Where Life Takes Place, Where Place Makes Life

Theoretical Approaches to the Australian Aboriginal Conceptions of Place

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay has been to relate the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place to three different theoretical perspectives on place, to find what is relevant in the Aboriginal context, and what is not. The aim has been to find the most useful theoretical approaches for further studies on the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place.

The investigation is a rendering of research and writings on Australian Aboriginal religion, a recording of general views on research on religion and space, a recounting of written material of three theoretical standpoints on place (the Insider standpoint, the Outsider Standpoint and the Meshwork standpoint), and a comparison of the research on the Aboriginal religion to the three different standpoints.

The results show that no single standpoint is gratifying for studies of the Aboriginal conceptions of place, but all three standpoints contribute in different ways. There are aspects from all three standpoints revealing the importance of place to the Aboriginal peoples.

The most useful theoretical approaches for studies on the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place are: Place as a living entity, an ancestor and an extension of itself; place as movement, transformation and continuity; place as connection, existential orientation and the paramount focus, and; place as the very foundation of the entire religion.
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Introduction

This investigation is a journey to find the way to place in the landscape of Aboriginal Australia, where the spiritual ancestors, the place-beings, woke up from their slumber, at their places in the ground, walked over the Country and sang everything to life. Here, the spiritual ancestors connected places to each other, before returning to the very places where they once rose, where they still linger on, and where they yet remain in perpetual connection with each people responsible for the regeneration and well-being of each particular place.

With the help from some of the writings on place and religion in Australia I will find the best pathways to wander, and which pathways to avoid, moving along in the landscape, to find place, and to find some clues to the true essence of place.

The reason for this theoretical journey in the ontological landscape is an earlier actual journey in the physical landscape, where I first was introduced to the Aboriginal conceptions of life. These conceptions keep mesmerizing me, and I keep coming back to learn more. This time, on place.

Not knowing if it is even possible to comprehend completely, the genuine significance of place to the Australian Aboriginal peoples, I hope to, at least, enable some advanced theoretical knowledge for further comprehension.

Purpose

The purpose of this essay is to relate the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place to three different theoretical perspectives on place – the Insider standpoint, the Outsider standpoint and the Meshwork standpoint – to find what is relevant in the Aboriginal context, and what is not, in order to find the most useful theoretical approaches for studies on the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place.
Question formulation

This investigation aims to answer the following question.

- What aspects of previous theories on place are useful for the understanding of the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place?

Terminology and definitions

The Aboriginal peoples

Ever since European invasion, the peoples of Australia have been extensively denominated by the colonizers. Many denominations are found offensive by the peoples themselves. Using the more appropriate terms, ‘Indigenous Australian people/s’ and ‘Aboriginal people/s’, helps to avoid to inaccurately label, categorise and stereotype people, according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (2017) and the University of New South Wales (2017), who state that, Indigenous Australian peoples are people of Torres Strait Islander descent and people of Aboriginal descent. Many persons prefer to be called Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal, rather than the generic term Indigenous Australian. There is no Aboriginal word referring to all Aboriginal people in Australia; Aboriginal is a European word, meaning ‘from the beginning’ in Latin. Talking of the Aboriginal people, in singular, tends to suggest that Aboriginal peoples are all the same, on a continent of, at the time of invasion, up to 300 autonomous language groups.

Aboriginal identities can be of many sources. People can refer to a greater region, to a language group, to country and a specific geographic location, or to certain features of the ecological environment, like ‘desert people’, ‘rainforest people’, or ‘saltwater people’.

In the past, governments tried to classify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people according to skin colour and parentage using […] less appropriate terms […] Until 1972 when the White Australia Policy was abolished, White Australia excluded Indigenous Australian people by definition. Major changes for Indigenous Australian peoples were not
introduced until 1967 through the referendum, and by returning land to some groups from 1975 […]

The less appropriate terms can be extremely offensive to many Indigenous Australians as they categorise people and assume that there are real differences between Indigenous Australian peoples of different areas. It is critical that they are not used to refer to or to attempt to classify Indigenous peoples.

In "long-settled" areas, the implication that "urban" Indigenous Australians are less Indigenous than "traditional" or "transitional" people and cultures is most offensive. A real issue is the "real Aborigine" syndrome, the idea that "real" Aboriginal people live in Arnhem Land or the Central Desert, and that only "traditional" Aboriginal people and cultures are "really Aboriginal" (University of New South Wales 2017).

The Arrernte

Between 1875 and 1912 anthropologists Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen (1927) collected material on the Aboriginal peoples in Central Australia. One of these peoples they termed the Arunta. Mircea Eliade (1959), a historian of religion, uses the term Arunta as well, while Jonathan Z. Smith (1987), also a historian of religion, uses the term Aranda. They all refer to the language group, and to the people who speak any of the different dialects of this language. The term Aranda is postcolonial,"[…] a left-over spelling of the old days […] (Central Land Council 2017)", but nowadays widely accepted; several similar spellings occur. However, the peoples of the language group today prefer the modern spelling Arrernte (Central Land Council 2017; Countries and their Cultures 2017; Peoples of the Arrernte Nations of Central Australia 2017; Spencer & Gillen 2017).

The so-called Arunta/Aranda, as mentioned in the material for this essay, is the peoples of the Arrernte language group, present in the area around Alice Springs, in Central Australia, in the Northern Territory, at the time of Spencer’s and Gillen's study. Eliade calls this specific group the Achilpa, Smith calls them the Tjilpa. Both Eliade and Smith alternate between the Arunta/Aranda and the Achilpa/Tjilpa.
Religion and Animism

According to Tony Swain (1993: 24), the Australian Aboriginal peoples do not use secular constructions, like ‘religion’, regarding their conceptions of life. They usually use the term ‘Law’, and, to a lesser extent, the term ‘Dreaming’, or local equivalents. This notion is a conceptual principal rather than an ontological description, Swain states.

According to Graham Harvey (2013: 1-12), a simple statement, saying people who believe in spirits are ‘animists’, is not wrong, but he argues the subject is more complicated. Belief of spirits, in the meaning of non-empiric realities, in studies on anthropology and religion, has been a denomination of religions engaged with other spiritual beings than a single deity. Spiritual belief has not been considered a characteristic of all religions globally, but only of some localized religions, “[…] drawing the attention to people who maintain “traditional” practices (Harvey 2013: 4)”, and so-called other culture. However, the contemporary label of ‘animism’ include a wide range of cultural phenomena regarding conceptions of the consciousness of non-human organisms as well as of human organisms, of other than human persons as well as of human persons, Harvey argues.

Place and Space

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of ‘place’:

place, n. […] II. Senses relating to space or location. 3. b. Space (esp. as contrasted with time); continuous or unbounded extension in every direction; extension in space […] 5. a. A particular part or region of space; a physical locality, a locale; a spot, a location. Also: a region or part of the earth's surface […] b. The amount or quantity of space actually occupied by a person or thing; the position of a body in space, or in relation to other bodies; situation, location […] 6. A piece or plot of land; a holding […] (Oxford English Dictionary 2017).
The dictionary definition of ‘space’:

space, n. […] II. Denoting area or extension […] 6. Linear distance; interval between two or more points, objects, etc. […] 7. a. Physical extent or area; extent in two or three dimensions […] b. Extent or area sufficient for a purpose, action, etc.; room to contain or do something. Also in extended use […] (Oxford English Dictionary 2017).

In the material for this essay, the writers on the Australian Aboriginal religion use, almost exclusively, the word place, and only occasionally space. As for the theorists, Kong & Woods use space, never place. Both Eliade and Smith use place as well as space, but mostly place. Ingold uses mainly place, and argues against space.

Lily Kong and Orlando Woods (2016: 2-3) consider space to be a cause of, a channel for, and a consequence of religious competition, religious conflict and religious violence. Location is an often-overlooked analytical lens that cannot be ignored when studying competition, conflict and violence in connection with religion. Focus on place reveals otherwise hidden patterns of religious activity, power structures and control. Depending on who claims, fights, or designates a space, the space may either hide or emphasize the religious presence. Religious groups often fill space with meaning to work for an agenda or to achieve a purpose.

By giving religion a visible and material presence, space makes religion tangible and, therefore, something that can be owned, developed, changed and fought over. […] Space is the arena within much of religious competition conflict and violence unfold […] An analytical focus on the spaces of religious competition and conflict stands to yield greater understandings of religious power, control and subversion […] The occupation and management of space is frequently heavily political (Kong & Woods 2016: 2-3).

To take possession of space, and to manage it, is inseparable from the presence of the religious group in the given area, either physically, through territorial presence, or more abstract, through changing social identities, cultural interaction and religious acceptance. Regardless of the type of space, religious possession of space always involves hierarchical power relationships between dominance and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, of power struggle between different religious groups (Kong & Woods 2016: 2-3).
3-4]. "[...] nobody being outside or beyond space or completely free from the struggle over space, given that all human action is both constitutive and enacted through space (Kong & Woods 2016: 4)."

According to Tim Ingold (2011: 141-147), space and place are always coupled because of the problems concerning the translation of the Germano-Scandinavian *raum* or *rum*, as philosophy on geography has its roots in the intellectual traditions of Germany and the Nordic countries. Space and room are quite distinct in English “...with room conceived as a highly localised life-containing compartment within the boundless totality of space...in its translation as ‘space’, *raum/rum* never entirely lost the sense of containment or enclosure that currently attaches to the notion of place (Ingold 2011: 147)”. Places exist, but not in space. Life is lived in an open environment, not in contained enclosed spaces. To Ingold, space is the most abstract, emptied and reality-detached term used to describe the world we live in. “Space is nothing, and because it is nothing it cannot truly be inhabited at all (Ingold 2011: 145).”

When I refer and quote, I use the terms of each writer. In my own writing, I use the term ‘place’, in the meaning of locality, in accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary.

**Land and Country**

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of ‘land’:

land, *n* [...] 1. a. The solid portion of the earth's surface, as opposed to *sea, water* [...] b. A tract of land [...] 2a. Ground or soil, esp. as having a particular use or particular properties [...] 3. a. A part of the earth's surface marked off by natural or political boundaries or considered as an integral section of the globe; a country, territory. Also put for the people of a country [...] 4. a. Ground or territory as owned by a person or viewed as public or private property; landed property [...] b. *pl*. Territorial possessions. †Also *rarely* in sing., a piece of landed property, an estate in land [...] 6. Expanse of country of undefined extent [...] (Oxford English Dictionary 2017).
The dictionary definition of ‘country’:

country, n. and adj. […] A. n. I. General uses. 1. The land of a person's birth, citizenship, residence, etc.; one's homeland […] 2. Land, terrain, or a region of undefined extent, esp. considered with regard to its physical characteristics […] a. As a mass noun: land, terrain […] b. As a count noun: a particular tract or expanse of land; a region […] 3. Chiefly with the. Originally: †the territory immediately outside a walled town or city, etc.; the environs (obs.). Subsequently: the areas away from towns, cities, and conurbations; the rural areas, the countryside; (in early use also) those parts of a state outside the capital, or away from the royal courts […] 4. a. An area of land of defined extent characterized by its human occupants or boundaries; a district or administrative region, typically one smaller than a nation or state […] 5. The territory of a nation; a region constituting an independent state, or a region, province, etc., which was once independent and is still distinct in institutions, language, etc. […] 6. The people of a district, region, or nation; the national population […] 11. Naut. a. A region of the sea or ocean […] B. adj. In predicative use: rural, countrified, unsophisticated; (also) of or belonging to the landed gentry, or following the lifestyle or pursuits regarded as typical of them […] (Oxford English Dictionary 2017).

In the material, on the Australian Aboriginal religion, for this essay, the term ‘land’ is the most used term to describe the Aboriginal peoples’ connection to where they live their lives. These works are from the nineteen-nineties. In a more recent work, Kristina Sehlin MacNeil (2017: 34) stresses on the term ‘Country’, which, she suggests, in an Indigenous Australian context, is a wider concept than ‘land’ or ‘area’. The concept of Country describes not a passive piece of territory, like in the Western conceptions of land, but rather a living and creative entity with a deep and ongoing relationship with the humans responsible for it. The connection to Country means identity, kinship, law, responsibility, inheritance and legacy. The Indigenous Australians consider themselves as born to the Country and indistinguishable from it, according to Sehlin MacNeil.

When referring and quoting, I use the terms of each writer. In my own writing, I use ‘Country’.
Material

I have used the databases of University of Gävle (Higgins, Discovery, LIBRIS and Google Scholar), and I have had assistance from university librarians, to find the written material for this work. ‘Place’, ‘space’, ‘sacred place’, sacred space’, ‘religion’, ‘Australia’, ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘indigenous’ have been the initial search words.

On religion

I have used the research on the Australian Aboriginal religion to describe the Aboriginal worldview. This research is the investigation, interpretation and deduction by scholars of Western tradition, not any given truth. I refer to the researchers’ findings and their own conclusions, not to any given facts.

I briefly refer to works of Harvey Arden, Frank Brennan and David H. Turner, but my main references are Monica Engelhart and Tony Swain. I have decided to use the works of Engelhart and Swain primarily, because of their in-depth knowledge on several aspects of the Aboriginal religion, of the focus of their works, and, most of all, because of their writings on the meaning of place to the Aboriginal peoples. Extending the Tracks is Engelhart’s, a historian of religion at Stockholm University, doctoral thesis. The work is primarily on male initiation rites among the Australian Aboriginal, but the writing contains considerable information on general life, society, culture and belief. When Swain’s A Place for Strangers was released, it was the first continent-wide study of the impact of outsiders on the Australian Aboriginal peoples. Swain, senior lecturer in the Department of Religion at the University of Sydney, in the book, investigates myth, ritual, cosmology and philosophy, before and after impact.

On the theories

Religion and Space, by Lily Kong, professor of social sciences, and Orlando Woods, research fellow, of Singapore Management University, is a plea on the importance of
space in relation to religion. It is also an account for previous work and theory on religion and space. Mircea Eliade, who died in 1986, was a historian of religion and professor at the University of Chicago. One of his allegedly most influential works is *The sacred and the Profane*, where he, out of ethnographic data of an Australian Aboriginal people, designs a theory on the conception of sacred place as a sacred centre, a cosmic axis connecting the human and the superhuman world. Jonathan Z. Smith, also a historian of religion, also at the University of Chicago, is, in his *To Take Place*, critical to Eliade’s assumptions, and puts forward some theories of his own, on place, in general as well as in an Australian Aboriginal context. Tim Ingold is a professor of social anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. In *Being Alive*, he is discussing life and the human perception of the environment, and states that his deductions are strongly influenced by the thinking of what is usually called animistic societies.

**Method**

Opting for a critical analysis of written material, I have used the suggestions of Neil McCaw (2013: 18-31), including his undergraduate questionnaire, the diagnostic tool for serious and self-conscious reading, to keep an objective mind to the texts, and to keep me aware of any biases on my own behalf. I have used the suggestions of Thorsten Thurén (2013: 81-89, 110-118) to keep my attention on the reliability and the probability of the references. McCaw stresses on letting the text speak for itself, seeing a text as perspectives, rather than a single perspective, as supported or unsupported, as persuasive or unconvincing, rather than correct or incorrect. We all interpret the texts we read, and therefore, to McCaw, we are all biased because of our personalities, interests, life stories and knowledge. Inevitably, we will read, just as we will write, from ourselves, and this is the starting position where ideology, in the meaning of bias and subjectivity, emerges, and this is knowledge we have to carry with us. Thurén stresses that no sources of information, how absurd they might seem, should be rejected initially, everything shall be considered worth to investigate. Reasons for reliability and probability is mainly, to Thurén, depending on competence and openness. I find the writers of the material for this essay most competent, they have specified their references, and thereby, according to Thurén, enhanced the reliability, and they all, but Eliade, have explained their methods to
reach their conclusions, and thus enhancing the reliability even further, to Thurén’s reasoning.

The Australian Aboriginal religion

Monica Engelhart (1998: 15-23) recounts that before the colonization of Australia, the Aboriginal peoples relied completely on hunting and gathering in small foraging groups. The men hunted bigger game; the women searched for vegetables and hunted smaller game. Sharing the foodstuffs was a very important social principle, sometimes according to strict rules that guaranteed interaction between different parts of the society. The natural environment, the land, was the source of provisions, and this one and only source was not improved in any way, except for the few local exceptions of blocking watercourses, making irrigation channels, the placing of bees in suitable trees, some cultivation of certain grubs and sporadic yam root growing and seed planting. The richness of the land and seasonal variations in the environment stated the mobility of the group, the population density and the species utilized, and this varied all over the continent. The foraging groups consisted of individuals related via the extended family, with each individual being categorised in one of four or eight named sections. Often several groups came together in larger compounds called tribes. Kinship and classifying orders were systemized reciprocally, with close as well as distant kin. “In that way an individual’s entire social environment was mapped out in a well-integrated system (Engelhart 1998: 20)”. In a similar way, the individual’s natural environment was mapped out into categories. The whole world – plants, animals, natural phenomena – was classified according to certain religious ideas. The different Aboriginal groups were territorial, but the defining criterion was sites, rather than areas; the area was viewed as a number of sites with patches of land between them, and not as an enclosed space. These sites were connected to the Dreaming. Engelhart holds that every descent group, who was patrilineal, had ritual links to certain sites with the connected rights to forage there, and duties to watch over it and perform the appropriate rituals for the continuance and well-being of the land.

Tony Swain (1993: 20-25) reports that before impact, all Aboriginal societies had their own language, customs and beliefs. Some aspects of the belief-systems varied throughout the continent, but some were the same. One such common aspect, for all Aboriginal peoples, was Dreamtime, though every language group had its own term for this.

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term Dreamtime or Dreaming to describe the Aboriginal beliefs is, at the same time, both almost appropriate and misleading; the Dreaming is not a dream, it is a reality, and before the European invasion, there was no such thing, in Aboriginal minds, equivalent to the Western understanding of the term time. Swain argues that, from an Aboriginal point of view, it is more proper to talk about place and space rather than time. The Dreaming is contemporary, it is now, in this world; the sacred is confined to spatial configurations, rather than to temporal. The Aboriginal peoples have, or had before the European invasion, no ontology in terms of time. There is a rhythmic understanding of events in understanding the world, a system that is precise, serviceable and aesthetically pleasing, and therefore requires no reference to time. Dreamtime, or Dreaming, is derived from the Arrernte *Altjiringa*. It is a mistranslation of the *altjira* root, meaning eternal, uncreated, springing out of itself. Even though this term is known to concern human sleep dreams, it has become an often uncritically used term in contemporary literature, thus becoming a self-fulfilling academic prophecy, according to Swain. Dreaming is a dimension of reality, and a period of time; it was there in the beginning, it underlies the present, and it is a determinant of the future. The present is a feature of the past *and* of the future. According to Swain the best English words to use, to get as close to the Aboriginal meaning of Dreaming as possible, is Abiding Events; Abiding Events collectively form Abiding Law, or, in short, Law. Before contact with peoples from outside Australia, the Aboriginal worlds consisted of rhythmic events and Abiding Events in interplay. This interplay between the rhythmic events and the Abiding Events was linked not by time but through place. The Law is being-design collectively inherent in Abiding Events, the locus of this Law is several Dreamings, which are located spatially, and not temporally. “[...] the entire discussion of time – linear, cyclical or Dream – has diverted our attention from the uncompromising position of place in Aboriginal worldviews (Swain 1993: 23)”.

“The Dreaming [...] an eternal dimension of the world that contains all existing creative powers, that can be evoked at need, and that manifests itself in human beings, natural objects and the natural environment – in fact, in the world itself (Engelhart 1998: 23)”.

To refer to one’s Dreaming is to refer to extremely holy knowledge and wisdom, and to moral truth.

“[If there is one principle permeating the Law it is *geosophy*: all knowledge and wisdom derives, through Abiding Events (Dreamings), from place (Swain 1993: 25)”. 


“Aboriginal understandings do not recognise the cosmos as a unified arena in which events occur; one cannot speak of space of any kind in the singular. The basic and only unit of Aboriginal cosmic structure is the place (Swain 1993: 28-29). Every piece of land in Australia has a group of people responsible for it. This responsibility is not limited to the land itself, each group also have responsibilities towards certain aspects within that particular land, for example an animal, a plant or a natural object. Everything is considered living, and the people of the specific land represent all the living creatures within it. The people are related to the creatures, they do not worship them; the humans are the creatures’ symbols. The Aboriginal peoples never speak about their totem; they use the word Dreaming, or the word’s local language equivalents. The Dreaming is always connected to land (Engelhart 1988: 43). In Australia, the so-called totemism means “[…] that certain humans share their place-being with other place-derived existents (Swain 1993: 35)”. All existence emerges from the being of place, all existents have Law, but only specific life essences emerges from specific sites. Therefore, a site cannot be self-sufficient, every living thing is an extension of their land, but no land can contain all life forms. Aboriginal ontology, Swain argues, is insistent on the immutability of place, and thus it is not possible with time or history as philosophical determination. The shapes of lands are established in Abiding Events, but there is no world creation, no cosmic centre, and no recognition of any single unifying world principle. Abiding Events stress, that place is conscious, and that spatial intentionality gives place extension by linking sites in direction-determined pathways. For the Aboriginal peoples, space is a network of places that rest on ancestral mind-matter (Swain 1993: 35-36). “[…] places, while autonomous, are unique and hence cannot contain the store of all existence. A place contains specific existence potentials, human and other, which form the ‘totemic’ nucleus of a place (Swain 1993: 36)

Engelhart (1998: 34-43) and Swain (1993: 32-36) recount that in the Aboriginal traditions there is no first cause, no world origin or creation. Rather, the world is seen as taking shape. The basis of the Aboriginal worldview of Abiding Events is that something came out of the earth, moved over it and returned back into it. In other words, place moves. Moreover, it has to move. Place must move because it has intentionality; place itself is stretched by conscious action, and all life is conscious because it is an extension of the consciousness of place. Also, place must move because it has to relate sites to each other
and thus overcome the indivisibility that would be the result of un-extended place. The spiritual ancestors do not move from one place to another, they rather link sites by a common intentionality of place. The movement of the spiritual ancestors means that place has inherent extension, and that places are related through structural networks. Because a place cannot be self-sufficient with species or a specific people, the system of “totemism" extend place by letting certain existence potentials, human and others, share its being. All rights and obligations derive from people’s existence as extensions of places. The biological parents do “[...] not contribute to the ontological substance of the child, but rather 'carries’ a life whose essence belongs, and belongs alone, to a site, [...] the mother carries, but does not contribute to, a life-potential of place. [...] Life is annexation of place (Swain 1993: 39)”. Death, Swain holds, causes a major disruption of life, but it is not resented, because life is considered as a temporary billowing in human form. The spiritual ancestor will return to the place from which it emerged. In this sense humans are not considered born of other humans, humans are derived from land. The first birth is, in initiation rituals, both symbolically appropriated, and reversed by men to reveal the land’s true land-self. The spiritual ancestors must return to become once more a fragment of the power of their country. This leaves no room for eternal life for the individual personality or the embodied self. As life’s actions are either rhythmmed or spontaneous events, they do not have value in comparison with the Abiding Events, on which the cosmos rests. There is neither rewards nor punishments at the culmination of life. The spirit is restored to place. Death is a return of the spiritual ancestor, the place-being, to place, Swain concludes.

Since the Dreaming did not stop when the earth had been shaped and the human beings had started living in the stipulated way, but continued in parallel with the common, “past-and-future" time, the mythic ancestors continued to live in the places from which they once disappeared, and people were able to contact them continuously. The areas where they had emerged, wandered and disappeared were known to every grown-up and the sites where they had left their life-giving substances were considered particularly sacred, but also extremely dangerous since their creative force was of supernatural kind (Engelhart 1998: 45-46).

Harvey Arden (1994: 200-204) holds that Aboriginal Australia is covered with places, and that these places are connected to each other. As each land belongs to a people, it is
not possible to go through their country without that people’s permission. As sites are
dangerous, and some more than others, you have to travel along safe paths when you
leave your country. You have to travel along certain lines, the only safe places to go on.
The sites, of which some are meeting places for ceremony, are connected through these
lines, called Story Lines or Song Lines. The lines are the pathways the spiritual ancestors
walked as they sang life to the world in the Dreamtime, and the lines are channels for
changing goods, and for messengers. The stories and the songs tell how to move along
the line.

The importance of land and place, Swain (1993: 50-57) states, has to do with identity and
relationship. As life is an extension of territory, and as death is a return of a locality’s
being-essence, the place of the land is essential for Aboriginal identity, both individual
and collective. As identified lands and their people relate to each other, the world is thus
maintained. The main task for the human beings is to maintain the shape of the world.
However, this is not achieved with a certain group’s or individual’s exclusive right to that
particular location they, he or she is connected. The humans who are of a land’s stuff do
not, and can not, have the exclusive right to that site. A site is more dangerous for the
people connected to it; therefore, a relationship is needed to ensure that the land’s own
emanations do not return without the association of other land emanations. Those who
share the site’s spiritual ancestors ensure that life essences effervesce from the location
and thus maintain the balance of resources, but they have no exclusive right to the
foodstuffs within the territory. The Aboriginal peoples have therefore no possibilities to
be self-sufficient, neither ritually nor economically. The Aboriginal communities form a
structured locative interdependent network. This interdependence counteracts the
destruction of the world-pattern; to conquer land by war over territory is impossible, to
do so would be to consume another person’s being; it would be cannibalism. What is to
be prevailed at all costs is Abidingness, according to Swain.

Engelhart (1998: 201-204) reports that the identity of an Aboriginal person, before
colonization, was constructed by elements of locality, section or subsection filiation,
spiritual descent, totemic affiliation, territorial affiliation and language. The local descent
group, who defined and confirmed the mytho-spiritual linkages of its members to a
specific area of land, was the social unit, and the main identification marker. The
relationship between an individual and the land was important and intimate; there was an emotional bond between an individual and his country. The land had been given to the human beings by the spiritual ancestors, to be taken care of for all times. Every individual belonging to that land was bestowed with the vitalizing spiritual ancestor spirit, and that spirit would go back to the same land after the death of the body. Every individual had residual rights and responsibilities for the continuation and maintenance of that particular land, which necessitated active participation in the ceremonial life associated with that land. The allocation rules were based on land affiliation through one’s Dreaming. The spiritual ancestor ancestry of an individual determined which natural object or objects the individual was responsible for, as well as the parts of the land he or she had access to, and responsibilities for. The access to land was crucial for the hunting and gathering economy, and therefore it was important that everyone’s particular land affiliation was recognised. However, according to Engelhart, because of the duty to strengthen the land and make it fertile and abundant through rites, the individual’s land affiliation could never be seen as only an individual concern. A continuum of interplay between partners belonging to lands in a defined region, on the one hand, and between partners of the same spiritual ancestor track stretching over one or more regional “boundaries”, on the other. All aspects of Aboriginal life were held together by the Dreaming, which was expressed through the land. According to this notion, every living person extends his or her ancestry, through the Dreaming affiliation, right back to the creative epoch itself. Because the communication with the Dreaming powers is kin-based, the spiritual ancestors are receptive to appeals or requests from their human kin, if ritual appeals and is performed properly. The spiritual ancestors, as co-residents of the same cosmic order, are obliged to respond positively to guarantee the continuance of life. However, to make the proper ritual appeals demand a great amount of know-how. This expertise is, according to Engelhart, largely transmitted in the initiation process.

Engelhart (1998: 207-216) holds that the Aboriginal persons were taught the mysteries of life through their whole life. As small children, when they followed their mothers on forage trips, they learned what could be used and how to use it, in the natural environment. The children were taught which parts to avoid and where to walk safely; they learned the sites and tracks connected to the spiritual ancestors. All people, young as well as old, learned from the rituals and the ritual context, from the stories told in the myths, in the
songs, in the dances, and in the artistic paintings on bodies, on objects and on the ground. The initiation process widened this knowledge, Engelhart recounts. The youth had to learn their own spiritual ancestor track, manifested in the geographic environment. The first step to this previously prohibited knowledge was a part of the initiation rite, but the learning continued after the initiation, as well. This was an on-going process of learning new tracks and thus mapping out new environments. The social environment was extended because of the fuller acquaintance with distant groups, and the geographical environment became better known when the young could walk the tracks, visit the sites and be presented to the objects and rituals embodying their spiritual ancestor. The tracks themselves were sacred, and so were the sites, and the sites could only be approached on the same track as the Spiritual ancestor once had wandered. The human network that evolved from the co-operation of different groups in society meant, according to Engelhart, that the individuals had their social landscape mapped out; everyone got a social orientation. They also got a mythic orientation, in that they became familiar with the spiritual ancestor tracks. Because of the wanderings in the spiritual ancestors’ footsteps, everyone got a landscape orientation, as well. It was almost impossible to separate the natural environment from the spiritual ancestor environment, an orientation in the landscape was almost equal to an orientation in the mythic landscape of the spiritual ancestors; to present the youth to the spiritual ancestors was often equal to showing parts of the country.

The initiation process can thus be regarded as a mapping out of a geographical environment, a social environment and a mythical environment, all cognitively and empirically interlinked and interconnected, separable only on an analytical level (Engelhart 1998: 214).

Places are not sacred because they refer to a beginning, they are sacred because the sacred essence of the ancestors is there, in the land. Sacredness is a spatial property, not a temporal. The land is the only possible covering concept as a natural, geographical, social and sacred entity. The road, or the track, can be seen as a symbolical network over the entire initiation complex – even over the entire religion, as a metaphor for the Dreaming (Engelhart 1998: 213).
Swain (1993: 276-293) holds that the encounters with strangers, with very different belief systems, became dramatic and philosophically threatening to the Aboriginal peoples. The first contacts with non-Aboriginal peoples took place in northern Cape York, when Melanesians, with agricultural traditions, and the beliefs linked to these traditions, arrived. The Aboriginal peoples had to cope with the difficulties of incorporating another, new, foreign and unprecedented land-being in their conceptions. The solution became a common ontological barrier, between the two groups, in the form of a Hero Cult, which allowed the Aboriginal order to carry on. The only real change was that the extension of place came to include places of another world, and that these places came to be heard in the heroes’ songs. A struggle between matrilineal and patrilineal principles arose, but never led to any of the systems exceeding the other. The heroes came to be pan-Aboriginal important. The heroes were on the verge of breaking apart from the land itself, but they were to endure as earthly beings.

Among the islands off the coast of Arnhem Land, the Indonesian presence caused a major issue, Swain recounts. The Indonesians did not recognize the Aboriginal conceptions of place, which meant that territorial invasion suddenly was an opportunity. The solution became the All-Mother Cult, which could accommodate a new conception of place without directly undermining the locative ideals. The All-Mother Cult embraced a vast worldly area, but the conception of specified place was maintained, and time was not allowed to change the form of the country. Identity based on kinship and cosmology weakened, as focus came on patrilineal kinship, and became an important metaphysical factor. The All-Mother came to attract undesirable attention to the human body, the mother as mother, but acted as counterbalance to the patrilineal identity, and therefore remained relatively unscathed from the now complemented determination of place-based spiritual origin.

The European colonization of Australia came to change the Aboriginal conceptions of place radically, according to Swain (1993: 276-293). In pastoral environments with long-term white settlements, the importance of sites reduced, for the Aboriginal peoples, over generations of lost contact with their home countries. It was under these circumstances that the external pressure came to be a threat to the traditional conceptions, rather than a complement. Localized powers came to be replaced by an idea of world centres and a
promise of time breaking free from the limitations of eternal lands. Here emerged pessimistic eschatologies and redemptive millenniums. The biggest change in cosmology was the notion that sacred power is neither earthly nor plural. It was only in south-eastern Australia, however, where the invasion was most extensive, these conceptions were spread to any wider extent, and the conceptions came to decline during the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, however, the Supreme Deity, the All-Father, had amassed all life essences to himself, as well as removed them from the earth into a, for the living unknown, realm in the sky, “…a refracted ideology of invasion chilling in its familiarity (Swain 1993: 283)”. The High God’s elevation from the land was both a rise beyond localised affiliations and a politico-religious premise that could, theoretically, embrace or conquer other worlds. The belief of returning to the land, at death, as an eminence of the ancestor’s, the land-being’s, existence was replaced by the belief of leaving the earth and, as individual spiritual beings, ending up in a better home in heaven.

The ever-intensifying intrusion of outsiders upon Aboriginal Abiding places thus introduced intellectual revolutions driving people from Abiding Events toward temporalized hopes for an other-worldly Utopia; a non-territorial pan-Aboriginality and an immortal individual self, freed from land (Swain 1993: 286).

The European colonization of Australia had the most profound philosophical and religious challenges, as well as the hardest social and political difficulties, for the Aboriginal peoples. The Aboriginal struggle for civil rights changed, with the start of the land rights struggle in the 1960’s, when efforts went from trying to achieve equality within the White law to insist on White law to recognize Aboriginal law, Swain holds.

In the religious domain, God was said to endorse Abiding land-Events. In political spheres, Captain Cook Law was deemed to be false, deceiving Blacks and Whites alike, for a true law, the real White Law, lay beneath the colonial lie. All of this, of course, accompanied the massive, continent-wide co-ordinated Aboriginal awareness of the issue – Land Rights (Swain 1993: 292)".
To Monica Engelhart (1995: 96), the word ‘land’ is the key word that covers all aspects of the Aboriginal religion. The land is the foundation for Dreamtime, Dreaming and Altjiringa. Whatever the religious dimension is called, what is central to the Aboriginal religion is the land. The land itself is the divine power in the Aboriginal religion. The land is sacred. The land is a promise as well as an obligation. The land is like a holy scripture to the Aboriginal peoples, according to Engelhart, and the arguments for land rights are outmost based on religious conceptions.

Harvey Arden (1994: 22-23, 101-102) holds that the Aboriginal peoples are the land, without it they are nothing. The land where an Aboriginal people live cannot be any land. The land, that particular land, has been given to that specific people, by the spiritual ancestors. The Aboriginal individuals are named after the ground’s different aspects, after the plants and the animals, after the stars and clouds of that land; the Aboriginal people represents these aspects of the land. In Australia today, this effects the struggle for land rights. The land right struggle is spiritual rather than political or economic, without the land, Arden argues, the Aboriginal peoples have no religion, no spiritual life.

To Frank Brennan (1998: 142-143, 155-156), there is no ready differentiation between law, religion and culture in Aboriginal society; the Aboriginal peoples are always connected to land. They see their reality in terms of their relationship with the spiritual ancestors, with the land and with each other. The Dreaming is life-giving as well as death-dealing, change is not sought nor comes as a surprise; no change can challenge the Aboriginal faith, the faith of a religion that is never an idealised system in isolation, but rather a vital force for contemporary peoples. The more the Aboriginal peoples are allowed to speak for their land, Brennan argues, the more they will be able to maintain and reveal the life-sustaining capacity of the land, which, being the only constant in a sea of change, is sacred.

According to David Turner (1996: xxviii), the closest English equivalent to the Aboriginal conception of land is the concept of Promised Land.

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1 Engelhart 1995 is in Swedish. The Swedish term 'land' translates to the English 'country' as well as to the English 'land'.
Theories

My theoretical point of departure

The animistic understandings of life stand apart from the non-animistic understandings of life. The Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place stand apart from any other conceptions of place. This is the reason I believe the conceptions of the Aboriginal peoples cannot be studied, truly, within the same framework as other conceptions. My theoretical viewpoint is that each of the theories on place, in itself, is not enough, as a thorough theoretical method for the understanding of the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place.

My theoretical approach is that neither the substantial Insider standpoint nor the situational Outsider standpoint, on studies on place, are sufficient to enable better comprehension of the fundamental importance of place in the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of life. The Meshwork standpoint, I believe, will help to come closer to an understanding of some aspects, as it is a similar way of thinking of the world to the beliefs of animistic peoples, and, thus, to the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. However, my approach is that I will find the best theoretical approaches for studies on the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place if this investigation remains open-ended.

The theoretical standpoints

According to Lily Kong and Orlando Woods (2016), over the past few decades, theories about sacred space have been developed according to two distinct axes for studies of the consequences sacred space have on the religious and non-religious actor’s conceptions and behaviours in relation to space. One is the insider standpoint, or substantial standpoint, the other is the outsider standpoint, or the situational standpoint.

The insider standpoint is mainly based on Mircea Eliade’s theories of the sacred, Kong and Woods argue. The sacred, to Eliade’s theory, is distinctly separated from the profane,
and the sacred manifests itself to man in certain spaces – a phenomenon he calls hierophany – and some spaces are spaces for communication between the human world and the supernatural world. The hierophanies are perceived, by man, as evidence of the divine, and the most significant hierophanies constitute a world axis, an *axis mundi*, which is the point of existential orientation. There is a clear separation between the sacred space and the profane space; the sacred space and the profane space represent distinctly different knowledge and experiences. The sacred is considered an inherent true characteristic of sacred spaces, an embedded and fully integrated property that can neither change nor disappear (Kong & Woods 2016: 3-10).

When a space, sacred to one group, is not seen as sacred by other groups, secular or of other religious conceptions, the space is, instead, interpreted as a religious space, by the other groups, Kong and Woods argue. It is from this point of view that the outsider standpoint examines the religious conceptions of space. Instead of investigating any ontological conceptions of space, the focus is on critically examining the human processes that make the space perceived as sacred. Space is considered as something claimed, developed and negotiated by groups of special interests. Nothing is seen as inherently sacred; the occurrence of religion in a space depends on human activity. A space is imbued of meaning through various processes of sacralisation, and these processes contribute to the ongoing construction and management of the space-bound sacredness. The processes of sacralisation of space are necessary to maintain the separation between sacred space and profane space, and without these processes, space would be meaningless and the sacred would be an empty signifier. Location is dynamic and changing, space is constantly changing and never becomes perfect (Kong & Woods 2016: 3-10).

Tim Ingold (2011) has his own theory on space; he is actually arguing against the notion of space. “Biologists say that living organisms inhabit *environments*, not space, and whatever else they may be, human beings are certainly organisms...Space is nothing, and because it is nothing it cannot truly be inhabited at all (Ingold 2011: 145)”. A specified piece of the environment is not to be seen as any confined space, but rather as an open part of the environment, consisting of places. Places exist, but not in space. Lives are never lived in one place or another, but always on the way from one place to another.
Instead of the web of life, where individuals are described as connected by a network of connected points, the individuals are connected through a meshwork of interwoven lines of life, growth and movement, where the lines of life do not connect, as in a network, but are rather the lines along which organisms perceive and act. This way of understanding the world is close to the conceptions of the ontologies of peoples usually called animists (Ingold 2011: 63-71, 141-148). I call this theory the Meshwork standpoint.

**Place according to Mircea Eliade**

According to Mircea Eliade (1959), the sacred is the opposite of the profane, and comprises something completely different from the profane. Eliade elaborates on the definition by referring to the term hierophany, which he, himself, has introduced. Hierophany is when the sacred manifests itself to man. History of religions is a large number of hierophanies, manifestations of sacred realities. Hierophanies are mystic actions that have a completely different nature than everyday events, and constitute a reality that does not belong to our world, manifested in objects that are otherwise an integral part of our natural profane world. Eliade believes that the religious man tries to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe.

Spatial non-homogeneity expresses itself, Eliade argues, in the experience of the opposition between sacred place and every other place. The religious experience of the site's non-homogeneity is a primordial experience that confirms the creation of the world, and primarily a religious experience that precedes all thoughts of the world. The place creates a gap that reveals a fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in a hierophany, not only a crack in the homogeneity of the place occurs, but also an absolute reality is revealed, as opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding areas. The manifestations that constitute the sacred are what ontologically create the world. It is difficult to navigate in an extensive landscape, but the hierophany reveals a fixed point, a centre point, a Centre. Nothing can start, nothing can be accomplished, without orientation, and all orientation requires a fixed point. That is why, to Eliade, religious man always seeks to place his dwelling at the centre of the earth, at the centre of the world. In order to live in the world, it must be created, given a
foundation, and no world can be born in the chaos that exists in the homogeneity and relativity that exists in the profane space, on the profane place. The discovery, or projection, of a fixed point, a Centre, is equivalent to the creation of the world. The revelation of a sacred place allows for a fixed point, which makes it possible to have orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to be alive truly. In contrast to the sacred stands the profane, where space and place are somewhat homogeneous and neutral, and where the homogeneity, and hence the relativity of place is maintained. In profane space, there is no possibility for any true orientation (Eliade 1959: 10-25). The sharp distinctions between different places are

On the most archaic levels of culture […] expressed by various images of an opening; here in this sacred closure, communication with the gods is made possible; hence there must be a door to the world above, by which the gods can descend to earth and man can symbolically ascend to heaven (Eliade 1959: 26).

Religious man’s desire to live in the sacred is, to Eliade, in fact, his desire to settle in an objective reality, to avoid being paralyzed by the subjective experiences of the illusion without end, to live in a real, actual world. This behaviour occurs at all levels of the religious humanity, but is especially evident in the endeavours to be in a sacred world always, in sanctified places. To orientate is to create sacred place. Hence, the developed techniques man uses to construct these sacred places. The creation of sacred place is done through ritual, where man recreates the works of God (Eliade 1959: 25-29).

"One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies […] (Eliade 1959: 29)” is the contrast between the inhabited territory of these communities and the surrounding unknown indeterminable areas, Eliade argues. The inhabited area is the world, "our world", the cosmos. Everything outside is not part of the cosmos, this is a form of "other world". Every inhabited territory is a cosmos. Because the inhabited area is sanctified, it is the work of the gods, or in communication with the world of the gods. Our world is a universe within the sacred, which has already manifested itself. The religious significance implies a cosmogonic significance. The sacred reveals an absolute reality while providing an opportunity for orientation, thereby laying the foundation for the world, by assessing
limits and determining the world order. To sacralise an area is equivalent to making it into a cosmos, to recreate creation (Eliade 1959: 29-32).

An uninhabited area, to Eliade, in the sense of uninhabited by what we consider our own people, means an area of chaos. By occupying an area, and especially by settling in it, human beings symbolically transform the area, through ritual rehearsal of the cosmogony, into a cosmos. What is considered our world must be created, and every creation takes place through the paradigmatic model of the gods’ creation the universe. Nothing that is not our world is a real world. A territory can be made ours only by recreating it, by sacralising it, by repeating the works of the gods (Eliade 1959: 29-32).

To describe the function of sacred place as communication with the gods, and as orientation, Eliade turns to Australia, to "[...] the traditions of an Arunta tribe, the Achilpa [...] (Eliade 1959: 33)” and a myth told to anthropologists Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen.

It must be understood that the cosmicization of unknown territories is always a consecration; to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods. The close connection between cosmicization and consecration is already documented on the elementary levels of culture – for example, among the nomadic Australians whose economy is still at the stage of gathering and small-game hunting. According to the traditions of an Arunta tribe, the Achilpa, in mythical times the divine being Numbakula cosmicized their future territory, created their Ancestor, and established their institutions. From the trunk of a gum tree Numbakula fashioned the sacred pole (kauwa-anwa) and, after anointing it with blood, climbed it and disappeared into the sky. This pole represents a cosmic axis, for it is around the sacred pole that territory becomes habitable, hence is transformed into a world. The sacred pole consequently plays an important role ritually. During their wanderings the Achilpa always carry it with them and choose the direction they are to take by the direction toward which it bends. This allows them, while being continually on the move, to be always in "their world” and, at the same time, in communication with the sky into which Numbakula vanished.

For the pole to be broken denotes catastrophe; it is like "the end of the world, ” reversion to chaos. Spencer and Gillen report that once, when the pole was broken, the entire clan were in consternation; they wandered about aimlessly for a time, and finally lay down on the ground together and waited for death to overtake them. [Footnote 3]. This example admirably illustrates both the cosmological function of the sacred pole and its
soteriological role. For on the one hand the *kauwa-auwa* reproduces the pole Numbakula used to cosmicize the world, and on the other the Achilpa believe it to be the means by which they can communicate with the sky realm. Now, human existence is possible only by virtue of this permanent communication with the sky. The world of the Achilpas really becomes *their* world only in proportion as it reproduces the cosmos organized and sanctified by Numbakula. Life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent; in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos. Once contact with the transcendent is lost, existence in the world ceases to be possible – and the Achilpa let themselves die.

To settle in a territory is, in the last analysis, equivalent to consecrating it. When settlement is not temporary, as among the nomads, but permanent, as among sedentary peoples, it implies a vital decision that involves the particular place, organizing it, inhabiting it, are acts that presuppose an existential choice – the choice of the universe, that one is prepared to assume by "creating" it. Now, this universe is always the replica of the paradigmatic universe created and inhabited by the gods; hence it shares in the sanctity of the gods’ work.

The sacred pole of the Achilpa supports *their* world and ensures communication with the sky. Here we have the prototype of a cosmological image that has been very widely disseminated – the cosmic pillars that support heaven and at the same time open the road to the world of the gods (Eliade 1959: 32-35).


Achilpa and their pole illustrate, to Eliade, *axis mundi*, the axis of the world, the Centre of the world, the sacred place that connects the humans with the divine, and that makes communication between the two worlds possible. The place of the world axis is a sacred place. Here it is possible to break through the universe's different planes. Here an opening has been created, either upward, towards the divine world, or downward, towards the underworld, the world of the dead. The three cosmic levels – the earth, the sky and the underworld – have been connected to each other. This connection is sometimes expressed through the metaphors of an *axis mundi*, which both connects and supports heaven and earth, and have its base rooted in the underworld. Such a cosmic pillar can exist only in the very centre of the universe, as the entire inhabited world extends around the pillar (Eliade 1959: 35-37). This constitute the religious conceptions and cosmological symbols that are inseparably linked, and shape what Eliade calls the world system.

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2 Eliade writes 1926; *The Arunta* was issued 1927.
Mountains and temples are the most important examples of symbolism for a world centre, to Eliade; the temple is a replica of the cosmological mountain, and hence the link between the earth and the sky, and the temple grounds reach deep into the underworld. The real and true world is always located in the middle, at the centre point, because this is the point of breach, and constitute the possibility for communication between the various cosmic zones. Man in the traditional society wanted to live in the centre always (Eliade 1959: 37-43). Eliade returns to the Achilpa to exemplify this traditional man. “But he felt the need to live at the Center always – like the Achilpa, who, as we saw, always carried the sacred pole, the axis mundi, with them, so that they should never be far from the Center and should remain in communication with the supraterrestrial world (Eliade 1959: 43-44”).

Since "our world" is a cosmos, to Eliade, every attack on our world is a threat that can turn the cosmos into chaos. Because our world was founded by imitating the paradigmatic work of the gods, it means that the enemies who attack our world are to be seen as the enemies of the gods, the enemies who were defeated by the gods at the beginning of time. The attack on our world is the same as an act of revenge from the mythical enemy, which is revolting against the work of the gods, against cosmos, and who wants to destroy the world. Our enemies belong to the forces of chaos. Any damage caused by an attack is equivalent to a return to chaos. Symbolic thinking, Eliade believes, assimilates the human enemy with the devil and with death. The consequence of an attack, whether it is demonic or military, always ends in the same way, in decay, disillusionment and death. The same images, the same symbolism, is used nowadays, as well, to express the dangers threatening, in Eliade’s words, a certain kind of civilization; chaos, disorder and darkness
will flood our world to repeal order and fundamental structures, that will decrease the flow and cause formlessness, everything that means chaos. These paradigmatic images and symbols remain in the language and in the templates of non-religious man; some of the religious conceptions of the world still lives on, subconsciously, in the non-religious human behaviour (Eliade 1959: 44-50).

There are two methods to transform a settlement ritually, according to Eliade, whether it is in a territory or in a house, into a cosmos, into an *imago mundi*. One method is to project the four horizons from a central point, like in the construction of a village, or in the symbolic installation of the *axis mundi*, as in the construction of a building. The second method is to repeat the paradigmatic actions of the gods through construction rituals (Eliade 1959: 51-53). Again, Eliade turns to the Achilpa.

> [...] the first method – cosmicizing a space by projection of the horizons or by installation of the *axis mundi* – is already documented in the most archaic stages of culture (cf. the *kauwa-auwa* pole of the Australian Achilpa), while the second method seems to have been developed in the culture of the earliest cultivators (Eliade 1959: 52-53).

Since a settlement, to Eliade, is an *imago mundi*, it is, according to him, located at the centre of the world. The reason there are no religious concerns regarding the fact that there is an infinite number of centres depends on the fact that it is not to any geographical location the reference is made, Eliade states; the location is an existential and sacred place. It is a sacred site, of completely different structure, that allows an endless number of breach points, and therefore an infinite number of ways for communication with the transcendent is made possible. The religious architecture came to take over, and to develop further, the cosmological symbolism that was already in the structure of, what Eliade calls, primitive settlements, and, yet again, he returns to the Achilpa. “In its turn the human habitation had been chronologically preceded by the provisional “holy place,” by a space provisionally consecrated and cosmicized (cf. the Australian Achilpa) (Eliade 1959: 58)”. All symbols and rituals that concern temples, cities, and buildings derive from this primary experience of sacred place, according to Eliade, referring to what he calls the higher civilizations and their new and significant valuation of temples, not only as an image, but also as an earthly reproduction of divine architecture. This conception, he
believes, has been taken over by Judaism, and is to be regarded as one of the probably latest interpretations of the primary experience of sacred place, in contrast to the profane place, which he claims is a new religious conception. The sacred city of Jerusalem, and the later Christian basilicas and cathedrals, which imitate the structure of the sacred city as well as depict a heavenly paradise, is a continuation of this symbolism (Eliade 1959: 58-62).

**Place according to Jonathan Z. Smith**

Jonathan Z. Smith (1987) is critical to Eliade’s theory on place from the symbolism of a centre. Smith means that the conception of an *axis mundi* out of information from the Achilpa, who Smith calls the Tjilpa, is completely wrong. To Smith, Eliade claims that man cannot live without a sacred Centre that allows man to cosmologize place, enabling communication with heaven and the supernatural world. By equating the pole of the Tjilpa ancestors with Numbakula’s pole, by emphasizing that the brake between heaven and earth has been caused by the break of the pole, Eliade has placed the traditions of the Northern Aranda in a celestial and transcendent context within his framework of universal symbolism around the Centre, Smith claims. Within that framework, space is determined from the connection of the place to the cosmogony, and enables an opening to a supernatural and distant world. Eliade interprets, according to Smith, the myth of the Tjilpa pole, as the pole enables the Tjilpa to cosmogonize the place, and communicate with the superhuman heaven. That is the reason, according to Smith, that Eliade believes the breaking of the pole means the end of the world. However, Numbakula is not a name for an individual divine being; it is a generic designation, a collective term. "It refers to the autochthonous class of "totemic ancestors" – those who "had been born out of their own eternity" (*altkirana nambakala*) (Smith 1987: 4)”. This myth is atypical to other Aranda mythology, Smith argues; the ancestors usually disappear down in the earth, from where they once came, or by turning to manifestations in the landscape or to *tjurunga*-objects. Australian Aboriginal mythology is generally of earthly transformation and continued presence, not of celestial withdrawal and disappearance. After their activities, the ancestors are sleeping under the ground, at a sacred place. Earlier versions of this myth do not treat Numbakula as a distinct divine being, according to Smith; this
interpretation is made only in Spencer and Gillen’s version of 1927. This is “[…] a Christianized reinterpretation of Arandan myth (Smith 1987: 5)”. Eliade’s conclusion is, to Smith, based on syncretism.

”The horizon of the Tjilpa myth is not celestial, it is relentlessly terrestrial and chthonic (Smith 1987: 10)”. The myth does not emphasize any dramatic creation, by transcendental figures, of the world out of chaos, nor any breach between these figures and the humans. The myth rather emphasizes the transformation and continuity of a world formed by the ancestors' movements over a featureless pristine earth (Smith 1987: 4-10).

During the Dreamtime, Smith recounts, when the ancestors appeared from their underground sleep, the topography of the present earth was created by the ancestors' activities. Every characteristic of today's landscape represents a trace, a deed, of these ancestors. When the ancestors died, they returned to sleep, underground, and left landmarks at the places where they returned. In most ancestral myths, the ancestors themselves turn into cliffs, trees, tjurunga objects or to the dust that constitutes the separate tribe. Every aspect of the landscape, like every living Tjilpa, is an objectification of these ancestors and their actions. The environs are considered originated from human activities, the environments are considered to be originated from human beings (Smith 1987: 11).

It is anthropology, not cosmology, that is to the fore. It is the ancestral/human alternation of and objectification in the landscape that has transformed the undifferentiated primeval space during the Dream-time into a multitude of historical places in which the ancestors, though changed, remain accessible. This is expressed in the myths. It is expressed as well in the extreme localization of the Aranda njinanga sectional organization, with its demarcated structures of homeland and birthplace (Smith 1987: 11).

Therefore, Smith argues, damage, or loss, does not necessarily mean any brake, fall or leap into chaos and non-existence. In fact, damage or loss can be the beginning of a process of adaptation and change, ”[…] which was, but is no longer, and yet remains present (Smith 1987: 11)”]. The ancestor’s transformation is an act that entails an eternal bond and immediate availability to the ancestor's particular personality. Through the process of change itself, by being disowned from its own self, and being placed in something else – like an object, a person or a landmark – the ancestor can achieve
The central ritual connection between the ancestor and his "place," between the ancestor and the individual Aranda, the central mode of celebrating and signifying objectification, is not dramatization, but recollection [...] In such a system, rupture does not occur by breaking poles linking heaven to earth; rupture occurs through the human act of forgetfulness (Smith 1987: 11-13).
particles in a cloud chamber – a solemn and important graffito, ”Kilroy was here.” (Smith 1987: 18)”. The differences between the intentional and constructivist traditions of ancient times and the spontaneous and formative traditions of the contemporary Tjilpa are radically contrasting (Smith 1987: 17-21). “A temple is built at a central place, the place where a king or god happens to have decided to take up residence (Smith 1987: 22)”. In the Arandan traditions, it is clear that all significant places are the result of ancestral activity. Although each place might, in the myths, be the accidental by-product of their wanderings, once marked, each place is precisely where the event occurred – it cannot be another. The specificity of place is what is remembered, is what gives rise to and is perpetuated in memorial (Smith 1987: 22).

Place is not to be regarded as geography, Smith argues. For studies in social anthropology and religious science place concerns orientation “[…] the topic of orientation, or how we ”place” ourselves (Smith 1987: 27)”. The relationship between the human body and man’s experience of his body is what orientates us in space, and what bestows meaning to the space. ”Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being (Smith 1987: 28)”. Place is to be regarded as a social position within a hierarchical system, and always the connotation when studying place (Smith 1987: 24-46). “[…] place is the beginning of our existence […] not simply in the sense of environmental generation, but also in the sense of social location, of genealogy, kinship, authority, superordination, and subordination (Smith 1987: 46)”. Place, as a temple or a city, shows, to Smith, a dichotomy of purity and impurity as well as a dichotomy of sacred and profane. This is where the moral framework of the social organization that define the formally approved status relationships between groups and individuals is expressed, and where the religion forms the ideological basis for the hierarchical restructuring of society, and enable the rulers to justify their goals. This is where profane areas contrast to sacred areas, being more sacred the closer to the symbolic mountain peak (Smith 1987: 47-73).

To Smith, place is a fundamental component in ritual as place directs attention. Any temple requires a differentiation of the ordinary and the sacred; a temple is sacred simply by being there. A ritual object or ritual action becomes sacred because of the highly marked attention focused on it. “Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement (Smith 1987: 47-73).”
1987: 104)”. Something is made sacred by ritual, rather than ritual is an expression of, or a response to, the sacred. Ritual is primarily concerned with difference, and is a systemic hierarchy that cannot be overthrown. Ritual is the difference between the now of everyday life and the now of ritual place, of the here and there, existing simultaneously, but not coexistent (Smith 1987: 103-105).

Ritual conjoined with myth with respect to place focus on coexistence rather than forms of differentiation, according to Smith. This combination focuses neither on simultaneous modes of difference characteristics of ritual nor on serial modes of conflict and transformation characteristics of myth (Smith 1987: 112).

Although the Aranda myths appear to be loose, paratactic constructions, connected only by “then…then…then…,” they presuppose an absolute duality between “then” and “now,” between the time of the Dreaming and the present […] the transformation of the ancestor is an event that bars, forever, direct access to this particular person. Yet through this very process of metamorphosis, through being displaced from his “self” and being emplaced in an “other” – in an object, person or mark – the ancestor achieves permanence. He becomes forever accessible, primarily through modes of memorialization. Here myth/ritual loses ritual’s definitive character of sheer differentiation (Smith 1987: 112).

The time of the Dreaming, the ancestral time, Smith holds, is the time the ancestors freely transform a featureless landscape into its present configuration. As all is fluidity, process, change, indeterminate and exponential it might be termed historical. Our time, what we call now and consider the historical present, might be considered, from point of view of the myths, by a sort of atemporality (Smith 1987: 113).

In an inversion of ancestral times, “now” all is determinate and constant; the fluidity of the ancestors has established the forms of the present. The ancestral motion has been permanently frozen in stabile memorials. It is not the ancestor, but, paradoxically, his movement, his act of transformation, that remains forever fixed and accessible. In this system, movement is what is most at rest (Smith 1987: 113).

According to Smith, the transformations were affected in the Dreamtime, but remain forever visible, and contain two forms of temporality, which we call then and now, and are thus freed from specific historical location. “More precisely, the precision from
temporal location results in spatial location (Smith 1987: 113). In this form of myth/ritual, all the qualities of attention are present, except the arbitrarily demarcated boundaries. Any place can be a focus of ancestral presence; some places might be forgotten while other places may be newly discovered. There is always an ongoing process, the details of any place, or any object, can be elaborated in the myth infinitely, and so the difference disappears. “Such a mode of myth/ritual resists the economy of signification, the exercise of the strategy of choice, that is characteristic of ritual. The only economy occurs not with respect to ritual categories but with respect to social ones (Smith 1987: 114).” Hence, myth/ritual works as a sort of distribution plan for all the non-human entities made, or recognized by, the ancestors (Smith 1987: 113-114).

**Place according to Tim Ingold**

Behind what is commonly known as the web of life, to describe the world, lies something that is not a network of connected points, but, instead, according to Tim Ingold (2011), a meshwork of interwoven lines of life, growth and movement. “This contention is not far removed from understandings of the lifeworld professed by peoples commonly characterised in ethnographic literature as animists (Ingold 2011: 63).” United not in belief but “[…] in a way of being that is alive and open to a world in continuous birth (Ingold 2011: 63),” where “[…] beings do not propel themselves across a ready-made world but rather issue forth through a world-in-formation, along the lines of their relationships (Ingold 2011: 63).” Animistic ontology is a world of becoming that embraces both sky and earth, in astonishment but not surprise, that comes from treasuring every moment as every moment is like encountering the world for the first time (Ingold 2011: 63-64).

Ingold stresses the point of the importance of distinguishing the network from the meshwork. The network is to be understood as “[…] a set of interconnected points (Ingold 2011: 64),” and

[... the meshwork as interweaving of lines. Every such line describes a flow of material substance in space that is topologically fluid [... the organism (animal or human) should]
be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space (Ingold 2011: 64).

The lines of life do not connect, Ingold argues, as in a network, they are rather the lines along which organisms perceive and act. “Action […] emerges from the interplay of forces conducted along the lines of the meshwork. It is because organisms are immersed in such force fields that they are alive (Ingold 2011: 64)”’. Conventionally, animism is described as belief systems which imputes spirit or life to truly inert things. This is wrong, and misleading, on two accounts, according to Ingold. Firstly, because the beliefs have nothing to do with believing about the world, rather it is a condition of being in the world, of being alive to the world “[…] by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in conception and action, to an environment that is always in the flux, never the same from one moment to another […] (Ingold 2011: 68)”. Secondly, “[…] it is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds […] continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence (Ingold 2011: 68)”’. In animistic ontology life is a continuous birth, not an emanation in a preordained world, but rather a generation of being in a world incipient forever (Ingold 2011: 64-71).

An organism has no inside or outside, according to Ingold, and no boundary that separate these two domains. The organism is, rather, a trail of movement and growth. Every such trail discloses a relation, but not between one thing and another, like the organism here and the environment there, rather a trail along which life is lived. The trail does not begin or end anywhere, it winds through or amidst. Each trail is a strand in a tissue of trails, and all trails together comprise the texture of the life world. This texture is the organisms’ relation field, a field “[…] not of interconnected points but of interwoven lines; not a network but a meshwork (Ingold 2011: 70)”. The image of the organism is a simplification, as the life of each organism rather extend along multiple trails, issuing from a source. As persons’, and other organisms’, lines of growth, get entangled with one another, the environment is a domain of entanglement, within which the tangled interlaced trails ravelling and unravelling, the beings growing and issuing forth along the lines of their relationships, rather than something that surrounds and encloses the organism. Beings do not occupy the world; they inhabit it, and thus, by making their own paths, contribute to the ever-evolving weave (Ingold 2011: 64-71).
[...] beings that inhabit the world (or that are truly indigenous in this sense) are not objects that move, undergoing displacement from point to point across the world’s surface. Indeed the inhabited world, as such, has no surface…whatever surfaces one encounters, whether of the ground, water, vegetation or buildings, are in the world, not of it. And woven into their very texture are the lines of growth and movement of its inhabitants. Every such line, in short, is a way through rather than across. And it is as their lines of movement, not as mobile, self-propelled entities, that beings are instantiated in the world (Ingold 2011: 71).

To Ingold, the beings that participate in the animistic world of perpetual flux go their various ways, and do not exist at locations, they occur along paths. The trails people leave behind them is what they are known and recognised by. It is the same way with the sun and the moon, and other celestial bodies, as they move through the sky, and not across it. Not all movement is life, but all life is movement. Every creature moves in its characteristic way. The sun is alive because of the way it moves; the trees are alive because of how they sway and their leaves flutter and the sound they make by doing so; the winds are alive because they are blowing; the thunder is alive because it is clapping (Ingold 2011: 72-75).

The inanimate conception is, to Ingold, that life is like a surface to be occupied, lived on the solid ground with the weather overhead, the earth beneath the ground surface, and the atmosphere above it. “In the animic ontology, by contrast, what is unthinkable is the very idea that life is played out upon the inanimate surface of a ready-made world. Living beings, according to this ontology, make their way through a nascent world rather than across its performed surface (Ingold 2011: 73)”. In making their way through the world, the living beings may experience a host of weather-related phenomena, all of which fundamentally affect their movements and possibilities of substance, as well as their moods and motivations, even as the treaded surfaces are sculpted and eroded by these phenomena. The inhabited world is not constituted by the grounded fixities of landscape, but rather by the aerial flux of the dynamic weather, always unfolding and ever changing. The earth is far from solid; it is fragile, leading powerful beings to take flight. Real or imaginary, the sky is not a surface but a medium, inhabited by the sun and the moon, and a variety of other beings, laying their own trails through the sky, just as terrestrial beings lay their trails through the earth. “Nor are the earth and the sky mutually exclusive
domains of habitation. Birds routinely move from one domain to the other, as do powerful humans such as shamans (Ingold 2011: 74)”. Integrated along the entangled lifelines of the world’s inhabitants, earth and sky are inextricably linked within one indivisible field, in the conception of a world undergoing continuous birth. The perception of this earth-sky is expressed in astonishment and openness to the world, fundamental aspects of the animic way of being, in a sense of wonder of the world’s continuous birth. Along with openness comes vulnerability, but the unsurprised astonishment is, also, a source of wisdom, strength and resilience to respond to the flux of the world with sensitivity, care and judgement (Ingold 2011: 72-75).

“Space is nothing, and because it is nothing it cannot truly be inhabited at all (Ingold 2011: 145)”, Ingold argues against the notion of space. Places exist, but they do not exist in space. We are often counterposing space and place, and there is a connotation of space with room, but there is no enclosure or containment, there is an opening or a clearing. The concept of room is set up to make a distinction between space and place, which lead us away from the fact that lives are never lived here or there, neither in this place nor that, but always on the way from one place to another (Ingold 2011: 141-148). We are led to believe that the trails or pathways along which movement proceeds are limits within which it is contained, but

[…] lives are led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere. I use the term wayfaring to describe the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement […] But […] human existence is not fundamentally place-bound…but place-binding. It unfolds not in places but along paths. Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot […] Places, then, are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring […]Together they make up what I have called the meshwork. Places, in short, are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement […] it is for just this reason that I have chosen to refer to people who frequent places as ‘inhabitants’ rather than ‘locals’. For it would be quite wrong to suppose that such people are confined within a particular place, or that their experience is circumscribed by the restricted horizons of life lived only there…occupation is areal, habitation is lineal […] it takes people not across the land surface but along the paths that lead from place to place. From the perspective of inhabitants, therefore, ‘everywhere’ is
not space. It is the entire meshwork of intertwined trails along which people carry on their lives. While on the trail one is always somewhere. But every ‘somewhere’ is on the way to somewhere else (Ingold 2011: 148-149).

A wayfarer is always on the move, according to Ingold, a wayfarer is his movement, and is instantiated, as a line of travel, in the world, in an ongoing process of development and growth, of self-renewal, through the engagement with the country opening up along his path. The wayfarer must pause for rest, and he may return repeatedly to the same place to do so, “[…] each pause is a moment of tension that – like holding one’s breath – becomes even more intense and less sustainable the longer it last. Indeed the wayfarer has no final destination, for wherever he is, and so long life goes on, there is somewhere further he can go (Ingold 2011: 150)”. In this way wayfaring stands in contrast to transport, that is destination-oriented, a carrying across from one location to the other, of a passenger being moved, in the vessel of his body. By “[…] turning the paths along which people lead their lives into internal properties of self-contained, bounded individuals […] (Ingold 2011: 151)” the passenger affirms the notion of space. The life of the wayfarer is the sum of his tracks, the total inscription of his movements, and something that can be traced along the ground, his presence on the land showing in the ever-growing sum of his trails. The wayfarer moves through his world, not across it from point to point. As a terrestrial being, the wayfarer must travel over the land, but the surfaces of the land are in the world, and not of the world, woven from the inhabitants’ growth and movement. This is not a point-to-point network connection, but strands, interwoven and complexly knotted; comprising a tangled mesh, where every strand is a way of life, and every knot is a place. It is necessary to distinguish the network of transport from the meshwork of wayfaring because the lines of the meshwork are not connectors, they are paths along which life is lived, and the mesh is constituted, not in the connecting of points, but in the binding together of lines (Ingold 2011: 149-152). “[…] wayfaring is our most fundamental mode of being in the world (Ingold 2011: 152)”.

Knowledge is conventionally seen as culture, as knowledge transported, as traditional knowledge passed on by ancestors to their descendants, where places are containers for people or their minds, and this is why traditional knowledge is assumed as local knowledge of local and localised people, Ingold holds. However, knowledge passed down
a genealogical line of ancestors, whether biological or cultural, cannot have its immediate source in the experience of inhabiting a particular place, as genealogical position is fixed from the start, regardless of where the person lives or acts in life. Therefore, the knowledge already acquired is seen as imported into the contexts of practical engagement with the environment. Hence, the knowledge needs to be categorised, and the transmitted knowledge is systemized, the conceptual knowledge is classificatory knowledge. Nevertheless, we should instead, according to Ingold, rather than suppose that people use their knowledge in practice, think that people know by way of their practise, in conception and action, through an ongoing engagement with the constituents of their environment. “Knowledge, in this view, is not transmitted as a complex structure but is the ever-emergent product of a complex process. It is not so much replicated as reproduced (Ingold 2011: 159)”. As movement is knowing, the integration of knowledge does not take place on the levels of a classificatory hierarchy, but along the paths that take people from place to place (Ingold 2011: 153-164).

The things of this world are their stories, Ingold argues, identified by their paths of movement in the relations of an unfolding field, and not by any fixed attributes. In the storied world each is the focus of an ongoing activity; things do not exist, they occur. Where things meet, and occurrences intertwine, things bound up in each other’s’ stories. “Every such binding is a place or a topic. It is in this binding that knowledge is generated. To know someone or something is to know their story, and to be able to join that story to one’s own (Ingold 2011: 160-161)”. To tell a story is to relate to occurrences of the past, bringing them to life in the present of the listeners, as if the occurrences were taking place here and now. The relation is to be understood literally, as retracing a path through the terrain of lived experience. By going from place to place, in the company of others, more knowledgeable, hearing their stories, the novices learn to connect events and experiences of their own lives to the predecessors’ lives. Stories do not end as life does not end. “And in the story, as in life, it is the movement from place to place – or from topic to topic – that knowledge is integrated (Ingold 2011: 161)”. Knowledge is not transmitted, it merges in to life in an active process of remembering rather than set aside as a passive object of memory, it is not passed on from generation to generation, knowledge subsists in the current of life and consciousness. There is no greater accumulation of mental content, but rather greater sensitivity to signs in the environment, and a greater capacity to respond
with judgement and precision to these signs, it is not how much you know but how well you know. To tell a story is to trace a path through the world, that others can follow, and not to represent the world. As a rule, stories do not come with already attached meanings; the listeners have to place the stories into context and discover the meanings for themselves. Storytelling is like “[…] following trails through a landscape: each story will take you so far, until you come across another that will take you further. This trail-following is what I call wayfaring […] And my thesis […] is that it is through wayfaring, not transmission, that knowledge is carried on (Ingold 2011: 162)”. It is said that people of a culture follow a way of life, that they follow a prescribed code of conduct, sanctioned by tradition, that individuals are always bound to follow. But “The task of the wayfarer, however, is not to act out a script received from predecessors but literally to negotiate a path through the world […] It is in following this path – in their movement along a way of life – that people grow into knowledge (Ingold 2011: 162)”. Storied knowledge is meshworked knowledge (Ingold 2011: 153-164).
Analysis and discussion

The Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place in relation to the theoretical standpoints

Eliade

The myth of the Achilpa is central to Eliade’s understanding of sacred place. His theory rests on his interpretation of the Aboriginal conceptions of life, and his interpretation of these conceptions is completely wrong.

In the Aboriginal ontology, both Engelhart and Swain show, there is neither any start nor any end, no creation and no destruction of the world, and the only cosmic structure is place. The world has taken shape, because something came out of the earth, moved over it, and returned back into it. The earth, the land, the Country, is the foundation of the ontology, and as Smith claims, any signs of celestial conceptions are best considered as signs of syncretism. The focus, as Engelhart and as Swain show, is place. The place stretches, because of its own intentionality and consciousness, in order to extend its consciousness, and to relate to other conscious places. To Swain, for the aboriginal peoples, place rests on ancestral mind-matter, and space is a network of places, intentionally stretching out in different pathways to connect places in structural networks. In such a universe, religious man does not need to seek to remain, as long as possible, in his universe, as Eliade and the Insider standpoint suggest. The Aboriginal peoples are always in sacred place, as place, by its intentionality and movement, extends along a myriad of pathways, to connect to other places. The Aboriginal peoples are, in fact, as extensions of sacred place, themselves of the sacred, of the ancestral mind-matter, of the life essences of the place who is their spiritual ancestor. Some places might be more prominent, but every place is sacred, every track is sacred, every area is sacred, as Arden, as Engelhart and as Swain show. Hence, there can be no homogeneity where sacred place occurs, and therefore no cracks in the homogeneity, in accordance with Eliade’s
suggestions. The sacred place is no absolute fixed point, no centre, for orientation in a world of chaos. Eliade is correct in the assumption that place is central to existential orientation, but not as any axis mundi sprung from any sudden manifestation; it is rather as the spiritual ancestor, in him- or herself, present always and forever. There is, as Smith suggests, no need for any symbolization, like a pole resembling a pillar, of any axis connecting and supporting any cosmic levels, as there are no three cosmological planes in the Aboriginal universe. Therefore, a brake of any ritual pole cannot be of any greater significance simply because it cannot represent any world axis. It is evident, with Engelhart as well as with Swain, and the other writers on the religion, the Aboriginal peoples do not inhabit any area by building any metaphorical cosmological mountain, or the like, in a perceived middle of the world, at a perceived centre of the universe, and they do not consecrate and cosmicize a place for settlement. Hence, an Aboriginal settlement is neither a symbolic installation of a world axis nor an architectural repetition of any primal actions of gods in the form of building rituals. This counterpoints Eliade’s, in my view, ethnocentric suggestion that any Australian Aboriginal people can represent any primary experience of sacred place, and serve as a model for the symbolic thinking of the construction of temples and cities in, what he, in his social Darwinism and hierarchical thinking, calls, higher civilizations.

As Engelhart and as Swain show, the sacred place is an already well-known connection point, where people and peoples meet, and, when invoked, spiritual ancestors and peoples meet, in ritual; the sacred place is not any revelation or projection of the centre of the world. There are places in any given area that are dangerous to visit, there are tracks that are dangerous to tread, but the danger is because of the sacredness of the place and the track, not because of certain places and pathways being parts of any kind of non-sacred area in a profane homogenous and relative world, as in Eliade’s reasoning. The actual situation is, in fact, precisely the opposite of Eliade’s suggestion. The non-reality, as Eliade puts it, in the vast surrounding areas simply is not there. There is no inhabited area of “our world” contrasting any uninhabited area of “other world”, no cosmos versus chaos. There is no heavenly world of gods, no earthly world of humans and no underworld of the dead. The superhuman beings are from the ground, the humans are from the life essence of the earthly superhuman spiritual ancestors and the humans do not go to heaven
in ritual, they stay on the ground, at place, to cooperate with the ancestor, with other people and with each other.

Access, rights and responsibilities are determined out of affiliation to the Country, and the duty is to strengthen the Country, and make it fertile and abundant, through ritual, Engelhart shows. Ritual, in the Aboriginal context, cannot be a recreation of the gods’ creation of the world, as there are neither any prehistoric time where any original creation can be recreated, nor any world creation, and nor any gods. Ritual takes place at place, rather than in time, as both Engelhart and Swain emphasise. Eliade is, in one instance, correct to see ritual as communication between “this world” and “another world”, but there is no heavenly world from which any gods can descend to the human world, and no world where humans can ascend to any world above; superhuman beings come from the ground, not from heaven, and humans meet the superhumans at place, not in heaven. Rather, in ritual, the humans, as life essences of the place, and the place, as spiritual ancestor, come together, as the same place, at the same place. Ritual relates the people to each other, ritual relates the people to the place, to the Country, and ritual, in transformation and continuity, relates different Countries and different peoples to each other, benefitting, as Engelhart shows, religious, social and economic cooperation and mutual interdependence.

Smith

For the Aboriginal peoples, as Engelhart and Swain show, the spiritual ancestors, and their movements and actions, formed the world, after waking up from their slumber. Hence, there is no breach at any centre of the world for the human and the superhuman domains to meet. Every aspect of the landscape is a trace of an ancestor’s deeds, every aspect of the landscape, like the people itself, is an objectification of the ancestors and their actions. The ancestral-human interaction is the foundation of the alternation of, and objectification in, the landscape; it is, to Smith, human action that has transformed the undifferentiated space of the, in Smith’s words, primeval Dreamtime to a contemporary plurality of, again in Smith’s words, historical places. According to Engelhart and, especially, to Swain, ‘primeval’ and ‘historical’, and even the word ‘time’ itself, are not
the best terms to use for the Dreamtime, or for any conception of the Aboriginal world. Engelhart describes the time of the Dreaming as in parallel with the common time of past, present and future, Swain more or less rejects time in an Aboriginal context, Dreaming is, to him, contemporary, and a dimension of reality where the beginning underlies the present and determinates the future. Nevertheless, Smith is correct in his assumption that transformation and continuity are central to the Aboriginal cosmology and cosmogony, and not any centre of the world.

Transformation, continuity and place are what is most clearly expressed in myth and ritual, Smith argues, and Engelhart and Swain support his argument. The myths of the Tjilpa emphasizes on the transformation and continuity of the world formed by the spiritual ancestors. So does the myth of Numbakula, climbing his pole. Any celestial reference is a warning sign for syncretic ontology or interpretation, Smith argues. Swain’s writing on the impact of colonization to the Aboriginal conceptions supports Smith’s argument of possible syncretic elements in beliefs. Smith indicates possible Christian interpretation; however, I suggest Christian analysis and/or deduction by Spencer and Gillen, and/or by Eliade, as equal probable explanations, at the time, and at the place, of the investigations and writings of Spencer and Gillen, and at the time of the writing of Eliade. The myth of Numbakula is not celestial, Smith argues, it rather emphasizes the transformation and continuity of a world formed by the ancestors' movements over a featureless pristine earth. As Engelhart shows, this transformation and continuity of the world, by the actions of the ancestors, is expressed in ritual.

The extreme focus on localization with the Tjilpa, and other Aranda, is because of the sectional organization and its effect on the demarcation structures of birthplace and homeland, according to Smith. Engelhart and Swain support the notion that birthplace and Country, and social organization, are the foundation for the focus on localization with the Aboriginal peoples. Any damage or loss of any pole, therefore, does not mean any brake or chaos. On the contrary, a damaged pole can be the start of a process of change and adaptation, as the ancestor can take place in something, someone or somewhere else, to achieve sustainability, and remain available, forever. To Smith, the eternal bond and immediate availability to the ancestor’s personality lie in the transformation process itself. I cannot find anything in the texts on the Aboriginal religion to support the idea that the
transformation process, in itself, is the foundation of the eternal bond and immediate availability. However, if Smith means ritual, when referring to transformation, I think his assumption is correct, because ritual, in the Australian Aboriginal context, is a caring and memorizing transformative and generative act, as Engelhart clearly shows, including continuation and maintenance.

Traditionally, as foragers and hunters, the Aboriginal peoples do not build anything, in the meaning of the symbolism of the construction ideology, Smith states Eliade uses to subsume the Tjilpa in the pattern in the theory of a centre. I argue Smith is correct. There is nothing showing, with neither Engelhart nor Swain, nor any other of the writers, of construction in line with Eliade’s reasoning. The Aboriginal peoples do not sacralise their dwellings, and they have no constructed sanctuaries. Smith is right; the ancient intentional constructivist ideology stands in sharp contrast to the Aboriginal spontaneous formative traditions. Generally, Smith holds, any sanctuary is built at the significant place where there is decided a god, or a human ruler with divine connection, resides, while in the Aboriginal world the significant place is a result of ancestral activity, at precisely the place where the event occurred, as it cannot be any other place. Arden confirms this notion, so does Engelhart and especially Swain, stressing on places as unique. Place has, as Swain holds, an uncompromising position in Aboriginal worldviews; place is the basic and only unit of Aboriginal cosmic structure.

Smith and the Outsider standpoint argue that place is a social position within a hierarchical system. The relationship between man’s body and man’s experience of his body orientates humans in, and bestows meaning to, space. Humans bring place in to meaning, instead of being placed. Place is not geography, but orientation. Place orientate humans in social location; place orientate in genealogy, kinship, authority, superordination, and subordination. To support the argument that place is a social position within a hierarchical system, Smith stresses on the dichotomy of the pure and the impure, and on the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. However, before colonization, there was no urbanization process in Indigenous Australia. The Aboriginal peoples do not have any ceremonial centres, like cities, with sanctuaries. According to Engelhart and to Swain, the religion constitutes the ideological basis for the society, but the society is not socially stratified. The rituals are performed to maintain the perpetual regeneration of the world,
not to justify any goals any rulers might have, and not to sanction any social order. I cannot exclude the possibility that the Aboriginal religion legitimize prevailing circumstances. However, there is nothing, with any of the writers on the religion, to support the Outsider standpoint, on the assumption that rituals and ceremonies serve as justification of political power, in the Aboriginal context. The only pattern of authority that emerges, in the written material, is authority on seniority. Any political organization is based on the social organization, in turn, based on kinship and location. There are no indications of any diversification of status, according to religious expertise, with any individuals or social classes; there are no indications of any individuals or classes with exclusive political power. Authority seems to be out of knowledge; a knowledge that is passed on, or reproduced, according to Ingold’s reasoning, from the older to the younger, during childhood and adolescence, and throughout adult life, in everyday life and in ritual life, where certain knowledge is transferred, or reproduced, especially in initiation rituals. There are indications that some places are considered more sacred than other places, but nothing that indicates that this has anything to do with any degree of purity or with any conscious gradation scale for sacredness, depending on how close or far from the place you are. I argue that, in the Australian Aboriginal context, this part of the standpoint can be ignored; there are, for the Aboriginal peoples, no connotations to temples or sanctuaries, and there is no connotation to hierarchy in the way Smith describes it.

Smith is not wrong, when it comes to general conclusions. However, he is wrong in some conclusions when it comes to the context of the Aboriginal ontology. The Aboriginal peoples are, in ritual, making the place sacred, but in the literature, there is as much evidence for this Outsider standpoint of Smith’s as it is for the argument of Eliade and the Insider standpoint, that ritual is an expression of, or a response to, the sacred. Place is sacred, and place must be made sacred. The place, and the pathways to and from it, is sacred by the sacredness of the place itself. The place is remade sacred by continuity. The spiritual ancestor, and his, or her, movements, means sacredness; the humans, as extensions of the spiritual ancestor and the place, must maintain the sacredness through the regenerating acts of ritual.

I think Smith is right, in regard to the Aboriginal conceptions, when he argues that ritual is the difference between the now of everyday life and the now of ritual place, of the here
and the there, existing simultaneously, but not coexistent. He is right, in the Aboriginal context, when he argues that ritual conjoined with myth, with respect to place, focus on coexistence rather than forms of differentiation, as Engelhart explains with the ritual cooperation between individuals and peoples of different parts of society and of different places.

Smith holds the ancestor achieves permanence through the metamorphosis of being displaced from its place, from itself, in any other object, person or mark, and thus enabling direct access, for the humans, to the ancestor’s particular person, forever, through the process of the myth-ritual. In contrast to Engelhart and to Swain, Smith argues that the Dreamtime might be termed historically, as it is when the ancestors transformed the landscape, in fluidity, process, change, indetermination and exponentiality. However, Smith comes closer to the reasoning of Engelhart and of Swain when he argues that the Dreamtime remain visible forever and is contained of two forms of temporality, the then and the now, freed from any historical location, resulting in spatial location. It is not the ancestor, but his movement, his act of transformation, that remains fixed and accessible forever. There is always an ongoing process, where the details of any place, or any object, can be elaborated with, in the myth, infinitely, and thus any differences can disappear. This means change. The track is the movement of place, is the way Smith is to be understood. The myth-ritual works as a distribution plan for all the non-human entities made, or recognized, by the ancestors. This argumentation correlates perfectly with the writings on changes, movements and tracks in the texts on the Aboriginal religion. Engelhart explains the process of change and difference in the widened knowledge, learning the mysteries of life, throughout the whole life, perhaps most importantly in ritual, and especially in initiation ritual. What Smith calls the distribution plan is explained by what Engelhart writes on the ritual cooperation, and what Engelhart and Swain write on the tracks as place connecting to other places, intentionally. Engelhart shows that ritual is a continuum of interplay between partners of Countries in a specified region, and between partners of the same spiritual ancestor track stretching over a region or several regions, to strengthen the Country, and make it fertile and abundant, by action and change rather than by passivity and preservation. Swain shows that all existence emerges from the being of place, but only specific life essences emerges from specific
places, as every living thing is an extension of their Country, autonomous and unique, and therefore requires a collaboration between the humans of different places.

**Ingold**

To Ingold, animistic conceptions of cosmos means that the peoples are sensitive and responsive to the continuing transformations and changes of the world. Life is continuous birth; it is generation of being in an ever-incipient world. Beings are considered living out of rather different aspects than in non-animistic understandings. According to Ingold, life, to an organism, is a trail of movement and growth. The trail winds through, it does not begin or end, and is entangled with other trails, as interwoven lines in the meshwork of life. The domain of entanglement is the environment in which the interlaced trails ravel and unravel, as the beings goes forth along the lines of their relationships, and grow, bringing one another into existence, reciprocally and continually. By making their own paths the beings inhabit the world, where every line of movement and growth goes through as instantiated beings in the world.

There is no support, in the texts on the Aboriginal religion, for any beliefs of life as an entangled intertwined meshwork of lines of movement and growth. However, there is indeed support for lines, for movement and for growth, as in change, in what Engelhart and Swain write on ritual and origin of life, and of death. Ritual is transformation and continuity, the tracks of the ancestors and the humans goes forth in the landscape, life is continuous birth and death for individual humans but eternal life for the people and the ancestors.

Beings, according to Ingold, in a world of perpetual flux go their various ways and do not exist at locations, they occur along paths. All life is movement. Living beings make their way through a nascent world, not across a performed surface. The landscape is sculpted by living beings, and not an already fixed surface. Location is of considerable importance to the Aboriginal peoples, but as Ingold stresses on the movement between different places, rather than the places themselves, this might contradict the texts on the religion, regarding the precedence of place over tracks. There is considerable attention, with the
Aboriginal peoples, on the pathways between places. Brennan as well as Engelhart talk of the lines as sacred and, therefore, dangerous for anyone without the right knowledge. Maybe Ingold is right in stressing the track.

Places exist, but they do not exist in space, according to Ingold. Places have opening or clearing; they are not contained or enclosed. Lives are not lived in one place or another, but always on the way from one place to another; lives are lived through and around places, to and from them, and not inside places. Human existence is place-binding, not place-bound, and unfolds along paths, not in places, to Ingold’s assumption. It is movement itself that delineates places, and not the outer limits of movement, Ingold argues. Inhabitants frequent places, they are not confined within a particular place; habitation is lineal while occupation is areal.

So, no. There is no contradiction to Engelhart and to Swain. This is not about greater emphasis on either place or track. Ingold is to be understood in the same way Smith and the tracks of the ancestors are to be understood; the pathways of the wayfarers are the movements of place. Trails intertwine where inhabitants meet, every entwining is a knot, and places are like knots, and the threads are the lines of wayfaring, comprising the meshwork of life. Life is wayfaring, a wayfarer is always on the move; a wayfarer is his movement, Ingold holds. The line of travel of the wayfarer is a process of development, growth and self-renewal in engagement with the Country that opens up along the wayfarer’s path without destination, as long as life goes on. The sum of his tracks, the total inscription of his movements, is the life of the wayfarer, a life that can be traced along the ground, his presence on the land showing in the ever-growing sum of his trails, according to Ingold.

The resemblance to the Australian Aboriginal thinking of the spiritual ancestors and their movements is striking. Engelhart and Swain explain that, in accordance with Ingold’s reasoning, the world was sculpted by the acts and movements of the living ancestors in a nascent environment, rather than on any already fixed surface. To the Aboriginal peoples, as Engelhart and as Swain show, Dreaming is always connected to Country, and, moreover, place moves, and, as extension of itself, place connect to other places through direction determined pathways, to connect places in a network – or in a meshwork, to use
the reasoning of Ingold. According to Swain, the importance of place and Country has to
do with identity and relationship. The world is maintained by identified Countries, and
their people, relating to each other, because a place cannot be self-sufficient, neither
existentially, ritually, socially or economically. As Swain explains, space is a network of
places that rest on ancestral mind-matter, and life is annexation of place. Life is a
temporary billowing in human form. Humans are derived from the Country, and when
the individual human dies, the spiritual ancestor will return to the place from which he,
or she, once emerged, to reveal the Country’s true Country-self; the spiritual ancestor is
returned to place – the place-being is returned to place – to become, once more, a fragment
of the power of its Country. Hence, life is extension of Country.

Knowledge, to Ingold, is reproduced, not replicated. People know by way of their
practise, in conception and action, through an ongoing engagement with their
environment, and not by using their knowledge in practice. Knowledge merge in to life
in an active process of remembering, with a greater sensitivity to signs in the environment,
and a greater capacity to respond with judgement and precision to these signs, where it is
not about how much you know but how well you know it. Movement is knowing, and
thus, knowledge takes place along the paths that take people from place to place, Ingold
argues. All the things of this world are their stories, identified by their paths of movement
in the relations of an unfolding field. In the storied world, to Ingold, each is the focus of
an ongoing activity where things occur; they do not exist. Where things meet they
intertwine, and bound up with each other’s stories. Every such binding is a topic, every
such binding is a place, Ingold holds, and here, in this binding, knowledge is generated.
To tell a story, to Ingold, is to trace a path through the world, like trails through a
landscape, which others can follow. The listeners have to place the stories into context
and discover the meanings for themselves. Storytelling is to relate to occurrences of the
past, bringing them to life in the present of the listeners as if the occurrences were taking
place here and now, Ingold argues, it is retracing, literally, a path through the terrain of
lived experience. Novices learn from the more experienced by hearing their stories, as
they go from place to place, and connect the events and experiences to their own lives to
the predecessors’ lives. The knowledge is integrated in the movement from topic to topic,
in the movement from place to place, according to Ingold.
The resemblance, again, is striking, to the thinking of the Australian Aboriginal peoples, and to the myth and ritual complex. Knowledge, as Engelhart explains, is reproduced through the whole life, in daily life and ritual life. Ritual life, in the Aboriginal context, is storytelling in myths, songs, dances and paintings, from the more experienced to the lesser experienced, and ritual takes place at places, and, in Ingolds’ reasoning, at knots in a meshwork. The stories are told along the tracks and at the places where they occur in Dreaming, or Law, with people from different parts of the society and from different societies, as Engelhart shows, mapping out an individual’s geographical, as well as social and mythical, landscape out of the environment of the spiritual ancestor. In this way, knowledge is movement in the landscape, in, to, and from, places, in Country, revealing tracks, as with Ingold’s reasoning. Places are sacred because the sacred essence of the ancestors is there, in the Country, Engelhart holds. The sacredness is spatial. The Country is the only possible concept that covers natural, geographical, social and sacred entity, with the track as a metaphor for the Dreaming. Engelhart consider the relationship between an individual and the Country as important and intimate, with an emotional bond between the individual and his or her Country. The Country is central to the religion, Engelhart argues, and like a holy scripture, while Turner regards Country equivalent to the conception of Promised Land. The arguments for the rights to Country, Engelhart holds, are mainly based on religious conceptions, and Arden argues the struggle for rights to Country is spiritual. Brennan finds the Aboriginal peoples connected to Country always, and that the Country reveals a life-sustaining capacity. Rights for Country is, to Swain, the big issue for Aboriginal awareness and true Law. This is where the reproduced knowledge has taken the Aboriginal peoples in Australia of today.

**Useful aspects**

The below summary is a compilation of what I have found useful in the three standpoints, when applying the ethnography by Engelhart and Swain as a kind of template.

*Eliade and the Insider standpoint*

Useful:
• Place is orientation, as existential orientation.
• Places are considered sacred.
• Ritual means communication between place-being and place-being, between the place-being the spiritual ancestor and the place-being the human or the people.
• Ritual means connection; ritual connect the people to the superhuman beings.

**Smith and the Outsider standpoint**

Useful:
• The ontology is terrestrial.
• The ontology is about transformation and continuity.
• The world is in perpetual change, and the world is maintained by continuous action.
• Recollection, care and memory is of significant importance.
• The place is transformation and movement.
• Ritual is performed in regard to spontaneous formative traditions of the spiritual ancestors.
• Place has importance as place and ancestor.
• The knowledge is religious knowledge, through introduction in life and ritual.

**Ingold and the Meshwork standpoint**

Useful:
• The ontology is about transformation and change.
• The peoples meet continuous changes and transformations with sensitiveness and responsiveness.
• Life is movement.
• Places are places, and places are also the movements between the places; the places are also their tracks.
• Knowledge takes place along the paths that take people from place to place.
Results

No single standpoint is gratifying for studies of the Aboriginal conceptions of place, but all three standpoints contribute to find the most useful theoretical approaches for further studies on the subject. There are aspects of all three standpoints showing the importance of place to the Aboriginal peoples.

Place is the basis of the Aboriginal religion; in the Aboriginal world, the focus is place. Place is existential orientation. Place is a living entity. People and other living organisms, and living objects, and living aspects of the environment, are extensions of place. Place-beings – places/ancestors, people and persons – connect and communicate at place, as place, in ritual. Place requires transformation and continuity; perpetual change and interaction is of significant importance, and so is recollection, care and memory. The importance of place is as place, in itself, and as ancestor. Place is movement. Place is the place-being as well as the movements of the place-being, the ancestor as well as the tracks of the ancestor.

Any focus on any other aspects than place is diversion from the genuine importance of place. Place is not a centre, or an axis or a pillar. It is not a sacred place as any breach or a connection point between heaven and earth, between humans and gods. It is not duality between an inhabited cosmos and an uninhabited chaos. The Aboriginal thinking on sacred place is not any form of primary human experience and not any prototype for symbolical thinking. Place is not an arena for performing rituals for political purposes. Place is not a distinctly sacred or profane, or a distinctly pure or impure, part of the environment.

Theoretical approaches

The most useful theoretical approaches for studies on the Australian Aboriginal conceptions of place are the theories that consider the following: Place as a living entity, an ancestor and an extension of itself; place as movement, transformation and continuity;
place as connection, existential orientation and the paramount focus, and; place as the very foundation of the entire religion.

My investigation

My material

I consider I have used relevant material by relevant researchers and writers. The writings on the religion have led me to a better understanding of place, and the writings on place have lead me to a better understanding of the religion. Most of all, the writings on the Aboriginal religion and the writings on sacred and profane place have led me to a better understanding of the Aboriginal conceptions of place. The writers are competent, experienced and dedicated, even though, I find the writing of Eliade, in large parts, anachronistic and ethnocentric.

The material I have used on the religion I find most adequate, but I wish I had found material that is more recent. Both Engelhart and Swain are able scholars and brilliant writers, I do not doubt their recordings or theories, but I cannot help to think there might be more contemporary research and writing that might shed even more light on both the Aboriginal religion and the Aboriginal conceptions of place.

Material on religion and place, and space, was hard to find. Perhaps, even here, there is more recent material, but as Kong & Woods issued their writings only last year, where they mention Eliade as a representative for the Insider standpoint and Smith is considered a representative for the Outsider standpoint, and as Ingold ‘s writing is only a few years old, this material must be considered pertinent.

My theoretical viewpoint

A more rigid theory might have served better if I had wanted to verify or falsify any, or all three, of the standpoints. This might have served its purpose if I had wanted to investigate the usefulness of either standpoint. However, as my investigation was aimed
at finding the most useful theoretical approaches, in all, I opted for an open-ended investigation. My theoretical point of view proved to be right to meet this purpose.

**My method**

I opted for a qualitative method for a critical analysis. As a primary way to learn more about the Aboriginal understanding, I think I have used a solid method for theoretical adaptation of the Aboriginal perceptions of place. My study has been aimed to find the most useful theoretical methods concerning one specific topic. The critical analysis has proved successful. I have remained on the chosen path of investigation. I have followed the intention to present the Australian Aboriginal religion, recorded some general views on research on religion and space, recounted for three different theoretical standpoints on place, and compared the research on the Aboriginal religion to the three different standpoints. The chosen analytical and theoretical method have been most rewarding to meet the purpose and to answer my questions.

For my critical analysis of the written material, the focus has been on keeping an objective mind, and on awareness of any biases, by serious and self-conscious reading, in accordance with Neil McCaw (2013: 18-31), and the focus has been on reliability and probability, for an authentic assessment of the material, in accordance with Thorsten Thurén (2013: 81-89, 110-118).

Initially, I had a positive bias towards Engelhart and towards Swain. As both Engelhart and Swain appear traditional scholars as well as bold researchers, as I consider them skilled writers, and as their writings exhibit a great amount of respect to the Australian Aboriginal peoples, and to the Aboriginal beliefs and conceptions, Engelhart and Swain made an impression. Aware of this I have made an extra effort to let the texts speak for themselves.

With Kong and Woods there is a disparity in volume between the different established academic views on space and religion. The account for the Insider standpoint, with Eliade as the sole example, is incredibly small in volume, compared to the accounts for the Outsider standpoint, with Smith as one of many representatives. It is obvious, by the way
Kong and Woods reason, they agree with the Outsider standpoint. My own view was initially, in accordance with this standpoint, that place and religion need to be examined in relation to social, political and economic factors. There is a substantial risk I would have leaned against the Insider standpoint, and towards the Outsider standpoint, without self-conscious reading.

I admit an initial bias against Eliade, and therefore doubts of his writings. It was difficult to see beyond his, in my view, social Darwinism. I started with a bias to everything Eliade had to say, but I managed to allay my resistance to concern only some aspects of his writings, to, finally, being able to take in his reasoning in its historical and cultural context. I found Eliade wrong in many ways, but I managed to see his contributions, perhaps mostly the possibility of place considered as being sacred rather than as something being made sacred, and here, I also managed to remain unbiased but critical to Smith’s assertion that place is always made sacred. I let the texts speak for themselves, and I did not reject the sources of information, in accordance with McCaw and with Thurén. I feared, for a while, I would side too heavily with Smith in his criticism of Eliade, but I consider I am not, in my reasoning and my conclusions, against or for neither Eliade nor Smith. A postcolonial analysis of Eliade’s text, and perhaps of Smith’s text, as well, would have been interesting, though too extensive as a part of this work, but maybe I could have put the texts, or the debate, in context and reported on the processes of development of thought in history of religions and in anthropology. I was, initially, tempted to disregard Ingold’s writings on place and religion. I feared his writings on the subject too philosophical to relate to my investigation. Furthermore, I was not sure his reasoning was scientific enough, for the purpose of my investigation. The thinking of the text in itself as well as of Ingold’s reliability, and the probability in an animistic context, changed my opinion.

I consider the great advantage with my method of choice the fact that I have been able to perform an open-ended investigation, to meet the purpose of the essay, and to give answer to the question formulation. A difficulty is that I have not used any fixed or designated method or methodological framework. The method has proved useful for this essay, but there is a risk it is too ambiguous for any reader or for anyone trying to perform a similar investigation. I might have acquired more by using a more rigid method, or by using a
more rigid complementary method along the method of choice. For example, any quantitative investigation, in combination with the method I have used, or perhaps an even more explorative qualitative method, to find data of current perceptions of place, would be most interesting. I consider any method including participant observation, yarning or interviews preferable to find the true meaning of place to the individuals and to the society of a given place. However, my investigation has served as a theoretical foundation for further research on the subject. I like to think of this work as a first step to better knowledge on the Aboriginal religion in general and on the Aboriginal perceptions of place in particular.

My purpose

I consider I have met the purpose by answering the initial question formulation.

Final comments

For studies on religion, place about existentiality. What is the self to the cosmos? Where is the self to everything else in the universe? The theories, on place, from the inside are the results of studies on an Aboriginal people of Australia. The theories from the outside are, as well, in parts, from this people, in particular, and to Australian Aboriginal peoples in general. The theories from the meshwork are mainly from the thinking of, so-called, animistic peoples of the world, like the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Hence, I have studied three theories originating from the context I have applied them to. I must conclude that this is not achievable. These theories, of the Aboriginal conceptions are not applicable to the Aboriginal conceptions. Here, place is where life takes place, and place is where place makes life. It is with this knowledge any further pathways are best wandered, to find more on place, in the landscape of Aboriginal Australia.
References


