

## Theme 1: Space & Place - Virtual Heritage and Virtual Cultures - Applied Cultural Theory - Cyber-anthropology. “Girl Travels the Songlines”

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**Abstract.** Virtual and physical worlds have bridged ideas of space and place since nomadic peoples first traversed the globe. Their ‘virtual world’ came alive through song and myth. This cyber anthropological investigation integrates Australia’s rich indigenous cultural appreciation of place with a fictional neo-nomadic journey through cyberspace. A character called “Girl” begins to discover what it means to be human by bringing to light the poetic movement and rhythm of *The Songlines*.

**Keywords:** Cyberanthropology, Transhumanism, Poetry, Songlines, Aborigine, Spirit, Future, Music, Movement, Neo-nomad, Bruce Chatwin.

### Part I: Time Traveller

The date is August 2023. Girl<sup>1</sup> awoke but her eyes remained closed. Turning from her side she reached up to rub the sleep from her eyes. She adjusted her body and licked the dryness from her thirsty lips. At the thought of water, she was sated.<sup>2</sup> With eyes still closed in rebellion against the day, she explored, with her hands, the texture of her location. It’s pillow-y softness, and the movement of her body, reassured her sense of comfort. She breathed in the aroma of wild grasses. Her ears filled with orchestral of sounds of throaty, croaking frogs, pointed chirps from small darting birds, and the accelerated tempo of industrious chipmunks. She opened her mouth and tasted the air. "Ummmmm, is that honey? Do I also hear a bee?" she asked herself.

Then, as though awakened from a dream, the sound of a mischievous crow shattered the air. Ka Cawww, Ka Cawww! For a brief moment it trumped all other sounds. Girl smiled, opened her eyes and invited in the day.

Her eyes revealed a brilliant blue. There was no single geographically bound scene,

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<sup>1</sup> The main character’s name is Girl. She is ambiguous even in name. This is to question what ‘identity’ will mean in a future of technological and biological human augmentation?

<sup>2</sup> Resulting from the benefits of personalized medicine, Girl has an internal, autocatalytic monitoring system for her internal body regulation. It works in tandem with her thoughts.

but rather, there was any landscape she wished. The Singularity<sup>3</sup> held a complete sensorial landscape.<sup>4</sup> It brought her whatever she imagined at the command of a thought.

Girl was anxious to continue working on the presentation she would be Mindcasting<sup>5</sup> in few weeks. She blinked her eyes to open 'Random Reality with Real Humans'.<sup>6</sup> Her mind flipped through various choices. "Oh! fighting tyrants...no, not in my peaceful state. Maybe sailing? No, too relaxing and I've too much to do. Hmm, let me see, a café with a Real Human (RH) transient who is living solely in the reality of his own mind? Yes, that's it!

"Oh, wait, what's this...do I want the option to allow any newly discovered information to be automatically uploaded to the system?" (This meant she would not be able to leave the interaction with the RH if the Singularity deemed it was adding valuable new information to the system/herself.) "Well", she sighed, "this is the danger and excitement of possibly giving up some freedom for the adventure of

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<sup>3</sup> ["We are entering a new era. I call it "the Singularity." It's a merger between human intelligence and machine intelligence that is going to create something bigger than itself. To me that is what human civilization is all about. It is part of our destiny and part of the destiny of evolution to continue to progress ever faster, and to grow the power of intelligence exponentially. To contemplate stopping that – to think human beings are fine the way they are – is a misplaced fond remembrance of what human beings used to be. What human beings are is a species that has undergone a cultural and technological evolution, and it's the nature of evolution that it accelerates. The next stage of this will be to amplify our own intellectual powers with the results of our technology."] –Ray Kurzweil [http://www.edge.org/3rd\\_culture/kurzweil\\_singularity/kurzweil\\_singularity\\_index.html](http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/kurzweil_singularity/kurzweil_singularity_index.html)

<sup>4</sup> ["According to the anthropologist David Thomas 'we are witnessing a transition to a postcorporeal stage that has great promise for creative social logics and sensorial regimes'(Escobar 1994:216)"]. Budka, Philipp and Kremser, Manfred. 2004. Cyberanthropology – Anthropology of CyberCulture In: Contemporary Issues in Socio-cultural Anthropology: Perspectives and Research Activities from Austria edited by S. Khittel, B. Plankensteiner and M. Six-Hohenbalken (eds.), pp. 213-226. Vienna: Loecker. P. 214.

<sup>5</sup> A 'Mindcast' is a fictional idea. Mindcasting is a way of presenting one's work, to both physically present and remote audiences, while seamlessly streaming text, video, and sound directly from the mind. An internal storage unit in the brain was genetically conceived and became a new part of our human physiology in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> A 'Real Human' (RH) is what humans were prior to computerized augmentation of the mind and body. Girl is what one might call a Transhuman or Posthuman. ["According to transhumanist philosophers a Posthuman is a hypothetical future being whose basic capacities so radically exceed those of present humans as to be no longer unambiguously human. The difference between the Posthuman and other hypothetical sophisticated non-humans is that a posthuman was once a human. As such, a prerequisite for a posthuman is a transhuman, the point at which the human being begins surpassing his own limitations, but is still recognizable as a human person. Posthumans could be a symbiosis of human and artificial intelligence, or uploaded consciousnesses, or the result of making many smaller but cumulatively profound technological augmentations to a biological human. Although the first known use of the term "transhumanism" dates from 1957, the contemporary meaning is a product of the 1980's."] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posthuman\\_%28human\\_evolution%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posthuman_%28human_evolution%29)

cognitive exchange with a randomly generated RH.” She thought ‘agree’ and it was settled. “Why not?” she mused to herself. “I do feel ready for some cyber-exploration and 'living on the edge'.”

She blinked, "Go" and instantly she found herself sitting at a rustic café. It had small dirty tables, wobbling with cheapness and the pavement was cracked. It was June 2007<sup>7</sup>.

She looked at the man who sat across from her. He had ashen skin, a bulbous nose and purple lips. He smelled.

Girl leaned forward, almost imperceptibly, to breathe in a taste of his humanness.

He seemed shocked at her sudden appearance, but soon regained his composure. He was not sure whether she just appeared or whether it was simply that he could not recall her appearing. She pondered for a moment, with sorrowful sigh, as she thought about those who remained 'real humans'. Seeing him before her, she could not bring herself to use the term 'RH' and so she thought to ask his name.

"So", she said. "What's your name?"

"My name, my name, well er..." He took an extended gulp from his beer stein and wiped his mouth with the back portion of his sleeve. With a satisfied sigh he looked to the waiter for another and then turned and looked deep into Girl. Girl looked uncomfortable so he broke the tension by asking almost flirtatiously, "What mysterious corner of the world do you come from my sweet, gentle lightness of being?"

"What do you mean, 'where do I come from'?" "Do you mean where did I just come from?" said Girl.

"No, I meant 'long ago', where did you come from long ago?" the man replied.

Girl said, "there is no long ago for me. I come from now."

"From now?" said the man. "You can't come from 'now', we are in 'now'." <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I am suggesting that future anthropologists can use cyberspace to travel through time and interact with captured or recorded information. Data can be analyzed to help bridge our understanding of past, present and future. Budka and Kremser write that [“‘Cyborg anthropology’ considers its main goal to be ‘the ethnographic study of boundaries between humans and machines that are specific to late 20<sup>th</sup> century societies’(Escobar 1994:216).”] Budka, Philipp and Kremser, Manfred. 2004. Cyberanthropology – Anthropology of CyberCulture In: Contemporary Issues in Socio-cultural Anthropology: Perspectives and Research Activities from Austria edited by S. Khittel, B. Plankensteiner and M. Six-Hohenbalken (eds.), p. 214. Vienna: Loecker.

<sup>8</sup> Girl’s notion of where she comes from is central to ideas initially brought to light by cyber-anthropologist Arturo Escobar, who, in his 1994 article “Welcome to Cyberia” [“created the

Girl looked perplexed. She had never lived in anything but hyper-time where the past and future are a convergence of the present moment. She had a conceptual notion of past and future but not an experiential notion of anything other than the neo-nomadic 'spatial present'. The 'collapse' of time began with the Internet. Place was brought instantly to you instead of you having to 'go' to a place. Now Girl, and others like her, routinely shifted location without the physical labour of movement, and were *physically* in a new place.<sup>9</sup>

She tried to grasp his meaning by asking, "What is the relationship between 'long ago' and 'where I come from'?"

Stumbling for a moment on his thoughts and questioning his own faculty of mind, he decided to rephrase the question. "Who are your ancestors?"

"My ancestors?" she replied. "Well, they are who I want them to be. We no longer have affiliation with who we are or where we came from. 'Ancestry' is such an antiquated expression! No, I am from whomever I wish to be from. If I am not happy with whom I have chosen I create something more representative of my current, contextual, spatial existence."

The man's face looked at her with a strange pity. Recognizing the similarity of her own empathetic feeling towards him moments earlier, a knot tied itself in her stomach and she wondered if she should have come. In wishing to overcome this feeling she pronounced, "All that is besides the point! What is your name?"

He took a moment to ponder his circumstance. She watched as he crossed his legs and straightened up in his chair. He seemed to adjust his seated presence as a way of recollecting his thoughts. Then, just as he was about to speak, he closed his eyes and began to hum a tune. It was a melody that, at first, was barely audible. As he gained energy the momentum of the sounds carried forward with brilliant clarity. A deep bass seemed to rumble from his chest. It continued on for what seemed an eternity until it hiccupped into a high note then resumed the rumble.

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concept of 'cyberculture' to analyse fundamental transformations in the structure and meaning of modern society and culture due to computer information, and biological technologies."] Budka, Philipp and Kremser, Manfred. 2004. Cyberanthropology – Anthropology of CyberCulture In: Contemporary Issues in Socio-cultural Anthropology: Perspectives and Research Activities from Austria edited by S. Khittel, B. Plankensteiner and M. Six-Hohenbalken (eds.), pp. 213-226. Vienna: Loecker. P. 213.

<sup>9</sup> Budka and Kremer also note that Escobar speaks to information technologies as ["bringing out a regime of technosociality, a process of socio-cultural construction activated by new technologies. Whereas, Biotechnologies, 'are giving rise to biosociality, a new order for the production of life, nature and the body'(Escobar 1994:214)"] Ibid. p. 214. It is in the questioning of this vast potential within bio and techno sociality that Girl begins to discover what it means to be human. The influence of nanotechnology, automation, miniaturization and the pervasive communications presence of our currently networked world are transforming our socialization. YouTube, MySpace, SecondLife, Facebook, Congresspedia, Wikipedia, and Zopa, are social, political and economic examples.

Girl was taken back to the morning of her awakening in the picturesque field...but she hadn't *chosen* to go back to that moment.

“How could this happen?<sup>10</sup>” she thought.

Just as she was contemplating this question, the man, in an unexpected explosion of enthusiasm, crowed, "Den hawww, Den hawww"!

Girl was startled and, quite frankly, unsure what to do. He had disrupted her sense of time by triggering her memory of the morning. However, It was followed by a strange calm. Actually she began to feel invigorated without knowing why.

For a long time, neither spoke.

Finally the man broke the silence by saying, “‘Denhaw’ is my name. Maybe I came to you in a dream. Maybe you thought you had 'chosen me' - who can tell when you don't know whether or not you are human.”

She was shocked at this thought. She was used to choosing everything and decided to interpret this as his human trickery. As if *he* could possibly be correct! She dismissed his unsettling words and tenderly replied, "Of what consequence is it whether or not I am human?" This question achieved no reply. Denhaw simply took a cigarette from his strangely beautiful silver container and withdrew a crumpled, handmade cigarette.

They both became conscious of a cool breeze wafting carelessly through their hearts. In response to the chilled air she imagined a light gauzy summer coat and it instantly adorned her. He responded with a shiver. Then he lit his cigarette, with a match, from a box of wooden matches. Subsumed almost by the magic of her immediate transformation, he began to search the breast pocket of his impossibly stained woolen coat for a book. At length he revealed a leather-bound journal and set it down on the table separating them.

Just as she was contemplating her next move he inquired, "Do you know the work of Rilke?<sup>11</sup>"

To which she responded with a twitch of her eye, flipping madly in her mind, back, through the downloaded documents. She responded in such an instantaneous fashion that he did not see the reversion, and replied, "Well of course, who doesn't?"

And so with a grievously slow response he uttered, "In particular do you know the

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<sup>10</sup> Questions of memory and intention arise when every action is potentially, a technically mediated experience.

<sup>11</sup> Excerpts quoted directly may appear as Girl or Denhaw speaking. Where it is the case that a character is speaking their own words, double quotes are used and single quotes represent direct textual usage from an original source and are footnoted.

"Sonnets To Orpheus I, 3?"

With the finesse of a small bird swaying from danger she replied, "I do so, in fact."

"Ah," he countered, "and you think of it...what?"

"Well he wrote it in..." (and she carried on a hopeless journey of knowledgeable artifacts regarding the poet and his life and, eventually, its meaning to others, but she could not proffer the answer he seemed to desire) "...and for this reason," she ended indignantly, "he was determined by all to be a brilliant poet."

Denhaw was like a mirror, yet she could see no reflection of herself in the old man's eyes. It startled her. Now she really wanted to leave. "Was this a mistake? Have I malfunctioned?"<sup>12</sup> She silently asked herself.

The pause was well understood by the old man and he accepted it generously<sup>13</sup>. "We cannot be bound by that which we do not know," he proffered.

She had answered the question and was dying to charge him with providing an explanation. Feeling defensive about notions of what a right answer may be, she thought twice and paused yet again.

However, after this silence, he said, "It isn't that you love, child, even if the voice exploded from your mouth - begin forgetting, that you sang."<sup>14</sup>

She was stunned. She had not sung and already he was telling her to forget that she had. Fragments of previous lives came back to her. In her mind she heard the singing of the old maid in the hallway as she got ready for boarding school. Then, in an instant, she was Joan of Arc going into battle. Then, all of a sudden, she found the words of Rilke. As she understood them she spoke aloud, "That disappears."<sup>15</sup>

"Yes," he countered and continued with, "To sing the truth is quite a different breath. A breath of void. A gust in the god. A wind."<sup>16</sup>

"Like the one that just went through us?" she returned excitedly.

"No, child, like the part of you that is still human," he replied.

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<sup>12</sup> Discomfort and uncertainty are uncommon in her daily existence.

<sup>13</sup> Denhaw's wisdom is recognizing her humanity. Questions like, Is 'human consciousness' a downloadable entity (like in Kurzweil's Singularity) or will it remain an elusive mystery? Or, is Denhaw part of the Singularity and her 'real' experience of him is a mental construct?

<sup>14</sup> Rilke, Maria Rainer. The Sonnets to Orpheus I,3. Trans. Howard A. Landman  
[http://polyamory.org/~howard/Poetry/orpheus\\_index.html](http://polyamory.org/~howard/Poetry/orpheus_index.html)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## Part II “*The Songlines: a Cyber Anthropological Journey*”

Girl and Denhaw had been sitting at the cafe for time enough. It became apparent by his falling into slumber while remaining seated at the table that a change of scenery would do them well. Girl felt a sense of urgency in continuing their conversation. As for the slumbering Denhaw, she presumed that waking in a different place may be not so unnatural a phenomenon to him. So she took action. She placed one hand on his belongings and the other on his forearm and her mind moved them both to sleeping pods located in the 7th quarter. The beauty of this location was that it would place them both, when he awoke, wherever he imagined himself to be. Real Humans are able to lead continued illusory existences, believing that each choice is their own. Girl paused a moment and reflected on how this could be true of herself? "No. Don't be ridiculous", she thought. Yet a small kernel of self-doubt left her decided to ask him, more genuinely, what it was to be human.

Denhaw slowly began to stir and as he did so his dreams rose in proximal distance to his waking conscious. Girl had set her internal alarm clock to the waking of his mind. Because of this she caught wind of his thoughts as he woke, which were these: “By singing the world into existence the Ancestors had been poets in the original sense of poesis, meaning 'creation'. No aboriginal could conceive that the world was in any way imperfect. His religious life had a single aim: to keep the land the way it was and the way it should be. The man who went 'Walkabout' was making a ritual journey. He trod in the footsteps of his ancestor. He sang the Ancestor's stanzas without changing a word or a note -- and so recreated the Creation.<sup>17</sup>” Girl was amazed.

As Denhaw stirred to wakefulness, their environment became a smoky blue room furnished with antiques from the twentieth century. A sleek black cat lay on a purple cushion bathed in sunlight that was streaming in from the bay window. Denhaw lay on a leather day bed with clawed feet and an ashtray stood in place of a night stand. “You’re still with me”, he said with surprise as he took Girl into his visual landscape and smiled at her radiance.

“Yes, I am.” Girl continued, “When we spoke, at the café, we read from Rilke. In the poem’s second stanza Rilke wrote: ‘True singing, as you teach it, isn't wanting, not wooing anything that can be won; no, Singing's Being. For the god, not daunting. But when are we?’<sup>18</sup>”

Girl continued, “Just now, as your mind was returning to your body, it occurred to me that the Aborigines of Australia must also believe that singing is being. I want you to help me understand this for I don’t believe my heart has ever found song.”

Denhaw paused and took the leather bound journal from his pocket. Then, with a look

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<sup>17</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Rilke, Maria Rainer. *The Sonnets to Orpheus* I,3. Trans. Howard A. Landman [http://polyamory.org/~howard/Poetry/orpheus\\_index.html](http://polyamory.org/~howard/Poetry/orpheus_index.html)

of deep sincerity, he read these words aloud, “‘Aboriginals could not believe the country existed until they could see it and sing it -- just as, in the Dreamtime, the country had not existed until the Ancestors sang it.’<sup>19</sup>”

Girl continued excitedly, “‘So the land must first exist as a concept in the mind? Then it must be sung? Only then can it be said to exist?’<sup>20</sup>”

“‘True,’” he said.

“‘In other words, to exist is to be perceived?’<sup>21</sup>” she inquired.

“‘Yes. [It is like] Pure Mind Buddhism, which also sees the world as an illusion.’<sup>22</sup>” Denhaw responded.

“‘Why a song?’” asked Girl.

“‘A song was both map and direction-finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across the country.’<sup>23</sup> These paths are called Songlines” said Denhaw.

Girl interrupted him, “‘And would a man on "Walkabout" always be travelling down one of the Songlines?’<sup>24</sup>”

“‘Yes,’” he answered and continued by adding, “‘In Australia, the Ancestors created themselves from clay, hundreds and thousands of them, one for each totemic species...Each totemic ancestor, while travelling through the country, was thought to have scattered a trail of words and musical notes along the line of his footprints, and...these Dreaming-tracks lay over the land as 'ways' of communication between the most far-flung tribes.’<sup>25</sup>” Girl was deeply interested and hung on every word.

“‘Do you think the singer, song and the Songlines could be similar to our virtual networked world? My friend Derrick DeKerchove once told me the ‘networked imagination penetrates the mind differently: it works on the connections between minds, and not on the contents of the imagination of private minds. A certain order of synaptic connections, established both by how we use a medium like a computer or an access on-line, and by what we are invited to do with these activities, establishes itself as a norm for our behaviour and our judgement. Connectivity becomes a way of life. We develop network minds.’<sup>26</sup>”

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<sup>19</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> DeKerckhove, Derrick. From <http://fusionanomaly.net/>

Denhaw looked excited, “Yes!” He said, “In Greek the word ‘private’ meant ‘idiot’<sup>27</sup>, the beauty of the Songlines is that singer, song and line are one. The networked Singularity that you come from<sup>28</sup> has the similar possibility of connecting people to their inner self, others and their environment. By actively singing the world into creation you are manifesting your presence. Singing a Songline and simultaneously connecting your birth, life and death creates a virtual, spiritual connection to the past. The Songlines are horizontal maps of geographical space, be it the space of the land or the space of the mind, and they are also vertical maps in that they go beyond the material world.<sup>29</sup>

“Let me explain further, ‘In Aboriginal Australia, there are specific rules for ‘going back’ or, rather, for singing your way to where you belong: to your ‘conception site’, to the place where your tjuringa is stored. Only then can you become -- or re-become -- the Ancestor. The concept is quite similar to Heraclitus’s mysterious dictum, ‘Mortals and immortals, alive in their death, dead in each other’s life.’<sup>30</sup>”

Girl was physically shaken by the inspiration of their conversation<sup>31</sup>. So many questions existed, like “What’s a tjuringa?” There was so much to ask and so much to say, her thoughts finally settled on William Blake. His words took on new meaning as they passed through her mind and she absently spoke them out: “What is proven now was once only imagined. The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the

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<sup>27</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988).

<sup>28</sup> Denhaw seems to know more about where Girl comes from than we know. This ambiguity alludes to classical issues of existence and Rene Descartes’ notion of ‘I think therefore I am’. Girl does not question him on this as she is caught up in the excitement of the discussion.

<sup>29</sup> Andreas Wittel in *Ethnography on the Move: From Field to Net to Internet* brings to light suggestions by [(Clifford:1997), that Human location should be constituted by displacement as much as by stasis. The idea that apparent boundedness of a culture is something constructed rather than found. Then in redefining the “Field” of ethnographic research he draws on (Castells:1996) “Network Society” who moves toward and ‘ethnography of networks’. Wittel writes, “Networks are still strongly related to geographical space—like field. Unlike field, a network is an open structure, able to expand almost without limits and highly dynamic...a network does not merely consist of a set of nodes, but also a set of connections between the nodes. As such, networks contain as much movement and flow as they contain residence and localities.”] Are the ‘Songlines’, of Aboriginal culture, also virtual and, if so, what can we learn from a virtual space existing from thousands of years ago, about our networked societies today? Wittel, Andreas. *Ethnography on the Move: From Field to Net to Internet*. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. Volume 1, No. 1 January (2000) <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-00/1-00wittel-e.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 293

<sup>31</sup> In a strategy to modernize ethnography, Wittel points to (Marcus:1998), who suggests [“a research self-consciously embedded in a world system, that moves out from single sites and local situations...to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space,”] Two ethnographic shifts noted by Wittel are from “field to network” and from “material space to cyber space.” These notions both capture what I refer to as new vast geographies for the neo-nomad.

divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. This world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation is finite and temporal. There exist in that eternal world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature.’<sup>32</sup>”

Girl looked up with great intensity and said, “So the Songlines are everything and what we call ‘virtual reality’ existed thousands of years ago with the Aborigines?”

Denhaw Spoke, “Yes, I agree this is true. But don’t forget that it is a universal nomadic phenomenon. ‘Most nomads claim to ‘own’ their migration path (in Arabic Il-Rah, ‘The Way’), but in practice they only lay claim to seasonal grazing rights. Time and space are thus dissolved around each other: a month and a stretch of road are synonymous.’<sup>33</sup>”

“Doesn’t this sound similar to your way of understanding time and space as ‘hyper’ space?” offered Denhaw.

“Yes, yes, it is true,” Girl agreed and continued, “I am defined by my relationships and my network connections, not the static existence of a single node. I am movement in motion – maybe a neo-nomad?”

“Yes, it is in the interconnectedness that lies the meaning of who and what we are,” replied Denhaw. With a vast sweep of his arm he said, “In Australia ‘there was hardly a rock or creek in the country that could not or had not been sung. One should perhaps visualise the Songlines as a spaghetti of Iliads and Odysseys, writhing this way and that, in which every ‘episode’ was readable in terms of geography.’<sup>34</sup>”

Gaining a rhythmic momentum Denhaw further expressed, “‘Il Rah ‘The way’ was first used as a technical term for ‘road’ or ‘migration path’ before being adopted by the mystics to denote ‘the Way to God’. The concept has its equivalent in the Central Australian languages where tjurna tjgurba means ‘the footprints of the ancestor’ and ‘the Way of the Law’. It would seem there exists, at some deep level of the human psyche, connection between ‘path-finding’ and ‘law’.<sup>35</sup>”

“Just think of yourself, when you blink your eye and you are searching back through infinite amounts of information, you are using your transhuman capability of instant recall.<sup>36</sup>”

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<sup>32</sup> Blake, William. *The Letters of William Blake* (1956).  
<http://fusionanomaly.net/williamblake.html>

<sup>33</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p.184.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p.13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 201.

<sup>36</sup> [“Kremser (1998) methodologically extended the classical concept of ethnographic fieldwork in order to include the emerging cyberspace as a new terrain for investigating his favourite topics of anthropological interest...Many originally indigenous religious concepts and practices are now ‘leaving’ their local territorial setting and becoming more global in scope...the concept of cyberspace was anticipated by the Ifa numeric system as well as by

“The Songlines originated in the virtual space of the mind and were stored in memory. Aborigines had a nomadic culture based in oral tradition. They did for centuries what technology and enhanced biology allows you to do, except for them ‘...a musical phrase is map reference [and] Music is a memory bank for finding one’s way about the world.’<sup>37</sup>”

Denhaw saw her interest and continued speaking Chatwin’s words from memory, ““People have thought that Aborigines were capable of telepathy but the reality is more astonishing, that regardless of the words, it seems the melodic contour of the song describes the nature of the land over which the song passes. So, if the Lizard Man were dragging his heels across the salt-pans of Lake Eyre, you could expect a succession of long flats, like Chopin's 'Funeral March'. If he were skipping up and down the MacDonnell escarpments, you'd have a series of arpeggios and glissandos, like Liza's 'Hungarian Rhapsodies'. Certain phrases, certain combinations of musical notes, are thought to describe the action of the Ancestor's *feet*. One phrase would say, 'Salt-pan'; another 'Creek-bed', 'Spinifex', 'Sandhill', 'Mulga-scrub', 'Rock-face' and so forth. An expert song man, by listening to their order of succession, would count how many times his hero crossed a river, or scaled a ridge -- and be able to calculate where, and how far along, a Songline he was. He'd hear a few bars and say, 'This is Middle Bore' or 'That is Oodnadatta' -- where the Ancestor did X or Y or Z.’<sup>38</sup>” Denhaw concluded by saying, “This is the intimate connection between the virtual and physical realm, this is where the nomad embodies the land and is the virtual key to communicating it.”

Girl responded, “But what if the language of the song was different from tribe to tribe?”

Denhaw said, “Ah this is where the magic of melody transcends the known. Chatwin tells us that ‘most tribes spoke the language of their immediate neighbour, so the difficulties of communication across a frontier did not exist. The mystery was how a man of Tribe A, living up one end of a Songline, could hear a few bars sung by Tribe Q and, without knowing a word of Q's language, would know exactly what land was being sung. Once the melody is recognized - even though the meaning of the words may escape him - by listening attentively to the melodic structure he could find his own words in sync with the melody and sing it over the 'nonsense' words.’”<sup>39</sup>

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African Geomany—although within the context of the ‘technology of the spirit’...In other words, all those ones and zeros, running around in every digital circuit from alarm clocks to super-computers, originate in African divination. Computer technology is just another transformation of the same principles (Kremser 2001: 7-8)”] Budka, Philipp and Kremser, Manfred. 2004. Cyberanthropology – Anthropology of CyberCulture In: Contemporary Issues in Socio-cultural Anthropology: Perspectives and Research Activities from Austria edited by S. Khittel, B. Plankensteiner and M. Six-Hohenbalken (eds.), pp. 213-226. Vienna: Loecker. P. 217.

<sup>37</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p.106

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

Girl felt the profundity of these ideas strike a chord in her heart. She said, “Is it like the metronome or the rhythm of the heartbeat felt synchronously while in the womb that unites us through a shared human condition?”

“Exactly, ” said Denhaw. “Chatwin had a good old German friend named Strehlow who ‘...wanted to show how every aspect of Aboriginal song had its counterpart in Hebrew, Ancient Greek, Old Norse or Old English: the literatures we acknowledge as our own. Having grasped the connection of song and land, he wished to strike at the roots of song itself: to find in a song a key to unravelling the mystery of the human condition.’”<sup>40</sup>

Immediately Girl replied, “Did he do it?”

“Well child, he made a valiant attempt at it, that is certain. No. I believe it is up to your generation to continue on where others have left off.

And with this said, Girl became ecstatic and exclaimed, “Eureka! That’s it. I will make my Mindcast presentation on this: Virtual and physical worlds have bridged ideas of space and place since nomadic peoples first traversed the globe. Their ‘virtual world’ came alive through song and myth. ‘In fact, in Tibetan, the definition of a ‘human being is *a-Gro-ba*, “a go-er”, one who goes on migrations.’<sup>41</sup> My cyber anthropological investigation will integrate Australia’s rich indigenous cultural appreciation of place into my own neo-nomadic journey through cyberspace. I will travel the Songlines and meet with Aborigines who I can live the experience with. Then I can begin to discover what it means to be human, through the poetic movement and rhythm of “The Songlines”, as you have begun to do for me through Chatwin.

### **Part III “Girls Mindcast: Neo-nomads in Dreamtime”**

Denhaw felt younger, being reinvigorated by the sublimity of her enthusiasm. For him she *was* the future. He felt the almost parental need to offer a few more thoughts as food for her contemplation. He began, “Remember we spoke of the tjuringa?” Girl nodded and Denhaw continued, ““A tjuringa is an oval plaque made of stone or mulga wood. It is both musical score and mythological guide to the Ancestor's travels. It is the actual body of the Ancestor (pars pro toto). It is a man's alter ego; his soul; his obol to Charon; his title-deed to country; his passport and his ticket 'back in'.”

Girl offered, “Ah, so you are telling me what I must do is make solid the connection between the physical and virtual world.” Girl continued speaking, “My friend, Robert Lawlor said, “Man is born in Space, man is born for Space. For striding out bodily

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<sup>40</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p.69.

<sup>41</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p.197.

and as far as Space reaching, so far will it be granted to him to walk at will.”<sup>42</sup>

“Yes,” Denhaw confirmed, ““All the Great Teachers have preached that Man, originally, was a 'wanderer in the scorching and barren wilderness of this world' -- the words are those of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor -- and that to rediscover his humanity, he must slough off attachments and take to the road.”<sup>43</sup>”

Girl replied, “So, maybe similarly to the aborigines, I am able to live a spatial existence beyond the temporal restraints of clock-bound reality?”

Denhaw said, “Yes, quite so. You know ‘...the Aborigine's deep affinity for the primacy of spatial experience was reiterated thousands of years ago in the Rig Veda of ancient India.<sup>44</sup> In the East, they still preserve the once universal concept: that wandering re-establishes the original harmony which once existed between man and the universe.<sup>45</sup> The Gautama Buddha said, you cannot travel on the path before you have become the Path itself.<sup>46</sup> What this means”, said Denhaw, “is that you cannot forget that action is explicit in experience.<sup>47</sup>”

Denhaw continued, “You have come to speak with me as a kind of ‘neo-nomad’. I saw you ‘smell’ my presence back at the café and I am honoured that you did not depart, for I am aware of its pungent nature.” They both laughed a little and Girl blushed. “Just also remember the song. Remember how you woke on the morning prior to our meeting---”

Girl blurted out, “But how do you--?”

Before she could finish her sentence, Denhaw made a knowing gesture with his hand and she was quiet. He continued, “You awoke to the universe alive in melody. The Greek word ‘melos’ means limb and from the sound of our walking motion came rhythm and understanding,<sup>48</sup>” said Denhaw.

Denhaw saw her interest and decided to continue with another important point, “One of Chatwin’s old friends, who was a ‘musicologist by training, climbed to distant

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<sup>42</sup> Lawlor, Robert. *Voices Of The First Day*. From <http://fusionanomaly.net/>

<sup>43</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p.162.

<sup>44</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rig-Veda>

<sup>45</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 179.

<sup>46</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 178.

<sup>47</sup> I am attempting to suggest that cyberspace has the potential to break its ‘virtual’ bounds and enter physical space through an integration of physical and virtual space; a Songline landscape one can travel. That a baby sleeps when her mother is in motion and awakes when she is not in motion is a sign that we are meant to move. Our current immobility caused by conquering geographical space, could be reversed by reuniting space and time through experience. Maybe similar to journeying the Songlines. Motion within a changing physical landscape brings, greater possibility for a holistic experience and thus, the greater potential for a spiritual return to ‘poesis’.

<sup>48</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 230.

mountain villages to record the folksongs of the Na-Khi tribe. He believed, like Vico, that the world's first languages were in song. Early man, he said, had learnt to speak by imitating the calls of animals and birds, and had lived in musical harmony with the rest of creation.<sup>49</sup> This is why I feel an urgency to impart to you the importance of rhythm and motion. It is one of the most basic components of being human and it does not live separate from animals and the natural world.”

Denaw smiled at Girl and spoke further, “The leather bound journal I keep contains the original manuscript from Bruce Chatwin’s novel titled, *The Songlines*. He was a good friend of mine and imparted much knowledge, the wisdom of which I have attempted to pass along to you. If you are going to further set out as a neo-nomad, steering<sup>50</sup> the study of human being in order to create a bridge of understanding between cultures in the world, then I believe you have a vast journey ahead of you.

“Chatwin once told me this, ‘Before coming to Australia I'd often talk about the Songlines, and people would inevitably be reminded of something else. Like the Ley-lines? they'd say: referring to ancient stone circles, menhirs and graveyards, which are laid out in lines across Britain. They are of great antiquity but are visible only to those with eyes to see. Sinologists were reminded of the dragon-lines of feng-shui, or traditional Chinese geomancy: and when I spoke to a Finnish journalist, he said the Lapps had singing stones, which were also arranged in lines. Other friends were reminded of the Nazca lines, which are etched into the meringue-like surface of the central Peruvian Desert and, are indeed, some kind of totemic map.’<sup>51</sup> So my fair child, what I am saying is you have a fair bit of travel ahead and best you make the most of it on foot.”

Girl burst into tears!

Denhaw was shaken and knew not what to do. He let her sob until her heart was exhausted. Upon finally regaining her composure she began to speak and said, “I found this part in *The Songlines* where it is written, ‘The Songlines may be like the art of Memory in reverse. In Frances Yates’s wonderful book, one learned how classical orators, from Cicero and earlier, would construct memory palaces; fastening sections

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<sup>49</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 176.

<sup>50</sup> Girl is studying to become a cyber anthropologist. [“The term ‘cyberanthropology’ derives from the notion of ‘cyberspace’, which was mentioned for the first time in the science fiction novel *Neuromancer* by William Gibson (1984).” At the end of the 1940’s the mathematician Norbert Wiener established the prefix ‘cyber’ by using the notion ‘cybernetics’ to define the science of human-machine interaction. Wiener had in mind the Greek word for ‘steersman’ or ‘pilot’ –kybernetes—to describe a steering or controlling device for machines. Today, the prefix ‘cyber’ refers generally to computer and information technologies and how humans interact with and through them.] Budka, Philipp and Kremser, Manfred. 2004. *Cyberanthropology – Anthropology of CyberCulture In: Contemporary Issues in Socio-cultural Anthropology: Perspectives and Research Activities from Austria* edited by S. Khittel, B. Plankensteiner and M. Six-Hohenbalken (eds.), pp. 213-226. Vienna: Loecker. P. 213.

<sup>51</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 281.

of their speech on to imaginary architectural features and then, after working their way around every architrave and pillar, could memorize colossal lengths of speech. The features were known as 'loci' or 'places'.<sup>52</sup>

Denhaw tenderly interrupted, ““But in Australia the *loci* were not a mental construction, but had existed for ever, as events of the Dreamtime’<sup>53</sup> according to Chatwin.”

Girl continued, “Yes, I see that. I began sobbing because I remembered that I meant to ask you what it was to be human. Until now I had not remembered why that was so important to me. I do have a recollection of being maybe ‘more human’ than I am now.

I was six when I had an accident. When I woke I didn’t know who I was. Everyone seemed surprised that I opened my eyes at all. The strange thing was, that when I tried to move, no single part of my body would move from my neck down. All I could feel were the hot tears on my cheek and I had not a hand capable of wiping those fears away.” Denhaw continued to listen in awed silence. Girl continued, “I had no movement in my body but joined the ‘alternate world’ of “Extended Life”<sup>54</sup>. In that realm I soared. I let my mind travel the corridors and discover the garden paths of existence, much like Cicero. Eventually I began to interact and socialize. I found, a sort of...happiness.”

Reluctantly Denhaw spoke and said, “But you are here with me now.”

Girl replied, “Yes, I am here with you now. I am ‘Girl’ who you know, but not Amelia, not the girl I once was. With breakthroughs in personalized, regenerative nerve technologies, they entered my body using nano-particles<sup>55</sup> and essentially recreated it. I am not only better but I am super-human. And, I am Girl.

Denhaw finally had the courage to reach up and wipe the last falling tear from her cheek. His touch echoed the vast kindness of his heart. He opened his journal one last time, “Ah, here it is, Alan Lightman, *Einstein’s Dreams*” and spoke these words, “You entered a world where time cannot be measured, no clocks, no calendars, and no definite appointments. Events are triggered by other events, not by time. In a world where time is a quality, events record the color of the sky, the tone of the boatman’s call on the Aare, the feeling of happiness or fear when a person comes into a room. The birth of a baby, the patent of an invention, the meeting of two people are not fixed points in time, held down by hours and minutes. Instead, events glide through

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<sup>52</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 281.

<sup>53</sup> Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines*. New York: Penguin books. (1988) p. 281.

<sup>54</sup> A made up term reflecting an “on-line, virtual world that is accessed via the world wide web.

<sup>55</sup> “Depending upon the application, each nanoparticle is functionalized with either a defined number of oligonucleotides (i.e., short pieces of DNA or RNA with a sequence that is complementary to a sequence on a target gene of clinical interest) or a defined number of antibodies that are specific to a particular protein of interest. One nanometer is approximately one ten-thousandth (1/10,000) of the width of a human hair.” [http://www.nanosphere.us/Nanoparticles\\_4516.aspx](http://www.nanosphere.us/Nanoparticles_4516.aspx)

the space of the imagination, materialized by a look, a desire. Likewise, the time between two events is long or short, depending on the background of contrasting events, the intensity of illumination, the degree of light and shadow, the view of the participants.’<sup>56</sup>

“Yes,” Girl countered, “and the space of the imagination obliterates time. It is what I imagine Dreamtime to be, existing in circadian rhythm. It also reminds me of a film I saw where this guy said, ‘So you produce a neo-human, okay, with a new individuality, a new consciousness. But that’s only the beginning of the evolutionary cycle, because as the next cycle proceeds, the input is now this new intelligence. As intelligence piles on intelligence, as ability piles upon ability, the speed changes. Until, what? Until we reach a crescendo. In a way, it could almost be imagined as an almost instantaneous fulfillment of human and neo-human potential. It could be something totally different. It could be the amplification of the individual, the multiplication of individual existences. Parallel existences. Now with the individual no longer restricted by time and space.’<sup>57</sup> So I am confused. Am I human? Am I to live up to some potential beyond that that has ever been imagined? All I know is that when I could not move I could still hear the sound of my heart. It made me question what it means to be alive. That music, I will never forget.

Denhaw said, “Nor should you child. Eric Davis, someone closer to your generation once said, ‘Like us, music expresses itself through time, but that linear motion also conceals a more complex temporal field, a nest of beat cycles and refrains and eternal returns. When we are enraptured or deeply moved by music...we shift away from clock-time. Music reveals time itself as a mystery, a mystery that is perhaps the most basic condition of consciousness. Perhaps this is why music remains the most ‘spiritual’ of arts...music models the invisible world.’<sup>58</sup>” Girl agreed, leaned forward and took up Denhaw’s hand and holding up to her face, she tenderly kissed its back.

At which moment her mind returned her to the pillow-y softness of the sweet smelling orchestral field in which she woke, the sky was a brilliant blue, and off in the distance (as she remembered: ‘You cannot travel on the path before you have become the path itself’) she heard what must have been a majestic crow shout out, “Ka Cawww, Den hawww, Ka hawww”.

The End.

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<sup>56</sup> Lightman, Alan. Einstein's Dreams.  
<http://members.iif.hu/visontay/ponticulus/britannicus/scientists/einstein-dream.html>

<sup>57</sup> Linklater, Richard. Waking Life. Australia (2002 film) <http://fusionanomaly.net/>

<sup>58</sup> Davis, Erik. The Future Mix. <http://fusionanomaly.net/wired.html>

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