A comparative analysis of perceptions of land between environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS OF LAND BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

BY

ROWAN GREENLEES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

at the Faculty of Arts,
Department of Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies,
Edith Cowan University.

Date of Submission: 31st October 1994.
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ...................................................................................... 4
Abstract ........................................................................................................ 5
Declaration ...................................................................................................... 7
INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 8
  Methodology ................................................................................................ 12
  Theory .......................................................................................................... 16
  Operational Definitions .................................................................................. 19
LITERATURE ANALYSIS - Introduction ......................................................... 22
Chapter 1 - The Many Shades of Green ......................................................... 24
  2 - The Dreaming ........................................................................................ 29
  3 - Aboriginal Perceptions of Land ............................................................... 37
  4 - The Earth, My Mother ............................................................................ 41
  5 - The Gaia Hypothesis ............................................................................ 43
  6 - Invocation (John Seed) .......................................................................... 46
  7 - The Dreamers - Nation of the Dawn ....................................................... 49
  8 - Voices of the First Day (Robert Lawlor) ................................................. 51
  9 - Mysteries of the Dreamtime (James Cowan) .......................................... 55
  10 - Called by the Land to Enter the Land (Veronica Brady) ....................... 60
  11 - Perceptions of Wilderness and Aboriginality ....................................... 65
CASE STUDY - Introduction ......................................................................... 72
  12 - Perceptions of Land ............................................................................ 74
  13 - Changing Perceptions, Inherited Connections ....................................... 95
  14 - Perceptions of Each Other .................................................................. 102
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................... 112
Appendix 1 .................................................................................................... 120
Appendix 2 .................................................................................................... 121
References ..................................................................................................... 123
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND THANKS

To my thesis Supervisor, Dr. Patricia Baines, without whose enthusiasm and support this thesis would have only remained a vague notion.

To the staff and fellow-students of the Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies Department, Mt. Lawley, whose advice and sharing of ideas fostered my ideas and perseverance.

To the Nyungar elders, Ben Taylor, Richard Wilkes, Yaruritja and Gwen Corunna, who contributed their viewpoints to the Case Study, and to all the Aboriginal people whose ideas have been cited in this thesis, in appreciation of their shared knowledge.

To the members of the Ellenbrook Conservation Group, Kingsley Dunstan, Lyn Dunstan, Brian Bush and Dorothy Mulder, for sharing their perceptions, and to the people at the Environment Centre, Perth, for their interest and assistance.

To Pam Nicholls and Garry Finch, both patient and perceptive sounding-boards, and to Sally Marston, for telling me: "Never highlight and delete without undertaking counselling first!"
ABSTRACT

"We believe the same thing, regarding land, as the Aborigines."

This thesis has been undertaken to investigate the above statement, which I have frequently heard from environmentalists in informal conversation with them. To investigate this statement requires an analysis of all its possible meanings and underlying assumptions, and a comparison with the beliefs and perceptions regarding land that Aboriginal peoples uphold. Emphasis has been given to the word "same", as the understandings of this word will indicate how this statement needs to be qualified.

As a person who has interests in both environmental issues and those that concern indigenous peoples, I feel that statements such as the one above can perpetuate misconceptions about the beliefs and perceptions of Aboriginal peoples. In situations where environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples seek to work together on issues that concern both groups, such as in the shared management of National Parks, these misconceptions can lead to conflict, and the severance of communication and mutual respect. This, in my opinion, would be regrettable. Both of these groups, in their own way, are challenging the dominant land ethic which threatens their interests, and, when necessary, much could be gained by mutual support.

Research for this thesis was carried out as a two-part process: (1.) a Literature Analysis, in which various texts from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sources were analyzed and compared, and (2) a Case Study, involving interviews with a Perth environmental group, and some of the Nyungar elders of the region. These people were asked to express their perceptions of land, where their perceptions originated, and how the two groups perceived each other. Their perceptions on each issue were then compared, within each group as well as a cross-culturally. Where relevant, references from the Literature Analysis were cited along with the findings. In the Conclusion that follows, the main points that had emerged from these two processes were outlined. My comments and points of view were added along with the summary.

During the process of research I found that for the environmentalists perceptions of land were often intermingled with problematical perceptions of Aboriginal peoples, and their designation as the "original environmentalists". It became apparent that the priorities of non-Aboriginal environmentalists were not the same as those of Aboriginal peoples. Phrases such as "sustainable economies" and "the spirit of Gaia" were contrasted to the Aboriginal peoples' "caring for country". These reveal not only different priorities, but also different conceptual models and perspectives.

This research project is not intended to provide a definitive answer to the point of inquiry, focussed on the statement given above. Its main purpose is to explore the topic and related issues, through an
examination of the excerpts and citations given in the Literature Analysis and the Case Study Analysis. It is hoped that an examination of the perceptions of land and related issues, as held by environmentalists and Aboriginal people, may give some indication as to where and how they diverge, and how their perspectives may interact in shared undertakings. It involves an exploration of world views, and the difficulties encountered in cross-cultural understandings. The practice of *verstehen*, or empathic understanding, has been offered as one means whereby different perspectives may be communicated and understood, not as a magic formula, but as a carefully-acquired skill.

In the Conclusion of this thesis, there is also the call for environmentalists and like-minded non-Aboriginals to respect the traditions of indigenous peoples, even while admiring their world-views and relationship to the land. If the former are to cultivate a more harmonious relationship with the land, it is far more appropriate for them to do so from within their own cultural framework, than to appropriate concepts and practices from indigenous peoples. Our beliefs need not be identical, but they can be equally valid in their own way.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature.

Date: 7-2-95
INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades two of the main issues that have both united and divided the social debate and politics of Australian society have been Aboriginal Land Rights and environmental awareness. What has exacerbated the impact of these issues is that both Aboriginal peoples and environmentalists are earnest about obtaining results, by putting their values into practice and achieving their goals. The success of the Mabo case in 1992 was a major step forward for Aboriginal peoples, but as has been shown since, that battle is not yet over, and for those who do not have "traditional" links to the land, the battle still continues as it has since 1788.

For environmentalists the battle has been mainly a series of contentions over issues such as logging in Australian forests, the impact of mining, the use of nuclear power, Greenhouse-gas emissions from industry and consumer products, and the prudent use and recycling of natural resources, to name but a few. Although there have always been people concerned with protecting the Australian bushland from unlimited urban, industrial and rural development, and conservation groups dedicated to preserving and fostering an appreciation of the natural environment for its own sake, since the 1960's and 70's a myriad of environmental groups have emerged in Australian society. These were formed, or gained support, as an extension of the New Left, and the anti-war and anti-nuclear power movements of those decades. This provided a political base for an international Green movement, which also had its influence upon Australia. The same people who questioned issues of international politics and safe technology also began to question issues regarding the environmental and social impact of these factors, and consequently these issues began to cross over to different groups and individuals. This movement came to be known broadly as the "alternative movement" of the 1970's. Feminists also added their perspective to issues of power, politics and perceptions of the natural environment (Hallen, 1994:18-21).

Concurrent with all this, Aboriginal activists and groups were also campaigning, in their own way, for Land Rights and the recognition of their culture and needs within Australian society. Some non-Aboriginals who were affiliated with, or influenced by, the groups and issues described above, acknowledged Aboriginal concerns as well, and gave them their support. Among them were those environmentalists who assumed that the Aboriginal peoples' quest for Land Rights, and their own aims to preserve and protect the land, particularly those tracts designated as "wilderness", indicated a possible coalition of interests. Aboriginal peoples were hailed as the "true environmentalists", on the basis of their 60,000 years of sustainable land management. As well as this, some environmentalists asserted that their perceptions and feelings for the land was the same as that of Aboriginal peoples.

During the times when I was involved with environmental groups, or in contact with environmentalists, I frequently heard this statement, or its equivalent: "We believe the same thing, regarding land,
as the Aboriginals". I took this statement at face value for quite a long time, and did not question its assumptions. However, having since completed three years of Undergraduate study in Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies, thereby becoming more conversant with Aboriginal peoples cultures and perceptions of land, I began to question it, as its assumptions did not match what I had learnt through my studies. On the basis of my commitment to environmental issues, as well as the concerns of indigenous peoples, I felt the need to investigate this statement, and therefore have made it the topic of this thesis. Preliminary reading showed me that behind this statement are a whole range of assumptions, some dating from far back, about non-Aboriginal perceptions of land, about "wilderness", and of the Aboriginal peoples as the "true environmentalists", all of which may seem innocuous or even positive on the surface, but upon closer examination reveal themselves to be problematical.

As will be seen in this thesis, these assumptions are still prevalent today among certain environmentalists. The contentious aspects of these assumptions emerge mainly in issues concerning the preservation of National Parks and "wilderness" areas, and the role of Aboriginal peoples in managing, or co-managing, these areas. These assumptions, and their effects on the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and environmentalists, have been well documented in recent publications (Toyne and Johnson, 1991; Nutting, 1994; Rowse, 1993; Head, 1990; Forbes, 1994). Some specific areas of contention (such as hunting technology and burning) have been discussed by these writers, and from their works it appears that there are quite a few areas in which Aboriginal values to land and priorities diverge from those of the environmentalists. These writers have also identified certain terms and concepts as held by the environmentalists that could cause conflict between the two groups if the preconceptions of the former are held unquestioned. The main terms of contention that will be examined in this thesis are those of "wilderness" and Aboriginal peoples as the "original environmentalists". Whilst many Aboriginal people may agree with the latter designation, it must be remembered that in non-Aboriginal understandings it is often loaded with assumptions about Aboriginality and appropriate land management that do not reflect the way that Aboriginal peoples see themselves, and the ways in which they "care for country".

Taking just the above facts into consideration, it is apparent that the statement: "We believe the same things, regarding land, as the Aboriginals" needs to be examined and qualified. As will be indicated in the following sections, it is the held understandings of the word "same" that will decide whether this statement can, with qualification, be upheld, or whether it needs to be qualified. Those "things regarding land" are matters of appropriate land use and habitation, and between the two groups there may be quite a different emphasis on what is "appropriate". There is a need to examine non-Aboriginal perceptions of land, conceptualizations of "nature", "wilderness" and the role of "environmentalists", whether indigenous or not, as all these issues have emerged from the literature.
This statement: "We believe the same things regarding land etc" also implies an assumed commonality of understanding with Aboriginal peoples, at least in regards to perceptions of land. From some of the literature, however, it has become evident that this assumed commonality extends further, and that it is believed there are other areas where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives can merge. This perception seems to prevail among New Age writers, whose works express their belief in some sort of mystical philosophy in which all the world's religious traditions are, at root, expressions of one and the same reality. To explore the theological and cultural implications of this belief are beyond the scope of this thesis; instead, emphasis will be given on the way such beliefs are articulated, and how they could influence environmentalists' perspectives towards Aboriginal peoples, their culture, and their relationship to the land. If a shared commonality is assumed, then Aboriginal peoples are at risk of enduring a new type of colonialism in the form of cultural appropriation.

However, the literature also indicates that it is not only the New Age writers who are guilty of such an imposition. Problematical perceptions of land and Aboriginal peoples are found in other sources within non-Aboriginal Australian culture, in literature and the arts as well as through representations in the media. Aboriginal peoples thereby become merely part of the scenery in popular depictions of the Australian landscape. This is no less a form of cultural appropriation than that described above, and both deny Aboriginal peoples not only their cultural identity, but even their very humanity.

It must be pointed out, however, that such assumptions are not universal among non-Aboriginal Australians. Certain sections of the Literature Analysis and citations from the Case Study Analysis reveal that there are some people who are making a sincere attempt to understand Aboriginal perceptions of land and priorities, without imposing their own conceptual framework too heavily over what they understand. This includes the expressed opinion that non-Aboriginal people will have to develop their feelings for the land in their own way, to search within their own cultural heritage for these perceptions. In so doing they may also express the fullest respect for Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. For example, a recent publication put out by the Australian Conservation Foundation titled "Competing Interests", addresses and defends Aboriginal participation in the management of National Parks. The contributors to this publication acknowledge that the priorities of Aboriginal peoples and environmentalists do sometimes diverge, and that the latter may then have to negotiate their policies in the interests of cultural sensitivity.

The perspectives of Aboriginal peoples have been included in this thesis as a balance and counterpoint to those of the non-Aboriginal contributors, in both the literature and the Case Study. Their statements have been compared with those of the latter, in order to ascertain if there is a commonality of perception. However, as a non-Aboriginal person, I acknowledge that my own cultural preconceptions may influence my understanding of their statements, and thus the conclusions drawn in the text. This is a common problem in intercultural communication, as will be shown by examples given from
some of the sources in the thesis, yet the very act of constructing a thesis dealing with these issues does not render it immune from those same problems. These are issues that will be dealt with in the section dealing with Theory.

The research for this thesis was begun as an attempt to examine and qualify the statement: "We believe the same thing, regarding land, as the Aboriginals", as expressed by certain environmentalists. It is not assumed that they all intend to impart an identical meaning by saying this, and thus a great deal of emphasis is put on exploring the possible shared and diverging meanings of this statement, and others that have emerged from the process of research. It is for this reason that the perceptions of Aboriginal peoples, as well as environmentalists, were studied and compared. It was also necessary to examine the cultural background of their respective perceptions, and that way in which these perceptions were sustained and transmitted. As will be explained in the Methodology, this involved the analysis of texts as well as the gathering of interview data.

It is also not assumed that a research project such as this can present a clear cut-and-dried answer or conclusion to the question that it sets out to explore. However, if it makes some small contribution to the understanding of the issues and perceptions that emerge from its undertaking, a contribution that may be of some benefit to those Aboriginal peoples and environmentalists who seek to work together in a mutually-constructive way, then it will not entirely be considered a failure.
METHODOLOGY

This thesis is constructed as a two-part document. The first part is an examination of some of the available literature on issues dealing with the topic. This will be referred to as the Literature Analysis. The second part is a Case Study analysis, dealing with material obtained from interviews conducted specially for this thesis. In the following Conclusion, the main points that emerge from a comparative analysis of both these sections will be outlined. It should be noted, however, that comparisons will also be made within each section, as part of the analysis.

The Literature Analysis

Selecting the material to be used for a comparative analysis of perceptions of land between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal environmentalists was not an easy task. Textbooks, journals and articles provided much material and offered me many different approaches that could be taken for this study. After some wide and careful reading I decided that certain texts would form the focus of the Literature analysis, and each of these would be designated as a chapter for the purpose of analysis. Apart from this, however, the viewpoints of those authors whose perspectives have contributed much to my understanding of the topic have been used to support, question, give emphasis or add perspective to the citations given by those writers whose works were selected for analysis. The first and last chapters of the Literature analysis will explore some of the topics and concerns delineated in these supplementary texts.

I divided the selected sources into three groups: anthropological works, whose authors deal with the issues explored in the thesis topic; popular works, which may also inform the perceptions of environmentalists, and a collection of citations from Aboriginal people who comment on these issues.

The anthropological works were selected because, by the very nature of their profession, anthropologists are expected to have attained some skill at cross-cultural understandings, and thereby ought to be the people best qualified to inform non-Aboriginal people, by translation, on the cultures and perspectives of the people that they have worked with. This is not to assume, however, that this is always so, or that an anthropologist's understandings on their topic are necessarily superior to everyone else's. The anthropological perspectives have been included in this Analysis as representing one approach to cross-cultural understanding and translation, according to the viewpoints of the four anthropologists selected. They will be appraised according to their observations, as supported or contradicted by the Aboriginal viewpoints included in this Analysis.

The popular texts included for examination were selected after informally surveying journals, library resources and bookstore shelves for works that dealt with Aboriginal people and culture, written by
non-anthropological non-Aboriginal people. The purpose of this was to see how Aboriginal cultures were perceived and translated by non-anthropological writers. I eventually selected five texts for focus, and out of these five, two of the writers described themselves as conversant with Aboriginal cultures, and as having had personal acquaintance and shared knowledge with Aboriginal people. Another writer represented a group who purport to be renewing affective links with the land in a similar way, according to their understandings, that Aboriginal people do. Another is a Deep ecologist who expresses himself in words as well as action. The fifth is an academic (English studies and literary criticism) who has written and spoken widely in areas related to this thesis topic.

The Aboriginal texts were obtained from a variety of sources, from textbooks, journals, anthologies, transcriptions from talks, newspaper articles, and their own publishers (eg. Magabala). The intentional selection of such a variety serves as an acknowledgment that Aboriginal peoples are diverse in their cultures and outlook, and that there is no one definitive Aboriginal viewpoint. Where known, the place where each writer comes from has been indicated with their citation, to acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples strongly identify with their country, and are not as likely to speak in a generalised context as non-Aboriginal people tend to do.

The names of the non-Aboriginal writers selected, and the titles of their works, will be shown in the Introduction to the Literature Analysis. The names and sources of the Aboriginal writers or speakers will be acknowledged with their citations, as their sources were too many to list in a brief introduction, and they range widely in their approach and style of expression.

In the Literature Analysis the chapters are ordered and titled in a way that would best fit the flow of the analysis, sometimes by the title of the work being examined in focus, sometimes by subject matter. It is hoped that in this way the reader who is unfamiliar with the issues and concepts dealt with in the thesis will be able to identify and follow the main points as they emerge from the literature.

The Case Study

The Case Study was undertaken in order to obtain some expressed perceptions of land from environmentalists, in order to compare them with those of Aboriginal peoples. The first task was to define exactly who an "environmentalist" is. Is s/he a member of Greenpeace or any similar organisation, a person actively involved in environmental issues, from writing letters to politicians to getting arrested at blockades, an organic gardener who also recycles their household rubbish, or one who professes to "love nature"? Or any or all of these?
It was decided, eventually, to focus on a case study of a group who were committed to a particular environmental issue. I made the initial contact with one person involved in such a group, introduced to me by my thesis supervisor. After an interview this person recommended three other people involved in the group, whom she had told of the research project and who also expressed interest in participating. This method, called network or snowball sampling, was considered to be the most appropriate and non-intrusive way of making contact with contributors to this Case Study.

Three of the interviews with environmentalists were taped, and one was written by the contributor. The taped interviews were one to one-and-a-half hours long, and were conducted in a variety of locations. These variables were due to necessity and expediency, as all of the contributors live outside the Perth metropolitan area, and interviews therefore had to be conducted where and when opportunity allowed. Despite all these factors, each of the contributors did their best to provide a comprehensive description of their perceptions of land, as well as other issues.

Each of the environmentalists was asked, in their own way, to express their perceptions of land. However, as the reading for the Literature Analysis had already shown that non-Aboriginal perceptions of land are often linked with perceptions of Aboriginal people and their relationship to land, the environmentalists were also asked to give their views on this topic. Thirdly, they were asked where their perceptions originated, how they were formed, and how they had developed or changed. I felt that these questions could help ascertain how their perceptions compared to those of Aboriginal peoples. Apart from these three questions, which the contributors were encouraged to answer in their own words, the interviews were unstructured, and as a result the contributors varied in the time or emphasis they gave to each question. This was not regarded as a flaw in the procedure, but as another indicator of their views and priorities.

I transcribed the interviews, and collected those citations that described their perceptions on each of the issues, to be analyzed and compared. The analysis was broken up into the three issues listed above, and each of the contributor's sections were presented in order (this will be further explained in the Introduction to the Case Study Analysis). Throughout the written analysis each of the contributor's citations are compared with those of the others, and, where relevant, citations or viewpoints from the Literature Analysis and other writers have been included.

Defining who were the most suitable Aboriginal contributors was easier than defining the environmentalists. It was decided that the most appropriate people would be some of the Nyungar elders who are associated with the Swan Valley region, and can speak for the land. Contact with five of these people was made with the assistance of my thesis supervisor, whom they already knew, and with whom she was in contact. As one of these people was ill at the time, only the remaining four were
approached. A letter was sent to them, informing them of the details of this research project and inviting them to participate. Each of the Nyungar elders approached agreed to participate.

Once again, due to busy work schedules, interviews were held in a variety of locations, but nevertheless this did not seem to be an obstacle. Two of the interviews were taped, and two were taken down in note form. As a result the latter rely more on paraphrasing than exact quotation, as will be evident in the Case Study Analysis. Even so, it was possible to show the essence of their perceptions and beliefs, which differed from the others only in individual expression. The taped interviews were then transcribed and analyzed in the same way as the interviews with the environmentalists.

The Nyungar contributors were asked about their perceptions of land, and about their perceptions of environmentalists. As all of them made it plain in the interviews that their perceptions of land were an integral part of their cultural heritage, I did not ask them where these perceptions originated. To do so would have been redundant, and even insulting.

Each of the contributors was sent a copy of their citations selected from the transcription, and invited to give comment or make amendments. Some of them responded, but only minor corrections and a few forgotten details needed to be added. As I transcribed their perceptions exactly as stated, a few minor grammar corrections were also requested, with the comment: "Did I really say it like that?"

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations underpinned the procedures involved in carrying out the interviews. The contributors were not approached directly; the environmentalists were mostly referred from a member of the group, and the Nyungar elders were approached by letter first, and given some time to consider whether they wanted to participate. Interviews were held at a place and time selected by the contributor, although mutual negotiations had to be made in some cases, mainly due to factors of distance and transport limitations. Contributors were asked whether they wished to be identified or remain anonymous in the write-up. They were also sent a copy of their selected citations, to give them a chance to make amendments, if necessary, before the thesis was submitted. A copy of the finished thesis will also be given to each of them, in appreciation of their contribution.

It was also decided, to protect the rights of the contributors, that they share the copyright on that portion of this thesis that deals with the Case Study Analysis, or in any other part where their citations are given or referred to. The material given by the Nyungar people may, for instance, be considered culturally-sensitive, and shared copyright is also extended to the environmentalists. Their permission must be obtained before any of their material can be used or cited by any other person.
THEORY

Method, it is said these days, is theory. Our methods reflect our assumptions and values, they limit what we study and what we learn (Crawford and Marecek, 1989. Cited in Burbank, 1994:6-7).

The statement: "We believe the same things, regarding land, as the Aboriginals", reveals, as stated before, certain assumptions and understandings. The very fact that I undertook to examine and evaluate this statement indicates that I hold these assumptions and understandings in doubt, and thereby reveal something of my own values. The statement affirms the possibility of shared belief between cultures, and whilst I do not deny this possibility outright, I would like to question the basis, or nature, of these perceived commonalities.

My examination is based on the assumption that all individuals in a society participate, in some way, in its world view. World view can be defined as: "a set of more or less systemized beliefs and values in term of which the group evaluates and attaches meaning to the reality that surrounds it" (Kraft, 1978. Cited in Gudykunst and Kim, 1984:40). Each known group has a world view (Weltanschauung) acquired through the socialization process and reinforced by familiarity to become "the way things are". We are mostly unconscious, or unaware, of the nature of our world view, which makes it very difficult to perceive, let alone articulate (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984:40). Our conceptual framework or world view thus not only influences the way we see others, but also how we regard (or fail to see) our own "natural" assumptions and biases.

Berger and Luckmann refer to world view as a "symbolic universe", saying that: "These are the bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality" (1966:113). They add that: "... symbolic universes are social products within a history" (1966:115). This is pertinent to the topic. If one considers the long and divergent histories that have shaped the societies of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia today, one would not readily assume that many cultural commonalities would exist between the two groups. One could, however, point out that Aboriginal peoples, to varying degrees, have adopted aspects of the non-Aboriginal culture and ways of life in the post-contact years, and that environmentalists have diverged from the values of their own culture, and its land ethic, to a land ethic more similar to that of Aboriginal peoples. It is on these words "similar" and "same" that I focus my analysis.

In a qualified sense, this thesis is a phenomenological analysis of certain expressed understandings, as given by people from different cultural backgrounds. Phenomenology is usually defined as being the study of the everyday-life, taken-for-granted shared meanings within a society, that, through social action, reflect back onto and influence that society (Bullock, Stallybrass, Trombley, 1977:46-
These shared assumptions emerge from "commonsense" knowledge, those "natural assumptions" that constitute world view. However, my analysis does not seek to achieve the phenomenological reduction sought by Husserl, whereby:

... consciousness abandons all ideas about the external world and its objects [to become] ... pure consciousness. In this way society, culture, history are 'bracketed away'...


My approach, instead, is based on the understanding that society, culture and history in fact shape our whole consciousness about the external world, and that there is no "pure" consciousness beyond or beneath these shaping influences. As in Schutz's sociological phenomenology, whereby: "Meaning is thus not waiting passively to be discovered but requires active construction" (Swingewood, 1991:269), I have focussed on the cultural and historical factors that construct and influence the perceptions cited and analyzed in this thesis. This approach has been supported by Schutz's own perspective:

Our everyday world is, from the outset, an intersubjective world of culture. It is intersubjective because we live in it as men among other men, bound to them through common influence and work, understanding others and being an object of understanding to others. It is a world of culture because, from the outset, the life-world is a universe of signification to us, i.e. a framework of meaning which we have to interpret, and of interrelations of meaning which we institute only through our action in this life world. It is a world of culture also because we are always conscious of its historicity, which we encounter in tradition and habituality (Schutz 1978. Cited in Swingewood, 1991:271).

In this thesis, however, there are two such cultural worlds to be looked at in examining the statement: "We believe the same thing, regarding land, as the Aboriginals". Central to my inquiry is the question of whether these "same" beliefs are identical or equivalent. If they are identical, then there can be no question that the statement "We believe the same things etc" is correct. If they are equivalent, then they each, as set of perceptions or beliefs, emerge from a different world view or conceptual framework. Even so, an empathic communication may be possible. This does not refute the statement, but qualifies it. This empathic communication or understanding is what I refer to in the thesis as verstehen. This term is further defined in this way:

Since social reality always originates in meaningful human actions, it continues to carry meaning even if it is opaque to the individual at a given time. The original may be reconstructed, precisely by means of what Weber calls Verstehen (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:222).
According to Trusted (1987:7-8), the operation of **verstehen** does not rely on shared, identical experiences, but on sufficient experience and empathic imagination, backed by knowledge of the cultural and historical context of the situation. She does, however, acknowledge that:

The greater the differences between the culture of the observed and the observer, the more difficult it is to explain the behaviour of the former, and the more important it is to see over cultural barriers to carry out the operation of **verstehen** (1987:140).

With this particular kind of understanding it may be possible to get at least some insight into another person or group's world view. Such an understanding, when expressed, may on the surface sound like an assertion of a commonality, when it is in fact an expression of **verstehen**. Through **verstehen** similar or equivalent views can be acknowledged, without adopting the assumption that beliefs and perceptions are shared and identical.

My approach to the analysis of the material used in this thesis is based on cultural relativism, the idea that cultures and societies each develop their own way of dealing with the basic human needs within their particular environments (Kornblum, 1988:94), and that these cultures ought not to be compared to one another by any set of absolute judgemental criteria. In its extreme form cultural relativism has been criticised as being morally-relativistic, or "anything goes". However, I take the assumption that no-one is ever entirely value-neutral, that somewhere along the line in between ethnocentrism and a relativistic suspension of judgement, their own values will be asserted. This is not to say that cultural relativism is ineffective as an analytical tool or approach. It is, instead: "an acquired skill to which the social sciences can contribute through cross-cultural research" (Kornblum, 1988:94). The striving for a value-neutral observation is part of the research process as a tool, and is not regarded as an intended goal itself.

My approach to the analysis has also focussed on the emic perspective, an insider's viewpoint, applying the use of **verstehen** as best as I can to the material found in the literature and the Case Study, especially when cross-cultural understandings are sought. However, I have also expressed criticism of sources whose stated or implicit assumptions conflict with my own. In the case of the statement: "We believe the same things, regarding land, as the Aboriginals", the distinction between identical and equivalent is, I believe, an important one that reflects on one's attitudes towards another culture. Ethical considerations are at stake here, especially when these attitudes violate the integrity of that culture and the perceived humanity of its people. In these situations, I feel that open criticism is justified.
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

In this section, some of the terms, assumptions, and understandings upon which the text of this thesis is based, will be defined and explained. It must be remembered that these definitions and understandings do not apply to citations, where the author's meanings will have to be ascertained from his/her own theoretical perspectives and the context of the citation.

Defining the "Environmentalists"

Throughout this thesis, the term "environmentalists" will be used to refer only to non-Aboriginal people, even though Aboriginal people have also, at times, referred to themselves as environmentalists according to their understanding of the term, and others may regard themselves as affiliated with both groups. One such person is Fabienne Bayet, from South Australia, who works at the Aboriginal Research Institute at the University of South Australia, and is also undertaking a course in Environmental Studies. She defines herself in this way:

I am Aboriginal, as is my mother's mother. I also consider myself as an environmentalist, conservationist, greenie, whatever. I care about this planet, this landscape we live in. So, am I black or green? Black on the outside and green on the inside, or the other way round? Perhaps there is no clear definition, I am both green and black, swirling colours which combine to make my identity, me. (Bayet, 1994:27).

However, in her article which follows this introduction, she focuses more on defending Aboriginal interests against non-Aboriginal environmentalists who uphold notions of "wilderness" and appropriate land use, particularly in regard to National Parks. She makes some incisive statements which will be cited in the relevant chapter of the Literature Analysis. While acknowledging Bayet's dual affiliation, in this thesis only the perceptions of non-Aboriginal environmentalists will be cited and examined, as an exploration of cross-cultural understandings needs to be undertaken in order to evaluate the statement; "We believe the same things, regarding land, as the Aboriginals".

The reason why the term "environmentalist" has been selected for use to cover all the different approaches and perspectives found within the Green movement has been explained in the closing paragraphs of Chapter 1, where some of these perspectives have been examined. The term "dominant land ethic" derives from the ecofeminist understanding outlined in Chapter 1 (Hallin, 1994), and is used to refer to the prevailing attitudes and values of land as held by the dominant or "mainstream" section of non-Aboriginal Australian society. These are, briefly, that land and natural resources are of primary value as a source of economic wealth. This economic imperative thereby over-rides the aesthetic, ecological and cultural values that environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples ascribe to the
land. It is in this mutual resistance to the dominant land ethic that some environmentalists assume a commonality of goals and perceptions of land with Aboriginal peoples.

Although in the Literature Analysis a whole chapter has been devoted to indicating some of the ways in which environmentalists diverge in aim and outlook, a similar attempt has not been made to delineate any similar divergences within or between Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal readers may feel that, to offer a balance in perspective and treatment, this should have been done. However, I have decided that such an investigation is best left for Aboriginal peoples to undertake for themselves, if it needs to be done at all. That there are divergences in aim and outlook among Aboriginal peoples is a possibility that I acknowledge, but as a non-Aboriginal person, it seemed inappropriate for me to speak for people who would no doubt prefer to define themselves in their own way.

Aboriginal peoples: Pre-contact and Post-Contact

It will be noticed that in the text of this thesis I have taken care to avoid the making a distinction between "traditional" or "tribal", and "urban" or "contemporary: Aboriginal peoples. As will be illustrated in Chapter 11, these distinctions are highly problematical when made by non-Aboriginal people. This distinction has reflected on the perception of Aboriginal peoples in non-Aboriginal society, in cultural images as well as in legislature. For instance, the Mabo ruling acknowledges the rights to land of only the "traditional" owners, and this neglects the needs of those Aboriginal people who are no longer affiliated with their ancestral lands, due to the history of dispossession and the breaking-up of families that occurred after the European invasion. As well as this factor, the term "traditional" is generally problematical, as anthropologist Erich Kolig points out:

To all peoples everywhere, tradition is what they think the past was, and this by definition is different from the past itself ... the very concept of tradition is ideological insofar as it redefines and reinterprets the past in terms of the present .... whether it is the social scientist's concept of the past or that of the people concerned, images of the past are always formed from the current stock of knowledge (Kolig, 1981:5-6).

In this thesis Kolig's critique of the definitions of "traditional" will be upheld in the context of non-Aboriginal understandings and use of the term, as they are applied to Aboriginal peoples and culture. In the text, the terms "pre-contact" and "post-contact" will be used where appropriate, whenever a distinction needs to be made. However, it must be stressed that this is a historical distinction, and does not reflect upon Aboriginal cultural self-definition.

20
Finally, it is acknowledged throughout the text that the Aboriginal population of Australia comprises of many different regional and language groups, each with their own sense of place and identity. For this reason I have used the term Aboriginal "peoples", indicating a plurality of groups, in the text to show this acknowledgment.

Defining Land

The term "land" was selected for this exploration of perceptions of land after some careful thought. The literature revealed that environmentalists use the terms "nature", "the environment", "the ecosystem" or "biosphere", or the "bush", more so than "land". However, I felt that these terms were not ones that Aboriginal peoples most frequently use, and may indeed not carry a shared meaning with the "land" or "country" that they speak for. It was for this reason that "land" seemed to be the term most easily shared by both in undertaking the research. In the interview question the term "land" was offered to both the Nyungar people and the environmentalists, but each were allowed to use the words of their own choice in expressing their perceptions.
LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this Literature Analysis several different texts will be examined, and where necessary, other references obtained from background reading will be cited to give complementary or contrasting points of view, or to offer further explanation of ideas or concepts encountered in the texts. The selection of texts is by no means exhaustive or definitive; due to the limits imposed on this thesis only a certain number could be selected, and from some of these only excerpts could be focused on. A brief introduction to the chosen texts will follow.

Graham Dunkley (1991:68-74) and Peter Marshall (1992:404-412) were the sources used for identifying and describing the different perspectives among environmentalists. Although through further research these perspectives could have been analysed in much greater detail to do them full justice, this section of the Literature Analysis mainly serves to acknowledge and illustrate that environmentalists do not always share the same perspectives and aims. Citations from the writings of Australian environmentalists are given to provide examples.

Definitions of the Dreaming, which is crucial to understanding the culture of the Aboriginal peoples, were obtained from anthropological texts, Aboriginal perspectives from various sources, and the definitions of a popular non-Aboriginal writer who has sought to explain aspects of Aboriginal culture to a non-Aboriginal readership. Being popular and easily available, works such as these may well have a significant impact on environmentalists who do not have access to academic or anthropological sources. The views of these anthropologists: Robert Tonkinson (1991), W.E.H. Stanner (1979) and Deborah Bird Rose (1988, 1992) are cited in this chapter. An excerpt from one of the works of James Cowan (1989) has been included to give a popularised perspective. Non-Aboriginal writer Tony Swain's (1992) observations of post-contact influences on the Dreaming are also examined. The sources of all the cited Aboriginal perceptions have been indicated where they are given in the text.

The Aboriginal sources have been indicated similarly in the next chapter, which examines their own expressed perceptions of land. Another anthropologist, Patricia Baines (1988) supports their view with an example from her own fieldwork. In the following section, which refers to the concept of "The Earth, my Mother", much is owed to the research of Tony Swain (1991, 1992). Although this is only a very short chapter, it was decided that the nature of the issue that it presents warrants its distinction from the previous topic. The Gaia hypothesis is then defined and examined, and the work of James Lovelock (1979) who first coined the term after developing his hypothesis, is the main reference source for this chapter.
The following text to be studied is the Invocation by John Seed (1988), whose perspectives are based on the Gaia hypothesis as well as Deep ecology. His perceptions are contrasted with those of an Aboriginal elder, Bill Neidjie (1989), as each refer to a Tree of Life, or a living tree, in a way that reveals quite a different way of seeing the world. The Invocation is reproduced in Appendix 1.

In the next chapter an article by Chris Farmer (1984) is examined, wherein s/he describes the beliefs and activities of a group called The Dreamers, who are seeking to re-unite with and regenerate the land in their own way. Following this, the aims and main ideas of Robert Lawlor, in his book Voices of the First Day (1991) are looked at, as well as an excerpt from the book in the form of a diagram which appears in Appendix 2. Another excerpt from James Cowan's book Mysteries of the Dream-time (1989) is then used to compare with the perceptions of Robert Lawlor given in the preceding chapter. An article by Veronica Brady (1991) then gives an alternative perspective to those of Cowan and Lawlor. These three non-Aboriginal writers each give their own perceptions of land, as well as their own perceptions of the relationship that Aboriginal people have with the land.

From undertaking this Literature Analysis, it has become apparent that non-Aboriginal perceptions of land, and their perceptions of Aboriginality, are often linked in the way that they view Aboriginals as the "original conservationists", and their conceptions of "wilderness". These issues are then explored in the last chapter of the analysis, using a variety of cited sources to offer different explanations and perspectives.
Chapter One

THE MANY SHADES OF GREEN

Environmentalists are in no way homogenous in their perceptions of land, their values in regard to natural resources (some even question perceiving nature as a "resource"), their ways of life, their methods and practices. Different analyses of the environmental movement have their own way of identifying and defining these divergences, some of which will be examined in this section.

Graham Dunkley (1991:68-74) has colour-coded the perceived groups into "light green" and "deep green". The first occupy a wide middle ground which seeks to replace the conventional economic logic within an environmental/social ethic, whereby environmental and human values precede consumer goods and GDP growth in value and priority. They seek to work within the existing framework, making change where necessary through legislation to bring about their goals. They are in favour of "sustainable development", and preservation of wilderness areas and parks for the recreational and educational benefit of future generations.

The "deep greens" are the radicals and idealists, who seek to take apart and re-form the whole system, replacing anthropocentrism (which they accuse the "light greens" of) with "ecological consciousness". They seek to deal with the underlying causes rather than the surface problems. They see anthropocentrism and human domination over nature as the basic flaws in present-day society. For them, nature is not just a resource for human needs, but an end in itself. Humanity is just one amongst many species, having no more "rights" or value than any other, and is therefore encouraged to "tread lightly upon the earth". Human over-population is thus often seen as a crucial issue. Deep ecology, as this perspective is also called, was first defined by the philosopher Arne Naess, and is founded upon the principles of biocentrism and a holistic consciousness, or "ecosophy", which emphasises the "unity within the diversity of forms" (Dunkley, 1991:71).

Freya Mathews defines anthropocentrism in this way: "... we tend to see ourselves as the paradigm members of the moral community, and we admit other beings according to their degree of resemblance to us" (1987:212). She then explains the biocentric viewpoint, which entails an alternative perception of the self:

Our interconnectedness with nature might be seen as entailing the view that Nature is an extension of the self - that the boundaries of our individual egos can expand to encompass the mountains, rivers, deserts, skies, etc .... Alternatively, the principle of interconnectedness might induce us to see ourselves as belonging not to ourselves but to the earth ... both these views of the self have affinities with the thinking of certain

Another Deep ecologist, John Seed, supports this view: "One of the things that we have to do is to extend our identification beyond the social fiction we call 'ourselves' and extend our identification to our body on this planet" (1991:35). He also expresses the radical nature of Deep ecology:

... Deep ecology has no particular faith in the ability of scientists to replace the life-support systems we are dismembering ... it's an indication of our alienation and it's an indication of our separation that we would rather look to solving these kinds of problems than to solving the spiritual problem that causes us to destroy these things in the first place (1991:35).

Peter Marshall (1992:404-412) distinguishes between shallow environmentalists, radical environmentalists and ecofeminists, and between conservationists and preservationists. The shallow environmentalists are anthropocentric, and regard nature as having only instrumental value. They are "environmentalists" only as far as nature can contribute to human well-being and survival, other than this, any interference is justified. Among the shallow environmentalists are two strands: the conservationists, who wish to conserve natural resources for human ends (eg. outdoor sports, recreation, tourism and sustainable development) and the preservationists, who are more concerned with maintaining "wilderness" and other endangered or fragile areas, free from any human interference, and with saving endangered species.

In contrast, the radical environmentalists have a biocentric perspective: that nature exists for its own sake, which over-rides the utilitarian interests of humans. They are the Deep ecologists mentioned previously. Marshall's description of their beliefs and aims concurs with that of Dunkley, but he also points out that Deep ecology's extreme holism threatens the autonomy of the individual, who is sacrificed or subsumed to the interests of the biological community. As a libertarian philosopher this attitude is of concern to Marshall, and he compares it to tribalism, nationalism and racism. "The call of some radical ecologists to put the earth first in all situations and their readiness to sacrifice individual humans for its general well-being tread perilously close to eco-fascism" (Marshall, 1992:408).

The other major perspective within the environmental movement is ecofeminism, which: "proposes that the domination of nature and the domination of women are not only intimately connected but mutually reinforcing" (Hallen, 1994:18). The roots of this identification of women with nature, and the domination of both, lie within Western culture, its religious beliefs and its science. Paraphrasing Francis Bacon, a Renaissance philosopher and scientist, Hallen says: "... the history of Western
Science is permeated by images of an enticing but uncooperative female who must be penetrated by hard science, mastered into passive submission, and rendered barren to reveal her secrets" (1994:19).

Marshall traces this woman-nature identification as originating further back in the history of Western societies:

For long in the Western tradition ... the earth has been considered female, sometimes as a consoling mother (as by the Romantic poets), and sometimes as a stern mother (as by James Lovelock). Whereas for the Egyptians the fecund earth was male and the sheltering sky female, the Greeks and the Romans turned the Egyptian goddess Isis (queen of the gods) into an earth goddess and universal Mother Nature (1992:410).

He perceives the effect of this identification upon the Western world-view and attitudes to women and nature thus:

The analogy of woman and nature, the idea that women somehow have a 'special' relationship with nature originates in the old dualisms of men and women, nature and culture. It continues the myth of transcendence, the myth that humanity transcends the realm of nature by entering the realm of culture. Such a view clearly shows a lack of ecological sensibility which recognises that all subjects, men and women, are interconnected with each other and other life-forms within the web of nature (1992:410).

This last image is also used by Freya Mathews: "According to Deep Ecology, Nature truly is a seamless web, a continuum which has to be understood in holistic rather than purely analytical terms" (1987:213).

Both Marshall and Hallen cite the Gaia hypothesis as encouraging a renewal of this ancient identification of Mother Earth. While regarding the Gaia hypothesis as "a powerful ecological metaphor", Hallen also says: "Mother Earth appeals to the fragility, beauty and vitality of the planet", and she regards the political consequences of the Gaia hypothesis as radical: "... the small is the significant, and we are profoundly interconnected" (1994:21). The Gaia hypothesis will be looked at in a later chapter, as will the images and understandings of Mother Earth in relation to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perceptions of land.

Ecofeminism combines Deep ecology's affirmation of diversity within the unity of life, the biocentric perspective, and the need for a radical transformation of society, with the social concerns of the "light greens". The exploitation of woman, coloured and indigenous peoples, and disadvantaged or minority
groups, is seen to parallel the domination of nature. "A central theme of ecofeminism is that if we are able to become ecologically sane, we need to overcome our need to dominate" (Allen, 1994:18).

Domination, or power-over, is to be replaced by shared power and non-violent means, and by "empowering the oppressed" (Marshall, 1992:411). Ecofeminism encourages social action to bring about change, though its aims are more radical than those of the "light greens". In contrast to this, Deep ecology "calls on one to examine oneself, one's own consciousness and lifestyle, more than it calls on one to change the world" (Mathews, 1987:213). Ecofeminism, instead, has emerged from the Women's Movement, whose leaders were involved in consciousness-raising in the 1960's and 1970's, and an ecological awareness allied to political action. Deep ecology attracts Buddhists and meditators, which may reinforce its more quietist approach, but this may not be typical of all its adherents. John Seed, who spent many years in a Buddhist monastery, is also committed to action for change:

To me, the highest form of ritual is non-violent disobedience. Putting ourselves on that line where the machinery of the modern world is eating yet further into the primal wiliness of nature ... I find that I have to participate in this kind of action at least once a year, in order to believe in myself. In order to really believe that this isn't all a bunch of talk (1991:37).

It is thus obvious then, that one cannot use the term "environmentalists" and assume a homogeneity of beliefs and aims, lifestyles and priorities. Some Deep ecologists don't identify themselves as "environmentalists" at all, they perceive the term as referring to the anthropocentric "light greens" who see nature more in utilitarian terms. In the literature studied for this analysis, the term "conservationist" was used instead as a broad definition by some writers. Marshall, however, uses "conservationist" to refer to a very specific perspective within the green movement. William Lines prefers the term "eco-activist" to "environmentalist" (1991: 296). These are some examples to illustrate the many differences of opinion and perspective that shape people's definitions of environmentalists.

Commenting on the Australian environmental movement, Boris Frankel has made these observations:

... most Australian environmentalists have tended to oscillate between essentially de-industrialized utopian models .... or a mixture of nature conservation and social democratic/liberal urban policies (1992:223).

Apart from those greens who want to break radically with existing forms of consumption and production, one could say that the main cultural differences between the large environmental groups is not over broader socio-cultural visions, but over how many
existing industries are to be opposed, or which tactics and organisational principles should be adopted (1992:223-4).

For the purposes of this paper, however, the term "environmentalist" will be maintained to refer to all of the groups described above, while acknowledging the differences in perception and policies that exist. When necessary, any relevant distinctions between the many shades of green will be given in the text. The environmentalists' perspectives will be returned to in later chapters, but first, some perceptions of the Dreaming and Aboriginal perceptions of land will be examined.
Chapter Two

THE DREAMING

Any serious study concerning Aboriginal culture and perceptions requires a certain understanding of the Dreaming: "...the key integrating force that shapes their lives and imbues every facet with powerful motivations and meanings" (Tonkinson, 1991:106). Alternatively called the Dreamtime, as a concept it has intrigued non-Aboriginals, although many different ways of defining and understanding it have been found in the literature. In this chapter both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal explanations will be examined. Of the latter, Robert Tonkinson, W.E.H. Stanner and Deborah Bird Rose will provide the anthropological perspective, and James Cowan will give that of a popular writer on the topic. The Aboriginal perspectives come from a number of sources as indicated after each citation.

It must be remembered, however, that Aboriginal understandings are presented in a language and conceptual framework not necessarily their own. How they themselves feel about the Dreaming, within their own set of shared meanings, may not be able to be expressed in a non-Aboriginal language and worldview, except in a rough or approximate translation. Anthropologists who have done their best to understand the Dreaming as it is explained to them, by verstehen, then have to try to communicate their understandings to other non-Aboriginals who do not have their experience or skills in cross-cultural comparison.

In his essay "The Dreaming" (1979:23-40) W.E.H. Stanner gives his interpretation as comprehensively as he can. Even so, he warns the reader that without an attempt to "think black", particularly in regard to adopting a holistic perspective, any understanding of the Dreaming will be flawed or incomplete. "We shall not understand the Dreaming fully except as a complex of meanings" (1979:23), and "The truth of it seems to be that man, society and nature, past, present and future, are at one together within a unitary system of such a kind that its ontology cannot illuminate minds too much under the influence of humanism, rationalism and science" (1979:27).

According to Stanner the Dreaming is a cosmology, a cosmogony, and a body of oral literature based on a long-ago event, thus having a linear, temporal perspective that non-Aboriginals are familiar with. But the Dreaming is also the past, present and future co-existing in what Stanner so aptly calls "everywhen" (1979:24), which pervades the everyday present, a unitary temporal dimension through which: "the blackfellow holds his philosophy in mythology, attained as the social product of an indefinitely ancient past, and proceeds to live it out 'in' life, in part through a ritual and expressive art, and in part through non-sacred social customs" (1979:30).
In this essay Stanner is concerned with defending the Aboriginal world-view against the prejudices of non-Aboriginals, and he gives little emphasis on the significance of land. He himself shows a cultural bias by ascribing the perceived failure of pre-contact Aboriginal societies to "develop" or "progress", as measured by material technology, as contributing to the continuity and the stability endowed by the Dreaming (1979:36). While he seems to admire these aspects of the Aboriginal world-view, as he understands them, his statement also indicates an adherence to the theory of cultural evolution, whereby Western technology and industrialism is seen as the pinnacle of human "progress", and hunter-gatherer societies are a less "developed" precursor.

Stanner also mentions the use of the term "dreaming", as given by his Aboriginal informants, as the closest possible translation of their understanding. "It may be because it is by the act of dreaming that the Aboriginal mind makes contact - thinks it makes contact - with whatever mystery it is that connects the Dreaming to the Here-and-Now" (1969:24). Stanner appears to believe here that his informants are using "dreaming", in its usual meaning, as a metaphor for their understandings; in other words, making an attempt at verstehen. Either that, or he has failed to perceive what they were trying to convey, and has instead given us an explanation based on his own understanding.

Robert Tonkinson's understanding of the Dreaming, as given to him by the Mardu people of the Gibson desert region of West Australia, is explained in a brief yet concise fashion:

Every Aboriginal group attributes a host of physical features in its territory to the creative acts of Dreaming beings. These events are forever imprinted on the landscape as visible signals of extra-human powers and are immortalized in myths, songs and rituals, which are the religion's vehicles for meaning. As people engage in their daily food quest, they are surrounded constantly by what they regard as certain proof of the existence, power and vitality of created beings.

The vital power, or life essence, contained in the bodies of the creators and in everything they possessed or touched remained undiminished, but not indivisible, throughout their lives on earth. Wherever they went, they invisibly shed a small part of this fund of power, which would eventually animate hosts of tiny spirit children, ultimately to be born as human beings. This vitally important aspect of the Dreaming extends the ancestry of every person back to the creative epoch (1991:107).

Deborah Bird Rose bases her interpretation of the Dreaming on the cosmogony of the Yarralin people of the Northern Territory, with whom she has worked. Unlike Stanner, her account is focused on what she has learnt and observed from these people, instead of a generalised view of Aboriginal perspectives. Her version is worth citing in its entirety:
In the beginning, according to Yarralin people, there was only earth covered by water. The water pulled back, and life emerged from the earth. The earth is mother to all life, and life is related by virtue of being descended from one mother. Within this cosmogony, time is conceptualised as being of two inter-penetrating types: Dreaming and ordinary. Dreaming is essentially non-sequential, an "everywhen" to use Stanner's (1979:24) felicitous term. In the Dreaming the forebears of all life acted together, producing what I will term "key events", which continue to inform the present. Although a boundary is conceptualised between the Dreaming and the ordinary present, Dreaming inter-penetrates ordinary time.... The cosmos is emergent: life is always coming into being according to the principles established in the Dreaming. Ordinary time is marked by sequenced and patterned recurrences, and can be characterised as the time in which moral agents (humans, animals and others), continue to construct the cosmos according to Dreaming principles. Through continued regeneration in social action, Dreaming continues to inform the ordinary present. Life in the cosmos is maintained and verified through the regeneration of the Dreaming (Rose, 1988 b:366):

Rose describes Yarralin society and its world-view as: "a-centred .... they place no species at the centre of creation, and any centralizing, unifying structures are rejected as being asocial" (1992:218). This is to be held in contrast to modern Western societies, which are monocentric both in their structure and world-view. According to Rose, Yarralin society has no hierarchy of value between the species or members of society: "the same meta-rules apply to all", and: "all parts of the system have their own world-view" (1992:221). In relating this to the Dreaming cosmogony, and the observations she has made from Yarralin society, Rose says that:

"An essential part of human culture is to know that other Dreamings and other parts have their own view. Once one understands, one can learn the system from any point (1992:221).

Dreaming law tells the story, often obliquely, frequently in bits that people have put together for themselves. Dreaming and ecology intersect constantly, providing a rich understanding of universal and local life (1992:218).

From what Rose seems to be saying, there is no one universal, unified body of knowledge called the Dreaming Law, but a web or pattern of information acquired through life by oral teachings, art, ceremonies, kinship, hunting and gathering, living in the land. Neither the universal nor the local, or particular, dominate over the other. Her perspective is supported by these words of Bill Neidjie, from Kakadu in the Northern Territory:
But all, each animal got "business".
They got story each (1989:13).

James Cowan's interpretation, in some respects like Stanner's, is taken from a generalised perspective of Aboriginal culture. Cowan, however, goes much further than Stanner in his comparisons or equations of Aboriginal cosmologies to Western and Eastern religious and philosophical traditions. For the non-Aboriginal reader, the result is likely to be more confusing than clarifying. Cowan's writing style does not help, being interspersed with Latin phrases and obscure or idiosyncratic terminology. One gets the impression that he is self-consciously attempting a scholarly or erudite analysis, and particularly so when compared to the direct simplicity of Tonkinson's and Bird's explanations. To illustrate this, here is an extract from his interpretation of the Dreaming:

The Aboriginal belief is that before the Dreaming or tjukurba - that is, before the Primordial Event had occurred - this pristine landscape was represented by an unending featureless plain. In this sense the land was pristine since it conformed to the idea of "chaos" (lit. formless void). Not until the period of tjukurba or Dreaming and the mysterious appearance of the Sky Heroes, either from inside the earth itself or from an ill-defined upper region, did the landscape take on a truly cosmic significance and attain to Form. At the conclusion of the Dreaming period the Sky Heroes disappeared from the face of the earth, leaving in their place their personalised 'signatures' in the guise of topographic landmarks, contour variations, tree, animals - in fact, all manifestations of life on earth. Such a remarkable event as the Dreaming however must not be confused with the advent of a Golden Age. It was simply a Primordial Event devoid of any qualitative associations that are normally appended to world-creation, or to those who might have been responsible for initiating the event in the first place (Cowan, 1989:25-26).

The "Sky Heroes" and the mythology attributed to them are later compared to the Vedic and Olympian deities. Cowan also uses Aboriginal terms (i.e. tjukurba) in a generalised context, as if they were universal, thus not acknowledging the regional and linguistic variations throughout the continent. Here is a further example of this:

Kurunba, or "life essence", is a metaphysical expression denoting the presence of a cultural layer within the landform itself that has been inspired by mythological contact with the Dreaming. In other words, the landscape has become iconic in essence, fulfilling a role of containment, not only of physical attributes ... but also of metaphysical signification (Cowan, 1989:19).
Cowan believes that the Dreaming has significance and meaning not just to Aboriginal people, but also, potentially, to all humanity:

Recognizing the Dreaming as a living reality, however, demands a fundamental shift in the attitudes of everyone concerned. It requires, firstly, that the dreaming is seen for what it is - a metaphysical statement about the origins of mankind as a spiritual being (Cowan, 1989:19).

The Dreaming, and characteristics of Aboriginality, are thus able to be claimed by non-Aboriginals as their own:

The Dreaming still exists. The pure ascetism of nature as an attainable condition within every one of us is possible if we listen to what the Aborigine is saying to us. Re-establishing our links with totems, making our own Dream Journeys, listening to the voice of our own Dreaming and acknowledging our ancestors as being primordially present, is the beginning of the process of renewal (Cowan, 1989:125).

His beliefs and intentions are made explicit in this closing sentence:

Indeed, it is this very unchangability of the Dreaming that makes it so steadfast in the lives of all Aborigines - and us if we wish it to be so (Cowan, 1989:126).

The futility of this notion, and its violation of respect for another culture, is expressed quite succinctly here by Veronica Brady, whose perspectives will be further examined in Chapter 10:

... to pretend that we are 'Aboriginals in spirit' may be both delusive and dangerous, a form of sentimentality, or "working off in words of feelings we haven't really got", to use D.H. Lawrence's definition. They are the ancient people of the land who have been here for at least 40,000 years. At the very least, we have been here a mere 202 years (1991:38).

Though Aboriginal people have different ways or approaches to defining the Dreaming to non-Aboriginals, none of them have expressed any doubt as to its endurance and relevance for them in contemporary situations. Yami Lester, from the Anangu people of central Australia, is most emphatic about this:
For Ananga [Aboriginal people] the time of creation is real and it is here and now. It is not just a story from the past, and this is crucial to understanding our culture. In the time of creation when our ancestors were human beings who walked the earth that same as we do now, the land and its features were formed and our laws and our culture were made for us to use and keep. For us the past and the present are part of the same thing (Lester, 1994:16)

Eddie Kneebone supports this view in his explanation, though he alternates between using past and present tense, and "them" and "us" when talking about Aboriginal people and spirituality. Despite this, the meaning of his message is clearly expressed:

The Dreamtime is still with them, it is not a long way away. The Dreamtime is the environment that the Aboriginal lived in, and still exists today, all around us ... the Creator spirit and the Dreamtime spirits that were created by the Creator spirit, and the spirit or soul, the life force that is common in all living things, flows from the Dreamtime and the Creator spirit through the environment to the Aborigines and back to the Dreamtime .... For the Aboriginals, the spirit is ever present and they are very aware of that presence (Kneebone, 1991:90-91).

Anne Pattel-Gray has combined her Christian beliefs with her understandings of the Dreaming:

All the Aboriginal ceremonies and sacred sites are based on our Dreaming. In our Dreaming, God the Creator gave to us everything that is here, now: the birds, the trees, the rivers, the lakes, the food, the caves, the mountains, the morning, day and night. Then God created man and woman, and with that creation God came to walk the land with our people, to lay down the law between God and the people, thus teaching us the worth and value of God's creation (Pattel-Gray, 1991:6).

David Mowaljarlai speaks of the history of the culture of the people from the north-west Kimberleys of Western Australia:

Wandjina came from the wind and travelled the land and made this earth, and sea, and the mountains, the rivers, waterholes, the trees, the plants, the animals, the language, and then the people. Wandjina made everything. Wandjina then gave us the Law to follow and gave us the land .... Wandjina's spiritual presence is in all things living, in the land itself and in the universe (Mowaljarlai, 1992:180).
Although many Aboriginal people have strongly expressed the endurance and continuation of their Dreaming traditions, a few non-Aboriginal writers have observed certain influences of European culture and history on Aboriginal cosmologies, but have interpreted this phenomenon in different ways. Here are a few examples of their observations and conclusions:

Tony Swain, a non-Aboriginal writer in religious studies, has studied the Aboriginal response to the threats to their cultural identity and links to the land since 1788, and has observed a "New All-Aboriginal macro-myth" emerging, including influences of Christian traditions, pop culture, environmentalism and New Age beliefs (1992:123-124). He describes pre-contact Aboriginal religion as abiding or ahistorical, pluralistic and locative instead of universal, with the focus on "learning one's own spiritual identity as ... a manifestation of the sacred essence of a specific site". This was "a cognitive acquisition, it was not primarily an affective appreciation or an emotional conversion" (1992:12). In contrast, in this new myth:

"The period of the Dreaming is equated with the time before colonization ... is spoken of as beginning 40,000 years ago ... and ended abruptly in 1788. Not only does the myth seem to incorporate a Judaico-Christian concern with temporality and historicity, it also reveals a part of its cosmogonic pattern. For the pre-colonial period is inevitably depicted as an idyllic eco-Eden, while 1788 surely marks what can only be determined the Fall (Swain, 1992:124).

The anti-hero of this myth is Captain Cook: "nor as a man of 1770 but as a symbol of the principle of theft which began then and has continued ever since" (1992:125). Swain seems to be implying that the Biblical metaphors and Western temporal perspectives have been grafted onto and perhaps even replaced the older Dreaming beliefs, for some people. Swain's conclusion may be influenced by the fact that most of his source material seems to have come from literary sources and publications, and not from personal contact with any Aboriginal informants. Deborah Bird Rose has also noticed this identification of Captain Cook among the Yarralin people, and she makes her own observation, based on her fieldwork, offering an alternative viewpoint:

Yarralin peoples' cosmology defines continuity as a key value, and in daily and ritual life, with the contexts still available to Aboriginal people, the process of constituting one's self requires maintaining communicative and other links between people, between people and country, between the past and the present, and between Dreaming and ordinary time and life. The Captain Cook saga offers a point of resistance to conquest through postulating that whatever Captain Cook may have been, and continues to be, he was not part of a moral order (Rose, 1988 b:371).
According to Rose's understanding, Captain Cook is not grafted onto or imposed over the Dreaming, but has instead been woven into it, and thereby incorporating post-contact events and influences into an older tradition or body of knowledge. Having thus given Captain Cook an appropriate meaning within their own cultural framework, Yarralin people need not see themselves as threatened by phenomena that would have been alien to their ancestors. The new myths described by Swain and Rose may thus not indicate a breach with the pre-contact Dreaming Law, but may illustrate a flexible and resilient way of incorporating post-contact events into a world view that continues to affirm the integrity of Aboriginal identity.
Chapter Three

ABORIGINAL PERCEPTIONS OF LAND

Aboriginal perceptions of land, its value and meaning, show a considerable consistency in the literature that has been studied. Land is kinship, identity, spirituality, and survival, and all these are interwoven in the Dreaming Law, however this may be expressed or interpreted. Their identification with land is immediate and affective, as the title of Bill Neilde's Story About Feeling (1989) indicates. In this chapter Aboriginal people will of course be the main contributors, although at the end an observation made by Patricia Baines, an anthropologist, during her fieldwork will be cited.

James Wallace says that: "there is a vast difference between the concern which white society hold for our land, and the instinctive, traditional feeling which we black society of Aboriginal people have always felt for the land" (1992:29). In reference to environmentalists, Burnam Burnam says that: "Aboriginal people dislike intellectual verbalising in the Green movement" (1987:92), and on looking after the environment, Dean Collard has given this response:

Aboriginal people have been saying this for years. It's not that we've jumped on the band wagon and said that conservation and our own spiritual attachment to the land was something new. We've always had that respect for the land and the intuitive knowledge that there is a delicate balance between the needs of man and the sustenance this earth in giving what we want to get out of it. I think that is an attitudinal change that needs to take place more in the non-Aboriginal community that in the Aboriginal community (Collard, 1993:15).

In these, and the following citations, land is referred to both in broad terms (the Australian continent) as well as specifically (one's country and sacred sites). For example, David Mowaljarlai speaks of the north-west Kimberley region of Western Australia, and Wandjina, who could be called an Ancestral Creator or Spirit, yet is "just Wandjina" to the people of that region.

Wandjina says we must keep this tribal land .... Wandjina's spiritual presence is in all things, in the land itself and in the universe (Mowaljarlai, 1992:180).

According to Mowaljarlai, Wandjina created the Dambun, a network of tribal boundaries across Australia, and designated an area of land for each tribal group, a Ghee, which indicated land affiliations and identity, and a set of responsibilities for looking after the land: "Our Ghee tells us which Wandjina we are related to" (1992:82). In this way the local and the universal are interconnected through the creative powers and Law of Wandjina.
To non-Aboriginals, Aboriginal descriptions of the links and boundaries between the local and the universal, between sacred sites and a sacred land, may seem to be contradictory. Different levels of understanding seem to be operating simultaneously. This is obviously not a problem for Aboriginal peoples, but it is easy to see how cross-cultural misunderstandings can, and have, developed with issues concerning Land Rights and the protection of sacred sites. Kenneth Maddock has pointed out that non-Aboriginals regard a site as a point on a map, but for the Aboriginals the surrounding area is also linked to a site, or series of sites (1983:131-133).

Eddie Kneebone tries to explain these links between sites and the surrounding land in this way:

Aboriginals don't go anywhere to worship because everything around them is alive and they are totally in touch, constantly, with the Dreamtime or the place of the spirits. But it is not the spirit world of the Europeans. It is everything that is living around them, that shares the common soul or spirit. It includes the entire environment. The Aboriginals didn't worship in the same context as Europeans do, but they did have special places for ceremonies that were necessary for the continuation of Aboriginal culture and teachings to the younger ones as they became older. These areas are where the Dreamtime spirits dwell and are the strongest (1991:90).

Eddie Kneebone speaks here, as before, in a mixture of past and present tense, but other Aboriginals cited here repeatedly affirm their connections and affinities with the land as ongoing. Despite the often-tragic impact of 200-odd years of European presence, there is still a strong survival of Aboriginal identity and affinity for the land. According to Alfred Mullet:

Aboriginal culture is not dead. It is alive in every Aboriginal person. And the sites themselves are not 'dead' either. They require free access and use by Aboriginal people .... We as Aboriginals belong to the land, we're part of the land so the land needs our presence ... we can bring the spirit back to the land (1992:46).

Aboriginal viewpoints are often given with a focus on land as kin. This is expressed either by the use of a simile, eg. "like father and mother", or as a direct relationship, eg. "the land is my mother". Some examples of both follow:

Daughter of the Sea and Land am I,
the Land my Mother, my Soul.
In my inheritance she gives to me - Rights
to care for her (Fest, 1989:8).
Aboriginals are true lovers of nature .... [We] come literally to love the soil .... we sit or recline on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power (Pattel-Gray, 1991:2).

The Aboriginal people's love for the land is the same love that white persons would have for their mother. Aboriginal people are proud of our Mother Earth (Pattel-Gray, 1991:10).

Listen carefully this, you can hear me.
I'm telling you because earth just like mother and father or brother of you (Neidjie, 1989:3).

Because feeling ... this country where you brought up and just like you'n'me mother (Neidjie, 1989:152).

... tree just about like your brother or father, and tree watching you (Neidjie, 1989:168).

The first thing that you are taught as an Aboriginal child of Australia is that you are part of the land. The land is your father and mother ... and if you can't respect it you will die (Wallace, 1992:30).

Survival, kinship, ceremonies, spirituality and the land are thus connected in both meaning and practise. Land forms and art forms are not symbols or representations of spiritual concepts, but they embody spirit, they are spirit, as are the people, animals, and natural forces of the land. All are bound in inter-connectedness through the Dreaming Law. As the local and the universal are interwoven, so the many diversities of language and ceremony are part of a larger pattern, as David Mowaljarlai illustrates:

We all got these ceremonies and that's why we married with a woman and we married in the ceremony and we married into the land .... because we all set in order in the marrying system, we all got different lingo in this big pattern - pattern of life - pattern of the Law and pattern of caring for place and country, pattern of responsibility, and that's what it is in the Kimberley now (1992:189).

Caring for place, looking after the land, is not a one-way process, it is part of a mutual nurturing, as these citations show:
...in nurturing it [the land] they [the Aboriginals] were as much part of the land's survival as the land was theirs .... The land is part of the Aboriginal people ... our people need the land as much as it needs us (Mullet, 1992:45).

Blackfellow never change him ... we been borning [in] this country .... We been grow up [in] this country. We been walking about this country. We know this country all over .... Blackfellow been born top of that ground, and blackfellow - blackfellow blood [in the ground] .... This ground is mother. We born top of this ground. This [is] our mother. That's why we worry about this ground (Riley Young. Cited in Rose, 1992:220).

Patricia Baines, an anthropologist who has worked with the Nyungar people of south-west Western Australia, has defined their perception of land as "subjectified", and explains her observations in this way:

To look at the land through Nyungar eyes is to perceive personhood in all life-forms. Old trees are parents and seedlings are children. Birds and animals, particularly when one of them behaves in an unusual manner or is distinguished in some way ... may be a deceased ancestor. The land is seen as a huge body - most often it is recognised as the body of one's mother. To put a trench through the ground is to scarify the mother's back or dig into her guts. This recognition of all living things as subjects, that is, as sentient and cognisant beings or persons, is one of the crucial premises of 'be Nyungar commentary on and reaction to white excavation, clearing or 'landscaping' of the land. From a Nyungar perspective, the essential relationship of generation and regeneration is seen to be shared in by all living things. The lives of animals and plants participate in the same life processes as people (Baines, 1988: 228).

This explanation reflects the perceptions given here by Aboriginal people, but also expresses the view of the Earth as Mother, a perception held by some non-Aboriginal writers as well. In the following chapter this perspective, as expressed by both groups, will be explored.
Chapter Four

THE EARTH, MY MOTHER

As will have been noticed, land is often perceived in close kin-relationship to individuals, communities, or even all Aboriginal people. Land as "mother", emphasising a nurturing aspect, is most often encountered, but so are other kin-definitions, like "father", "brother", "sister". Tony Swain has observed that "The Earth, My Mother", or slight variations of it, is a statement that Aboriginals have used in written or spoken statements with increasing frequency in recent years. He has traced the origins of this statement back to early anthropologists (Geza Rohelim, AP. Elkir, A. Capell) and non-Aboriginal writers (poet Roland Robinson), who equated the local Earth-Mother ancestors on Bathurst and Melville Islands and Arnhem Land with the European Earth Mother or Goddess (1988:6-10). According to Swain, this has no universal basis in Aboriginal pre-contact perceptions:

... the land as a whole is the immanent presence of a multiplicity of ... Dreaming Beings. Some are female, some male, but in any case human reproductive methods are not relevant to them ... To speak of a single Earth Mother is not only to misrepresent the evidence, but also to negate the principles of desert Aborigines' ontology (1988:6-7).

Nevertheless, this identification of the Earth or land as Mother has been supported by many statements from Aboriginal people, as indicated in both Swain's article, and in the citations given in the previous chapter. However, Swain has also noticed that:

Every instance of Aborigines asserting their belief in Mother Earth of which I am aware is contextualized, either in referring to Christian faith or white Australian destruction of the land or, often, both (1988:13).

An example of this is a statement from Anne Pattel-Gray:

We still fight against the destruction of our land and the abuse to our Mother Earth, and on a wider scale, we now believe the world is starting to see what their destruction has done to Mother Earth .... As believers in God, should we not be taking up our swords for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (1990. Cited in Swain, 1992:134).

In order to assess Swain's observations and his claims, one has to consider the possibility that Aboriginal people might be using "Mother Earth" as a means of communication to non-Aboriginals, as the closest approximate conceptual translation of their perceptions of land. In this case, "Mother Earth" is
then the bridge whereby, with *verstehen*, their viewpoint may be appreciated. Swain has also observed that:

\[\text{Mother Earth perfectly suits the needs of contemporary Aboriginal spiritual life. Unlike specific lands whose traditions are open to those who have the privilege of an often esoteric education, Mother Earth is open to all of Aboriginal "Blood" who feel for the land in an Aboriginal way. She provides a new, radically-transformed spiritual community for those denied their place (1992:134).}\]

"Mother Earth" may then be one of the means of cultural survival and renewal, related to the new "pan-Aboriginal myth" described in Chapter Two. Whatever its origins and understandings, Aboriginal people refer to the earth as "Mother", in one way or another, with noticeable frequency and conviction throughout the citations given in this thesis, and thus "she" cannot be ignored. Their understandings of "Mother Earth", however, need to be compared to those of non-Aboriginals, and this issue will be more fully examined at the end of the next chapter. Swain has also considered "Mother Earth" as potentially having both ecological and theological significance for non-Aboriginals as well as Aboriginal people, and gives as an example the Gaia hypothesis (1991:12-13). The Gaia hypothesis, a union of Western science and Classical beliefs, offers a holistic, ecological perspective of the planet, and as it has been referred to in the non-Aboriginal writings examined for this analysis, a brief account of this hypothesis and its origin will be outlined in the next chapter.
Chapter Five

THE GAIA HYPOTHESIS

The Gaia hypothesis was formulated in the 1960's by scientist J.E. Lovelock, and further developed with the collaboration of another scientist, Lynn Margulis in the 1970's. It postulates that the planet Earth is in itself a living organism: "... a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetics system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life (Lovelock, 1979:11). Lovelock named this perspective of the Earth "Gaia", after the Ancient Greek earth goddess, and intended this designation to be understood merely as a metaphor:

Ancient belief and modern knowledge have fused emotionally in the awe with which astronauts with their own eyes and we with indirect vision have seen the Earth revealed in all its shining beauty against the deep darkness of space. Yet this feeling, however, strong, does not prove that Mother Earth lives. Like a religious belief, it is scientifically untestable and therefore incapable in its own context of further rationalization (1979:IX).

Even so, Lovelock seems to slip into a personified view of the planet in a later chapter of his work. He may still intend to regard "Gaia" as only a metaphor, but his repeated references to "Her" could invite certain readers to envisage Gaia theologically, as a Goddess, or a teleological process:

... the evolution of homo sapiens, with his technological inventiveness and his increasingly subtle communications network, has vastly increased Gaia's range of perception. She is now through us awake and aware of herself. She has seen the reflection of her fair face through the eyes of astronauts and the television cameras of orbiting spacecraft. Our sensations of wonder and pleasure, our capacity for conscious thought and speculation, our restless curiosity and drive are hers to share (1979:148).

This citation also illustrates Lovelock's views on technology and humanity's role in Gaia's functionings. It echoes the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin, and offers an extension of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Lovelock also suggests that a sense of beauty is in inherent in human beings as part of the Darwinian fitness selection process:

It may be that we are also programmed to recognise instinctively our optimal role in relation to other forms of life around us. When we act accordingly to this instinct in our dealings with our partners in Gaia, we are rewarded by finding what seems right also
looks good and arouses those pleasurable feelings which comprise our sense of beauty. When this relationship with the environment is spoilt or mishandled, we suffer from a sense of emptiness and deprivation (1979:142).

Lovelock does not take into account that evaluations of goodness and beauty may be culturally-determined, an issue that will be further examined later in this analysis. However, it is evident from the given citations how Lovelock's hypothesis could strongly influence the perceptions of environmentalists, and, according to Tony Swain, those of contemporary Aboriginal people as well. The concept of Gaia, as Mother Earth, has been taken up as a new religious perspective as well as a scientific theory, and parallels have been drawn with indigenous beliefs. Deborah Bird Rose, citing the Gaia hypothesis, makes this comparison:

When Yarralin people speak of Mother Earth they speak to a similar understanding. They are the inheritors of a theory and practice of participating in living systems. They understand these systems scientifically, through observations and hypotheses developed and tested through time. They also understand them metaphysically... Dreaming and ecology intersect constantly, providing a rich understanding of universal and local life (1992:218).

This can be seen to offer a perspective similar to that of the Nyungar people of south-west Western Australia, for whom: "The land is seen as a huge body - most often it is recognised as the body of one's mother" (Baines, 1988:229).

It must be remembered that the Gaia hypothesis presents a global perspective, including sea and air as well as land. It refers to the biosphere, and thus supports the global awareness fostered by environmental groups: "Think globally, act locally". In this view of the world humanity has a very special role, albeit as part of an interdependent network of species and natural forces. It appeals to people who have lost their ancestral land affiliations and sense of place, due to the cultural and historical transformations that have shaped Western societies to what they are today. The Gaia hypothesis, as presented by Lovelock, redeems and validates Western humanity's place in the world, and also validates an ecological perspective with which they can defend their commitment to environmental issues. It also invites those who are so inclined to adopt "Gaia" as a religious concept, or an actual personification of deity, the Goddess, Mother Earth. Ecofeminist Patsy Hallen has also cited the Gaia hypothesis in her article (1994:21) in reference to both the ecological and theological "Mother Earth", Tony Swain has commented:

... they both owe their being to their felicity as symbols of otherness - the natural Earth defiled by Western technology, the Mother of the Land juxtaposed with the Christian
God of the Sky, the autochthonous (allegedly) female against the (alleged) patriarchy of European civilization. In brief, Mother Earth is but a negative image of a stereotype of the Western world and thus ... she cannot be spoken of in detail without including, at the same time, non-Aboriginal beliefs and culture (1991:13).

Swain assumes, however, that Mother Earth, as a metaphor for the land or the biosphere, conveys the same understanding that Aboriginal people hold when they speak of the land as "my mother" (or as "father" or "brother"). The similarities of kinship designations and their use in expressing perceptions of land could in fact be deceptive. There may actually be a huge gulf of understanding between "Mother Earth" as a metaphor for the land (emphasising closeness, nurturance, dependence), and the land as "mother" as an actual source of all material and spiritual sustenance, and therefore not just a metaphor. From the citations given in Chapter Three, one may posit that for Aboriginal peoples, the land as kin in some form is not a symbolic, but an actual, personal link or identification. It may include, but also transcends, a metaphorical understanding. These distinctions bear consideration when comparing perceptions of land between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples. Swain's observations may hold true for the former, but one cannot assume that they accurately describe the understandings of the latter.

In the next few chapters, the perceptions of some non-Aboriginal writers will be examined, not only in regards to land, but also in regards to their views of Aboriginal perceptions and their attitudes to Aboriginal culture. The statement "we believe the same thing, regarding land, as the Aboriginals" implies certain understandings of Aboriginal beliefs, and it is thus these understandings that are important to consider in a cross-cultural comparison of perceptions of land.
Chapter Six

INVOCATION (John Seed) Appendix A.

We ask for the presence of the spirit of Gaia and pray that the breath of life continue to caress this planet home ... (Seed, 1988:2-3).

This is an invocation, a prayer, a petition, an affirmation and a manifesto all in one. In its scope it encompasses the entire cosmos, and the feathers and scales of every species upon the earth. The language is at times oratory, even grandiose, and at other times expresses the reverence and humility of a prayer. It thus calls for a wide range of emotional response on the part of the reader or listener, and draws on both Western scientific and religious modes of discourse.

Fundamentally, it is an invocation of "the spirit of Gaia", perceived here as ungendered (in contrast to Swain's perceived designation of Gaia as female, or the Earth Mother), and to "the spirit of evolution". To its readers it call for inspiration, compassion, vision, and the deep ecologist's self-realization extending into the natural environment, herein referred to as "the biosphere", or "this planet home". The invocation is made on behalf of an undefined "we"; one assumes this refers to those committed to Gaia, as it requests rights of advocacy, to "speak in all human councils on behalf of the animals, plants and landscapes of the earth". Human beings are thus to defend and care for the Earth, with their "dispensation" and "charter to witness and facilitate the healing of the tattered biosphere", in these "leaden times" of the "present crisis", the nature and cause of which is not described in this text. This petition to the "spirit of Gaia" implies that Gaia is more than her physical being, the biosphere, but also has a transcendent aspect that may be invoked. Gaia may thus also be understood as some kind of deity or teleological force. If this is the case, the "spirit of evolution" may refer to the latter.

The Invocation calls for the sustenance and continuity of life on Earth, as well as the "well-being and continuous enfolding of the Self", "the true Self", "our true and only nature - none other than the nature of Gaia". Global and personal identity are perceived as linked on the continuum of the diversity of the individual parts within the planetary whole: "... tiny ephemeral blossoms on the Tree of Life". Personal, localised identification extends into a global, even universal, identification.

The Tree of Life symbolism is found in many Western traditions: the Middle Eastern Tree of Life, the origin of the Biblical Tree of Life, the Tree of Life of the Cabbalists, and the World Tree of Norse mythology. In all these traditions, the Tree of Life is a symbol of the cosmos and the process of creation. Here the Tree of Life is used as a symbol of all life within the biosphere, and recalls the "evolutionary tree", which branches out into all the species, as often seen in textbooks of Darwinian evolutionary theory. It has "purpose and destiny", as do its individual parts, which recalls the teleo-
logical ideas found, in a scientific expression, in the citations from Lovelock cited earlier, and in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, as a palaeontologist and a Christian. In the Invocation humanity's role and purpose is that: "... our brief flickering lives may truly reflect the work of vast ages past".

This is a Tree of Life on a grand, universal and symbolic scale. To give an example for contrast from an indigenous tradition, Bill Neidjie also mentions a tree in his story, but with a different perspective:

Have a look while e blow, tree
and you feeling with your body
because tree just about like your brother or father

That tree, same thing,
Your body, my body, I suppose.
I'm same as you ... anyone.
Tree working when you sleeping and dream (1989:3).

This tree has a sense of awareness and consciousness of its own, and is aware of everything in its environment, including humans. It is an active agent, felt by human beings who are being watched, and: "working when you sleeping and dream", when humans are passive and unconscious. Here the tree, and everything else in the land, is depicted as participating in a process of mutual awareness and caring with human beings, kinship makes them "same thing", "just about like your brother or father". The tree Neidjie describes could be a tree he knows, or is watching while talking and mentioned to illustrate his perceptions, or a tree with an ancestral link. It is a particular tree, not a centralizing, universalizing symbol or metaphor, but part of an "a-centred" landscape in which each individual tree, rock or animal, has its own particular "angle of perception" (Rose, 1992:211). In reference to Nyungar perception of the trees of their land, Patricia Baines says:

The tree is respected for its particularity as tree. It is also and at the same time an icon, for tree is the sign of immanent ancestral presences by virtue if having shared in the life and times of the old people. Instead of human lives being set off against the landscape, here locations within the landscape are integral to the interpretation of human acts (1988:229).

Neidjie's story is not a petition or invocation addressed on behalf of an unspecified audience towards fulfilling a transcendent evolutionary goal, but is instead the articulation of an elder who can speak for his community, and for country. The story comes from the land, and he needs no abstract concepts or transcendent source of inspiration. The Dreaming Law is embodied in the landscape.
If any sacred texts have inspired the Invocation, it is the writings of the sciences as well as religious beliefs. Scientific terminology ("biosphere", "metamorphose", "biology", "evolution") and a religious style of expression combine in this text, for example, "the power that sustains the planets in their orbits", and "You who have stood by us for millions and billions of years - do not forsake us now". The "spirit of evolution" has all the characteristics of an omnipotent deity, yet the "aeons of our solar journey" refers not to a Heavenly afterlife, but an ongoing destiny in the Solar System, the cosmologist's universe. The scale of space and time is extended beyond the history of humanity and planet Earth, to the origin of the galaxy, the "200-million year spiral". The human individual hold "the millions of years of evolution" in his/her "trembling hands", like Christian humility in the face of an almighty, eternal God.

Western science and Western religion have thus shaped and influenced Seed's perceptions in the Invocation, and it bears little if any resemblance to those expressed by Aboriginal peoples. In Seed's universe there is an evolutionary link through time to the earth and all its life, but there is no mention of kinship or social structure apart from the "human councils". It speaks of the relationship of the individual to the cosmos, an inheritance of "the works of vast ages past", but not of homeland, landscapes and community. One has to believe in "the spirit of evolution", as if in God, in order not to become lost in this immense world.

Seed, however, sees this as a positive image. In an interview he refers again to the image of the Tree of Life in this way, which offers another perspective of his vision:

> When we acknowledge our roots in nature, that we're not the apex of some pyramid ... that we're not the crown of creation, but actually that we're a little leaf that's growing on a huge old tree, and that we have no existence independent of that tree, we are thereby related through the sap that runs through that tree to all the other leaves, all the other species, and so on. As we acknowledge this, then immeasurable new sources of joy become available to us (1991:33).

The Invocation is thus the expression of a new vision or world-view in which humanity can discover an alternative perception of its place and role in the natural world. One might argue, however, that Seed has merely replaced the Christian perspective of God with "the spirit of Gaia" and "the spirit of evolution", and redirected the mission of saving souls to the saving of life on Earth, combining scriptural language with scientific terminology. In the Invocation Seed does not give specific directions as to how to implement this new vision, but an environmentalist group in New South Wales called The Dreamers have put their own particular philosophy into practise. This will be described in the next chapter.
Chapter Seven

THE DREAMERS - NATION OF THE DAWN

An article by Chris Farmer in an environmental magazine describes a group "of both European and Aboriginal background" (1984:32) who call themselves The Dreamers, and who regularly meet in places where the Earth's energies are felt to be strong, to meditate there and link up with this energy. In this article, however, the European perspective dominates, although there is an acknowledgment of Aboriginal custodianship of specific sites in south-east New South Wales, and an expressed respect for their link with the land. "They may be well-known bushwalking or tourist places, but the custodians are closely wedded to them" (1984:32). It is not indicated in this article whether the word "Dreamers" is a reference to either Aboriginal or European understandings.

The Dreamers believe that the energy of the Earth is more concentrated at specific sites, and that: "It is a fair assumption that such places would have been used as Dreaming Channels prior to the British conquest" (1984:32). They call their project "The Renewal", defined as: "... the restoration of mankind's innate spiritual relationship to the Earth, using as a starting point the power at selected sites" (1984:32). They also encourage people to attune themselves to the Earth's energies in their own localities, cities, parks and gardens.

The Dreamers believe that their activities will bring about a new harmony in society: "... if enough people are able to sit with the environment as openly as most Australians do before television sets, sporting events of human teachers, then a new harmony will begin to influence society" (1984:32). Farmer does acknowledge that: "It may be a very long time before the one-ness of man, society and nature, past, present and future, returns to dominate the land as it did during Aboriginal times" (1984:32). It is interesting that in this statement unity dominates the land, as is the implication that the "Aboriginal times" are over.

In this article Farmer refers to "Earth" as the Australian continent, and says that: "Earth is always experienced as a woman, usually either Mother or Bride, a loving, uniting and sustaining power" (1984:32). He also quotes the Bible (Genesis 11) to support his ideas: "... it was after man began to build a tower to Heaven that they ceased to be one people. Unity lies in one-ness with the Earth" (1984:32). Throughout this article unity is emphasized - between people, between people and the Earth. Alternative ways or perceptions, such as that of the Aboriginais, are seen to have been lost in the past.

The Dreamer's activities include group meditation at sunrise and sunset: "Such times are moments of cosmic unity when, through identification with the Earth, we feel, as it were, the light of the sun..."
sinking into the depth of our beings” (1984:32). They also practise sensitization: “Sensitization to a tree, for example, involves being acutely aware of it through the five senses and extending awareness into the dreaming dimension of consciousness” (1984:32). They alsouddle together for the wordless song “The Humming Bee”, as “an attempt to unite with subtle Earth energies and bring them upwards through our bodies to disperse them in silent blessing” (1984:32). Meditative linking is “thinking of specific people and places at the same time... When undertaken from sites of natural power it seems to have an effectiveness and if developed has the potential for developing peace on Earth” (1984:32).

This group seems to have adopted the methods of Deep Ecology for a utilitarian, anthropocentric purpose. While citations given earlier from Aboriginal people, Eddie Kneebone in particular, also acknowledge the significance of certain sites as having special meaning or power, those sites are understood to belong to specific people and their ancestors, are not there for any groups or individuals, Aboriginal or otherwise, to visit and utilize for their own purposes, no matter how well-intentioned.

Farmer does acknowledge that “the spiritual activities of the Dreamers are fumbling and hesitant compared to the true Earth-based cultures” (1984:32). Despite this, he also believes: "We can all move toward that union with the environment, each other, and the inner self which typified most of the past 40,000 years of human occupation on this continent" (1984:32). The article then ends in this way: "We can be the new Nation of the Dawn, and lead the world into a new age of unity if we learn how to release the mighty harmonizing energies in the land” (1984:32).

This last sentence shows influences of New Age ideas, wed to a commitment of re-linking with the land. The land is seen as filled with “mighty harmonizing energies” which need to be released, and is thus perceived as passive. People are the active agents who will renew the life-force and restore their "innate spiritual relationship with the Earth". Although the past Aboriginal custodianship has been acknowledged in this article, it also indicates that those who will "lead the world into a new age of unity" will be non-Aboriginals with New Age perceptions of land and the role of humanity within it.

In the next part of this review, two popular publications that have been influenced by, and in turn in their own way perpetuate, such perceptions will be examined.
Voices of the First Day (1991) is a complex and lengthy piece of work, aimed for a non-Aboriginal readership. The author's intention is to transform the held perceptions of these readers into an alternative world-view, based on his understandings of Aboriginal culture and other traditions. In his own words:

This book is an invitation to leave behind the most basic assumptions of our civilization, along with its destructive arrogance and false sense of security. It is an invitation to enter, as in a dream, a lost memory of our race as well as a fresher imagining of the earth's cycles of death and rebirth. We know that Western civilisation is based on the ancient cultures of Greece and Egypt, but our ancestral roots extend far beyond: the so-called primitive world is the common ancestor of us all. The Aborigine's rituals, beliefs, and cosmology may represent the deepest collective memory of our race (1991:8-9).

In order to support this idea, Lawlor collects his material from a variety of sources: Eastern metaphysics, Western religion and science, including quantum physics, Egyptian mythology, and theories about the formation of the world and the origins of humanity from the "fringe" regions of science and occultism. These are all selectively combined to formulate Lawlor's grand narrative, in which he compares the Western world-view negatively against that of older cultures such as that of the Aboriginals. His sources of Aboriginal material are described as thus:

In preparing this book, I decided not to pursue field work with any one particular tribal group, but rather to seek out Aborigines who were involved in a renaissance of the universal aspects of their culture. In addition, I selected from the sizeable body of published anthropological works some of the more prominent research on early, pre-contact tribal life. The traditional customs and rituals I describe may or may not be fully practiced among tribal people in Australia today. I refer to them in the present tense, however, since I believe they are part of an eternal tradition (1991:10-11).

This "eternal tradition", if the presentation of this book is any indication, is that of a past that almost evokes the "Golden Age" and the "Noble Savage". Most of the photographs and illustrations of Aboriginal people are in brown and sepia, and always depict them in pre-contact lifestyles in desert or outback regions, never in contemporary situations or settings. These are not the Aboriginal people the reader might meet and relate to in their own lives, but the idealised people of a bye-gone past. Against
this, Lawlor compares what he perceives as the evils of modern, Western society. Here is an example of his comparative bias:

The Aborigines have no concept or word for the two things that most torment modern man: the passage of time and the accumulation of possessions (1991:5).

Apart from the above, Voices of the First Day is flawed by a lack of acknowledgment of the cultural diversities that exist between each region and language group, and a blending of the perceived commonalities into the author's version of a universal traditional Aboriginal way of life and world-view, which is assumed to be adequate for making comparisons and providing insight into "Aboriginal" culture. Julie Marcus has also observed this tendency, and its effects, in similar works by other non-Aboriginal writers, and made this comment:

Such explanations have the effect of negating local knowledge, and reducing Aboriginal religion to a variation of a universal, often shamanistic religion which is being defined and explored by settlers and which originates in Western mysticism (1988:267).

The comment perfectly illustrates the approach taken in Voices of the First Day. As Lawlor states in his first chapter, he does not intend to do injustice or show disrespect to Aboriginal peoples, but despite this, his examination of Aboriginal culture is only used as a means to an end: that non-Aboriginal people thereby re-assess their own world-view according to his interpretations and vision. His intentions are borne out in his own words:

The overlapping webs of invisible lines of communication that exist among humanity, earth and cosmos can return to our active consciousness only when we rediscover the myths, ways of life, language and thought patterns of society that will permit us to perceive the importance and meaning of the interconnectedness of all things. The Aboriginal culture is a reservoir for that which will help us regain the vision of the Dreamtime (1991:134).

In any cross-cultural comparison or shared communication, some sort of translation must take place, a translation that may at best be approximate. Only an approach such as verstehen, empathic understanding, can help bridge the gaps. One example of Lawlor's attempts at cross-cultural translation will next be examined, and assessed for its effectiveness as an attempt at verstehen.

The diagram on page 329 of Voices of the First Day (Appendix B) purports to illustrate "The Relationship of Animals and Humans in the Dreamtime Creation". This is depicted as a flow chart, with the Ancestral Creators (here separated into a duality) at the top, and clan moieties at the bottom.
Creative processes and totemic affiliations flow from top to bottom, dividing and reconnecting. The differentiations and their qualities are categorized and arranged in a series of rectangular boxes, connected by straight lines to indicate the order of the flow. Next to this is a ladder of levels or states of being, in numerical order, again from top to bottom. There are seven levels (seven being a significant number in Western mystical traditions) but the bottom two are empty and undefined.

The diagram is ordered, symmetrical and hierarchical in its presentation. It resembles the flow charts of bureaucratic organizations and the diagrams found in sociology textbooks, as well as depictions in Theosophical and other esoteric texts of the hierarchies of the cosmos and levels of being in humanity, from spiritual to physical, from God down to humanity. Lawlor is this replicating the conceptual framework of the cultures that he is setting out to criticise in favour of a more "traditional" (ie. indigenous) world-view.

This diagram is thus more of an imposition than an attempt at translation or verstehen. Lawlor has imposed his own metaphysical understandings over whatever he has learned about Aboriginal beliefs, and ordered them into an arrangement and depiction that is totally alien to Aboriginal perceptions, and misleading to non-Aboriginal readers. An excerpt from Lawlor's accompanying explanation is given here to show how it reflects the approach revealed in the diagram, and the inaccuracies and generalizations that both make about Aboriginal beliefs and practices:

The Aborigines believe that the source of creation is symbolised in a quartz crystal with an internal fracture that causes a rainbow spectrum to appear within it. This sort of quartz was referred to as the crystal throne of the sky: the clear stone itself was called the All-Father, the internal rainbow, the All-Mother (1991:328-329).

Lawlor's book has been mentioned in this review because popular works such as these may inform the ideas and perceptions of non-Aboriginal readers, many of whom are likely to be already committed to environmentalist issues. Its subject matter, presentation and spiritual emphasis could earn it great popularity among those who are open to new perspectives. A review of the book in a West Australian New Age magazine gave it praise:

Lawlor ... has presented us with a remarkable insight into the Dreamtime heritage. Dedicated to the ancient and living spirit of the Aboriginal people, Voices goes beyond the historical to offer the broadest possible perspective (Mulligan, 1992:30).

In this analysis Voices of the First Day has not been examined for the purposes of trying to define Lawlor's perceptions of land. His particular combination of sources has produced such a metaphysical mish-mash, wherein there is little that is definitive. It does, however, provide a good example as to
how a Western conceptual framework can be inappropriately superimposed over that of another culture, even with the best expressed intentions to foster an appreciation of that culture. Lawlor’s underlying purpose and motives are typical of certain other non-indigenous writers, according to Deborah Bird Rose:

There is always the possibility that people who perceive a lack in their own culture will be drawn to a romantic and nostalgic glorification of other cultures and seek to transplant another culture’s ethical system onto their own. The attempt is misguided. Every culture is the product of particular beings living particular lives within the particular options and constraints of their own received traditions, their mode of production and so on, none of which can be readily transplanted. Furthermore, the attempt to appropriate another culture’s ethical system is self-defeating because it is self-contradictory: the act of appropriation is so lacking in the respect which is the basis of the desired ethic that the appropriation becomes annihilation (1988:378).

With the above citation held in mind, a piece of work from another popular non-Aboriginal writer on Aboriginal traditions will be examined in the next chapter.
In this book Cowan sets out to provide an analysis of Aboriginal culture, and, like Lawlor, he has made extensive use of Eastern and Western cultural concepts and perspectives for cross-referencing and comparison. There is no doubt that he too intends to make a sincere attempt to understand and communicate the Aboriginal world-view, but the effective practice of \textit{verstehen} requires that as little as possible be added or subtracted. Cowan has added copiously to what other non-Aboriginal writers (eg. Rose, 1988; Baines, 1988; Tonkinson, 1991; cited previously) have been able to express briefly and simply. He loads his text with cross-references, repeated explications and a formal academic style that seems inappropriate for a publication intended for general readership. This excerpt provides a good example of his approach:

The stage had been set for the transformation of landscape from its pristine state before the occasion of the Primordial Event into that Leo Frobenius called the creation of a 'paideuma' at the conclusion of the Dreaming. The paideuma being the 'tangle of inrooted ideas' or 'the gristly roots of ideas' that are the bedrock of any culture. According to Mencius' epistemology, the men of old (ie, "the ancients") wanted to clarify and diffuse the light which comes from looking straight into the heart of things and then acting. By looking 'straight into the heart' of the physical world, the Aborigines were able to discover for themselves a profoundly symbolic language capable untangling these inrooted ideas so they could exist in relative harmony with themselves and their environment. At this point landscape transcended itself as a metaphor only for Creation, for the \textit{\'iykurba}, and became instead part of the Tradition (1989:29).

Like Lawlor, Cowan uses his understandings of Aboriginal culture as a point of comparison to "modern man" (1989:112) in order to express his criticism of the latter. In so doing he adopts an idealised view of Aboriginal societies, particularly in regard to nomadism (1989:124) and as "true environmentalists", a point that will be discussed more fully later. Cowan's perceptions of land, as can be gleaned from this book, reveal more about his own views than it does about his topic, as will be illustrated by the following citation:

... what to the early European settlers of the country was little more than a pristine landscape, was for the Aborigines a complex and luminous spiritual edifice reminiscent of an open-air cathedral. They were not living in a lonely and desolate place, but in an environment conducive to their well-being and happiness, provided that the land be respected for the icon that it was (1989:25).
This citation contains two concepts that Cowan uses frequently: land as "icon", and sites as "open-air cathedrals" or as a "sacred precinct or temenos" (1989:24), thus linking Aboriginal sacred sites with European places of worship, albeit without a roof. Land as "icon", "spiritual edifice" (1989:24), as "sacred topography" (1989:25), "sacred temple" (1989:27), "symbolic landscape", "metaphysical gift" (1989:28), land as a "mnemonic device" (1989:29), "metaphysical edifice" (1989:41); these are some of the terms Cowan uses to explain what "land" means for Aboriginal people, although the meaning risks getting lost beneath the conceptual tangle created by all these combined definitions.

Here there is no "feeling" for country evoked, there is in fact very little real feeling in this sort of writing, and it recalls Burnam Burnam's comment cited earlier about the Aboriginal dislike of "intellectual verbalising". In these excerpts from Cowan's book, there are only the idealised, romanticised views mentioned previously, as in his perceptions of the Australian continent, before European contact, as "wilderness" or "wild": Here is an example of his understandings:

Environments have their own individual genesis .... This is very true of the Australian continent which has always been the epitome of wildness. It was this wildness that the Aboriginal people sought to preserve in its integrity. They had no desire to pacify the land because they knew that in doing so they would cut off access to its mysteries. A land that remains wild is a land that remains mysterious (1989:121).

The land is also anthropomorphised: "A land yearns for its freedom just as men do" (1989:121). These two citations reveal colonist perspectives (of "mysterious" foreign lands and "uncivilized" or "free" peoples) still inherent in the late 20th Century, if now projected from the past into the unsatisfactory present. They were "mysterious" because their landscapes were unfamiliar, "uncivilized" because their cultures were incomprehensible by European conceptualizations, and "wild" or "free" because the land was inhabited and utilized in a way that Europeans could not recognise or acknowledge. They could not perceive the patterns, the logic and the social structures behind the Aboriginal peoples' behaviour and way of life. As a result the Aboriginals were usually either condemned, or burdened by the "Noble Savage" stereotype. Despite the fact that he probably "knows" better, Cowan cannot help evoking the latter, in his praise:

Aborigines who maintain a deep reverential contact with the Dreaming are true Doctors of the Spirit. It is they who understand this power of land as a principal force and teach us how to respect it. They are true environmentalists, who have carried on a tradition of husbandry for countless millennia. For them, true imagination is the power to see subtle forces of nature and their angelic prototype in the form of spirits of the Dreaming (1989:122).
These ideas and statements found in Cowan's book raise important points that will be discussed more fully in Chapter Eleven: that of the land as "wilderness" before European occupation, and Aboriginals as "true environmentalists". Both of these views have been expounded and challenged by other writers.

In Chapter Two of this analysis Cowan has been cited as suggesting that the Dreaming can be apprehended and experienced by non-Aboriginals. Both he, Chris Farmer and Robert Lawlor thus seem to share the same beliefs: that aspects of Aboriginal culture can be appropriated and universally applied, to the benefit of all. Julie Marcus has identified this viewpoint as a common New Age belief, in regard to indigenous cultures:

Aquarian [New Age] writings on Aboriginal religion have two important characteristics. First... there is no sense of any relation between a cosmology and a particular social structure, no sense of the politics of religious beliefs, but rather a feeling of the timelessness and essential human truths that such beliefs offer. And second, Aboriginal beliefs are homogenized so that it is possible to speak of generalities and to use a word or concept from here and another from there, without having to consider how widespread such ideas or practises were (1988:265)

Marcus' concerns are not unfounded, nor has this attitude to Aboriginal culture changed since 1988. A recent issue of a West Australian Neo-Pagan/New Age magazine carried an advertisement for a public workshop titled "Dreamtime and Clocntime in Parallel". This event is described as:

An experiential journey to discover the sacred in everyday life. Our challenge is to experience the dreamtime here in the city as well as in the wilderness. It is time for us to awaken to our heritage; to begin to heal our separation from the land; to learn from forty-thousand years of Aboriginal dreaming; to integrate the sacred and the secular (Neville, 1994:6).

The facilitator of this workshop describes herself as a Transpersonal Psychotherapist (with qualifications attained in the US, Canada and Australia) and a Deep spiritual ecologist. She is putting into practise the beliefs held by Farmer, Lawlor and Cowan, cited previously: that the Dreaming can be appropriated by non-Aboriginals because it is universal. This is indicated by her use of "us and "our" in reference to the Dreamtime heritage, which evidently can be experienced in the city (where most of Australia's non-Aboriginal population live) as well as the "wilderness". The concept of "wilderness" is often based on a misconception, as will be illustrated later in this analysis.
"... to learn from forty-thousand years of Aboriginal dreaming" indicates the misperceived universality of Aboriginal traditions, as described by Marcus previously. It also assumes that Aboriginal knowledge is rightfully public knowledge, which is not the case. Knowledge to Aboriginal people may be considered as what material possessions are to non-Aboriginals; that is, private property belonging to certain people or kin-groups, which may not be shared except at their discretion. The "universal tradition" that Lawlor (1991:11) writes about is merely a concept held by non-Aboriginals influenced by New Age beliefs, and one that violates the integrity of the myriad expressions of Aboriginal beliefs and practises, each belonging to a particular people and place.

Finally, "to integrate the sacred and the secular" refers to the duality of perception inherent in Western societies, as a split between the sacred and the profane, spirit and body, man and woman, nature and civilization, Heaven and Earth. This is reflected in the city/wilderness dichotomy as expressed in the advertisement. The concept of "wilderness", and its influence on perceptions of Aboriginal peoples, will be discussed in Chapter 11.

An article in another West Australian New Age magazine serves well to illustrate how popular notions of the "universal Dreaming" and relationships to land may be propagated not only by non-Aboriginals, but also by Aboriginal writers. Here Burnam Burnam proposes that non-Aboriginals could embrace the "spirituality of the land" by undergoing some sort of initiation by "traditional" people. He does not indicate how non-Aboriginals would make contact with such people, or on what basis their relationship would be, but suggests that: "Initiates would be given their own Aboriginal names, symbols and signatures once they have sworn allegiance, not to the Australian government, but to the Australian environment" (Burnam Burnam. 1992:7).

He also suggests that non-Aboriginal land-owners could pay local Aboriginal Land Councils $10 per annum for ten years, for every block of land owned, as some sort of acknowledgment and restitution. According to Burnam Burnam's proposed plan:

They could be given official documentation, but most importantly, could enjoy a deep love of the country for the rest of their lives, shaking off the shackles of their 'European-ness'. Landowners could be happy knowing that the land on which they dwell has been blessed by the Aboriginal people. As Aboriginals see their land as their mother, so very sacred in all her parts, all Australians would also see their block of land as sacred (1992:7).

It is probably safe to assume that this proposal would not be supported by many other Aboriginal groups and individuals, who are striving to obtain Land Rights for their own people without the sort of acquiescence to non-Aboriginal terms of ownership that Burnam Burnam describes. Also, his
proposal that this act of "initiation" could also serve as some sort of amnesty for the history of dispossession is also likely to be rejected: Yet evidently he believes that: "By doing this, the whole guilt consciousness about the acquisition of Australia would be lifted, and that would free up the people to take the obvious next step - treaties" (1992:7).

Adherents of the notion of the "universal Dreamtime", and associated ideas, as they have been illustrated in this analysis so far, may very easily assume that their ideas have been validated by those of Aboriginal writers such as Burnam Burnam, whose articles appear in widely-available magazines and textbooks and anthologies, and who is a well-known public speaker and activist. His article has been cited here to illustrate another of the influences on non-Aboriginal perceptions of land and Aboriginality. The connections between perceptions of land and Aboriginality, as held by certain non-Aboriginal writers and as they emerge in public opinion, will be discussed later. But first, another non-Aboriginal writer's perceptions will be examined, as they offer an interesting contrast to those examined previously.
Chapter Ten

CALLED BY THE LAND TO ENTER THE LAND (Veronica Brady)

In her article "Called by the Land to Enter the Land" (1991) Veronica Brady points out the need for non-Aboriginal Australians to make a spiritual connection to the land. She cites Aboriginal people and their relationships to land as an example, without idealizing them or portraying their culture as the antidote to all the evils of non-Aboriginal society, as do Farmer, Lawlor and Cowan in their previously-cited writings. In fact, of all the non-anthropological non-Aboriginal writers studied here, she gives perhaps the most sensitive and perceptive references to Aboriginals in regard to their relationship to the land. She also expresses perceptions and possible connections to the land which originate from her own cultural framework and religious perspective.

Her main aim in this article is to focus on non-Aboriginal Australians' relationships to land. By examining some examples of their literature, she suggests why they have been unable to "enter the land", and ways in which they might overcome this inability. Brady uses the imagery of her Catholic faith to show how spiritual identification may be found in the land, without appropriating aspects of Aboriginal culture or adopting their conceptual language. As she makes clear: "We are who we are and are called as we are" (1991:37).

Her article begins with the premise that: "...by the large, we non-Aboriginals Australians have refused, or better perhaps, have been unable to hear the call of the land to enter the land" (1991:37). Brady sees this alienation as being due to the cultural and geographic displacement of the first settlers, and later the migrants. Many came here by deportation, economic opportunism, or displacement due to the Wars. Economic hardship, as during the Depression, or economic wealth, as during the gold rushes and the mining boom, reinforced their perception of land as a source of wealth, and encouraged the exploitation of natural resources. For the early settlers the Australian continent was an alien, even frightening land, with no characteristics which could be accorded aesthetic or spiritual significance (1991:38-39, 44-45). Brady also acknowledges the cultural influences that have contributed to this sense of alienation:

We are children of the Enlightenment, educated mainly in rationality, so we read for meaning rather than for presence. We "read" the land in terms of our own projects into it, read it instrumentally, whereas the way we should read it is symbolically, for what it reveals, for how God speaks in and through it (1991:42).

However, there is another side to this condition, according to Brady:
As our unofficial national anthem "Waltzing Matilda" tells us, in our depths, we are a restless people unable to settle down... longing to enter the land. Hence the spiritual fascination with the land, which is the paradoxical other side of our fear of it. Our deepest need, I suggest, is to enter the land to find the sacred place where we can enter the mystery of God and thus of ourselves and of the land (1991:45).

She suggests that to answer the "call of the land", and to "enter the land", non-Aboriginals might:

... find in the land, not just a place but a spiritual ocean. A place of the encounter with the living God who figures in the Exodus story as the desert god. In this story the desert becomes rather the place of the Covenant where the mutual bonding of God and his people is sealed. Nor is it accidental that this occurs in the desert, because the desert is the place above all others in which we come to the end of our human resources and are ready therefore to listen and hear the call to go further, to move over the frontier of our limited reason, desires and purposes, into the vastness of God (1991:42).

For Brady then, in keeping with her Biblical inspiration, the desert, the country's interior, is where the spiritual reconciliation can take place:

Here we understand the sheer audacity of existence, the wonder that life should exist at all where we in our arrogance find it so difficult to exist. To its Australian Aboriginal inhabitants, of course, the desert is fertile and life-giving because they can read its signs (1991:46).

In her work with the Yarralin people of the Northern Territory, Deborah Bird Rose has also noted their ability to "read" the messages of the land. Compared to Westerners, whose understandings of the seasons and weather are "partly conditioned by our sense of calendar time and by our ideas of statistical normality", Yarralin people "know far more about what is happening at any given time of year... their knowing depends on correctly interpreting the messages that plants and animals communicate through their behaviour" (Rose, 1988 a:381-382). Veronica Brady is thus aware that Australian Aboriginal and Western perceptions of land may diverge due to cultural and historical factors, and that these differences are not intrinsic in the land itself, as some academic non-Aboriginal writers have postulated. This raises another issue, however, which will be mentioned again in the next chapter.

She expresses the differences of culture and history that reflect the ways in which land is perceived by Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginals in this way:
We are not Aboriginals but newcomers, migrant peoples who must learn the secrets of this state - learning it, however, not just from Australian Aboriginals, but by coming to accept and love and forgive ourselves even in our woundedness (1991:48).

By implication, then, Brady equates Christian redemption with a spiritual reconciliation with the land, and the healing of historical, cultural and personal wounds, including that of the dispossession of the Aboriginals, and the alienation from the land and its inhabitants experienced by non-Aboriginals:

Essentially, then, the call by the land to enter the land is a call to conversion, to a change in our way of living, a call to become friends of the earth, of its creatures and all peoples who share this one life with us on this small and very vulnerable planet suspended against the backdrop of infinite space. (1991:48).

Brady's ultimate perspective is thus global and universal, although in this article she focuses on Australia. This global perspective, including the Gaia hypothesis, seems to predominate among non-Aboriginal perceptions of land, whereas Aboriginal people tend to speak of "my country" or "my people's country", indicating a regional or localised perspective. These differing perspectives have been addressed by Deborah Bird Rose, who has compared the centralised, incorporative systems of Western societies with a-centred systems, such as that of Aboriginal societies. The Western perspective is based on monism: "a system that recognises one ultimate principle" (Turner, 1987. Cited in Rose, 1992:219), which may be God, Gaia, "the spirit of evolution", or a universalizing scientific concept. In contrast to this, in societies such as the Yarralin people: "local initiatives ... are co-ordinated independently from a central instance" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1981. Cited in Rose, 1992:220), and their perspective is "one of a multi-centred world in which each centre is structurally equivalent, and linked, to every other centre" (Rose, 1992:220). Aboriginal people might say that they can only really speak for their own country, and not for anyone else's country, much less the globe.

Lesley Head gives an alternate view of these two perspectives, and their ways of relating to the natural environment, by citing Richard Dasman's concepts of "ecosystem people" and "biosphere people", and saying that:

The former live within a single ecosystem, depending for their survival on the continued functioning of the ecosystem. Biosphere people, on the other hand, are tied in with the global technological and economic system. If they draw on one system, they can draw on others .... In a collision between the two, ecosystem cultures are extremely fragile and the destruction of both nature and culture is the result (1990:451-452).
The monocentric perspective and *modus operandi* of the "biosphere people" can here be identified by their effects upon the a-centred or multicentred societies of the "ecosystem people", and compared to Rose's definitions of these two differing societies.

To repeat a previously-cited summary of Rose's findings: there is no one universal, unified body of knowledge called the Dreaming, but a web or pattern of information, acquired through life through oral teachings, art, ceremonies, kinship structures, hunting and gathering, living in the land. It is a multi-centred web, focused on specific peoples in specific locations, yet each is connected to the rest of the world and all of life. If this perception is correct, then it becomes apparent why a generalised and universalized understanding of Aboriginal culture such as those upheld by Lawlor and Cowan only serve to misinform their readers and even violate the traditions they profess to revere.

A certain understanding of the Gaia hypothesis can be compared to Rose's description of an indigenous perspective, whereby each part, each habitat, landform and ecological niche, is interconnected within the whole of the biosphere itself. Lovelock named this entity Gaia and perceived it, or "her", as a self-regulating entity. He did, however, doubt that Gaia "lives" in the sense of having a centralized site of consciousness, as humans and many other living beings are said to have. Instead, he postulates that the self-awareness of Gaia is the result of human self-awareness and developing technology in communications (Lovelock, 1979:148).

Like the Aboriginal people's "Mother Earth", Gaia may be either perceived as web or pattern of information similar to Rose's description of Yarralin people's perspectives, or as another centralizing, universalizing concept. From the writings of John Seed and other non-Aboriginals studied here, their perceptions tend toward the latter, more so than they may actually be aware of. For those who seek a spiritual approach, models such as the Gaia hypothesis can be perceived as a focus for a universalizing spiritual and ecological awareness, as described by Swain (1991:13). This is often the perspective held by adherents of the New Age and other forms of contemporary mysticism, who may also identify themselves as environmentalists of some kind.

This recalls the aims of the Dreamers and their Renewal project, and Lawlor and Cowan's proposed reclamation of the "universal Dreamtime". They profess to speak in a universal context, for all peoples, in all places, and if not for all time, then certainly the New Age millennium. Aboriginal people may also express opinions in this context, but within their own societies, they can only speak for their own people and their country. The particular is thus never dissolved into the general, nor are local identifications and the links between humans, animals and land subsumed into any universal vision, or centralizing concept or source of authority.
The literature so far examined has presented many different ways of perceiving land, and in this analysis many dichotomies have emerged and have been defined and compared, such as the global and the local, the particular and the universal, the anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives.

Within non-Aboriginal perceptions, however, one can find further dichotomies between concepts of culture and nature, wilderness and civilization, traditional and non-traditional, to give but a few examples. From the readings, it has also become obvious that non-Aboriginal perceptions of land are frequently bound up with their concepts of “wilderness” and Aboriginality. In the next chapter these concepts, as they have emerged from this analysis, will be explored with the assistance of other writers who have already identified and examined them in connection with non-Aboriginal perceptions of land.
Chapter Eleven

PERCEPTIONS OF "WILDERNESS" AND ABORIGINALITY

Wilderness, by popular definition, is a tract of land which has remained in a pristine state, uninhabited and unaltered by human activity. It is of particular concern to certain environmentalist groups such as the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Wilderness Society, particularly in the protection and maintenance of national parks, and in issues where human habitation and economic development are considered to threaten the well-being of such designated areas.

Wilderness is often seen as of particular significance to environmentalists, as compared to inhabited and utilized lands, such as rural and urban areas. There are, of course, the utilitarian arguments of the "light green" conservationists, who regard wilderness areas as important for human education and recreation, or as places where the biological diversity necessary for the well-being and survival of the biosphere may be maintained.

But wilderness, as a concept, also has important symbolic significance for many non-indigenous people, especially environmentalists of the "deeper green" persuasion. Wilderness represents a state (or place) of grace, in contrast to the cultured, civilized realm of human life, often perceived as the home of corruption. Wilderness is instead a sacred place, a place of purity, where numinous and spiritual powers reside and may be contacted, whereas civilization is polluted, a place of the profane. Only in the "wilderness" may redemption be found, be it desert or forest. Despite the utilitarian arguments of "light green" environmentalists for the preservation of "wilderness", the symbolic meanings may often be the underlying, perhaps unconscious motivations behind their emphasis on it.

In Australia, more emphasis has been given by environmentalists to issues of "wilderness" preservation and land management, than has been given to the greening of the cities (Eckersley, 1990). This may be due to the popularised image of ourselves as an outdoor, outback nation, despite the fact that the vast majority of non-Aboriginal Australians live in urban areas along the coast. However, when great distances separate these urban centres, combined with this outback image, it may be easy to turn one's back on urban environmental problems and focus on the land beyond. That urban centres also provide many of the facilities, benefits and enjoyments that are part of non-Aboriginal Australians' way of life does not seem to affect the moral and spiritual values conferred to "wilderness" and "nature".

These moral and spiritual values have been described in the writings of Brady (1991), and Cowan, who refers to sacred sites within the land as "open-air cathedrals" (1989:24). Boris Frankel has observed a perspective of the "outback" that parallels those held toward "wilderness", and says that:
...a majority of the environmental movement (although living in cities) tend to treat urban life as the cultural Other. In wishing to preserve the 'outback' from destructive and polluting urban production and cultural practices, many greens have still been locked into the bush myths of the 'Australian legend' - minus the logic of domination. As such, they have largely neglected the socio-cultural basis of urban, non-Aboriginal society (1992:223).

One might add that these perceptions, as described by Frankel, also ignore the socio-cultural basis, and perhaps even the presence, of urban Aboriginal peoples as well. Fabienne Bayet, an Aboriginal environmentalist, has this opinion of the concept of "wilderness":

Such conceptions of wilderness and conservation are yet another form of paternalism and dispossession if they continue to conceptually remove Aboriginal people from the Australian landscape (Bayet, 1994:27).

The attitudes and perceptions of non-Aboriginals to land carry important implications for Aboriginal people, as some writers have already observed. Tim Rowse has commented that: "In particular, ecologists working in Australia have commonly viewed as 'natural' a landscape much transformed by human use", and he asks "Is there in Australia any 'wilderness' - any Nature untouched by human hand?" (1993:118). Lesley Head supports this view, saying: "This attitude of Australian landscape as 'an untamed wilderness', ignoring the past and present Aboriginal presence, is 'terra nullius'" (1992:49). Fabienne Bayet agrees with her on this issue, and elaborates on it in these words:

Those concerned about the destruction of the environment have often promoted Aboriginal people as super-conservationists. Although this is an acknowledgment that Aboriginal people have sustained the Australian landscape for thousands of years, it stresses the relationship of the noble savage with an idealised 'garden of Eden', once again distorting the reality of the landscape we live in. In effect the doctrine of terra nullius lives on under the conceptual banner of wilderness: a land without human interaction or impact (Bayet, 1994:28).

Lesley Head also mentions the dichotomies inherent in non-Aboriginal perceptions, whereby "wilderness", timelessness, stability, the pristine and primeval landscape are contrasted to the urban, civilized, polluted, unstable and destructive realm that Western societies have created. (1992:49). Within these sets of opposing values and qualities, "traditional" (as opposed to "non-traditional") Aboriginal people are seen as part of the natural order, thus inheriting all those qualities of timelessness and stability accorded to the "wilderness" that the whole continent was perceived to be before 1788.
In reference to this perception, Ros Sultan, speaking as the Aboriginal liaison officer for the Australian Conservation Foundation, has said:

For the Aboriginal peoples of Australia any definition of wilderness is problematic. We do not think in terms of wilderness, we think in terms of 'country', particular landscapes within which people have played an integral part for over 60,000 years (Sultan, 1991. Cited in Head, 1992: 52).

In support of this statement, Lesley Head, who has undertaken an archaeological and palaeo-ecological study of the Australian continent, has come to the conclusion that:

Aborigines have been on the continent for at least 50,000 years and have occupied all parts of it ... Since that time the landscape has changed as a result of both climatic fluctuation and human action ... [it was, till 1788, and in many areas still today] 'country'; land cared for, known, named, and managed on a sustainable basis by its owners (1992:52).

This citation by Galarrwuy Yunupingu is a good illustration of how sustainable land use and spiritual respect for the land are combined, and transmitted, within an Aboriginal society:

When I was sixteen years old, my father taught me to sing some of the songs that talk about the land. He told me they are the history of the Gumatj people, which talks about us being one with nature ... as though the land is another you. One day I went fishing with Dad. As I was walking along behind him I was dragging my spear which was leaving a long line behind me. He told me to stop doing that ... that if I make a mark, or dig, with no reason at all, I've been hurting the bones of the traditional people of the land. We must only dig and make marks on the ground when we perform or gather food. (Galarrwuy Yunupingu. Cited in Maddock, 1982:23-132).

This sustainable management on behalf of the original inhabitants has not gone un-noticed by certain environmentalists, who have cited them as being the "original environmentalists", often with an assumption of shared perspectives and objectives. While some Aboriginal people have also identified themselves as such in communication with non-Aboriginals, there are also non-Aboriginal writers who have questioned the appropriateness of this identification. Head has observed that: "the notion of 'original conservationists' is framed in Eurocentric terms, and does not do justice to the complex interactions between Aborigines and their environment" (1990:448). She goes on to explain:
Conservationists have often assumed community of interest with Aborigines because they have a view of Aborigines as 'the original conservationists', living in perfect 'harmony with their environment'. There is then a backlash against the view and the people when they act out of character with the stereotype. Since the stereotype derives largely from the way Aborigines 'used to be', we need to examine the evidence in this regard (1990:450).

This point has also been mentioned by Fabienne Bayet earlier. It is therefore necessary to examine what both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginals mean when they designate themselves as environmentalists.

Non-Aboriginal environmentalists, particularly those of the "deeper" shades of green, see themselves as deviating from the dominant land ethic, to some degree. Their "struggle" takes place within the conceptual and economic framework of their own culture, at least where issues of land use are concerned. There are also those, such as the Deep ecologists, who propose to create an alternative framework or paradigm, based on a biocentric perspective. They may be inspired by indigenous values and ways of life for their model of the ideal ecological society, and works such as those of Cowan (1989) and Lawlor (1991) could well provide their source material.

Aboriginal peoples are also concerned with issues appropriate land-use, and may cite their deep, practical knowledge of the land as justifying their interests. However, at the same time they are also seeking to strengthen and consolidate their own culture, not to divide it or challenge its basic framework. Their priorities may not be recognised or respected by those environmentalists who assume an across-the-board solidarity with Aboriginal peoples. Idealized or generalized notions of Aboriginality and Aboriginal values often feed this assumption, and may eventually lead to disillusionment or conflict. According to Rowse:

Non-Aboriginal thinking about 'Nature', however rigorously scientific, also remains, to some degree, poetic and metaphoric. The same can be said about our thinking about 'Aboriginality'. Put the two together and you have a potentially poetic discourse (1993:117).

This brings us back to the topic of dichotomies, this time of traditional or non-traditional, past or present, authentic or unauthentic. The attitude dies hard that the "real", "tribal" Aborigines are those few that still maintain a "traditional" hunter-gatherer lifestyle in the "outback", far from where most non-Aboriginal people live, far from where they create their concepts and views. Others, such as urban Aboriginals, are seen as unauthentic, not "real Aboriginals", their culture is considered to be
corrupted or deficient. This perspective can be illustrated in an recent article on Aboriginal spirituality, compiled by mostly non-Aboriginal writers, in a New Age publication:

Perhaps if we stopped perceiving Aboriginal spirituality (or lack of it) as it may express in those displaced peoples in inner city suburbs who are trying to grapple with their ancient heritage in a modern man's world, and look to the outback where the people still have the ability to express themselves with the land as they have for thousands of years, through their unique style of art, music and dance, then we can see their beauty and their undeniable bonding with the land (Provost, 1992:6).

It is not just in popular publications and texts that problematical concepts of the land, and Aboriginality, are to be found. William Lines points out that certain: "leading progressive interpreters of Australian culture and history ..." (he names Patrick White, Alan Moorehead and Manning Clark) subscribe to a "mythic geographic determinism", whereby the perceived alienation that non-Aboriginal Australians experience in the landscape is due to certain qualities inherent in the land itself (1991: 278). In the Literature analysis, this experience of alienation has been described by Veronica Brady (1991) in her article, using examples from literature and her own perceptions, whereby the inland regions, the desert, was seen as both the place of privation and the testing of resources, as well as the place of communion with God. Like Lovelock's projections of "goodness" and "beauty" onto the pristine or sustainably-managed biosphere (Lovelock, 1979:142), these perceptions of land, whether positive or negative, are always culturally-based. Lines vehemently criticises the negative aspect of this view of the Australian landscape, by saying:

The spiritual darkness they detect at the heart of Australian civilization they claim emanates from the land itself - a continent of primeval cruelty sustained by omnipotent sunlight and a dry interior. Australian indifference to human suffering reflects the apathy of the land and sky to all human striving and travail (1991:278).

Lines also compares the successful and sustainable lifestyle that the Aboriginal peoples maintained for thousands of years, with the attitudes and values of the colonizers and their descendants towards the land. He condemns these attitudes as a projection of culture onto nature, in these words:

If European Australians, as the learned critics maintain, turned out an obdurate, alienated people, it was because of the nature of the society they constructed in Australia, not because of the landscape. The natural world imparts no moral qualities or lessons ... [and] is neither good nor bad, just nor unjust .... neither harsh nor gentle, indifferent nor compassionate, primevally cruel nor humanely forgiving, male nor female. Cruelty and forgiveness, injustice and compassion, are all human inventions. The British
Empire and Australia's tethers to the post-Enlightenment industrial world - human constructions all - not nature, created modern Australia (Lines, 1991:278).

Lines' perspective that the natural world imparts no moral qualities or lessons may be challenged by the beliefs of Aboriginal peoples, or by those environmentalists whose perception of the land are otherwise. However, he does quite clearly express the way in which the Western perception of the land, or "nature", whether positive or negative, is very much a cultural construction over the physical or biological world. Even the deep ecologists' assertion that nature has an "intrinsic" value of its own is a culturally-based perspective, based on their own need to come to terms with and relate to it. It may be argued that Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of land are equally their own cultural creation.

There is, however, one crucial difference in perception - from the works examined for this analysis, it is evident that for the Aboriginal peoples culture and the land are inseparably intertwined. To damage one is to equally damage the other. Take away the land, and their culture is diminished, and survival becomes a struggle. As Fabienne Bayet puts it: "Without land there is no base for the structure of Aboriginal culture", and throughout her article she emphasizes that this is as true of the pre-contact hunter-gatherer societies as it is for Aboriginal peoples today.

The dominant Western perspective is that culture is a triumph, or progression, over nature. Marshall has identified this perspective as: "the myth of transcendence, the myth that humanity transcends the realm of nature by entering the realm of culture" (1993:21). Whilst there are many environmentalists who are working hard to try to change that perspective, their views, as this analysis has shown, are still often articulated within a Western conceptual framework. Among some of them, this has led to misconceptions of indigenous peoples' relationship to the land, as the citations from the works of popular writers have shown. Anthropologists may have a more finely-tuned practice of verstehen which reflects in their understandings of the Aboriginal viewpoint, but they too have to struggle to convey their understandings in a conceptual framework different from that of the people they have worked with. In a culturally-diverse society such as Australia, this problem is unavoidable, and learning the skills of effective intercultural communication is a pre-requisite to living in a society where such differences are to be cherished, and not crushed by policies of assimilation or by persistent misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

"All our views of the landscape and of the human place in it are images and constructs affected by a range of factors" (Head, 1992:53). In this Literature analysis, some of the images and constructs that have emerged from the texts have been examined and compared. The factors that have influenced them are both cultural and historical, and while to go into each of these factors in detail is beyond the scope of this analysis, it is to be hoped that the reader will be able to perceive how they operate to influence the works of the writers cited here.
This Literature Analysis will be followed by a Case Study, whereby the perceptions of land have been obtained from interviews from both environmentalists involved in a particular group, and Nyungar elders from the Swan River Valley region in Western Australia. From this case study, the stated perceptions of land (and related issues) will be compared with each other, and with reference to some of the concepts and issues that the Literature Analysis has raised.
CASE STUDY - INTERVIEWS

Introduction

This case study comprises of a collection of interviews held with four members of a Perth conservation group, and four Nyungar elders of the Swan Valley region of Western Australia. Their perceptions and points of view will be examined and compared in this section. Where necessary, references and points of comparison to material cited in the Literature Analysis will be given. Any other perceptions and ideas from these writers will also be presented if they relate to issues that emerge from the Case Study. In the Case Study analysis, the contributors will first be briefly introduced, and in later chapters their contributions will be given in the same order.

Kingsley Dunstan is a member of the Ellenbrook Conservation Group, a group of residents who are trying to prevent the semi-rural area where they live from proposed housing development and the building of a freeway through the region. He outlines the main issues and goals of the ECG, as well as expressing his personal reasons for being involved. His concerns are also global, and he sees the aims and efforts of the ECG in this perspective as well as for its local impact.

Lyn Dunstan shares his commitment and many of his concerns, but also emphasises the deep personal affinity that she has developed for the bushland that the ECG is seeking to protect. Her involvement with the ECG and her growing commitment to the bushland has led her to undertake a course of study in Environmental Management. Both Lyn and Kingsley Dunstan have sought contact with local Nyungar people on the issue of protecting the bushland, and speak with respect of these people's presence and relationship to the land.

Brian Bush is a herpetologist, who has lent his skill and knowledge to the ECG and is involved in protecting reptile species through education and conservation. With his work he travels extensively throughout the state, and has had contact with Aboriginal people in the areas that he visits. As well as this, he is concerned with many other environmental issues, and the complexities encountered in trying to combine a deeply-held respect for the land with the sustainable use of natural resources.

Dorothy Mulder is also involved with the ECG, and is a resident of the area. She has felt a deep link with the land from her early years in north-west West Australia, and later in different places along the Swan River in Perth. Her perceptions of the land and Aboriginal people thus originate from her own personal experience. She also speaks out strongly against the indiscriminate use of natural resources for economic gain. Dorothy Mulder preferred to contribute her views in writing, and citations from her contribution will retain her punctuation and capitalization.
These four Nyungar elders from the Swan Valley region of Perth also contributed to the Case Study:

**Ben Taylor** was born at New Norcia, north-east of Perth, and has an intimate, personal knowledge of the Swan Valley, as did his father before him. **Richard Wilkes** was born in the Swan Valley, where his family have lived for several generations. It is through links such as these that the Nyungs who have contributed to this Case Study have the right to speak for this region. Both Ben Taylor and Richard Wilkes, each in their own way, perceive the land as their Mother, and emphasise that land is vital to the self-esteem and cultural survival of their people. They also stress that the pre-contact spiritual links with the land and cultural identity are not dead, but still survive today.

**Yaluritja (Ciarrie Isaacs)**, who has knowledge of the Swan Valley through his father who lived and worked in the area, is equally concerned with these issues, and he also gives a comprehensive account of pre-contact Aboriginal peoples as the "original environmentalists". Yaluritja is also concerned with present-day land degradation and the neglect of sacred sites, and non-Aboriginals' perceptions and (mis)use of the land. He offers many suggestions for change, and speaks strongly about the obstructive attitudes of bureaucrats and politicians to these issues.

**Gwen Corunna** is married to a Swan Valley Nyungar man, whose family have been there for generations. She herself has lived and worked in the area for much of her life. In her contribution she focuses on her childhood in the bush, her personal relationship with the land, and its importance for her people. She, too, is concerned with environmental degradation, but more as it affects the lives of local people. One of her main concerns is the building of a freeway through the area, which will go right by the Nyungar school where she teaches. She also expresses her views on the problems and prejudices that young Nyungar people are faced with in Australian society.

Although the contributors to the Case Study expressed many interesting views on aspects relevant to the given topic, for the purposes of this thesis three main issues have been examined in corresponding order in the following chapters: they are perceptions of land, the personal or cultural influences behind these perceptions, and environmentalists' and Nyungs' views of each other. The Conclusion will then analyze these issues, as they emerge from the contributor's statements, with comparisons from the Literature Analysis. It is acknowledged that this method of ordering and analysis may not do justice to the flow of individual expression of each contributor, but in this way each of these issues may be most clearly examined from the material provided on that issue by the contributors. Where necessary, individual cross-references will be given from other parts of the interview. Any particular emphasis in the citations, as shown in bold type, is that of the contributors.
Chapter Twelve

PERCEPTIONS OF LAND

The responses of the environmentalists on perceptions of land were all expressed in quite different ways. In order to perceive these differences, each of their responses will be examined, one at a time.

Apart from describing his childhood in suburban bushland, Kingsley Dunstan did not express his perceptions of land in any direct statement. The importance of land, for him, was conveyed by his emphasis on the problems of environmental degradation and the costs of economic growth. He describes himself as a "thinking" person, and his perspectives, as given in the interview, seem to be practical and philosophical, more so than emotive. He did not, however, express his ideas about land explicitly, being more concerned with presenting a criticism of the dominant land ethic. This is an example of the sort of issues that he explores in the interview:

... if you look out here now where we're looking, out across the Swan River and Perth city, most of Perth city is built on wetlands, and [these wetlands] were a unique part of the coastal plain. They say that we've destroyed probably 85% of the wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain, so what does that mean? Does that mean, that cost, that we should be proud of that, because we've got some skyscrapers over there, we've got a big freeway that looks very pretty at night, but, are they all important things or not?

I personally believe that this growth syndrome that we have, that we must grow, to be able to succeed and survive ... is not necessarily correct, because at the end of the day we have an environment that we've got to live in, and an environment that has got to be able to sustain us .... [not this] fabricated, false sort of economic environment that we've created for ourselves.

In this way he indicates his view of the cultural values of his society, and its effects upon the natural environment. He perceives the role and responsibilities of human beings within this environment as thus:

We are ultimately responsible for everything that has happened. The other animals out there, we have an obligation to ensure that they survive.

It would appear from this statement that there is a perceived separation between humans and other species "out there", although he adds that he perceives human beings as "only another species of animal", whose "arrogance" often leads them to believe they are a highly-superior species. In his own
words: "We are only animals, but perhaps a more developed or advanced type". He also makes it clear that the responsibilities that humans have incurred are due to their damaging economic activities described previously, and not by some pre-ordained evolutionary hierarchy. The latter view is more typical of the dominant land ethic, by which religious beliefs (man's relationship with the rest of Creation, as expressed in Genesis 2), and scientific values (Darwinian) are interpreted and used to justify human domination over nature. Kingsley Dunstan's perceptions of humanity as "perhaps more developed or advanced" seem instead to refer to biological characteristics and capabilities, and not to an anthropocentric perspective.

Towards the close of the interview, Kingsley Dunstan stated that, despite the recent successes of the ECG, his own thoughts and experiences in environmental issues have led him to become pessimistic, and even somewhat fatalistic, about the future of the rest of the globe, and the ability of groups like the ECG to have any influence over larger powers:

I honestly believe that it's getting almost too late because there are too many other pressures and powerful influences that take place in every corner of the globe, for the small lobby groups of the green movement to have any real significant influence on the total picture .... My view is, I don't think we can now, but what we've got to do now is whatever we can to make life on earth, for all species, as best as is possible .... It's probably unlikely that we can change our destiny now, so we've just got to try and do what we can.

He is also pessimistic about economic and population growth, and the pressures these are putting on the natural environment and its resources:

The only thing that may happen and may control them would be things like natural disasters, or perhaps war, where there will be large numbers of people lost, killed ... But I still don't see that as being on a large enough scale to influence it in the lifetime that we have.

Despite all this, Kingsley Dunstan does acknowledge the success of the ECG in saving a significant area of bushland, and the current EPA statement recommending against the proposed national highway that would affect the Ellenbrook and adjacent regions, which he describes as an "incredible turn of fortune". This must indeed seem like a turn of luck to someone who is well aware that in the decision-making at government and private enterprise levels:

... it comes back to politics, and that's the thing that's driving everything, politics, you know, votes and power .... We live in a highly-complex environment, not the natural
environment, but life, and unfortunately it comes down in many cases to politics and power.

Kingsley Dunstan thus presents himself as a pragmatist who understands the need for strategy, as will be reinforced by his views of other environmentalist groups shown in Chapter 3. He expresses more than once his perception that urban people live in an un-natural environment, a "fabricated, false sort of economic environment" as cited earlier. This illustrates the natural/artificial, nature/culture dichotomies discussed in Chapter 11. Even so, he acknowledges that it is the natural environment "has got to be able to sustain us". His critical questioning of the dominant land ethic cited earlier also indicates that the natural environment is, for him, of primary value and concern.

Lyn Dunstan expressed a very powerful emotive attachment to the bushland that the ECG is trying to protect. Her feelings were developed by becoming knowledgeable about the area, and its flora and fauna. This knowledge was obtained by consulting botanists, the Conservation Council, and educational courses given by CALM. This is the way she describes this process and its effects, although she is not specific as to who "we" are, other than herself:

The more we went out there, the more we got to know the place, we just got sort of hooked in by it all. We ended up with a real, I suppose, affinity for the place, a most possessive affinity in a way because ... we want the place preserved, for the sake of future generations, but we don't want it preserved to have thousands of people just walking in and out of it willy-nilly, dropping rubbish and lighting fires and whatever. We want it to be protected a bit more. In a way its sort of a selfish thing, 'cause we sort of want to keep it to ourselves, but not just ourselves, but some of the local people and responsible people.

It really upsets you when you see areas getting degraded, it really does.

This is her response to the news of the proposed development in the region:

It was just horrifying to think of thousands of houses everywhere, and cars roaring all around us.

It's all very well for you to put your house there, but you've got to respect what's already there. That's the only problem with any of the bush being developed, because there's just so much land already cleared. We just can't see any justification whatever for any bush being cleared. You've got to have a balance ...
These citations show that her priorities are not just to protect her own place of residence and way of life, though that may have been the initial impetus, but also to protect the bushland that she has come to be familiar with through undergoing the necessary study and research. The last citation reveals this more clearly. The former attitude has become known in popular terminology as that of the Nimby's (Not In My Backyard), a derogatory term given by those who invoke community or national interests in defending urban planning or development schemes. Though Lyn Dunstan admits that her feelings for the bushland are indeed possessive and to a certain extent exclusive, it is the bush itself and its inhabitant species that are her primary concern. Even so, there is a slight contradiction in her desire to save it "for future generations", and her expressed exclusivity in regards to "the local or responsible people" who can benefit from its presence now, and in the future.

Her affinity for the Ellenbrook bushland is not generalised, but focussed on specific places:

To be able to get out there, there's just so many places. It's not just one big blob of bush, there are all sorts of little nooks and crannies that you get to know, some really thick areas, sort of like rainforest, because it's all ferns and things everywhere. One's like a paperbark forest, a lot of young paperbarks lined up in a row, with virtually nothing underneath, that's special, and all the wetlands are quite different from each other. It makes it all the more important to preserve it all, all the different sorts of damp lands right through to the lakes.

She emphasises the necessity for becoming familiar with the land, in order to be able to really value it:

Telling people doesn't do anything. Unless you can get them to go out there and experience it .... When you really feel like you know the place, that's when you're willing to do anything to protect it. It's definitely a very deep affinity to a place that you get, it's a real bonding ... It really does change your attitude.

Lyn Dunstan also expresses a perspective typical of European Australians that Lesley Head has also noticed, and called "the myth of the older, the better", whereby age or antiquity is said to impart greater credibility or importance to a place or a people. Aboriginal people, in contrast, do not relate to such a linear concept of time in expressing their values in regards to land, as the Dreaming law encompasses both the distant past and the present. But in regards to European Australians: "Whether we are talking of Aborigines or national parks, the appeal to antiquity is a dominant theme" (Head, 1992:47). Lyn Dunstan expresses it in this way, in reference to the bushland:
There's a really big paperbark there, it's quite strange where it is, actually, because it's quite high up so there must be something under the soil that is making it a bit wetter in that place, for it to be there. Either that or the waterhole must have been a lot higher hundreds of years ago .... Some botanists have told us they think it could be up to 600 years old, this tree, so that's certainly more significant than any of the colonial times. It's quite amazing to think that it was there for such a long time before whites were here, in fact, I think it worked out to about the time when Christopher Columbus went to America.

Whereas Lyn Dunstan tries to explain the phenomena of a tree being in an unusual place through her knowledge of environmental science, such an anomaly might be understood by an Aboriginal person in a different way. According to the observations of anthropologists: "... trees are likely to have Dreaming significance if they are out of place ecologically or are distributed in what appears to be a non-tree-like fashion" (Rose, 1988 a:381), and: "Birds and animals, particularly when one of them behaves in an unusual manner or is distinguished in some way (by uncommon size or colouring) may be a deceased ancestor" (Baines, 1989:228).

Here is another citation that expresses Lyn Dunstan's respect for antiquity:

The impression of age that you get with the bush there is really important - because it gives you the feeling that it's always been there, longer than men have been around, I'm sure, and I think it's important to keep that link with the past, and want to continue it through to the future. Because I mean humans might die out. It'd be good to think that places like that will always be there .... I've heard it said that the planet will always survive, the planet will always be there, and wildlife will always be able to adapt even under horrific conditions. Men will be gone, people won't be there ...

In this statement, she also shows a biocentric perspective, which entails an appreciation of the land, or the biosphere, for its own sake, and not just for human survival or human instrumental ends. Although her personal affinity might be for certain places in the bushland around her home, she is also aware of the role of the activities of the ECG in a global perspective, as shown by this statement:

... it's made me realize that what we've got here, banksia woodlands and the jarrah forests, and all the wildlife here, it doesn't just belong to us, it belongs to the whole world .... We're bulldozing bush that actually belongs to the whole world, and I don't think we've really got the moral right to be doing that.
Her phrase "bush that actually belongs to the whole world" does not acknowledge its past dispossession from the indigenous peoples, and indicates a "universalising" conceptualisation, as discussed in Chapter 10. However, Lyn Dunstan does acknowledge Aboriginal links to land later in her contribution, as will be shown in Chapter 14, which deals with these environmentalists' perceptions of Aboriginal peoples.

Lyn Dunstan believes that the bushland will survive only if it is protected and managed by people committed to it:

I'd like to do something eco-touristy in a way, because I really think you need to try and educate people, try and make them realise how important these places are. They won't survive without people's help.

Most people probably don't know how to protect the bush unless they've gone on a course that says how you should treat the bush.

Here she is drawing on her own experience of undertaking such a course, and the affinities and commitment that she has developed for the bush in this way. As stated previously, she believes that only a deep knowledge and practical experience can lead to such commitment. It is interesting to compare her experience and her recommendations, directed at non-Aboriginals, with the way that Aboriginal peoples experience and express their links and commitment to land, as shown in Chapter 3, and later in this chapter.

From their contributions as given for this Case Study, it would appear that both Lyn and Kingsley Dunstan, whilst primarily concerned with the ECG in saving their local bushland area from development, have also considered the broader issues behind their immediate conservationist goals. Kingsley Dunstan is more pessimistic about the global environmental perspective, yet considers that one has to continue doing what one can. Lyn Dunstan appears to be more ambivalent about the future, although acknowledging that, in a worst-case environmental scenario: "men will be gone, people won't be there". Both of them emphasise the amount of time, money and effort that they have spent in the past six years in their quest to save the bushland, and that the activities of the ECG have put much personal and family stress on the people involved. This serves to illustrate the strength and resolve of their commitment, which has no doubt enabled them to attain the gains that they have made so far, despite the odds and seeming inevitabilities that Kingsley Dunstan perceives.

Brian Bush's perceptions of land were also expressed in an emotive way, and also conveyed his experience of the numinous:
When you get past the bricks and the concrete and get out there, I mean, it's so gorgeous, and if you absorb something for the first time, it's like discovering another continent. A particular plant, a bird, a reptile or even a bloody snail... there's just so much out there, it's all waiting to be learnt about and experienced.

That's why I like it up there in the Pilbara... the presence there... no people (laugh)... there's something primitive about that country... when you get up there, get away from the people... you know, if I didn't have a family I think I'd go bush, turn my back on society.

Brian Bush's last statement recalls Boris Frankel's views on seeing urban life as the "cultural Other", as cited in Chapter 11. Equally culturally-based is his perception of this region as "primitive", an issue also raised in the same chapter. His experience of the "presence" in the desert or outback, however, differs from Veronica Brady's confrontation with God in these regions (1991:42-47), yet nevertheless evokes a sense of impenetrable mystery:

It just makes you feel how insignificant you are, I mean, even at night time, especially at night... I mean in the daytime you can usually visualise why it is, because you've got such an elevated perch, you just got these wide open spaces, the country's just so big and rough... but the first time I experienced it was at night time, the first time I'd even hit the Pilbara, and I felt closed in, initially. Just that it was so big and I was so small... that same area I've been through now in the daytime and it's just massive old hills, broken country, rock... but there's definitely something there... I'm not a religious person, when it comes to Christianity, I mean, you can stick it up your bum (laugh)... Nature's my God!

Nature - it's a tangle, you can see it, but you'll never explain it. We keep trying but there's no way you can pigeon-hole or explain it... it's just too big.

The numinous mysteries manifest in "nature" recalls John Seed's Invocation, whereby the biosphere is invested with a sentence or spiritual aspect, called "the spirit of Gaia". Brian Bush's perceptions, however, are experienced and expressed in a much more immediate and less abstract fashion. He is also critical of the human exploitation of natural resources, but acknowledges that, despite their effects on the natural environment, these activities seem to be an inevitability:

You get frustrated, it's all for expedience, it's all for the almighty dollar, but, you know, we've got to live. We've got to have some sort of happy medium. Where you've got
houses for the people, a massive urban sprawl, at the same time, you're destroying large areas of natural bush.

But it's sad, you know, you get people on the wrong track, even the conservationists become radical, they seem to have vested interests. They target the big dollar mobs like mining ... I mean, mining's minimal impact, look at the damage we've done with the agricultural development ... the land they clear produces bugger-all. They don't use intensive farming techniques, but you always hear it's the mining mobs that are targeted the heaviest ... how do you get across to people ... unless they actually experience the same things as you experience, you can't really get people to appreciate the value ... I'm not talking about the economic value, but the value of leaving these tracts of bush.

So I don't know what the solution is because we're nor all clones, the way we think. I don't know there is a solution, all you can do is when you're here to try to get as many people as you can, not necessarily to think as you think, but to appreciate what's there.

The last citation indicates that he believes, like Lyn Dunstan, that only personal experience of the bush: "to appreciate what's there", will influence people's commitment to it. As shown above, Brian Bush also expresses disagreement with some other environmentalists, particularly radicals such as the "animal libbers":

...they tend to be radical, lose all credibility. It would be all right if you lived in a perfect world, but we don't, we are a life-form, even though our brain has now become out of proportion to our requirements, and to the detriment of most other life forms.

However, as he himself asserts that the bush has other than economic value, he is certainly not entirely a "light green" who regards the land as instrumental, only for human utilitarian values, to be conserved and sustainably managed for human ends. He does acknowledge that: "we've got to have some sort of happy medium", but perhaps this is more of a concession to necessity than an expression of his personal feelings. As he says in a previously-given citation, he has also considered "going bush" and turning his back on society, a much more radical, "deep green" sentiment held by those who perhaps see little hope for change in their society.

He shares with Kingsley Dunstan a concern with overpopulation of the human species:

The problem is the numbers of us ... there's just too many of us, I mean, Australia's not a problem as to population, but Australia's a fragile environment. Most of it is desert, but we'll end up with a Sahara if we aren't careful ... like these Third World countries.
And again like Kingsley Dunstan, he too, has a rather pessimistic view of the future, but his concerns are more about the role of humanity with the other species on this planet, and as part of the global ecosystem:

It's sad to lose anything, you know, especially when we're supposed to be such an intelligent life form. I mean, it's past the stage of survival of the fittest where life forms are concerned, it's at a stage where we're going to multiply and change things at all cost. I mean, if it's a plague of grasshoppers moving around, it's a plague of vermin, but we'll see when it comes to humans ... Humans are a real aberration, haven't been a benefit to any other life form ... I get depressed I was born human.

I think we're very short-sighted, that might be one of the biggest problems. We don't care about the future ... [or] future generations either, when it comes to conservation. I mean, the radicals lose their credibility, because if they don't drive a motor vehicle they ride a bloody pushbike, [which] was mined anyway (laugh), same for the forest areas, you've got to have timber. It's just trying to strike that sustainability, but there's nothing sustainable in the long term.

Here Brian Bush seems to despair of humanity and its failings, and it's seeming inability to face and overcome ecological crises. He does not directly target power and politics, like Kingsley Dunstan, but blames humanity's misuse of it's "brain" or intelligence:

We've got a brain, we're supposed to be an intelligent life form, but we live completely without nature ... we tend to change it to suit ourselves, so we live in an artificial environment, and in so doing, everything else has got to fall by the wayside.

Here are the same dichotomies of natural/artificial, in relation to the human or cultural environment and the natural environment, that Kingsley Dunstan also indicated in his views. Humanity is perceived to be at fault for this situation and the results through its misuse of intelligence, according to Brian Bush. As he says elsewhere:

We're the result of evolution, and it's got to run its course, but because we've got a brain, we know what's right and wrong, shouldn't we be doing something to try and sustain these things ... to sustain the life forms for future generations?

The seeming inevitability that evolution "has got to run its course" may have some influence on his rather pessimistic outlook for the future of humanity, as mentioned earlier. His views on "we know
what's right and wrong" also evoke the Biblical concepts of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, from Genesis in the Old Testament, and the Fall, whereby humanity was banished from the Garden of Eden, even though he emphatically declares himself to be a non-believer. However, as has been shown by other examples in both the Literature Analysis and the Case Study, a dichotomized perspective seems to underpin the Western world-view, and its religious beliefs reflect this conceptual framework. Most Christian beliefs separate good from evil, right from wrong, and both God and humanity from the natural environment. One may reject the religious trappings, and replace them with another set of beliefs or understandings, without necessarily discarding the framework that sustains both. This has been well illustrated by the excerpts from Robert Lawlor's book Voices of the First Day (1991) shown in Chapter 8 and Appendix 2.

Brian Bush also tends to include all peoples and cultural perspectives in his perceptions of humanity, when in fact he is only referring to the world-view and projected future of his own society. Although other citations show that he knows that peoples such as the Aboriginals have a different regard for land, this assumed inclusiveness, or tendency to "universalize", as frequently found in non-Aboriginal perspectives, can be regarded as another form of ethnocentrism. The problems or issues of one's own society are perceived and expressed as those of all humanity, and other cultures and societies share the blame, or are upheld and idealized as an antidote to the world's ills. The first view negates them entirely, the latter sees them instrumentally. Either way, an ethnocentric or culturally-solipsistic perspective prevails.

When describing attitudes towards snakes in a cultural perspective, Brian Bush does mention Biblical influences in reference to people's fears and prejudices:

With reptiles you're not really going to change anyone, they have an affinity for furry animals, so most of the resources are targeted for furry animals, everyone's got cats and dogs, and you go to the zoo, past the nice cuddly koalas ... you try and pull a koala out of a tree (laugh) .... But in some cultures [snakes] are held in very high regard, in some cultures it's a regard born out of fear, but in other cultures, I mean the Aboriginal people .... It's surprising, Christianity with their serpent in the garden of Eden, and you take the Aboriginal people, with the Rainbow Serpent, which gave birth to the tribes and caused the land formations, and then look at the mythical monsters, often they've got reptilian features.

He then points out that Australia has the least dangerous snakes in the world, and that our fears are not based upon scientific objectivity, but on a subjective response, and the fact that: "we've got no predatory mammals so we tend to target the snakes." Of the fear response he said:
It's one of the instincts that we haven't fully suppressed, potentially dangerous things, there's still a certain amount of awareness even if we don't know it's dangerous ... I mean Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, he was a mortal ... a snake symbolized evil, not a mythical monster ... I always maintain that Moses was a herpetologist (laugh) ... he knew people's attitudes towards snakes!

These citations show the divergent regard for reptiles between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, as understood by Brian Bush. His acquaintance with Aboriginal peoples has shown him that they hold different kinds of snakes with a different regard, either as food, or as having sacred significance. He seems to believe that the fear response is an innate and universal instinct, which manifests in the "healthy respect" that the Aboriginal people maintain, and the fear and revulsion expressed by most non-Aboriginal people, even though these instincts may be "suppressed". Brian Bush's views on instincts, in regard to Aboriginal peoples, will be studied again in Chapter 14.

Dorothy Mulder formed her perceptions of land from the past, from her early years:

The land is everything I love best - life, freedom, nature, peace, creativity, beauty, history, background. It's simply in my blood. I belong to the land, it does not belong to me.

The land for her is the ultimate value: "Everything I love best", and this includes cultural activities and concepts: "creativity", "beauty", "history", as well as "freedom" and "peace". "Life" and "nature" are also included, though whether she means these in a biological sense or, again, in the context of cultural understandings, is not defined. The last statement: "I belong to the land, it does not belong to me" is a minor variation of a statement frequently made by Aboriginal people, who usually say: "We belong to the land ..." instead. In the sentence: "It's simply in my blood", Dorothy Mulder indicates that her feelings were fostered by her family's history on the land:

Right from the time I was born I have loved, appreciated, observed and lived on the land as did my father, his father, as far as I can go back my family have always lived on the land.

Her perceptions of land are thus imbued with happy memories, of relationships with family and local people, and also a sense of the numinous:

When I travelled to the world's largest cities my thoughts always flew to the open inland where I grew up, and I yearned to be out there roaming along the Elistoun Creek with my brothers and sisters out hunting with our best friends - the local Abor-
originals ... The lure of the bush forever rings in my ears, and my happiest learning and peaceful times were away from the maddening crowds, enjoying nature. There just has to be a Designer of this amazing Great Ecosystem where everything plays a part in the Overall System. Obviously we have overplayed our part as humans.

This "Designer" of the "Great Ecosystem" recalls a Western religious perspective of God as the Divine Architect of the world. However, the "Designer" of the "Great Ecosystem", wherein everything plays a part, also recalls the Gaia hypothesis, and John Seed's Invocation, calling upon the spirit of Gaia and the spirit of Evolution (Seed, 1988:2-3). This seems less like Veronica Brady's Old Testament desert God, who tries and redeems humanity, and may be instead a more contemporary perspective of God as the Great Ecologist, creator of the awe-inspiring "Great Ecosystem", be it the biosphere, the entire planet, or the universe. For Dorothy Mulder, nature, the bush, is a refuge from civilization: "the world's largest cities", and "the maddening crowds". Nature and civilization are seen as an antithesis here, as in other parts of her contribution. Like Lyn Dunstan and Brian Bush, Dorothy Mulder also seems to uphold the view that human beings may not be the prime or central species within this ecosystem, and indeed one who may have overplayed their "part".

As well as this, she quite emphatically condemns human-centred, utilitarian values:

I feel very sad when such destruction of land is carried out by greedy, selfish, unscrupulous humans - all for the almighty dollar. For power, for self-motives and ego-boosting. Man is destroying the earth and every day we see it in reality, the media, television. Destroying our natural forces forever, wiping out flora, fauna, everything that we love. We should not allow this to happen as this is all we have - no water, no land, and then no life!

This is one sentiment that was shared by each of the environmentalists who contributed to this case study, although expressed in different ways by all. Each expressed strong concern about the use of natural resources for economic ends, and questioned the values of the dominant land ethic, despite the concession that "you've got to have timber", as made by Brian Bush.

Dorothy Mulder equates her feelings for the land with that of the Aboriginal people she has known:

I believe the Aboriginals were very territorial, and I felt like that, although only fourth generation on the land. I really believe that the people of the land have the same attachment, whether of Aboriginal or other descent, and I am only happy living among bushland and birds, etc.
Here she asserts that: "We [or I] believe the same things, regarding land, as the Aboriginals", in her own words. Her views on this topic will be encountered again in the next chapter. Before dealing with the other relevant issues that emerged from the environmentalists' contributions, the perceptions of land as given by the Nyungar contributors will first be examined.

Nyungar elder Ben Taylor expressed his feelings for the land quite simply; "The land is our Mother, we don't own it, it owns us", thereby almost repeating Dorothy Mulder's statement. Like Dorothy Mulder, he, too, developed his perceptions from an early age, but in a different way. He learnt about the Dreaming and the Rainbow Serpent from his grandparents, while sitting around a campfire, and was taught:

... about how the Rainbow Serpent crossed the land and formed the landscapes, trees, minerals. The land, and the waterholes, are the home of the sacred Waugyl [Rainbow Serpent].

Ben Taylor sees land as being a crucial factor in the healing and consolidation of his people's culture:

Aboriginal people today are lying down in that park, they don't know who they are, they have no land, the white man has taken their soul from them - but they haven't killed us out. Drinking, being jailed, deaths in custody. Longmore [prison] is a place for racism. I talk to young people there, there are too many white people telling them what to do. [The Welfare system] ... They have a different way of oppressing us now.

Alcohol is killing off my people - they are crying to go back to the land, lost in this concrete jungle, spiritually, mentally, physically bankrupt, spirits broken.

With the land we could do a lot, sit around the campfire, talk about the Dreamtime, share stories.

Ben Taylor also made it clear that talk of reconciliation is futile:

... until we can get our land. We don't want all Australia, not your backyard. I want to take my people out of bondage.

As a Catholic, like Veronica Brady, Ben Taylor also uses Biblical allusions to give emphasis to his statements. He praised the support that his people are getting from the Catholic Church, and from the Pope, the Holy Father, who said "strong words" about land and Aboriginal people during his last visit to Alice Springs. Ben Taylor emphasised this in his own words:
...our roots are strong in the ground. The bush is burnt, the bark scorched, but we like a tree stand strong.

This tree does not symbolize evolution or the biosphere, as in John Seed's Invocation, but is more like Bill Neidjie's tree that was kin, "father and brother", to his people, and is always aware of their presence. Ben Taylor uses the tree as an analogy of Aboriginal cultural survival; with the desecration of the land and oppression of the people, it has shared their history of near-destruction, but nevertheless endures. The physical and spiritual link between Aboriginal peoples and their land is also vividly expressed in his reference to iron-ore mining:

We look at all that dirt being taken away as being our body, our people's bodies.

His views on the selling, or appropriation of land for mining are reinforced in this statement about the people of the Kalgoorlie goldfields region:

They were sold out by their own people, for big money, for a mining company. I swear on my mother's grave I would never sell out my land.

His views on the early explorers of the Swan River region, such as Sir John Forrest, were also clearly expressed:

[The] discovery of this land - that's white history, that's nothing, you've only been here 200 years

Here Ben Taylor uses the concepts of linear time and antiquity to dismiss the impact and importance of the European presence, in comparison to that of the indigenous peoples. Although he does not directly state "the older, the better" in regards to his own culture, he does turn the European perspective round to measure it against the Aboriginal perspective, in order to make his point.

Richard Wilkes shared many of the views and concerns of Ben Taylor, both emphasise the injustices of dispossession of the land experienced by their people since European colonization, and the introduced diseases and poverty, as well as outright massacre, that had decimated their populations and weakened those that remained.

Richard Wilkes points out that the Nyungars would leave a site after a death had occurred, and after the European invasion there were many deaths among them. The Europeans became aware of this custom and would then move in and take over the land in their absence, this being one of the means
of dispossession. Now the Nyungars have no ownership of land along the Swan River, and no access except where there is general public access. There are many sacred sites and special places along the waterways of the Swan River region, they are associated with the Waugyl, and once provided access to water for the Nyungars.

Like so many of the other Aboriginal contributors, such as Ben Taylor in this Case Study and many of those cited in the Literature Analysis, Richard Wilkes expressed his perceptions of land as "The Land is our Mother", and added:

The first thing that you remember when you're born is the smell of your mother's breast... The land is your mother ... When it's raining, the Mother is making the world all fresh and clean again.

There are strong connections to the land through the mother and the maternal line in this region, according to Richard Wilkes. Despite the fact that men are the most visible leaders in Nyungar society, the role of women in community life is by no means insignificant, if less obvious.

While professing a great respect for the Christian religion, and acknowledging that some of his people are Christian, Richard Wilkes finds the Dreaming beliefs are more significant for him. The Dreaming connections begin at birth, and continue on through life, and according to his explanation:

When you die, it's best to be buried in the place where you were born, and return to the Dreaming. After death, the spirit returns to the Mother, the land.

He also emphasises that the indigenous ways of life and world-view are still very strong, despite education in white schools. This belief has been backed by all the other Nyungar contributors to this Case Study, as further citations will show, and it illustrates the fact that urban Aboriginals have as strong a sense of cultural identity as those living in other parts of Australia, despite the dispossession from land and the ongoing oppression and the poverty that both Richard Wilkes and Ben Taylor speak of in their interviews.

Yaluritja (Clarrie Isaacs) began his response with the statement; "Aboriginals have been the real environmentalists for thousands of years", and gives a detailed explanation of how they lived with the land:

It wasn't a broad sort of living ... individuals had selected duties, so it took the whole community to manage or to take care of the complete system, and it was a whole lifetime commitment of caring and learning about the environment, which catered for their
lives. It was protecting the waterways, protecting the continuation of plant species, the harvesting at the different times of year, it was the duty of these people as individuals to care for it. They didn't just start doing anything, they had duties to do, and they had to follow very clear rules ... to harvest certain leaves or berries, or the roots of the trees, or collect insects that came to those plants. They were very specific ... not to over-harvest all of the things that were entrusted to these people, and this obligation went on through their families, through other generations in their families as well.

These people lived a total life of living, not on the land, but living with the land.

Like Richard Wilkes, Yaluritja is concerned at the lack of knowledge and lack of respect for the sacred sites in the Swan River region, on behalf of the non-Aboriginal residents. He also emphasises the inseparable link of spirituality and the land as held by his people:

Not only were their physical beings, their physical presence, intertwined with living with the country, but their spiritual lives as well. People had their own tracts of land, their spiritual places, their sacred sites ... Unlike other people who could take their religion with them, and build churches wherever they liked, over to other countries .... Indigenous peoples in Australia can't take their sacred sites with them, so many of them had gone into oppression and slavery, as a sacrifice to stay on their land. And it's still happening today, that's why they're in towns which are the most racist and hostile to them. But there's nothing more poor in this world, when you think of materialistic things, there's nothing more poor than to be without your country.

[You can have] all the materialistic things and just carry them around in plastic bags, but it's even worse to have no country where you are known, to sit there, and where your identity is maintained. When people can't understand that they'll say the needs of Aborigines will be addressed by education and better health conditions. But the whole ground of who they are is embodied in being with their country ...

You can't be happy because you're living next door to Alice or anything like that, you've got to belong in your country ... and when it comes to times of dispute, there are people who are questioned about: "What right do you have to speak in this part of the country?"

Yaluritja's own affinity to the land is particularly evident when he discusses the important role of trees in an urban environment. His reasons are both philosophical and aesthetic as well as practical,
though it is interesting to note that the trees he describes here are deciduous: "all different coloured leaves", and therefore possibly exotic:

Why do people choose certain types of trees when they draw up a plan? Why do people look upon trees as being messy sorts of things when they're so beautiful, all different coloured leaves, laying there and just sort of decaying away like us, like we will decay, as they will decay, as all things will be regenerated, by the next springtime they'll be alive.

They need to have the strength and support of other plants around them, you can't just have a tree. And why should they have just big open parks and no trees in them, so that people can't sit underneath those trees and be in the shade and watch a game of football or do what they want to do.

I mainly see trees because they're just so lovely. Oh, I see the grass, weeds and that ... flowers are beautiful, some imported flowers are lovely, the ones that live with the environment.

These citations indicate that while Yaluritja has a sound ecological awareness: "you can't just have a tree", he is also tolerant of exotic species for their aesthetic value, a tolerance not shown by all the environmentalists, as will be indicated later. Although he clearly described his own people's ways of caring for the land and the link of land to cultural identity, it is evident from his contribution that he also shares many of the concerns of the environmentalists. In fact, a significant part of his contribution focussed upon environmentally-friendly urban planning, and a respect for natural resources that did not preclude their use by human beings. Here are some examples of these concerns:

Why not have a system where people can get away from the continuation of houses, housing areas, and can go and live and walk in green belts that go for miles, and walk through there. The roads can go underneath the ground, not over the top, they should go underneath. The green belts should be like highways so that people can walk over them. What's the purpose of having nature reserves like islands in a great polluted river? The seeds need to go from one island to another, to cross-pollinate the country. The pollen needs to be carried by insects and those insects need to travel from one place to another at different times, to different places in the environment. They really do need to be looked at in a holistic way.

I think it is important to see the value of timber. Not just artificial timber which is put out by machines, which is made of sawdust and glued together ... it's not timber at all.
There's nothing more beautiful than big slabs of timber, cut them and make them into tabletops and things like that... and people should be encouraged to do something with the wood that's cut or fallen down, lots of things they can do rather than just cut them up and throw them in the rubbish tip. Big logging companies shouldn't be allowed just to go and log all the time. There's lots of timber from building sites just dumped ... just forklift pallets ... you see it thrown away everywhere. Hardly used and they throw it away. I think there's not enough recycling of materials.

Yaluritja aims his strongest criticism at farmers, citing rural areas as the main site of environmental degradation. From amongst the environmentalists, Brian Bush concurs with this view, saying that in comparison mining has only minimal impact, despite the criticism levelled at this industry from other environmentalists. Yaluritja, however, is also critical of mining, both for its appropriation of Aboriginal land and resources, and in it's impact on the environment:

Mining companies come and go, the destruction they leave behind. It's a very poor country where the local people are just seen as workers.

Yaluritja summed up his views with this statement:

People need to care for the country. You don't need a Bill of Rights to care for the country, you need a Bill of Commitment and a Bill of Responsibility.

From the concerns and viewpoints expressed in his contribution, it is safe to assume that he is including both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians in his call to "care for country".

Gwen Corunna began describing her feelings for land by giving an account of her early childhood in the bush, from which her family drew their sustenance. At that time the town was out of bounds to them, and her parents would only go there to get necessary staple foods. Later on, living in a house and going to school presented the children with a real culture shock, including encountering racism directly for the first time. Gwen Corunna says this about the Aboriginals' need for land:

To me, I think it's always been that when people talk about Aboriginal people just wanting land for the sake of land, I mean, it goes deeper than that. It's part of your own spirituality of the land and your culture that's all sort of intertwined in the bush.

She also describes how she herself draws much more than physical sustenance from the land:
At times when I get really stressed and I'm really feeling low, and I need a booster for myself I go into the bush and I'll sit down and I'll just relax and I'll just let the bush take over my spirit, and it's like an injection that comes in, and you can feel it sort of flowing through you ... It's very hard to explain, but it's like a revival, and it's like your spirit has been given a new lease of life, and you come out there and it's just like ... I don't have any stress any more, and I don't feel lost any more. I feel my energy flowing again, and I feel that I can go out and I can cope with whatever problems I have after that happens.

I do it quite frequently, and my own beliefs in that is that it's the old people's spirits who are roaming the countryside, and when you go in there they are revitalizing your spirit because they know that you have a job to do ... to look after the little kids that are in this school here. You've got to see that they get to know about their heritage and their culture and so you know you draw on their strengths ... and that's how I feel, and the older I get I find that it's very important to me as an Aboriginal woman that I can draw on their strengths. And the other thing is that it does not interfere with my own religious faith, because I believe that they are one and the same, that they both have the same flowing of energy, into me.

Gwen Corunna's relationship with the bush is thus personal in it's therapeutic effects, but it also affirms her membership and responsibilities in the community. She shows very explicitly how the bush can confer strength to those who are linked to it, as Aboriginal people. She also draws a distinction between the "bush" and the urban environment:

To me the bush or the land that's not been touched by white man has more power there, than there is in the city. You don't get that, you lose it because they [the old people's spirits] can't settle there, you know, because that's where the white man has sort of taken over. So to really feel that you have got to go out into the bush or even this place here [the Nyungar school], it has good feelings about it.

This is not identical, however, to the Western city/wilderness dichotomy described in Chapter 11. While "white man" may have appropriated the urban areas, the "bush" is not seen as a pristine, uninhabited area, but a place where the presence of past ancestors remains to sustain those alive in the present. Culture, the impact of people past and present, and the land, are not perceived as separate or dichotomized. Through these links with the past, the bush is alive with meaning, and can communicate this to those in the present who are sensitive, as Gwen Corunna explains:
... the bush has got something very special about it, it doesn't have to be any specific bush ... there are bushes, or parts of the bush that you can't go to; because you just sort of know that you can't go there, something instinctively says no, that's not a right and proper place to go, so you don't go near that. But you then go to other places, you get this real happy feeling about going in there, it's a sort of peaceful one, so you go there and you sit there. And I still firmly believe that the old people are looking after us, because they tell us where not to go and where to go ... it's all still part of that culture that flows through.

The importance of the "old people" and the past is perceived by Gwen Corunna in both a historical and personal sense, as she explains in these citations:

We did a little bit of research and found that this was a camping area, when they were moving through they used to camp here, so that was very significant, because we were going to build a school on a place that was a camping ground to our ancestors. Sometimes here, if we're having after school classes and stuff like that, and when the children go ... and the peace that comes through the school, is like revitalizing everything for tomorrow. And you've got that sort of flow on all the time, and it's very hard to explain, but it's there, and the strength is there. I guess you've go to really believe these things, and I firmly believe them.

Because my grandfather taught me a lot when I was growing up, I believe that he is always there guiding me. In directions, when I can't make a decision, I think and I think about him, and I believe that his strength's still there.

This may be compared to Lyn Dunstan's respect for antiquity, as described previously. Gwen Corunna's perceptions are based on an ancestral presence from the past in the land, which still influences the present, whereas Lyn Dunstan expresses a sense of awe that a tree or landscape has outlived so many human generations, including those of the European colonizers of the region. She draws significance from the parallel strands of linear time, whereas Gwen Corunna seems to perceive the past as inter-penetrating the present. (This concurs with the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner's explanation of the Aboriginal perceptions of time and the Dreaming, as described in Chapter 2.) For Gwen Corunna, it appears that the influence of past ancestors: "the old people" may be as strong or significant as that of more recent and more personal relationships, such as with her grandfather. The passing of linear time does not necessarily diminish these links.
Gwen Corunna also strongly expressed her feelings about the environmental degradation that has happened as a result of the European impact on the land. She spoke at length about this, and here are some of her views and concerns:

...wouldn't it be nice if we could have tried a bit better here, in Australia, because I mean we're the last country to have been discovered, you would have thought that they would have learnt from other countries, of the devastation that's taken place in these countries. I mean, they've cut down rainforests and stuff like that, you would have thought that Australians would have looked at all those places, before starting in on and destroying all the stuff in Australia ... I mean, it's nearly all gone now.

Like, I mean the Swan River now, you know that was just so beautiful. You could go down there of an evening and have a barbecue and take the kids out, but now you can't.... The river is full of horrible algae and whatever else is in there, and who knows what you can pick up if you let your kids go in there, so people have had to back off. Whether it'll ever be back to its proper place again, who knows? It depends on how far or how damaging or what new thing they can think of to do next, who knows? I don't know what to think about it (laugh) ... it's really sad ... that we've let such a beautiful country go to waste ...

These are feelings that non-Aboriginal environmentalists have also expressed, for example Lyn Dunstan: "It really upsets you when you see land getting degraded, it really does" From the information given here, however, it appears that the environmentalists are more concerned with conserving land, species and resources, repairing environmental damage, and examining and contrasting their values with those of the dominant land ethic which is held to be to blame. The Nyungar people do share some of these concerns, but they are also concerned with their own needs as a people. Land is indeed a crucial part of these needs, but their priorities appear to be focussed as much on cultural restoration as with protecting and restoring the land. In fact, the two concerns must be regarded as one and the same.

In the next Chapter of this Case Study, the personal or cultural influences that shaped the perceptions of land as held by the environmentalists and the Nyungar people, will be looked at.
Chapter Thirteen

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS AND INHERITED CONNECTIONS

Each of the four environmentalists interviewed for this Case Study said that their affinities to the land were formed by factors and influences from their childhood. All of these four will be cited in turn, in order to illustrate how their perceptions and understandings were formed, and, in a couple of cases, strongly renewed by their involvement in the ECG.

Kingsley Dunstan described his childhood in the Perth suburb of Doubleview as influential:

... at that time Doubleview was in fact bush and I spent all my childhood in the bush, playing with some of the other kids in the area. We developed a very healthy respect and relationship with the bush ... I used to collect lizards and make all sorts of implements in the bush, and just generally muck around as a kid in the bush ... I used to have lizards and things like that as pets, and you'd watch things on programs ... I can remember it was children's Channel 7 years ago, when there was Harry Butler and Len McKenna, who used to have a segment ... and you'd become involved in that part, so involved you would have an interest ...

It would appear that cultural influences, such as television programs, had a part to play as well in developing his interest in the bush. Kingsley Dunstan then goes on to describe how his interest was then eclipsed by other concerns, only to re-emerge later in life:

... and then throughout life, as you get into the next stage of life, where you're looking for some kind of employment ... in my case, you don't follow that road, you go for a more professional and academic or economic environment ... And then you go through another stage, a few stages in life, and then, if you're a thinking person, you sort of analyze a lot of what's going on around the place ... and the media in particular have an incredible amount of power in this way, and can constantly put forward issues as they would like them put forward ... and along the path that you are going, you get to a point, I think, either some experience has happened along the way ...

For Kingsley Dunstan, this experience occurred when he and his family spent some time living in the Kimberley region in the north-west of Western Australia, in small communities in quite remote areas, where they grew to have an appreciation for the local natural environment. It was here that they were confronted with the "naturalness" of their environment, emphasised by its isolation and low population density. Moving back to Perth later, into suburbia, proved to be uncongenial for the family, as
Kingsley Dunstan put it: "we found ... this is ridiculous, here we are, living within metres of the next house and people, and, I mean, it's just ridiculous ...", so they moved out into the Ellenbrook area. Not long after that, they and other local residents found out about the proposed development for the local bushland area, and thus the ECG came into being. He goes on to describe the outcome of his changing perceptions in this way:

Now along the way, of course, [with] all these things that have happened, you develop, I suppose, a much healthier and broader understanding of the environment ... it becomes a very philosophical-type thing ... in my case, I think quite deeply and analyze these situations, and that drives me to be more committed to what we're doing .... Yes, we do change along the way, but that's what it's all about anyway, that's life, it's about changing. So I suppose, yes, we've changed our values in some ways, if anything, they were always there, in early childhood in my case, and they were resurrected at some later stage, and were then developed more strongly.

It would appear that for Kingsley Dunstan the time and effort spent in participating in and furthering the goals of the ECG not only renewed and fostered his affinity for the bush, but also stimulated his philosophical explorations into related areas and into the meaning of life itself: "that's life, it's about changing". In his case, the change was a divergence in perception from the dominant land ethic, and the influence of the media in supporting its values, to a questioning of these values and their effect on the natural environment, as shown by his citations in the previous chapter.

Although claiming that his perceptions were shaped by many influences, but "no-one in particular", Kingsley Dunstan acknowledged some of the ideas that influenced his philosophy as coming from the works of Dr David Suzuki, a Canadian geneticist and writer on environmental issues, and Dr. Graham Chittleborough, a West Australian scientist, and past chief of the EPA. Kingsley Dunstan has read his publications, as well as having made personal contact and shared discussions with him. Dr. Chittleborough has been publicly vocal on environmental issues, and "has made me think further". However, Kingsley Dunstan emphasised that his perceptions primarily "evolved from my childhood background, to where I am now", and that his early experiences in Doubleview set the stage for the influences that followed.

Lyn Dunstan was also very much influenced by her childhood in Applecross, which was then a new suburb surrounded by banksia woodland. As a child she spent a lot of time in the bush: "climbing trees and catching bugs and all sorts of creepy-crawly things". Much time was also spent down by the foreshore of the Swan River, before it was cleared. Although she also participated in other activities such as music and dancing, she was never as interested in these as she was in exploring the bush. More recently, she says her main influences have been people like Dr. David Suzuki and Richard
Attenborough, and also the people she knows in the conservation movement, such as Joan Payne of the Conservation Council, who has devoted much of her time to issues such as enforcing a ban on duck shooting.

She also spoke about how her appreciation of the land has been consolidated since becoming involved with the ECG, and pursuing her studies:

I've always thought that it was important, but I've never been able to look at something and say 'that's a weed, it shouldn't be there'. Now the property that we've moved on to, I turn around and think 'Oh my God, there's weeds everywhere', whereas when we first moved in I wouldn't know, it wouldn't have made any difference.

You get upset when you see trees dying from dieback. You really get depressed, incredibly depressed, whereas before we would have thought 'Oh well, just stick something else in'. Now I'm getting really particular about what sort of plants get put in. I tend to want to go for the indigenous species ...

This change of perspective and desire to learn was fostered by her involvement in the ECG:

... yeah, definitely, it gives you the strength to sort of carry on doing things like [community work, study]. It's given me that extra sort of push to get out there and get involved in flora and fauna surveys all over the Swan Coastal Plain, and volunteering for CALM at the moment, their Go-Bush program and Earth-Carers program ... and doing the course here at uni [Environmental Management].

In his own way Brian Bush has explored many of the same issues that concern Kingsley Dunstan, and his affinity for the land was also influenced by his childhood, for him in the Sydney region of Menai which was then: "all sandstone and woodlands". On a later visit he found that "it's depressing, it's all highways and freeways now". Of his childhood experiences and perceptions he says:

I've been fascinated by reptiles since I was a boy, bitten by my first snake as a ten-year-old, but I just had a fascination. It's marvellous how you can relate to them ... I can remember as a boy, you're going into an agricultural area, your family takes you out there picking mushrooms. As a boy I thought 'oh, this is natural', these man-made grasslands, and it's not natural, you know. I mean, all the timber's been removed and it's a totally foreign environment, really, and it took a few years for me to appreciate the damage that had been done.
He explains that he was "always a bit of a loner" as a child, and became interested in reptiles by observing the common lizards in the garden. The only books that he then had on the subject were European and North American books, which gave information that couldn't be applied locally. His "passion for the bush" equates his "passion for the reptiles"; although he has had no formal education apart from his electrician's trade, he "picked it up as I went along" instead. Even today he says that there is "more at peace in the Pilbara than in the city."

Dorothy Mulder's perceptions were also shaped by her childhood on the land:

Like the Aboriginals I was born to the bush, being reared in the outback .... Virgin land taken up by my father from 1926, north from Laverton, no telephone, no mail, no vandals, and mostly no trouble.

The "outback" where she grew up is thus perceived as a refuge from all the "troubles" of the urban environment, like the city/wilderness dichotomy discussed in Chapter 11 of the Literature Analysis.

My first recollection of life was feeding a baby kangaroo and baby lambs, and every day we saw Aboriginals hunting, digging and specking for gold after the rains .... From the time I was 3 or 4 I always looked after joeys, wallabies, orphans ... in fact my sister and myself would have reared most creatures from the wild ....

We were always in contact with the Aboriginals wherever we lived to live outback .... We learnt from these Aboriginals how to track, fum, dig up wild onions, barrides, bungarra, goanna, while eating quandong and sandalwood nuts, honey from the ants, gums, mistletoe, fruit, etc.

When she was eight years old, she moved to Perth, to her grandmother's house at Como. From her account, it would seem that, like Doubleview, Como still retained much of its original bushland in earlier years:

They were great days as I could walk bare-footed from Como school through mostly bushland and through the great wet lands to see the water-birds and the great looming 'Wizard of Oz' paperbarks .... I had a lot of freedom even around the city areas and would walk among the river reeds along the river banks of those days to see the wildlife.

Popular children's literature thus also influenced Dorothy Mulder's early perceptions of the natural environment. Native trees have an association with the "Wizard of Oz", the creation of an American
author. (This is probably when there was no TV, and thus no Harry Butler or other nature programs, such as those that inspired Kingsley Dunstan's affinity for the bush in his childhood.) She later moved to her other grandmother's house at West Guildford:

She had a look-out on top of the house and a jetty. We could watch the water birds and fish right out on the Swan River. As my brother was also there we spent all our spare time in the low swamp lands and creeks catching frogs, gilgies, tortoises, etc.

It must be remembered that what is now part of Perth's built-up urban environment was obviously still covered or fringed with native bushland in Dorothy Mulder's younger years, and this is born out by her description. Her affinity for the natural environment has continued and still gives her pleasure today:

My greatest pleasure in the last 12 years has been to watch the bird-life, flora and fauna of Ellenbrook, and this morning I saw a large colony of splendid Fairy Wrens, including four with blue tails and three full-coloured males. How lucky I am to see Blue Wrens every day on my home block alongside Ellenbrook.

Some of the Nyungar contributors also described the way their perceptions of land were shaped in their early years. However, this appreciation of the land was endowed to them by their elders, their grandparents or other relatives, and would have included detailed local knowledge about the environment as well as the Dreaming stories of how it was created and sustained. This endowment, in whatever form it takes, is an inherited connection with the land, with the past, and with the culture. It is an endowment that these people have been immersed in since birth, and the difficulties face them daily in living alongside non-Aboriginal society has not diminished their feelings for their land.

The environmentalist's perceptions of land were for most part shaped by a change or divergence from the attitudes of their family or society. Although Lyn and Kingsley Dunstan say that, in their own ways, they have "always felt like this", they also outlined how events in later life, especially their involvement in the ECG, greatly influenced their present perceptions, and even affected their understanding of broader issues, global perspectives, and philosophical views. Brian Bush admits that as a child he was not aware that the environment that he grew up in wasn't "natural", he learnt this later in life. Dorothy Mulder, however, asserts that her affinity for the land has always been strong, and inherited from her family four generations back. Whether her perceptions have ever changed or been influenced since, she did not mention in her contribution.

When asked how her children responded to their parents' preoccupations with conserving the bushland, Lyn Dunstan replied:
I think our oldest boy has sort of slipped past, because he was already fairly grown up by the time we got into all this, and he sort of thinks it's all a bit ... Mmmh! It's not very cool! It's good that they're getting environmental education at school, so they know it's not just us that say these things .... And the other kids are just totally rapt. They spend heaps of time just out in the bush .... but we don't like them riding bikes and things through the wetlands.

She then went on to give an example of how the children were encouraged to respect the habitat of nocturnal animals that are rarely seen, such as the bandicoots:

We try to tell the kids 'don't go through there, don't disturb them because there's not many places where they can feel safe', 'don't go poking through all the time. We prefer them to be completely left alone.

Kingsley Dunstan also described how his children's environmental education would probably vary from that of his own, as a child:

My grandparents and parents didn't sit down with me and tell me about the bush as such [except in the context of bullock trains and logging], so we haven't had the opportunity of passing on, and we still probably don't do that ... but in an environmental group, like, our children, for example, we do discuss these things, and we do relate to what Doubleview as like 38 years ago, it was all magnificent bushland, and then we drive through today and have a look. I think that is where our children, at least, whether they continue with the cause or not, will have a good understanding of what's happening out there.

Speaking both as a parent and a schoolteacher, Gwen Corunna gives an account of how Nyungar values of land were imparted to the young, and the problems encountered in passing on these values:

It's very hard for our kids that are here to come from suburbia to appreciate the bush as much as my generation. Like my kids, they like the bush, and they all go to the bush, we've always taken them, but it wouldn't be their top priority, because their up-bringing was not in the bush. So they don't have that affinity, but then again it may not come until later in life, because sometimes Aboriginal people have to mature, before they get special things happening to them, so maybe that can come later, I don't know.
[On the children at school] ... if we do a good enough job here, then there is hope for those kids and they can still maintain their culture and their identity to land ... they talk about it now, this is ours, or this was our land, because things are being taught about it. So they know that many, many years ago this was their country, the whole of it was their country, and I think that's part of where they will link up to their past.

It is interesting to compare how both these women, Nyungar and non-Aboriginal environmentalist, emphasise the need for school education as well as home education in imparting their values, yet Lyn Dunstan emphasises the need to protect wetlands and animal species, whilst Gwen Corunna sees her people's perceptions and relationship to land as a crucial component of their cultural awareness and identity. These citations of these two people reinforce the point made at the end of Chapter 12 about the different priorities held by each group.
Chapter Fourteen

PERCEPTIONS OF EACH OTHER

One of the issues examined in the Literature Analysis was the way that non-Aboriginals, particularly environmentalists, perceive Aboriginal peoples and their values and priorities in regard to land. Each of the environmentalists who contributed to the Case Study gave quite a substantial response when asked how they thought Aboriginal perceptions of land compared to their own, so the issue obviously warrants a chapter of its own in the Case Study Analysis. All of the environmentalists based their responses on personal contact and observation with Aboriginal people, yet, as will be shown, their understandings and perceptions of Aboriginal peoples varied significantly. Their perceptions are worth comparing to the issues discussed in Chapter 11. Most of the Nyungar contributors gave their perceptions of the aims and understandings of environmentalists, and these will also be studied in this chapter.

Kingsley Dunstan thought that in situations such as at Ellenbrook, where bushland areas were threatened by development, the Nyungar people and the ECG could give each other mutual help and support. His explanation is lengthy, but is worth including in its entirety:

Aboriginal communities in the area have certainly been very understanding and supportive of conservation and environment type of groups. However, they do have a healthy distrust of white people, which is understandable, and it takes time for them to be able to trust people, because they see white people as perhaps more of an economic mould, that we don't have the same types of interests, that link with the natural environment. Bearing in mind, of course, that Aboriginal people have had it right all along ... they know their environment, for them it has been a sustainable existence.

And for white people, I suppose it's very hard for them to understand the Aboriginal connection, what Aboriginal people see in the land, how can they have this connection, and I think it's changing, it's a very slow process, but yeah, environmental groups, conservation groups, they are willing to assist and we assist them. They can rely on white skills, we can assist them in getting information, and presenting that information in a way that the other white people who are in that position controlling the outcome ... it could be in their interests to have it presented in a way which will assist them.

On the other hand, of course, it works well for the community environmental-type groups to use the skills of Aboriginal people because they understand the land, they understand seasons, they understand the changes that are taking place, where we don't
have a hope of understanding ... because of their family situation, a lot of this information is passed on, and they get to understand signals in the environment, which we haven't even begun to understand.

So I think there's an incredible amount of knowledge with Aboriginal communities which we haven't been able to utilize fully ... but sure, the environmental groups are probably the ones that a lot of Aboriginal people that are still living in a semi-rural type environment relate to more than the average white person, I suppose, because the common link there is the natural environment, the bush. Their links with the land are more spiritually-based, where I suppose white people's links ... people who have a concern for the environment, it's more of a learned thing in a relatively very short time.

Kingsley Dunstan tries to give a balanced perspective of the possible ways in which environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples could help each other when necessary. He perceptively understands the cultural and historical differences between the two groups that could explain a divergence of their perceptions of land. He emphasizes that a sharing of knowledge could be for mutual benefit, although he acknowledges that Aboriginal peoples would have their own reasons for doing so: "their concerns are about the same end product, but their needs are different". Despite this, he asserts that there is a commonality of concern in regards to the natural environment. However, there is no acknowledgement here that Aboriginal peoples, in all or some situations, may prefer to liaise with non-Aboriginal official bodies and bureaucrats on their own terms, and in their own ways.

Lyn Dunstan, however, seemed to find it hard to understand why there wasn't more interest shown by the Nyungars in regard to protecting the Ellenbrook bushland:

We've heard that there's been some Aboriginal artefacts found in the area, but we haven't been able to get any more information than that. It's just rumours and hearsay, I think.

We find it quite amazing that that huge bit of bush is there, and there doesn't seem to be anybody that's completely linked with it, none of the Nyungar people really seem to know very much about it. Probably because it's been in private ownership for such a long time. The little block where we're at is one of the original places where they used to bring cattle over from the Darling Ranges to the coast back in the pioneer days, one of the permanent waterholes.

Like Gwen Corunna, who researched the Nyungar history of the land for the school and found it to be a significant and auspicious site, Lyn Dunstan has also researched the history of the block of land she
lives on. However, she has not been able to access more than it's part in the post-contact history of the area. Also, for Aboriginal peoples, size ('that huge bit of bush') does not always equate with the significance of a site or area of land. It is also possible that the people once associated with it are no longer in the region, or that those who are linked with it may, for whatever reason, not wish to indicate their association.

As a member of the ECG, Lyn Dunstan has also made contact with the Nyungar elders, and her account of their interaction concurs with that of Kingsley Dunstan:

We've met quite a bit with the Nyungar circle of elders, people down at the Lockridge [Perth] campsite. We're trying to keep in touch with them, because we can back each other up, when it comes to the crunch, letting each other know what's going on .... There's certain things that Aboriginals only get consulted on, and things that only we get consulted on ... It's just incredible, I can't believe that in this day and age they don't realize that people have got a close link to a particular area of land.

Speaking about her own contact with the Nyungars, Lyn Dunstan said:

I'd like to have more ... at this stage I'm still learning how to approach them. I'm not an elder, so I can't just go and start talking. I mean, I have to find my own level ... and try and communicate at that level with them.

This statement shows that she is sensitive to the Nyungar ways of consultation and the right way to approach the elders, those who can speak for their people in liaison with other groups. Still, as Dorothy Mulder's account will also show later, it seems that the Nyungar people of the region have not responded with as much interest in the Ellenbrook bushland as these members of the ECG had expected from them. It must also be noted that both Lyn and Kingsley Dunstan drew no distinction between urban and "tribal" or "traditional" Aboriginal peoples, and only mentioned Aboriginal peoples in context with those of the region that they had contacted.

Brian Bush's contact with Aboriginal peoples has mostly been in the north-western regions of Australia, as far as can be gauged from his contribution. As the following citations will show, he draws a distinction between "tribal" peoples, whom he admires and perhaps even envies, and educated, urban Aboriginals. He deplores what he perceives as the destruction of their lifestyles through the increasing adoption of a non-Aboriginal way of life, and blames non-Aboriginals for the problems that result:
I mean, you know, the Aboriginal people, I mean tribally, were very small populations, in little groups that meandered about. They were fairly nomadic and had very little impact on the environment. But see now we've placed them on cattle stations and things like that and they're still using their burning, they're burning their areas far too often. I mean, up in the Pilbara, up in the Kimberley, the areas have been totally degraded because of over-burning...

Living in a white man's world and going to a white man's school, and learning our ways, they've more or less had one foot in the tribal ways and one foot in white man's ways. It's a great life, but really, we've stuffed it, haven't we, we've removed that mobility... and we've given them lots of diseases and things. Even up there they plonk them in areas but they still go wandering... that's why you find them broken down everywhere, you know, out to Jigalong, ripping out to somewhere else, up to Marble Bar or out to Nullagine, they're always mobile, they've got relatives everywhere...

As a herpetologist, Brian Bush has made certain observations about the relationship and attitudes that the Aboriginal peoples he knows have for the snakes in their region:

In places other than the Pilbara, the Aboriginal people will tolerate a black-headed python around the camp because it does feed on venomous snakes, so you get a bit of control over the venomous species... The pythons tend to be the more heavy-bodied snake that they utilize as food, and they are not the venomous snakes anyway... like the Waugyl around Perth, the Waugyl's the carpet python. Because the pythons often hunt around water, animals come to drink, and they harvest their prey around the waterhole. The Aboriginal people tended to give that particular snake significance because it related to water... again, I mean, that's the tribal situation... not the educated Aboriginal people today... most of their Aboriginality has gone.

Contrary to what he might believe, the Nyungar people of the Swan River region still give great significance to the Waugyl and its associated sacred sites, as the citations given by elders Richard Wilkes, Ben Taylor and Yaluruja in the first chapter will testify. Brian Bush is also incorrect in identifying the Waugyl as the carpet python. This is true in other areas in the south-west of WA, but not in the Swan Valley region. While still on the topic of snakes, and identifying dangerous snakes, Brian Bush reveals another perception of Aboriginal people that is not supported by either anthropological studies, or their own account of themselves:

But I believe a lot of these things that are dangerous, and aren't dangerous, they know without any training, it seems to be just an instinctive knowledge; like, you can
probably take that a step further, also the medicinal qualities of different vegetation, they probably know instinctively, too. When they're on walkabout, and something happens to them, they don't necessarily have to be trained, they tend to be closer to nature. They haven't relied on their brain to the extent people of European origin have in Australia, and we've suppressed our instincts, we move without instincts. There are people who are probably more instinctively aware of things than others, but, like the Aboriginal people, tribally, I mean, I think a lot of these things they just know. They've still got that strong instinct that's passed on genetically .. which tends to initiate their different behaviour, in different situations.

This indicates a strange sort of genetic determinism whereby the "instincts" of "tribal" Aboriginal peoples endow them with survival strategies largely lost to Europeans and those who have lost their "Aboriginality". His previously-cited perception of the Pilbara region as "primitive" seems to have been projected onto its indigenous inhabitants. The latter, according to Brian Bush's viewpoint, by increasingly relying on their "brain", have so diminished these "instincts" and thus their cultural identity. For any people, the act of defining and defending their cultural identity is often fraught with conflicting perspectives and the articulations of things more easily felt than described, and this is particularly so with the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Often, and even with perceived good intentions, non-Aboriginals have imposed their own measures of authenticity upon them, in the arts, in print, in legislature, and in daily life wherever contact is made. It is beyond the scope of this part of the chapter, and even this thesis, to examine and evaluate all the perspectives and attitudes that emerge from the above citation, as they touch upon issues of debate within and between many disciplines, particularly ethnology and cultural anthropology.

However, there is plenty of material already given by Aboriginal people in the Literature Analysis and in the contributions from the Nyungar People as given in this Case Study, to indicate that the survival strategies described by Brian Bush in his previous citation are not acquired biologically, but culturally. This has been supported by the observations of anthropologists such as Deborah Bird Rose:

... intimacy with [the land] is achieved through cultural constructions of the environment based on close observations accumulated through time .... it is through moral and ontological systems that Aboriginal people have strategies (Rose, 1988 a:384-385).

According to Yalurilja, for Aboriginal peoples: "living in the land" was: "a whole lifetime commitment of caring and learning about the environment", and Kingsley Dunstan is also aware that: "a lot of this information is passed on, and they get to understand signals in the environment, which we haven't even begun to understand". Perhaps because this form of education is not recognised as such by many non-Aboriginals, Aboriginal knowledge may be thought to be instinctive, like animals who
have their survival instincts, and not as a body of knowledge and skills acquired culturally, as in all other human societies.

Dorothy Mulder also perceived a distinction between "bush" Aboriginals and urban Aboriginal people. She, too, seems to see them as being closer to nature than most non-Aboriginals, in her own way:

I personally see the Aboriginal people as part of the land, blending into the eco-system with the rest of the ecology.

Whether intended or not, this perception implies that Aboriginal people more part of the flora and fauna of the land, than part of humanity. By implication also, human beings are perceived to be, to some degree, removed from the ecology, and she has said elsewhere, in reference to the ecology: "Obviously we have overplayed our part as humans". Are Aboriginal people part of this humanity that has "overplayed it's part", or not? Her intentions are unclear in this respect. The issue that emerges is related to those discussed in the previous chapter on the non-Aboriginal tendency to universalize from perceptions of their own culture.

Despite these ambiguities in her statement, Dorothy Mulder expresses a strong affinity for the Aboriginal people she has known in her past:

We were always in contact with the Aboriginals wherever we happened to live outback. We were also very friendly with the tribal people and had great respect and affinity for them. They loved my family dearly and there was nothing they would not do or share with us ...

However, she seems to be unaware of the contradictions inherent in the following statement:

These were pure bush Aboriginals still living in their simplest manner from the land, and supplemented with flour, tea and sugar from us on the station.

This affinity with the Aboriginal people seems to have led her to identify with them throughout her childhood, at least as regard to feelings for the land:

When we returned to the station Dad had shifted to the main homestead, and we spent our time mustering sheep with the Aboriginals, and we rode and laughed all day with them. How happy we all were together on our beloved land. Was there any difference in the way we felt - I don't think so.
Memories of an idyllic past, of which time spent working and playing on the land with her brothers and sisters, and with the Aboriginal people, form the basis for Dorothy Mulder's perceptions. Her affinity for the land still seems strong today, as can be gauged by her citations given earlier. Her perceptions of Aboriginal people, however, seem to be locked in the past that she describes, and in her conceptions of the "true bush Aboriginals". Her account of more recent observations of the Nyungar people of the Swan River region and attempts to make contact with them give indication of this:

I did notice the Aboriginals asked permission to kill kangaroos in Ellenbrook ... no doubt with guns and dogs, which I find very sad ... I did ask the local Aboriginals to become involved in saving the bushlands of Ellenbrook originally, but I never heard anything more from them.

Here Dorothy Mulder seems to be deploiring the use of guns and dogs for hunting, although no doubt the outback Aboriginal peoples she has known would today be doing the same.

So far in this chapter the environmentalist's perceptions of Aboriginal people have been examined. Some of the Nyungar people also gave their opinions of non-Aboriginal environmentalists, which will now be examined.

Ben Taylor had this to say about the environmentalists who are at present trying to save areas of forest in south-west WA from being logged:

They understand ... those forests are the roots of the land. My heart goes out to those environmentalists ... trees are the heart of the earth.

Yaluritja, who is acquainted with some of the organisers of local environmental groups, also gave praise to those who are committed to environmental issues and activities:

It's really great, they're committing their time, which they don't have to do, and they're distributing lots of information.

He does, however, acknowledge that there were differences in perception to land:

They have different ideas, such as the use and cultivation of land. They are familiar with the people who do the destroying, who clear the land to make paddocks. They have different perceptions, and seek to achieve different things, and are not linked to one
particular place like our people. They can go anywhere, they can be happy wherever they are.

He also gives caution that, by the same token, this "go anywhere" attitude has also hastened the land degradation caused by farmers and miners: "when they've finished, they just move on ..." This recalls the comparison made by Lesley Head in Chapter 10 between "eco-system people" and "biosphere people", whereby the latter: "... if they draw on one ecosystem, they can draw on others" (1990:451-452).

Richard Wilkes expresses his opinions in a very similar way. He feels that the environmentalists are more concerned with "saving what's left of the world", such as the trees, and adds that the clearing of land has interfered with rainfall patterns. However, they don't have the same "love for the land", a love that for Aboriginal peoples "can't be denied" as it has developed for tens of thousands of years. For them, Australia was "the one land they lived in, living with the land".

Richard Wilkes also points out that non-Aboriginal Australians are a migratory people, and move from one place to another. "They do not have the same allegiance to the land, to the Mother". They move about the continent, drawn by opportunism and expediency from one place to another, whereas while Aboriginal peoples moved over their land, they were, and still are, loyal to their land, no matter what happens. He defines their relationship to the land as that of a parent and child.

Despite this, Richard Wilkes adds that when environmentalists protest against the abuse of the land, his people are "with them in spirit". He is critical of CALM's attitude to Aboriginal management of land, and adds: "they cannot take away our love for the land, even while they deny us the land". This love for the land is part of the Dreaming and their religion, whereas "Jesus, he came from another land, he walked on water, but you can't see his footprints". In contrast, the Waugyl: "we can see where he's been".

Gwen Corunna has a somewhat more critical perception of non-Aboriginal environmentalists:

My own personal feelings is that I believe a lot of environmental people go too much by the book, and not by instinct. Whereas Aboriginal people go by instinct, and there's a vast difference between book and instinct. The Aboriginal people themselves were probably the most expert environmentalists in the world, because they had to live off the land and they had to survive by the land, everything else related to the land. So they moved from section to section and season to season, and every area was significant because of the changing of seasons, where the food was. So I guess in that extent they were the real experts.
And I guess later we've got what we call the environmental people who are non-Aboriginal people, who are experts in their fields, but still have not got that same kind of instincts that's within the Aboriginal person. Because I believe that that's still there, part of their cultural being is that. If they were lost in the bush, they would be able to survive, and I'd love to learn if these environmentalists were lost in the bush, whether they would survive.

It is worth comparing Gwen Corunna's use and understanding of the word "instinct" with that given earlier by Brian Bush. From the understanding implicit in her statement, it is likely that Gwen Corunna is referring more to intuitive responses that have been cultivated as part of her people's cultural upbringing, than to genetically-acquired traits, as Brian Bush understands the term. She also indicates, in this citation, that her people moved over the land with purpose, according to the season and the availability of food in each region. This is a very different sort of activity than the "meandering about" "on walkabout" that Brian Bush mentioned in his citations given in this chapter.

Having examined the Nyungars' and environmentalists' perceptions of each other, it is also interesting to note that Kingsley Dunstan's perspective of the ECG as compared to other environmentalist or conservationists groups. In order to maintain their public accountability and credibility, members undertook careful research, and were always dressed formally, or as was appropriate:

So that when we started to meet with politicians and various government bureaucrats, developers, and that, we were treated probably a little differently to an average group of environmentalists, I suppose. When we would attend a meeting we'd have documents to substantiate what we were saying, and I think that was important in the early stages of these groups, to establish that early credibility.

He and the other members intended to be seen as other than an "average group of environmentalists", thus indicating that they are also aware of the popular media image of environmentalists as being unkempt, unemployed and uninformed. He does this, however, without defining which groups he was referring to. Kingsley Dunstan describes the members of the ECG as representing as "a mixture of skills and backgrounds", but "with a genuine desire to achieve its objectives". He attributes their diligence and sensitivity to public accountability and personal appearance as contributing to the successes of the group.

In his contribution Brian Bush criticised the radicals, particularly their views on the use of natural resources and the measures they take to put these views into practice:
I mean, the radicals lose their credibility, because if they didn't drive a motor vehicle they'd ride a bloody pushbike, [which] was mined anyway (laugh) ... same as for the forest areas. You've got to have timber, it's just trying to strike that sustainability, but there's nothing sustainable in the long term.

Environmentalists can thus encounter some critical appraisal from within the movement (even if only implied, as in Kingsley Dunstan's citation) as well as from Aboriginal people. With the diversity of goals and philosophies found within the environmental movement, as described in Chapter 1, this is not surprising. However, in the Case Study, the environmentalists cited did not represent any of the particular shades of green in a pure sense; conservationists expressed views more common to deep ecologists, such as the serious concerns about over-population and perceptions of the role of humanity in the biosphere, as well as light-green concerns with sustainable development. Some of them acknowledged that Aboriginal people had perceptions of land and priorities different to their own, whereas Dorothy Mulder felt that her feelings for the land was the same as theirs.

However, although there is a mutual acknowledgment of different perceptions and priorities between environmentalists and Aboriginal people, there is nothing to indicate that the two groups could not support each other and work together when necessary - if these differences are respected in both understanding and practice.
CONCLUSION

Having examined the views of the writers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, it is worthwhile returning to the original statement as heard from certain environmentalists: "We believe the same things, regarding land, as the Aboriginals". It is the term "same" that needs to be carefully defined before this statement can be rebutted or endorsed, either with or without qualifications. The question that needs to be asked is: "Is this a statement of identical belief and experience, or an understanding and agreement that does not necessarily imply identical beliefs and experience, and thus an expression of verstehen?" In the case of the latter, it indicates beliefs that may be considered equivalent, in the context of each respective cultural framework. With both this question and the original statement held in mind, the responses of the contributors cited in the Case Study analysis will be examined and compared.

Do we believe the same things?

While looking back onto her past childhood experiences, Dorothy Mulder came to the conclusion that: "Was there any difference in the way we felt - I don't think so", and "I really believe that the people of the land have the same attachment, whether of Aboriginal or other descent." She is the only one of the four environmentalists interviewed for the Case Study who unequivocally states that her feelings for the land are the same as those of the Aboriginal peoples she has known. Brian Bush appears to believe that it is the diminishing of "instinct" that separates the "tribal" Aboriginal peoples' perceptions and relationship to land from those of non-Aboriginals and other Aboriginals, and that this diminution is caused by the "white man's" way of life and education. He does not compare his own expressed feelings for land with those of Aboriginal peoples, as he recognises, in his own way, that there are differences.

Lyn Dunstan and Kingsley Dunstan do not directly equate their perceptions of land with those of Aboriginal peoples, either. They appear to be more concerned with their own views and goals as non-Aboriginal environmentalists, and mention the local Nyungar people only as they may be connected to the bushland and with the possibility of mutual support. By and large, both Lyn and Kingsley Dunstan, each in their own way, base their understandings of the Nyungar peoples' relationship to the land on their own acquaintance with these people, and not on theories from elsewhere. However, in their articulations of their own perceptions and goals, they do not evoke a commonality of perception with Aboriginal peoples, as Dorothy Mulder does. Kingsley Dunstan shows the most perceptive use of verstehen in his cited comparison of the way that Aboriginal peoples learn how to live in the land, as compared to the way that non-Aboriginals do (or don't). Lyn Dunstan cites her understanding of the land as coming mainly from courses of study and advice from trained experts such as botanists.
The contributions given by Yaluritja and Gwen Corunna show that in Aboriginal societies every person is trained to be an "expert" from an early age, and that non-Aboriginals do not have this kind of learning, but have to go about it their own way. The other Nyungar contributors, Richard Wilkes and Ben Taylor, emphasize that along with their need for land, Aboriginal peoples are also concerned with cultural restoration, and that these two issues are inextricably intertwined. From the contributions given by these Nyungar people, one may come to the understanding that for these people issues of land are not separated from cultural issues. Land does not just concern the well-being of the biosphere, but also the well-being of the people.

What's the land for?

All four of the environmentalists cited in the Case Study expressed criticism of their society's values in regard to land. Although Brian Bush asserts that: "you've got to have timber" and "we've got to have some happy medium", they all disagree with the economic imperative of the dominant land ethic in some way. Dorothy Mulder condemns the "greedy, selfish, unscrupulous humans" responsible for the destruction of the natural environment, and Brian Bush agrees that: "It's all for the almighty dollar". Lyn Dunstan expresses her anguish that urban development threatens the bushland she has developed an affinity for, and Kingsley Dunstan looks out over the view of Perth city from the elevation of Kings Park and asks: "What's it all for?"

These statements of criticism are directed at the individuals, institutions and perceptions within their own society that perpetuate the dominant land ethic. Although none of these contributors have "dropped out" of this society (although Brian Bush indicates that he would like to be able to), they all distance themselves from these values and perceptions and take a critical stance. The Nyungar contributors, on the other hand, seem intent on consolidating their own society and supporting its own land ethic, not just for the sake of the land, but, as stated before, for the sake of the people. These two groups are taking a different stance within their own societies, and their priorities regarding land may not be in every way identical. Their perceptions of land may thus also diverge. Any apparent similarity that emerges from their expressed perceptions of land does not necessarily mean that the underlying understandings are identical, as has been explained in the Theory section.

Nevertheless, a certain sharing of interest with environmentalists may be found in the contributions of Yaluritja and Gwen Corunna, who both deplore the misuse of natural resources and environmental degradation. However, while Gwen Corunna feels that in urban areas where the "white man" dominates, the original ancesiral presence within the land has departed, Yaluritja devotes a substantial part of his contribution towards suggesting ways in which the urban environment might be improved for the benefit of both its human inhabitants as well as the natural environment. Even so, both of these Nyungar people assert that their people, like all Aboriginal peoples, have a relationship to the land
that is not shared by non-Aboriginals; and of the environmentalists Yaluritja says: 'They have different perceptions, and seek to achieve different things, and are not linked to one particular place, like our people'. This migratory characteristic of non-Aboriginal people, and the way that it could affect their perceptions of land, was also expressed by Richard Wilkes.

Migratory movements have played an important part in the history of Western societies, culminating in the "discovery" of the New World, and the colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific since the 15th century. However, even before then, the development of agriculture, the growth of cities, changing political and social structures, religious and secular conceptual frameworks, have all combined to influence Western perceptions and values of land. Berger and Luckmann have previously been cited as saying that "symbolic universes are social products within a history" (1966:115), they are the products of change, and resistance to change.

This briefly-outlined example of some of the historical factors that have influenced Western perceptions of land may be compared to the history of the Aboriginal peoples in the Australian continent, whose perceptions and values of land were, and are, shaped by living the Dreaming in everyday life. These traditions have sustained Aboriginal peoples for over 60,000 years, on a continent that has remained relatively isolated, as compared to other countries, for that period of time. After 1788, post-contact history inflicted a brutal breach of these traditions. The loss of their lands caused these people not only an economic, but also a profound spiritual crisis, from which many are still suffering and recovering today. Time has not erased the pain, and Aboriginal peoples have not adjusted to living well without their land. As shown by citations from the Nyungar elders in the Case Study, their people cannot happily migrate, their attachments to land are still deep-rooted as a result of their long history in the land, and the ongoing law of the Dreaming.

The Dreaming Law is not resistant to change. As the observations of Tony Swain (1991, 1992) and Deborah Bird Rose (1988 b) have shown, it seems to have the capacity to incorporate post-contact influences without losing anything of its essence or functional qualities. In this way it may be compared to a web, which survives amendment or repair because of its inherent structural resilience. Without the land, however, where the ancestral spirits of the Dreaming reside, Aboriginal peoples are without their spiritual roots and connections, and are thus culturally and even physically impoverished. Citations given from the Nyungar elders, and by Aboriginal people in the Literature Analysis, strongly support this fact.

This kind of feeling for the land, and this kind of land-ownership, has largely gone un-noticed and often violated by most non-Aboriginal Australians throughout post-contact history. It is only in recent decades that more of them have begun asking "what's the land for?", thereby searching for new values and perceptions of land. All the environmentalists interviewed for the Case Study expressed strong...
affective links with the land, although in many cases these were connected to their wider environmental concerns, a critique of the dominant land ethic, and issues of human and even planetary survival. One may summarise this point by saying that while land is a crucial issue to both Aboriginal peoples and environmentalists, their values and priorities may diverge, and so may their way of perceiving it.

Global or local?

This brings us to the next point to be discussed in the Conclusion: the divergent perceptions of land between the local and the global. Citations from Deborah Bird Rose as given in Chapter 2, the perspective shown by the Gaia Hypothesis in Chapter 5, John Seed's Invocation in Chapter 6, and "The Dreamers" in Chapter 7, all serve to illustrate a comparison between the global perspective held by many environmentalists, and the more localised perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, supported by citations in Chapters 2 and 3.

Whether or not all environmentalists know of or uphold the Gaia hypothesis, it is evident from examples given in the Literature Analysis and citations from the Case Study that their concerns, while in practice perhaps focussed on local issues, are ultimately global. Lyn Dunstan asserts that the Ellenbrook bushland, for which she has a possessive affinity, really "belongs to the whole world". Kingsley Dunstan analyzes the global situation, particularly in terms of politics and power, in regard to the effect of environmental groups. While not explicitly indicating a global concern, Dorothy Mulder's criticism of the economic imperative is no doubt directed towards a wider perspective than the preservation of the Ellenbrook bushland. Brian Bush also mentions global concerns as well as local issues in his contribution, such as in his views on human over-population. In articulating these global concerns, such as population pressure, little or no mention is made of indigenous peoples.

This global perspective supported by concepts such as the Gaia hypothesis, whereby the biosphere in its entirety is regarded as a self-regulating organism, involving land, sea and atmosphere. John Seed, in his Invocation (Appendix 1), combines the global with the cosmic, whereby the "spirit of evolution" refers to not only the evolution of the species but also to the formation of the planet in the history of the universe. It may be argued that all cosmologies, by their very nature, are writ large and beyond human scale. However, John Seed's "spirit of evolution" is as remote as the Christian Heaven in its conceptualisation, while the Dreamtime ancestors of the Aboriginal peoples still dwell in the physical environment around them in localised sites, and they may be visited and cared for by those people who are associated with these sites. Gwen Corunna's contribution to the Case Study illustrates this most clearly.
As well as the divergence of perspective or priority between the global and the local as shown by these examples, the anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose (1992:219-220) has perceived a divergence of "centralized" and "localised" perspectives between the two cultures. This has been shown in her citations in Chapters 2 and 10. Her understandings are supported by citations from Aboriginal people, as indicated in the Literature Review. She posits in this excerpt that Yarralin people share a similar understanding to the Gaia hypothesis, and in the context of the belief that the land is, in a sense, alive, and that all parts of the ecosystem are inter-related, her views may be correct. As has been shown in Chapter 5, however, this was not exactly James Lovelock's original understanding of "Gaia", which was more an application of systems theory to global ecology. One might argue that these perspectives of Lovelock and Yarralin people are equivalent from within their own respective world views, but it certainly cannot be said that they are identical.

The more localised perspective of Aboriginal peoples becomes easier to understand when one remembers that in Aboriginal societies only certain people are allowed to speak for certain sites or areas of land, regarded as their "country". To do otherwise, to presume to speak for other peoples' country, is against their custom and law. The globally-oriented "biosphere" people, such as Western societies, have no such restriction, and their concepts of land-ownership are much more fluid, as land can be bought or sold on its market value.

Interestingly, despite its mention by Marshall (1992), Hallen (1994), Rose (1992), Swain (1992) and Seed (1989) as cited in the Literature Analysis, the Gaia hypothesis was not cited by any of the any of the environmentalists who contributed to the Case Study, either as a concept or as the source of their perceptions.

A Wilderness of Dichotomies

With the texts studied in the Literature Analysis and the citations given by environmentalists in the Case Study Analysis indicate that non-Aboriginal people have a strong tendency to dichotomise their perceptions and understandings. In terms of the issues dealt with in this thesis, this applies not only to land, but also to Aboriginal peoples as they relate to the land. Their conceptualisation appears to be based on "either/or" conflicts, whereby sets of concepts are polarised and in competition with each other. In Chapter 11 Lesley Head has listed some of these, as they relate to non-Aboriginal concepts of "wilderness" (1992:49), and it was found that these dichotomies reflected those held towards Aboriginal peoples.

To recapitulate: The pristine, untouched, uninhabited wilderness is contrasted to the despoilt, over-populated urban areas; this is the city/wilderness dichotomy referred to or indicated in many of the
texts and citations. This also parallels the sacred/profane dichotomy, as applied to the landscape. The concepts of "traditional" versus "non-traditional" are applied to Aboriginal peoples as being either "outback" or "tribal", or urban and therefore not "authentic". These distinctions have been made on the basis of their use of non-Aboriginal technology, their place of residence, and their way of life.

These dichotomies are not value-neutral, and therein lies their problematical nature. One is always preferred over the other, but the preferences do not always reflect in non-Aboriginal lifestyles. For example, the realm of "nature" or "wilderness" is usually seen as having a moral and even spiritual superiority to the urban, civilized realm, even though that is where most of them remain to live. Many may be forced to do so by expediency or necessity, but those who do move out of the cities end up taking much of the city with them. One's quiet home amid the trees soon gets surrounded by others, and shopping centres and busier roads soon follow. This is the case with Ellenbrook, whose residents end up either deciding to move further out into rural areas, or staying instead to fight "selfishly" and "possessively" (to paraphrase Lyn Dunstan) against creeping urban development. Even so, they know that if it is prevented from happening in Ellenbrook, it will surely happen elsewhere.

It is perhaps no wonder that urban-based non-Aboriginals, and in particular environmentalists, regard the way that Aboriginal peoples live in the land in outback regions as the ideal way out of this Catch 22. Their status as the "original environmentalists" seems duly warranted. Unfortunately, urban Aboriginal peoples do not fit into this often-idealised perception, nor do those who use modern technology or adopt other "white man's" ways. In many popular non-Aboriginal depictions and understandings, Aboriginal peoples are expected to embody pristine culture as well as pristine "nature", in contrast to the polluted, corrupted urban environment and the culture that created it.

As stated throughout this thesis, dichotomised perspectives seem to underpin Western world views and values. These have their basis in the Judaeo-Christian world view, and the Neo-Platonic dualism that strongly influenced the religious concepts and philosophies of many earlier Western societies. Deborah Bird Rose has also referred to Western perspectives and social structures as "monocentric" and "centralized" (1992:218-220), which links to the global perspective discussed earlier. The centralized structures of Non-Aboriginal societies, such as their urban areas, may well be a major factor in environmental problems, such as when extensive roads and freeways are needed to take those who live in the outlying areas of the cities to their places of work and recreation. In contrast, while Aboriginal perspectives and social structures are "a-centred", they are also less likely to perceive the world as dichotomized. When each part of the world, each tree and human being, has got it's "own story" (to paraphrase Bill Neidjie), there is more likely to be a multiplicity of perspectives, each one speaking for its own people, its own land, and its own concerns.
It may seem inconsistent, or paradoxical, then, to point out that from the material studied for this thesis, Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of land showed a greater coherence than those of the non-Aboriginal writers and the environmentalists who were interviewed. It would appear that beneath this multiplicity of localized perspectives there is an underlying unity, or commonality of understandings. Deborah Bird Rose cites Yarralin people's perspective as: "one of a multi-centred world in which each centre is structurally equivalent, and linked, to every other centre" (1992:20). These linkages may be perceived as a web, extending beyond Yarralin society, into other Aboriginal societies, and preserving both the particular qualities of each as well as the shared understandings. This is a metaphoric way of explaining what may seem, from a non-Aboriginal viewpoint, to be illogical, but for Aboriginal peoples it is made plain in the Dreaming Law.

From the Literature Analysis and the Case Study, non-Aboriginal perspectives of land, including those of the environmentalists, did not display such a consistency of outlook or priority. There is the divergence between the "light greens" and the "deep greens", and between those who respect Aboriginal peoples and their cultures, and those who violate that respect through idealisation and "positive" stereotypes that are as deleterious as the negative ones. Although the members of the ECG who were interviewed shared a common concern for the environment in a global as well as local perspective, their views diverged in many ways on other issues. And, when compared to some of the viewpoints that emerged from the non-Aboriginal writers cited in the Literature Analysis, an even greater diversity of outlook was shown.

This discovery does not give cause to dismiss the perceptions and feelings for land that were expressed by non-Aboriginal environmentalists in this thesis. While Aboriginal peoples have a more older and cohesive tradition to draw from, most environmentalists have had only the Green movement of the last few decades to draw on for their political as well as philosophical perspectives. As Kingsley Dunstan put it: "It's more of a learned thing in a relatively very short time". Their diversifications of outlook and priority may well reflect a need for the exploration of many ideas, and experimentation, along with the concomitant mistakes. In seeking to create a new land ethic, or even a new society, it may be tempting to idealise those of other peoples as exemplary models, and even to try to emulate them or claim their traditions. This is, however, one of the lessons that will need to be learnt: that each culture or group must cultivate a relationship with the land that best suits the conceptual framework and needs of its people, while giving due respect to the ways of others.

The Call of the Land

In this thesis concepts such as the Gaia hypothesis, and practices such as those of the Dreamers, have been examined critically, especially in their regard to attitudes to land, and Aboriginal peoples. In practice, the Gaia hypothesis can become just another universalizing metaphor, ignoring the dier-
sities and needs of indigenous peoples, and those who do not participate or believe in Lovelock's technologically-based global self-awareness. The Dreamers perceive themselves as initiating a similar global awakening, based on their earth-centred meditational practices. Cowan and Lawlor seek the "universal Dreaming" for similar purposes, and a workshop offers it as a means of self-development. These are some of the ways in which non-Aboriginal writers have expressed their perceptions and aspirations, in regard to land and indigenous cultures, in the Literature Analysis.

The environmentalists cited in the Case Study analysis did not refer to any of these practices and their concomitant mystical beliefs, in their statements, yet each indicated, either directly or implicitly, that their perceptions of land diverged from the dominant land ethic. This appears to give them both much fulfilment as well as great stress, particularly in their efforts to save the Ellenbrook bushland, and in perceiving the environmental degradation around them. They all expressed some degree of pessimism for the future, yet believed in persisting with their cause. Whatever underlying philosophy sustains them, it suffices to maintain their commitment to the land.

Models such as the Gaia hypothesis, and practices such as those of the Dreamers, can, I believe, offer a viable alternative to the dominant land ethic if they can be upheld and carried out without ignoring the presence and violating the needs of indigenous peoples. It is the underlying assumptions, and the lack of acknowledgment of the diversities in perspective and culture that does the real harm. If indigenous peoples have anything to teach environmentalists, it is that there are a multitude of perspectives within this earth, and that they are all "structurally-linked and equivalent (ie. not the same), to every other centre" (Rose, 1992:220). This also refers to the beliefs and practices that accompany those perspectives. As non-Aboriginal peoples, most of us inherit a Western conceptual framework. The dominant, and dominating, land ethic is part of this, but it can not be effectively changed by appropriating aspects of indigenous peoples' cultures. To do so only perpetuates the act of domination. We may be inspired, or guided, by their world-view and ways of life, but beyond that, we will have to create a new land ethic in our own way. In the words of Veronica Brady: "We are who we are, and are called as we are" (1991:37).
APPENDIX I

INVOCATION - John Seed (1989:2-3)

Invocation

We ask for the presence of the spirit of Gaia and pray that the breath of life continues to caress this planet home.

May we grow into true understanding—a deep understanding that inspires us to protect the tree on which we bloom, and the water, soil and atmosphere without which we have no existence.

May we turn inwards and stumble upon our true roots in the intertwining biology of this exquisite planet. May nourishment and power pulse through these roots, and fierce determination to continue the billion-year dance.

May love well up and burst forth from our hearts.

May there be a new dispensation of pure and powerful consciousness and the charter to witness and facilitate the healing of the tattered biosphere.

We ask for the presence of the spirit of Gaia to be with us here. To reveal to us all that we need to see, for our own highest good and for the highest good of all.

We call upon the spirit of evolution, the miraculous force that inspires rocks and dust to weave themselves into biology. You have stood by us for millions and billions of years—do not forsake us now. Empower us and awaken in us pure and dazzling creativity. You that can turn scales into feathers, seawater to blood, caterpillars to butterflies, metamorphose our species, awaken in us the powers that we need to survive the present crisis and evolve into more aeons of our solar journey.

Awaken in us a sense of who we truly are: tiny ephemeral blossoms on the Tree of Life. Make the purposes and destiny of that tree our own purpose and destiny.

Fill each of us with love for our true Self, which includes all of the creatures and plants and landscapes of the world. Fill us with a powerful urge for the wellbeing and continual unfolding of this Self.

May we speak in all human councils on behalf of the animals and plants and landscapes of the Earth.

May we shine with a pure inner passion that will spread rapidly through these leaden times.

May we all awaken to our true and only nature—none other than the nature of Gaia, this living planet Earth.

We call upon the power which sustains the planets in their orbits, that wheels our Milky Way in its 200-million-year spiral, to imbue our personalities and our relationships with harmony, endurance and joy. Fill us with a sense of immense time so that our brief, flickering lives may truly reflect the work of vast ages past and also the millions of years of evolution whose potential lies in our trembling hands.

O stars, lend us your burning passion.

O silence, give weight to our voice.

We ask for the presence of the spirit of Gaia.

— John Seed

Thinking Like a Mountain
APPENDIX 2


THE RELATIONSHIP OF ANIMALS
AND HUMANS IN THE DREAMTIME CREATION

All-Father
Crystal Sky Throne

All-Mother
Rainbow Womb

Ancestral Beings
Animal and human characteristics combined
in the ancestral personalitites

Earth Formation
Animal Humans

External Nature of Animals
Express the quality and
characteristics of the ancestors in
body and behaviour

Internal Nature of Humans
Expresses the quality and
characteristics of the ancestors in
psychology and emotion

Internal Nature of Animals
Internal life is absorbed in the
universal dreaming

External Nature of Humans
Body proportion expresses the
universal symmetry vertical
posture—unites earth sky polarity

Animal and human recombine in collective consciousness

Clan Totem

Patrilineal

Matrilineal

Divide as in the beginning

LEVEL I
Universal Symmetry

LEVEL II
Fields of Force

LEVEL III
Material Universe

LEVEL IV
Perceivable/Imperceivable

LEVEL V
Imperceivable/Perceivable

LEVEL VI

LEVEL VII
REFERENCES


