USE OF THESES

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SUSTAINING DESIRE
A STRUCTURALIST INTERPRETATION OF MYTH AND MALE CULT IN
CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

John A. Morton
November 1985

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University
All work presented in this thesis derives from my own research unless otherwise credited in the text.

John Morton
SUSTAINING DESIRE

A STRUCTURALIST INTERPRETATION OF MYTH AND MALE CULT IN
CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

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CAUTIONARY NOTE

The ethnographic material in this thesis comes primarily from published sources. However, much of it is of a restricted nature. Readers are urged to consider that sections of the work may not be suitable for viewing by some Aboriginal people.
To my father and my mother
Acknowledgements

This thesis was written over a four-year period financed by a scholarship from the Australian National University. I would especially like to thank my supervisors, Nic Peterson and Howard Morphy for their sustained support, advice, friendship and critical acumen over those years. Mike Young also gave generously of his time in an informal supervisory role and was a vital source of encouragement.

Many other people have had an indirect input into the work and I would especially like to single out Jadran Mimica, Don Gardner and Diane Smith. In addition, I should also thank Doug Miles and all the student members of the anthropology thesis-writing seminar who ploughed through early drafts of three chapters and offered their critical advice. David Wilkins commented on several chapters and I am particularly indebted to him for access to his linguistic skills.

Thanks to Diane Smith for her skills in drawing maps, illustrations and diagrams, and to Bob Dowhy for reproducing the photographs. Diane Smith also assisted greatly with proofing and collating.

It is usual in an anthropology thesis to express gratitude to one's informants, though in this particular case, in view of the overwhelming significance of published material on which the thesis is based, such acknowledgement would look out of place. Nevertheless, I have been from the very beginning of the project acutely aware of the genius of both the Aboriginal people (mainly Aranda) who rendered the ethnographic information and the writers who collected and presented it in print. Most of these people are now long dead, but I pay my deep respects to them all.

Finally, thanks to Diane Smith and especially Peret von Sturmer for putting up for so long with a part-time husband and father.
Abstract

The Aranda Aborigines of Central Australia are one of the most intensively studied peoples in the world. This thesis surveys the extant literature, stretching back to the 1880's, and from it mounts a detailed investigation of Aranda religious life, in particular the mythology and the practice of the male cult. The analysis is also situated against the background of previous major interpretations of Aboriginal religion, notably by Durkheim, Roheim and Stanner, and suggests that a structuralist perspective, drawing mainly on the works of Levi-Strauss and Lacan, makes significant advances in the anthropological understanding of Central Australian religious life.

Ethnographic interpretation begins in Part Two with an examination of mythology. Here five groups of myths are studied over three chapters, while a fourth chapter draws general conclusions about the nature of mythic speculation. The five myth sets comprise: 1) Central Australian (Arandic and Western Desert) sky myths; 2) stories concerned with the opening up of the world in terms of the separation of radically united contraries; 3) a single myth which accounts for the inauguration of ritual life in terms of the primordial wanderings of native cat ancestors; 4) stories which account for the origin of humanity from an initial proto-plasmic mass; and 5) an individual myth accounting for the institution of a localised totemic cult in terms of a theme of generational takeover. A persistent undercurrent in these myths is that the universe comes into being as the result of a drift towards fragmentation and multiplicity which is allied to the symbolism of loss—particularly phallic loss. In the concluding chapter this theme is related to theoretical considerations emerging from structuralism, so-called post-structuralism and psychoanalysis.

Part Three is an interpretation of the ritual cycle and charts the ceremonial participation of Aranda men 'from womb to tomb'. Broadly speaking, the findings of this part of the thesis fall into three categories: 1) that boys make their transition to 'true' humanity when they are named after their first year of life, this event being connected to the ritual use of tjurunga (sacred boards and stones) and aligned with a trajectory of psychic development which stems from a very close involvement with women, including the latter's ritual life; 2) that this close association gives rise to a pervasive symbolism of phallic motherhood which is ritually negated when a boy reaches puberty and undergoes symbolic castration at the hands of senior men—this whole process being highly elaborated and undertaken through four rituals ('tossing', circumcision, subincision and the ing-kura, sometimes known as the 'fire ceremony') whose structure is laid bare; and 3) that the symbolic castration which occurs at adolescence is logically related to the donation of blood and acquisition of knowledge and tjurunga which take place in the so-called increase rites in which men participate in the second half of their lives. The three phases of ritual life—childhood participation in women's ritual, initiation, and adult participation in men's cere-
monies - are finally drawn together in terms of an ancestral cycle of reincarnation based on the identity of both old men and young infants with *tjurunga*.

Part Four, the conclusion, situates the findings of the thesis in the psychological, moral and historical (mythical) contexts of Central Australian Aboriginal society. Drawing particularly on work done by Roheim, Stanner and Levi-Strauss, it is argued that absence of historical depth, a transcendental view of life and a shallow superego are all logically related not only to each other, but also to the Aranda's conception of *tjurunga* and the duties that people have towards them. *Tjurunga* are, in effect, the embodiment of 'Aranda traditions', linking The Dreaming, consciousness and conscience in a lasting set of collective values obtaining in an otherwise anarchic, parochial-minded world.
Orthography and Presentation of Text

There are at least three major orthographies for Arandic languages: one based initially on the work of Carl Strehlow, but later very much refined by his son T. G. H. Strehlow (and later still by other Hermannsburg missionaries); a second, which has to some extent been popularised, based on the works of Spencer and Gillen; and a third, which varies considerably according to dialect, based on current work by linguists in Central Australia. In addition, writers such as Geza Roheim and Olive Pink use orthographies which, in some respects, are distinctively their own.

The one adopted in this thesis is the first, as used in Strehlow’s (1971) *Songs of Central Australia*. The orthography was chosen in preference to others not according to linguistic criteria, but as a matter of convenience in following references. However, for technical reasons, the dialectics in Strehlow’s script have been omitted in the thesis (as have all others pertaining to European languages). To facilitate minimal accuracy of pronunciation, Strehlow’s η has been transcribed as *ng*, and ρ as *gh*.

Some of Strehlow’s transcriptions used before the publication of *Songs of Central Australia* differ from later versions. Where such divergence obtains, words have been altered to conform to the later conventions. All references to indigenous terms in quotations, no matter what the source, have been altered to conform to Strehlow’s orthography, and this has been done without the use of square brackets. This policy was adopted in order to facilitate a smoother flow of the text. All proper names based on Aboriginal words, including those of ‘tribal’ groups, have likewise been standardised. ‘Tribal’ names are as used by Strehlow, or, when not applicable, Tindale (1974). All Aboriginal words, except proper names, have been italicised, even where they have not been by other authors. Whenever song verses have been quoted, I have not indicated the omission of the Aranda versions which Strehlow usually interposes between the translations.

The ethnographic present has been assumed throughout the thesis, but this is no more than a convenience of style and the reader should constantly bear in mind the historical depth of the material which is being analysed.

All references to, and translations of, original German work by Carl Strehlow have been made with the assistance of the unpublished translation of *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stamme in Zentral-Australien* by Charles Chewings (see Chewings n.d.). I have sometimes made minor amendments to Chewings’ manuscript in order to be (in my estimation) more faithful to the original text.

References to Strehlow are always to T. G. H. Strehlow unless otherwise stated or obviously indicated by context.

Most natural species are scientifically identified in the appendix, not in the text.
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We now need new minds and new points of view, even if only about old ideas.

W. E. H. Stanner (1958)  
Continuity and Change among the Aborigines (in White Man got no Dreaming), p. 66.
Chambers Pillar, or Itirkaware as it is known by the Aranda, is a startling sandstone pillar in the traditional lands of the Upper Southern Aranda. The formation is believed by the Aranda to be the phallic body of a knob-tailed gecko ancestor, known for his incestuous liaisons in The Dreaming (see Strehlow 1978a: 114-5 and Spencer and Gillen 1927:350-1).
PART ONE

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER ONE

Past Masters 1
(The Ethnographers)

It takes many years to understand [Aborigines], and then the more you know of them, the less you know of them.

Baldwin Spencer (1920)
(Quoted in D. J. Mulvaney and J. H. Calaby, 'So Much that is New', p. 284).

The fact is that, although I speak the language, I scarcely know anything about the traditions of the people with whom I grew up ... I want to learn all I can ...

Theodore Strehlow (1932)
(Quoted in W. McNally, Aborigines, Artefacts and Anguish, p. 36).
1.1 The Aranda and their Neighbours

Although this thesis is concerned with several Aboriginal groups in Central Australia, it is primarily about the Aranda. More specifically, it is an analysis of the religious life of that group. And if there are any people known to anthropology to whom the old cliche - 'need no introduction' - applies, then it must be the Aranda. Not only are they the subject of some of the earliest and most famous high-quality ethnographies ever produced, they have also entered the ranks of the immortal by giving their name to a kinship 'type'. In addition, the Aranda are the primary ethnographic reference point of the most influential of all works in the anthropology of religion - Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, first published in French in 1912. Be that as it may, some form of introduction to the Aranda and their neighbours is in order here, if only to set the stage for what is to follow in subsequent chapters. For although I shall be writing first of all about Aranda religion, it needs to be made clear exactly who the Aranda are. This is by no means as straightforward a problem as it may at first appear.

It goes without saying that the Aborigines of Central Australia are traditionally nomadic hunters and gatherers sparsely populating a vast area of arid lands. In Strehlow's (1971:Map) most mature estimation, there are ten distinct Arandic groups making a living as more or less self-contained units. These are: the Lower Southern Aranda, the Upper Southern Aranda, the Eastern Aranda (south), the Eastern Aranda (north), the Central Aranda, the Western Aranda, the Northern Aranda, the Anmatjera, the Aljauwara
and the Kaititja. All of these ten groups are defined as Arandic on the basis of the dialects which they predominantly speak. Surrounding this Aranda-speaking area are a number of other groups, mainly from the Western Desert bloc. These include the Walbiri, Ngalia, Kukatja, Matuntara, Andekerinja, Arabana, Wangkanguru and Waramanga. In addition, there are several other groups who, while not being immediate neighbours of the Aranda, are influential within the Aranda-speaking area. Among these are the Pintubi, the Pitjantjara and the Dieri (see Maps 1 and 2).

The problem of defining a corporate group in Central Australia is immense (see, for example, Berndt 1959). But Strehlow (1965) has fortunately made his criteria for demarcating Arandic sub-groups reasonably explicit. Basically, an Arandic group defined by Strehlow, such as the Western Aranda or the Anmatjera, is a collection of inter-marrying clans cohering in a territorial unit composed of a number of clan estates. Such a group, although by no means closed to both in- and out-migration, is relatively self-sufficient in terms of both production and reproduction. In addition, presumably as a by-product of this partial closure and autonomy, the group tends to speak its own distinctive dialect of Aranda.

Although all Arandic groups, together with their neighbours, share a basic culture in common, there are a number of distinctive differences (apart from dialects) which mark each group off from the others. As Strehlow (1968:1) states:

From the very beginning strong stress must be laid upon the essential disunity of every large Central Australian tribe. It is split up into a great number of smaller groups, all of which are almost independent, self-contained units. They possess
MAP 1
THE ARANDA-SPEAKING AREA
AND NEIGHBOURING GROUPS

From the maps of Strehlow (1971) and Tindale (1974)
MAP 2 - ARANDA COUNTRY IN THE
AREA OF HERMANNSBURG
AND ALICE SPRINGS

From Strehlow (1971:map)
their own hunting grounds, and frequently they are
even on terms of hostility with one another.
Customs and ceremonies and religious ideas also
differ very markedly amongst these smaller tribal
units ... There is no common system of religion
which is embraced by the tribe as a whole; all
legends - and hence all ceremonies, since the
latter are always dramatizations of portions of
the legends - are tied down to definite local
centres in each group (my emphasis).

Strehlow is undoubtedly correct here and his remarks have
done much to rectify what he refers to as the "tacit as-
sumption" of many earlier scholars

that the Aranda people, when they first came into
contact with white men, formed a well-knit, uni-
fied tribal whole, with perhaps minor local
differences in speech and culture and religious
ideas amongst some of their widely-separated sub-
groups (Strehlow 1968:47).

Strehlow's own work, which I will describe in more detail
below, is indeed testimony to the truth of his remarks.

Nevertheless, with Strehlow's cautions now well-estab-
lished, it may be time to bring Arandic studies full circle.

For the unitary nature of Central Australian Aboriginal
society and culture which struck early observers and com-
mentators is not entirely illusory. Quite apart from the
fact that all Central Australian groups share a basic
hunter-gatherer way of life, it is also clear that their
religious life exhibits a fundamental homogeneity, in spite
of sometimes quite marked differences in the use of ritual
paraphernalia and in the details of myth narration and the
chanting of songs. Important common concerns include, for
example, the role of religious ideas in demarcating terri-
tories and in giving or denying individuals access to land.
Related to this is the problem of authority in traditional
Central Australian society, which is intimately and in-
extricably bound up with the teaching of ritual knowledge.
Concerns such as these give to Central Australia a distinctive identity, which the Aborigines themselves, for all their parochialism, tacitly comprehend. An Aborigine from any Central Australian group has no fundamental cultural difficulties in settling with any other. And not least of all in order of importance in this tacit understanding is the basic orientation which all Central Australians have towards their religious world. What Bell (1983:Chapter IV) has said, in respect of men and women's different responsibilities towards what the Aborigines know as The Dreaming, can equally well apply to all the different groups of Central Australia: "We follow one Law", meaning 'We have one, and only one, fundamental way of life governed by our religion - The Dreaming'.

1.2 Study Aims

In this study of Aranda religion, then, I intend to take a line which is the opposite of that of Strehlow: I will be stressing the unity of Central Australian religion over and above its fragmentary character. But I have to admit that this intention is not tied solely to an ethnographic problematic. It is my contention that Central Australian religion not only has a fundamental unity in so far as it is a common set of assumptions about The Dreaming, but also because The Dreaming itself encapsulates certain kinds of truths about the human condition per se. Such an argument, of course, takes us a very long way from the specificities of Aranda religion, and has to be understood within a framework which is, in the strict sense of the word, anthropological rather than ethnographic, universal.
rather than particularistic.

This problem, and related matters, can profitably be returned to in Chapters Two and Three. For the moment, however, I need to establish my directions by giving a more extended introduction, both to the Aranda themselves and to the general problematic of the thesis. The first subject can, I think, be best achieved by looking in turn at each of the main ethnographers who have written on the Aranda and their neighbours, and without whom this thesis would be impossible to write. But before doing this I will expand a little on the second matter.

When Durkheim wrote *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* he had an immense problematic in view. And he chose to tackle this problematic largely, if not entirely, through the ethnographic medium of Central Australian Aborigines. The specifics of Durkheim's project need not detain us here (see Chapters Two and Three), but I do need to point out at this stage that the ethnography with which Durkheim dealt was not as high a quality as he would have supposed. True, it was some of the best of its time, but it lacked a good deal of the refinement and authenticity that was to come with the great functionalist wave of fieldwork.

As we shall see, Central Australian ethnography has been very greatly enhanced since Durkheim's time. And this suggests that it may be timely to reconsider the nature of the project enshrined within the pages of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Of course, that project has hardly been left untouched after some seventy years of anthropological research and theoretical deliberation. This is true both on a general level, where the thesis of *The
Elementary Forms of the Religious Life has been subjected to heavy criticism and revision from a great many quarters, and on an ethnographic one, where the interpretations of the Aboriginal data have been exposed to show profound weaknesses. But as yet, nobody has gone back to the materials originally used by Durkheim, placed them alongside the newer ethnographic studies, and reassessed the project - at least they have not reassessed it in quite the same systematic fashion which marks Durkheim's own enterprise.

Twenty years ago Evans-Pritchard (1965:58) remarked in connection with Durkheim's theory of religion that the French sociologist's

choice of that region [Australia] for his experiment was unfortunate, for the literature on its aboriginals was, by modern standards, poor and confused, and still is.

This assessment, even if it was wholly true at the time of writing (which is debatable), cannot be accepted any longer. The literature on Australian Aborigines is rich, complex, and in most cases expertly compiled. Certainly, many old misconceptions have been dispatched once and for all. Durkheim thought that the early

Australian material ... seemed to furnish the evidential basis for a systematic theory of religion relying on the comparative method (Lukes 1975:452-3).

If such an assessment was premature, then I would suggest that it pertains more reasonably to the situation found at the current time.

This thesis, then, has a double aim. It is first of all an analysis of a corpus of data, namely that existing on the Aranda and their neighbours. But I do not propose to undertake the analysis simply in order to shed light on Central
Australian religion. For while that is a large component of my project, I also want to use the Aboriginal ethnography to illustrate some general propositions about religion. In that sense this work is on a direct line of descent from *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Durkheim wanted to show, perhaps above all else, that religion was in some sense a repository of truth; that the idea of the soul, for example, "is not the product of a pure illusion" (Durkheim 1976:262). My aim is similar. I want to use the Central Australian ethnography to show that Aboriginal religion points towards fundamental truths - some of the eternal verities perhaps - about the human condition.

Anthropological theory and ethnographic reality sometimes do not sit easily beside each other. Indeed, often they seem very much to get in each other’s way, a problem which I think one can justifiably say beset Durkheim’s work. The difficulty is a profound one, though not, for all that, one that should be avoided. My own ability to steer a safe course between this particular version of Scylla and Charybdis will have to be judged, I think, according to whether I can manage to make reasonably convincing use of a theoretical and truly anthropological perspective without losing sight of the people under scrutiny. In my opinion, this means not simply that theories have to be shown to be applicable to a body of data, but also that the analysis of that body of data should illuminate the theory. It is perhaps this latter demand which Durkheim failed to meet. As I will have cause to point out again in Chapter Two, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* suffers from a disjunction between bold theorising and ethnographic interpretation.
In Chapters Two and Three I aim to render explicit my theoretical position. In Part Two of the thesis (Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven) I will take up a position in respect of mythology. In Part Three (Chapters Eight, Nine, Ten and Eleven) I will adopt a related position to ritual. In the final section (Part Four - Chapter Twelve) I will assess the overall analysis in terms of what I see as a fundamental meeting point for religious discourse and anthropological theory. But before embarking on this project, I need first to lay the ethnographic groundwork. As I remarked earlier, this thesis would be impossible to write were it not for the extraordinary amount of ethnographic attention that has been lavished on the Aranda. It is fitting, therefore, to begin by taking an introductory look at the work of the past ethnographic masters.

1.3 Spencer and Gillen

It is usually assumed that the ethnography of Central Australia begins with the works of Sir Baldwin Spencer and his associate Frank Gillen. While this, as we shall see, is not absolutely true, it is the case that the first outstanding and comprehensive ethnographies came from these two men. The first major anthropological reporting by the two authors came as a result of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia, carried out between May and August 1894, and whose findings were published as four volumes under Spencer's editorship in 1896. The fourth volume is devoted entirely to anthropology, and contains two papers; a lengthy piece by E. C. Stirling, human biologist and member of the expedition, and a much shorter, but more noteworthy
essay by Gillen. Gillen himself was not a member of the Horn Expedition, but the Special Magistrate and Sub-Protector of Aborigines stationed at Alice Springs. His paper shows a particularly strong concern with Aboriginal religious life—a concern which was to become a hallmark of his and Spencer's later collaboration.(1)

The Horn Expedition had traversed a good deal of the southern part of Arandic territory, together with a small part of that belonging to Western Desert groups. Accordingly, the ethnographic information that may be found in Stirling's paper pertains primarily to the groups located in the southern and central regions of the Aranda-speaking area. Gillen's paper, as one would assume, pertains particularly to the groups in the vicinity of Alice Springs.

Spencer had originally joined the Horn Expedition as a zoologist, but, largely prompted by meeting Gillen during the Expedition, he became much more anthropologically inclined.(2) In 1896 Spencer returned to Central Australia and the findings of his fieldwork, together with those of Gillen from a much longer period of time, were published in the now classic The Native Tribes of Central Australia (Spencer and Gillen 1899). This authoritative work covers a good deal of the ground originally dealt with in volume four of the Report on the Work of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia, but it includes much else besides. Of nineteen chapters, no less than fourteen are concerned with aspects of religious life. Again, southern and (particularly) central Arandic groups are the main ones covered in this work.

Spencer and Gillen had had their work sponsored in no
small measure by Sir James Frazer (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:passim), so it is perhaps little wonder that they enquired so thoroughly into the subject of Aboriginal totemism. In 1901, largely at Frazer's instigation, Spencer and Gillen were released from their normal duties so that they could undertake more fieldwork. This they did, and the ethnography of Central Australia, as well as the northern half of what is now the Northern Territory, was considerably expanded as a result. In 1904 Spencer and Gillen published *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, which, while managing to cover a good deal of old ground, adds much new information, particularly concerning the Anmatjera, Kaititja and Waramanga. Again, an overwhelming percentage of this book deals with Aboriginal religion.

Gillen died in 1912, but Spencer continued his anthropological work during that same year by studying groups in the northern half of the Northern Territory whilst serving an appointment in Darwin as Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines. In 1923, and again in 1926, he returned to Central Australia for brief periods of fieldwork. These resulted in a considerable amount of revision of earlier ideas about Central Australian society and religion, and culminated in the publication of the two-volume *The Arunta* in 1927. On Spencer's own admission, *The Arunta* only 'amplified' the original account given in *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, but it does so at times 'considerably' (Spencer and Gillen 1927:x). The new work had a total of twenty-eight chapters. At least eighteen (arguably more) were directly about religion. (3)
1.4 Carl Strehlow

Although Spencer and Gillen were the first authors to write comprehensive and authoritative accounts of the Aborigines of Central Australia, as indicated earlier, they were not the first to contribute anything at all to the subject. Academic interest in the Aborigines in fact began only fifteen years after John McDouall Stuart first traversed Central Australia in 1862. For in 1877 the Evangelical Lutheran Church, keen to build upon its original pioneering work among the Dieri, set up a mission station at Hermannsburg, in the heart of Western Aranda territory. As a result of this, ethnographic information began to trickle south to the urban centres of Australia, and thence overseas. (4)

But, anthropologically speaking, Hermannsburg's high moment began in 1894 when a young German missionary, Carl Strehlow, was taken out of service at the Bethesda Mission in Dieri country and transferred to Hermannsburg. Strehlow was an accomplished linguist and he was already quite familiar with Dieri. It did not take him long to master the Western Aranda dialect and, aside from using his skills to translate biblical teachings and hymns into Aranda, he put this mastery to good ethnographic effect. In 1907 the first volume of Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien was published — an extensive volume on the mythology of the Western Aranda. A year later the second volume appeared, this one being a study of 'Loritja' (Kukatja and Matuntara) myths, combined with disquisitions on the tju-runga or kuntangka (sacred boards made of wood or stone — Spencer and Gillen's churinga) of both the Western Aranda and the 'Loritja', and the general subject of totemism.
Between 1910 and 1920 Strehlow published three more volumes (in five parts) of *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral Australien* (1910, 1911, 1913, 1915, 1920). Volume three (in two parts) deals at great length with the totemic cult ceremonies of the Western Aranda and 'Loritja' groups. Volume four (again in two parts), although entitled *The Social Life of the Aranda and Loritja*, deals primarily with ceremonial life. The final volume, on material culture, also contains a good deal of information about religion. Strehlow, then, by the time he had finished his *magnum opus*, had produced over six hundred pages of close text on the Western Aranda, the Kukatja and the Matuntara. And the great bulk of it is specifically on religion.

Strehlow died tragically in 1922 (see Strehlow 1978a), but he had left behind him an enormous corpus of material to be added to that of Spencer and Gillen. He also left a second legacy in the shape of his then twelve-year-old son, Theodore, who was to carry on the outstanding ethnographic work. But before this particular branch of the ethnographic tree bore fruit, another outstanding anthropologist was to visit Hermannsburg and add to the welter of data. This was the Hungarian psychoanalyst and student of Sandor Ferenczi, Geza Roheim. (5)

1.5 Geza Roheim

Roheim came to Hermannsburg to conduct fieldwork in 1929, but he already had a long-standing interest in the Aborigines of the area. Prior to fieldwork he had joined the growing band of theorists (of all conceivable persuasions) who were using the material provided by Spencer and Gillen,
Strehlow and others to illustrate various anthropological points of view. Roheim’s main, but by no means only, contribution to this armchair theorising was *Australian Totemism*, first published in 1925. Again, the lure of religion over and above any other aspect of Aboriginal life proved decisive, and the bias was always to remain in Roheim’s work.

Roheim worked with people from a variety of groups – Western Aranda, Eastern Aranda, Pintubi, Kukatja and Pitjantjara – for by now, Hermannsburg had become a focal point and place of residence for Aborigines from a very large part of Central Australia. Fieldwork lasted nine months, half of it being conducted at the Mission, and half in the bush with Western Desert groups. This nine months’ labour proved to be extremely fruitful. A good ear for Aboriginal languages and an unflagging tenacity proved to be a formidable combination acting in Roheim’s favour. A remarkable amount of information, especially pertaining to ritual life, was the result.

The first major appearance of Roheim’s fieldwork findings came in 1932 in *Psycho-analysis of Primitive Cultural Types*, an extended essay (or group of essays) which takes up a whole volume of *The International Journal of Psycho-analysis*. Something like one half of this is devoted to entirely new information on the sexual life, childhood, ritual and ethnic character of Central Australian Aborigines. 1933 saw the publication of a notable paper in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* about the life of women in Central Australia. This focuses mainly on various forms of magic and dream experiences. 1934 was something of a ‘bonus’
time. In that year Roheim published *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, a book alternatively titled *Human Origins*. Here he uses a great deal of his own Central Australian data to explore the transition from nature to culture in the kind of terms first broached by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* some twenty years earlier (see Roheim 1974b). The same year saw the publication of another extended essay called *Primitive High Gods* (see Roheim 1972:1-118). Half of this paper, which was published as a monograph by *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, was conceived and written before Roheim went to the field. The finished product, however, incorporates a great deal of his Central Australian data. The basic theme of the monograph is similar to that of *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, and there is a good deal of ethnographic redundancy in the two works.

Things slowed down somewhat after this initial burst of publication, but before his death in 1954 Roheim was to publish many papers either dealing directly with Australian Aborigines or using the Aboriginal ethnography at his disposal to make a more general point. In addition, a number of important books were published. In 1945 came two monographs: first, *War, Crime and the Covenant*, a book which deals primarily with the role and function of aggression in human society, and second, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* (see Roheim 1969). The former work explores a number of new ideas which Roheim had been working with concerning the role of the oedipus complex in shattering the original psychic unity of mother and child, and a similar kind of theme is in evidence in *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*, a work which Roheim basically saw as a theoretical update on *Australian
Toemism. The book, like the 1925 publication, takes a very broad sweep, but it includes a great deal of new information from Roheim's own fieldnotes.

The Eternal Ones of the Dream is undoubtedly the high point of Roheim's thinking about Aboriginal society, but it was by no means the last thing to appear in print. In 1950 Psychoanalysis and Anthropology was published and it contained a very long chapter on The Psychology of Australian Culture. New data on Central Australia also came to light in 1952 with the publication of The Gates of the Dream. But the most significant material to see the light of day after The Eternal Ones of the Dream was published posthumously. Outstanding in this regard is Children of the Desert, published in 1974 and based on a manuscript Roheim had hoped to publish before his death. Though this work introduces significant new information about religious life, it is the least religion-oriented of all of Roheim's full-blown monographs on Australian culture and society (see Roheim 1974a). I understand that it is unlikely to be the last of Roheim's books, since another is currently being put together by Roheim's executor, Werner Muensterberger.(7)

To call Roheim a prolific writer would clearly be something of an understatement, but for all that, on the ethnographic level at least, his work is probably of lesser importance than that of Spencer and Gillen and Carl Strehlow. For it is not only The Riddle of the Sphinx and Primitive High Gods which suffer from a good deal of redundancy. As a whole, Roheim's corpus is full of repetition. Nevertheless, Roheim remains an important contributor to the ethnography, and, as we shall see, his theoretical contributions to the
understanding of Central Australian religion are outstanding, especially when compared to the writings of Spencer and Gillen and Carl Strehlow. A man who shared this view before his recent death, though not without reservations, was T. G. H. Strehlow - the last ethnographer to contribute extensively to the knowledge of the traditional Aranda.

16 I. G. H. Strehlow

In 1929, at the same time that Roheim was conducting fieldwork in Central Australia, The Board for Anthropological Research at the University of Adelaide sponsored an expedition to the same area. In 1932 the University sent another expedition. Among those involved in this research was Theodore Strehlow, son of Carl. Much of the research undertaken by the various members of the Adelaide teams was devoted to Western Desert groups, but it was Strehlow who, although by no means restricting his own future research to Aranda-speaking groups, was to become the authority on the Aranda.

Strehlow, of course, had a head-start on all other researchers in Central Australia. He had been born at Hermannsburg and had grown up speaking the Western Aranda dialect 'like a native'. And Strehlow intended his original research in Central Australia to be linguistic. In 1933 he published a brief, but innovatory, paper in *Oceania* which contains a translation of, and commentary on, a Northern Aranda sacred myth and song. Nothing of note appeared for another nine years. Then Strehlow published the first of a series of articles on the Aranda language over more
accurately, Aranda dialects). There were six papers (plus an extensive corrigenda) in the series, and these were collected together and published by Oceania as a monograph - Aranda Phonetics and Grammar (Strehlow 1944).

With this considerable undertaking out of the way, Strehlow embarked once again on more mainstream anthropological work. In 1947 (see Strehlow 1968) Aranda Traditions was published. This is a remarkable piece of work quite unlike anything else that had been published on the Aranda before it (with the possible exception of Strehlow's own 1933 article). Strehlow's academic background had been in linguistics and literature, and this shows in the production of the book. Not only is Aranda Traditions a beautifully crafted piece of work, bringing to life 'Aranda traditions' in a way that they had never been brought to life before, but it also demonstrates a conspicuous lack of any of the dogmatic tendencies one associates with the then dominant functionalist school of anthropology. Primarily a book about Aranda religion - myths, rites and the ownership of the sacred tjurunga - Aranda Traditions allows the Aranda to speak through Strehlow rather than being forced into any theoretical (or ethnocentric) straight-jacket. Accordingly, there is a great deal in Aranda Traditions which was in 1947 long before its time. The discussion of the politics of tjurunga ownership is particularly noteworthy.

Aranda Traditions focuses on the Western, Northern and Southern Aranda, and these groups were to remain the chief focus of Strehlow's attention. At the same time, however, Strehlow was to conduct a great deal of fieldwork between the 1930's and the 1960's, extending his ethnographic net
very considerably in the process. At one stage or another, Strehlow worked with all of the Aranda-speaking groups and he built up a considerable knowledge of a number of others, such as the Pitjantjara, Kukatja, Matuntara and Wangkanguru. However, the anthropological world had to wait a long time after the publication of Aranda Traditions before any substantial new ethnography got to print.

In 1964 Strehlow published his definitive summary study of Aranda religion, Personal Monototemism in a Polytotemic Community (see Strehlow 1964a).(9) Hard on the heels of this in 1965 came Culture, Social Structure, and Environment, and this in turn was followed in 1970 by Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia. In these three lengthy papers, Strehlow tackles a number of related questions to do with religion, social cohesion, territoriality and authority. In between Journey to Horseshoe Bend appeared. Aside from being an intensely moving account of his father’s last days, and being of such high quality as to win an award for the best general book published in Australia in 1969, Journey to Horseshoe Bend contains a not inconsiderable amount of interesting ethnography, much of it about Aranda religion (see Strehlow 1978a).(10)

In 1971, after over twenty years of preparation and revision, Strehlow’s last and grandest book was published. This is the massive and impressive Songs of Central Australia, a study of ritual verse and music. Although the text of this book is sometimes clogged by lengthy comparisons of Aboriginal mythological themes and motifs with European traditions and literature, it adds a very great deal to our knowledge of the religion of Central Australia. Indeed, al-
though its main focus is restricted to song, its subject matter is broad enough to make the book probably the definitive work on Central Australian Aboriginal religion. Certainly, it reads as the most authoritative, especially throughout Part Three (approximately one half of the book which situates the songs in their social and ritual settings).

1.7 Orientation

In spite of Strehlow, who wrote about the Aranda continually in the past tense in order to maintain an image of irretrievable breakdown in Aboriginal Central Australia (see especially Strehlow 1971:xlv-xlvi), the ethnography of the traditional Aranda did not cease with his death in 1978. The Aranda, admittedly having changed a good deal as a result of contact with white Australia, are still very much culturally alive in Central Australia. That much I can testify to from my own field experience, and the view would be corroborated by many others. Aranda groups still perform (at least) some of their customary rites, and many of the traditions which Strehlow — and Spencer (Spencer and Gillen 1927:ix-x) — thought would quickly die have been successfully handed on to junior generations. In addition, most Aranda still lay claim to their traditional lands and territories on religious grounds, (11) and virtually all Aranda still have an Arandic dialect for a first language. As far as this thesis is concerned, however, the Arandic ethnography basically stops with Strehlow and I do not intend here to introduce very much information that can be found outside of the main works of Spencer and Gillen, Carl Strehlow, his son
Theodore, and Geza Roheim.

I should state, however, particularly in view of my earlier remarks about the essential unity of Central Australian culture, that I do intend to draw from time to time on comparative evidence, mainly drawn from the large ethnographic corpus on Western Desert and allied groups. It seems best, though, not to give a lengthy introduction to this corpus, since it will only be playing a supporting role in the analyses. The ethnographic scope of this thesis is primarily limited by the concentrated nature of the research that has been done on the Aranda. In effect, this means that my main geographical focus can be taken as the area which immediately surrounds an axis drawn between Hermannsburg and Alice Springs. In other words, the main groups who will be discussed are the Western Aranda, Central Aranda, Northern Aranda, Eastern Aranda (north) and Upper Southern Aranda.

One thing is overwhelmingly clear from the summary of the ethnography: there is tremendous scope for a new analytic study of Central Australian religion. For not only is there an immense amount of ethnographic detail on religion on which to draw, there is the added incentive to bring to bear a semblance of order upon a highly fragmented data base. Of all the main ethnographers of Aranda religion, only Roheim approached his material with anything like a coherent theoretical frame, and even he (as I will argue in Chapter Two) did not use this frame to best possible effect. Spencer and Gillen on the one hand, and Carl Strehlow on the other, were basically atheoretical in their writings,\(^{12}\) while Roheim perhaps allowed his tendency for grand theory to stand in the way of clarity of ethnographic exposition. As
Strehlow (1971:xvii) has commented: "Too many half-truths mar his writings", to which one might add that if Roheim had restricted himself to more modest efforts, he may well have been better able to see the wood from the trees.

Paradoxically, perhaps, it is Strehlow who often comes nearest to giving us an impressive analytical account of Aranda religion - paradoxically, because it is evident that Strehlow (1964a:750) had a good deal of scorn for anthropology as "a study of dead museum specimens, abstract social theories, and neat, cold, and boring dissections of human institutions". As a counter to this, Strehlow came to anthropology with a literary background and something of an informal phenomenological approach to his subject matter. His efforts to make the Aranda heard behind the welter of 'objective', and sometimes clinical, commentary often appear as incisive interpretations. We will encounter several of these in the body of the thesis. But as Strehlow himself (1971:xvi-xvii) was only too ready to admit, in spite of a number of excellent points made by Roheim, the work of interpreting the rich symbolism of Central Australian religion has all (or very nearly all) to be done.

Like Dr Roheim, I hope some day to work out in full the symbolism and the concepts that are expressed in the aboriginal songs; but before doing that I want first to translate all the songs in my possession so that others can check my theories for themselves. I do not for a moment believe that all of our present-day psychological or sociological explanations about the aboriginal Australians and their institutions are sufficiently well-attested or statistically validated to survive the criticisms of later generations. Psychological and sociological theories themselves will no doubt undergo considerable changes within the next hundred years. We cannot help our ignorance of such future trends; but we should at least do all within our power to ensure absolute accuracy in whatever documents we are accumulating now for future
research.

Unfortunately, Strehlow never achieved his stated aim, and we cannot even be sure how much of his collection of songs, myths and so on he managed to translate before his death, since those documents 'accumulating now for future research' are locked away beyond the prying eyes of most of the anthropological community. Nevertheless, it is timely to pick up where Strehlow left off, since we are now in an excellent position to proceed with a reasonably comprehensive symbolic analysis of Central Australian religious life. The ethnography, while far from complete (like any ethnography), is extensive; and as Strehlow predicted, anthropological theory has moved on considerably since it was last thoroughly applied to the Central Australian material. It is now beginning to "blossom into maturity at last as the true Science of Man" (Strehlow 1964a:750). We need now in the next two chapters - without losing sight of the ethnographic scope of our problems - to see exactly how.
CHAPTER TWO

Past Masters 2
(The Interpreters)

When the Australian is carried outside himself and feels a new life flowing within him whose intensity surprises him, he is not the dupe of an illusion; this exaltation is real and is really the effect of forces outside of and superior to the individual.

Emile Durkheim (1912)
The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, p. 225.

I knew Pukuti-warra and Yirrampa and it is through the believer that a god is really known.

Geza Roheim (1934)
2.1 The Durkheimian Legacy

In this chapter I propose to discuss three major contributors to the theoretical understanding of Aboriginal religion. Two of these - Durkheim and Roheim - wrote particularly about Central Australian Aborigines, while the third - Stanner - wrote chiefly about the Murinbata of the Port Keats district near Darwin. I have chosen these three commentators partly because of the singularity of their views, and partly because of the profound influence they have had on Australian anthropology. Between them, I believe they provide a firm basis on which to build a coherent and revealing theory of Central Australian Aboriginal religion. That theory will be the subject of Chapter Three, but before I can construct it, I need first to summarise the contributions of the theoretical 'past masters'.

Durkheim was neither the first nor the last writer to use Australian ethnography for theoretical aims; but he has arguably been the most influential. To be sure, Frazer and other evolutionists before him had capitalised on the ethnography, but it was Durkheim whose contribution was truly lasting. Religion was an abiding interest of Durkheim's, and *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* was in many ways the climax of his sociological career. Following Goldenweiser (1975), Stanner (1979:111) refers to the book as

five brilliant theses about religion, totemism, social control, ritual, and thought, all inspired by Aboriginal materials.

And the different strands of the book are indeed complex.

If it is true, as Stanner (1979:111) suggests, that "[s]ome anthropologists may have escaped Durkheim's influence" in the study of religion, they must be very few in
number. The impact of the book was immediate and profound, and although it came under fire from a veritable salvo of criticisms, the impact remained. For whatever the nature of the criticisms—too many and too detailed to be reproduced here in anything like their fullness—it seemed as if Durkheim had offered, if not completely demonstrated, a number of essentially profound propositions about religion in general and Aboriginal religion in particular.

The 'five theses' referred to by Goldenweiser and Stanner are these: 1) the theory of religion itself, based on the fundamental dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, and of the identification of the former with society or the moral community conceived of as a 'church'; 2) the theory of totemism, historicist in orientation and arguing for a kind of primal identity between totemic species and clans; 3) the theory of social control, in essence stating that the sacred reveals itself to men as intrinsically powerful and mysterious due to its correspondence with the realities of the power and mystery of social forces; 4) the theory of ritual, based on the idea that rites exist as the practical side of religion in order to create and sustain wholesome social sentiments in the minds (hearts?) of the believers; and 5) the theory of thought, perhaps the most radical of all the theses, stating that all conceptual thought, indeed classification itself, owes its existence to society and its religious apprehension. This final thesis had earlier been developed in collaboration with Mauss in the classic text *Primitive Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]).

By modern standards it must be said that the different strands of these arguments do not cohere well in *The Ele-
mentary Forms of the Religious Life. The book is marred by what Lukes (1975:480) refers to as the logical failings ... characteristic of Durkheim's thought as a whole - in particular, argument by elimination, special pleading to account for awkward evidence and, above all, petitio principii.

These are what Levi-Strauss (1967:10) has more picturesquely called "the icy winds of dialectic, the thunder of syllogisms, and the lightning flashes of antinomies".

But on a perhaps more significant note, Levi-Strauss (1967:15) has also called attention to the disparity between the theoretical aims of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life and the ethnographic analyses of Aboriginal religion.

[Durkheim] has often been reproached for having formulated, in the second part of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, a theory of religion so vast and so general that it seemed to render superfluous the minute analysis of Australian religions which preceded it and - one would have hoped - paved the way for it.

Yet the enterprise remains both daring and bold. Stanner (1979:141), for all his incisive criticisms of Durkheim's "brilliant muddle", thought that The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life was the only thing of lasting value for the understanding of Aboriginal religion to come out of pre-1920 anthropology. And while one may want to differ with Stanner on the point of emphasis, it is undoubtedly the case that Durkheim's intuitions, if not the absolute basics of his theories, have acted as the very bedrock for the anthropological understanding of religious life.

Durkheim discerned that there is a profound relationship between a number of key aspects of social life which account for religion having a just claim to being the guard-
ian of eternal verities. These are outlined in the 'five brilliant theses'. Whatever else religion is, asserted Durkheim, it is not entirely illusion. The idealisation which always enters religious life, and which often appears to the non-believer as a sheer error or mistake, corresponds to something true. It symbolises something - society. Everywhere men feel themselves to be under restraint by external forces - forces which the narrow horizons of individual life cannot directly comprehend. And those forces, manifesting themselves to people as the sacred world, are quite real. They are the forces of social cohesion which guarantee the continuity of the group. In other words, to use terms borrowed from a different tradition, society only manages to apprehend itself in alienation. "[T]he sacred principle is nothing more nor less than society transfigured and personified" (Durkheim 1976:347). Society grasps itself as an externality through individual consciousness, but at the same time transcends that consciousness by common allegiance to the sacred. The sacred itself is always conceived in terms of collective representations; as the conscience collective of the 'church'.

The theory of totemism is a piece of pseudo-history dependent first of all on the prior establishment of the social nature of the sacred. Having first asserted that the totem, being a quasi-divinity, is sacred - and thereby social - it is but one straightforward step to assert in turn that, for the Aborigines, totems are collective representations of clans. For the clan, in Durkheim's opinion, is the most primitive form of social organisation known, and it follows that since totemism and clans 'go together',
totemism must be the elementary form of religious life. This, then, was part of the rationale for choosing Aborigines as the main subject matter for The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Since the Aborigines were thought to be the most socially primitive of all people known to the anthropological world, they should afford an exemplary case study of the barest essentials and rudimentary framework of religion per se. Australian totemism is privileged as an arena of analysis because it is the simplest, the most elementary, form of religion that we know.

The thesis on social control may be briefly stated as follows. Because the opposition between the sacred and the profane is isomorphic with that between society and the individual, we must look to the sacred for an understanding of socialisation. It is necessary for individuals to submit to social forces – what, perhaps, we might call norms, values and moral expectations – if they are to live in society, and indeed, since it is necessary for man to live in society, he cannot escape these forces. In the Aboriginal case, these forces appear in consciousness as the 'totemic principle'.

It is not the clan emblem, the totemic design, which is worshipped, nor the totemic animal, nor the various beings and things which form part of the totemic cycle of participation; but the totemic principle which pervades them all and constitutes their holiness (Goldenweiser 1975:217).

And in submitting to this principle in his rites, the Aboriginal submits to socially transmitted values. Or as Durkheim (1976:226) himself puts it:

[The]he practices of the cult, whatever they may be, are something more than movements without importance and gestures without efficacy. By the mere fact that their apparent function is to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to his god, they at the same time really strengthen the
bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member, since the god is only a figurative expression of the society.

The theory of social control, then, leads directly to the theory of ritual, arguably the one thesis of the five to which Durkheim paid considerable ethnographic attention. As has often been pointed out, it was in the analysis of ritual that Durkheim seemed to come close to violating his own rules of sociological method by taking recourse to psychology as an explanatory principle (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1965: 67-8). Rites, said Durkheim, are the essential component of religion and are in some sense fundamentally prior to myths and beliefs about divinities and 'totemic principles'. A man undertakes ritual action out of moral obligation, but as a result of the realisation of this obligation, he is psychologically transformed. He shares with his fellow ritual practitioners a kind of core feeling, which he describes in terms of the condition of his soul. But it is the collective action or 'effervescence' of the rite which instils the transformation of the soul, and the transformation is in reality nothing more than the re-created social situation of the person. The beliefs which are used to describe the transformation come about as genuine speculations and interpretations about the objective, but at the same time subjective, feelings experienced in rite. The feelings themselves constitute the morale of the social body.

The nature of this speculation brings Durkheim to his fifth thesis - that on the origin of thought. In Primitive Classification Durkheim and Mauss (1963:82-3) had stated quite baldly that:

Society was not simply a model which classifica-
tory thought followed; it was its own divisions which served as divisions for the system of classification. The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men, into which these things were integrated. It was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct. Moieties were the first genera; clans, the first species. Things were thought to be integral parts of society, and it was their place in society which determined their place in nature.

This was not an easy argument to sustain, but in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* Durkheim tried valiantly to give it flesh.

Put simply, Durkheim believed that he had found the origin of conceptual thought in the speculations man made about the subjective states he experienced in rites. In a sense, this was a theory about the relationship between myth and rite, and Durkheim had for a long time given the latter a fundamental priority. As he said in 1887 (see Durkheim 1972:219):

Men did not begin by imagining gods; it is not because they conceived of them in a given fashion that they became bound to them by social feelings. They began by linking themselves to the things which they made use of, or which they suffered from, in the same way as they linked each of these to the other - without reflection, without the least kind of speculation. The theory only came later, in order to explain and make intelligible to those rudimentary minds the modes of behaviour which had thus been formed. Since these sentiments were quite similar to those which he observed in his relationships with his fellows, man conceived of these natural powers as beings comparable to himself; and since at the same time they differed amongst themselves, he attributed to these exceptional beings distinctive qualities which made them gods. Religious ideas thus result from the interpretation of pre-existing sentiments and, in order to study religion, we must penetrate to these sentiments, avoiding the ideas which are only the symbol and surface expression of these.

It is from this mythical speculation, Durkheim came to
assert, that general and imperative mental categories are
derived. Thus, the 'totemic principle' (or mana), being the
first conception of abstract force, is the prototype of the
very idea of force; the notion of causality comes from
similar deliberation; the idea of totality comes from the
experience of the group; and time and space only come to be
standardised as a result of common experience.

Since the world expressed by the entire system of
concepts is the one that society regards, society
alone can furnish the most general notions with
which it should be represented. Such an object can
be embraced only by a subject which contains all
the individual subjects within it. Since the uni-
verse does not exist except in so far as it is
thought of, and since it is not completely thought
of except by society, it takes a place in this
latter; it becomes a part of society's interior
life, while this is the totality, outside of which
nothing exists (Durkheim 1976:441-2).

In these five theses, Durkheim managed to link together
a number of otherwise disparate fields: conscience and con-
sciousness, morality and morale, thought and commitment, re-
ligion and social reproduction, and so on. But although the
influence of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life was
profound on both sociology and anthropology, it is ironic
that it did little to touch the ethnographers who had ren-
dered so much of the necessary ethnographic information. It
is equally ironic that it fared just as badly with the
future generations who came to work in Central Australia.
Long before the publication of The Elementary Forms of the
Religious Life, Spencer (in Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:394)
had already decided that Durkheim "simply [did] not
understand matters", although he never came to mount any
major criticism in print. The senior Strehlow seems to have
been silent on Durkheim, while Roheim, although not disre-
garding him completely (see below, this chapter), had another theoretical furrow to plough. The junior Strehlow also completely ignored Durkheim, though since he rarely mentioned any theoretical commentators (except for Roheim) other than in passing, it seems unfair to see this, as Evans-Pritchard (1981:168) has, as anything like a damning indictment.

Much of the critique of Durkheim has already been well-accomplished, and it would take me too far from my ethnographic concerns to deal with this critique in anything like a thorough way. However, the five theses are important to bear in mind. Together, I would suggest, they represent a programme — moreover, a programme to which I propose to stay reasonably close in this thesis. But in order to do this, some form of criticism must be necessary. This, I believe, can be achieved most economically by looking first at what other important theoreticians have had to say about the Aboriginal ethnography.

2.2 The Psychoanalytic Intrusion

Just one year after the publication of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Freud published Totem and Taboo. In spite of the obviously very broad intentions of Freud’s book, the author was tentative about its findings.

The two principle themes, totem and taboo, which give the name to this small book are not treated alike here. The problem of taboo is presented more exhaustively, and the effort to solve it is approached with perfect confidence. The investigation of totemism may be modestly expressed as: ‘This is all that psychoanalytic study can contribute at present to the elucidation of the problem of totemism’ (Freud 1938:6).

However, Freud never saw any reason to revoke the main
hypothesis concerning the origin of totemism. Indeed, in *Moses and Monotheism* he was substantially to reaffirm it. But what exactly is that hypothesis? And how does it relate to the Central Australian ethnography?

The dramatic myth of the primal horde, through which Freud accounts not only for the origin of totemism, but also the origin of religion itself, is too well-known to be explained in great detail. Essentially, Freud and Durkheim agree to the extent that they both maintain that totemism is the primal form of religious life. Where Durkheim found the clan to be the simplest form of society, Freud saw its precursor in the horde – a group of proto-humans under the direction of "a violent, jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away the growing sons" (Freud 1938:189). It was out of this primal tension, says Freud, that both society and religion were born.

Freud's (1964:81-3) own summary of the primal horde theory of *Totem and Taboo* in *Moses and Monotheism* is terse. He says that the "decisive step" towards society and religion in prehistoric times came about when the all-powerful father was murdered by his sons and eaten by them. The consumption of the father was prompted by the fact that the sons not only feared and hated him, but at the same time revered him as an ideal as well. They in fact wanted to be like him: hence the jealousy, and the cannibalism, which was "an attempt to ensure identification with him" by incorporation.

But, says Freud, the sons then fell into dispute, each wanting his father's heritage for himself. Realising the futility of their struggles with each other, they agreed on
"a sort of social contract".

The first form of a social organization came about with a renunciation of instinct, a recognition of mutual obligations, the introduction of definite institutions, pronounced inviolable (holy) — that is to say, the beginnings of morality and justice. Each individual renounced his ideal of acquiring his father's position for himself and of possessing his mother and sisters. Thus the taboo on incest and the injunction to exogamy came about ... Recollection of their father persisted at this period of the 'fraternal alliance'. A powerful animal — at first, perhaps, always one that was feared as well — was chosen as a substitute for the father ... In relation to the totem animal the original dichotomy in the emotional relation to the father (ambivalence) was wholly retained. On the one hand the totem was regarded as the clan's blood ancestor and protective spirit, who must be worshipped and protected, and on the other hand a festival was appointed at which the same fate was prepared for him that the primal father had met with. He was killed and devoured by all the tribesmen in common ... This great festival was in fact a triumphant celebration of the combined sons' victory over their father.

It is well enough known that Freud relied less on ethnography for this hypothesis and more on findings in the psychoanalytic study of children. For Freud, phylogeny and ontogeny bear each other's stamp, and the fact that children could be shown often to project their fear and hatred of their fathers onto animals was enough to convince Freud that primitives (both historical and contemporary) must have done the same. But of course, Freud did not compare his psychoanalytic findings with thin air. A good deal of ethnography finds its way into Totem and Taboo, including some from Spencer and Gillen. However, Freud did not use this ethnography in anything like the systematic manner of Durkheim.

It was left to Roheim to show the relevance of Freud's thesis for Aboriginal Australia and to bring to bear something like a semblance of psychoanalytic order to Australian ethnography. As stated in Chapter One, this process really
began in 1925 when Roheim published *Australian Totemism*, a breathless romp through the Australian materials which virtually defies summary. The book is thoroughly loyal to Freud and is essentially historicist in orientation, actually attempting to build up a psycho-history of the prehistoric settlement and colonisation of Australia by Aborigines. Six phases are posited and they basically cohere around Freud's myth of the primal horde (see Roheim 1925:438 for summary). On the whole, however, the book is most notable not for its pseudo-history, but for the reduction of Aboriginal religion to psychoanalytically conceived symbolism.

Kroeber (1979:26) once remarked of Roheim's work that it was "so organized as to be unusable" by anthropologists, and it is indeed true that Roheim's books and papers suffer from a number of overriding problems — a stifling use of jargon, a tendency to ramble, a lack of coherent structure, and an inclination towards dogmatic assertion, especially in respect of the understanding of the sexual nature of symbolism. In many ways, *Australian Totemism* is the worst offender on all counts. But things improved after Roheim's fieldwork and in 1932 in *Psycho-analysis of Primitive Cultural Types* he began to move away from the sterile historicism of earlier years. Now the functional side of totemism was becoming much more of a concern.

Of particular note is Roheim's use in 1932 of Aboriginal exegesis to make his interpretations more convincing and — as we might appreciate now — more sound. For example, returning specifically to the question of the primal horde and its relation to Central Australian religious practice, Roheim (1932:72-3) states:
I have repeatedly been told that if a boy were not initiated something terrible might happen. He might become an erintja, i.e. devil, fly up into the air and kill and eat all the old men of the tribe. This is what the ritual must prevent, first by going as near to castrating the boy as may well be imagined (circumcision and subincision), and then by creating a basis of identification with the men. 'Don't cry; your penis is now like mine, you are a man,' Kanakana said to the boy whom he had circumcised. The identification is again ambivalent. It is a libido identification based on the penis; father and son both in erection, the mother absent. But it is also an identification on the basis of a common anxiety as if the elder man said to the young one: 'See we are both circumcized, we both have the castration complex.' … [Elder and junior generations] are friends because both have the aralts [subincision]. Now in the ritual song this subincision hole is called kuna, i.e. vagina, and the same word is applied to the whole subincised penis.

It is as if the fathers were telling the sons: it is true that the women cannot be present, that you cannot have your mother; but instead of that we offer a substitute ourselves, we have both a penis and a vagina; you too will be like we are with a penis and a vagina. Like a boomerang we return to our starting point: ambi-sexuality is the cure that is prescribed against the Oedipus complex. A stream that rushes like a torrent to its goal is rendered harmless by a canal into which part of its waters flow; what remains can go on flowing without threatening the stability of its shores.

…

Since immemorial time, the process has been going on. Libido has been diverted from its direct incestuous and genital aim into new channels. The genito-fugal libido thus reinforcing the narcissistic cathexis of the ego, it has become possible for many males to live together in a horde and for humanity to fight a more effective battle against the world in general. Thus the ego, like a skillful general fighting on two fronts, uses not only its own strength but also the forces of the id in its struggle with environment. But as every analysis shews, the stand we can make against reality is based on the stand we could make against the father, and it is the deeds of the fathers and sons that are continually dramatized in ritual.

What I think is especially noteworthy about this lengthy disquisition by Roheim is the shift in emphasis away
from phylogeny and towards an ontogenetic theory of Abor-
iginal society and religion. As Muensterberger and Nichols
(1974:xiv-xvii) point out, Roheim had been tending in this
direction from as early as 1920, though it is only in his
post-fieldwork publications that we can really detect the
movement. Even so, Roheim remained faithful to Freud's own
programme. He still stressed above all else the importance
of the renunciation of instinctual aims and the manner in
which society is transformed as a result. Presumably, Ro-
heim always had in mind the lessons from Group Psychology
and the Analysis of the Ego (Freud 1905 [1921]:91-178) and
Civilization and its Discontents (Freud 1905 [1930]:243-
340), in which Freud had returned to the subjects of the
primal horde and the consequences of the deflection of in-
stinctual aims for social progress.

"The ontogenetic theory of culture", as Roheim (1974b:
Chapter III) was to call his new orientation, became the
guiding principle of all his remaining work on Aboriginal
Australia, and historicism fell almost completely from view.
In The Riddle of the Sphinx Roheim consolidated the theory
by stating that the determining factors governing Central
Australian religion are essentially twofold: the belief in
spirits "originate[s] in the primal scene and form[s] the
basis of religion" (1974b:69). In other words:

The belief in devils begins with the anxiety re-
action to the primal scene. The child sees the
copulating parents; but in the projected version
of this memory, in the version which denies the
original content, those who copulate are not the
parents but non-human devils. The anxiety is, how-
ever, fixed on real beings, chiefly animals ... In
place of devils we find the phallic ... ancestors
and the double tjurungas with whom the men
identify themselves and whose coitus they imitate
in the ritual performance ... Humanity first tries
to dispose of the disturbing content (primal scene) by projection (devils); but introjection follows the failure of this attempt (Roheim 1974b: 142-3).

By the time The Eternal Ones of the Dream appeared — some eleven years after The Riddle of the Sphinx — Roheim's work had become less 'patricentric' and far more 'matri-centric'. In the early works, and quite in line with Freud's own thinking, Roheim had concentrated almost exclusively on the father as the transforming agent in the oedipus complex. In addition — again in line with Freud — the father basically appeared as the threatening ogre. But by 1945 Freud was dead — and so was a great deal of the original emphasis of Roheim's work. Suddenly, the mother was becoming more central to the analysis.

Roheim was especially taken with some (then) recent research by Imre Hermann which dealt with the mother-infant bond.

According to Hermann, human infants are separated from their mothers at a relatively premature phase of development; hence the psychological importance of a series of attempts to cancel this separation by graspings. The grasping reflex is based on the impulse of the infant to hold on to the mother. But at the same time we also find the opposite impulse at work — a tendency to effect a separation from the mother and to grasp new objects or mother-substitutes. The impulsive wandering away of juveniles ..., especially conspicuous at puberty, is due to extroversion of the original clutching impulse. In the reaction-formation, the infant ceases to hold on to the mother because she will not let him continue to do so indefinitely, and then, with certain libido-quantas at its disposal, it cathects transition-activities such as walking, and, finally, the new object or mother-substitute (Roheim 1969:11).

Here, as Muensterberger and Nichols (1974:xxv) have pointed out, Roheim was anticipating a whole new field of research to do with transitional objects (Winnicott 1980:Chapter 1).
It is, I think, fair to say that Roheim's use of Hermann's theories gave rise to his most original and best work on Australian Aborigines. In another very broad ethnographic sweep - though one which was a good deal clearer than that of Australian Totemism - Roheim proposed what looks like a totally new theory of Aboriginal religion. Since Hiatt (1975a:9) has already made a good summary of this book, we may follow his account.

The central theme of The Eternal Ones of the Dream is that Australian religion acts both to widen the gap created naturally by parturition and to compensate the offspring for the loss of his mother. Within this general scheme, myths play three important functions. First, by celebrating phallic heroes and libidinising the countryside that they created and wandered over, myths counteract the deprivation felt by maturing youths as they become increasingly isolated from the bosom of the family. Through absorption in the myth fantasies, the boy is able in effect to say to his mother: 'I do not need you (i.e. the nipple). I can get pleasure from my own penis' [Roheim 1969:66]. Second, myths help to effect an eventual transfer of libido from the mother to the father (or, in social terms, the removal of the boy from the domestic group into the all-male cult group) by offering a heroic and supernaturally-conceived dual unity of Father and Son in place of the natural unity of mother and son. Finally, myths keep alive the dream of an eternal reunion with the mother.

Thus, as Roheim himself (1969:249-50) put the matter in perhaps his most emphatic statement on Aboriginal religion (which I quote without the original emphasis existing throughout):

Totemism as a social institution is a defense organized against the separation anxiety. As a religion it represents the genitalization of the separation period and the restitution that follows destructive trends. As an aid to man in his struggle with internal and external difficulties it is a balancing apparatus consisting of a series of introjections and projections. Finally, in its mythical form, it represents the wanderings of human beings from the cradle to the grave in a web of daydreams. It represents our efforts to deal with the problem of growing up, aided by the illu-
sion of an eternal future. In the eternal ones of the dream it is we who deny decay and aggression and object-loss, and who guard eternal youth and reunion with the mother... Mankind the eternal child, splendide mendax, rises above reality. Man can perish, but the Path, the Tao, from Life to Death, the Life that was in the ancestors and will be in their descendants, remains forever. The path is Eros, the force that delays disintegration; and hence the promise held forth in the daydream and in its dramatization is no illusion after all...

[i]ike the Savior [sic] God of Christendom, Mal-bungka the phallic hero and all the other eternal ones of the dream have a proud claim to the sentence,

[I am the Path, the Truth and the Life].

Although Roheim's work is desultory and covers a great many different themes, often without there being clear linkages between them, it is possible to discern a unitary chain of reasoning in his theoretical corpus. In the mature, post-fieldwork books, there is a continuous attempt to consolidate the 'ontogenetic theory of culture'; as I have said, moving from a 'patricentric' to a 'matricentric' view. But the two vantage points do not cancel each other out: they are essentially complementary. For example, the ambisexual-ity of which Roheim wrote in Psycho-analysis of Primitive Cultural Types, together with its functioning in respect of the oedipus complex and renunciation of instinct, is evidently closely related to the thesis concerning the transfer of libido from mother to father argued in The Eternal Ones of the Dream. Likewise, the projection/introduction formula said to be at the root of religion in The Riddle of the Sphinx is also related to the mother rejection/father acceptance schema through the image of the primal scene.

Both Roheim and Freud had occasion to mention Durkheim in their works. For example, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life has one short and unexceptional paragraph
devoted to it in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 1938:154), while Roheim (1925:187-8), in *Australian Totemism*, sent a more than affirmative nod in Durkheim's direction in respect of the latter's equation of the sacred with society. And later, Roheim (1932:106-10) was to develop this idea by saying that Central Australian *tjurunga* were a kind of materialisation of the super-ego. Durkheim himself (1976:120) had considered the Aranda term *tjurunga* to be a kind of Aboriginal gloss on the very notion of the sacred, a problem to which I shall return in this thesis. On a more general level, also, we know that both Freud and Durkheim owed a great deal to Robertson-Smith. For the present, however, I will say no more about the parallels and/or differences between Freud and Roheim on the one hand and Durkheim on the other. It is an important topic, but it can be tackled indirectly.

2.3 The Reaction of the Faithful

In a critical assessment of the effects of the works of Frazer (1910), Durkheim and Freud, Stanner wrote in 1962 (see 1979:110-1):

Three great works – the four volumes of *Totemism and Exogamy*, Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, and Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* – [created] complications from which [the] study [of Aboriginal religion] has not yet wholly freed itself. It is not possible [in a short space] to review even briefly the manner in which these three men set back understanding while appearing to advance it, or how they kept the main questions entangled with matters in no necessary connection with them. However, at the very time Durkheim was developing [his] five brilliant theses . . ., Freud was developing still more revolutionary views. Of what use now to discover the 'profoundly religious character' of Aboriginal life if religion, anyway, were but illusion? The thought of both men darkened the study they sought to light. Durkheim, paying too little attention to the elements of human experience and aspiration, considered
society the reality underlying religion; Freud, who appeared to confound dogma with religion, thought the reality the pathology of society. One made religion an ecstatic, the other a neurotic phantasm. Both assisted the growth of a sociologism concerned mainly with the sources, functions, and effects of religion identified with illusion yet, somehow, still necessary to man's collective and individual life. Some anthropologists may have escaped Durkheim's influence. Few escaped Freud's. A deepened scepticism led to an empiricism of growing aridity. Many a writer about the Aborigines dropped the word 'religion' altogether.

Of course, rather a lot is laid at the door of Freud and Durkheim here. As Stanner must have known, it was Frazer, rather than Durkheim or Freud, who was most responsible for any wariness of calling Aboriginal myths and rites religious (see, for example, the quote in Strehlow 1971:333, cf. Chapter One, note 3). In any case, if anybody did grow chary about the use of the term, it certainly could not be directly due to Durkheim, who was in many respects the champion of primitive religion, (1) or Freud, who, along with Roheim, continued to stress the specificity of religious thought and action. (2) True, in stressing that religion had something essentially 'false' about it, Freud and Durkheim may have helped to give rise to a mood of scepticism. But it must not be forgotten that both writers emphasised how religious idealism was in some sense both necessary and purposeful. We have already seen what Durkheim had to say about this in respect of society only being capable of grasping itself through a form of religious alienation, and Freud (1964:130) had also come to the conclusion that religion was in essence a "truth [in] delusional wrappings". But long before 1962, Stanner had had enough: it was time to stop reducing Aboriginal religion to the status of illusion and to
start examining it for what it is in itself — something "more complex philosophically than we have so far realised" (Stanner 1979 [1956]:24).

Stanner's reply to the sociological and psychological reductionists was a two-pronged attack: one advance was ethnographic, the other theoretical. For not only did Stanner (1963) furnish us with a sensitive and all-but explicitly comparative study of a particular Aboriginal religious system — that of the Murinbata — he also wrote two very influential papers on the general topic of the character and function of religion in Aboriginal society (Stanner 1979 [1956/1965]:23-40, 106-143). In addition, he treated the anthropological world to two theoretical pieces, one lengthy and on Durkheim (1975 [1967]), the other, published posthumously, short and on Freud (1982a). It is thus convenient to begin the critique of Durkheim and Freud (and Roheim) with Stanner.

Stanner, as Eliade (1973:196-7) approvingly points out, took the view that Aboriginal religion is to be understood 'in brackets' as a hermeneutic system. As Stanner himself (1963:vi) says at the beginning of his classic monograph On Aboriginal Religion:

I thought I should take aboriginal religion as significant in its own right and make it the primary subject of study, rather than study it, as was done so often in the past, mainly to discover the extent to which it expressed or reflected facts and preoccupations of the social order. That is, study it as religion and not as a mirror of something else.

The result of this attitude was a study of the Murinbata in terms of a religious symbolism which "defers to [a mythological] ontology": a study which saw "[a]t the core" of re-
ligion "a concern with man's being" (Stanner 1979:140).

Stanner’s approach to, and findings from, Aboriginal religion are multi-faceted, but it is possible to isolate a number of key strands. These show that his main reaction was against the Durkheimian rather than the Freudian heritage of anthropology, as indeed one would expect given the relatively insignificant effect of Freud (and Roheim) on the anthropological establishment (contrary to Stanner’s own statement). The strands I have in mind are: 1) the separation of religion from the social; 2) the denial of a purely 'mechanical' character to Aboriginal social life in its relations to religion; 3) a theory of symbolism; and 4) a theory of the functions of, and relations between, myth and rite.

The first strand is, of course, essential to Stanner’s attempt at non-reductive modelling. It is a straightforward rebuttal of Durkheim and subsumes within it a radical critique of the sacred/profane dichotomy. In his paper on Durkheim, Stanner (1975:290-6) literally pulls the sacred/profane opposition to pieces, saying that: "The schema, plainly, is empirically inadequate while at the same time being caught up with conceptual and logical difficulties". Empirically, the dichotomy is inadequate to deal with the overall structure of movements in and out of sacred time which take place in Aboriginal social and religious life (Stanner 1963:67-70), while the other problems render the whole schema a muddle.

Basically, Stanner’s critique of the sacred/profane distinction is on the grounds that it is too rigid. In the first place, while the notion of the sacred appears to have
a certain applicability, its opposition to the profane renders it fixed to a relation (or rather lack of relation) which obviates its use. Murinbata ritual, says Stanner, only makes sense as a whole if we follow van Gennep's (1977:1) example and admit a third category into the system - that of the mundane. But even then, the purely formal problems do not disappear.

The difficulties may be expressed figuratively. Let a rectangle be the suppositious 'whole universe' divided into two 'domains' which 'exclude each other' and together exhaust 'all that exists' [- all characteristics attributed to the sacred/profane dichotomy by Durkheim]. S contains all that is sacred, P all that is profane. The uniformity of S does not properly convey the 'ambiguity' and 'polarity' of 'the sacred', and the shared boundary between S and P does not convey the 'sort of logical chasm' and 'break of continuity' asserted [by Durkheim] to lie between the two domains. We need another system of divisions, such that a cross-division is made within S to show [S1] as the 'polar opposite' of S, with a domain O interposing between S-[S1] and P. This is the only condition on which S-[S1] and P can have 'nothing in common' except co-existence within the 'whole universe' of the rectangle. But what then of O? A 'dichotomous' universe of three necessary parts? A universe 'exhausted' by two parts but requiring a third to be possible? One part containing its own antithesis, the other(s) uniform? I can see no way of dealing with these and other such questions in the terms Durkheim used. On the other hand, the problems are at least eased if the implicit third category is made explicit. Then O becomes the domain of mundane things (Stanner 1975:275-6).

Stanner admits that this kind of abstract juggling does not solve other major problems. We need not concern ourselves with these at the moment, but we should ask what it is that Stanner sees as operating in the place of the sacred/profane opposition. Some clue is, of course, given by the introduction of the mundane, but the issue is spelt out more clearly in On Aboriginal Religion, where the following diagram is reproduced (Stanner 1963:26).
The reasoning behind the representation is this. R and S map the relations between the religious (R) and social (S) dimensions of the Aboriginal world, conceived in toto as The Dreaming. (3) The Dreaming, then, is "whole reality". "It is the total referent of which anything else is a relatum". The shaded and blank areas of "whole reality" indicate an essential dualism in the Aboriginal conception of the totality. For example, "[r]eality is both visible and invisible". The figure indicates "that the religious and social orders are only analytically separable". They have distinct areas each to themselves, but they also interpenetrate each other "with a more comprehensive reality of life and thought". R is placed nearer to the all-encompassing circle in order to indicate that religion "brings people closer than does social
activity to ontological reality". In order to realise this ontology, R borrows analogies from S, using them as symbols. Religion is a move towards "whole reality": rites act it out, while myths describe it allegorically. In sum, "macro-experience" itself—The Dreaming—is "the natural ground of mysticity" (Stanner 1963:26-7).

As will be seen in subsequent chapters, these images have a good deal to recommend them, and they certainly give a better idea of the complexities of Aboriginal religion than Durkheim's rather baldly-stated dualism. But in order to see how the abstract model works, we need to turn to some of Stanner's other major points.

Stanner's conception of society was an uneasy blend of a structural-functionalism which he was trying hard to shake off and a more action-oriented framework. Virtually from the very beginning of On Aboriginal Religion he showed his concern for the question: 'structure or operations?' (Stanner 1963:16), and he then made his ethnographic case quite clear by declaring that Murinbata society was not the tightly organised, unified, homogenous system that 'primitive' societies were then mainly thought to be—or at least portrayed to be.

It follows from the above that, except under hypothesis, Murinbata society and/or culture cannot be set up as 'a unified whole'. The hypothesis seems to me quite unpersuasive. The 'principles' of social interaction do not appear to have a ground of unity which can be stated. Indeed, the metaphysical conceptions which the Murinbata have developed about their own ontology of life are filled with what for the present may be called 'dualism'. It is thus impossible to deal, in any rigorous sense, with a social system which is supposed to exhibit a structure. The many classes of relations of association exhibit several distinct though connected structures (Stanner 1963:36).
It was this very lack of unity which Stanner came to see as being central to what is symbolised by religious life. But before turning to the problem of symbolism, we should note that Stanner’s recourse to a kind of proto-action theory was a significant aspect of his reworking of Durkheimian assumptions.

In Chapter Three I will discuss in more detail how Durkheim treated society as a kind of metaphysical construct. Although he was not the first to note this, Stanner certainly was one of the first to bring out the relation between Durkheim’s two misconceptions—of religion on the one hand and of society on the other. As Stanner (1975:302), quoting Ginsberg, said:

The ‘society’ on which the argument [of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life] turned was largely a figment to which, as Ginsberg has correctly said, Durkheim attributed ‘powers and qualities as mysterious and baffling as any assigned to the gods by the religions of the world’.

For just as God is monolithic, so too is society; just as the totem is transcendent, so is the clan. And yet the nature of the monolithic transcendence is nowhere specified. Rather, it is taken for granted and really corresponds, according to Stanner, to nothing but an illusion. Thus if Durkheim got his theory of religion and society wrong, it was in no small measure due to his inability to distinguish the essential dynamism of the ‘total social fact’. The allusion here to Mauss is not accidental. As we shall see in the next chapter, Stanner’s conception of Murinbata society as transactional was very close to Durkheim’s colleague’s later view of society—a view that was to have important repercussions for the revision of Durkheim’s thesis on re-
ligion.

But Stanner had his own path to follow, apparently unaffected by the French sociological school. Durkheim and Freud (and Roheim) had had their own conception of symbolism and its relationship to religion. They had both argued for quasi-materialist conceptions of religion as symbolising something hidden but real. Stanner too wants to say that religion is symbolic and that it symbolises something 'real', but the 'real' in his terms is not material - it is essential, spiritual, ontological - almost the 'unreal'.

Durkheim was confident that he had demonstrated the referent of the symbols to be concrete and unmysterious. What in fact he had done was to use novel material, in an extraordinarily vivid way, to vindicate a postulate which permanently invested his thought: that there cannot be 'an aspect of reality which evades ordinary knowledge as well as science'. His was not the ordinary positivist dogma - that it is meaningless to set up a transempirical reality - but rather a profession of faith in the destiny of science to discover and identify the empirical reality which, since there could be no other, must be behind the distorting veil of mythological imagination (Stanner 1975:296-7).

Because Durkheim made this assumption that "non-empirical symbolic referents must be distorted representations of empirical reality" (Stanner 1975:297), he was led to two substantial errors. He assumed - to a modern student unjustifiably - that the aborigines were incapable (in part because of his belief that they had an 'insufficient aptitude for abstracting and generalizing') of objectifying in symbols a deeper view of life. He thus did not enquire seriously into the dimension of 'ultimate concern' exemplified, strongly if darkly, in their symbolism. Secondly, he did not perceive that there is a 'multiple ... incidence' in the symbols. By this is meant that there are cognitive aspects of the feelings, valuations, and aspirations which as well as the conceptualizations go with the symbols (Stanner 1975:297-8).

In short, Durkheim
did not credit primitive man with any capacity to form judgements of experience, to objectify in symbols determinants of social life more ultimate than any which arise from human association as such, or form an idealization of it (Stanner 1975: 298).

Stanner was quite adamant that Durkheim was wrong to see in totemism nothing but the misty configuration of the clan. Rather, what happens is that Aborigines borrow terms from normal discourse, rework them, and apply them towards another area - the 'whole reality' of Diagram One. Aborigines are profoundly analogical in their thinking (Stanner 1963:50), but one misses the point if one mistakes the symbols for the things symbolised.

For my own part I see neither true interest nor significance in dissecting the figurative aspect of ... myth for 'reflections' or 'expressions' of the social structure. That there are such I do not doubt. What I should think remarkable would be to find myths which did not contain such reflections or expressions. For what other image or idea-language could be used? (Stanner 1963:50-1).

What, then, are the 'real' things symbolised? In Stanner's (1963:37-8) estimation these are varied, but they cohere about a double-sided theme - namely, "a celebration of values and at the same time a dramatization of the moral imperfection of social being". And really there is an end to it. All that remains to be done is to flesh out this skeleton by sensitively analysing the myths and rites. In this way, Aboriginal religion reveals itself for what it truly is - in Murinbata terms, "life as a joyous thing with maggots at the centre" (Stanner 1963:37).

It is problematic as to whether Aboriginal religion really simply 'reveals itself' in this way. Indeed at one stage Stanner (1963:38) makes it quite clear that his work is inspired in no small way by religious philosophers, so
there is at least a suggestion that Aboriginal religion is approached with some general and prior view of its character. And as Hiatt (1975a:15) has said, Stanner is never really explicit about where he sees the sense of 'primal injury' coming from. Sometimes, the sense of imperfection looks as if it is reduced to the "anarchic" nature of society (Stanner 1963:164-5) - a thoroughly Durkheimian position, even if somewhat modified, and perhaps for that reason not one with which Stanner felt easy. As Mol (1982:53) seems to imply, Stanner's method and analysis require a reduction, and indeed come close to making one. But Stanner himself, along with his "comrade-in-arms" Eliade (Mol 1982:53), fails to make this explicit for reasons of polemic against other schools of thought.

Hiatt (1975a:15-6) has suggested one way of looking at Stanner's central hypothesis in a different light. The imperfectibility of being, Hiatt states, comes about because of the relationship between ontogeny and ontology.

[II]f reality as a whole is conceived as paradoxical or dualistic, it may be in some degree because the individual's first meaningful experiences are marked by imperfection and ambivalence (Hiatt 1975a:16)

Here Hiatt is referring to Roheim's thesis that totemism is an 'institution [which] is a defense organized against ... separation anxiety', and Roheim would have approved of the remarks. For Roheim himself (1950:Chapter XI), following the grievous tone of much of Freud's writings on civilization, referred in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology to the human predicament as 'the tragedy of man', adding into the bargain that "[m]an is the only animal that wants to be different from what he really is" (Roheim 1950:487). The myths which
Stanner analysed in terms of 'life as a joyous thing with maggots at the centre' are, in Hiatt's terms, insights into this tragic human predicament. And, when translated into practical form in rites, the insights represent a powerful means of social control. (4)

Stanner had his own view of the relationship between myth and rite. It most certainly was not Freudian, for, as we shall see, Stanner had little but contempt for psycho-analysis. Central to his own view was the question of mystery.

In looking closely at myths and attempting to outline their structure as a system of belief, Stanner was moving far away from Durkheim. The latter, even if he felt that he had managed to place myths into his overall view of religion as speculations on the feelings engendered by rites, chose not to analyse them. All he made was the occasional programmatic statement (Durkheim 1976:101), otherwise ignoring the myths or stating simply that they were 'glosses' on the rites (Durkheim 1976:129-30). Stanner (1963:50) agrees that there is no theory of myth that is not also a theory of rite, but he thought that in his own day anthropology had yet to come up with any theory that qualified as such.

In Stanner's scheme, although Murinbata myth is an insight into the human predicament, at once universal and distinctively Aboriginal, it is not the insight of a detached intellectual. Aborigines "rarely if ever ask the how or why-questions from philosophical motive" (Stanner 1963:51). Aboriginal religion is essentially intuitive. It has at its core the ability "to excite feeling" (1963:51). Although in a sense under human control, The Dreaming is first of all
a subjective mystery. Myths tell of a world which is larger than life. And in the rites what is taught and learned is taught and learned as discipline, not as rational discourse.

What happens on such high occasions is ... apprehended in a deeper fashion and the interior life is shaped in a positive way. All the things seen and done have the authority of ancient, sacred ways ... They are also true things ... More, they are good things of the utmost gravity ... These phrases [as rendered in Murinbata] are commonly used, and every circumstance of context - beauty, drama, excitement, mystery - reinforces them. As well, both young and old, neophytes and instructors, have a lively dread of sanctions of irreverence. It would scarcely be possible to weigh the contributions made by these influences to the attitude of uninquiring acceptance exemplified by the old and emulated by the young (Stanner 1963:60-1).

Much of this, of course, is pure Durkheim, particularly in its emphasis on the essential dramatic quality of rites. Much else of Stanner's analysis is derivative (which is not to say that it completely lacks originality). Van Gennep is one very important influence, for Stanner (1963:38-9) sees in rites and myths a quaternary structure:

- a setting aside from normality, a kind of destruction, a kind of transformation, and a return to a new normality of the same order as, but qualitatively distinct from, the original.

But Stanner also adds much that is new, particularly in his conception of how identity is stripped away and reconstituted at the points of "consecration" and "transformation" in the rite of passage. Here he introduces the notion of "sign", saying that consecration is marked by a "positive" sign, while transformation is marked by a "negative" one. In between these two sign ascriptions a "negative status" holds sway (Stanner 1963:12-13). Here Stanner seems to have been moving independently towards the Turnerian ideas of liminality and anti-structure (Turner 1974).
A major problem with Stanner's theory of myth and rite stems from the avoidance of reduction. As we have seen, some of what Stanner had to say about the structure of Murimbata myth and belief is perfectly compatible with a reductive model, either social and Durkheimian (which was Stanner's own tendency, if not commitment) or psychological and Freudian (which Stanner avoided at all costs). Stanner himself was alive to the problem and sensed that his 'settling for mystery' as rock-bottom begged the question.

Many anthropologists, confronted by [the inability of Aborigines to explain their rites in rational, didactic fashion], might feel that they must transpose the study to phenomena of the aboriginal unconscious. But the symbolisms are constituents of collective acts of mutuality, with a logical structure, a detectable range of meanings, and an aesthetic appeal as well as a premial [sic] place in the social development of individuals. These relations may appropriately be studied by the methods of anthropology. The fact that they are perpetuated apparently without the kinds of conscious awareness or rational explanation that might represent them to the aborigines as things requiring explanation is not in itself a sufficient reason for thinking them beyond the province of anthropological study (Stanner 1963:61).

Here, I think, one detects a common prejudice.

At one and the same time, Stanner saw psychoanalysis as being beyond or outside of anthropology, and as an insult to man. True, he had detected the latter "depreciatory" reductionism in Durkheim (Stanner 1975:298), but Freud and Roheim, it seems, were beyond the pale. In a characteristic punning sideswipe, psychoanalysis was described by him (1979:136) as "the vast cloacal theorem" of the unconscious, which made it a even less palatable than Durkheim's "theory of public conveniences" (Stanner 1975:301). Yet as Hiatt has argued, there is no necessary incompatibility between Stanner's own view of Aboriginal religion and that of Roheim.
And it will be my contention in the following chapter that the Stannerian perspective is very much enhanced by the potential combination.

Durkheim struggled hard in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life to give an account of the way in which ritual instilled into the faithful wholesome sentiments serving the purpose of the group, but in the end one is left with an intuition every bit as mysterious as the process of ritual control itself. Stanner then says that since the mystery is intrinsic to the phenomenon, there is little else one can say about it other than the fact that it works. But at the same time he sensed that there was a direction in which one could move to render the mystery intelligible. In the same breath he discounted it on the grounds that it was outside of social anthropology.

The fact may, I think, be accounted for simply in terms of Stanner's misconception of psychoanalysis. Jung was dismissed with a single sentence (Stanner 1979:135): Roheim fared worse to be told that his tracing of symbolism in Aboriginal religion presented "a grotesquely exaggerated significance" of the sexual (Stanner 1979:140). Yet Stanner showed a marked reluctance to take psychoanalysis on in the way that he had confronted Durkheim. The only extended commentary is a paper written in the mid-1950's and which he did not see fit to publish in his lifetime (Stanner 1982a). One may speculate as to why, but one is on surer ground when one says that Stanner's critique of Freud was based on nothing like the same familiarity with the oeuvre as his critique of Durkheim.

However, I will refrain at this juncture from criti-
cising Stanner directly on this count, since in this chapter I wish only to consider his views as they impinge more or less directly on existing interpretations of Aboriginal religion. The brief critique of Freud is really a critique of psychoanalysis in general, and I will therefore leave my remarks on it until the next chapter. There, I intend to return to the themes introduced in this chapter and attempt to arrive at a synthetic position by adopting a structuralist perspective. In particular, I will focus attention in Chapter Three on another theoretician - Levi-Strauss - who has paid a considerable amount of attention to Aboriginal religion. I will also examine the discipline of psychoanalysis from a point of view yet to mentioned - that of Lacan.
CHAPTER THREE

A Structuralist Manifesto

[Ε]θνoλογία is first of all psychology.

Claude Levi-Strauss
The Savage Mind, p. 131.

Psychology deals with ideas and other mental contents... They are not made by the individual, but they rather happen - they even force themselves upon the individual's consciousness. This is not platonic philosophy but empirical psychology.

Carl Jung
Psychology and Religion, pp. 3-4.
3.1. Elementary Strictures

Two points are of overwhelming significance in understanding why psychoanalysis has been peripheral to mainstream anthropology in general, and why in particular the work of Roheim has nearly always been on the fringe of Australian studies. Both of these points may be discerned in the rejection which Stanner made of Freud (see Chapter Two). The first is that psychoanalysis is, rather obviously, a psychology, and Durkheim’s influence on anthropology and sociology regarding the sui generis nature of social facts and their irreducibility to psychological facts has been immense. This is why Stanner can say that psychoanalysis is ‘beyond the province of anthropological study’. The second is that psychoanalysis (as opposed to Jungian psychology) has a quite radical theory of sexuality, which non-specialists often find difficult to understand and accept. Stanner’s comment on Roheim’s work is an example of this.

The two points are not unconnected. Consider first the question of psychologism. Earlier, when discussing his rejection of Durkheim’s monolithic conception of society as a kind of external and unitary force, I likened Stanner’s own conception of the social as transactional to Mauss’s total social fact. The point was strategic, for Levi-Strauss has argued that Mauss’s idea of the social was such a refinement of the Durkheimian conception that it more or less dissolved the false antinomy between social and psychological facts. For, like Ginsberg, Levi-Strauss (1967:10) realises that Durkheim’s ‘society’ was something of a ‘metaphysical phantom’. And this was due to the (at times) too radical a gulf which Durkheim placed between individual and collective
representations.

Durkheim never rejected social psychology, and to that extent Evans-Pritchard's comment about *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* being a violation of Durkheim's own rules of sociological method may be misplaced. There was, in fact, a sense in which Durkheim (in Lukes 1975:234) understood "collective psychology [to be] the whole of sociology". But Durkheim found it difficult to blend the two halves - 'social' and 'psychology'. According to Levi-Strauss, it was Mauss who was more aware of [the] basic problem of the relationship between sociological and psychological phenomena. Although the latter never wrote a word inconsistent with the former's teaching, he listens more carefully to the echoes of modern psychology and keeps on the alert, so that bridges between the two sciences may never be cut ... Mauss states that although sociology is a kind of psychology specifically distinct from individual psychology, 'it is nevertheless true that one may pass from the facts of individual consciousness to collective representations through a continuous series of intermediaries' (Levi-Strauss 1945:528-9).

Thus it was Mauss, more than Durkheim, who drew attention to the fact that:

Social facts do not reduce themselves to scattered fragments. They are lived by men, and subjective consciousness is as much a form of their reality as their objective characteristics (Levi-Strauss 1967:14)

"[A]ll this which seemed so new", says Levi-Strauss (1967:15), "was implicit in Durkheim". And this is particularly so in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, a work which, according to Nisbet (1976:viii-ix), even warrants the description "phenomenological". But if much of the intention got mangled beyond recognition in the storm of dialectic, syllogisms and antinomies, it was Mauss who,
according to Levi-Strauss, offered it shelter.

Mauss's quiet reworking of Durkheim is the point at which Levi-Strauss takes up his own position. The key problem with Durkheim's system, says Levi-Strauss (1945:518), is that it lacks any appreciation of the unconscious. Mauss, on the other hand, oriented himself in another direction when he conceived of the total social fact in terms of exchange. For the total social fact is precisely that - a totality - but Mauss escaped Durkheim's untenable hypostasis by conceiving of society as foliated as it were and made up of a multitude of distinct yet connected planes. Instead of appearing as a postulate, the totality of the social is manifested in experience ... Now, this totality does not suppress the specific character of phenomena, which remain 'at once juridical, economic, religious, and even aesthetic or morphological' [see Mauss 1969:76-73], so that totality consists finally in the network of functional interrelations among all these planes (Levi-Strauss 1967:11-2).

Not only is this a "down-to-earth sociology" (Levi-Strauss 1967:13), rescuing the social totality from Durkheim's quasi-metaphysical conception, but it also points the way towards an understanding of what is truly transcendent about the social. As Badcock (1975:49) states in relation to Levi-Strauss's work:

The importance of Mauss was that his analysis, particularly in The Gift, allowed us to move from the purely conscious normative consensus to the structural and unconscious system of communication. For Mauss it was the implicit logic of the principle of reciprocity that mattered, rather than the conscious norm.

In short, Mauss was tending towards a model of society as an overall system based on communication and exchange, and of anthropology as the bona-fide occupant of [the] domain of semiology which linguistics has not already claimed for its own (Levi-Strauss 1967:
Levi-Strauss's conception of society as a system of communication, of course, owes a great deal to Saussure. But what, I think, is remarkable for present purposes, and which takes us straight back to the point of agreement between Freud and Durkheim over the questions of totemism and social organisation, is that once Levi-Strauss begins to situate society in terms of a symbolic function, he analyses first not myths, ritual, and so on, but kinship. It is here that one may find important links between the social, the psychological, and sexuality.

According to Levi-Strauss (1945:516), Durkheim was victim of a confusion, common in his day, between historical priority and elementary character. He mistook the 'elementary' for the 'simple', suggesting that the latter was without an 'anterior' form and represented by Aboriginal totemism. But the elementary nature of social and religious organisation is something quite distinct from the place of a social formation in history. Elementary forms exist in their internal articulation, not their historical position. Once we realise this, a fruitful analysis of the relationship between elementary social forms and elementary religious forms - between, for example, clan organisation and totemism - may be embarked upon. To a large degree, Durkheim attempted just such an analysis, but he did not entirely shake off the historicist tendencies of his generation.

Durkheim argued strongly that the social is a reality *sui generis*: therefore, anything truly social should always be explicable in terms of something equally social. "The determining cause of a social fact should be sought among
the social facts preceding it" (Durkheim 1964:110). Yet this non-reductive view is not without its difficulties. As Levi-Strauss (1945:518) points out, it implies, among other things, that sociology has a narrower ambit than Durkheim would have wished to give it.

The problem of symbolism, to which Durkheim hoped to have found a solution in his notion of the "expression of [the] 'outwardness' which is an inherent property of social facts" (Levi-Strauss 1945:518), is placed beyond the realm of analytic intelligibility in a 'pure' sociology.

No social phenomenon may be explained, and the existence of culture itself is unintelligible, if symbolism is not set up as an a priori requirement of sociological thought. Durkheim was strongly aware of the importance of symbolism, but probably not enough: 'Without symbols, social feelings could have but a precarious existence.' [See Durkheim 1976:231.] He could have said: no existence at all. But his hesitation, however slight, is revealing: it shows that this Kantian ... is reluctant to think dialectically on the very occasion when an a priori form is inescapably required: sociology cannot explain the genesis of symbolic thought, but has just to take it for granted in man (Levi-Strauss 1945:517-8).

On the other hand, if we are to avoid placing sociology outside of the sciences altogether, we need to specify the point at which the symbolic function is reducible, a legitimate exercise so long as we do not impoverish that function (cf. Levi-Strauss 1966:247).

In the first chapter of The Elementary Structures of Kinship, Levi-Strauss (1969) argues that there is one social fact - the prohibition of incest - which has claims to a privileged status. Incest prohibitions are at once universal and normative, at once necessary and arbitrary. Since no single society has ever been known which does not prohibit incest, we are safe in thinking that the prohibition has its
grounds in nature. On the other hand, since the prohibition is never just any old set of proscriptions, but always of a peculiar type specific to the society under review, we know also that it is truly cultural. Clearly, then, when we look at the problem of incest we look also at the question of the transition from nature to culture, because we seem to be looking at a phenomenon which straddles the great divide. In that sense, we find what is strictly speaking impossible in Durkheim's sociological scheme - a social fact which is in some other sense not social (cf. Badcock 1975:34-5).

If, then, we are seeking grounds for the reducibility of social facts, the prohibition of incest appears as a promising area to examine closely. It appears to relate biology and sociology in a profound way. At the same time, it also links instinct (sexuality) and obligation (marriage rules), and therefore the individual with the group.

The prohibition of incest is in origin neither purely cultural nor purely natural, nor is it a composite mixture of elements from both nature and culture. It is the fundamental step because of which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished ... We have been led to pose the problem of incest in connection with the relationship between man's biological existence and his social existence, and we have immediately established that the prohibition could not be ascribed to either one or the other ... (We propose to find the solution by showing that the prohibition of incest is the link between them (Levi-Strauss 1969:24-5).

The theses of The Elementary Structures of Kinship need not concern us here in any detail, since I wish to move on as quickly as possible to the subject of religion. One may note in passing, however, that it is to Australia that Levi-Strauss first turns to examine restricted exchange. What is of great significance for present purposes is the general
treatment given to sexuality and the incest prohibition. It is the latter which is in some sense the key to symbolic life, since it is on the boundaries of the nature/culture divide, and therefore between the biological and the social on the one hand, and the individual and the group on the other. It stands at the point at which one would hope to achieve reduction. It also, of course, raises the subject of psychoanalysis once more.

At the end of The Elementary Structures of Kinship Levi-Strauss (1969:491) addresses Freud directly and accuses him of the same sin committed by Durkheim - historicism.

[What makes Totem and Taboo unacceptable, as an interpretation of the prohibition of incest and its origins, is the gratuitousness of the hypothesis of the male horde and of primitive murder, a vicious circle deriving the social state from events which presuppose it.

Far from it being the case that Freud explained why it is that incest is prohibited, says Levi-Strauss, he managed only to show why in each and every individual it is unconsciously desired.

The desire for the mother or the sister, the murder of the father and the sons' repentance, undoubtedly do not correspond to any fact or group of facts occupying a place in history. But perhaps they symbolically express an ancient and lasting dream. The magic of this dream, its power to mould men's thoughts unbeknown to them, arises precisely from the fact that the acts it evokes have never been committed, because culture has opposed them at all times and in all places. Symbolic gratifications in which the incest urge finds its expression, according to Freud, do not therefore commemorate an actual event. They are something else, and more, the permanent expression of a desire for disorder, or rather counter-order. Festivals turn social life topsy-turvy, not because it was once like this but because it has never been, and can never be, any different (Levi-Strauss 1969:491, my emphasis).

Two important moves are being made here: one towards a
theory of religion ('festivals'), the other towards what Roheim referred to earlier as an 'ontogenetic theory of culture'.

I agree with Muensterberger (1974:xix) that Roheim's work in *The Riddle of the Sphinx* has certain affinities with the views of Levi-Strauss. Freud (1938: 213) ends *Totem and Taboo* with the famous paraphrase "In the beginning was the deed", and yet immediately prior to this he had concerned himself with the point that, in neurotics at least, symbolic beliefs and actions are not related to deeds, but impulses that have never been realised. So, says Roheim (1974b:159),

> [possibly the religion and social organization of primitive peoples also may be derived from the reaction to wishes rather than to deeds. We must admit that action and desire are not clearly distinguished by the narcissistic savage. But in spite, or rather because, of this we must prefer the assumption that primeval man translated his impulses into acts, and that the tragedy of King Oedipus contains not only the typical symbol of human fate but also a recollection of the mythical primal king of mankind.

If we ignore the false general assumption of narcissism, then the similarity with Levi-Strauss, who regards Freud's own primal horde hypothesis itself as a myth (Levi-Strauss 1969:492, 1972:217), is striking.

Roheim and Levi-Strauss appear to agree on a second count. As we have seen, Roheim, having moved away from Freud's historicist blind alley, explained culture in general, and religion in particular, ontogenetically. Levi-Strauss's own (partial) rejection of Freud leads him to very similar conclusions.

The moment the claim was made that certain extant features of the human mind could be explained by an historically certain and logically necessary event, it was permissible, and even prescribed, to attempt a scrupulous restoration of the sequence.
The failure of *Tote* and *Taboo*, far from being inherent in the author's proposed design, results rather from his hesitation to avail himself of the ultimate consequences implied in his premises. He ought to have seen that phenomena involving the most fundamental structure of the human mind could not have appeared once and for all. They are repeated in their entirety within each consciousness, and the relevant explanation falls within an order which transcends both historical successions and contemporary correlations. Ontogenesis does not reproduce phylogenesis, or the contrary. Both hypotheses lead to the same contradictions. One can speak of explanations only when the past of the species constantly recurs in the indefinitely multiplied drama of each individual thought, because it is itself only the retrospective projection of a transition which has occurred, because it occurs continually (Levi-Strauss 1969:490-1).

As we saw in Chapter Two, Roheim moulded his thoughts on Aboriginal religion around three major themes. Without for a moment deserting Freud's fundamental insight regarding society and culture being born of the renunciation of instinctual aims, he first emphasised ambisexuality as a resolution to the oedipus complex and the identification of fathers and sons; then the conditioning effects of the primal scene in the origin of projection and introjection; and finally the child's propensities to move away from the mother and find substitute figures for her. But central to the whole theoretical edifice is the oedipus complex - the 'indefinitely multiplied drama' somehow crucially the key to society, culture and symbolic life.(1)

3.2 Elementary Signifiers

In the 1940's, when Levi-Strauss was conceiving *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, and Roheim was producing his best work on Australian Aborigines, Lacan was beginning to apply structuralist theories to psychoanalysis. It is within the Lacanian school that one finds a theoretical con-
cern with the oedipal drama in its constitutive function in relation to symbolic life per se. Two themes dominate Lacan's enterprise: the emergence of the subject — what Freud referred to as das Ich (the I), and the role of language (or symbolism in general) in this emergence. Both are, for Lacan, intimately related to the oedipus complex and its resolution.

I will have a good deal to say about Lacan's work in this thesis, particularly in Chapters Seven, Eight and Ten, but I should at least give some prior indication of its importance at this stage. Broadly speaking:

In the history of the subject in the way it is reconstituted in Lacan's theory of the unconscious, two moments are dominant in which the subject finds his place in the process of signification. These are the mirror-phase and the castration complex (Coward and Ellis 1977:109).

The mirror-phase is largely bound to what Lacan refers to as 'the Imaginary', whereas the castration complex, which in Freudian theory brings to resolution the conflicts of the oedipal stage, is the moment when the subject accedes to 'the Symbolic'.

This two-fold emergence of subjectivity may be summarised as follows. Lacan (1977a:1-2) says that from about the age of six months, a child can "already recognize as such his own image in a mirror". This ability to apprehend one's self has to be understood "as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term"; that is, as a "transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image", or as an "[a]ct whereby an individual becomes identical with another" (Lalande in Laplanche and Pontalis 1973:205). Thus, this grasping of one's own image,
which, of course, may take place perfectly well without any actual mirror being present, is a kind of finding of oneself in alienation. It happens when the infant, having previously 'considered' himself only in a fragmentary way, 'pulls himself together' and recognises his integrated body as a singular entity of which he will at some future stage be able to say: 'That is me'.

This ... assumption of his specular image by the child at the infans stage ... would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it ... its function as subject (Lacan 1977:2).

The mirror-phase is a time when a child has a basically narcissistic orientation to his world. He sees only himself in things and has to learn through bitter experience the truths of the reality principle. Mirroring is itself a quite primitive means of 'communication'. As Winnicott (1980:Chapter 9) points out, the first 'mirror' is the mother's face, which quickly becomes a barometer of a child's own feelings: a smile elicits a smile, and an anxious expression instils fear. The significance of the mirror-phase, however, is that it raises this identification to a corporeal unity not before attained. And as we shall see in later chapters, it is closely connected with the maturation and articulation of the human body, especially in the field of perambulation.

Lacan regards this primitive identification of the 'whole self' as a precursor to the proper establishment of the subject within a symbolic field. This field is established in language, which the subject takes on, and in 'the dialectic of identification with the other'. This latter
sense of identification is what is achieved through the resolution of the oedipus complex; and for Lacan, the resolution and the ability to speak are intimately associated.

The prototypical identification of a child is with its mother, and it is from the mother that it has to separate in order to establish an independent identity. But the nature of the identity of mother and child (which is two-way) is quite specific.

At first ... the child does not merely desire contact with his mother and her care. He wishes to be everything to her ... He is the desire of his mother's desire and, in order to satisfy that desire, he identifies with its object, with the phallus ...

One could say that at this stage the child, identifying with the object of the other's desire, passively submissive and subjugated, is not a 'subject', but a lack, a nothing, because he is not individually situated or registered in the symbolic circuit of exchange. He merges with the object of the other's desire and, fusing with his mother as a mere extension of her, presents himself as a nothing, as a blank. Having no symbolic substitute for his own self, he is deprived of individuality, subjectivity and a place in society. This is the period of imaginary possession (identification with the mother by way of identification with the object of her desire) and the realm of primary narcissism (Lemaire 1977:82).

It is this narcissism which it is the fate of the father to destroy.

The role of the father is, for Lacan, first of all a symbolic one which consists in a double interdiction or Law: the first, directed to the son, commanding that he no longer be the phallus, and the second, directed to the mother, that she never take back what she herself has produced. The result, for the child, is maternal rejection and the need to reformulate the original identification, which it achieves by transferring that identification to the father himself.
If the child does not accede to this Law, then he remains subjected to the mother’s desire and thereby does not come to differentiate himself properly from his environment.

If, on the contrary, the child does accept [the Law], he identifies with the father as he who ‘has’ the phallus. The father reinstates the phallus as the object of the mother’s desire, and no longer as the child-complement to what is lacking in her. The child’s identification with the father announces the passing of the [oedipus complex] by way of ‘having’ (and no longer ‘being’). He is either he who has the phallus or he who does not have it, or he who can give or receive it in a full sexual relationship. At the same time a symbolic castration takes place: the father castrates the child identical with the mother] by separating it from its mother (Lemaire 1977:83).

It is this drama, occurring in the first few years of childhood, which, according to Lacan, perpetuates both society and culture; both the ‘elementary structures of kinship’ and the symbolism attendant on them. It is, on the microcosmic, ontogenetic level, the transition from nature to culture.

The resolution of the oedipus complex through symbolic castration is the key to symbolic life in that it transforms a dualistic relationship into a triangular one. This is crucial because the dualism of the mirror-phase cannot provide the child with a singular identity, whereas the accession to symbolic castration places him in a mediate relationship. No longer completely with the mother, the child is no longer in himself the phallus that makes her complete. He is a separate entity. At the same time, although assuming an identification with the father, he cannot actually be him either, since it is the father who possesses the phallus which is the object of the mother’s desire. The father has taken the place of the child.

The only way out of this predicament, which is,
strictly speaking, an insoluble problem, is repression. The desire for the mother is repudiated, and made unconscious, while the desire to be the father is suspended or deferred. Thus, one neither is the phallus, nor does one possess it. However, one assumes that one will, at some future stage, gain it. In relation to the mother, one 'is not'; in relation to the father, one 'will be'. It is as if one's sense of not being were the condition of one's future being. This is primal repression, a phenomenon which Lacan sees as intrinsically linguistic.

The precise role of language and symbolism in repression is open to debate. Lacan sometimes writes in accordance with his famous dictum that the unconscious is 'structured like a language'. On the other hand, he often implies that the unconscious is language. He has also said (Lacan 1977c:xiii) that "language is the condition for the unconscious", that "the unconscious [is] the logical implication of language". In all of this can be traced a complex theory about the relations obtaining between, on the one hand, the different levels of the mind and, on the other, the articulations of signifiers, signified and signs.

I will have more to say about the interpenetration of mental and linguistic structures in Chapter Seven of this thesis. What is important to bear in mind now, however, is the link between language (and symbolism in general) and the oedipus complex. For Lacan, the latter is only resolvable through symbolism, for the simple reason that repression requires representations for censorship to take place. If something is to be closed to conscious apprehension, then it needs to have something to 'stand' for it, and this in turn
requires a separation of word and object which co-exists with the splitting of the mind into two systems - the unconscious and the preconscious (the latter including consciousness itself).

Signification is connected to repression because of the relationship which obtains between the absence of a desired object and the ability to represent that object. The word is literally a substitute for the real thing and it is the loss of the real thing, prototypically the mother, which is said to prompt the acquisition of language. In this view, language is projective, since it depends on misrecognition: that which is recognised in consciousness corresponds to something different, though related, in the unconscious. In a primordial sense, associated with the instigation of the unconscious through primal repression, it is the self as phallus connected to the mother which is initially repressed.

In the Lacanian view, the phallus is the privileged signifier associated with the self through the child's name. This name, at first, consists only as a 'he', because in the beginning the child cannot speak and therefore cannot participate in the exchanges attendant on language. This 'he' is a blank, a void, the negation which allows the structure to exist: it is simply the precondition for the permutations of the 'I' and the 'thou' (Lemaire 1977:69).

Thus, in so far as a child's name has a place in discourse, it at first corresponds to the child existing as a 'nobody'; and young children do indeed often refer to themselves in the third person - as if they were somewhere or somebody else, merely an object. But with the intervention of the
father, this 'nobody' is repressed, and with it the possibil-
ity of the continuity of lived experience. The mind is thus
formulated as two selves - the primordial 'splitting' or
Spaltung (Freud) which creates the subject. Within the un-
conscious half of the mind exists what Jung (1983:26-8),
through his own dream experiences, came to realise as the
phallus as a "man-eater", a "subterranean God 'not to be
named'".

I do not think it false to say that if the subject
'crosses himself out' in the [Spaltung], if he
effaces himself to the profit of a signifier, it
is in so far as he is the phallus that he is
crossed out (Lemaire 1977:88).

This 'crossing out' and forming of a dual self is what
accounts, in Lacan's view, for the perennial nature of human
desire - a desire that can never be satisfied (hence the
'man-eater') on account of the subject being for ever partly
out of touch with its source. This is a matter which I will
expand on in Chapter Seven. But I would emphasise here
several important points.

First, desire is intimately connected with language,
and, according to Lacan, all speech is desire (or at least
expresses it incompletely). Second, the accession to lan-
guage is achieved through the rejection of the mother/child
bond at the father's behest. The father is thus understood
to be the guarantor of the Law, and for that reason it is
important that both mother and child should submit to his
authority. Without submission to that authority, there would
be no continuity of symbolism and no continuity of society.
The phallus, then, in so far as it is hidden from view
('veiled' in Lacan's [1977a:285] view), is the guarantor of
culture. It is the child's
true desire ... pushed back into the unconscious. This is the primal repression which determines accession to language and which substitutes a symbol and a Law for the Real of existence (Lemaire 1977:87).

Obviously, the researches of Roheim into Aboriginal religion are important in regard to these theories. It also appears that the Lacanian conception of the making of the subject, as Hiatt has suggested in respect of Roheim's own work, is closely related to Stanner's analyses of Aboriginal religion. The subject makes his entry into society and culture as a result of a fundamental flaw, and the images of sexuality, which Roheim finds, are perhaps not the grotesque exaggerations of which Stanner writes. They may well be the necessary terms of the tragedy. Particularly interesting in this respect is Roheim's emphasis on the primal scene in The Riddle of the Sphinx.

I have noted how Roheim's work has three basic orientations which are represented by the following themes: 1) the move of the infant away from the mother; 2) the role of the father as both castrator and model in this move; and 3) the primal scene. The first two have just been described in Lacanian terms, and the third, too, may be interpreted as central to structuralist psychoanalytic discourse. The resolution of the oedipus complex, after all, is something which coincides with the onset of the latency period around five or six years of age. Yet the child has been speaking for a long time before this, so the castration complex in itself cannot be the whole of the story. This is where the significance of the primal scene comes to the fore.

The 'transition from nature to culture', from object to
subject, and from silence to speech in childhood is a
lengthy process. Lacan, as we have seen, sees its beginnings
in the mirror-phase, which occurs before the end of the
first year of life. Children normally begin to master lan-
guage some time after this first year, struggling to master
its complexities for several years. If it is the castration
complex which finalises this transition, then it has been
argued that it is the phantasy of the primal scene which
sets it in motion. For it is here that the child first real-
ises his separation from the mother at the hands of the
father. In this way, the "phantasy of the primal scene is
the imprint, as it were, upon which the [oedipus complex]
will be structured" (Stein in Lemaire 1977:89). It is the
prompt which initiates the need for substitution and symbol-
isation, and the 'imprint' on which the subject will con-
struct his oedipal myth through the symbols already made for
him in his cultural milieu. The fundamental structuring of
culture within the individual thus begins in the primal
scene, and ends with the castration complex and submission
to the father's 'word', which is not at all dissimilar to
Roheim's claim that religion begins with projections induced
by the primal scene and is consolidated by introjections.

At this point we should perhaps deal with some impor-
tant misconceptions held by Stanner about psychoanalysis; the
ideas which I suggested in Chapter Two revealed a prejudice.
In his paper on Totem and Taboo Stanner (1982a:5-6) makes
the point that

Freud had no sufficient theory of society. He con-
trives to make institutions and culture the epi-
phenomena of individual life ... [H]is idea of man
is fundamentally contra-social. His doctrine seems
to be that men are born at odds with society for
biological reasons. Their instinctual equipment leads, on the level of the unconscious, to a necessary and persistent conflict with the social world made for every I by Them. We are born to suffer, to be victims, and all we can do is to outwit society. It is an argument against the whole idea that men can be both social selves and at the same time free, self-responsible and rational. I cannot accept the sufficiency of this formulation. I believe we have to maintain that neither society nor the individual self is the cardinal reality of human existence. The fundamental postulate is that man is 'socius'. Both self and society are equally primordial. They were, are, and always will be correlative. Empirically, it is a case of 'self with others', and it must be that way theoretically. Only thus can one avoid the formulative errors of the viewpoints which posit 'individual v. society' or 'self v. others'.

While one is bound to agree with much of this, one must also protest that it describes in no small measure the very findings of psychoanalysis. It is true that the Freudian conception of the individual unconscious is that it is 'contra-social', but it is equally true that this reservoir of counter-order is established by social means and remains absolutely indispensable as the ground of sociality. That which is repressed is that which is not allowed, and the fantasy of the murder of the father and the taking of the mother is the key element of the unconscious which has to remain at the level of counter-order. To that extent, non of us can 'outwit society'. But it is true that 'we are born to suffer, to be victims'. Our most fundamental desires can never be realised, and yet their displacement leads us into the kind of symbolic creativity which brings about truly social relations. This is the basis of the social contract envisaged by Levi-Strauss in The Elementary Structures of Kinship. We exchange because we renounce. This seems to me to be perfectly compatible with, as well as enlightening of,
Stanner's flawed creation.

It may well be true that 'Freud had no sufficient theory of society', but it is not the case that he attempted to reduce social life to individual life pure and simple. The living through, and dealing with, the oedipus complex, are elementary social phenomena: and they create elementary social effects. Crucial in this regard is the relationship between the unconscious and society, and it is here that Stanner makes further errors in his conception of psycho-analysis. Stanner speaks of 'the social world made for every I by Them', and it is quite true that psychoanalysis demonstrates that the subject only enters his social world by taking on burdens made for him by others already within the symbolic configuration to which the subject himself must accede. But this is not a question of the world being made for the I by Them: it is a question of the I itself being made by Them. The I is, in the nature of things, social in the psychoanalytic frame of reference, which is precisely Stanner's own point. We may recall that Freud himself (1973: 112) stated that the birth of the subject (das Ich - the I) was the subject's own moral duty and "a work of culture" (cf. Chapter Five).

Stanner (1982a:7) says that: "Freud admits an I (a three-component I) and an It. There is no place for a Thou."

Yet this is manifestly untrue. It is not clear to what the 'three-component' refers, but if Stanner intends it to mean the division of id, ego and super-ego, then the It is already included in the I. On the other hand, if it means 'conscious, preconscious and unconscious', then one is bound to say that it presupposes a Thou.
The subject is created by what he takes on from his world (incidentally at the same time what he loses in the world - another dimension to the theme of flawed primordiality), and in becoming an I, he comes to recognise a Thou for the first time. As we have seen, the I/Thou distinction is achieved through the castration complex. Previous to this accession to language and symbolism, there had only been a 'he' incommensurate with a 'me'. Lacan refers often to the unconscious as the domain of the Other; and sometimes, borrowing the terms ein andere Schauplatz from Freud, as "that other scene" (Lacan 1977a:285). According to this view, the I is never more than a kind of site, poised delicately between two other objective and collectively instituted realms - the real world, the subject's social predicament, on the one hand, and, on the other, his interior life, his arena of imagination framed in terms of the language that he has learned. Viewed thus, the unconscious is an indispensable part of the social world, if only by acting as the latter's negative. Between the It and the Thou is the I, participating in both.

3.3 The Source of the Sacred

As we have seen, Mauss stated that it is possible to 'pass from the facts of individual consciousness to collective representations through a continuous series of intermediaries'. In addition, Levi-Strauss claims that the prohibition of incest is the link 'between man's biological existence and his social existence'. The oedipus complex is, in fact, the 'link' of which Levi-Strauss speaks, and at the same time the limit of Mauss's 'series of intermediaries'.
In so far as the oedipus complex is resolved through primal repression, it establishes the unconscious (the id or It) as the point where representations and instinctual aims meet; where signifiers participate in a 'language' to which the logical laws of thought do not apply ... There is nothing in the id that could be compared with negation ... There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time ...

The id of course knows no judgements of values: no good and evil, no morality (Freud 1973:106-7).

Yet the paradox, in the Lacanian view, is that the id is constituted by signifiers - the elements of language.

As we shall see, there is a good deal of similarity between the Freudian conception of the id and the Aboriginal conception of The Dreaming as beyond the proper laws of time, space and moral judgement. I do not think this convergence to be merely fortuitous, and I think it can be shown that there is an important relationship between the sacred and the repressed.

The logical problems which Stanner found to dog the opposition of the sacred and the profane did not force him to drop completely the Durkheimian resort to dualism. Stanner seems to have felt that the opposition, while not being altogether satisfactory, pointed in the right direction and had some correspondence with the facts on the ground. In this he was in agreement with Elkin (1937a:119). But as we have seen (Diagram 1, Chapter Two), in the place of the sacred and the profane Stanner put another dichotomy - that of the religious and the social within the domain of the 'macro-experience' of The Dreaming.

The problem with this conception is that it is not altogether clear what the difference is between The Dreaming
as a totality and religion. After all, I think that probably all Australianists would agree that The Dreaming, as constituted by totemic 'complexes', is Aboriginal religion, so the criteria of separation (religion from The Dreaming) seems rather arbitrary. But Stanner had to make it in order not to reproduce the same errors which he had criticised in Durkheim. One feels that Stanner sensed the problem. He placed his category of religion near to the boundaries of 'macro-experience' in order to show that he thought that the former approximated to 'absolute or whole reality'. Yet I am not sure that Stanner escaped his own strictures.

Durkheim made his absolute starting point an opposition between two poles. But in order to make the opposition absolute, according to Stanner, he made it impossible to pass from one to the other. To avoid this problem, Stanner starts with a singularity, which he then breaks down into dual aspects. Within the ambit of this dualism, the religious and the social, themselves overlapping domains, are constituted. Religion, however, not only moves towards 'whole reality', it is somehow from the beginning closer to The Dreaming. It has its home wholly within one half of the total dualistic structure (which particular half is not specified by Stanner). So difficulties begin to emerge. Religion is only a part of reality; but it is in some sense the whole reality; and within the dual structure of whole reality, it is very nearly identified with a portion compared to which it is smaller.

In the course of the second part of this thesis I hope to provide a model of The Dreaming which overcomes these difficulties, but for the moment I should point out that
Durkheim's and Stanner's difficulties are only to be expected. For both commentators are trying to grasp the total social fact as a singularity, and this, I would argue, is in the nature of things impossible. The total social fact inheres in the principle of exchange and the symbolic function. As such, it will always appear from one point of view as a dualism - exchange is always between two parts - while from a second angle it may look singular - in the form of the synthetic thing which is exchanged. There seems to be no point in arguing about the logical priority of the singular over the dual or vice versa: they are simultaneities stemming from the dynamic function of the sign. For this reason one can only say of the world in toto that it is transcendent and incapable of being finally or completely expressed (cf. Munitz 1970).

The problem of apprehending the totality, then, is the problem of deriving one from two or of situating two in one. Put that abstractly, one can see why it is that both Durkheim and Stanner run into problems - and indeed why anybody, including Aborigines, run into problems when they apprehend the transcendent. In a sense, the problem is akin to that of defining the position of the subject: the singular 'I' is positioned between two worlds. Society exists as a pre-existing and, of course, historically specific framework, and as an external phenomenon sui generis. But it also depends for its existence on what one might call its projective base - the levels of repression in the unconscious which allow the renunciation and sublimation necessary for exchange and moral behaviour. Durkheim, apparently having no knowledge of the unconscious, and Stanner, who knew it only
to reject it, fail to give this essential dualism any place.

Yet it demands one, and, paradoxically, I would argue that it is the Aborigines themselves who are much more attuned to the realities of the unconscious than many of the interpreters of their religion. This, I believe, is connected with the conservative world view of Aborigines, which Maddock (1970:177-8) describes as follows.

There is among them [Aborigines] what can only be described as a profound resistance to crediting themselves with their own cultural achievements. All they will claim credit for is fidelity to tradition or, as they put it, for ‘following up the Dreaming’, the cultural features of human societies having been established entirely by the acts of mythical beings who, demiurges or animals-to-be, are alone conceived of as active and creative, men being passive beneficiaries of unmotivated generosity.

This view is, of course, an ideological one, but it has important repercussions for an understanding of religion and its relation to unconscious processes.

Levi-Strauss has made two points about the conservatism of ‘primitive’ societies which I see as related to the dominant role of religion in Aboriginal Australia. The first is that there is a tension between history and totemic classifications.

Totemic classifications no doubt divide their groups into an original and a derivative series: the former contains zoological and botanical species in their supernatural aspect, and the former is asserted to have existed before the latter, having in some sort engendered it. The original series, however, lives on in diachrony through animal and plant species, alongside the human series. The two series exist in time but under an atemporal regime, since, being both real, they sail through time together, remaining such as they were at the moment of separation. The original series is always there, ready to serve as a system of reference for the interpretation and rectification of the changes taking place in the derivative series. In theory, if not in practice, history is subordinated to system (Levi-Strauss
In other words, the totemic system is a 'given' to which the contingencies of history can only be adapted (rather than the latter being able to modify the former - cf. Levi-Strauss 1966:66-74).

The second point concerns the nature of magical operations. In two papers Levi-Strauss (1972:Chapters IX-X) compares 'the effectiveness of symbols' in ritual to the method of practical psychoanalysis. He finds the two operations - the psychoanalytic cure and the transformation of ritual participants - to be effected by the same essential processes, except in so far as those processes are inverted. Speaking specifically of shamanistic curing, he says:

Both cures aim at inducing an experience, and both succeed by recreating a myth which the patient has to live or relive. But in one case, the patient constructs an individual myth with elements drawn from his past; in the other case, the patient receives from the outside a social myth which does not correspond to a former personal state (Levi-Strauss 1972:199).

Thus we arrive at the following formula:

Magic readapts the group to predefined problems through the patient, while psychoanalysis readapts the patient to the group by means of the solutions reached (1972:183).

According to Levi-Strauss, then, both ritual and psychoanalysis are conservative: the former adjusts society to contingencies, while the latter adjusts the individual to the group and elicits from him a myth by which he may live as a normal member of society. I will return to this convergence of psychoanalytic method and religious practice later in this chapter, but it should be noted now how religion is tied to the suppression of history. The latter, understood as the realm of the contingent, is continuously converted,
and its 'progressive' possibilities subverted, by being forced into the pre-existing totemic classificatory order.

Psychoanalytic curing shares with religious operations the fact of 'conversion' (Levi-Strauss 1972:183). In both cases, the person is transformed and moulded into a pre-existing intellectual (mythical) structure, either religious (totemic in the Aboriginal case) or psychoanalytic (posed in terms of the interpretation necessary to make the patient's predicament intelligible).(2) So, as Levi-Strauss (1972:184) says, we have to understand "magical behaviour" as a "system built at the expense of the progress of knowledge"; as a system, like psychoanalysis, which does not create a new system of intelligibility which can be applied to previously unintelligible things, but which is a pre-existing order to which unintelligible things must conform.

A corollary to this conservatism, and an interesting comment on the similarity of ritual operations and psychoanalytic method, is the degree to which the perspective of the unconscious is, or so I propose to argue, privileged in 'primitive' societies. It is well known that 'the savage mind' regards hidden reality, the reality which may be approached in trance, dreams, etc., as the 'true' one. A calculating rationality, while certainly far from absent from the 'primitive' world (Levy-Bruhl notwithstanding),(3) is given second place to a kind of knowledge which Stanner so well described as existing in rites in an air of mystery. For Aborigines, this mystery is intrinsic. The 'unreal' world of dreams is the world which contains all the fundamental truths.

Broadly speaking, the opposition between the religious
and secular perspectives, between 'the savage mind' and that of the engineer, is co-extensive with the degree to which the unconscious is given some form of explicit expression, as in psychoanalysis. This is something which is suggested by Lacan's (1977b:59) cryptic pronouncement: "the true formula of atheism is not God is dead ... - the true formula of atheism is God is unconscious". But the convergence of religious beliefs and the 'myths' of psychoanalysis finds its ultimate expression in Jung's work. Writing of the numinous nature of symbolic expressions such as dreams and other projections, Jung (1983:368) states:

Such experiences have a helpful or, it may be, annihilating effect upon man. He cannot grasp, comprehend, dominate them; nor can he free himself or escape from them, and therefore feels them as overpowering. Recognising that they do not spring from his conscious personality, he calls them mana, daimon, or God. Science employs the term 'the unconscious,' thus admitting that it knows nothing about it, for it can know nothing about the substance of the psyche when the sole means of knowing anything is the psyche. Therefore the validity of such terms as mana, daimon, or God can be neither disproved nor affirmed. We can, however, establish that the sense of strangeness connected with the experience of something objective, apparently outside the psyche, is indeed authent-

cic.

The convergence here with Durkheim's idea that symbols are expressions of the reality of the 'totemic principle' is striking.

Religion and psychoanalysis are ahistorical because they both employ myths, and anthropology, too, in Levi-Strauss's (1970:13) view, must also partake of this mythical dimension if it is to make the structure of the human mind intelligible. Mythological analysis is itself mythological (Levi-Strauss 1970:12) and opposed to historical explanation. Because it deals with what is transcendent, the mind,
it is among those "instruments for the obliteraton of time" (Levi-Strauss 1970:16), which include also music and more conventionally understood mythical texts. In so far as myths are an intrinsic part of religion, they are basic structuring mechanisms, whose content matters less than their form. In that sense they are conservative, because the rich tapestry they weave has no practical import. Myths facilitate understanding not so much of the world, as of the human soul, and that understanding is also the business of anthropology. If "[t]he characteristic feature of the savage mind is its timelessness" (Levi-Strauss 1966:263), then it is one it shares with both structuralism and psychoanalysis.

If gods are projections of the human spirit, then we not only begin to understand why religion and anthropological discourse may be regarded as transformations of each other, we also come to understand the source of the sacred. In worshipping their divinities, Aborigines are not, strictly speaking, worshipping their society as such, as Durkheim would have it. Rather, those divinities are created and sustained through projections of the unconscious world onto nature. As we shall see, totemic beings are, in the nature of things, asocial. Like the unconscious itself, they belong to a kind of social counter-order. In that sense, in so far as society in the conventional sense is related to religious life, it is not that society itself is represented and worshipped, but rather that its unconscious ground is brought to life and somehow made manageable in the process. Just as Freud (1976:769) saw dreams as the "royal road" to unconscious realities, so too do Aborigines see The Dreaming as a way to follow in order to unmask mysteries.
The sacred and profane may be capable of being renovated in these terms. Not, I think, as Stanner has done, by slipping into the error of allowing part and whole to be made falsely identical, but by sketching the outlines of a dynamic interaction between four terms—sacred, profane, mundane, and supramundane. The third term I adopt at Stanner's suggestion, but the fourth is my own and is meant to indicate some form of reality which is opposed to the mundane, but is not the sacred. A set of relations between these four terms can be envisaged as follows.

Diagram 2. A Renovated Sacred and Profane
The reasoning behind this diagram is as follows. In Durkheim's scheme, the profane corresponds largely to what Stanner calls the mundane. It is the normal world, opposable to the sacred in terms of ordinary/extraordinary status. But the profane is also opposable to the sacred, and in terms defined quite well by Durkheim: that is, as a kind of utter opposition, where the one pole cannot mix with the other. It is in the nature of the sacred that it is to be 'set apart' - not 'profaned'. The profane, in these terms, could well be rendered as the diabolical or the sacrilegious, following Stanner's own (1975:294) suggestion. Having thus separated the mundane from the profane at Stanner's behest, we are still presented with the problem of discerning the role of the profane in the total schema, a problem akin to that inherent in Stanner's revised 'suppositious rectangle' representing the 'whole universe'.

The profane, I would suggest, corresponds in real terms to the language of the unconscious - that which cannot be said and which is deemed (incorrectly) to be unthinkable. This is the counter-order on which mundane life rests; society's ground. But this leaves us with something of a paradox in respect of the relations between the sacred and the profane. For the sacred actually takes on, in explicit form, the character of the profane. The totemic beings, as we shall see, are supermen who lived beyond the bounds of cultural life, even though they instigated it, and committed all the sins of the unconscious, including incest and murder. Why should there be this kind of strange identity between the divine and the diabolical?

The fourth term in the series points the way to an
answer. Durkheim, for reasons which now appear inexcusable, failed to make a rigorous distinction between the profane and the mundane: commonness and anti-sacredness are not the same thing (Stanner 1975:293). The sacred may well be opposed to the mundane, but the two are also in some sense quite compatible. This has to be the case, even in the Durkheimian system, because the sacred somehow guarantees the mundane. The term supramundane is introduced into my scheme in order to get round a similar confusion in Durkheim's own thought: that is, the absolute identification of the sacred with society. Quite evidently, the sacred is not the social: not even a transfiguration of it. Indeed, in many ways the sacred is very much the anti-social, a matter Durkheim himself (1976:409-10) came close to realising when he spoke of the ambiguity of the sacred (in the process somehow managing to assimilate the 'impure', 'sacrilegious' and 'diabolic' to the sacred itself). The supramundane, then, I intend to denote the total social fact; the sum of institutional arrangements in the social formation (to use terminology somewhat alien to Durkheimian discourse) of which individuals are largely unconscious due to what Marx indicated as a lack of transparency in social relations. In sum, then, we have four terms spawned from Durkheim's original two: two which pertain to unconscious realities and two which pertain to their conscious counterparts. Within, this scheme, I would suggest, lies a dynamic operation capable of describing the real relationship between religion and society.

The dual world of which Durkheim wrote is basically assimilable to the division of the sacred and the mundane.
As we have seen, for Durkheim there is no fundamental distinction between the profane and the world of ordinary things. We may justifiably say, I think, that Aborigines experience their lives in this way: as a movement between two kinds of reality, one transcendent, religious and larger than life, the other temporal, secular and at the level of ordinary concern. And the sacred world is the world from which the mundane stems: everything stems from The Dreaming, both historically and in the present. To that extent the facts are in accord with Durkheim's thesis: the sacred is in some sense a causal agent in re-creating the social world.

However, coterminous with the sacred and the mundane are the profane and the supramundane, realities not fully accessible to consciousness. Yet although these unconscious realities are not freely accessible, they are necessary for the totality to operate. Firstly, because society depends for its continued existence on laws which transcend the individual and which cover a set of social relations whose network is beyond the ken of any particular subject, and secondly, because in order for these laws to be upheld the individual has to submit to them and forego his own instinctive inclinations, a Durkheimian (1976:207) as well as Freudian view. Thus the two unconscious realities come together in much the same way as Durkheim proposed for the sacred and mundane (his profane).

Of course, for Durkheim the sacred exists at the level of the collective, while the mundane is the domain of individual life and interests. A similar opposition marks the profane, which is the individual unconscious, and the supramundane, which exists only at the level of the group. So a
number of paradoxes are generated. The sacred is supposed to embody the collective, yet it uses terms which are taken from the profane, an individual realm of existence. Likewise, the mundane exists on the level of the individual, yet it borrows its terms from the collective exchanges which constitute the supramundane. The mundane is, after all, nothing more than proper social life lived according to the dictates of The Law, an Aboriginal term as well as an English one, though with a rather different semantic load in each case. In Aboriginal terms The Law is profoundly sacred, not secular.

It is here, I think, that one has to take seriously the kind of pronouncements made by Lacan to the effect that the unconscious is not only structured like a language, but also in some sense is language - the language from which "speech must be delivered" (Lacan 1977a:59). For it is one of social life's great paradoxes or contradictions that, in so far as the individual takes on language and the rest of social life contingent on linguistic exchange, he does so not simply in the form of a well-formed grammar, but also as a kind of organisation of signifiers which runs counter to well-formedness - what, in Victor Turner's phraseology, might be called anti-structure. It is from this anti-structure, acting as a kind of projective base, that speech and other mundane exchanges spring.

Here, I think, one gains insight into that strange identity between the sacred and the profane. For, in so far as the sacred is reckoned to be the ground of society, then it functions in precisely the same way as the profane does in relation to the supramundane. Indeed, there is a sense in
which Aborigines are quite well attuned to this convergence. The Dreaming, after all, is The Dreaming — a world in which dreams take precedence over waking reality and in which all that is larger than life also contradicts life. Yet Aborigines, out of that which is contrary to life, have built a system which guarantees it, which suggests, at the very least, that their religion is in touch with some fundamentally hidden truths concerning the nature of the relationship between psychological and social realities.(4)

Durkheim, of course, stressed that religion expressed truth. Freud, on the other hand, stressed its illusory character. It is not necessary to regard either view as unduly partial. The sacred does deal with a truth, and that truth, as Durkheim discerned, is an eminently social one. The sacred represents — symbolises — the collective, though only by synchronising the group's projections in mythic discourse. For a myth, as Levi-Strauss (1970:28) suggests, "appeals to our group instinct", and no matter how varied the particular mythic formulations as they are discerned in consciousness, they are "absolute objects" in the sense that they are a

system of axioms and postulates defining the best possible code, capable of conferring a common significance on unconscious formulations (Levi-Strauss 1970:12).

But religion, at the same time, distorts. For it is only in touch with the collective at the level of the unconscious — the realm of the profane.

Thus if Freud and Roheim saw in Aboriginal religion representations of, and ways of dealing with, unconscious realities, they were not taking a contrary position from
Durkheim. But they were drawing attention to the fact that the reality or truth to which religion corresponds is a reality or truth that cannot literally be known. The unconscious is, as Levi-Strauss suggests for rites ('festivals'), that which the law of exchange shuns or keeps under lock and key, so to speak - repressed. If the sacred somehow unlocks this repression, it does so by turning the profane into a virtue, and by 'collectivising' it. Religion is thus both true and false at the same time, a formulation which is not less telling for it being paradoxical, and certainly no less paradoxical than Stanner's idea that the good life is a life in which one suffers.

Thus I cannot agree with Stanner (1975:293) when he says that the sacred/profane distinction does not even have a heuristic value. But in taking a contrary position, I need to demonstrate more fully that my model is capable of shedding light on religion in a dynamic way. In order to do this, I must return to the subject of the theory of myth and rite.

3.4 A Concluding Prelude

In this concluding section I intend to spell out the manner in which my analysis will proceed. As a starting point, it is useful to take Levi-Strauss's (1973a:83-4) definition of totemism as a set of ideological relations obtaining between nature and culture. According to this view, Aboriginal totemism, the religious phenomenon which is at the very basis of the mythological and ritual systems, is based on a kind of projection and counter-projection. Nature and culture reproduce each other, but are at the same time
opposed. The natural series (in which we might say the supernatural resides) and the cultural series (which constitutes the social totality) are homologous: the differences within one system are translatable into the differences in the other. The natural system is thus like a map of the cultural system, and vice versa. One may pass between the two realms in much the same way as one would transfer from map to territory, from one code to another. The geographical analogy is telling. As Stanner (1979:131) reminds us, totemism is basically a relationship between three aspects of the totality: men, animals and places (nature), and the marvels or mysteries which are signified by these other two elements.

But wherein the marvels and mysteries? If we believe Freud, of course, they are in the unconscious, and Levi-Strauss agrees (though not without points of difference). But when Levi-Strauss concludes his discussion of totemism, he does so with reference to Rousseau, not Freud, and through Rousseau he speaks of the profound character of the primitive identification between nature and culture. In relation to the age-old tripartite question of how we are to understand the passages from animality to humanity, from nature to culture, and from affectivity to the intellect, he says:

Rousseau's answer consists in defining the natural condition of man, while still retaining the distinctions, by the only psychic state of which the content is indissociably both affective and intellectual, and which the act of consciousness suffices to transfer from one level to the other, viz., compassion, or, as Rousseau also writes, identification with another, the duality of terms corresponding, up to a certain point, to the above duality of aspect. It is because man originally felt himself identical to all those like him
(among which, as Rousseau explicitly says, we must include animals) that he came to acquire the capacity to distinguish himself as he distinguishes them, that is, to use the diversity of species as conceptual support for social differentiation.

... The total apprehension of men and animals as sentient beings, in which identification consists, both governs and precedes the consciousness of oppositions between, firstly, logical properties conceived as integral parts of the field, and then, within the field itself, between 'human' and 'non-human'. For Rousseau, this is the very development of language, the origin of which lies not in needs but in emotions, so that the first language must have been figurative (Levi-Strauss 1973a:174-5).

He then immediately quotes Rousseau to the effect that true language and reason were born of tropes.

This kind of mythologising is vitally important, for it corresponds closely to that which is actually undertaken by Australian Aborigines. Myths deal with the transition from nature to culture, and they do so very much along the lines suggested by Rousseau - that is, by positing first a kind of absolute identification between man and nature (the totemic beings of mythical time were half men, half animal) which is later to become broken down into a discontinuity. The correspondence between Rousseau and the Aborigines is not accidental. It stems from the same desire on the part of each to apprehend a problem which can only be apprehended mythically. We shall see in considerable detail in the second part of the thesis (Chapters Four, Five Six and Seven) how the mythical plan reveals itself in Central Australia.

But if Rousseau and Aboriginal totemites follow more or less the same lines of thought in their mythical enquiries, this is also the fate of the structuralist. Levi-Strauss, as
we saw, approves of Rousseau's formulation - no doubt all
the more appealing for its link with the idea of the social
contract - and Lacan, too, works from a similar basis in
describing the constitution of the human subject. As we have
seen, the subject comes into his social world first in a
condition of absolute identification - a form of narcissism
in which everything is 'thought' in some way to be 'me'. It
is the destruction of this primordial mirroring which places
the subject squarely in the realm of the symbolic.

What, then, does this say about myth and rite? In
ritual, as Stanner has rightly said, people do not learn
anything in the conventional sense. Rather - and we shall
see in Part Three of the thesis the applicability of the
notion - things are impressed upon people by way of an in-
articulate process of identification. Ritual is, in this
sense, a regressive phenomenon. It depends for the trans-
mission of its symbolisms on the kind of narcissistic id-
entification which is prior to the articulation of language
in its well-formed aspect. Myth, on the other hand, as we
have seen, only participates in this kind of primitive
identification in order to break it down.

Thus if myths explain and rites transform, they do so
by peculiar forms of discourse which are alien to the field
of mundane speech and action. Levi-Strauss has attempted to
characterise the unique properties of mythic discourse by
likening it to music. Music, says Levi-Strauss (1970:28),
"hits us in the guts", and is the counterpart to myth when
the latter 'appeals to our group instinct'. Myth is, indeed,
peculiarly attuned to the unconscious: "thought in rela-
tively free play [sitting] above and athwart the exigencies
of social life" (Douglas 1975:289), and distinguishable from music only in so far as the latter has managed to divest itself more fully of public signification and reduce itself (very nearly) to pure form. Myth, then, like music, is the mind in 'freeplay', and through it the mind exhibits its own structure.

Myths are anonymous: from the moment they are seen as myths, and whatever their real origins, they exist only as elements embodied in a tradition. When the myth is repeated, the individual listeners are receiving a message that, properly speaking, is coming from nowhere; this is why it is credited with a supernatural origin. It is therefore comprehensible that the unity of the myth should be projected onto a postulated center, beyond the conscious perception of the listener through whom for the time being it is merely passing, up to the point at which the energy it radiates is consumed in the effort of unconscious reorganization that it has itself prompted (Levi-Strauss 1970:18).

A number of important points arise here which will be picked up in the body of this thesis, but I touch on them here by way of sketching my intentions. Myths are projective deliberations on the soul. Products of an impersonal unconscious, they appear to transcend the individual's involvement and are projected onto an external form. For Aborigines, this external form is the totemic ancestor - that half-man/half-beast from whom all life and culture stems. As it happens, we know already that the totemic ancestors of the Aborigines betray precisely those characteristics which Levi-Strauss says are at the heart of myths, namely, a sort of pure, untrammeled mind which Munn (1970:143) chooses to call "dynamic subjectivity". I will have cause to return to this finding of Munn's and embellish it considerably. In the meantime, it is enough to note the direction of the analysis that will follow. That direction could be well summed up by
the terms which Erich Neumann (1970) uses to describe his mythological project: *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. (5)

But we must remember also Stanner's challenging statement that there can be no theory of myth without a theory of rite, and it is to the latter problem that I shall turn in Part Three (Chapters Eight, Nine, Ten and Eleven). I previously stated that myth is something like speech that has been so divorced from the level of praxis that it has taken on the pure forms of language and thought; a kind of 'free speech' that has no intention other than to exhibit its mainspring, the unconscious. But just as myth is thus (very nearly) pure language, so we may say that rite is, in its relative lack of rational articulation, (very nearly) pure action. As Levi-Strauss (1981:675) remarks: "On the whole, the opposition between rite and myth is the same as that between living and thinking".

Thus, while myth and ritual are undoubtedly two sides of the same religious coin, they run counter to each other, a theme I intend to make central to my ensuing analysis. While myth is divorced from living, ritual is life divested of thought and reduced, as near as possible, to pure action sequences. The opposition, while from one point of view surprising, is not really all that remarkable. For in ritual it is well enough known that the actors believe themselves to become the mythic beings whose quasi-historical purpose was to bring the well-formed world into being. So if, in the Aboriginal case, the totemic ancestors moved in a world of primitive identification, but towards a fragmentation of this state of continuity with the world, it makes perfect
sense that in moving from the world into the sacred sphere of ritual, men renounce that fragmentation and take on the prior condition of continuous identification — perhaps the only part of the so-called primitive world which is characterised by what Levy-Bruhl saw as participation and the violation of the law of contradiction (though, of course, only by way of a temporary suspension of that law).

Again the work of Munn (1970) is important here. For while she has described mythology as 'the transformation of subjects into objects', she sees ritual as human beings 'submitting' to these objects (Munn 1970:145) — as the transformations of objects into subjects. This is part of the conservative religious order which, being embodied in the landscape and in ritual paraphernalia, is conceived of as being split off from the individual and outside him, bound to the ancestral past, this autonomy [having] to be integrated into the individual through identification with the external world — that is, through submission to the ancestral 'givens' of existence. Its attainment can never be separated from receptive submission to a given order of things. In this sense, subjective integration is forced into the external social field (Munn 1970:159).

So, following Munn (1970:141, 151, 157), we must remember the Durkheimian concern with the function, as well as the form, of ritual. In what ways, if any, do Australian rites refresh the moral and social constitution of the participants? In this respect we might note something of the similarity between myth and rite in so far as they are both divorced from living praxis, myth moving, so to speak, to the one side of social action and in the direction of pure language, and rites moving towards the other side constituted by spontaneous re-action unaided by thought.
Both myth and rite, then, free one from the constraints of social life, but while myth enhances the symbolic function, ritual closes it off.

It was not for nothing that Freud (1959:115-27) saw in the observance of religion something of the obsessiveness and desperation of the neurotic (cf. Levi-Strauss 1981:679-80), for the comfort that ritual brings is at the same time the allaying of the anxiety produced if the ritual is not performed. Ritual is thus meticulously repetitive, a means of coping without having to put oneself through the burden of having to think a novel solution to a problem. It is what Charlesworth (1984:12) has called in the Aboriginal context an "orthopraxy". The difference is, though, that whereas the neurotic feels that he is "estranged from reality" and thus in a "withdrawal from human companionship" (Freud 1938:106), the observer of ritual acts shares his estrangement from the real. And therein lies also a difference in function.

If ritual retreats from thought and is conservative, we cannot for all that deny its ingenuity. In the Aboriginal case, what, after Durkheim, one might refer to as the re-creative aspect of dramatic rite stems precisely from the collective orientation. Not that all rites partake of that 'collective effervescence' so beloved by Durkheim (though some do); but all rites provide the medium through which people may find, as it were, a breathing space in the transition from one social condition to another. In that sense, rites borrow and use the means adopted by the obsessional neurotic for positive purposes. For psychoanalysis is now well-attuned to the fact that not all obsessive behaviour is
dysfunctional. The security blanket of a child, for example, may play an important role in enhancing separation from the mother and in orienting the child to the wider world. This, in fact, is the general function of the 'transitional object' which Winnicott (1980:passim, cf. Chapter Eight) sees as central to the paradoxical identification which takes place in play, art and religion. The transitional object - the security blanket, the toy, the work of art, the religious observance - is a kind of fetish, but one that is 'functional', and necessary for the subject to spread across the cultural field. This again relates to the findings of Munn on the 'transformation of objects into subjects'.

If it is true, as Durkheim seems to have intuited, that ritual imparts spiritual strength to the participants, it is because, through a process of inarticulate identification, the ritual paraphernalia impress what is necessary for the subject to make a further transition into a new realm of social life. We know from psychoanalytic experience that without due care and attention from those in authority, the transitional object can take on the characteristics of a true fetish, can become a lasting obsession. But when handled correctly, it becomes the indispensable basis for an adequate and fulfilled social life. In the withdrawal from thinking into living that is ritual, then, we may see the method of learning by identification - that same kind of narcissistic mirroring which Lacan sees as preceding the true birth of the subject, and which Levi-Strauss, following Rousseau, sees as definitive of man in a condition of pre-culture.

There is little or nothing in this 'structuralist
manifesto' that was not already contained in germinal form in the intentions of Durkheim's 'five brilliant theses', and an ideal way of summarising the findings of this chapter would be to return to The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. What can we now say of the theories of religion, totemism, social control, ritual and thought?

First, the theory of religion. Contrary to what Stanner says, the sacred/profane dichotomy does have heuristic value, but in the terms Durkheim conceived of the opposition it is better expressed as the dichotomy of sacred/mundane. The sacred is only the expression of the social in so far as the former is a transfiguration of the profane, the unconscious understood as the 'language' from which mundane 'speech' stems. Thus religion is indeed society in the presence of its own image, but it is not the image of the total social fact - the supramundane. It is the image of the microcosmic 'society' internalised by the individual and the projection of this society into the macrocosmos.

Second, the theory of totemism. The relationship between nature and culture posed in totemic terms is not to be understood as historically prior, but it may be examined in terms of its elementary structures. That is to say, it may be safe to assume, as Durkheim did, that Aboriginal society is structurally simple compared with more complex forms requiring further levels of integration, but we need not, for all that, fall into a historicist trap. Without having to suggest that Australian totemism is the earliest type of religion known, we may say that it is in some sense an elementary one and that it will therefore render, through examination, 'the elementary forms of the religious life'.
Third, the theory of social control. It is indeed true that men submit to the sacred in a way which gives to the latter the power of true force. But this force is not to be identified with society as such; it is not the total social fact to which the individual submits. Rather, the reality of the force inhere in language, understood not as the totality of speech acts, but as the structured conditions of the linguistic unconscious from which speech stems. "[I]t thinks", says Lacan (1977a:193): "It thinks rather badly, but it does think". But "[I]t [also] speaks, (Lacan 1977a:125), and imperiously so - it "insists" (Lacan 1977a:167) on speaking from that location "where I do not think to think" (Lacan 1977a:166). In so far as the sacred reproduces the discourse of the unconscious, the profane, it is not wrong in making this discourse an external command.

Fourth, the theory of ritual. It is true, as Durkheim thought, that ritual assists in re-creating the social, and we are now in a better position to specify the mechanism by which it does so. Ritual transforms the subject through the means of primary identification or narcissistic mirroring. It is what Lemaire (1977:178) has called "a mould for the symbolic". Those sentiments to which Durkheim paid so much attention are akin to that compassion written about by Rousseau as the 'psychic state of which the content is indissociably both affective and intellectual'. We know that rites generally have a tripartite structure of exit, passage and return. The subject is first stripped of his prior identity and relations; then has inscribed upon him a number of new identifications which transform his deepest levels of unconscious commitment; and he is finally brought back to a
new region of the mundane with a 'gift of speech' contingent on the modification that has taken place in his 'language'. As will be shown in Part Three, the metaphor of the gift of speech is one which Aborigines themselves use.

Finally, the theory of thought. Durkheim never had anything like a full theory of myth to go with his theory of rite. His dogmatic reduction of abstract categories to social ones is related to this. There is no priority of social classification over natural classification, or vice versa (Levi-Strauss 1966:90-1), for the simple reason that it is inconceivable that thought should at one point in time be applicable to one area but not another. "Meaning is not decreed: if it is not everywhere it is nowhere" (Levi-Strauss 1973a:163). But in mythic discourse we find in the projections of each onto the other - nature onto culture and vice versa - thought in its purest form - a philosophy of nature and society as ingenious as the next. Furthermore, the characteristic nature of myth as being 'pure' thought ensures that it reveals the Kantian universals which Durkheim thought to be generated in religion.

Is there room in this project to accommodate Stanner's plea for the non-reducibility of mystery? I would say that there is and that it is correct, as Stanner has done, to stress the nature of the mysterious in religious life. Marcel (1950:Chapters IX-X) once argued that the 'mystery of being' is above all else a question of depth, and elsewhere he remarks (Marcel 1973:105-6) that it is from within this mysterious depth that we gain our appetite for life. These elegantly simple metaphors are also employed by Central Australian Aborigines. They would agree with Levi-Strauss
that music 'hits us in the guts'. The myths, in their most potent form, are actually sung, and the stomach is revealed to them in rites as the very centre and deepest part of their inner being. The stomach is the seat of the passions and to desire is to hunger after something, to have an appetite (see Chapter Six). It so happens that the rites have the function of sustaining this desire and of strengthening the depths of one's centre - one's core of being.

But there must always be an air of inarticulate mystery surrounding this core, whether we view it from the vantage point of Aboriginal life or from the angle of our own. The analysis of myths, rites, dreams and all the rest of the very stuff of religious life is interminable (Levi-Strauss 1970:5-6, Freud 1976:383). No matter how long the analysis, it is impossible to reach rock-bottom. The 'depth' truly is unfathomable, even if it is axiomatic that it is there. So the element of mystery remains, and in the Aboriginal context it must be viewed as the problem of "the origin of the human spirit" (Elkin 1937b:125). Recently, Bettelheim (1983:Chapter X) has shown how Freud's original writings on the soul (Die Seele) have been wholly distorted in English translations by being rendered as 'mind'. We know also that Levi-Strauss (in Leach 1967:xv) writes in French of "l'architecture de l'esprit" where his translators furnish us with the rather more prosaic "structure of the mind" (Levi-Strauss 1970:341). I see no particular reason for being wary of terms such as spirit or soul: we recognise easily enough a human being who lacks them. This thesis, then, is concerned with man's soul. Sustaining desire in Central Australian religion is to render to man his strength, his taste
and appetite for living. It is the mastery of the mystery of being; the management of the soul.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Lost World of the Emu

So true is it, what I then say, that the Fraction of Life can be increased in value not so much by increasing your Numerator as by lessening your Denominator. Nay, unless my Algebra deceive me, Unity itself divided by Zero will give Infinity. Make thy claim of wages a zero, then; thou hast the world under thy feet.

Thomas Carlyle
Sartor Resartus, p. 144.

The bird, which is almost completely spherical, is certainly the sublime and divine summit of living concentration. One can neither see, nor even imagine, a higher degree of unity. Excess of concentration, which constitutes the great personal force of the bird, but which implies its extreme individuality, its isolation, its social weakness.

Jules Michelet
(Quoted in G. Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, p. 237).
4.1 Elementary Cosmology

Terms such as 'The Dreaming' or 'The Dreamtime' have entered English vocabularies to denote mythical realities conceived of by Aboriginal people. The Aranda word to which such English terms correspond is altjira, the connection with dreaming being indicated by the words altjira rama, which mean 'to see altjira'; that is, to dream, "to perceive sights and shapes beyond the comprehension of human eyes" (Strehlow 1964a:732). However, altjira itself is difficult to render adequately in English. Strehlow (1971:614), who eschews any recourse to the notion of The Dreaming, says: "It is a rare word, whose root meaning appears to be 'eternal, uncreated, sprung out of itself'; and it occurs only in certain traditional phrases and collocations". One such phrase or collocation - altjiranga ngambakala - incorporates Spencer and Gillen's popularised term for The Dreaming (alcheringa). Altjiranga ngambakala means literally 'having originated out of altjira', and is an expression used only about the earth-born supernatural beings [who created the world]. It can best be translated as 'having originated out of his (her, their) own eternity'. It means, in fact, that these supernatural beings have always existed and that no one has created them ... It can be abbreviated to altjiranga, which can be translated as 'out of all eternity', 'from all eternity', 'ever from the very beginning'. Altjiranga is also commonly used as the answer to questions about the origins of the world. Thus, according to the Aranda, the earth and the sky have existed altjiranga - or as we might say, they have existed 'in the beginning', meaning thereby that nothing preceded them (Strehlow 1971:614).

Altjiranga, as used here by Strehlow, is derived from altjira and the ablative suffix -nga, which can mean 'from', 'out of', or 'because of' (Strehlow 1944:76-7).(1) Thus, whatever one might think of the suitability of Strehlow's
gloss – eternity – it is evident that, for the Aranda, *altjira* is related to a doctrine of first causes. It is therefore a fundamental cosmological datum. Moreover, as Strehlow’s translation may be intended to suggest, this is no simple matter of history or of The Dreaming that was. *Altjira* continues to manifest itself – as, for example, in dreams. It has often been noted that the very essence of The Dreaming in Aboriginal societies is that it acts as an umbrella, under which the whole fabric of the cosmos, both natural and cultural, rests. The spiritual personages who moved to create everything in the first instance continue to act as a necessary reservoir of power required for the maintenance of life. As Tonkinson (1978:14-5) puts it:

> The Aborigines ground their entire existence firmly in a conception of spiritual beings as holders of life-giving and life-sustaining power that is automatically accorded those who act out the life design formulated by these beings. The living conform to the dictates of a culture transmitted by their forefathers but attributed to spiritual, not human, actions.

In this sense, *altjira* is for the Aranda a fundamental concept of their philosophy or *weltanschauung*: their "all-embracing" view of the world which is expected to have full validity for all times (Strehlow 1964a:727). In Stanner’s (1979:24) felicitous phrasing, The Dreaming is "everywhen".

I do not propose here to suggest a new or better translation for *altjira*. To do so would doubtless leave me open to the charge, that can also be levelled against Strehlow, of introducing a term which carries a good deal of conceptual baggage which is alien to the Aranda. From one point of view, *altjira* is probably best thought of simply as *altjira*. (2) Nevertheless, one should, I think, take heed of
Stanner’s (1979:31) claim that The Dreaming is "proof" that Aborigines have sought to "make sense" out of human experience and to find some 'principle' in the whole human situation. These searches, suggests Stanner, stem from a propensity that "is, in some way, built into the constitution of the human mind". The principle to which he refers may be likened to "a kind of logos" (Stanner 1979:24).

In examining the various accounts of The Dreaming given by scholars of Aboriginal society, one is struck by two facets of the fundamental idea. Firstly, it is metaphysical and, in itself, corresponds to nothing tangible outside of the mind (even though it may manifest itself sensually). As Myers (1976:158-9) states for the Pintubi:

The distinction between the Dreaming and all else underlies every feature of the Pintubi universe. tjukurrpa [The Dreaming] is typically in contrast semantically with the word yuti, the latter meaning 'clearly visible' [or] 'within the subject's field of sensory presentation'.

A similar contrast, between djugurba (= tjukurrpa) and yidjaru, is indicated for the Walbiri by Munn (1973a:24), and this maps on to Meggitt's (1972:71-2) distinction between the "noumenal" and "phenomenal" sides of Walbiri reality. On the other hand, Myers (1976:159-60) also states:

The relationship between the two concepts [tjukurrpa and yuti] in Pintubi ideology is not one of simple logical opposition, because tjukurrpa is seen as the ground of all being.

This second aspect of The Dreaming — what we might call its inclusiveness — is called by Meggitt (1972:71) "metaphysical monism": a doctrine "that regards man, society, and nature as interlocking and interacting components of a larger, functionally integrated totality".

There is a certain amount of equivocation here; or at
least an implicit contradiction. On one level Aborigines see
the Dreaming as something quite distinct and opposed, while
on another they portray it as inclusive and all-embracing.
However, as Levi-Strauss has pointed out in Totemism, this
kind of equivocation may well be universal in cosmology.
Towards the end of Totemism a startling congruence of
thought between the philosopher Bergson and a Dakota Indian
is established. According to the Dakota man, the world is
articulated in the following way.

Everything as it moves, now and then, here and
there, makes stops. The bird as it flies stops in
one place to make its nest, and in another to rest
in its flight. A man when he goes forth stops when
he wills. So the god has stopped. The sun, which
is so bright and beautiful, is one place where he
has stopped. The moon, the stars, the winds, he
has been with. The trees, the animals, are all
places where he has stopped and the Indian thinks
of these places and sends his prayers there to
reach the place where the god has stopped and win
help and a blessing (Dorsey, in Levi-Strauss
1973a:171).

The parallel piece is as follows.

A great current of creative energy gushes forth
through matter, to obtain from it what it can. At
most points it is stopped; these stops are
transmuted, in our eyes, into the appearances of
so many living species, that is organisms in which
our perception, being essentially analytical and
synthetic, distinguishes a multitude of functions;
but the process of organization was only the stop
itself, a simple act analogous to the impress of a
foot which instantaneously causes thousands of
grains of sand to contrive to form a pattern
(Bergson in Levi-Strauss 1973a:171).

In the final analysis, says Levi-Strauss (1973a:172), these
two metaphysical accounts correspond so exactly because the
philosopher and the Indian both have "the same desire to
apprehend in a total fashion the two aspects of reality
which the philosopher terms continuous and discontinuous",
and because they both share "the same refusal to choose
between the two" and "the same effort to see them as complementary perspectives giving on to the same truth".

These accounts are instructive, because Aborigines also see the world in terms of 'stops'. These are spoken of as marks or names (Myers 1976:160, Munn 1970:145) which indicate phenomenal entities typically formed, much in the manner of Bergson's 'footprint', by the actions of itinerant totemic ancestors. This is how Strehlow (1964a:727-8) describes the situation for the Aranda.

At the beginning of time the earth had looked like a featureless, desolate plain... It was covered in eternal darkness... Time began when [the] supernatural beings awakened from their sleep. They broke through the surface of the earth; and their 'birthplaces' became the first sites on the earth to be impregnated with their life and power... After emerging from their eternal slumbering places, these supernatural beings, commonly labelled 'totemic ancestors', moved about on the surface of the earth. Their actions and their wanderings brought into being all the physical features of the Central Australian landscape. Mountains, sandhills, swamps, plains, springs, and soakages, all arose to mark the deeds of the roving totemic ancestors and ancestresses. In the scores of thousands of square miles that constitute the Aranda-speaking area there was not a single striking feature which was not associated with an episode in one of the sacred myths... in which aboriginal religious beliefs found their expression.

Altjira, then, is both inclusive and particular. It is seen as the source of all phenomenal reality (the ancestors were created altjiranga - out of The Dreaming), but manifests itself only through the same. Strehlow draws attention to the manner in which the discrete existences of the landscape are manifestations of altjira, but it was not simply the land which was given form by the ancestors in the beginning. Animals, humans and plants also owe their current situation to The Dreaming. It was the ancestors who...
populated the world with all the different floral and faunal entities; and it was the ancestors who dissected and shaped the original, protoplasmic, amorphous mass of infantile humanity that lay hapless on the surface of the earth, afterwards furnishing it with all that was necessary for a cultural livelihood (see Chapter Six).

The asymmetric opposition between The Dreaming and phenomenal reality recalls Levi-Strauss's contention that continuity and discontinuity are 'complementary perspectives giving on to the same truth'. It is as if that 'principle' spoken of by Stanner, although being a central unifying factor, is also essentially dualistic - consisting only in its 'complementary perspectives'.{3} We can, I think, pursue the comparison with profit.

According to Levi-Strauss, continuous and discontinuous aspects of reality are factors of classification. If one imagines a multi-dimensional worldview as consisting of a number of dynamic classes arranged in vertical fashion, then the discontinuous aspects of the world become more in evidence as one descends the arrangement, while the continuous ones emerge in more coherent form as one travels in the opposite direction.

[C]lassifications do not constitute separate domains but form part of an all-embracing dynamic taxonomy the unity of which is assured by the perfect homogeneity of its structure, consisting as it does of successive dichotomies. One consequence of this feature is that it is always possible to pass from species to category. Again there is no inconsistency between the system (in evidence at the top) and the lexicon whose role becomes progressively more dominant as one descends the ladder of dichotomies. The problem of the relation between continuous and discontinuous reaches a solution in terms of origin since the universe is represented as a continuum made up of successive oppositions (Levi-Strauss 1966:139).
The contrast between continuity and discontinuity is thus the same as that between generalisation and specification, or intension and extension. Their contradictory, but complementary, perspectives are reconciled 'in terms of origin', since it is there that the whole edifice has come into being.

But there are problems of a logical kind in specifying origins, because the continuous - the continuum of lived experience - cannot be identified or related: it is simply the system itself and that is all one can say. At the same time, however, because of inherent constraints on our thinking, we cannot envisage the system except in opposition to what it is not, which can only be non-existent (by definition).

Negation is intrinsic to any classification.

When the classificatory intention ascends ... towards the greatest generality and most extreme abstraction, no diversity prevents it from applying a scheme through the operation of which reality undergoes a series of progressive purifications, whose final term will be provided, as intended, in the form of a simple binary opposition (high and low, right and left, peace and war, etc.) and beyond which it is, for intrinsic reasons, useless as well as impossible to go (Levi-Strauss 1966:217).

Now we have seen how, when viewing their world as a total, integrated system, Aborigines make use of an absolutely fundamental distinction between The Dreaming and visible reality, between what Meggitt, in a Kantian vein, has dubbed the noumenal and the phenomenal. In a sense, one can say that this represents the most fundamental opposition 'beyond which it is, for intrinsic reasons, useless as well as impossible to go'. (4) On the other hand, there is a sense in which the opposition is surpassed: Aborigines say that The Dreaming is the ground of all being, a unity which en-
compasses everything. It would be futile, for the very reasons pointed out by Levi-Strauss, to try to overcome this contradiction. We can, however, note it, and try to ascertain the fulness of its significance in Aboriginal thought. For the asymmetry has qualities which, when explicated, allow us to come to grips more firmly with the nature of that 'principle' (or logos) that is posited by Stanner.

4.2 Sky and Earth

As pointed out earlier, the word altjiranga may be used to explain the origin of the world, and the example given by Strehlow - 'the earth and the sky have existed altjiranga' - is a typical one in so far as it circumscribes a cosmic opposition, or formulation, that may be discovered worldwide. However, exactly what the Aranda mean by this formulation is not clear from Strehlow's exegesis. He says that altjiranga means 'from all eternity', but in the case of the cosmic datum of sky and earth we find the word translated as 'in the beginning' - 'meaning thereby that nothing preceded them'. Presumably, if the Aranda had wanted to say 'in the beginning', they would have done so rather differently. (5) On the other hand, the connotation 'nothing preceded them' may be quite accurate, since ngambakala does not simply mean 'having originated', but 'having originated out of nothing' or 'having originated from oneself' (Spencer and Gillen 1899:308, 1927:307-8). (6) What remains to be specified and explicated is the nature of the initial conditions out of which the ancestors, the earth and the sky, and the whole of the known universe were created. What was altjira 'in the
beginning'?

The question has been touched upon above, but the brief remarks already made about the condition of the earth prior to the coming of the ancestors and the creation of man are worth expanding.

In [the Aranda-speaking] area it was believed that the earth, like the sky, had always existed, and that the earth, like the sky, had always been the home of supernatural beings. At the beginning of time the earth had looked like a featureless, desolate plain. No mountain ranges, sandhills, swamps, or river courses existed on its barren surface. It was covered in eternal darkness, lit only dimly by the distant fires [stars] bordering the Milky Way; for the sun, the moon, and the Evening Star, too, were still slumbering under the earth's cold crust. No plants or animals could, of course, exist under such conditions; but a vague form of human life existed in the shape of semi-embryonic masses of half-developed infants, all joined together in their hundreds, lying helplessly at places which were later revealed as saltlakes or great waterholes. These 'infants' were not merely joined together in their hundreds; their hands and toes were also drawn together by webs, their eyes, mouths, and noses were closed, and they could not move any of their limbs. They could therefore not develop into individual men and women. But neither could they grow old, decay, or die. For if life in the accepted sense of this term was unknown on the surface of the world, so was death. Only below the surface of the earth did life already exist in its fulness, in the form of thousands of uncreated supernatural beings that had always existed; but even those were still slumbering in eternal sleep (Strehlow 1964a:727).

In the beginning, then, there was no life on earth; only the dual condition of the eternal infancy of the Inapatua (the Aranda name for the massed, embryonic human chain - see chapter six) on the surface of the world, and the eternal, death-like slumber (borkerama) of the ancestors in their underworld domain.

However, this dual condition of lifelessness was contrasted with another situation obtaining somewhere in the sky.
The Western Aranda believed the sky to be inhabited by an emu-footed Great Father (knga-rirri), who was also the Eternal Youth (altjiya nditja). This Great Father had dog-footed wives, and many sons and daughters — all the males being emu-footed and all the females dog-footed. They lived on fruits and vegetable foods in an eternally green land, unaffected by droughts, through which the Milky Way flowed like a broad river; and the stars were their campfires. In this green land there were only trees, fruits, flowers, and birds; no game animals existed, and no meat was eaten. All of these sky dwellers were as ageless as the stars themselves, and death could not enter their home: the reddish-skinned emu-footed Great Father of the sky, whose blonde hair shone 'like a spider web in the evening sunlight', looked as young as his own sons, and all the women who lived above the stars had the grace and the full-bosomed beauty of young girls (Strehlow 1964a:725).

In contrast to the earth, then, as a place of 'death without life', the sky was populated by beings who possessed 'life without death' (and as we shall see, 'life without birth' also). Moreover, the environment of the sky dwellers, far from approximating to the barren condition of the earth, was one of green and plenty.

Exactly how these two worlds were juxtaposed is not entirely clear, but it seems that while the earth and the sky are conceived of as being separate existents, they were at the beginning of time somehow conflated into the same space. Later, when the earth-born ancestors emerged from their perpetual, underground rest, the two realms were radically separated. This is what Strehlow (1971:621) says about this union and separation.

Traditions in various parts of the Aranda-speaking area seem to hint that at the beginning of time the sky was not completely beyond the reach of the earth-born supernatural beings. The original [ceremonial] poles of the totemic ancestors could penetrate the vault of the sky. The two Ntjikantja brothers of Tjikara [on the lower Finke River] used their spear to climb into the sky. Members of the Lower Southern Aranda group used to point out
to one another the stone stump near Akar Intjota in the Simpson Desert, where there had stood the gigantic casuarina tree which had once formed a bridge linking the earth with the sky. But all these links had been broken when the totemic ancestors returned to their eternal sleep (borkerama). The ceremonial poles had sunk back into the ground. The gigantic casuarina tree had been cut down ... [T]he two Ntjikantja brothers had pulled their spear up into the sky, and then pronounced the curse which brought death into world for the Southern Aranda.

It is an essential characteristic of the sky-world that it is forever cut off from the earth. People say that the state of life that obtained there in the beginning still exists, but it is a form of life about which they can know little or nothing due to its inaccessibility. As Strehlow (1971:615) says: "The sky dwellers were of no practical concern to mankind. They dwelt beyond the stars, and took no interest in anything that happened on the unquiet earth beneath them". The 'Great Father'

and his large family exerted no direct or indirect influence upon anything outside of the sky. They had not created the earth, nor any of its landscape features, nor any of its plants and animals, nor any of its human inhabitants. They had not brought the totemic ancestors into being, nor had they controlled any of their actions. They had no power over winds, clouds, sicknesses, dangers, or death. They were not even interested in anything that went on below them. If any crimes were committed, the evil-doers had to fear only the wrath of the totemic ancestors and the punishment of outraged human society (Strehlow 1971:615).

Thus, one would have to agree with Strehlow that his father's translation of altjira, as it is applied to the emu-footed 'Great Father', as God is somewhat inappropriate (Strehlow 1971:614-5, Carl Strehlow 1907:1-2, cf. Spencer and Gillen 1927:589-96). Nevertheless, it is true that the Aranda apply the term altjira to the sky beings, and in a way which distinguishes them from the earth-born totemic
ancestors. For while the totemic ancestors were created, or came to life, altjiranga ngambakala, this phrase cannot be applied to those who dwell beyond the stars. The latter have always existed in their present condition: they were never created and never sprang into life anywhere or at any time. But one is entitled to ask as to what possible function there could be for supernatural beings that are said to be of no practical concern whatsoever. Why do the Aranda bother to envisage a world which, being totally detached from the here-and-now, appears to serve no purpose? The answer, as I now propose to show, is that the sky dwellers do not so much serve practical ends as intellectual ones; an answer, incidentally, which again brings the problem of the congruence of altjira and God to the forefront.

4.3 Variations on a Theme

In order to get to grips with these matters it is useful to know that the Arandic conception of the sky world has widespread resonances. Throughout a very large part (perhaps all) of Australia there is a belief that the sky is associated with an emu. More particularly, this emu tends to be identified with the dark patches of the Milky Way, especially that gaping void in the heavens which we call the Coal Sack. The belief is found at least as far north as the Darwin and Denpelli areas (Basedow 1925:332-3, Spencer 1928: 853) and as far south as the Great Australian Bight (Basedow 1925:334). It may also be found in the west at Jigalong (Tonkinson pers. comm.) and in the Broome district (Roheim 1969:64), and in the east at Cape York (Keefe pers. comm.), in New South Wales (Mountford 1978:59, Parker 1953:231), and
in Victoria (Basedow 1925:333-4). In some Western Desert dialects this emu may be referred to as *kalaia pubarantja* or *kalaia pubanji* - the 'stopped' or 'rested' emu (von Brandenstein 1982:101, Basedow 1925:332).

As one might expect, the way in which people conceive in detail of this emu being over such a vast area shows tremendous variation, but as I intend to show here, in Central Australia at least, there is a certain strain of consistency in what is being said. This consistency, I suggest, leads us to a more profound understanding of the form and function of the emu- and dog-footed sky dwellers of the Arandic cosmos.

The first main account of the emu being is furnished by Gillen (1896:183). He states that (in Eastern and Central Aranda country) it is said that the sky is inhabited by three persons: a huge man with an immense foot shaped like that of an emu, a woman, and a child that never grows up. The emu man is a great spirit, and whenever men die their spirits ascend to the sky to join him. However, the emu-footed man is described as inhospitable. He ejects these travelling souls from heaven and sends them down into a saltlake on earth. There the souls are rescued by lesser spirits with whom they forever after dwell.

The second account is given by Carl Strehlow for the Western Aranda (1907:1-2, 16). It is more or less the same as that reproduced by his son (see above). According to the senior Strehlow, the Western Aranda have a conception of a supreme being living in the sky. They call him Altjira. He is eternal, big, of ruddy complexion, and has long, fair hair. He has emu feet, and for that reason goes by the name
of Iliingka (ili= emu, ingka = foot). He is beautifully decorated and has many beautiful wives, red-skinned like himself, but with the feet of dingoes. His many sons and daughters are also beautiful: the sons have emu feet like their father and the daughters dingo feet like their mothers. Iliingka lives in the sky where he has been for all time. The sky itself is like another earth, but the Milky Way, which is a great, broad river, is bordered by an inexhaustible supply of waterholes, fruit-bearing trees, and game. Iliingka hunts while his wives collect fruits and edible roots. The stars are their campfires. Iliingka is intrinsically good, but his authority goes no further than the sky. He did not create the earth and there is no sacred ritual pertaining to him. People neither fear nor love Iliingka: their only anxiety is that one day his domain will collapse to obliterate the earth. Some believe, however, that the souls of the dead may go to Altjira, but only if those souls have been good in their earthly life. Those that have been bad also go to the sky, but not to Iliingka’s land.

As the reader will have noticed, T. G. H. Strehlow’s account of Iliingka and his family differs slightly from that given by his father. Strehlow (1971:618) questioned four of his informants about the possibility of Iliingka going hunting in the sky. One flatly denied that this could happen, while the other three simply stated that Iliingka lived only on fruits and vegetables. At one stage Strehlow (1971:616-7) reproduces a verbatim account of his informants’ descriptions of the mode of existence in the sky. The mood of the narration is generally one of sadness
and regret in the realisation that the sky dwellers are never subject to age, decay, disease and death. At one point an informant gets confused about the anatomical character of Iliingka's wives. He states first that they have emu feet like Iliingka himself, but then corrects himself to say that the feet are really those of dingoes:

They ... have emu, — no, dogs' feet. Listen, they are dog-footed! Their feet are short, like balled paws ... 

Although the stars are said to be fires, it is stressed that the sky dwellers live some distance beyond:

Up above they are, those stars, near Iliingka himself. He dwells beyond them: the stars are closer to us ... Most certainly he dwells beyond them, this man we are telling you about.

The most extensive survey of the emu-in-the-sky motif is provided by Roheim (1972:54-118) in his paper Primitive High Gods. Much of the imagery mentioned so far is duplicated by Roheim, but there are significant variations also. A man from Henbury (Upper Southern Aranda) told Roheim that Iliingka originally lived on earth. But one day he decided to go to the top of a mountain and make a plentiful supply of grass and water. He then ascended to his permanent abode in the sky. Some of Carl Strehlow's (1907:2-3) informants gave him a similar interpretation. They said that in the beginning there were totemic beings who, while living on earth, which was then covered by a great expanse of water (cf. Chapter Six), used to travel freely to the sky to hunt in Iliingka's domain. But Iliingka eventually forbade this. He commanded that a bird should make the sea withdraw from the land and that a huge mountain, which had previously linked the sky and the earth (like the ceremonial poles, the
Ntjikantja brothers' spear, and the giant casuarina tree spoken of by T. G. H. Strehlow), be flattened. Only a handful of the original earth dwellers managed to scramble up a long tree (another axis mundi) to remain in the sky as stars. Now the sky is completely inaccessible. (7)

An Alice Springs (Eastern/Central Aranda) informant remarked to Roheim that Iliingka is exceedingly evil. He lives in a large dwelling in the western sky and, even though he has emu feet, he is an atua ndurpa (true man, real person). His sons, however, are baby emus. He carries a whole battery of pointing bones with which to perform his evil magic. The informant first states that Iliingka has no tjurunga (sacred objects), but then he contradicts himself to say that Iliingka does possess tjurunga. He can make men 'crazy' and has the power to initiate shamans. Iliingka is first said to have been born from an emu's nest, but the informant then says that nobody really knows whence he originated. He is big, 'cheeky' (bold), and unfriendly. He used to live in a cave on earth, but one day ascended to the sky in smoke. He moves around in the sky in the shape of a whirlwind and may sometimes visit the earth, though nobody can detect his presence. The informant thought that Iliingka might die one day much like anyone else. This seems to be the only documented case where a man believes Iliingka to be mortal.

Carl Strehlow (1908:1-2) and Roheim give a number of non-Arandic beliefs which help to clarify the nature of the transformations. According to Strehlow, the Luritja (Kukatja and Matuntara), say that the sky is inhabited by one man and his single wife. Both are eternally beautiful, while their
lone child remains forever young. The Kukatja say that the man has emu feet, while the Matuntara say that he is a perfectly formed human being. He sleeps at night, but by day hunts and performs ceremonies. His idyllic heavenly abode is supported by pillars, which people fear may one day give way to level the earth’s surface. Everybody, including women and children, know all there is to know about the sky beings. There is no esoteric knowledge about them; they have no ritual significance; and they had no hand in creation. As against one of the Arandic formulations, it is said that the sky dwellers did not order that the sea be withdrawn from the earth, since the earth had been from the very beginning quite dry.

This information is questioned by Roheim, who, working with the same groups, and even the same informants, discovered different stories. According to Roheim, the Kukatja (Jumu) and Pintubi say that the sky is inhabited by a man, his single wife as beautiful as himself, and many sons. All of them have the feet of dogs. The man may be helpful to hunters, occasionally helping them to find good weapons. There is no story for these beings, but people know that they once had ordinary feet. They were broken by incessant shaking and dingo feet grew in their place. Even now the dog-footed man is always shaking and showing his feet. All the beings are peculiar in that they have no symmetrical appearance. Beards and pubic hair grow only on one side of the face and body. There are no eyebrows or eyelids, and only single eyes located on one side of the head. Women have only one breast and men only one testicle. People believe that the sky dwellers are ‘good’, but nevertheless behave
like ‘devils’. Only men who have had one testicle removed can ever hope to ascend to the sky after their deaths.

The Pitjantjara state that the sky is inhabited by a man with emu feet. He has many sons, but there are no women at all in the sky. Everything in the sky is imperishable, especially the tjurunga. One of these tjurunga holds the sky in place. It is thought that if a dead man’s soul should one day go to heaven and pull at the tjurunga, the sky will collapse. There used to be two emu-footed men, but no explanation is given as to why there is now only one. These two men used to live on earth with a blind woman, but journeyed to the Milky Way to ‘stop up there altogether’ after maltreating the woman by being stingy with gifts of emu meat.

This is one of the few variants which stresses any real mythical elaboration on why it is that the emu-footed sky dwellers live where they do, although similar stories can be found from further afield. Daisy Bates (1972:59-60) records one such story from South Australia, and here too the emu — this time a female — rises to the sky as a result of anti-social behaviour. She had cuckolded her husband, a native cat man, by having a sexual liaison with a wombat man. She was thrown onto a fire, from which she rose to go to a dark patch in the Milky Way which now bears her name.

Roheim also provides another elaborated story, this time from the Kukatja (Ngatatara, Yumu). The Milky Way is regarded as a great tjurunga which represents the ‘supreme mystery of initiation’. There is a man there who is called Rough Foot. He lives with his many novice sons. The stars are their women. Originally the novices were all in a state
of sleep, but Rough Foot tipped over a large vessel of water and lit a fire-stick, whereupon the novices all awoke. Having seen the fire and water, the novices remained forever with their father in the sky. They all originated up there, but never, like the earthly ancestors, turned into sacred objects. They were born from their own bodies and now move around by stamping their feet.

A further story concerning an emu sky being, published only recently by the Aboriginal community at Papunya (in traditional Kukatja country), is also quite elaborate. In The Dreaming there lived a blind man with his wife. The latter would always go out into the bush to collect emu eggs for her husband. The man, however, always complained about their small size. So the wife, eager to please her man, determined to find a large emu that would lay bigger eggs: and this she did. Having followed the tracks of the big emu, she attacked it; but the bird retaliated and killed her. The husband became concerned at his wife’s absence, but while feeling around a tree for some firewood he came across some berries. Since he was so hungry, he ate them and was surprised to find that he could thereafter see. He immediately took up a spear to go in search of his wife. After following her tracks, he finally came across the big emu. He speared that emu and banished its spirit to the Milky Way. On a very clear night one can still see the shape of the emu amongst the stars in the Milky Way (Ngitji Ngitji 1979). Again, then, the emu’s fate seems to be intimately bound up with anti-social behaviour.

Before leaving these myths about the sky beings and embarking on an analysis, I should mention one final set of
beliefs reported by Spencer and Gillen (1904:498-500) for the Kaititja. The Kaititja believe that the sky is populated by a great man with a very black face. He is called Atnatu, which is said to mean 'the man without an anus'. He originated in the sky and has been active there since long before The Dreaming on earth came into being. He both created himself and gave himself his name. His world is like a duplicate of the earth, with another sky and another sun beyond it. The stars are Atnatu’s women. His daughters are also stars, but his sons he calls by the same name as himself. Before The Dreaming began on earth Atnatu had a great many sons and daughters in the sky. But they were mean to him and would not co-operate in ceremonial activities. So he banished them to the earth, dropping them through a hole in the sky. He remained in the sky, where he lives to this day with his thin, but full-breasted, wives. But the children whom he dropped onto the earth instigated The Dreaming there by bringing with them all of the cultural arts. Atnatu takes an active interest in Kaititja ceremonies. It was he who made all the first tjurungas; and now, when he hears the sound of the bull-roarer at initiation, he initiates one of his own sons in the sky. Were the Kaititja to fail to initiate their boys, Atnatu would become angry and haul them up into the heavens. He is once said to have really done this and to have eaten one of the young boys. The un-initiated know nothing of Atnatu. He is one of the closely guarded secrets of the senior men.

4.4 Emu and Dingo Footnotes

No one, with the single exception of Roheim, has
undertaken a systematic analysis of these beliefs and mythic fragments. I will return to Roheim's arguments in the next section of this chapter, but first I wish to explore a number of aspects of animal symbolism used in the texts. Some remarks by Strehlow (1971:619) can get us under way.

The animal symbolism implicit in the emu feet of the male and the dogs' feet of the female sky dwellers fits admirably into the general picture of supramundane happiness [that is described for the sky world]. Ilingka is the perfect father symbol: all Central Australian emu ceremonial cycles abound with acts showing the emu father proudly strutting about with his chicks. For in real life it is the male emu which patiently sits on the eggs and hatches them; and it is the male bird which takes the young chicks to the food plots and the waters and protects them against their natural enemies. Nothing, however, shows the reversal of the normal earthly attitudes better than the changed nature of the dog-footed sky women. The dingoes, the main enemies of the emus on earth, have become in the sky the wives of the emus, and now go out gathering grass seeds, yams, berries and bulbs for themselves and their emu-footed husbands.

Strehlow has made an important point here in drawing attention to the significance of ethno-zoological knowledge in the construction of the imagery of 'supramundane happiness'; but there is considerably more to say. He is correct to note that the emu is a kind of 'male mother', since Central Australian Aborigines are fully conversant with the hatching and caring behaviour of the male bird (see Plate 3). Carl Strehlow's (1910:33-6) description of Western Aranda emu ceremonies confirms his son's contention that male caring behaviour is dramatised as male behaviour. In addition, 'male motherhood' is frequently portrayed in Central Australian myths (Carl Strehlow 1907: 30-1, 42-5, Mountford 1976:146, 188-99, Roheim 1974a:166-72, Ellis 1970: 129), while in real life Aranda men who are for some reason
The hen emu leaves the nest area after laying her eggs and the male hatches them without any assistance from her. He also looks after the chicks for as long as 18 months (cf. Plate 9).
Plate 4. Domestic Dingo Bitch with Pups

(from Tindale 1974: plate 80 - black & white section)

The dingo bitch is the perfect image of exclusive motherhood. This one is a tamed camp dog from the Warburton Ranges, but still rears her pups without any assistance from males.
left caring for their children may be mockingly likened to emus. Strehlow is also correct in stressing the normal animosity existing between emus and dingoes, since, apart from man, the dingo is the only predator which may threaten adult emus, this also being a common mythological theme (Carl Strehlow 1907:42-5, Basedow 1925:316, Roheim 1974a: 172-5, Robinson 1956:82-3, Elkin 1934:187-8, Horne and Aiston 1924:130).(10) I would also point out that, as far as inversion is concerned, these conceptions implicitly stress an abnormal division of labour. The emu, a herbivore, is contrasted with the dingo, a carnivore, so that there is a connotation of 'man the gatherer' and 'woman the hunter' (though the latter does not appear to be consciously elaborated, possibly because of the overall de-emphasis on hunting in the sky world). Of course, inversion is also the case where fatherhood is changed into motherhood, and in order to complete the picture I would now like to draw on my own ethnography.

One night, while myself and a group of Aranda men were camped on the fringes of the Simpson Desert, we heard the distant howls of a dingo. An old, senior man from Maryvale, George Breadon, was immediately struck by their uncanny nature and made a number of unsolicited comments. He said that he had been told that dingoes live in families in the bush, just like the Aranda, and that each family consists of a mother, a father, and a number of pups. As the pups grow up, he continued, the eldest brother begins to go out hunting and brings back meat for his juniors. The mother and father, George explained, are glad to see this, for it means that the youngsters can now fend for themselves.
Accordingly, the parents can also be independent and depart to 'have their own feed'.

This information may not be directly relevant to the traditions of the sky beings, but it illustrates something important about Arandic mythopoeia. It is perhaps not surprising that dingo families should be thought of as being similar to human ones, for not only are dingoes and humans alike in being hunters, but they are also the only large placental mammals to be found in inland Australia. Dogs and humans, then, reproduce, both sexually and socially, to a similar pattern. However, George's account of dingo social behaviour is also very subtly accurate. In Central Australia bitches abandon their pups when the latter are three to four months old. The young dogs, who at this stage are unable to hunt properly, then congregate as a pack near a local waterhole, eventually attaching themselves to a lone male when he comes to drink. From this new partnership the young dogs learn to hunt effectively (Corbett and Newsome 1975:377-8). Since after this event the bitch has nothing more to do with her offspring, its seems clear that George's description must be based (directly or indirectly) on some very acute environmental observation (as well as a 'totemic projection' of actual human qualities onto dogs).

But George's account is not absolutely correct: dogs and bitches rarely, if ever, live in pairs and as a nuclear family. Dingoes do sometimes live in groups, but the manner of sociability is extremely loose. As Meggitt 1965:12-3) states in a study of the association between Aborigines and dingoes:

Normally .., each dog occupies a specific
territory of no great extent from which it tries to exclude other dogs. A male and female that live nearby and commonly mate may regularly join forces to hunt larger game, afterward going off to their separate lairs ... Similarly, although the male dog visits the female’s domain to engage in characteristically aggressive courting behaviour, he returns to his own territory after mating. The bitch whelps in winter ... [She] cares for the pups for some months, after which they not only have to fend for themselves but must also find a new home.

Male dingoes may have relations with pups, visiting and greeting them in the female’s den, but they play no role in nurturing the young. It is the female who brings the pups meat when they have been weaned, a role which is acted out in Central Australian dingo ceremonies (Carl Strehlow 1911: 14). The bitch may be helped in this task, but assistance is always rendered by another female living nearby (Corbett and Newsom 1975:376-7). I would have little doubt that Aborigines know of this female exclusivity, since the time of weaning is an active one in the acquisition of camp dogs as easily tameable pups (Meggitt 1965:14 – see Plate 4).

The essential point here is, of course, that dingo bitches may appear to be reproductively independent in a similar way to male emus; although in the case of the latter the independence is even more marked. Emu ‘male motherhood’ is a protracted process. After the female has laid her eggs, the cock alone incubates them. This may take about two months, after which he herds his family around for about one year (Rowley 1974:191). Hen emus have absolutely nothing to do with the raising of their offspring, and should they encounter their chicks are known to behave aggressively towards them (Grzimek 1967:160). Similar behaviour has been documented for dingoes, who may occasionally kill and eat
younger dogs (Grzimek 1967:228). Just such an event is described in an Aranda myth where a male dog rushes onto a den of pups to kill them (Strehlow 1969:27). Perhaps, then, it is not surprising to find that emus and dingoes are the main 'bogeyman' figures to be found in the Central Australian 'nursery' (Roheim 1974b:14, 119). The dingo may also find its way into stories as a child-devourer (Basedow 1925:318).(12)

With these observations in mind, I think one might want to qualify Strehlow's remarks about the emu and the dingo living in peaceful co-existence in the sky. For the idea that the emu and the dingo live in harmony may have less to do with any co-existence marked by reciprocal interchange, and more to do with reproductive autonomy and isolation from each other. Of course, complementarity might be taken for granted if the normal relationships between the sexes are taken as a model: but this model may be inappropriate. It is invariably noted that whenever the main sky being has a wife or wives, she or they are marked by species differentiation. It is, of course, axiomatic that different species do not mate,(13) and this idea may be expressed in the stories by the fact that daughters have dog feet like their mothers, whereas sons have emu feet like their father. This suggests, at the very least, that male emus reproduce in their own likeness only; that is, as emus. Conversely, dingoes reproduce only as dogs. If this is the case, then what is in evidence is a relationship of pure opposition and lack of complementarity.

Such a lack is given expression in other ways. In the first place, the emu and the dingo can appear inter-
changeably: either the dingo may be substituted for the emu as one moves from one area to the next, or, as in the case of one of Strehlow's informants, a myth narrator may get confused about which animal is appropriate to denote particular kinds of beings. But if the motivating idea here is one of independence, then one can see that it would make little difference which animal is chosen and in which context. For male and female emus, as well as male and female dingoes, have little to do with each other in reproduction: little more, in fact, than would male emus and female dingoes. Having said that, however, one should note that there is a definite tendency in the myths to skew the male representation in favour of the emu, which is perhaps not surprising given the remarkable reproductive activities of the bird.(14) Significantly, one variant even explains that there are no women whatsoever in the sky.

The isolation motif is also remarkably affirmed in one of the stories in the lack of symmetry existing on the bodies of the sky beings. In each case — lack of a breast, testicle, eye, etc. — the lack of symmetry is exemplified by the absence of a bodily attribute from one side. None of the single organs are centrally situated. Thus, what I would suggest here is that all these features serve to express the central idea of singularity, either in the form of total opposition and independence, or isolation, which in formal terms are tantamount to the same thing: everything appears one-sided.(15) Perhaps the most simple forms of this condition of irrelation are furnished by Roheim's Kukatja informant who describes the sky dwellers as being born from their own bodies. Perhaps, too, one might have wanted to ask his
Aranda informant who described Iliingka as having been born from an emu’s nest whether the nest had not been Iliingka’s own.

There is some confusion about the way in which the sky beings undertake their productive activities. Even though women are often aligned with dingoes, they are never explicitly said to hunt. Though the emu is a herbivore, Iliingka is occasionally portrayed as a hunter, though this is usually denied. But one thing is more or less invariant; the sky dwellers are seen as living in a land of complete plenty. Similarly, the sky beings are hardly ever regarded as being subject to either growth or decay. Whether the sky beings be seen as emu chicks, eternally young adults, sons and daughters who look the same age as their fathers and mothers, or as novices, all remain in the same form for all time.

Some further explorations in zoology may be called for here. Roheim (1974a:169) has suggested that Central Australian myths and songs sometimes emphasize the creative power of emu excrement. The suggestion is supported by a myth published by Carl Strehlow (1907:13). This calls to mind discoveries about the cassowary (Gardner 1984:139), a close relative of the emu. The cassowary is a prolific defaecator, and in being so it serves to propagate many of the plant species on which it lives, since many seeds pass undigested through the bird’s gut. The emu, too, is a proverbial defaecator (Gould 1969:42), and Pintubi people told Fred Myers (pers. comm.) that they used to be able to find supplies of food in emu excrement during harsh seasons. I do not know whether emus are ever seen to feed from their
own faeces, but comparable behaviour may certainly be found among dingoes. Like all canids, dingoes lick the urethral and anal openings of their pups during the lactation period in order to stimulate the passing of exuviae. But in Central Australia, in order to keep dens clean and to conserve moisture in giving milk, bitches also eat that exuviae (Green and Catling 1977:55). Anal and genital licking is, of course, common among domestic dogs, and it is not unusual in Central Australia to see camp dogs consuming their own faeces.(19)

There is little warrant in the myths to suggest that these factors have contributed directly to the image of the sky dwellers as being self-contained, although one variant does explain how Iliingka created the water and grass in his idyllic land. However, the Kaititja story of Atnatu is intriguing in this respect. Atnatu is said to be neither emu nor dingo in any respect, but his name is said to mean 'without an anus'. On the other hand, the fact that he is without the ability to excrete sounds odd when he is said to have created everything on earth by dropping his disobedient children and cultural objects through a hole in the sky. For this image, as Dundes (1976:228) has noted, is almost certainly excremental. Perhaps Atnatu was originally self-contained in the manner I have been outlining here for the emu and the dingo, only 'opening himself up' at the beginning of The Dreaming. This is a theme I will return to in the next chapter, but for the moment I would only note that Atnatu and the emu- and dingo-footed sky dwellers are fascinatingly close in certain respects. Atnatu, incidentally, is quite transparently connected in myth with
dogs and their propensity to sniff faeces (Spencer and Gillen 1904:420-1, Dundes 1976:228-9). And, at the very least, we may say that Atnatu and the emu share the fundamental quality of having particularly fecund 'droppings'.

4.5 Stuck in the Milky Way

In order to understand the full significance of this multifaceted imagery, its sociological, ethical and cosmological importance, we can take as a starting point the analysis of the form and function of the sky beings provided by Roheim. Roheim deals with many of the myths reproduced here as part of a wider set. It serves his psychoanalytic frame of reference to do this, because many of the other stories make sexual themes more explicit. He does, however, use a controlling factor by concentrating largely on myths about the Milky Way. Three Western Desert myths account for the Milky Way in terms of a woman and a boy being stuck together in an eternal sexual act: one of them specifies that the woman and boy are mother and son. There is another earth in the sky, explains one of the stories, and the woman and child live there completely alone. Roheim also mentions a Dieri myth which accounts for the dark patches in the Milky Way in terms of two men, who, having circumcised their own father and watched him die in intercourse with their mother, fled to the heavens. Not unreasonably, Roheim interprets this in terms of oedipal rivalries. The Dieri and Western Desert myths, says Roheim, are thus variations on the same oedipal theme. One story poses the positive side of the complex (union with the mother), while the other poses the negative side (annihilation of the father). In his most
mature verdict on the function of the Milky Way in Aboriginal mythology, Roheim concludes that the Milky Way represents the most basic of all unconscious wish fulfillment. Whenever Aborigines speak of beings as 'stuck' in the Milky Way (as they often do), they are (consciously or unconsciously) referring to "eternal coitus and union with [the] mother" (Roheim 1969:193).

Notwithstanding that this summary represents only a fraction of Roheim's insights into the Milky Way motif in Aboriginal myths, it is sufficient to highlight a major problem with his analysis. Roheim makes many excursions into the transformational network of Milky Way stories, but in the end he makes the common psychoanalytic error of reducing the whole set to a single 'true' variant. Roheim makes this claim quite explicit when he refers to some myths as being more repressed than others on the grounds that the former do not directly tackle the question of incest. I do not wish to suggest here that Roheim's conclusions are irrelevant to the issues being discussed, or that they are wholly wrong. But I do question the validity of saying that some myths must be more repressed than others only to discount all the variant (sublimated?) forms as somehow less authentic. Perhaps Roheim would deny that that was what he was doing; yet it seems to be an inevitable outcome of his (at times) less than subtle approach. Myths are always projective (see Chapter Five), and no matter what the explicit themes might be, the stories will invariably involve the recollection of some events and the repression or suppression of other possibilities which do not suit either the constitution of the narrator or that of his audience. Thus, what we need to
achieve in order to show that Roheim's formulation is pertinent is its valid position within a scheme of transformations, no one of which can be taken as completely privileged. (20) To be satisfied with less would be to impoverish unduly the genius of Central Australian mythopoeia.

In this respect, consider first the idea of being stuck together in eternal coitus. In Central Australia people who shirk their responsibilities by being either lazy or uncooperative are often referred to as being 'stuck'; that is, as unable to escape from the lure of their spouses or lovers. They may be graphically and derisively likened to dogs, since camp dogs are occasionally seen to get stuck in the sexual act (a highly amusing experience for the onlookers, but a distressing one for the dogs). Such irresponsible people are, of course, figures of fun, but something serious is also being indicated about the importance of assuming responsibility. The matter is all the more serious in a society where a Don Juan image may have to be paid for dearly by the non-acquisition of ritual knowledge withheld by the ever-watchful elders. And it so happens that the image of a pair of dogs being permanently stuck in the sexual act is closely connected with Central Australian beliefs in evil bush-spirits. Roheim (1974b:14-6) states that such spirits may have that precise double-canine form, and he interprets the evil qualities as being derived from the image of the primal scene. In addition, he notes that the image of the ever-copulating dogs may be projected into the sky (Roheim 1974b:50). Shamans are often said to visit the sky. Their main anxiety is that one day they may get stuck there in the Milky Way, which is sometimes envisaged
as a great subincision wound.

The moral side of these beliefs is fairly transparent: eternal sexual union is seen as dangerous, bordering at times on evil. And as the description of irresponsible people as ‘stuck’ shows, this intrinsic badness is closely linked with sociality. People who indulge in constant pleasure-seeking are irresponsible and fail in their duties towards others. The manifest idea is that in order for people to be good and responsible they must learn to forego complete selfishness and interact with other people who may make demands on their time. All this is, of course, central to the Oedipus complex, through which the developing child has to learn that he cannot take the mother as an unending source of safety and security. Thus, if it is the case that the sky dwellers are noted for their autonomy and independence, and their situation in an environment where everything needed is automatically provided, it is perhaps not surprising that oedipal imagery should find its way into their conception.

But Roheim’s analysis helps us to come to grips with the moral character of the sky beings in a more profound way. Roheim (1974b:112) states that when Central Australians describe the sky beings as good, they do not necessarily mean good in the moral sense, but rather beautiful or healthy. The Aranda term *mara* may mean either beautiful or morally good, but the intended meaning only emerges in context. Similarly, one can note that the word for evil or wicked is also polysemous: *kona* may mean morally bad, decayed (rotten), or even sad. (21) Now it is an invariant feature of the original sky beings that while they are
'good' in the sense of being beautiful or healthy, they tend
to be connected with moral corruption. Roheim interprets
this contradiction in terms of the infant's perception of
the primal scene; that is, of the child's realisation that
the erstwhile good parents and providers indulge in some-
thing that is threatening or wicked. There is, I believe, a
good deal of truth in this idea, but it is not the only
dimension to be taken into account.

It seems to me that the myths dealt with by Roheim are
not all of a piece. Rather they fall into a broad division
according to whether or not the stories are 'historical' - a
division which also fits the corpus introduced in this
chapter. In the 'historical' texts, that is to say in those
myths which are narrative in structure rather than a mere
catalogue of beliefs, there is a definite tendency for the
sky beings to be viewed as bad - in most senses of the term.
Likewise, in the 'non-historical' group there is a tendency
for the sky dwellers to be seen as good - again in a variety
of senses. It seems, then, that the contradiction of good
and bad is homologous to that of ahistoricity and develop-
ment, and that the sky dwellers are only viewed as being in
an undesirable condition from the vantage point of history.
As original, unchanged beings, such as Iliingka, they elicit
sadness and regret born of a kind of envy: as beings who
ventured or were sent to the sky after activities on earth,
such as the stingy emu hunters, they tend to be viewed as
having received their just deserts. As far as Roheim's
oedipal images are concerned, I think this insight improves
his analysis. For just as being 'incestuous' at the very
beginning of one's life is far from being morally bad - to
the contrary, we all begin our lives in perfect union with our mothers – so the 'non-historical' sky beings are not normally seen as evil. But just as surely as it is our duty to live out the drama of separation which is at the very heart of the oedipus complex and to sustain its positive results, so 'the historical' sky beings, having hankered after and achieved a return to primordial selfishness, are not normally seen as good. Like those irresponsible people on earth who are likened to perpetually copulating dogs, the 'historical' sky beings are laws unto themselves existing in an asocial state of irrelation. It is no surprise, then, to find that the sky dwellers may occasionally be likened to, and associated with, shamans; those men whose almost boundless spiritual powers always appear threatening in spite of their enormous potential for good. As Roheim (1972:67) states: "The demon and the medicine man are birds of a feather". (22)

The emu, too, is a 'bird of a feather', since it is very closely associated with sorcery in the minds of Central Australian Aborigines, both mythically (Spencer and Gillen 1927:417-8), and in terms of the 'emu feet' of the *kadaitja* (Spencer and Gillen 1927:454-61). (23) But the emu also has certain anatomical features which connect it with the notion of being stuck in the Milky Way. Emus, in common with all birds, possess a single urogenital opening – the cloaca – through which egg-laying, copulation, micturation, and defaecation all occur. But the male emu, in common with a number of other bird species such as the cassowary (Gardner 1984:140-1), also possesses a penis. Moreover, this penis, which is of considerable length when extended for mating, is
housed within the cloaca. It is not canalised, but grooved (King and McLelland 1975:88-90, Dorst 1971:168). Perhaps the likeness of this to subincision is too obvious to note, and it has not escaped the attention of the Mardudjara, who explain their subincision ceremonies with reference to emu myths (Tonkinson 1978:76-7). I do not know if any Aboriginal groups make conscious use of the fact that the emu has a penis housed within its own cloaca, but the similarity of the image with that of the stuck-together people in the Milky Way is fairly straightforward, (24) as also is its relevance to the idea that the sky beings are self-contained. In psychoanalytic terminology, then, the emu is not just a 'male mother': it is also a phallic one, and it would appear that that proud, strutting emu father described by Strehlow is 'up himself' in more ways than one. Like the prima materia or radix ipsus of mediaeval alchemy, the emu, "[b]ecause it roots in itself ... is autonomous and dependent on nothing" (Jung 1953:307). As the Wik-mungkan say, the emu is "just itself or sui generis" (McKnight 1975:91).

For Roheim such images of self-closure are closely linked to ontogenetic development, particularly with respect to the functioning of the pleasure principle in children. There are, he suggests, two essential features of the sky beings: 1) their state of eternal pleasure, and 2) their moral condition which often leads to the idea that they are intrinsically bad, or that they have achieved their condition by way of punishment. Thus, for example, in some myths the sky beings achieved their position as a direct result of anti-social behaviour. The imagery is taken to its logical conclusion, suggests Roheim, by the Pitjantjara, who say
not only that the Milky Way is really a mother and son in eternal coitus, but that the son suffers constant pain in his penis as a result of the union. Thus we are presented with a vagina dentata motif.

The fear of the penis captivus, of the small vagina out of which it would be difficult to extricate the penis, is well-known and quite conscious among the natives of Central Australia. The myth in its psychological structure is similar to well-known legends of European folklore ..., the leading idea of which is that somebody who had committed an offense (coitus) was now punished for that offense by eternal repetition. But considering what we have here is the repetition of fundamental pleasure, we really have a supreme wish fulfillment under the guise of a punishment. Pleasure is endless, and aphanisis ..., the fear of losing pleasure, is eliminated (Roheim 1972:80).

"The functional value of an eternal god lies in the fact that the concept is a refuge, an asylum from the haunting specter of aphanisis" (Roheim 1972:86).

This thesis is reminiscent of remarks made by Freud in Civilization and its Discontents (1930:243-340). In the first part of that book Freud states that the fear of losing pleasure is a fundamental aspect of becoming human. He works from the initial premise that man's mental faculties are from the very beginning dominated by the pleasure principle. But from the earliest days of its life the infant learns that the pleasure principle is frustrated, and thus limited, by the reality principle. Three aspects of the real world are bound to make us suffer: our bodies, which are doomed to decay and which need pain and anxiety as survival mechanisms; the forces of nature, which provide an environment in which we have to struggle; and our relations to other men, whose own needs we must ever take into account in the pursuit of satisfying our own. The summary is altogether apt.
The original sky beings contradict all three aspects of the reality principle: they do not decay or grow old; their environment is eternally bounteous; and (if my arguments about the self-containment of the emu and the dingo are accepted) they do not have to undertake obligations to others.

In various ways, says Freud, people attempt to escape the reality principle. They take refuge in phantasy, take their own bodies as a source of pleasure, displace inhibited aims onto objects over which they believe themselves to have total command, and so on. One aspect of this escapism is what Freud, borrowing the term from a religious friend, called the oceanic feeling. This may manifest itself in a variety of ways—love, intoxication, the religious statement that one is 'one with the universe', and so on. But what all manifestations of the oceanic feeling have in common is a total blending of the self with its surroundings: "Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that 'I' and 'you' are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact" (Freud 1985:253). Essentially, such a sense of total immersion in the world is infantile, in that it has as its prototype the security a child first feels while 'blending' with its mother.

The images of the sky dwellers as stuck together in the Milky Way have clear affinities with this account by Freud, and, so long as we bear in mind the qualifications I have made about the 'historicity' of the myths, or the lack thereof, we are thus presented with a further aspect of the notions of autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency. For if the sky beings are sometimes viewed as being radically
separated, then the state of independence which this entails is in fact little different from the condition of total fusion which characterizes the stuck-together people. In both cases, I would suggest, the motivating idea is that of singularity or lack of differentiation, either as a fusing of the self with its environment, or as a complete negation of that relationship. The first represents the appropriation of the other as self, while the second is a form of involu-

tion. Both, as Roheim notes, represent the narcissistic trends of the libido. It remains something of a paradox, however, that a duality acting as one, and two singularities acting completely independently, can be tantamount to the same thing. To this problem we will return.

4.6 Further Footnotes

While one may concur with Roheim that the sky beings are projections of the unconscious desire for eternal pleasure, the analysis cannot be allowed to stop there. As Roheim himself points out, albeit rather obliquely, this wish-fulfilment fails to account completely for the function of the sky dwellers in Central Australian belief. For one of the main points about the sky beings is that they are invariably catalysts for displeasure, either by being strong motivating images of a life that is utterly unobtainable, or by directly causing anxiety through fear of their evil ways and the realisation that their world may one day collapse to annihilate the earth. At one stage Roheim tries to get to grips with the problem of why it is that the land of great beauty and eternal pleasure is often seen as a haven of evil. His suggestion is that since the phantasy projections
are ultimately based on unconscious wishes that are bad — incest, parricide, total selfish desire — so the sky beings themselves must be tinged with moral worthlessness. In the final analysis, though, the evil has its roots (according to Roheim) in the primal scene. For it is there that the child is first confronted with the realisation that otherwise good parents can undertake acts that are bad and disturbing. On the other hand, the child himself has to cope eventually with the fact that he desires to perform the same acts.

The primacy given to the image of the primal scene is almost entirely theoretical in Roheim's schema. As Hiatt (1975a:9) has stated, there is little evidence in the material itself to support his hypothesis. This is not, however, to say that it is entirely false. It is clear that the mythology does sometimes give rise to imagery that is characterised by profound ambiguity: that which is seen as eternally pleasurable may also be dangerous and threatening. One example is provided by the vagina dentata motif, but on a more general level it is expressed by the proposition that eternal pleasure is equal to death and annihilation. It is "quite evident", says Roheim (1972:103), "that apotheosis is death, and that the sky abode of these beings is merely a euphemistic way of expressing their annihilation". This, if not always so, may be true on various counts. Shamans who fly to the Milky Way are scared that they may get stuck there and never return; sometimes it is said that the souls of the dead make their way to the sky (though perhaps only to be ejected); and, most significantly of all, people generally believe that the world of the sky, if transported to the world of the earth, would herald the end of nature.
and civilization.

It is evident, then, that Central Australian Aborigines see the life of the sky beings as a kind of counter-order, and according to Roheim, this shows the work of the super-ego. For if the cultural world is to continue, then people have to realise that they must take reality, both social and natural, into account. Living in the world is both a matter of growth and development on the one hand, and give and take on the other. These are primary factors of experience which have to be fully grasped by all mature people. To that extent the sky dwellers are bankrupt. Their mode of existence can be nothing more than a chimera to which man may turn attention only to discount it. And this seems to be precisely what happens. The sky beings either elicit the sentiment of fear or that of disappointment. In the first case one realizes that one does not want to be like them; in the second one knows that one cannot.

These ideas allow us to tackle some outstanding problems in the symbolism of the sky beings as being animal-footed. Now in one sense it is possible to see in this imagery the literal employment of 'footnotes'. For while the sky beings are often thought of as emus and dingoes, their conception is basically human and anthropomorphic. What is said about them is primarily a comment on a human predicament. But it is the animal feet, acting as a form of minimal coding, which allow one to think of the peculiar productive and reproductive capacities of emus and dingoes, and in turn the sense of autonomy which these capacities connote. But Roheim goes further than this. For him the animal feet are phallic symbols which testify to the sexual origins of the
phantasies. Like the penis painfully stuck in the mother's vagina, the feet of Iliingka and his family are deformed.

This argument has definite warrant. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the foot and the penis are often interchangeable in Aranda myths, songs and jokes (cf. Roheim 1969:89-90, 1974a:165, 1974b:118). But I think Roheim is wrong to privilege the phallic character of the feet completely over their less sexual connotations. Jackson (1979:122-6) has cogently argued (and his ideas are of great relevance here) that lameness and deformation of the feet are universal symbols which are exploited to convey notions to do with immobility, timelessness and social discontinuity.

Man evolved in the Pliocene, bipedal and well adapted to open plains living. Dexterity, physical agility, fleet-footedness, and suppleness of limb must have had a survival value and supplied, on the intellectual plane, some of man's first images and metaphors for socially adaptive behaviour. Long after the evolution of semi-permanent settlement and sedentary habits, physical mobility and agility continued to serve as images of culturally valued traits: quickness of mind, strength of purpose, flexibility and vitality of thought. Infirmitiy, lameness, dragging the feet, and physical imbalance served, similarly, as images of social breakdown and discontinuity (Jackson 1979:125).

Such imagery is, of course, also kept alive through ontogenetic factors, since the passage of time in the infant's early years sees him progress from the complete lack of control over his limbs, through a stage of partial mastery through crawling, and finally on to the fully-developed mode of perambulation. This progression goes hand-in-hand with the development of other faculties, such as manual dexterity, intellectual ability, and sexual awareness (cf. Chapter Eight).
Feet are thus provocative symbols: well-formed they connote mobility, exploratory behaviour, and interaction with the environment; but when deformed they may serve to express immobility, utter dependency, and the lack of goal-oriented behaviour. In short, they are powerful images of growth or the lack thereof. Roheim is quite correct in interpreting the feet of (at least some of) the sky beings as deformed. One variant explains that the animal feet grew on human legs after the original feet had been broken off; a second calls attention to the fact that the main sky being is called Rough Foot; and on a more general level the employment of animal feet as symbols connotes a contrast between the feet themselves and the rest of the bodies, which are seen as permanently youthful and beautiful. Given that the sky beings live in a kind of ahistorical world where they remain forever the same and refuse to grow (up), one may concur with Jackson (1979:120-2) that the symbolism of deformed feet is used to denote retardation: the deceleration of all life processes and evolution itself.(25)

In a sense this conclusion adds credibility to Roheim’s thesis on the symbolic equivalence of the penis and the foot, for the former, when deformed, is also a powerful (perhaps the powerful) expression of retardation. I would suggest that the castration fear to which Roheim refers in connection with the sky beings is a transformation of the central idea of ‘prevented successions’ (Jackson 1979). For both the genitals and the feet, in their distinct ways, are capable of connoting the abstract idea of movement, genealogically in one case and perambulatory in the other. But as the myth of Oedipus reminds us, the symbolic repertoire need
not stop there. Blindness, the fate which befell the lame, parricidal, incestuous hero, Oedipus, is also a way of expressing self-closure. Interestingly, the motif is found in two of the myths about the origin of the Milky Way, and it may sometimes be found in other stories about emus (Carl Strehlow 1907:30-1, Roheim 1974b:115-6, cf. Horne and Aiston 1924:60).

But there is one way of looking at the symbolism of the sky dwellers' feet which is probably the most revealing of all. Jackson has drawn our attention to the symbolic value of movement by foot, tracing it back to its significance in the prehistoric hunting mode of production. Of course, the Aranda and their neighbours are still hunters. They are also nomads who need to keep on the move if they are to maintain a way of life. But they are also great observers and trackers, knowing every sign of life by the traces left on the surface of the earth (Strehlow 1964b:47). In traditional Aranda communities individuals may be known by their footprints with all the certainty of a modern fingerprint identification. So we are back again to Bergson's footprint causing 'thousands of grains of sand to contrive to form a pattern'. It is in just such a way (amongst others) that the ancestors came to create the world.

What, then, does this say about Iliingka? 'Emu Foot' is basically human — perfectly so except for the deformation of his feet. Thus, in spite of his (almost) ideal condition, Iliingka cannot be truly human because he is quite unable to make a human impression. Such a view of him fits well on the metaphorical plane with his anti-social, autonomous and static 'way of life' (if indeed it may so be called).
It is clear that many of the motifs to be found in the myths of the sky beings indicate, above all else, a concern with structural immobility and the lack of the succession of time. This being so, perhaps Strehlow's remarks to the effect that the sky beings are of no practical concern to the Aranda are telling. For what the sky beings appear to symbolise is first and foremost an indeterminate mode of being; a way of life that can have no real consequences because of its utter contrariness to the most fundamental laws of space, time, and social being. As Roheim rightly suggests, this shows the work of the super-ego. For if the images of self-closure are ultimately founded in the selfish desires of the id, then culture must intervene to demonstrate the potentially self-destructive tendencies of indeterminacy. Life as it is lived, as opposed to life as it is thought, must always take the other into account. Certainly, the Aranda appear to recognise this fact by relegating the life of indeterminacy to the inaccessible voids of the Milky Way. Their only concern is that it should stay there.

On the other hand we cannot for all that generalise Iliingka's position as a redundant god. For not only is it quite conceivable for some Arandic groups, such as the Kaititja, to give their sky dwellers a creative role in the opening up of the world, but Iliingka himself even shows signs of being active in this regard. In one story it was Iliingka who ordered that the sky and earth should be separated in the beginning, and on a more general level we should still bear in mind the association of shamans with the sky. There seems to be two ways of viewing the
possibilities. Either the sky dwellers are given no role in creation, in which case it is important that their way of life should be separated completely from the earth and the realm of culture; or they may be given a determinate role, in which case their original self-containment has to be negated (as seems to be the case for Atnatu). Both cases have the same end result: the original beings are rarely, if ever, allowed to exist as models for human behaviour. Nevertheless, they still function in the system of belief, and we need to specify precisely how.

4.7 The Constitution of The Dreaming

In Aranda Traditions Strehlow (1968:35-8) writes of The Dreaming — the time when the totemic ancestors wandered about on the surface of the earth — as the Golden Age. He describes how the ancestors lived in a superabundant environment far superior to that which is currently in existence, and continues with the following lines.

It is clear that the native’s own desire for happiness would have gained its complete satisfaction and realization in such an ideal environment. The world in which his totemic ancestors move is the unattainable Golden World of the native himself; the age in which they live is the Golden Age of his own dreams; and only in his dreams can he recapture something of that primal joy which eludes his quest in waking hours (Strehlow 1968:37-8).

But while it may be true that myths and songs tend to give a heavily idealised image of the landscape, stressing its fertility, greenness, and well-watered creeks, it is worth enquiring further into the nature of this Golden Age. For as Strehlow himself notes in the very same text, the activities of the ancestors showed little concern for moral-
ity: The Dreaming was not wholly good.

The happiness which is to be found in this ideal world is, however, not of a very high degree, even if judged by the most primitive standards. Almost nothing is heard about love or courtesy or honour or kindness in these myths. The lives of the totemic ancestors are deeply stained with deeds of treachery and violence and lust and cruelty: their 'morals' are definitely inferior to those of the natives of today. Most of the ancestors, indeed, are utterly lacking in even the most elementary conceptions of morals and virtues and ideals (Strehlow 1968:38).

In short, "the unrestrained, all-powerful beings who peopled the Golden World had no laws, save those of expediency and selfishness, to govern their conduct (Strehlow 1968:41-2).

It was the deeds of the ancestors, typically marked by conflict, division and strife, which created the world of the here-and-now — a world in which one must struggle for existence and squarely face the external forces that constrain one. This, I think, is part of what Stanner (1963:45, 1979:24) has in mind when he counters Strehlow's claim and states quite categorically that Aboriginal religion has no Golden Age. The myths, he says (1963:46), if carefully analysed, can be shown to be "a sort of statement about whole reality, a declaration about the penalties of private will, and by implication a thesis on the spoiling of possible unity". They may even, he suggests (1963:46), be compared with "The Buddha's observation that suffering is a product of the striving for being" (1963:46). In short, Aboriginal myths are the intellectual side of a religion which has at its core

the celebration of a dependent life which is conceived as having taken a wrongful turn at the beginning, a turn such that the good of life is now inseparably connected with suffering (Stanner 1963:39).
And in the end the religion has to be understood has having the purpose of what, "in Confucian terms", is, "to unite hearts and establish order" (Stanner 1979:143).

Some of these points can be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters, but for the present it is enough to note the contrast between Stanner's and Strehlow's characterisations of the lives of the ancestors with the mode of existence obtaining in the sky. For in the sky there is no celebration of dependence, no death, no suffering, no conflicts, and certainly no penalties of the private will, since everyone exists there in a state of independence, or, what is but a logical transformation of the same state, a condition of 'oceanic' interdependence bound by suspended animation. Admittedly, the Aranda do distance themselves from this mode of existence and see it in some sense or another as a threat to their own, but as Strehlow's doleful informants ably demonstrate, the mode of existence in the sky is a Golden Age, and it represents, both spatially and temporally, a way of life that can only be contrasted with that on earth in terms of its lack of currency.

Stanner (1963:52) also maintains that Aboriginal mythology is dialectical in nature. It is, he says, concerned with development

from one state or situation or condition to another, such that new and old belong to the same order but are qualitatively distinct, the old not quite annulled and the new not quite unfamiliar.

However, he qualifies this and says that his use of dialectics has nothing in common with the normal philosophical usage (Stanner 1963:56). Implicit in this disclaimer is a disavowal of the idea that Aboriginal religion has anything
fundamentally in common with a Hegelian view of the universe. For while Aboriginal religion is concerned with dialectical development,

[there is no suggestion of a first cause, or a spiritual personage who is all-good, or one who is so all-powerful that all are subject to him in all things. There is no independent entity, and none of a wholly unitary nature" (Stanner 1963:45).

Taken as a whole the myths deal with cosmology rather than cosmogony. That is, they deal less with origins as such than with the instituting of relevances—the beginnings of a moral system—in a life which already was. The tacit assumption invariably is that something existed before the marvels. No imagination is exercised about that aspect. The myths rationalize and justify familiar entities, forms and relations. In that sense one may say that they deal with being rather than with existence, or with existence become intelligible by having taken on familiar forms (Stanner 1963: 46).

But while one may concur with Stanner that Aboriginal religion has no supreme being—even Atnatu does not really fall into that category—one is not, for all that, entitled to deduce that there is no doctrine of first causes in the system, or 'no independent entity of a wholly unitary nature'. Indeed, a good deal of this chapter has been geared towards establishing the contrary. For the Aranda at least, as well as other Central Australians, there is a state of independent unity that has existed for all time; and while this condition cannot always be taken as a prime mover, and must remain relatively insignificant in relation to the worship of the earth-born ancestors, one is still left with the problem of identifying its function in Aranda belief. To come to grips with this problem, it is necessary to understand that the Aranda are indeed interested in cosmogony.

Stanner (1963:164) summarises The Dreaming in a profound way. He says:
Things began. How or whence, no one knows. But there was a state of life that, though differently, contained all that now exists. Strife divided it into the present parts. The parts remained connected by common source (The Dreaming) but were made distinct, separate and in some cases opposed.

The implications of this datum, he continues, are felt within the very constitution of society. People who are the same in certain respects (such as siblings, or clans of the same moiety) are distinct in others. People who are distinct and opposed (such as spouses, or clans of different moieties) cannot cohere or lose identity, but must nevertheless associate in mutuality. "That measures", he says,

in an impressionistic and approximate way, the struggle between circumstance and principle, identity and relation, independence and interdependence, which seemed to me to characterize Murinbata society. It disallows any hypothesis or postulate that the society or culture was a 'unified system' or an 'organic' or 'integrated whole'. In couple with the empirical facts, it may lend some force to my contention that in Murinbata life there were only workings towards system and transient captures of unity. I would contend that nothing more was possible in a somewhat anarchic society which, while being caught up in change and development, was segmented into like (but not identical) and unlike (but not independent) parts that had to compete for many of the scarce goods of life, and to do so under conjugate principles, i.e. a set of principles no one of which covered all real-life situations (Stanner 1963:164-5).

As stated above, I believe this summary to be quite profound, but to understand fully its import it is necessary to broaden its Durkheimian scope. For what Stanner is dealing with is not simply the constitution of society as it is reflected by The Dreaming, but the constitution of the world itself - a society of entities as well as persons. And elsewhere Stanner (1979:142), following Elkin, is prepared to admit as much. At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that the Arandic concept of altjira encapsulates this con-
stitution of the totality, and that it is to be understood, in the manner of all total philosophies, as being bound by the contradictory, yet complementary, principles of continuity and discontinuity. In this sense, Stanner's formulative expression of The Dreaming is not dissimilar to a structuralist interpretation, since it begins with the question of origins, reducing it essentially to a matter of continuity, and then describes how the system is broken down into its component parts, which must forever after systematically interact in a dynamic way. Myth, according to Levi-Strauss (1981:679), has precisely this function: it

resolutely turns away from the continuous to segment and break down the world by means of distinctions, contrasts and oppositions, [while] ritual moves in the opposite direction: starting from the discrete units that are imposed upon it by this preliminary conceptualization of reality, it strives to get back to the continuous, although the break with lived experience makes the task forever impossible.

In other words, while the intellectual side of religion is concerned with explaining discontinuity and how the world came to be segmented out of a unitary whole, rites have as their impetus the intrinsically vain attempt to re-establish the continuum of experience. Thus, religion can only achieve 'transient captures of unity'.

Where, I think, one must part company with Stanner is in his assertion that Aboriginal religion has no developed conception of the initial conditions. He says that at the beginning of time there was a state which 'contained all that now exists' - 'though differently'. What now exists is characterised by unity in diversity and vice versa, so that one would have to deduce from this that the initial conditions are characterised by like parts that really are
identical, and unlike parts that really are independent. And indeed, this is precisely the image which is put forward in some of the myths of the sky beings, particularly the Arandic variant which maintains that Iliingka has emu-footed sons which are the same age as himself, and dingo-footed wives and daughters all of the same generation. This segmentation of the family follows the lines given by Stanner - there are 'like' and 'unlike' parts - but one is unable to qualify the distinctions and similarities any further. The like parts are identical: the unlike parts are independent. Moreover, these parts do not have to compete for many of the scarce goods of life', and certainly not 'under conjugate principles'. Each is independent in its own way.

The structure of this autonomous being is important, because it contains within it a kind of genetic template for the life which came into existence when the totemic ancestors emerged from their perpetual sleep beneath the earth. For while altjira, in its original heavenly form, is modelled on principles which actually do cover 'all real life situations' (the sky dwellers have all their demands met without effort) the condition of altjiranga ngambakala (auto-creation from The Dreaming) modified these principles through struggle among the component parts.

Of course, we must be careful here in respecting the authenticity of the Central Australian formulations. For Aborigines, it seems, unitary being is not exactly consistent with the idea of 'the One'. Even where there is a tendency to concentrate on a single personage among the sky beings, Atnatu, for example, or to a lesser extent Iliingka, the key figure does not encapsulate absolutely everything.
These beings are still in some perverse sense in a world, and therefore only a part of it. But even in some more modern philosophies the problem of 'the One' and 'the Many' is only solved through their absolute identification. When there are many existents whose perspectives are completely closed, then we may say, paradoxically enough, that all are one. The essential feature of the sky beings, I would argue, lies in this unity. If I may be permitted to recall the earlier point made about the emu being 'up himself', we can be reminded that everything in the sky has the peculiar quality of being-in-itself (as well as merged in the 'oceanic feeling'). Here we finally come close to an answer to our problems.

4.8 Dialectical Immaterialism

We have so far explored much about the moral and psychological aspects of the sky beings, but little has been said about their cosmological significance. The Aranda say that the earth and the sky have existed since all eternity. The sky has always been in its present form, but in the beginning the earth had been barren—a featureless plain covered in eternal darkness. No true creatures existed and no prominent heavenly bodies moved in the firmament. A vague form of infantile humanity was in evidence, but in amorphous shape. It would have remained this way but for the mysterious awakening of the ancestors, who rose to give it form, growth and differentiation. In this original condition the earth was contrasted with the sky, the latter being a land of green and plenty, shape and form, and life in a developed condition (albeit static). But soon after the ancestors
began their work, the place of life, which had previously been in close proximity to the earth, was in various ways cut off. Not only did the sky become inaccessible, but its reality was relegated to the outermost regions of space—particularly to the blank spaces of the Milky Way in the form of the Coal Sack and other visible voids. As surely as the death-like state of the earth was transformed into one of life, so it seems that the life of the sky was in some sense transformed into non-existence.

Like the sky beings, we would do well at this point to dwell on the Milky Way and ask why it is that those beings tend to be identified with that stream of light. The problem has already been considered in relation to the emu by Basedow (1925:315, 332-3) and von Brandenstein (1982:101), who both conclude that the Milky Way evidences itself to the naked eye in such a way as to suggest a particular image. Thus, according to von Brandenstein, the whole of the Milky Way is suggestive of an emu, while Basedow maintains that the emu shape can only be constructed by an imaginative conjunction of various dark patches obtaining within the broad expanse of stars. Basedow’s argument has native opinion on its side (though not Arandic or Western Desert). Von Brandenstein, who suggests that Basedow’s argument is ‘not quite correct’, appears on the other hand to be proffering only his own explanation. A short glimpse at Plate 5 should be enough to convince anyone of the accuracy of Basedow’s Aboriginal-backed account.

It is evident that conceptualisations of the sky differ markedly from place to place, but throughout Central Australia there is a great deal of interest in the Milky Way,
Plate 5. The Emu in the Milky Way (with explanatory illustration)


(from Gaposchkin 1960: 293 & figure 1)
including its dark areas and individual constellations. The Coal Sack is not always identified with an emu. Some Western Desert groups, for example, say that it is the nest of a wedge-tailed eagle. The Southern Cross, in whose immediate vicinity the Coal Sack lies, is the eagle's footprints (Mountford 1976:450, Carl Strehlow 1907:25, Basedow 1925:349, cf. Maegraith 1932:20). The Northern Aranda, according to Strehlow (1971:372), identify the Coal Sack as the transformed body of a rock wallaby ancestor from Tailitnama. Clearly, then, astronomical beliefs in this region show marked variability, a fact which Maegraith (1932:19) confirms in his study of conceptions of the celestial bodies in the Hermannsburg area. Let us consider, however, one possible view of the Milky Way and its voids which is consistent with both the findings of von Brandenstein and Basedow on the one hand, and this chapter on the other.

Following Levi-Strauss (1970:247) one could define the Coal Sack as "the non-presence of the Milky Way at a point where it would normally occur". (26) In other words, the Coal Sack is characterised as an absence - an absence of light. The Milky Way exists in the sky as a broad band of light. It is composed of stars, most of which are too dim to be detected by the naked eye, but which merge together to radiate a continuous glow across the sky. However, this continuity is broken at certain points by what were once believed by astronomers to be 'holes in the heavens' tearing the Milky Way apart (Murdin and Allen 1979:124). In fact, these 'holes in the heavens' - perhaps reminiscent of the hole in the sky through which Atnatu created The Dreaming - of which the Coal Sack is the most obvious, are really clouds of cosmic
dust which absorb, and so obscure, the light of the Milky Way. The Coal Sack is not by any means the darkest part of the sky, but it is the darkest patch in the Milky Way and appears as the darkest place in the night sky because of the contrast against the Milky Way's brightness (see Plate 6).

Now it is clear that, at the level at which it presents itself to perception, the Coal Sack appears as intensified darkness. It appears as an undifferentiated void, its only character being defined by that other undifferentiated realm — this time of light — the Milky Way. But the darkness of the Coal Sack is not only in contrast with the Milky Way: it is also capable of being opposed to the beauty, radiance, life and unity which marks the lives of the sky beings. Darkness — thick, intense, darkness — is the characteristic of the still, quiet and lifeless earth upon which the ancestors have yet to cast their favours. Somehow, this deathly quality of the earth has managed to reach the sky. But at the same time, too, the earth was to come alive and light was to be known there for the very first time. Contrary to what Stanner says about the dialectical nature of Aboriginal religion, there is something very Hegelian about this double transformation. Throughout this chapter what has been stressed about the sky beings is their absolute autonomy; their lack of relation to others; their immediate existence; and their pure identity with themselves. These features are, in fact, the very ones which Hegel (1969:82) uses to define the abstract notion of being: "as without further determination"; as "not unequal to an other"; as having "no diversity within itself nor any reference outwards".

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The Coal Sack is "a dark nebula of dust absorbing the light of stars beyond. Its striking appearance arises because of its relative nearness ... Some of the starlight falling on the Coalsack is absorbed by the dust grains in the cloud. However, nearly all the incident starlight is reflected by the dust grains, although it no longer comes directly from the stars. Thus the stars behind the Coalsack are dimmed, while the Coalsack itself ... has about 10% of the brightness of the Milky Way. Nevertheless, the contrast between the Coalsack and the surrounding star clouds gives the impression that it is darker than any other part of the sky" (Murdin and Allen 1979:131-2, my emphasis).
Let us pursue Hegel further down the dialectical path. Hegel states (1969:82) that because pure being is indeterminate and undifferentiated, there is nothing that can be thought about it. It is empty; devoid of all qualities, quantities and relations, and thus tantamount to nothing in particular. Similarly, the abstract notion of nothing is also described as empty. It is the "absence of all determination and content, undifferentiatedness in itself". On the other hand, says Hegel, nothing exists; like being, it appears in our thought and may be given a meaning. "Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather the absence of determination and thus altogether the same as, pure being".

Now this may seem a very long way from Central Australia; and I do not want to contradict Stanner's (1963:271) contention that Aborigines have "no class of scholars or detached intellectuals". But the question which Hegel is beginning to answer is in a sense very similar to that posed by Central Australians about the state of their world before it took on that familiar identity of which Stanner speaks elsewhere. Hegel is interested in 'the beginning', understood in the metaphysical sense as the ground of all existence. He starts from the premises of being and nothing and comes to the conclusion that they are identical; both empty intuitions. The parallel with the Aboriginal worldview is unwittingly indicated by Stanner. Aborigines, he says (1963:271), "face a vast undifferentiation of entities and relations which ... can only be intuited". Presumably, the intuition of this undifferentiation is The Dreaming: "the logos of The Dreaming" (Stanner 1979:40), which is the
product of the drive to 'make sense out of human experience ... built into the constitution of the human mind'. It is this logos which appears as "intuited dualisms supposed to compose the life processes" (Stanner 1963:155); as a "design in the sense of pattern, shape, form, structure" (Stanner 1979:117).

So long as we understand first that Aboriginal philosophy is largely "implicit" and not composed of "abstract propositions", but rather embedded "in life" (Stanner 1979:29-30), we may trace in Aranda cosmogony a similar line of reasoning to that of Hegel. Hegel argues that to discover that being and nothing are the same is not trivial. To the contrary, one has discovered a truth, namely that the two are in a kind of movement with each other. The movement is referred to as becoming, the phenomenon which is in evidence as being passes over into nothing and vice versa. Becoming is thus the first movement; the most primitive idea that constitutes the dialectic. For the essence of becoming is that it encapsulates everything in history: "there is nothing which is not an intermediate state between being and nothing (Hegel 1969:105). Everything includes both being and nothing as a process, since history moves from one state to another, thus both annihilating itself and becoming something positive.

Becoming is in this way in a double determination. In one of them, nothing is immediate, that is, the determination starts from nothing which relates itself to being, or in other words changes into it; in the other, being is immediate, that is, the determination starts from being which changes into nothing: the former is coming-to-be and the latter is ceasing-to-be (Hegel 1969:105-6).

But both are "[t]he empirical transition" which is "self-
evident" given the initial conditions (Hegel 1969:98).

The synthesis contains and demonstrates the falsity of those abstractions; in it they are in unity with their other, not, therefore, as independently self-subsistent, not as absolute, but purely as relative.

What, then, would be a comparable summary of the beginning for the Aranda? In the first instance, they begin with the same formulation, posed concretely, between 'being' and 'nothing' - the contrast between the immediate life of the sky world and the desolate condition of the earth. There is even a hint of equivocation about these premises. What existed in the beginning was either the pure existence of the sky or the barren non-existence of the earth, but both, in spite of their apparent mutual exclusion, may be conflated into the same time and space. In the beginning the earth and the sky were both altjira: they were inseparable - perhaps even physically compressed (see Chapter Five) - and it was possible to pass over from one world to the next (which is precisely, as Hegel would have it, what the Aranda do in their thinking about the world and its beginnings). We may therefore say that while opposed, the earth and the sky were in some sense the same.

Becoming, for the Aranda, appears to be indicated by a real Hegelian shift in the relations between sky and earth. At the time when the Milky Way becomes patchy and darkened, and the sky dwellers are relegated to the 'back and beyond', the earth-born ancestors spill forth to flood the earth with light, populate it with animals, and give to man his first faltering steps. In this way the process of becoming has annihilated the initial terms; 'being' has invaded 'nothing' and vice versa; the light now appears in the dark, but the
dark also appears in the light. This movement, in so far as it is personified and given totemic form, is linguistically enshrined in Arandic descriptions of the earthly ancestors and their heavenly counterparts. The first are said to have been created *altjiranga* — from The Dreaming: the second are referred to only as *altjira* — The Dreaming itself. So perhaps we may see after all at least a fragment of truth in Carl Strehlow’s translation of *Altjira (= Iliingka)* as God.

While it is true that the Aranda do not quite conceive of Iliingka and his family as prime movers in the Christian sense, there is another in which the sky dwellers represent the logical build of The Dreaming which had to be transformed into a dynamic framework. In so far as that is true, then one would expect the component parts — the like parts which are identical, and the unlike parts which are independent — to reappear as true relationships. But as Hegel says, the initial conditions, when so transformed, must be rendered obsolete.

In becoming [being and nothing] were coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be: in determinate being, a differently determined unity, they are again differently determined moments. This unity now remains their base from which they do not again emerge in the abstract significance of being and nothing (Hegel 1969:108, my emphasis).

And so we come to something like a conclusion. For if its is true that the moment of becoming disallows any return to the very first states, one can readily appreciate why it is the indeterminate being comes to a kind of full stop in the voids of the Milky Way. The emu, as some Western Desert groups remind us, is the ‘stopped’ or ‘rested’ one: (28) and it is true that the appearance of the emu in the voids of the Milky Way gives the impression of the bird as having no
legs (which may be seen as the normal resting position of the emu). But it is also an inversion of that condition which afflicts Iliingka - the man with emu legs. So the dark in the light is an inversion on two counts, comparable, I think, to Hegel's passing over of nothing into being. Likewise, just as the light of the sky passed over into the darkness of the earth, the ancestors arose and began to make their impressions on the land - most typically with their footprints. And this conjunction - coming-to-be - is the source of all life, so it is imperative that its forward march be sustained. Certainly the Aranda seem to know this, and in a quite dramatic way. Should the domain of the sky beings ever move again, it will fall and level the earth. History, one might say, would then have come full circle - a quasi-Marxist, if not Hegelian, position.

There is more to say about this dialectical beginning, and I shall have cause to return to it in the following chapters. For the moment, however, I will draw these comparative efforts to a close and put aside the moral, psychological and cosmologically idealist 'pre-history' marked by the absolute opposition of sky and earth. But by now I think that it has been established, through Hegel, that Levi-Strauss's view of the classificatory totality is wholly applicable to the Central Australian data. For Hegel's myth, and that of The Dreaming, share what is necessary: "structure [as] a primordial fact" (Levi-Strauss 1981:627).

In the last resort, there is only one absolutely undecidable sequence in the case of each mythological system. When reduced to its essential features, this sequence boils down to the expression of an opposition, or, to be more accurate, to the expression of the opposition as the initial datum" (Levi-Strauss 1981:602).
One must conclude, then, that the opposition between sky and earth is the most fundamental of all in the Arandic worldview, though as we shall see in the next chapter, this does not prevent it being transformable into a number of others. But the point about Aboriginal dualism (as Stanner calls it) is well made by von Brandenstein (1982:101).

From the Aboriginal point of view it would be misleading to use our term ‘universe’, as we usually do, for an entity comprehending all phenomena. The totemic universe in the Aboriginal conception is dual. Beside the earthly reality with its innumerable totems, which can be perceived by the senses, there is a replica of it all in the sky. The sky world, however, cannot be perceived directly. It has to be known, to be taught. The places and happenings on earth, their heroes and deeds are stored as mythology in the eternal record of the starry sky, in which the celestial bodies and their constellations function as mnemonics for men of high degree [shamans].

Thus what the opposition of sky and earth affords is a spark from which all else comes. It is The Dreaming in its total aspect and the ultimate opposition ‘beyond which it is, for intrinsic reasons, useless as well as impossible to go’. What I will now explore is the nature of the synthesis; how The Dreaming itself came to be determinate; how the ‘one-in-the-many’ combined with the ‘zero below’ to give rise to the ‘system’ and the ‘lexicon’. To do this is to study Strehlow’s eternity (altjira) in action.
CHAPTER FIVE

Traces of Native Cats

There where it was, it is my duty that I should come into being. It is a cultural achievement somewhat like the draining of the Zuyder Zee.

Sigmund Freud
New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 112. (1)

The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth.

Jacques Derrida
5.1 Opposing Forces

Aranda religion is neither absolutely systematic and coherent nor characterised by orthodoxy in the realm of mythic discourse. In common with myths throughout the world an Aranda story "is never more than tendential and projective ... It is a phenomenon of the imagination, resulting from the attempt at interpretation" (Levi-Strauss 1970:5). As against the view of Strehlow (1968:5-6), who tended to take the conservative ideology of the Aranda rather too literally at times, one can note that Maegraith (1932:19), in his attempts to elicit myths about the stars and heavenly bodies, obtained "a large amount of heterogeneous information". This leads one to conclude that the Aranda conform to the pattern of myth variation documented elsewhere by Stanner (1963:84).

There is no univocal version ..., in my opinion, of any aboriginal myth. One is not dealing with dogmata or creeds, so there is no question of an authoritative or doctrinal form. Narrators may, and do, start or finish at somewhat different points; omit or include details; vary the emphases; describe events differently and attribute them to different causes and persons. Certainly, there is a nub or core, a story with a plot, that all observe broadly. But in my opinion, there is no accepted or enforced consensus, as in a formulated creed.

So, while some people may be recognised as having authority over the form of a myth, there is nothing like absolute constancy in the re-telling of the stories. There are authoritative myth narrators, but not authoritative myths.

What is true of particular myths is, *ipsa facto*, true of Aranda mythology in general. Taken in their total aspect, Aranda stories present the observer with a dazzling kaleidoscope of themes, schemes and interpretations. If likened to
a symphony, then we may say that they always remain unfinished. Nevertheless, just as each individual story revolves around a 'nub' or 'core', so does the gross outline of the mythic period. There is no single, universally held Aranda myth of creation. But the many and varied accounts of the first movements of the ancestors are capable of being collected, collated, and distilled into sets which deal with like problems and offer similar solutions. Themes such as the interruption of communications between sky and earth tend to recur with such frequency that one is justified in abstracting them from the corpus, treating them as invariant motifs, and constructing a 'super-myth'—an account of cosmogony in general as opposed to a collection of disparate stories whose differences are marked only by superficial aspects of content rather than deeper levels of form. In this way, we render what is tacit explicit. And as I will later show, the enterprise is not altogether alien to the Aranda, just as it is not alien to other peoples in the world who do not participate in a literate culture (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971, de Civrieux 1980).

As it happens, Strehlow (1964a:725-9), using his own materials plus those of his father (Strehlow 1907, 1908: 1-50) and Spencer and Gillen (1904:393-454, 1927:304-90), has constructed an excellent example of such a 'super-myth'. It shows, in spite of the fact that in this oral culture there was never a philosopher with the systematic turn of mind of Hegel, that Aranda mythology is capable of being reduced to a coherent outline without doing too much injustice to the ethnographic facts. An essential part of Strehlow's description is that it begins with an account of the sky
beings. He then follows with a general characterisation of the ways in which the union of the sky and the earth was severed after the emergence of the ancestral heroes. And finally he describes at length the process of primordial creativity - how the totemic beings fashioned mankind; how they created all the features of the sensible world; and how they gave to man the cultural arts. In other words, Strehlow's 'myth' is a portrayal of a cosmology which sees the passage from nature to culture as a breakdown of an initial state of continuity and undifferentiation into a multiple universe of discontinuous elements (cf. Maddock 1972:27-8). We will see in this chapter how the transition is achieved dialectically.

The movement is essentially threefold. In the first instance there existed only the sky beings and the shapeless earth. The ancestors and the inapatua were on earth, but neither had any life or character. Then, at the same time as the ancestors moved from their slumbers, the avenues of contact between sky and earth were destroyed. The progression is thus from conjunction, through disjunction, to creation. And creation itself, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, turns out to be a further conjunction, specifically of the powers of the underground ancestral beings and the incipient forms of humanity that were the inapatua. The initial conjunction, however, is by no means easy to conceive. As stated previously, the Aranda seem equivocal about the first conditions of existence. For some purposes primordiality is viewed as desolate and amorphous (the earth); for others it is bright and with shape (the sky). And yet the two cosmic levels were fundamentally fused. Like
the radical unity of Hegel's being and nothing, the opposition between sky and earth appears not as a simple juxtaposition of levels, each retaining its specific character, but as a kind of alternating area of perception: a concrete formulation of 'now you see it, now you don't', as in the optional images of field and ground in an ambiguous representation of two faces and a candlestick. The two are really one, but one can only grasp them one at a time. (2)

Perhaps for some Aranda existence is a puzzle. On the whole, however, it may be taken for granted. But whether tacitly or explicitly held, knowledge of the conditions of existence always takes recourse to a fundamental form of dualism.

It follows ... that [in cosmology] the absolutely undecidable sequence boils down, if not to the empirically decidable assertion that there is a world (whereas instead there might have been nothing), at least to the statement that this 'being of the world' consists of a disparity. It cannot be said purely and simply of the world that it is: it exists in the form of an initial asymmetry, which shows itself in a variety of ways according to the angle from which it is being apprehended: between high and low, the sky and the earth, land and water, the near and the far, left and right, male and female, etc. (Levi-Strauss 1981:603).

And indeed, we know that there is a marked tendency for people to operate with these disparate oppositions, which together may be said to represent the totality of the universe, in an all-pervasive binary scheme (Needham 1973). Left and right, sky and earth, male and female, and so on, may all in some sense be regarded as homologues. The problem with which mythic thought is faced in the realm of cosmogony is, given that all these asymmetries must exist initially in radical unity, how are they to be disunited in order to give rise to the well-formed categories of space and time? How is
it, as Jung (1967:243) states the case, that the perfect "balance of the primordial world is upset"?

It is perhaps not entirely correct to think of the indeterminate condition of the sky world just in opposition to another mode of indeterminacy (that of the earth). We already know that, in another sense, the two are identical. Together, like the androgynous qualities of the emu, they may be said to represent wholeness; "the perfection of a primordial, non-conditioned state" (Eliade 1975:174-5). Nevertheless, it is equally true that there exist what Eliade (1973:39-41) refers to as two kinds of primordiality in Aboriginal religion, one associated with the upper realm, the other with the earth.(3) The asymmetry of the relationship is indicated by the priority which the primordial sky has over the primordial earth in terms of shape and form. For while the earth may have always been in existence, and have been in a sense coterminous with the sky, only the latter demonstrated something like true life. The former, like the posited void of Christian mythology and the nothing of Hegel's dialectics, was akin to non-being. In other words, only the sky had an appearance - but nothing was its ground.(4)

One might want to account for this asymmetry in a number of ways, but whichever is chosen, it has to be regarded for some purposes as one explanation among many, which together may be taken as a set. The explanations must, in the nature of things, be mythical. For the opposition between sky and earth is primordial in terms of both time and space, and a logical corollary to this is that the initial conjunction must have contained within it everything
that now exists in disjunctive forms - male and female, up and down, here and there, before and after, and so on. Indeed, we have already seen how the polar opposites of male and female are contained within the singular appearances of Iliingka and his family, and one could make a case for saying that this conjunction, posed in terms of corporeal imagery, is transformed into the cosmological datum of sky and earth. For the Aranda, as appears to be the case almost universally, maleness tends to be associated with the sky, while femininity tends to be connected with the earth: "Father Sky and Mother Earth" as they are rendered figuratively by Roheim (1972:103), using an idiom which, as far as I can tell, is not Arandic. Still, we have seen how the world of the sky is thought mainly to be the domain of the 'Great Father' (kngaritja) Iliingka, and it will become only too-evident as this thesis proceeds that maternity is connected with the earth. But what has to be borne in mind, accepting the symbolic formula male:female::sky:earth as valid, is that the oppositions must in part be conditioned by the notion of sexual conjunction. If the world exists 'in the form of an initial asymmetry', then it is in part the asymmetry of 'the one' and 'the other' joined together in intercourse - perhaps the primal scene, which so fascinated Roheim, projected back in time to become the primordial union.

5.2 Red in Black and White.

But at the same time it must, in principle, be possible to assimilate many other oppositions, as well as that of male and female, to that of sky and earth. One such oppo-
sition, the important one of night and day, is dealt with in
the following myth taken from Roheim (1974b:110-1).

The Milky Way is a tjurunga (sacred thing) of the
night. Night and day first came into existence at
a place called Pmoara. A horde of nailtail
wallabies lived at Pmoara in The Dreaming. One of
them was called Intjaminja, which means morning
twilight. He lay at Pmoara covering the daylight
with his back. The Milky Way was also there. He
was a real man and the wallabies seized him and
stretched him out. As they did so, they declared
themselves to be pmoarinja - 'of the womb'. These
wallaby people performed many ceremonies. They had
a ceremonial pole which they stretched out so far
that it pierced the sky. They hung many sacred
objects on this pole and bent it right round until
it reached the earth again. This pole is now the
Milky Way. A number of perentie lizards were
there. Upon declaring the break of day, they
lifted the end of the Milky Way, placed many
sacred objects on it, and raised it back into the
sky.

There are some highly revealing mythemes in this text.
The myth identifies the wallabies, in the first instance,
with both the night and the womb, so confirming indirectly
the association of the earth with the female element. At the
beginning of time the earth was covered in darkness, though
below it, in their deep, underground caverns (Carl Strehlow
1907:3), lay all the totemic ancestors - including the
nailtail wallabies of Pmoara (Womb).(5) But if the wallabies
themselves are associated with the dark and the female, then
we might expect them to be opposed to the Milky Way. And
indeed this is obviously the case: the Milky Way is light;
it is a ceremonial pole (which as we shall see is phallic);
and it is, in the form of a man, the wallabies' 'antagonist'
who is stretched out. However, the narrator of the myth
stated to Roheim that the Milky Way is tjurunga inguupuntja
- the secret of midnight. Correlative to this, one of the
wallabies is called Intjaminja, which means dawn or break of

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day. Thus is appears that day and night, presumably as a result of the stretching out of the Milky Way, change places. The Milky Way, initially opposed to the wallabies and the night, eventually becomes itself a part of the night. Likewise, the wallabies, initially 'in the dark', are born into the daylight. This was how night and day began, and the switch or mutual invasion of realms is reminiscent of the way in which the 'being' of the sky and the 'nothing' of the earth originally passed over into each other at the beginning of The Dreaming.

As it happens we may confirm the interpretation from a different angle. According to one of Carl Strehlow's informants, Iliingka commanded that the earth be cut off from the sky at the dawn of time. He did this by flattening a connecting mountain which previously stood between the two cosmic levels and sending his messenger—a pied butcherbird—to withdraw the expanse of sea that had hitherto covered the ground (see Chapter Four). The position of the butcherbird in this scenario is unlikely to be wholly arbitrary, as the following story implicitly shows.

[In the beginning] the sky was so close to the earth that it not only shut out all light, but forced everyone to crawl around in darkness, collecting, with their bare hands, whatever they could find to eat. But the magpies, one of the more intelligent birds, decided that, if they all worked together, they could raise the sky to make room in which to move about. Slowly, with long sticks, the birds lifted the sky, resting it first on low, then on higher boulders, until everyone could stand upright. As the magpies were struggling to lift the sky even higher above their camp, it suddenly split open, revealing the beauty of the first sunrise. Overjoyed with the light and the warmth, the magpies burst into their melodious call and, as they sang, they saw the blanket of darkness break into fragments and drift away as clouds. From those remote times until now, the magpies have always greeted the sunrise with their
warbling song of incomparable beauty (Mountford and Roberts 1973:98).

From this story it appears that the 'magpie' is a transitional animal, standing between day and night due to the clear beauty and distinctiveness of its dawn call. But I suspect that the 'magpie' is a transitional animal in another sense as well, since it is commonly known to be the very embodiment of opposites in the form of its patchy black and white plumage. However, the so-called magpie mentioned by Mountford and Roberts is almost certainly not a magpie at all. It is, in all likelihood, the pied butcherbird, another member of the crow family with plumage virtually identical to the magpie (see Illustration 1). \( \text{\textsuperscript{6}} \) It is this bird which is also mentioned as Iliingka's messenger by Carl Strehlow. Pied butcherbirds are sometimes known in Australia as 'break-o'-day boys', because they greet the morning with a particularly melodious song reckoned to be one the finest known in the Antipodes (Frith 1976:574 cf. Carl Strehlow 1911:24).

The pied butcherbird's association with the sunrise is revealing about the myth of the nailtail wallabies. In the story reproduced by Mountford and Roberts the 'magpies' endeavour to lift up the sky, reminiscent of the way in which the wallabies stretch out their ceremonial pole (Milky Way), result in a bursting asunder of the heavens. From this violent rupture comes the brilliant light, colour and warmth of the sun. Figuratively speaking, we could thus say that between black and white comes red; that one sees red between the light and the dark. It is this very feature which explains the position of the wallabies in the myth of night
Illustration 1. The Pied Butcherbird and the Bush Stone Curlew

a) Pied Butcherbird
(from Frith 1976:574)

b) Bush Stone Curlew
striking characteristic pose
when disturbed on its nest
(from Frith 1976:167)

Drawings approximately to scale
and day. For the species in question is the now-extinct crescent nailtail wallaby, a creature which is ash-grey on the upper side of its body and pale grey to pure white on the lower, with a number of variegations of black, white and reddish-brown on its sides (see Plate 7). Now we know that this embodiment of colour contrasts is important, since the myth of night and day actually explains that Intjaminja (Dawn) lay at Pmoara covering the daylight with his back.\(^7\)

Mountford and Roberts' story does not, as far as I know, relate directly to the Aranda. In point of fact, the developed position of the butcherbird in Aranda mythology appears to have little to do with either the contrast of night and day or that of sky and earth. Rather, it is concerned with the opposition of life and death. The following story is Western Aranda and taken from Strehlow (1968:44).

In The Dreaming a group of stone curlews fell into dispute, resulting in the death of one of their members. The dead man was buried, but in those days people were capable of renewing themselves and the man began to rise up out of the grave. But the 'magpie' (actually the pied butcherbird), who had witnessed the whole series of events from afar, flew down upon the emerging dead man, thrust a spear into his neck, and trampled him back into the ground, saying: "Remain rooted down firmly for all time; do not attempt to rise again; stay forever in the grave!" Having completed his gruesome deed, the 'magpie' soared up into the sky to his own home far away.

If in some myths the 'magpie' is an 'in-between' animal embodying basic contrasts, in this myth it appears as altogether one-sided. In so far as the story relates directly to themes already discussed, then the 'magpie' seems to indicate the realm of the above. At the end of the myth it is explicitly stated that the 'magpie' soared into the air, leaving behind the hapless, now totally-dead stone curlew in
The crescent nailtail wallaby's distinctive colouration makes it a fit image of sunrise. The species is now presumed to be extinct and the above drawing is from an early print by John Gould.
the earth. The contrast between above and below is activated by the choice of totemic operators. The magpie, an able flier, is opposed to the stone curlew, a ground-dweller which is a very reluctant user of its wings, preferring instead to rely on the camouflage of its plumage in the scrub (Frith 1976:166-7).

Other contrasts may exist on the connotative plane. The pied butcherbird, for example, very much like the true Australian magpie, is a very aggressive bird when nesting (Frith 1976:574). Aborigines say that it is an extremely fierce fighter that will capture other birds and tear them to pieces with its hooked beak (Carl Strehlow 1911:24). The stone curlew, on the other hand, crouches perfectly flat and still when disturbed, stretching out its neck in order to remain inconspicuous (Frith 1976:167, cf. Illustration 1). Perhaps it is little wonder, then, that the dead stone curlew man 'got it in the neck'. The contrast between night and day also seems to be implicit in the story. When the stone curlew was finally laid to rest by the 'magpie', all the curlews turned into real birds. "Their wailing shrieks rang out without ceasing; their tears fell without ceasing; they were deeply stricken with grief" (Strehlow 1969:44). It so happens, in contrast to the melodic call of the pied butcherbird, which heralds the dawn, "the wailing calls of the bush stone curlew are common during the night in the scrubland of the Australian interior" (Frith 1976:166). Some Central Australian Aborigines indeed say that the stone curlew only ever moves at night (Hale and Laughren 1983:39).
5.3 On Copulation

Sky and earth, male and female, life and death, night and day, dark and light, and active and passive represent only a handful of the oppositions which myths have to deal with in order for the known world to come into existence. But there can be no doubt, especially since the voluminous works of Geza Roheim, that the asymmetries often appear determined by sexual significata. Evidently, body symbolism has an overwhelmingly important role to play in religious life. Thus, if it is true that the initial union of sky and earth was partly sexual, then the priority which the sky has over the earth must be conditioned by the privileged character of phallic signification over its opposite. We might have been able to predict this on theoretical grounds, since psychoanalysis has long argued that the phallus is the key to symbolic life. Lacan (1977a:287) argues the case in the following terms.

It can be said that this signifier [the phallus] is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real sense of sexual copulation, and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is the equivalent there to the (logical) copula. It might also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation.

'Generation' is precisely what we will be concerned with from now on in this chapter.

When the Lutheran missionaries first came to Hermannsburg, they tried to tell the Aranda that their totemic religion was inherently bad. The Aranda replied that this was a nonsense: "We are upright, we are altogether different and better [than you], - we children of the tjibulara" (Strehlow 1971:347). Tjibulara means brightness, and refers
to an underground track of the ancestral native cats, so the Aranda seem to have been suggesting that they too knew the meaning of the way, the truth, and the light (as Roheim has suggested - see Chapter Two). I suspect, in fact, that 'the light', as the Milky Way, has an absolutely fundamental role to play in Aranda religious doctrines, though this is nowhere explicitly stated in the ethnography. As I will describe later in this chapter, the Aranda sometimes state that all life and creation stemmed from the native cats who roamed the earth in The Dreaming. These native cats, who crossed a vast area of Central Australia, are often said to have begun their journeys at Port Augusta at the head of the Spencer Gulf in South Australia. Western Desert Aborigines know Port Augusta as Amiwarra or Yamiwara (White 1975:133), which happens also to be the name which the Aranda apply to the Milky Way, as well as Port Augusta itself (amewara - Strehlow 1971:179, 550). The suggestion is, then, that when the Aranda say that they are 'children of the brightness', it is because they may ultimately trace their ancestry back to the Milky Way. We may be reminded here of the fact that one of Roheim's Western Desert informants told him that the Milky Way is the 'supreme mystery of initiation'.

That the Milky Way is a phallus seems fairly evident from the myth of night and day, and Roheim treats it accordingly, saying that its stretching out is really a metaphorical erection. Perhaps this is so, and it would make a good deal of sense in terms of the wallabies saying that they are 'of the womb'. For the wallabies, representative of the alternation of day and night, are about to be born. Pmoara is their 'mother', so perhaps the Milky Way is their
'father'. The myth actually explains that the Milky Way is a *kauaua urbula* (Roheim 1972:84) - a black ceremonial pole. So the Milky Way, it seems, was first of all dark, like the earth itself at the beginning of time. As the narrator of the myth of night and day told Roheim (1972:83), night and day originated at the same place (Pmoara), but at first night was 'chief' over the day. What I would suggest here is that the imagery corresponds to that which Roheim speaks of as being the primal union of 'Father Sky and Mother Earth': the phallus is 'in the dark'. But copulation ends in a (be-)coming, and the perfect union is fractured in the process. The Milky Way, which is a stream of light, would thus be equivalent to an ejaculation in the darkness; a spreading of seminal influence in the shape of a patchy stream of white against a dark background. Not only is this patchiness characteristic of the Milky Way itself, it is also embodied by the perenties who place it finally in the sky (see Illustration 2). The perentie, a gigantic lizard, is a common and often explicit phallic symbol in Central Australia (Meggitt 1966:119). Aranda women may sometimes be banned from eating perentie meat lest it make them unduly promiscuous (Spencer and Gillen 1899:472).

But we need not rely entirely on the myth of night and day for our interpretations, since Strehlow (1962:7) has translated a song which describes how, in the beginning, there stood a great ceremonial pole at Port Augusta. The description is graphically phallic and sexual.

It was called 'The Milky Way' because it reached from the sea to the sky. Flames from its crest lit up the sky at night, and it drew all men to itself because of its irresistible magic power.
Illustration 2. The Perentie

Description: Rich brown above, the back and sides with a series of large creamish or yellowish spots or blotches which tend to be aligned in transverse rows across the body and tail. Each large spot is edged with dark brown or black, while the black edgings of the spots on the neck run together to form a conspicuous reticulated pattern on the sides of the neck and face, and on the throat. The limbs are darker brown, spotted with cream or yellow. White or cream below. The above pattern is brilliant and contrasting in juveniles, gradually becoming more obscure with increasing size (Cogger 1979:234).
The narrowing sea embraces it forever, —
Its welling waves embrace it forever.

The sea, ever narrowing, forever embraces it, —
The great beam of The Milky Way.

Its embracing arms forever tremble about it, —
The great beam of The Milky Way.

Set in the bosom of the sea it stands,
Reverberating loudly without a pause.

Set in the bosom of the sea it stands,
Sea-flecked with drifts of foam.

The tnatantja pole, flecked with drifts of foam, —
The tnatantja pole casts off its foamy covering.

The tnatantja pole strips itself bare like a plain, —
The tnatantja pole untwists and frees itself from its covering.

The tnatantja pole rises into the air, —
The great beam of The Milky Way.

The kauaua pole rises into the air, —
The great beam of The Milky Way.

The great mulga beam rises into the air, —
The great beam of The Milky Way.

It showers sparks like burning mulga grass, —
The great beam of The Milky Way.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Gleams and shines forever.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Casts a flickering glow over the sky forever.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Burns bright crimson forever.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Trembles with deep desire forever.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Quivers with deep passion forever.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Trembles with unquenchable desire.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Draws all men to itself by their forelocks.

The great beam of The Milky Way
Unceasingly draws all men, wherever they may be.
It would, I think, take considerable temerity to try to improve on this imagery in so far as it relates to the primordial significance of the phallus.

We should now pause to consider the importance of the primordiality of the phallus in relation to the dialectic constituted by the mutual passing over into each other of 'being' (sky) and 'nothing' (earth). In the myth of night and day the nailtail wallabies are born from the womb at Pmoara, and their birth is co-extensive with the dawn - the birth of the day. Matching this is the transition of the Milky Way itself, which is transformed from phallic pole into the 'broken' or fragmented existence of a broad band of stars interrupted by dark patches. There is a sense here in which these two transitions are complementary, but opposed. In the beginning the wallabies and the Milky Way are contrasted as female is to male: the wallabies are in the womb, and of it, while the Milky Way is a phallic ceremonial pole. But male and female are also opposed as light is to dark (or as sky is to earth), and it is the darkness of the womb at Pmoara which could be seen as enveloping the original dark, phallic character of the Milky Way as a kaauaua pole. Light comes only as a climax to this conjunction, but it is marked in two ways.

Firstly, the wallabies are born, which is a transition from the darkness of the womb to the lightness of the day - at first, night is said to be 'chief' over the day. Secondly, the Milky Way comes into being. Certainly this second transition involves a movement of light, but as we have seen the Milky Way is noted less for its pure light and more for its fragmentation - in particular for its dark
areas such as the Coal Sack. What I am suggesting, then, is that the birth of the wallabies and the creation of the Milky Way in the sky involve a mutual passing over akin to that detailed previously for sky and earth. In the case of the wallabies, originally wholly dark, and hence female, light becomes co-existent with the dark: they are night and day. The Milky Way, on the other hand, is fractured light; light in which the dark appears to invade. Were we to apply the symbolic equations involving dark and female on the one hand, and light and male on the other, then, we would have to say that the sexual valencies have also been transformed into each other. The female has become male, and the male has been feminised.

This dialectical movement has important repercussion for understanding other myths. We have seen, for example, how the synthetic image of the 'magpie' may be used to denote the disjunction between sky and earth. But the myth fragment in which this disjunction occurs also calls attention to the fact that the sky and the earth were originally bridged by a connecting mountain and a long tree up which a handful of the earth-born ancestors climbed before communication between the two cosmic realms was finally ruptured. This mountain and tree, like the Milky Way represented as a ceremonial pole, therefore play the role of an axis mundi, the cosmic copula elsewhere duplicated by the spear up which the Ntjikantja brothers climbed before uttering their death-curse on mankind (a theme which is itself transformable into a 'magpie' function); the giant casuarina tree of Akar Intjota which was eventually cut down by a band of avengers (Strehlow 1971:621); and, most import-
antly of all, the original ceremonial poles of the local
totemic ancestors which in the beginning pierced the very
vault of the sky, but which later disappeared from the face
of the earth. Each and every totemic ancestor is said to
have first issued from the root of one of these poles
(Strehlow 1933:187).

What is common to all these myth fragments is that the
presence of the cosmic copula is only rendered in order to
be ruptured. The original break between sky and earth is
never regarded as a simple movement; it is invariably a vio-
 lent and radical driving asunder of an original state of
wholeness, unity and totality. This break is portrayed with
great force by the myth taken from Mountford and Roberts. At
the moment that the 'maggies' lift the sky, so the heavens
are rent apart and the redness and warmth of the sun bursts
through. This kind of rupture is in fact similar to the way
in which one of the Iliingka myths explains the presence of
animal feet on the bodies of the otherwise perfect sky
dwellers. According to this story the sky beings originally
had normal feet, but they were broken by incessant shaking.
When one considers the link between Iliingka and the Milky
Way one the one hand, and the manner in which the Milky Way
is fragmented in the myth of night and day one the other, we
are presented with a hypothesis concerning the ultimate
significance of the sky dwellers' place in the cosmos.

It will be recalled that Roheim, with some justifi-
cation, argues that Iliingka's feet have a phallic charac-
ter, and it is actually true that Iliingka himself may take
on a wholly phallic presentation. In one of the myths re-
produced in the previous chapter it is said that Iliingka is
identified with the whirlwind, another variant of the *axis mundi* and which is sometimes explicitly identified with phallic ceremonial poles (Strehlow 1971:111-2, 175). Now the emu, as we have seen, is literally 'full of himself'; and Iliingka, in his perfect form, is a man who has no identity or relation with anything other than his own being. Hence, he is 'on top of the world'. This suggests that the significance of Iliingka's feet is not exhausted by the earlier discussions of zoological coding, retardation and phallic symbolism. As I noted before, retardation can be simultaneously indicated by a number of forms - castration, limping or lameness, and blindness - which serve to express immobility. But what these three metaphors also involve is the abstract idea of *loss*, most obviously in the cases of castration and blindness, and more obliquely in the case of Iliingka's deformed feet, which denotes a transition from a prefect state to a lesser one. One can therefore deduce that retardation and loss are related: but in what precise way?

The image of the emu as a closed phallic mother is helpful in answering this question, and in a way which relates directly to the myth of night and day. For if the primordial unity of Iliingka represents a synthesis of opposites, especially that of male and female, how is it to be broken down into thesis and antithesis? The synthesis of male and female is, of course, achieved through the image of the phallus as copula. This involves an initial asymmetry between the original opposition, since the area of 'thirdness' - the copula itself - is male. The synthetic operation, therefore, does not simply involve fusion. Rather, it has to be accounted for in terms of a movement through ex-
propriation: the male aspect loses something of itself in the union, while the female gains what the male has lost. The operation is akin to the castration motif, and in a sense parodies the cycle of erection, ejaculation and detumescence in intercourse. The male begins with the phallus, which is then taken by the female. The end result is both the synthetic copula - the phallus that has been taken - and the retarded condition of the donor, who thereafter has to be content with an instrument of lesser power. We must remember, though, that we are here speaking of a phallus which is fundamental - inside the body to which it belongs. It is as if the castration motif is used to open up one's own inner world, a theme we shall return to later in this chapter.

Although it has to be borne in mind here that Strehlow portrays the sky beings as akin to a deus otiosus (Eliade 1973:33-4), we also know that the sky beings may be part of the secrets of initiation. This suggests that, either in secret or in the past, the sky beings may indeed have been given a prominence in the creation of the world (as Carl Strehlow's variant involving the pied butcherbird would also imply). The interpretation that presents itself, in view of what has just been said about the role of the copula in dialectical movement, is that Iliingka and other animal-footed sky dwellers may be deformed because they had to give up something of themselves in the initial creation of the world. For if the relegation of Iliingka and his domain into the sky world beyond the Milky Way represents a separation of sky and earth, of male and female, then the copula that once united them must have been severed in the original pro-
cess of self-reflection, just as the various connecting principles — mountain, trees and ceremonial poles — had to be ruptured at the dawn of time. At any rate, it seems fair to say that, even if Iliingka does not appear to the Aranda as an active agent in the first creation, he does appear in the mythology as a logical precedent of the world 'coming into being'. Thus, if there is any concrete formulation of a cradle of civilisation in Aranda cosmogony, it is the place from which Iliingka himself originated: in the words of one of Roheim's informants, 'the nest of the emu'. And perhaps we get a final insight into the importance of Iliingka's emu feet when we know that those male emus who attend their nests so devotedly actually 'give birth' with their feet, by assisting the chicks in hatching by gently treading on the eggs (Hale and Laughren 1983:76). What is more, the chicks themselves, apart from using their own feet to break out of their eggs (Ellis 1970:129), also embody darkness and light in separation, since they are born with plumage which, unlike that of their parents, contains dark and light stripes (see Plate 9).

Dialectics, then, have a double movement: one side appears as reversal, each oppositional element taking on the character of the other, while a second side appears as mediation, through the presence of the copula. Each synthesis or copulation gives rise to thesis and antithesis or separation through a process of inversion. That these operations are pervasive characteristics of creation, as well as necessary conditions for the instigation of true space and time, is well evidenced in the important narratives which the Aranda and their neighbours possess concerning the
Plate 7. Emu Father with Chick

(from Isaacs 1980:143)

As with other ratites such as the cassowary, emu chicks are born with distinctive dark stripes which are lost after a few months' growth. There may be as many as twenty chicks to a brood, but the average is between seven and eleven.
exploits of the ancestral native cats - the most potent of all the totemic beings. It is to these myths that we must now turn our attention.

5.4 Coming and Going

As mentioned earlier, there is no single, universally accepted Aranda myth of creation. But there is one story which approximates very closely in intention to Strehlow's 's. er-myth', in that it attempts to account for everything that the Dreaming brought into existence. The story concerns the origin of the native cats and their movements throughout a vast area of Australia. It may be found in The Arunta, where it occupies 'two complete chapters (Spencer and Gillen 1927:Chapters XIII-x'). Strehlow (1970:138-9) has criticised this myth, saying 'hat it is essentially syncretic, and thus against the spirit of Aranda mythology. But while Strehlow is right to point out that Spencer was unaware of the influence of Christian teachings on the long and involved story that he collected about the native cats, the myth remains for all that unmistakably Arandic. It is perhaps unfortunate that Strehlow said that the myth was "co-ncocted for Sir Baldwin Spencer's consumption", since 'hat remark carries an only too-obvious value judgement about the 'impurity' of the myth. The myth could equally well be seen as a valid example of the creative genius of Aranda religion, and I propose here to treat it as such. We are, I believe, fortunate to have recourse to this myth in order to study the Aranda's own thinking on the subject of the unity of The Dreaming. To repeat Levi-Strauss's remarks, a myth 'is never more than tendential and projective. It is a
phenomenon of the imagination, resulting from the attempt at interpretation. If in this case 'the attempt at interpretation' involved wrestling with the notion of a wholly unitary God, that is no reason to doubt the myth's authenticity.

Spencer and Gillen's protracted story begins as follows.

At Lamburknga, in Dieri country, there once arose 'out of nothing' (ngambakala) a man who was without any particular totem (knganintja). Although this man was from the south, he and his progeny were to travel widely throughout Central Australia and beyond - through the countries of the Wongkanguru, Arabana and the Western Desert groups; through many parts of the Aranda-speaking area; and even to the countries of the Walbiri, Waramanga and the groups to the north of these. Because of the nature of his origin this man went by the name of Ngambakala.

Ngambakala was a great ritual leader (ingkata). Indeed, he was the ingkata, in the sense that he came before all others and directly or indirectly had a hand in their creation. For Ngambakala was to give rise to many places, beings and sacred objects connected with all the different totems. During his extensive journeys through Australia he created major sacred sites by leaving his footprints in the landscape. To each of these sites he allotted a totem and gave them all a circular ground painting (ilbantera).

When he returned to Lamburknga, Ngambakala created a great sacred storehouse (pota altjira). On the ground inside this storehouse he painted a native cat (tjiilpa) ilbantera. He made a second ilbantera outside and planted in its very centre a great ceremonial pole (kauaua). Then, on crafting a special sacred object made of stone (tjurunga), he placed within it a spirit (guruna) to give it life. When the tjurunga was placed in the centre of the ilbantera in the storehouse, the guruna rose as the first tjiilpa man - ingkata tjiilpa mara kngara (the great and good native cat ritual leader).

Ngambakala proceeded to make a great many more tjurunga and guruna, each associated with a different totem (emu, kangaroo, honesuckle, and so on). These were all handed over to the tjiilpa man, and in time each one was to give rise to an ingkata for a particular local totemic group. It
was the duty of the *tjilpa* man to see to it that each *tjurunga* was placed in its appropriate local area as previously created and designated by Ngambakala. Each of these original *tjurunga* contained within them many more *tjurunga* and *guruna* placed there by Ngambakala. All of the *guruna* had originally been drawn from Ngambakala’s own body.

Ngambakala produced his *guruna* in pairs; each a male and a female coupled as ‘mates’. The corresponding *tjurunga*, on the other hand, were made singly and had to be split into two halves to make pairs. All the pairs were tied together, so that there was a male and female for each totem. Each half of the *tjurunga* was given a name, and these were to be the sacred names of the people created from the corresponding *guruna*.

Ngambakala taught the *tjilpa* man everything about ceremonies: not only *tjilpa* ceremonies, but all those connected with all the different totems. After commanding that the *tjilpa* man distribute the various totems in the landscape, Ngambakala took his great *kauaua* pole, painted it with blood, and told the *tjilpa* man that in future men would have to use much lesser poles in their ceremonies. He climbed the pole and the *tjilpa* man attempted to follow. But the pole was too slippery for him to climb. So Ngambakala proceeded to the sky on his own, and, after drawing up the pole, was never seen again.

The native cat traditions are extremely complex. Aside from those which may be found in the works of Spencer and Gillen, there are also many other references to be found in the literature. (9) I will have cause to mention many of the other myth fragments as this thesis (particularly this chapter) proceeds, but for the moment I wish to pause to analyse a number of aspects of the episode reproduced above. (10)

The Aranda view of the world is what Tylor would have called animistic, and what Levy-Bruhl would have labelled participatory. And it is certainly true that the Aranda, in common with others who share ‘the savage mind’, dwell in a universe which establishes a great many general correspondences between nature and culture, between the world of animals and natural phenomena and the world of human beings.
To some degree these two realms are seen as continuous. They share the same source — The Dreaming — and continue to be identified with each other in the ongoing present. Nature and culture share something quite essential and this kind of correspondence is well illustrated by the relationship between Iliingka and his environment. Iliingka is himself a man who is self-contained and ever-youthful. Likewise, his environment is eternally bounteous and not subject to the ravages of history. Such a mode of identification covers some important theological points for the Aranda and is more explicit when we come to deal with the myths about the earth-born ancestors.

Ngambakala, I would suggest, is the earthly equivalent of Iliingka. He is, so to speak, Iliingka born 'out of nothing', out of the quiet darkness of the earth. The imagery may be seen as reflective, much in the same way as in Christian mythology God is said to have cast his face upon the waters, since the earth (nothing) was originally both different and identical with the sky (being). So as the one passed over into the other, instituting The Dreaming (becoming), each had to take on the other’s properties. We have already seen how Iliingka and his world were relegated to the regions beyond the sky as a result of this 'coming into being', but Ngambakala, on the other dialectical hand, appeared as the world of nothing — the earth — raised to a level of true existence, light, shape and form.

And like Iliingka, Ngambakala comes onto the scene as a result of this 'aufhebung' as universal — or at least very nearly so. He pervades his world in its entirety, for even though his birthplace is in Dieri country, he is not con-
fined to any single place. Ngambakala is thus identified with his cosmic domain, and indeed, the very first thing that he does is to move about in the world creating mountains, valleys, sandhills, and so on, each place being an 'impression' of himself. The narrative makes it clear that this 'impression' may be of several kinds. It may be literal, as when Ngambakala is said to have created places by making an imprint with his foot; or it may be metaphorical, as when he created a place by painting a special design (ilbantera) or giving it its name. More significantly, perhaps, Ngambakala also created a great many tjurunga and infused them with life (guruna) drawn from inside his own body - the very core of his being. In all these ways, the landscape and other things 'of the world' are expressions of Ngambakala: they are simultaneously his projects and his projections, thereby identified with him (cf. Munn 1970).

It would appear, then, that as Ngambakala begins to create, he literally loses himself in his world, which becomes infused with the life force of his own body. Like the artist that he indeed is, he is the master of self-expression and creativity. The specifics of this creativity, and that of his tjilpa progeny, can be dealt with later, but for the moment I wish to concentrate on an important detail of the myth fragment reproduced above. For when Ngambakala finishes his work, handing on all his knowledge to his son, he smears his kauua pole with blood and climbs it. His tjilpa son attempts to follow, but is unable; and Ngambakala rises to the sky never to be heard of again. The phallic character of this pole cannot be in doubt. It is precisely the same kind of pole which elsewhere represents the Milky
Way, and its phallic dimensions are directly alluded to when it is placed in the centre of the *ilbantera*. *Ilbantera* are circular graphic designs representing the female principle, and their name is partly derived from the word *ilba*, which may mean womb (Strehlow 1971:519).

It seems fair to deduce, then, that Ngambakala’s creativity is phallic, and the final part of the myth episode, when he draws up his pole and disappears from view, can be understood as a further variant on the theme of broken communication between sky and earth. And like those other representatives of the theme, Ngambakala’s withdrawal appears to have a pathetic and tragic ring. Before he leaves the earth, Ngambakala first paints his pole with blood and then warns his *tjilpa* son that thereafter no one will ever possess such a fine specimen again with which to conduct ceremonies. The account seems similar to that aspect of Aboriginal mythology, described by Stanner (see Chapters Two and Three), which relates how life took a wrongful turn at the beginning, destroying an original unity. For the pole and Ngambakala are in a manner identical: the loss of the pole is the loss of the creator. The ceremonial poles wielded by the ancestors are, in fact, identified with their owners to the point where they take on the sentient character of the supernatural being (Strehlow 1968:24), and they are always seen as being vastly superior to the "very poor, lifeless copies" (Strehlow 1968:25) used in ceremonial life today. This notion of a falling away from an original condition of greatness is a pervasive aspect of Aranda mythology, the implications of which are profound. We can explore these implications later, but for the moment I would
only point out that the motif of leaving the world with a blood-smeared phallic pole is reminiscent of Roheim’s claim that the feet of the sky dwellers (as phallic symbols) are to be read as standing for castration. It may well be, then, that the lessening of power and might which happens as a result of Ngambakala ‘spending’ himself is related to a castration motif.

Given this tentative interpretation of Ngambakala’s phallic being as creation through mutilation, I now wish to present a hypothesis on the relationship between Iliingka and Ngambakala. It is not one which is explicit in the ethnography, but it can, I think, be regarded as a legitimate reconstruction in the spirit of the original materials. Iliingka and Ngambakala both represent far horizons in the minds of Central Australian Aborigines. Iliingka is an unreachable personage living beyond the stars, his domain being partly signified by the intense darkness of the Coal Sack and other voids in the Milky Way. In the same way, Ngambakala rose into the sky never to be seen or heard of again. And although he moved to create the world, people do not see in Ngambakala any major significance for their rites (at least in so far as the matter is documented in the extant ethnography). Both Iliingka and Ngambakala, then, may be taken as representations of the limits of human knowledge, as indices of extreme distance in its most abstract form.

But the two, although on one level identical and reflections of each other, are not precisely the same. Ngambakala, as his name suggests, came into being, whereas Iliingka did not. The latter has existed for all time in
visible form, while the former may be said to occupy a place in history, having come into time and passed out of it. Iliingka thus precedes Ngambakala, and although we have no exegetical account of the whereabouts of Ngambakala, we might assume that Iliingka takes precedence in terms of space as well as time. One of Strehlow’s informants was most emphatic that Iliingka dwelt completely beyond the reach of sensible apprehension: ‘Up above they are, those stars, near Iliingka himself. He dwells beyond them, – this man we are telling you about’. Thus it seems fair to say that Iliingka and Ngambakala signify the extreme and near extreme horizons of the world – the ‘other world’ spoken of by von Brandenstein in the previous chapter, and the limit of this one.

But if Ngambakala, unlike Iliingka, came into being at Lamburknga, the question also arises as to how this birth took place. I have argued before that the deformation of Iliingka’s feet represents the abstract idea of loss through creation, and if Ngambakala marks the second movement of the dialectic, then one might further deduce that Ngambakala’s gain – his virtual existence – is Iliingka’s loss – the deformity of the feet, metaphoric of castration. In other words, as Ngambakala ‘comes’, Iliingka ‘goes’; as the sky comes to be divorced from the earth, the latter stirs and gives rise to a new form of being. In this sense, Ngambakala would represent the new synthesis: an area of thirdness which is the result of the primordial phallic rupture between ‘Father Sky’ and ‘Mother Earth’. One might say, then, that Ngambakala takes over Iliingka’s phallic character, and he does this through the dialectical progression of the earth taking from the sky the latter’s originally
possessed copula, and then giving rise, through the release
of the copula, to a new mode of phallic existence.

As I have said, there is nothing in the ethnography to
suggest that this interpretation would be endorsed by Aranda
people, but it does appear to be implicit in the pattern of
creation. For while Iliingka is altjira pure and simple,
like the original earth with which he was fused, Ngambakala,
born of the earth, was created altjiranga - from altjira -
that is, from the initial union of sky and earth. Moreover,
the interpretation is perhaps confirmed by the myth of
Ngambakala, since the creator has to proceed by the same
design. Ngambakala, too, is ambisexual. He possesses, and is
indeed consubstantial with, an ilbantera, a metaphorical
womb. And within this 'womb' he plants erect his kauaua pole
- also consubstantial with himself - prior to creating his
native cat son. But in giving rise to his son, an event
which the myth marks quite explicitly with the loss of his
own being (the guruna drawn from his body), he expends him-
self and literally becomes less than he was before. This ex-
penditure of energy is transparently equated with the loss
of phallic power as Ngambakala disappears into the sky along
with his blood-stained pole.

The suggestion is, then, that Ngambakala is the second
movement in creation. He is, so to speak, the second
instance of Iliingka; the one who supercedes Iliingka in
linear time, but who duplicates him in cyclical time. But
Ngambakala, for all his greatness, is a lesser being than
Iliingka, since the former is one step nearer to the here
and now; one phase nearer in both space and time. On the
other hand, Ngambakala is greater than all those he pre-
cesses. He says as much in the myth and identifies his greatness with the power and size of his bloody (injured?) pole. From this one might tentatively conclude that the Aranda apprehend the progression of mythical time as a lessening of organised unity; if not as a movement towards randomness and entropy, then as an increase in organised differentiation. And this increase sees no turning back: the episode ends with the tjiilpa son’s vain attempt to follow his father into the sky. This detail is reminiscent of the myth of night and day where the wallabies extend the Milky Way (also a kauaua pole), declaring that they are ‘of the womb’—about to be born. For if the wallabies represent the birth of the day by taking their character from the Milky Way in a state of erection, then the first tjiilpa man also represents the creative loss of Ngambakala’s phallic powers. Indeed, given what we know about traditional teachings concerning the origin of the native cats, which state that the totemic beings came from Port Augusta, where stood the Milky Way itself at the beginning of time, we may ponder afresh the correspondences traced between Ngambakala and the Milky Way. According to the myth which we have just looked at, everything and everybody comes from Ngambakala. The Aranda are in a sense his children. But, as we have seen, they refer to themselves as ‘the children of the brightness’.

It is with Ngambakala that history really begins. There can be no question here of the tjiilpa man being allowed to follow his father into the sky, for once creation is set in train, the loss is complete. The attempt to rebuild the initial unity of father and son can only be considered in order to be discounted. For if such a return were permitted, then
time itself would cease, just as a return to the original conjunction of sky and earth would herald the end of civilisation. Thus we are back again to Stanner's flawed creation: creation itself necessarily involves the lessening of fundamental unity. With this, the identities and relations previously disallowed in the sky world come into play.

5.5 The Law of Diminishing Returns: 1 (Time)

After Ngambakala had departed from the world, his native cat son continued the business of creation. This is how the myth continues.

After his father had left the earth, the tjilpa man found all of the pairs of tjurunga in the sacred storehouse. He had been instructed to distribute these in the landscape, a pair for each totemic place. But the tjilpa man still had his own tjurunga, the one that had been made for him by Ngambakala. This one was tjurunga njinta - 'on its own', 'without a mate'. There was, in addition, a second tjurunga without a mate, and like that of the first tjilpa man it was of the native cat totem. At a place called Wairiritjja, like Lamburknga in Dieri country, this tjurunga was deposited. It gave rise to a second native cat man - ingkata tjilpa kngara (the great native cat ritual leader).

The first native cat man gave to the second two special tjurunga called mbiljikara which were filled with a great many tjilpa guruna and tjurunga. The Wairiritjja man took one of the pairs of tjurunga from the mbiljikara and the corresponding guruna arose as a third tjilpa man - ingkata tjilpa kubitja - and a woman called Ilaparintja. These two people, being mates, were the great progenitors of all tjilpa people.

The second native cat man taught the third everything about ceremonies, just as he had been taught by the first. Before his death, the second tjilpa man handed over the mbiljikara, still stock-full of guruna and tjurunga, to the third, who carried them about with him, one under each arm. This third native cat man, having learned the knowledge from his predecessor, could also make new tjurunga and infuse them with life (guruna) drawn from his own body. He wandered extensively over the country, stopping at many places to perform
cere monies.

The third native cat man gave Ilparintja a ceremonial pole (tnatantja) to carry on their journeys, although as it was wrapped, she thought that it was just a large digging-stick. At their first camp the man lay down with his head on the mbilji-kara and Ilparintja lay to his right. A guruna entered her and she conceived and bore a son called Malbungka. Then a great many more spirits entered her body and she bore many more sons— but no daughters. All these people marched on to a second camp. In exactly the same way Ilparintja bore a second son called Malbungka, while another guruna which entered her gave rise to a woman called Lungarinia, who came to lay at the ceremonial chief’s left side. At this second camp Ilparintja conceived another large batch of sons. These men born at the first and second camps were known as urumbula or ingkata kurka— the small or least of the ceremonial leaders.

The way in which increased differentiation proceeds in mythical time is well conveyed by this second section of the myth of the native cats. Ngambakala, the great creator, gives rise to the first tjilpa man, who although a lesser personage than Ngambakala, is referred to as ingkata tjilpa mara kngara— the good and great native cat leader. (11) This first native cat man in turn, by placing a special tjurunga at Wairititja, gives rise to a second ceremonial leader. But the second man is lacking the description mara (‘good’): he is simply kngara (great). Similarly, the third native cat man comes into existence through the agency of the second, the former being known as ingkata tjilpa kubitja— the lesser native cat leader. Finally, this third native cat man gives rise to many sons through his guruna entering Ilparintja at the first two camps. These men are the urumbula and they also go under the title of ingkata kurka— the ‘small’ ritual leaders. (12) Thus, even accounting for the speculative nature of the posited relationship between Iliingka and Ngambakala, it is clear that the progression of
mythical time sees a five (possibly six) generation sequence in which 'being-in-the-world' is steadily cut down to size. It is as if the emu, representative of both continuity and self-inflation in the cosmos, gives way through a series of links to a kind of humility and imperfection.

The sequence recalls, given the phallic nature of creative beings, the way in which present-day ceremonial poles are regarded as pale imitations of the mighty examples originally used in The Dreaming. The force of this progressive diminution has been eloquently described by Strehlow (1971:585-6).

The native regards the natural objects at the sacred site and the surrounding landscape itself as the handiwork of the supernatural ancestors; and he is forced to admit that the present-day trees, rocks, and springs are at best only poor substitutes - ruins as it were - of the original glorious features of the pmarra kutata [major sacred site, birthplace of an ancestor]. The present rockhole at Kolba [in Eastern Aranda country], for instance, is only a poor reminder of the original ancestral soak whence the powerful tjilpa sirens emerged at the beginning of time; a fig tree at the same site is only a weak replica of the tnatantja pole that once touched the sky over Kolba.

But if time, for the Aranda, entails a lessening of being, it is nevertheless true that at each stage in the sequence of creation there is a further instantiation of the previous mode of existence. This is very clearly shown in the myth as each tjilpa ingkata gives rise to a duplicate (or duplicates) of himself. So things change, and The Dreaming moves further away from radical unity. But things also stay the same as linear time appears as a stream of connected and recurring cycles. One is reminded here of Levi-Strauss's (1966:235) claim that 'cold' societies (including the Aranda) do not so much deny history as admit it "as a
form without content", before and after having their "sole significance ... in reflecting each other". One is reminded also of Stanner's (1979:34) contention that Aborigines see time less as a continuum and more as "'bent' into cycles or circles".

But there is a further dimension to this steady diminution through duplication. For as I have already noted, an ancestor's power is coterminous with that of the phallic pole with which he is absolutely identified. It so happens that when the Aranda stress the nature of the cutting down to size experienced as a result of moving away from the original Dreaming, they do so most markedly in relation to these poles. Time, then, is the transmission of the phallus, since this is duplicated in each generation. On the other hand it is never the whole phallicism of the previous generation which is carried over to the next. Rather, it is always a lesser form of power. Widespread throughout Central and South Australia there is a myth in which a lecherous man chases a woman only to somehow lose his penis. This penis in turn becomes his son and continues his amorous adventures. Sometimes the son too may lose his penis, so giving rise to another woman-chaser (White 1975:129-30, Meggitt 1966:113-20, Berndt and Berndt 1945:103, 144-5, 317, Hamilton 1979: 256, 267-8). Clearly, then, Central Australian Aborigines are attuned to the truth of Lacan's remarks about the phallus being 'the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation'. It is the phallus, or more exactly the transmission of the phallus, which 'makes the difference' necessary for the apprehension of time. As one generation passes on its phallic power, the next takes it on
in exactly the same form, except quantitatively inferior. Why the lessening takes place in the way that it does should become clearer below. For the moment, however, we can note that Aranda history appears to have something of a Nietzschean flavour: it is a genealogy - a passage in time through which one can trace one's roots (see Diagram 3).

Diagram 3. Linear and Cyclical Time

Tj = Tjilpa
(Native Cat)
However, this progression is not the simple reduplication of a singular mode of being in ever-decreasing size. It is also a trend towards differentiation and multiplicity. This is obviously the case with respect to the ingkata tjilpa kurka, who are a plurality of urumbula men, but the trend is marked from the very beginning of the story, since Ngambakala contains within his body countless numbers of guruna, which appear as 'life-cells' which are to give rise to all forms of life in the known world. We can return to the specifics of this trend towards multiplicity below, but for the moment we need to concentrate on a number of related aspects of cosmogony.

As noted earlier, Ngambakala's creative work is simultaneously a project and a projection. Munn (1970) has written extensively and lucidly on the nature of this dual process for the Walbiri and Pitjantjara and states that ancestral transformations tend to be of three related kinds:

(1) metamorphosis (the body of the ancestor is changed into some material object); (2) imprinting (the ancestor leaves the impression of his body or of some tool he uses), and (3) externalization (the ancestor takes some object out of his body). Of the three, externalization is more specialized; the first two are most common, and need not be sharply distinguished from each other. In general, any object created in any way by an ancestor is thought to contain something of himself within it, and the various creative modes all imply a consubstantial relationship between the ancestor and his objectifications (Munn 1970:142).

All these modes of transformation or instantiation may be known as the ancestor's marks. They are, so to speak, traces or signatures of the ancestor, and the very process of naming is regarded as coterminous with externalisation, impression and metamorphosis (Munn 1970:142-3). (13)

Munn's summary of the nature of mythic transformation
is in accord with my interpretation of the passage of mythic
time, since the former covers both metaphorical relations
between sequences (metamorphosis) and the idea that a later
mode of existence only comes about as the result of taking
something from an earlier one (externalisation). In other
words, the sequential flow of time is apprehended as both
identity and relation between the temporal elements — the
very dual condition of identity and relation that was
originally lacking in the mode of existence of the sky
beings. The function of the second mode of transformation —
imprinting — can itself be interpreted as a mediation
between the other two, since both metaphorical relations
(identity) and metonymic ones (relation) are encapsulated
therein as the ancestor leaves an impression of himself on
something which is other than himself. Strictly speaking,
however, there is always this dual process. Metamorphosis,
although lying more on the side of metaphor, also implies a
difference in states as one aspect of the ancestor changes
over into some other realm. Likewise, externalisation
implies identity as well as relation, since the new mode of
existence is drawn from the body of the ancestor himself.

In the first part of the myth of the native cats
metamorphosis is not mentioned explicitly, though this is an
extremely common, almost invariant, motif in Aranda myths at
their very ends when an ancestor is normally said to have
become tired and changed into tjurunga. But the story does
emphasise Ngambakala’s abilities to imprint in the
landscape, a process explicitly equated with his capacity to
draw circular graphic designs (ilbantera) and to name them
as sacred sites. It also draws specific attention to
Ngambakala’s ability to create by externalisation, for in the beginning all the spirits which were eventually to animate the tjurunga were all within the body of Ngambakala himself. Sometimes it is even said that the tjurunga are inside him as well. In a very profound sense, all this is a question of self-expression. In the view of the Walbiri, the ancestor first dreams his objectifications while sleeping in camp. In effect, he visualizes his travels - the country, the songs and everything he makes - inside his head before they are externalized. Objectifications are conceived as external projections of an interior vision; they come from the inner self of the ancestor into the outer world (Munn 1970:145, my emphasis).

An important aspect of this ‘inner world’, I would argue, is its femininity. For in the trend towards multiplication and ‘diminishing returns’, Ngambakala takes on a character that is not wholly phallic. He also appears to be uterine; a kind of primordial container from which all ancestral life stems. There is, of course, nothing necessarily contradictory about this double formulation. For if Ngambakala’s phallic existence is balanced by a feminine side, then he, like Iliingka before him, may be seen as androgynous. And indeed the myth actually draws attention to this androgyny. At his great camp at Lamburknga, Ngambakala plants his erect kauaua in the centre of an ilbantera, both of which are aspects of himself - his own ‘expressions’. So in this way Ngambakala is identified with both male and female principles. Like Iliingka, the great phallic mother emu, he encapsulates the opposed principles of fertility in the form of a radically put together womb (ilbantera) and phallus (kauaua). The idea of the phallic pole enclosed by a circular design is, incidentally, strictly parallel to the
Walbiri's various ways of expressing, through the graphic arts, circular enclosure (female) of a linear form (male) (Munn 1973b). This dialectical relationship between inside and outside on the one hand, and male and female on the other, tells us something important about the apprehension of space.

5.6 The Law of Diminishing Returns: 2 (Space)

I have suggested that the movement of the separation of sky and earth should not simply be seen as a mere disjunction of juxtaposed parts. Rather, it is the disuniting of two unlike poles fused together with an area of synthetic 'thirdness' - the (phallic) copula. Taken in its obvious sexual meaning, this copulation clearly indicates that the original state of 'being' and 'nothing' (sky and earth, male and female) was also an opposition of container and contained, because "Father Sky and Mother Earth are the [primordial] parents in the act of cohabitation" (Roheim 1972: 103). But if the sky is male and the earth female, how do we account for the fact that Ngambakala, born of the earth and identified with it in much the same way as Iliingka is identified with the sky, is of the masculine gender? In order to deal with this problem it is necessary to examine more closely the nature of both Iliingka's and Ngambakala's androgyne.

We must remember, above all else, that Roheim's figurative rendition of earth and sky as 'father' and 'mother' is figurative. For earth and sky, although fundamentally opposed, are also in a profound sense the same. Their union, therefore, is the union of two opposed principles in a
single condition – *altjira*. But at the same time, this unity only evidences itself as a mediation when the earth stirs and gives rise to Ngambakala – the phallic copula ‘taken’ and ‘released’. It is as if the condition of nothing (the earth) were the interior of the condition of being (the sky), while at the same time being only appears in nothing (Ngambakala is born of the earth) when the latter takes something from the former. If this is true, then being would lose itself within itself. The idea may not seem so far-fetched or philosophically remote when we remember the two motifs of being inside oneself, like the emu, and then symbolically castrated, like both Iliingka and Ngambakala. Thus if ‘Father Sky’ and ‘Mother Earth’ are the primordial parents in copulation, we can note that it is in a sense only themselves that they can be parents to – for they are one and self-contained.

As argued earlier, Aborigines generally believe that beyond the sky there is another world: this was explicitly stated by one of Roheim’s Pitjantjara informants, and it is presumably the same land beyond the world of sensible apprehension which Strehlow’s informant indicated as the abode of Iliingka. Apparently only shamans have privileged access to this world beyond the Milky Way. It is worth recalling a number of points about the Milky Way at this stage. Firstly, according to the myth of night and day, the Milky Way owes its position in the sky as ‘*tjurunga* of the night’ to the fact that it was stretched out by the nailtail wallabies in order to make the dawn break. Secondly, when shamans visit the land beyond the stars, they believe they do so by passing through a kind of gateway, specifically
said in one instance to be a subincision hole. The shamans fear they may get stuck there, in much the same way as the 'stuck-together' (eternally copulating) people mentioned in several of the sky myths. Finally, the idea that one passes through a hole to get to the land beyond the Milky Way is reminiscent of the view of the voids in the Milky Way as rents or passages tearing apart the fabric of the universe.

Taken in conjunction, these three points combine to form the lineaments of an interpretation. At the level at which it presents itself to perception, a void in the Milky Way may suggest a vision into infinity or an outer world. That world would be Iliingka's home. But the Milky Way, as well as being 'nebulously' identified with Iliingka, only achieved its position in the sky by being stretched out and fractured - a symbolic castration motif. So the Milky Way, originally phallic, appears to take on a uterine function. Not only does it become a hole through which a shaman may pass into another world, it achieves this status by being made bereft of its phallicism; that is, it is feminised. According to some Aborigines, the Milky Way is a massive subincision hole, and we shall see later on in this thesis how subincision represents a form of attenuated castration and femininity.

Some further remarks by Munn (1970:143-4) throw this interpretation into starker relief. Noting first that "[a]n ancestor may leave an indefinite variety of [transformations] of himself", she continues:

There is thus a disappearance linked with a new appearance; a transient 'will', temporarily located, from which emanate atemporal, static embodiments. The ancestors continually move from place to place, or they travel around until they
go in forever. A kind of perpetual motion is remedied by images of permanence, yet at the same time this motion and the dynamic subjectivity it presupposes are, as it were, incorporated into permanent objects: transformations contain the ancestral being and his 'strength' at the same time that they are disengaged from him (my emphasis).

The suggestion is, then, when Munn's more abstract interpretation is juxtaposed with the more concrete sexual imagery outlined above, that the 'strength' which an ancestor imparts in his creativity is his phallic or seminal power. An ancestor loses his 'strength' - his phallic power is 'disengaged' - and the ancestor's counterpart - that which is created (his 'transformations') - is brought into being through the acquisition of the phallus. Thus as one mode of being passes over into the other and vice versa, the original possessor of the phallus comes to be characterised by a lack, while that which originally lacked the phallus comes to possess it. This is what, following Lacan (1977a:324), may be called "the will to castration inscribed in the Other". And it seems that there is an intrinsic link between castration and expression, since the loss of phallic power is the mode of creativity among the ancestors - the axis of 'disengagement' which turns inside into outside and dreams into things.

But to return to the solid ground of ethnography, the fact that Iliingka is seen as dwelling beyond the sky and through the voids of the Milky Way adds yet further credibility to the image of earth and sky being originally fused by a phallic copula, later to be withdrawn but leaving behind its synthetic 'thirdness'. For the Coal Sack is also characterised by a lack - the absence of light where one would expect to find it. Moreover, it is a lack which is
clearly sexual in nature, as the Milky Way was originally a phallic kauaua pole. We may see in this an indicator of 'disengagement', the result of which is (variously) the wallabies to be born at Pmoara or Ngambakala, the man born 'from nothing' - out of the earth. Ngambakala, then, identified with his own kauaua, is the phallic synthesis, originally expropriated from the sky, taken over into the earth, and then brought into existence by stirring from the earthly womb.

But the earth itself has its horizons, marked principally in the world of the night by the stars. This being so, Ngambakala must be a phallic existent obtaining in a uterine world, much in the same way that a shaman is a phallic character defined by his passage through the Milky Way, or an original ancestral pole pierces the vault of heaven. However, at the same time, Iliingka is deemed to have retained something of his phallic character. His deformity, although a modification of his strength, still marks his power. In other words, although Ngambakala can be envisaged as obtaining in a uterine environment, the limits of that environment, when surpassed, regain something of the original masculine character. Thus, Iliingka in a sense retains his ambisexuality, but it is broken down into the two opposed aspects by a spatial reference. Viewed internally, Iliingka's existence is feminine; viewed externally, it is masculine. Thus one is reminded of the classic image of the serpent swallowing its own tail, a kind of unity which is indeed at the very heart of the self-containment of the emu.

I would contend that this opening up of an internal world relates to the imagination which the ancestors ex-
ercise. In so far as the world of Iliingka is a world beyond the limits of the universe, with ongoing creation taking place through a kind of expression and naming of places and things, we come around again to the idea of altjira as logos—as Word. For it is essential that language should operate with names—the "quanta of signification" (Levi-Strauss 1966:215). And it is equally essential that language should have a boundary beyond which there can only be silence and the kind of non-communication that is the hallmark of the sky beings. "[T]he limits of language ... mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein 1974:57). But within those limits it is language—ritual words—which is (are) the very power of The Dreaming and which is (are) said by Central Australian Aborigines to open up potentialities (Roheim 1969:219, cf. Chapter Eleven). It is, incidentally, normal in Central Australian myths to say of an ancestor's erection that it is his talking penis (Roheim 1952:104).

If these interpretations are granted, it means that the severe limits of cosmological space are conditioned by the alternating images of phallus and womb, coming together to form something like a set of Russian dolls or Chinese boxes. If the outer world is phallic, and the inner uterine, then Ngambakala, himself phallic, is the masculine principle housed within a feminine ambience which, when viewed from afar and externally, is a recapitulation of the masculine. (At least, this is so in principle, although one cannot view the extreme masculine limits of the world because the sky world disallows any vantage point from which to view anything. It is itself the limit). The view of Ngambakala as a complete container of all future life would take this series
one stage further in the progression of 'diminishing returns'.
But the myth does not stop there. It proceeds to show that
this alternation of container and contained is a pervasive
aspect of the world as it comes into being in its various
and multiple forms. Ngambakala creates the first tjilpa man,
who is basically identified with all the tjurunga and
guruna. His domain is the pota altjira, the sacred store-
house which is explicitly seen in the myth as a smaller ver-

tion of Ngambakala’s whole cosmic domain. Ngambakala has his
own ambisexuality portrayed outside the pota altjira where
his phallic kauaua is placed in the centre of his uterine
ilbantera. Inside the storehouse, however, this situation is
duplicated exactly, save for the fact that it is a lesser
form, a tjurunga substituting for the kauaua pole. The first
tjilpa man’s world, then, is, like Ngambakala’s, a feminine
ambience (the inside of the storehouse) in which himself as
tjurunga comes into being. In addition, the myth states that
the tjurunga, like Ngambakala, are themselves containers of
life.

The progression continues when the second tjilpa man,
created by the first from an original tjurunga, also takes
on the character of a container, this time indicated by the
mbiljikara given to him by his father. The mbiljikara is
also a container – actually a double container which can be
split into two so that the second tjilpa man can carry one
part under each arm. From this mbiljikara the second tjilpa
man creates a third, together with a woman called Ilapa-
rintja. At this point the association of the feminine with
the inside becomes more marked. For the woman Ilaparintja
and her brother are created from a pair of tjurunga, one male, the other female, which were initially constructed from a single ritual object split in half and then tied together by Ngambakala. Ilaparintja and the third tjilpa man are thus, quite literally, two sides of the same existence, and the role of each falls directly in line with the alternating functions of inside and out. It is Ilaparintja who next comes to fulfil the role of container when she is entered by various guruna in order to give rise to the Malbungkas, the woman Lungarinia, and the many urumbula or ingkata tjilpa kurka. On the other hand, the third tjilpa man is an inseminator who controls phallic power in the shape of the guruna and tjurunga contained within his own body and the mbiljikara inherited from his father.

We may sum all this up by saying that creation follows the following pattern: creativity proceeds through the progressive alternation or substitution of phallic and uterine functions attributed either to the same beings or to beings who are refractions of each other. In this way, each further instantiation of being can be seen as a 'contained' (phallus) acting as a 'container' (uterus), as an external agent (male) acting upon an internal one (female). This progression adds a further spatial dimension to the diminishing character of cyclical time in The Dreaming. For it effectively asserts that the recapitulation of being takes place in a context of alternating male and female functions. In the early part of the story (together with its synthetic relations to the myths concerning Iliingka), there is the suggestion that beings which begin their existences in a phallic aspect end in a uterine one, and that this
temporal sequence is homologous with a spatial one. For just as Iliingka, Ngambakala, and the first, second and third tjilpa men are phallic creators, they all require the passing over of their masculinity into a feminine world - the earth, the pota altjira, the woman Ilaparintja, and so on - in order to create at all. In this way, what they originally possess, they require to lack, and their female complements take on the initial phallicism. Even Ilaparintja has her creativity prefigured by the taking possession of a ceremonial pole, so completing the alternations of sexuality which follow 'the law of diminishing returns'. To slip again into Hegelian categories, we can thus say that in The Dreaming all appearance is male, whereas the female always acts as its essential ground. And on a related point, but back within the Aboriginal context, we may note that the dark (black) is normally associated with 'inside' (esoteric) meanings in ritual, while the light (white) is aligned with 'outside' (exoteric) ones (Hamilton 1979:259).

**Diagram 4. Inside and Out, Female and Male**

Iliingka  
Ngambakala  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tj 1</th>
<th>Tj 2</th>
<th>Tj 3</th>
<th>Tj 4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M F M F</td>
<td>M F M F</td>
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M = Male  
F = Female  
Tj = Tjilpa (Native Cat)
5.7 The Destiny of Quolls

The myth of the native cats continues after the birth of the Malbungkas, Lungarinia and the many urumbula men in the following vein.

The ingkata now decided that it was time for him to release all the pairs of tjurunga and guruna in order to populate all the local totemic centres. He began this programme by first making a great storehouse in Wongkanguru country, in which he placed the mbiljikara and all the tjurunga. Collecting all the pairs, he took the lower (that is, female) from each and placed them on the ground. He selected two of them and transformed them into wood. Up until now they had all been made of stone. He replaced the rest together with their mates in the storehouse. At the same time that the tjurunga were changed from stone to wood their sex also changed from female to male. The guruna associated with them entered the second woman, Lungarinia, and they were born as two men called Tuanjiraka.

The two wooden tjurunga were given to the Malbungkas, and this meant that the two stone ones were left without any mates. Once again, the ingkata took out all the lower, female tjurunga from the storehouse and changed them all into wood, so leaving no females whatsoever. He bored holes in some of these to make bull-roarers capable of attracting otherwise reluctant women. The tjurunga were all tied together again as pairs consisting of one wood and one stone. After this, both male and female guruna began to enter Lungarinia, who began for the first time to give birth to children of both sexes.

The remainder of the story—really a complex of individual stories—is extremely convoluted and need not concern us further, other than to note that it tells of how the native cat horde travelled throughout Central Australia performing a great many ceremonies. In its general intention, the remainder of the myth is a carry-over of the part reproduced here, since it basically shows how the native cats moved from place to place introducing their totemic cults, particularly those of subincision and the ingkura (a combined initiation and fertility rite—see Chapter Ten), to local
groups. An important part of the native cat horde's destiny is that it brought all of the local totemic groups into existence. In essence, then, the myth is a drift towards differentiation and multiplicity. Before looking closer at this, it is worth raising the question of why it is that native cats should be so closely associated with an original burgeoning of life.

The native cat or tjilpa is generally known in the zoological literature as the chuditch or western quoll. It is an animal which is now entirely extinct in Central Australia, though several specimens have been recorded in the region and many older Aborigines still recall the animal's habits and appearance (Johnson and Roff 1982). Particularly relevant to the current discussion is the recollection of a Walbiri man that the western quoll "made big mob piccaninny" (Johnson and Roff 1982:223).

The western quoll is, in fact, a prolific reproducer, and many of the features of its reproductive capacities are of clear inspiration in the myth of the native cats. According to Strahan (1983:22), the western quoll has six nipples in the female's rudimentary pouch, and during the breeding season all of these nipples are occupied by young. However, quite aside from the fact that this reproductive rate is fairly high, it by no means exhausts the symbolic fertility of the quoll.

One of the few examples of superfetation (or the over-abundant production of young) in Australian marsupials is provided by the [quoll], and, from the numbers of embryos observed in the uterus, it seems to be the usual condition. [There are] recorded cases of two females giving birth to eighteen and ten young; the pouch contains only six teats - those that do not attach to them die (Ride 1970:106-8).
The myth of the native cats certainly appears to be inspired by this remarkable reproductivity, since not only are Ngambakala and the tjilpa men noted for being containers of a life force in the shape of a great many spirits (guruna), but the first tjilpa man was said to have possessed and passed on a pair of mbiljikara, which according to Spencer and Gillen’s informants refers not only to these tjurunga but also the amnion of a pregnant woman or the pouch of a marsupial. According to this view, mbiljikara literally means ‘baby bag’, and in The Dreaming the tjilpa men’s ‘baby bags’ were stock full of the life force necessary to bring all the totemic groups of Central Australia into being.

The natives say that the great, ancestral tjilpa ingketa's mbiljikara was full of tjurunga and spirits, or guruna associated with them, just as the mother is full of the baby child (Spencer and Gillen 1927:225).

And as the myth goes on later to explain, the ingkura ceremony, with its attendant manipulations of the mbiljikara, is in fact the great fertility rite concerned with the prolific reproduction of human beings.

But there are a number of other quoll functions implicit in the myth. In the first place, the quoll is associated with the underworld, the birthplace – the earth – from which Ngambakala first came, since the animal’s normal habitat in Central Australia was a set of complex burrows (Johnson and Roff 1982:223). But this subterranean association is supplemented by another reproductive feature which aligns the quoll with Ngambakala’s phallic creativity. Ngambakala’s phallicism is indicated by his bloody kauaua pole, a point which I have interpreted as indicative of
mutilation. It so happens that the quoll, too, is marked by reproduction through apparent mutilation.

The approach of the breeding season is signalled in March when the pouch of the female begins to deepen. Over the next few weeks the inside of the pouch becomes stained with a reddish secretion, the hairs become sparse and the nipples enlarge (Strahan 1983:22).

One does not have to rely purely on theoretical considerations from psychoanalysis to see in this a conflation of phallic and mammary imagery.

When I was in the field I was told that the blood flowing from the penis [in ritual blood-letting] was not blood but ipi (milk, in esoteric lore) ... In a Pitjantjara myth in my collection the wildcat [quoll] ancestors who introduce subincision are all supposed to have two penes, and ... that is actually what the subincised penis looks like when it is in erection. The two penes are the two nipples; the flowing blood which the neophyte receives is male milk; and the flowing blood they squirt on themselves is the same (Roheim 1969: 219).

The quoll is thus a provocative image of prolific reproduction through loss, and male and female functions in reproduction appear to have been conflated in the ritual exegesis collected by Roheim. But if the female nipple and the male penis can be seen as similar, what is one to make of Roheim's informants' claims that the quoll ancestors possessed two penes? In point of fact, in 1895, in a letter to Spencer, Gillen stated that his informants in Alice Springs were insisting the same. Gillen was intrigued by these reports, but was unable to procure a freshly-killed male native cat specimen for examination (Spencer n.d., Box 2: 27). In fact, as one might expect, Gillen's Aranda informants were not entirely wrong, since the penis does have what has been described as a "secondary appendage" (Lawlor 1979:41). Both the penis itself and the appendage become
erect during mating (Archer 1974:65 - see also Illustration 3). Perhaps, then, it comes as no surprise to find that among the Aranda the western quoll plays the same mythological role as the emu and kangaroo in other areas of Central Australia; that is, it is regarded as the originator of both subincision (like the Mardudjara's mythical emus) and circumcision (first performed by the native cats after the birth of many children to Lungarinia). In the latter case, the native cat appears to have the same position as the Walbiri's mythical kangaroo who is said to have first undertaken circumcision because he has a bifid glans penis and a ventrally placed urethral orifice (Cawte 1974:120-34).<sup>14</sup> In addition, it seems likely that the natural 'subincision' and 'doubling' of the native cat's penis has everything to do with the way in which the tjilpa ancestors deal with the sacred tjurunga by cleaving them in two and treating them as pairs. According to Carl Strehlow (1913:39-40) and Roheim (1974b:127-9), another meaning of the term mbiljikara is 'the two which are stuck together'. I will have cause to return to these matters more than once.<sup>15</sup>

**Illustration 3. The Erect Penis of the Western Quoll**

![Diagram of the erect penis of the western quoll]

(from Archer 1974:64, cf. Illustration 18)
The quoll is thus "good to think" (Levi-Strauss 1973a: 162) for at least three reasons - reasons, moreover, that combine to form a powerful synthetic image of procreative potential. It is a prolific reproducer; its reproductive capacity is marked by phallic dualism; and its mode of procreation is associated with the castration (creation through loss) motif. In their entirety, these models of reproductive capacities combine to form the outlines of a very concretely understood dialectic involved in the myth of the native cats and its relation to the original movement of becoming when Iliingka was separated from the earth through cosmic rupture. We can trace the beginnings and continuity of this movement in a moment, but first I need to draw attention to a subsidiary point about the quoll which helps to specify further the nature of its reproductivity.

Like all the different species of quoll, the western native cat has a mottled coat, predominantly dark brown with a number of white patches or spots (Strahan 1983:22). In the ceremonies performed by the native cats as they wandered across Central Australia, the performers are often said to have imitated the quoll's behaviour. Thus, for example, in one story about a troop of quolls which split off from the original single band, the leader of the group, one of the Malbungkas, is said to have carried his novices around in a bag (presumably synonymous with the mbiljikara) as tjurunga. At various stopping places he would release the young men from the bag in order to hunt and perform ceremonies (Carl Strehlow 1907:51-5). The behaviour is highly reminiscent of the way in which quolls care for their young. From eleven weeks onwards
the combined bulk of the litter is too large for
the pouch, and the young dangle from its opening,
or cling to the mother's fur. About 15 weeks after
birth ... the young leave the pouch, resembling
small adults. They remain in the family group for
some time, and engage in vigorous play (Strahan

In another story about a second off-shoot of the original
great troop, the novices, under the leadership of a man
called Kukatja, are portrayed as constantly indulging in
games (Carl Strehlow 1907:57-8, cf. 59).

But the 'vigorou play' has a serious side in myth,
just as it does in nature, since it is implicated in
ceremonies. In a Western Desert myth variant, for example,
about yet another off-shoot of the original quoll horde, the
ceremonial leaders are painted with black charcoal, red
ochre and white feather down, the latter in imitation of the
quoll's white spots. The novices surround the leaders in a
line and aggressively hiss in the normal manner of native
cats. But as is invariably the case in these ceremonies, the
culminating act sees the leader setting his whole body into
a quiver while the white down is shaken or torn off (Carl
Strehlow 1908:24-6, cf. Chapter Ten).

According to Strehlow (1971:301) the Aranda interpret
the use of feather down (sometimes red as well as white) in
ceremonies as a representation of fertility. The scattering
of feathers at the culmination of rites is a metaphoric ex-
pression of creativity (cf. Roheim 1974b:107-8). In the case
of the native cats, this clearly indicates that when the
ceremonial leaders lose their white feathers, they are giv-
ing up a part of themselves to the benefit of the novices
who are being initiated. Moreover this giving up of 'the
white' is juxtaposed with the presence of 'the red', since
Illustration 4. The Western Quoll with Young

(from Ride 1970:107)
the native cat leaders are smeared with red ochre. The castration motif is thus reiterated, and in such a way as to align the quoll with other animals we have encountered in myths — the butcherbird and the nailtail wallaby. For in order to make youths into men, the elder quolls have to lose their whiteness, being left only with their dark fur, represented in the ceremony by charcoal stained with red ochre. The quoll thus changes from light to dark in order to see the succession of the generations. The ceremonial quiver and loss of white down is actually referred to in Aranda as alkngantama, (Strehlow 1968:57) which means to give sight or to give eyes. It is cognate to the word alkngerama, which is a metaphorical way of expressing birth (Roheim 1972:91). It literally means 'to become eyes': that is, to gain sight or 'to see the light'.

The similarity with the position of the Milky Way, which also had to shed some of its light, to give rise to voids such as the Coal Sack, does not stop there. The native cats, like the Milky Way, Ngambakala and the rest of the totemic ancestors, are decidedly phallic. In all the myths of the native cats the ceremonial leaders are identified with great ceremonial poles which they wield during their travels. According to Roheim (1969:10),

the prototype of all great wanderers, Malbungka, is the great phallic hero. He is always described as walking behind the young men in a state of perpetual erection. His penis is his tjurunga or his ceremonial pole, and it is with this ceremonial pole, or tnatantja, that he opens the road for future generations. When the song describes how he walks behind the young men whom he initiates, it says:

His foot stands up

and my informant added, "They say foot, but they
mean the penis."

What all this shows is a triple analogy between the feet of the native cat heroes, their ceremonial poles, and their very bodies. All are in a profound sense phallic. And the image of the native cat elders as shivering and scattering down recalls the fact that in ceremonies tjurunga, including ceremonial poles, are also covered in down for reproductive purposes. At the end of some rites, for example, the down which has decorated ground paintings and tnatantja poles is stripped from them and a good deal of it is scattered to the four winds (Strehlow 1971:301). What we now need to explore is the way in which these symbolic functions of the quoll relate to the dialectics of multiplication.

5.8 Mathematical Mythology

Aranda mythology appears drawn to images of unity and wholeness, to symbols which draw together things which are otherwise separate and opposed. Basic to this symbolism is the phallic representation which is also in some sense female. One might note here an important point to which we will have cause to return several times in this thesis, namely that all Aranda men have to come to embody this ambisexual symbolism.

The subincision hole [made at initiation] is frequently called a vagina or 'penis womb', or the subincised penis may, in the sacred songs, be called a vagina (Roheim 1969:164).

So the phallus itself is bisexual, much like the emu's body and the original union of sky and earth. And it is clearly this same androgyny which is absolutely central to the
conception of native cat ancestors as superordinate creators. In mathematical terms, we could say that this androgyne is the union of one and zero, of the phallus with the womb as its essential ground. Viewed differently, however, the androgyne is also the union of one and two, of the phallus enclosed and included in the uterus. Yet again, the union could be seen as an original 'three'—because one plus two equals three, which in mythological terms is the synthesis of the primordial sexual dialectic.

Iliingka is in a sense 'two in one' because of his androgyne, but his successor, Ngambakala, is interestingly 'four in two'. The essence of Ngambakala's creativity is outlined at the beginning of the myth of the native cats where he shows himself to be in possession of a double androgyne. Ngambakala does not possess one phallic womb, but two, since he first paints a great ilbantera outside of his recently created pota altjira and then another inside the sacred cave. Moreover, in the first he places his phallic kauuuaa pole, while in the second he places his newly fashioned tjurunga. It follows that Ngambakala does not simply recapitulate Iliingka in diminished form. Rather, he represents Iliingka's complementary opposition in fission, so that the original state of 'two in one' thereby becomes two 'two in ones' (or 'four in two').

As if to draw attention to the importance of multiplication through fission (or division), the myth then describes how Ngambakala creates all his tjurunga by cleaving into two originally singular creations and filling them with spiritual life. The divisions also recapitulate the androgyne motif, since each pair of tjurunga consists of
two 'mates', one male and one female. Thus, while division appears to be necessary for creation and the establishment of the world in its multiple forms, this division is also a trend away from unity. Complements always have to be separated.

When Ngambakala departs from the scene, ascending his bloody pole into the sky, the first native cat is left with the storehouse to care for. But while the cave is stock full of 'mates' (bound-together *tjurunga*), the myth states that the native cat man finds a second lone *tjurunga* apart from the one from which he himself was created. This second singular *tjurunga* gives rise to the second native cat man, but at the same time this new man becomes the possessor of a pair of *mbiljikara*. In effect, this means that the first native cat man's creative potential is also split, for the *pota altjira*, the original container of all the *tjurunga* pairs, becomes refracted (or re-fractured) into a dual form.

However, it is important to note that as this progressive fission and multiplication proceeds, there is also an element of conservation taking place. For while each being — Iliingka, Ngambakala, the first native cat man, and the second native cat man — all eventually disappear from the world, they always leave behind them a new form of existence inherited by successive generations. Thus, Ngambakala inherits a *kauuua* pole, but also makes a particular kind of *tjurunga*. The first native cat man inherits both the *tjurunga* and the pole (all native cat leaders have ceremonial poles), but creates and hands on the *mbiljikara*. Thus, although there is a continuous subtraction of beings from the world, there is always an addition of something new
and essential for the The Dreaming to be 'followed'.

After the emergence of the ceremonial poles, the tjurunga and the mbiljikara, the second tjilpa man moves to create yet another new form of existence. He takes from his mbiljikara a pair of 'mates' and infuses them with life to give rise to the third tjilpa man and the first woman - Ilaparintja. (16) Ilaparintja and her brother thus represent the fourth creation, and they do so again in the manner of dialectical fission. It appears that this is the point where the split tjurunga realise themselves properly in the human realm. Previously, the dual principles of male and female had been encapsulated in singular figures. Now they are actually brother and sister.

From this time on the business of reproduction is no longer an exclusively male affair, for the third tjilpa man now proceeds to give rise to children through Ilaparintja's own body - in much the same way as reproduction was previously carried out through tjurunga. Through her first conception Ilaparintja bears a son called Malbungka, and after this many other sons. After moving to another camp, another son, also called Malbungka, is born, followed by a daughter, Lungarinia, and a further batch of sons. It is at these points, then, that the myth introduces a number of important sociological distinctions necessary for ritual life. These are the contrasts between elder and younger siblings on the one hand, and between men and women on the other. Fatherhood has, of course, been present right from the very beginning, but motherhood is also an innovation at this point in the myth. In all of this, a dual principle seems fundamental. There are two women to act as procreators of future
generations, and there are two Malbungkas to act as the senior men of their generations.

The dualisms continue when the third tjilpa man turns two female tjurunga, previously made of stone, into wood. At the same time they turn from female to male and give rise to two men called Tuanjiraka. (17) The creation of the wooden tjurunga thus heralds the creation of yet another generation, one below the Malbungkas and their siblings, and two below the third tjilpa man and Ilaparintja (because they are born from the body of Lungarinia).

The next stage of the proceedings sees the third tjilpa man turn all the other female stone tjurunga into wood. These become known as alkngarintja tjurunga, that is bull-roarers used in love magic. (18) This act sees yet another dualistic turning point in the story, since it is after the transformation of the stone, female tjurunga into male, wooden ones that Lungarinia and Ilaparintja begin to give birth to daughters as well as sons. In this way, the dialectical transformations of male and female are completed. Both second and third generations (that is, those coterminous with the Malbungkas, the urumbula and Lungarinia on the one hand, and the two Tuanjiraka on the other) now have 'complete' sibling sets. There is now a distinction between older and younger sisters (Lungarinia and her female siblings); a distinction between brother and sister in the third generation (the Tuanjiraka and their female siblings); and a reduplication of the elder/younger brother distinction previously obtaining in the second (Tuanjiraka and their younger brothers).

The remainder of the native cat stories need not
concern us here. For I will now bring this current line of reasoning to a close, noting by way of conclusion that the generative model which is encapsulated in the myth of the native cats entails all four of the basic mathematical operations – addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. It is these which together combine to account for 'the law of diminishing returns' (see Diagram 5).

Diagram 5. Quoll Transformations

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/
/  
/  
/  
/  
/  

Iliingka

Ngambakala

Tjilpa 1

Tjilpa 2

Tjilpa 3

Tjilpa 4

+  
+  
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Thus we can say with some justification that the story of the native cats is a "myth of addition" (Derrida 1976:167). Basically, it is a narrative which accounts for the world in terms of the dialectics of absence and presence on the one hand, and inclusion and exclusion on the other. Perhaps even more fundamentally, it is a myth about expression: it is a text in every sense of the word. A text, moreover, which is inscribed for the Aranda as a language - as "an immense store of meanings" (Stanner 1979:115) - written onto the landscape and the tjurunga.

This analogy between writing and the landscape is quite profound. When Baldwin Spencer was once taking notes during his 1901 field trip, an old Kaititja man attempted to emulate him. The result was nothing at all like those celebrated Nambikwara squiggles once elicited by Levi-Strauss (1973b:296, 1970:325) in South America. Rather, the Kaititja man 'took notes' in the form of a landscape drawing consisting of the conventional symbols in use in Aboriginal art in Central Australia (Spencer and Gillen 1912:325-6). In other words, this Kaititja man, in his attempt to write a text of information, used 'the art of circle, line and square' (Strehlow 1964b, see Illustration 5).

**Illustration 5. Kaititja Writing**

- place where man died
- places where man stopped on journey
- place where man originated
- track taken by dead man's spirit when visiting his place of origin

(from Spencer and Gillen 1912:325)
This is the language that the Aranda read as if their lives depended on it. The Dreaming is not only inscribed, but prescribed as well (cf. Derrida 1976:17). The ancestral marks which the Kaititja man reproduced were a dreaming, a story, a vital aspect of The Law. But Aboriginal people only read this 'writing' as traces — marks, names, tracks, signatures; things left behind which they simply must follow. It is their Law; a

sequence of supplements [in which] a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer (Derrida 1976:157).
CHAPTER SIX

Quintessentially Bandicoot

There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplummable - a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.

Sigmund Freud
The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 186.

A name cannot be dissected any further by means of a definition: it is a primitive sign.

Ludwig Wittgenstein
Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, p. 13.
6.1 The Signatures of Lizards

In the previous chapter I analysed the myth of the native cats and made particular note of Strehlow’s criticism of the story. In this chapter, however, I intend to analyse two myths which Strehlow would have regarded as wholly authentic. Indeed, from Strehlow’s ‘super-myth’ these stories emerge as of fundamental importance, since they basically define the outlines of creation on earth.

The myths pertain to two particular kinds of beings, the totemic ancestors and the embryonic humans or inapatua. In Chapter Four I drew attention to the initial state of the world as a contrast between sky and earth; as an opposition between form and formlessness, between ‘being’ and ‘nothing’. But it was within the world of ‘nothing’ that two forms of life lay dormant. For as surely as Iliingka lived above the earth, so too did the totemic ancestors dwell in slumber beneath it. Somewhere in between lay the amorphously shaped chains of human embryos known as the inapatua.

The fortunes of the totemic ancestors and the inapatua were inextricably entwined. As the former stirred from their perpetual sleep, so the latter began to develop and grow. I shall return to the specifics of this relationship later, but for the moment I wish only to draw attention to a particular aspect of the complementarity. That aspect is an opposition — between the infancy of the inapatua and the aged character of the ancestors. That the inapatua represent the very epitome of infancy is, of course, obvious, but the contrast of this to the agedness of the ancestors only emerges when we know that "[t]he totemic father ancestor was always visualized as an elderly personage with a flowing
white beard" (Strehlow 1971:618). The point is often made emphatically by myth narrators. (1)

This opposition is revealing when compared with Iliingka's unitary character. As we know, Iliingka is the perfect embodiment of the fusion of opposites and this includes the contrast between old and young. For Iliingka, like the rest of the sky dwellers, was never born and never grows old. Rather, he is perfectly poised between birth and death, 'stuck' forever in the position of an eternal youth. In a sense, then, the totemic ancestors and the inapatua represent another aspect of the breaking down of the sky's fundamental unity and a further dimension of the dynamism which replaces the stasis of the sky world once The Dreaming is set in motion (see Diagram 6).

Diagram 6. Sky and Earth, Young and Old

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SKY (youth)  EARTH

SURFACE (infancy)  UNDERWORLD (old age)

ABOVE (life)  BELOW (death)
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The image of embryonic humanity lying helpless on the surface of the earth at the beginning of time is one with widespread currency throughout Central Australia. The transformation of this helplessness is normally associated with small lizards. Among the Dieri, for example, the moon created man by first making two small black lizards. He then divided their feet into toes and fingers and, with a forefinger, formed the noses, eyes, ears and mouths. [The moon] placed the creatures in a standing position, which they could not retain, and so he cut off their tails and the lizards walked erect. They were then made male and female, to perpetuate the race (Roberts and Roberts 1975:70).

This myth fragment is particularly interesting because it is part of a longer story which involves both the emu (whom the first men desired to hunt) and the first sunrise (which rendered the light necessary to make emu-hunting successful). It is thus connected with a number of mythic themes dealt with in the previous two chapters. However, it is most noteworthy for its links to Arandic myths yet to be introduced.

Gillen (1896:184–5) provides the following story, presumably Eastern or Central Aranda, about the origin of mankind.

Ages ago ancestors of the present race lived in the form of a great species of porcupine [echidna] called inapatua, which had no limbs or organs of sight, smell, or hearing, and which did not eat food. This animal, incapable of motion, presented the appearance of a man whose legs and arms were so shrunken and 'doubled up' that mere indications of limbs were visible. A spirit man called Alka-para came from the east ... who, seeing these strange creatures, felt a great pity for them and, on examination, discovered that, with the aid of his magic knife, he could, by releasing from the curious mass of flesh the faintly outlined legs and arms, give these creatures the same shape as himself. Taking up one inapatua he quickly released the arm, adding fingers by making four clefts at the end of the arm; the legs were then released and toes added in like manner. The figure could now stand erect, the nose was formed and the
nostrils bored with the finger; one stroke of the knife added the mouth, which was pulled open several times to make it flexible; eyes were formed by the simple process of incision and another stroke or two of the magic knife provided the new being with genital organs. ... Alkapara continued his operations until all the inapatua were converted into living images of himself. In this way both sexes were created with equal rapidity. Having finished his task the spirit called all the men and women together, endowed them with the gift of speech, and informed the men that the women were made for their use, with a view of increasing their numbers. It was ordained that the men, before taking wives, must undergo the ordeals of circumcision and subincision ...; these operations being performed on them at once. The men and women assembled were then divided into [marriage] classes ... and were instructed in the marriage laws, which are observed at the present time.

Spencer and Gillen give further elaborations of this story. In The Native Tribes of Central Australia they say (1899:388-9) that the earth was originally covered with salt water, but that when this was withdrawn it exposed the inapatua. In the western sky two beings who were ngambakala saw the inapatua and descended to make true people of them (in the manner already described by Gillen).

These inapatua creatures were in reality stages in the transformation of various animals and plants into human beings, and thus they were naturally, when made into human beings, intimately associated with the particular animal or plant ... of which they were the transformations—in other words, each individual of necessity belonged to a totem the name of which was ... that of the animal or plant of which he or she was a transformation ...

The same tradition relates that, after having performed their mission, the ngambakala [beings] transformed themselves into little lizards called amungakunjakunja, a word derived from amunda a fly and kunjakunja to snap up quickly (Spencer and Gillen 1899:389).

In The Northern Tribes of Central Australia Spencer and Gillen (1904:150) briefly repeat this story, but they also reproduce another which, while not quite being of the same type as the first one, is very definitely related. The frag-
ment which is most revealing is as follows.

In [The Dreaming] a ... man of the Anmatjera tribe arose at a place ... in the Harts Range. At first he had the form of a little lizard called amungakunjakuja ...; then he looked at himself and said 'Hullo, I have got bristles like a porcupine [echidna].' At first he was stiff and could not walk, but he lay down all day long in the sunlight, and warmed himself and stretched his legs. After a time he looked at himself and saw that he was not a porcupine, but ... a jew-lizard. He still lay quiet, and, later on, again looked and saw on the ground beside him another little [jew-lizard], who had come from him, and he said 'Hullo, that is all the same as me'; again and again he looked, with the same result ... For a long time he remained quietly in the one spot, and continually looked at himself until gradually he increased and became great in the flesh, and grew into [a] kngaribata - a great and wise man (Spencer and Gillen 1904:400).

The remainder of the story (Spencer and Gillen 1904:400-3) tells how the jew-lizard man travelled around the country showing various kinds of totemic beings how to reproduce. This reproduction consisted simply of the spontaneous creation of identical totemic beings from ancestral bodies, the technique which the jew-lizard man discovered quite by accident in simply looking at himself.

Spencer and Gillen (1904:399-400) reproduce a second Anmatjera myth in The Northern Tribes of Central Australia.

In [The Dreaming] an old crow man sat down ... in Kaititja country. He arose at first from a tjurunga, and when he came out he looked at himself and said, 'I think that I must be a hawk; but no - I am too black.' Then he thought that he was an eagle-hawk, but decided that he had too much wing; then he looked at his arms, out of which black feathers had sprouted, and said, 'I am a crow.' When the sun shone he sat out on top of a hill warming himself, and when it set he [returned home]. One day he saw ... a lot of [inapatua] ... He decided to go over and make them into men and women. He did this by means of his beak, and then returned to his camp and there made a ... sacred stone knife, with which he intended to come back and circumcise them. Meanwhile, however, two old [perentie] lizard men had come up from far away to the south, and, with their teeth, they performed
circumcision and subincised the men, and performed the [equivalent] operation ... upon the women.

The Kaititja tell a similar story (Spencer and Gillen 1904:153), except here a pair of 'hawks' (black falcons) replaces the pair of perenties. In addition, the pair of 'hawks' perform all the surgical operations without the interference of any other ancestral beings.

The final story of the inapatua may be found in the work of Carl Strehlow. Strehlow gives three versions, one Western Aranda (1907:2-8), one Kukatja (1908:4-5) and one Matuntara (1908:5), thought they are essentially the same. The following is a shortened account of the Aranda version.

The earth, like the sky, was eternal, but covered by sea out of which several mountains towered. On the slopes of these mountains dwelt the inapatua, known also as 'the grown-together people' on account of their limbs being still unseparated from their bodies and the fact that they were all joined together as a chain. Their eyes and ears were completely closed, and instead of mouths they had minute openings on the face. The fingers of the hands were webbed and the hands themselves were balled and grown to their breasts. Their legs were drawn up, foetal fashion, to their bodies. One half of these beings were called land dwellers, the other half water dwellers, each division corresponding to a moiety.

When Iliingka commanded that the butcherbird separate the sky from the earth, the water receded and the high mountains sank into the earth below. As the sea and the mountains disappeared, the inapatua settled at the banks of great waterholes, and found there great nests on little islands. At the same time as this happened, from everywhere out of the earth sprang the totemic ancestors, who had freed themselves from eternal slumber in underground caves.

The ancestors were supermen of great strength who could assume both human and animal shape. Some had local areas of their own in which they created new things, while others travelled around the country. All performed ceremonies and created the environment. They possessed many tjurunga and sometimes left them in the landscape. At these spots spirit children are now located. Eventually the ancestors all grew weary from their labours and sank back
into the earth. Although they remain on earth embodied in the landscape, their spirits also live under the ground, clothed in red in the underworld caverns.

The inapatua remained for some time in their helpless condition. But one of them, a fly-catching lizard called amungakunjakunja, eventually approached them and with a stone knife made them all separate individuals. Then he took each one, slit open their eyes, ears, mouths, fingers and toes, and at the same time subincised them and taught them all the cultural and religious arts. To every one he gave a tjurunga and stressed how they were to continue performing ceremonies and marrying according to the rules and regulations. He then distributed all the people throughout the country.

Carl Strehlow’s story ends with a kind of fall from grace. The institutional arrangements given to the people by the fly-catching lizard fell into misuse and other totemic beings are said to have come to reinstate them (Carl Strehlow 1907:9-11). But the story is similar in intention to that of the native cats, since it is an attempt to account for the creation of the world more or less in its entirety. How, then, do the inapatua myths relate to each other and to Spencer and Gillen’s account of the native cats?

6.2 The Divided Self

Carl Strehlow’s myth of the inapatua states first that the earth and the sky were similar, but at the same time opposed. Of that much we are already familiar. But the story opposes earth and sky in a novel way, since it calls attention first to the fact that the earth was covered with water, and second to the emergence from beneath the sea of a group of towering mountains. In effect, this means that the earth and sky were already passing over into each other at the beginning of time, for the shapeless earth gives itself
form as it rises upwards in the form of mountains, whereas the sea, placed above the earth like the sky, is uniform and amorphous. The sky, as we already know, is itself associated with water through the image of the Milky Way as a river (see Diagram 7).

Diagram 7. A Cosmic Chiasmus

The crossing over of sky and earth is at the same time a mediation. We have seen how this is the case in the previous chapter; how the separation of sky and earth reveals the presence of the phallus, particularly represented in the form of the ceremonial pole from whose root each totemic ancestor sprang. Again, we have also seen how this mediation is associated with injury, with the castration motif. In psychoanalytic theory there is an important link between castration and birth, between the threat to the penis and the severing of the umbilical cord,(2) so it is of great interest to note that Roheim (1969:200-4) interprets some of the lizard myths presented here (plus a number of others) in
terms of birth.

Roheim (1969:202) regards the myths about the inapatua as "the true key to Australian mythology".

The infant starts life in ... the dual unity organization. For the embryo really lives in the ... ocean of the amniotic fluid in an indissoluble unity with the mother. Birth causes the first cleavage of this unity ...

Whereas the description of [the inapatua] is in some ways similar to that of an embryo, their state of being not separated symbolizes the dual unity of mother and child ... In the beginning there was the separation of mother and child and what separated them was the phallos or the life impulse [the trend of movement and growth away from the mother] (Roheim 1969:202).

Certainly, Roheim must be correct here in treating the inapatua as in a kind of foetal unity with their environment. They are, after all, embryonic, and their condition is such that they are quite continuous with each other, linked together as a foetal chain. But what are we to make of his claim that the operations conducted on the inapatua are akin to the cleavage of birth?

Consider first the identification of the inapatua with echidnas by Gillen's informants. Australian Aborigines, perhaps more than any other people in the world, are attuned to the 'foetal' nature of reproduction. This is so because they live in a continent whose fauna include so many varied species of marsupials and monotremes. Marsupials, such as kangaroos and possums, give birth to their young in a very early stage of development, and those young have very much the characteristics of the inapatua - undeveloped limbs, undeveloped sense organs, and so on. The echidna, a monotreme (egg-laying mammal), is perhaps the most remarkable Australian animal in this respect. It is born as what has
been described as "a curious little naked baby" (le Souef and Burrell 1926:371, cf. plates 100 & 101); as a tiny hatchling which is "rosy pink" and "translucent white" (Griffiths 1978:240, cf. figures 79, 80 & 81). At first only its head and fore-limbs are recognisably shaped and most sense organs are virtually non-existent (see Illustration 6 & Plate 10). It is thus no accident that the Aranda see in this most primitive of (proto-)mammals a model for the most primitive and embryonic characteristics of humanity. Indeed, the term inapatua, seems to be a compound of inapa (echidna) and atua (man). (3)

An image of birth seems to be indicated in Carl Strehlow's myth where the inapatua settle in nests prior to being fashioned into true human beings. But it is the way in which this 'birth' takes place which is remarkable. Roheim attributes the birth to the intervention of the 'phallos' or 'life impulse', which for him is linked to the "identity of body-image and object" (Roheim 1969:202). What Roheim means by this is the identity of the inapatua themselves and the ancestral beings who fashion them. For him, the lizards (and presumably other creatures in the myths) are phallic. But at the same time, the lizards change positions in the stories. In the Dieri story, for example, lizards appear to be identified with the inapatua, whereas in one of the Anmatjera myths the lizard appears in a similar role by being transformable into an echidna (and then a jew-lizard). Given this identity, then, what are we to make of the claim of phallicism?

Stanner (1979:121) once called Aboriginal body mutilations "ineffaceble signs designating stages in the social-
Illustration 6. The Echidna

(from Ride
1970:193)
Plate 10. 'Baby' Echidna (with illustration of newborn young)

(from Walker 1964:3)

(approximately to scale)

(from Griffiths 1978:240)

The photographed 'baby' is between two and four months of age and too large to be kept in the pouch of the mother. Such young are deposited by the mother in a sheltered spot and fed periodically. The newborn infant is tiny, transparent, and without any properly developed rear limbs (which appear stuck to the body).
isation of man", and this would certainly be an apt description of the 'finished product' of Amungakunjakunja's labour with a knife. But this idea of creation through mutilation is not derived from nowhere, and we have already seen in the previous chapter how it may be linked to the theme of castration. On a more general level we might refer to castration as a primordial *imago*; the key *imago* among a group that includes also mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short, the *imagos* that I have grouped together under the apparently structural term of *imagos of the fragmented body* (Lacan 1977a:11).

Let us see, then, the manner in which the body is fragmented in the myths of the *inapatua*.

For Roheim, the question as to why lizards should be chosen as symbols in the myths of the *inapatua* is a matter of the former's evident phallicism. There may well be truth in this, but it is clearly not the whole of the story. In the first place, it appears from the Anmatjera jew-lizard myth that reptiles may be chosen because of their cold-bloodedness. The story tells how the jew-lizard man was first of all very stiff and unable to move, a predicament not unlike that of the chained-together *inapatua*. But, again in a way reminiscent of the *inapatua*, the jew-lizard man begins to stretch his legs; that is, he begins to discover his limbs. However, the crucial point here is that this discovery only takes place as a result of the rising of the sun, and it is, of course, a normal characteristic of reptiles that they have to warm themselves up in the heat of the morning in order to 'come alive'. I would suggest, then, that one of the main reasons that lizards recur in these
myths about the birth of humanity is that they themselves are, so to speak, born with every dawn. And we already know from the previous chapter the immense significance of the mythological image of the sunrise. Interestingly, the first group of people that the jew-lizard man travels to in order to teach them how to reproduce are men of the nailtail wallaby totem (Spencer and Gillen 1904:400-1) — the same totemic group who in Northern Aranda myth are associated with the first sunrise (see Chapter Five).

Another name for the jew-lizard is the bearded dragon. It gains this second name in virtue of possessing numerous spines, both on its back and on the throat, where the impression of a full, dark beard is given (Cogger 1979:200-1, 574-6, see Illustration 7). (4) The confusion which this lizard felt in The Dreaming about its identity is thus perhaps not all that surprising. It is a lizard, like the amungakunjakunja, but it also has spines, like the echidna. Significantly, the myth states that in the beginning the jew-lizard really was an amungakunjakunja, and it is in fact true that when young, jew lizards have yet to develop fully their beards and spines (Cogger 1979:201). The story, then, is quite clearly one which emphasises growth to manhood (hence the black beard), and it does so by bringing together three connected species of animal. But before showing how the amungakunjakunja fits into this scheme of transformations, I wish to draw attention to that other myth fragment where there is a confusion of identity.

In Spencer and Gillen's other Anmatjera myth, the key figure is a crow. This crow first believes himself to be a hawk and then an eagle. He decides that he cannot be a hawk
Illustration 7. Profiles of the Bearded Dragon

a) juvenile
(from Cogger 1979:figure 444)

b) adult
(from Cogger 1979:figure 443)

c) throat of adult to show
formation of beard (from
Cogger 1979:575)
because he is too black. Likewise, he realises that he is not an eagle because his wings are the wrong shape. Two factors are thus important in the establishment of his identity, his colour and his limbs. But it is the former which seems to be crucial, since in all probability all three birds are chosen because of their black plumage. The eagle in question is the wedge-tailed eagle, the largest Australian bird of prey. It is notable for its silky black plumage (Frith 1976:129). The type of hawk in the myth is not specified, but it seems likely, in view of the uncertainty expressed in the story about plumage colour, that it is the black falcon. This bird, which we will encounter again both in this chapter and in Chapter Nine, may "appear black, but most of its body plumage is dark sooty-brown" (Frith 1976:133). It may, in fact, often be confused with the crow when on the wing (Frith 1976:133). What, though, is the overall significance of this concentration on blackness?

Black falcons and wedge-tailed eagles are hunters, whereas the crow is primarily a scavenger. (5) But perhaps the most important distinction between the two hunters on the one hand, and the scavenger on the other, is their respective bill-shapes. As with most birds of prey, falcons and eagles have hooked beaks with which to tear the flesh from their victims. The crow's beak, on the other hand, is long and straight "and can penetrate the carcasses of animals up to the size of sheep" (Frith 1976:578). (6) Thus the suitability of the crow among these three black, or nearly-black, birds, stems not only from the fact that it is the darkest among them, but that it possesses the most appropriate instrument for fashioning the inapatua - a bill that
can, as it were, mould or sculpture rather than tear to pieces (see Illustration 8).

That this ability to create by wounding should be associated with the colour black is almost certainly connected with the findings of the previous chapter in respect of the opposition of dark and light. The crow is black, just as in the first instance the Milky Way exhibited itself as a kauaua urbula - black ceremonial pole. The correspondence is doubly interesting in view of the appearance of the two perenties in the crow myth, since it was a group of perenties who raised the fractured light of the Milky Way up into the sky after it had been involved in the creation of the first dawn at Pmoara. As I showed in Chapter Five, the perentie assumes this role on account of the fragmented nature of the dark and light which it embodies on its skin. In the crow myth, this function is transformed into another context - that of circumcision. It is the crow who first fashions humanity, but before he can manage to circumcise them, he is beaten to the task by the two perenties, who also introduce subincision into the bargain. Thus three essential 'imagos of the fragmented body' come together: penile mutilation, a skin pattern embodying contrasts, and the moulding of the human form. Remarkably, the black falcon, who is replaced by the more suitable crow in one myth, becomes transformed in the Kaititja story into the being who is responsible for both fashioning humanity and surgical operations on the penis. We shall see in Chapter Nine how the Aranda themselves attribute the origin of circumcision to the black falcon. (7)

But to end this section, we need to turn our attention
Illustration 8. Profiles of the Black Falcon, Eaglehawk and Crow

a) head of the black falcon (from Frith 1976:133)

b) head of the eagle-hawk (or wedge-tailed eagle) (from Frith 1976:129)

c) head of the crow (or Australian raven) (from Frith 1976:578)
to the amungakunjakunja, which we are now in a better position to understand in terms of its continual reappearance in stories about the inapatua. In the Dieri myth about the inapatua it is said that the first human beings were originally black lizards. These lizards were fashioned into human form by various surgical operations, including the cutting off of their tails so that they could walk. The blackness of the lizards is no longer puzzling to us in view of the foregoing analysis; and neither is the theme of walking, given the way in which cold-blooded reptiles make their limbs 'come alive' in the sun. But both these themes take on particular significance in relation to the amungakunjakunja, for here we see a remarkable duplication of the themes of fragmentation and birth.

There are two conflicting species identifications for the amungakunjakunja, one given by Spencer and Gillen, the other by Carl Strehlow. Amungakunjakunja, however, means no more than 'fly-catcher', and it is quite likely that this name may apply to different species at different times and in different places, since many lizards feed on flies. We have seen, for example, how the young jew-lizard may be called amungakunjakunja, yet both Spencer and Gillen's and Strehlow's identifications for the species are different from this. Let us consider first the species given by Spencer and Gillen.

In *Across Australia* Spencer and Gillen (1912:156, see also plate III) say:

One of the most interesting forms [of lizards] was a representative of the genus Physignathus (*P. longirostris*) ... [It] is a very graceful, active creature ... Its general body colour is light blue-grey, except along the back, where there is
always a median light line with a darker and lighter brown band on each side. It darts about with great rapidity, often standing up on its hind legs as it runs, and catches flies and other insects with wonderful dexterity, so much so that, in some parts, the natives call it 'amungakunjakunja,' which means 'fly-quick-quick.'

Two things thus stand out about this amungakunjakunja - its colouration and its perambulatory habits. In respect of the latter, we already know that the ability to stand is an important aspect of the inapatua myths, and we know also from previous chapters that there is a link between walking and phallic symbolism (a matter to which I will return in more detail in Chapter Eight). It is thus of particular interest to note the way in which Spencer and Gillen's amungakunjakunja is dissected along the back by a 'median light line with a darker and lighter brown band on each side', since the same kind of dualism and dissection is involved in the surgical operations of the mythical lizard. Amungakunjakunja, then, seems to be the embodiment of 'the divided self'.

Probably no other type of animal in Central Australia would attract more attention in terms of its variability in colour than the lizard. There are a great many different types, and even within species the colour variation is enormous (cf. Spencer and Gillen 1912:155-7). The characteristic dorsal division of the amungakunjakunja is common in many other lizards, including the one identified as amungakunjakunja by Carl Strehlow (1908:65). Strehlow says that the species is Ablepharus boutonii, which appears to be the same as the species Cryptoblepharus boutonii (Cogger 1979:258, 577, cf. Barrett 1950:76), the zoological name for Bouton's snake-eyed skink. Ablepharus and Cryptoblepharus mean 'with-
out eyelids' and 'with concealed eyelids' respectively and refer to the fact that the (sub-)genus is "[c]haracterised by a fused, immovable lower eyelid forming a spectacle over the eye" (Cogger 1979:258). I will return to this important point in a moment.

The snake-eyed skink is subject to great colour variation. But it is typically pale silvery-grey to brown above [sometimes bluish-green according to Barrett 1950:76], usually with a pale silvery dorso-lateral stripe from above the eye to the base of the tail. This stripe is usually bordered above by a narrow black [sometimes containing some small, pale spots posteriorly] zone, and below by a broad, dark brown upper lateral zone, commencing as a stripe from the nostril through the eye to the base of the tail. This zone contains scattered small white dots (Cogger 1979:258).

In recent years the species has been subdivided into four, the Central Australian type coming to be known as cryptooblepharus platiocephalus (Cogger 1979:577). As can be seen from Plate 11, Cryptooblepharus platiocephalus is a quite remarkable embodiment of opposites, comparable perhaps to the conventional representation of yin and yang.

But if the snaked-eyed skink embodies the contrasts of dark and light, with colouration intervening between them along its dissected body (thus aligning it with the motif of the sunrise), it also seems to symbolise much about the senses. As we know, one of the Aranda idioms for birth is alkngerama – to gain one's eyesight, and amungakunjakanja, apart from performing a number of other operations on the inapatua, helped fashion infantile humanity by slitting open their eyes. It seems appropriate, then, that, in one of its forms at least, amungakunjakanja should emerge as an animal whose eyes are eternally open. Interestingly, the stripes
Bouton's snake-eyed skink is widespread throughout virtually the whole of Australia. However, many of the localised subspecies should probably be counted as distinct species in their own right. The skink pictured here is *Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*, which appears to be the only subspecies living in Central Australia.
which dissect the amungakunjakunja into so many varied forms pass directly through, and appear to connect up, many of the animal’s sense organs – mouth, eyes, ears and nostrils – as well as its (phallic?) tail.

But it is the colouration of the skink that is most remarkable, turning the animal into a virtual repertoire of oppositions. In the first place, the animal is dissected by a dark stripe which is variable in colour. Either side of this stripe is a black border. Then along the sides are the silvery stripes. The overall effect, when viewed from above, is thus of a dark and colourful centre bordered on either side by light. But when the animal is turned the other way and viewed from below, the colouration is reversed, since there are two dark lateral zones on the lower flanks which border an underbelly which is "pale, gradually merging with the immaculate white or pale metallic blue ventral surface" (Cogger 1979:258). But that is not all. As if to reinforce the inversion, and at the same time give it a completely new dimension, the dark lateral stripes are invaded by pale spots, while the light stripes are s mattered by dark ones.

It follows from all this that the skink embodies the notion of birth in the same chiastic form as the cosmos. In the first place, it recapitulates the formulation of sky and earth with which I began Chapter Five (as a kind of ‘now you see it, now you don’t’ representation), because it presents optional images – dark against light (when viewed from above) or light against dark (when viewed from below). But at the same time, the skink surpasses this ambiguity, since it allows the dark to invade the light and vice versa. It thus not only embodies opposites qua opposites; it
embodies them as reversed modes and as the modes coming together. In short, it completely encapsulates the dual process of fission and fusion.

In the previous chapter I pointed out, following Levi-Strauss, that primordial oppositions are fundamentally asymmetrical. Again taking my cue from Levi-Strauss, I suggested that, for the Aranda, existence itself was less of a puzzle than the way in which 'being in the world' consists of such asymmetrical disparity. One could be reminded at this juncture of Sartre's critique of Hegel to the effect that existence is prior to essence; that "being is prior to nothingness and establishes the ground for it . . . Non-being exists only on the surface of being" (Sartre 1966:49). Unfortunately, the metaphors are somewhat mixed here, since for the Aranda there can be no doubt that in the beginning it was nothing (the earth) which was the ground for being (the sky). Nevertheless, the point is well taken. Being (sky, light, phallus and male) appears to have a claim to priority over nothing (earth, dark, uterus and female).

We could see, I think, something similar in the concrete structure of amungakunjakunja. When viewed from below, the skink portrays the pre-eminence of light against dark, for the Aranda synonymous with the asymmetry between the primordial earth and sky. But when one views the skink from above, it miraculously inverts the image, first momentarily reversing field and ground (dark and light), but at the same time giving rise to a multiplicity of forms (in the shape of spots) suggestive of emergence within both field and ground. In other words, being (light) appears to emerge from nothing (dark), which is itself the inverse of being (ventral
light); and nothing (dark) appears to emerge from being (light), which is itself the inverse of nothing (ventral dark). So the Aranda view is perhaps more balanced in its concrete expression. Being may exist on the surface of non-being, and nothing may exist on the surface of being. This is so because being and nothing co-exist on the surface of the skink.

If the skink signifies emergence at the level of colouration, then it also encapsulates this emergence as birth through its eternally open eyes. But this birth is yet more complex. It involves, for example, walking and standing, which are other mythopoeic functions of amungakunjakunja. It also involves the opening up of other senses, which are metaphoric of birth, including the ‘gift of speech’ in one of the Aranda accounts (see also Strehlow 1964b:49 on birth as the opening of the mouth). And it involves once again the theme of castration (through mutilations of the penes of the newly-formed inapatua). Most generally, however, we may say that in the myths which have just been reviewed, creation is a function of ‘body blows’: humanity does not enter the world until the outlines of its body are placed ‘under the knife’.

In one variant at least, it is the fate of the skink, the one with the eternally open eyes, to wield this knife. So the skink is revealing – an eye-opener – and it embodies the ongoing dialectics of creation as if in ‘the twinkling of an eye’. If, then, for any Aranda, existence poses a genuine puzzle, an answer might lie in the pseudo-Cartesian formula: ‘I blink therefore I am’.
6.3. The Name of Karora

According to one of Spencer and Gillen's accounts of the inapatua, the infantile creatures of The Dreaming represented a stage in early growth for each of the totemic species. But this is not the only way in which the Aranda account for the instigation of totemic institutions. As we saw in Chapter Five, it is sometimes said that all totemic species originally came from Ngambakala, whose native cat progeny distributed them at various sacred sites throughout Central Australia. But the Aranda are sometimes less monistically, inclined and the All-Father figure of Ngambakala is replaced by the simultaneous presence of a number of other personages, each of whom is restricted in totemic presentation. Here I am referring to the totemic ancestors as Strehlow understood them.

This is how Strehlow (1964a:727-8) describes the emergence of the aged totemic ancestors from the earth.

The earth was flooded with light for the first time: for the sun too rose out of the ground and cast its warm rays over the night-cold earth. The supernatural beings that 'had been born of their own eternity' (altjiranga ngambakala) varied greatly in appearance. Some rose in animal shapes, resembling kangaroos, emus, and the like. Others emerged in human guise, looking like perfectly formed men and women. Both sexes were represented among them: for the female ancestresses already formed 'a second sex' in their own right, and were not merely inferior, imperfect editions of the males. In most of these supernatural beings there was an indivisible link between elements found in animals (or plants) on the one hand and in humans on the other. Those beings that looked like animals, for instance, generally thought and acted like humans; conversely, those in human form could change at will into the particular animal with which they were indivisibly linked. Only plant shapes were unknown in this assembly: since plants cannot move or speak, the ancestors and ancestresses linked with them were invariably visualized as being human in form. Their food, however, consisted exclusively of the plants that
formed their totem. (9) Finally, there were a few sacred sites which had given birth to human-shaped supernatural beings that were linked with neither plants nor animals, though they were in all other respects the equals of the earth-born totemic ancestors.

From this point of view, then, Aranda theology is typically 'polytheistic'. However, the birth of the many and varied totemic ancestors, as we shall see, follows a certain pattern which relates them to the findings of Chapters Four and Five. This pattern, which is essentially once again a breaking up of fundamental unity, is nowhere better portrayed that in the myth of Karora, the great bandicoot sire of Ilbalintja on the Burt Plain in traditional Northern Aranda country – the same place where the nailtail wallabies were 'born' when the sun rose out of the ground (see Chapter Five). This is how Strehlow (1968:7-10) transcribes the story.

In the very beginning everything was resting in perpetual darkness: night oppressed all the earth like an impenetrable thicket. The gura (desert bandicoot) ancestor – his name was Karora – was lying asleep, in everlasting night, at the very bottom of the soak of Ilbalintja; as yet there was no water in it, but all was dry ground. Over him the soil was red with flowers and overgrown with many grasses; and a great tnatantja [ceremonial pole] was swaying above him. This tnatantja had sprung from the midst of the bed of purple flowers which grew over the soak of Ilbalintja. At its root rested the head of Karora himself; from thence it mounted upwards towards the sky as though it would strike the very vault of the heavens. It was a living creature, covered with a smooth skin like the skin of a man.

And Karora's head lay at the root of the great tnatantja; he had rested thus ever from the beginning.

And Karora was thinking, and wishes and desires flashed through his mind. Bandicoots began to come out from his navel and from his arm-pits. They burst through the sod above, and sprang into life.

And now dawn was beginning to break. From all
quarters men saw a new light appearing: the sun itself began to rise at Ilbalintja, and flooded everything with its light. Then the gura ancestor was minded to rise, now that the sun was mounting higher. He burst through the crust that had covered him; and the gaping hole that he left behind became the Ilbalintja Soak, filled with the sweet dark juice of the honeysuckle buds. The gura ancestor rose, feeling hungry, since magical powers had gone out of his body.

As yet he feels; slowly his eyelids begin to flutter; then he opens them a little. He gropes about in a dazed state; he feels a moving mass of bandicoots all around him. He is now standing more firmly on his feet. He thinks, he desires. In his great hunger he seizes two young bandicoots: he cooks them some little distance away, close to the spot where the sun is standing, in the white-hot soil heated by the sun: the sun's fingers alone provide him with fire and hot ashes.

His hunger satisfied, his thoughts turn towards a helpmate. But now evening is approaching over the earth; the sun hides his face with a veil of hair-string, covers his body with hair-string pendants, vanishes from the sight of men. And Karora falls asleep, stretching his arms out on both sides.

While he is asleep, something emerges from underneath his arm-pit in the shape of a bull-roarer. It takes on human form, and grows in one night to a full-grown man: that is his first-born son. That night Karora wakes up, because he feels that his arm is being oppressed with the weight of something heavy: he sees his first-born son lying at his side, his head resting on his father's shoulder.

Dawn breaks. Karora rises; he sounds the loud vibrating call know as raiangkintja. The son is thereby stirred into life. He rises; he dances the ceremonial dance around his father who is sitting adorned with full ceremonial designs worked in blood and feather down. The son totters and stumbles; he is still only half awake. The father puts his body and chest into a violent quiver; then the son places his hands upon him. The first ceremony has come to an end.

The son is now sent by his father to kill some more of the bandicoots which are playing peacefully about near by in the shade. The son brings them back to his father who cooks them in the sun-glowing soil as before, and shares the cooked meat with his son. Evening has come again, and soon both are asleep. Two more sons are born that night to the father, from out of his arm-pits; these he calls into life on the following morning by the
rajangkintja call as before.

This process is repeated for many days and nights. The sons do the hunting; and the father brings into life an increasing number of sons each night — as many as fifty on some nights. But the end cannot be delayed overlong: soon father and sons have succeeded in devouring all the bandicoots which had originally sprung from Karora's body. In their hunger the father sends his sons away on a three-days' hunt, to scour the great Ilbalintja plain as far as Ininta and Ekalakuna. For hours they search patiently amongst the tall white grass, in the half-light, of the almost limitless expanse of mulga trees. But the vast mulga thicket is devoid of bandicoots, and they have to return.

It is the third day.

The sons are returning, hungry and tired, through the great stillness. Suddenly a sound comes to their ears, a sound like that of a whirling bulroarer. They listen; they proceed to search for the man who may be swinging it. They search and search. They stab with their tjurunga sticks into all bandicoot nests and resting places. Suddenly something dark and hairy darts up and is gone. A shout goes up — 'There goes a sandhill wallaby.' They hurl their tjurunga sticks after it and break its leg. And then they hear the words of a song coming from the injured animal:

    I, Tjenterama, have grown lame,
    Yes, lame; and the purple everlasting are clamping to me.

    'I am a man as you are; I am not a bandicoot.'
    With these words the lame Tjenterama limps away.

The astonished gura brothers continue on their way home to their father. Soon they see him approaching. He leads them back to the soak. They sit on its edge in circles, one circle around the other, ever widening out like ripples in disturbed water. And then the great pmoara flood of sweet honey from honeysuckle buds comes from the east and engulfs them; it swirls them back into the Ilbalintja Soak.

Here the aged Karora remained; but the sons were carried by the flood under the ground to a spot in the mulga thicket three miles further on. Here they rejoined the great Tjenterama, whose leg they had unwittingly broken with their tjurunga sticks.

Today rocks and stones on the ceremonial ground represent the undying bodies of the gura brothers and Tjenterama, for this injured man is now regarded as the great bandicoot chief. Karora,
however, has always remained in his original home at the Ilbalintja Soak. He lies there still in eternal sleep, though he may smile when people come to visit and care for his site.

This remarkably evocative story furnishes us once again with a great many themes already encountered: the key place of the phallic pole; the motif of the sunrise; birth and the opening of the eyes; the general opening up of the body (as Karora spawns his young); the symbolism of laming; and the theme of multiplication (as Karora gives birth to one son, then two, and thereafter increasingly more). But some key new motifs appear: the dominant symbols of hunger and eating; the prominent positions of the navel and the head, the latter being the seat of Karora’s thinking and desiring; and the overall importance of the father/son relationship. It is to these novel themes that I now propose to turn my attention. (10)

6.4 Food for Thought

Karora’s world is at first co-extensive with the dark earth which obtained in the beginning. The image of the earth as being somehow closed (like the original sky) gains immediate reinforcement in the story. At first, the Ilbalintja Soak was dry, and when Karora and his animal children emerged from beneath the earth, they had literally to burst through the earth’s crust. But the nature of the closure is quite specific, for it is as if the original soak were plugged by the tnatantja pole which had been there for all time. The pole was ‘a living creature, covered with a smooth skin like the skin of a man’

This closure recalls the idea of Iliingka as ‘being
in itself'. The pole is Karora, and he lies at its foot with his head resting upon it. As the myth proceeds, no mention of this pole is made. Like Iliingka and Ngambakala, it seems simply to vanish. Strehlow (1968:153) suggests that these ceremonial poles sink back into the ground after the ancestor has completed his work, and this indeed may be the fate of ordinary ones after they have been used in ritual. They are said to be 'weary and exhausted' and then thrown away into a ditch (see Chapter Ten). But the precise whereabouts of the poles seems less important than the fact they have, so to speak, to be written out of the world. A similar fate befalls Karora himself when he is swept back into the ground by the flood. And indeed, Karora and the pole are one and the same.

But if the disappearance of the tnatantja is yet another variation of the theme of ruptured communication between two domains (sky and earth, earth’s surface and underworld), it is also a creative act: and Karora and his sons are the result. Let us say, then, that the tnatantja is 'the father'. But the soak itself is clearly also 'the mother'. It is within the soak that Karora first stirs, and when he and the bandicoots burst forth, the soak takes on for the first time its damp character: it 'filled with the sweet dark juice of the honeysuckle buds'. The honeysuckle juice is pmoara, the very same pmoara which is involved in the myth of the nailtail wallabies and the origin of day. Actually, the dark, sticky juice which honeysuckle flowers yield may sometimes be used "to denote the secretions of the female internal organs" (Strehlow 1971:513) or the blood which courses in the veins of the ancestral beings (Strehlow
1971:552). In this way, Karora thus seems to be ambisexual (like Iliingka and Ngambakala). He is coterminous with both the pole and the soak; father and mother to himself.

While laying in Ilbalintja Soak, Karora’s mind stirs; as a result he gives birth, quite spontaneously, to countless bandicoots. Karora himself emerges hard on their heels. The myth states that he is hungry because of the loss of ‘magical powers’ from his body. He gropes, feels the mass of bandicoots, and seizes some to cook in the sun’s fingers and eat, thus quelling his hunger. It seems, then, that this hunger is precipitated by the process of giving birth. For Karora, like other ancestral figures such as Ngambakala, is a parthenogenetic creator, and he loses himself in this creativity, here seen as an aspect of thoughts and desires in the head (cf. Munn’s remarks made about ancestral creativity made in Chapter Five). So we are not only presented with the familiar theme of creation through loss, but also with a peculiar feature of that theme: namely, Karora’s experience of that loss as a form of hunger. As a consequence of this hunger, Karora attempts to take back in what he has given out. He consumes his own bandicoot sons in an attempt to recoup the losses stemming from his desires.

But the attempt to reinstate self-closure is different from anything we have so far encountered. Karora cannot quite achieve his aims. For as soon as his hunger is satisfied, he is overcome by a second desire — this time for a helpmate. As a consequence, he spontaneously gives birth to his first-born human son, and later many others, all emerging from Karora’s armpits, as some of the bandicoots had done. But this places Karora in the throes of a
contradiction: in order to gain his helpmates - his sons - 
and so acquire more bandicoots to eat, he has to lose more 
magical powers from his body and hence grow more hungry. At 
first the contradiction is not acutely felt, but as time 
passes it ensnares the situation to the point where there is 
no game left in the district. This leads to the dire circum-
stances of Tjenterama's lamning.

We can return to Tjenterama in a moment. What needs to 
be noted for the present is the nature of the paradoxical 
predicament in which Karora finds himself. Locked into a 
form of process which is entirely new to him, he causes his 
world to differentiate, giving rise to more and more novel 
forms of himself. But the creative expression is marred by a 
kind of 'entropy': the more differentiation proceeds the 
more Karora is spent. It was this very process of energy 
loss (together with the inability of the ancestor to re-
coup), which was completely lacking in the sky world. There, 
all man's needs were automatically supplied for; everybody 
was completely independent; and nobody ever grew old. In 
short, the sky beings knew no life-cycle. But Karora did 
come to know the life-cycle. In the myth he has to both pro-
create and feed, and in doing so he introduces important age 
distinctions between himself and his children, a feature 
lacking in the families of the sky beings. In Karora's en-
deavours, he must continually expend energy until a point is 
reached where he is exhausted.

Strehlow (1964a:728-9) has noted this difference be-
tween the totemic ancestors and the sky beings, and main-
tains that is a quite general feature of Aranda mythology.

After the earth-born supernatural beings had ac-
complished their labours and completed their wanderings, overpowering weariness fell upon them. The tasks they had performed had taxed their strength to the utmost. They had found the earth a barren and desolate land of darkness, and had turned it into a land of light and life by their supernatural creative powers. The world which had sprung up in their wake was the mythical Golden World about which their later human reincarnations [see Chapter Eight] were to dream ever afterwards. For the totemic ancestors were free from the multitude of inhibitions and frustrations that inevitably obstruct human beings who are living together in organized communities. Nor were they accountable for their actions to any superior Power. For they were personages living in a world where the human notions of good and evil had but a shadowy meaning: they wandered around 'beyond the borders of good and evil', as it were. This must not be taken to mean that the world of the totemic ancestors was completely beyond the reach of all moral laws. The slaughter of the grim Eagle Brothers of Alkutnama [in Western Aranda country] by the Mice Men, and the annihilation of the bloodthirsty and cannibalistic Bat Men of Imanda [in the lands of the Upper Southern Aranda] by a single honest champion who lived at Atota, in the northern wastelands of the Simpson Desert, were only two of the myths which showed that even in a world where every totemic ancestor and ancestress could do what was right in his or her own eyes—a world upon which the great Emu-footed One looked down from the sky with complete and carefree indifference—there still existed some undefinable, nameless Force which was capable of bringing about the final downfall of even the most powerful supernatural beings that had believed themselves superior in strength to all possible opponents.

I have identified this 'nameless force' as something akin to entropy, but on a different level it may be envisaged as the reality principle. As Strehlow (1964a:729) says:

There was one further limitation to the might and power of these earth-born totemic ancestors: unlike the Sky Beings, they were subject to age and decay. They could be hurt and wounded, and they knew the meaning of pain. But while they resembled mankind in their subjection to many ills of the flesh, they differed from it in one vital respect: they were immortal, and even those of them who had been 'killed' by other totemic ancestors, still lived on in the form of tjurunga. All of them, however, in the end sank back into their first state of sleep (borkerama), and their
bodies either vanished into the ground (often at the site where they had first emerged) or turned into rocks, trees, or tjurunga objects. The sites which marked their final resting places were, like their birthplaces, regarded as important sacred centres, and were called by the same name - _pama raka_ kutata [eternal camp, 'everlasting home'] ... Before the final disappearance of the totemic ancestors from the surface of the earth, Death had been brought into the world by acts of some of these supernatural beings. The sun, the moon, and the rest of the earth-born celestial bodies now rose to the sky; and the world of labour, pain, and death that men and women have known ever since came into being.

At this point, then, we return once more to familiar themes; the problem of morality and its relation to cosmology on the one hand, and the nature of the duty of 'coming into being' as a destruction of primordial and total pleasure on the other. We must now link these factors to the newer ones and see how they articulate with the motifs of passion and hunger, desire and the ruminations of a bandicoot.

6.5 'Totem and Taboo Before the Fact' (11)

The myth of Karora provides the means through which Strehlow (1968:10-3) delivers one of those insightful analyses mentioned in Chapter One. He says that narrators and listeners tend to emphasise, and be struck by, two key aspects of the the story: firstly, the parthenogenetic character of Karora, and secondly, "the deep hostility between this all-powerful father and his sons at the time of the latter reaching maturity" (Strehlow 1968:11). He suggests, in fact, that the hunting themes, which, it will be remembered, were completely lacking from most of the stories about the idyllic existence obtaining in the sky, are scarcely-veiled portrayals of cannibalism. This feature,
Strehlow argues, is a very general characteristic of Aranda mythology as it pertains to the first ancestral movements.

The all-powerful father is both venerated and feared by his sons who realize their impotence in the presence of his seemingly limitless strength; and the father distrusts his sons and sometimes hates them, because he senses in them his own future rivals for the possession of power (Strehlow 1968:11).

We know from Chapter Five that creativity involves displacement and replacement. Succession in time, that key aspect of reality which is prevented in the sky, entails the simultaneous disappearance of a senior generation and its replacement by a junior one, the latter being regarded as a replica of the former. Just how this succession involves mutual mistrust between the generations is well-portrayed by Strehlow (1968:11-2).

In almost all legends the ancestor preys on his sons, though this form of cannibalism is thinly veiled by the extensive employment of animal symbolism. In the Ilbalintja myth, for instance, we are told quite definitely that the bandicoots which provided food for the gura ancestor and his later sons had, in the first instance, emerged from Karora himself in the same manner as did the human-shaped gura brothers at a later time. The native has no illusion as to the real significance of such feasts, however; thus the ghagia [native plum] ancestor is stated to have had his periods of remorse when he would go hungry rather than eat the ghagia berries — because these were part of himself. The tinjimeta [species of witchetty grub] ancestor of Lukara [in Anmatjera country] refuses to touch the grubs brought to him by his human sons: he ‘cannot bring himself to devour his own flesh.’ And, at the present day, a Central Australian native normally is not permitted to kill or to eat his own totem animal, for he has been taught to regard it as his own elder brother.

Strehlow (1968:12) states that he believes animal symbolism is called upon to mask the true horror of cannibalism, but in some legends ... the ... all-powerful, son-devouring sire has remained in all his grimness; no
symbolism veils his crime, and no excuse of ignorance is made on his behalf. Notable amongst the latter is the *tnjimatja* [dialectical variant of *tnjimeta*] ancestor of Mboringka on the Burt Plain, who regularly went out on raids to kill *tnjimatja* men who are definitely stated to have possessed human shape; and these he roasted and devoured with relish, delighting in their sweet flesh. In the end, however, their flesh turned into grubs in his bowels, and so he was devoured from within by his own slaughtered sons.

But if the ancestral beings are cannibals, eating of their very selves in refracted forms, then the tension which inevitably exists between senior and junior generations in The Dreaming is capable of resolution. "Under such conditions", says Strehlow (1968:12), one may reasonably expect to find a correspondingly hostile attitude amongst the sons towards their father". On this matter, Strehlow (1968:12-3) again writes eloquently.

It is a curious but interesting fact that the ancestors - who in all of these Northern [Aranda] legends are imagined as elderly men with strong limbs and flowing white beards - usually suffer from some serious physical disability. In many cases the ancestors are lame or blind; and the myth gives no explanation for the lameness or blindness. Usually such a myth, however, will be found to contain a lengthy detailed account of a seemingly irrelevant hunt in which the sons give chase to a large male animal of their own totem, which they either kill or disable in the end. Thus, in the Ilbalantja myth, it should be noted that the sons break the leg of Tjenterama while he is lurking in his resting place in the guise of a bandicoot; and this Tjenterama later becomes their chief at the sacred cave, after the final catastrophe. Since such a chief in other Northern Aranda legends is invariably, as far as we know, the father of the young men who are obedient to him, we may safely infer that Tjenterama and Karora were originally imagined as one and the same person.

Strehlow (1968:13-5) gives more explicit examples from other stories to bolster his interpretation and makes it appear quite convincing. He mentions a native cat myth fragment where an ancestor is mutilated by his eldest son out of
sexual jealousy; a second native cat story where an ancestor’s son blinds his father and turns him into a pitiful half-wit at the end of an ingkura ceremony; and the (already documented) case where the witchetty grub sons takes revenge on their father by eating their way out of his stomach. Elsewhere, Strehlow (1968:19–21, 1933:193, 199, 1971:558-60) adds yet further examples of this ‘primal horde’ predicament. Often these gruesome deeds are masked by animal symbolism, but, says Strehlow (1968:15), no one is misled and the "excuse is repeated until it becomes wearisome; it is of very little value".

The resort to animal symbolism to hide these heinous crimes is revealing precisely because it is transparent. It recalls yet again the Stannerian proposition that Aborigines discern life as having taken a wrong turn at the beginning. For the ancestral heroes are overcome by contradictory desires. They wish first of all to subdue their hunger, but their options are severely limited: the only food available to them is in the form of beings with whom they share con-substantiality. Consequently, the ancestors are caught between the sheer relief of quelling desire and the remorse they feel at doing the same; they suffer from consumption.

Yet the dilemma is necessary: it stems practically from the experience of being, of desire and intellectual awareness, of hunger and the thoughts which stir in the primordial mind of Karora. And all of these are equated with the breaking down of continuity. Karora’s unitary self is destroyed the moment that the first bandicoots spring from his navel and armpits. This brings his moral nature into sharp relief. For, as with Iliingka, personification of the total-
ity and the very epitome of self-closure, Karora’s evil deeds stem from his attempt to reinstate the original unitary condition. He wishes to take back in all that he has lost. He attempts to become himself and himself alone; to reinstate an original narcissistic form.

At the same time, however, the paradox asserts the opposite truth: desire leads to fragmentation. For Karora’s first birth and subsequent ones are precipitated by wishes and thoughts emerging in his head as it lay at the foot of the great tatantja pole. As a result of these, he spontaneously ‘gives of himself’ from his body and creates not only a multitude of bandicoots, but also human progeny. In the second case, the myth explains the motivating desire to be wholly positive: Karora wants the assistance and company of a helpmate. But if giving of oneself is good, in the sense that it moves to create and provide continuity in time, it is also responsible for the bad. Karora’s blood-thirstiness is brought about by his ‘gifts’ to the world, since these entail the loss of magical powers which leads to hunger. Perhaps, then, the Aranda would have cause to agree with Ricoeur (1969:172): in the "drama of creation, the origin of evil is coextensive with the origin of things; it is the ‘chaos’ with which the creative act of the god struggles.”

But the struggle comes to an end, in Karora’s case as the result of the laming of Tjenterama. Karora may chase after his original being only in vain. Finally, he must ‘die’. He grows weary from his efforts and is mutilated in competition with his own-born sons — but he leaves behind the work which he undertook for others to maintain. For
his sons are his heirs. As Strehlow points out, the mythical sires are killed, mutilated or disfigured by their sons so that the latter can then take the place of the former.

There is much more to say about this, since it may appear, in view of the return of both Karora and his sons to the earth at the end of the Ilbalintja myth, that the sons do not in fact succeed their father, but instead share his fate. However, as we shall see, this is in no way a return to the initial conditions. Karora’s unity has forever been fractured: his sons remain quite separate from himself, even if they are consubstantial with him, and they are embodied as tjurunga at another place three miles away from Ilbalintja, the eternal home of Karora himself. It is this separation which constitutes something akin to a ‘fall’: the tragic events of the myth are never rectified. The deeds of Karora and his sons remain true in all their grimness: they are recalled faithfully in the oral traditions of present-day Aranda people, and they represent both revelation and, through the ritual round (when the myths are re-enacted), a kind of ‘salvation’. The deeds are re-established in every generation and undertaken as a moral necessity.

Karora’s creative acts have a definite air of finality about them. They break down the continuous world, and ritual can only re-enact the final terms, not the initial conditions. So if ritual is ‘all for the good’ and ensures the continuity of The Dreaming, then it is also, in the words of Stanner (1963:58), “the endurance of the joint imperium of the good and the bad”. Exactly what this entails at the level of rites can be left until later chapters, but now it is enough to note the profound difference between the final
conceptions of the sky beings on the one hand, and the earth-born totemic ancestors on the other. The latter, in contrast to the former, are more 'diffuse' in nature: they have been 'broken down' in 'the fall'. Nevertheless, the two types of beings are related. It was necessary for the sky to move away from the earth in order for the ancestors to be born. Aranda cosmogony, then, has a dual aspect: the first creation occurs when the sky pulls away from the earth, so causing the rupture of the totality. But once this has been completed, a complementary transformation is brought to bear. The rupture of sky and earth is a creative movement in itself, but it remains within itself. The self-closure is finally broken through the secondary tragedies of a host of totemic sites such as Ilbalintja.

The counterpart of a schema based on the notion of a 'fall' is that salvation is a new peripeteia in relation to the primordial creation: salvation unrolls a new and open history on the basis of a creation already completed and, in that sense, closed (Ricoeur 1969:172).

To which one may add, in view of the significance of the 'traces of native cats', that the 'fall' teaches one how to walk, and the peripeteia is at the same time a peripatetic.

6.6 A Window on Infinity

Altjira is a reality that is transcendent. It is infinite, in the sense that it goes beyond the bounds of time and space. In Strehlow's term, it is eternity. The contrast between the sky beings and the earthly ancestors is one between two forms of eternity. Sky and earth, both originally altjira as such, represent infinity pure and unadulterated — as it were, concentrated — whereas the totemic ancestors,
created *altjiranga ngambakala*, represent it in a kind of 'scattered' form. In one sense, of course, there is no such thing as infinity broken down into parts, for the eternal and the one are just that – all pervasive and singular. But we know also from Chapter Four that 'the one' is identical to 'the many' – a kind of relative infinity where everything shares the same essential unity. It is precisely in favour of this second kind of infinity which Strehlow, arguing against the theological judgement that 'there are no societies which possess the eternal', has in mind when he states:

Before the invasion of his home country by the Europeans, the Central Australian totemite certainly believed that he 'possessed the eternal' in his own lifetime. If, as has been stated by theologians, it is the Christian ideal that 'we are to think, will, and act like Him', then the aboriginal totemite believed that he could readily achieve this ideal relationship with his totemic ancestor: the second soul that gave him his true personality [the first being derived from the parents] was part of the living supernatural being whose totemic appellation he bore. Throughout his life he regarded himself as being in perpetual union with a supernatural being in a life after death. Somewhat paradoxically to our European way of thinking, but perfectly natural in the Central Australian world view, it was in the present, in the limitations of evanescent Time, that a man lived in union with Eternity (Strehlow 1964a:739).

Strehlow is here alluding to Aranda beliefs about conception, and the identity through 'reincarnation' that all Aranda people believe they have with one of the totemic ancestors. These ideas will be dealt with at some length in subsequent chapters, but I should point out at this stage that all the manifestations of an ancestor – the parts of the landscape he made, the *tjurunga* connected with his stories, and the human beings who are his reincarnations – are all in a fundamental sense radically identified.
All the manifestations may be different, but they remain manifestations of the same 'thing'. Every "cell" (Strehlow 1968:17) in the ancestral body is potentially a separate living alter ego, and each of these is an aspect of the singular characteristic of the ancestor with "the power to create [his] own identity without limitation" (Munn 1970:145).

We have seen how Karora does this; how he calls into being a great sacred site, a number of tjurunga, a proliferation of bandicoots, and a multitude of sons. But we have also seen that in some sense the power is limited. Karora loses strength and cannot recover. But his powers are tremendous; too mighty to quantify in terms of the number of progeny whom he calls into being.(12) Thus while Karora's self is phenomenally fragmented, it retains its full and 'wholesome' identity: another manifestation of the one in the many.

In the beginning, Karora (and his tnatantja pole) was the only living thing in the vicinity of Ilbalintja Soak. (13) But from this singular subterranean existence Karora populates the world with animals, and follows them through the earth's crust onto the surface of the world. The creativity changes now. When below the ground, Karora gives birth only to human sons - the same ones that he comes to eat. But when above the ground, he gives birth to true humans. Karora's identity, like that of so many other ancestors, is ambiguously animal and human. But at the same time, the ambiguity is cosmologically coded: Karora gives birth to animals below the ground and humans above it.

This differentiation is significant and it corresponds
to another. Earlier I quoted Strehlow to the effect that the Aranda believe their totemic species to be their elder brothers. This is precisely the relationship obtaining between Karora's animal and human sons, so aligning the opposition of above/human:below/animal with that of young:old. These interpenetrating contrasts are operative elsewhere in the myth. Karora, when he was in deep slumber in the Ilbalintja Soak, was human, identified with the ceremonial pole covered with 'the skin of a man'. Yet towards the end of the story, as his identity changes to Tjenterama, he becomes like an animal, 'dark and hairy'. Why the myth should state that Tjenterama is seen by the band of brothers as a sandhill wallaby remains rather mysterious. (14) The song cycle which tells of the laming of Tjenterama, however, makes it quite clear that the wounded animal is indeed a bandicoot (Strehlow 1971:363):

'Are you indeed a bandicoot?
Are you one indeed?'

'I, Tjenterama, have now grown lame,
Yes, lame; and the noramong flowers are clinging
to me.'

And as if to call attention to the identity of this bandicoot with the human Karora, the 'animal' responds to his wounding by saying: 'I am a man as you are; I am not a bandicoot.'

The introduction of Tjenterama into the myth, whose wounded leg recalls once more the castration motif, is the signal for Karora's unitary existence to be radically split. The resultant duality is consistent with the previous oppositions between elder and junior brothers on the one hand, and above and below on the other. For while Karora,
replete with all the bandicoots of his original creation, returns to the earth, Tjenterama and the band of human brothers are swept by the pmoara flood to a site three miles (c. five kilometres) further on. There they were transformed into tjurunga rocks. So while the human Karora comes to be aligned with the underworld and the animal elder brothers, the animal Tjenterama becomes associated with the earth's surface and the human younger brothers.

These events have to be understood in the light of so-called reincarnation beliefs. At the end of the myth, it is stated that Tjenterama is regarded as the chief of Ilbalintja. Given the kinds of symbolic inter-relations traced above, this is perfectly consistent with Strehlow's idea that the myth represents a kind of generational takeover in 'the primal horde'. Tjenterama comes to lie with the human sons. Thus while Tjenterama is Karora in another guise, his identity is dual, because he is associated also with the sons. He describes himself as a man to whom 'the purple everlasting are clinging', but he distances himself from Karora and the soak and is embodied somewhere else. As Strehlow (1968:10) says, all bandicoot ceremonies held at Ilbalintja have Tjenterama, not Karora, as the great gura chief. It is Tjenterama, not Karora, who is believed to become reincarnated through the conception of a spirit child. (16)

But if Tjenterama represents the passing over of the senior into the junior, then Karora's fate stresses the opposite movement. For while Tjenterama is a refraction of Karora, and transposes the latter's human shape into an animal one, the elder sons - the true bandicoots - literally
pass into Karora's body; they are ingested by him. So Karora is, in a sense, identified with that which is younger than himself, the reversal of the fate which overcame Tjenterama. I will return to these respective fates and their relations to the ideas of transcendence and infinity in the next section. But first it is necessary to add a further dimension to the set of contrasts.

Towards the end of increase rituals (see Chapter Eleven), there is a juxtaposition of male and female elements said to make a totemic species multiply. Strehlow (1971:313-4), writing of one particular rite, refers to an ancestral soak, represented in the rite by an ilbantera, as a "'great mother'" or "fertile womb", out of which spring new individuals of the species after an increase rite has been performed. In order to make this womb fertile, it is brought into conjunction with the ceremonial phallus which represents the ancestor's original tnatantja. It is only the living reincarnations of the ancestor who can wield this phallus. Exactly the same pattern is duplicated during the bandicoot increase rites of Ilbalintja Soak (Strehlow 1968: plates 3, 4 & 9).

So the Ilbalintja Soak is a symbolic womb, an ilbantera. It is explicitly identified as such in the myth as Karora is swept back into the ground. For at this moment all the sons of Karora sit, in the precise manner of an ilbantera pattern, around the soak in 'ever widening circles like ripples in disturbed water'. In addition, the soak is identified with the fertility of blood as the pmoara flood engulfs it. But for this womb to be productive, it requires the presence of the phallus - the very same phallus that was
there in the soak towering into the sky since time immemorial. Furthermore, this phallus has to be wielded by reincarnations of the ancestor. It follows, then, that when The Dreaming is re-enacted in rites, the elements that were originally divided are brought back together.

A corollary of this conjunction is that Karora - the 'great father' - has by the end of the myth become the 'great mother'. He has been feminised, and his sole function now is to give birth to true bandicoots. On the other hand, it is Tjenterama who wields the ceremonial phallus, and it is he who is aligned with the human brothers (who, as reincarnations also, may share with Tjenterama the task of bringing the phallus into contact with the symbolic womb). Karora's divided being, then, is also a breakdown of his original parthenogenetic function. In the beginning, he, and he alone, possessed the phallus. Accordingly, he was able to give birth by himself. Now he requires human assistance to be creative. Bereft of his phallus, and having circled back into the ground amidst a flood of (symbolic) blood, he smiles only when people come to visit him and reinstate that ambisexual unity that was forever broken in The Dreaming. Once again a complete being, he may be satisfied with the reconciliation of the male and the female, the young and the old, and the animal and the human. Thus what was eternal and infinite remains, but its contours have altered. It becomes the infinite only by re-creation.

6.7 The Spirit of One and All

When ancestors are reincarnated, this occurs by the entry of a 'spirit baby' into a woman. Spirit babies are
akin to those 'germs' or 'cells' which exist in an ancestor's body and which are capable of growing into further manifestations of that body. They are scattered all over the landscape, resting in places where the ancestral beings are said to have once made their presences felt. Spencer and Gillen (1927:363) describe them as "very small, like a very little pebble, and red in colour." They have "neither arms nor legs nor head", but develop these characteristics within a woman's womb as they change into ratapa - true human embryos. As Montague (1974:31) points out, this means that a spirit child is very similar to an inapatua.

Although Spencer and Gillen nowhere explicitly say so, it would seem probable that [spirit babies] are regarded as actually representing that stage in the evolution of men and women when the latter were all inapatua. The description given by the natives of the physical form of the inapatua corresponds exactly to that which they give of the physical form of the [spirit babies].

This, I think, is a crucially important observation.

We know from earlier discussions in this chapter that the inapatua owe their development into proper human beings to the totemic ancestors, for it was the latter, in the form of beings such as the amungakunjakunja, who emerged from the underworld to dissect the embryonic chain and to give to each individual his senses (sight, smell, hearing, etc.). Furthermore, each newly created human being was allotted a totem, and in this way the characteristics of the totemic beings in general passed over into the inapatua. The strength of this identification of the inapatua with ancestral beings is testified to by the fact that the inapatua and the beings who dissect them are sometimes confounded. Lizards as surgical operators are transformable in myth into
lizards as embryonic beings.

But if the ancestors in some sense pass over into the inapatua, it is equally true that the reverse is the case. Karora's first act was to give birth to children, to multiply, and this was his lasting legacy. For it is through Karora's creativity that man comes to participate in his ancestral power. Only because of the original stirring in Karora's mind, with all of its marvellous results, does man know The Dreaming (of Ilbalintja). This is so because Karora's movements institute a set of relations between terms - tjurunga (sacred boards, other ritual paraphernalia, sacred sites, and so on) - which man can comprehend and put to use. But they can only put them to use in virtue of Karora's powers being left for posterity in the form of spirit children, since it is the periodic conception of these which establishes the necessary totemic credentials for performing the rites (see Chapter Eight).

The waterholes and island nests which the inapatua inhabited after the separation of sky and earth are very similar to the soakages in the landscape from which many totemic ancestors sprang. In the beginning, Ilbalintja was completely dry. But as soon as Karora and his animal progeny burst through the earth's crust, the site was flooded with pmoara. And it is to this sodden environment which Karora eventually returns. It is in this place that he dwells forever in slumber, managing occasionally to smile. And it is from this place that he is periodically called upon to bring forth bandicoots in their hundreds after the performance of increase rites.

The Dreaming (of Ilbalintja), therefore, partakes of
birth and death, the very processes that are completely absent from the sky world. Totemic animals have to be born from Ilbalintja Soak; totemic spirit children have to be conceived and delivered; and Karora rests forever in a death-like slumber, having wearied from his earthly labours. But this birth and death are not those of mundane life, where each new birth calls into existence a completely fresh state of being, and where each death sees an old state obliterated. An ancestor always dwells in his multiple forms at conception sites (the homes of spirit children) and the place that was his first home (usually the same place to which he also returned). And in all these forms the ancestor is identical. His existence may in some sense be fragmented, but it remains fundamentally synthesised as altjira - The Dreaming. On the other hand, in order for The Dreaming to be a living reality, to be experienced as part of the phenomenal world, a life-cycle is required. Spirit children become tangible human existents when they enter women at conception sites, and the aged ancestral beings are called upon to fortify nature when the old men perform their sacred ceremonies.

The articulation of the human life cycle with the unitary existence of the ancestors is a subject that will be dealt with more fully in Part Three of the thesis, but there are aspects of this articulation which are worth drawing attention to immediately. It was earlier noted that the animal/human dichotomy is an essential part of the Ilbalintja myth. Transposed into a more inclusive non-human/human opposition, this dichotomy is a general feature of the totemic universe. The bandicoots to which Karora gave birth were the
elder brothers of his human sons, and totemites always re-
gard their affiliated totemic species as senior siblings.
But Karora and Tjenterama are peculiarly aligned with this
contrast. Tjenterama makes his appearance as an animal, even
though he is the human Karora in another guise. On the other
hand, Tjenterama comes to rest with the human brothers,
while Karora is swept back into the soak full of the animal
ones. These ambiguities are not incidental, as I now propose
to show.

The elder brother/younger brother opposition forms the
basis of a theory of consubstantiality existing between man
and nature. Karora, a human being of aged appearance, is a
reservoir of natural (animal) fertility. But Tjenterama, who
is regarded as the chief of Ilbalintja, is in effect aligned
with the fertility of spirit children. This is so because it
is he, rather than Karora, who undergoes periodic reincarna-
tion; and it is he whose existence, like that of the inap-
atua, is on the surface of the earth rather than below it,
since Tjenterama and the human sons are carried away by the
pmaora flood to a place where they become embodied as rocks.
Karora, by contrast, is swept deep into the soak.(17) But at
the same time, Tjenterama and Karora are one, and their
splitting into two named individuals is the exception rather
than the rule. Normally, as Strehlow points out when he
discusses the identification of Tjenterama with Karora,
there is only one named ancestor who was, and is for ever,
the chief of a major totemic site. The human and the animal,
then, are simply two aspects of the singular being, and the
animals that Karora continues to spawn are, so to speak, an-
other side of the humans who are born of the spirit children
in the tjurunga into which Tjenterama and the human sons were transformed at the end of The Dreaming.

In a sense, therefore, when totemites are called upon to fertilise the Ilbalintja Soak, they cause the births of bandicoots who are themselves: they beget their own brothers. On the other hand, since Tjenterama is Karora's alter ego, there is also a sense in which the symbolic copulation at the soak is an act of self-generation on the senior genealogical level. Karora and Tjenterama and the human totemites come together in a creative act which sees the two aspects of the bandicoot sire, originally separated in the Dreaming, placed back into conjunction. Karora, identified with the soak, is the feminine side of this union, while Tjenterama appears as the masculine side. The conjunction is thus a variation of the theme of 'back to the womb'. It is an act of self-closure.

The self-closure is related to the themes of paternity and siblingship. In mundane life, the span of the generations between infancy and old age is threefold, mediated by the youthfulness which was the eternal characteristic of Iliingka. Yet in the Ilbalintja myth there are paradoxically only two generations to span the three age categories: there are only fathers and sons. On the other hand, the myth seems to compensate for the discrepancy by introducing other age distinctions - ones that not only work on genealogical levels, but also in alliance with the humanity/animality opposition. The resultant relations may be summarised as follows.

Karora and Tjenterama are the same person, two aspects of the same father. Karora is human, Tjenterama animal. A
corresponding division works on the junior level. The bandicoots and the human sons are brothers and share the same essential inheritance; but the former are animals, the latter true persons. There is a sense in which Karora, in spite of his identity with Tjenterama, is senior to him. Karora is an old man, but Tjenterama in effect comes to be seen in the guise of a spirit child. This senior/junior distinction also applies to Karora's children: the animal brothers are older than their human counterparts. It follows, then, that the two sets of oppositions reproduce each other by inversion. In one case an elder human is contrasted to a younger animal, while in the other younger humans are contrasted to older animals (see Diagram 8).

Diagram 8. Young and Old. Animal and Human in the Myth of Karora

These relations bring us back to the subject of infinity. Increase ritual at Ilbalintja, as we have seen, in-states self-closure. It is a return to the union of the totality. But at the same time it is the forerunner of open-
ness, fragmentation and multiplicity, since the purpose of
the rite is to cause the soak to burst open once again as it
did in The Dreaming and populate the country with animals.
It is as if, on the feminine side of things, Karora and the
Ilbalintja Soak are being made to diffuse across the country
in the form of animals, while on the masculine side,
Tjenterama, the wielder of the phallic tjatjatja, is the in-
strument which causes this diffusion. However, the situation
is yet more complex, and we have yet fully to consider the
position of the band of human brothers.

As I will show in Chapter Eight, one of the common
ways in which spirit conception takes place is for a woman
to consume part of the species associated with a particular
totemic complex. A woman who eats bandicoot meat, for ex-
ample, could be considered to have been entered by a bandi-
coot spirit child should she shortly afterwards feel the
quickening of the foetus inside her. There are various other
ways in which animals are involved in totemic spirit con-
ception, but the net result is always the same - the entry
of the spirit child into the woman's body. But as I will
point out in more detail in Chapter Eleven, there is a
counterpoint to this in increase rites. For in these rites
totemites with specific responsibilities (caused by their
conception affiliations) towards their totemic ancestors
have to donate blood to ensure that the rite is successful.
So there is a complete relationship between the four terms
of the Ilbalintja myth which are only glimpsed at in the
story itself. That complete relationship may be spelled out
as follows.

In increase rituals Karora and the Ilbalintja Soak give
rise to many, many bandicoots. Tjenterama, on the other hand, together with the thnatantja pole, are aligned not so much with animal births as human ones: Tjenterama falls on the side of the human sons and the spirit children who are the ancestral legacy to man and which are the totemic equivalent of the inapatua. In a sense, then, Karora's and Tjenterama's two creative modes are opposed, even though they come together in ritual and are evidently complementary: Karora (the feminine soak) gives birth to animals, while Tjenterama (the masculine pole) gives rise to human beings. Thus, when one bears in mind the way in which spirit conception takes place through animal intermediaries, and the manner in which totemites donate blood in order to make increase rites effective, one is presented with something like a complete image linking all four terms - Karora, Tjenterama, bandicoots and human beings.

As Diagram 9 below makes clear, this completed picture makes it readily apparent why Tjenterama and Karora have ambiguously animal/human characteristics, while the bandicoots and the human sons fall squarely on one side of the natural/human divide or the other. It also makes clear why their ages are intermediate and more or less coterminous (even though the elder status of the animals gives them a particular link with Karora, while the younger status of the human sons gives them one with Tjenterama). For what one appears to have is a model which, so to speak, cleaves the totemic identity into two. It sets up a number of circular relations which give to the totemic whole a dual structure somewhat akin to that yin and yang representation spoken of in connection with Plate 11. On one side of the circle
exists the feminine, the animal and the elder; on the other is the masculine, the human and the younger. Since this circle encapsulates the full set of relations obtaining in the totemic world, we may refer it as the totemic cycle of re-creation.

Diagram 7. The Totemic Cycle of Re-creation

6.8 A Broken Heart

The dual structure of Diagram 9 recalls Hamilton's remarks about black and white being associated with 'inside' and 'outside' meanings in Aboriginal thought. For the finished product, so to speak, of Karora's labours is a division of his existence into deep and surface levels. As the ancestor who has been feminised and who is associated with the productive depths of Ilbalintja Soak, he is also an animal being - or at least, continues to reproduce himself in
this way as a result of increase rituals. Karora is thus associated with the interior and returns to that dark cavern in the earth from which he first emerged. By way of contrast, Tjenterama, aligned with humanity, rests at the surface of the earth with Karora’s human sons. By implication he is in the light.

The image of a circle with two ‘sides’ is not simply a result of the construction I have put on the myth. It is an image which the Aranda themselves use, and in a very revealing way. When Strehlow witnessed the totemic rites of Ilbalintja, he saw at one stage an act which centred around the sacred ilbantera which represents Ilbalintja Soak. Two men, elaborately and identically decorated in feather down, sat directly opposite one another with the ilbantera in between. Attached to both men’s heads, and hanging like a clothesline between them, was a length of rope, presumably made of animal fur and/or human hair, (18) which was also elaborately decorated with down. The rope is said to represent the entrails of a bandicoot. At the very centre of the rope, hanging pendulously over the absolute centre of the ilbantera, was a ball covered in down. This represented a bandicoot’s stomach. As the onlookers sang a sacred verse, the two performers began to move slowly around the ilbantera (Kathleen Strehlow 1980:76-7, see Illustration 9). (19)

There can, I think, be no doubt what this act represents: it is the re-enactment of Karora and his children sitting together at the Ilbalintja Soak and being swept back into the ground by the pmoara flood. A great many features of the act are telling. In the first place, the actors who sit opposite each other are absolutely identical. Unfortun-
Illustration 7. The Bandicoot Rite of Ilbalintja

Identically decorated actors circling the ground painting

Bandicoot entrails

Bandicoot stomach

Sacred ground painting representing Ilbalintja Soak

(from Kathleen Strehlow 1980:76-7)
ately, we do not know for certain who the actors represent. They could conceivably be Karora and Tjenterama, or they may just be two of the sons of Karora. Whichever is the case, however, the idea of absolute identity in opposition on a circle is very clearly in evidence.

More telling still are the references to images of the bandicoot actors' 'guts'. When Karora gave birth to his bandicoot sons, he did so by issuing them from his navel and his armpits. Both modes of birth are intriguing, but it is the first that I want to concentrate on here. According to Roheim (1952:125), some of his informants saw a threefold analogy between the circular ground painting, the navel and the vagina.

The concentric circle ... is called ilbæntera, which means ... in the very center of the womb. The concentric circle as ground drawing is tjalup-alupa which means navel but this is only a euphemism for the vagina.

A euphemism it may be, but it is one with considerable profundity. In Aranda love songs describing the sexual passions of women, lines such as the following are rendered.

In the deepest lakes of their bodies they are churning with passion, —
In the depths of their fertile wombs they are churning with passion.

In their chalices of nectar [pmoara] they are churning with passion, —
In their innermost fastnesses they are churning with passion.

In their chalices of nectar they are churning with passion, —
In the deepest lakes of their bodies they are churning with passion.

In their chalices of nectar let them shiver violently! Let their very navels shiver violently!

(Strehlow 1971:513-4).

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And Strehlow (1971:514) comments:

To a white reader, 'navels' may sound like an anticlimax. In Aranda ears, however, the word *tjaluputjala* has important overtones. *Tjaluputjula* not merely means 'navel'; it is used normally also in many cases where we might speak of the 'centre' or 'heart' of an object.

*Tjaluputjula* and Roheim’s *tjalupalupa* are evidently variants of the same word. They both mean navel, but according to Strehlow they would be better rendered as heart. I would suggest that another telling rendering would be 'guts', in the manner in which we use that term metaphorically to denote strength and a sense of commitment. As Carl Strehlow (1908:46) says, the Aranda, in common with many other peoples, see the stomach as a vital seat of the emotions. It is the centre of strong sentiments — pain, deep sorrow and anger. Like the heart which Theodore Strehlow has in mind, the stomach is a centre of feelings, those very ones which Stanner maintains it is the purpose of religion to excite (see Chapter Two). And as we shall see in the chapters on ritual, the stomach and the navel are indeed key areas of bodily manipulations.

The depth of being which the navel denotes, then, is profound, and it seems that it is the same depth which is denoted in the rites held at Ilbalintja when the totemic actors suspend their bandicoot stomach over the very centre of the *ilbantera*. At once womb, heart, navel and meta-physical centre of existence, the *ilbantera* is also the opening into the depth of the underworld where Karora still resides in slumber. So the depth of the person, then, is synonymous with the heart of the country. And the inside of the body is at the same time the inside of the world.
But Karora's 'guts' are also in a sense his 'head'. For not only do the bandicoot actors of Ilbalintja hang the rope representing bandicoot entrails from their foreheads while circling the sacred ilbantera, in the myth, Karora's mind is regarded as almost synonymous with his passions. Karora thinks and he desires, and he performs these mental acts together. It is just such thoughts and desires, as we saw in Chapter Five, which cause all the ancestral beings to rise and project themselves onto their environments. So it comes as no surprise to discover that desire too is connected with the 'guts'. For as Carl Strehlow (1907:49) writes, the idiomatic way of expressing desire in Aranda is by the word for hunger. The throat is regarded as the seat of desire and the quelling of desire is synonymous with consumption. A common enough metaphor in any case, we should not be surprised by the desire/hunger equation in view of the raging appetite which Karora felt and which could never be satisfied.

If, as Stanner says (see Chapter Two), the Murinbata see life as a 'joyous thing with maggots at the centre', we might be reminded of the Arandic mythic image mentioned earlier where the witchetty grub ancestral father, after consuming his own-born animal sons, is devoured from within by those very same beings. Something, one might say, 'gnawed away at his guts' and made him feel the tragedy to 'the pit of his stomach'. Karora, too, has a 'broken heart'. Beginning in The Dreaming as a perfect unitary figure, he has by the close of mythical events become a kind of fourfold personality, at once animal, human, young and old, but exhibiting each of these characteristics in separate places - as true bandicoots, human totemites, spirit children and ances-
tral power within the Ilbalintja Soak. And as the totemic
cycle of re-creation shows (Diagram 9), this fourfold exist-
ence is, like that ilbantera which the Ilbalintja actors
skirt, a circle.

Jung would have recognised Diagram 9 to be a variant of
the mandala motif, which he discerned to be an image of com-
pleteness and which emerges universally in symbolism. The
basic structure of a mandala figure is circular and it has
four key points on its circumference. The total image, Jung
(1953:119-20) suggests, may be compared with the opus
alchymicum of mediaeval alchemy, which

breaks down the original chaotic unity into the
four elements and then combines them again in a
higher unity. Unity is represented by a circle and
the four elements by a square. The production of
one from four is the result of a process of
distillation and sublimation which takes the so-
called 'circular form': the distillate is sub-
jected to sundry distillations so that the 'soul'
or 'spirit' shall be extracted in its purest
state. The product is generally called the 'quint-
nessence'.

The mandala, then, models that which is quintessential about
'the one'. It takes a singularity, breaks it down into a
fourfold existence, and posits a square (or, as we shall
see, a centre) which recaptures the unity. Four plus one is
five: hence the model is quintessential. And the quin-
tessence is 'the soul or spirit'.

I would argue that the structure of the myth of Karora
denotes something similar to this. The events in the story
give rise to something that is quite essential and central
to totemic identity - a quaternity of animal, human, spirit
child and aged ancestral figure combined as one. That is,
they cause something quintessential to form; something
'quintessentially bandicoot' formed by a set of identities
and relations pertaining to the ritual round. The totemite, after all, does not simply say that the bandicoot (or some other species) is his elder brother. He is as likely to say of the bandicoot that it is "the same thing as himself" (Spencer and Gillen 1927:80, cf. Strehlow 1968:16-7): he is fully identified with it. This is the same identity in opposition that exists on either side of the circle as it is marked by the contrast between man and beast. Similarly, we know that Tjenterama and Karora are also conflated in Aranda minds: they too are identified, though this time across another axis of the circle. This gives rise to the following pattern, another common feature of mandala-like structures, where the circle contains within it a cross and where the cross itself pinpoints the very core of the whole (see Diagram 10).

Diagram 10. The Circle and the Cross
We know that this circular structure is not alien to Aranda thinking about Karora and his various bandicoot and human transformations. Jung (1983:222) states that the mandala symbolises wholeness because the central point is where all the oppositions of the circle are reconciled, thus rendering an image where the complementarity of opposites involves a "circumnambulation of the self". The Aranda seem to symbolise something similar with the images of the ilbantera and the swirling pmoara flood sweeping the totemic figures back into the ground. For in the rite, this mythical event is quite literally a 'circumnambulation of the self', with two absolutely identical actors, joined together with the very same 'guts', moving around the representation of the soak. Thus, although in opposition, these two bandicoot beings share the same heart - and presumably the same desire. Face to face across the ilbantera, the ritual actors, dramatising the tragic results of Tjenterama’s laming, might have been described by these words spoken in a dream related by Jung (1953:147): "Salvation comes from complete surrender, with one's eyes always turned to the centre."

But the centre is only a notional point here, somewhere in the 'guts'. There is no necessary indication that it can be fully reached. This, I think, is shown in the myth by a kind of dialectic of presence and absence which characterises the axes of oppositions. Tjenterama, for example, is the counterpoint to Karora, and in the Ilbalintja myth the former makes his appearance at the time that the latter makes his disappearance. Tjenterama appears as an animal and is lamed. But as soon as this laming takes place, the scene switches to that of Karora being engulfed in honeysuckle
juice and descending back into the underworld. The dialectic is even more marked in the case of the human and bandicoot brothers, since the absence of one type of Karora's progeny is always the presence of the other. Karora first gives rise to countless bandicoots: but when he follows them into the world and starts to consume them, he sets in train the emergence of his human sons. The more animals he consumes, the more humans are born. In so far as these transformations are temporal, they are inverted: in the latter case animals are transformed into humans; in the former, the human Karora is transformed into the animal Tjenterama. It is as if the terms of the circle are fundamentally two-sided, but at the same time one-sided as well. When one side is significant, the other always falls from view. Thus, one is always on the periphery 'circumnambulating the self'.

This is the very essence of Karora's 'broken heart'; namely, that the four terms are only related on the outside, even though there are identities established at a notional core. We should remember here the significance of the name or the mark in Aranda mythology. Everything which the ancestor leaves behind bears his trace, is named by him and remains indissolubly linked to the original name - in this case Karora. Perhaps, then, the totemic identities of Aranda people have affinities with the view of persons elsewhere in Oceania. For at first there was Karora, and Karora alone. Now there is Karora in many forms, though still the same one Karora. The forms are truly "replicas of his body", and of the notional core which I have posited we may say that the "empty space is him, and this is what is named" (Leenhardt 1979:153).
It is, of course, a truism to say that the gods need men as much as men need the gods, and this is so because the two are but reflections of each other. But in this combined human and divine identity, the role of the name is crucial. For the Aranda, as for other Aborigines in Central Australia, it is an indispensable part of religious life, because everything has an ancestral signature upon it. Nothing escapes this mark, least of all man himself who was fashioned with the knives of lizards. So whereas in the beginning there was just a name, Karora, now there are many parts of Karora. And so far as man is concerned, this is a 'god-send', since it allows his temporal self to participate in that original unity and wholeness that was radically Karora's ever from the very beginning. In virtue of the fragmentation, man, subject as he is to birth, death, pain and decay, may participate in the infinite and the eternal. For above all else, the terms establish the ritual round from womb to grave (as we shall see in detail in Part Three). Thus, we may say of Karora's transition from one to four, and from there back to one (the quintessence): "The place of the deity seems to be taken by the wholeness of man" (Jung 1938:99).

The name of Karora could thus be described as "the price of his existence", stemming from the fact that he "needs to be able to be summoned" (Leenhardt 1979:155). We return, therefore, to the problem of The Dreaming as Logos, since it was certainly the Word ... that was in the beginning, and we live in its creation, but it is the action of our spirit that continues this creation by constantly renewing it. And we can only turn back on this action by allowing our-
selves to be driven ever further ahead by it (Lacan 1977a:61).

A better description of a journey around a circle would be hard to find, especially in view of the identity of the spirit with the quintessential centre. And the aptness is more than fortuitous, since, as I now propose to show by way of conclusion, the juxtaposition of the Word with religious re-creativity in the life cycle is an implicit aspect of the Ilbalintja myth.

The event which 'makes the circle' in the myth is the laming of Tjenterama, Karora's alter ego. This is the cue for the honeysuckle flood to swirl and create a set of concentric circles. Now we know from previous analyses that laming and castration are closely linked. In addition, as Strehlow's interpretations of the Ilbalintja myth indicate, the laming/castration theme is at the heart of the question of the male line of succession. The ancestral father is mutilated so that the sons may take the place of the father.

The manner in which the momentous event 'makes the circle' is itself revealing. As we shall see, it exhibits the structural form of a double-cross, in which may be seen a metaphor of the tensions existing between the generations in the myth. The metaphor, I would contend, is one which indicates the 'surrender' in the words of the dream quoted by Jung.

Diagram 10 shows the circle and the cross formed by the four terms: bandicoot sons, human sons, Karora and Tjenterama. The overall structure reveals a fundamental dualism related to the human/animal opposition. But we must also remember the masculine and feminine valencies involved in
these relations. Karora and the bandicoots, it will be remembered, lie on the side of the feminine, while Tjenterama and the human sons lie on the side of the masculine. So when one considers the way in which Tjenterama is aligned with the bandicoots in terms of animality, and the manner in which the younger brothers are aligned with Karora in terms of humanity, one can see that the four descriptive terms mediate the substantives — to create a double-cross (see Diagram 11).

Implicit in the double-cross is a direction of movement. We have seen how the opposed points of the circle are related to each other by a dialectic of presence and absence. But the transformations involved in this dialectic reveal the movement and its direction. Karora precedes everything, but the first beings he gives rise to are the bandicoots. The dialectic then transforms these into human sons. Then, towards the end of the story, Karora is himself transformed into Tjenterama. The two transformations are thus reversals — ‘animal into human’ and ‘human into animal’, and these appear asymmetrically on the diagram below (see lines 1 & 2).

A similar lack of symmetry occurs in relation to the masculine/feminine opposition, where Karora is transformed into Tjenterama (the same person but with a different name) and Karora is swept back into the soak bereft of phallic powers. In the second case the transformation is from male to female and may be represented by line 3 in the diagram. But in the first case there is an implicit reversal: the direction is from male to female along line 4. The basis of this latter assertion will become clear in Part Three of the
thesis where ritual is discussed. It rests essentially on the association of spirit children with the women's secret world and of increase rites with the secret world of the men.

Diagram 11: The Double Cross

In this geometric representation of events, the fact that the double cross is formed by a forty-five degree shift anti-clockwise is not incidental. The movement actually defines the direction of the totemic cycle of re-creation by setting the four main terms in motion. The two crosses appear the way they do because of the nature of the shift. It is as if one emerges from the other and at the same time reverses it, for if the second cross (formed by lines 2 & 3) were shifted clockwise it would reproduce the first (formed by lines 1 & 4) but with the reversed directions across the circle. The myth, then, appears to have created a situation for the rites, but the rites do not actually depend on the
same sorts of transformations occurring in the myth. In the myth, transformations are dialectically across the circle, whereas in the ritual round, as a man moves through the stages of life represented by the four terms, he moves around it. The double-cross has become a circuit.

When scrutinised more carefully, this structure reveals itself as the conversion of a point into a circle, the transformation depending above all else on the fate of the name of Karora. The circular model, related to the Aranda's own conception of the human spirit, is first of all dual, and then quaternary, but prior to the act of structuration there is only the central being of Karora himself, lying still within the ground and containing all oppositions within. But Karora emerges from the earth, the 'zero' below the 'one' of the sky, and it is this emergence which causes the doubling, redoubling and drift towards multiplication.

It has been said that in the birth of the human subject, "[t]he name is the best illustration of the paradox of the generation of one from zero" (Irigary in Lemaire 1977:70). I think that the truth of this for the name of Karora can be shown in the following way.

Karora's first existential encounter is with the bandicoots which spring from his body. His second is with those dialectically related human brothers of the bandicoots. And bandicoot and human brothers are related to each other as absence is to presence. It is as if Karora, initially identified as the central point, spreads in two directions and creates a fundamental opposition between animal and human. The former is the absent counterpart of the latter and, since we know it to be also aligned with the feminine side.
of the circle, we might with some justification adopt Jung's well-known term 'anima' to describe it. This is Karora's doubling: the creation of two from one. But what of his second transformation, the redoubling?

This we know to be a function of the laming/mutilation/castration motif, since it is the inadvertent crippling of Tjenterama which brings into the existence the opposition between infantile (spirit child) and aged (ancestral figure). This is the crucial point at which the cross is formed by Karora 'spreading' in two directions at right angles to the original line. The body blow, then, which we also saw to be so absolutely central to the myths of the inapatua, appears again as the culmination of creation. Strehlow says that the Aranda have no illusions about the severity of this body blow in the Ilbalintja myth. They know full-well that it is a result of parricidal intentions. Thus we might reflect upon the heavy tone of the story at its climax when the band of brothers hurl their tjurunga weapon at Tjenterama and when Karora is swept underground in the concentric circles of the pmoara flood.

The fourth realm, stressed by a weighty pause, is the One that adds itself to the three and makes all four into a unity. The circles naturally produce a mandala, the outermost circle paradoxically coinciding with the centre, and recalling the old image of God. 'God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.' The motif of the first coinciding with the fourth was expressed long ago in the axiom of Maria: 'One becomes two, two becomes three, and out of the third comes the One as the fourth.' (Jung 1979:152-3).

It would appear, then, that the body blow, the laming or symbolic castration, is the crucial fourth term which makes the circle. So, if The Dreaming as logos is The Dreaming as Word and as name, it is also The Dreaming as phallic.
body. And the paradox of the emergence of one from zero is that the one itself is zero—a circle defined ultimately by the disappearance of the phallic body, the act of symbolic castration. 'Life as a joyous thing with maggots at the centre' (Stanner) is also the strength of 'circum-stances' indicated by the totemic cycle of re-creation—Karora's family circle. And if Karora's eventual disappearance from the surface of the earth follows an act which guarantees continuity and the perpetuation of totemic identity through inheritance of The Dreaming, we may understand why it is that Karora 'dies' of a broken heart. Having tried in vain to regain what in the beginning he lost, he returned to the earth completely full of all the bandicoot progeny of his original creation. He succumbed; surrendered to the circum-stances. His power, however, remained as the decentred circuit in which he and his other selves can only move without really understanding the point. One cannot resist the metaphors. The crux of the matter is also its heart, and Karora has the guts to bear his cross. Seeing the point is also to surrender to the tragedy of events, so Karora leaves the world (quite literally) fed up.
CHAPTER SEVEN

One Dreaming, Zero Dreaming

Our psyche is set up in accord with the structure of the universe, and what happens in the macrocosm likewise happens in the infinitesimal and most subjective reaches of the psyche. For that reason the God-image is always a projection of the inner experience of a powerful vis-à-vis ... I am thinking here of the simplest basic form of the mandala, the circle, and the simplest (mental) division of the circle, the quadrant or, as the case may be, the cross.

Carl Jung
Memories, Dreams, Reflections, p. 368.

The laws of logic which ultimately govern the world of the mind are, by their nature, essentially invariable; they are common not only to all periods and places but to all subjects of whatever kind, without any distinction even between those that we call the real and the chimerical; they are to be seen even in dreams.

Auguste Comte
(Quoted in C. Levi-Strauss, Totemism, p. 67.).
7.1 In the Tracks of Desire

In the previous chapter I showed how the (symbolic) navel is absolutely central to The Dreaming as what Freud refers to as the 'point of contact with the unknown'. In addition, I argued that, in so far as The Dreaming is typically represented by the myth of Karora, the former can be graphically represented as a mandala - what Jung understands to be the representation of the numinous as it is at the heart of everything yet simultaneously all around it. In keeping with Munn's insights into ancestral projection, I think that one may justifiably refer to the mandala/navel image as a model of a decentred subject. In this chapter, without bringing to bear any further myth analyses, I will explain the nature of ancestral subjectivity and its relationship to the circle and the cross.

According to Derrida (1978:278), any 'event' has the "exterior form" of "a rupture and a redoubling", and it is this double movement which constitutes the 'event's' structure. Psychologically speaking, the rupture is the splitting of the subject which is prefigured in separation from the mother, while the redoubling is the consolidation of this splitting through the drama of the oedipus complex. In the myth of Karora, the same doubling and redoubling constitutes the mandala: first as a dialectic of presence and absence between the animal and human sons, and second as a symbolic castration of Karora/Tjenterama. In the estimation of both the Aranda and Derrida, it is desire - 'hunger' - which sets the wheel in motion, and the hub of this wheel - the centre or navel - is its pivot, which in Derrida's understanding is at the heart of structure itself.
The function of this center is not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure - but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form ... [T]he notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.

Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements ... is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained interdicted ... Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure ... is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered ... And again on the basis of what we call the center ..., repetitions, substitutions, transformations, and permutations are always taken from a history of meaning [sens] - that is, in a word, a history - whose origin may always be reawakened or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence (Derrida 1978:278-9).

In the Aboriginal case, this certain history is the secure heritage of The Dreaming whose genealogy I have just partly traced.

The constitution of desire has two moments stemming from primal repression. These are: 1) the desire for the mother and to be the phallus, and 2) the desire to replace the father and have the phallus. The first moment arises
with the consolidation of the mirror phase, when the infant begins to grasp its own corporeality, and the second stems from the intervention of the father—the primal scene. Thus, for the unconscious to be constituted, two wishes must be repressed, and it is the specific combination of these which accounts for the structure of desire. In what follows, I propose to elucidate that structure through the myths.

Lacan (1977b:31) calls the pleasure principle "a principle of homeostasis": Freud (1984:277) refers to it as "the principle of constancy". The satisfaction of desire and the fulfilment of pleasure are not, strictly speaking, the same thing, because whereas the first is always partial, the second is complete. The first corresponds to a world in which one must work and struggle, whereas the second exists in a world without worry. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, the 'world without worry' exists, in Aranda terms, as the region of the sky beyond the Milky Way. There, everything is indeed constant and homeostatic, since the beings that live there are poised at the peak of the life-cycle, eternally youthful and with all their wants immediately catered for. I think, therefore, that we must agree with Roheim that the sky dwellers are representations of the pleasure principle—pure existence, simple, innocent and heavenly.

The sky world first existed in conjunction with the dark and featureless earth; but when the two realms moved apart, beings arose who, as Strehlow explicitly states, 'knew the meaning of pain' (see Chapter Six). This 'event' was interpreted by me as a reflective disjunction; a separation that was also a passing over of one realm into the other as the totemic ancestors arose to take Iliingka’s
place. The 'event', I would suggest, is thus metaphorical of the initial constitution of the unconscious. In the beginning, the world existed as 'one over zero', but for it to come into being the 'zero' had to be opened up. What is more, it had to be opened up by the appearance of the phallus in the shape of those ancestral tnatantja poles, 'covered with a smooth skin like the skin of a man' and piercing the very vault of the sky. In the beginning, then, the amorphous state of the quiet earth was the equivalent of an empty unconscious, which came to be 'filled' as much as 'constituted'. It was pre-existent, and like the infant whose pleasure has been granted, its occupants slept (borkerama). Eventually, however, they came to dream – altjira rama (to see altjira).

It is the fate of the phallus, as it initially bridged sky and earth, which takes us 'beyond the pleasure principle'. The pleasure principle, says Freud (1984:277-8) cannot be the sole governing principle of thought.

If such a dominance existed, the immense majority of our mental processes would have to be accompanied by pleasure or lead to pleasure, whereas universal experience completely contradicts any such conclusion. The most that can be said, therefore, is that there exists in the mind a strong tendency towards the pleasure principle, but that that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure.

As I pointed out in Chapter Four, it is the reality principle which intervenes and puts a check on the pleasure principle. When the ancestors rose from their eternal slumber, they were 'hurt and wounded' (Strehlow). Even as immortal beings, they became engaged in the vicissitudes of living. That engagement, however, was at the same time a form
of disengagement. As the myth analyses have shown, the ancestral march in mythical time is a continual cutting down to size represented by the 'flickering' appearance and disappearance of the phallus. It could well be described as a

mark of deletion ... [under whose] strokes the presence of a transcendental signified [the phal- lus] is effaced while still remaining legible. Is effaced while still making visible the very idea of the sign (Derrida 1976:23).

In other words: "The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move" (Derrida 1976: 49).

In The Dreaming it is the phallus which is always on the move and which leaves behind an ancestral track, mark or name, all of which, in Derrida's discourse, correspond to the trace as difference (difference) and difference (defer- ral). This brings me back to the matter, which I introduced in Chapter Three, of the subject crossing himself out when he comes to take his place in language through his name. In terms of the oedipal metaphor of the unconscious, it is the phallus that one wishes to be in order to gratify the mother, and the phallus that one wishes to destroy in order to dispense with the father. Thus the structure of desire and the unconscious is precisely in this paradoxical ab- sence/presence formula; a formula which keeps constantly on the move because it is both unrealisable and indestructible (Lacan 1977b:31-2). In Lacan's (in Lemaire 1977:164) view,

it is thanks to the [father] that man does not re- main in the sexual service of the mother, that aggression towards the father is at the principle of the Law, and that the Law is at the service of desire, which it institutes through the prohibition of incest.
It is, therefore, the assumption of castration which creates the lack through which desire is instituted. Desire is the desire for desire, the desire of the Other and it is subject to the Law.

It is the default of the phallus which mounts up the symbolic debt.

Desire reproduces the subject's relation to the lost object (my emphasis).

Derrida's difference and differance, difference and deferral, stem from the two simultaneous moments of repression. Difference is created when the subject is separated from the mother at the father's behest. For at this moment, the subject has to deal for the first time with two terms, mother and father, with the phallus as synthetic bridge between them. The phallus, being what the mother desires and the father possesses, is the sign of this difference. Deferral is created by the repudiation of the phallus at the moment when the subject represses fully his desire to be the father and have the mother. The original phallus is repressed and projected out onto substitutes. In Aboriginal terms, the first difference may be said to occur when the sky moves away from the earth, leaving in its wake the utter blank of nothingness, the sudden 'active void' (Lemaire 1977:167). But the phallus, originally possessed in its purest form by the sky beings (beings 'in themselves'), immediately emerges to fill the void, creating what for Roheim is an image of the primal scene - 'Father Sky' and 'Mother Earth' in intercourse. But this phallus also has to be transformed, modified according to the drama played out in the myth of Karora. This is a deferral - Derrida's differance - in the sense that Karora's existence is made conditional on future beings who will reproduce him, first of
all as spirit child reincarnations.

Translating from Aranda to psychoanalytic mythology, one can say that The Dreaming begins with blissful maternal union; has its second moment in the primal scene (both a separation and a realisation of the phallic copula); and progresses to the reinstatement of union. But, as the analysis of the myth of Karora showed, from three (the first synthesis) four is born (a further rupture). For the reinstated union is incest – the son in identification with the father – and 'desire is subject to the Law'. It can only reproduce, not instate, 'the subject's relation to the lost object'. The importance of the cosmic copula in Aranda mythology lies precisely in it being severed. It is representative of the father whom one wants to be, but whom one cannot be without at the same time ceasing to exist (by becoming once again only a nameless appendage of the mother). The cosmic phallus is thus

an abstract signifier, which, like any symbol, goes beyond its materiality and beyond what it represents. Adopting a phrase from S. Leclaire ... we can say that: 'It is a copula, a hyphen – in the evanescence of its erection – the signifier par excellence of the impossible identity' (Lemaire 1977:86).

Lacan (1977a:287) maintains that "the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire", this being so because the structure of the unconscious is formally the structure of thought and symbolism in general. Derrida, taking his cue from Freud's (1984:427-34) analogy of the unconscious as the 'Mystic Writing-Pad', sees in this the trace, which has all those (for Derrida deliberate) connotations of mark, track, signature and footprint which I drew attention to in Chapter Five and which are reproduced in Aranda conceptions of The
Dreaming. In structuralist understanding, the trace derives specifically from the dialectic which makes the sign appear, disappear and reappear in a series of infinite dialectical substitutions, like those which were shown to be central to the understanding of the myth of the native cats. The link of this conception with the phallus and The Dreaming can be shown by briefly looking at some of Barthes' ideas on signification.

At the most elementary level, semiology deals with three terms - signifier, signified and sign. Or as Barthes (1973:112-3) says:

> [A]ny semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified. This relation concerns objects which belong to different categories, and this is why it is not one of equality but one of equivalence. We must here be on our guard for despite common parlance which simply says that the signifier expresses the signified, we are dealing, in any semiological system, not with two, but with three different terms. For what we grasp is not at all one term after the other, but the correlation which unites them: there are, therefore, the signifier, the signified and the sign, which is the associative total of the first two terms.

In other words, the function of the sign is synthetic, in much the same way as the phallic copula.

But the sign is also dialectical, which means that it is capable of generating further signs, and that its copulatory role is never more than a moment in time destined for collapse. For example, in Barthes (1973:114-5) understanding,

myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech . . ., however different at the
start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Myth sees in them only the same raw material; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language. Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writing, myth wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain. And it is precisely this final term of the greater system which it builds and of which it is only a part. Everything happens as if myth shifted the formal system sideways.

Barthes (1973:115) then goes on to represent the situation diagrammatically.

**Diagram 12. Barthes' Model of Language and Myth**

All language has a mythic dimension which leads to the former's peculiarly realistic guise. Language and the world, words and things, appear confounded, even to the point where the signified as concept or idea is confused with reference, so rendering to the subject the virtual facticity of his world (society, environment or culture). This projection is well portrayed in the subjectivity of the ancestral beings as they create the world from dreams and ideas. But they achieve these dreams in a quite specific way. For at the
beginning of The Dreaming, everything was turned both upside-down and inside-out, as sky and earth not only separated from each other, but assumed each other’s positions. As the ponderous, slowly-waking ancestors came into view, the sky beings disappeared forever and the cosmic copulae which linked sky and earth were all irrecoverably lost as a condition of creation.

What I would suggest here is that we are presented with an image of primordial signification. On might say, in fact, that the sky was the first signifier, but in the beginning there was no sign, a simple corollary to the fact that nothing was signified. The sign only appeared when sky and earth separated and the phallus emerged between them. Thus, in so far as it is the sign which makes anything and everything, including The Dreaming, intelligible, the first operative signifier was the earth, or more exactly, the earth as it contained the phallus. Given, then, that the sky beings are representative of the pleasure principle, and that the earth was first of all a void, one may say that the ancestral, paternal phallus was the first sign; that the first signified was ‘the lack’ – what Lacan (1977a:323) calls manque-a-etre (‘want-to-be’); and that the first signifier was the initial blissful state of pure being – for Lacan (1977a:323), en-trop (‘too-much-of-it’).

But one has also to bear in mind that in the initial disjunction of sky and earth, the two cosmic levels not only separate – they change places. The sky begins to exhibit a lack, while the earth is raised to the level of being. It is something very similar to this that Barthes (1973:113) indicates when he says that "the signifier is empty, the sign is
full, it is a meaning (my emphasis). And it is precisely what Lemaire (1977:59) means when she says that the phallus takes on the symbolic meaning of absence of lack ...

... It is that which denies the lack, that which fills the empty space.

So, in the synthetic relation of the sign was also established the passing over of life into the unconscious, and the raising of the unconscious to life. But once the paternal sign was instituted as the imaginative conjunction of two otherwise independent realms, it was relegated to the position of a signifier through an encounter with a second lack: it was castrated. It was this symbolic event which set in motion the infinite chain which left the traces, tracks and marks of the ancestors. For the first sign, the phallus (of Ngambakala, Karora or any other ancestral being born altjiranga ngambakala), was only in the place of that which was intrinsically unobtainable - that which was no longer allowed and relegated to beyond the Milky Way. As Lacan (1977a:323) states the matter, the subject "sacrifice[s] his difference", the answer to the alternatives of 'want-to-be' and 'too-much-of-it', as synthesised in the phallic copula, being "anything but that". Keeping close to Barthes' spatial metaphor of signification, the overall 'drift' of The Dreaming could therefore be rendered as follows (see Diagram 13 overleaf).
7.2 The Circle of Desire

Although Diagram 13 represents the ongoing process of signification in terms of a tripartite schema, it relates in a profound way to the quaternary structure of the mandala image distilled from the myth of Karora. It will be remembered that in the myth, the initial stages of the transforming drama also involved three terms—Karora himself, and his human and bandicoot sons. But the fourth term, Tjentereema entered the scene at the very end of the story as the result of the introduction of the castration/laming motif. This structural form can be mapped onto the Barthesian scheme.

Karora is the phallic sign who contains two halves, one animal the other human. These two halves substitute for each other and may be interpreted as representing the emergence of a new signified and sign. In the beginning, Karora's desire was embodied only as bandicoots—as something he immediately generated as soon as he began to think and wish.
But over a period of time these were taken back into his body and replaced by human sons. It is thus animality which first appears, and Karora comes to signify this animality, particularly in his gruesome cannibalism (perhaps a metaphor of the primal scene). But in time this lack of humanity falls from view and the human sons take over. I would interpret this as the original signified being linked to the old sign (now a signifier) by a new sign – humanity itself. For Karora, in so far as he is the sign of the conditions from which humanity stems, only completes his work when he passes away by being mutilated and replaced by Tjenterama. The phallic sign is thus divided. It generates another signified, the fourth term which Jung sees to be finally constitutive of the mandala.

Diagram 14. Karora's Generation
In the diagram the second sign is the *replacement* for Karora’s original phallic unity, and it relates to a specific combination of signifier and signified involving a transition from nature (animal) to culture (human). But the myth of Karora only leaves this significant conclusion implicit, which is one reason why it is so well represented in the form of a mandala - the circle and four points forming a cross. One could say, in fact, that whereas the myth of the native cats is historical, in so far as it traces the development of *tjurunga*, ceremonies and totemic identities from a recurrent pattern, the myth of Karora is more truly timeless. It simply sketches the structure which is duplicated time and time again in the genealogy of the quolls.

The quaternary structure of the mandala, I would argue, is related to the constitutive form of the unconscious. Freud, particularly in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, identifies the mechanisms of the unconscious as being dualistic. They inhere, he suggests, in the processes of *condensation* and *displacement*, whose function is to distort, but at the same time represent, unconscious desire (Freud 1976: *passim*). In Lacan’s view, these twin processes can be understood in terms of metaphor (*condensation*) and metonymy (*displacement*), and it is these which give rise to the formal structure of the mandala.

The unconscious operates with signifiers which, for Lacan, are ‘structured like a language’. These are arranged as two axes, along each of which distortion may take place. The first axis is syntagmatic or metonymical: signifiers are connected to each other as a chain of elements. Here the
elements, although continuous with each other, are distinguished and opposed. The second axis is paradigmatic or metaphorical: signifiers refer back and forward to each other throughout the 'text' on the basis of similarity. Here elements that are otherwise discontinuous come to be related (cf. Levi-Strauss's [1972:212-3] analogy of an orchestral score in myth). In other words, metonymy occurs through distinctions, while metaphor occurs through likenesses, a very straightforward distinction which is at the very heart of structuralist understanding.

If I have understood Lacan correctly, it is possible to say that metonymy and metaphor are related to each other as desire is to satisfaction: "the symptom is a metaphor ..., as desire is a metonymy" (Lacan 1977a:175). It appears to be something like this that Wilden (1977:269) has in mind when he says that "the phallus begins in metonymy and ends in metaphor". The distinctions may be elucidated by looking closer at the ideas of continuity and discontinuity inherent in the structure of the 'text'.

The early relationship between mother and child is completely continuous. There is no break between them and it is as if they reflected each other absolutely—a sort of metaphorical relationship that is total, and not therefore really a metaphor at all, since metaphor requires the assimilation of two unlike terms. It is this relationship, dominated entirely by the pleasure principle, which is expressed in Aranda myths about the beings who live beyond the Milky Way and who once lived much closer to the earth. Metonymical relations are not possible within this context (if indeed it may so be called), and it is a definitive attri-
bute of the sky beings that they are completely unrelated to each other.

By way of contrast, whenever a child is 'dropped' and left by the mother at a time of need, a kind of pure metonymy obtains: the two are absolutely separated. Yet as with the initial 'metaphorical' relationship, this is not really metonymy at all, because metonymy requires distinction to occur when there is also continuity. For a difference to be a difference, the two terms must be related, and in this situation no such thing occurs. Nevertheless, we may say that, in the beginning, the satisfaction of need engages one in a kind of perfect analogical relationship, whereas frustration entails no relationship at all—a kind of perfect metonymy. So how do true metaphor and metonymy come to be instated?

It is here that we come back to Wilden's remark about the phallus starting in metonymy and ending in metaphor. In the primal scene the infant comes to grips with a third term—the father—intervening between himself and his mother. This occurs in a moment of rejection—'perfect metonymy', and instates the oedipus complex with which the child will struggle for several years. In the end, however, the child realises that he can never simply reinstate the perfect analogical relationship he once had with his mother, because the primal scene causes him to fear both parents as castrators. The mother is eventually repudiated as an object worth 'having', while the father is revered as an object worth 'becoming'. This is the moment of symbolic castration, when the tie to the mother is cut and identification with the father cemented. In other words, the object with which
one was once continuous is rendered quite distinct and opposed to oneself, whereas the object which previously signified one's sense of dissatisfaction and non-being comes to be a model to which one aspires. What was 'metaphorical' has become truly metonymical, since two similar terms have been separated. And what was once 'metonymical' has become truly metaphorical, since two unlike terms have been related, one as a model for the other.

Lacan maintains that metonymy distorts because an original signifier (that which was desired) is repudiated and relegated to the level of a signified (repressed in the unconscious), this process occurring through a form of division or elision (child separated from mother).

[It is the connexion between signifier and signifier that permits the elision in which the signifier installs the lack of being in the object relation, using the value of 'reference back' possessed by signification in order to invest it with desire aimed at the very lack it supports (Lacan 1977a:164).]

And for Lacan this means that metonymy has precisely the same function as the bar which separates signifier and signified in Saussurian linguistics. It is the mark which separates - a difference which literally bars by not allowing the original signifier (now the signified) into consciousness. In short, the difference is the paternal phallus which 'begins in metonymy'.

In so far as this same phallus 'ends in metaphor', one is dealing with the castration complex and identification with the father. Lacan (1977a:158) states that "[m]etaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from nonsense". He goes on to say:

Metaphor must be defined as the implantation, in a
signifying chain, of another signifier whereby the supplanted signifier falls to the level of a signified and, as a latent signifier, perpetuates there the interval in which another signifying chain may be grafted (Lacan in Lemaire 1977:197).

In Barthes terms, we may say that metaphor is instituted at the moment when 'myth shifts the formal system of the first significations sideways'. In other words, according to the general structure of Diagrams 12, 13 and 14, metaphor (or condensation), and with it full meaning, occurs only with the second sign. Prior to this there is the paradox of the sign which stands alone - the phallus, whose only function is, according to Lacan, to separate signifier and signified in the metonymical dimension.

Metaphor presents itself as a substitute for this paradoxical sign and replaces it. In other words, the first sign is erased - castrated, which is why Lacan (1977a:164) sees the formula for metaphor being represented by a cross. This cross is at once a crossing of the original bar created in metonymy, its being wiped out, and the creation of a new meaning thereby (a plus). Paradoxically, it is through being crossed out that a gain is made in the symbolic function by the instatement of difference, which replaces difference. 'Desire is a metonymy' precisely because separation from the mother institutes a distorting relationship along the syntagmatic axis. 'Symptom is a metaphor' because desire is a chase after substitutes.

Articulated with signifiers, expressed in words, the desire can never be satisfied since, beneath this significant articulation, there still remains the primal need which aims at fusion with the mother. Having been caught in the signifier by the paternal metaphor, this need can aim at satisfaction only by following the signifying 'concatenation'. It thus becomes metonymic, a reflection, that is, of itself and it is, therefore, always
elsewhere, eternally straining after a more adequate substitute for the lost object (Lemaire 1977:196).

Condensation and displacement are distorting mechanisms that effectively require four terms if they are to operate together. The four terms are well represented by Barthes’ spatial representation (Diagram 12) — one requires two signifiers and two signifieds if one is to create an intelligible sign. And in the genesis of this system of signs, the phallus appears as the central figure: first, because it establishes a synthetic relation, and second, because the effacing of this relation is the projective base from which substitutions are sought. But the representation is yet more revealing: out of the four terms, Barthes creates two signs, one (in lower case) centrally placed, the other (in capitals) on the periphery. Thus we are reminded of the four terms of the mandala which combine as a ‘fifth’ quintessential unity which is both at the centre of the circle and outside it. From this, I think it is possible to show how the drama played out in the myth of Karora is constitutive of the mechanisms of the unconscious.

In Chapter Six I showed how the mandala distilled from the myth of Karora was constructed by two axes set in motion. The first axis was that of the opposition between the human and animal sons, and was constituted in a dialectic of presence and absence. The second was that of the opposition between Karora and Tjenterama, transformable into that between old and young. The myth thus seems to portray the genesis of unconscious realities in terms of spatial and temporal co-ordinates. In the story, the human and animal sons almost literally vie for space. When the aged Karora
consumes the bandicoots, human sons are concomitantly lost from his body, as if evicted into the open. On the other hand, Karora and Tjenterama place the human brothers in the temporal dimension: in laming Tjenterama, and implicitly creating the split between aged ancestral figure and infantile spirit child, they place something both before and after them in time. In short, they create three generations.

For Lacan, desire begins with the lack, and Karora appears to portray this lack through hunger. Having given up something initially, he is empty-bellied and tries in desperation to re-fill himself. Everything in the story is dependent in the first instance on the lack of his fulfilment. Karora came from the root of the human-like phallus which first bridged sky and earth at Ilbalintja. In a sense, then, he is the lack which comes into existence as a result of that primordial separation - the phallus as difference.

Karora's attempt to reinstate the initial homeostatic conditions (borkerama) consists in consuming the bandicoots which he has already given rise to as a consequence of the separation. But in the continuous attempt to satisfy his desire, Karora gradually becomes more human. His sons are but reflections of his own being, and they shift in appearance from animal to human, the coming of the one being contingent on the passing of the other. The seal is set on this progress when Tjenterama is lamed, and this symbolic castration bears the stamp of a shift from a 'pure' metonymy of desire to a truly human predicament where meaning is enriched in metaphor. For if the presence and absence of the two types of sons can be read as a shift from animal to human in terms of appearance, and concomitantly from human
to animal in terms of disappearance, then the two instituted realms are finally separated as independent systems when Tjenterama appears on the scene. Through his laming, the sons substitute for the father. As Strehlow says, the ancestral sons always rebel against their fathers in order to take their place.

Karora’s bandicoot progeny signified in the beginning his potential, as yet not truly human. By the time the bandicoots were consumed, the human sons had taken their place. The original signified thus disappeared deep into Karora’s ‘heart’, while the new sign was raised to the surface. Before Tjenterama arrived, then, the stage was set for a separation of powers, the underworld ready to receive Karora and his animal progeny (in the pmoara flood), and the earth’s surface ready to become Tjenterama and the human sons (who were transformed into tjurunga rocks). The two terms of metonymy were ready, as signifier and signified, to be converted into an independent system. This is what the human sons achieve by wounding Tjenterama, but at the same time they institute a second realm on the surface. Their existence is also metonymically split as Tjenterama comes to represent the spirit children. Thus an ongoing human potential exists on the earth, while an ongoing animal one exists below it, with Tjenterama and Karora being the points of intersection between the two realms.

The acceptance of symbolic castration is the moment of primal repression which instates two independent systems of signification, conscious and unconscious. It does this by instituting metaphor as the completion of the emerging symbolic matrix. Jung (1953:196) was of the opinion that the
mandala image was a specific combination of a "masculine trinity" and a "feminine quaternity". The analysis of the myth of Karora suggests something very similar, and relates the two forms to metaphor and the castration complex. For if the first sign is the phallus - obviously masculine and inherently a triad through its relation to signifier and signified - symbolic castration means that this phallus be operative only in its absence and on the condition that it be realised through substitutes. Thus is instituted the mechanism of identification, a specifically metaphorical correspondence between two independent systems of difference. It is just such a relationship which is posited by Levi-Strauss as existing between nature and culture in totemism (see Chapter Three), and it is just such a relationship which is instituted in the myth of Karora.

Diagram 15. The Metaphor of Castration

![Diagram 15. The Metaphor of Castration](image-url)
7.3 Of Zero Significance

The relationship between the one and the many, which is implicit in that between Karora (as original unitary ancestor) and Tjenterama (as representative of the myriad potential of spirit children), is also one between the centre and the periphery of the mandala: the central point is singular, while the periphery is indefinitely multiplied. There are an infinite number of points on a circle, but the centre of the mandala is the point of synthesis of all oppositions, which in current understanding means that all contrasts and distinctions are unified by the primordial 'phallus-as-sign'. On the other hand, symbolic castration ensures that this singular centre cannot be known, except in a roundabout way. It has been erased and cannot be known in itself, even if its effects are felt all around it in every conceivable symbolic manifestation. It is there, in its absence, to make sense of everything else.

With this formula I think we can define The Dreaming in a similar way to Aborigines' own conceptions. As stated in Chapter Four, Aborigines see in The Dreaming both synthesis and opposition: they say that it is everything, yet absent from 'reality' and in contrast with it. It is, to use Meggitt's Kantian terminology, the noumenal as against the phenomenal and at the basis of a doctrine of metaphysical monism. This suggests that The Dreaming (altjira) might well be described as what Levi-Strauss (1950:XLIX) has called a 'floating signifier' (signifiant flottant) - a symbol which has no value whatsoever except in so far as it may be opposed to all others. In this final section of the myth chapters I will attempt to define altjira in this way.
In his introduction to Mauss's *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, Levi-Strauss (1950:XLIX) says:

In his endeavour to understand the world, man ... always has at his disposal a surplus of signification (which he portions out amongst things according to the laws of symbolic thought ...). This distribution of a supplementary allowance - if it is permissible to put it that way - is absolutely necessary in order that, on the whole, the available signifier and the signified it aims at may remain in the relationship of complementarity which is the very condition of the use of symbolic thought.(1)

In all cultures, says Levi-Strauss, there is some form of privileged signifier which represents this guarantee.

[W]e see in mana, wakan, orenda and other notions of the same type, the conscious expression of a semantic function, whose role it is to permit symbolic thought to operate in spite of the contradiction which is proper to it. In this way are explained the apparently insoluble antinomies attached to this notion [mana] ...: force and action; quality and state; at once noun, adjective and verb; abstract and concrete; omnipresent and localised. In effect, mana is all these things at once; but is it not precisely because it is none of these things that it is a simple form, or, more exactly, a symbol in a pure state, and therefore capable of becoming charged with any sort of symbolic content whatsoever? In the system of symbols constituted by all cosmologies, mana would simply be a zero symbolic value, that is to say, a sign marking the necessity of a symbolic content supplementary to that with which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required, provided only that this value still remains part of the available reserve ...

... [I]t could almost be said that the function of notions like mana is to be opposed to the absence of signification, without entailing by itself any particular signification (Levi-Strauss 1950:XLIX-L).(2)

I would say that the notion of 'zero symbolic value' expresses perfectly the position of altjira as it is constituted in its 'pure state' as the conjunction of sky and earth. For this conjunction of signifier and signified is achieved through the phallus - the sign that has to be
'crossed out' in order to play any positive role.

Furthermore, the positive role is one which relates it to every other sign. As the first sign which stands alone, it represents the point where metaphor can be inserted to bring language into being. All other signs 'refer back' to this original sign which in itself is meaningless. In the semiotic system of Barthes (1967:77), it would correspond to "the unmarked term" or the "zero degree" which constitutes "a significant absence".

We have here a pure differential state; the zero degree testifies to the power held by any system of signs, of creating meaning 'out of nothing'.

'Out of nothing', it will be remembered, is one of Spencer and Gillen's glosses for ngambakala. Altjira ngambakala means having originated from The Dreaming and is a formulation that can be traced back to the phallic synthesis of the Milky Way. Though 'nothing' in itself, beginning life as a kauuua urbula (black pole), the Milky Way generated all that is meaningful. In so far as the cosmic copula is altjira, then it continues to be the source from which all things stem, even though it is now virtually beyond reach in the heavens.

As a functioning symbol, the zero signifier is best understood through comparisons and analogies. Shalvey (1978: 38) suggests a number of these. The symbol with zero value, he says, serves the same function a concept of proportionality would serve, allowing one to understand variability in the midst of invariability, continuity in the midst of discontinuity. It plays the same role played by the concept of alienation (mediation) in Hegel.

Alternatively, it may be understood as "the foundation ...
of synthetic, a priori judgements" (Shalvey 1978:37), in much the same way as "the scholastics' possible ... provides interior harmony and meaning to the actual" (Shalvey 1978: 126). A very down to earth analogy can, I think, be found in the flickering cursor on a computer screen. This signifier has absolutely no meaning whatsoever, except in so far as it may be transformed into any other in the text. In addition, it is from it that new signifiers emerge, at the same time that it shifts to another position in order to take on fresh meaning once again.(3) A less down to earth form of standardisation which also warrants the mantle of a symbol with zero value is the scientific notion of cause - that which in science is everywhere and nowhere.

The Dreaming shares many characteristics with these very different, but fundamentally similar, forms. It is certainly the absolute basis of all a priori judgements in the Aboriginal worldview, and it is also very much 'the cause' in the system. Everything stems from The Dreaming and will continue to do so. But like the cursor, it is also the background to anything emerging in the present. The Dreaming is parallel to phenomenal reality; invisible, but always behind its manifestations. And more than this, The Dreaming can under given circumstances be made to appear - made to appear, moreover, precisely at those points in time when there is a danger of collapse within the system. The rites re-create The Dreaming of the past, but in so far as they are The Dreaming of the present, their function is to sustain the system intact. As I will show in the following chapters, rites are a guarantee of intelligibility which paradoxically use forms which are themselves not intelli-
gible. It is out of the unintelligible - the anti-structure of Turner - that meaning is created.

In a word, the zero significer is transcendent, as Strehlow's translation of *altjira*, eternity, is meant to suggest. As Strehlow (1968:17) says elsewhere, a totemic ancestor never really 'dies, even though he is spoken of as 'going down' or coming to the end of his earthly labours.

His body merely undergoes a transmutation into something that will weather all the assaults of time, change, and decay.

In other words, he becomes tjurunga, the indestructible legacy of The Dreaming (see Chapter Twelve). But the transcendent is, in the nature of things, ill-defined. Durkheimian anthropology has long known, especially through the work of Douglas (1966), Leach (1964) and Turner (1974), that the sacred realm deals with paradoxical formulae and is drawn towards symbols of ambiguity. This is because ritual forms are synthetic. They present us

with a 'moment in and out of time', and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties (Turner 1974:32, my emphasis).

In the Aranda case, this 'generalised social bond' is represented in the tjurunga, the prototype of which was the ancestral phallic pole which originally bridged sky and earth and which was 'neither one thing or the other', but rather a straightforward potential of "the seminal adventure of the trace" (Derrida 1978:292). One of the most important findings of Roheim, which runs like a leit-motif throughout his work, is that tjurunga are phallic symbols of the very idea of instrumentality. It was with a tjurunga, used, as it
invariably is in myths, as a *weapon* (Strehlow 1968:21-25), that Karora/Tjenterama was symbolically castrated. It is thus possession of the phallus, as replacement for an original seminal power which has become feminine, which symbolises the teleology of The Dreaming. In the next part of the thesis, I will show how this teleology is ineluctably a part of every Aranda man’s life and how the ritual round deals with the synthetic paradoxes of the *tjurunga*.

For the moment, however, one should note that there is nothing illogical about the paradoxical character of the sacred. The zero signifier has to be understood as a logical necessity generated by the structure of thought. What Levy-Bruhl considered to be definitive of logic – the law of contradiction – is not so much contravened by paradox, as guaranteed by it. This is so because the structure of opposition is not simply one of negation (*P* and *not-P*): it is also one of analogy. Signs may only be opposed on the basis that they are first of all in some sense the same as each other. A cat is not a dog, but the basis for comparison is that they are both animals – united as "heterogeneous terms", as Durkheim (1976:239) once put it. The synthetic operation of classification is every bit as constitutive of the phenomenon as is its analytic dimension. Indeed, it is the specific combination of the two which is inescapable and intrinsic to the structure of 'the one and the many'.

Formal logic itself does not escape paradoxes, but it relegates them to another order known as the null class, a class which can be shown to share a great deal of properties with The Dreaming. In the first place, the null class, as Langer (1967:128-9) states,
is the one and only class which may have incompatible properties, and more than that, it is the class which has all incompatible properties, which all absurd combinations of concepts define. It is the class of round squares, secular churches, solid liquids, and fellowmen without fellowmen. For to any of these we must say there is no such thing. The class of round squares is null, the class of secular churches is null, etc., etc. It is, indeed, rather hard to suppose that all round squares are all secular churches, and also that all round squares are all married bachelors; but imagination is no measure of logical possibility or fact, and besides, no one is called upon to imagine that there is a round square which is a married bachelor or a secular church. It is comforting to know that there is none. There is, however, the Null Class; and since it is defined by all forms that have no true values, it most conveniently saves us from having to deal with all sorts of structures that might look just like defining forms but define no class. Such forms define the null class.

Because "all null classes are identical ... there is only one class 'nothing'". "Its extension is zero". (Langer 1967: 128).

But if the null class is fundamentally unitary and stands alone at the apex of the classificatory (or, more exactly, in opposition to the the universe class - 'everything', the totality [Langer 1967:127]), it is also ubiquitous. All classes are formed in opposition: there may be A and not-A, B and not-B. But within the total scheme of things, this negation forms a paradox which is best understood diagrammatically (see Diagram 17 overleaf). The diagram shows how when two elements are compared within the total field, they leave behind a residue which is 'neither one thing or the other'.

Diagrammatically, we have two classes, A and B, each of which lies entirely in the complement of the other; for if everything horizontally striped is -A, and everything vertically striped is -B, A is vertically striped and only vertically; B is horizontally striped but only horizontally; and everything else is striped both ways. Everything
that is neither A nor B is both -A and -B, i.e. it is -A X -B. Note that there is no area representing A X B; one of the weaknesses of diagrammatic expression is that it cannot represent [zero] (Langer 1967:146).

The reason why zero is not represented in Diagram 17 is that zero and the totality are, paradoxically enough, identical: the universe and the null class are the same. This stems from the very odd but perfectly logical fact that the null class is included in every class. Every extension includes 'nothing' (Langer 1967:147).

This is so because if the null class is defined as "the class which has all incompatible properties", zero must be included in A and not-A, and B and not-B: the null class is formed precisely by properties which define the thing and that which it is not. Being both the thing and its negation, it simply has to be everywhere. Zero

is included in every class which is a member of a complementary pair, and since every class has a complement, every class includes [zero] (Langer 1967:147).
The ambiguous phenomena which Douglas in particular sees at the heart of the sacred are null class objects. Logicians may be comforted to know that there are no secular churches and married bachelors, but 'the savage mind' has precisely the opposite point of view when it takes, for example, a pangolin, which is a 'tree-climbing fish', a 'lizard that suckles' and a 'reproductively moderate animal' \( (\text{Douglas 1966:168}) \), and makes it the centre of ritual focus. But then 'the savage mind' elevates the locus of these paradoxical phenomena, which may always be found in dreams, as well as in The Dreaming. And among objects of the null class it would not be stretching the point to include sexually desirable mothers and castrated fathers, themselves elementary signifiers of impossible identity.

Basically, the null class is the zero signifier, and the zero signifier is the constitution of the unconscious as constructed in the principles of metonymy and metaphor. For the Aranda, it is \textit{altjira}, the realm which is a universal resource that may always be called upon to give significance to something otherwise perplexing.\(^{(4)}\) It is within the ever constant structure of \textit{altjira} that the symbolic life, and therefore all social life, takes place. The structure itself is paradoxical: like the null class, it is everything and nothing, maximal and minimal infinity. Of it one may say that, as with the cursor on a computer text, it does not really mean anything, but 'you always know where you are with it' in the total scheme of things.

But between all and nothing, a whole world is opened up (cf. Levi-Strauss \textit{1969:490}), just as it was when sky and earth separated at the beginning of time. This world is at
once smaller, in so far as it involves subtractions, and larger, in that it entails additions; at once impoverished in its divisions and more complex in its multiplications. In short, it is the jointly instituted principle of the combination of metaphor and metonymy, constantly working and re-working the system at the behest of human desire.

But part of this world is not easily seen. It is transcribed, but at the same time hidden. The ancestors created the landscape, and the features of the country are a constant reminder of The Dreaming. But the tracks are no longer there, except in so far as they are re-created by men, and neither are the circular ilbandara out of and into which the tracks came and went. In so far as these latter places exist 'in their absence' in the landscape, they are sacred sites where the power of The Dreaming is concentrated; places which were described to Stanner (1979:135) as loci of an indefinable 'something' - "'Like engine, like power, plenty of power; it does hard work; it pushes.'"

These are the anchoring points of The Dreaming's power; the central foci out of which radiates 'the seminal power of the trace' (the ancestral tracks along which one can expect to encounter some aspect of ancestral spirituality - see Chapter Eight). (5) The Aranda would thus have cause to agree with Durkheim (1972:88) that "the land ... bears the imprint of society", at least in so far as the invisible and inviolable sacred is the social in its negative manifestation.

I have attempted to identify The Dreaming as a zero signifier, and have illustrated this form of signification in a number of ways. But I will end this chapter be return-
ing to the original Aranda conception — the phallus which lies between 'having' and 'not-having', being and nothing, and which only derives its value by being realised in substitutes (the tjurunga). It will be recalled that the mythic images of the sky-dwellers tended to be rather poorly conceived, in the sense that there were few which were embedded in elaborate myths. The sky beings, complete in themselves and utterly uninvolved in the projective labours which were to become the hallmark of their earthly counterparts, simply moved away from the earth without any apparent prompting. There is good reason for this mythic impoverishment; reason which is connected once again to the function of zero signification.

As just noted, the definitive attribute of the sky beings is that they were unable to project. They did not open themselves up and give the world their stamp — until, that is, their feet were deformed in doing just that. They existed as a kind of pure unity; as being, a signifier which had no reference to a signified in the sense that it corresponded only to the dark and formless earth of which it permitted no view. In the beginning, therefore, one may say that the world (as sky) signified, but that it signified precisely nothing (the absent earth). Levi-Strauss (1950: XLVII) says something very similar when he says that the universe "signified, from the very beginning, the totality of what humanity could expect to know about it", (6) but that man did not know what it was signifying.

The fact that the transition from the signifying of nothing to the dynamics of The Dreaming took place without a story, reminds one of Levi-Strauss’s (1950:XLVII) struc-
turalist myth of origin.

Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance on the scale of animal life, language could only have been born in one fell swoop. Things could not have set about acquiring signification progressively. Following a transformation the study of which is not the concern of the social sciences, but rather of biology and psychology, a transition came about from a stage where nothing had a meaning to another where everything possessed it. (7)

This passage was the passing over of sky and earth into each other and the emergence of the phallus between them, the event which caused Karora to stir from his timeless sleep, flutter his eyelids and embark upon a never-ending journey. That stumbling journey was consolidated only in so far as the two categories of signifier and signified were constituted simultaneously and jointly, like two complementary units; but ... knowledge [the journey itself] ... only began very slowly (Levi-Strauss 1950:XLVII-XLVIII). (8)

Thought is at once analogical and digital: it requires metaphor and similarity as much as it does metonymy and difference. Thus, the moment that thought occurs is the moment that the phallus emerges as the instrument of projection. But thought is not consolidated until the moment when the phallus has been lost in the projection (symbolic castration). The zero signifier is, therefore, a signifier of lack (Lacan 1977a:318); the thing which 'is', but at the same time 'cannot be', much in the manner of any object which belongs to the null class. The primordial phallus is, as Jung's dream revealed to him, unnameable (see Chapter Three), and therefore in a sense unthinkable (even though it is indeed thought in 'the other scene').

The Dreaming is signified by the phallus, but only in so far as that phallus is perpetually lost - it 'is' and 'is
not' all at once, destined to play its part as the point of intersection between metaphor and metonymy, condensation and displacement, in the continual sliding of signifiers in the mind. The loss of the phallus — symbolic castration — is, of course, a gruesome business, so it is perhaps little wonder that Freud (1973:106) approached the unconscious (the id) with the (unmistakably feminine) analogy of "a cauldron of seething excitations". The Aranda, too, view the seal set on The Dreaming in much the same way — as a swirling flood of honeysuckle juice sweeping back Karora to the place from where he first emerged, at once the womb of the earth, the sacred ilbantera, the navel, and the zero below. It is from this zero that the power of The Dreaming still emerges, a power whose participation in human life I will now begin to trace.