FROM RESISTANCE TOWARDS INVISIBILITY

CATHERINE DE LORENZO AND JUNO GEMES

RAI
Royal Anthropological Institute

Anthropology & Photography No. 3

ISSN 2397-1754

Anthropology & Photography

is a new open-access RAI publication series edited by the RAI Photography Committee. Emerging from the international conference of the same name organized by the RAI at the British Museum in 2014, the series will highlight and make available to the widest possible audience the best new work in the field.

Volume 1 *Photography in the Age of Snapchat*
Daniel Miller

Volume 2 *A Shaykh's Portrait: Images and Tribal History among the Negev Bedouin*
Emilie Le Febvre

Volume 3 *From Resistance Towards Invisibility*
Catherine De Lorenzo and Juno Gemes

Forthcoming Titles

'Look Away from Me!': On the Material Meanings of Images in a Digital Landscape by Paolo Favero

Culture, Memory and Community through Photographs: Developing an Inuit-based Research Methodology by Carol Payne

Alfred Maudslay's Causality Dilemma: Archaeology, Photography and the influence of Nineteenth-Century Travel Literature by Duncan Shields

'Pierre Verger, A Cigarra, and the Construction of Candomblé's African 'Purity' by Heather Shirey

Visual Economies and Digital Materialities of Koorie Kinship and Community by Sabra Thorner

Reflecting (Upon) 'Truth' Online in Iranian Popular Digital Photography by Shireen Walton

FROM RESISTANCE TOWARDS INVISIBILITY

CATHERINE DE LORENZO AND JUNO GEMES

RAI
Royal Anthropological Institute

Anthropology & Photography No. 3

First published 2016

Cover image: The March for Truth & Justice , La Parouse, 1988, © Juno Gemes

ISSN 2397-1754
ISBN 978-0-900632-45-7

Inspired by Aboriginal activism of the 1970s, a small group of non-Indigenous photographers worked closely with Indigenous people, their culture and struggles, making them empathetically visible for the first time. This cracked open the barriers of invisibility, silence and negative imaging surrounding the realities of Aboriginal life. Informed insider images appeared in exhibitions and publications. These activist photographers, working collaboratively with Aboriginal leaders in communities and towns, created images that were enthusiastically used by Aboriginal people and helped change the consciousness of the nation. Our paper examines this history and asks why these historic images are overlooked by some scholars and art museum exhibitions.

Most photographic histories addressing Australian Indigenous issues and contemporary photography begin their accounts in the mid eighties with the landmark NADOC'86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photography (Ennis 2007:41–50; Gellatly 2000:285–6; Jones 2011:204–6) — although some literature does exist that intimates a longer tradition of photography produced for domestic purposes (Aird 1993; Lee 2000; Macdonald 2003:225–42). This paper argues that the 1986 starting date is problematic because it implies that Indigenous photography suddenly landed fully formed on the art-exhibition scene from virtually nowhere. Missing from these photo histories is an analysis of a significant body of work developed by non-Indigenous photographers who worked closely alongside Indigenous people to inform the Australian nation about the struggles, activism and achievements that were transforming Indigenous lives. The 1970s had seen the introduction of momentous cultural reforms by the Whitlam Labor Government (1972–5), including the overhaul of the Australia Council for the Arts and the establishment of its all-indigenous Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB), where 'Aboriginals [were] given full responsibility for developing their own programs in the arts' (Aboriginal Arts Board 1973), and even the Prime Minister was reported as saying that 'Aboriginal art should be used to inspire social protest in the cities' (Mendelssohn 2013).

In seeking to make explicit some of the transitional activities that helped bring about the rapid transformation of Australian photography by so many Indigenous photographers, our purpose is not just to augment existing histories but to draw attention to some of the healing narratives developed by highly skilled and committed photographers engaged in creating Australia's visual history during this seminal period of dramatic change.

Our paper is informed by multiple research strategies. The authors bring together the perceptions of an activist photographer and an academic researcher on Indigenous photo representation during this period. Memory informs this paper, but does not frame it. We have conducted archival research on relevant exhibition goals and critiques, and where documents are wanting, we interviewed relevant protagonists.[1] Our understanding of the period is informed by photo-historiography, as well as by more recent theoretical perspectives that seek to throw new light on the period. It is important to state that the oversights we note in curatorial and historical discourse are not driven by self-interest. Our goal in revisiting the 1970s and early 80s is to draw attention to strategies adopted by a small number of dedicated photographers, including outstanding practitioners such as Jon Rhodes, Wesley Stacey and others, to put their

1 De Lorenzo corresponded with Bruce Hart (11–16 March 2015), Peter Kennedy (14 March 2015) and Linda Burney (29 May 2015).

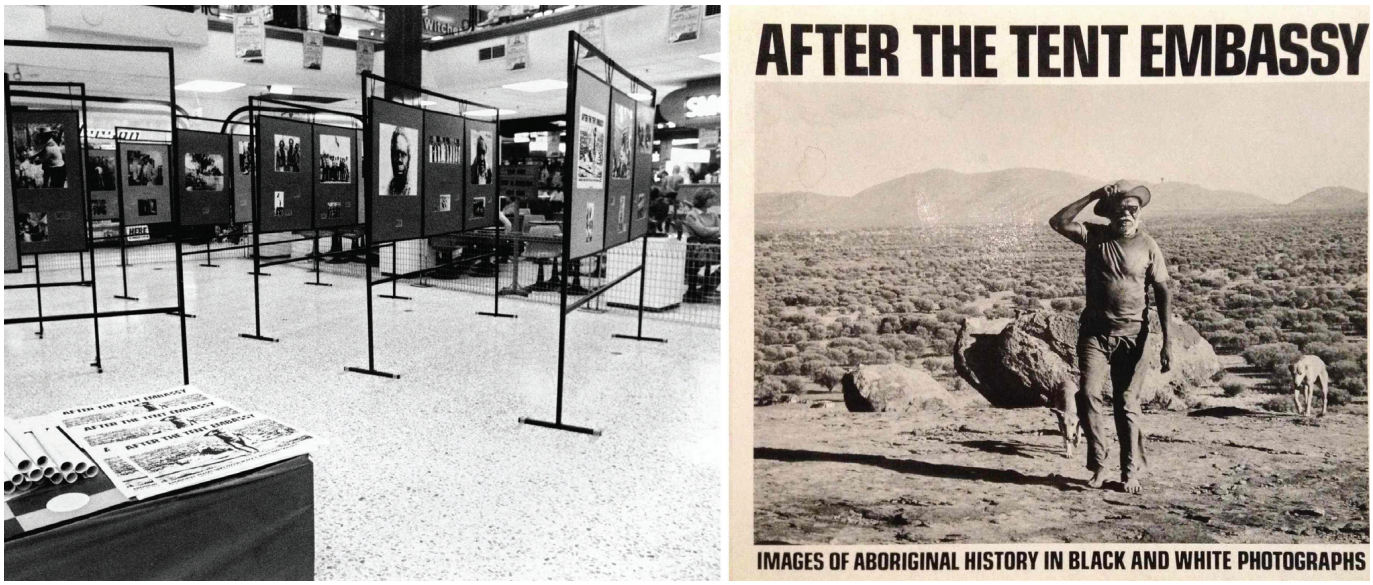

Figure 1 Left: Installation of After the Tent Embassy, 1982–3, here seen at Wooden Plaza, Canberra, 1983. © Juno Gemes. Right: cover for After the Tent Embassy: Images of Aboriginal History in Black and White Photographs, cover image ©Penny Tweedie, Sydney, Valadon Publishing, 1983.

photographic skills to the service of Indigenous struggles for self-determination. As Peter Sutton has since reflected, the 'old rights-based progressivism' of the period has now well and truly gone (Sutton 2008:147). We contend that it would be a shame to allow shifting paradigms of cultural and Indigenous studies to displace this seminal period of the larger narrative.

Resistance

The photography exhibition After the Tent Embassy (November 1982) was an event that celebrated ten years of Indigenous activism for self-determination and land rights following the erection of a Tent Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra on 26 January 1972 (Foley *et al.* 2013), and the election later that year of a reformist government that was responsive to these demands. Anthropologist John von Sturmer has described the ensuing Aboriginal movement as 'the Civil Rights story in Australia. It underpins major changes not only in Indigenous rights but also in non-Indigenous consciousness during the last half century.' (pers. comm. to Gemes, 17 April 2014). The visual records of this movement exist because of the photographers who worked by invitation with Indigenous people around the country, photographing upon request and contributing in any other way they could. Significantly, a few of the photographers were anthropologists (Diane Bell, John von Sturmer), and their works reflect a time when the practice of anthropology was being transformed, with researchers documenting new economic and cultural structures as well as land-rights claims for the courts. Among the professional photographers — including Penny Tweedie, Juno Gemes, Wes Stacey, Jon Rhodes, Elaine Pelot-Kitchener, Lee Chittick and Michael Gallagher — perhaps only Tweedie would have described herself as a professional photojournalist. These visual-advocacy photographers were drawn to some of the charismatic Aboriginal leaders and culture makers and to the current realities that

gripped them. At the time there were few outlets for publishing photographs sympathetically documenting land-rights struggles. There were occasional images in the mainstream press such as *Nation Review* (Melbourne, 1972–81) and *The National Times* (Sydney, 1971–86), but some community presses accepted images — such as *Land Rights News: A Newsletter for Aboriginals and Their Friends.* (Darwin, Northern Land Council July 1976–August 1985), *Aboriginal Land Rights Support Group Newsletter* (Leichhardt, Sydney, June 1979–June 1985) and the more glossy *Identity* magazine (various places, 1971–1982) — though they rarely acknowledged the photographers. However *AIM: Aboriginal-Islander-Message* (Glebe, Sydney, 1979–82) regularly published work by Gemes and Pelot-Kitchener, as did mainstream newspapers on occasion.[2] In bringing together the work of many photographers working with communities from around the nation, both the exhibition and the post-exhibition publication (Langton 1983; see Figure 1) for After the Tent Embassy identified all photographers by name (although most archival images had yet to await research that might identify the subjects). It seemed less important to note whether the contemporary pictures were by professional photographers, anthropologists or other fieldworkers, for significant differences were near impossible to spot: the informality of many images conveyed an energy that resonated with the political impulse for change. Each of the contemporary photographers advocated the aspirations of the land-rights movement. Our interest here is to look at the reception and legacy of the exhibition throughout the 1980s and today.

Figure 2 Martin Sharp, Art Sale for Land Rights, Paddington Town Hall, Sydney, 1982.

After the Tent Embassy was one of three Apmira[3] (an Arrernte word for 'land') exhibitions held in Sydney in November 1982. The larger exhibition, Art Sale for Land Rights (Figure 2), with works by over 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists including photographers, was a fundraiser for the New South Wales, Kimberley and North Queensland Land Councils (Apmira

2 The first Indigenous newspaper was *Koori Bina: A Black Australian News Monthly* (January 1977–March 1978), produced by the Black Women's Action Group under Roberta Sykes. It was absorbed by *AIM* (1979–82). Newspapers such as *Koori Mail* (1991 onwards) and *National Indigenous Times* (2002–15) came much later. To ensure coverage of the 1982 Commonwealth Games Action Committee, Tweedie secured a commission from *Newsweek* and Gemes from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *AIM*.

3 Apmira was a land-rights support group largely run by non-Aboriginals. Two Apmira exhibitions are discussed now, the third, later.

archives). After the Tent Embassy was conceived of as a 'documentary survey of photographs tracing the dispossession of Aboriginals from their land, from the earliest records until the present' (Anon. 1982:60), and although by this time photographic galleries were emerging in Australian cities, this exhibition, which toured to four other venues, was pitched at community spaces.[4] Thanks to the image edit, reinforced by a hard-hitting text by Marcia Langton revealing history from an Aboriginal standpoint, it became obvious even to the untrained eye that the oppressed people seen in colonial and assimilationist photographs[5] were now claiming their history and fighting for their rights. For viewers in the south-eastern states used to ethnographic images of people from the distant north, the surprising element in the exhibition was the number of urban Koories who not only lived in the cities but were also well connected to communities around the nation. A ground-swell of leaders was running new Aboriginal organizations such as medical services, housing cooperatives, radio stations and dance schools,[6] as well as actively working to bring about reform in land tenure, educational services and prisons, as was the case with Mum Shirl (Shirley Colleen Smith, Figure 3). Because mainstream audiences had seen so few images of Indigenous enterprise and activism, one critic saw the exhibition as 'an important educational resource for all Australians' (Maloon 1982:9). Here could be seen evidence of a new and exciting Australian cultural landscape. If 'the easiest and most "natural" form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible' (Langton 1993:24), then After the Tent Embassy proved a powerful corrective: here images and text focused the eye, and prodded the mind to reflect on issues facing Aboriginal communities around the nation.

Figure 3 Mum Shirl (Mrs Shirley Smith) Town Hall Sydney, 1988. © Juno Gemes.

4 Immediately after its opening at the Australian Centre for Photography, After the Tent Embassy was installed at the Bondi Pavilion, a surf club that in 1975 had been converted into a multi-arts centre opened by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. It later toured to Northcote Town Hall, Melbourne (December 1982), the Wollongong Regional Art Gallery (February 1983) and Wooden Plaza Shopping Centre in the national capital, Canberra (March 1983).

5 This early 1980s negative perception of the colonial archive, if not the assimilationist images, has since been contested by Jane Lydon (2005, 2012).

6 For example, the Aboriginal Medial Service, Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Housing Company, Radio Redfern and Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre (now NAISDA), Black Theatre.

Figure 4 Percy Mumbler and Kevin Cook, Land Right Action, Sydney, 1981. © Juno Gemes.

Figure 5 Land rights march from Legal Service Redfern to Parliament, Sydney, 1981. © Juno Gemes.

Figure 6 Essie Coffey (Bush Queen), Bundeena, 1978. © Juno Gemes.

Figure 7 Countrymen, greeting before a ceremony, Mornington Island, 1978. © Juno Gemes.

The key difference between the old and new images lay in the commissioning process: for the first time positive collaborative images were produced. The contemporary images were by photographers who made choices to engage with communities and challenge mainstream society. By 1982 Aboriginal marches for land rights and self-determination, and against government and corporate paternalism, were familiar issues in the local presses. Photographers were invited to record political rallies and marches (Figures 4 and 5). Less familiar were the images about these and other events that were commissioned not by the newspaper editors but by the Aborigines themselves. In place of mob anger, After the Tent Embassy showed an alternative visual repertoire in which people, individuals and groups, were determined and buoyant (Figures 6 and 7). Everyone on the production side of the exhibition — the curatorial team (photographer Wes Stacey and artist Narelle Perroux conducted the image search; Marcia Langton, already a major contributor to land-rights claims, yet still a student, helped make the final selection and wrote the pithy text), the communities, the photographers — recognized that 'photographs can communicate from within one culture to another' (Gemes 2003:86). Together, the images did more than document particular people, places and political activism. To anyone who looked closely, the contemporary images demonstrated what would now be called relational aesthetics, a mutuality so missing from the earlier objectified images. Having built relationships with Aboriginal people, leaders and activists, the photographers saw their work as subjective; their intent was advocacy and cross-cultural understanding. These were no 'fly-in, fly-out' photographers. Their experience of collaborative work, created in slow time, Koori time, set their work apart from the imperial modalities of fast non-relational photojournalism. Tweedie and Gemes also worked with the editors of the associated exhibition publication (Langton 1983) to ensure that the publisher deposited copies into each home-community library, so that all the people represented in the publication could see the acknowledgement of their history. Whether encountering the exhibition directly or via the book in a library, community centre or at home,

Figure 8 Peaceful Protest before The Commonwealth Games, Brisbane 1982. © Juno Gemes.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers could see that self-determination, the driving concept behind so much Indigenous activism at the time, was given photographic expression.

An example of a particularly recent event included in Tent Embassy was the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane (30 September—9 October 1982), where Aboriginal and Islander Australians from around the country came to Brisbane to expose continuing racism and oppression throughout Australian society and especially in Queensland (Tweedie 1982). With the ban on street marches, however, there were hundreds arrested every day (Davies 2012; Figure 8). As every Indigenous spokesperson made clear in the documentary film *The Whole World is Watching* (King 1982), the goal of the Black Protest Committee was non-violent resistance to racism. Holding placards or addressing the crowds, the leaders of the estimated 10,000 marchers are shown standing up for their rights (Figure 9). Gemes and Tweedie joined the march as participant photographers; it was a moment to fully exploit photography's potential to both document events and critique society through powerful image-making. Each photographer instinctively understood the need for an insider's perspective that might act as a corrective to lazy journalism that did the state government's bidding. When Gemes took her photographs of the illegal land-rights marches to the picture editor of *Sydney Morning Herald*, he baulked at publishing them, saying: 'it's clear what side you are on'. Gemes agreed: 'This is no time for

Figure 9 Lionel Fogerty leads an illegal march, Land Rights Before Games, Brisbane, 1982. © Juno Gemes.

impartiality. Your photographers are neither impartial nor informed about the tactics of non-violent resistance.'

Because photographers working closely with Indigenous people recognized the need for partiality and subjectivity, it might now be seen that they were inadvertent advocates of standpoint theory, though such an intellectual framework had yet to be named by feminists (Harding 2004) and Indigenous scholars (e.g. Moreton-Robinson 2013; Nakata 2007). The reason standpoint theory may well be a useful construct for understanding this material, is that it 'exposes the spurious truth claims to impartiality of patriarchal [in this case, mainstream] knowledge production' (Moreton-Robinson 2013:335), and in so doing would appear to extend the relatively individualistic impulse behind what, in photographic theory, was known as 'concerned' photography (Capa 1972). To the extent that many of the contemporary photographers in After the Tent Embassy spent extended periods of time building relationships with Indigenous people, and when on site were able to record people, places and moments of significance to the community, their images were seen as producing new insights/knowledge grounded in people's lived experience — consistent with standpoint theory. As the visual evidence shows, the photographers were activists every bit as much were the Indigenous people with whom they collaborated. One account on imagery of the civil rights movement in America noted that photographs were 'artistic expressions and instruments for organizing. Like the justly famous freedom songs of the movement, they were aids to understanding feelings and strategies, to cementing solidarity, and to spreading the passion.' (Kasher 1996:16). Precisely the same could be said of the archives created and used by photographers engaged in the Aboriginal movement of the 1970s and 80s.

In 1983 the *Canberra Times* (3 July:16) (which, as it happens, had posted sympathetic editorials on the Brisbane marches) carried an article outlining the many research projects supported by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS).[7] It noted that the two exhibitions, After the Tent Embassy and Aboriginal Communities of the ACT (Australian Capital Territory), both of which had toured in the previous twelve months, were 'seen by more than 100,000

7 Now AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies).

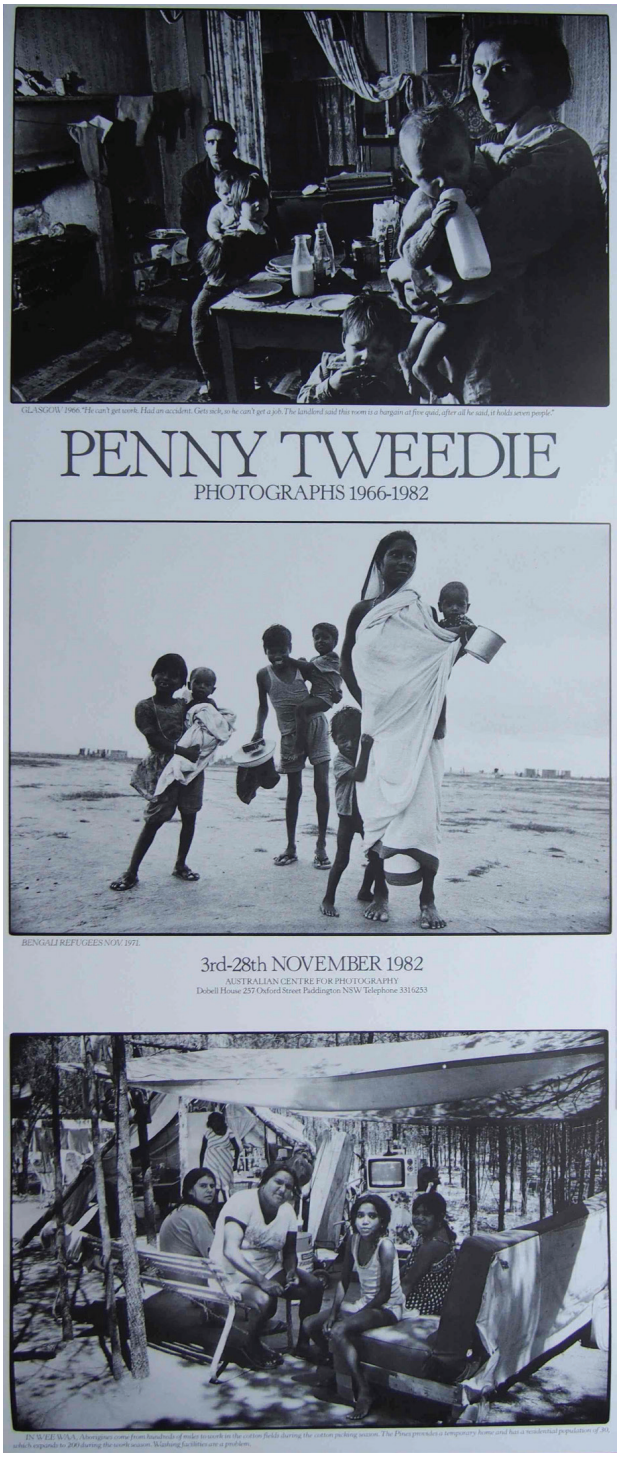

Figure 10 An Australian Centre for Photography 1982 exhibition poster: Penny Tweedie, Photographs 1966–1982, image courtesy and copyright the Australian Centre for Photography archives.

people'. If only half that figure was for Tent Embassy then the audience was significant. Certainly, the immediate critical response was positive. Photographer and critic Mark Hinderaker (1982) co-examined After the Tent Embassy with two concurrent solo exhibitions by two of the most prolific artists involved in it: Gemes's We Wait No More[8] (Hogarth Galleries, 5–26 November) and Tweedie's Photographs 1966–1982 (ACP, 3–28 November). Tweedie's photographs spanned sixteen years and, as Figure 10 shows, they range from unemployed families in overcrowded houses in Glasgow to Bengali refugees to overcrowded temporary accommodation for itinerant Aboriginal workers in Wee Waa, New South Wales. Gemes's poster/catalogue for We Wait No More (Figure 11) shows that it was a joint Hogath Galleries and Apmira exhibition dedicated to 'Men's Culture, Women's Culture, Identity, Politics, Land, Survival', with an observation on the verso by essayist George Alexander that 'Unities are not found in persons but in group connections and disconnections', and the artist herself quoting the activist poet Kath Walker/Oodgeroo Noonuccal: 'I don't blame you for the past but I hold you accountable for the present and for the future' (Alexander and Gemes 1982). Hinderaker tackled the solo exhibitions first, pinpointing the difference between outsider photojournalism that reflects mainstream biases (Tweedie) and "'participant observer" [images with] the beginnings of structured, meaningful cross-cultural visions' (Gemes). He understood the curatorial intent behind After the Tent Embassy as a 'compelling visual polemic [presenting] aspects of the Aboriginal experience in Australia … racial conflict, massacres, assimilation, preservation of

8 Taken from a speech by Gary Foley, National Aborigines Day, Sydney, 1982. Gemes's photographs were exhibited alongside paintings by Yolgnu elder, Wandjuk Marika.

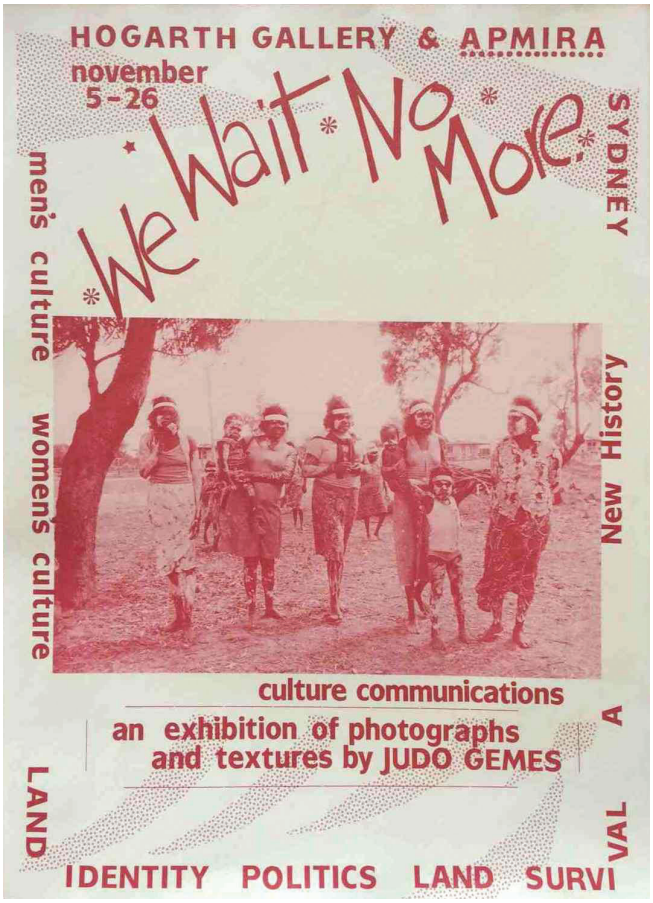

Figure 11 We Wait No More, poster for Juno Gemes' first exhibition, Hogarth Galleries Sydney + Bituman River Gallery, Canberra, 1982 © Juno Gemes.

culture and cultural identity, and the pursuit of social, economic and political justice through land rights ... [which] every Australian with a concern for national identity should make an effort to see' (Hinderaker 1982:8).

It is indisputable that After the Tent Embassy had a lot of Indigenous input through a dialogic process: the catalogue lists participants from forty-one communities (Langton 1983:2). Copies of the exhibition panels show Marcia Langton's commentary as hand-written, adding authority and affect to her use of the first person plural when she lets the audience know what 'we' do in 'our' lives (Apmira 1982). Yolgnu elder Wandjuk Marika, a founding member of the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1973 and its chairman for five years from 1975, wrote the catalogue foreword 'for Aboriginal people, my people', but also so that others would 'please recognize Aboriginal people in Australia' (Langton 1983:3). Indeed the AAB provided a publishing subsidy for the catalogue. The AIAS saw the exhibition as

> *a statement by us about our Aboriginality which since colonisation has been under threat... [It] explains why we have a strong sense of identity, unity, and why we want real land rights. The statement is what every black person wants to say.*
>
> *(AIAS 1983:30)*

At this time there were no Aboriginal photographers taking politicized images. This was extraordinary, given that in 1957 Ronald and Catherine Berndt had argued for Aboriginal art to be seen as contemporary (Berndt 1957), and that in 1981 Bernice Murphy in the first Perspecta show included Aboriginal art as contemporary Australian art (Murphy 1981). Contemporary Aboriginal art was included in the broader Apmira exhibition, but not in the touring component, After the Tent Embassy. In 1982 the only Aboriginal professional photographer was Mervyn Bishop. Australia's first Aboriginal press photographer, winner of the Australian Press Photographer of the Year in 1974, and photographer for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra (1974–9). Before returning to the *Sydney Morning Herald* until 1986, Bishop had chosen not to engage with the Aboriginal movement of the 1970s: 'I didn't get involved, I stayed on the very edge.' (Bishop 1994:84). Effectively, there were no Indigenous professional photographers working with the Aboriginal movement in the 1970s and early 80s,

Figure 12 Aboriginal photographers, NADOC exhibition, 1986. © William Yang, courtesy Stills Gallery, Sydney.

although from the late 1970s photo workshops were run by Lee Chittick on the NSW south coast, Jon Rhodes at Halls Creek, NT, and Gemes in Mornington Island, QLD.

By 1986 the gains of the Aboriginal activism movement were evident. Ten photographers — Mervyn Bishop, Brenda L. Croft, Tony Davis, Ellen Jose, Daryn Kemp, Tracey Moffatt, Michael Riley, Chris Robinson, Terry Shewring and Ros Sultan (Figure 12) — in the NADOC'86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photography showed that one exhibition could cover diverse approaches to Indigenous photography, including activist politics, history, identity and high art.[9] Some of the 1986 NADOC photographers built on the activist land-rights imagery of the kind found in the above-mentioned publications and the 1982 exhibition. They also introduced new modes of representation that critiqued the old stereotypes and examined identity. Evidently, they too were committed to a practice of thoughtful photography, but their modus operandi were different. Extending the gains of fifteen years of activism, the NADOC photographers not only produced collaborative portraits but used their art-school education to enlarge photographic vocabulary with great flair and innovation. In keeping with some experimental and provocative Indigenous urban-art exhibitions (Johnson and Johnson 1984; Raffel and Watson 1986), NADOC'86 launched a lively mix of wit, political gravitas and aesthetic panache that quickly emerged as the hallmark of Indigenous photography. These qualities have meant that the list of curated exhibitions on Indigenous

9 There is no catalogue for the exhibition, but see Howell 1986.

photography is sizeable (Croft 2012; Gellatly 2000), with recent touring exhibitions such as Making Change giving it pride of place (Fenner *et al.* 2012). Audiences, at least in Australia, recognize and enjoy the layered historical and cultural references.

For the record, subsequent exhibitions of activist photography centred on social-justice issues, though relatively few in number, have been curated by Indigenous and settler photographers. For example, in 1988 Indigenous poet/playwright/activist Kevin Gilbert included ten photographers — Wayne Barker, Iris Clayton, Brenda L. Croft, Kathy Fisher, Kevin Gilbert, Alana Harris, Ellen José, Bulprinda Mununghurr, Tracy French and Tjanara Williams — in Inside Black Australia. For Gilbert, the images of protest and survival showed 'the effects of that great canker, injustice' and the exhibition as a whole centred on the curatorial intent that 'there can be no reconciliation without justice ... integrity' (Gilbert 1988:1–2). In 2003 the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra explored the idea of social portraiture through Gemes's Proof: Portraits from The Movement 1978–2003[10] (Gemes 2003), an exhibition that reminded one critic of how photography can explore 'the tension and the drama on one hand, and the genuine will for reconciliation on the other' (Bojic 2003:20). 'Recording these actions on film,' noted Gamilaroi historian and film-maker Frances Peters-Little, 'provides us with so much more than words. It provides us with a face, an impression and a humanity that underpins the rhetoric of the time.' (2003:14). Curator Andrew Sayers saw the work as 'quite clearly and unambiguously an engaged body of portraiture' (Bennie 2003:12). Each of the dozens of individuals photographed had made a significant contribution to reshaping political and cultural life, and their cumulative humanity, what Sayers identified as a 'collective consciousness', was in such stark contrast to the mean-spiritedness pervading the Howard government at the time. Continuing the collaborative tradition, in 2013 Jagath Dheerasekara, with backing from Beyond Nuclear Initiative and Amnesty International, worked with the Manuwangku (Northern Territory) traditional owners on an exhibition in an attempt to prevent the dumping of nuclear waste on traditional lands (Manuwangku *et al.* 2013). Throughout this period there have been occasions when Indigenous and non-Indigenous photographers work together to support activist groups, such as the recent The Fire Burns On: 12 Months of Life at the Redfern Tent Embassy, through the Eyes of a Diverse Group of Artists (The Rocks Discovery Museum exhibition, May–June 2015). With the exception of Proof, however, such exhibitions remain under the radar of mainstream curators and art institutions. Like Tent Embassy, the majority are billed as community activities, though that is not to deny their photographic and political polish.

10 Proof toured eight major venues around the country, as well as the Kluge Rhue Aboriginal Art Museum at the University of Virginia USA (2006), before concluding its tour at the Museum of Sydney in 2008.

Invisibility

At the time of the NADOC'86 exhibition Geoffrey Batchen interviewed Tracey Moffatt for *Photofile* magazine. She wryly commented on the state of the discourse in Australia, which she found 'overly cautious' and frankly 'annoying' (Batchen and Moffatt 1986:26). Moffatt seemed to be referring to a proclivity towards description rather than critical analysis in writings on Indigenous photography, but we would argue that her observation was prescient in relation to ongoing curatorial and historical critiques of the 1980s. To this day, many curatorial and historical surveys of the period appear overly cautious in

acknowledging non-Indigenous photographers, lest it be inferred that to do so might somehow diminish the acknowledged achievements of the Indigenous photographers. For instance, in her book *Photography and Australia*, Helen Ennis, a leading curator and academic who is more mindful than most of the impact of Indigenous-settler issues on Australian culture and photography, only credits Aboriginal photographers as developing 'new representational codes based on an engagement with Aboriginal people as individuals in control of their own lives' (Ennis 2007:41); selected non-Indigenous practitioners in the field are mentioned only in a footnote. Another example is Jonathan Jones' 2011 essay 'Picturing self-determination: the use of photography by Australian Indigenous artists'. Jones, a renowned Indigenous installation artist whose work with light usually involves neon tubes rather than cameras, proposes that it is Indigenous photographers who can best capture 'the relaxed and comfortable subject' (Jones 2011:206). This eclipsing of history in favour of Aboriginal-only empathetic representations of Indigenous communities and issues has remained the pattern in most writings. We would argue that these kinds of arguments would be strengthened by a more subtle comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous photographs in public collections. These stories are deserving of more attention lest, in the words of Edwards and Mead (2013:20), they become 'another form of disavowal and aphasia'.

In the 1970s and 80s Indigenous people took on the political and cultural education of white society. There were settler individuals eager to redress the ignorance that underpinned lingering concepts of *terra nullius* (empty land) and to respond to the challenges put by poet Kevin Gilbert to 'take up your responsibility… [have] the courage … to march. To stand against a wrong law, or no law. To commit yourself financially…' (Coombs *et al.* 1979:3). Although various scholars have invoked the concept of incommensurability between 'Indigenous ways of being in the land … [and settlers' claims] for possession of the land' (Haggis 2004:54, referencing Moreton-Robinson), there have been non-Indigenous supporters of land-rights claims who sought to breach this chasm by supporting Indigenous claimants when possible — through listening, through speaking up for Indigenous rights within their own circles, through advocacy; and through photography. As we have seen, artists in their hundreds donated works as fundraisers for land-rights groups through agencies such as Apmira — as they do to this day for annual fundraisers for Aboriginal-run galleries such as Boomalli in Sydney. It could be argued that photographers were in a privileged position amongst artists because of their ability to provide visual evidence of political struggles, pride and achievements. Aboriginal activists recognized those committed photographers searching for ways to communicate, support and advocate the ideals of their struggles through picture making, and brought them on board.

But the 1982 exhibitions also showed that Aboriginal innovations throughout the 70s in Aboriginal dance, theatre, painting and other art forms were yet to be manifested in photography. The absence of Indigenous photographers in After the Tent Embassy did not pass unnoticed. Some white photographers had begun working closely with young black photographers, some of whom were also enrolled in photography classes and art schools. A few quick stories, all interconnected, demonstrate this point. Various photographers strategized to ensure the transfer of skills. In 1982/3 Gemes recalls securing support via AAB Chairman, Chicka Dixon, to run a seminal Koori Photographers Workshop,

and asked the more experienced teacher, Bruce Hart, to run it at the University of Sydney's Tin Sheds;[11] A significant result of activities such as these was the inclusion of two Indigenous photographers, Ian Craigie and Michael Riley, in Koori Art '84 (Johnson and Johnson 1984). Another instance of cross-cultural collaboration was when photographer/video artist, Geoff Weary, also at the Tin Sheds, received funding from the Australia Council's Art and Working Life program for an oral-history and photo-archival research project focused on 'Aboriginal and Industrial' presence since the 1930s in the nearby Redfern area (Pearse 1984; Rogers 1985; Tin Sheds 1985). A young Tracey Moffatt was hired as a researcher, successfully applied to the AAB for funds (Australia Council 1985) and helped put the findings into an exhibition that toured several locations. Our final story of collaboration, and the one that rightfully gets much historical credit, is of when Moffatt convinced gallery owner Ace Bourke in 1986 that an all-Aboriginal photo exhibition was feasible: thus, NADOC'86. Cross-cultural relationships such as these were part of the creative scene in Sydney — and perhaps elsewhere, though the evidence nationally is not yet clear.

Cross-cultural stories of these kinds, each unique, and based not on power relationships but on friendship, solidarity and the desire to understand another complex view, have been largely edited out of the photo histories and curated exhibitions. The result is a hiatus in the historical narrative. Evidence for this can be seen in the touring exhibition Making Change (2012 Beijing, 2013 Sydney), curated by Felicity Fenner and Brenda L Croft (University of New South Wales) and Kon Gouriotis (Australian Centre for Photography) in Sydney. Making Change looked back over four decades to the Whitlam years, when Australia opened new diplomatic relations with China, renewed support for Indigenous Australians and offered unprecedented support for all the arts, including photography (Fitzgerald 2012). Apart from Merv Bishop's *Prime Minister Gough Whitlam Pours Soil into Hand of Traditional Landowner Vincent Lingiari, Northern Territory* (1975), the other images, all by outstanding Indigenous photographers and digital-media artists, were strangely disconnected from the purported exhibition thematic of honouring Whitlam and understanding his legacy. Non-Indigenous photographers, to whose images we turn when trying to understand the transformations in Australian art and culture during the Whitlam years, were not included, with the result that the narrative seemed strangely anomalous and the exhibition as a whole carried the inadvertent proposition of the inherent separation of cultures. A not dissimilar anomaly could be seen in the 2015 exhibition Photography and Australia, which, according to the curator, was 'structured around two major ideas or subjects: people and land (or country)' (Annear 2015:11). The representation of Aborigines by commercial and scientific photographers of the past and by Indigenous photographers of the present constituted an important strand throughout the exhibition. Yet it displayed no photographs from the land-rights struggles of the 1970s and early 80s, nor is there any reference to the photographers who were there. A rare voice in the literature acknowledging this period, it seems, is Jane Lydon's recognition that some non-Indigenous photographers — she especially notes Gemes, Rhodes and Tweedie

11 Gemes was responding to requests from Tiga Bayles from Koori Radio in Redfern and the politically and culturally active Watson and Cragie families, all of whom requested a Koorie photography workshop near Redfern. Versions of this period at the Tin Sheds differ, although all agree that Michael Riley followed Hart when he moved to Sydney College of the Arts in 1984.

— were 'driven by an intense desire to counter degrading historical imagery' and, in the process, 'helped shift emphasis from the image's content to the relationship between photographer and subject' (Lydon 2012:236—41).[12]

Why the diffidence in giving recognition to land-rights photography of the seventies and early eighties? One answer might be 'shame'. By 1982, not only were white Australians far more aware than ever before of the arguments for land rights, but the entire arts industry had been transformed, not least by the establishment of the Indigenous-run Aboriginal Arts Board. Between 1972 and 1982 the nation changed socially and artistically, and equity for Indigenous people was very much on the agenda. Another answer might be 'seduction': NADOC'86 captured the imagination of the art industry — its dealers, critics and curators. Whether photojournalism (such as Bishop's image of Whitlam and Lingiari), images of family and friends (Brenda L. Croft), poetic explorations of the land (Riley and others), constructed stories (Tracey Moffatt) — or the heady mixes of history and invention that were yet to emerge in the work of Brook Andrew, Christian Thompson, Genevieve Grieves, Michael Cook and many others — any and all the approaches to Indigenous image-making were henceforth firmly positioned as art. The 1982 elisions between documentary and anthropological photography were gone. Could it be that these twin sentiments of shame and seduction lurk somewhere behind the systemic omissions?

Or could it be argued that today's reluctance in dealing with these images — of land rights, certainly, but also of long-established relationships that reached deep within the sphere of the personal — more broadly reflects a general discomfort with the period. Frances Peters-Little has used the word 'prickly' to describe perceptions of 'Aboriginal public imagery, such as activism' (Peters-Little 2003:14). Is it remotely possible that theoretically astute curators and historians, aware of whiteness theory, detect evidence of it in the photo archives, including those by the contemporary photographers in After the Tent Embassy? Whiteness, it is claimed 'is constitutive of the epistemology of the West; it is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse', and only through careful analysis can we understand 'the silence, normativity and invisibility of whiteness and its power within the production of knowledge and representation' (Moreton-Robinson 2004:75). Another way of putting it is: the 'writer-knower as subject is racially invisible, while the Aboriginal as object is visible' (Moreton-Robinson 2004:81). The problem is that evidence contradicts the theory. Of course it is always possible for *any* photographer to take refuge behind the camera and assume invisibility. It is also possible to frame the subject to suggest a wide gamut of positive or negative attributes. But none of this makes sense when looking at the works produced by the contemporary After the Tent Embassy photographers, all of whom were engaged by the communities to help spread the word that reform was overdue. Nor does whiteness theory work as an explanation of what we referred to above as systemic omissions: some authors have been black, some white, some curatorial teams black or white, or both. Instead, we would argue, images generated by the photographers in After the Tent Embassy demonstrate a common purpose, a shared vision, with the Indigenous people. Whatever the mistakes of earlier generations, in the seventies to mid eighties (and beyond), the making and dissemination

12 For the record, De Lorenzo was probably the first to look critically at this material — see De Lorenzo 1991, 1993. See also an unpublished thesis by Charlene Ogilvie (2007).

of images relating to self-determination, land rights, connections to land and community and new forms of cultural expression all reflected a consensual project between photographers and communities. Indeed, it is worth recalling that in 1993 when Langton published her famous essay on Indigenous representation in the media, she proposed a definition of Aboriginality that was essentially inter-personal, relational and driven by a desire for mutuality. '"Aboriginality"', Langton (1993:81) argued, 'is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, imagination, representation and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create "Aboriginalities".' This generous and astute insight fully resonates with the imagery in After the Tent Embassy. Today, however, it is rare to find this sentiment expressed in academic and curatorial literature on photography relating to the Aboriginal movement of the 1970s and 80s. It is time to reinsert into the discourse Langton's idea of an 'intercultural dialogue', a shared striving for Aboriginality — in this instance by both Aborigines and photographers desiring justice — that so informed the period under discussion.

The cross-cultural interdependency that had evolved over the years changed once there was a critical mass of trained black photographers. This was a trend understood and well received by all. In any case, there was no going back to a moment of grass-roots activism that was becoming passé. Sutton has pinpointed a conference in the far north Queensland town of Cairns in May 1991 as the moment when 'the old rights-based progressivism' in Queensland Indigenous political thinking was eclipsed by new leaders with a 'grasp of the complex pragmatics of governance' (Sutton 2008:147). In Sutton's estimation, May 1991 marks the moment when the compelling strategies of Marcia Langton, Noel Pearson and others changed forever the way Indigenous politics was enacted. The counterpart in the photographic representation of Indigenous rights activism could be said to be September 1986. National drives for social justice shared by the white photographers and black communities had shown it was possible to undermine 'the deadweight legacy of ethnographic documents and negative media stereotypes' (Newton 2006:48). It was not that the challenges to a long and troubled history of Indigenous representation could then cease, but that after September 1986 Indigenous photographers added into the mix personal and aesthetic investigations that resonated with considerable opportunities provided by the art world. Transformations in terms of Indigenous access to photographic know-how may have been slow to get underway in the 1970s, but once change started it was decisive. Today, the immense diversity of robust work produced by Indigenous photographers reflects the benefits of art-school training, grants and sympathetic curators, all of which were active from the mid 1980s.

We have drawn attention to a current lacuna in photo discourse so that elements of the bigger narrative are not forgotten. The standpoint history of activism, inadvertently evident in the work of activist photographers of the 1970s and 80s who welcomed Aboriginal people as their teachers, is still in evidence today. These cross-cultural modalities in photography warrant a significant place in Australian photographic history. Informed by this more complete history, future curators and historians can better explore a more complex portrayal of the continuities within indigeneity and photography.

The new photography of the 70s and 80s that encapsulated cross-cultural knowledge is in the major collections but has been ignored by some curators and writers.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the peer reviewers whose comments have enriched the paper.

All images are by Juno Gemes, unless otherwise indicated. Please be aware that some of these photographs are of people who have passed away.

Juno Gemes copyright courtesy: Juno Gemes Archive; Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London; Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane; Josef Lebovic Gallery, Sydney.

References

Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB). Press Statement 83, 3 May 1973, Prime Ministers' Transcripts website: pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/preview.php?did=2908 (accessed 10 January 2015).

AIAS/Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. 1983. After the Tent Embassy: Aboriginal history since 1972 in b&w photographs. *Art Network* 9:30–1.

Aird, M. (ed) 1993. *Portraits of our Elders*. South Brisbane: Queensland Museum.

Alexander, G. and Gemes, J. 1982. Land (essay) and artist's statement. In *We Want No More*. Sydney: Hogarth Galleries and Apmira. nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn6617276.

Annear, J. 2015. *The Photograph and Australia*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Anon, 1982. Apmira. *Art Network* 7: 59–60.

Apmira, 1982. 'After the tent embassy': an exhibition mock up of photographs. State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 9593.

Apmira archives: trove.nla.gov.au/work/32065177?selectedversion=NBD44320493.

Australia Council. 1985. *Annual Report*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Batchen, G. and Moffat, T. 1986. NADOC '86 exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander photographers. *Photofile* 4:24–2.

Bennie, A. 2003. Charting the moves for justice. *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 July):12.

Berndt, R.M. and Berndt, C.H. 1957. *The Art of Arnhem Land: An Exhibition of Australian Aboriginal Art. Arnhem Land Paintings on Bark and Carved Human Figures.* Arranged by the Anthropology Section of the University of Western Australia and the Western Australian Museum. Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 24 December 1957 – 31 January 1958.

Bishop, M. 1994. Looking back on thirty years. In A. Dewdney and S. Phillips (eds) *Racism, Representation and Photograph*. Sydney: Inner City Education Centre.

Bojic, Z. 2003. Political images. *Canberra Times* (23 August):19.

Capa, C. 1972. *The Concerned Photographer 2: the photographs of Marc Riboud, Roman Vishniac, Bruce Davidson, Gordon Parks, Ernst Haas, Hiroshi Hamaya, Donald McCullin, W. Eugene Smith* (ed.) C. Capa. New York: Grossman Publishers in collaboration with The International Fund for Concerned Photography, Inc.

Coombs, H.C., Keane, M., O'Shane, P., Williams, T., Thomas, T., Miller, M., Gilbert, K., Lowe, D., Albert, S., and Dugong, L. 1979. Printed transcripts of talks from Aboriginal Land Rights Teach-In, Sydney University, City Road, Merewether Building, 17–18 March.

Croft, B.L. (ed.) 2006. *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia.

——— 2012. Changing times, timing changes. In M. Fitzgerald (ed.) *Making Change*. Paddington (Sydney): Australian Centre for Photography.

Davies, G. 2012. 'Taking to the streets of Brisbane', *Independent Australia* (7 October): independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/taking-to-the-streets-of-brisbane,4572.

De Lorenzo, C. 1991. The imaging of Aborigines: commitment to land rights, *History of Photography* 15 (3):228–35.

——— 1993. Ethnophotography: Photographic images of Aboriginal Australians. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sydney.

Edwards. E. and Mead M. 2013. Absent histories and absent images: photographs, museums and the colonial past. *Museum and Society* 11(1):19—38.

Ennis, H. 2007. *Photography and Australia*. London, Reaktion Books.

Fitzgerald, M. (ed.) 2012. *Making Change*. Paddington, N.S.W.: Australian Centre for Photography.

Foley, G., Schaap, A. and Howell, E. (eds.) 2013. *The Aboriginal Tent Embassy: Sovereignty, Black Power, Land Rights and the State.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Gellatly, K. 2000. Is there an Aboriginal photography? In S. Kleinert *&* M. Neale (eds) *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Gemes, J. 2003. *Proof: Portraits from the Movement 1978—2003*. Canberra: National Portrait Gallery.

Gemes, J. 2003. The Political and the Personal Process in Portraiture: Juno Gemes in Conversation — National Portrait Gallery, August 2003. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*. 2:85—92.

Gilbert, K. 1988. *Inside Black Australia*. Canberra: Treaty '88.

Haggis, J. 2004. Thoughts on a politics of whiteness in a (never quite post) colonial country: abolitionism, essentialism and incommensurability. In A. Moreton-Robinson (ed.) *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Harding, S. (ed.) 2004. *The Feminist Standpoint Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Hinderaker, M. 1982. Aboriginal life: three very different views in photography. *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 November):8.

Howell, A. 1986. Tired of the clichés, Aborigines focus on themselves. *Sydney Morning Herald* (6 September):4.

Johnson T. and Johnson, V. 1984. *Koori Art '84*. Surry Hills: Artspace.

Jones, J. 2011. Picturing self-determination: the use of photography by Australian Indigenous artists. In J. Anderson (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Art*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Kasher, S. 1996. *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954—68*. New York: Abbeville Press.

King, A. (dir.) 1982. *The Whole World is Watching*. *c.*24 minutes. vimeo.com/99423950

Langton, M. (with W. Stacey and N. Perroux) 1983. *After the Tent Embassy: Images of Aboriginal History in Black and White Photographs.* Sydney: Valadon Publishing.

Langton, M. 1993. *Well, I Heard It on the Radio and I Saw It on the Television... An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things.* North Sydney: Australian Film Commission.

Lebovic, J. 1984. *Images of the Australian Aboriginal People as Seen by Europeans.* Paddington: Josef Lebovic Gallery.

Lee, G. 2000. Picturing: Aboriginal social and solitical [*sic*] photography. *Artlink* 20:45—9.

Lydon, J. 2005. *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

——— 2012. *The Flash of Recognition.* Sydney: New South.

Maloon, T. 1982. Artists support land rights. *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 November):9.

Macdonald, G. 2003. Photos in Wiradjuri biscuit tins: negotiating relatedness and validating colonial histories. *Oceania* 73(4):225—42.

Manuwangku traditional owners, Beyond Nuclear Initiative, Amnesty International and J. Dheerasekara 2013. *Manuwangku: Under a Nuclear Cloud.* Canberra: Manning Clark House.

Mendelssohn, J. 2013. 40 years on: how Gough Whitlam gave Indigenous art a boost. *The Conversation* (6 November): theconversation.com/40-years-on-how-gough-whitlam-gave-indigenous-art-a-boost-19749.

Moreton-Robinson, A. 2004. Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation. In A. Moreton-Robinson (ed.) *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

——— 2013. Towards an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory. *Australian Feminist Studies* 28(78):331–47.

Murphy, B. 1981. *Australian Perspecta 1981: A Biennial Survey of Contemporary Australian Art.* Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Nakata, M. 2007. *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines.* Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Ogilvie, C.S. 2007. The Aboriginal Movement and Australian Photography. Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University.

Newton, G. 2006. The elders: Indigenous photography in Australia. In B.L. Croft (ed.) *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia.

Pearse, W. 1984. Art & Working Life. *Photofile* (Spring): 1 and 7.

Peters-Little, F. 2003. Actions on film … so much more than words. In J. Gemes (ed.) *Proof: Portraits from The Movement 1978–2003*. Canberra: National Portrait Gallery, and Sydney: Macquarie University Art Gallery (with support from AIATSIS).

Raffel, S and Watson, C. 1986. *Urban Koories: Workshop Arts Centre, 23 May – 12 July, 1986*. Willoughby: The Centre.

Riley, M. 2003. Michael Riley interview with Hetti Perkins. In H. Perkins & J. Jones (eds.) *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Rogers, C. 1985. Pictures for cities. *Photofile* 3 (Winter): 24–5.

Sutton, P. 2008. After consensus. *Griffith Review* 21:138–52.

Tin Sheds 1985. Pictures for Cities project – a visual and social history of South Sydney. *Australian Left Review* 92:24–5: ro.uow.edu.au/alr/vol1/iss92.

Tweedie, P. 1982. The Commonwealth Games: a showpiece for what? *Identity* 4(7):15–21.

Anthropology & Photography

is a new open-access RAI publication series edited by the RAI Photography Committee. Emerging from the international conference of the same name organized by the RAI at the British Museum in 2014, the series will highlight and make available to the widest possible audience the best new work in the field.

Forthcoming Titles

'Look Away from Me!': On the Material Meanings of Images in a Digital Landscape by Paolo Favero

Culture, Memory and Community through Photographs: Developing an Inuit-based Research Methodology by Carol Payne

Alfred Maudslay's Causality Dilemma: Archaeology, Photography and the influence of Nineteenth-Century Travel Literature by Duncan Shields

'Pierre Verger, A Cigarra, and the Construction of Candomblé's African 'Purity' by Heather Shirey

Visual Economies and Digital Materialities of Koorie Kinship and Community by Sabra Thorner

Reflecting (Upon) 'Truth' Online in Iranian Popular Digital Photography by Shireen Walton

ISSN 2397-1754

ISBN 978-0-900632-45-7