The experimental 1860s: Charles Walter's images of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, Victoria

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This is the first meeting like this I have ever seen. I am very glad this night. When I was camping about in every place I never got any meeting like this. Mr Green spoke to me a long time ago. He told me not to walk about any more. I kept his word. Mr Green told me plenty of good words from the Bible, and they made me very glad. Mr Hamilton spoke to me at Woori-Yaloak, and made me to know more. I now know plenty of good words from the Bible. I am very glad. Mr Green and all the Yarra blacks and me went through the mountain. We had no bread for four or five days. We did all this to let you (Goulburn blacks) know about the good word. Now you have all come to the Yarra, I am glad. You now know plenty. Do not go away any more, else you will lose it again. This is better than drinking. We are all glad this night. This is good.

Simon Wonga, Wurundjeri leader,
Illustrated Australian News, 25 August 1865: 13.

Australian historians have long known of the importance of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, near Healesville, Victoria (1863–1924), as a site of Indigenous strength in responding to the forces of colonialism.¹ The political sophistication of Kulin residents in protesting official treatment during the 1870s and 1880s effectively gained the support of politicians and the public, with the result of delaying attempts to close the station until the late 1880s. Less well known is the station's role as a place of prolific visual production, where meanings about Aboriginal culture, difference, and race relations were created by white photographers, and subsequently circulated amongst an international popular and scholarly audience. As the Aboriginal community closest to Melbourne, Coranderrk was visited by photographers and scientists from its earliest years, assuming emblematic status as an Aboriginal 'showplace', and generating an archive of around 3000 images now held by institutions around the world – the largest body of photographs taken at a single Australian Aboriginal place. These images constituted a powerful visual language which has been overlooked by historians concerned with the documentary record. One of Australia's first travelling

¹ See, for example, Barwick 1998, Mulvaney 1989.

photographers, Charles Walter, took photographs of Coranderrk between 1865 and 1866 which were circulated within a range of increasingly distant contexts. As these images spiralled outward from Coranderrk, they were used to demonstrate very different truths about Aboriginal people: as newspaper illustrations or lush private albums they sought to efface difference, in demonstrating missionaries' successful 'civilisation' of their subjects; conversely, as scientific data they were used to 'prove' an essential biological difference. However, despite the strength of these colonial 'frames', it is also possible to see Indigenous objectives emerge from these powerful early images, in the evidence for their subjects' involvement in the picture-making process.

'This civilising experiment': Coranderrk in 1865

Simon Wonga's speech was reported in one of the station's first real public appearances: a newspaper account of the new 'civilising experiment' at Coranderrk, comprising a full page of text and five engravings based on Charles Walter's photographs.² Over the following year it was followed by several more written accounts of the station, and Walter sold images from his visits to Coranderrk and the surrounding region to several other newspapers.³ Some of these he collated in a commercially available album, titled 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation'.⁴ Consequently Redmond Barry, the President of the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition, commissioned Walter around May 1866 to make a series of portraits of the residents of Coranderrk, which was incorporated into a large display panel and subsequently sent to scientists in Russia, Italy, and England.⁵ These images were also made into an album for the family of John Green, the station superintendent.⁶ As a series of artefacts – here I examine newspaper features, two albums, an exhibition panel and scientific records – it is possible to trace their consumption and effects across a range of different audiences.⁷

At this time the Coranderrk station was a symbol of hope for Victoria's Aboriginal people and their white supporters. Despite opposition and difficulty, it had eventually been established in March 1863, at the junction of Badger Creek and the Yarra River. The station's internal dynamics were uniquely harmonious: relations between John Green, the station manager, and the residents, and between the different Aboriginal clans, were characterised by good will, mutual cooperation, and a sense of common purpose, as Wonga's speech attests. This was also a decade when humanitarians held sway over colonial policy, fostering a climate of public sympathy and optimism.⁸ However, this hopeful local movement had to contend with the juggernaut of colonialism: white government sought to confine Aboriginal people on stations, to

² *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 August 1865. An earlier account had appeared in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 24 March 1864.

³ See for example *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 24 March 1866; *Australian News for Home Readers*, 25 August 1865; *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 September 1865: 1, 10; *Illustrated Australian News*, 11 June 1866: 8.

⁴ State Library of Victoria (SLV), La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807, H13881/1-22.

⁵ SLV, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 326, H91.1/1-106.

⁶ Museum Victoria (MV), XP1937-XP 2043.

⁷ My approach, developed independently, echoes Deborah Poole's (1997) model of 'visual economy' and Elizabeth Edwards' (2001) examination of the flow of images through interpretative communities.

⁸ Attwood 1989: 82-85.

impose disciplinary technologies upon them which relied upon the visibility and demeanour of the residents. Walter's images helped to define textual and visual tropes which were repeated over and over during the century to follow, shaping the way people thought about Aboriginal people and difference, but also reflecting something of Aboriginal concerns.

Charles Walter

Charles Walter arrived in Australia from Germany in 1855 and was collecting for his patron, botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller by 1856. His earliest known photograph is dated 1862, and he was advertising as a 'Country Photographic Artist' by 1865. Gael Newton locates him at the vanguard of 'the new breed of photographers' specialising in landscape work, who, from the mid-1860s, set off on solo expeditions into remote parts of Victoria in search of picturesque views.⁹ As a collector of plants and images, Walter represented himself as an explorer, battling alone through impenetrable bush to capture the best views of Victoria's natural beauty for an urban audience.¹⁰ In 1873, a drawing showed 'our artist' off to work in pith helmet, axe and camera bag.¹¹ In 1874 another newspaper engraving showed Walter photographing an Aboriginal 'pin-up girl', alluding to his work with Aboriginal subjects, and indicating the legendary status his travels had achieved (Fig 1).¹² The accompanying text explained that:

Our engraving illustrates a characteristic phase of Australian bush life. A travelling photographer on the lookout for subjects has come upon a camp of natives. One, a half-caste girl, has attracted his attention by her wild beauty, and he has placed her in position, and is taking her photograph. Some of the natives squat close by watching the strange and mysterious process, and presently their grim figures will also be photographed to serve as ethnological specimens and curios to send to friends in England as examples of the rapidly disappearing Australian race.

This slightly prurient fantasy bears no relationship to Walter's *oeuvre*, which does not contain any images of naked women. The cartoon showing the 'half caste girl' suggests a gypsy rather than an Aboriginal woman, although the group in the background resembles some of Walter's views of camp groups taken at Lake Tyers, for example. The writer combines romantic fancy with an early allusion to photographic souvenirs of the 'dying race'.¹³ While Walter was known, then as now, for these early and

⁹ Newton 1988: 50; Gaskins 1992: 834–35; Crombie 1995: 1; Gillbank 1992: 3–10.

¹⁰ *Illustrated Australian News*, 10 October 1866. In March 1868 an article accompanying an image of Victoria's Niagara Falls described how he 'scrambled for days over rocks and ravines, through tangled undergrowth and swollen creeks, in order to get the nearest and best views [and] to direct lovers of nature to places hitherto unknown, where they will be able to gratify their admiration to the full' *Illustrated Australian News*, 3 March 1868.

¹¹ *Illustrated Australian News*, 31 December 1873: 212.

¹² *Australasian Sketcher*, 18 April 1874: 6. For an account of Walter's scientific exploits see Gaskins 1992: 834–35.

¹³ While Newton annotates this image as being 'after a photograph', the original newspaper account does not state this, nor does it seem likely that a second photographer would have been on hand to record this moment. Like the text, the form of the image appears to combine a cartoonist's romantic notion of a 'wild beauty' with a version of one of Walter's Lake Tyers views, showing a standard camp scene, such as 'Black's Camp. Lake Tyers Mission, Gippsland', *Illustrated Australian News*, 7 August 1869: 160.

powerful records of a significant moment in Aboriginal history, and he visited Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers subsequent to his early trip to Coranderrk, in the context of Walter's long-term photographic practice there are not many of these images, nor were they frequently reproduced. They should be seen in the wider context of the developing popular interest in the environment which Walter catered to. Despite evidence for a relationship of mutual sympathy between Walter and the Coranderrk community, he used various techniques to comply with contemporary stories told about his Aboriginal subjects, or to invent new ones; his images intersect systematically with contemporary rhetoric about the process of civilising and Christianising Aboriginal people.

Newspapers

In considering how ideas about Aboriginal people – for example, as a 'doomed race' – were popularised during the 1860s, Bain Attwood points to Coranderrk's emblematic importance in shaping the views of Melbourne policy-makers who had little or no other contact with Aboriginal people.¹⁴ One aspect of this discourse which has not been examined is the visual imagery circulated by the illustrated press, which communicated the arguments of a range of competing interests, including humanitarian segregationists such as the Reverend Hamilton and John Green, as well as opponents of this policy, who became increasingly vocal into the 1870s. Elizabeth Morrison has argued that Victoria's very numerous newspapers were powerful agents of political and ideological change: the 'regular, multiple, individual and contemporaneous acts of reading' by its mass audience constructed an imagined world grounded in everyday life.¹⁵ Engraved versions of Walter's first photographs of Coranderrk as an exemplary 'civilising experiment' appeared in June 1865, stressing the rapid progress being made by Aboriginal residents in adopting Christianity, a work ethic, and European material culture.

From the point of view of the Kulin, an important effect of Walter's photographic practice and its reproduction in newspapers was the development of a sharp awareness of their visual representation by whites. In contrast to the contemporary understanding of the 'civilising process', they can be seen to have appropriated these forms selectively, for their own uses. This took place at several levels: as many have acknowledged, the Kulin's political activism was particularly effective because it was adroitly expressed through white structures of negotiation, as in the early and formative deputation to Governor Barkly's 1863 *levée*. An important aspect of this approach was the manipulation of verbal and visual representations, perhaps more congenial to people who had traditionally stressed these dimensions of sociality. I argue that these visual aspects of Coranderrk's history have been overlooked by historians, perhaps because of European cultural assumptions, equating writing with a more general competence, and reflected in a historiographical bias towards documentary evidence, and political history. While the history of colonial photography has generally presented it as a practice which exploited Indigenous subjects, a detailed understanding of the mechanisms of visual imagery and ephemeral mass media such as newspapers at this period suggests that the Kulin in some degree shaped the content and form of these early photographs.

¹⁴. Attwood 1989: 83–88.

¹⁵. Morrison 1992: 136–38.

At this time it was noted of the station that:

Many of the interiors were tolerably well furnished, the seats and tables being made of rough bush timber, and the walls decorated with pictures cut out of the *Illustrated London News* and the illustrated newspapers published in Melbourne. There were also several photographs, which were highly prized.¹⁶

The Kulin would have had access to Walter's photographs of Coranderrk once they appeared in the illustrated newspapers, from August 1865.¹⁷ In May 1866 another visitor noted that the huts 'were all partially papered with that ubiquitous periodical the *Illustrated London News*, and on most of the side mantelpieces were photographs of the ladies and gentlemen of the establishment'.¹⁸ It seems likely that Walter had passed the results of his work at the station back to his subjects. We know that Aboriginal people had always had a rich visual culture, and they readily appropriated this new form. In the mid-to-late 1860s most Kulin adults were illiterate, but were keen to learn to read the bible and newspapers, and to write letters;¹⁹ their consumption of the newspapers commented on by visitors would have centred upon the images. It is entertaining to imagine the settlement's self-reflexive enjoyment of these mass-produced portraits of themselves and their home, as well as hearing what was written about them.

More to the point, I suggest that the self-conscious awareness of their own public profile and agency in white society through the mass media of the press and commercial photography was one means of enabling residents to develop the 'sophisticated' approach to politics and representation that outsiders were always surprised by and often attributed to external white intervention. A crucial aspect of the residents' political savvy and their ability to manipulate public debate, later to prove so important, was their self-conscious understanding of how they were represented in white discourse, and their dextrous intervention within it.

Queen Victoria's promise: the Governor's levée, May 1863

For example, traditional Aboriginal protocols had involved sophisticated formal negotiations between tribal groups, and the Kulin quickly learnt the value of diplomacy in white society also, enabling them to assert their ownership of Coranderrk. In May 1863, only a couple of months after the station was established, a deputation of Wurundjeri and Taungurong led by Simon Wonga attended Governor Barkly's public levée, celebrating the Queen's birthday and the marriage of the Prince of Wales. They presented him, as the vice-regal agent of Queen Victoria, with weapons for the Prince and rugs and baskets for the Queen. The Jajowrong at Mount Franklin sent their gifts to the Queen independently with two letters written by 13-year-old Ellen, who had also crocheted a collar for the Queen and a doily for the wife of the departing Governor. Later in the year the Jajowrong joined the others at Coranderrk.²⁰

¹⁶. Report of Board inspection on 22/7/1865, Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1866: 4.

¹⁷. *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 August 1865.

¹⁸. 'Country Sketches: The Blackfellows' Home', *Australasian* (Melbourne), 5 May 1866: 135.

¹⁹. Reverend Hamilton's evidence to Royal Commission on the Aborigines 1877: 23; Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1866: 5.

²⁰. Barwick 1998: 66–67.

The levée was reported in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 June 1863, accompanied by an engraving of the 'Deputation of Victorian Aborigines at the Governor's levée' (Fig 2). It described how members of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines were introduced, 'accompanied by chiefs of the Goulburn, Yarra, Western Port, and Gipps Land blacks, and several members of the respective tribes to the number of about sixteen, clothes in European costume, but wrapped in opossum rugs and carrying spears.' Mr Heales then read an address from the Board which introduced the 'Waworung, Boonorong, and Tarawaragal tribes of Australian aborigines' who wished to congratulate the Queen on the marriage of the Prince of Wales, and explained that the deputation originated with the people of Coranderrk, whom the Board merely assisted. The secretary of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, Robert Brough Smyth, read an address, interpreted as:

Blacks of the tribes of Wawoorong, Boonorong and Tara-Waragal send this to the Great Mother Queen Victoria. We and other blackfellows send many thanks to the Great Mother Queen for many many things. Blackfellow now throw away all war-spears. No more fighting but live like white men almost. Blackfellows hear that your first son has married. Very good that! Blackfellows send all good to him, and to you, his Great Mother, Victoria. Blackfellows come from Miam and Willam to bring this paper to the Good Governor. He will tell you more. All Blackfellows round about agree to this. This is all.

Wonga took a 'large and beautifully worked' opossum skin rug which he spread out, and the 'other blacks, one of them about eighty years of age ['Mr King?'] 'laid on the rug a number of spears, a wimmera, shield and waddy'.²¹ The engraved image shows the uniformed, decorated Governor, flanked by costumed judge and soldiers, facing an elderly man wrapped in a cloak and the taller, younger Wonga. A short white man in evening dress stands behind Mr King, facing away from the Aborigines, hands held apart as if declaiming – presumably Thomas or Brough Smyth. The assembled throng fills the ornate ballroom. The image echoes the written account's attention to protocol and formality, representing the deputation on a footing of equality with the assembly's other delegates, but belongs to an iconographic tradition showing defeated peoples paying tribute to their conqueror.²² The Board was later to report that 'The conduct of the Aborigines was grave and dignified; and Wonga, the principal man of the Yarra tribe, addressed His Excellency with becoming modesty, and yet with earnestness'.²³ This newspaper representation was evidence to the Kulin of the extreme political importance to whites of English government, represented by the Crown.

While Simon Wonga expressed his people's gratitude to the Queen, this was of a limited kind. However, as intimated by the pictorial icon of surrender, it was received by Europeans as an expression of loyalty and submission, subsumed into a model of conquered peoples surrendering to imperial might, as the Queen's response demonstrates. She expressed the:

satisfaction with which Her Majesty has received such assurances of their attachment and loyalty, and the Queen would be glad that the girl Ellen should be

²¹ *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 June 1863.

²² I thank Roger Benjamin for pointing this out to me.

²³ Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1864: 11.

assured that Her Majesty has had much pleasure in accepting the collar which she has worked. The Queen trusts that the advantage of education may be shown to this poor girl, and that she may be encouraged not only to seek her own improvement, but to acquaint the other aboriginal inhabitants of the interest that their Queen, however distant from her, will always feel in their advancement and welfare.

... their Royal Highnesses have received many tokens of good will and affection from the subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, but conspicuous in their estimation are those which show, as in the present instance, that these sentiments animate the native population of so distant and loyal dependencies.²⁴

The Queen's letters to Coranderrk had a double meaning, equally satisfying to black and white, explaining why it became a central story told by and about the residents of Coranderrk. To the newspaper-reading public and to white officials, it appeared that the Aboriginal people had acknowledged the importance and power of the Crown and the benefits of white civilisation in a suitably grateful manner. The Board report for 1865 recorded that 'when, in obedience to your Excellency's commands, the gracious sentiments of her Majesty were made known to the blacks, they appeared to be sensible of the kindness and favour shown to them'.²⁵ Ellen and her crocheted collar became to whites an emblem of acquired virtues and the 'civilising process', and the honour paid her by the Queen's 'personal' response.

To Aboriginal people, by contrast, the event symbolised their rights to the land. While Ellen's crocheted collar was not presented at the Governor's levée, the personal expression of royal concern, resulting from the protocols enacted between the ambassadors of black and white, was taken to represent a legal and binding promise of ownership.²⁶ Diane Barwick suggests that European rituals such as the Batman Treaty were understood by the Kulin in terms of the Tanderrum ceremony, a means of sharing rights to territory, 'a formal procedure whereby approved strangers were guaranteed the host clan's protection as well as giving and receiving allegiance and access to each other's resources'.²⁷ These competing meanings coalesce in Charles Walter's photographs of Ellen, who crocheted the collar and was singled out by the Queen (Figs 6, 14, and 34).²⁸ Walter's two portraits of Ellen were of great significance: they are very similar in organisation, being oval framed and bust length, showing a young, neatly dressed woman. Both portraits are characterised by her neat and tidy demeanour, easily enfolded into the story of Ellen and the Queen.²⁹

A range of historians have noted the role of 'Queen Victoria narratives' in Indigenous responses to colonialism, in which the Queen gave Aboriginal people their reserves as compensation for dispossession.³⁰ Heather Goodall also notes the recur-

²⁴. Despatches from Duke of Newcastle to Governor Sir Charles Darling, 18 September 1863 and 17 November 1863, reproduced Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1864, Appendix VI.

²⁵. Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1864: 12

²⁶. Several writers have, like the Kulin, conflated the two independent presentations: eg Mulvaney 1989: 153.

²⁷. Barwick 1998: 23–24.

²⁸. MV XP 2003.

²⁹. Ellen makes three archival appearances: in the newspaper engraving reproduced in the *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 August 1865, in the AAUC album; and attached to Walter's letter to the commissioners of 8 May 1866, PROV: VPRS 927/3.

rence of this theme in NSW claims to land well into the twentieth century, suggesting that it reflects the conviction that Aboriginal rights to land had been recognised at the highest levels of the British state.³¹ More specifically, Diane Barwick argues that the deputation members had

for years been told that the Queen had explicitly commissioned the Governor to protect Aborigines and were apparently aware that his formal consent was required for the reservation of land ... The reservation of 2,300 acres [931 ha] for their use on 30 June 1863 was probably coincidental ... But the timing of this decision, whatever its cause, encouraged the Kulin to believe in the efficacy of deputations ... [the Queen's] letters helped to establish their belief, still voiced by descendants in the 1970s, that Coranderrk was the direct gift of the Queen and Sir Henry Barkly and belonged to them and their heirs in perpetuity.³²

The image's mythical status is reflected in the inclusion of Ellen's portrait in *every* set of photographs which survives from Walter's work at Coranderrk, even in a letter from Walter to the Melbourne Exhibition Commissioners, as a sample of his work; no other image appears in each instance. Perhaps the newspaper report of the levée had originally inspired him to go to Coranderrk, where the event's reception by the Kulin as well as by whites directed his attention towards its emblemisation in the person of Ellen. The entangled meanings converging in this image were facilitated by its visual ambiguity; as tangible objects, these portraits could call up the story over and over again. In the Green family album, where handwritten captions reveal something of the personal and idiosyncratic relationships prevailing between the Greens and the residents, the memory of this legendary event is prompted by 'Eliza's daughter. (crocheted a collar and sent it to Queen Victoria, who acknowledged it by a letter.' The queen's presence was also invoked by the portraits of her which hung above residents' mantel-pieces, as noted of Wurundjeri leader and artist William Barak in the 1890s.³³

'This civilising experiment'

The feature article, which appeared in the *Illustrated Australian News* on 25 August 1865, defined several themes which remained influential in shaping representation of the station and Victorian Aborigines. It consisted of a full-page article accompanied by six engravings based on Charles Walter's photographs (Figs 3–8). This account, in a sense, offers a means of anchoring the photographs' often ambivalent meanings, reducing their polysemy through the less ambiguous text. Changes made to the photographs on which the published engraving was based also point towards editorial intention. Roland Barthes suggested that newspaper text becomes parasitic on the press image, 'a kind of secondary vibration'.³⁴ Here, where the image has been changed, even caricatured, it is hard to weigh their relative strength; they are complicitous, telling the same story: that of the humanitarians, specifically the Reverend Hamilton.

The August 1865 feature is dominated by a full-page engraved view of Coranderrk (Fig 3). This differs from the original photograph (Fig 9), known from a

³⁰. Rowse 1993: 13–14; Rowley 1972; Read 1984; Reynolds 1992: 146.

³¹. Goodall 1996: 103.

³². Barwick 1998: 66; Barwick 1974: 60.

³³. Baessler 1895: 173, cited in Sayers 1994: 15.

³⁴. Barthes 1977: 26.

contemporary album, in various ways. In fact, the original panorama comprised four photographs of different sections of the settlement, glued together to form a more comprehensive view, the different vantage points resulting in an awkward distortion of perspective.³⁵ The panorama view encapsulated the station landscape in its entirety, recording its operation as an orderly, self-sufficient system.

The engraver's changes to the original are significant: it has been tidied up. Formally, the complex, untidy elements of the photograph, with its assorted vantage points, have been balanced, and its perspective unified. As Louise Partos notes, the miasmas have been deleted from the extreme left hand side of the image, denying the problem that white officials had in persuading the Kulin to abandon traditional housing and their nomadic lifestyle. Clothing hanging over fences on the photograph's left has also been removed. The neat houses and schoolroom have been enlarged, a distortion introduced by the original collage but conveniently 'imbuing the reproduction with a sense of order and the importance of education', the addition of a central bullock and dray balancing the distant buildings and hinting at industry and wealth.³⁶ Pictorially, the flattened, businesslike composition of the photograph, attempting to record as much of the settlement as possible, has been organised according to conventions of the picturesque, reducing the complexity of the photograph to a symbol.

These visual insinuations are spelt out by the text, which emphasised Coranderrk's neatness:

Nowhere else in the Australian colonies is there to be seen so large a number of natives collected together, of whom it can be said that they appear to be reclaimed from their former wandering and savage life, and to be conformed to the manner of Europeans. They are all dressed in European clothing, not received in charity, but acquired by the earnings of their own industry. They live in huts neatly constructed of slabs and bark, consisting of two rooms, having two square windows in front and a door in the centre. The houses are separated from each other by a small space, and stand on rising ground in a row, like one side of a street. A little lower down the rising ground, and in front of the natives' houses, stands a spacious school room, with dormitories for the children attached.

This emphasis on the place's physical order accords with the engraved view, underlining the notion of the settlement as productive, shortly to be 'independent of government supplies'. It describes the accomplishments of the children's schooling, and the 'religious element [which] is made a prominent part in this civilising experiment', concluding that 'efforts at civilising the blacks have been made before, and have failed. But, as far as we can judge at present, Mr Green's experiment is very hopeful.' Like the engraved view, the original's complexity has been smoothed out, reduced to a set of tropes stressing industry, improvement, and order.

³⁵. The photograph itself improved on the settlement's layout by lining up the building facades, actually scattered across the hillside, so as to present a united front. From Walter's views onwards, however, images of Aboriginal reserves are characterised by order and regularity; for example, see Caire's view of Lake Tyers, where the houses run in a line downhill towards the water, seeming, like their residents, to stand to attention.

³⁶. Partos 1994: 101-03.

This glowing overview, comprising view and text, is supplemented by several shorter vignettes. First, a portrait of John Green, the manager – a bust of a serious bearded man gazing to the right (Fig 4) – is underwritten by a biographical account of his arrival from Scotland in 1855, and his conversion to the mission. Interestingly, two portraits of Aboriginal residents provide a counterpart to Green's. First is Simon Wonga, the Wurundjeri leader, 'chief of the Yarra tribe' (Fig 5). The text noted his conversion from hard drinking to Christianity, and that 'It was very much owing to Simon's influence with the blacks that Mr Green succeeded in getting them to adopt a settled mode of life; and throughout Mr Green has found him eminently serviceable in the work of native improvement.'

As cited at the beginning of this paper, Wonga's speech, on the occasion of the teacher's birthday, demonstrates the positive view the residents held of the settlement's establishment and future, celebrating his conversion. He alludes to the trek to Coranderrk in epic terms, and interestingly, in integral relationship with his references to the bible. This event was of profound importance to the Kulin, and, indeed, to their white supporters, such as Green and Thomas. Its memory was structured by biblical imagery and, like Ellen's letter from the Queen, passed into local myth, as I discuss shortly. Then followed Ellen's portrait (Fig 6), for whites representing submission to civilisation, and accompanied by a short paragraph re-telling the story of the Queen's letter.

These two examples of a hopeful future are counterbalanced by an account of 'Old King,' (Fig 7), described, however, as docile and elderly, a remnant of traditional Aboriginal culture who yet acknowledges the benefits of white society. An interest in Aboriginal 'nobility' characterises white representations throughout the 19th century, perhaps evident here. Pictorially, 'Old King' is complemented by a view of a 'MI MI', inhabited by a man and a woman dressed in European clothes, which we are told is his dwelling, 'until a hut can be built for him' (Fig 8).³⁷ This image of 'savagery', deliberately excluded from the main settlement view, jars a little with the preceding seamless account of progress and prosperity, a dissonance deployed on several levels as a narrative device constructing an opposition between different ideas about Aboriginal people. Broad thematic patterns are evident within illustrated newspapers at this time, on the one hand contrasting stories about 'wild' Aboriginal people in conflict with white settlers³⁸, and 'traditional' Aboriginal culture, with the redemptive theme of the more optimistic mission features, often written by missionaries, on the other. This tension also exists within representations of Coranderrk itself, as exemplified by the August 1865 feature's inclusion of 'Old King', despite its overt message of evolution: he measured the progress made by the educated residents of the station, marking the difference between traditional and modern.

'Australian Aborigines Under Civilization'

Walter's 1865 Coranderrk images were also collated in the form of a commercial album titled 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilization' (AAUC, Figs 9-13), part of a mid-1860s boom in the sale of bound albums.³⁹ Unlike the newspaper reproductions, its

³⁷. It is not clear what the origin of this engraving is: it appears in neither the AAUC nor the 1866 series.

³⁸. Dowling 1998: 36-38.

only written signposts take the form of captions; in particular, the album's title uncompromisingly directs our understanding of these photographs: we are being shown Aboriginal people who are being changed. Its effects are primarily visual, however, achieved by the internal logic of the choice, arrangement, and relationship of the photographs within the album, as well as each image's individual import. The album's structure, like the popular newspaper reports, imposes on the viewer an understanding of the progress of Christianity and civilisation at Coranderrk, in teaching Aboriginal people how to dress, live and behave like whites. It tells the story of hardships overcome by Aboriginal settlers whose attachment to a new home symbolises commitment to the Christian values of religious devotion and hard work. Again like the newspaper account, the familiar themes of order and industry, attachment to place and their new home, defined against traditional 'savagery', structure this series. However, it is also possible to perceive Indigenous objectives, which disrupt the rhetoric of 'progress', or which, more subtly, appropriate it for Aboriginal purposes.

The album opens with the four-part panorama known from the newspaper engraving of August 1865, its title appearing below in large stamped Gothic script (Fig 9). As I've noted, each photograph assumed a different vantage point, emphasising the schoolhouse, and the Green's home, which were taken from closer up. The photographic panorama, unlike the engraving, makes this disjunction apparent. It also includes rows of schoolchildren standing, stiff and posed, in front of the schoolhouse, with Mr Green on the right, and two unidentified Aboriginal women and Ellen standing on the steps.

Unlike the careful layout of other reserves, a totalising hierarchical plan had not been imposed on the Coranderrk settlement, which arose from more consensual origins, despite the textual accounts which stressed its neatness – and so Walter did his best to portray it. He resolved the technical difficulty of getting everything in, while giving certain landmarks sufficient prominence, by collage, a ruse which allowed him to stress what he thought were the settlement's salient features. The four parts prompt an evolutionary narrative in reading the image, moving from the mia mias on the left, across the tidy huts of the 'civilising' Kulin, to focus especially on the schoolhouse and dormitories, also used for religious services, and the Green family's exemplary residence. This comprehensive view was aided by the album format, determining the image's consumption in private; it could be pored over, a slow traverse of the station landscape yielding up many small details about the place and its inhabitants to the interested viewer.

But the unruliness of the Coranderrk landscape hints at other priorities: details erased from the engraved version include a possum skin rug and washing spread out to dry over the split rail fencing across the front of the 'street' of huts, marring its appearance, and the mia mias on the extreme left, last of the row of dwellings, which indicate the presence of residents pursuing a way of life which was to some extent traditional.

³⁹. It seems likely that all these photographs were roughly contemporaneous as a number of photographs included in the album appear on the basis of newspaper reproductions to have been taken between August 1865 and before June 1865, while no 1866 portraits are included; in addition their message echoes the newspaper series rather than the 1866 portraits.

These residents were represented as marginal to the settlement's real work, although, as photographs reveal, they continued to live in this way into the 1880s.

As the viewer moved closer into the village other signs of civilisation appeared: turning to page two, we see four similar views of station buildings, captioned 'The Station Kitchen', 'Simon Wonga's Residence', 'Johnny Webster's Residence', and 'Morgan's Residence' (Fig 10). In each of these, a family group stands before neat slab huts, accompanied in almost every case by the Greens. Page three shows more of the same, imposing European structures of domesticity embodied in the nuclear family upon the residents, pictorially effecting a central humanitarian 'civilising' objective by disaggregating the settlement into a series of small family units. Like the Board's periodic inspections, these images exposed Aboriginal homes to white surveillance and report.

By page four, Walter has selected groups ('girls', 'boys', 'lubras', 'blacks') who stand stiffly in front of a blanket hung on an outside wall (Fig 11). These neatly posed groups de-personalise the people involved; they are studies of types, distinguishing between the successfully progressing residents of the first ten images, and, as a kind of savage postscript, what is being left behind.

But while we might be acutely aware of the large-scale, irreversible changes being imposed upon the Kulin, we cannot overlook the fact that they have chosen to cooperate with the photographer, conforming with his requirements: standing stiffly according to arrangement, even where a small boy's hurt foot requires that he be supported from behind. More significantly, they stress a theme which was of central concern to the residents as well as to the missionaries – that of *home*, arguing for the care and attachment of the Kulin to the place. Like their promise from the Queen, the Coranderrk residents' assertion of their goals within white discourse was characteristic. They had their own reasons, perhaps different from the missionaries', to see settled residence at Coranderrk as necessary and desirable. This is made explicit when we turn to page five.

Coranderrk as Goshen, a 'land of light and plenty'

Here we see a remarkable photograph titled 'The Yarra Tribe starting for the Acheron' (Fig 12). This caption locates the photograph at the moment of setting off for the promised reserve, in February 1860 (Coranderrk was finally chosen in February-March 1863) – but it is impossible for Walter to have been present at this time. Instead it is a fictionalisation, a historical recreation of the mythical story of the station's foundation. It reflects the extreme importance of this event to the Kulin and to the Green family. This unique reconstruction of a key event in Aboriginal history must have been prompted by the Aboriginal subjects; while its form may have been Walter's idea, and the importance of the theme to Coranderrk's residents was certainly recognised by sympathetic whites such as William Thomas, *Guardian of Aborigines*, its conception reflects an Aboriginal perspective. Like Ellen's portrait, the story represented by Walter's image had a double meaning: to whites it signified progress; to the Aboriginal people it symbolised their rights to the land.

Despite the technical requirement to remain quite still during the exposure of the plate, Walter has attempted to achieve a sense of movement by posing the line of men and women as if taking their first step forward. Each man holds a gun over his shoul-

der, and a swag, as do the women lined up in the background, but parallel with rather than following, the men. The leader is presumably Simon Wonga, who we are told was tall, at 5ft 10in. The third man in line is John Green, his face slightly obscured; he carries a staff instead, as befits a man of the cloth. As 'manager' we know that John Green's relationship with the residents was close and 'equal'; interestingly, Walter was able to represent the relationship between Green and the Aboriginal people pictorially, with the Aboriginal leaders at the head of the line but Green occupying a central position. This technique also assigns the women a secondary but complementary role. Rather than addressing the camera in an explicit relationship of mutual regard, as in the posed groups, here the remembered event itself is the subject.

The story of the blacks' journey to Coranderrk was translated into biblical figures of speech, and condensed into this heroic pictorial form by the white photographer. It is predicated on Coranderrk as a 'Goshen', a land of light and plenty. The road to Coranderrk was indeed a long one, so it is not surprising that it was remembered in epic terms. We know that a deputation of Taungerong and two Wurundjeri as interpreters had visited William Thomas in February 1859 to petition for 'a particular part of the Upper Goulburn, on the Acharon [sic] River.'⁴⁰ On 10 March the delegation and Thomas set off to select the land, and on his return to Melbourne, Thomas met groups of Aboriginal people 'wending their way to their Goshen.' This is an allusion to the story of Exodus, where God's promise to Abraham, subsequently reaffirmed to his descendants, is fulfilled after Moses led the oppressed Israelites out of Egypt, through a period of exile, spent wandering in the desert, finally to Canaan.⁴¹ The men assured Thomas that they would 'set down on the land like white men',⁴² as Marie Fels notes, a landmark moment in cross-cultural history.⁴³ But they were moved from the Acheron in August 1860 to another reserve, the Mohican, and finally to Coranderrk in February–March 1863.

The biblical imagery used by William Thomas suffused the memories of those connected with the founding of Coranderrk, as evidenced by Simon Wonga's speeches of August 1865 (quoted at the beginning of this paper) and again at a wedding in February 1865:

This the way always- meeting together- this what I want you for- to come down here- Ye were all nagging about before. This the way Mr Green want all the people gather here from the bad place- bring you all up here to this good place- this place a home- God give the blacks this place. We have Mr Hamilton here alongside Mr Green- always come when we want him- good friends to blackfellow. These town ministers preach to us- make every fellow know more about God and Jesus Christ- make blackfellow- know all about it.⁴⁴

⁴⁰. Massola 1975: 7; Fels 1989. The Select Committee into Aborigines of 1858–59 had just concluded, in a climate of sympathy; it recommended that Aboriginal people had a right to compensation. The Mohican Run was requested 11 January 1861 and the first report by its manager, R. Hickson, was included in Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1861.

⁴¹. Genesis xlv, 10, Exodus viii.22, ix.26, The Holy Bible 1974; See also 'Promised Land', in Metzger and Coogan 1993: 619–20. Although, as David Frankel has pointed out to me, the Israelites spent their time in Goshen as slaves, an irony of which Thomas was probably aware.

⁴². Thomas to Brough Smyth, 20 July 1860, NAA: CRS B 312, Item 3, 6/912.

⁴³. Fels 1989.

Coranderrk's importance and attachment as a permanent home and refuge for its residents cannot be overestimated. Many scholars have seen the story of Exodus as sanctioning the dispossession and oppression foundational to western colonisation.⁴⁵ The figuring of Coranderrk as promised land is an ironic inversion of this pattern, for the Aboriginal people by no means became the triumphant conquerors who took possession of Canaan. Perhaps this is why this story (unlike that of Ellen and the Queen) was displaced by white settlers' views of themselves as the protagonists; seeing themselves as exiled, having won the land through suffering and hardship, white settlers have had difficulty in recognising Indigenous perspectives.⁴⁶

Despite traditional links to different territories at the time of establishment, as the speeches of Wonga testify, there was a firm alliance between the Kulin clans, the Taungerong (whose land at the Acheron the first reserve had been established on) and the Wurundjeri (whose territory Coranderrk lay within) and agreement to share the reserve. This unprecedented amalgamation and settlement must have seemed like the only option available to these people, who by 1860 had experienced 25 years of social dislocation. The biblical story told them by white supporters like Green would have provided an explanation for the process of settlement on a reserve, and a promise for the future, one which might have been expected to be understood and acknowledged by white society also.

But more than simply making sense to the Kulin, surely we must acknowledge that the Aboriginal people themselves played a large role in deciding to make this image, as well as in determining its resultant form. Available evidence for Aboriginal awareness of their plight, a determined and active response to it in establishing Coranderrk, and their lasting commitment to retaining the station, suggests that the story of how the residents endured great hardship for God's reward, their own land, would have been of primary symbolic and historical significance.

Further, the form of this image might be seen to owe something to traditional visual practice. As a re-enactment of a historical event, this image is almost unique in 19th-century photography. It is true that a very few examples are known of re-enactments, or purported eyewitness records, in fact staged after the event: for example, in 1916 an 'artificial reconstruction' of the capture of Maori leader Rua was produced as a piece of police propaganda.⁴⁷ But these address white exploits such as capturing 'wild' or 'criminal' blacks: a view from the European side of the frontier. They utilize the medium's supposed power as realist document, adopting the stance of an eyewitness: for example, Thomas Andrews' 1890s images of Fijian 'barbarism' purport to represent timeless ethnographic moments.⁴⁸ Again, Lindt's 'genre' scenes such as 'Gossip', showing an encounter between a maidservant and a male visitor, attempt to present accidental

^{44.} *Illustrated Australian News*, 2 February 1866: 14. Earlier, in 1863, John Green passed on fragments of Woiwurrú to local anthropologist Robert Brough Smyth which are similarly patterned by these tropes of destruction and hope: Brough Smyth 1878, volume II: 111–12.

^{45.} Docker 1999: 3.

^{46.} Curthoys 1999: 32.

^{47.} Binney and Chaplin 1991: 437, Figure 7. And see Roslyn Poignant's study of Ryko's reenactments of the 'Fort Dundas Riot' (1996), also produced in 1916.

^{48.} Thomas 1994: 33–36.

Figure 1: 'Charles Walter at work', *Australasian Sketcher*, 18/4/1874, reproduced in G Newton, *Shades of Light: photography and Australia 1839-1988*, Australian National Gallery & Collins Australia with assistance from Kodak, Canberra, 1988: 50.

Figure 2:
'Deputation of
Victorian
Aborigines at the
Governor's levée',
*Illustrated
Melbourne Post*,
18/6/1863,
National Library of
Australia.

Figure 3: 'The Aboriginal Settlement at Coranderrk – from a photograph by Charles Walter', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25/8/1865: 13, State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

Figure 4: 'Mr John Green [From a photograph by Charles Walter]', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25/8/1865: 13, State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

SIMON.

Figure 5: 'Simon', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25/8/1865: 13, State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

ELLEN.

Figure: 'Ellen', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25/8/1865: 13, State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

OLD KING.

Figure 7: (right) 'Old King', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25/8/1865: 13, State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

Figure 8: (below) 'Mi Mi', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25/8/1865: 13, State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

MI MI.

Figure 9: Charles Walter, Four-part panorama, 'Front View of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Village' page 1, album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807. Within the album, these images form a single, continuous strip.

Figure 10: 'The Station Kitchen', 'Simon Wonga's Residence', 'Johnny Webster's residence', 'Morgan's Residence'. Page 2 (H13881/2-5), album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807.

Figure 11: 'Girls of the Station School', 'Boys of the Station School', 'Group of Lubras', 'Group of Blacks'. Page 4 (H13881/10-13), album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807.

Figure 12: 'The Yarra Tribe Starting for the Acheron 1862' (H13881/14). Page 5, album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807.

Figure 13: 'Open Air Service Amongst the Blacks in June 1865' (H13881/15). Page 6, album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807

Figure 14: (left) Ellen (H13881/16). Page 7, album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807

Figure 15: (right) Mr King; Chief of the Goulbourne tribe (H13881/17). Page 7, album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807.

Figure 16: (left) Mrs Cotton (H13881/18). Page 8, album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807.

Figure 17: (right) Mr Cotton; the oldest Native in Victoria (H13881/19), album 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilisation', State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection, LTA 807.

Figure 18: Panel produced for Intercolonial Exhibition, 1866. 'Portraits of Aboriginal Natives settled at Coranderk...' (H91.1/1-106), State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

Figure 19: Detail of panel produced for Intercolonial Exhibition, 1866 (top, centre, showing 'Males' ('full-blooded'). 'Portraits of Aboriginal Natives settled at Coranderrk...' (H91.1/1-106), State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

Figure 20: Detail of panel produced for Intercolonial Exhibition, 1866 (bottom, centre, showing 'Half Castes'. 'Portraits of Aboriginal Natives settled at Coranderk ...' (H91.1/1-106), State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection.

Figure 21: Page 1, 'Coranderrk and my Aboriginal Friends', Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1937.

Figure 22: Page 2, Man climbing a tree, Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1938.

Figure 23: Page 3, Canoe on Yarra, Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1939.

Figure 24: Page 4, view of settlement, Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1940.

Figure 25: Page 4, 'Women with baskets', Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1941.

Figure 26: Page 5, Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1942–1946.

Figure 27: 'King Billy (Of the Upper Goulburn tribe) A polygamist. Once in the hulks for being concerned in a murder, jumped overboard and escaped to Healesville', Museum Victoria XP 1944.

Figure 28: Page 6, Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1947–1951.

Figure 29: Page 12, Green family album, Museum Victoria XP 1977–1981.

Figure 31: 'Harriet', Museum Victoria XP 1990.

Figure 32: Page 16, Green family album, Museum Victoria XP 1997–2001.

Figure 33: Page 17, Green family album, Museum Victoria XP 2002–2006.

Figure 34: 'Eliza's daughter (crocheted a collar and sent it to Queen Victoria, who acknowledged it by a letter)', Museum Victoria XP 2003.

Figure 35: Timothy, Green family album, Museum Victoria, XP 1951.

Figure 36: Drawing by Timothy (detail), Museum Victoria, XP 86705.

moments of observation;⁴⁹ there is a sense of triumph, as if the camera has stalked and captured its subject.

By contrast this much earlier image, belonging to the experimental days of view photography, has adopted a uniquely dynamic structure – posed as if in mid-step. Instead of attempting to adopt the naturalistic stance of a bystander to actual events, a vantage point facilitated by the wide availability of the dry plate from around 1880, its composition is clearly staged. Despite the stillness required by the photographic process, it does not incorporate the frontal regard characteristic of portraits of this time, instead centring our attention upon the *event*. Its complex pictorial structure is formal and symmetrical, symbolising certain elements of the foundation story: Wonga's leadership, Green's guiding role, the women's complementary status, yeoman strength marshalled to accomplish a gruelling trek, and a new beginning.

I suggest that we can explain this remarkable image in terms of traditional Kulin visual practice. While it deviates from contemporary European photographic conventions, it presents certain features which are reminiscent of Aboriginal representational codes. During the early days of white settlement several observers noted a traditional 'narrative style', which, as Carol Cooper has noted, appeared to be 'almost totally naturalistic and figurative in content and to be concerned with recording historical events.' Figurative drawings in charcoal on bark were often noted to decorate the inside of shelters, depicting real events such as encounters with white settlers.⁵⁰

Finally, perhaps even the formal arrangement of the figures within the scene might be linked to Kulin pictorial conventions. The persistence of this tradition is best known through the art of Wurundjeri leader William Barak, whose paintings, predominantly depicting ceremonial and hunting scenes, are also interpreted as images of the past.⁵¹ Barak's work combines geometric and figurative elements, for example in the detailed rendition of the abstract motifs incised upon the cloaks worn by corroboree dancers. He also tended to abstract forms such as human figures, forming banded patterns.⁵² While the uniform spatial distribution of figures across his sheet of paper was impossible for a camera to imitate stylistically, the arrangement of the Kulin and Greens in 'The Yarra Tribe starting for the Acheron' reminds us of the repetitive lines of figures which feature in Barak's art. Hence, in the photograph's thematic and pictorial relationship to traditional Kulin visual practices, we can perhaps perceive the active engagement of the Kulin, informing Walter of their recent and momentous history, suggesting this key event as a photographic subject, and helping to develop the tableau.

Turning to page six of the album, we return to Walter's and the residents' present, with 'Open Air Service Amongst the Blacks in June 1865' (Fig 13).⁵³ Clearly the image of the white preacher, Green, declaiming to his black congregation, had power in contemporary eyes. The people, many recognisable individuals, are neatly arranged

49. Davies and Stanbury 1985: 78–79.

50. Cooper 1994: 105–7. See also Morphy 1998: 355–68; Cooper 1981: 38–39; Eagle 1997.

51. Tommy McRae's silhouette drawings of the 1880s and 1890s have also been read as retrospective in viewpoint: Sayers 1994: 20–24 and especially 27–49; Morphy 1998: 356.

52. Sayers 1994: 19.

53. And see 'Open air service, Lake Tyers Mission Station, Gippsland', c.1868: *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 24 March 1866: 233, 244.

according to age and sex, and each man holds a book, symbolic of literacy and Christianity. It forms the logical sequel to the 'setting off' image, representing the residents' Christian thanksgiving after their arrival, for the fulfilment of God's promise. This powerful narrative structure effects a movement from the station's origins to a hopeful future, inserting the album's evidence for progress and a settled lifestyle into a Christian teleology.

Finally, on page seven we see Ellen and Mr King, 'Chief of the Goulbourne tribe', reproducing the logic of the newspaper feature (Figs 14-15), and on page eight we see 'Mrs Cotton' and 'Mr Cotton, the oldest Native in Victoria' (Figs 16-17). Whites were interested in his status as elderly 'King', a link with the past, and possibly as indigenous 'royalty'; perhaps he signified the melancholic passing of his race.⁵⁴ The album's production was prompted by an interest in the 'civilising' of the residents within the dominant contemporary discourse of Christianity and humanitarianism. Its narrative structure invokes past, present and future in amalgamating a range of popular and local ideas about Coranderrk, framed by Christian rhetoric.

The 1865 images produced by Walter, as circulated within both newspapers and in the AAUC album, comprise a uniquely celebratory record of Aboriginal life in this period. In the period before more extreme views of fixed biological differences between different human groups gained popular currency, it was in the humanitarians' interest to stress the pliable, teachable nature of the Aboriginal people of Victoria, and their potential for conversion, seeking to diminish rather than exaggerate difference, in the interest of persuading white audiences of the worth of the missionary project.⁵⁵ In campaigning for civil rights, photography was seen as a useful tool by missionaries.⁵⁶

On one level the AAUC can be read as missionary propaganda, intended to show a Christian audience that progress was being made at Coranderrk, that this 'civilising experiment' was indeed a success. From another angle however, Aboriginal interests emerge too, through images which commemorate Kulin stories about their ownership of Coranderrk, a claim of central importance throughout the station's life.

In the larger context of theories about Aborigines and civilisation, which at this time were beginning to undergo scrutiny and revision within developing scientific frameworks, Walter's next series of photographs were to play a rather different role.

Walter's 1866 exhibition portraits: 'communicating correct ideas'

Walter's commission

Charles Walter visited Coranderrk over a period of at least six months in 1866, during which time he made a series of portraits of the Kulin.⁵⁷ This series was to travel around the world in the service of science and colonial progress. Redmond Barry, the President of Melbourne's Exhibition Commissioners, had apparently seen the newspaper engrav-

⁵⁴. I discuss this trope and its later uses further in Lydon 2000.

⁵⁵. Cf Thomas 1993: 50-54.

⁵⁶. *Weekly Review and Christian Times*, 17 October 1863: 7; see also Jenkins 1994: 115-45. Further, that the English owner of the AAUC viewed these images within a missionary framework is indicated by a newspaper clipping preserved within the album, which recapitulates Christian activist Charles Kingsley's career as parson, historian, and social campaigner: H13881/20, 9.

ings of Coranderrk and sent a message to Green requesting photographs for the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866.⁵⁸ Barry undertook several 'Aboriginal projects' around this time, including life-cast busts of sixteen Coranderrk residents and a vocabulary, following the approach set out by Prichard's chapter on 'Ethnology' in Sir John Herschel's *Admiralty Manual of Scientific Enquiry*.⁵⁹

These projects were intended to produce scientific data, but their immediate purpose was to put Victoria's Aboriginal people on display within the international exhibitions. These spectacular but temporary blockbusters were held throughout the modern world from the mid-19th century, presenting the richness, enterprise, and industries of participating countries.⁶⁰ They were symbols of stability and civilisation in a chaotic colonial society, asserting an imagined local identity on the world stage: when Redmond Barry opened the 1861 Melbourne exhibition he proudly welcomed the opportunity to

set the people of Europe right upon many points relative to this country, respecting which ignorance and confusion prevail ... Victoria will appear to advantage and the progress made by her during the last decade may rival that of any of the numerous possessions of her Majesty.⁶¹

In May Walter responded enthusiastically to Barry's request:

Sir, Mr John Green the Superintendant of Aborigines of Victoria has informed me that it is desired to have Photographs of the Blacks for the forthcoming Exhibition. Now as I shall be most happy to comply to the wishes expressed by Sir Redmond Barry I beg to inform you, that I am intending to take the photographs required as follows:

separate, single portraits of both sexes and all ages from infancy (6 month) up to old age (80 years!)

The different tribes as far as they are represented in this establishment (there are 123 Blacks in all belonging to about 10 or 12 different tribes!)

The photographs will be bust portraits the head of each portrait of the size of a half a crown piece.

Those photographs can be arranged according to the tribes ages & sexes on different large plates holding from 12 to 24 different portraits, as might be suitable for framing.

^{57.} As indicated by his signature on local documents, for example, witnessing several marriage certificates over this period: Sandra Smith, Museum Victoria, personal communication, 1998. His letters from Coranderrk are dated from May to November of that year. It is possible that he sometimes used the station as a base for his expeditions into the bush for the years that he worked in the area.

^{58.} 11 May 1866, Walter to Secretary Knight 14 May 1866: State Library of Victoria (SLV), Australian Manuscripts Collection H17247, Exhibition Commissioners' Letterbook, 'Intercolonial Exhibition 1866-7': 85.

^{59.} Downer 1989: 27, links Summer's commission to Barry's knowledge of local phrenologist and waxworks proprietor Sohler, following a request for 'aboriginal skulls of both sexes, and at the different periods of life': *Australasian*, 21 July 1866: 497. However Barry's 'Aboriginal projects' were already well under way, and there is strong evidence for his reliance upon the Admiralty Manual: see Lydon 2000.

^{60.} Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia 1866: 9-10; Galimany 1995: 26-27.

^{61.} Hayes 1995: 2-3.

If anything more should be desired as above already stated, I shall be very glad of being informed of it.

If Sir Redmond Barry approves of their arrangement I will be most happy to know and also very thankful for any hints as additional information on the Subject.

I may further remark that it was me who has supplied the proprietors of the Melb. Illustrated periodical paper with the portraits and photographic views of the Aboriginal settlement.

I enclose the portrait of Eliza [sic] a black girl of ab. 18 years of age, not as a sample of a photograph but merely to show the size of the portraits.

Hoping not to impose to (sic) much upon your kindness by expecting an answer soon,

Believe me to be Sir, Yours, Most obedient servt, Charles Walter, Photographic Artist⁶²

It is apparent that Barry had not specifically sought Walter out, but that Walter was eager to take the job. The selection and arrangement of the portraits – by sex, age and tribe, as well as the focus on the subjects' heads – echoes a contemporary ethnographic interest in individuals as racial types, and specifically Barry's preferences, as I explain further.

The Melbourne exhibition, as noted by the Commissioners in the Official Catalogue, was 'in some degree preparatory to the arrangements for forwarding certain productions to Paris for the Exhibition to be held there in 1867'.⁶³ In October, the month the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition opened, Walter, presumably having overseen the installation of the series, wrote again to say that he had 'Returned to my residence amongst the Natives here, I intend to make up now the Collection for Paris'.⁶⁴ He went on:

Whenever you have done with the list of the names of the Blacks I beg you respectfully to oblige me by returning the same as it would save me the trouble in making a new list.

As I cannot obtain here the Copyright for these photographs I beg you to grant me the favor of the Commission, that they will not permit the copying of this collection as long as the photographs remain the property of the Commission.

If desired by Parties interested in the Blacks, I shall be most happy to furnish duplicates of the whole collection at a moderate Charge, but I do not wish my black friends to be sold in every shop at the rate of 6d. each!⁶⁵

Walter approached his task systematically, recording all but one or two of the station residents.⁶⁶ His surviving lists record the English name, native name, tribe and age of each of the 104 sitters, starting with the eldest men, progressing through younger and younger men, to end with number 50, baby Thomas Harris (sitting on his mother's

⁶². Walter to Barry, 8 May 1866, 9 October 1866, PROV: VPRS 927/3.

⁶³. Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia 1866: 10.

⁶⁴. PROV: VPRS 927, unit 3, Notes and letters Oct–Nov 1866.

⁶⁵. PROV: VPRS 927, unit 3, Notes and letters Oct–Nov 1866. The existence of two lists, held by the Pitt Rivers Museum, suggests that Walter was indeed forced to transcribe the list again.

⁶⁶. Statistics for June 1865: Barwick 1972: 25. By 1871 the total had increased to 107: Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1871: 1.

lap), aged 3 months. It continues with the 'Female Sex', from the oldest woman (51, 'Old Mary, age 60, Jim Crow tribe) to youngest (80, Minnie, Yarra Yarra, 9 months), then there is a section headed 'Half Castes', starting with men (81, Dan Hall, Loddon, 20 years) descending in years to the boys (91, Alfred (Quadrona) 93, Lake Mering, 5 years - father a native of Ireland. Jemmy Davis), then 'Female sex, half castes!' beginning with 92, White Ellen, Carngham, 21 years down to 104, Nelly Bly, Wimmera, 2 years.⁶⁷

Hence the category 'pure blooded' man was of the greatest interest or importance, the male elders representing the archetype of cultural otherness. This hierarchical ordering of the population descended systematically to the youngest, 'half caste', female (Little Lizzie, age 5, Jim Crow tribe). Below this list, Walter noted under 'Remarks' that:

No. 95 and 99 sisters the only half castes with grey eyes. Nos 82, 98 and 102 are Brothers and Sisters (all half castes!) No 86 and 78 Brother and Sister; the first born a half-caste Boy Bobby and the last born a pure black Girl Mary!

All the Aborigines in this colony have assumed english Names, generally the vulgar names of Bob for Robert, or ? Jack, Larry, Jimmy, Ned etc etc. I have added the Native Names, where I was able to obtain them'.⁶⁸

This interest in 'blood', and the effects of miscegenation, may have stemmed from Walter's familiarity with the contemporary concerns of local ethnographers such as Robert Brough Smyth and Baron Von Mueller, for whom Coranderrk was a kind of archive of Aboriginal culture, perhaps transmitted by the latter's informant John Green.⁶⁹ Here Walter was actively collecting ethnographic information, a role which perhaps he saw as analogous to his acquisition of botanical specimens on Von Mueller's behalf.

Barry's decision to commission a photographic series reflects larger currents of inquiry into human difference, and specifically contemporary notions of the medium's accuracy as a means of making scientific records. The 'type' portrait was the most common form used by adherents of the emerging discipline of anthropology for collecting data, imitating the precision, taxonomic arrangement and comparative approach of the biological sciences.⁷⁰ The 'racial type' assumed fresh importance after the Darwinian theory of natural selection gained popularity from the 1860s, but the notion of 'type specimens' and the idea of racial fixity had long been accepted by monogenists and polygenists alike. Huxley and Lamprey developed standardised photometric methods in the late 1860s, attempting to ensure that photographic types would contain comparable morphometric data, allowing systematic comparison of racial form.⁷¹ Walter produced his colonial 'type series' before the better-known English methods were developed, but his experience as botanical collector, Barry's instructions, and perhaps

67. Album PRM.AL.56, Photograph Collection, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Numbers in brackets after some names indicate kinship ties with other individuals on the list.

68. The second list includes only the 80 so-called 'full bloods'. Photograph Collection, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

69. His comment on 'half-caste' and 'full-blood' siblings appears to refer to a debate regarding the effect of Aboriginal women's intercourse with white men: Brough Smyth 1878: 92-93.

70. Spencer 1992; Edwards 1990.

71. For example, see Huxley 1869: 513.

his knowledge of popular debates about Aboriginal people all shaped his 'scientific' approach to his commission and its resulting form.

The surviving panel measures around 176cm wide by 123cm high; a central, elaborately-painted title reading 'Portraits of ABORIGINAL NATIVES Settled at Coranderrk, near Healesville, about 42 miles from Melbourne. ALSO VIEWS Of the Station & LUBRAS BASKET-MAKING' (Figs 18–20). The panel was displayed, as intended, in 1866 at the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition, hung in the photography section of the Fine Arts Gallery between '71. HEWITT, C. 95 Swanston Street – Portraits, in fancy dress' and '74. NETTLETON, C., – Coloured Photographic Views of Melbourne'.⁷² In the centre, below the title, we see two views of Coranderrk: a distant panorama which achieves the expansive scope of the collage, but at the expense of detail – Walter has backed into the bush, and trees have started to obscure the distant buildings, giving an impression only of a tiny bush settlement; the second view shows women making baskets, an activity lauded, encouraged and photographed perhaps because it had the novelty of cultural difference but accorded with European notions of appropriate gender roles and industry, was aesthetically pleasing, and contributed to the support of the residents.

The arrangement of the palm-sized portraits over the huge space of the panel amplifies the logic of the list: the ('full-blood') older men occupy the top left hand quarter of the panel, boys below, and the adult women the top right. So-called 'half-castes' occupy the lower centre. As our gaze sweeps downwards and to the right, we see increasingly younger, whiter faces, graphically predicting the future of the race. As human *types*, the individuality of the people of Coranderrk was lost in their massed and diminishing arrangement over the huge panel, made to form a human pattern structured by sex, age and blood. In a final reductive movement this single object abridged 104 people, making them stand for the Aboriginal 'race' as a whole.

Victoria on show

Yet the 'Aboriginal' works were not a prominent feature of the 1866 or 1867 exhibitions, nor were Walter's portraits highly regarded: although two Tasmanian photographers received medals in the 1866 'Photography' category – Charles Woolley 'For portraits of Aborigines', and 'S. Spurling, Hobart Town – For portraits of Tasmanian children' – Walter received merely an Honourable Mention, some way down in the list, and the dismissive comment: 'For a collection of Aboriginal portraits, on account of the interest they possess, although exhibiting little merit as photographs'.⁷³ Despite their relative insignificance as an individual exhibit, we can perhaps see these works as helping to define larger conceptions of humanity and civilisation. From the mid-1860s living Indigenous people were displayed at expositions, and later in the century cultural difference became one of their basic structuring principles.⁷⁴ In this context, Aboriginal

⁷² Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia 1866: 102.

⁷³ Woolley's portraits were probably regarded more highly than Walter's because, by showing each of the five Tasmanian subjects full-face, in three-quarter view and in profile, they conformed more closely to developing anthropometric conventions, as well as because of their subjects' tremendous, tragic significance as the supposed 'last of their race': List of awards, *The Argus Supplement*, 14 February 1867:2.

⁷⁴ Greenhalgh 1988: 82–85; Çelik and Kinney 1990: 34–59.

people seemed to represent the modern industrialized nations' past, measuring their relative advancement and justifying imperial expansion.

Here, domestic Aboriginal policy – which consistently sought to separate the residents of Coranderrk, as a place of Aboriginal incarceration, from the white population – intersected with a contemporary, countervailing, movement, which Tony Bennett has termed the 'exhibitionary complex'. Bennett suggests that, counter to Foucault's panoptical control, ran a tendency which effected control by re-orienting the gaze outward, making the forces of order visible to the populace.⁷⁵ This new technology of vision located nations within the development of Western civilisation, construing Indigenous peoples as mankind's past, underlining the 'rhetoric of progress by serving as its counterpoints.' The exhibitions' totalizing organisation celebrated empire, metonymically constructing a public identity in temporal and cultural opposition to 'the primitive otherness of conquered peoples'.⁷⁶ Walter's images were also sent to the 1872 London International Exhibition and the 1873 Vienna Universal Exhibition.⁷⁷ These events asserted a colonial identity before a European audience, defining colonial society and culture; the Aboriginal portraits occupied its margins, marking the boundaries of civilisation.

The exhibition panel represents Walter's idiosyncratic attempt to draw upon both his background as botanical collector and his newly-acquired local knowledge of debates about Aboriginal people in applying the methods of natural science to the task of representing a race. He took his own, taxonomic, approach to the problem of human difference: the scale and arrangement of the exhibition panel revealed the form of a group rather than individuals. Significantly, Walter created a visual text whose internal relationships and differences would have been read from top to bottom by the exhibition-going public, showing the 'full blooded' men and women, arranged in decreasing age order, displaced by the young so-called 'half castes'. With all the evidential force of visual imagery, this temporal organisation appeared to demonstrate change over time consequent upon contact with whites, simultaneously constructing a relationship between black and white, explaining the community's past and calculating its future.

The international culture network

But the lasting scientific impact of Barry's 'Aboriginal projects' was felt after the exhibitions closed, when Walter's photographs and Summers' busts, standing for the Aboriginal people of Australia, were sent to Europe to participate in scientific debates about human evolution. Baron von Mueller seems to have played an active role here, using Walter's images as scientific currency within an international network extending to England, Italy, Russia and France. He was appointed Director of Melbourne's Botanical Gardens in 1857, shortly after his arrival in Australia, and was already employing Walter to collect botanical specimens. By 1858 he was sending botanical specimens to the Imperial Botanical Gardens of St Petersburg and the Moscow Botanical Gardens. Dr Edward Regel, his counterpart in St Petersburg, also took an interest in anthropology, and they exchanged information and specimens throughout the 1860s. In May 1864 von

⁷⁵. Bennett 1995: 59–63.

⁷⁶. Bennett 1995: 73–79; see also Davison 1988: 158; Greenhalgh 1988: 53.

⁷⁷. Partos 1994: 60.

Mueller was elected to the *Russian Society of Amateurs of Natural Sciences*, coinciding with the Society's proposal for a national exhibition which became the 1867 Ethnographic Exposition of all Russia, held in Moscow.⁷⁸

Von Mueller was requested to send Australian material in early 1866, presumably for the 1867 exhibition, and he responded with energy, assisted by his friend and fellow-collector Robert Brough Smyth, who, as member of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, had been collecting artefacts and information since the early 1860s.⁷⁹ Both were members of the *Ecological and Acclimatisation Society* (as were other members of the Board), which visited and collected at Coranderrk. Brough Smyth's large collection held many Wurundjeri (Woiwurrung) duplicates, and these formed a significant proportion of the two consignments of material which von Mueller sent in 1865–68. Von Mueller's appreciation of photography as a scientific tool is indicated by his gift of a pair of photographs by 1868, and four more stereoscopic tableaux by 1869, apparently also by Walter.⁸⁰

Von Mueller's second major dispatch in 1869 also included 102 photographs, and later accounts of their use in Moscow reveal these to belong to Walter's 1866 series.⁸¹ While they are not described in detail in Moscow collection records, eighty portraits of Aboriginal people, including Simon Wonga and William Barak, 'figured prominently' at the 1879 Moscow Anthropological Exhibition, presumably the eighty so-called 'full blooded' residents, indicating that it was this supposedly 'pure' group who were of interest as specimens of a race. Most of the views are recognisable from their captions as Walter's 1860s images of Coranderrk, Lake Tyers and Ramahyuck.⁸² The Society repeatedly expressed its gratitude to von Mueller in its reports, and by bestowing an honorific title upon him, while Alexander II presented him with a vase. The contemporary value of Walter's series and its continuing scientific usefulness is further indicated by its subsequent use by museum director Anuchin, who like many contemporaries, saw photography as useful evidence for the variations among humankind.

It may also have been von Mueller who sent the series to the Anthropological Society of London, or to the geologist J Flower, before it lodged finally with Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum.⁸³ It is currently housed in a 'mixed album of visual material which appears to have been shown at meetings of the Anthropological Society of London' in

⁷⁸. Objects from the 1867 exhibition subsequently formed the Dashkov Ethnographic Museum and are now part of the Moscow Public and Rumiantsev Museum: Barrett 1982: 14–21.

⁷⁹. For a detailed discussion see Barrett 1995: 10–15; Board for the Protection of the Aborigines 1864.

⁸⁰. Russian Society of Amateurs of Natural Sciences' Bulletin 1868 XLI(4): 111; Bulletin 1869 XLII(2): 17, cited Barrett 1995: 10.

⁸¹. Barrett 1995. As do its size, and Von Mueller's close links to Coranderrk.

⁸². Titled 'Native Types of the Colony of Victoria (Australia)': 'Divine service in an encampment in Gippsland', 'An encampment of natives', 'Natives from Suovy (sic) River', 'Women weaving baskets', 'Girls of the Tambo Tribe', 'Fisherwomen on Lake Tyers', 'A Camp of the Tambo Tribe in Gippsland', 'Capital of the Gippsland Chief, Glengarry Tribe', 'Divine Service in a Gippsland Church (Ramma-hanga)': *Antropologicheskaiia Vystavka 1879 goda: opisania predmator*, 1879, part 4: 10, cited in Barrett 1995: 10–20.

⁸³. Von Mueller was possibly a member of the Anthropological Society: Gillbank 1992: 3–10.

1867.⁸⁴ It was collated with photographs from India, South Africa, and the European margins, crania (from all over the world), drawings of archaeological sections, maps, photographs of stone tools, and Peruvian mummies, represented as one of many 'primitive' human groups, irrespective of their ethnographic origins. This was standard within a typological system which constructed an evolutionary series leading from the simple to the complex, in which the lowest stage was represented by Australian Aboriginal people.⁸⁵ As curator Elizabeth Edwards notes, the arrangement within the album is significant: the eighty 'full bloods' appear first, 'in closely mounted grids of nine per page'. The 'half caste' series was mounted separately, and 'Scars on the album show that the lists [written by Walter] were originally pasted in separately to document what were clearly perceived as two different sets, on racial grounds.'⁸⁶

Giglioli's 1867 series

Von Mueller also presented Walter's series to Italian scientist Enrico Giglioli, Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy in Florence, in May 1867. The internationally-respected ethnographer Giglioli belonged to a scientific expedition attached to the voyage of the Italian naval vessel *Magenta*; he made an excursion to the Dandenongs with von Mueller on which they hunted possums and observed the flora and fauna. On a separate visit Giglioli made to Coranderrk, he described the settlement and its inhabitants in some detail, and made his own series of photographs. Giglioli was also pleased to note that 'Later I received from Dr Mueller an almost complete collection of photographic portraits of the aborigines (sic) and halfbloods (sic) living at Coranderrk, which has been very useful to me in recalling my impressions', and which he also used in making arguments about the origin and distribution of different human 'races'.⁸⁷ Giglioli's own images form an interesting contrast with Walter's, made only months before. While I have been unable to acquire the full series, eleven photographs by Giglioli in 1867 are reproduced by Aldo Massola in his documentary history *Coranderrk*, and nine appear to have been taken at the station.⁸⁸ These show the residents in less elaborate dress than Walter's, capturing the people in their everyday circumstances, and some, for example 'Man of the Hamilton Tribe, 1867', are seemingly naked except for a possum skin rug. One even shows a 'woman of the Yarra tribe' wrapped in a blanket and with one breast exposed – a uniquely revealing and impersonal image for this appearance-conscious community, whose women are otherwise always fully-clothed.⁸⁹

The images complement Giglioli's published account of the visit, which assumed the imminent extinction of the race. In this publication he reiterated his hypothesis that the whole of Australia had been 'populated by a people identical with the Tasmanians, and that this people was destroyed or assimilated by the present aborigines (sic) of New Holland', whom he believed to be unique among the peoples of the world (occu-

⁸⁴. Pitt Rivers Museum: Photograph Collections catalogue.

⁸⁵. Bennett 1995: 79; see also Morphy 1988: 48–61.

⁸⁶. Elizabeth Edwards, Curator, Pitt Rivers Museum, email correspondence, 25 June 1999.

⁸⁷. Giglioli 1870: 774.

⁸⁸. There are 'extensive Australian collections' in the Museo Nazionale di Antropologia e Etnologia, Florence, but my letters and email queries received no response. Massola 1975.

⁸⁹. Massola 1975: 49.

pying an 'isolated position in ethnical terms'). He supported his argument with detailed anatomical comparisons, based upon the Coranderrk portraits.⁹⁰

As active members of an elite and close-knit international scientific network, von Mueller, Flower, Giglioli, Regler and other men of science exchanged information and objects, including Walter's Coranderrk series. Despite some evidence that local whites were not unsympathetic to the Aboriginal subjects, these photographs were used in both public and scientific contexts to represent the people as objects of science. The portraits, and especially the eighty 'fullblooded' subjects, constituted evidence for the biological difference of Aboriginal people, visual data deployed within scientific arguments of the day. They were emblems of a culture which was assigned a specific place in the history of Western civilization, designed to complete the larger cultural and historical schemes which assured European civilization its pre-eminence. As Prichard argued, 'words afford but very imperfect means of communicating correct ideas'; physical form more effectively signified invisible attributes and capabilities.

The Green family album

It is astonishing to see these same portraits – as if unfurled, or fully developed – in the context of the Green family's photograph album. Here the people come to life. John Green, the first manager of the station, is an exceptional figure in the history of Australian race relations. His closeness to the Aboriginal people of Coranderrk was doubtless shaped by his Presbyterian beliefs, and contemporary notions of civilisation and progress, but in many ways he was unusual for the period in his sympathy with Aboriginal traditions and needs. The Reverend Hamilton recalled that Wildgung (Jemmy Webster, c.1806–1874) believed Green to be the reincarnation of his brother; hence 'Jamie implicitly believed' his Scriptural teachings about the 'unseen world' because he thought they were based on direct experience.⁹¹ His policy was to help the residents rather than manage them, and a court was established which communally 'laid down rules of conduct and punished offenders by administering fines, withdrawing privileges or imposing the ultimate sanction of banishment'. Green resigned under pressure in 1874, and went to live nearby in Healesville; the efforts of the residents to persuade the Board to reinstate him were unceasing until his death. Hence the 'Green family album' was viewed in a context of friendship between the Aboriginal subjects and the Green family.

On the first page we see a third version of the view of the settlement, here captioned in Walter's hand: 'Coranderrk and my Aboriginal Friends' (Fig 21). Presumably Walter presented the album to the Greens (perhaps on behalf of the Aboriginal residents) following his lengthy stays at the station. Again, this distant view gives only an impression of a cluster of houses with smoking chimneys. It is only when we scan the image in to Photoshop and blow it up to enormous proportions that we notice the cricket game several children are playing in front of the schoolhouse. But this is how the 19th century viewers would have viewed the album – repeatedly, holding it to the light, close to their face to see every familiar detail.

⁹⁰. Giglioli 1870: 777–95; first published in Giglioli 1871.

⁹¹. Reverend Hamilton's *History of the Presbyterian Church*, cited Barwick 1998: 71.

On page two we see a man climbing a tree, surrounded by an actively involved audience (Fig 22). This activity fascinated whites, as indicated by its recurrence in photographs throughout the century, as well as in the fine arts, such as Joseph Lycett's paintings. The image is structured by the relationship between photographer and subjects: in documenting Aboriginal skill in climbing a tree; the camera is openly acknowledged and welcomed. It is not that the people have stopped what they are doing to watch the photograph taken – *this* is what they are doing! Several figures have even climbed on to the cottage roofs to get a better look – or a better chance to be included. I believe this relationship of mutual regard characterised Walter's work at the station. While largely obscured by the images' subsequent manipulation and circulation, here is evidence for the interest shown by the Aboriginal subjects in the process of taking pictures. We are then shown a canoe scene (Fig 23), the 'exhibition' views of the settlement, and 'Women with baskets' (Figs 24–25), reflecting an interest in traditional pursuits which were acceptable within the missionaries' Christian framework.

The Kulin's evident engagement with Walter's activities implies their active choice of subject, staging and performance. Whites observed Aboriginal people and recorded feats such as tree-climbing, which they admired; Aboriginal pride in their own skill, for example at boomerang-throwing, tracking, or fishing, also structured relationships between the residents and visitors to the station. Performing for white observers became the ritualised, public face of the station, and photographs taken throughout its life record these encounters. The recurrence of the subjects of tree-climbing, canoeing, fishing, or boomerang-throwing in the photographic archive reflect this dialogical process of imitation and refinement; an integral element of colonialism's ambivalent operation, this process undermines totalising notions of colonial photography as structured solely by the exploitative, controlling eye of the white photographer.

Pages five to 24 are filled by the portraits, their arrangement following Walter's list, but only five to a page, allowing us to examine them closely (Figs 26–35). Pencilled captions, presumably by John Green or another family member with an intimate knowledge of the people, have later been inked carefully beneath them, in fancy lettering. These post-scripted captions record sometimes idiosyncratic details about some of the subjects, such as Mussie Fundert's (Mr King's): 'King Billy – of the Upper Goulburn Tribe. A polygamist. Once in the hulks for being concerned in a murder, jumped overboard and escaped to Healesville' (Fig 27). These hint at the Greens' memories of the people.

When we look at these portraits now, we are struck by the dignity and strength which radiate from them. The people are well-dressed, in good quality European clothes. They stare to one side or the other, permitting us to gaze unashamedly. The oval frame, cropped tightly around the head and torso, embraces each person, bringing them into close proximity with the viewer, allowing their force of character and individuality to emerge. Where many photographs of Aboriginal people (as is often noted of the studio portraits of JW Lindt or the later Coranderrk visitor, Frederick Kruger) prominently display artefacts – deploying them, as props, to maximum effect – the possessions of many of the Kulin are often cropped or obscured, subordinate to their owner (they wear the cloak rather than the cloak wearing them). They signal the importance of clan identity as represented by cloak designs, also a central feature of William Barak's

drawings. I believe it is because of this power as individual portraits that descendants today are drawn to this series.

Timothy

There is evidence for a similar fascination on the part of at least one sitter. One portrait shows a mature man recorded as 'Timothy', 34 years old, of the Yarra Yarra Tribe, his Aboriginal name 'Garrak-coonum' (Fig 35). As we stare at Garrak-coonum, he looks seriously out of the frame, past us, at something in his own time, his expression heavy and thoughtful. Like the other men in the series, he is well-dressed in a serviceable suit – coat, waistcoat, shirt – with neatly brushed hair. But, unlike the others, he holds a small book in his right hand, deliberately central, chest high, one finger marking his place.⁹² Amongst this gathering of men he doesn't immediately stand out – it is only when we stop and take up his oval framed image, peer closely at his expressive eyes, his grave face, partly shielded by his beard, that we begin to wonder about him. Like each one of the portraits in this series, the man's personality is tangible and vivid. Although he doesn't engage directly with us, his gaze cannot be dismissed: to my mind, it conveys something profoundly touching.

In staring at Garrak-coonum, we reproduce Walter's gaze: the white photographer imprinting this Aboriginal man on to his plate, mechanically reproducing his likeness in permanent form. Why were Walter and his patrons so interested? Did their fascination lie in the successful appropriation of European ways – clothes, industry, religion, goods and accomplishments (of which the book was just an example) – that is, in the Aboriginal mimicry of whites? The evidence for the missionaries' pride in such transformations suggests that this was so. But perhaps beneath the rhetoric of improvement lies something more fundamental. As Michael Taussig notes, photography 'concentrates to an exquisite degree the very act of colonial mirroring, the lens coordinating the mimetic impulses radiating from each side of the colonial divide'.⁹³ In Walter's interest in the people of Coranderrk (and other reserves), expressed through a visual language, we see the circulation of mimesis and alterity, as white fascination with Aboriginal mimicry is itself expressed mimetically, as subject reaches out to embrace object.

Timothy's averted gaze does not mark a refusal to engage with the new circumstances he found himself in, nor with us. In an astonishing drawing held by Museum Victoria, our yearning to share Timothy's vision, see what he sees, is extravagantly satisfied (Fig 36).⁹⁴ This drawing measures 75cm long by 52cm wide, comprising two pencil sketches glued to a cardboard and cloth backing. It is signed by 'Timothy, Coranderrk' in running script, and beside it appears a thumbnail sketch of an Aboriginal man, dressed in a suit, and holding a book (Fig 37). This drawing comprises seven scenes of Aboriginal life: a cosmological frieze of stars, clouds, and planets, hunting scenes, ranks of men, and of women, and a ceremonial meeting.⁹⁵

⁹². The irresistible supposition is that it is a Bible.

⁹³. Taussig 1993: 25.

⁹⁴. Museum Victoria, Ethnographic collection Reg. No. X 86705.

⁹⁵. Museum Victoria's catalogue notes that the drawing is 'probably by two artists' – perhaps because of stylistic discrepancies. Sayers 1994: 22.

Timothy's traditional choice of subject, like Barak's better-known art, preserves memories of life before colonization, but it is given a different inflection by his self-portrait. When Garrak-coonum made his mark, identifying himself as owner, author of this story, he signed his drawing in a new language, as 'Timothy', and, beside the word, he signed it with his new image of himself. Just as he presumably chose to be photographed holding a book, symbol of a new skill (and, if it is a bible, a new religion), Timothy self-consciously names himself as the white photographer saw him, as an Aboriginal man who had adapted to new circumstances. Cooper argues that what is essentially new about the work of 19th-century Aboriginal artists was that their work, unlike traditional art which was intended to be read only by insiders, communicated with outsiders.⁹⁶ Similarly, Timothy's drawing demonstrates the Aboriginal appropriation of white forms, and expresses a new consciousness of himself.

Conclusion

Charles Walter's Coranderrk series demonstrate that the different cultural frameworks which existed for viewing these complex images allowed them to hold more than one meaning simultaneously, although in 1860s practice a range of strategies effected closure and decided their significance. Within scientific discourse, the series was deployed by ethnologists arguing about Aboriginal people and humankind. The 1866 exhibition panel used techniques such as the reduction of scale of each person's portrait, and its diminished standing within an assemblage of patterned visual differences, which created physical, cultural and temporal distance between observer and observed, subject and object, allowing the subjects to be seen as scientific data, objects of public curiosity. In other contexts these same portraits effect an opposing tendency, drawing the viewer towards the viewed, as in the Green family album, where the oval framing hugs the subjects' head and shoulders, the lens caresses his/her face, revealing texture, form, and expression in fine detail. The Aboriginal subjects were an integral element of the circumstances of the series' production, and their form must be acknowledged to owe much to the subjects' decisions and intentions, as well as to European conventions.

These different readings also reflect the medium's fluidity, able to be endlessly reproduced, made large or small, crammed on to a large display panel for consumption during a single public event, or scattered over the pages of an album, to be pored over repeatedly, in private. This polysemous quality belies the images' apparent clarity, inscribing them with multiple and contradictory meanings. Walter's experiments with this new medium survive as evidence for a time when ideas about race and difference were changing and contested, defining new ways of seeing black and white.

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⁹⁶. Cooper 1993: 93.

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