcolonial anthropology is a way of deconstructing colonising mentalities and being respectful of the value of Indigenous philosophies.

**Recognition of the ongoing colonisation of Indigenous minds by Euro-systems**

It is important that Non-Indigenous discourses be distinguished from Indigenous discourses. Ways of moving between the essentialised and separatist notions of ‘Non-Indigenous’ and ‘Indigenous’ are explored later in Turnbull’s discussion of joint-rationalities (in Chapter 2), and in Muecke’s sense of double-consciousness (Chapter 5). Transformations of both Indigenous and European consciousness as a way forward to negotiations on a footing of equal power are explored in Turnbull’s discourse (Chapter 2).

The documentation of Indigenous Australian spiritualities by Eurocentric anthropologists, sociologists, researchers, and cultural theorists has in the past extended dominant ideological positions as a barely detectable ‘colonisation’ of Indigenous minds. Ms. Irahapeti Ramsden of Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, in a keynote address on ‘Cultural Safety’ at the CATSIN Indigenous Nursing Conference in Melbourne May 2001, noted that:

> Although in most countries economic colonisation is considered complete, (except where land is so marginal that it is not considered commercially useful) the colonisation of the mind is the process to be rigorously aware of. There is a tendency in academic literature to refer to the current period in history as post colonial. Many First People would argue strenuously that as long as one of us refuses to accept the ongoing colonisation of our minds and continues to need to work for our rights, colonisation continues.

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2 Francis Mulhern. 1993 ‘A European home?’ in *Mapping The Future: Local cultures, global change*, edited by John Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson and Lisa Tucker, reprinted 1996 Routledge, London and New York. Mulhern ends his essay by focusing on a new European identity located in the East and West of the current European continent. The essay moves between heterogeneity and homogeneity where in a contradictory way: ‘There will be a day for a Europe (and a world) of differences, lived as a history of closure, but its precondition is a general social transformation that will not come through the free (?) proliferation of particularities... This is the decisive reality of “Europe”, with its multiply-stressed politics and culture. Identities made out of “these people in this place” belong to the romances of nationalism and imperialism. The attempt to make a European identity in such terms must prove self-defeating... when capitalism seems likely, for the first time to inherit the earth, the worst, the most truly hopeless of all “European” identities would be one in which comfortless critical knowledge has been forgotten.’ pp 203-204.

Ramsden is addressing the First Nations people of Melbourne about her First Nations experience of the colonisation of the mind in New Zealand. She goes on to speak of how anthropologists, ethnologists, artists and historians have been in control of the archives, education and dissemination of information about Maori histories, cultures and language. Said addressed the same issue by identifying Imperialistic stereotypes of "the African (or Indian, or Irish, or Jamaican, or Chinese) mind" that in some cases create the illusion that Other (Indigenous) ways of thinking are backward, primitive, infantile, marginal, or psychologically diseased. I believe this colonialist stereotyping is a gross generalisation of Indigenous ways of thinking compared to Western mindsets.

In hindsight it seems obvious how generalisations about the 'primitive mind', voiced by Freud and perpetuated by sociologists like Durkheim, extended the idea that Aboriginal Australians were exemplars of early forms of human life on an evolutionary scale. The primitive mind became a model for the dominant European cultures of the Western world in the early part of the twentieth century to explore subliminal or subconscious realms of philosophical analysis. Frazer’s work in The Golden Bough used ethnographic data about Indigenous people to formulate a type of universalisable mythological consciousness for thinkers living in Western societies, and invested the value of Aboriginal culture (in Australia) and customs with the misnomer ‘magic’. Baldwin Spencer, like Frazer, used field studies of Aboriginal peoples to postulate primitive forms of Western societal structures. In reference to the Aranda people Spencer wrote in 1927 that:

> Australia is the present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that have elsewhere passed away and given place to higher forms. This applies equally to the Aboriginal as to the platypus and the kangaroo. Just as the platypus laying its eggs and feebly suckling its young, reveals a mammal in the making, so does the Aboriginal show us, at least in broad outline, what early man must have been like before he learned to read and write, domesticate animals, cultivate crops and use a metal tool.

It is noticeable how Spencer compares ‘the Aboriginal’ to Australian fauna. In this way he projects a theory of the behaviour of ‘primitive man’ (the Aboriginal) comparable to an uncivilised, prehistoric, un-evolved social animal.

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4 Judy Maddigan MP introduced the CASTSIN Conference by listing these Indigenous communities as traditional owners of the land in and around Melbourne, p ii.
7 Max Charlesworth, 1984 ‘Introduction’ in Religion In Aboriginal Australia: An Anthology, ed. by Max Charlesworth, Howard Morphy, Diane Bell and Kenneth Maddock, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, Australia. Charlesworth has noted that: ‘According to Sir James Frazer and the evolutionists, magical modes of thought gave way to religious modes, which in turn gave way to scientific thought, and for them Aboriginal myths and rites were firmly placed in the category of magic.’ p 1
As late as 1958, E.O. James, Professor of History and Religion at the University of London, considered Aboriginal Australians to be a type of ‘missing link’ between primitive and modern man living in a state of arrested development until the arrival of European settlement. He stated that the main purpose of his inquiry into the beginnings of religion in general was in ‘constructing a background of primitive thought and practice against which the more developed faiths of mankind can be placed by other writers’.

James’s academic findings are derived from the Eurocentric historical and cultural discourses of evolutionary biologists and early anthropologists and philosophers of organised religion. In this intellectual framework, all ‘primitive societies’ were thus presumed to perpetuate magical or prelogical ideas about their lives. He claims there is a lack of evidence for what he calls ‘prehistoric religion’ in primitive societies. Thus in James’s view, Aboriginal Australian ‘religion’, if it exists at all, is unorganised. Colonisation of the ‘primitive mind’ began when Western anthropologists and cultural theorists devalued Indigenous ways of thinking in comparison to their perceptions of the industry and progress of modern European man. Gradually, anthropologists like A.P. Elkin and T.G.H. Strehlow began to take Aboriginal Australian ‘religion’ much more seriously.

In using the term ‘postcolonial’ there is the accompanying idea of a discourse constructed ‘after’ the practices of ‘colonisation’ have been recognised and drawn to a conclusion. Ramsden’s argument about the ongoing colonisation of Indigenous minds by implicitly Euro-centric intellectual frameworks indicates that the term ‘postcolonial’ must incorporate the idea that colonial policies of assimilation and cultural disruption still affect Indigenous cultural identities. ‘Postcolonial anthropology’ is a term that indicates Euro-centric and secular anthropological research methodologies that focus on Indigenous (Australian) cultures are in a state of transition.

Van Toorn’s critique of Aboriginal literature and a translation of ‘spirit’

Penny Van Toorn (1998) argues that literary scholars have overlooked the fact that Aboriginal Australian people have utilised a broad range of written and printed textual forms since 1796. In particular, a collaborative translation of the Gospel of John written c.1830 by a white missionary (Threlkeld) and an Indigenous informant

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9 E.O. James, 1958 ‘Introduction’ to The Beginnings of Religion, Arrow Books, London, UK, pp 20-24. James’s work indicates the perpetuation of a colonialist mindset. Under the subheading Australiens, Tasmanians and Andamanese James asserts that: ‘The native tribes of Australia... have been completely cut off from all contacts with modern civilisation until two hundred years ago. Thus, when Spencer and Gillen began their systematic investigation of their culture in 1894 they found them living under Stone Age conditions, devoid of metals, ignorant of any of the processes of growing crops, taming animals apart from the dog, and without clothes or permanent houses. In physical type they have affinities with the pre-Dravidians of Southern India, the Sakai of the Malay Peninsula, the Veddas of Ceylon and the Australoid groups in Java, New Guinea and possibly Borneo. It would seem probable, therefore, that they reached Australia by way of South-east Asia while they were still in a pre-Neolithic state of culture. The Tasmanians may represent an earlier and even less advanced migration of Negroids, akin to the Melanesians and Papuans, who were cut off by the formation of the Bass Strait.’ p 24.

10 Ibid., p 27.


(Biraban) in the Awabakal tongue reveals a negotiation of spiritual identity between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians. Van Toorn’s discourse on the Biraban-Threlkeld text reveals both Christian and Awabakal spiritual perception. I perceive this type of literary translation to be a corrupted representation of Awabakal cultural Law, in which Awabakal spiritual perception is Christianised and Anglicised in the translation process. At the same time, the Christian iconography and ideology undergo subtle transformations into terms that may hold entirely different connotations in Awabakal language and Law. The Biraban-Threlkeld Gospel is thus a hybrid translation composed of a spiritual language created between cultures, a ‘language’ that is different in comparison to both Christianity and Awabakal cultural Law.

I believe that such Aboriginal authorship and literature is an attempt by Indigenous people (and Non-Indigenous writers) to translate traditional Indigenous Australian spiritualities and cultural Law. Anthropological discourse, like Indigenous literature, contains narrative elements, biographical, cultural and philosophical details that show Indigenous Australian cross-cultural interpretations of their social, philosophical and spiritual vision that illuminate their localised cultural Law(s). Aboriginal writing is not simply a recent literary phenomenon written by assimilated Indigenous people. Penny Van Toorn has shown ‘Aboriginal people began using the technologies of alphabetic writing and print far earlier than the dominant literary historical narrative would suggest.’

Van Toorn claims that:

As far back as 1796, Aboriginal people have utilised a broad range of written and printed textual forms including letters, poems, essays, pamphlets, newsletters, newspaper articles, petitions, manifestos, speeches, interviews, anecdotes, and traditional stories. On this broad range of textual materials, literary history has so far remained largely silent.

It is suggested here that before 1964 the history of relations between Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians indicates that there are numerous examples of Aboriginal ‘literary authorship’ unacknowledged or unseen by literary critics. In one example that Van Toorn provides, there is literary negotiation of ideology, culture, and importantly (for the focus of this thesis) religious or spiritual thinking that occurs between a white missionary and a bi-lingual Aboriginal man of the Awabakal people of New South Wales. It is necessary to quote Van Toorn at length because her ideas on translation are similar to my own cross-disciplinary interpretations that interface anthropological data with postcolonial cultural studies:

In 1830 and 1831, on the Congregational mission at Lake Macquarie in New South Wales, an Awabakal man named Biraban, who was fluent both in English and in the Awabakal language, enabled missionary Lancelot Threlkeld to learn Awabakal, and ‘assisted’ him in translating the Gospel of Saint Luke into Awabakal... Historian John Harris’s description of the translation process is worth noting on two counts. First, Biraban is said only to have ‘assisted’ Threlkeld in the work of translation because Threlkeld alone of the two is presumed to have known what the Gospel of St Luke ‘really meant’. He and ‘I’, writes Threlkeld ‘went through it sentence by sentence, and word by word, while I explained to him carefully the meaning as we proceeded’... Biraban is not listed as the co-author of the Awabakal translation of the Gospel, nor in any of the four

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14 Ibid., p 177.
additional volumes concerning the Awabakal language, which were published under Threlkeld’s name between 1827 and 1892.

The second point to note in Harris’s representation of Biraban’s translation work is that Biraban is assumed simply to be re-coding a fixed, unitary, original message, which does not change in the course of being translated from one language to another. Biraban’s task is conceived as maintaining strict fidelity to meanings laid down permanently in advance by the biblical text itself. Biraban’s work is understood neither as a way of entering into negotiation over the meaning of the Gospel text, nor as a process of creating ‘new’ texts through the process of translation. The point to be stressed here is that although there is never a precise one-to-one fit between different languages, translation work carried out by Aboriginal people like Biraban was thought not to be worthy of notice by traditional practitioners of literary studies, not only because the texts were not in the English language, but because the translation was not understood as a creative or recreational textual practice, but only a kind of copying or passive transcription. The institutionalised conflation of ‘literature’ and ‘English’, working together with Romantic notions of the literary, of ‘originality’, and of ‘creativity’, have operated within traditional literary studies to exclude translation work such as Biraban’s from the field of Aboriginal writing.  

Van Toorn’s literary critical method locates Aboriginal literary authorship in colonialist historical dialogue. Her literary critical method could equally well be applied to much anthropological research both in colonialist and postcolonial discourses. Anthropology and similar kinds of ethnographic field research is written in negotiation with self-analytical and self-conscious Indigenous oral historians and Indigenous speakers on cultural Law. Van Toorn’s discussion of the Biraban-Threlkeld text illuminates the existence of nineteenth-century Indigenous Australian authorship. I think her discussion illuminates an early account of the Awabakal cultural tradition. Of course, the etymology of Awabakal terms of cultural Law and spiritual experience must undergo a re-translation via the constructed Christian and Anglicised Awabakal terms to approach Biraban’s way of cultural/spiritual thinking. It is a belated but nonetheless valuable literary reconstruction of an early ethnographic/spiritual dialogue between colonising and colonised cultures.

Biraban operates as a sort of cultural mediator, go-between and translator-guide for Threlkeld’s missionary Gospel translation. Anthropologists do not function without Indigenous informants, thus Indigenous cultural history can be located, albeit in more or less distorted forms, presumably, in anthropological discourses. In anthropological discourses in general, the often-Eurocentric theoretical structure of society and its values of a spiritual life distort the meaning of the Awabakal cultural data. Biraban negotiated with Threlkeld for control of cultural rights via an Awabakal cultural/spiritual language formation. Biraban is echoing Threlkeld’s ideas about Christian religion via the Gospel of John. Due to the unavailability of the Biraban-Threlkeld text (to this author’s knowledge) one might speculate that the oral-cum-written translation process converted Christian religious metaphors into the Awabakal language, which was a language not written by Awabakal people and had existed only as an oral tradition. Awabakal spiritual iconographies or cultural Law would through

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Biraban’s bilingual abilities and Threlkeld’s communication skills become Christian religious metaphors.

Biraban’s translated understanding of Christianity is a process of comparing religious experiences. For example in a modern English translation of the Gospel of John, Jesus said to the Pharisees of his spiritual discernment that ‘You judge by human standards; I pass judgement on no-one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.’ Christian readings of Jesus and His Father have often inferred that to follow the rules or inheritance of the Father is to know an ‘omnipresent entity’ or an ‘Almighty God of Israel and All-nations’. I cannot easily determine the Awabakal word for ‘follow [in the tradition of] the Father’. However, in coming to terms with a translation between Christian and Awabakal spiritual perceptions, a comparison between Koori nations is helpful in revealing notions about Biraban’s Awabakal use of the term ‘Father’. In 1880 several Kamilaroi and Kurnai informants of south-east Victoria were reported to have said that it seems natural enough that their children should ‘follow the mother’. The phrase seems to relate to kinship ties and Indigenous identity formation so that the Kamilaroi and Kurnai children ‘should be of the mother’s class... not the father’s.’

In light of the cultural differences noteworthy in the translation of Christian religion and localised Indigenous Australian cultural Law, postcolonial (literary) anthropology can be seen as a process of renegotiating the methods of cross-cultural translation. These interpretive methods that compare the spiritual experiences of Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians must be wary of re-colonising Indigenous ways of thinking as a homogenised Koori (or more generally Aboriginal) spirituality, or as a Eurocentric-universalisable spirituality. A further complication in dealing with the Aboriginal sacred is the tendency of scholars to want to invent a pan-Aboriginal Spirituality that is unchanging across time, rather than to see the sacred as specific, historically specific and grounded in particular communities.

Indigenous Australians have suffered from the ongoing effects of colonisation processes, having their homelands taken from them and their traditional culture devalued. Influenced by European schools of thought, early twentieth century academia centred upon secular models of a spiritual discourse. These models misrepresent the praxis of Indigenous philosophy applied to traditional Indigenous social cohesion and spiritual beliefs. A number of commentators see Indigenous religious belief in urban centres to be a disrupted and modernised form of the old ways, giving rise to the belief that Indigenous spiritual life in urban centres is a synthesis of traditional Indigenous religious customs and New Age type spiritualities. This is not the case. New Age type philosophising engaged in by Western researchers and theorists investigating Indigenous Australian culture existing in the modern world, sometimes use Eurocentric spiritual discourse terminology, such as ‘dreamtime’, ‘totem’, ‘third eye’, ‘metaphysics’, and ‘medicine men and women’. These phrases are symbols drawn from other continents used to describe the non-ordinary perceptions and spiritual experiences undergone by Non-Indigenous people.

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18 Ibid., p 33.
in contact with Indigenous Australian people and their cultural world. The 'dreamtime' cannot be psychoanalysed or psychologically evaluated in terms of mental health, disease, or as a sub-standard philosophy. 'Dreamtime' knowledge is learned and perpetuated in localised Indigenous communities, taught by traditional owners and, they assert, ancestor spirits of the local land in a staged progression. Dreamtime terminology is a form of postcolonial (literary) anthropology that renegotiates the language and symbolic forms (or signifiers) of spiritual awareness to facilitate understanding among Non-Indigenous Australians. This renegotiating of Indigenous forms using postcolonial critical discourse can be seen in the Chapters on Tacey and Muecke, especially in their attempts to come to terms with what Indigeneity is in modern Australian society.

Modern anthropological methodologies and postcolonial perspectives
A review of some modern anthropological discourses contributes to knowledge of the usefulness of self-reflexivity in (postcolonial) anthropology. Anthropologists Crick & Geddes point out that since the 1960s '[whatever] methods are employed, anthropological knowledge is always influenced by the concrete field situation and the personal attitudes of the individual [researcher]. Aspects of the self and of the ethnographer are thus crucial...’19 Geddes indicates that 'if anthropologists do not manage to uncover those fundamental organising presumptions [that underlie the forms of organisation and interaction of research subjects], they run the... risk of reinventing the worlds they are studying to fit their own categorical and classificatory imperatives.'20 It is worth noting that Crick & Geddes acknowledge that there is some sharing of both theory and method between the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. However they claim that 'Sociology has long been so preoccupied with its scientific credentials that it sometimes seems as if its practitioners produce more books on methodology than on society itself.'21 While noting that anthropologists 'run the risk of reinventing the worlds they are studying' Crick & Geddes seem to indicate that anthropological methodology can firmly establish core principles that underpin the societies being studied. Anthropologists like Ganguly-Scrane and Geertz introduce postcolonial and postmodern readings that refute global theorisation of specific cultural encounters.

In a sense, Crick and Geddes are perpetuating the notion that a careful researcher can locate fixed ideas about culture by uncovering 'those fundamental organising presumptions' that bring about the social cohesion of research subjects. Obtaining accurate knowledge of the organising principles of a culture under investigation is a reconceptualisation of fixed methodological traditions, such as structural or social anthropology. Alternatively, postcolonial anthropological methods are at times poststructural in order to open fixed interpretations of culture to new meanings of anthropology and human experiences.

Some anthropologists are aware that they are disturbing observers when conducting field research. Ruchira Ganguly-Scrane says that:

20 ibid., p 10.
21 ibid., p 14.
Until the mid 1960's, it was widely assumed that anthropologists remained fairly objective observers of the culture in which they did their research. Over the last few decades, however, there has been a marked shift in the mode of inquiry in ethnographic research and especially in how that inquiry itself is reported. There has been a tendency to move away from a scientific, supposedly dispassionate approach to one of self-reflexivity. This approach suggests that fieldwork does not merely involve observing and recording 'facts'; it is also a highly intricate interpretive process. Rather than claiming universal validity for our representations of other cultures, we now recognise instead that the relationship between the knower and the known substantially shapes the findings. In such a renewed self-conscious fieldwork practice, it follows that the presentation of one's self to the people one studies will influence the collection and interpretation of data. \(^{22}\)

As a postcolonial theorist and anthropologist Ganguly-Scrane is aware of the notion of cultural baggage that an indigenous anthropologist brings to the fieldwork enterprise, which creates a 'situation of simultaneously being alien and an insider.' \(^{23}\) She was born in India and grew up in Australia, gathered anthropological data in her own 'home' community in West Bengal, India, aware that she was not a neutral recording instrument. She was aware that her comparative anthropological project constructed 'the other' in which relations of domination and subordination could not be overlooked. \(^{24}\) Due to her Western education people in her hometown viewed her sometimes as an outsider, and other times as an insider. Thus her background in Western education and West Bengali life experience contributed to a variety of hybridised cultural experiences, placing her in an awkward position of unprivileged-privilege when collecting cultural data.

This awkward postcolonial methodological condition of anthropological enquiry (a kind of self-critical anthropology) was noted in 1961 by W.E.H. Stanner in his observation that 'in every field of anthropological study a going beyond the facts of observation — a "guessing" about them — is intrinsic to the act of study and is not even theoretically separate from it.' \(^{25}\) To put it another way, the study of human life systems that anthropology performs is a science of translation between life systems, a sort of cross-cultural co-creation, much like the cross-cultural translation of fixed spiritual ideals that Biraban and Threlkeld jointly undertook.

During the early to mid twentieth century anthropological texts generated general ideas about Aboriginal people, culture and religion derived from academics who based their enquiries on evolutionary, biological, and sociological scientific perspectives. \(^{26}\) Christine Stevens highlights 'doomed race' or 'manifest destiny' assumptions made about the 'fate' of Aboriginal Australians derived from the early anthropological fieldwork reports of Spencer and Gillen. In a written introduction to Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen's published work, Sir James Frazer praised

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\(^{23}\) Ibid., p 51.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p 51.


\(^{26}\) See particularly, Christine Stevens, 1994 White man's dreaming: Killarpanima Mission 1866—1915, Oxford University Press, Melbourne. Stevens presents an overview of the academic intellectual and social milieu which accompanied and enforced principles of colonisation in Australia. She argues that: 'Europeans were firmly entrenched in a sense of their own physical and cultural superiority, vindicated "scientifically" by Social Darwinism and its network of European theories.' p 1.
Spencer for 'his full, detailed and exact description of a people living in the Stone Age.' Stevens points out that Gillen testified to Aborigines as being 'the lowest on the scale of the barbarian races, as well as lowest in human intelligence.' Durkheim, Freud, and Frazer, contributed to these supposedly exhaustive scientific accounts of so-called 'primitive man' in Australia by projecting Eurocentric theoretical biases that deny Indigenous Australians their cultural beliefs. W.E.H. Stanner in particular reveals how Eurocentric philosophical and cultural biases infiltrate the work of Durkheim, Freud and Frazer, in two essays 'Reflections on Durkheim and Aboriginal Religion' and 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism.' In the essay 'Reflections on Durkheim and Aboriginal Religion', Stanner reveals that:

A comment which Durkheim himself made on the French socialists – that 'the research was undertaken to establish the doctrine... far from the doctrine resulting from the research' (Peyre, 1960...) – could justifiably be made concerning The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, but it would not detract from the masterly ethnographic feat, even though a detailed analysis would certainly show much wrestling and contrivance to make facts fit the doctrine. In this paper I do not undertake to make a thorough assessment of this 'brilliant but unconvincing treatise on religion' (Goldenweiser, 1914...) against the findings of modern Australian anthropology. To do so would be a very formidable task, and whether the work should be so assessed is perhaps itself a question... In particular I ask... To what extent did Durkheim succeed in his main purpose -- 'to go underneath the symbol to the reality which it represents and which gives it its meaning'?

Stanner concludes this essay with an insight into Durkheim's incomplete perception of Aboriginal Australian society:

The insistence on making religion... dependent on society inevitably put Durkheim at the mercy of the society [Aboriginal Australia] chosen for the crucial experiment... He had a good sense of factual shortcomings... eg: the poor studies of initiation rites... [The tone of The Elementary Forms] was one of supreme confidence that enough was known to test and prove the thesis. The 'society' on which his argument turned was largely a figment to which... Durkheim attributed 'powers and qualities as mysterious and baffling as any assigned to the gods by the religions of the world.' (Ginsberg, 1956...)

27 Ibid., p 220.
29 Ibid. Stevens explains how influential European theorists (such as Frazer) during the early twentieth-century denied that Australian Aborigines had any organised religion. She states that: 'Spencer and Gillen have been credited with an immense contribution to the understanding of Aboriginal totemism and with articulating the absence of the worship of gods among Aborigines. This appeared to fit well with current anthropological theory in Europe, and with Frazer... writing that "When we contrast the universality of magical rites among the Australian tribes with the conspicuous absence of the worship of gods, among them, we may fairly conclude that these facts lend some support to the theory first broached by Hegel that in the early history of humanity the Age of Religion has been preceded by an Age of Magic."' p 221.
33 Ibid., p 78.
These cultural and intellectual framework biases that Stanner detected in Durkheim’s work reflect a colonialist and secular character that needs to be problematised and deconstructed.

Social ‘sciences’, such as Durkheimian anthropology, use methodologies that imply ‘science-based’ assessments of culture. Durkheim’s scientific logic equates Aboriginal religious experience to an emergent property of social conditioning and function. However, this logic fails to evaluate the real existence of ancestor spirits and cultural Laws that bind Indigenous communities.

Anthropologists, such as T.G.H. Strehlow and A.P. Elkin, felt they were preserving the oral history and memory of a dying race of people. While Elkin believed that the practices and beliefs of the Indigenous medicine men in general would begin to work in tandem with Western medical practices34, Strehlow speaks of the dying-out or loss of particular songs in the Aranda nation that he could not record. Whereas Strehlow and others thought they were recording antiquities, of archival interest only, contemporary researchers like Richard Kimber, working in a living culture, find surprising gaps in Strehlow’s archival knowledge.

The danger of exclusively secular anthropological theory and data collection is that they tend to universalise the efficiency of secular modes of enquiry. Some commentators, like Mudrooroo, claim that:

In Australia, many stories dealing with the origins of the different Indigenous communities have either been lost, or incorrectly recorded. This means that much of the oral literature of the Indigenous people is no longer available for examination and that it is impossible to deconstruct records dealing with each and every community.35

Mudrooroo’s recognition of the need to deconstruct or re-evaluate Indigenous oral literature is useful in the case of knowledge discovered by Richard Kimber in comparison to T.G.H. Strehlow. Kimber speaks of being ‘locked into’ the Walpiri Law and thus unable to accurately or properly speak about the Law of other Indigenous nations. He recalls that Strehlow was a white man raised in Central Aranda country among Indigenous people. Kimber says that Strehlow was denied access to songs that were not part of the Aranda Law he was ‘locked into’. Kimber found elders from neighbouring Indigenous communities who knew and could recite the songs of their land word for word, the very songs Strehlow had claimed were lost.36 Kimber said that he was staggered at the amount of knowledge that remains in the face of widespread cultural displacement. Thus anthropologists as proficient and multi-lingual as Strehlow obtained only part of the available knowledge on Central Aranda Traditions. He recorded information with a scientific reasoning that does not allow for the Aboriginal spiritual Law to reveal localised and semi-moieties knowledge. Thus when Strehlow wrote Aranda Traditions in 1947 only a fragment of the deep Aranda law was revealed to him. Later in writing Songs of Central Australia (1971)

though he is an older, much wiser individual, he is not a traditional custodian or owner of the Aranda law, thus his documentation of Aranda oral history and songlines presents only one real fragment of the deep Aranda law. A.P. Elkin claims that ‘Professor Strehlow considered that the last Western Aranda man of high degree died in the mid-1960’s’. \textsuperscript{37} Strehlow, the ardent anthropologist, was trying to save what he perceived to be a dying language and oral song-cycle tradition that in this case was still alive. Kimber has shown that certain areas where those song cycles live were still intact as of 1990.

**Geertz and Thomas: examples of divergent modern anthropological discourses**

A review of the anthropological research methods of Clifford Geertz and Nicholas Thomas sheds light on two different ways in which postcolonial anthropological research operates. Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) offers what I see as a deconstructive method of presenting anthropological data. On the other hand, Nicholas Thomas in *Out of Time: History and Evolution in Anthropological Discourse* (1989)\textsuperscript{38} proposes to expand anthropological methodologies by incorporating historical and archaeological research data, thus providing wider interpretations of modern Indigenous cultures. Geertz offers what I see as a postcolonial method of deconstructing one’s assumptions one about what culture is. Thomas’s method of reconstructing Indigenous history is interdisciplinary and creates an implied evolutionary philosophy to better account for the modern status of Indigenous research subjects. Both methods are helpful in developing ways of talking about Indigenous Australian Spiritualities.

David Turnbull explains the function of interpretive anthropology thus:

> [Geertz's] critique of global theories and his emphasis on 'thick description' [in which] Geertz pointed out that cultural meanings cannot be understood at the general level because they result from complex organisations of signs in a particular context; that the way to reveal the structures of power attached to the global discourse is to set the local knowledge in contrast with it. \textsuperscript{39}

Geertz is a Postcolonial Anthropologist in the sense that he creates a discourse that initially roots itself in anthropological methodology and turns increasingly to literary, critical and philosophical analyses in an effort to understand the localised human conditions that are being studied. His ‘literary-anthropologic’ theorising of social structure has more in common with Foucault and Said than with anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard.\textsuperscript{40} Geertz was no armchair anthropologist as


\textsuperscript{39} David Turnbull, 2000 ‘Chapter 1. “On with the motley”: The contingent assemblage of knowledge spaces’ in Mason’s, Tricker’s and Cartographers Comparative Studies in the Sociology of Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge, Harwood Academic Publishers, imprint of Gordon and Breach Publishing Group, Australia. Turnbull summarises some of the ideas in Geertz’s *Interpretation of Cultures* on p 45.

\textsuperscript{40} Fred Inglis, 2000 *Clifford Geertz*. My comparison of the functional anthropologists with poststructuralist and postcolonial writers is derived from Inglis' statement that: ‘Both [Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard] were serenely confident of the scientific status of their handling of their subject-matter and both would have been hautly disdainful of our latter-day dissolution of confidence in objectivity.’ pp 35-36.
Durkheim once was seen to be. He did fieldwork in Java and Morocco among other places during twenty or more years of professional anthropological research. Biographer, Fred Inglis argues that one of the lessons of Geertz's method of thick description:

Is that the discipline of ethnographic attention to the variety of human doings is primary. Describing thickly and truthfully the real things which are there is the first, best duty of the human scientist and intellectual.

Skipping over the boundaries between one field of intellectual life and another is then not so much a duty as an inevitability... The world is incorrigibly global and incorrigibly various; it is not monoculture... which beckons, so much as a world of interpretive fragments...

This is Geertz's manner. His long lists, his sudden juxtapositions, are figures with which to dramatize the abrupt propinquities of this now-modern, now-ancient world.

Inglis alludes to Geertz's 'thick description' as akin to Dickens literary technique. He further compares Geertz's manner of complex description interpretation and explanation of any given social strata, to the literary depictions of life in nineteenth century London novelised by Charles Dickens. Geertz's technique of thick description makes a variety of truth-claims about the anthropological research subject. Dickens' novels are not intended to be sites of anthropological research. It is this problematisation of cultural studies and the related field of anthropology with (post)modern literary criticism that Geertz undertakes via incessant theorisation of symbolic and social structures that also characterises the work of Stephen Muecke in No Road: bitumen all the way (1998) which is reviewed in Chapter 3.

According to anthropologist Nicholas Thomas, the danger of remaining steeped in irreducible concepts of identity, culture, and social structure, that Geertz's interpretative anthropology alludes to, is that we may lose sight of the identity and social structure of the foreign (Indigenous) subject. For Thomas, Geertz's 'anthropology is characterised by a method of elucidation rather than theory' and gives way to the ethnographer's (Non-Indigenous) self-analysis with little useful knowledge generated about the (Indigenous) culture under investigation. He quotes from Geertz's description of interpretive anthropology:

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41 W.E.H. Stanner, 1967 'Reflections on Durkheim and Aboriginal religion', in Ian Weeks, 1990 Sacred Space: Australian Aboriginal Religion, Deakin University Press, Victoria, Australia. Stanner notes that: 'Durkheim of course had never visited Australia, but apparently he had read every significant work about its ethnography, Lowie's observation... that he was saturated with the technical literature was not an over-statement.' p 67.


43 Ibid., pp 27-28. Inglis argues that: '[A duly enlightened rationalism whose best expression is as much artistic as it is scientific] suggests a more literary analogy for Geertz's way. When Charles Dickens set himself to capture the most modern and runaway of modern cities, London, in the net of art, he forged an astonishing and novel kind of English in which to write novels... Perhaps it will serve as an analogy for what this great contemporary anthropologist, who wants to make interpretation and explanation at once complex and intelligible, has to do for himself.'

Finding our feet, an unnerving business which never more than distantly succeeds, is what ethnographic research consists of as a personal experience; trying to formulate the basis on which one imagines, always excessively, one has found them is what anthropological writing consists of as scientific endeavour.\footnote{Thomas, 1989, op. cit., p 25. Thomas quotes from Geertz’s 1973 work The Interpretation of cultures: essays in interpretive anthropology, Bantam Books, New York.}

Thomas finds Geertz’s deconstructive critical analysis of anthropological method unhelpful. He argues that ‘these propositions [effect] a monopolisation of the field of thick description or cultural interpretation – set up as the proper terrain of anthropology – by professional ethnographers.’\footnote{Ibid., p 25.} It has been identified by Inglis and Thomas that Geertz’s method usually starts with a key symbol or central idea that proceeds by reducing to contrasts, for example between inside/outside and refined/vulgar. Geertz’s reductionist methods work within the methodological framework of structural anthropology and highlight the intellectual biases of the interpreter of culture (the anthropologist) by prolonging and inherently problematising the research findings.

Thomas discusses the absence of history or time in contemporary anthropology (as of 1989)\footnote{Ibid., p 102.}, and the use of historical and social analysis in the understanding of Indigenous peoples (in the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand). He explains that:

[Radcliffe-Brown’s socio-anthropological] analysis thus operates by selecting certain features within a social or cultural domain and demonstrating their consistency or coherence with others. In sociological functionalism, this entails establishing that an institution plays a part such as providing an outlet for social tensions; in ‘interpretive anthropology’ it involves showing that some meanings are versions of others, that an act can be understood to express a meaning, and so on. While concepts of time may interest both perspectives, historical time has no place in either.\footnote{Ibid., p 26.}

Thomas indicates that Geertz’s interpretive method questions or undermines the nature of anthropology and is geared more towards a philosophical analysis of an anthropologist’s investigative method, and has no interest in historicising culture. Thomas is alluding to a potentially unhelpful outcome of interpretive anthropology. He argues that a Geertz-style analysis of culture refers to the incompleteness of systems of analysis, symbolism, and social structure, but does not refer to the time and place of interpretation. He interprets Geertz’s method of merging cultural metaphors as the creation of an indissoluble synthesis of disparate cultural ideas. In the essay ‘History structured and unstructured’ Thomas refers to ‘the historical processes which actually make the conditions of life and culture variable across time and space.’\footnote{Ibid. p 109.} Thomas’s argument indicates that cultural motifs that can be interpreted under the same label are upon closer examination actually separate entities, bodies of knowledge, and/or physical and mental acts resulting in social conditions that are distinctive over time and space.
I think Geertz’s anthropological methodologies aim to capture some deeper evaluations of research subjects that incorporate the researcher’s ability to be self-reflexive and receptive to extraneous or subtle meanings of culture. It is a discovery process that is wary of continuing the colonisation and expansion of imperial psychologies upon the Other (Indigenous) culture. Alternatively, Thomas’s anthropology seeks to validate social, mental, and evolutionary processes of Indigenous cultures by mapping their pre-contact social and environmental conditions via archaeological valuations.50

Forays into history, politics and archaeology
Thomass’s anthropological vision creates a dialogue between pre-contact and modern Indigenous societies, noting changes in circumstances. This implicitly acknowledges that cultures in general change socially and thus intellectually over time. It is unclear whether Thomas’s method of observing social and intellectual change over short- and long-term history serves to expose cultural and environmental disruptions as indications of the impermanence of Indigenous customary relations with their spirit ancestors. If we accept Tony Swain’s notion that Indigenous Australians hold sacred space (sacred geographical sites) as more important than the social conditions that occur in such spaces over time,51 then it would appear that the unchanging nature of Indigenous cultural Law was dependent on environmental and ecological factors more so than social, migratory, or human impact-on-land factors. Mining operations on land deemed sacred to Indigenous people (e.g., Jabiluka Mine) are considered invasive and life threatening to Indigenous people because mining is not a natural phenomenon (such as flooding, earthquakes, plate tectonics, storms, erosion, or the like) that can be understood as the action of spirit beings. I think that land-human relations often define Indigenous Australia cultural Laws.

Thomas thus widens the field of anthropological enquiry in ways that enact postcolonial theory. He claims that:

The redefinition of anthropological interests, the development of an extended anthropological practice, the reconstitution of history, and the critique of evolution, are exercises which seem to operate at different levels, but which should be mutually implicated in an effort to transform this sort of intellectual practice.52

Postcolonial anthropology is about redefining anthropological methods of knowing and explaining culture. An expanded anthropological practice aims at presenting a short-(modern) and long-term (prehistoric) history of a given culture as an exhaustive social and philosophical analysis. Thomas sees that such practice ‘entails judgements about relative complexity, inequality, cultural elaboration, productive capacity, and so forth.’53 These judgements are vague at present because each category requires almost endless qualification of the analyst’s observation of what culture and social analysis is according to place and context. This renewed anthropological ideology depends on

50 Thomas, 1989, op. cit. Thomas notes that anthropology in relation to Indigenous studies must consider that if wider historical questions of cultural variability are to be validated, then the interpretation of archaeological evidence needs to be linked much more directly with social and historical analysis, p 109.


53 Ibid., p 114.
what is of interest to the anthropologist. This includes his/her reasons for engaging with the culture under investigation or elaboration. In my case, Indigenous Australian spiritual experience, particularly Koori perspectives are of interest to me, because I am looking for ways of explaining and validating Koori spirituality in the modern social spaces of cultural disruption and reorientation. Thus the notion of what traditional Koori cultural Law is and how if at all has such Law changed in contact with modern Australian society constitutes an underlying motivation in my investigation. Thomas suggests that these types of anthropological interests require an analysis of the structures of archaeological and political Indigenous histories that have impacted Indigenous cultures today. These ideas are intellectual exercises in the ‘redefinition of anthropological interest, the development of an extended anthropological practice, the reconstitution of history, and the critique of evolution.’

Thomas’s focus on an historical exegesis of Indigenous cultures assumes that truth-claims can be made about Indigenous society based on a renewed interpretation of archaeological physical-evidence. He argues extensively for new directions in anthropology that provide a wider analysis of structures from a range of related disciplines:

These critiques demand an extension of anthropological vision in two directions: first, further back in time, into processes which generate social variation and historical dynamics; and second, toward dealing with the array of inter-societal processes, including those constitutive of colonial systems and their effects.

... [These social analyses] situate societies in implicit evolutionary terms but do not acknowledge that processes and even sequences are imputed...

Larger social categories are essential because certain crude classes do have features in common, including ways of dealing or coping with metropolitan intrusions, but if anthropology is to amount to more than an articulation of the ideology enacted in these instructions, the basis of such types and transformations needs to be specified. Actual history can displace the evolutionary narrative as the necessary chronological structure encompasses the variety of cases and gives them more general meaning in our own culture. Where there is no longer documentary record, archaeological evidence is a crucial element of this movement of explication, since it pertains to located histories and makes a break from culturally-charged evolutionary schema.

The difficulty is that the bearing of archaeological evidence upon social processes, or upon social processes which are salient in a particular historical situation, is highly variable. Much of the evidence relates to specific technological matters, rather than subsistence, trade settlement changes, political organisation, and so on. Linking what can be attested to archaeologically with what can be historically documented or ethnographically observed can involve making associations between different time-scales. The potential effects of long-term processes which have general effects in intensive or less intensive production, in an orientation toward exchange or warfare, must be linked with historic outcomes among groups of related societies. Diversity at a particular time – some centuries ago, in the early contact period, under colonialism, or in the present – can be the key to the unfolding of short- and long-term transformations. Attempts to ‘translate’ between prehistory, and a new kind of socio-historical inquiry will be problematic or not, depending on whether existing work is compatible with such objectives. In the Pacific, there has always been some co-operation between

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anthropologists, prehistorians and historians, and there is thus a basis for more integrated projects.

... Some theoretical perspectives have emphasised certain kinds of time, but have not often effectively integrated ethnographic facts and colonial histories: the system may now be seen as open or permeable, but it is possible to acknowledge external influences of various kinds without recognising the depths of externally-generated internal transformation.\(^{55}\)

Thomas expounds upon his desire to detect transformations over time in existing Indigenous cultures. I disagree with Thomas’ focus on ‘implicit evolutionary terms’ because such terms marginalise the existence of Indigenous ancestor spirits who are recognised by Indigenous peoples as living in a past-present reality.\(^{56}\) The danger of a renewed focus on archaeological evidence is that politics and social conditions may become another form of secular interest in Indigeneity. This focus on physical and recorded prehistoric evidence can implicitly equate human ancestral remains and their envisioned socio-political structures with the living Indigenous peoples. Alternatively, Thomas claims that archaeological evidence provides the details of how an Indigenous culture once operated or was subject to the pressures of environmental or social change.

Thomas’ new form of anthropological interest incorporates evolutionary theory juxtaposed with historical (eg: history of Indigenous warfare and inter-tribal exchanges) and social evidence in order to create a more comprehensive view of Indigenous histories. Though his new archaeo-record proposes to be wide in scope and comparative detail, it seemingly disregards or marginalises interest in the philosophy of Indigenous cultural Laws. Oral history, song cycles, and the like, that constitute various instances of Indigenous cultural Law reputedly bind, permeate and effect all aspects of Indigenous society. For example, politics, land, environmental conditions, and land-human interactions contribute to the local philosophies of Walbiri or Wathaurong cultural Law. In considering the scope of Thomas’s proposal anthropologists should incorporate a study of Indigenous principles or philosophies of culture. I do not intend Indigenous principles to imply pan-Aboriginalism. Charlesworth has observed that Indigenous cultures ‘differ quite radically among themselves.’\(^{57}\)

In Thomas’s proposal there is the notion of modern culture as an open system that is subject to the integration of ethnographic facts and colonial histories. Cultural hybridity relates to urban Indigenous people in Australia, such as many Koori communities. Studies in Koori-EuroAustralian hybridity reveal people who have struggled to maintain their links with traditional culture while living in modern social conditions. Kevin Gilbert, a Wuradjeri man (Koori-N.S.W) has expounded on an aspect of the ongoing development and reclamation of Koori traditional cultural knowledge:

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While conservative [white and black members of white-valued society] tend to rubbish anything that that is traditionally Aboriginal, a more wholesome instinct is manifesting itself in the young blacks who are taking tentative steps to go back, to revive the knowledge of things traditional and to promote them as something for blacks to be proud of. As Paul Coe said:

We’re trying to invite tribal people to come to Sydney to teach young kids. Even if they don’t teach us the culture of our particular tribes, at least we’ll be able to learn aspects of the Aboriginal culture from certain other tribes – which will be invaluable.\(^{58}\)

Double-consciousness is a hybrid awareness of ethnographic facts and ongoing colonial histories – two cultures simultaneously existing in the places regarded as homeland by both cultures. Thomas approaches these new grounds for understanding the social and intellectual place where two different cultures have in the past met (under colonial conditions) and continue to meet today (under either/both colonial or reconciliatory conditions). By following Gilbert’s argument it can be seen that the Indigenous tribal teachers to whom he refers teach Koori people forms of cultural Law. Gilbert is saying that Kooris have already established their talent for developing culturally hybrid awareness and are very capable of re-learning tribal ways of thinking.

Thomas proposes that prehistorical and archaeological investigation of anthropological subjects will reveal socio-historical transformations of culture. He argues that this new evidence used by anthropologists will show how Indigenous culture has developed over time. This implies that Indigenous culture must have undergone changes despite Indigenous claims to the eons-old, intransigent, and long-lasting quality that characterises their living cultural Law. Thomas’ tendency to focus on transformations of Indigenous culture misses the point of Indigenous cultural Law. Indigenous Australian localised cultural Laws are often expressed as religious or metaphysical experiences. If postcolonial anthropological studies is to develop useful Indigenous Australian discourses, such research must recognise Indigenous cultural Law as a form of ‘religious’ experience.

Chapter 2

Postcolonial anthropology:
Western cultural and Indigenous Australian knowledge claims

While Foucault has criticised the European logic of anthropology in general, Turnbull, Charlesworth and Swain construct what I see as discourses in postcolonial anthropology by expressing differences between Western and Indigenous (Australian) cultural knowledge. Foucault opens up the philosophical discourse of Western culture (especially anthropology) to other knowledge systems. Turnbull, Charlesworth, and Swain each contribute wider discussions that compare and differentiate between Western cultural and Indigenous Australian knowledge systems. Finally by not privileging a single transcendental rationality (either Western cultural philosophy or Indigenous cultural Law) we can see a difference between Non-Indigenous and Aboriginal Australian talk of what ‘Indigeneity’ is. What Charlesworth calls ‘religious thinking’ is a Non-Indigenous (non-secular) way of talking about and interpreting Indigenous Australian sacred ceremonies and deep cultural Laws.

Foucault on the episteme of Western culture and anthropology

Foucault has expanded an interpretation of anthropology by showing how Western or Eurocentric philosophies are subsumed in anthropological methods. In Chapter 1 of this thesis, the postcolonial anthropology of Ganguly-Scrase and the interpretive anthropology of Geertz provided self-reflexive examples that demonstrated a critique of Eurocentric anthropology. In Foucault’s discourse, the notions of historical and scientific reasoning, such as ‘humanity’, ‘thought’, and ‘life’, become separated.¹ One of the outcomes of Foucault’s deconstructive method claims to decentre absolutist claims of scientific and historical reasoning that privilege universal ideas about what human life is. Such universal or systematic claims (such as those made by colonialist or Eurocentric anthropological literatures) produce knowledge systems that are transportable tools for interpreting all other life experiences. Thus Foucault allows a place for other forms of knowledge to enter as solutions about ‘life’, ‘thought’, and ‘humanity’ that are intended to widen the scope of anthropology.

According to Foucault the history of humanity is a recent invention. In The Order of Things (1970) Foucault suggests that the study of man [sic] and the ‘solutions of anthropology’ have emerged at the threshold between Classical thought and Western modernity at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe. He is critical of ‘a profound historicity’ that he sees emerging at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a form of Western culture’s modern ‘age of reason’.² He noted how classification schemes that sought to identify the Same and the Other in a field of study implicitly privilege the representations of the classifier. Highly critical of theories of

¹ Michel Foucault, 1970 ‘Foreword to the English Edition’ in The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, Tavistock Publications Limited, London. Like Foucault, I am aware of the difficulty of speaking about ontological notions such as ‘what is life, in comparison to human-life?’ or epistemological notions such as ‘what is human-thought and knowledge as opposed to life experience?’ pp xiii–xx.
representation in 'the episteme of Western culture' during the nineteenth century, (such as natural orders of biology, comparative anatomy, evolutionary theory, and analyses of money wealth and value), Foucault reflects on the unreliability of the rational, historical and linear study of humanity. He sees that such a monolithic knowledge system is permeated with unspoken general grammars of 'science' that provide the illusion of a presumed historical continuity of ideas.

... as things become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development, and abandoning the space of representation, man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge. Strangely enough, man [sic] – the study of whom is supposed by the naive to be the oldest investigation since Socrates – is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an 'anthropology' understood as a universal reflection on man, halfeEmpirical, half-philosophical. It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he [sic] will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.5

The new form of knowledge that improves upon or surpasses 'anthropological' methodology and the human sciences emerges as a challenge to the Eurocentric thinking that once dominated colonial encounters in the 'new world'. Foucault's critique of the solutions of anthropology and history assists us in perceiving the possibility of different ways to interpret life and living conditions on planet earth. However, his critique of classical and modern humanism begs the question – if 'humanity' is not to be that focal point of study as one learns about the world around and within us, what or where is this Other focus?

Foucault's line of thinking suggests that a new form of knowledge will abandon the chimeras of the new humanisms couched in totalising truths that are 'half-empirical, half-philosophical'. Colonial anthropology is a type of nineteenth century humanism that has built scientific, historical and European ways of thinking that create and govern a colonial interpretation of Otherness. A derivative of colonialism and classical humanism is the assumption that the historical progress of scientific thought and achievement in Western culture has resulted in the potential for a unified theory of what human life constitutes. Foucault argues that decentering Western philosophical truth-claims in relation to 'what humanity is' opens up 'a space in which it is once more possible to think.'6

Foucault is critical of the philosophical foundations of anthropology that circumscribe a Westernised transcendental notion of 'what man is', knowable as a summation of the variety of locations and contexts of life-experience. German anthropologist, Michael Landmann provides an example of philosophical anthropology in which he centralises all the problems of the philosophical inquiry around the question: what is man [sic]? Citing Max Scheler during what he sees as the anthropological renaissance of the 1920s, Landmann observes that 'If there is a philosophical task whose solution our age needs with singular desperation it is that of philosophical anthropology. I

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mean a basic science on the nature and constitution of man’. In contrast to the presuppositions of thinkers like Scheler and Landmann, Foucault contends that:

... we find philosophy falling asleep once more... this time not the sleep of Dogmatism, but that of Anthropology... The anthropological configuration of modern philosophy consists in... the precritical analysis of what man [sic] is in his essence [and] becomes the analytic of everything that can, in general, be presented to man’s experience...

In order to awaken thought from such a sleep... in order to recall it to the possibilities of its earliest dawning, there is no other way than to... [reject] not only psychologism and history, but all concrete forms of anthropological prejudice...

Anthropology constitutes perhaps the fundamental arrangement that has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought from Kant until our own day. This arrangement is essential, since it forms part of our history; but it is disintegrating before our eyes, since we are beginning to recognise and denounce in it, in a critical mode, both a forgetfulness of the opening that made it possible and a stubborn obstacle standing obstinately in the way of an imminent new form of thought.

I think Foucault’s iconoclastic method of philosophy aims to undermine the European thinking thing that has initiated anthropological research with preconceived notions about human life. Almost hypocritically or self-reflexively, Foucault enters into a transcendental solution to this problem of anthropological prejudice, suggesting that one possible solution ‘is a matter of crossing the anthropological field, tearing ourselves free from it with the help of what it [philosophy] expresses, and rediscovering a purified ontology or radical thought of being’. I think this Foucauldian analysis suggests a transformation of anthropological methods and Indigenous studies to approach the study of anthropological subjects from a new perspective. Geertz’s interpretive anthropology is an example of the opening up of anthropology to interdisciplinary nomenclature, ideologies, and practices to accommodate alternative worldviews and social structures that are apparent in Indigenous studies.

Foucault’s critique of philosophical anthropology employs a post-structural critical method and is also a form of postcolonial discourse. Anthropologists such as Scheler and Landmann represent the anthropologies of classical European philosophy, while Geertz, and Ganguly-Scrase (in Chapter 1) represent newer forms of anthropological enquiry sensitive to Eurocentric philosophical biases applied to research subjects. Foucault’s way of opening up a scientific discourse of human life to other ways of thinking is vital when reflecting on Indigenous cultural Law, Indigenous philosophy, and society. From this type of deconstructionist thinking it can be seen how Indigenous elders who were once labelled with implicit condescension as magicians of a pre-historical era are now talked about as caretakers and traditional owners of cultural knowledge and Law in contemporary society.

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9 Ibid., p 341.
The episteme of Western culture (or the intellectual models that have arisen out of an ‘Age of Reason’) has privileged ‘man’ as a thinking thing. When a researcher brought up in this Western tradition is confronted by what they understand to be non-ordinary thought processes, such thought processes may be deemed irrational thought, or be seen as metaphysical thinking, or emotional thinking that is subordinate to rational thinking processes. Thus Western science has in the past tried to classify Indigenous Australian knowledge using terms and conditions of Western inspired social or psychological experiences in order to clarify Indigenous metaphysical principles of thought.

Thus the episteme has knowledge-producing agencies not adequately equipped to understand and label ‘non-ordinary’ or so-called marginal cultural philosophies of Indigenous peoples. The whole classification of Indigenous Australian ‘religion’ that refers to ‘logic of a different order’, or ‘cultural heritage of a sensitive (secret-sacred) nature’ is a signified observation of Indigenous spirituality without using the word “spiritual”. Indigenous cultural Laws that show land-human relations and land-human perceptions reveal a combined type of simultaneous ecological-psychological interpretation of space-time experience. The coining and combining of multiple phrases that denote Indigenous Australian cultural Law as spiritual perception is intended to show that Indigenous spirituality and culture is, despite painstaking methods of analysis, nonetheless, unclassifiable in terms of the episteme of Western philosophy.

**Turnbull on Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge systems**

The way I perceive Foucault’s new forms of knowledge can be better clarified by David Turnbull’s use of Foucauldian and Kuhnian scientific discourse contrasted with his description of Geertz’s interpretive anthropology. In Turnbull’s book *Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers: Comparative Studies in the Sociology of Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge* (2000) he explores two outcomes of Thomas Kuhn’s work on ‘paradigm shifts’:

a) How do practitioners of science build paradigmatic models of scientific theory?

b) How do practitioners of science share and agree on scientific puzzle solutions?

In the first outcome a) Turnbull indicates that formation of a disciplinary (scientific) matrix is practical, in which ‘acquiring a paradigm is more like acquiring and

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10 David Turnbull, 2000 ‘Chapter 1. “On with the motley”: The contingent assemblage of knowledge spaces’ in Mason’s, Trickster’s and Cartographers: makers of knowledge and space, Harwood Academic Publishers, Abingdon, Marston, Amsterdam. Turnbull argues that: ‘This challenging of the totalising discourses of science by other knowledge systems is what Foucault had in mind when he claimed that we are “witnessing an insurrection of subjuggated knowledges”, and corresponds to an emphasis on the local that has emerged in anthropology at least since Clifford Geertz’s *Interpretation of Cultures*: In his critique of global theories and his emphasis on “thick description” Geertz pointed out that cultural meanings cannot be understood at the general level because they result from complex organisations of signs in a particular context, that the way to reveal the structures of power attached to the global discourse is to set the local knowledge in contrast with it... At the same time we need to recognise that theory and practice are not distinct; theorising is a local practice.’ pp 44-45.
applying a skill than like understanding and believing a statement’. Traditional Western scientific cultural approaches seemingly provide fundamental laws that have the appearance of being far tidier and practicable (like a)) than the reality of a social intercourse in which agreements and learned similarities are fleshed out (like b)) In this sense a), paradigm shifts take place in consciousness as a new model or philosophy of scientifically amenable realities. Turnbull focuses, rather, on the second usage b) of paradigm shift that provides key sociological perspectives on scientific debate and use that are systemised as a theory in a).

In the second outcome b) Turnbull examines paradigmatic exemplars that are seen as shared examples of puzzle solutions based on ‘agreements about which kind of problems are sufficiently similar as to be treated in the same way.’ He argues that:

If we allow theory the less dominant role of ‘the pattern that connects’, an increased emphasis falls on human activity in the production of scientific knowledge. It is in large part because of its philosophical origins in the epistemological critiques of foundationalism that SSK [the sociology of scientific knowledge] was initially heavily concerned with the problems of representation. Recent work has shown a shift towards the performative nature of knowledge production.

Turnbull also indicates that discourses that invoke a division between ‘Western and so-called primitive knowledge systems... [have] turned crucially on the question of the rationality of science’. Like Foucault, Turnbull shows that the Western rationality of science is impacted by Other philosophical and social structures that transform universalising and one-sided knowledge systems. In this sense, Turnbull sees that global theories of scientific measurements are transported into a local social setting, where scientific knowledge meshes with local knowledge to provide results. The sociology of sharing and agreeing about specialised (scientific) knowledge production is a way Turnbull sees as creating a shared Scientific and Indigenous knowledge discourse. He provides a brief overview of how many Indigenous Australians think in terms of a cultural map. This ‘cultural map’ is a specialised form of Indigenous Australian knowledge (comparable with Western science) that has been shared in part with and documented by Western researchers.

Turnbull argues that ‘Aboriginal maps in whatever form [bark paintings, sand sculptures, body painting, or rock art] are typically landscape maps depicting known places in the geographical environment... Everyone has a spiritual linkage to the land by virtue of birth such that they are the land’. In statements such as Turnbull’s made about Indigenous Spirituality, I understand that Indigenous Australians in general have a developed sense of spiritual perception that combines experiences of Australian lands with Aboriginal minds and bodies past and present knowable as one symbiotic entity. Kevin Gilbert, a Wuradjeri man, reiterates this point claiming that ‘Not only did the land belong to them [Indigenous Australians], but they belonged to

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12 Ibid., p 9.
13 Ibid., p 12.
14 Ibid., p 12.
15 Ibid., pp 38-40.
16 Ibid., pp 33-34.
it – now and for ever’. In relation to Indigenous cultural maps Gilbert suggests that in 1788:

There were no fences or boundaries in the European sense, but each tribal area was clearly defined by land marks such as mountain ranges, rocks, trees and waterholes which all had a rich cultural and spiritual significance for the people. Within these land-marks dwelt the spirits and totem gods that nourished, protected and gave continuing life to the owners of the tribal area.

Gilbert’s description signifies knowledge of land and place in relation to Indigenous socio-cultural and spiritual life experiences. Turnbull outlines Gilbert’s kind of description in terms of the rationality of a map. He explains that:

Aboriginal conceptions of identity with the land do not equate with the notions of boundary precision, exclusion and individual property rights and linkages to the state implicit in Western maps and knowledge spaces. Aboriginal maps, in celebrating that identity with the land, express a very different kind of knowledge space in which boundaries and their permeability are open to negotiation in ceremony and ritual.

Turnbull cites a Yolngu conception of place that ‘[does] not correspond to Western legal notions of enclosure but are more typically open and extendable “strings” of connectedness.’ His description of permeable Indigenous ‘map-boundaries’ negotiated by ceremony and ritual (cultural Law) is an indication of the fluid space of knowledge that can represent Indigenous Australian cultural Law as different to Western maps of land and society.

Turnbull further argues for the need to establish a joint working space between cultures that depends on a joint rationality. Turnbull cautions the reader, or potential reader-maker of cross-cultural discourses, with the following insight:

Perhaps it has to be acknowledged that there is a minimal rationality assumption, that links between rationalities can be created by common human endeavour. So given a lack of universal criteria of rationality, the problem of working disparate knowledge systems together is one of creating a shared knowledge space in which equivalences and connections between differing rationalities can be constructed. Communication, understanding, equality and diversity will not be achieved by others adopting Western information, knowledge, science and rationality. It will only come from finding ways to work together in joint rationalities and in knowledge spaces constituted through these joint rationalities.

The episteme of Western culture, the rationality of science, and the production of knowledge about a common life-world we all share, needs to address and accept the use and value of different ways of thinking and interacting in the life-world. Writers like F. David Peat address the need for joint rationalities between people of Native

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18 Ibid., p 3.


20 Ibid., p 37.

21 Ibid., p 13.
American nations and Western scientists in his work *Blackfoot Physics*. Joint-rationality is a comparative method between cultures and knowledge systems similar to Turnbull's work noted above. By coining the term ‘Indigenous science’ Peat has endeavoured to explain the ordered structure and function of an Indigenous society, for example, Native American farming methods, which involve story-telling and practical applications of mythological and metaphysical thinking to grow healthy crops. Turnbull applies the same method of showing the structure and function of three Indigenous societies (the Anasazi, the Inca, Australian Aborigines) characterised by a highly structured knowledge which is comparatively different to Western culture though just as effective in providing for a vast populace. ‘Indigenous science’ used by Peat to describe Indigenous philosophies of life I see as importantly not a derivative form of Western science.

While Western ‘scientific’ and ‘religious’ thinking are different ways of classifying experience, such systems of knowing the world are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Turnbull’s suggestion of a joint-rationality between Scientific and Indigenous knowledge recognises equally useful thought processes. There is no sense that one method of thinking is better than the other, or that one should replace the other. Rather, I think that joint-rationality suggests both methods are to be used side-by-side.

**Religious thinking in Indigenous Australian studies**

I believe that Aboriginal ‘religion’ is a broad way of describing the character of knowledge-systems found in Indigenous Australian cultural Law. ‘Religious thinking’ is a Non-Indigenous step towards appreciating Indigenous Australian philosophy and cultural Law as a pervasive everyday spiritual awareness. In a simplistic delineation, Foucault and Turnbull can be seen as comparing Other (Indigenous) knowledge with a Western philosophy of science and social reasoning, while Charlesworth, Katz and Swain are comparing Indigenous knowledge with a Western philosophy of religion.

Under this subheading I will:

a) explain Max Charlesworth’s proposal for a religious mindset methodology in studies of Indigenous Australian ‘religion’;

b) show how comparative religionist, Steven Katz claims that there is no (Western) philosophical or religious ground that can prove the existence of mystical experiences, yet mystical truth-claims are prevalent across a wide variety of cultures made by intelligent people; and

c) show how Non-Indigenous writer Tony Swain conceives a core ‘religious’ belief in all Indigenous Australian recorded experiences as land-place based, which is different from the Western historical time-space categorisations of human experience.

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24 F. David Peat, 1994 ‘Author to Reader’ in *Blackfoot Physics: A Journey into the Native American Universe*, op. cit. Peat explains that: ‘All these topics have been gathered together under the general rubric of Indigenous science, a term I have used following the lead of Pam Colorado, Leroy Little Bear, and others. While I am comfortable with this term Indigenous science, I am also part of the Western sciences tribe and I can already sense the kind of objections that it’s members could make: ‘Why do you use the term science?’... Science is a specific and disciplined approach that was developed in the West. Indigenous people have traditions, folklore, and mythology.’ pp xi-xii.
a) Max Charlesworth’s Indigenous Australian ‘religion’. I believe that ‘religious’ or spiritual thinking is a useful subject for postcolonial methods of enquiry into Indigenous Australian culture. I follow Foucault’s philosophical implications that widen the scope of anthropological methodologies by paying particular attention to how ‘religious’ thinking can be perceived as a way of talking about Indigenous Australian spiritual awareness. Such ‘religious’ perceptions are often located in discussions of Indigenous cultural Law. In studying Foucault and Turnbull it can be seen how dominant Eurocentric philosophies of humanity and culture hold to a different philosophical base compared to Indigenous Australian cultural Law. Max Charlesworth in his introduction to Religion in Aboriginal Australia (1984) noted that comparative religion was a mode of enquiry useful in determining the tenets of any local Indigenous Australian cultural law, which is presumed to be spiritually based:

The scientific and philosophic investigation of religious phenomena inevitably raises questions about the religious predispositions of the investigators. Clearly, one does not need to be a religious practitioner in order to observe and study religion. On the other hand, if one believes that religion is an infantile illusion, or a form of ‘collective neurosis’, or a kind of ‘opium’, or at best a mechanism of social cohesion, it will be difficult to enter sympathetically into the religious ‘life world’ and to understand it from the inside. In the case of Australian Aboriginal religion, while anthropologists have been forced to recognize the centrality and importance of religion in Aboriginal life, they have tended to concentrate on the rational and pragmatic aspects of Aboriginal religion in a neo-Durkheimian way. It is perhaps because of this that we have not had empathetic ‘inside’ accounts of Aboriginal religions that would compare with certain of the accounts of North American Indian religions. As Burridge... has said: ‘The reality of religious life as the religious themselves have expressed it, has been almost totally lacking in studies of Aboriginal religion.’ One must also note, however, that part of the difficulty of providing this kind of account of Aboriginal religious life stems from the fact that it often involves the white observer being admitted by Aboriginal confidants to knowledge of secret-sacred matters. Some observers who have been admitted to such knowledge and participated in certain ‘deep law’ ceremonies, believe that to publish reports on such things would be to break trust with Aboriginal confidants and to expose them to ritual danger.²⁵

Charlesworth’s commentary implies that Non-Indigenous investigators who seek knowledge of Indigenous secret-sacred matters must come to terms with the centrality of ‘religion’ in Aboriginal life. In the course of such enquiry investigators must also come to terms with their own understanding of a religious mindset or belief in non-European, otherworldly, non-ordinary phenomena. This question of Non-Indigenous Spirituality implicitly becomes a comparative study between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous notions of Spirituality.

Charlesworth notes that ‘inside’ accounts of Aboriginal Australian religion do not compare with certain Native American religions. Native American, Black Elk revealed Oglala-Sioux sacred pipe beliefs to Joseph Epes Brown.²⁶ Richard Kimber claims that the Black Elk narrative is an autobiographical account by a Native

²⁵ Max Charlesworth, 1984 ‘Introduction’ in Religion In Aboriginal Australia: An Anthology, ed. by Max Charlesworth, Howard Murphy, Diane Bell and Kenneth Maddock, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, Australia, pp 15-16.
²⁶ See particularly, Joseph Epes Brown, 1953 The sacred pipe: Black Elk’s account of the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, USA.
American medicine man. 27 Lame Deer has written an autobiography in collaboration with Non-Indigenous editor Richard Erdoes, which similarly reveals the difference between Lakota sacred-cultural beliefs and Western American society. 28 An ethnographical ‘insider’ account submitted in a Native Title claim Connection Report is the kind of cultural and historical detail that is required in fulfilling the binding legal process of Indigenous land-use agreements 29 for Native Title determinations. 30

Dr. Julie Finlayson has argued that in establishing Connection Reports during the early stages of Native Title claims ‘Anthropologists have observed that materials [Indigenous] claimants wish to restrict are not confined solely to culturally sensitive information but may include personal information too. For these reasons, some restrictions on open access [to the details of Connection Reports] will be warranted. 31 Finlayson’s insight into the legal process of Native Title claims is sensitive to the secret-sacred cultural knowledge restriction asserted by Indigenous claimants.

Jeremy Beckett, anthropologist at the University of Sydney, has noted that Carlos Castaneda’s work on Native American shamanism 32 is comparable to A.P. Elkin’s work on Aboriginal Men of High Degree, 33 and Mircea Eliade’s work on shamanism. 34 Beckett claims that neither Elkin nor anyone else to his knowledge has tried ‘like Castaneda, to become the sorcerer’s apprentice.’ 35

The reputation of Castaneda’s anthropological methodology is contentious. 36 Anthropologists, like Beckett, are impressed with Castaneda’s experiential narratives that claim Indigenous ancient-Mexican subjectivity. Alternatively, Richard De Mille

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34 See particularly, Mircea Eliade, 1964 Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, trans. by W.R. Trask, Princeton University Press; and,
36 The validity of Castaneda’s anthropological academic research has been explored in, Darren Drake, 1999 Indigenous Australian Spirituality As Alternate Worldview: A Postcolonial Discourse of Indigenous Identity and Sacred Law, Deakin University Honours Thesis, [manuscript], p 67.
has questioned the authenticity of Castaneda’s fieldwork claiming that the ethnographic material was assembled from library archives in UCLA,37 where Castenada was doing graduate work for the Anthropology Department in the 1960s.38 De Mille constructs a number of proofs that Castaneda is a fraud intent on selling academic-styled mysticism for money and fame.39 De Mille cites in Castaneda’s works implausible detail (such as word for word, action by action transcription of Don Juan’s teachings, and Castaneda often does not have a field notebook or recording equipment present in the field), absence of necessary detail (the subjective narrative style is unscientific), implicit new age cross-cultural references to other ‘religions’ (such as zen, auras, drug hallucinations). He also includes papers that defend Castaneda to build up a case for and against this kind of subjective ‘ethnomethodological paradigm’. In De Mille’s collected critical works of Castaneda, Mary Douglas claims that Castaneda’s ‘remarkable document throws a big spanner in the works of anthropologists who have put much more doing than he has into the recording of primitive religions’.40 Douglas uses Castaneda’s syntax of ‘doing’ to suggest that Eurocentric anthropologists have predominantly used rationalist documentary techniques as a form of physical doing, as opposed to Castaneda whose interactionist ethnomethodology aspires to document shamanic practice, as a logical metaphysical ‘not-doing’. Castaneda’s active participation has apparently stretched the logic and academic requirements of anthropological research by actually attempting to live the lifestyle he was investigating.

Castaneda spoke of a unique ethnomethodological paradigm in which he entered into ‘the cognition of the shamans of ancient Mexico’, which Don Juan considered was intrinsically different from the cognition of modern Western life.41 His claim about cognitive differences is a similar argument to Turnbull’s comparison between Scientific and Indigenous knowledge. In Castaneda’s estimation, Western ‘cognition’ should not be considered to be an exclusively secular mode of thinking, nor a religious, or philosophical mode of thinking. His anthropological research argues that shamanic ‘cognition’ is unique and of a non-philosophical or non-Western variety. Castaneda’s Non-Indigenous ‘insider’ account claims Indigenous subjectivity and knowledge of a secret-sacred culture-specific knowledge. In Turbet’s view, Indigenous Australian elders are often forbidden from revealing secret-sacred cultural matters.42 In relation to Australian Aboriginal ‘deep’ law knowledge obtained by Elkin from a variety of Indigenous informants, Beckett explains that ‘Elkin relays what he has been told with the caution that one is never told everything’.43 From this analysis of ‘insider accounts’, I claim that it is difficult for cultural ‘outsiders’ (such as Non-Indigenous researchers) to assess whether they have obtained authentic ‘insider’ ethnographic detail from any particular Indigenous informant.

Charlesworth speaks (above) of some observers who feel that to publish reports on Indigenous deep law ceremonies ‘would be to break trust with Aboriginal confidants,

37 Richard De Mille, ed., 1980 Don Juan Papers, Ross-Erickson Publishers, Santa Barbara, CA, USA.
and to expose them to ritual danger'. Due to the secret-sacred nature of cultural Laws, seen in events such as initiation rites practiced in many Indigenous communities, observation by outsiders can be seen as abbreviated or partial forms of sacred knowledge.\(^{44}\) Western observers of Aboriginal initiation rites seemingly draw speculative conclusions about what they have seen because initiated Indigenous informants often evade such questioning for fear of placing themselves in ritual danger. Peter Turbet indicates that during certain rites performed in the Sydney district:

...initiates learnt about the Sky Hero at the ceremony and heard the sacred mythology, which was usually presented in song form. At south coast bunan rituals the head gommera [clever man] threatened to kill the youths if they revealed information about [ancestor spirits] back at camp. The novices also began to learn a special language known only to initiates and spoken only at ceremonies.\(^{45}\)

From Turbet’s account it can be seen why Indigenous informants in general are evasive when an outsider asks questions about sacred objects and ceremonial knowledge. To prevent the effects of ‘ritual danger’ Indigenous caretakers, such as Nose-peg,\(^{46}\) perform ceremonies for general public viewing with choreographic variations that present the illusion of traditional ceremony without revealing the actual cultural reality of deep law knowledge. In Elkin’s case of knowing that he probably has not been shown everything, as in Nose-peg’s partial ceremonial presentations, and due to the secret-sacred Law observed in numerous Indigenous communities, it is apparent that many archival records on Indigenous cultural Law may in fact be radically incomplete.

Non-Indigenous researchers have struggled to document Indigenous cultural life and especially their spiritually based systems of knowledge. I believe this is often due to the secret-sacred character of Indigenous ‘deep law’ culture. Thus the accuracy of anthropological and cultural texts that document Indigenous ‘religion(s)’ is implicitly brought into question. Writers insensitive to Indigenous secret-sacred cultural Laws tend to: neglect spiritual consciousness as irrational; consider such knowledge as irrelevant or ‘primitive’ in a secular society; consider such knowledge as non-democratic, and thus not open to free thinking enquiry and research; or writers presume they have an authentic all-inclusive spiritually accurate account of an Indigenous cultural experience recorded in print, on audio, or film.

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\(^{44}\) Peter Turbet, 2001 (1989) op. cit. In Turbet’s chapter on ‘initiation’ there is seemingly a lot of guesswork presented by the Western observers of Aboriginal initiation rites. He notes that: ‘At Dargmung rites carvings of emus, wombats, possums, kangaroos, goannas and gliders appeared on the trees. The etchfield figures were images of [ancestor spirits]. At the Sydney yoolung eraballung witnessed by D. Collins in February 1795, no ground or tree carvings were noticed. It might be that Collins was not allowed to see them, but R.H. Mathews believes that Collins observed an abbreviated form of initiation, called kudsha on the south coast, where no such reproductions were made. Possibly, in the Sydney area, rock engravings replaced the ground carvings’. pp 114-115.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p 124.

b) Steven Katz's mystical truth claims. Cross-cultural philosopher of religion, Steven Katz, argues that cultural and epistemological differences should be recognised in standard discussions of mysticism and mystical experience. He argues for cultural tolerance of non-ordinary ideas from a position of philosophical analysis, not as an insider privy to mystical experiences. I think Katz's ideas help explain why Indigenous Australian spiritual descriptions of land and life appear to be weak truth-claims when couched in the intellectual and communicative framework of Euro-Australian rationality. In the way Foucault criticises philosophical biases in Western anthropology, Katz criticises philosophical biases in Western religious thinkers. Katz proposes that:

There are major, perhaps insuperable, problems involved in the issue of trying to verify mystical claims, if by verification we mean the strong thesis that independent grounds for the claimed event/experience can be publicly demonstrated... As a corollary of this view it also seems correct to argue that no veridical propositions can be generated on the basis of mystical experience. As a consequence it appears certain that mystical experience is not and logically cannot be the grounds for any final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position nor, more particularly, for any specific dogmatic or theological belief. Whatever validity mystical experience has, it does not translate itself into 'reasons' which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition. Thus, in the final analysis, mystical or more generally religious experience is irrelevant in establishing the truth or falsity of religion in general or any specific religion in particular.

Despite the strict limitation being placed on the justificatory value of mystical experience, it is not being argued either that mystical experiences do not happen, or that what they claim may not be true, only that there can be no grounds for deciding this question, i.e. of showing that they are true even if they are, in fact, true. Moreover, even this disclaimer requires the further declaration that, though no philosophical argument is capable of proving the veracity of mystical experience, one would be both dogmatic and imprudent to decide a priori that mystical claims are mumbo-jumbo, especially given the wide variety of such claims by men [sic] of genius and/or intense religious sensitivity over the centuries as well as across all cultural divisions. Nor does it seem reasonable to reduce these multiple and variegated claims to mere projected 'psychological states' which are solely the product of interior states of consciousness.47

Katz's argument indicates that the truth or falsity of any religious experiences is not verifiable by philosophical analysis, and requires a different investigative procedure in order to show that mystical experience truth-claims have taken place in many cultures. He claims that mystical states of awareness cannot be talked about accurately from the point of view of a dogmatic scientific or a dogmatic religious intellectual position. Though he is rather dismissive of any analytical attempts to report on mystical states of consciousness, he does not dismiss the reality that mystical or religious states of being have existed for many people from a wide variety of cultural divisions. I believe that many Indigenous Australian cultures are ensconced in a 'living religion' or active spirituality, a phenomenon noticeable in the proliferation of Native Title Claims throughout Australia.

In claiming that religious truth-claims cannot be verified by philosophical argument, Katz's argument suggests that colonialisit practices in general have not understood the truth and reasoning behind Indigenous religious experiences. Eurocentric universalist ideologies that have attempted to assimilate all useful knowledge-systems into the philosophical and social expansion of colonies, Empires, and centralised knowledge-productions, have not understood the value of Indigenous religious experiences. In respect to Indigenous Australian 'religion' or 'cultural Law', mystical consciousness is not only possible, but it creates binding social conditions, such as the 'knowledge' that Indigenous Australian traditional cultures claim to hold. This is not a neo-Durkheimian argument to recognise mystical consciousness as a psychologically induced social contract. It is a way to present Indigenous Australians not as walking mystics, religious fanatics or greenies, but (to use a Eurocentrism) as serious minded philosophers of modern culture and life experience.

Katz further argues that there is no Huxleyean\(^{48}\) perennial (or universalisable) philosophy in which all mystical experiences across cultures are the same. In Katz's estimation it is not true that all 'religions' reflect 'an underlying similarity which transcends cultural or religious diversity'.\(^{49}\) He concludes that the fundamentally important differences in mystical experiences between cultures is not often recognised. This pertains to our argument that Non-Indigenous researchers of Indigenous Australian cultural law often transform their understanding of the Indigenous cultural milieu into a Non-Indigenous philosophical base. Although well informed about the symbols and ceremonies of Indigenous cultural Laws, Non-Indigenous spiritual perception of Australian lands will not necessarily be the same as any particular Indigenous cultural Law.

The white editor and black informant relationship that characterises the data formulation and collection process of Eurocentric Aboriginal studies has in recent times been transformed by accounts produced by Indigenous writers and researchers utilising Western discourse methods. What is 'mystical and non-ordinary' in Western discourse is seen as 'normal and coherent' to Indigenous Australian thinkers. Patrick Dodson, one-time Director of the Central Lands Council has said:

> The English word 'dreaming' can be misleading because the concepts which it translates are exceedingly complex and largely unrelated to the English meaning of the word. These concepts are often alternatively described as 'The Law'. They are a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths which govern the whole of life.\(^{50}\)

Thus use of the terms 'cultural Law', 'traditional culture', 'spiritual culture', 'Indigenous Australian Spirituality' or 'traditional Law' are Western concepts that in general refer to what has been dubbed 'the Dreaming' in anthropological discourses in

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\(^{48}\) Aldous Huxley, 1946 *The Perennial Philosophy*, Chatto & Windus, London. Inspired by the work *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901) by philosopher-psychologist William James, in which he proposed a theory that homogenises all religious experience as a reflection of a universally applicable psychological state. Ninin Smart countered this argument by pointing out that the register for the varieties of religious experiences is unfinished; see particularly, Smart, Ninian, 1988 'The Convergence of Religion' in *Religion and Comparative Thought*, edited by Purisottoma Bilimoria and Peter Fenner, Sri Saiguru Publications - Indian Books Centre, Delhi, India, p 252.


the past 100 years of scholarship. Traditional Indigenous Australian culture is often referred to as a land-based cultural/spiritual experience. Thus cultural Law in Dodson’s formulation can be talked about as ‘a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths that govern the whole of life’. The ‘Dreaming’ is thus not separated from a practical knowledge that Indigenous caretakers and owners use to govern the upkeep of their homelands.

c) Tony Swain as land-place based categorisations of human experience. Tony Swain argues that ‘If there is one principle permeating the Law it is geosophy: all knowledge and wisdom derives, through Abiding Events (Dreamings), from place.’51 I think that Swain’s exceedingly complex geosophy that transcends the limits of Western philosophical analyses loosely refers to the ‘religious’ character of Indigenous traditional Law. Notions such as ‘history’, ‘monotheism’, ‘society’, ‘polytheism’, ‘theism’, ‘song’, ‘ancestor spirit’ or any locus of meaning rooted in a Eurocentric attempt to totalise or globalise the meaning of Indigenous cultural Law(s) is an incomplete register of Indigenous cultural and sacred facts. Swain points out that Edmund Husserl was shaken by his brief encounter with Aboriginal thought.52 Husserl indicated that Aboriginal society and ways of thinking did not merely represent a lack of historicity but positively ‘a humanity whose life is enclosed in a vital tradition’.53 Swain believes ‘the essence of that tradition is place and that Aboriginal interpretation of changes to their life-world has been cast in terms of space rather than history.’54 Swain’s argument circumscribes geographical place as a fundamental source of knowledge that endures beyond the transformations of time on sacred places. Alternatively, Katz’s argument indicates that although mystical states of being have been reported, they are not representable as a philosophy or as a religion.

Non-Indigenous writers have found the topic of the Aboriginal conception of time a difficult process of translation. ‘Time’ is a Western measurement of temporality and historicity that is not ‘always’ foundationally or ontologically present in Aboriginal thinking. The hermeneutics of time in Aboriginal studies has lead to folly in regard to understanding Aboriginal sacred sites, customs, thoughts, land-transactions. Though ancestor spirits who created Aboriginal Australians and their sacred sites existed in a pre-historical timeframe, that pre-history of creation continues to exist in the present. Charlesworth has noted the scholarship surrounding the etymology of Aranda linguistic phrases (associated with the notion alcheringa) to refer to the ‘ancestor spirits who laid down the Law’, with the connotations ‘immortal’, ‘uncreated’, ‘the Dreaming’, ‘to see with eternal vision’.55 Swain likewise refers to scholarship that has in a number of examples (vague phrases such ‘distinctive energy potential’, ‘ethicmic forces’, ‘fourth dimensions’ that allude to Aboriginal spirituality, thinking and cultural Law) have sought to capture the essence of what ‘the Aboriginal conception of time’ is. Swain prefers W.E. Stanner’s phrase in which he considered the

52 Ibid. Swain’s reading of M. Merleau-Ponty’s ‘Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man’ shows that both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty were interested in the a-historical philosophical ramifications of Aboriginal Australian society. Merleau-Ponty asked: ‘... is it actually possible for us, who live in certain historical traditions, to conceive of the historical possibility of societies... in which our concept of history is simply absent. p 4.
53 Ibid. Husserl is quoted in Merleau-Ponty who has been read into Swain’s discourse. p 4.
54 Ibid., p 4.
relationship between Dreaming and time and concluded that 'one cannot “fix” the Dreaming in time: it was, and is, everywhen.'56 'Everywhen' is a concept similar to Patrick Dodson's 'coherent and all-encompassing body of truths that govern the whole of life' that tries to briefly explain the holistic philosophical foundation of Indigenous Australian cultural Law(s).

The point of Swain outlining Indigenous Australian cultural Law as inherently a geosophy, or land-based knowledge, indicates that a form of Indigeneity can be learned by studying the colonial records of government, anthropological, social, business, and political records of the last two hundred years in Australia and map the land according to how Indigenous people have spoken and continue to speak about it. Swain is not suggesting a pan-Aboriginality based solely on Aboriginal land claims — it is more subtle in the sense that geosophy refers simply to place as a site where land and thought evoke an eternal presence of spiritual connection in Non-Indigenous estimates gleaned from Indigenous cultural Law and ceremonies.

Such thinking is indicative of two forms of 'Indigeneity' — an Aboriginal Australian 'Indigeneity' (that Dodson and Gilbert see as different from European conceptions of 'land' and 'Law'), and a Non-Indigenous representation of Aboriginal 'Indigeneity' (which Swain would argue is in part a geosophy). Non-Indigenous 'religious' thinking approaches a sensitivity to the secret-sacred reasoning behind Indigenous Australian cultural Law, though is not an identifiable representation of Indigenous spiritual experience and Law.

Two general types of religious ‘Indigeneity’ in Australia
I am concerned with notions that pertain to modern Australians identifying with an ‘Indigenous’ paradigm within which a religious mindset is explored and utilised to classify life experiences.

The sense of Indigeneity covered by this thesis focuses on Non-Indigenous formulations of Indigenous spiritual knowledge. There is a sense in which Indigenous 'spiritual knowledge' collapses into a concept of Indigenous 'cultural Law'. And there are two senses of Indigeneity: Australian First Nation People's Indigeneity, and Euro-Australian or Western Indigeneity. It is the ideological development of Euro-Australian talk and writing about Indigeneity that is the focus of postcolonial critical thinking in this thesis. The concept of Indigeneity incurs two meanings that differentiate between the human life-mind origins of First Nations Indigenous (Aboriginal Australian) people and Non-Indigenous people.

It is the question 'What is Indigeneity?' that attracts Non-Indigenous writers to speak about Spirit-human interactions in the modern world. Jim Everett, a Tasmanian Aborigine (Palawa,57 or Koori), states that in Aboriginal Men of High Degree (1977) anthropologist A.P. Elkin's lifelong survey of Australian Aboriginal society:

...gives an insight into how white society perceives the mystic, spiritual, and psychic world of Aboriginal people. It shows too the inability of the Western world, which has

57 Jay M. Arthur, 1996, op. cit. 'Palawa' is a term used by Tasmanian Aboriginals that has recently replaced the use of 'Koori'. See 'Koori', p 234.
lost contact with its indigenous mentality and its spiritual world, to participate in the
Spirit-human interaction.\textsuperscript{56}

Everett claims that Elkin ‘brings out the views but not the inner workings’\textsuperscript{59} of
Indigenous Australian tribal practice and their mystical worldviews. Everett argues for
the recognition of Indigenous principles or philosophies to counter Western-framed
anthropological analysis of Indigenous Australians. In response to Everett’s difficult
proposition (almost a utopian ideology) that ‘failure to achieve recognition and
practice of indigenous principles will end this era of human life on planet Earth’,\textsuperscript{60} I
have strived to understand the need to adopt Indigenous principles, such as ecological
conservation, native title, oral histories and spiritual business associated with
Indigenous Australian people all of which pertain to a (postcolonial) interpretation of
Indigenous Australian cultural Law. Commentators, such as Gelder and Jacobs, show
how secular attitudes question the relevance of modern Aboriginal sacredness in
modern Australian society (investigated in Chapter 3). Elkin’s type of Non-
Indigenous desire to develop an Indigenous way of thinking drives David Tacey’s
psychological analysis of Australian societal attitudes in his book \textit{Edge of the Sacred:}
\textit{Transformation in Australia} (1994) (investigated in Chapter 4). In the same way,
Stephen Muecke problematises Euro-Australian attitudes and cultural constructions of
‘Indigeneity’. His literary analyses show philosophical and cultural differences
between Western and Aboriginal societal structures and functions.

Inspired by Mircea Eliade, Max Charlesworth tends to promote a philosophy of
comparative religion with a focus on ‘primal religions’.\textsuperscript{61} Thus he proposes that
‘primal’ religious studies as a form of Indigenous cultural studies in a cross-
Indigenous context, as a sub-category of comparative religion. Cross-Indigeneity
studies mean a comparison between, for example, Native Americans and Aboriginal
Australians, or Hunkpapa Sioux and Walpiri nations. Turnbull has conducted a brief
cross-Indigeneity study in order to show how non-European cultures have complex
knowledge systems on a par with Euro-knowledge systems.

In his essay the ‘Indigenous Literature of Australia’ Mudrooroo has an optimistic
approach to a shared vision of a multicultural republic in Australia: ‘The Dreaming is
increasingly seen as the heritage of all Australians and the songlines of our Indigenous
ancestors the great epics singing the land, part of our common heritage’.\textsuperscript{62} Mudrooroo
believes that a Non-Indigenous appropriation of Indigenous Australian culture is
possible but not desirable or legitimate in the eyes of Indigenous Australian owners
and caretakers of land and cultural Law. He compares the new-Republic ideal as

\textsuperscript{56} Jim Everett, 1993 ‘Foreword’ in A.P. Elkin’s \textit{Aboriginal Men of High Degree: Initiation and Sorcery in the World’s Oldest Tradition}, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont 05767, USA, p ix.
\textsuperscript{59} Jim Everett, 1993 ‘Foreword’ in A.P. Elkin, \textit{op. cit.}, p xiii.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p xiii.
\textsuperscript{61} Charlesworth, \textit{op. cit.}, pp 12-13. Charlesworth notes that research conducted into all aspects of
Aboriginal religion has been predominantly done by — as of 1984 — ethnographers and anthropologists
and “while an enormous debt of gratitude is owed to them, it is a pity that very few scholars with
interests in the philosophy of religion or comparative religion have attempted to work in the area of
Aboriginal religion with a view to discussing it in a wider context... There remains a real need for
work of what Eliade calls ‘creative hermeneutics’ which would situate Aboriginal religions within a
wider religious and philosophical context.
\textsuperscript{62} Mudrooroo, 1997 \textit{The Indigenous Literature of Australia —Milla Milla Wangka}, Hyland House
Publishing Pty Ltd, South Melbourne, Australia, p 2.
being akin to the British Empire appropriating the Greek epics, such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* as inspiration for their imperial culture. Mudrooroo's perspective identifies how a Euro-Australian literary and ideological 'empire' can be created based on appropriated Aboriginal oral histories. I think the literary 'creation' of an Australian imperial heritage or the origins of a civilisation contain questions about 'Indigeneity' that raise further questions about the use and value of cultural origins in Australia. However, one should be wary of easy definitions of 'the Dreaming' or 'European-Indigeneity' as part of a multicultural republic. Attempts to translate European cultural ideas into an Indigenous Australian cultural landscape (or vice versa) are a hybridising process that potentially 'recolonises' and reinvents the secret-sacred dimension of Indigenous Australian cultural heritage.

In an effort to know Indigenous Australian cultural philosophy a number of Non-Indigenous writers draw on comparative models of society, magic, mysticism, religion, and iconography from other communities that appear to share a sense of 'Indigeneity'. For example, Elkin compared Aboriginal men of high degree with 'Tibet, a country characterized by psychic specialization.' Elkin performs a cross-cultural comparison between the Kundalini Serpent-Power of Tibetan yogis and 'the miwi, the cord, and the rainbow serpent' of the Yaralde Aboriginal Nation of the Lower Murray region. Though the separate cultural literatures reveal similar feats of non-ordinary perception ('telepathy', 'rapid travelling'), such supernatural feats are not necessarily of the same order of experience. It appears that Elkin tried to trace the migration patterns of tribal practices from Australia back north to an 'Oriental' source, which, in Elkin's research, implies that Aboriginal Australian religion is derived from Oriental cultures. Elkin states that:

I have referred to Tibetan occult practices principally because those of Aboriginal Australia seem to be of the same order, even if not so highly developed. They may even have degenerated from a common source...

Apart from the interesting problem of origin, Australian Aboriginal religion, with its emphasis on mysteries and degrees of initiation, its doctrines of pre-existence and reincarnation, and its belief in psychic powers, belongs to the Orient, not to the West, and can only be understood in the light of the Orient. In the past, the custom has been to study and judge Aboriginal religion and magic from the point of view of the Occident.

Elkin's research is an example of an anthropological academic theory that stems from a Eurocentric evolutionary biological perspective. More importantly, Elkin proposes a study of Aboriginal Australian religion with a view to showing that it is *almost* as advanced as he perceives Oriental (Tibetan) shamanism to be. Elkin also assumes that 'the Orient' in general can be characterised as 'scientifically experimental in religion'. If we delineate between 'Oriental' and an 'Occidental' religion as theoretical identity boundaries, we must realise that Indigenous Australian shamanism ('religion and magic') does not necessarily connote an Indo-Asian (Tibetan) origin, as suggested by Elkin. A narrative introduction to the video documentary *Koorie culture, Koorie control* (c. 1992) reads: 'We are the first Australians, we have been here since

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55 Ibid., pp 66-67.
56 Ibid., p 67.
the beginning of time.\textsuperscript{67} A number of Indigenous Australian (Koori) informants (Gilbert,\textsuperscript{68} Pettit,\textsuperscript{69} Clarke,\textsuperscript{70} Walker,\textsuperscript{71} Lovett,\textsuperscript{72} Hoffman,\textsuperscript{73} Morgan,\textsuperscript{74} Johnson,\textsuperscript{75} Chatfield\textsuperscript{76}) perceive that their spiritual and cultural traditions originated in the Australian continent itself. This contravenes anthropological research that insists on migratory or external origins of Indigenous Australian culture. Everett notes that he does not confirm or reject Elkin's details and 'should there be inaccuracies or misinterpretations by Elkin, then it is for representatives of the people he describes to state their views on his writings.'\textsuperscript{77}

Everett's concern is that the Western world needs to adopt Indigenous philosophy in order to better understand and function in the 'modern world'. He argues that Indigenous principles provide models of living in harmony with an environment that needs ecological attention and protection. Thus Indigenous principles from a Koori point of view contend that the human life world in Australia incorporates spiritual life experiences beyond the (Eurocentric) human mind-and-ethic world.

The two types of 'Indigeneity' exist in the form of a comparative difference between beliefs in human origins and Indigenous principles in Australia held by First Nations Aboriginal Australians and Non-Indigenous Euro-Australians. In the following chapters the effects of secular thinking and Non-Indigenous spiritual beliefs will be explored demonstrating how Indigenous Australians have often been misrepresented by Non-Indigenous ideas about what Indigenous Australia culture is.

Foucault's criticism of European philosophical anthropology as narrow-minded in relation to other ways of thinking is helpful in coming to terms with new

\textsuperscript{67} Koorie culture, Koori control [videorecording], c. 1992, writer and director, Russell Porter; producer, Lucy Maclaren, [Melbourne, Vic.], Film Victoria, Mozo Films.

\textsuperscript{68} Kevin Gilbert, 1973 [1994], A White Man Il Never Do It, op. cit., p. 3.

\textsuperscript{69} A.V. Darcy Pettit (Watti Watti man), in Koorie culture, Koori control [videorecording], c. 1992, op. cit. Pettit noted of his repeated bush experiences 'The spirits are with us all the time in everything we do. We're not screaming land rights, we're screaming tradition — spiritual stuff. We have to protect these burial sites... for future generations.'

\textsuperscript{70} Banjo Clarke (Gunditjmara man) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit. Clarke claimed that 'It's the spirits who sing out to us: don't forget our people. We feel the spirits are still with us.'

\textsuperscript{71} Colin Walker (Yorta Yorta man) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit. Walker explained that 'I got stacks of books at home but I don't read books. Still, until the day I die, I'll go by what I was told. And what I was told (by the old men) is coming true today.'

\textsuperscript{72} John Lovett (Gunditjmara man) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit. Lovett said 'I always feel a sense of spiritual contact when I come back to these areas. We [our ancestors] built houses around here [made of stone], yet we have often been stereotyped as nomads. These places were occupied and we're still here today.'

\textsuperscript{73} Elizabeth Hoffman (Gunditjmara woman) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{74} Des Morgan (Gunditjmara man) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit. Morgan said 'This land provides us with life. Old saying: you are what you eat. When we eat we eat a bit of the land. We still believe the land belongs to us and we belong to it. We been here since the creation cos we were created for this place. We didn't come from anywhere else and it's not in our oral history to say we come from anywhere else. So that's what I believe, and that's what our children today believe.'

\textsuperscript{75} Mélva Johnson (Gunditjmara woman) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit. Johnson said: 'Children are standing up in school for themselves saying they are not doing Captain Cook anymore because where does that leave us... Once they start thinking along those lines that we have got out history and we do not need to be told who we are and what we are.'

\textsuperscript{76} Tim Chatfield (Grenwird National Park Koori Liaison Officer) c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control, op. cit. Chatfield said noted: 'Burjiul created all things, Koori people, this national park...'

\textsuperscript{77} Everett, 1994, op. cit. p ix.
interpretations of ‘anthropology’. Turnbull’s cross-cultural view of Indigenous and Scientific knowledge production shows that both cultures hold different yet equally complex philosophies. He suggests that a joint rationality between Scientific and Indigenous knowledge with a common purpose is paramount to further reconciliation debates in Australia and abroad. Charlesworth and Swain claim that religious experience is very different from European philosophical and secular analysis. In order to approach an understanding of Aboriginal religion in any context, they argue that one must be sensitive to religious belief as an investigator who reproduces what Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge and religion is. It appears that ‘Indigeneity’ and ‘Aboriginal religion’ are contentious terms that suggest issues of cultural heritage, the continued protection of Australian homelands, environments, and ecologies, and that there are philosophical differences between Euro-Australian and Aboriginal representations of sacred cultural experiences in Australia.
Chapter 3

A Non-Indigenous Debate About 'The Modern Sacred' and Indigenous Australian Culture(s)

Recent debates on ‘Aboriginal sacredness’, in the context of its meaning and use in the wider Australian community, have in the words of Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs ‘radically disturbed the nation’s image of itself’.1 Gelder and Jacobs signify this ‘crisis of consciousness’ by presenting ‘Aboriginal sacredness’ and its discourses as uncanny diagnoses that inhabit ‘a modern, secularized nation state such as Australia’.2 The postcolonial commentary that Gelder and Jacobs construct in Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation (1998)3 sets up a field of power relations that are irreconcilable, in which Aboriginal sacredness is rendered arbitrary by oppositional and competing claims made on the codification of Indigenous Australian sacred sites, objects, and spiritual beliefs. I think that Gelder and Jacob’s text suggests a playful reading of Durkheim’s The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1915)4 and Freud’s essay on ‘The Uncanny’ (c. 1922).5 Gelder and Jacobs treat these texts out of the context in which they were written and without regard for terms under which Durkheim and Freud would have them understood, in order to make a point about the lack of understanding and respect with which Non-Indigenous people typically approach the Aboriginal sacred. The gesture is more poignant, because of the stature of Durkheim and Freud in modern European humanist thought and because they were both systematic thinkers — grand theory builders, whose theories have subsumed ‘primitive’ religious experience into a sociological or psychological secularising framework. I think that Gelder and Jacobs present the ‘modern Aboriginal sacred’ and forms of ‘Australian secular society’ by problematising both the sacred and the secular as equally unfamiliar in a postcolonial nation. Gelder and Jacobs’ postcolonial discourse suggests that ‘reconciliation is never a fully realisable category; it can never be completely settled.’6 I argue that a reconciliation discourse needs to address differences between secular and sacred modes of thinking about ‘Indigenous’ or Aboriginal sacred culture. In this chapter my main point is to show how inappropriate secular representations are when speaking of Indigenous Australian culture.

Under the postmodern conditions presented in their discourse, Gelder and Jacobs implicitly argue that Non-Indigenous significations of the structure and use of Aboriginal sacredness are valuable and fair contributions to wider interpretations of ‘the sacred’: ‘valuable’, in the sense that secular insights into the sacred in modern Australian society explain how the sacred works; and ‘fair’, in the sense that Non-Indigenous representations of the sacred are part of a democratic process that allows all


2 Ibid., p 1.


6 Ibid., p xvi.
people the right to explain how the sacred works in modern Australian society. This form of postmodern/postcolonial theorising functions as a paradigm of non-judgemental inclusivity, in which both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous notions of sacredness are represented. However, in their representation of what Indigenous sacredness is, Gelder and Jacobs illustrate the sacred and the modern nation with Durkheimian and Freudian theories of the sacred, which interpret the (Aboriginal) sacred in secularist terms.

Gelder and Jacobs perform a revisioning of both Freud’s and Durkheim’s theoretical models of Indigenous cultural aspects in and for a modern setting. Gelder and Jacobs perform an intellectual bloodsport in debunking Durkheim and Freud by using their own theories against them. They critique their reputation as specialists of ‘primitive’ psychology and culture, setting out inadequacies and shortcomings in their theoretical work, so as to demonstrate the limited scope of strictly secularist viewpoints in relation to Indigenous Australian cultures. It is important to show that notions of the uncanny and paradoxical ideas about the Aboriginal sacred being simultaneously ‘out of place’ and ‘all over the place’ in modern society, are Non-Indigenous explanations of the effects that Indigenous Australian cultural beliefs have had on (Non-Indigenous interpretations of) modern society. Gelder and Jacobs have used Non-Indigenous classically secular authors to describe ‘white anxiety’ over Indigenous cultural impact on modern society. What becomes apparent in Gelder and Jacobs’ narrative constructions is that a secular framework is shortsighted when Indigenous spirituality is talked about.

However, the focus in this chapter is on how secular mindsets interpret ‘religious’ or spiritual consciousness in a modern society. One of the outcomes that Gelder and Jacobs see in the course of reading *Uncanny Australia* is that their book has been neither pessimistic nor skeptical about the redistributive powers of postcoloniality... Rather, we are simply suggesting that the kind of postcolonial narrative we have been trying to shape through these pages might nevertheless need to build an uncanny experience of democracy into its structure.7

Gelder and Jacobs’ movement between secular and spiritual discourses in a debate about the nature of the modern sacred in Australian society informs the postcolonial narrative of their book. The ‘uncanny experience of democracy’ they have implicitly built into the structure of an Indigenous Australian postcolonial narrative, indicates that the democratic process of equal right to representation by all people living in Australia is challenged by differing perceptions of the modern sacred. Freud and Durkheim’s theories describe some of the possible effects Indigenous cultures have upon secular-minded people. Gelder and Jacobs use Freud and Durkheim to explain the anxiety expressed by Non-Indigenous debates about the modern sacred.

**Use of Eurocentric paradigms to define ‘the sacred’**
Gelder and Jacobs use Eurocentric paradigms to qualify their initial statement that ‘Some of us think of Aboriginal sacredness as anachronistic in a modern, secularized nation state such as Australia.’8 By saying that ‘some of us think of Aboriginal sacredness as...’ Gelder and Jacobs create the impression of themselves as cultural mediators between secular and sacred thinkers in Australia. They do not explicitly

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7 Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, 1998 *Uncanny Australia*, *op. cit.*, p 143.
locate themselves as partisan to secular or sacred interpretations of cultural identity formations in Australia. They are apparently attempting to speak from the space where two cultures meet (Indigenous and Non-Indigenous) to discuss 'what is sacred in Australia'. They are concerned with how discourses of the sacred are talked about, and they do this by analysing 'ways in which Aboriginal sacredness manifests itself in the public domain of a modern nation'.

By not actively supporting one side or the other in the debate, Gelder and Jacobs presume to operate in an ethics-neutral domain. Their discursive neutrality tolerates no code of ethics that protects the integrity of sacred sites. Thus the postmodern/postcolonial condition, in Gelder and Jacobs's use of the term(s), delimits and opens the secret-sacred boundaries of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and intellectual property.

In setting up a field of enquiry into the structure and function of Aboriginal sacredness Gelder and Jacobs create the impression of an unbiased report, drawing on Eurocentric models to explain sociological and psychological conditions in 'a modern secularized nation-state such as Australia'. The use of postcolonial theory, which mobilises Foucauldian-Derridean poststructural theoretical constructs to disallow and dismantle strictly formulated identities and boundaries of cultural knowledge, problematises exclusively Indigenous Australian determinations of sacred sites. Foucauldian-Derridean discourses, while dismantling canons of Eurocentric 'humanist texts', can be used to imply an ethics of equal representation of 'other', 'marginal', or parallel discourses not explicitly represented by Eurocentric humanism.

Native Title legislation in Australia serves to protect and frustrate the human rights of Indigenous Australians. Gelder and Jacobs argue that in national debates many disparate Indigenous and Non-Indigenous groups are drawn into negotiations about the boundaries of sacred sites and their effects on Australian society. Leela Gandhi has observed that:

For a postmodern thinker like Lyotard, however, the participants in an ethicopolitical dialogue are rarely equal, and almost never equally represented in the final consensus. Insofar as this dialogue is already projected towards some predetermined end — such as justice or rationality — it is always conducted, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues 'within a field of possibilities that is already structured from the very beginning in favour of certain outcomes'... One of the participants invariably 'knows better' than the other, whose world view, in turn, must be modified or 'improved' in the reaching of consensus. The heterogeneity of thought, Lyotard would argue, can only ever be preserved through a refusal of unanimity and the search for a radical 'discensus'.

Gelder and Jacobs defend Non-Indigenous and Indigenous rights to representation in debates on Aboriginal sacredness in an apparently impartial (postmodern) way. They outline two streams of thought in modern Australian life: perceptions of 'much contemporary New Age environmentalism and Jungian spiritualism that turns to

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Aboriginal religion as a means of making modernity reconcilable with itself;\textsuperscript{13} and claims that Aboriginal sacredness is ‘neither residual nor emergent, but dominant’ in the spheres of government, business interests, mining companies such that it is ‘blocking business’ and thus ‘sacredness needs to be deactivated, discouraged, restrained; the sites themselves need to be identified only to be restricted, bounded, fenced off: neutralised.’\textsuperscript{14} Gelder and Jacobs narrow the field of possible representations of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians for argument’s sake to an entanglement between parties with opposing interests in how sacredness affects modern Australian society. They seek to redress the imbalance in which Indigenous Australian claims on sacred sites inordinately affect the interests of Non-Indigenous Australians who seek equal representation of their own interests in the so called ‘modern sacred’ dimensions of Australian land and life. Gelder and Jacobs claim that what is ‘modern’ and what is ‘sacred’ in Australia become entangled in ways so ‘that they cannot live apart.’\textsuperscript{15} Thus they seek a definition of what is ‘the place of the sacred in the modern world.’\textsuperscript{16} And to do this they seek ‘to draw attention to some key figures who have helped to shape the way this can be thought about.’\textsuperscript{17}

Gelder and Jacobs draw on the ideas of Emile Durkheim, Georges Bataille, and Sigmund Freud to show how sacredness can be understood in contexts of modernity (modern society, modern art, modern socio-psychology). By using Durkheim and Bataille, Gelder and Jacobs portray secularist explanations of ‘the modern sacred’. The contents of such secularist models supposedly provide more certain or explicable visions of ‘modernity’ and ‘sacredness.’ Thus the structure and function of (Aboriginal) sacredness are addressed using Eurocentric models of thought and viewpoints on ‘the modern sacred’ in Australia.

First, it is necessary to explain how Gelder and Jacobs build a secularist bias into their own analysis of discourses of the sacred. Durkheim, Bataille, and Freud understood ‘modernity’ and ‘the sacred’ in a strictly Non-Indigenous sense. Gelder and Jacobs’ theoretical construction of ‘discourses of the sacred’ incorporates postmodernist techniques to disrupt absolute determinations of the sacred. They cite determinants of the sacred derived from Freud, Bataille, and Durkheim, so that sacredness is seen as an emergent property of characteristics ascribed to modern social conditions.

Gelder and Jacobs do not explicitly locate themselves or their state their personal beliefs in relation to Aboriginal sacredness. So it is hard to tell whether they are using Freud, Bataille, and Durkheim to represent a secularist mindset, as a thought experiment in Eurocentric rationality without necessarily favouring a secular analysis of sacredness in postcolonial Australia. Gelder and Jacobs cite the influence of Derrida’s essay ‘Différence’ which impacts on the language and meaning of their critique, whereby the irreducible and dialogic meaning of words can transfigure or introduce parallel negotiations on the meaning of the modern sacred. Gelder and Jacobs remind the reader of how deconstructionist theory can be applied to problematise exclusivist and ‘dominating’ self-determinations that Native Title claims can appear to be. By rendering ‘sacredness’ somewhere between being theoretically/practically incalculable in a

\textsuperscript{13} Gelder and Jacobs, 1998, op cit., p 2.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p 2.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p 3.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p 3.
meaningfully centered and coherent way and being an emergent property of society and modernity, Gelder and Jacobs would appear to significantly reduce the power of Indigenous Australians to offer evidence for claims on sacred sites.

If in the words of Derrida’s translator, the search for the meaning of the word ‘solicit’ can ‘shake the whole, to make something tremble in its entirety’, then a post-structuralist reading of (Aboriginal) sacredness is disruptive. Gelder and Jacobs suggest:

Let us note the possibility here that sacredness – a claim for an Aboriginal sacred site, for example – can ‘shake’ the entire nation… Hugh Morgan’s response to the decision over Coronation Hill (that it was a ‘shocking defeat’ along the lines of the fall of Singapore) is, therefore, simply one particularly cataclysmic reading of the force of the sacred in modern Australia. One could equally read this force in a positive way… as a way of inducing a productive realignment of power in an emergent postcolonial nation… [The] Aboriginal sacred, far from being restrained and ‘mute’, far from having nothing to say to modernity, becomes activated and dialogic. It is always in a position of negotiation, and this includes the negotiation of its own position in the framework of modernity.

Gelder and Jacobs add to this post-structuralist reading by showing how a disrupted and contentious meaning of the sacred gives Indigenous Australians an ongoing power to negotiate on what the sacred is. The implication is that under the currents of a contentious dialogic debate over the value and use of sacred sites, Indigenous Australians can maintain their cultural identity (sacredness) by a continued process of deferred positionality. Gelder and Jacobs argue (Indigenous) modernity in two senses here: Indigenous Australians have a cultural position that is reconcilable with modernity, and this activated and dialogic modern cultural position ‘includes the negotiation of its own position in the framework of modernity’. Indigenous cultural identity problematises modernity with new ideas about modern culture, and complex cultural personalities renegotiate modernity with dialogic philosophies of sacredness. Because specific Indigenous spiritualities are not easily categorised as practices having a social function, or practices linking people with their home, negotiations for a steadfast position on Native Title claims appear changeable. This can be unsatisfactory for decision-making bodies that need to define use of land. Thus the idea that Indigenous people are forever defining their cultural identity for governmental and business purposes places Indigenous people in an equivocal negotiating position in regard to what constitutes the various Indigenous Australian sacred cultural beliefs. This can be perceived as a privileged position of power at the negotiating tables of business and law-making bodies. So the framework of a continually negotiated modernity allows indefinable qualities to empower the social right of Indigenous people to defer judgement on the meaning of their sacred cultural property (a meaning which includes cultural personality and sacred sites). Thus Gelder and Jacobs’ construction of a deferred Indigenous cultural personality (in the Derridean sense of the infinite deferral of meaning) is indicative of incomplete representations of Indigenous Australian spiritualities. And incomplete Indigenous cultural signifiers are not a defect or virtue of Indigenous Australian peoples, but a defect of the systems of knowledge and language that require explicit and containable cultural signifiers that readily define the ‘modern (Indigenous) sacred’.

A postmodern condition, which cites incommensurable differences between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous claims on sacredness, can also empower Indigenous claims on

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19 Ibid., pp 21-22.
sacredness by rendering Indigenous people as ‘other’. Gelder and Jacobs explain that
Non-Indigenous deliberations on Aboriginal cultural knowledge privileges Indigenous
claims for sacredness in a problematical way:

Former Labour Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s remark on the Jawoyn people’s claim for the
sacredness of Coronation Hill, [was] that ‘they are outside of an intellectual framework with which
most of us are comfortable’. So this is an available response to the sacred in Australia which can
have a positive outcome, for Aboriginal people at least. But in our view, this can also generate a
nostalgia for the sacred which allows it to proceed into the modern nation only as a kind of residue...
Now this is not to say that through this process the sacred is deactivated entirely. In fact, the
‘residual’, for Raymond Williams, is distinguished from the ‘archaic’ precisely because the former
‘is still active in the cultural process’. Nevertheless, this view of the sacred withdraws it from
modernity through claims which depend upon stressing its incommensurable difference; and this can
work paradoxically as a form of restraint. Under this logic, the sacred is not allowed to speak about
itself. And this withdrawal, this silence, carries with it losses, as well as gains.20

Gelder and Jacobs speak about how the secret knowledge restrictions placed by
Indigenous traditional owners on their cultural property, or sacred sites, creates a silence
in the public domain in which ‘the (Aboriginal) sacred’ is perceived as being ‘residual’
to that silent Indigenous determination. The Aboriginal sacred is labeled ‘residual’ in
the sense that it retains the property of being in the public domain, yet it is restrained
from a supposedly fully activated use by being outside the ‘normal’ range of public
perceptibility. Bob Hawke’s comment can be read as privileging Indigenous intellectual
frameworks, yet such privileging can create feelings of resentment, in that Indigenous
claims on sacredness are regarded as too powerfully employable by a minority group
(Indigenous Australians) in modern Australian society. So, in Gelder and Jacobs’
estimation, Aboriginal sacredness can be seen to simultaneously empower socially
disadvantaged Indigenous peoples and create a feeling of resentment among Non-
Indigenous peoples that Indigenous people have ‘too much’ when employing their
‘secret’ cultural knowledge and boundaries. They claim that “Under this logic, the
sacred is not allowed to speak for itself”, which implies that sacred sites and Indigenous
Australian cultural identities are separate entities or vehicles of knowledge. The
intellectual separation of Australian soil and homeland from Indigenous claims to land-
human sacred cultural relations implicitly disempowers the logic of Aboriginal claims
on the sacred sites. This line of reasoning further implies that Non-Indigenous people
have an equal right to speak about the sacred effects that the Australian land has on their
identity formations, inadvertently disallowing Aboriginal peoples the secret character of
their sacred knowledge. Thus in Gelder and Jacobs discourse, the symbolic
representations of ‘modern Aboriginal sacred’ is simultaneously empowered and
disempowered by Indigenous claims on sacredness.

In relation to this postcolonial equivocation over the value and use of Indigenous
Australian sacredness, Barry Hill sees that Gelder and Jacobs’ sympathies are
postcolonial vogue, but their sedate ironies are as “colonial” as any “whisperings in the
heart”.21 Basically Hill’s point is that Gelder and Jacobs’ discourse of ‘postcolonial
vogue’ and ‘sedate ironies’ continue to colonise Indigenous people by representing their
sacred cultural Laws as radically unfamiliar and transformed by secular dispositions in
modern Australian society. The potential secular vs. sacred alignment of imagined
opposites in their discourse can have a deleterious effect on the self-determinations of

the various Indigenous communities. I think Hill warns that in Gelder and Jacobs’ unbiased position is the unwitting promotion of a democratic approach to Indigenous sacred culture as a signifier open to interpretation by both Non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. To break open the meaning of Indigenous deep law for personal or general use in modern Australian society is indicative of a colonialist mentality. I believe this is dangerous because Non-Indigenous thinkers may implicitly represent Indigenous cultural Law using the religious symbols, iconographies, and philosophies of Western culture without really knowing the pervasive effects deep law ceremonies have on Indigenous communities.

In brief, Durkheim’s theory of religion claims that ‘religion’ is an emergent psychological and physiological property of people gathering into groups — e.g., sociological anthropology. Under Durkheim’s secularist claim ‘the sacred’, in modern (Australian) society, is not confined to the rules of secret ceremony located in Indigenous Australian cultural signification, and thus, in Durkheim’s analysis, the residue of ‘the sacred’ is deployable in wider contexts outside the frameworks of Indigenous Australian tribal communities.

Gelder and Jacobs’ intellectual ‘position’ appears to offer an impartial representation of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous ‘discourses of the sacred’. However, Non-Indigenous discussions of ‘religious history, anthropology, [and] social theory’ represent Indigenous intellectual interests in Aboriginal sacredness. The secularist bias of Gelder and Jacobs’ work can be located in the citations of Non-Indigenous intellectuals and data collectors who provide evidence and theories about the contents and implied impact of Indigenous Australia cultural knowledge systems on the wider Australian community.

Barry Hill cites one of Gelder and Jacob’s paradoxical observations generated by their postcolonial discourse techniques:

So one can never be completely in possession of a place: one is (dis)possessed, in the sense that neither possession nor dispossess is a fully realizable category. In the same way, one’s authority over a place always entails a certain arbitrariness.

Who is the ‘one’ here? Certainly not any traditional owner making a valid Native Title claim to their own land.

Hill also notes that ‘In the end Gelder and Jacobs’ book is ungrounded – which is, of course, its point.’ Thus the ungrounded nature of the postcolonial discourse appears unbiased in its presentation and definition of what is sacred in Australia. Being ungrounded in a postmodernist deconstruction of the Aboriginal sacred, Gelder and Jacobs’ discourse appears deliberately non-ethical as well, appearing to be representative of the various ideologies of sacredness in Australia. However, as Hill has pointed out, Aboriginal traditional owners make Native Title claims that support the integrity of Indigenous Australian peoples’ affinity with, and need to protect what they perceive to be sacred sites in the land and various communities. An Indigenous person’s right to self-determination, they claim, provides a moral and logical use of land as home and protected resource. Gelder and Jacobs’ ungrounded or shifting terrain of theories.

create open interpretations of exclusively Aboriginal land and identity. Aboriginal secret/sacred cultures often occlude open interpretations of their traditional land and sacred affinities; sacred cultures that have been determined by Indigenous Australians independent of Western evaluations.

**Durkheim as exponent of the (Aboriginal) sacred**

It is necessary to describe extensively Gelder and Jacobs' reading of Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), a text that draws directly upon studies of Australian Aboriginal people. This is useful because their narration of Durkheim's transition from anthropological to sociological theory offers evidence of a secularist viewpoint of Aboriginal sacredness.

In Robert Nisbet's introduction to Durkheim's text, he notes that Durkheim "was himself a professed, virtually devout, agnostic in all matters of religious belief" and that "his intellectual progress lay in the transfer from religious to scientific contexts of all fundamental ideas on universe, society, and man." As outlined by Gelder and Jacobs, Durkheim formulates homogenizing religio-sociological ideas of the impact that so-called 'primitive' culture has on 'modern society'. Durkheim develops a correlating principle between religion and society, such that if religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion. Religious forces are therefore human, moral forces. In this model, idealised forms of human consciousness that emerge as sacred rites, objects, and tools of religious practice contribute to social cohesion in general. Durkheim defends a characterisation of religion as derivative of social forces. He alludes to a universalisable theory of religion in his conclusion to his extensive study of Indigenous Australians:

If among certain peoples the ideas of sacredness, the soul and God are to be explained sociologically, it should be presumed scientifically that, in principle, the same explanation is valid for all peoples among whom these same ideas are found with the same essential characteristics. Therefore, supposing that we have not been deceived, certain at least of our conclusions can be legitimately generalised.

Durkheim goes to great lengths to explain how religious principles are discoverable by scientific analysis of 'religious' actions. He refuses to allow 'religion' 'its right to dogmatise upon the nature of things and the special competence which it claims for itself for knowing man and the world. As a matter of fact it does not know itself. It does not know what it is made of, nor what need it answers. It is itself a subject for science, so far is it from being able to make the law for science! In this way, Durkheim privileges secular insight above religious insight. Human consciousness is made a system of facts by objectifying sacred rites, symbols, and artifacts, in terms of observable human behaviours or actions. The dogmas of Eurocentric scientific reasoning replace Indigenous Australian 'religious' reasoning as primary explanations of the variety of sacred cultural laws in Australia.

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Gelder and Jacobs explain that Durkheim modernises Indigenous Australian ‘religion’ by refining an understanding of ‘the development of luxury’ in society. By way of explaining Durkheim’s use of the word ‘luxury’ to describe a general social action in Australian Aboriginal communities, they suggest that:

... modernity stands in a super-structural relationship to the base of the ‘primitive’; Durkheim even describes the ‘primitive’ as that ‘nude’ thing that modernity clothes... Durkheim concedes that the ‘primitive’ can also be a ‘luxurious’ thing.  

Durkheim’s modernity, they suggest, can describe the human world in scientific language using observable socio-religious actions as facts. Durkheim decides he has located ‘luxury’ in Indigenous Australian religious actions, citing three different instances where Aboriginal ceremonial rites are deemed to be secondary or a nostalgic accessory that supports social cohesion. Durkheim speaks of the Warramunga and Arunta [Aranda], whom Spencer and Gillen, and Pastor Strehlow did field research among, and it is this research Durkheim appropriates for the formulation of his theory of ‘luxury’. He says that the Warramunga have only the haziest ideas about ‘myths’ passed down by their ancestors:

When the whole ceremony is completed, the old men announce that if the Wollumqua [Serpent-figure] is pleased, he will send rain. But it is not to have rain that they go through with the celebration. They celebrate it because their ancestors did, because they are attached to it as to a highly respected tradition and because they leave it with a feeling of moral well-being. Other considerations have only a complimentary part; they may serve to strengthen the worshippers in the attitude prescribed by rite, but they are not the reason for the existence of this attitude.

So we have here a whole group of ceremonies whose sole purpose is to awaken certain ideas and sentiments, to attach the present to the past or the individual to the group.

In a second example, Durkheim generalises the cultural beliefs of the Arunta [Aranda]:

We have seen that among this people, the irregularities and depressions of the land, which mark the places where some ancestor sojourned, sometimes serve as totems. Ceremonies are attached to these totems which are manifestly incapable of physical effects of any sort. They consist only in representations whose object is to commemorate the past, and they can aim at no end beyond this commemoration.

While they enable us to understand the nature of the cult better, these ritual representations also put into evidence an important element in religion: this is the recreative and esthetic element.

The above quote by Durkheim I located as a possible source of Gelder and Jacobs’ protracted discourse on the Aboriginal sacred as connoting ‘luxury’. Following Durkheim’s logic, what is recreative and aesthetically based binds Aboriginal social groups together with a sense of unity. ‘Recreative’ has the twin-function (in English translation from Durkheim’s French) of meaning ‘re-creating’ or commemorating the social actions of the past, and ‘recreation’ which implies leisure, luxury, marginal, peripheral, or secondary social activity. I believe that it can be seen here how Durkheim (or his English translator, Joseph Ward Swain) might combine both senses of the word.

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31 Ibid., p 5.
33 Ibid., p 378.
34 Ibid., p 379.
‘recreative’ or luxurious, to arrive at a simplistic, peripheral or secondary basis for describing the function of religious action. In fact Gelder and Jacobs’ focus on Durkheim’s sense of ‘luxury’ is further compared to the secondary and non-modern status that ‘the Aboriginal sacred’ has in modern Australian society. For Durkheim, Aboriginal peoples maintain a living religion explainable as a social force. It remains present as a secondary explanation of the primacy of sociological structure and function in modern society, which effectively reduces the religious impulse to a scientific measure.

Gelder and Jacobs explore Durkheim’s secularising principle to describe the role of the sacred in ‘modern (Australian) society’:

Durkheim...recognized that it is the very nature of modernity, which directed his attention to Aboriginal religion – to what he designates as the ‘primitive’ – in the first place. For Durkheim, the sacred is central to religion, and it works to organize people socially; it unites them ‘into one single moral community’. This is a fundamental insight for Durkheim: that sacredness produces sociality. This connection is realised through a study of Aboriginal religion and then applied to the modern world, which must be reminded of the sociality it now seems to lack. This is why, for Durkheim, the otherwise ‘primitive’ phenomenon of sacredness must always be ‘near to us’ [as an emergent, embodied presence]. Its profound significance lies in the fact that it stands for something – the social – which seems increasingly difficult to grasp in the modern world.

This thesis puts Durkheim in a particular quandary in that he runs the risk of making the ‘primitive’ seem consequently more attractive than the modern, a feature we see today in much New Age-ism. There is certainly some nostalgia here, but Durkheim is at pains to say that he does not wish to ascribe ‘particular virtues to the lower religions’: ‘we cannot make them’, he remarks ‘a sort of model which later religions only have to reproduce’.35

Gelder and Jacobs suggest that Durkheim’s description of what he calls ‘the lower religions’ as ‘rudimentary and gross,’36 appears at first to ‘stabilize the “primitive” status of Aboriginal religion’,37 but Durkheim’s terminologies are paradoxical. They explain that for Durkheim ‘rudimentary’ means elemental, base, and undeveloped thus not ‘modern’; and ‘gross’ means luxuriant, flagrant or excessive.38 Gelder and Jacobs explain this paradox as a formula: the “primitive” is (not) modern.39 By this paradoxical condition, a debate over the Indigenous Australian sacred knowledge can maintain and repeatedly negotiate the terms of their sacred beliefs, while being marginalised as extrinsic to the ‘modern, secular’ interests of mining companies, businesses, and governments. In this sense, the paradoxical Aboriginal sacred is pre-modern (‘rudimentary’) and postmodern (‘gross’/luxurious), which places the Aboriginal sacred outside yet intrinsic to modern society; as luxurious yet necessary to the structure and function of modern society. So the pre-modern noble savage ideology and the postmodern noble savage ideology both allude to utopian and underdeveloped aspects reflected in the margins, or on a parallel course with modern society. This pre-modern/postmodern idea of radical instability of the Aboriginal sacred in relation to so-called modern society will be taken up in further detail in relation to Gelder and Jacobs’ critiques of both (in separate instances) David Tacey and Freud.

36 Ibid., p 5.
37 Ibid., p 5.
39 Ibid., p 5.
Gelder and Jacobs feel that Durkheim gives us two senses of Aboriginal religion, as well as the sacred which is for him religion’s ‘vital substance’:

Firstly, he [Durkheim] establishes the proximity of the sacred to the modern world: it is ‘near to us’, we can become intimate with it; it speaks directly to ‘the man of to-day’. He may have wanted to distinguish the sacred from modernity; but in the process, he gives it such a radical instability (‘rudimentary’ and yet ‘gross’) that it seems at times as if it is modernity’s mirror image. Secondly... Durkheim endows the sacred with immense significance. Far from imagining the sacred as a ‘primitive’ residue or an anachronistic remainder, it provides modernity with an image of what it might become. The sacred is a socialising force; it provides the ‘very concept of totality’ which takes the modern individual beyond ‘his own narrow horizon’, beyond a modern condition which is defined, paradoxically here, as a lack. The paradox lies in this fact: that modernity, which is a ‘luxurious’ thing, is nevertheless seen to be lacking when it is without the sacred... The sacred, which might otherwise have been designated as ‘primitive’, thus becomes the luxury that the modern world cannot afford to do without.

Let us pause momentarily over this conclusion and place it somewhat casually for the moment, in the context of modern Australia and Aboriginal claims for sacred sites. How often are such claims seen, by mining companies, businesses and governments, as luxuries we simply cannot afford!  

Gelder and Jacobs use Durkheim’s theories to show how Aboriginal sacredness is perceived as simultaneously representing a lack in, yet being essential to, modern society. Political opponents of Native Title make claims that Indigenous Australian determined sacred sites are irrelevant to business and governmental needs, thus secondary or luxurious, which disempowers claims made on sacred sites. As a consequence of opposition to Native Title claims, Aboriginal sacredness is thus perceived to be a living religion in modern society existing to fulfill a social function, the mythical past existing in the present to establish and continue social ties within a local (Indigenous) community. Durkheim believed that ‘Scientific thought is only a more perfect form of religious thought.’ So the use of a Durkheimian exegesis to explain simultaneously ‘Indigenous Australian culture’, ‘modern society’, and ‘sacredness’ all stem from a value system that favours science above religion, thus debasing the value of non-scientific interpretations of the sacred. This ‘secular’ value system favours secular interpretations of the sacred, which do not exceedingly interrupt the interests of a ‘modern, secular society’.

So Gelder and Jacobs’ statement that governments, businesses, and mining companies often see Aboriginal sacredness as non-profitable, and without a solid base of reasoning, can be seen to stem from a secular mindset that values religious experience as subordinate to sociological function. In Durkheim’s formulation, religious experience is a medium that reinforces role-playing in society and further reinforces social cohesion. Durkheim’s diagnosis of Aboriginal sacredness which represents a paradoxical lack and luxury in modern society is used by Gelder and Jacobs to promote a notion of Indigenous Australians being associated as suffering from a lack and being blessed with luxurious living conditions, which is part of a Non-Indigenous perception of the political and social status of Indigenous Australians en masse. There are other subtle meanings of luxury indicated by Gelder and Jacobs, in which Indigenous cultural customs and beliefs at first complement Eurocentric societies with alternative ways of

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living and thinking, and later are integrated into and thus extend the boundaries of 'modern society'. Thus (Indigenous Australian) 'luxury', in this sense, is defined as a leisurely intellectual activity that uses the 'excessive' dimensions of Indigenous cultural/spiritual knowledge, which lay beyond adequate comprehensibility, to redefine the contents of national identity. This notion of post-Durkheimian (Indigenous) 'luxury' portrays Indigenous Australian spiritual knowledges as surplus and unnecessary data that does not improve the quality of life in modern society. This sense of surplus/excessive Indigenous knowledge 'luxury' can lead to One-nation type claims that Aboriginal people are given too much, are privileged by intellectuals and governing bodies and should be monitored for relevancy more closely. Indigenous knowledge that is valued as surplus or luxurious meta-data can lead to privileging Indigenous cultural knowledge as an empowering pre-contact and pre-modern tool with which to reinvigorate modern societies with a larger embodiment of available human experiences. These senses of luxury are how Gelder and Jacobs see Durkheim's intellectual position on Indigenous culture contributing to modern Australian society.

Durkheim's theory of religion remains effective for representing secular interests in the use and value of Aboriginal sacred sites, lands, cultural knowledges, and communities. Gelder and Jacobs show how a secular theory of religion can extend itself, drawing upon the work of Georges Bataille, in which a form of 'sacred sociology' develops a reinvigoration of the modern world: 'The project of these “sacred sociologists”... was to try to reactivate the sacred, to return it as a luxurious thing to what they saw as an otherwise depleted modernity.'

Upon further development of Bataille's vaguely Marxist theory of a new socialising force, Michel Leiris located the sacred not as an absence but as present within modern life — similar to what Gelder and Jacobs see as Durkheim's predicament, the sacred being 'absent yet omnipresent at the same time: it has no place (in modernity), and yet it is all over the place'.

This is the point of Gelder and Jacobs’ exposition of the notion of 'luxury' as a way of interpreting ‘the modern Aboriginal sacred’. I understand Gelder and Jacob's discourse on Durkheimian 'luxury', which they embed in the meaning of Aboriginal religion, in a twofold manner: as 'secondary' or 'marginal' to the secular interests of modern society (potentially seen as useless or inappropriately pre-modern); and as 'post-modern' in the sense that Aboriginal religion surpasses or goes beyond the Euro-Australian social forces of modern society.

Bataille and Leiris, like Durkheim are proponents of a secularising tendency towards perceptions of what is the sacred is. By offering a theory of religion as a socialising force, a secular Marxist paradigm, of the kind that Bataille’s discourse inspires, can be applied to the meaning of the sacred. Under these theoretical conditions Indigenous Australian spirituality becomes simplistically quantified as a socialising force, without reference to metaphysical properties, which cannot be objectified by psycho-social analyses of consciousness and social actions.

In the preceding commentary on Durkheim, and briefly on Bataille, it has been necessary to describe in detail the intellectual processes and theoretical frameworks that equate modernity with secularity, and secularity with a theory of religion. Gelder and Jacobs have done this in Chapter One, 'The Modern Sacred', of _Uncanny Australia_ as a

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44 _Ibid._, p 8.
precursor to an understanding of 'uncanny Australia', in Chapter Two 'The Postcolonial Uncanny'. Durkheim's 'predicament' informs their introduction of Freud's theory of 'the uncanny' as a similarly paradoxical explanation of the way the Aboriginal sacred is talked about. Durkheim's predicament and Freud's uncanny paradox contribute to Gelder and Jacobs' notion of a postcolonial Australia; both models become the prime explanatory theories which inform a number of discourses of the (Aboriginal) sacred throughout the book. However, 'postcolonial Australian' discourses are represented as ongoing, paradoxically embattled with discordant, exasperated, exhausted voices repeatedly problematising the Aboriginal sacred in extensively secularised ways. Aboriginal Australia is represented by secular intellectual constructs within a secular and secularising environment. This may be the point of Gelder and Jacobs' postcolonial analyses of Durkheim and Freud— to demonstrate how secular discourses colonise the 'extraneous' matter of 'the sacred'.

Robert Nisbet outlines the social and intellectual milieu in which Freud and Durkheim constructed their theories:

The age in which [Max] Weber and Durkheim lived and worked was itself deeply preoccupied by the scientific or rational study of religion. In the generation that bridged the passage of the nineteenth to the twentieth century are to be found the names of E.B. Tylor, Max Müller, William James, Robertson Smith, Herbert Spencer, Sir James G. Frazer, Andrew Lang, Ernest Renan, and Sigmund Freud, one and all devoted, as were Durkheim and Weber, to the study of origins, development and nature of religion conceived as a study of scientific analysis.45

W. Paul Vogt in his study of 'The Uses of Studying Primitives: A Note on the Durkheimians, 1890-1940'46 similarly outlines the ideological views constructed by European academics (in the timeframe Vogt's essay suggests) who extrapolated and extended Durkheim's ideas in relation to 'Primitive' societies and civilizations. Vogt's study is a good indicator of how Gelder and Jacobs arrived at their paradoxical premodern/postmodern (out of place) Durkheimian model of the sacred in modern society. Durkheimians increasingly focused their new discipline of sociology on comparative civilizations,47 though, as Vogt has noticed such 'practices seem to harken back to the generalising tendencies which Durkheim had so often criticized in Comte and Spencer.'48 Vogt explains that Durkheimians did little field research, preferring to use ethnographic and historical data to discover new facts.49 Durkheim himself relied on the work of Baldwin and Spencer, Howitt, and Pastor Strechow and other such field researchers in Australia,50 to conduct his research of Indigenous Australian culture. Durkheim seems to have believed that the weight of exhaustive evidence gathered by researchers, also lent scientific weight to his overviewing conclusions about Aboriginal

47 ibid., p 180
48 ibid., p 180
49 ibid., p 186
50 For example, in the chapter 'Totemic Beliefs' in 1915 [1976] The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, op cit., Durkheim relies on the weight of evidence collected by Spencer and Gillen in the northern part of central Australia ('... 204 kinds of totems... out of a large number of tribes...' p 104) and Pastor Strechow in central Australia (who collected 442 totems from among the Arunta and the Loritja nations, p 104) and Howitt in south-eastern Australia (who collected 500 totemic names, p 103). The point Durkheim seems to be making is that these first-hand researchers have conducted quantified extensive research in a directly scientific manner of fact gathering.
Australian ethnographic data. He relied on these specific field studies of intellectual conceptions and ritual practices of ‘religion’ in Australian tribes to formulate a generalist theory of primitive religious experience, as a psychological determinant applicable to all human social behaviour. What is inappropriate in Durkheim’s generalist theory of socio-religion is the correlation of Indigenous Australian spiritual experiences with externally observable social behaviours, in which Durkheim believed the fundamental idea is not the study of mythology but social science. What is inappropriate in Freud is the presumption of knowing the psychological processes of primitive animistic beliefs to be artificial, or a subliminal residue of an outmoded society. However, the intellectual positions of Durkheim and Freud are indicative of Non-Indigenous arguments for secular characteristics discernible in the various claims made for Indigenous Australians’ sacred awareness in modern society.

Vogt explains that early comparative religionists (such as Frazer) and sociologists felt they were contributing to an evolutionary perception of a modern world, by (rediscovering) ‘new’ facts about social functions via data on Indigenous (‘primitive’) societies. Vogt discerns that when ‘Durkheimians described collective socio-religious rites and festivals they usually did so in tones of approbation, awe, and even yearning for something similar for modern man [sic].’ The nostalgia for contact with uncanny phenomena ‘from the past’ that frames the collecting of ‘new’ facts from non-European ethnographic data in Durkheimian research, contributes to a Eurocentric urge to rediscover similar primitive socio-religious cultural faculties and insights in European-built societal structures. This is similar to Gelder and Jacobs’ observation that Indigenous cultural knowledges are talked about as ‘luxurious’ data resources. Such knowledge systems are ‘luxurious’ in the sense that they are out of place in (or are beyond) modern society; yet contribute to reformulations of modern society. Vogt argues that:

As with all research strategies, however, something was inevitably lost as well as gained by the Durkheimian approach to primitive societies. Their methods not only added to but replaced other sorts of (comparative) work that could have played a similar role in their sociology. Important among the advantages lost by exclusive concentration on the primitive was an historical perspective. Rather than ground their work in a firm knowledge of other eras, the Durkheimians most often referred to other places. They generally tried (with some misgivings) to get the best of both tactics by dubious

51 In an introductory passage to the chapter ‘Totemic Beliefs’ in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, op. cit., Durkheim explains that ‘[i]t is not our intention to retrace all the speculations into which the religious thought, even of the Australians alone, has run. The things we wish to reach are the elementary notions at the basis of the religion, but there is no need of following them through all the development, sometimes very confused, which the mythological imagination of these peoples has given them. We shall make use of myths when they enable us to understand these fundamental ideas better, but we shall not make mythology itself the subject of our studies. In so far as this is a work of art, it does not fall within the jurisdiction of the simple science of religions. Also, the intellectual evolution from which it results is of too great a complexity to be studied indirectly and from a foreign point of view. It constitutes a very difficult problem which must be treated by itself, for itself and with a method peculiar to itself.’ p 101. Durkheim was aware that his ‘foreign point of view’ was using evidence of Indigenous Australian ‘totemic beliefs’ indirectly, to support his generalist claims about religious experiences in society at large. Durkheim is distinguishing his intellectual position from J.G. Frazer’s (a practitioner of the discipline whose main focus was ‘mythology’); thus alternatively, Durkheim’s discipline was social science. However, Durkheim is borrowing from ‘mythological’ research data (eg. Totemic Beliefs of Indigenous Australians) to construct a stronger intellectual position from which to enforce his secular view of religion and society.

assumption that contemporary primitive civilizations were somehow historically distant. Thus, such
temporal dimensions that their work had were ‘evolutionary’ rather than ‘historical’ – that is, they
were mostly the result of deduction from the properties of primitive and modern societies, not
explicit studies of what comes ‘in between’.53

Vogt here approaches the paradox of ‘inbetween-ness’ (a hybrid awareness of two
cultures existing in the one person and/or place) in postcolonial narratives, which
informs debates about ‘the properties of primitive and modern societies’, the margin and
the center of society, the minority groups and dominant culture, the colonised and the
coloniser, and urban Indigeneity. The Durkheimians’ study of ‘primitive civilizations’
evokes a paradoxical theme of the study of historically distant and contemporary
primitive peoples in Vogt’s view, similar to Gelder and Jacobs’ review of Emile
Durkheim’s work in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. What Vogt sees as a
dubious ideological position, Gelder and Jacobs label a paradox that explains
contemporary perceptions of the modern (Indigenous) sacred in Australian society.

In a generalising diagnosis of where the intellectual processes that struggle to define
‘the modern sacred’ lead to, Gelder and Jacobs believe that:

The impulse is... towards reconciliation at one moment, and division at another: ‘one nation’ and
a divided nation. It is this ceaseless movement back and forth between these two positions, which
is precisely postcolonial. And the various promiscuities arising from this movement, where
sacredness and modernity solicit each other, produce a condition... designated as ‘uncanny’.54

The postcolonial condition of ceaseless movement between ‘one nation’ and a ‘divided
nation’ produces an uncanny impulse, an interminable search to contain Non-
Indigenous and Indigenous identities within one political framework. The boundaries of
difference and sameness are erected by Eurocentric paradigms that seek to quantify the
knowable and the unknowable, with the implicit intention to re-colonise or re-constitute
cultural personalities in ‘Australian society’. A sense of presupposed cultural/theoretical
identities battling across a permanent divide (Indigenous vs. Non-Indigenous, secular
vs. sacred, science vs. religion) is an arena that the ceaseless movement of postcolonial
discourse plays deconstructionist games of truth within. How do ‘modern, secular’
mindsets frame a discourse of Indigenous Australian sacredness? Gelder and Jacobs
represent a number of Non-Indigenous contributions to discourses of the (Aboriginal)
sacred in the public domain, and how secular discussions of ‘modernity’ and
‘(Aboriginal) sacredness’ infiltrate each concept’s codified boundaries. However,
‘sacredness’ and ‘modernity’ are both defined using Eurocentric measurements of
sociological structure and function of ‘postcolonial Australia’, which disallows or
marginalizes Aboriginal determinations of the way society functions in relation to
sacredness.

The (Aboriginal) sacred in a (post) Freudian framework
Gelder and Jacobs cite Freud’s essay ‘The Uncanny’ to show how a notion of ‘home’ in
Australia can become simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Discourses about
Aboriginal sacredness present Western socialising forces with an ‘other’ vision of
society, such that Australians of non-ethnic or Anglo-Celtic origin are defined by a lack
of awareness of one’s position in society. To generalize, being white, or Non-
Indigenous, and/or possessing an awareness of having been educated in a Eurocentric

54 Ibid., p 22.
setting, presents feelings that one’s cultural personality is confounded by a state of incompleteness. Peter Barry in ‘Postcolonial criticism’ read Said’s work in cultural studies (Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism) as suggesting that the mysterious otherness (Oriental, Indigenous) often amounts to a projection of the repressed aspects of the Westernising self, that is a misrepresentation of Non-European cultures. The urge to complete an understanding of an unconscious and lingering dread abiding in a settled notion of a home-made personality (a notion of settled rational beings in a non-stressful environment?) was taken up by Freud. Golder and Jacobs use Freud to represent a number of (Non-Indigenous, Eurocentric) anxieties about defining and interacting with the modern (Indigenous) sacred.

Freud refers to a psychological artifice produced as a form of double consciousness in ‘The Sand-Man’, a short story by E.T.A. Hoffman. Freud perceives a secondary social awareness in the form of a ghost story, which Freud sees as an oral–cum–literary tradition invented to preserve human infantile emotions and nurture them into mature revelations about such (double) consciousness. By defining the secondary awareness or double consciousness, Freud controls the pathology, examined and defined by using a psychoanalytic theoretical method. Freud performs an exegesis of ‘the double’ in Hoffman’s ethereal and dreaded Sand-Man, comparing the double identity character development to a vision of terror that is uncanny, prelogical, and given to analogies with a very early mental age in adult human behaviour, drawing a parallel to ‘primitive’ man. The theme of ‘the double’ for Freud is scientifically determined through literary analysis:

This invention of doubling as preservation against extinction has its counterpoint in the language of dreams... [The desire to] make images of the dead in some lasting material. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect... [Nothing can account] for that impulse towards self-protection which caused the ego to project such content outward as something foreign to itself...

They are harking back to particular phases of evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons. I believe that these factors are partly responsible for the impression of the uncanny. 

The uncanny becomes a homogenised experience where primitive man, the stages of child-like mental development, and Eurocentric fears become co-determinants of unquantified socio-psychological energies, which converge within Freud’s scientific framework. Freud infers that primitive peoples were/are preservers of death cults with shamanic practices seen as ghost stories that preserve identity and culture as socialising narratives of the spirit-world, which Freud explores psychoanalytically as a global form of double-consciousness (disturbing elements located in ‘the unconscious’). This homogenising quality that reduces difficult-to-describe forms of ‘religious awareness’ to general socio-psychological determinants, is characteristic of Freud’s and Durkheim’s descriptions and uses of ‘primitive culture(s)’. Primitive culture becomes a

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resource for modern societal conditions to be diagnosed in the work of both Freud and Durkheim.

Freud details how ‘primitive humanity’ is a model of an archaic humanity, whose belief system is incongruous with ‘modern humanity’; yet the ‘primitive psyche’ intrudes upon modern human consciousness at an unconscious level of awareness. In Freud’s estimation, the unconscious is partly a reservoir of repressed non-rational, disruptive energies from the past intruding upon the present:

Our analysis of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of humane narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes (such as the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, the magical practices based upon this belief, the carefully proportioned distribution of magical powers or ‘mana’ among various outside figments and things), as well as by all those other figments of the imagination with which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us have traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be reactivated and that everything which now strikes us as ‘uncanny’ fulfills the condition of stirring these vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression...

In cases of anxiety there must be a class in which the anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which recurs. This class of morbid anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny, irrespective of whether it originally aroused dread or some other effect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why the usage of speech has extended das Heimlich into its opposite das Unheimlich; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light.57

Freud states that ‘modern humanity’ is at a later stage of evolutionary development, yet the ‘primitive mind’ continues to function in a barely discernible way within the minds of many European people. Thus Freud sees ‘primitive’ peoples to be out of place in the modern world, due in part to their animistic belief system. Freud characterises primitive beliefs using examples from German ghost stories, by which a homogenized and ideal-typical representation of Indigenous experiences is correlated with Eurocentric human development, with the implicit philosophy that European society is the social norm by which to measure human behaviour.

Gelder and Jacobs’ purpose in Uncanny Australia is to explore how the Indigenous Australian sacred is talked about, and their use of Freud’s ‘uncanny’ theoretical model can be seen to inform their overviews of current discussions about use of land, sacred sites, and Indigeneity by Non-Indigenous Australian peoples. In a sense, Gelder and Jacobs are using Freud to diagnose Non-Indigenous (psychological) encounters with (modern) Indigenous cultural conditions, which lays bare a number of Eurocentric cultural biases. Freud and Durkheim are representative of a traditional scientific mindset that speaks about Indigenous (‘primitive’) peoples as models reflecting the early development of social and psychological aspects of humanity in general (or generally applied to comparative studies between Indigenous and Western cultures). Gelder and Jacobs distill ‘the uncanny’ in Freud, and a Durkheimian inspired paradox of modern Indigeneity (as simultaneously pre-modern and post-modern) in relation to the way Indigenous Australians are talked about in Australia.

Gelder and Jacobs elucidate their use of Freud’s uncanny in the context of anxiety expressed about native title claims in Australia:

In postcolonial Australia, and in particular after the Mabo decision in 1992, Freud’s ‘uncanny’ might well be applied directly to those emergent (that is, yet-to-be-established) procedures for determining rights over land. In this moment of decolonisation, what is ‘ours’ is also potentially, or even always already, ‘theirs’: the one is becoming the other, the familiar is becoming strange.

The value of this concept, then, is that it refuses the usual binary structure upon which much commentary on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations are based. We often speak of Australia as a ‘settler’ nation, but the ‘uncanny’ can remind us that a condition of unsettledness folds into this taken-for-granted mode of occupation. We often imagine a (future) condition of ‘reconciliation’, and indeed, a great deal has been invested in the packaging of this image as a means of selling it to the nation – but the ‘uncanny’ can remind us of just how irreconcilable this image is with itself. It is not simply that Australians will either be reconciled with each other or they will not, rather two possibilities (reconciliation; the impossibility of reconciliation) coexist and flow through each other in what is often, in our view at least, a productively unstable dynamic.38

Gelder and Jacobs set themselves up as commentators on settled and unsettled notions of the (Aboriginal) sacred in Australian modern society; that is, they do not appear to take sides in an Indigenous and Non-Indigenous debate about claims on the modern sacred. They appear non-partisan both to Indigenous or Non-Indigenous intellectual positions. However, the issue ‘what is the (modern) sacred’ in Australia becomes an issue of democratic equal representation in the use of land; thus spiritual claims are interdependent on property claims. So while Indigenous people are busy endlessly qualifying and quantifying their spiritual claims, so too are Non-Indigenous people re-negotiating the terms and conditions of their own identity in relation to Indigenous spiritual awarenesses. The productively unstable dynamic of reconciliation debates is in part fuelled by negotiations of ‘what is sacred’. Anxiety about this inconclusive debate is partly about Non-Indigenous reconfigurations of national identity and cultural personality in relation to claims made about the modern (Indigenous Australian) sacred.

Gelder and Jacobs emphasise the anxiety produced by unfamiliar circumstances residing in the familiar. They explore Indigenous cultural knowledges narrated as ghost stories in Australia, for instance, tracing how ‘the bunyip’ has been represented. They place Freud’s ‘uncanny’ in an Australian context and a post-Freudian framework. Their explication of Rosa Campbell Praed’s ‘The Bunyip’ (1891) and Roland Robinson’s ‘The Bunyip’ (1958) show how the bunyip has been idealised in a twofold manner, as a figure of displacement and belonging. The multiplicitous image of the bunyip in these narratives confirms the ghostly characterizing that produces anxiety in the readers of such narratives. The haunting image contributes to a sense of the bunyip inhabiting many places across historical time and among both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples.

Praed’s 1891 story portrays European colonials making their new home in the Australian bush. Gelder and Jacobs suggest Praed’s bunyip corresponds to unsettled Eurocentric colonial settler movements in the bush, colonials who are on the move toward an imagined home. The colonials are immersed in an unfamiliar landscape in which they feel out of place, a feeling compounded by the haunted sounds emanating from the bush. Praed’s story is what Gelder and Jacob’s define as a traditional ghost story, in which the central characters are white settlers and there is no sense of

negotiation about the (pre)occupation of the land. Gelder and Jacobs note that ‘[in] Praed’s story there is no one actually to negotiate with: there are no Aboriginal people attached to the haunted site (even though the bunyip may itself signify something “Aboriginal”).'\textsuperscript{59} Gelder and Jacobs note that the settlers ‘contribute to their own haunting and their own unsettlement, since the bunyip is animated only when they talk it up.’\textsuperscript{60} Thus the haunting of the settlers can be interpreted as a psychological condition that the settlers have produced in their minds in an unfamiliar environment, independent of the ‘reality’ of the bunyip. The storytelling features of the traditional ghost story function as a Eurocentric psychological thriller in this sense. This type of ‘psychological thriller’ can flirt with the unconscious workings of the mind that correspond to the unfamiliar, rendering familiar what might be ‘paranormal phenomena’ for secular consumption. The bunyip is rendered familiar by typecasting the creatures’ ‘Indigeneity’. By defining the abstract psychology of the ‘primitive’ workings of the mind, anxiety about inexplicable non-ordinary experiences is reduced (for the Non-Indigenous secular reader of ‘Indigenous culture’). Hybrid European/Indigenous double-consciousness is represented as a function of a singular (colonial) mind. The haunting is interpreted as an unconscious ‘primitive’ activity of the (Eurocentric) mind, thus spiritual awareness is assimilated to a psychoanalytic interpretation.

Gelder and Jacobs make a distinction between a traditional and a postcolonial ghost story.\textsuperscript{61} Roland Robinson’s postcolonial ghost story has narrative functions that include negotiation over occupation (possession and dispossession) of land/home. In Robinson’s 1958 story an Indigenous Australian ‘clever old-man’ derives his power from the bunyip. Thus the bunyip was ‘promiscuous’ and ‘evasive’ in Praed’s pre-1891 colonial setting, and is ‘monogamous and attached’ in Robinson’s 1958 postcolonial setting, situating the bunyip simultaneously as knowable and unknowable. A generalising image of the bunyip is drawn from two historical time periods and from locations ‘up and down the coast.’\textsuperscript{62} In these narrative representations of the bunyip time and place do not localize the creature’s peculiarities (by naming Indigenous Australian cultures who identify with the bunyip), as much as expand upon the creature being defined by (post)colonial narratives and ‘mythologies’ as unfamiliar and unpredictable.

Gelder and Jacobs note that ‘[in] the postcolonial ghost story Aboriginal people... are just as liable to be subject to hauntings as anyone else.’\textsuperscript{63} However, exactly how Aboriginal people come to be haunted by spiritual emanations of their Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices is open to speculation. Represented simultaneously in Robinson’s story are the Aboriginal clever-man who is empowered by the bunyip, and the Indigenous Australian family who must negotiate with the bunyip when it comes out of the ground at the family home unexpectedly to effect a form of ‘savage’ justice. Gelder and Jacobs quote from Robinson’s work to demonstrate how Aboriginal people are spoken of as caught in a contradictory movement between the ‘primitive’ and the postcolonial – the bunyip arrives at the narrator’s (Percy Mumbulla) family home:

\textsuperscript{59} Gelder and Jacobs, 1998, op. cit., p 32.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p 32.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., pp 32-33.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p 35.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p 32.
My old dad was smoking his pipe by the chimney. Mum heard the bunyip coming, roaring. The ground started to shake. He was coming closer. He came out of the ground underneath the tank-stand. Went over to the chimney and started rubbing himself against it. He started to get savage. He started to roar. Mum told Dad to go out and talk to him in the language, tell him to go away, that we were all right.

Dad went out and spoke to him in the language. He talked to him: ‘We are all right. No one doing any harm. You can go away’. Every time Dad spoke to him, he’d roar. My old-man was talking: ‘Everything is all right. Don’t get savage here’.

Percy’s third person narration detaches direct experience of what ‘the language’ is that is used to communicate with the bunyip. Percy’s dad speaks with the bunyip directly, and this information is revealed to the reader second hand by Percy, who may or may not know ‘the language’. It is possible that ‘the language’ is a traditional local custom that an Aboriginal clever-man uses to communicate with the land. Gelder and Jacobs’ point in citing the above passage is to further indicate the complexities of modern (Indigenous) sacred; to show how the contradictions of unsettlement and empowerment contribute to postcolonial uncanny experiences of Indigenous Australian spiritual culture.

Gelder and Jacobs indicate that ‘we should pay attention to the way in which this Aboriginal couple engage with the bunyip as a matter of course. If nothing else, the later part of this strange story [by Robinson] shows these Aboriginal characters keeping their place, and their sense of place, through direct negotiation.’ By paying careful attention to the negotiating actions depicted in Robinson’s story, it may be revealed that Percy Mumbulla’s family are being haunted by the bunyip in accord with traditional laws; though Gelder and Jacobs speculate that the bunyip’s concern for the family is drastically misplaced, or out of place, such that ‘the bunyip has an “unhomely” effect on what is clearly a “homely” (that is, domesticated) scene’. Gelder and Jacobs speak of the bunyip as an uncanny life experience (an unfamiliarity in the postcolonial home) for the Aboriginal people represented in Robinson’s story. However, the Indigenous people were in touch with their cultural beliefs enough to negotiate with the bunyip in a specific (though unknown) language, and to know that the bunyip is a harbinger of justice. Though, once again, the narrative forms of Indigenous cultural interaction are designed for a readership interested in Australian cultural experiences. If the Aboriginal family is ‘haunted’ by the bunyip, they also are prepared to deal with the haunting, though it is unclear why the bunyip has turned up at all. Gelder and Jacobs focus on this element of non-clarity in the bunyip’s cultural function to reiterate how the creature’s unsettling effects are out of place in the (modern) life of the Aboriginal family. Thus Gelder and Jacobs see Robinson’s bunyip as a modern emblem of the sacred, precisely because the Aboriginal family rejects the ‘unexpected’ arrival of the bunyip. In Gelder and Jacobs’ view, the bunyip:

... signifies two contradictory things: the ‘primitive’, from which this modern, homely Aboriginal couple has disassociated itself; and the post-colonial which, precisely because it is a modern thing, shakes up (that is, solicits: sexuality implicit in this word is evident in the bunyip rubbing himself up against the chimney) the Aboriginal couple’s home under the pretext of concern and demands their attention.

64 Gelder and Jacobs, 1998, op. cit., p 34.
65 Ibid. p 35.
66 Ibid., p 34.
67 Ibid., p 35.
Gelder and Jacobs trace the ‘modernity’ of the bunyip in a postcolonial setting, via the Aboriginal family’s rejection of traditional ‘primitive’ beliefs (in the relevance of the bunyip) to maintain a ‘modern’ domesticated home. Thus the bunyip’s arrival appears peripheral to the concerns of Percy Mumbulla’s family – the bunyip in this sense is uncanny, out of place, simultaneously pre-modern and post-modern, a modern spiritual phenomenon manifesting in a ‘primitive’ form. The bunyip, in this sense, fits Gelder and Jacobs’ post-Freudian model of the uncanny, the bunyip being a luxurious event of marginal unfamiliarity to modern (Indigenous) family life. Gelder and Jacobs have interpreted the actions of the bunyip described in story form as modern (and postcolonial), because a non-traditional, unplaced form of bunyip threatens the ‘modern’ Aboriginal family home. However, the bunyip/Aboriginal family interaction could also be interpreted as a direct participation in traditional Aboriginal culture, not necessarily a disassociation from the calling roar of the bunyip. How is one to know what constitutes traditional Aboriginal culture, if one has not lived it?

Postcolonial discursive functions, such as narrative representations of the bunyip and interpretations of Indigenous Australian cultural interactions with the bunyip, often simplify, distort, or render into plain language the complexities of (Indigenous) spiritual/cultural beliefs and actions. Gelder and Jacobs’ speculation on the unsettling effects of the bunyip in modern social settings indicate the limited scope of Indigenous Australian cultural representations set in a (post)Freudian (postcolonial uncanny) intellectual framework. The postcolonial uncanny theory more specifically represents Non-Indigenous intellectual biases and anxieties about the co-determinations of ‘modernity’ and ‘spirituality’ when discussing Indigenous Australian culture. Some Indigenous Australians talk about the complexities of modern society that indicate a double-consciousness, a hybridised vision of two ways of shaping life experience (Indigenous and Non-Indigenous) that inhabit the same space.

**Summary of the secular vs. sacred debate**

By looking at how sociologists and psychologists of religion have understood Indigenous cultures in Freud and Durkheim’s era, it can be seen how Eurocentric societies have become increasingly fascinated with non-European societies, with an eye to assimilating new perspectives and practices to reinvigorate and stimulate further growth in the Eurocentric ‘centers’ of culture. What started as a programme of investigation into the structure and function of primitive cultures with an eye to finding a use (or non-use) for it in contemporary society at the turn of the twentieth century, has increasingly become a programme of self-awareness, and a reconfiguration of the necessary components of (an increasingly multicultural) modern society in the once Eurocentric Western world. One of the points of Gelder and Jacobs’ discourse is that modern Australian society is at a cultural and democratic impasse in relation to the pragmatics of defining and knowing what the modern sacred is. In a sense, this cultural, ideological, and practical impasse that informs many reconciliation debates is a national crisis in consciousness on a variety of grounds (moral, spiritual, academic, legal, social, psychological, environmental) that will be explored in the following chapters.

A promotion of intercultural understanding to overcome cultural exploitation and ongoing colonisation practices (seen in the perpetuation of colonial-secular mindsets) needs to address cultural differences being proactive and co-creative in shared Australian social spaces. In Chapter Two of this thesis, Turnbull pointed out an
intercultural joint-rationality that implies an intellectual and practical partnership between Euro-Australian and Indigenous thinkers sharing a common interest. Turnbull's work refers to comparative studies between Scientific and Indigenous knowledge, which in a simplistic sense can be interpreted as a comparison between secular and sacred fields of knowledge. Alternatively, Charlesworth indicated that Non-Indigenous 'religious' thinking is a non-secular way of investigating Indigenous culture with a sympathetic interest in metaphysical perception. Non-Indigenous investigators/thinkers who can accept the ongoing reality of Indigenous spiritual business are useful in a reconciliation debate; whereas it seems that exclusively secular determinations of reality do not adequately illuminate the purpose of Indigenous cultural Laws, for initial understanding requires belief in a spirit world interconnected with mind, body and Australian lands. Tacey takes up this issue further in the next chapter as a form of Euro-Australian recognition of, and reconciliation with what 'Indigeneity' is.
Chapter 4

Tacey on the use and value of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australian Spiritualities

This chapter will explore David Tacey’s view of modern Australian society in *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* (1995). In this text Tacey sees a need for a resurgent spiritual awareness in modern Australia. Tacey implicitly attaches his notion of a ‘resurgent (Non-Indigenous) spirituality’ to ‘Indigenous Australian Aboriginality’, which is an unavoidably Eurocentric viewpoint based on a post-Jungian ideology. Gelder and Jacobs take exception to Tacey’s work, due to his alleged Jungian ‘New-Age’ cultural perspectives that they argue result in Non-Indigenous or post-Indigenous models of the (modern) sacred. He treats the ‘crisis’ in reconciliation debates that remain culturally divisive as a psychological lack of spiritual awareness in many sectors of the Australian community. Tacey’s work aims at a Non-Indigenous audience, and thus couches a sense of overall Australian cultural transformation in his own limited ‘aboriginal’ ideology based on Eurocentric measures of culture. However, Tacey seems to be aware of the pitfalls of cultural appropriation and social disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. So it is remarkable that he unwittingly privileges a Euro-Australian spiritual psychology, while marginalising an Indigenous Australian spirituality, in his assessment of ‘the Australian psyche’.

**Brief outline of how Tacey represents Indigenous Australian cultures**

Tacey problematises Euro-Australian identity formations, and attempts to provide examples of Australian cultural experience that show traces of a Euro-Australian ‘Indigenous’ cognitive state. His post-Jungian model of ‘the Australian psyche’ is a useful generalisation that approximates a Euro-Australian national ethos that neglects or marginalises unconscious psychological developments. It will be argued in this chapter that non-Indigenous discourses on ‘the spirit of Australia’ ought not represent or homogenise Indigenous Australian spiritual beliefs. Tacey avidly seeks to promote ways of approaching a universalisable model of ‘aboriginality’ beyond perceived limitations imposed on ‘Australian spirituality’ by Indigenous Australian cultural Law and intellectual property. He generalises a theory about ‘the Australian psyche’ to reformulate an ego-driven national identity balanced by a correlative knowledge of its unconscious impulses.

My point is that Tacey circumscribes Non-Indigenous spiritual life in Australia as awakening primarily in encounters with Australian landscapes; places where Indigenous people have developed symbiotic spiritual and cultural relationships while traversing, utilising, living in or on the land. He implicitly indicates that one must become familiar with concepts of ‘land’ that are similar to Aboriginal cultural perceptions of ‘land’, which Tacey ultimately sees as centralised in Euro-Australian mythologies of an archetypal Earth Mother. I think that Indigenous and Non-Indigenous spiritual life experiences and corresponding cultural knowledge systems should be developed side by side, aware that First Nations people have traditional knowledges that have existed for thousands of years in relation to particular homelands and ancestor spirits. He points out that anthropological literature indicates that Aboriginal culture has developed over time
and is not a static culture ‘though it can appear to be so to the untrained eye.’ I think that this possibility of change noted in Aboriginal cultural practices and beliefs, Tacey has used as a way to validate Non-Indigenous interpretations of land in a wider context that incorporates all human experiences in Australian lands. Tacey thus implicitly privileges a (post-Jungian) human philosophical mind-tool of life experience above ‘the Aboriginal sacred’ that is an irreducible concept. He proffers his own estimates of what Indigenous Australian cultural law and knowledge is; that it can be contained in the ‘world-soul’ and its accompanying archetypal ‘aboriginality’. The Aboriginal sacred has been attributed signifiers by different writers over many years that indicate both human and trans-human concepts (Aboriginal kin-groups and ‘their’ land; ‘land is life’) to explain the same (spiritual/religious/cultural) phenomenon.

I believe that what is useful in Tacey’s work are the ways he demonstrates how Western consciousness and ideologies might reconcile with subliminal otherness, that is a ‘necessary’ recognition for further ‘progress’ in Australian cultural studies (of relations between and within multi-cultures, and ‘othering’ discourses). Non-Indigenous spiritually aware discourses often set an agenda for self-transcendence via knowledge of Indigenous issues. ‘Indigenous cultural knowledge’ is re-presented in Non-Indigenous discourses in ways that reflect similarities and differences between Non-Indigenous and Indigenous cultural awareness. It is often difficult to extricate Non-Indigenous intellectual and cultural biases from a desire to represent Indigenous cultural authorities ‘authentically’, usually in relation to ‘spiritual’ perception of land. Land, life and society are some of the interrelated foci in late twentieth-century Indigenous Australian cultural studies, and in the Reconciliation debate. However, Indigenous peoples are the authorities on how local Indigenous knowledge systems can be defined and implemented, and such definitions usually stem from an oral tradition that does not yield easily to data collection.

Post-Jungian archetypal ‘aboriginality’
I think that Tacey privileges an archetypal ‘aboriginality’ that governs human life as a whole, a type of planetary and collective unconscious that exists as a psycho-spiritual reservoir for all humans, regardless of geographical boundaries, customs and beliefs. Jungian archetypal theories tend to universalise given signifiers or images, such as ‘aboriginality’, which I find requires endless qualification in defining what is ‘aboriginal’ or ‘primal’. Tacey attempts to define a concept of transcendental ‘aboriginality’ that is representative of an unconscious universal human condition or an anthropomorphic trans-human condition. As Charlesworth has explained, there are at least 500 distinct Aboriginal nations in the Australian continent (as of 1984) that are ‘easily distinguishable from other religious systems, both “primal” and “universal”, [and] they nevertheless differ quite radically among themselves.’ I think a universalisable ‘aboriginality’ implies ‘pan-Aboriginality’, which is a erroneous way of explaining that all Aboriginal Australian tribes and cultural Laws are derived from one ‘aboriginal’ source. Tacey illuminates a post-Jungian interpretation of an archetypal

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aboriginality' or 'Indigeneity', which he applies to his study of spiritual perception in Indigenous Australian cultural Law.

Tacey has studied in the US under James Hillman, an exponent of 'archetypal psychology' from whom he derives his ideas. Commentators on Hillman's post-Jungian ideas suggest that Hillman's objective 'is not to induce individuals to be more realistic... but to enable them to appreciate that "imagination is reality"... and that reality is imagination: that what seems most literally "real" is, in fact, an image with potentially profound metaphorical implications.' Tacey's commentary on Hillman specifically explores archetypal 'aboriginality' locatable in modern Australian society. Tacey uses a Hillman-inspired notion of 'soul' to explore 'the Australian psyche' and its corresponding unconscious Non-Indigenous 'aboriginality'.

Hillman argues that 'man [humanity] exists in the midst of psyche, it is not the other way around. Therefore, soul is not confined by man, and there is much of psyche that extends beyond the nature of man'... Although soul is associated with 'innerness', it is wrong to claim this innerness for human persons; 'interiority is a metaphor for the soul's nonvisible and nonlITERAL inherence', which is found everywhere, whether in animate or in so-called inanimate things. In a sense, Hillman extraverts our sense of interiority...

Tacey has further speculated on a Hillmanesque theoretical application of an archetypal 'aboriginality' that transcends exclusive Indigenous Australian sacred cultural knowledges in an Australian context, as the following lengthy extract indicates:

James Hillman would argue that because we participate in a living cosmos, and because our human souls are linked to the world-soul or anima mundi, it is hardly surprising that we should find ourselves to be influenced by the soul's presence or inherence in nature. This school of thought insists that we do not need an archaic theory about spirits in the land to account for our being influenced by landscapes or scenes, nor do we require a theory of anthropomorphic projection of human subjectivity into the outside world. If we arrive at the view that we and the physical universe are enwrapped and enmeshed in a world-soul (a view which approximates to that of theoretical physics), then the flow and movement of emotional content and imaginal images between ourselves and the world is a logical consequence of being alive and in the world. Only a spiritually barren society would need to invent intellectual theories about the secret transmission of psychical life from subject to object...

Landscapes, countries, places do not 'have' or 'possess' spirits, but are phenomenological expressions of the world-soul. Different places express different states or conditions of soul. And importantly, the psychic dimension in nature would impact all people in the same way... The spirit-based model of land and earth would be far more constricting and mechanical: one or more fixed spirits in a place, or genius loci, would rise up from the land like ghosts or banshees, taking hold of their human subjects in predictable and predetermined ways. There would be hardly any room in this model for variation and difference, and no accounting for why different people experience landscapes and countries in contradictory ways...

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It points to the possibility of finding a middle way between Western mechanistic perception and Aboriginal metaphysical perception. That it should be the soul that offers this middle position is entirely appropriate and a time-honoured solution to an archetypal dilemma.5

The above extract shows how Tacey privileges Eurocentric (post-Jungian) psychological assessments of the world-soul in Aboriginal metaphysical perception. Thus in an effort to explain the depth psychology of Non-Indigenous Australian culture, Tacey devalues exclusive determinations of sacred sites and spiritual knowledge that Indigenous Australian communities strive to maintain. Tacey homogenises both Non-Indigenous and Indigenous (spiritual) perceptions of land as a collective expression of a world-soul in which ‘aboriginality’ (both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous) is an archetypal dilemma.

The difference between Indigenous Australian ‘aboriginality’ and Non-Indigenous ‘aboriginality’ is in the way spiritual knowledge/life is experienced in Australia. For example, what was once Ayer’s Rock to Non-Indigenous Australians was Uluru to a minority of Indigenous Australians. Now that Uluru is part of Non-Indigenous awareness, the site’s archaic ‘aboriginality’ is recognised. Uluru is an obvious example of how non-Indigenous people can witness to the Aboriginal sacred. Tacey derives his sense of ‘aboriginality’ from his early life growing up in Alice Springs. He argues that there is an indigenous archetype within the collective human psyche:

This ‘indigenous archetype’ can express itself in us in various ways: in my case it links me indirectly to Aboriginality, in the case of others it might link them to Celtic or Jewish sources. The impact or ‘influence’ of Aboriginality upon the white psyche is subtle and complex – and it is psychological rather than metaphysical. Whatever ‘latent’ layer of indigenous life lies buried beneath the sophisticated ego will be stirred to activity by the mytho-poetic power and resonance of Aboriginal culture.6

Tacey merges his own knowledge of Indigenous Australian ‘Aboriginality’ with Non-Indigenous subconscious ‘aboriginality’. The danger in Tacey trying to establish a middle ground between Euro-Australian and First Nations people in Australia is that Euro-Australian Non-indigenous culture may subtly colonise the meaning of sacred sites in Australia by couching the Indigenous sacred in exclusively philosophical and psychological terms. In trying to stimulate the mythic possibilities in Non-Indigenous people, Tacey indicates that it ‘may mean activating the lost or repressed “indigenous” elements within the European traditions... rather than to parasitically draw on others.’7 Tacey justifies his post-Jungian theory of a repressed Euro-Australian ‘indigeneity’. I believe that both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous spiritual experiences should be taken seriously without homogenising or universalizing what ‘aboriginality’ means.

I have read Tacey as being cavalier in the face of perceived accusations of cultural appropriation8 of Indigenous principles. The Indigenous principles he illustrates are

6 Ibid., p 136.
7 Ibid., p 174.
8 Ibid. Citation 14 attempts to justify his use of ‘The Great Mother’ as a core archetype that describes all Indigenous Australian affinities to ‘land’ as ‘mother’. Tacey notes: ‘Some may find this analysis of Aboriginal culture Euro-centric, but the claim of Jungian psychology, which I support, is that archetypal processes such as those described here are found in all cultures and at all times in world history, by virtue of a collective dimension in the human psyche.’ Citation 14, Chapter 7, p 139.
universalised as primarily matriarchal and governed by laws of nature.\(^9\) Tacey envisions modern Australian society as in need of transformation by a new-found spiritual awareness, which, in Tacey’s view, points to a universal spiritual ‘source’ or archetypal awareness beyond Indigenous Australian perceptions of land and ancestor spirits. I believe Indigenous Australian nations cannot be reduced to one archetype that describes a centralised belief system based on a matriarchal or patriarchal belief system. Both men’s and women’s business are mutually respected in Indigenous communities. Tacey is aware of a distinction between Indigenous Australian men’s and women’s socio-politics, but indicates a belief that an ‘Earth Mother’ provides a key role in the religion and mythology of Aboriginal society in general.\(^{10}\) While Tacey correctly identifies an ‘Earth Mother’ as providing a key role to an understanding of some Indigenous cultural rites, Indigenous society and spirituality are complex in ways that seem to disallow ‘one’ archetypal signifier to represent all Indigenous Australian socio-culture and religion. Max Charlesworth has commented\(^{11}\) on how various anthropologists, like Berndt, Elkin, and Peterson, have found variety in Aboriginal Australian religious beliefs and customs from locality to locality. Mobile fertility cults, sky-world beings, and spirits of the dead occur in the religious beliefs and practices of peoples located in Northern Australian (Arnhem Land), Victoria, and north-east Queensland. Charlesworth’s commentary problematises Tacey’s centralising archetypal notions of Indigenous Australian ‘mythology and religion’, showing that a simplistic notion of a world-soul does not suffice as a generalisation that can represent all Indigenous Australian spiritualities in all localities. Spiritual perception certainly does pervade Indigenous Australian cultures, but a variety of Indigenous cultures appear to have rites, customs, and knowledge that extends beyond a centralised ‘worship’ of the Earth as Mother.

Gelder and Jacobs see Tacey’s theory as privileging a psychological ‘aboriginal’ interior.\(^{12}\) I believe that by rendering ‘aboriginality’ as an archetypal step towards knowledge of a human soul accessible by all Australians (Indigenous and Non-Indigenous), Tacey places Indigenous Australian ‘Aboriginality’ into a collectively unconscious pool of primal ‘aboriginality’. Gelder and Jacobs indicate that Tacey’s theory of ‘aboriginality’ implicitly debases the value of Indigenous Australian spiritual knowledge, a knowledge that Indigenous people have fought hard to establish as recognition of a First Nation’s secret-sacred cultural and intellectual property as demonstrated in the struggle to have Native Title claims recognised by Australian law. Tacey’s book proclaims an intention to awaken the spiritual and unconscious dimensions of Non-Indigenous people in modern Australian society. However, by charting a parallel course for Non-Indigenous and Indigenous spiritual consciousness he runs the risk that Non-Indigenous people will pursue and develop a spiritual awareness totally independent of Indigenous Australian knowledge of ancestor spirits and associated spiritual/cultural knowledges.

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\(^{9}\) Tacey, 1995, op. cit. Tacey writes: ‘Although there are clear indications of social and political patriarchy within the structures of Aboriginal society, the actual archetypal situation is matriarchal and is governed by laws of nature.’ p 139.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p 216. In Chapter 7, Tacey’s Citation #13 reads: ‘The key role of an Earth Mother (such as Kumipipi) in the religion and mythology of Aboriginal society is widely supported in the literature, as is evident in the works of Flaitt, King-Boyes, Stanner, Swain, Elkin, and others.’ p 139.

\(^{11}\) Max Charlesworth, 1984 ‘Introduction’ in Religions In Aboriginal Australia, op. cit., pp 7-9.

Eurocentric biases proliferate in discourses on Indigenous spirituality. An exception to this general ‘rule’ of observation is that cross-cultural translations of beliefs incorporate ideas from both cultures, and an anglicised partial-language of Indigenous cultural knowledge. For example, early anthropological field research team, Spencer and Gillen,\textsuperscript{13} used the term ‘the dream time’ to translate a local notion of Indigenous Australian beliefs that was not quite deemed to be organised ‘religion’ in early twentieth century Euro-academia. ‘Primitive’ peoples were said to have no religion by early anthropologists. ‘The dream time’ was a notion indefinable enough to stimulate an extended interest in Aboriginal mythology and religion by future social scientists. As Max Charlesworth has pointed out, Indigenous people have in recent times adopted the use of the anglicised word ‘Dreaming’ when speaking of their own cultural knowledge\textsuperscript{14} – at least when communicating spiritual knowledge in the presence of Non-Indigenous observers. Like Charlesworth’s desire to establish a study of distinctive Aboriginal religions via a philosophy of comparative religion, Tacey seeks to situate Aboriginal religion within a wider religious and philosophical context that incorporates what he sees as forms of Non-Indigenous Australian ‘aboriginality’. Specifically, Tacey seeks to show how Non-Indigenous people are unconsciously ‘aboriginalised’ by the fact that they live in the geographical environs and social spaces of Australia.

Aboriginal religion and society has in the past been seen as dysfunctional in a modern social setting. David Tacey speaks of the need to recognize how Euro-Australian nationalists and imperialists have developed a siege mentality against anything ‘un-Australian’, anything that disturbs the status quo. Tacey sums up the Australian psyche with the following statements:

Many [Australians] are alert to the false unity imposed upon the country by nationalistic sentiment, and are keen to explore ruptures and gaps – both within society and the self. There is a new receptivity to plurality and otherness, especially as these are embodied in women, Aboriginality, multiculturalism and Asia-Pacific neighbours... Meanwhile, a good many other Australians, especially in our folk- or low-culture, want to continue as before, nationalistic, contracted, suspicious of foreigners, masculinist, devoted to closure, unity, certainty...

With these changes taking place at a furious rate, with people from the city and country being exposed to a post-masculinist consciousness that encourages openness and is suspicious of closure, the old nationalism is under threat. But then, threat is what it is used to and what it has come to expect, because the siege mentality is its forte.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Max Charlesworth, editorial introduction in 1988 \textit{Religion in Aboriginal Australia}, ed. by Charlesworth, Howard Morphy, Diane Bell, and Kenneth Maddock, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, Australia, p 9. Charlesworth has identified that field anthropologists, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen as the writers who coined the phrase ‘the Dreaming’, being among the few early researchers who recognised Aboriginal cultural knowledge as a form of organised non-Western ‘religion’ – ‘magic’ being the preferred label that denoted a lesser form of amoral spiritual belief. ‘The dream time’ translates as \textit{alcheringa} or \textit{altijiranga} to Aranda-speaking people, a notion that describes the period when the ancestor spirits shaped the physical world and at the same time laid down the ‘Law’ or way of life to be followed by Aboriginal groups. Thus, the Aranda phrase \textit{altijiranga ngumbakula} has the connotation of ‘having originated out of one’s own eternity’, ‘immortal’, ‘uncreated’, and it is this which is essential to the concept of ‘the Dreaming’. At the same time T.E.H. Strehlow’s translation of \textit{altijira rama} means ‘to see or dream eternal things’, or ‘to see with eternal vision’.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.} Charlesworth notes that: ‘Although the terms ‘Dreaming’, ‘the Dreaming’, ‘Dreamtime’, have now been appropriated by Aborigines themselves, there is no specific concept in the various Aboriginal cultures which is translated by these English terms.’ p 9.

\textsuperscript{15} Tacey, 1995, \textit{op. cit.}, p 59.
The ruptures and gaps Tacey highlights indicate he is aware of postmodern and postcolonial shifts in intellectual and cultural awareness. Tacey sees that nationalistic-imperialist Australian identities rest on a shaky, consciously ego-driven ground that disallows unconscious elements to infiltrate them. Tacey is a spiritually-minded Non-Indigenous person concerned with the preponderance of nationalist attitudes that reinforce economic rationalist, masculinist, and beer-swilling battler identities as normal in Australia. Such identities have been constructed against a threat of invasion. These are very colonialist, exploitative and fearful attitudes generated against perceived ‘outsiders’. Ironically, Indigenous Australian cultural knowledges are often seen as a threat to the continuation of a true-blue Australian identity, especially when they lead to Native Title claims, while places like Uluru and Kakadu are promoted as great nationalist tourist icons.

Having trained in post-Jungian psychotherapy, Tacey warns that narrowly focused ego-centred behaviour observed over extended periods of time will eventually give way to unconscious behaviours. To Australians fixated on their nationalistic identities, unconscious behaviour threatens the stability of their relationship with their well-earned homes in their true-blue nation. Unconsciousness, it may appear, comes from outside their comfort zone. Lateral or unconscious knowledge ‘is knowledge that comes from a wholly unexpected direction, from a direction that is not even understood as a direction until the knowledge forces itself upon one. Lateral truths [or behaviours] point to the falseness of axioms and postulates underlying one’s existing system of getting at the truth’[^16]. Unconscious awareness is knowledge that ‘the average Australian’ does not think it necessary to possess on a regular basis. Tacey is questioning generalist notions about what constitutes ‘the average Australian’, redefining such easy identity formations with complementary notions of unconsciousness contained in perceptions of Australian landscape and the ‘aboriginality’ (or ancient spiritual archetypes) of human souls.

**Formulation of a crisis in Australian consciousness**

In *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, Tacey explores the tenets of an Australian national identity to show that an overly masculinist, secular, and ‘true blue’ mindset is not representative of *all* Australians. Tacey further suggests that a rigidly patriarchal and Euro-imperialist self-awareness endangers itself by not allowing ‘unconscious’, subliminal and external forces to penetrate the mould. Denial of other cultural experiences can lead to what Tacey sees as a radical destruction of fiercely ‘conscious’ and ego-driven Australian people if unconscious developments are not taken seriously.

Tacey sees Western intellectuals detecting the falsity in Australian society, detecting a presence of decay in a patriarchal imperialistic nationalist ethos that implicitly represents a ‘true humanity’ or true societal model. Such intellectualism reveals a crisis of consciousness manifesting in writers like D.H. Lawrence, Judith Wright, and Patrick White, who have documented Australian culture in novels and poetry. In reference to *Kangaroo* by D.H. Lawrence, Tacey narrates the novelist’s awe of the immensity of the Australian outback landscape, a ‘land’ that challenges the self-importance of the individual in comparison to such impenetrable and indecipherable monumentality of being. He refers to Judith Wright’s landscape poems post-1950, which conflict with her

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earlier poetic reiteration of the Banjo Patterson national-identity-forming poetic mythos of the battler. Wright's later poetry problematises the continuing colonial attitude that cannot conquer landscape, no matter how many towns and cities are built.

For Tacey, Lawrence and Wright are representative of Euro-Australian (intellectual) self-reflexive perceptions that criticise 'modern' Australian society in its blindness to 'an enormous gap between consciousness of Europeans and the primal reality of Australian landscape.'

Primal', in the above sense, does not narrowly refer to Indigenous Australian culture, but is part of a nomenclature that broadens definitions of 'archaic', 'remote', and 'strangely alien', when communicating 'almost non- or anti-human' psychic atmospheres experienced in the Australian landscape. 'Primal encounters' is a Non-Indigenous sense of the spiritual Tacey is trying to evoke. Tacey feels that even Henry Lawson's work similarly reflects upon the unconquerable aspects of Australian landscape and negative aspects of modern society. The 'unconscious' reflections in Lawson's work have been overlooked in favour of his socialist literary narratives that promote the underdog and an Australia built on working-class attitudes, an image that continues to influence a nationalist sense of the 'Aussie battler'. In this sense, Lawson metaphorically represents the dark side of Banjo Patterson's colonialist poetry. The 'siege mentality' in the Australian psyche, which I have interpreted as a crisis of consciousness, helped to create the 'battler' stereotype. The crisis of consciousness, in Tacey's estimate, can be detected in the battler mentality that continues to dominate Australian national identity formations, to the extent that people like Lawrence and Wright, who represent academic or high-brow consciousness, can detect an overwhelming falsity and ignorance of undernourished unconscious drives and expressions in Australian communities. Tacey explains that this situation is ironic because in the nineteenth century it was the colonial high-culture which was felt to be moribund and obsolete, whereas the egalitarian low-culture was progressive and forward looking... and the siege mentality is its [modern society's] forte. Now, the strictly working-class, anti-intellectual battler image projected on all Australians as the norm is being challenged by postcolonial investigation of attitudes in Australian communities.

A model of modernity

In Tacey's view, modern Australian society is predominantly a conscious, ego-driven identity fixated on a siege mentality that protects a nationalist and Euro-imperialist cultural identity. Zygmunt Bauman provides a theoretical model for the psychological development and enforcement of modernist practices that sets the scene for the entry of postmodernist discontinuities that disturb such rigid practices. Bauman describes a type of modern polis observable in Eurocentric societies:

In this reason-drafted city with no mean streets, dark spots and no-go areas order was to be made; there was to be no other order. Hence the urge, the desperation: there would be as much order in the world as we manage to put into it. The practice stemming from a conviction that order can be only man-made, that it is bound to remain an artificial imposition on the unruly natural state of things and humans, that for this reason it will forever remain vulnerable and in need of constant supervision and policing, is the main (and indeed, unique) distinguishing mark of modernity. From now on, there would be no moment of respite, no relaxing of vigilance. The ordering impulse would be fed ever again

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17 Tacey, 1995, op. cit., p 82.
18 Ibid., p 59.
by the fear of chaos never to be allayed. The lid of order would never seem tight and heavy enough. Escape from the wilderness, once embarked on, will never end.\(^9\)

Bauman’s philosophical description of ‘modernity’ describes a form of siege mentality against ‘the unruly natural state of things and humans’. The ordering impulse that ‘would be fed ever again by the fear of chaos never to be allayed’ is a consequence of nationalists and imperialists who believe their ‘battler’ identity is under constant threat by Australians who oppose them, such as republicans, and those who speak of multicultural and Indigenous Australian values. Bauman’s description of the Eurocentric nation-state echoes a rational and scientific way of organizing society, a mentality that is constantly being reformulated by the expansion of Australian society by multicultural and Indigenous value systems. Scientific paradigms are in perpetual motion with hypotheses, results and conclusions repeatedly defining the microcosms and macrocosms of human life. Tacey treats Indigenous Australian spirituality as part of an unconscious realm of thought and being that repeatedly challenges the tenets of scientific and social knowledge systems. A siege mentality is noticeable in the ‘little Aussie battler’ persevering against a harsh Australian elemental climate, amidst ‘rugged mountain ranges, droughts and flooding rains’ – this describes the ‘heritage’ of Australian nationalists and imperialists. In light of Bauman’s comments, the ideology of the battler is a modernist derived ideology whereby hard-working Australians carve out their social niche over the span of their lives. The siege mentality maintains a cultural divide between vague outside forces and hard-won Australian cultural norms. I believe that Australian nationalists and British Empire supporters have maintained a siege mentality, which has been noticeable recently in One-Nation-styled political opinions. These views inhibit the development of Aboriginal cultural discourses that feature Indigenous wisdoms and spiritualities. Crossing the divide between conscious and unconscious Australian culture is part of Tacey’s plan for transformation of dominating forces in ‘the Australian psyche’.

Tacey refers to an entity called the Australian psyche. He claims that journalists ‘often talk about the national psyche because it is a convenient fiction that allows them to make generalizations one step removed from statistical reality.’\(^{10}\) To Tacey ‘the Australian psyche’ is a device that enables him to integrate apparently disparate materials – spiritual and social experiences. As seen in Chapter One, secular-minded theorists, like Durkheim and Freud, have denied the value of Indigenous Australian spiritual/cultural knowledge by recasting its importance as precursors to modernist social and psychological types. Theorists sensitive to the import of ‘other’ knowledge systems, like Tacey and Bauman, encourage the development of ‘unconscious’ cultural impulses, such as those they claim to locate in Indigenous Australian spiritual discourses.

**Cultural renewal in White’s literature**

The following is a report on Tacey’s reading of Patrick White’s novel *Voss* (1957), and how it contributes to Tacey’s understanding of a split between conscious and unconscious identity formations in Australian society. Tacey has explored Patrick White’s constructions of two worlds of being in Australia with an eye to defining ‘modernist’ and ‘unconscious’ elements noticeable in Australian culture. Tacey notes that in White’s *Voss*, the theoretical split between modern, rational, safe city ‘huddlers’,

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and those people who dare explore the irrational inner continent geographically and psychologically, is delineated in way that suggests that the huddler and explorer are barely familiar with each other’s worldview. To be specific, Tacey speaks of White’s narrative structure in *Voss* that juxtaposes frenzied self-mutilation in (*Voss*) the protagonist’s Australian desert exploration, and ‘the safe, enclosed world of Mr. Edmund Bonner and his bourgeois circle in Sydney... occupied with petty and trivial tasks of keeping up appearances.’ Tacey gets the sense in his reading of *Voss* that ‘the unconscious interior “devours” because the conscious exterior defends.’ White’s literary account becomes a springboard for Tacey to generally define some psychological anomalies in the Australian psyche. Tacey allows that White’s textual framework is inadequate in its symbolical representation of a ‘devouring Earth Goddess,’ signified by *Voss*’s death-sacrifice encounter with an Aboriginal death-cult led by an Aboriginal woman at a sacred site. The land, as an Other discourse, is as complex and irreducible as any notion of a or the postmodern condition. The Australian landscape as a realm of otherness is ‘not simply good or evil, or stereotypically of heaven or hell.’

The two worlds of the city and the desert in *Voss* become increasingly divergent, yet infiltrating each other’s boundaries only superficially over the course of the novel. For example, Edmund Bonner finances *Voss*’s desert journey; members of *Voss*’s party abandon him in the desert to go home to the city; their attempt to return home ends in their death. *Voss* has often been seen as undergoing a hero’s journey. *Voss*, in the heroic sense, is on a nobly self-proclaimed course into darkness and mystery, driven to conquer the unknown for those in the future who would further codify and thus ‘colonise’ the archaic and strangely alien Australian desert experience. For Tacey, *Voss* has anti-hero impulses:

> It is clear that *Voss* is an unknowing victim of a demonic complex, and yet most conventional accounts of this text represent *Voss* as an heroic achiever who finally attains Christ-like humility and divine status. The real problem is that we in secular society do not understand the language of myths or archetypes, we have no way of knowing who or what drives human personality, and so we cannot distinguish sainthood from ritual suicide, or a demonic complex from divine inspiration.

Thus, in *Voss*, readers have seen *Voss*’s death-sacrifice in the Australian desert landscape as paradoxically paradisal and/or demonic. Tacey sees that if this novel is read as a metaphor for the cultural currents in modern society, then one can sink too far either way into rational and/or irrational boundaries of being, and describes a need to balance knowledge of both conscious and unconscious developments in Australian society. Tacey sees the Australian psyche overburdened with consciously ego-driven cultural ideals that need to be balanced with an understanding of unconscious psychological drives. Tacey says that ‘[my] own view is that if either extreme gains the ascendancy, cultural evolution and spiritual development cannot take place.’ The

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26 David Tacey, 1995 ‘Relaxing barriers, admitting the other’ in *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, HarperCollins Australia p 112.
distinction Tacey makes between secular consciousness and spiritual unconsciousness is that they constitute paradigms of thought that need to recognize the use and value of each other’s intellectual and cultural position. White’s narrative is perceived by Tacey as a warning to Euro-Australians that shows the terrible consequences invoked by the characters in his text, whose cultural mindsets become increasingly pronounced and disturbingly ego-driven or unconsciously driven. A radical split in the general psychology of Australian communities is a narrative device used by both White and Tacey to arbitrarily distinguish between what is known and what is denied in Australian cultural experiences.

**Psycho-spiritual transformations in modern Australian society**

Tacey makes two claims that conflict with each other:

a) Tacey is aware of white middle class cultural appropriation of Indigenous Australian spirituality to create notions of self-transcendence, and to define new/old age spiritual concepts.\(^{27}\)

b) Tacey sees landscape as a bridge to understanding the (Aboriginal) source, in Tacey’s words a symbolic continuum between land and people. He believes that, ‘By becoming attuned to the land, one is, almost involuntarily, becoming attuned to Aboriginality, or as it were to the ‘source’ of Aboriginality.’\(^{28}\)

The first claim a) highlights the derivative spiritual status that is brought about by cultural appropriations of Indigenous culture by New Age movements. The second claim b) seeks to define ‘Aboriginality’ as a post-Jungian archetypal image of Non-Indigenous unconscious life in Australia, that is (to be) differentiated from Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge. Yet ‘Aboriginality’ is initially galvanized into action (and thus appropriated) by Non-Indigenous perceptions of Indigenous Australian land-as-life experiences. Tacey presents an impossible possibility: ‘Aboriginality’ as an archetypal Non-Indigenous psychological concept that is independent of specifically Indigenous Australian culture, yet the term ‘Aboriginality’ is an indicator of spiritual and subconscious elements that are dependent on hybridised Indigenous/Euro-Australian ontological or archetypal judgements of the ‘source of Aboriginality’. In this way, Tacey implicitly homogenises all (traditional) Indigenous Australian cultures as spiritual and land-based in origin. In contrast to Charlesworth’s commentaries on religion in Aboriginal Australia noted earlier in this chapter that indicate sky-based as well as land-based Indigenous cultural knowledges, Tacey explains that the source of Non-Indigenous Aboriginality should be a reflection of what he indicates is a predominantly land-based Indigenous Australian spiritual/cultural knowledge.

Relating his own growing up in Alice Springs, he says:

> I did not, I could not, take on their particular [Aboriginal] cosmology as my own, but it served as a living reminder of the possibility of cosmology, and I know that my soul was stirred and inspired by the Aboriginal example... This budding mysticism, pantheism, or desert-romanticism deeply moved me, and had a lasting impact. It may not have been the anthropologically precise Dreaming to which Elsa Corbett exposed me, but it was, at the


\(^{28}\) *Ibid.*, p 14
very least, the psychologically satisfying white man's dreaming, and landscape was never the same for me again.  

One example of a way 'towards a new dreaming' that Tacey speculates upon, is a type of land-based cognition that is recommended as an aspect of psychological transformation of Australian national identities:

The Australian landscape is our greatest asset, our assurance that any society here cannot afford to become complacent, that the other around us cannot be ignored or deprived of its shocking revelatory and transformative power. The only way to develop a spiritually powerful culture in Australia is to enter more into the psychic field of nature; to 'shamanise' ourselves in the image of nature... We need to become less human and more like nature.  

This synopsis of a new spirituality begs many ontological questions: what is nature that it supersedes human lifeforms? Is our humanity or Australian community not 'real' enough? How can we tell? Who decides? What structures and functions determine these new coordinates of being? Such questions are not readily answerable in a classically logical and reasonable manner.

Tacey is speaking from a spiritually receptive position that invites change to our modern human social and intellectual structures of well-being and identity. This again is an exploration of 'Aboriginality', in the sense of coming to terms with an entity called the (or a) human soul. Tacey says:

The archaic dreaming soul, which is buried beneath the busyness of contemporary white rationality, is the missing ingredient necessary for Australia's psychological health and cultural stability. That dreaming soul is what we must integrate, not by way of consuming Aboriginality itself, but by way of cracking open our layers buried there, waiting to be released into life. Landscape is sufficiently powerful to be able to deliver the necessary blow to our consciousness, and thus create the opening through which the soul 'down under' can be born...  

Tacey indicates that he is generalising when he develops a need for a psycho-spiritual transformation of the Australian psyche, via external, unrealized, 'unconscious' sources. The Australian psyche is an enabling device; so too 'dreaming soul' is an enabling device to talk about a new spiritual development, to map the unrealised discourses of unconsciousness in a general way. Tacey's expression of an archaic 'dreaming soul' is a way of talking about the archetypal 'source of Aboriginality'. By combining the linguistic signifiers of an Indigenous (dreaming) and Non-Indigenous (soul) he creates a language to express a trans-historical and timeless post-Jungian archetypal 'aboriginality'. I think Tacey's 'dreaming soul and sense of timelessness aspires to being half-Indigenous and half-Euro-Australian.

Appropriation, disadvantage and soulless cultural cringes

Tacey sees the 'dreaming soul' equation as 'our' [Non-Indigenous] need to befriend the deeper, more primal or 'aboriginal' layer in our own psychic structure. I believe it is important to explore Non-Indigenous unconscious psychic structures, and in this need to

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30 Ibid., p 7.
31 Ibid., p 12.
explore the Australian psyche to formulate principles of a healthy body, mind and spirit, I support Tacey. He explains that this deeper, spiritual layer in ourselves (as multicultural Australians) is now being projected upon Aboriginal people, and this gives rise to several important cultural problems. Tacey perceives that there are at least three problems with projecting Euro-Australian desires and impulses towards Indigenous Australian people and their cultural ideas:

a) Cultural appropriation of ‘the Other’.
b) Stereotyping Indigenous people as spiritual yet incapable of entering secular mindsets in modern society.
c) Projected ‘soullessness’ upon Non-Indigenous people.

a) Cultural appropriation of ‘the Other’. Tacey sees that ‘Western consumerist mentality will want to devour and consume Aboriginality... The consuming of Aboriginal cosmology is merely the most recent expression of white imperialist appropriation of the other. I understand Tacey’s idea of Western consumerism and cultural appropriations to mean that colonisers have taken Aboriginal land under the terra nullius legal interpretation for 200 years. Modern world colonisers, under the guise of economic rationalism, want to colonise the potential ‘lands’ of the Aboriginal psychological interior, by codifying and re-colonising Indigenous Australian spiritual laws of being as a commodity for mass consumer markets. For example I have seen that Aboriginal dot-art is sold in global markets by Non-Indigenous art dealers purporting to be selling traditional Aboriginal knowledge of land contained in the canvas, didgeridoo, boomerang, or other artwork codified as purely Indigenous Australian. Tacey refers to W.E.H. Stanner’s coming of the phrase ‘White Man Got No Dreaming’ where we ask for their Dreaming because we have none. This is evidence of what Tacey sees as the ‘pursuit of Aboriginal cosmology [that is read by many political commentators as still further evidence of our willful destruction of this ancient culture.’

Appropriation of Indigenous language and culture exists in archival records in some cases. In Central Australia T.G.H. Strehlow recorded over 4000 Aboriginal ‘songs’ as an Aboriginal linguistic specialist and interpreter of pure representations of Indigenous Australian cultural law. In Songs of Central Australia (1971) Strehlow explains the Walbiri structure and function of ‘song’:

The term ‘songs’ used in this book denotes the traditional native poems of Central Australia which are intoned according to traditional rhythmic measures. Each of these poems is associated with a definite ceremonial centre and with a mythical supernatural being or a mythical group of totemic ancestors. Hence a ‘song’ is the complete set of verses associated with any ceremonial site and pertaining to the doings of any single mythical being or group of local totemic ancestors.

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33 Ibid., p 132.
34 Ibid., p 133.
35 Ibid., p 133.
36 T.G.H. Strehlow, 1971 Songs of Central Australia, Angus and Robertson Ltd., Sydney, Australia. Strehlow’s work re-created numerous words and sounds of traditional Aboriginal ‘songs’ using the English alphabet among the Walbiri in central Australia. Strehlow gathered 4270 aboriginal song verse from 1932—1960 ‘most of which were in couplet or quatrains’.
Strehlow’s purpose was to record the traditional languages of central Australian Indigenous peoples as song cycles that are supernaturally or mythically based. He believed ‘all Central Australian verse is intended to be sung or intoned’. He further believed that: ‘Knowledge of the old ceremonial languages has already become extinct in several of the areas where I collected my material; and it is difficult to see how future linguistic and anthropological students could unravel the meaning [of the songs].’

There is a recent answer to the problem Strehlow has seen as the continued interpretation of Indigenous song cycles. In Indigenous lands and nations where songs had been reported by Strehlow as having died-out or had been lost, Richard Kimber found elders who could recite the songs of their land word for word. Thus Non-Indigenous researchers (such as Strehlow) who represent Indigenous culture should be wary of being the authenticators of a pure Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge.

These examples of ‘Indigenous Australian commodities’ that are opened for general use by Non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike, were once specifically designed for use by those people who were locally familiar with traditional Indigenous cultural laws. Traditional aboriginal ‘arts’ are generally approximate imitations of the Indigenous Australian traditional cultural knowledges. I believe that a Western consumerist mentality has often appropriated Indigenous icons as sellable produce in marketplaces, libraries, and museums, without the Westerners having digested or understood the ‘Aboriginal’ codes/symbols they are selling.

b) Stereotyping Indigenous people as spiritual yet incapable of entering secular mindsets in modern society. By adopting traditional Indigenous Australian culture as a surrogate-spirituality for a nation, Tacey perceives that:

We continue in our old mode of foisting psychological projections upon [Aboriginal people]. Rather than understanding Aboriginals [sic] as a complex people, we reduce them to a single archetype, which can so rapidly turn into an imprisoning stereotype. This means that they are not respected as a real people with real material and developmental needs, but viewed as participants in a desert fairytale... Aboriginals [sic] ought to be free to live their Dreaming and to move toward political independence and material prosperity. Spirituality ought not be regarded as anti-thetical to worldliness.

I think Tacey is basically right about how Euro-Australians project their own理想isations of what ‘aboriginality’ and ‘spirituality’ is upon Indigenous Australian people and their culture. Tacey’s perception of Indigenous Australian people being stereotyped by Euro-Australian expectations relates to Eurocentric notions of the Dreaming and Aboriginal political and economic independence. Due to Aboriginal cultural displacement and European intellectual institutions that sought to submerge Aboriginal spirituality into the human sciences, notions of ‘spirituality’ in Australia were, in the past, stereotyped by Eurocentric cultural ideas. European academic notions (for example, Durkheimian sociology) and organised Christian religious groups implicitly formulated Australian ‘spirituality’ (for example, early twentieth-century

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39 Ibid., p xiv.
41 Tacey, 1995, op. cit., p 130.
Lutheran Church in Hermansburg, South Australia). Indigenous cultural ideas were seen as a marginal and alternative social force compared to 'religion norms' recognised by imperial Euro-Australians.

The ‘desert fairytale’, as Tacey has indicated, is a stereotype with the connotation that traditional Indigenous cultural beliefs are a shallow intellectual framework supported by folk-tales and myths. The fairytale is also an idealisation of a place outside of modern (secular) society. Tacey’s criticism works to empower the value-system of Aboriginal religious and spiritual principles in the face of an Aboriginal cultural stereotype that belittles ‘the Dreamtime’. I think the ‘desert fairytale’ fails to acknowledge that 'traditional' Aboriginal communities are confined to the desert (and other more or less inhospitable regions) because colonisers slaughtered, abused, dispossessed them and drove them into parts of the country that the colonisers did not see as useful. A ‘return to Eden’ notion (which can accompany the ‘desert fairytale’) evokes the noble savage ideology which idealises Aboriginal people as always blissfully happy in the desert and ‘outback regions’ of Australia. This may be true in certain cases. However, perpetuation of the ‘desert fairytale’ confines Aboriginal communities to inhospitable regions on the fringes of towns and cities in the fallacious belief that Aboriginal people are happy to continue their hunter-gatherer lifestyle unhindered by the Euro-Australian farming, mining, and tourism industries of modern Australian life.

Thus the pursuit of a ‘return to Eden’ ideal located outside of Australian cities signifies a sort of desperate longing for (Aboriginal/ pre-colonial) desert experiences that exert a catharsis upon ‘our’ (predominantly Non-Indigenous) sleeping unconscious impulses. I think the search by Non-Indigenous thinkers for Indigenous principles that adequately function in and/or problematise modern social settings is a revaluation of the Western and European principles that guide the laws and ideologies of modern societies. This Non-Indigenous impulse for a neo-Romantic return to Nature is a seeking to re-invigorate or reconnect Non-Indigenous people with their own Indigenous heritage. Considering Anglo-Celtic and Euro-Australian ‘ancient cultures’ are rooted geographically in Europe, Indigenous Australian culture is seen as a replacement for ‘our’ lost indigenous connections. Tacey views the essence of life and the human soul in modern Australian society in the spiritual context of geographical and intellectual settings of Aboriginal spiritualities.

Gelder and Jacobs speak of how Indigenous Australian spirituality is addressed by Euro-culture as impracticable in modern (secular) society. As Gelder and Jacobs have expressed, the Aboriginal sacred is read as pre-modern and postmodern. Tacey believes ‘[we] need to develop not pre-modern mysticism but a postmodern spirituality.”42 I believe that a stereotype is maintained whereby irresolvable differences between the '(Aboriginal) sacred' and modern society indicate that ‘spiritual lifestyle choices’ result in social disadvantage. Indigenous Australian Spirituality is praised by Tacey as the hallmark of a new level of consciousness that is influencing new identity formations noticeable in mainstream Australia. This new spirituality is an unconscious dimension that promotes a psychological balancing of the Australian psyche that Tacey describes as a rigid and ego-driven secular societal structure. Tacey indicates the fallibility of the outdated stereotype of Indigenous Australia having social and material standards that are not expected to ever improve dramatically. This is a stereotype that perpetuates the

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perceived incommensurability between Indigenous Australian spiritual living standards and modern (secular) society’s living standards. This stereotype wrongly circumscribes Indigenous culture as the pursuit of a spiritual knowledge and practices that is deemed stimulating yet ultimately ‘unworldly’ in modern society. I believe that Indigenous Australians deserve the human respect of being deemed capable of successfully pursuing materiality and spirituality in modern society. The long history of maltreatment and assimilation policies that forbade Indigenous people to practice their language and ceremonies has disrupted Indigenous cultural Laws. I believe that one of the reasons for the imputed projection of the burden of spirituality onto Indigenous people has been so that they stay in their socio-economic place and get patronised as quaint tokens of a marginal world while others can get on with getting rich. Thus Indigenous spirituality has been inappropriately projected as a burden for Indigenous people of an old and dying world of values that is out of place in modern Australian society.

b) Projected ‘soullessness’ upon Non-Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous idealisation of Indigenous Australian spiritualities constitutes a limited vision of the potential of human souls living in Australia in Tacey’s reckoning. Tacey sees that ‘by projecting sacredness upon Aboriginals, white Australians disempower themselves spiritually and refuse to accept responsibility for their own souls.’ I can see two ideas interfused here:

i) That Indigenous Australians can harness and understand sacred realities while Non-Indigenous Australians cannot, an idea that reinforces the ‘strangely alien’, non-ordinary ways of Indigenous people without coming to grips with Non-Indigenous sacred realities and ‘Indigeneity’.

ii) that secularised denial of spirituality implies that such other worlds do not exist, except as pathologically unstable mental excursions into fantasy and illusion to escape the rigours of ‘the real world’ (modern society).

The second claim has a lot to do with maintaining order and security in a secularised modern state, by administering orthodox ideas about normality as a curative for those individuals ill-at-ease in coping with progress, industry, economic, and social forces traditionally seen as typical life in modern (secular) society. Under such conditions ‘modern society’ is maintained by a prison-like state of consciousness-controlling philosophy that promotes a rational and secular mentality that will never finalise the boundaries of modern societal rationality. Thus spirituality becomes an anomaly that must be systemized with minimal fuss for the continuity of unconscious and spiritual denial in a Non-Indigenous secularised Australian psyche. ‘Soullessness’ is my description of Bauman’s model of how Eurocentric societies maintain secular principles of the modern state. Tacey’s words point beyond Bauman’s description to a projected soullessness of Non-Indigenous people rather than the maintenance of ego versus unconscious cultural boundaries, whereby ‘Australian middle classes and the new age fringe-dwellers join together in the indulgent experience of feeling inferior to Aboriginal people. Alongside Aboriginals [sic], many Europeans feel themselves to be merely ego, merely material, empty and hollow.’

43 See particularly, c. 1992, Koorie culture, Koori control [videorecording], [Melbourne, Vic.], Film Victoria, Mozo Films [production].
45 Tacey, 1995, op. cit, p 131.
In making the first claim, I have drawn from Tacey’s notion of Non-Indigenous spiritual disempowerment—an inference that Non-Indigenous Australians will never be able to attain the status of Indigenous Australian people who are owners and caretakers of the culture-specific spiritual laws and their ancestor spirits. Gelder and Jacobs are similarly aware of discourse that portrays Non-Indigenous people as spiritually inadequate. As I have indicated on page 44 of this thesis (footnote 20), Gelder and Jacobs have noted that ‘Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s remark on the Jawoyn people’s claim for the sacredness of Coronation Hill, [was] that “they are outside of an intellectual framework with which most of us are comfortable”’.

‘Us’ circumscribes ‘most Non-Indigenous secular minded Australians’, and is spoken with a hint of exasperation and incredulity at the (spiritual) meta-narratives that form part of the discourse of numerous Native Title claims. Tacey refuses to accept that ‘white man has no dreaming’, and seeks ways to establish Non-Indigenous spiritual perception, albeit, in the first stages of cultural and spiritual development via Indigenous Australian models.

To put it crudely, Western culture is often accused of being incomprehensibly soulless when confronted with the sacred claims of Indigenous cultures. Tacey sees this as a form of cultural cringe at our awkward spiritual impulses that are not up to scratch with Indigenous spiritualities. In this sense, Australians generally feel impelled to measure themselves against the idealised progressive communities of America, or Europe, forever being perceived to be a country with fledgling social, intellectual, and spiritual forces, composed primarily of the cultures of other countries. New ideas generated in Australia about culture are deemed embarrassing if they do not meet the demands of global economy. Imperialistic nationalism in Australia is derived from Eurocentric socio-political forces. A Non-Indigenous exploration of unconscious psyche-spiritual forces that aims at revealing a ‘source’ of aboriginality, applicable to at least Non-Indigenous Australians, is Tacey’s fledging idea. For Tacey, this is not a process of unconscious cultural appropriation; rather, of the unconscious revelation.

Tacey’s argument advocates a self-development ‘programme’ (a way to ‘shamanise ourselves in the image of nature’) for those who subscribe to a Eurocentric or secular mindset, to reassess and discover a deeper awareness of the principles of Eurocentricity and securality, to accommodate new insights into the use-value of these systems and how spiritual psychology needs to explore and strengthen an understanding of the use-value of sacred dimensions of our humanity. Tacey hypothesises that:

Our need is certainly to re-mythologise and to develop spiritual kinship with the land, but the Aboriginal cosmology may best serve us as an inspiration to create our own cosmology, rather than as a template or foundation upon which to build our own. We need to regard Aboriginal mysteries metaphorically rather than literally, to experience them as rich cultural fantasies that stir our own souls to activity, rather than as metaphysical systems to believe in.

The danger with this formation of a Non-Indigenous cosmology is an associated belief that Indigenous Australian cultural laws (cosmologies) do not affect Non-Indigenous people physically, mentally, and spiritually. Little is known about the extent to which Indigenous Australian cultural law affects Non-Indigenous people on a daily basis, or

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47 Tacey, 1995, op. cit., p 133.
whether such spiritual phenomena affect Non-Indigenous Australians similarly or not at all. Tacey’s tacit appropriation of the Aboriginal sacred is to stir our human souls to increased activity. Tacey’s transformation theory is geared towards Non-Indigenous Australians, and an intuitive language to describe the new experiences:

The deep world of the psyche, which is really ‘nature’ inside us, is directly influenced by the forces of nature outside us. In Australia, where land and Aboriginality are fused, this means that white Australians, virtually in spite of themselves, are slowly aboriginalised in their unconscious. 44

Tacey delineates two cosmologies – a Non-Indigenous cosmology and an Indigenous cosmology. White Australians being unavoidably aboriginalised in their unconscious seemingly contradicts Tacey’s idea that Non-Indigenous Australians can build their own ‘aboriginal’ cosmology separated from Indigenous Australian cosmology. Tacey attempts to point to a spiritual ‘source’ that is beyond conceptions of Aboriginal Australian cultural law, to a post-Jungian archetypal ‘aboriginality’ that can potentially permeate all human souls on planet earth, regardless of notions of separate races and nations. It is a universalisable notion of ‘nature’ (inside and outside us) that pertains to an Australian experience of the human soul. Tacey’s ontological framework is implicitly reconciliatory to multi-culturalism, and importantly is built on European philosophical cross-cultural encounters using a notion of Euro-Australian ‘aboriginality’ or archetypal Indigenous principles.

In adopting Tacey’s plan to create a Non-Indigenous ‘aboriginality’, one would consider Indigenous Australian spirituality as one facet of our human condition grappling with profound and unrealised dimensions of a Non-Indigenous ‘aboriginality’ (not simply or exclusively, what it is to be Aboriginal – e.g., Koori, Walbiri, or otherwise). Traditional Indigenous peoples are often connected with what white observers call ‘unconscious’ or ‘spiritual dimensions’ of day-to-day life. This is the day-to-day mindset Tacey seeks more familiarity with, where spiritual and unconscious discourses become more commonplace. His discourse of re-enchantment ‘towards a new dreaming’ (a cultural renewal of the Australian psyche) seeks to problematise the Weberian conception of disenchantment characterising the modern world, via the integration of a Non-Indigenous aboriginality, derived from experiences of Australian landscape. I believe it is important to be aware of a form of double-consciousness taking place in Tacey’s formulations of Non-Indigenous aboriginality – Indigenous Australian aboriginal cosmology and Non-Indigenous cosmology. In Tacey’s Non-Indigenous spiritual discourses contained in Edge of the Sacred there is the central adoption of land-based spirituality (the Earth Mother), so Indigenous and Non-Indigenous cultural principles merge in the formation of a Non-Indigenous land-based cosmology. So to regard Indigenous Australian cosmology metaphorically and not literally 45 as Tacey suggests is impossible in the Australian landscape where Aboriginality and land are fused 46. The difficulty is in Tacey’s paradoxical use of the word Aboriginality. Gelder and Jacobs explain Tacey’s use of aboriginality and Aboriginality in my commentary below.

46 Ibid., p135.
Gelder and Jacobs’ criticism of Jungian ‘New-Ageism’
Tacey proposes that Australian national consciousness must undertake a realisation of spiritual awareness. Interaction with Australian landscape is a way of realising unconscious elements in ‘our’ Australian psyche. Connectedness with landscape is a concept that alludes to an Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge, that often features ‘land’ as a way of knowing tenets of self and community at a deeper level of awareness than is generally deemed necessary in dominant Euro-Australian communities.

Gelder and Jacobs find Tacey too presumptuous about the structure and function of a general ‘Australian psyche’ being transformed by a form of unconscious ‘aboriginality’. They see Tacey as performing cultural appropriations from Aboriginal Australian culture to define a new Australian spirituality. Gelder and Jacobs initiate a discussion of how David Tacey’s work inappropriately correlates a growing national awareness of Aboriginal sacredness with a dimension of ‘modern’ society that is lacking. Tacey argues that where ‘our’ aboriginality is suppressed, modern society is in need of revitalisation with unconscious (spiritual) discourse.

Tacey performs a kind of Hegelian dialectical synthesis of divergent cultural ideas. He states that:

[In Australian culture]... the thesis of white rationality is being eroded by the antithesis of black Dreaming, but the synthesis will probably combine and transcend both terms in this cultural encounter. My own experience in central Australia bore witness to the erosion and destructuring of white rationality, but I did not feel that this would simply be replaced by the indigenous antithesis.51

Gelder and Jacobs respond to Tacey’s theoretical approach with the following insights into synthesis:

In his [Tacey’s] account, modern non-Aboriginal Australians are the ‘thesis’ and Aboriginal people are the ‘antithesis’: one reconciles the two in order to transcend their incommensurability and thus produce ‘synthesis’. This synthesis provides an ‘answering image’ for non-Aboriginal Australians which mirrors Aboriginal spirituality by creating an ‘aboriginal’ identity (with a small ‘a’) which has its own ‘dreaming’ (with a small ‘d’).

Let us note how closely aligned synthesis and appropriation really are here. Tacey’s ‘aboriginal’ identity owes everything to the fact that an Aborigamity precedes it. This is by no means a synthesis between two equal partners, since modern Australian society is viewed as lacking-through-its-excess, inauthentic, empty, etc., whereas Aboriginal spirituality is seen as complete, authentic, full... The sacred, as Tacey imagines it in this book, flows into everything he describes; it is omnipresent... But having made it so ‘promiscuous’, Tacey reacts by restraining it in turn, to such an extent that it becomes the opposite of what it was: an absence. The capital ‘A’ is transformed into a small ‘a’. (Aboriginal people, by contrast, have spent a considerable amount of time trying to get others to give their title a capital letter!) This is the ‘transformation’, then, that Tacey advocates – a transformation that works itself out by effacing the word ‘Aboriginal’. A Jungian synthesis may be able to live perfectly well without a capital ‘A’, but this is a luxury that reconciliation in its political manifestation simply cannot afford to indulge.... He has empowered them [Aboriginal people] spiritually so that they may transform ‘all

of us'; after putting them to use in this way, all Tacey appears able to do is leave them behind.\textsuperscript{52}

Gelder and Jacobs are interested in how Tacey intellectually performs cultural appropriation of Aboriginal culture to give voice to a growing 'latent spirituality' that he sees apparent in Australian national culture. Having outlined a Freudian-Durkheimian secularist theory of how sacredness exists in 'modern' culture, they provide an apparently flawed counterpoint in Tacey's Australian cultural theory to oppose the secularist argument. Thus:

We can see the relevance of Durkheim, Bataille and others to the Australian context when, for example, we come to look closely at contemporary New Age and Jungian commentaries on sacredness in the nation. David Tacey's The Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia (1995) has become a key text in this field.\textsuperscript{53}

When Gelder and Jacobs take exception to Tacey's Jungian analysis of Australia's national identity, in which modern society is lacking spiritual awareness, and Aboriginal sacredness is a resource for developing spiritual awareness, Gelder and Jacobs accuse Tacey of cultural appropriation of Aboriginal sacredness in his redefinition of the 'collective unconscious' of Australian society. Gelder and Jacobs are right to demonstrate the limitations of homogenizing tendencies in Tacey's Jungian psycho-spiritualising analysis of Australian culture en masse. If all Tacey intended in his work was the taking up of Aboriginal sacred sites (of sacred-cultural knowledge, social networks, so-called Aboriginal environmental awareness) into a mainframe of national consciousness, then his theoretical approach is another form of Eurocentric colonisation of the (Indigenous) mind. This type of neo-colonial mindset implicitly assimilates Aboriginal sacred cultural beliefs without fully exploring difference, hybridising, or other factors in the process of cultural appropriation. The space between cultures disrupts the boundaries of both Non-Indigenous and Indigenous, thus Gelder and Jacobs' postcolonial commentary disrupts exclusive determinations of the sacred. The hybridising of the postmodern third (cultural) space will be looked at later in this chapter in relation to Muecke's work.

An outcome of reducing Indigenous Australian 'Aboriginality' to an archetypal, and thus universalisable, 'aboriginal' form, is that Indigenous Australian spiritualities are perceived as subordinate to a Euro-Australian spiritual matrix. Indigenous Australian politics often advocate the right of Indigenous Australian cultures to locally determine their own Native Title claims and the boundaries of their intellectual property. This Indigenous advocacy for self-determination stems from the secret-sacred cultural Laws entirely known and exclusively controlled by Indigenous elders and caretakers. Self-determination also derives from an Indigenous Australian intellectual and cultural resistance to Western Laws that specify the use and values of Australian lands. I think Indigenous people retain the right to differentiate between Indigenous and Euro-Australian uses and evaluations of Australian lands. I see an underlying problem for Indigenous Australian cultures negotiating with Tacey's Non-Indigenous cosmologies for control of the intellectual property that determines their geographical, cultural and spiritual homelands. A post-Jungian 'aboriginality' for Non-Indigenous people is a concept that Tacey proposed to solve cross-cultural and interpersonal differences in

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p 8.
spiritual experiences of Australia, while promoting spiritual awareness for all Australians to connect with Australian landscape a deeply human and psychological experience. Indigenous Australian ‘aboriginality’ becomes an experience opened to the general public assimilated into a greater program of contributing to the Non-Indigenous spiritual awakening. Traditional ownership of Aboriginal sacred sites under the circumstances in which the ‘source’ of aboriginality can be spoken about by both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous cosmological structures, further colonises Indigenous cultural law and knowledge systems. There is a danger in Tacey’s Non-Indigenous generation of cosmological data that ‘Aboriginality’ will become deemed a lesser form of Eurocentric envisioned ‘aboriginality’, in which the local ‘Aboriginality’ is superseded by the global (post-Jungian) ‘aboriginality’.

Tacey’s universalising approach to Australian national consciousness (the Australian psyche) is derived from post-Jungian models of archetypes and a collective (Australian) unconscious. Tacey’s point is that modern Australian society lacks unconscious or spiritual awareness. ‘Unconsciousness’ or ‘spiritual awareness’ are a promiscuously used terms in the sense that they pervade Tacey’s analysis of Australian psychologies, to the same extent that sacredness pervades Indigenous Australian cultural discourses. Tacey represents a Non-Indigenous spiritual understanding of human nature, which opposes many interpretations of modern society as predominantly secular, excessive, progressive, scientific, logical, etc. Gelder and Jacobs are critical of Tacey as someone promoting utopian idealistic notions of a (pre/post)modern society. Tacey says ‘[we] need to develop not pre-modern mysticism but postmodern spirituality... one that meets the demands of technical, scientific, and intellectual development. The new physics and new biology are already moving towards a genuinely postmodern spirituality...’54 In contrast, Gelder and Jacobs observe that ‘[for] Tacey, one returns to the premodern in order to (re)produce a fully developed modern identity. He is at pains to say, however, that this does not amount to appropriating Aboriginal religion for “our” purposes.’55 However, while opposing Tacey’s psychological analyses and principles towards a repositioning of cultural personalities/identities in Australia, Gelder and Jacobs do not provide a solution to a lack of awareness in Non-Indigenous people of Indigenous culture, other than their postmodernist conditioned insights that see discourses on the Aboriginal sacred under constant erasure and re-evaluation.

Tacey’s unfinished maxim might be: while in Australia, do as the Indigenous Australians do. Revere landscape as a source of life, mind, and spirit. Tacey addresses a notion of the existence of Non-Indigenous spirituality coinciding with the future development of modern Australian society; but what forms do Non-Indigenous spiritualities take? What hybrid cultural properties are taking place, where, by whom, what for, why is this valuable or necessary?

55 Ibid., p 12.
Chapter 5

Muecke’s sense of self, other, and double-consciousness in relation to Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australian Spiritualities

Muecke’s writing in *No Road: bitumen all the way* (1998) is a study of how Non-Indigenous writers study Indigenous peoples, and how European-influenced intellectual frameworks seek reference to self and ‘otherness’. Muecke implicitly warns the reader against totalizing and essentialising ‘the Other’. His cultural perspectives serve as a counterpoint to Tacey’s predominating Euro-Australian ‘aboriginal’ framework. His sense of double-consciousness in Australian culture explores how two cultures that exist in the same living space (Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people in modern Australian society) gradually redefine each other’s cultural boundaries according to each culture’s distinct sense of self. Gradual redefinitions of identities are noticeable in Muecke’s struggle with languages that try to explore Indigenous Australian senses of reality that coexist in his cultural narratives with postmodern and postcolonial deconstructions of cultural space-time.

The previous chapter has a brief outline of comparisons between Tacey and Muecke’s writing and ideologies. This outline painted Tacey as working in a Euro-Australian intellectual framework catering to a Non-Indigenous audience interested in (Indigenous) landscapes as a source of cultural transformation. Tacey can be seen as an advocate of how Indigenous Australian culture can be used as a springboard into a Non-Indigenous rationale of spiritualised cultural awareness, or a Non-Indigenous ‘aboriginality’. Tacey and Muecke have Non-Indigenous experiences of Australian culture that have led both writers, separately (Tacey in *The Edge of the Sacred*... and Muecke in *No Road*...), to explore a repositioning of national identity formations in Australia. These transformative identities implicitly problematise normative and ‘rational’ value systems in modern society. Muecke is aware that Indigenous and Non-Indigenous cultural discourses are often being determined by Western academic principles and social structures. Muecke’s work is sympathetic to ideological biases foisted on Indigenous cultures by Eurocentric cultural and linguistic analysts. Thus, Muecke shows how, as a Non-Indigenous cultural commentator, envisages Indigenous Australian people and their contribution to a postcolonial and postmodern redefinition of Euro-Australian society.

To digress briefly, discussions of Non-Indigenous spiritualities have in recent times occurred amidst postcolonial awareness of hybridising environments, where Euro-Australian and Indigenous knowledge systems meet and assemble languages to describe the cultural intersections in (modern) Australian society. Jay Arthur has written a cultural dictionary entitled *Aboriginal English* (1996) so as to ‘provide some understanding of the social organisation, the history, the value system, and the linguistic history of Aboriginal Australia through ways in which Aboriginal people have extended, altered, and in other ways made a language of Europe their own.’ Arthur’s ‘dictionary’ shows how a language system is formed between communities who cannot speak each other’s language. Arthur’s linguistic analysis simultaneously explores the formation of how the other” culture thinks and acts. His cultural analysis can be seen as

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a study of a hybridising environment where coloniser and colonised meet and form a language for cross-cultural communication purposes. Aboriginal Australian cultural and spiritual knowledge exists independently of a hybridised language and Aboriginal English is a linguistic and signifying medium that approximates Indigenous Australian culture and spirituality. Aboriginal English indicates that Aboriginal people have had their culture and ideas placed into a predominantly English speaking society, which have in the past seen Aboriginal English speakers as using remedial English.

Muecke's work, like the work of the linguist Arthur, is simultaneously a cultural and linguistic analysis of the intersections where Indigenous and Non-Indigenous cultures seek to understand each other. I believe Muecke's work indicates that a new language is needed to foster Non-Indigenous cultural awareness, inspired by his postcolonial problematisation of the intellectual frameworks of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians. 'Double-consciousness' describes an intermediary intellectual framework that incorporates arbitrary distinctions between rationality and spirituality, which seeks to harmonise the parallel cultural mindsets.

Tacey and Muecke on tourism and the desire for cultural renewal
Tacey defines geophysical locations at the edge and in the centre of Australia, such that the conscious urban edge is separated from the unconscious desert centres of Australia. He speaks of crossing between the town and the country, which functions as a form of psychological therapy whereby the conscious ego cultivated in cities is shocked out of the literal into the metaphorical. Tacey explains that tourism is an impulse to shatter the ego's boundaries; however those barricades were extended into the geophysical depths of the continent. 'The impulse to shatter the ego had brought [tourists] here [to central Australia], but no shattering would take place.'3 Tourism often promotes a brief interaction with the location travelled to or through; photographs capture the location as form of memory and consciousness of the tour, noting how the centre differs from the edge, or capturing time spent in the centre via buildings and structures that remind the tourist of home, or how city structures are apparent in the country centres as they are in the cities at the edges of the continent. Tacey suggests 'if I remain attached to ego and its structures, this landscape would no more act as a laboratory of transformation for me than it would for [tourists]... The sacredness of the centre becomes evident only when we achieve the courage to leave the psychological edge.'4

Tacey sees the conscious ego cultivated and reinforced in cities located at the metaphorically peripheral and geographical edge of Australia. Central Australia is a metaphor for a subconscious awareness that is not often explored in terms of its power to change Eurocentric ego-structures that define the characteristics of a nation. Tacey provides a psychological distinction between coastal cities and desert centres noticing that 'as a society transplants itself from the old to the new world, the delicate and carefully maintained balance between the two psychic systems, between consciousness and unconsciousness, is disturbed.'5 The new world that Tacey implies is found in locations where the impact of landscape upon the mind's eye is more noticeable, such as Alice Springs and Uluru; locations where Aboriginal sacred sites are more noticeable. There is a tendency for Aboriginal sacred sites to be seen as tourist destinations, which in a sense become part-time attractions to stimulate the imagination for a brief period.

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4 Ibid., p 32.
5 Ibid., p 35.
before the tourist must return home to life in the city, or a lifestyle defined by ego-structures. Thus, Uluru is seen as a distraction/attraction and reminder of an aspect of Australia that is ill-defined by commercial concepts of Aboriginal art and spirituality. Tacey theorises that what is outside a tourist’s ego-consciousness is the neglected ‘unconscious’ impulse to renewal of self-awareness.

Muecke suggests that Non-Indigenous researchers are like cultural tourists who are ‘transforming a graphical landscape into the hieroglyphics of literary art with a modesty which [tries] to be respectful of cultural distances.’ My understanding of Muecke’s comment here is that the hieroglyphics of literary art produce metaphors and extract myths from a Non-Indigenous researcher’s vision of an Australian landscape to evoke images and philosophies of ‘our’ origin of being. So Indigenous cultural motifs that co-exist with Australian graphical landscapes inspire Westerners to seek a deeply authentic mode of being. This ‘mode’ is a consciousness melded with the landscape that re-invigorates ‘our’ (Westernised) sense of humanity and community. I would argue that the Western search to develop harmonious relationships with Indigenous culture is a deep need to reconnect with unconscious or lost ways of being human. ‘Our’ obsession is with learning how, where, when, and why Indigenous people use their (sacred) knowledge, and the Westerner imagines/assumes they can do likewise, to transform their own restless identity to incorporate or completely become an Other to reforge connections with an ‘origin of being’.

I would further argue that Muecke’s work implies that Non-Indigenous Western researchers who seek ‘Other’ ways to transform modern Australian society tend to use Indigenous Australian cultural and intellectual paradigms in their redefinitions of culture. Muecke indicates that such Indigenous Australian paradigms of ‘spiritual’ and ‘cultural’ thought are often symbolic tools, discursive frameworks, or communication devices that target a predominantly Non-Indigenous audience. The paradigm shift occurring in the general community in regard to the ‘modern Aboriginal sacred’ is a Non-Indigenous intellectual shift of awareness towards understanding Indigeneity (Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australian) and ‘our’ sense of home in (postcolonial) Australia. However, at least one Indigenous cultural commentator suggests that as long as (Non-Indigenous) anthropologists, ethnologists, artists and historians remain in control of the archives, education, and dissemination of information about Indigenous histories, cultures, and language, the colonisation of the Indigenous mind (and people) continues. Similarly, Muecke is trying to encapsulate in the concept of Indigenous cultural tourists/researchers factors that contribute to the ongoing signification of (and thus ongoing intellectual ‘colonisation’ of) Indigenous Australian culture for a Euro-Australian audience.

However, a psychological tension is produced in Muecke’s identification of a contradiction between maintaining cultural distances and categorising or signifying what is valuable in the land-culture of Indigenous peoples. Both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous seek the best use of land. It is the Non-Indigenous urge to use the land that conflicts with an apparent Indigenous urge to exist with the land. It is this encounter

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6 Stephen Muecke, 1998 No Road [bitumen all the way]. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Western Australia, p 138.

with Indigenous philosophies of living with the land in a symbiotic relationship that attracts and confuses the Non-Indigenous tourist/researcher. And the argument for best use of land deepens further when both parties see the other culture as being disruptive. Muecke has generally observed that:

[The tourist] industry [in some areas is] superseding the cattle industry which is growing unprofitable because of the degradation of the land...

Because of these developments the indigenous custodians have had to move back to their old country to protect it.

The pastoral and tourism industries have disrupted the Indigenous ‘old country’, while Indigenous custodians move back onto the vacated lands of the pastoral industries to renew and revitalise the local Indigenous cultural Law. The working relations developed by cultural tourists with Indigenous peoples and their land differs slightly from pastoral degradation of landscape.

Muecke perceives that Australian graphical landscapes have been codified by Eurocentric literary hieroglyphics and metaphors of being ‘at home’ in the Australian landscape. These graphical landscapes are effectively spaces where Indigenous cultural knowledge and modern (Euro-Australian) social forms co-exist. He has seen the pastoral and tourism industries’ disruptive uses of landscape, and offers the idea of an aesthetics of disappearance:

Take to the road, to that travelling which achieves what Virilio calls the aesthetics of disappearance.

These guidelines, adopted in the textual suburbs, soon teach the way to get lost (even if it is only the way to lose a form of knowledge); following them may lead us, by the sound of its streets to the city transformed into sea...

Here in the transversality of the desert and the irony of geology, the transpolitical finds its generic, mental space. The inhumanity of our ulterior, a-social, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic form here, its ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance.9

Muecke utilises a transformative spatial metaphor that melds the idea of a static city with an idea of a seascape of city-forms. He makes a literary critique of city-life in an effort to show what exists outside the obvious appearances of city-state. His ecstatic critique of city-culture, where travellers adopt an ‘aesthetics of disappearance’ from the city into the desert, evokes an aesthetics of transcendence. Notions of ‘the city’ disappear in the ‘transversality of the desert and the irony of geology’ in an ecstatic desire to renew the city’s boundaries. The city merges metaphorically into geo-logical interactions with space in comparison to the city being strictly known as a socio-logical space. This touristic impulse to transcend self is limited by the strictly narrow vision and environs of ‘the city’. Muecke’s work implies that the tourist seeks renewal outside of such physical environs, sometimes without relinquishing the intellectual baggage of aesthetic forms. Muecke describes ‘tourists puffing and wheezing, pausing only enough to utter the usual clichés

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9 Ibid., p 134.
describes ‘tourists puffing and wheezing, pausing only enough to utter the usual clichés about the place, the beauty of appearances defined by the picturesque – not yet the beauty of disappearances.’

Observed ‘erosion’ in desert landscapes, taken as an ecstatic form found in ‘the beauty of disappearances’, reminds the tourist or cultural researcher of the impermanence of classical and modern forms of human science, city-making/knowing and society. The a-social geo-logical landscape merges into the sociological landscape in the process that extends a touristic sense of self outside the codes of city-life. The landscape also provides a comparison between the value of desert-life and city-life. A psychological tension exists where people cannot decide between the value of maintaining aesthetical appearances (of the city-mindset) and the value of disappearance (of a non-city mindset). This is the point I believe Muecke is trying to make – that in the effort to escape the city and extend self-awareness, the Westernised tourist accumulates more definitions and symbologies of what is inside the scope of the city-mindset. Thus the tourist uses the desert landscape to absorb, discover, or (alternatively) release extensions of self-awareness. An implication of Muecke’s critique is that there are two types of tourists – tourists who seek predictable, unproblematic appearances during their country tour; and tourists who accept the problematics of the disappearance of Westernised forms during their country tour. The latter type of tourist finds the aesthetics of disappearance cathartic, sensing that deserted regions in Australia transform their (Non-Indigenous) cultural identities. Muecke’s literary critique seeks to communicate that the self has been repositioned by a touristic or transcendent impulse they have pursued. This newly extended self-awareness returns to the socio-culture of Westernised city-state-life to find its static structure problematic in comparison to the desert where ‘the transpolitical finds its generic, mental space.’

The Non-Indigenous sense of escape into the desert assumes that the city exemplifies normality and the desert signifies the exotic. I would argue that such belief systems are assumptions not actualities. The stereotypes of a Non-Indigenous controlled rational city-life and Indigenous Australian spiritual desert-life are artificial cultural boundaries created between cultures. Ordered forms of society and Laws that denote what Western culture calls ‘civilisation’ are apparent in both stereotypes of a Non-Indigenous ‘city-life’ and an Indigenous ‘desert spiritual-life’. So too are the spiritual, unconscious, religious, and mysterious forms of human life detectable in both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples. It is incorrect to assume that Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people do not have both rational and non-rational orders of thinking and being. Muecke’s cultural discourse explores the dissolution of cultural boundaries and identities mostly as a Euro-Australian discovery of inexplicable life-facts.

Postmodern and postcolonial cultural studies
Without reviewing the entire diversity and complexity of Muecke’s No Road, I would like to highlight some of what I see as fundamental examples of his postcolonial writing of Australian culture, and his postmodern descriptions of intellectual frameworks that he infers are inherited from European academies and academic writing processes. Muecke’s postcolonial writing gives me the impression that he is struggling with new language strategies. Muecke’s deconstructionist discourse shows sensitivity to how the theoretical construction of Eurocentric and hybridising languages fail to adequately capture cultural ideas for both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples alike. While

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11 ibid, pp 134-135.
showing how modern French writers have deconstructed their own intellectual writing process, he struggles to document his understanding of Indigenous peoples.

In my postcolonial critique of Tacey’s ideas about the Australian psyche and its ‘aboriginality’, there is an underlying divisionist discourse between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture existing in the same social space. It is difficult in Muecke’s writing to assess where the divisions exist between ideas such as Indigenous Aboriginality and non-Indigenous aboriginality. Muecke’s work is sensitive to the binaries created by a Eurocentric sense of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, or the arbitrary ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ of culture. Muecke repositions both Euro-Australian and Indigenous Australian modern senses of self, by drawing numerous marginal ideas to the fore in his discourse, thus offering a continued deconstruction of the binary cultures. By referring to what is not often noticed about Euro-Australian and Indigenous Australian cultures, Muecke extends the boundaries of each culture by repeatedly referring to what is outside of normative understandings of these cultures.

There are numerous examples in Muecke’s travel book (travel in Europe, Africa, and outback Australia) of cultural repositioning. For example, having watched the Bruce Beresford film *The Fringe Dwellers*, Muecke muses on Eurocentric rationality, problems with an industrial-centered modernity (a city-mindscape), and Euro-Australian sense of Indigenous people providing an insight into marginalised living conditions in modern (Australian) society (a non-city-mindscape):

... the usual expectations about work have been upset. Our heads, normally full of ‘enterprise bargaining’, ‘goals’, ‘productivity’ and ‘commodity values’ welcome the feelings of sympathy, community, even the sense of liveliness and cunning that come with survival, with ‘being on the edge’. Once again, Aboriginal people have been called upon to be the ‘human side’ to our industrial nightmare, the *eros* to our *thanatos*.  

I understand Muecke’s sense of ‘our’ neglected human side in the face of progress and industry to be a Euro-Australian realisation (Muecke’s implied subtext) that modern society (*thanatos*) dissuades its members from exploring the fragile sensitivity of human feeling (*eros*), for eros interferes with productivity, and the smooth running of commerce and industry.

Muecke shows that the act of writing and communicating about the dimensions of what is known and unknown in modern society, communicates a silence that seems to separate the town (a city-mindscape) and the country (a non-city-mindscape), another sense of the centre and the margin in a modern society. A societal philosophy of unflaging economic rationalism and a desire for low costs and high efficiencies is problematicised by perceptions of what is outside and inside modern society. Muecke explores such perceptions with a language of landscape and silences:

When we write, we sometimes run out of words. This is because we come to the edge of the city of words, where there are no more words left in the place we find ourselves. There are places on the surface of the earth where there are no words at all. There are also places in the heart where words are lost forever.

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12 Stephen Muecke, 1998 backcover of *No Road (bitumen all the way)*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia.
This is not a metaphor. Don’t imagine… inner-city suburbs with broken A-frames, rusted H-girders, O-roundabouts and S-bends… [or] the Daily Telegraph building a spot where words and meanings come from. Language infinitely generated, day by day, but always the same stories, with slight variations… The words that count are actually rare to the point of disappearance.

The irony here is that Muecke is using metaphors to demonstrate the Western language of built landscapes and city-dwellers consuming the daily papers to keep up with society’s documented progress. In Muecke’s estimation, city landscapes have a different language to un-built landscapes “the fierce sun of the Western Plains.” The integrity, sense of community, and well-being of Indigenous culture is often revealed via built Non-Indigenous cultural artefacts, such as the Western media of theatre, books, films, research grants, and European-inspired ways of communication. Such media are different from the irreducible languages that Muecke sees in un-built landscapes, open spaces, deserts, and the feeling of freedom in deserted spaces. Muecke sees places not touched by the geometries and epistemologies of ‘civilisation’. And it should not be inferred that Indigenous Australian Traditional Culture does not constitute a "civilisation" in the Western sense of an organised human society. Traditional Indigenous Australian cultures are often described as a desert or external, fringe-dwelling culture by Non-Indigenous discourses, (at least in Central, Northern, and Western Australian traditional Aboriginal communities). There are also the Indigenous people who have become displaced from their land and disconnected from their traditional cultural knowledge, who also live ‘on the fringe’ in Alice Springs for example. Such ‘fringe-dweller’ discourses describe peoples who live in contact with unmarked, non-geometric spaces. However, these unmarked spaces are labelled ‘non-Western’ or Indigenous spaces. In a sense, documented Indigenous spaces are inescapably rationalised. So Muecke indicates that Euro-Australians seek a point of departure from what is known about modern society, in the symbols, mythologies, spiritual laws, and societal structures of Indigenous Australians.

I understand that these points of departure are places where words fail to describe human experience in Australia. These places of departure exist where Indigenous cultures have a secret-sacred language of civilisation, such as sacred ceremonies and songs of Indigenous cultural Laws, that is not recorded accurately by Euro-rationality. Such places, not-yet labelled by syntax or known signifiers, become sites where Non-Indigenous discursive projections of Euro-unconsciousness take place. In a sense, Muecke gives the mystery of these subtle notions of ‘civilisation’ back to the Indigenous owners of traditional secret-sacred culture, by showing the inadequacies of the dominant culture’s linguistic systems of meaning. Muecke explains that ‘A language like English is like a group of textual suburbs.’ Muecke’s poetic travelogue urges escape from the suburbs of English towards new texts observable at the margins moving towards new texts of double-consciousness. Muecke speaks of disciplined research frameworks and his desire for an interdisciplinary mode of inquiry in his research experience. He is aware of the rigidity of disciplined cultural studies, as opposed to

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15 Ibid., p 21.
16 Ibid., p 22.
17 Ibid., p 24.
18 Ibid., p 32.
the variety and irreducibility of cultural experiences that defy categorization under pre-existent research conditions and/or practices.

**Muecke’s problematisation of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous identity formations**

It seems that Tacey is constructing his sense of aboriginality out of a postmodern theoretical condition that promotes deconstructed and multiple speaking positions. Under such conditions, Indigenous Australian cosmologies and secret-sacred cultures become a fluid subject merging both non-Indigenous and Indigenous ‘Aboriginalities’. Indigenous Australian people desire to retain cultural autonomy and difference, notable in the Indigenous rights identified in Native Title legislation. Muecke’s sense of postcolonial theoretical development is to show the inadequacies of rigid identity formations of Non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in Australia. Muecke’s commentary on cultural studies as a discipline indicates, I believe, a confrontation between the ‘language’ of Aboriginal sacred sites and Western linguistics and signification devices. So while working as a deconstructionist of received opinions about Indigenous Australians and modern Australian society, I believe Muecke indicates differences in cultural ideology as a form of double-consciousness, without necessarily denouncing or valorising the significance of Non-Indigenous or Indigenous culture. So there are two modes of human cultural consciousness explored in Muecke’s discourse: a discourse conscious of two-cultures — Indigenous Australian and Non-Indigenous Australian ways of thinking.

In Indigenous Australian cultural studies there is constant reference to other ways of seeing and knowing the world, a constant self-and-other assessment. As Muecke points out, cultural theorists demonstrate a need to ‘justify one’s relationship to these [Indigenous] people in a non-touristic way, but how? Anthropology? Surely not. But who funds Cultural Studies, and where is it supposed to find its political rectitude?’

Muecke is acutely aware of the theoretical dilemma that currently underscores cultural studies, and in turn such a perceived dilemma is a criticism of anthropological and sociological field research methods that do not take the problematics of documenting ‘the Other’ into consideration:

There is no longer the tracing of parallel paths. These two figures — circle and parallel — represent a confrontation of methodology between, on the one hand, the romantic aesthetic of participatory ethnography, in which subject and object merge phenomenologically, and on the other, the desire to retain cultural autonomy and difference — a parallelism of both subject and object. You either mix with the people and by becoming ‘one of them’ produce a realist ethnographic text in which the identity of the writer is subsumed for the moment only to re-emerge later when the work is published, or you stand your text beside the text of the other so there is a parallelism, perhaps only accidental encounters, like we produced in *Reading the Country.*

Ethno-methodological (participatory ethnography) paradigms attempt to produce accurate and realistic descriptions of ‘the Other’ (Indigenous) culture having mixed and lived with the Other culture. Yet subject and object, non-Indigenous editor and Indigenous informant merge into a cultural assessment with hybridised ideologies, such as participatory ethnography. The ethnographer becomes a disturbing observer documenting what they see as relevant to their study, or the ethnographer is motivated

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19 Muecke, 1998 *No Road, op. cit.*, p 32.
20 Ibid., p 34.
by their pre-conceptions of Indigeneity. Homi Bhabha has noted that in relationships between the coloniser and the colonised, it is the colonised person that attempts to mimic the coloniser in an act of supplication and communication. Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker explain the project of domesticating and civilising indigenous populations through Bhabha’s work on hybridity:

The obligation on the part of the colonised to mirror back an image of the coloniser produces neither identity nor difference, only a version of a ‘presence’ that the colonised subject can only assume ‘partially’. Thus the ‘mimic man’ [sic] who occupies the impossible space between cultures... is the ‘effect’ of a flawed colonial mimesis in which to be Anglicised is emphatically not to be English. Occupying also the precarious ‘area between mimicry and mockery’, the mimic man is therefore iconic both of the enforcement of colonial authority and its strategic failure.  

I find that this idea of (post)colonial mimicry pertains similarly to modern settings where the ethnographer and the Indigenous informant are working as ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’. However, the ethnographer is recording a hybrid pattern that is a reflection of both coloniser and colonised, codified under the one label — Indigenous. In Muecke’s work there is a constant comparison between two cultural paradigms. Muecke’s observation of methodological formation in ethnographic studies pertains to forms of double-consciousness as well.

**Double-consciousness and the practice of cultural studies**

Quite often in his work, Muecke constructs a double-consciousness of two cultural paradigms. I see double-consciousness as a framework that seeks to harmonise parallel cultural mindsets. Earlier I indicated that ‘double-consciousness’ in one sense describes an intermediary intellectual framework that incorporates arbitrary distinctions between rationality and spirituality. Muecke’s use of postmodern worlds differs slightly from Lyotard’s watchful incredulity toward metanarratives where in the recognition of an incomplete ‘script’ of the socio-political State ‘differences stand as valid, and time is not quite so imperious.’ Muecke sees that a new script disrupts modernisation projects that some commentators call spirituality. Double-consciousness is thus an intermediary discourse that accommodates modern society as rational and spiritual, and Indigenous Australian traditional culture as spiritual and rational. I believe Muecke’s work indicates that a new language is needed to foster non-Indigenous cultural awareness. Muecke’s work, like the work of the linguist Jay Arthur, is simultaneously a cultural and linguistic analysis of the intersections where Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures seek to understand each other. A language of rationality and spirituality recognises these two mindsets operating in both cultures.

‘Our’ documentation of the Other cannot simply be homogenised into the Western self as a kind of ‘Other of the West’. Muecke problematises identity formations of Non-Indigenous, Western, Eurocentric, and Euro-Australian by challenging the generalising.

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25 Monga, Padmini (ed.) 1996 *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, Arnold, a member of the Hodder Headline Group, London, UK., see Introduction for discussion on ‘the Other of the West’.
language of ‘our’ and ‘other’. Muecke implies that in our long, drawn-out ‘ways of becoming Other’ we carry around an organizing principle that draws its health from continual re-organising principles, whereby its parts relocate ‘a place like a city in a space which is not like a State’. It seems that Muecke is warning the reader of the Other about the Eurocentric urge to colonise everything deemed knowable. He is warning the reader about a modern society that is like a virus, moving to an area, sucking up all natural resources until the area is unsustainable, so the virus-city-state must move to another area to survive. Thus I understand Muecke to be diagnosing a number of dis-eases of rationality in Western social structuring.

Muecke is aware of the incomplete nature of his own investigative impulse to ‘raise the question of representing the Other’ and ‘to re-open endlessly the fundamental issue of science and art; documentary and fiction; universal and personal; objectivity and subjectivity; masculine and feminine; outsider and insider.’ He qualifies his own postmodern theoretical impulse further in the discourse, supposing that:

... a newer architecture for the environment is proposed, for surely there is a house in which the spirit can more comfortably reside.

We can know this, to know is not to perish quickly in the deserts of endless deferral of meaning, but getting to know may mean leaving home and getting lost for a while, to admit that there may not be a road going anywhere that we all agree on, but that somewhere along that road is a local guide who knows a story we may never have heard before ...

It is the concept of people escaping to have a wilderness experience, or a decultured experience, that Muecke sees as invigorating cultural studies. It is the parallel paths of the aesthetics of the city and the aesthetics of the desert, a cultured rationality and a decultured non-rationality, which approaches a paradigm of a double-conscious life in Australia.

In his reading of Walter Benjamin, Muecke noted that:

His [Benjamin’s] writings traced the intellectual architecture of twentieth century modernity; it is as if displaced persons or refugees (like Auerbach or Said) are the emblems of the modern person, they are able to theorise a fragmented culture because they are the ones who can see from more than one perspective.

Muecke’s double-conscious paradigms function in numerous ways. Such paradigms distinguish between cultural ideologies, and raise awareness in the reader of hybridising functions in non-Indigenous and Indigenous discourses that explore ‘spiritual awareness’. Cultural displacement is an experience that can cultivate double-consciousness, a sense of living simultaneously with two worldviews in the one cultural space. W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the first theorists to use the notion of ‘double-consciousness’. He recognised an intellectual and cultural dual existence of ‘worldviews’ in his African-American life experiences. He observed that:

27 Ibid., p 59.
28 Ibid., p 96.
29 Ibid., p 130.
31 Ibid., p 152.
It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others… One ever feels [this] two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body…

What Du Bois recognises is the failure of the proposed logic of the dominant culture that seeks to homogenise the double-aims and the double-consciousness of ‘the Other of the West’, to combine the two ways of life into one univocal identity – a predominantly Eurocentric consciousness. Resistance by displaced intellectuals (such as Said and Du Bois) to dominating Eurocentric cultural beliefs and ideals provides the stimulus for ‘other’ cultural beliefs. Muecke’s sense of ‘otherness’ extends from deconstructed postmodern and poststructuralist critical apparatuses to struggling with ecstatic forms of disappearance. His struggle with postmodern concepts that deconstruct the Eurocentric geometry of cities gradually refines his sense of (de)cultured space-time. His encounters with Indigenous Australian spiritualities likewise refine his sense of (de)cultured space-time. I believe that Muecke’s sense of postcolonial cultural studies is a description of his own sense of Non-Indigenous intellectual ‘displacements’. So it is not simply his encounters with Indigenous cultures that stimulate Muecke’s sense of ‘otherness’. It is the subtle breaking down of a dominating rational Eurocentrism in his sense of self, as his self strives for deep and long lasting realities of space-time and culture. Muecke deliberately seeks his own displaced intellectual position, or experiences of double-consciousness, in his constructions of an Indigenous Australian cultural discourse.

Penny Van Toorn’s insight into the Biraban-Threlkeld gospel-text (noted in Chapter 1) reveals a form of cultural hybridity. Her discussion of the Awabakal gospel indicates sensitivity to profound cultural issues involved in the encounter between Threlkeld and Biraban, which can be read as a hybrid cultural encounter. I believe hybridity can be read as a form of double-consciousness. Lancelot Threlkeld, a Christian missionary, and Biraban, an Awabakal Man, have together re-produced a written translation of the Gospel of Luke in the Awabakal tongue. Two spiritual ideals (Awabakal and Christian) are represented in a translation process that has taken place verbally and in print between two people that represent different cultural backgrounds. The crisis in communication is a facet of a larger crisis of speech between coloniser and colonised. Both Threlkeld and Biraban perform their own philosophy of religion in order to mediate an understanding of truth. The two have talked, but as reader’s we are not sure if they understood each other. It is difficult to differentiate the Awabakal spiritual perceptions from the Euro-Christian perceptions in a gospel-text that is composed of both culture’s spiritual icons.

Whilst reading the Awabakal-gospel a double-conscious experience may occur, which depends on the reader’s ability to note differences between Euro-Australian and Awabakal spiritual-cultural Law(s). The recording of Christian-spirituality as an Awabakal cultural-gospel has renegotiated and extended the spiritual Laws of each culture. This cross-cultural translation of religious experiences blurs the spiritual boundaries of each culture, a process which takes the Awabakal Law out of it’s secret-sacred and lawful context. Knowledge of both cultures’ secret-sacred spiritual traditions

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would be essential to a double-conscious experience, knowledge which is not easy to
differentiate between in the hybrid cultural text.
A form of ‘double-consciousness’ that strictly delineates between two cultural
standpoints cannot adequately describe the investigative nature of Muecke’s work in *No
Road [bitumen all the way]*. Double-consciousness is subject to hybridising functions
that exist when differing cultural ideologies meet. He points to Marcia Langton’s
proposition that ‘there is no other, there is only self and self (as in the intersubjectivity
of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal).’ Extending on this point, Muecke derives three
ways** that Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal identities constantly renegotiate each
other’s cultural boundaries:

a) White mythologising.
b) Dialogues between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.
c) Aboriginal people negotiate within Aboriginal cultures.

The white mythologising in point a) is another way of explaining how non-Indigenous
people construct notions about Indigenous cultures. I have already gone into detail
about Eurocentric frameworks in relation to Durkheim and Freud, and I have explained
how Tacey constructs a Non-Indigenous ‘aboriginality’ inspired by his ‘mythologising’
of Indigenous Australian spirituality (a template for a Non-Indigenous Australian
‘aboriginality’ and ‘cosmology’). In a sense many Non-Indigenous discourses are
implicitly engaged in white mythologising. Muecke is no exception, although he tries to
complement his Euro-Australian subjectivity with his sense of ecstatic disappearances
and cultural displacements.

The dialogues between differing cultures (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) constructed
in point b) is an example of differing selves coming together to create a discourse. The
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal discourse indicates what Mary Louise Pratt has
identified as a hybridising cultural intersection in which is created a mutual
‘creolisation of identities.’ Postcolonial discourses that concentrate on ‘self and other’
are subject to this mutual creolisation that redefines the identities of both Aboriginal and
non-Aboriginal people. It is this renegotiation of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous
identities that is constantly referred to by Muecke in *No Road*. For example:

Fatima is not worried about her indigenous beliefs being corrupted by European ones,
because she knows the corruption goes both ways. She is nevertheless grounded in an anti-
colonial politics which takes her to conferences at the UN. Her methods are lateral: the bare
feet of a Diogenes, and Nietzschean laughter opposing itself...36

Langton’s sense of ‘self and self’ appears more pertinent to point c. in which Aboriginal
people negotiate within and between Aboriginal cultures. Yet, for example, even within
broadly defined cultural groups such as ‘Kooris’ there are nations such as Wotjabaluk
and Wautharang peoples, and these displaced Indigenous people are constantly
renewing their sense of cultural and geographical boundaries. Jay Arthur further
explains the cultural displacement and renewal for Indigenous Australians thus:

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34 Ibid., pp 181-182.
York, p 131.
Aboriginal people belong to a different Australia. They live in a place where many of their ancestors have lived for at least 50,000 years. Since the British occupation, Aboriginal culture and society have undergone violent change, including loss of many languages. Despite the changes, there remain concepts, behaviours and understandings of life that are in many ways continuous with pre-invasion Australia. They are not identical — all cultures are dynamic — but they continue out of this tradition. This collection of words [Chapter One ‘Always was, always will be’ in Arthur’s *Aboriginal English*] tracks the survival of these traditions and the perceptions of life arising from them — understandings that are now expressed in the new language of Aboriginal Australia.

For many Aboriginal people, this new language was the one in which they expressed their continuing traditions. Others who spoke their own language still had to communicate these specific concerns to non-Aborigines. Concerns that did not belong in the European world still had to be spoken about in the European language. Aboriginal people who spoke English as their first language still had their own concerns to talk about.  

It is apparent that communication between Aboriginal peoples is confounded by cultural displacement in the case of Koori peoples, and the need to address the dominant culture in the case of the Indigenous custodians of Jabiluka. Yet the need for Indigenous people to retain their traditional cultural Laws is a primary concern, that cannot be so easily translated or Anglicised as intellectual, cultural, social, and custodial properties of life experience. So, between Aboriginal peoples, communication presumably takes place on a private secret-sacred Indigenous Australian cultural level, and at a level of addressing a public responsibility to preserve environmental and social awareness. Indigenous people negotiate their sense of self with other Indigenous selves and communities using both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communication methods, languages, and systems.

The above three points show that double-consciousness is an experience that extends to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, however the strict cultural boundaries and beliefs that delineate two peoples are subject to ongoing changes in each culture’s identities. There is a sense of continually and restlessly crossing boundaries back and forth in order to expand one’s sense of self and other, or self and self. This is another way of understanding double-conscious experiences between cultures.

**Difference between Roman highways and Indigenous roads**

‘The road’ is a metaphor of a nomadological philosophy for Muecke. He senses that his Indigenous friends and acquaintances use linguistics of ‘space’ to express measurements of travel, and not of time to measure distance travelled. Muecke observes:

Our everyday writings skip lightly over the surface of the country, as deeper undercurrents pull us inevitably in one direction or another, what historian Greg Denning has called the ‘deep narratives’ of a culture. In Australia, for instance, are we ‘deeply’ oriented in space or in time?

... If I ask my friend Paddy Roe, In Broome, ‘Where’s so-and-so? he might reply in Broome English, ‘Oh ‘he’s comin’ behin’.’ Not later, but behind, somewhere on the road. On a line in a spatial world, possibly quite at home in this world, where he belongs. Saying

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‘later’ might imply the anxiety of delay (schedules! timetables! – shouldn’t the one we are waiting for be where we are now, in the ideal of our self-presence?).

When one writes about the road one attends to its form and function. Maybe there will be no ‘final form’, maybe we will always be halfway. The linearity of the road is homogeneous with the linear drive of the text, but deep narrative is what has interested me as I write and drive, drive and write, so the two almost become the same thing. Australia is a country where the deep indigenous narrative lines have been confused by the imposition of another grid of lines. Let’s not forget that the Romans invented a kind of road, the via, the straight, permanent paved imperial highway. What kind of story do you tell on the road if you don’t want to write like an imperial highway, on the road to further colonial expansion, where you engage in trade, slow down, get boring, lay out the plan for a town, create rectangles, and climb into a coffin?38

Muecke conveys a postcolonial presence of a deep Indigenous narrative that exists beyond, within, or in the midst of the linearity of Eurocentric colonial expansionism and geometric configurations of space-time. He sets up the deep Indigenous narrative against a feeling that a stark and coldly non-comprehending imperialistic logic lives over the top of the country. The Non-Indigenous road is described identified in this instance as ‘Roman’, labelled ‘the via’, classified as ‘the straight, permanent paved imperial highway’, and becomes a synonym for death (climbing into a coffin). Muecke shows how colonists inspired by Roman imperialism built inroads that ultimately reach dead ends in a modern (Australian) society that is beginning to be aware of other roads or ways of travelling over a country in a repetitious manner. The Roman highway is a way of viewing the country on a ‘permanent basis’ that Euro-Australians have inherited from the ancient Roman Empire. In showing the translocation of imperialistic logic upon the Australian country, Muecke separates the deep Eurocentric narrative in Australia from the deep Indigenous narrative. This is important as people begin to realise that the ‘permanency’ or ‘still life’ of Roman paved highways do not assist one in the Non-Indigenous nomadological journey that seeks to ‘read the country’, or the deep Indigenous narrative ‘on the road’ in Australia. It is in this familiarisation with nomadology that Muecke approaches double-consciousness.

The deep Indigenous narrative is explained further by comparing how Indigenous Australians walk and how non-Indigenous people walk. Muecke considers colonising attitudes that trivialised walking among Aboriginal people, in that it is:

Strange too that much of the history of Aboriginal life has ignored walking as a basic activity... Walking was the activity that enabled later classifications like ‘nomadic society’ to emerge from comparative accounts of anthropologists. There are peoples for whom walking is a way of life, for whom walking might be a mundane, taken-for-granted, or yet even noble activity.

When Aboriginal people walk together they may have to cover quite a distance, and if you look at them they seem to move as one, the idea of mob is invoked. Hardly marching, like a platoon, but rather drifting, like a swarm of bees or a flock of birds or a school of fish. Who is the leader, does any individual in the group know since they all seem to know how to move as a group so that no one falls out?

Contrast the movement of people in a city street. These people’s trajectories are constrained by the imperatives of the individual motivation over short distances. Or seductive strolling

as an apparatus of capture. They bump into one another, they race to be the first off the mark when the lights turn green; they tire easily, they can’t gather momentum as a group.\(^{39}\)

Once again, Muecke notes Indigenous and Non-Indigenous differences even in a simple activity such as walking. However, he does this to point out a deeply significant notion that this fundamental difference in the mechanics of walking actually gears a walker ‘rationally’ (according to the logic of the Roman via in modern societies) or ‘spiritually’ (according to the logic of the Australian country).

The entire chapter entitled ‘footwalk’ is a narrative about being ‘on the road’, which at one point lends an ear towards a logic of walking among some Indigenous peoples (in central Australia):

‘A friend must leave a footprint…’ I have quoted these words a number of times before, ever since I first noticed them in the story by David Unaipon that was published in *Paperbark*. I like repetition. Like walking it is the same movement, over and over, lively spoken words, put down, lightly, leaving a friendly trace. Then I asked myself what gave one the right to follow, as I heard a story on Aboriginal television:

*Harold also talks about how travellers who come to the Alice had to enter through Honeymoon Gap and only when escorted by our elders... Each person travelling through here had to follow the footprints exactly, each footprint on top of another...*

There is a lesson here for thinking about getting to know places, or texts – it’s all in the approach. If you want the opinion of the Aboriginal custodians of sites, then you have to observe the protocols. In the observation of the rules, that is, the footsteps, you can get new insights into their meanings.\(^{40}\)

It appears that travellers non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike can attempt to follow the logic of travel that Aboriginal custodians in the Alice (Springs) observe. Muecke hints at a nomadology that is actually a form of secret-sacred culture observed by Aboriginal custodians in Alice Springs. I believe that Muecke is suggesting that in order to find forms of Indigenous sacred intellectual/geophysical property in Alice Springs one must be willing to walk the geophysical countryside in the proper manner. This is another instance of Muecke approaching a double-consciousness cultural perspective by being aware of two roads (one made by being paved, another made by walking a path). I consider it thus extraordinary how much Indigenous culture has been misunderstood, or not seen at all, by not approaching Indigenous sites (both intellectual and geophysical sites) correctly – with the right footfalls and right perspective.

**Hypoptics**

Muecke introduces the Western term ‘third eye’ to approximate Aboriginal ‘spiritseeing’ under the heading ‘hypoptics’:

**hypoptics**

*Seeing, in this aesthetic, is glancing, it is not gazing full on so as to possess a scene, take it away and store it. It is an aesthetic of the glimpse where things half seen can be imagined as something other, beyond and magical.*


\(^{40}\) *ibid.*, pp 197-198.
Sometimes we see a woman pass but,
When you look again you might say:
‘Oh I’ve only seen a grass.’
But it is the woman Wurawora, she still lives today.

Stories of the third eye and the ngadjyu (spirits) confirm this. Perceptions come in flashes, in disruptions of the steady gaze. Since the country is peopled variously by spirits, ghosts and natural things transformed, there is always the danger that this mystical world will break through into perception, especially if you walk in certain ‘danger places’. Gaps can appear in the veil of ordinary looking. ‘Clever men’, like Butcher Joe, can look through the gaps and see a ‘long way’. He has drawn pictures of rai and balangan, so he is not disturbed when they make themselves visible to him. It is not the intensity of his gaze which produces them: if he is happily in a place they will come. The harder you look the less likely you are to see. You dream, and something good will come to you, like your boyfriend, but when you look again...  

Muecke performs a rationalising of Indigenous perception of spirits. Once again Muecke impresses upon the reader the importance of approaching third eye perceptions with the right intellectual apparatus and with the acceptance of non-ordinary perception. The ‘hypoptics’ discourse flatly challenges rigidified scientific rationality, requiring a new method in which to classify data taken in by the eyes and processed by the mind. It offers a new ‘logic’ of rationality. In psychology (a rationalising science) it is noted that depth perception cues can occasionally lead us astray, creating a misperception of ordinary objects (the paradox Muecke quotes as being either the movement of the grass or the spirit-woman ‘Wurawora’). The short yet ‘deep Indigenous narrative’ attempts via the anthropological definitions of shamanic trickery to represent to Non-Indigenous people what was once known, now through the eyes of the Indigenous clever man with whom Muecke is friendly. So to approach double-consciousness in this instance, Muecke must enter into an ethnomethodological paradigm with all its unavoidably complicated Eurocentric, as well as self-and-other-arbitrated, shortcomings of field research.

Muecke projects a similar deferred sense of the Aboriginal sacred that a recent reviewer of Indigenous Australian ethnographies attests to. Colin Dean introduces his thesis concerning The Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime (An account of its History, Cosmogenesis, Cosmology and Ontology) in the following manner:

[The introductory] discussion points out: 1) the variability and complexity of ‘Dreamtime’ metaphysics and 2) the danger of all-encompassing universalistic theories to explain ‘Dreamtime’ metaphysics. The demonstration of this complexity and variability of ‘Dreamtime’ metaphysics, within this thesis, is an attempt to prove W.E.H Stanner’s claim that the ‘Dreamtime’ is ‘much more complex philosophically than we have so far realised.’

Dean analyses the variety of perceptions about what the ‘Dreamtime’ is among urbanized and traditional Indigenous communities. He is interested in Indigenous ideas that the ‘Dreamtime’ (to use the much derived Baldwin and Spencer’s coining of Indigenous spiritual life) is only a past reality (Dean finds this among Tiwi, Wuradjiri,...

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42 Colin Dean, 1996 The Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime (An account of its History, Cosmogenesis, Cosmology and Ontology), Camahaucher Press, Geelong West, Victoria, p vi.
and Jigalong peoples). In other Indigenous communities the ‘Dreamtime’ is simultaneously a past and concurrent reality (among Mardudjara, Murngin, Wailbiri, Ooldea, and Warrabri peoples). Comparing Dean’s understanding of Indigenous Australian spiritualities to Muecke’s exploration of his encounters with Indigenous Australian spirituality, it appears that both authors are careful to not overly conceptualise what Indigenous spirituality is as a whole. Thus both Muecke and Dean are careful not to construct notions of a pan-Aboriginal Spirituality or Indigenous cultural law. There are localised Indigenous communities and tribal groups that observe different cultural laws, songs, and ‘dreamings’. In Muecke’s recounting of the Aboriginal custodians of Alice Springs the reader is reminded that the spiritual perception of the road leading into Alice Springs is specific to Alice Springs. The knowledge communicated is general enough to alert non-Indigenous people to the Indigenous spiritual life located at Alice Springs, yet is not specific in the way of supplying direct ‘how to do and know’ instructions for just anyone to presumably walk in the way of the local ancestor spirits. Non-Indigenous conceptions of Indigenous spiritual life must be very careful of Eurocentric generalisations of secret-sacred knowledge. This applies to the above commentary in which Muecke’s speaks of knowledge gained ‘on the road’ and ‘hypoptics’ – knowledge designed by Muecke to describe the space where non-Indigenous people transform their sense of self and other with non-ordinary perceptions. It is an intersection where re-evaluations of ‘Dreamtime’ metaphysics and postcolonial anthropology redefine the boundaries of Indigenous and non-Indigenous spiritual discourses.

Conclusion

So how do we talk about what cannot be talked about? How is the secret-sacred world of Indigenous Australian Law and culture revealed and represented? How can reconciliation debates be fuelled by concepts of the Indigenous sacred? How is secularism an exhausted medium when it come to understanding Aboriginal Religion, the Non-Indigenous Sacred, and Native Title claims which imply cross-cultural ways of using and valuing the land and homelands of Australia. The following commentary is a brief summary of the concepts and arguments this thesis has covered, and an indication of the implications for the reconciliation debates occurring in the wider community.

Penny Van Toorn’s examination of Threlkeld’s gospel text written in the Awabakal tongue in collaboration with an Awabakal man, Biraban was useful in indicating a hybridised spiritual text that is neither purely Christian nor Awabakal, but a text with inextricable parts of each man’s ‘religion’. It furthermore provided an insight into how Non-Indigenous writers and thinkers have spoken on behalf of Indigenous people, which problematised the authenticity of Aboriginal religious texts.

In line with Irarahpeti Ramsden’s warning about implicit ongoing colonisation practices in Chapter 1, I have argued that representations of Indigenous mindsets by secular authorities on Aboriginal religion (such as Freud and Durkheim) cannot accurately portray Indigenous Australian cultural thinking. In critically re-evaluating colonalist anthropological texts and the way implicitly secular Non-Indigenous mindsets are apparent in the selected anthropological texts, it is clear that Aboriginal religion and culture is better represented by Aboriginal writers and speakers unhindered by Euro-

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44 Ibid., p vi.
Australian ambitions and interpreters. Repeated exposure to a variety of anthropological texts on Aboriginal culture and religion as well as speaking to Indigenous informants myself has lent to the notion that Indigenous Australians still struggle to be heard and to speak their mind when it comes to the re-discovery, protection and upkeep of their traditional cultural-life connections.

Clifford Geertz offers what I see as a postcolonial method of deconstructing one’s assumptions about what culture is. Thomas’s method of re-construction Indigenous history is interdisciplinary and creates an implied evolutionary philosophy to better account for the modern status of Indigenous research subjects. Both methods are helpful in developing ways of talking about Indigenous Australian Spiritualities. However, Thomas’s implied evolutionary agenda of discovering the history of Indigenous cultures can lead to implications that Indigenous people’s homeland and social structures have changed so much over time that they have lost their original connection to their ancestral spirits and cultural beliefs. Once again, the concept of evolution must not predispose investigators of Indigenous cultures into thinking that Aboriginal religion is rooted solely in the matter of earth and biological forces, thus subject to physical and philosophical changes that destroy a culture’s religious identity.

Foucault’s argument that anthropology is flawed shows that anthropological methodology is implicitly Eurocentric. The field of anthropology represents one of many cultural facets that make up humanity. Foucault’s criticism of anthropology is relevant to the theoretical structures of Freud and Durkheim who influenced many psychological and sociological representations of Indigenous Australian people by Non-Indigenous field workers, anthropologists, welfare workers, and cultural commentators.

Turnbull’s short work expresses the need for an expanded cross-cultural anthropological study in order to speak of joint rationalities between cultures (Indigenous/Non-Indigenous) and mindsets (scientific/other). He wrestles with cultural differences between Western and Indigenous mindsets advocating the need for a joint-rationality because both mindsets are capable of maintaining the health and welfare of people living in their particular social settings. He notes the value of Geertz’s interpretive anthropology that focuses on the uniqueness of events and the particularity of cultural experiences in localised settings. Geertz’s work shows that global and universal theories of culture and anthropology become problematised by the methods applied to investigating the uniqueness of localised cultural events. Thus Turnbull illuminates why a joint-discourse with a common aim is imperative in establishing reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous cultures: knowledge of other cultures cannot be accurately established without repeatedly re-evaluating the values, needs, ideas, philosophies of both cultures on a regular basis. It cannot be assumed that knowledge of Indigenous culture can be obtained via past and present Non-Indigenous methods of investigation, historical research, data retrieval and interpretation alone. One must also be aware of re-colonising or re-building a discourse of fixed intellectual boundaries that settles the differences between Them and Us. Joint-rationalities, I would further suggest, indicate fluid cultural boundaries in the identities of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

Charlesworth speaks of the need for more insider accounts of Aboriginal religion in Australia, from the perspective of a religious mindset. Katz points out that mystical or
religious experiences are philosophically and often empirically unverifiable. Yet many intelligent people from a variety of cultures and times past and present have reported mystical experiences do exist and are worthy of investigation. This is important in understanding in appreciating the value of Indigenous Australian cultural Laws that often have the character of religious or mystical experience to the Non-Indigenous observer. Swain endeavours to characterise Indigenous Australian cultural experiences as a geosophy (a land-based philosophy of life) not fixed to European concepts of historical timeframes. Changes in Indigenous society, Swain has argued, occurred in terms of place, not time. From numerous anthropological and cultural studies of Aboriginal Australia Swain has attempted to enter into the mindset of Indigenous Australian religious experience and represent it in philosophical terms; his efforts infer a religious-minded assessments of Aboriginal religion.

In their arguments about how the Aboriginal sacred is talked about in Uncanny Australia Gelder and Jacobs concluded that reconciliation issues in Australia can never be settled due to the vast cultural difference between modern (secular) Australian society and the Aboriginal sacred. In Gelder and Jacobs’ work the Aboriginal sacred is assembled as a shifting terrain of opinion that impedes the progress of reconciliation debates towards a satisfactory conclusion that appeals to both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people. Their talk of the Aboriginal sacred is at times an arena of argument between secular and sacred opinions about the state of Australian society. By drawing on Freud’s sense of ‘The Uncanny’ and Durkheim’s sense of religious experience reducible to sociological processes, Gelder and Jacob’s create secular arguments against the pervasive cultural interest and legal impact that the Aboriginal sacred is having in modern Australian (secular) society at present. They use these arbitrary boundaries of secular versus sacred in order to expose difficulties with the reconciliation debate and revealing and representing the sacred. In contradistinction to Gelder and Jacobs’ portrayal of secularism, I have argued that interpretations of the Aboriginal sacred that make use of secular theories of psychology and religion misrepresent Indigenous cultural and religious life experiences.

Tacey attempts to go further than Muecke’s respectful outsider cultural analysis of Indigenous Australians, by advocating that modern Australian society in general shows signs of a repressed unconscious ‘aboriginality’. His post-Jungian psychological method of analysing Euro-Australian ‘aboriginality’ is useful because it indicates that Euro-Australians struggle with a language to describe sacred life experiences. However Tacey’s discourse that compares Euro-Australian unconsciousness with Indigenous Australian ‘aboriginality’ is insensitive to the secret-sacred manner in which Indigenous Australian hold their cultural Law. Tacey suggests that Indigenous Australian ‘aboriginality’ is a mirror of what Euro-Australian unconscious life experiences can become. In Tacey’s estimation, Aboriginal religion and culture can be used as a philosophical and psychological tool to create a similar (though not the same) Euro-Australian spiritual renewal of consciousness. This argument for the psychological development of a Euro-Australian unique sense of ‘aboriginality’ derived from Indigenous Australian culture is a form of cultural appropriation. Gelder and Jacobs accuse Tacey of being decidedly ‘New Age’ with his talk of Australian cultural and

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spiritual renewal. Tacey’s New-Agist point is arguably flawed because he suggests that a dominant consciousness-driven life experience held in Australian society has lost connection with its origins of mind and philosophy, origins that Tacey perceives to be rooted in a mental and spiritual way of life that have been marginalised. I believe it is important to acknowledge particular Non-Indigenous desires for cultural renewal via sacred, non-ordinary, or religious life experiences. However, one should not assume that feelings of connectedness with Australian lands and people are ‘aboriginal’ life experiences directly connected to Indigenous Australian cultural Law or ‘Dreamtime’ experiences. Such beliefs are unverifiable and depend on the information obtained from Indigenous informants. Indigenous Australians are often unwillingly to reveal the whole truth about their particular cultural beliefs due to the secret-sacred Laws that can be found in many Indigenous Australian cultures.

Muecke’s cultural study shows that Non-Indigenous people struggle with an understanding of what culture and society is, especially when confronted with Indigenous Australian culture, which implicitly challenges Eurocentric notions embedded in the structures of modern society. Muecke uses deconstructive, postmodern and postcolonial literary theory as a way of emphasising a need to re-evaluate the theoretical structures and conditions of modern Australian society. He discusses the Aboriginal sacred in conjunction with his studies of postmodern cultural phenomena that reflect the need for change in modern society. His awareness of a postmodern world in a state of permanent cultural change reveals hybridity whereby Aboriginal representations of the sacred are difficult to distinguish from Indigenous Australian representations of their sacred culture. What is authentically ‘Aboriginal’ in thought and delivery is blurred by hybridity and endemic subtle colonising tendencies, such as the Aboriginalism created by Tacey’s conversion of European repressed unconsciousness into European ‘aboriginality’.

Some of the difficult and complex issues in contemporary Indigenous studies are prejudice, racism, oppression, implementation of strategies recommended by the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, social justice, social health and disadvantage, cultural difference, acceptance and working intercultural relationships. The intellectual frameworks that support racism need to be dismantled, and that has been part of the objective of this thesis in critically evaluating implicit imperial and Non-Indigenous structures that inform modern Australian society about Aboriginal religion. This thesis does not pretend to cover all these issues; however, it indicates how academic methodologies that favour Eurocentric and secular models of society tend to disadvantage Indigenous Australian people. Indigenous cultural Law is recognisable amidst the legal processes required of Native Title claimants. However, the re-education of people living in ignorance and fear of ‘the Other’ in Australia needs to be addressed as a lack of understanding and communication of cultural difference and tolerance. In this thesis I have indicated that Indigenous Australian cultural Law is often an Indigenous spiritual perception of land-human and spirit-human relations. This notion of belief in ancestor spirits continuing in a modern (secular) society challenges Non-Indigenous belief systems in part due to the fact that Indigenous cultural Law is of a secret and sacred order of knowledge.

I set out to show in this thesis how a lack of knowledge of Indigenous worldviews, especially Indigenous cultural Law and its spiritual dimension, is deleterious to Indigenous Affairs and reconciliation debates. Instead of coming up with short term fix-
it methods and throwing money at issues without investigating why racism happens, I believe that (re)education is a key to understanding Aboriginal religion. That includes the (black) history of Australia, and a continued support network for the reorientation towards Indigenous people determining the contents and signifiers of Indigenous Australian cultural Law, in social, political, and domestic, and education environments.

I have claimed that there are degrees of 'authentic' representations but no absolute representation of the Aborigine as such. Non-Indigenous writers have often tried to speak the other's (Indigenous) language when documenting Aboriginal religion. But in doing so the language of the Non-Indigenous writer on the Aboriginal sacred would probably collapse with the "terrain" of representation already tempered by Non-Indigenous symbolic, linguistic, and philosophical cues. In this rather complex appropriation of the others (sacred) language for purposes of self-and-other representation one must come to terms with a different order of thinking. It is in meeting Indigenous Australian people that Non-Indigenous people first become familiar with another way of thinking about the same social space both cultures share. In such encounters, double-consciousness arises; a place where two apparently contradictory, or different views on reality and life experiences move, though not necessarily in competition, with each other. I believe that secular mindsets that have attempted to determine what Aboriginal religion is have been exhausted and simply serve to frustrate communication about Aboriginal cultural experiences. Such experiences can loosely be referred to as, in Non-Indigenous terms, religious experiences. In an attempt to establish a like-minded experience of culture, adopting a religious mindset when talking to and about Indigenous people is productive.

If Indigenous Australian cultural representation is to escape from the control of implicit Non-Indigenous biases then a high degree of Non-Indigenous self-reflexivity is essential. Representations of Aboriginal religion need to be controlled by Indigenous owners and caretakers of cultural Law for such secret-sacred Law is important to the continuation of such traditions to be passed on to posterity both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous. Aboriginal religion can only really be known when talked about with Indigenous people, though secret-sacred conditions limit authentic insider accounts. Cultural Law is important in Native Title claims and Indigenous owners and caretakers of such cultural property should control such representations of the Indigenous sacred. By adopting a religious mindset, Non-Indigenous people can become more usefully aware of the physical, mental and spiritual conditions that occur when encountering the Aboriginal sacred, located at sacred sites and in the living experience of Indigenous people. One of the ways forward in reconciliation debates is in developing a double-conscious awareness that utilises a religious mindset when talking about Aboriginal religion and Indigenous Australian people. Uniquely Aboriginal religious experiences seemingly permeate many Indigenous Australian people’s life and being.

What I have accomplished by re-evaluating Non-Indigenous writers is to note a distinct lack of spiritual awareness in the epistemologies of Non-Indigenous representations of the sacred. The writings of Freud, Durkheim, Thomas, even Gelder and Jacobs to an extent, do not attempt to enter into the mindset of Indigenous people as religious thinkers. Theses writers tend to engage their own understanding of a fundamental ontology of Aboriginal religion from a secular point of view. Though their work claims to be deep, penetrating, practical and analytical, their outcomes often fail to adequately describe how Indigenous people think in light of recent work by Indigenous writers.
Alternatively, Non-Indigenous writers like Charlesworth, Turnbull, and Muecke all work on approaching the spiritual experiences of Aboriginal religion from a respectful outsiders' point of view, which still falls short of authentic perspectives on a living Indigenous cultural deep Law. The writings of Elkin and Kimber approach the deep Law of Indigenous Australian shamanism though their positions as writers reporting on events of the Aboriginal sacred are limited to a respectful outsiders' point of view.

The way forward in approaching the fundamental ontologies of Aboriginal Australian religion can be found in works by Indigenous Australian commentators who speak and write of their own spiritual experiences. Chief political correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald working in Canberra, Michelle Grattan has assembled an anthology of essays analysing Australia's reconciliation process, entitled Essays on Australian Reconciliation (2000).46 Forty short essays written by Non-Indigenous and Indigenous leaders and thinkers speak on a range of issues noted in the titles of their respective essays. For example, Sir Gustav Nossal writes on 'Symbolism and Substance in the Surge Towards Reconciliation', Prime Minister John Howard on 'Practical Reconciliation', Former Opposition leader Kim Beazley on 'Unfinished Business', Henry Reynolds on 'A Crossroads of Conscience', and Raimond Gaita on 'Guilt, Shame and Collective Responsibility'. Much of the Non-Indigenous focus tends to be on righting the wrongs of past government practices, how historical consciousness impacts the present, Indigenous health, welfare, and the effects of assimilation policies on Indigenous communities.

In Grattan's anthology Indigenous writers speak of a range of issues past and present in order to recognise the depth of colonial injustice and the need to heal via reconciliation processes. Former Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Patrick Dodson outlines the need for Aboriginal people to have full access and equitable outcomes from participation in relevant mainstream programs. He suggests programs such as education and training in their own cultures and languages, the right to own and control the use of Indigenous-owned land and other resources, right to self-government and autonomy in relation to Indigenous affairs, constitutional change recognised by Federal Parliament to protect the rights of Aboriginal people, Federal government negotiation of and respect for treaties and agreements entered into with Aboriginal peoples, and ongoing processes of discussion, research, public awareness, public policy guidelines to maintain the framework of negotiation of the agreements made with Federal government.47 Dodson's claims read like a proposed treaty of reconciliation with legalistic terms and conditions drafted by an Indigenous leader.

It is important to note how Indigenous writers speak about reconciliation often in terms of recognising the injustices of the past and letting them go in order to move on, and reclaiming spiritual connections. Part of the healing for Indigenous Australians via reconciliation processes is the recognition of the value of spiritual experiences. It is important to note that in localised areas where it was once thought that Indigenous culture had been eradicated from the land and environs, spiritual contact with one's Indigenous Australian heritage is still possible for Indigenous Australians. Tasmanian

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Aboriginal, Jim Everett has spoken of such re-visioning and reclamation by the spirits of the land in his story of the burial rites ceremony during the 1990s of returned ancestral remains to Bruny Island in Tasmania.\textsuperscript{48} Hannah McGlade in her essay ‘Doubtful Island’ speaks of reading a book with an account of her grandmother Ethel Hassell, about her culture and traditions. McGlade speaks of her grandmother citing “women’s booliah” or wizard stones: if you hold them in your hand and wish hard for a new cullum or baby boy, you might just get what you wish.” McGlade goes on to say:

I remember that my baby son came to me only after I brought home the pretty stones from the Quaalup river. My son is also from my grandmother’s country, and the pelicans or butahings who live there came to his very early on. So genocide was not as complete as it may have seemed. I do not think anyone can kill the Nyungar spirit; it is timeless, like this country.\textsuperscript{49}

Reconciliation depends on the recognition of claims such as those made by Everett and McGlade. Such spiritual insight is what drives Native Title claims for Indigenous Australian people. Everett speaks of Indigenous land rights in terms of a spiritual heritage, and the recognition of Indigenous principles of spiritual perception is a way forward in the Australian reconciliation process:

Aboriginal land rights represent a whole set of responsibilities, among which is the obligation to preserve the unique essence of their original law. Aborigines have the responsibility to be custodians to the ecological world, which accepts indigenous intrusion and use of that ecology only on sound practices of interaction with the spirit of the land, manifested in strict rules of respect and protection...

In all those endeavours, the responsibilities of indigenous people... can be carried with us as a symbol of human accountability in being allowed the right to participate in the planet’s ecology.\textsuperscript{50}


\textsuperscript{50} Everett, 1994, \textit{op. cit.,} p xii-xiii.
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