

Death of Providence/Dance of the Liminal:  
Mabo and the Politics of Postcolonial Identities

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a reading of the politics of postcolonial identities that emerged in Australia between the Bicentenary celebrations in 1988 and the Native Title Act of 1993. It suggests that contemporary identity politics in Australia can be understood as an expression of dilemmas associated with the subjectivities of modernity. It argues that conflicts have arisen when Aboriginal communities and organizations represent themselves on a continuum of aboriginality formalised by the Native Title Act, and that Friedrich Nietzsche's analysis of the 'Death of God' offers a powerful account of the problem of modern subjectivities, an account that has been taken up by a broad range of contemporary postcolonial scholars. Drawing from these scholars, the thesis provides a critical reading of the Native Title Act as a modernist project, and, on this basis, offers suggestions about how remote aboriginal communities can respond to a politics framed through a modernist reification of cultural identities.

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## Introduction

This thesis follows a personal journey into some specific spaces of contemporary cultural politics in Australia. It 'follows' in the dual sense of 'coming after' and 'tracing elements within,' and it seeks to arrive at some point of considered orientation to, and political judgement about, the dynamics of aboriginal politics in Australia. The intervening itinerary involves an engagement with various strands of theoretical debate about the character and fate of modernity which, I argue, offer useful terrain from which perspectives on and judgements about aboriginal politics in Australia can be productively enabled. Contrary to various contemporary claims that a critical stance towards modernity leads to a suspension of political engagement and the embrace of a relativistic quietism, I want to suggest that it is precisely such a stance that offers at least some lines of resistance to contemporary practices of neocolonialism/recolonialism, practices that have been legitimized in Australia by specifically modern accounts of multiculturalism and aboriginal identities. In the context of life "After Mabo" especially, that is, after the debates about Native Title that followed the celebrated Australian High Court judgement in favour of claims lodged by Eddie Mabo in 1992, I want to argue that it is necessary to be extremely suspicious of much of the commentary that identifies Native Title entirely as a cause for celebration among those seeking a progressive or emancipatory response to the injustices suffered by the aboriginal peoples of Australia.<sup>1</sup> Such commentaries, and the political choices they both express and facilitate, participate in an uneasy struggle between the postcolonial and the neocolonial.

The thesis and the journey begin in the political field of the Australian Bicentennial celebrations of 1988 and the simultaneous assertion of diverse indigenous identities. The official celebrations of a modern state, the increasing consciousness of aboriginal cultures, and a more widespread sense of the violent relation between that state and those cultures, had just begun to inspire rather different readings of colonial practice than those found in the official or popular accounts of Australian history. Located, as I was in 1988, in a University (the Australian National University, in Canberra) studying Social Science, I was drawn to literature I could use to make sense of the recent proliferation of aboriginal voices and aspirations -- voices and aspirations that had begun to enter into my daily life over the previous 3 years. At that time, literatures that could be used to make sense of events that were clearly becoming more and more important, both to Australian political culture and to my own political and academic interests, were still scarce. This was a time, it is now easy to forget, in which concerns with the politics of identity had not yet become the fashion of the post-Cold War, postmodern and postcolonial world that has now become so familiar.

From that vantage point, the literature that was of most pressing interest to me was that which explored claims about a contemporary crisis of modernity in very general terms. This literature pointed to a cultural crisis arising from the universalizing tendencies of modern thought and the consequent marginalizing of cultural difference and specificity. Of particular interest to me were those thinkers loosely grouped together under the label of postcolonialism, who understood colonialism as a

constitutive practice of modernity, and who generated various frameworks through which to locate contemporary cultural politics in long established economies of cultural hegemony. Believing that those thinkers who were challenging modernity at its philosophical roots offered the very best chance of understanding the divergent forms of contemporary cultural politics that had become so important for me, I embarked on graduate level study of these debates and thinkers. In my own case, the thinker who inspired my imagination was Friedrich Nietzsche. The further I read, the more it seemed as though the major dilemmas of identity and community posed by almost every contemporary commentary on the status of modernity were already posed by Nietzsche a century before they became palpable during the Australian Bicentenary. Contemporary poststructural and postcolonial thinkers, who had taken up many of Nietzsche's critical ideas, also seemed likely to illuminate my journey through the contested spaces of aboriginal politics in Australia on account of their persistent engagement with the enigmatic problems of cultural politics.

This thesis partly maps my understanding of Nietzsche's legacy in this respect. It develops an outline of how certain themes from Nietzsche, and from a variety of poststructural and postcolonial thinkers, have enabled me to frame my own orientation towards the dilemmas of identity raised by contemporary indigenous politics. This orientation also offers a critical perspective on the way in which identity claims have been lodged in recent influential political and legal judgements about aboriginal affairs in Australia. It is this critique that is the explicit focus of the thesis, though it is necessarily grounded in a long discussion of theoretical literatures that, on the face of it, seem far removed from the immediate practical demands and constraints of aboriginal peoples living on the margins of a modern and notoriously materialistic society. I argue that these theoretical and philosophical critiques of modernity do indeed have immediate practical implications, not least in relation to the possibilities of a politics in those places that have been marked out as the appropriate sites of aboriginal cultures.

Four years after the Bicentenary, the Australian High Court handed down its historic Mabo decision acknowledging land ownership on the basis of native title. The following year, the Native Title Act was passed to provide legislative protection to this new form of official title described in the High Court's ruling. Since then, the political spirits of 1988 have surged once again and issues of self-determination and reconciliation hold the nation's attention. However, on my reading, there is a serious danger that a resurgent aboriginal politics will be appropriated and coopted through a classic modernist move to position and discipline it. This move, I suggest, is explicitly embodied in the Native Title Act. It is likely to fix aboriginal identities on a continuum of possibilities within a modern frame, and thereby establish a register of authentic indigenous voices. It is this possibility that leads me to counter much of the recent literature on the implications of the Native Title Act which, in my view, adopts a rather uncritical and prematurely celebratory tone. Having lived and worked on a remote aboriginal community on the edge of the Great Victorian Desert for the past three years, I have

watched a plethora of disparate aboriginal identities in operation and been part of a struggle to adapt traditional culture to inflexible administrative requirements. In my view, traditional communities that are remote will not necessarily do well in this modern, legal economy of formally defined, administratively precise aboriginality, especially where a community's cultural and developmental aspirations do not concur with official framing and sanction. What may from some perspectives be seen as a cause for celebration may also be viewed as yet another testament to the capacity of modern administrative and legal politics to constrain all political options within very narrow limits.

Yet cultural politics into the foreseeable future will need to reconcile specific aspirations with official location. As the Forward to the 1993 Native Title Act puts it, "Native Title only exists for those indigenous people who have not been dispossessed. It will generally have survived in areas of Australia where governments have not made grants to others or have not undertaken any inconsistent activities. Survival of native title in these usually remote areas will have been because of a traditional attachment to that land, an attachment based on a special relationship founded on complex spiritual associations and carrying special responsibilities."<sup>2</sup> Or as Zygmunt Bauman reminds us in what only seems to be a very different context, "Nothing merely ends in history, no project is ever finished and done with. Clean borders between epochs are but projections of our relentless urge to separate the inseparable and order the flux. Modernity is still with us."<sup>3</sup> The analysis I develop here seeks both to confirm and to resist Bauman's reminder, while negotiating the link between the context that informs Bauman's reflections and the possibilities open to an aboriginal politics now that the modern framing of a native title edict once again struggles to assign the proper -- but quite intolerable -- place of difference to the margins.

## Part One:

### Spirits of the Madman: Encounters With Modernity

#### i). Antiquarian Stories, Australian histories.

1988 was an important year in Australia. Two hundred years had passed since Captain Philip sailed into a sheltered Cove on the east coast of the Great Southern Land and claimed it as Crown Territory, thereby initiating a series of events which led to British colonization and ultimately the formal establishment of Australia as a nation. Quickly growing beyond an initial role of vast penal colony, Australia developed through rapid expansion of pastoral and mining industries to become an outpost of modernity in South East Asia. The country-wide Bicentenary celebrations planned in 1988 to proudly toast a marvelous journey to nationhood precipitated an unprecedented reappraisal of all that had gone on in the records, memories, myths and mists of the country's two hundred year past; a sort of national genealogy was at work that year. For perhaps the first time since Federation, Australians prepared to consider publicly what 'being Australian' has meant and might mean.

In preparing for these national celebrations, Australians looked back to find those elements of spirit that best characterized the cocky and independently courageous stance that powers the most cherished moments in the Australian identity. The patriotism and nationalism that surged in Australians that year most often followed currents forged by the nation's catalogue of cultural heroes; outlaws who had lived rough but righteous lives fighting corrupt magistrates and vested interests; desert explorers who trekked thousands of sunburnt miles to perish or record for new Australians the unimaginable dimensions of their vast adopted continent; young volunteer soldiers who valiantly stood shoulder to shoulder on foreign beaches against overwhelming odds in the ultimate service of countries whose goals in war showed scant regard for Australian lives; men and women who with radio telephone, flying machines and an adopted bush medicine, provided Royal Flying Doctor Services to isolated communities, farms and towns. An adventurous people who spread across the country and beyond into the 'outback' in countless unrecorded, yet heroic struggles against the unfamiliar, the uninviting and the unknown. Pioneering people. A spirited People who often broke new ground against heavy odds. People who defied traditions, norms and authorities in order to pursue innovative or even heroic ends. Such spirits powered the reappraisal in 1988 as Australians looked back across two busy centuries to rethink, reclaim and restate who and what they were and must be.

An integral part of this process was a direct confrontation with Australia's colonial and colonizing past, particularly with reference to the changing status of Aboriginal Australians and their relationships with non-Aboriginal Australians. On the one hand Australia had been established initially as a penal colony; a place to send mainly Anglo/Celtic convicts unable to be found a constructive space, place or future in modernizing, industrializing Europe. On the other, as the frontier eventually

moved across the entire continent, Aboriginal lands and Aboriginal cultures were seized, uprooted and suppressed in the face of an advancing urge to build economies and construct a Nation. As explorers, missionaries, pastoralists and miners spread out across these lands it became apparent that the constitution of a new nation required the extinguishment of older, long established cultures which had held the land for thousands of years prior to the coming by sea of people with fair skin.

With the Nation preparing to officially remember, reconstruct and celebrate the advance to nationhood, the voice and presence of Aboriginal people for so long marginal to mainstream history, politics and culture in Australia was drawn into the very heart of a national process. In an ironic twist, the embracing of colonial history and the coming of nationhood on the part of mainstream Australian culture meant that the voices of Aboriginal people for so long calling from outside in the wind became the central focus of questions about national identity. Those Great Australians and Australias whose identity had been comfortably and proudly associated with the flag of Progress and the flame of Civilization came, for perhaps the first time, under serious question. Two hundred years after the establishment of Australia as a Western European outpost in the South Pacific, grand narratives about savages, primitive communism, fallen man and the state of nature that drove social programs behind the 'settlement' of Australia were no longer credible.

Yet, as the celebrating nation examined its past, the conclusion that its history had indeed proceeded on such distasteful stereotypes and cultural simplicities could not be avoided. In the Australian context, a nation born bore the death of nations. Racism and colonial expansion, genocide and patriotism, barbarity and civilization, exploration and appropriation were in Australia coupled forever as part and parcel of the same story. The very fabric of nationhood and national spirit was interwoven with colonial threads whose colors would shimmer in any attempt to celebrate Australian history. The multiple meanings of the slogan 'White Australia has a Black History' seen on bumper stickers that year spoke to the quandary of celebrating common historical trajectories typically embraced in Australia. Birthday parties are notorious for bringing up old stories for new ears, but during the Bicentenary in Australia old ears would hear new stories.

As Australians dusted off old or purchased new Akubra hats in readiness for telling stories about pastoral exploits on great stations, the cultural market was flooded with new items which told different stories. There were stories about massacres and pastoralists poisoning water holes or shooting those who would dare compete with stock for water; stories about prisoners forced to trek miles in neck chains or of missions that combined physical hardship with strident forms of Christian practice to break the hold of tradition on the newly faithful; stories which told how governors, magistrates, police, pioneers and 'protectors' sanctioned policies and practices aimed at either eradication or rapid assimilation of 'Natives;' stories about spiritual powers and a spiritual landscape so profound yet unknown to those who seek only to seize. In this time when histories began to emerge from behind History, when a plurality of cultural experiences again challenged the myth of a

single path from primitive past to civilized future, discomfoting stories about events of which an Australian public was hitherto mostly unaware found a place alongside comforting stories of pastoral heroes. Stories that told the blunt side of a racially harsh colonialism caught the attention of Australians like news that an old lover is back in town.

The impact of emerging histories in 1988 was greatly enhanced by a focus in the print media on scientific evidence of, increasing public concern over, and widespread speculation about a hole in the earth's ozone layer centered above Australia<sup>4</sup>. In a country which usually claims some of the world's finest beaches and most sensual suntans, the impact of this frightening revelation was dramatic. All at once ozone publicity seemed to radically problematize the previously unassailable investment in life styles, development aspirations and cultural horizons that had underpinned much of mainstream Australian life. The implications of ozone loss transformed or even overturned the relative power of rhetorical claims upon which 'middle Australia' had been so solidly based. No longer could previously popular phrases such as 'that's the cost of Progress', or, 'you can't stop it', or, 'development can only occur with the aid of technology and industry investment' hold the power of rhetorical veto over objections to cherished social and economic goals. A relatively consistent historical, cultural and social trajectory that had carried Australia through much of its two hundred year history was exhibiting ominous signs of severe instability. Atmospheric degradation thrust the concept of a 'creaky environment' into the public domain. Previously low-profile environmental troubles such as soil erosion, salination and river system pollution, species-loss and heavy metal build-up became part of a high profile package of troubling environmental disruptions. Like a fatigued patient receiving news about lifestyle disease, Australians were being asked to take a broader and more critical view of a cherished way of life.

The hole in the ozone layer first registered in the southern hemisphere over Australia served as a kind of flashpoint critique of modernity. It seemed that things could not just go on as they had; the 'Lucky Country' may have been living beyond its means, certainly living in a manner that was not sustainable even in the medium term. Just when the nation was making a national reappraisal of its historical trajectory and historical heroes, contemporary cultural and environmental implications of this trajectory were brought into stark relief. It seemed that the dual notions of Progress and Development which had always seemed so clear and promised so much at the heart of this flourishing outpost of modern industrialized life may have sanctioned a serious overestimation of its own sophistication whilst simultaneously misunderstanding the cultural strengths of indigenous cultures which, it now appeared, had lived on parts of the continent for at least 75 000 years. In a strange way, in this year in Australia, questions of history, cultural politics, development and science met in a manner that opened the nation's historical past to new subtleties within the country's cultural and environmental present. Tribal voices spoke from bush communities and the annals of history to issues of silence, science and Modernity in a space hitherto dominated by voices of convention,

industry and pragmatism. Conversations were possible with previously marginal voices because in a time when histories were emerging from behind History, the center itself had become less coherent and fixed.

There were, of course, many currents in this play of forces. One of the more urgently pressed turned on rejuvenated hopes for a Treaty between Black and White Australians that had never been signed. Activists argued that Aboriginal title had never been ceded, the Government argued it could not now construct such a document, and the general public struggled to find some position between the two. As a response to emergent black histories felt this year, the treaty debate sought to go back into history and 'redo' or 'correct' some of the wrongs and thus construct a more honest and complete History. But more radical and wide-ranging forces were also at work which suggested that, given questions of marginal voices, the presence of different histories actually opened a direct critique of any concept History itself. Some groups active in Australia at the time argued that it was not actually the letter but the concept of a treaty that was most important. To rethink issues of History was effectively to suggest that a nation's History -- with a capital H -- obscured the existence of multiple histories; that is to say, the 'story' of Australia actually involved an underplay of many often incompatible and certainly different stories. The real issue, it was argued in such quarters, was the persuasive power of a recurrent dominant story which had been retold, reproduced and represented as the story in the fixing of Australian identity and marking of social aspirations. On this reading, the stories of Aboriginal people had not been heard because a national deafness to the language and aspirations of indigenous cultures was ensured by practiced inattention borne of a belief in singular story lines. Such deafness had been sustained for so long by the sheer volume of the telling of the dominant story, amplified through generalized self-confidence, rational conviction and a comforting belief in the coherence of modern, rational progress. The hope of this celebration time in certain critical quarters was that now, perhaps, this chronic national deafness was treatable as marginal voices increasingly found new airspace and could provide different renditions of Australia's past. The soundscape in Australia, it seemed, was opening up.

Within schools, community and political groups, and some segments of the media, an injection of enthusiasm, concern for and belief in the need for change saw unprecedented efforts to open space for the serious contemplation of previously marginalized 'languages.' Serious doubt was cast upon the dominant Australian story in its most common telling by a growing sensitivity to that which had been spoken over and the strategies and patterns through which such domination had been reproduced.<sup>5</sup> For example, as young teachers in dispersed situations struggled to expand the historical profile of their student's educational consciousness, the cultural horizon of Australia in general was opening up. Beneath such efforts was a very serious questioning of the central concepts held crucial to Australian identity past and present, and ultimately, a radical questioning of the social, cultural and economic projects and aspirations developed within and legitimized through notions of

linear History. A belief in new possibilities and aspirations seemed plausible. As the violence and limitations of supporting, insisting upon, and inscribing a single trajectory of History/Nation gained a higher profile, the richness of alternative cultural strengths pointed to the possibilities of radical critiques of popular cultural and thus national options. In many ways, such projects became the unwitting gifts of the Bicentennial celebrations.

A decade will soon have passed since the lights went down on the final events scheduled for 1988 in Australia; the celebrations are over, the public exhibitions are all complete and national spirit has for the most part once again returned to a primary focus on questions of economic austerity, credit ratings, social scandal and party politics. However the issues so clearly raised by the Bicentenary have not gone away. The fractures of race and culture and progress remain as pertinent in Australia as they have become in other parts of the world in recent years. Aboriginal People have retained their increased profile; land rights and questions of native title remain a pressing concern across the country; remote communities still claim traditional rights of land occupation, social organization and ceremony; school curricula are still developed by innovative teachers searching for new and better ways to deal with old and often hurtful issues; urban Australians are still drawn by a deep urge to travel in the 'outback' and experience the frontier side of their heritage; Aboriginal music, art and culture are still in high demand. The debates about History and histories are in a thousand different ways still being played out in the Great Southern Land. With the sadness, fear and the inspiration of 'other' stories now firmly lodged in the cultural memory, attempts to 'gather together' into one big happy story are simply not credible.

The explosion of History into histories -- or history into History -- evident in Australia in 1988 could be read with equal conviction into many contemporary political situations which occupy the global stage. Tribal politics and questions of nationhood, self government and constitutional change that continue to drive yet debilitate issues of political identity in Canada; the often violent upsurge of ethnic forces which have underpinned the most visible political turmoil in Eastern Europe of the past half decade since the more entrenched rigidities of the Cold War structures have broken down; the enormously complex picture of Islam that emerges out of any serious attempt to account for the diversity of Muslim states, sects and teachings and the recent dramatic changes in the political horizon of South Africa serve as high profile examples. But the issues of contested and/or competing claims to identity, sovereignty and community -- emerging histories rather than present History -- are also to be found in a vast array of other seemingly disparate yet powerful contemporary forces. Here one could mention debates over the possibility of sustainable land use practices in the face of agribusiness food production; the call for renewed local input into increasingly alienated spheres of local council administrations; mobilizations that seek to keep local fishing, logging or farming communities viable in the face of global capital mobility; attempts to preserve and present ethnographic material held in institutional locations in less ethnocentric formats; efforts to balance

bureaucratic forces in educational structures through the inclusion of parental or community voices; demands that local communities be protected from, or at very least benefit from the location of globally organized capital forces within their proximity; an insistence that the dangers of mainstream medical practice and immunization be acknowledged as part of a debate about alternative medical traditions; the eruption of gang-sponsored drug abuse, violence and rioting at the very heart of industrial capitalist societies. At least as I read the most powerful and contested forces on the contemporary political horizon, the dual trends of insistence on universalizing claims to identity in the face of vigorously asserted claims to multiplicity are always present.

### Thinking about Mabo

In the Australian context, no event since the Bicentennial Celebrations of 1988 has focused as much attention on questions of national identity as the 1992 High Court decision to rule in favor of Eddie Mabo's Mer Island Land Claim on the basis of Native Title. In doing so, the High Court Judges unleashed the concept of Native Title upon the legal profession, Aboriginal groups, industry organizations and a previously uninterested public. No such title had ever officially existed before. Perhaps predictably, the dramatic impact of this decision sent shock waves throughout the Australian community, precipitating celebrations and shrill warnings, raising accusations and counter-accusations, breaking old alliances and forging new ones in combinations hitherto unknown. It is worth rehearsing the process by which these waves were generated.

In 1988, the nation's two-hundredth year birthday celebration finally came around. Australians had been preparing for some time to dig into colorful Australian identity myths and lift out those elements of national pride historically and culturally most treasured as the spirit of a young nation. There were, to be sure, already some serious misgivings about particular elements of early Australian History, about the convict era and transportation, harsh treatment of Aboriginal people, hasty participation in imperial wars and colonial activities in the Pacific, but these seemed to have been incorporated into the Australian character and could always be constructed as situations which rightly belonged back in the semi-detached past. The Australia of the late 1980's was a mature, dynamic, and keenly adventurous place. It was fair, democratic, open minded and could congratulate itself as free of serious historical slurs. Within this optimistic and open picture of a contemporary Australia as a maturing nation recently finding confidence within the Asia-Pacific region, an honest will to engage with the issues of Aboriginal past and present prevailed. For arguably the first time in the nation's history, most Australians seemed prepared to own up to the observation that much of Aboriginal Australia had been dispossessed of land and culture and that ignorance of the deeper issues embedded in a colonial past had allowed a selective naiveté to drive social practice and policy even into the present. A national enthusiasm to make amends prevailed.

Into the opening space provided by such thinking stepped a whole series of Aboriginal

People; artists, musicians, playwrights, advisers and workers. Suddenly every government department wanted Aboriginal staff, corporations were busy being seen sponsoring Aboriginal talent in every possible field of endeavor, Aboriginal artists were in demand from big name galleries internationally, and eagerly sought nationally for high powered art spaces such as the new Parliament house in Canberra. Aboriginal bands produced records with slick videos, performed at football grand finals, headlined concerts and toured overseas. It seemed that wherever one looked an Aboriginal person was being given a hand up, or had simply sprung into the ring of mainstream Australian life. In 1988, Aboriginal People could have been forgiven for thinking that non-Aboriginal Australia had become infatuated with indigenous culture.

For four years this process continued with everybody more or less satisfied that as long as an Aboriginal person was involved then things would be done properly and cultural inadequacies filled. Schools began teaching mandatory classes on Australian history which recited racially oriented wrongs pursued as official policy in the past. Videos were produced, films made and books published which catalogued and traced the errors and disgraces of history. One could readily find people with titles such as 'cultural liaison officer' or 'Aboriginal dance group leader' or even 'tribal elder' teaching the great unwashed about the intricacies of Aboriginal culture or stepping into some new space somewhere created to paint the new, complete picture of Australian life. Within government departments, staff were retrained in the sensitivities required to deal with Aboriginal people in their particular line of work. Such classes were inevitably taught by Aboriginal People and covered all sorts of topics from bush foods to kin structure and social protocol.

Why then did the Mabo decision create such a furor throughout the country, and how could such a significant portion of the population be so quickly turned against those warm if somewhat fuzzy sentiments generated over the previous four years? After all, the granting of Native Title would seem to be only a formal legal acknowledgment of a principle that in the broader culture had been prevalent for some time, especially in the four years since the Bicentennial. Why was a legal and legislative embrace of aboriginal identity so divisive given a prior enthusiasm for tolerance, accommodation and honest history? The answer lies in the process of validation initiated and authorized by the concept of Native Title and in the realization that Native Title may become validated across the country.

Despite taking just over two hundred years for the highest court in the Australian legal system to make its official ruling, and for the Australian Parliament to pass its follow-up Native Title Act in January 1994, the concept of Native Title is relatively straightforward and fairly easy to understand. The High Court ruling declared that wherever it could be shown that Aboriginal People held and continue to hold sacred attachment and responsibilities to Land the concept of Native Title could be said to exist prior to and not be extinguished by, subsequent forms of official land tenure (crown, freehold and so on) current in common law. That is, the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* --land of no people -- which had hitherto framed and guided all government (Crown) Land Acts in Australia since

colonization was declared invalid, and the possibility of traditional ownership preceding and withstanding the coming of the Crown in certain parts of the country was raised formally. Eddie Mabo's momentous historical act was to drag this conceptually simple yet politically powerful form of land ownership into the highest court and insist that the country that he was talking about was the one owned by his people and their ancestors.

The furor started outside the legal system when the newly sanctioned concept of Native Title hit the streets. As acknowledged by many commentators, the confirmation of Native Title has enormous symbolic importance for Australia's indigenous people, confirming a land title not given by the Crown, not extinguished by the practices of colonialism, and still alive and well in the 1990's. Aboriginal people had, and have, traditional rights to the land. The principle of Native Title brought to the courts, and thus the legislature, by Eddie Mabo immediately raised the questions about where and for whom this title applies. The ease with which Australians had enthused about the 'songlines' of traditional Australia during the big bicentennial birthday party became itself a personal dilemma as traditional law became Law and a legal title of traditional land ownership became enshrined in legislation.

Australians slowly realized that granting Native Title opened a Pandora's box of history and social organization. If one recognized the contemporary existence of a distinct body of law effectively beyond the realm of Common Law, other aspects of traditional law including tribal punishment, fire management, resource control, hunting rights and ceremonial road restrictions could also be presented for formal recognition. It was feared that such a realm beyond common law would impinge on the established legal system and way of life developed with the secure assumption of 'one law for all peoples' founded on the old *Terra Nullius* reading of History. Furthermore the recognition of Native Title raised even larger questions of Aboriginal self determination and community independence together with an entire range of possible contingencies for pursuing autonomy in domestic cultural, political and economic spheres.<sup>6</sup> Non-Aboriginal Australians grappled with the idea of being an 'Other' below an identity fixed by the High Court ruling and contemplated the costs, missed opportunities and benefits that might thus be denied to them. Circulating stories of backyards and half acre real estate under threat spoke to a generalized level of confusion released when the always assumed appeared to have been overturned in a single stroke.

Ultimately what put such fire in the High Court's decision was the declaration of a particular definitive element or component in the construction of a contemporary Australian -- in this case Aboriginal -- identity claim, namely the concept of demonstrable spiritual or 'traditional' connection to land as evidenced in the conduct of sacred ceremony that Aboriginal people traditionally practice. Suddenly the vast majority of Australians were forced to confront the living presence of traditional Aboriginal People who were generally considered to no longer exist. This was especially troubling for pastoralists and miners who now faced the prospect of a serious challenge to commercial

interests in land tenure and resource control. At the very least, serious dialogue and negotiation with Aboriginal land owners for access to resources seemed a minimal manifestation of Native Title. A new link had been added to the 'resource access' chain. Even the concept of 'extinguished' Native Title caused serious consternation because the legal overthrowing of *Terra Nullius* as a formal pre-contact status was effectively a declaration that Australia was 'settled' by force which had required the 'extinguishment' of previous land tenure forms. History was once again glimpsed with barbs and rifles, and a validated, declared and legal basis for compensation now loomed.

At the same time, non-traditional Aboriginal political groups were suddenly aware of a potential self deficiency or radical lack (of current Native Title status) that might come to define the main game of indigenous politics. Such a deficiency would nullify their capacity to talk or act on behalf of all Aboriginal groups in the blossoming domain created by a formal declaration of Native Title and by extension in the plethora of areas that would come to be informed by this newly 'sanctioned' definition of being Aboriginal. As expected, the acknowledgment of prior title -- that is, official recognition that Australia was 'owned' by Aboriginal peoples prior to the arrival of European colonizers -- in the form of Native Title declared by the High Court in the Murray Islands case paved the way for a series of land claims and claims to compensation for title extinguishment. Yet the beckoning path of compensation would be in itself a dual edged sword for both non-traditional Aboriginal people and critical non-aboriginal population because compensation claims were now given a clear, legally established basis for legitimacy yet, at the same time, to claim compensation was effectively to publicly declare that a crucial element of one's Aboriginality was now missing or extinguished.

Predictably when two such politically powerful forces were challenged serious disputes arose complete with angry voices, walk outs, ultimatums and violence. Government, industry and Aboriginal groups quickly strained their capacity to meet each other for discussions based on common ground. The media focused on claims and counter claims for months on end. State governments in general, and conservative politicians in particular, seized on the opportunities to talk tough and show how they would not bow to the dictates of political correctness and guilt generated around the 'Aboriginal question' which they said, threatened the very fabric of life in the nation. Aboriginal activists countered that Australians were set to once again prove to the world what a racist and cold-hearted people they were. Those within the bureaucratic sphere to whom the mess was passed, such as the Native Title Tribunal set up under the Native Title Act, struggled to find some negotiated path through the minefield of claims and histories, although their entire field of inquiry was such a political hot potato that all actions were immediately scrutinized and loudly criticized. The Tribunal began to take the easy way out and accept all claims for further consideration, thus deferring acrimonious decisions for the future when the issues of granting or declaring Native Title extinguished would ultimately need to be faced.

As a spate of seemingly ridiculous land claims by groups deficient in the crucial area of traditional association began to be lodged on the basis of Native Title, public opinion swung quickly against the workings and future of what were incorrectly called Mabo claims. Good will from the past few years turned into resentment in the face of such claims, which re-ignited old style indignation against Land Rights from the early 1970s. Those caught up in Aboriginal politics began to see a new form of imperialism emerge and the battle lines of a new political struggle looming. Politically, the future would involve demarcations between and within different cultural groups, effectively creating a continuum of Aboriginality which could not simply be represented as 'capital A Aboriginal'. Location, or identity on this continuum of Aboriginality would come to dominate political posturing, yet the seemingly innocuous establishment of this continuum itself would be achieved through the Native Title Act. Understanding how the Native Title Act changed the field of Aboriginal politics is crucial to understanding how various political actors (organization) reacted to the legislation.

Aboriginal groups from all walks of life leapt in to press Mabo-style claims for territory. Urban-based claims attracted the most attention, but parallel claims were filed in many parts of the country. As the wider Australian population stood by baffled and stung by this contemporary example of misunderstanding, they grew ever more angry with the claims and accusations emanating from politically powerful elements of the Aboriginal movement. Very public brawling broke out in areas where two or more groups claimed title and ownership over the same territory, allowing Australians critical of recent developments to conclude that the entire process was both shameful and bogus; a series of fraudulent claims driven by greedy opportunism. In the Kimberley region, for example, key tribal groups with competing claims to the same territory tore into each other in a politically unhelpful public brawl that fed the worst fears about Native Title right across the country. In towns all around Australia old fears, prejudices and intolerances were being rekindled. Mabo backlash and Mabo posturing was taking hold. Native Title had put the issue of Aboriginal identity firmly into the political arena.

To develop an understanding of the confused politics around the Mabo milieu in Australia requires a recognition that divergent claims to land cannot be reconciled with fixed identities assumed to inhabit such claims. A politics of identity which exploits particular readings of Aboriginality available following the Native Title Act will, in all likelihood, have the greatest impact on how land claims are lodged, disputed and ultimately settled. Yet, despite the high stakes of identity construction and identity politics inherent in Mabo very little attention has been given to these seemingly theoretical issues. To facilitate such an understanding one could expect theoretical advances within the social sciences concerned to develop methodologies and ontologies suitable for the study of representational fractures in contemporary life to be especially helpful. However, one finds that within the social sciences the status of knowledge itself is recently the focus of much debate. Indeed one finds that the confusion surrounding the emergence of histories behind History in the Australian

context parallels a breakdown of confidence in objective Knowledge within the disciplines of the social sciences. Theoretical insights or analytic procedures can no longer be treated as Truths with which to assess or negotiate a political situation. Rather, the situational location of Truth and truths has become the subject of fiercely contested theoretical and political battles. One can no longer aspire to simply present the Truth when truths are recognized as reifications of particular representations. If the ontological lessons of contemporary theoretical debate are taken seriously one must learn to ask not 'what is the Truth about Mabo' but 'what truths will Mabo admit.'

ii). Contested theoretical practice: Social and Political Theory in Postmodern Times.

In recent times, in intellectual forums and institutions, theoretical activity has been conducted amid conditions of considerable ferment. Vigorous dissension and dispute rather than a coordinated search for the building blocks of knowledge has characterized this time; a time in which innovation has been sought, old disputes and stand-points rejected, cross-disciplinary production pursued, cherished intellectual markers and makers overturned, classic authors banished, previously entrenched disciplinary boundaries dismissed and old schools fallen from favor. New scholars have turned from old masters. Just as the crumbling Berlin wall seemed to symbolize an overcoming of old certainties and the beginning of new uncertainties, or virulent auto-immune viruses announced a era in which old boundaries will be breached and previously immune systems ruptured, the shaking of positivistic, rationalistic, objectivist foundations of social science research heralded new and uncertain futures. Ours, many have claimed, is a time of great theoretical upheaval.

In the relevant literature, such shaking of intellectual foundations and theoretical ferment is often conceptualized as a dispute over the aspirations and methodologies of Modernity. On this reading, modernity is the manifestation and reification of particular ontological assumptions about reality, rationality and objectivity that in combination constitute a metaphysical framework within which knowledge about modern life and community in Western Europe has for the most part been guided since at least the time of the European Enlightenment. Such metaphysics, rooted in the project to overthrow Medieval cosmology and the emergence of a developmental modern subject, has served to generate social science methodologies whereby a foundational belief in humans as rational autonomous individuals is transferred, through the dictates of reason and utilitarian calculation, into predictable social, political and economic forms of life. Modernity understood in this way provides both the foundations for the generation of modern knowledge and the principles for appropriate social organization and development. Knowledge can be generated through appropriate -- in this case positivistic, or, scientific -- rational interaction with a world understood to be fully external and open to correctly undertaken investigation, and thus social development is taken to involve the application of that which becomes known. Once the metaphysics of modernity is accepted, production of knowledge becomes a question of methodology. Such a metaphysics thus ultimately provides not

just the order and knowledge for an ordered universe and but also the framework within which such a universe can be negotiated politically.

Recent debate has focused on the various social projects generated through positivistic pursuit of knowledge and the political and intellectual foundations of this modern framework. Consequently, concepts at the very centre of social science disciplines have recently been opened to radical critique. Thus in International Relations the concept of nation, in Psychology the notion of ego, in Political Science the notion of discrete states operating in a system of states, in Sociology the notion of community, in Anthropology the notion of Other, and in History the concept of historical agent have in recent times become the focus of dispute.<sup>7</sup> All of these themes have come into renewed contention as the old, so called 'metanarratives' from which they have been generated and for which they have provided conceptual frameworks have fallen into disrepute.<sup>8</sup> Hence what might be termed the issues of authorship -- questions about who writes, for whom, from where -- have powered the critical edge of much contemporary research.

Not surprisingly, much of this ferment and debate over modernity, and the projects, practices and politics of metanarratives within the academy, has been articulated in terms of a battle between modernity and neo/late/post/modernity in order to account for what is made to seem like another misguided attack on the metanarratives of modernity.<sup>9</sup> In this framing, Postmodernism supposedly directs a misguided critique of Modernity through a focus on the relationship constituted between an assumed object and a constructed subject that debilitates projects of advancement. However, by highlighting an implicit authorship in modern metanarratives of advancement, postmodern energies expose unacknowledged relationships of modernity in which the 'manifold armory of assumptions, leaps of faith and a priori categories are ratified [reified] as real and natural'.<sup>10</sup> Postmodernism has thus precipitated a cultural moment in which the intellectual foundations of modern faiths, what is accepted as 'the real' and 'the natural,' are themselves opened to question. By extension, sources which aspire to erect a social science constructed methodically from objective knowledge become the most dramatic sites of political dispute. Postmodernism locates politics where analysis of knowledge generation processes meets knowledge reification practices.

Given the magnitude and extent of ontological questions raised in current debates across the social science disciplines, a vast literature has been generated which seeks to (re)establish grounds for intellectual and thus ultimately political projects. In a period of ontological uncertainty, the problems of scepticism and relativism seem to force a (re)engagement with the largest questions of life, philosophy and the universe in a manner which precipitates considerable debilitation and malaise. I do not intend in the current context to focus on the specific questions, moments or insights generated within the vast literature that marks the return of such issues. Here I intend to undertake a very brief preview to show how recent, broad-ranging attempts to deal with the urges and challenges that underpin the modernity/postmodernity debate attempt to regain control of an

intellectual framework within which theoretical coherence -- and thus political guidance -- can once again be regenerated and reasserted. These struggles to regain control and to reaffirm theoretical coherence offer instructive guidance for an understanding of what is at stake in contemporary readings of Mabo.

One way to proceed with a preview would be to assess the work of a single, influential thinker who over time has sought to engage the problematics of intellectual inquiry raised by postmodernism in a manner that incorporates challenges, transforms and deepens critical insights, and regenerates modernist frameworks. In this context, the work of Frederic Jameson is exemplary. Jameson is often championed as a scholar who has neither been infatuated by the 'trendiness' nor cowered by the dangers of postmodern thought, and as a thinker whose 'commitment' to political activity means his long term intellectual quest has turned what is typically presented as a nihilistic and thus unproductive contemporary movement into a insightful and productive analytical tool. Jameson, that is, emulates other contemporary thinkers who seek to turn what is perceived as an unproductive moment of interruption -- the arrival of a noisy upstart called postmodernism on to the scene of serious radical discourse -- into a fruitful movement of political action.<sup>11</sup> Cheered by relief that finally a counter attack on postmodernism has been launched Jameson serves the role of boot camp lieutenant; the belligerent and uncooperative are disciplined into making a productive contribution to social life and in the process shown their real purpose.

Such an uncompromising stance is made explicit in the title of Jameson's influential text Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. On Jameson's reading, although postmodernism masquerades as something new and decisively different from modernism, it is actually an ideological manifestation of late-twentieth century capitalism. Thus postmodernism is best understood in historical terms rather than as a fundamentally decisive cultural break with the projects of modernity that went before. Not surprisingly given this framing, Jameson argues that the politically active thinker in the contemporary period is one who understands the need for some adjustments to the more rigid framework of traditional Marxism but who still holds true to the value of locating contemporary life -- of which postmodernism is an important albeit distasteful and unsavory element -- within a materialist conception of history in order to generate genuinely insightful social critique and effective political programs. Jameson thus pursues a social critique and political program that understands and incorporates the 'real' insights rather than capitulates to the surface attractions of postmodernism. Jameson does not simply dismiss postmodernism; rather, he affirms its insightfulness as a means of combating and nullifying its dangers whilst turning this tool to the great task at hand.

Jameson's reaction to postmodernism as a critique of modernity is what I term here a 'paradigm defense' response. That is, the paradigm defender theorist concedes that postmodernism -- or whatever term is given contemporary theoretical challenges to orthodox, positivistic social

science foundations -- has exposed serious flaws in the epistemological basis of modernist discourse and generated serious challenges to political projects derived from them. What is deemed necessary to the functioning paradigm, therefore, is a more sophisticated and encompassing analysis that can handle the challenges of postmodernism. Thus, as in the case of Jameson, who adds social movements and ethnic forces to his analysis in order to bolster the conceptual precision of the analytical category 'class', the most pressing contemporary intellectual project for paradigm defenders is to generate a more sensitive analysis of current social forces incorporating previously marginalised and misunderstood elements to generate studies with contemporary political relevance. A 'logic' is still sought behind disparate historical processes and cultural forms that will both explain those forms and neutralize contemporary postmodern forces of nihilism. Paradigm defender analysis remains systemic in its attempt to locate and speak coherently to wide-ranging contemporary social, cultural and political formations. There are still 'foundations' which, although tenaciously obscured by contemporary social formations, provide the key for understanding these formations and as such must be located and worked into any coherent analysis or program.

Exactly this paradigm defense response to postmodern critique could be shown to frame the recent work of Nancy Hartsock, Edward Said, Anthony Giddens, Jurgen Habermas, Marshall Berman, Jane Flax and Michel de Certeau: some of the more influential contemporary cultural commentators. I am not suggesting that either the research interests or the epistemological directives at work within such productions are not sophisticated, diverse and/or seriously presented. What these thinkers share though, is a reading of the contours of the contemporary debate which ultimately attempts to salvage what are presented as 'positive' political programs from the ravages of a 'nihilistic' postmodern critique. This stance is especially well expressed in some recent edited collections which have attempted to grapple with questions of modernity/postmodernity that have colored the contemporary intellectual horizon. Collections are important because they bring together, and thus suggest the interrelatedness of, a wide range of thinkers from across the disciplines who deal with particular theoretical issues with strong currency in the contemporary debate.

A recent publication titled Modernity and Identity edited by Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman especially exemplifies some of the more common themes evident in recent theoretical accounts of contemporary intellectual debate.<sup>12</sup> As announced in the title, there are two general themes, of modernity and of identity, which guide the construction of the book. Developed from a pair of conferences called to pursue an analysis of these two major themes, the editors sought a suitable forum to canvas 'work in progress' responses to contemporary debate. The theme of identity as developed in the book is drawn from a particular rendition of modernity and its relation to a postmodern critique; a rendition which has been particularly common within academic studies in the contemporary period. This rendition of the meanings and potential of modernity found in the introduction to the book establishes the intellectual terrain, the standpoint for analysis and the tone

of the subsequent discussion.

In the opening paragraph the editors declare that the book's general thrust and the particular essays gathered from a diverse range of scholars represented therein can be seen as joining the now somewhat institutionalized tradition of debate over modernity and postmodernity. Whilst, in the view of the editors, current commentators have typically come to treat modernity as the 'static and abstract model separated from the dynamic ebb and flow of reality', with a classical reliance on abstract 'blueprints' for analysis, the authors assembled wish to restate a position within modernism as a place to stand against the 'excesses' of 'utopian' postmodernism. The authors will display a different sort of modernism from that which is 'fixed' and dismissed by the postmodernists.

For the editors, postmodernism is seen as particularly problematic because it 'annuls movement and change through its disavowal of avant-gardes'. Postmodernism that is, has created a 'mediascape' within which only signs are considered to occur. When power and social relations are 'reduced' to a universe of texts and signs political power is stripped from the hands of individuals or collectives especially those active at the fringes or margins. Within this 'astral empire of signs', neither collective action, nor meaningful change can occur because postmodernism by only giving credence to circulating text as locations of power has taken away the basis for agency and pronounced the death of the active subject. The editors' understand the implications of removing agency to be particularly dangerous as it forsakes the possibility of political intervention and thus change. Without a subject there can be no political consciousness, without agency, no history. The picture constructed of a postmodern world is therefore a gloomy place for the politically active paradigm defender who gazes out from the fort at the malaise wrought on disheartened troops by postmodern critique: "Utopian postmodernism is thus a vision of a neo-tribal paradise in which a set of spatially set forms of life carry on experiments, each in their own culture. In this vision however, communication is impossible between tribes. The overwhelming spatiality of the tribes seems to suffocate the temporal dimension. Subject-less signifiers remain fixed in the absence of any sort of forward-propulsions. There is no future."<sup>13</sup>

Here is the real problem for the editors: in the face of postmodern culture and poststructuralist critique we have no acceptable concept of forward, no source of propulsion. Our chances of a planned or controlled future have been removed. Postmodernism, it is argued, is fundamentally debilitating because it has taken away the basis for vision. Hence the author's heroic search for readings that reopen notions of a dynamic modernity and reclaim the possibility of a political agent through a focus on identity in modernity as the condition of possibility for 'vision' and hope again for 'a future'.

Such a reading of the history, fate and potential of modernism is much indebted to the work of Marshall Berman.<sup>14</sup> Although Berman figures prominently in the text itself, his real influence on the thinking of paradigm defenders in general is found in the intellectual response to postmodernism that

he heralds; a response that informs many of the contributions to this book. As related in the introduction, it is Berman who has shown the way out of the impasse of the 'postmodernist onslaught' by revitalizing an older, different, more mobile reading of subjectivity and modernity than that which it is claimed has come to caricature recent scholarship. On this reading Berman has shown that 'all that is solid, melts into the air', reminding them that in an older form of modernism we all knew what the post-modernists keep insisting that we do not know: Modernism fundamentally involves change. So inspired, the real modernism is presented as a populist or 'low' modernism that resists the 'excesses of abstraction' and is generated and regenerated 'on the streets'. It is a modernism that constantly changes, that is rebuilt and reborn anew, that understands that everything will melt into the air, that is fully conversant with the themes of change, diversity and transformation and that endlessly lays open again the forces of creation. It is indeed such a reading of modernity that can generate the specific concept of identity capable of reestablishing politics sought by the authors.

Following the logic laid down by the editors in this introduction, the primary implication of poststructuralism and postmodernism has been the smothering of workable concepts of subjectivity; in particular the driving concepts of social agency and political identity. Thus in putting together the essays for this collection, the editors gathered contributors whose various quests activate a (re)generation of the political actor. Modernity and Identity are presented in question and answer form with the latter operating as the solution to the dilemma raised in contemporary postmodernist (mis)treatments of the former. The intellectual malaise spread by the impact of postmodernism on a crippled modernity can be reversed through the reconstitution of an active, fluid, social subject or identity. The search for this revitalized identity will center not in the 'high' modernism of the great blueprint tradition but in the 'low' or street modernism opened up by a Berman-style analysis. Modernity can once again be conceived as active, vibrant and changing when the identities possible and produced in the street level milieu of the contemporary period become the focus of social analysis. It is the belief of the authors that such a critique will at once overcome the nihilism of postmodernists whilst re-initiating earnest, politically valid social research and action.

Behind such high hopes for an end to the interruptions made by noisy postmodernists and the triumphant return of an effective, active, legitimate wing of theoretical modernists, is a belief that the 'fragmentation' of reality so central to contemporary post-modern theorists is a mirage. Behind the mirage lies some solid ground, rooted in contemporary economic reality which any decent theorist concerned with actual social issues in the world (rather than the fashionable nihilism of postmodernism) would be concerned to engage. Getting to this reality would allow us to "...probe more deeply into the structural phenomena that may have occurred several times in the past that we, without any sense of history, have impetuously dubbed modernity and postmodernity."<sup>15</sup> "Do we not learn"?, the authors seem to ask. Have we not seen that in the past, in history, even several times, the 'deep' structural forces of emergent modernities have been at play and yet as theorists we

misinterpret the surface signs and simply declare that a totally 'new' time has come? Thus, in the most recent example, modernity is precipitously assessed and dumped by postmodernity repeating yet again a well rehearsed mistake; a mistake whereby a new epoch is loudly announced in terms which simultaneously misinterprets connections to and denies insights from the old epoch.

The editors hope this need not be the case. If, as social theorists, we could become sensitive to the 'variations of these themes' we could dispense with concepts as divisive and unhelpful as modernity and postmodernity understood as times of fundamental transformation in favor of more 'structurally neutral terms'. A move in this direction would bring very clear rewards: "Such terms might truly elucidate the family resemblance between, for example, the baroque and the postmodernist and allow us to look further into the contextual regularities involved in their emergence. The ultimate historicization of these terms is essential in any attempt to grasp the contours of the present."<sup>16</sup> The contours of the present, the structures, the map and the logic, would emerge if we found the contextual regularities that stood behind the present. To make such a discovery, to demonstrate the 'family', or 'same blood' connections behind seemingly disparate forces, would seem however to require the services of a pioneer, one who could gather around themselves the accoutrements of the known for a journey of discovery into the unknown.

On my reading, for the editors of this collection, the services of not just one but a group of such pioneers is close to hand. Those who have been assembled from diverse backgrounds in this very collection to revitalize the concept of modernity whilst defending against the challenge of postmodernism are presented as perhaps indicating a whole new dimension of theoretical inquiry. For them, "...the convergence of interests represented here may be evidence of a trend towards a more unified social science, or human science, in some distant future that is truly holistic."<sup>17</sup> The magnitude of this claim serves to tie together and exemplify the dominant themes and political aspirations of the editors as a suitable resolution of contemporary theoretical debate. A really meaningful, and thus politically useful, social science would be altogether more holistic. As such, it would resist the debilitation of postmodernism's 'obscurant fetish' with the fragmentary nature of contemporary life and instead strive to analyze the structures and logic that lie deep within the emergent contours of today's 'seemingly divergent' global culture. Looking through the essays collected in the book, this is exactly the type of analysis that is collected: analysis of the 'postmodern moment' which attempt to reappropriate the ground conceded to postmodernism in recent times on the basis of a revamped, sensitive, street-wise modernism that is mature enough to go beneath the surface uninhibited by postmodern fears to retrieve that which is 'essential' to our time for the greater good of political analysis.

What this collection does is often done. Most intellectual work these days measured in sheer volume is part of the same shared project to return social sciences to constructive, positive ends dealing with actual social issues by locating a perhaps deep but existent logic beneath events. Sit

in on any discussion; be it tutorial, lecture or presentation which dares to open the questions of postmodernism and one rapidly becomes aware of the depth of animosity generated when these concepts and the assumptions behind them are even gently opened to question. Paradigm defenders are convinced that the very project of social science is debilitated by the presence of postmodernism.

Yet the machinations of paradigm defenders that have ridden out from the fortified walls of modernity to meet the challenge of an emergent postmodernism are not the only deployment on the hillside. Although by far the loudest and most numerous troops are paradigm defenders, scattered amongst them are those who believe that the coming of postmodernism actually heralds a radical change in attitude to knowledge inquiry and as such allows one to raise again the foremost questions of existence. Such thinkers have come to celebrate the breakdown of credibility that modernist knowledge has experienced not as a loss but as the most potentially productive intellectual force at work in the contemporary period. On this reading, it is the assumed foundations, the frameworks and the categories of knowledge which have structured the constitution of knowledge, and thus its multifarious social manifestations, which have characterized the period of modernity. Therefore, a precondition for the transformation of such knowledge and modernist social manifestations is a critical appraisal of these very intellectual foundations. Poststructuralists especially share an attitude to knowledge production which invites rather than condemns critical appraisal of the categories and foundations of (modern) knowledge. They do not accept the existence of neutral or objective foundations, and understand all knowledge to be generated from particular standpoints. They question the designation of categories as simply given, or natural, or essential. Poststructuralists find politics in all claims to knowledge.

Such an attitude to knowledge requires a serious engagement with that which is uncertain. Once one questions the simply given, a trail of ambivalence quickly leads to the very heart of modernity. In the literature, there are those who strive to follow these themes of ambivalence and uncertainty despite the rigidities and fixity of modernist thinking. Such a focus is found for example in a recent article by Zygmunt Bauman titled 'Modernity and Ambivalence'<sup>18</sup> In this article Bauman takes the two principle themes of modernity and ambivalence as being deeply in tension; indeed the former is understood as an attempt to overcome the uncertainties of the latter. Ambivalence is used as a way to note uncertainty at the core of the certain modern project. Bauman traces these themes and tensions through a rigorous focus on the concept of 'stranger' as distinct from its common cousins in the couplet friend/enemy.

What Bauman reads at the very center of Modern cosmology, and therefore of the ontologies of Modernity, is a very clear fixing and delineation of that which is inside and that which is outside. Such a fixing, which elevates distinctions into 'master oppositions' such as that within the friend/enemy pair, present knowledge and activity as linked in a unison and thus serves not just to reduce but to expel doubt or uncertainty from the equation and allow action to occur in a premeditated

form. He argues that through clear oppositions of inside/outside the modern is rendered immune from the dilemmas of choice borne of uncertainty. Under the steady hand of clearly marked oppositional distinctions, the world can be read and reacted to in a clearly (pre)ordained and (pre)ordered manner. Bauman suggests that just as the opposition friend/enemy is exposed as inadequate and overturned by the concept of stranger, so modernity is rendered visible through a broader incapacity to deal with the concept of ambivalence.

What makes the concept of stranger so powerfully unsettling for Bauman is its refusal to submit to the 'cosy collusion' of identities that oppositions such as friend/enemy require to the extent that the stranger threatens the very conditions of sociation itself. The stranger saps social life of a secure sense of location, an essential condition of social existence. For Bauman, the concept of stranger takes the same form of the 'undecidables', such as Greek *pharmakon*, at once poison, remedy and recipe, explored by Derrida. Undecidables are all neither/nor, that is, simultaneously either/or. Their underdetermination is their potency: because they are nothing they may be all. They brutally expose the fragility of even the most secure of separations. They bring the outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos. For Bauman, this is exactly what strangers do and they remain a constant challenge.<sup>19</sup>

A stranger does not just reproduce the fear of an enemy, it refuses to accept that the couplet friend/enemy is capable of expressing the 'fullness' of difference between entities. Because the stranger spills into and beyond both categories in the couplet, the category cannot ever be known in full and remains by definition, undecidable and never complete. The nausea brought on by the inability to know a stranger -- and thus locate, respond to and determine oneself -- represents, for Bauman, a threat to the very process of sociation. The stranger is not just an 'as-yet-unknown', an 'unfamiliar' which given the appropriate mediation will be secured<sup>20</sup> Rather, the stranger is the absolutely 'unclassifiable'. Strangers are the true monsters, those who are forever the hybrids, the not fit-in-ables. As such they will always render oppositions and their inadequate attendant classification systems questionable. This destructive power, Bauman suggests, attracts the most virulent efforts to disarm or suppress their disruptive potential. Such an action must be taken or 'the world [as we know it] may perish'.

The virulent efforts to disarm or suppress the disruptive potential of the Bauman's stranger obviously opens out into questions about international relations and the presumed existence of an anarchical state system inhabited by discrete friends and enemies. Yet Bauman's commentary on the nauseous, debilitating effect of strangers on social location in general suggests a wider application wherever fully coherent identities are assumed to be present in a fixed terrain. Bauman's willingness to confront the deep tension between ambivalence and the required certainties of modernist projects offers a powerful antidote to those theorists who, from fear of social malaise or political seizure precipitated by the loss of a coherent actor, adopt strategies of paradigm defence to

deflect the challenge of uncertainty wrought by postmodernism. Paradigm defenders require a fixed identity to drive modernity, yet Bauman suggests, no such identity is available and modernist projects will inevitably carry an ambivalence at their core.

The principles of an emergent postmodern uncertainty that uncovers a political crisis in modernist projects, parallels I believe, the emergence of alternative readings of indigenous/colonial history generated as part of the bicentennial celebrations of Australian History in 1988. In the following section I argue that the philosophical challenges of ambivalence and locational uncertainty to modern cosmologies was clearly identified and elaborated as a dilemma for modern life by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche more than 100 years ago. By proclaiming the death of God and raising the riddle of Eternal Return Nietzsche seems to identify the key philosophical themes at play in the modern world and challenges all to ask which moderns will have the strength to embrace a world without certainties.

iii). Return of the Madman: Friedrich Nietzsche and the Death of God.

Between 1872 and 1889 Nietzsche wrote 12 complete books, released numerous segments of the subsequently collated 'Meditations', added prefaces and poems to previously published material, generated enormous collections of notes, some of which were subsequently published in dubious form by his sister, produced an autobiography, and 'broke down.' The somewhat cloudy circumstances of his breakdown, the 'editorial' activities of his sister, the sheer magnitude and literary style of the various works and the breadth of his intellectual project(s) have generated considerable dispute over Nietzsche's life, philosophy, historical significance and sanity ever since, and provoked a range of hostile readings. Amongst the more serious charges leveled against Nietzsche are that he was racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, a Nazi sympathizer, a nihilist and in more recent times the ancestor of contemporary poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers. It is not my intention here to survey the enormous body of secondary literature associated with his name, but rather, to focus on particular works -- and very specific and heavily metaphorical sections within these works -- in order to locate a particular set of questions which have remained central to philosophy in the European tradition since Nietzsche. That is, for my present purposes at least, Nietzsche is worth remembering for the power of his insights rather than for his specific guidance in provision of a political framework,<sup>21</sup> as a stern critic of philosophical commitments expressed in modernity rather than as a prophet of how life should be in modern times. The manner in which Nietzsche poses the problem of uncertainty is, I believe, especially suggestive for reading contemporary political struggles in Australia around issues of identity, Aboriginality and Native Title. Two well-known themes are especially interesting in this context: the Death of God and the Eternal Return. The process of unpacking the move from the metaphorical to the political (or the philosophical to the empirical, to use the three point schema of empirical, theoretical and philosophical used above to read contemporary events) begins most

suggestively, I believe, with Nietzsche, and can be followed, as I do in subsequent chapters, through the more recent analyses of poststructuralist and postcolonial writers.

In Book Three, aphorism 125 of The Gay Science<sup>22</sup>, Nietzsche makes his now (in)famous announcement through the voice of a Madman that God is dead. In the market place, in the bright sunlight of early morning the Madman, burning lantern in hand, moves through the People and cries thus: "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. "Has he got lost?" asked one. "Did he lose his way like a child?" asked another. "Or emigrated?" Thus they yelled and laughed.<sup>23</sup> The crowd falls around with laughter at Nietzsche's forlorn madman, yet the news spoken was more profound than the market crowds laughter suggested and the People's derision of the madman was premature. God had not just gone on holidays, or taken a break from the crowd, or sought regeneration through meditation or become disorientated on some distant path far from home. One who journeys can always return, or be called back, or be sent a message, or appoint a successor. The Madman carried rather more startling news for which perhaps there were not ears in the crowd to hear:

"The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him -you and I. All of us are murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not the night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing yet of the noise of grave diggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine composition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."<sup>24</sup>

Such was the magnitude of the news borne by the Madman. God was dead, yet God's death was an act of murder, an unholy business undertaken by the hands of people with ramifications of epochal magnitude. With the passing of God by human hand, the world was irrevocably changed. The very horizon which marks the most distant and bounds the universe for a central seeing eye had been wiped away as by a sponge. The very sea which forever sealed, protected and nurtured the land had been drunk up. The very sun around which the earth had circled to receive its warmth, fertilization, energy and light had been cast off. Whither to, now, goes the earth and its human crew?

Light and warmth and gravity and direction and orbit and spirit have been plucked from the sky and wrenched from the heavens to earth. All must now be ordained from the earth alone. Although the morning light of the sun, freshly risen, shines its light upon the marketplace, the Madman carries by hand his own lantern. He lives as one who knows that the sun has set forever and

withdrawn its powers. He knows that the magnitude of that dawn is yet to rise upon the people. The need for light much closer to hand has not yet been awakened in the people whose path still seems so clearly lit by the memory of God. The dawn for which the Madman comes prepared will require light and morning songs hitherto unknown.

A crime of such magnitude will create unprecedented debts and bring not blame but responsibility. The greatest weight will come not from guilt but from responsibility. Verily the madman speaks this charge to the crowd. "Do we hear nothing as yet of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead and we have killed him....How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves?"<sup>25</sup>

When the seat of the sacred itself has been toppled and its alter smeared with blood from their own hand where can a People turn to for atonement and justice? This is Nietzsche's most powerful question. How can the murder of God be understood and thus atoned? To what does this event condemn the People? What becomes now of the world of people?

One could argue that much of the rest of the book is an attempt to provide an answer to these questions; the same might even be said of Nietzsche's subsequent works.<sup>26</sup> Valid as these observations may be, one does not have to look so far afield, he provides some clue for this most profound task in the rest of the Madman passage; a theme to which Nietzsche returns again and again. The magnitude of the crime, and hence the enormity of the quest to reconstruct a basis for life, or sense of gravity which this crime has initiated, is on the madman's lips as he asks: "Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There never has been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us -- for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."<sup>27</sup>

The magnitude of the task is here announced. The problem for subsequent Peoples is laid bare. To atone for the death of God people must themselves become gods. And in the process of doing so history will be driven to a hitherto unknown plane. The greatness of the deed of killing God will ultimately propel human kind into a higher state of being than has ever existed before. Coming to grips with their status as murderers of God will force people to become Gods themselves; in order to even understand and withstand their crime humankind must take dramatic metaphysical steps. The subsequent forces unleashed by the new metaphysics will propel history to a higher plane. History will be not that given by God, the history of linear time, but rather history must be created at the hands of people.

Speaking through a madman laughed at in the market, Nietzsche suggests that the news which he brings is too great for comprehension in his day. Rather, he is resigned to the passing of much time before the dawn of this dawning<sup>28</sup> Like the shadow of Buddha which was shown for

hundreds of years after his death, Nietzsche knows that there will be caves from in which the shadow of God will be difficult to vanquish for many years to come: "Here the madman fell silent and looked at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. 'I have come too early,' he said then; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than from the most distant stars -- and yet they have done it themselves'."<sup>29</sup>

On this particular day it is said that the Madman went on to sing of the death of God in churches telling those who accosted him that such buildings were now naught but the 'tombs and sepulchers of God.' For the Madman, so close in time and comprehension to such an announcement, can only spend time calling new songs into old music halls waiting for the crumbling walls to fall. One who comes so early must come with patience and the resilience to endure inevitable charges of 'madness'.

The question I wish to pose, then, is this: living as we do some hundred odd years after Nietzsche's Madman visited the People in the market, how do we live in the presence of a dead God? Which smells of decomposition waft into our world? How far has the shadow of God been erased from our horizon? Have the new songs brought on a crumbling of the old walls? Is he who carries a lantern in the twilight of morning still scorned and derided as mad?

To bring such questions into the present requires closer consideration of the metaphysical issues which Nietzsche raises using the madman metaphor. At one level Nietzsche speaks directly of the Christian God who provides focus, meaning and an anchor to the Christian universe simultaneously generating the foundations of a moral code for living one's Christian life. Orbiting around a father like God, the Christian universe is as a solar system from which the dictates of the all powerful centre are available and may be fully known. The centre provides the point of rotation, the source of gravity that maintains a stable and constant revolution, the infinite source of inspiration and the focus and frame of worship. Metaphysically, the rules or codes of life and living are given from the centre, one knows how to live by one's obedient orientation to the pattern established at the centre. Guidance, inspiration, encouragement, chastisement, familial order, education schema, time division, indeed ones entire interpretative framework is provided from light emanating from the God centre and one's location/orientation to this centre. Metaphysical meaning of life is given from that which is beyond life, the human becomes in terms of that given by God, the relationship is one in which the earth bound receives from God the heavenly provider.

Such is the relationship, or life orientation, which Nietzsche hopes to highlight through his focus on the Christian God. Whilst acknowledging the centrality of Christianity at the time of writing, I would suggest that Nietzsche is throwing his metaphorical net much wider than the school of

Christianity and actually means to illuminate the persuasiveness of philosophical relationships which take the heliocentric, or, 'solar system' form in which Truth emanating from an active centre is amplified and transmitted to a passive, receptive outer. Throughout his works, Nietzsche refers to thinkers such as Plato and the Greeks as Christians, suggesting a wider than literal use of the term to illustrate a wider philosophical point. Using the Madman to bring news of the death of God into the everyday market, Nietzsche seems to suggest that words of great meaning -- usually the preserve of high priests -- must come from those whose eyes are trained on the horizon. In the market, far from ears blocked by priestly-ness, sensitive eyes are required to register the fading light or hear the subtle sounds of the heavenly sunset.

Philosophically, through the Madman, Nietzsche voices a profound critique of prevalent ontological assumptions that structure a society's fabric; to highlight this, Nietzsche brings his eruptive insight into life at its most mundanely structured moment in the everyday practices of the marketplace where the small time activities which sustain existence are carried out day after day after day. Thus the notion of daily light and seasonal life-giving sun are woven into the metaphor of the Madman with his lantern in the early morning market. The Christian God stands to the Christian world as the Sun stands to the Earth. A fixed, anchored, definitive authority from which all light, meaning, explanation, relations and power emanate. Announcing the death of God in such a metaphorical manner throws all relations with such philosophical foundations into question -- the Earth is unchained from the Sun -- and declares that the basis of all philosophical relationships will thereafter forever be transformed. Nietzsche focuses his analysis on the big ones; morals, the sacred, and 'thing in itself', knowledge's which have been at the heart of European philosophy and culture since the Greeks. Thus Science, realism, or any form of positivistic knowledge which appeals to a static, unchangeable, timeless, universal, ultimate center is in this passage being announced as dead.<sup>30</sup>

I read such an announcement as heralding and precipitating a severe challenge to Modernism and the projects of Modernity. All that has been construed as determined outside and beyond human categories of knowledge smells in this context of rigor mortis, death and of the impostor. Foucault, in a controversial and often misunderstood move, extrapolates this concept and announces the 'Death of Man.'<sup>31</sup> On this reading Foucault -- like Nietzsche before him -- is not saying that 'we' are insignificant, but that the bourgeois notion of the rational autonomous individual has been unable to stand the test of serious scrutiny and should be abolished as a philosophically coherent form of received social explanation. Washed away like a face drawn in the tidal sands, the image of bourgeois man has seen its time come and go. The rational individual can no longer simply be accepted as a 'given' part of any 'given' reality.

Nietzsche's evidence of having borne witness to a major philosophical event of historical magnitude throws into question foundational principles used to form powerful alliances. The principle of a God-fixed, centered universe has spawned many long lasting and wide-ranging concepts, some

of which are to be found at the very heart of the most powerful legitimizing discourses of the past two centuries. I think here, in particular, of the notion of Providence; playing out in the realm of the 'this-worldly' that which takes its instruction, depiction and legitimization from the 'that-worldly'. Providence is a notion which serves as a conduit from which the metaphysical is translated into social vision and earthly political practice.

Providence features strongly in many of the most powerful and pervasive practices and writings produced over the past two centuries. Perhaps the most common, certainly the most widely circulated, justification of colonial explorations, inventions, desecrations's, condemnations, alterations, conversions, promotions, devotions and emotions since the beginning of the colonial period have drawn strength from the notion of divine sanction or holy mission inherent in the concept Providence. Divine sanction understands that which is unfolding here on earth seemingly at the hand of mankind to be actually the playing out of God's will on a truly cosmic scale. Literally with the word of God on their tongues and the fire of God in their hearts, modern peoples set out from the 'old world' to discover and impose God's holy plan on the plethora of 'new worlds' exposed as the storms of the early modern, industrial West broke on distant and foreign shores. Guided thus, knowing their time had come, missionaries were ready to travel for the Word, and savages were found like so many stray lambs needing a kindly shepherd to herd them into a flock.

The strikingly powerful combination of an all encompassing Christian God, and the attendant principle of divine will with knowing, rational individuals who will with honor and zeal carry out divine deeds with the blessing and to the glory of God, has only in recent times lost its prominence. Although actions in the name of some 'extraterrestrial' power or other are still most common, the use value of " Providence' in its colonial form has waned with the demise of old style colonialism and now resides only on the fringe of religious orders. Although overt appeals to divine right are in remiss in contemporary times the contemporary world has been irrevocably shaped by the actions, adventures and conquests of the colonial period built upon actions legitimized under various claims to divine will. Indeed the current 'shape' and 'order' of the globe has been determined for the most part in the practices and conquests of the colonial period justified through claims of Providence.

The journey to America and subsequent writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and friend Gustave de Beaumont between May 1831 and February 1832 provide a fine example of just how powerful this combination of belief and practice can be. Together Alex and friend Gustave were drawn to the 'New World' being created in America in order to see what the seeds of a dawning, democratic, rational future looked like soon after germination, and thus how such seeds would, should or could soon be sown in non-rational, tradition-bound Europe.

De Tocqueville believed that the 'general equality of condition' between all peoples was a fundamental historical principle behind the recent revolution in France and general unrest in Europe. The Divine urge behind this principle was clearly to be seen in tumultuous France where the nobles

were moving down whilst the commoners were moving up the social ladder in an inevitable climb towards equity. Whilst thoroughly disturbed about how this inevitable move has been (mis)understood by 'the most powerful, intelligent and moral classes' who ought be guiding its development, De Tocqueville is adamant that these same inevitable forces currently causing havoc in his native country are to be felt around the world<sup>32</sup>.

"Nor is this particular to France. Whithersoever we turn our eyes we perceive this same revolution going on throughout the Christian world. The various occurrences of national existence have everywhere turned to the advantage of democracy: all men have added to it by their exertions, both those who have intentionally labored in its cause, and those who have served it unwittingly; those who have fought for it and those who have declared themselves opponents, have all been driven along the same track, have all labored to one end; some ignorantly and some unwittingly, all have been blind instruments in the hands of God.

The gradual development of the principle of equality is therefore, a Providential fact. It has all the chief characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is durable, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as men contribute to its progress."<sup>33</sup>

In America, De Tocqueville's concerned yet enthusiastic eyes could see the hand of God and the path of Providence at work in the marvelous creation of a modern nation upon a vast fertile land occupied by savage caretakers who had long awaited in their ignorance the arrival of God's chosen people. The creation of America as a modern nation unfolding in the New World was therefore to these two pairs of eyes literally the work of God. All that occurred therein was a manifestation of the will of God and thus part of the divine plan. Those who came, turning new soil, civilizing savage races, establishing economic and political communities on richly fertile but previously unused lands all undertook the work of God and hence furthered knowingly or unknowingly the workings of Providence. De Tocqueville was ecstatic to bear witness to and indeed to play a part in God's divine plan, and a sense of religious awe, reverence and divine optimism pervades his writings from the period. "I cannot believe that the Creator made man to leave him in the endless struggle with the intellectual miseries which surrounds us. God destines a calmer and more certain future to the communities of Europe. I am ignorant of his designs, but I shall not cease to believe in them because I cannot fathom them, and I had rather mistrust my own capacity than his justice."<sup>34</sup>

How wonderful to feel an earth-moving power relentlessly sweeping across this land and eventually the lands of Europe like an incoming tide. How wonderful to know that the hand of God smoothed the path for God's people. How foolish one would be to deny the forces of Providence: "If the men of our time should be so convinced, by attentive observation and sincere reflection, that the gradual and progressive development of social equality is at once the past and future of their history, this discovery alone would confer the sacred character of a Divine decree upon the change. To attempt to check democracy would be in that case to resist the will of God; and the nations would then

be constrained to make the best of the social lot awarded to them by Providence."<sup>35</sup>

Resisting this process would in itself be an act against Providence and doomed to failure; peoples of the world must embrace this emerging cosmic principle. De Tocqueville came to America then to observe first hand the working out in its purest form how the principle of democracy built upon equality would develop. 'America' itself was a first. Here was a new nation just developing on a blank page at the hands of men driven by the divinely sanctioned principle of equality. From America those who would carry history forward must learn in a most profound way: "Providence has given us a torch which our forefathers did not possess, and has allowed us to discern fundamental causes in the history of the world which obscurity of the past concealed from them."<sup>36</sup> The freedom, rationality and unfettered moral enthusiasm available in America presents for de Tocqueville both a wonderful opportunity and a religiously grounded moral obligation to develop. In de Tocqueville's mind, "Religion perceives that civil liberty affords a noble exercise to the faculties of man, and that *the political world is a field prepared by the Creator for efforts of the mind.*" [emphasis added]<sup>37</sup> That is, the principle of equality which underpins the concept of democracy growing in its purest form in America actually indicates a divine principle of civil liberty free to roam creatively on a new field. The galactic scale of the project is obvious and certainly inspired a reverent awe in de Tocqueville; the New World was actually a 'field' given by God to his people on which to develop as its most noble exercise. Providence housed, then, both the idea of God's will and the moral obligation of mankind to develop the political and natural world as part of God's plan.

Extrapolating from a universe revolving around an authoritative Christian centre the various discourses of God enmeshed with projects of Colonialism have proceeded hand in hand. One could read the focus of Providence/Colonialism as an imperialistic projection on a global scale of particular 'grounded' or 'fixed' knowledge's that renders meaningful the unknown in terms of the known. Current global geography reflects such a historical intertwining of knowledge, Providence, morals and Colonialism. The foundations of modern existence and categories of knowledge are bound up in these processes. Nietzsche looms as a most profound critic of the Modern world if one grants that his metaphorical warnings about a dead Christian God are actually applicable to the philosophical principles modernist metaphysics. Nietzsche would be an ancestor of contemporary postcolonial thinkers who record the death of Providence. Could he indeed have referred to all this blood being lit by the Madman's lantern?

My suspicion that indeed Nietzsche intended to address issues of this magnitude is fueled by the opening passage of Book Three where 'given the way of men' the shadow of Buddha is known to have been shown within caves for centuries after his death. Nietzsche here chooses another obviously religious moral universe as his focus, which has substantial lingering consequences. No new light will be shone on the walls of such caves until lanterns are lit and carried within. The old light, or more particularly its darkness, cannot be just turned off; it must burn out and the shadows

be chased away by the bearers of new light. These themes are taken up again in aphorism 343, which deals with the cheerfulness of those who, knowing God to be dead await for new light, new morals, new visions. It is significant also, that the opening chapter of the book begins with a section titled "Teachers of the purpose of existence," a purposefully religious/metaphysical concept. Those who teach the purpose of existence, regardless of the actual form that such teachings may take, are actually the return of that which brings faith in life once again to a tired and confused humanity. I suspect that such teachers are, from Nietzsche's eyes, required once again. God is dead, and in death has crumbled the will of God. Existence itself has been thrown open to radical questioning. Faith in life, in whatever form the marvel of human species may yet produce, must be inspired once again.

When the Madman announces the death of God, Nietzsche sounds the death knoll for Providence. Navigating without the hand of God on the tiller, the prospect of sailing the ship of life into uncharted sea's raises the greatest questions of life, death and the sacred. Morality, passion and responsibility are placed at the very center of human life and existence once again. When the Madman asks 'What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?' he affirms that subsequent life must eventually deal with this death; that now, humans must become fully responsible for their actions. As God can no longer be their guide through the workings of Providence, so, God can no longer serve as a justification for a mode of life. All the great questions of existence are thrown up again. Death of Providence sparks a Dance of the Liminal.

If it could be posited, then, that the death of God actually heralds the death of Providence, what can be said about Nietzsche's assessment of our future? The death of God and 'Providence' has removed divine sanction as an urge for colonizing activities 'in the field.' Neither God, nor any other metaphysical centre, can be appealed to as an ultimate presence who oversees and directs our journey through life. Within each of us and collectively, the divine blood that the death of God shed requires a cleansing water. Nietzsche stated that the search for this cleansing will actually push humans to become gods themselves; gods who in being able to acknowledge their crime will overcome the desires for a blessed light that God served.

This process of becoming gods is, I would argue, at the very heart of Nietzsche's notion of Eternal Return. It is with this concept that Nietzsche seems to state most fully what he sees as the future dilemma for Europeans challenged by the death of God.

The fullest discussion and clearest statement of the notion of Eternal Return comes at the very end of Book Four in The Gay Science. It is worth noting that when first published this section was effectively the conclusion of the book. The very last aphorism, number 342, was almost verbatim the very beginning of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, his next work. Book Five of The Gay Science was added after Beyond Good and Evil had been written and published. Given the above it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that aphorism 341 is crucial to the central themes of both works, and

thus stands amongst Nietzsche's most important concepts. Here I wish to suggest that his use of the Eternal Return mirrors and in fact answers his postulation of the death of God. Upon God's death, Nietzsche seems to be suggesting, humans will be faced with the awesome charge of creating for themselves the frameworks of their own existence.

In characteristic form Nietzsche uses a subtle metaphor to express his insight: "The greatest weight: What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence -- even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"<sup>38</sup>

Out on a limb, in ones 'loneliest loneliness,' the demon comes. At the moment of most vulnerability (in the dark, remembering the Death of God) comes the news that all that has been, and is, will be again. Such news, Nietzsche suggests, would either change you as you are, or crush you. Crushed by this weight one would 'throw [oneself] down and gnash [ones] teeth ...curs(ing) the demon who spoke thus.' Or, forever changed by the thought one could experience this news as a tremendous moment in which one answered the demon 'you are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.' Nietzsche's own aspiration is found in the second response.

What Nietzsche has here termed the greatest weight comes not in the moment that the demon whispered such words, but in the responsibility of all life subsequent to that news. Ever after one must ask of each moment not, 'will this moment return,' but, 'do I require this moment to be again and again, forever more?" Bringing the demon to whisper in an individual's ear validates Nietzsche's description of humans as Gods, the responsibility generated pointing to the magnitude of one's life decisions from this point on. As Nietzsche asks at the conclusion of this section, and thus of the book, "...how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" One must constantly carry the weight of responsibility for all the elements present and not present in every moment of ones life. Without a God to shine on life and thus accept responsibility for that which grows, each individual not crushed by the words of the demon must take responsibility for finding their own path, and for the paths left behind! Thus despite its feeble light in comparison to the dawn, when the Madman came calling his news into the market he carried his own lantern.

Nietzsche , then, identifies two themes that inform the analysis to be developed below: First, the death of God which I read as the overturning and throwing into crisis of the philosophical grounds upon which any complete, external, authoritative modern power can be claimed. Such a death removes the grounds for legitimizing this-worldly activities on the grounds of some 'received' divine

order. Whilst this critique could be made of any such 'divine' assumption, (science as observed human behavior on the basis of an inherent rationality; social organization on the grounds of some necessary structure of social existence such as gender, economics, individual choice or the calculation of utilitarian value; international conflict as a manifestation of an inherently violent state system; austerity measures from a calculative reading of economic imperatives), I have chosen to focus its light onto the concept of Providence. Accordingly, following Nietzsche, I have suggested that the death of God also precipitates the death of Providence. No longer can colonial quests, priorities or programs be legitimized by a simple appeal to 'Gods will on earth.' In fact, as killers of God, people are now left with responsibility for that which has been claimed and carried out in his name, including the quests of colonialism. Atonement, it has been suggested, begins only when people become Gods in order to create for themselves the parameters and paths of their own future.

Atonement will be available according to this reading, by an embrace of the freedom, responsibility and 'weight' that the postulation of humans as gods generates. Thus, second, the principle of Eternal Return has been read as a principle which forces Europeans either to be crushed or be transformed by the news from their demon. After the demon has whispered its devastating news it is no longer possible to legitimate life on the grounds of God's will, nor avoid taking responsibility for that which will be. Regardless of one's past trajectory -- be it collective or individual -- the future remains infinite, and responsibility for all choices has been laid firmly in the lap of every identity. Nietzsche understands that such news will either crush or transform those with ears to hear it.

Bringing together these two themes in the title I have suggested that the death of Providence precipitates a dance of the liminal. Listening to the words of the Madman prompts a crisis of dogma and loosens bonds which hold particular claims fixed. Put differently, Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God can be read as regenerating the space in which different concepts of history can be entertained. It is this space from the fringes and the marginal which I call the liminal. Typically, 'liminal' is a label applied to that which is in between, the gray area, the fluid space between and beyond given or accepted boundaries. Inhabitants of the liminal are thus nomads, transgressors, those who continually render problematic the centre, the fixed and the clearly understood. Life of the liminal is an unknown dance; it is unfixed, mobile, energetic, fluid and ambiguous. Typically misunderstood by the centre which seeks to fix its margins, the liminal space cannot be fixed, it remains a fluid space and a conglomerate style of life; a space of perpetual movement I will call a dance.

At its most provocative, the current work seeks to suggest that in untroubled times at the center -- times when a God provides the necessary, stabilizing anchor -- the liminal, and those who live as nomads are known only by their marginalization or absence from the centre. However, when crisis occurs at the centre (when news of the death of God is heard), the lack of a radiant, central

presence allows liminal spaces to be illuminated. Dancing in the light of their own fires, nomads from the corners and edges of life begin to celebrate their lack of fixity. Liminal elements both as marginals and as repressed presence at the centre itself glow once again.

In contemporary terms, the death of Providence seems to have generated exactly this type of dance. Around the globe many non-Western cultures and peoples are celebrating a spatial and temporal change, though usually in very difficult circumstances. In the absence of an unambiguous coherence generated from God, or Progress, or Civilization, or Providence, or Chosen People, the hold of accepted certainties that smothers liminal spaces has been broken. I suggest that in the coming years some of the most profound forces of social change will be found where such spaces impact on the various centers of life. Similarly, one of the most powerful themes of reaction will be to establish fixity where liminal spaces have caused fracture. These simultaneous processes of liminal freedom and fixity are themes that the following chapters seek to locate. They do so initially through an examination of a range of postcolonial thinkers who have engaged in an intellectual critique of contemporary (neo)colonial practice both by demonstrating the incoherence of those modernist assumptions informing those practices and by resisting the fixing of essential identities through which the legitimacy of colonialism has been sustained.

## Part Two:

### Journeys of the Madman: Encounters with Subjectivity

In this section, I attempt to bring the philosophical issues raised by Nietzsche's Madman in the market to bear on two concepts crucial to political formations of the twentieth century, gender and colony. I develop a particular analysis of gender following a reading of Julia Kristeva's 'Women's Time' and an analysis of Colony through a focus on the work of Ashis Nandy. I argue that gender and colony as articulated by Kristeva and Nandy represent two moments through which the philosophical dilemma identified by the Madman is brought to bear on a political reading of modern life. Both theorists have thus identified major themes at stake in any attempt to unsettle universalistic or logocentric practice at the center of modernity.

#### i). The Madman and Gender: Julia Kristeva, Feminism and the Times of Woman.

Kristeva's 'Woman's Time' analyses the philosophical and historical implications of a developing 'Feminism as Women's Movement' built upon a concept of gender as it transforms important components of feminist politics during the last century. The conceptual categories developed by Kristeva to locate and distinguish various 'attitudes' of Women who have thought seriously about gender in the past -- including that which she advocates as informing the most appropriate stance for European Women in the contemporary period -- provide a suggestive focus for the philosophical and political potentials of contemporary thinking about gender and thus for contemporary feminist projects. Kristeva's analysis thus allows the general critique of modernity raised in the first chapter to be (re)located and examined within the specific terrain of gender, opening questions of contemporary political practice and organizational dilemma around the issue of identity.

Kristeva suggests that by the late 1920's in Europe, the nation -- the central core of politics, economics and culture in the preceding period -- had lost its social and philosophical coherence. Although in an ideological sense the nation remained an important political institution, there had developed by this time a crucial sense in which economic homogeneity upon which the political coherence of the state had rested, had given way to forces of interdependence. Henceforth, the historical, linguistic and religious coherence of political communities in the region was to be found in relation to a greatly expanded geographical and cultural entity called 'Europe.' This interdependent entity, Europe, was constituted through a 'symbolic denominator,' defined as the 'cultural and religious memory forged by the interweaving of history and geography' which linked together on a continental scale previously homogenous national entities.<sup>39</sup> Of central interest to Kristeva are those elements of this newly forged, deep seated symbolic denominator which simultaneously inform and transcend the old domain of the nation thus creating new social and cultural categories applicable across entire continents. In a time when economic activity was organized and structured on a scale which