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**Peck, Julia ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5134-2471> (2010) Performing Aboriginality: Desiring Pre-contact Aboriginality in Victoria, 1886-1901. History of Photography, 34 (3). pp. 214-233.  
doi:10.1080/03087291003765802**

Official URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03087291003765802>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03087291003765802>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/3277>

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**Peck, Julia (2010). *Performing Aboriginality: Desiring Pre-contact Aboriginality in Victoria, 1886–1901*. *History of Photography*, 34 (3), 214-233. ISSN 0308-7298**

Published in *History of Photography*, and available online at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03087291003765802>

We recommend you cite the published (post-print) version.

The URL for the published version is <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03087291003765802>

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# Performing Aboriginality: Desiring pre-contact Aboriginality in Victoria 1886-1901

Julia Peck

[This paper reproduces some nineteenth-century terminology. In order to avoid these words and meanings being mistaken for my own opinions I have dissociated myself from these words by placing these terms in quotation marks.]

This paper reinvestigates notions of performed Aboriginality in relation to photographs made at Lake Tyers Mission Station (Victoria, Australia) and argues that Nicholas Caire's photographs reveal complex Aboriginal subjectivities. The photographs, made originally in 1886 and distributed to tourists, were later reproduced and circulated in book format in 1897. The first presentation of the photographs, whilst focusing on historical Aboriginality, contains traces of cross-cultural hybridity. However, the later presentation of the work reinforces historical and traditional material culture over cross cultural dialogue. This paper argues that the desire to find historical notions of Aboriginality on mission stations in Victoria was not just due to the establishment of hierarchical racial theories in the latter part of the nineteenth century (generating the idea that Aborigines could not change and adapt to notions of 'civilisation'), and doubts about the success of mission stations, but also because there was an interest in the Aborigines who had experienced little assimilation from more remote parts of the continent of Australia. This curiosity in pre-contact Aboriginality fuelled tourism in Victoria to accessible mission stations such as Lake Tyers.

**Keywords:** *Nicholas Caire* (1837-1918), *Aboriginality*, *Performance*, *Lake Tyers*, *Gippsland Scenery* (1886), *Glimpses of Australia* (1897)

In February 1886 the photographer Nicholas Caire visited Lake Tyers Mission Station, 'on a tour in search of the picturesque'.<sup>1</sup> Caire was a commercial photographer and the images made at Lake Tyers Mission Station were available to purchase as part of his *Gippsland Scenery*, a serialised folio of photographs which included images of the surrounding lakes, woodland, roads, settlements, bush characters and industrialised business, such as saw mills. Caire was an occasional and significant photographer of

Aborigines in south eastern Australia, making photographs at Maloga Mission Station in 1883 and at Coranderrk Mission Station in 1904.<sup>ii</sup> Caire's 1886 photographs of Lake Tyers Mission Station and of the Aboriginal inhabitants continued to circulate into the twentieth century and were included, together with three other photographs made on the mission by Caire in 1886, in the publications *Glimpses of Australia* and *Federated Australia: Its Sceneries and Splendours*.<sup>iii</sup> Some photographs from *Gippsland Scenery* also circulated as postcards and were copied for other illustrated publications such as *Cassell's Picturesque Atlas*.<sup>iv</sup> Further photographs at Lake Tyers were presented in album format, held until recently by a Gippsland family, but these images do not appear to have circulated amongst a wider public.<sup>v</sup>

Comparing the photographs and their presentation from 1886 and 1897-1901 exposes a shift in the ways Aborigines were perceived and imagined in Victoria. It is proposed that these changes arose from the desires of the viewers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to see and experience pre-contact Aboriginal cultural traditions. Caire's initial contextualisation using captions in *Gippsland Scenery*, whilst focusing on ethnographic details and utilising a patronising tone, is not as emphatic in creating historical Aboriginality as the later captions in *Glimpses of Australia*. The later re-presentation of the photographs, with the significantly different captions, attempts to situate the inhabitants of Lake Tyers more clearly within the doomed race theories prevalent at the time.<sup>vi</sup> The captions emphasise traditional cultural activities and situate Aboriginal cultural traditions in the past, attempting to situate the subjects photographed as part of an unchanging culture. The idea that Aboriginal subjects desired to integrate with Europeanised society is not respectfully entertained. Despite the textual accompaniment, however, the photographs resist easy categorisation. This paper proposes that the photographs maintain evidence of a culture in transition and cultural hybridity. Caire's photographs are not unproblematic or straightforward and the photographs partly romanticise Aborigines within the beauty of the landscape, which facilitates the later emphasis on pre-contact Aboriginality, a trend that was typical of broader cultural preoccupations of Aboriginality throughout the States of Australia. These broader cultural trends, it will be argued, create a context through which to read and interpret the shift in

presentation of these photographs as evidence of a surge in interest in pre-contact Aboriginality in the late nineteenth century.

Jane Lydon has written extensively about photography depicting mission stations and their inhabitants in Victoria in the nineteenth century, focusing on the work of Charles Walter and Nicholas Caire at Coranderrk Mission Station.<sup>vii</sup> Lydon demonstrates how the images circulated as ethnographic data on the subjects but her central thesis, that the photographs were not just a tool of colonial exploitation, but also produced in accordance with the demands and needs of the inhabitants of Coranderrk, deepens the historical and present day understanding of Aboriginal and settler relationships in Victoria. Lydon demonstrates how Walter's photographs, especially in relation to the context in which they were made, intersected with the indigenous subjects' ability to campaign for self-determination.<sup>viii</sup> Lydon's study is part of a broader concern in recent academic work to locate the ways in which indigenous subjects have engaged with their representation and to locate the ways in which Aboriginal subjects have been active subjects in their own histories. Moreover such recent work also incorporates the personal and historical responses of Aboriginal viewers, responses that negotiate or contradict overly determined ideological interpretations of historical photographs.<sup>ix</sup>

Lydon has also analysed Nicholas Caire's Lake Tyers photographs made in 1886. She proposes that Nicholas Caire's photographs of Lake Tyers 'position the subjects in the past, fishing from bark canoes according to unchanging tradition; here the people are secondary to picturesque scenery, subsumed within it – literally at one with nature'.<sup>x</sup> Further, she proposes that the Aboriginal subjects were seen, through images such as these '[a]s humanity's childhood, the original inhabitants were a 'doomed race', and visitors wanted to see them before they disappeared'.<sup>xi</sup> This seems to be part of Caire's broader project: at Maloga Mission and at Coranderrk in 1904, Caire photographed aspects of the traditional lifestyle.<sup>xii</sup> This emphasis in Caire's work was produced at the expense of acknowledging cross-cultural interaction and the extent to which Aboriginal subjects wanted to engage with the civilising practices of the mission.

Lydon's central thesis is important but Caire's photographs warrant further analysis; one that accounts for the contingent nature of the photographs and which might facilitate a discussion on Aboriginal subjectivity at Lake Tyers in the late nineteenth century. For example, I argue that although Caire (or his purchasing audience) had an interest in historical Aboriginality (rather than Aboriginality as a lived and living subjective experience) his photographs betray signs of a culture in transition. However, in the textual accompaniment to the photographs there is an attempt anchor the meaning of the photographs, more emphatically so in the later reproduction of the work; yet the anchoring, in both instances, is not convincing.<sup>xiii</sup> The text and image therefore exist in tension. One can deduce that a white nineteenth century audience desired to see a simplified historical Aboriginality yet the photographs retain details that trouble these expectations.

One of the challenges of this research is that there is little evidence of how audiences, especially popular audiences of photographs in the nineteenth century, interacted with or responded to photographs and their captions. Attempting to recreate a space in which historical interpretations that acknowledge dominant discourses, alternative points of view and Indigenous subjectivities can occur is fraught with problems, especially if other cultural objects and practices (such as literature, in this instance) are used to create a context for interpretation. Firstly, such interpretations 'can be faulted as [being] too precise and too narrow in some ways, too vague in others' and secondly, images can be used to answer any 'variety of historical questions'.<sup>xiv</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, in her excellent book *Raw Histories*, acknowledges the contingent qualities of the photograph and uses this to productively examine historical material.<sup>xv</sup> This provides a rich framework through which to view Caire's photographs, accounting for their contingency, both in terms of what is represented and how this material might be interpreted.

In her book Edwards theorises a space for responses to photographs that 'recognise both possible closures of meaning, and open spaces of articulation'.<sup>xvi</sup> Edwards acknowledges that although photographs were often 'intended to present some closure

within a specific body of practice' they instead present 'points of fracture' (p. 6).<sup>xvii</sup> The photograph becomes a site of ambiguity that can become an interrogatory tool and a social actor, 'impressing, articulating and constructing fields of social action'.<sup>xviii</sup> The photograph's 'active agency implies a level of performance, projection and engagement on the part of the object. In the idea of performance, and its more overt and formal manifestation, theatricality, is implied a presentation that constitutes a performative or persuasive act directed towards a conscious behold'.<sup>xix</sup> The resulting photograph is a 'heightening of sign worlds'<sup>xx</sup> that represents performative acts as much as it is performative in the constructing of meanings. The photograph, existing between reality and imagination, between the consciousness of the representer and in the mind of the beholder, deals with both facts and possibilities; 'the viewer participates in the creative process of representing'.<sup>xxi</sup>

In analysing Caire's photographs, then, it is necessary to account for the heightened theatricality at the moment of the photographic encounter and its subsequent and potential histories. Edwards uses historical contextualisation in combination with semiotic practices to produce close readings that identify the points of fracture; these create possibilities of meanings that exist in addition to the ones that were produced within the dominant historical discourses at the time of the photograph's production.

### *Lake Tyers Mission Station*

Lake Tyers, an Anglican Mission, was established in 1861 by John Bulmer as part of the Victorian government's policy to establish reserves, where it found practicable, within the remaining Aborigines' hunting grounds for the purposes of farming.<sup>xxii</sup> Lake Tyers (Bunyarnda) was a meeting place known for its plentiful supply of food, including fish, where different groups within Kurnai/Gunai country could congregate.<sup>xxiii</sup> The Board for the Protection of Aborigines initially suggested Buchan, north of Lake Tyers for the site of the mission, but Lake Tyers was chosen at the suggestion of Kun-dhero-billeyman (William Flanner) because of the abundance of food.<sup>xxiv</sup> John Bulmer was the superintendent and mission leader from 1862-1907, and missionary (but not manager) from 1908 to his death in 1913. He allowed various cultural customs to be practiced, such as fishing and fighting, and some inhabitants

continued to live in traditional dwellings. His decision to allow traditional practices was partly pragmatic; the Victorian government provided insufficient food and disputes settled by customary practices produced a peaceful result that all parties respected.<sup>xxv</sup> Tourism to the Mission Station was established by the late 1870s but there was a surge in intensity in the summers of 1886 and 1887.<sup>xxvi</sup> Indeed, tourism in Lake Tyers was developed enough to see a boarding house established on the bank opposite the station in 1886 which was run by Louisa Morris, wife of the schoolteacher to the mission David Morris.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Caire's visit to Lake Tyers was timely; he made his photographs a few months before the 1886 Aborigines Protection Act was implemented in December in Victoria. This act (also known as the 'Half-Caste Act') redefined 'an Aboriginal' on racial rather than cultural terms and those who were part Aborigine were reclassified as 'white'. This reclassification enabled the Board to decide that part-Aboriginal men and women between the ages of fourteen and thirty-four were not the Board's responsibility. As a consequence many Aborigines were forced to leave the Missions in Victoria, despite their established relationship with the places they lived and the significance of the extended family to Aboriginal society. This resulted in widespread changes for the Aborigines at Lake Tyers; families were split up and many had to find employment in a society hostile to Aboriginal participation. The act further prevented those who were part Aborigine to marry 'full-blood' Aborigines, as an attempt to 'breed out' Aboriginal heritage by encouraging marriage to white people. However, some families were able to settle locally to the station and were able to retain familial links.<sup>xxviii</sup> The number of Aborigines living on the station decreased significantly after the Act's implementation.<sup>xxix</sup>

The debates that led to the implementation of this legislation had been raging for several years with calls from public figures and some missionaries to decrease the spending on the missions.<sup>xxx</sup> John Stanley James (the 'Vagabond'), travel writer for papers such as the Melbourne *Argus*, visited several of the Aboriginal Missions in Victoria including Framlingham in 1885 and Lake Tyers in early 1886. He reported on the running costs of the stations, and provided observations on neatness and



productiveness. His opinion on who should be living on the Missions was unequivocal:

[A]t Framlingham there is considerably more white blood than black. Of the 97 'aborigines' on Framlingham (47 males and 50 females), 54 are returned as half-castes. From what we see in our round it appears that 75 per cent are half-castes, and the majority of these so-called 'half-castes' have only a fourth of black blood in their veins, some only eighth. That these should be classed and brought up as aboriginals, herded with full-blood blacks, handicapped by this association at the very start of life, I hold to be a crying shame as well as a mistake... If all the half-castes, orphan or otherwise, were removed from the associations of their black ancestors, it would be a gain to them and to the state.<sup>xxxii</sup>

James was naïve about the effects of separating children and their families, and his opinion reflects the widespread doubts about the missionaries' effectiveness in civilising Aborigines, which was shared by F.A Hagenhauer, the missionary at Ramahyuck.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Changing debates about racial and environmental determinism influenced both Hagenhauer and the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. As James's article makes apparent the language and level of calculation surrounding the expression of racial ideas had become more complex, indicating the degree of hereditary influence; anxieties about hereditary influence became increasingly significant in the ways in which policy determined the Aborigines' position in society and the expected place that they might occupy within it.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It took nearly a decade for these debates to be reconciled and it was Hagenhauer who promoted the 1886 Act, suggesting that 'half-castes' should be separated from the 'full bloods', encouraged to be self reliant and integrated into the European population. In part his motivation was the concern that the Aborigines were not adapting to station life, were suffering from poor health and were decreasing in numbers with little obvious evidence of progress (which was defined as the successful adaptation to a pastoral lifestyle and conversion to Christianity).<sup>xxxiv</sup> Ultimately, the 1886 Act combined paternalism with self-sufficiency and aimed to reconcile debates about segregation/exclusion. It also

allowed that some Aborigines did not bear the characteristics that had once deemed them unfit for the modern world.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Caire's photographs, then, depict Lake Tyers shortly before the implementation of the 1886 Act but continued to circulate while the 'Half-Caste Act' was in force. His photographs allow viewers to see elements of cultural tradition and the impact of civilising missions. The photographs raise questions about the changing nature of cultural traditions and how they were perceived by tourists. Caire's captions, the representation of the photographs in books with lengthier texts and the problematic debates about race and culture, will be considered together to create an interpretation that potentially reveals the ways in which Australians and Britons looked at and thought about Aborigines between 1886 and 1901.

### *Nicholas Caire's Folio Gippsland Scenery*

*Gippsland Scenery* contains approximately sixty photographs, one third of which were made in the Lakes in Eastern Victoria, which contains Lake Tyers and its Mission Station. Each image was mounted on card with an extended caption on the reverse. The mounts are elaborate, with printed borders featuring information on Caire's business, title and a number indicating the photographs' position within the sequence. Few surviving folios, however, are complete.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Caire's photographs assisted in promoting tourism in Gippsland,<sup>xxxvii</sup> and his sequence shows a diversity of Gippsland life: roads, scenery, townships, mining, sheep stations, forests and fishing industries. People appear in the photographs, showing particular activities in their scenic context, and there are a few bush character portraits. Only four of the images taken at the Mission in the portfolio, however, show obvious Aboriginal presence.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The photographs of the residents of Lake Tyers Mission Station are not grouped together and they do not attempt to make a coherent statement about Aboriginality. They do, however, speak to a number of tensions within the discourses surrounding Aboriginal policy and race in the nineteenth century.

Lake Tyers was a rich opportunity for photographing indigenous cultures in transition,<sup>xxxix</sup> especially as John Bulmer allowed various cultural customs to be

practised. Caire did acknowledge the civilising intent of the station (figure 1), and photographed the neatly kept cottages, which led down to Lake Tyers' edge (John Bulmer is fourth from the right). The image is clearly constructed with a view to demonstrating the orderliness and success of the mission; the photograph confirms Lake Tyers to be a beautiful place and successful at civilising its residents.<sup>xi</sup> Lake Tyers was known both for its picturesque setting and for its well-organised and beautiful layout,<sup>xii</sup> which is visualised by the photograph. The picturesque, however, was a complex idea and as a commercial phenomenon enabled the depiction of progress. The picturesque was a useful existing framework on which to draw to show the progress of the mission, but in attributing notions of progress to Aborigines, the significance of Aborigines within the picturesque tradition is called into question, especially in the context of this folio. A fuller exploration of the picturesque will facilitate the demonstration of this point.

The picturesque in Australia has a long history as a 'way of seeing', a way of settling space and place, and picturing progress.<sup>xiii</sup> The picturesque required an aesthetic representation of space, a scopic way of reading and ordering land, place and nature. Ordered compositions balanced foreground and middleground, 'the colour of sky and land, the shape of trees and mountains, the quantity of light and dark, all in a way that promoted the smooth but interested movement of the eye across the scene'.<sup>xliii</sup> The picturesque, moreover, was largely associated, in the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century, with the middle classes and the trend towards aestheticising everyday life, fuelling consumerism<sup>xliv</sup> and promoting tourism. Picturesque seeing became associated with a narrated journey linking a series of views.<sup>xlv</sup> The picturesque became a 'label of approval' representing 'variety, plenitude and superabundance', recouping the process and impact of settlement on the landscape.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Although Caire's photographs are the commercially picturesque,<sup>xlvii</sup> his work suited the burgeoning picturesque publishing industry, with photographs from *Gippsland Scenery* appearing in *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* and *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*.<sup>xlviii</sup> Caire's photography eminently suited picturesque publishing ventures

as it depicted, within the larger sequence of his photographs, the progress of Gippsland and other settled rural areas in a way that was popularly pleasing.

Aboriginal figures formed a significant, if physically peripheral presence in colonial picturesque art, signifying the early history of the continent against which colonial progress could be measured.<sup>xlix</sup> The device of using Aboriginal figures continued to be used in publications such as *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, where Aborigines are represented as historical reference points or are absent altogether from visual representations.<sup>l</sup> Indeed, the Lakes of Gippsland are given an entry in *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, with no reference to the presence of the mission and its inhabitants at all.<sup>li</sup> However, as already indicated, Aborigines do not unproblematically represent Australia's history in Caire's photographs and there are 'points of fracture' to investigate. 'Native Civilisation', then, could be said to problematise Caire's broader narrative of progress. *Gippsland Scenery* is a conventional folio of commercial picturesque photographs, which demonstrates the progress of the colony in the rural district of Gippsland. However, if the Aboriginal presence in the folio is meant to provide the means by which a measure of progress can be made, then these Aborigines have shown that they are not exclusively the historical *before* that precedes civilisation's *after*: the Aborigines at Lake Tyers show signs of adopting Western cultural traditions.

The other three images of Aborigines in *Gippsland Scenery*, in contrast, concentrate on traditional aspects of Aboriginal cultural customs and the situation of Aboriginal subjects in picturesque settings. These photographs depict activities that were part of mission life, including living in *mia-mias*. 'Native Bark Canoes' (figure 2) shows four Aboriginal subjects (an older man, and three younger residents) spread between three canoes. All four subjects are dressed in station clothes. The photograph is partly an account of how bark canoes are used for fishing (which the accompanying caption confirms), although the photograph also demonstrates the beauty of Lake Tyers.

There are several ways in which this photograph could be interpreted. Jane Lydon's account of Caire's *Gippsland Scenery* emphasises how Caire depicts the Aborigines

‘at one with nature’ and that the Aboriginal subjects are ‘secondary to picturesque scenery’, situated in the past rather than as part of a contemporary and changing present.<sup>lii</sup> Such an interpretation is viable, and corresponds with the broader changes in policy dealing with Aboriginal affairs. But the captions to Caire’s photographs are significant and the Aboriginal males form a significant presence within the photograph. There is indeed an interest in traditional practice in Caire’s text, but the use of the boats by the Aborigines also provided the means for subsistence practices. The photograph’s aesthetics and construction suggests the melancholic demise of the Aborigines, but this is profoundly disrupted by the visibility of station clothes, the presence of children and maybe even a sense of curiosity expressed on the part of the photographed subjects (one wonders if the subjects were interested in the performance of making a photograph). Contextualising debates, which maintained that Aborigines would not be able to adapt to modern life, would have undoubtedly informed historical engagements with this photograph, but this fishing scene was happening on a mission station where life was not simply split into the historical and the modern; Bulmer’s approach allowed for some integration of traditional practices so the station’s life would not have been dichotomous.<sup>liii</sup> Further, Caire’s caption indicates an ethnographic interest, describing cultural artefacts and indigenous subsistence practices:

The Canoe of the Native of Gippsland is made of a large Slab of Bark tied at both ends, and is capable of carrying three or four person[s]. They are also used for fishing.<sup>liv</sup>

Traditional Aboriginal lifestyles were included in picturesque representations but Caire makes the activities of the subjects central to the photograph rather than peripheral. In addition, the clothing indicates that the subjects were living in a context where western clothing was obligatory, and even desired.<sup>lv</sup> The photograph could imply Aboriginal ownership and use of the land but this is not emphasised by Caire’s caption and instead we are pointed towards the subjects’ material cultural practices and therefore their difference. The image therefore remains ambiguous in its representation but not wholly aligned with nature and historical Aboriginality.

We are introduced both to the context of the Mission Station and the scenic beauties of the layout of the place through ‘Lake Tyers, Native Station’ (figure 3). Although it is not clear whether the man in the suit to the left of the image is Mr. Morris (the school teacher) or a tourist, he has permission to look upon the scene. He looks out over the lake and in the background are two Aboriginal subjects (one certainly female) in a small boat (not a bark canoe). Another man stands on the edge of the lake. The scenic setting of this photograph matches the beauty of ‘Native Bark Canoes’, but the site of the mission, the schoolhouse and the church can be seen behind the screen of gums. Although this image is reminiscent of the previous fishing scene the purpose of this photograph is less clear; it is not clear whether the Aborigines are fishing. One figure in the boat, looking back to the camera, is aware of being the subject of the photograph. All the figures, except the one looking back to us, are arrested by the image, caught in picturesque suspense. Whether tourist or mission employee the man looking at the scene seems unable to take full possession of the scene, and may even have his feet stuck in the mud. If Caire desired to depict the pleasures of looking he was not entirely successful.

Whilst Caire’s photograph of the Aboriginal houses at Lake Tyers features in this small selection of photographs, Caire does not appear to have been telling a story of the civilising process (from ‘native’ to ‘civilised’) in relation to the inhabitants of Lake Tyers.<sup>lvi</sup>

Caire concludes his visit to Lake Tyers, though, with ‘Male Native of Gippsland’ (figure 4). Caire’s caption reads: ‘This Fine Specimen of an Aboriginal is named ‘Billy the Bull’, who is noted for his great physical strength. He is a native of Lake Tyers.’ ‘Billy’ is photographed outdoors but not in relation to the lakes seen in the preceding photographs. He is photographed in front of a *mia-mia*, in which some residents of Lake Tyers continued to dwell. Billy’s alignment with this dwelling situates him away from the orderly spaces of the houses and institutions (Caire’s photographs avoid recreating the space of the station) but he is well dressed and engages with the process of being photographed in a confident way. Billy also holds a

boomerang and a spear and his physique appears to corroborate the caption. There is a question here about how Billy would have been perceived by historical viewers of this photograph, especially as Billy's name, 'Billy the Bull,' has pejorative overtones.

Billy's pose and his clear display of the boomerang suggests that Billy was selected for photographing because he conformed to late nineteenth-century viewers' expectations of 'savagery'. This is not to imply that Billy's demeanour in the photograph looks 'savage', which it clearly does not, but that the photograph could have been read in those terms. The Aborigines of Australia in the latter part of the nineteenth century were not just considered to be of the past and lacking in material progress but also to be of a lower racial order. Such ideas were propagated by ethnologists such as Lewis Henry Morgan who classified Australian Aborigines as falling within the 'middle status of savagery'.<sup>lvii</sup> While Lewis's ideas were subject to debate he was influential in south eastern Australia and corresponded with A.W. Howitt, the writer of *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* and co-author, with Lorimer Fison, of *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*.<sup>lviii</sup>

Ideas of 'savagery' in the nineteenth century were broadly propagated, including on the international performing stage. Roslyn Poingnant argues that the idea of 'savagery' was specifically associated with cannibalism in the popular imagination.<sup>lix</sup> However, Jane Lydon argues that aspects of material culture, such as boomerangs, baskets and rugs, were considered to be 'relics of 'savagery'' by late nineteenth century Australian tourists.<sup>lx</sup> Many aspects of Aboriginal material culture could signify 'savagery' to a late nineteenth century audience precisely because their culture had been broadly classified as 'savage'. To Lewis Henry Morgan 'savagery' described subsistence practices rather than social behaviour or material culture, yet in the popular imagination such conflation happened perhaps because the terminology that was chosen was ambiguous and sought to rationalise the belief in racial hierarchies. Indeed, Australia itself was representative of 'Savage Lands' in one tourist's imagination.<sup>lxi</sup> In the space of the photograph of Billy, though, there is a negotiation of the 'savage' relics of Aboriginal culture with his station garb and proud and steady appearance. As Billy is clearly posing for this photograph, questions rise

about his performance for the camera, which in retrospect become relevant to the proceeding photographs.

### *Performing Aboriginality, Performing Civilisation*

We are unable to tell whether Billy has been asked to accentuate aspects of his Aboriginal material culture for the camera and for other tourists at Lake Tyers. Given that tourists were regular visitors and that they expected to hear one Aboriginal woman, Bessie Cameron, playing the harmonium in church and to see boomerang throwing, Billy and other Aborigines at Lake Tyers were clearly expected to spend part of their days performing.<sup>lxiii</sup> This suggests that Billy and fellow residents lived in a complex performance space where the everyday patterns of the station had to be conformed to, whilst catering for the tourists expecting to witness a safe and comforting (albeit melancholic) Aboriginalism alongside the adoption of Christianised worship and living patterns. The reoccurrence and regularity of these actions, together with the prevailing controlling constrictions of the day, place both the traditional and modern aspects of Aboriginal life under what Judith Butler has identified as the 'reiterative and citational'; Aboriginal bodies and practices and the dynamics of their very existence are placed under regulatory practices which defined normativity.<sup>lxiii</sup> John Bulmer, the Missionary at the station, contributed ethnographic papers to *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia*<sup>lxiv</sup> and also corresponded with A.W. Howitt. In addition, as Missionary on the station, he was part of the mechanism by which life in relation to Christian and European modes of living were conducted. Bulmer was therefore involved in *defining* normative practices in relation to indigenous culture and *regulating* normative practices in relation to civilised cultures on the station. In treating both Aboriginal and civilised acts as performative both cultures can be seen to contain acts which produce discourse. The iterative and citational acts of both cultures is meaningful to those who engage in such acts; what is most real or meaningful to those who practice citational acts cannot be read in photographs or through casual observation. Distinguishing between, say, real or authentic acts and those that are performed or staged is extremely difficult and, moreover, not particularly useful. Indeed, as noted above, Edwards claims that all photographs capture a heightened moment of performativity,



a moment of regard between the subject and the photographer and between the photograph and subsequent viewer.

The question of how meaningful cultural performance is and who it is meaningful to is worth considering; this consideration applies equally to both traditional cultural performances and acquired cultural performances. Traditional Aboriginal skills for hunting, such as boomerang throwing, were modified for the non-hunting purpose of entertaining tourists but this does not make them less meaningful for Aboriginal performers.<sup>lxv</sup> Conformity to civilisation through dress, undertaking regular work, compliance with religious practices and customs and civic codes of behaviour are also iterative and citational acts, but not necessarily ones that are less meaningful for Aboriginal subjects. It is likely that Aboriginal subjects were adopting, adapting and maintaining practices that were meaningful to them and testing, modifying or rejecting those that were not.<sup>lxvi</sup>

These considerations productively problematise the interpretation of the photographs because the subjects depicted exhibit signs of self-conscious performance in nearly all instances, regardless of whether they depict historical Aboriginality or Christianised Aboriginality. The photographs speak of performative acts that indicate differing kinds of discourse, but seeking an authentic moment of Aboriginality amongst this makes no sense. Instead, the encounter between the viewing subject and the subject of the image meet in a space where the subject is aware of their performance and where the viewer becomes aware of their expectations. The captions emphasise historical Aboriginality but the photographs retain the traces of cross-cultural Aboriginality. The photographs can be read against the determining influence of the captions for more nuanced suggestions about Aboriginal subjectivity.

Jane Lydon has reported on incidents of where photographs of Aborigines conforming to Christianised practices were subject to ridicule and disbelief on the part of white audiences and this happened at Lake Tyers.<sup>lxvii</sup> The reporter John Stanley James was unimpressed with the Aborigines' adoption of civilisation and criticises the cleanliness and orderliness of the cottages, the Aboriginal contributions to work on

the station (building, farming), their engagement with education, use of money and their sporting ability.<sup>lxviii</sup> Reading his account now it is clear that no effort could have satisfied him: ‘Very lazy and useless is my summary of the Lake Tyers’ blackfellow’.<sup>lxix</sup> James is appalled when Bulmer relieves Joe Banks and Dick Cooper from rowing when on a boat excursion.<sup>lxx</sup> James does not comment on Aboriginal cultural practices at the station except to joke about Cooper’s fishing skills<sup>lxxi</sup> and it is clear that he has no interest in Aboriginal culture, except when listening to Mr. Bulmer. He reports in a derisory and disgusted way about the capture of a koala, where Cooper and Banks demonstrate tree-climbing skills (frequently the subject of quasi-anthropological photographs). In James’ account no Aborigine can be adequately civilised, the odd exception being a few individuals such as Bessie Cameron’s husband, a skilled carpenter.<sup>lxxii</sup> On the whole James implies that Aborigines cannot be changed and his writing does not reveal a sense of loss in regard to Aboriginal culture or dignity. This leaves Aborigines in a no-win situation in James’s worldview: doomed to die and unable to adapt to the Europeanised culture and customs, Aborigines had no long-term place in James’s version of Australia, except as references to the historical past. This makes Caire’s photographs that contain hints of cultural adaptation strategically useful – the photographs contradict James’s certainty that Aborigines could not adapt to a Christianised lifestyle.

There are no details in Caire’s photographs or his captions that could be considered to encourage laughter at the Aboriginal subject’s engagement with the mission, possibly because the subject of the mission is so underdeveloped. However, it is not clear whether the photographs adequately represented historical Aboriginality as captions are required to supplement, or supplant the visual clues. These photographs do not inform us about Aboriginality in the 1880s and are contradictorily located in the traditional (with the boomerang, spear, fishing, and boat making) and the lived everydayness of the mission’s activities (living in the cottages and fishing). More interestingly, the photographs are productive; by questioning the dichotomy of the ‘civilised’ and the ‘savage’, the photographs emphasise a culture in transition, with the Aborigines performing differing selves. With this in mind Caire’s photographs are not simply of Aborigines in a natural setting (doomed to extinction); they can be seen

as advocates of Aboriginal existence in ways that were probably uncomfortable to viewers in the late nineteenth century. In re-presenting these photographs in book form with different captions, however, this ambiguity is made less obvious to the reader although the ambiguity is retained in the image for those perceptive to it.

Two of Caire's photographs (figures 3 and 4) made at Lake Tyers were copyrighted in March 1886, suggesting that Caire planned further distribution of the images in postcard format or in other published forms. Yet *Lake Tyers, Mission Station*, (figure 1) was reproduced as an altered engraving in *Cassell's Picturesque Atlas*, which emphasises the civilised leisure enjoyed by the missions' inhabitants.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Despite being depicted in the volume, however, the Mission was not selected for extended commentary, except to say that Lake Tyers itself was a 'gem of lake land' and that the Mission had 'neat buildings and quite a pretentious church'.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Perhaps 'Native Civilisation at Gippsland', depicting Aboriginal people on the front porches of their houses in a landscape context, was too unsettling to be released as a popular image; was it too similar to images of the white tourist and settler in showing Aborigines taking part in the progress of settlement? 'Native Civilisation' was not reproduced in the later books, as a postcard, or in publications such as *Glimpses of Australia*.<sup>lxxv</sup> In this image, Caire, or the publishers, seemed to prefer more explicit accounts of traditional cultural practice. It is *Glimpses of Australia* that I wish to examine in further detail here, as the increased emphasis on traditional material cultures, through a different selection of Caire's photographs and the production of new captions, becomes clearer.

### *Representations of Aborigines in View Books*

The increased emphasis on Aboriginal cultural traditions can be best demonstrated by examining the images and captions in *Glimpses of Australia*,<sup>lxxvi</sup> also printed in Britain four years later as *Federated Australia: Its Sceneries and Splendours*.<sup>lxxvii</sup> However, the claims made of *Glimpses* can also be applied to other, smaller, view publications such as *100 Views Sydney Descriptive and Illustrative* and *Picturesque Victoria*.<sup>lxxviii</sup> *Glimpses of Australia* provides the most comprehensive account of the contradictory attitudes towards Aboriginal subjects, containing a total of thirteen

images of Aborigines. The photographs were taken in different geographic locations; this provides an opportunity to compare Caire's photographs of Aborigines at Lake Tyers to photographs of Aborigines made in remote locations that had experienced considerably less cultural impact.

On each page of *Glimpses of Australia* there is an extended caption which accompanies a photograph. In these written commentaries there is a notable emphasis on the 'doomed race' theory, proposing that the Aborigines were soon to die out (although this is potentially contradicted by depictions of subsistence practices such as fishing, hunting, boomerang throwing and spear throwing). Tracking abilities and the depiction of *mia-mias* are also a source of fascination and commentary but overall there is little account of adaptation and survival. The cruel treatment of Aboriginal people is frequently mentioned, but this is treated as a past demeanour, enacted by gold seekers and convicts, but not by settlers or missionaries. The emphasis, in visual terms, is on the material cultural practices of Aborigines, even if the images also reveal signs of Europeanisation. There is comparatively little discussion of how Aborigines would exist in a modernised world. (There are no photographs of the Aborigines in Victoria who had been forced to leave the mission stations subsequent to the 1886 Act; there are no representations of their new lives.)

The visual and written representations of the more remote Aborigines demonstrate a detailed interest in cultural tradition. It seems, therefore, that the increasing interest in the cultural practices of Aborigines was spurred on by increased knowledge of Aborigines from more remote parts of the continent. This interest affected how Aborigines in New South Wales and Victoria were seen in the popular imagination and generated an interest in traditional cultural practice in preference to accounts of successful adaptation to civilised life. A tension was therefore created between the demands and expectations of mission living, on the one hand, and a desire on the part of white viewers to see historical practices on the other. This interest in pre-contact Aboriginality potentially undermined the adaptation demonstrated by Aborigines living in Mission Stations, such as Lake Tyers. However, it is also likely that Lake Tyers residents were able to use the performances of their traditional cultural practices

in ways that were both meaningful to them and which satisfied tourists, producing an Aboriginal subjective experience more complex than many nineteenth century audiences could allow.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Perhaps the most immediately significant images that appear in *Glimpses* are three additional images that Caire made at Lake Tyers. These photographs are different to the images that appeared in *Gippsland Scenery* but appear to have been produced at the same time. Unlike 'Native Civilisation at Gippsland' (figure 1) which shows the neat and orderly layout and use of Lake Tyers, all of the photographs in *Glimpses* have more in common with 'Billy the Bull' (figure 4) in terms of emphasising historical Aboriginality. Although Lake Tyers is occasionally mentioned in titles and briefly in the accompanying text no mention is made of the mission or of the potential work that residents would have been expected to perform. Many of the images are limited in the specificity of location and context and could literally have been taken in any number of locations. Caire's emphasis, or that of the writer, E.D. Hoben, was on the historical customs rather than adaptation and change. In 'Lubra and Child, Lake Tyers Tribe, Gippsland', (figure 5) Hoben proposes that:

Gippsland, with its rich flora and fauna, its abundance of wild foods, both in the rivers and streams and in the woods was a particularly happy hunting-ground of the aboriginals. There they found all that was required to complete the happiness of the aboriginal heart. Lake Tyers was a very favourite resort, for not only did its waters teem with fish and water-fowl of all kinds, but its shores were a favourite haunt of game. The natives in their rude dug-out canoes were wont to slip in and out along the bush and reed-fringed shores in pursuit of the wild things on which they subsisted. One extraordinary trick the aboriginals of Australia practiced was to fasten around their necks a quantity of the growing aquatic weeds, and, quietly slipping out through some reedy creek, swim without sound or splash slowly into the midst of the feeding ducks. Once in the flock they skilfully and silently whipped duck after duck under water, there wringing their necks without arousing the suspicion of the

rest. All the Australian waterside aboriginals were most expert in the water.

This picture shows a woman and child, survivors of the Lake Tyers natives.<sup>lxxx</sup>

The commentary systematically neglects the content of the image and creates an imaginary and ancient world. The text does not acknowledge a viable role for the Aborigines in the present, or in the future, and instead this woman and her child are considered to be survivors from the past. The contemporary positions of the Aborigines are elided in a way that reveals the desires of the white spectator. The actual presence of the woman, with her blanket, baby, dress, demure expression and neatly kept hair are not mentioned in favour of her position within the narrative of history, survivor of Europeanised progress. No concession is awarded to the baby, who might hint at an Aboriginal future.

‘Group of Aborigines, Lake Tyers, Victoria’ (figure 6), shows a group of Aborigines, close to the edge of the lake. Billy, from ‘Male Native of Gippsland’ (figure 4) can be seen on the far left. Billy is proud, holding a child in his left arm and overall there is much pride and confidence to be read in the faces of the residents. But the emphasis in the accompanying text is on the Aborigines’ nomadic existence and their preference for temporary dwellings (negating the houses with verandas at Lake Tyers and those who lived in them and the central role that the *mia*-mias played in the social life of the Mission). Again, the text denies the complex subjectivity of Lake Tyers’ residents and their engagement with civilisation.

The same *mia-mia* has appeared in ‘Billy the Bull’ (figure 4) ‘Lubra and Child, Lake Tyers Tribe, Gippsland’ (figure 5) and ‘Group of Aborigines, Lake Tyers’ (figure 6). Although these images are not printed consecutively, being interspersed with other images as in *Gippsland Scenery*, treating them in isolation allows the staged qualities to emerge from these photographs. Details such as western clothing and the confidence of the subjects trouble the ‘doomed race’ theory mentioned in the captions. The accompanying text is historical in its focus and it strains against the contradictory photograph with its mix of cultures. These images fulfil the spectators’

desire to see pre-contact Aboriginality, such as living arrangements, a boomerang and spears, at close hand.

The text's neglect of Lake Tyers as a Mission Station, however, reaches its epitome in the commentary accompanying 'Native Sports, Lake Tyers' (figure 7) whilst also creating a connection to nationalism. This vividly demonstrates the extent to which Aboriginal culture was subject to appropriation in the nineteenth century by settler culture.

... There is still a remnant of the people there, and they are quite willing to show the visitor some of their native sports. In many respects the Australian natives were remarkable, but in one nature they were unique, and that was in the development of the boomerang or throwing-stick. This was their distinctive national weapon, possessed by no other people, and developed on quite independent lines, and to-day it has become one of the national emblems of Australia. With the boomerang the natives developed great skill, and they could hurl it with unerring accuracy at furred or feathered game, or at their enemies, the strange missile coming back to the hand of the thrower. Europeans have often practised the throwing of the boomerang as a pastime, but it is a rare thing for them to attain great skill with it, such as aboriginals developed by the need for using it in the pursuit of their sustenance. It is at throwing the boomerang that these natives are practising.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

In this commentary the boomerang features as a national emblem; it is significant to Aboriginal populations (despite the fact that boomerangs vary enormously across the continent according to their usage) and to settlers, even though their skill at using them is less proficient. The photograph is also spatially interesting, depicting a split in the organisation of the Aborigines; the *mia-mias* are on the right together with what appears to be 'uncivilised' Aborigines and well-presented Aborigines are on the left. But this image does not seem to represent a division between historical and 'civilised' Aborigines. Instead, the split seems to be amongst men and women. (However, the man throwing the boomerang is on the left, throwing the boomerang towards the *mia-*

*mias*.) The purpose of the organisation of the photograph is unclear, but the gathering of the subjects of Lake Tyers does not appear accidental.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Further examination of the photograph reveals Bulmer standing amongst the men on the left together with a number of other non-Aboriginal men. The community at Lake Tyers appears as fluid and mixed (with Bulmer and others taking an interest in Aboriginal cultural traditions) and the spaces of the mission appears less dichotomous here than in Caire's 'Native Civilisation'.

What is missing in all three of the commentaries on Lake Tyers and its residents is an acknowledgement of it as a place with a recent and on-going history. The photographs themselves prompt many questions and leave one wondering about the opportunities for maintaining Aboriginal customs and ceremonies beyond the expectations of the tourist. The depiction of Lake Tyers in *Glimpses* as a modern and organised space disappears and is replaced with images that emphasise pre-contact curiosity (which is then exaggerated by the extended captions). While the photographs still retain the traces of Aboriginal adaptation, and their success at conforming and playing with European traditions, the authority of the text points towards a late nineteenth-century denial of Aboriginal adaptability.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> And although the photographs were made in the 1880s, their circulation in the 1890s placed less emphasis on place and context, diminishing the Aboriginal occupation of land as historical and geographically specific.

The argument that the historical Aboriginalism that *Glimpses* emphasises was influenced by stories and reports of 'wild blacks' is demonstrable through an examination of the other images which include Aboriginal subjects. Included in *Glimpses* are photographs of Aborigines resident in New South Wales (through a surprising inclusion of a camp on a cattle station); Tasmania, (through the inclusion of Woolley's photographs of Truganini and King Billy, so-called 'The Last of the Tasmanian Aborigines'); two photographs from Queensland, both of which depict Aborigines who have experienced less intensive assimilation; two images from Western Australia; and one image from Central Australia. The two photographs from Queensland vividly demonstrate the emphasis on material cultural practices, even



though the text admits that the photographs were made in what is already considered to be the recent past:

The Aboriginals of Queensland were once numerous, and a large proportion of them were physically superior to the generality of the Australian natives, while they shared the singular cleverness of their people in the crafts of the bush and the chase, and in the instinct of the tracker. For much longer than others they held aloof from the whites whose treatment of them they had good reason to fear; but in time, they, except in the very remote and unsettled districts, gave in their submission, and the wild black is now only to be found in districts far removed from settlement. The picturesque picture here reproduced, was taken in the ranges surrounding Toowoomba in the early part of the eighties. It represents a party of aboriginals, men and women, clad in kangaroo and opossum skins. Their splendid physique is notable, and they hold in their hands the weapons of war and chase. One man is making fire in the native fashion, by twirling a stick on a log, in front of the gunyah of boughs which is their temporary dwelling. The two old men hold clubs; the others the spears with which they were so expert.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

The past tense of the text is significant; it implies that by the time the book was published such a photograph would be possible only in the very remote regions. ‘Group of Queensland Aboriginals’, the photograph that accompanies the above text (figure 8) is clearly posed and succeeds in demonstrating a number of activities associated with Aboriginal cultural practices at the same time (*mia-mias*, spears, fire making, the display of clubs). The use of possum skins is supposedly more traditional than other forms of clothing. The point, however, is that this is meant to show the specificity of Queensland Aborigines in comparison to other regional Aborigines, without making concessions to nations or clans. The ‘authenticity’ of their performance is suggested in the text through the reference to the aloofness in which the Aborigines kept themselves, in fear of the treatment that they might receive from white settlers. This is further reinforced through ‘Blacks of the Yanko Tribe,

Queensland' (figure 9). The text commences its discussion of Aborigines as a dying race before explaining that,

The wild blacks are generally known as 'Myall Blacks'; and it is a tribe of Myall blacks which is here represented, although in this case the people have seen whitemen oftener than was good for them. It is unhappily but the remnant of a once numerous Queensland tribe in wild country, and it is still wholly uncivilised. They were soon won with gifts of tobacco, a thing all dark races seem to take at once and become fond of, to range up for the benefit of an adventurous photographer. They are in their native garb, and have their native shields and weapons. One of them has adorned himself with a sock that was once white, and which was probably cast off by some passing drover, and he is wearing white clay matted in his beard, as a badge of mourning for the death of his lubra (wife).<sup>lxxxv</sup>

The text informs us that these are 'Myall Blacks' without providing further specificity. The isolation of the site of the photograph is suggested by the reference to the 'adventurous photographer' and 'wild country'. The photograph includes spears and a *mia-mia*. The text informs us that the inducement to being photographed was the gift of tobacco, underlining the performative exchange of the photographic encounter. The point here, though, is that these Queensland examples demonstrate the interest taken in 'uncivilised' Aborigines, who were thought to be less degraded by white men's customs. There were many Aborigines in Queensland working on stations but there are no images that demonstrate this. The only photographed example of Aborigines living on a station was taken in New South Wales. Queensland therefore acts as a site for imaginatively engaging with pre-contact Aboriginality rather than aiming to document the range of contexts in which Aborigines could be found. These photographs exist alongside Caire's photographs, where he seeks to photograph traditional material cultural practices, yet his photographs also reveal a culture in transition, albeit through the romanicised framework of the picturesque. Looking at these images in *Glimpses of Australia*, with their extended captions, it is

clear that the photographs of the residents of Lake Tyers were being contextualised within historical notions of Aboriginality.

### *Locating Aboriginality – the Popular Imagination*

As Jane Lydon has demonstrated, photographers such as Caire responded to questions surrounding Aboriginal conformity to European standards by creating images that required Aboriginal subjects to further maintain and demonstrate historical Aboriginality through performances that suited the European taste for a culture that was seen as doomed precisely because it could not change.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> However, Lydon situates this almost entirely within the discourse of the ‘doomed race’ theory and does not fully consider the effect that reports from the remote parts of the continent might have had upon Aborigines in the more populated states.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Literary production also revealed an interest in pre-contact Aboriginal culture. Francis Adams, reporter, poet, novelist and radical, produced short stories, which reveal stereotypes about Aborigines living away from civilisation. *Australian Life*,<sup>lxxxviii</sup> a compilation of short stories, includes ghost stories which engage with the gothic romance of weird melancholy, alongside three stories that relate encounters with Aboriginal subjects: *The Red Snake*, ‘Long Forster’ and ‘Aggy’. *Australian Life*, published in 1892, appeared after Caire had made his photographs at Lake Tyers in 1886 but before their reappearance in *Glimpses of Australia*, in 1897.

In each of these stories, the Aborigines are not fully characterised, instead appearing as groups of people with little individuation. Recounting terrible crimes and retribution killings, the Aborigines (and sometimes the settlers) are depicted as murderous but there are also references to ceremonial practices, especially in *The Red Snake*. This story includes references to rock drawings, specific Aboriginal myths and the beliefs associated with them. Adams utilises these motifs for gothic ends but interestingly has Frank Melville, the main narrator of the story, recount how his own knowledge and appropriation of these beliefs enables him to subjugate the local Aboriginal population. Despite Adams’ evident critique of ‘civilised’ behaviour in white settler communities, the Aboriginal community is defined as ‘savage’ through

these references to material cultural practices and to the use of fire to endanger settlers' lives in *'Long Forster'* and *'Aggy'*. He does not touch on the possibility of Aborigines adapting to civilisation: instead they remain wild and subject to the exoticised curiosity of the urban dwellers in his stories. Moreover, the urban dwellers that listen to Frank Melville's story can enjoy the frisson of fear and adventure and the Aborigines' function in his stories is to provide adventurous risk to the settlers' exploits.

These fictional stories rehearse the dominant idea of an unchanging culture and they also confirm an interest in pre-contact Aboriginality; I argue that it is this shift in the popular cultural curiosity that influenced the shift in the context of Caire's images between 1886 and 1897. Stories from Queensland and other states stimulated an interest in the Aborigines in south eastern states; Aborigines in New South Wales and Victoria, who experienced cultural assimilation, were expected to perform their Aboriginality to tourists and photographers. This performance of pre-contact Aboriginality did not disguise the cultural change that had already happened. Whilst upholding the idea that Aborigines were unchanging and were part of the past, the re-contextualised photographs in *Glimpses of Australia* reveal the performative tensions of being both 'Aboriginal' and 'civilised'.

Caire's images were only partially successful in providing popular audiences with examples of historical Aboriginality from Aborigines living in Christianised contexts because they point to cross-cultural subjectivity. The desire to see and experience 'savagery' was influenced by the 'doomed race' theory, by Lewis Henry Morgan's categorisation of Aborigines as 'middle status of savagery', and by the doubts that Mission Stations were able to effect real change for Aborigines (the failure of paternalism). Photographers, publishers and readers of the images were collusive in disavowing the signs of cultural transformation that are present in the photographs in the interests of experiencing the frisson of historical Aboriginality close at hand. Caire's photographs, which while they depict aspects of traditional material culture, were recontextualised within *Glimpses of Australia* to emphasise these traditional references (such as *mia-mias*, boomerangs, spears and living arrangements). The

recontextualisation, through the use of captions, seemed to cater for a broader interest in Aboriginalism in the late 1890s and opportunities for considering the subjectivity of Aborigines experiencing and actively taking part in the life of a Mission Station were missed. It is precisely these traces, though, that provide points of fracture for arguing that the photographs were more subtle than their textual accompaniments allowed.

### *Conclusion*

As running costs of mission stations and their effectiveness came into question in the 1870s and 1880s, the legal definition of Aboriginality changed. 'Full blood' Aborigines were thought to be uncivilisable and mixed heritage Aborigines were redefined as 'white'. In addition there was an increased awareness of and curiosity about Aborigines in other states, especially those who had experienced little contact with settlers, producing a demand for images of Aborigines who had not experienced cultural assimilation. This fuelled the demand for representing residents of mission stations in Victoria as historically Aboriginal, negating, in the process, Aboriginal adaptation and survival in a civilised world. Lake Tyers Mission Station became a complex performative space in which residents were maintaining cultural traditions and negotiating new traditions. Visitors to the Lake Tyers Mission Station engaged with the different spaces of performance yet Caire's images, as published in *Gippsland Scenery* and *Glimpses of Australia* emphasise historical Aboriginality. These photographs served a large audience of spectators interested in 'authentic' Aboriginality, yet the photographs reveal a cross-cultural co-existence of mission and traditional cultural practice. The signifiers of Aboriginality were limited to spears, *mia-mias*, boomerangs and other Aboriginal cultural products, although one of Caire's photographs in *Glimpses of Australia* depicts the re-enactment of nomadism.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

All photographs are partial and Caire's images emphasise a historical notion of Aboriginality, which makes treating his photographs as 'evidence' of a way of life problematic. But concentrating exclusively on the historical references in his photographic practice means that the visual evidence of a culture in transition is

overlooked. Caire's initial selection of photographs revealed Aboriginal culture co-existing with the space of the mission where civilisation and religious practices were observed. However, it is known that there was a shortage of food, making traditional subsistence practices essential and Bulmer, for practical reasons, allowed some rituals to be sustained. This argues for treating Caire's photographs, in the 1886 presentation, as representations which capture some of the cross-cultural activity sustained at Lake Tyers. Yet Caire's (or E.D. Hoben's) later selection in *Glimpses of Australia*, further emphasise historical Aboriginality for a public that was keen to see images of pre-contact Aboriginality. Whilst Caire's photographs are not unmediated representations of the real, they are nonetheless a significant statement about the co-existence of Aboriginal and settler ways of living. The photographs can, and do, successfully prove links between people and place, especially as the locations of these photographs are specified. The images act as reminders of Aboriginal adaptation and are painful reminders of colonial policy; such depictions, problematic as they are, offer an opportunity to reflect on the changing discursive position of Aboriginality. Of course, these latter-day re-interpretations of photographs of Aborigines are potentially recuperative for Aboriginal and settler audiences. Indeed, there are precedents for Aboriginal re-negotiation of such photographs.<sup>xc</sup>

The photographs discussed in this paper circulated widely. They held a significant place in the visual economy of Australia and enabled the city-dwelling population who purchased them to see and experience Aboriginality at a safe distance. Lake Tyers as a beautiful and safe tourist spot was also confirmed in Caire's first presentation of his images. In the later reproduction of the photographs in *Glimpses of Australia*, however, historical Aboriginality of the subjects was emphasised and the adopting of civilising practices whilst physically evident in the photographs was not treated as an opportunity for considering viable Aboriginal futures and the complexity of Aboriginal subjectivity.

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## Illustrations

Figure 1. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Native Civilisation at Gippsland' in *Gippsland Scenery*, albumen silver photograph, c. 1886. Melbourne, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 2. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Native Bark Canoes' in *Gippsland Scenery*, albumen silver photograph, c. 1886. Melbourne, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 3. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Lake Tyers, Native Station' in *Gippsland Scenery*, albumen silver photograph, c. 1885. Melbourne, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 4. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Male Native of Gippsland' in *Gippsland Scenery*, albumen silver photograph, c. 1886. Melbourne, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 5. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Lubra and Child, Lake Tyers Tribe, Gippsland' in Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Melbourne, Gordon & Gotch, Vol. 2, 1987 [1897], 53.

Figure 6. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Group of Aborigines, Lake Tyers, Victoria' in Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Melbourne, Gordon & Gotch, Vol. 2, 1987, [1897], 97.

Figure 7. Nicholas J. Caire, 'Native Sports, Lake Tyers' in Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Melbourne, Gordon & Gotch, Vol. 2, 1987, [1897], 303.

Figure 8. Unknown photographer, 'Group of Queensland Aborigines' in Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Melbourne, Gordon & Gotch, Vol. 1, 1987 [1897], 313.

Figure 9. Cosmos Photo co., 'Blacks of the Yanko Tribe, Queensland' in Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Melbourne, Gordon & Gotch, Vol., 2, 1987 [1897], 181.

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## Notes

- i Gael Newton, *Shades of Light: Photography and Australia 1839-1988*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia 1988, 65.
- ii Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians*, Durham and London: Duke University Press 2005, 188-189.
- iii *Glimpses of Australia* and *Federated Australia* are the same book but in different covers and published on different continents. *Glimpses* was produced in Australia and *Federated Australia* was printed and distributed in Britain. Caire had a total of fifty one images (from a total of three hundred and eighty-four) and these were representative of his career in photography to that date. Different selections of the photographs appear in *Gippsland Scenery* and in the published books. Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia: Depicting Scenes, Cities, Industries, and Interesting Phases of Australian Life, with Concise Literary Descriptions by E. D. Hoben* (Vols I & II), Melbourne: Gordon and Gotch Limited 1987 [1897]. Charles Taylor, *Federated Australia Its Sceneries and Splendours* Commemorative Volume II, London: Charles Taylor 1901.
- iv E. E. Morris, *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, London, New York, Paris & Melbourne: Cassell & Company Limited 1889.
- v Christine Hansen and Julia Peck, personal communication, January 2010. Laura Breen and Julia Peck, personal communication, January 2010. National Museum, Canberra. These remarkable photographs show the complex nature of cross cultural interaction and suggest new readings of Caire's broader project. These images show John Bulmer participating in Aboriginal cultural activities and demonstrate the social fluidity of the Mission Station. The photographs are now held by the National Museum, Canberra and Melbourne Museum; the acquisition records of these photographs have yet to be completed.
- vi Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 1997.
- vii Lydon, *Eye Contact*.



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viii Ibid, 73-121.

ix Sylvia Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City: Re-Reading Koorie Photographs', *Aboriginal History*, 30 (2006), 69-94.

x Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 186.

xi Ibid, 187.

xii Ibid, 188 & 191-195.

xiii Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, London: Fontana Press 1977, 40. Barthes proposed that titles to photographs worked either to fix ('anchor') the meaning of the photograph, or expand (through 'relay') the meaning of the photograph. In this instance, I am proposing that the captions exist in tension with the image, although Caire probably wanted to anchor the meaning of the photographs.

xiv Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London: Reaktion Books 2001, 41-42.

xv Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford & New York: Berg 2001.

xvi Ibid, 2.

xvii Ibid, 6.

xviii Ibid, 17.

xix Ibid, 17.

xx Ibid, 17.

xxi Ibid, 20.

xxii Alistair Campbell, *John Bulmer's Recollections of Victorian Aboriginal Life 1855-1908*, Melbourne: Museum Victoria n.d., xvii.

xxiii Philip Pepper & Tess de Araugo, *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be: The Story of a Victorian Aboriginal Family*, South Yarra: Hyland House Publishing Pty Limited 1980, 37.

xxiv Campbell, *John Bulmer's Recollections of Victorian Aboriginal Life*, xvii

xxv Ibid, xvii.

xxvi Peter Carolane, *Parallel Fantasies: Tourism and Aboriginal Mission at Lake Tyers in the Late Nineteenth Century*, in *Evangelists of Empire?: Missionaries in*

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*Colonial History*, Melbourne: University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre 2008, 162.

xxvii Alison Goding, *This Bold Venture: The Story of Lake Tyers House Place and People*, Kew, Victoria: Alison Goding 1990, 23.

xxviii Pepper & de Araugo, *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be*, 32.

xxix Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, *Lake Tyers Land Title*, Melbourne: Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs 1971.

xxx Pepper & de Araugo, *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be*, 30.

xxxi Michael Cannon, *Vagabond Country: Australian Bush & Town life in the Victorian Age*, South Yarra, Melbourne: Hyland House Publishing Pty Limited 1981, 78.

xxxii Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin 1989, 90.

xxxiii Ibid. 91-93.

xxxiv The reasons for the lack of 'progress' demonstrated on the missions was complex and included the lack of funds and the properties being too small. Ibid, 90.

xxxv Ibid, 96.

xxxvi It is possible that subscribers would cancel their subscription, or frame their photographs resulting in sets becoming incomplete over time; the cardboard mounts used by Caire would lend themselves to this activity.

xxxvii Anne and Don Pitkethly, *N.J. Caire: Landscape Photographer*, Rosana, Victoria: Pitkethly and Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd 1988, 13.

xxxviii Caire made many photographs of Aborigines and their surroundings at the Mission Station on his visit but only four appear in this folio.

xxxix Cultural transition at the mission station was also photographed by John Bulmer. Bulmer's photographs, however, did not reach a very wide audience, existing as objects of personal interest rather than staples for the views trade. Bulmer did publish his anthropological observations through the Victorian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society Australasian Branch, but there is no evidence to suggest that he illustrated his talks with photographs, although they clearly fed his ethnographical interest.

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xl Caire also made one photograph which depicts the sheep and cattle of the station, but he does not include Aboriginal pastoral workers in this instance. He did show Aborigines working in the dairy at Coranderrk, in 1904, but refrained from making the working conditions of Lake Tyers explicit.

xli Morris, *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, 742, & Cannon, *Vagabond Country*, 158.

xlii Tony Hughes-D'Aeth, *Paper Nation: The Story of the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, 1886-1888*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 2001, 41-42.

xliii Ibid, 45.

xliv Ibid, 50.

xlvi Ibid, 55.

xlvi Ibid, 56-57.

xlvi Pitkethly, *N.J. Caire: Landscape Photographer*, 1 & 12.

lviii Morris, *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, 740 & Andrew Garran, ed. *Australia The First Hundred Years: Being a Facsimile of Volumes I and II of the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia 1888*, Sydney: Ure Smith 1974, 196.

lix Ibid, 42.

l Ibid, 42.

li Garran, *Australia The First Hundred Years*, 195-198.

lii Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 186.

liii Caire's other photographs, recently purchased by the National Museum, Canberra and Melbourne Museum, strengthen this assertion. The photographs in the private album, which were owned by a Gippsland family, reveal Bulmer sitting in the boats and taking part in the life of the mission around the *mia-mias*. The photographs in *Gippsland Scenery* were sold in large numbers but the images in this private album did not reach a wider audience. Christine Hansen and Julia Peck, personal communication, January 2010 & Laura Breen, personal communication, January 2010.

liv Nicholas Caire, [Folio of Photographs] *Gippsland Scenery*. Melbourne: State Library of Victoria, PCV \*LTA 194, 1886, H27475.

lv Kleinert, *Aboriginality in the City*, 80.

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lvi The photographs of Aborigines could be seen as symbols of the historic primeval within the overall progression of the colony, especially as there are fifty-four other photographs that make the colony as place and progress manifest; but this is troubled by the evident 'progress' made by the Aborigines themselves.

lvii Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society*, London: Macmillan and Company 1877.

lviii Alfred William Howitt and Lorimer Fison, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, Melbourne: George Robertson, 1880, and Alfred William Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, Macmillan, 1904.

lix Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2004, 28.

lx Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 191.

lxi Unknown, *Savage Lands* [Album of Photographs], Cambridge: Royal Commonwealth Society Collection, Cambridge University Library, n.d. Y308B.

lxii Cannon, *Vagabond Country*, 164 and Carolane, *Parallel Fantasies*, 166.

lxiii Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London: Routledge 1993, 2.

lxiv John Bulmer, 'Some Account of the Aborigines of the Lower Murray, Wimmera, Gippsland', Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia, 5 (1888), 15-43.

lxv Roslyn Poignant argues that Aboriginal performers were able to retain comfort and cultural confirmation from performances that were modified and adapted for American and European public audiences. Although the performances were modified (for example, boomerang throwing was not a stage act in Aboriginal culture and mourning rituals would not normally be performed to members outside of an affiliated group) these performances were still valued by the performers; the authenticity of the performance was not in question for the performing Aborigines. Poignant, *Professional Savages*.

lxvi John Bulmer's 'Missionary Experiences' contains numerous instances of where Aborigines on the mission were able to take part in sporting activities, work, Christian religious practice, earning money, going to school, learning to read and write etc. In some cases the Aborigines adopt Bulmer's suggestions but some are rejected or

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partially engaged with. Campbell, *John Bulmer's Recollections of Victorian Aboriginal Life*, 75-88.

lxvii Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 210-212.

lxviii Cannon, *Vagabond Country*, 158-165.

lxix Ibid, 163.

lxx Ibid, 165.

lxxi Ibid, 164.

lxxii Ibid, 163.

lxxiii Morris, *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, 740. No credit was given to Caire for this image.

lxxiv Ibid, 742.

lxxv It seems significant that this image was not reproduced as a postcard; the presence of children in the image would have undermined ideas of the doomed race' theory.

lxxvi Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*.

lxxvii Taylor, *Federated Australia Its Sceneries and Splendours*.

lxxviii A.C. Rowlandson, *100 Views Sydney, Descriptive and Illustrative, Choice and Characteristic Country Scenes in New South Wales*. Sydney: New South Wales Bookstall Co. Ltd n.d. and Sands & McDougall Limited, Printers, *Picturesque Victoria: Glimpses of Picturesque Victoria. Shewing a Few of the many Delightful Scenes and Favourite Resorts for which the Colony is so noted. A Charming Little Souvenir*, Melbourne: Sands & McDougall n.d.

lxxix Kleinert, *Aboriginality in the City*.

lxxx Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Vol. II, 52.

lxxxi Ibid, Vol. II, 302.

lxxxii Caire's unpublished images of Lake Tyers, suggest that either well-dressed Aborigines lived in the *mia-mias* or that there was considerable socialising between the different areas of the mission station.

lxxxiii Aborigines were being systematically excluded from modern representations of Australia. The implementation of the 1886 'Half-Caste Act' is not mentioned in *Glimpses*. Caire, or other photographers, could have traced the dispersal and

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integration of Aboriginal populations outside of mission stations and have not chosen to do this. Instead, we are left with the primitive Aborigine in the mission station and the absence of Aborigines (who were expected to pass as ‘white’) in the wider community.

lxxxiv Gordon & Gotch, *Glimpses of Australia*, Vol. 1, 312.

lxxxv Ibid, Vol. 2, 180.

lxxxvi Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 191-199.

lxxxvii Ibid, 50-52.

lxxxviii Francis Adams, *Australian Life*. London: Chapman & Hall 1892.

lxxxix Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 195, for Caire’s images made at Coranderrk.

xc Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 214-247, Kleinert, *Aborginality in the City*, 82 & 85, & Poignant, *Professional Savages*.