

# Visual knowledge: Spencer and Gillen's use of photography in *The native tribes of Central Australia*

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**Abstract:** The native tribes of Central Australia, published in 1899, was by far and away the best photographically illustrated ethnography up to that time. It has been suggested that Spencer and Gillen relied on photography because of the practical difficulty they had in communicating with the Arrernte and in understanding what was going on. Here it is argued that the involvement with photography arose out of the intersection of the limits that face verbal communication when in the presence of complex performance, and the significance of visual information within the emerging natural-science fieldwork orientation. However, it seems that Spencer and Gillen's intellectual understandings of Arrernte life and culture were challenged by the photographs, leading them to deny aspects of the evidence the photographs provided.

I have printed a set of the Echunpa [perentie] pictures for Sambo and have had a neat shallow tin case made to hold them and they are to be taken and deposited with the Churinga in the Ernatulinga [storehouse cave] shortly. Sam was delighted and so was your Okilya [elder brother], the King. (Gillen in Mulvaney et al. 1997:157)

Gillen provides no further information on this fascinating event and so one is left to speculate about the surrounding circumstances and motivations. Although it is unknown whether Sambo requested the ceremonial photographs spontaneously or took up an offer of the prints, it would seem likely that it was his idea to place the photographs in the churinga storehouse.<sup>1</sup> Gillen and Spencer took a great many ceremonial photographs, and clearly showed them to the Aboriginal men from time to time (below), but there is no evidence that this lodging of prints in the storehouses was a common practice. It might also be reasonably assumed that it was Gillen's idea to make a tin box for the photographs since it was integral to both his and Spencer's work that the photographs were of great archival value.<sup>2</sup> Speculation also has to fill the gap about motivation. Gillen is clear that both Sambo and his father, the King, were pleased about the whole idea.<sup>3</sup> The acceptance of the box and the lodging of the images in the storehouse are clear evidence that the photographs were highly valued and one can only assume that that was because they were seen to be related directly to the events/people that they depicted.

Because the photographs printed for Sambo recorded restricted information in an entirely comprehensible form, they had to be restricted in the same way as the events and objects shown in them. This rational view is one that is shared by many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons to the present (e.g. Kimber 1998:50–1).<sup>4</sup> They are not concerned about taking the simulacra for the real but recognise, as WT Mitchell (1994:284) has said, that one connotation of the photograph is that it is pure denotation

and that is simply what it means to recognise a photograph as a photograph. But what about Spencer and Gillen: what did photography mean to them?

*The native tribes of Central Australia* (1899, hereinafter *The native tribes*) is a lavishly illustrated work, and it is clear both from the volume of Gillen's letters to Spencer (Mulvaney et al. 1997), where photography is by far the biggest subject entry in the index other than for the key persons, and from Mulvaney and Calaby's (1985) biography of Spencer that it was a powerful interest. Why was this? At least two views have been expressed. Alison Griffiths (1997:29) has suggested that the reason for the emphasis on photography, particularly of the Engwura ceremony, was in response to the practical difficulties they had in communicating with the Arrernte and in understanding what was going on. She specifically refers to the debate on the extent to which Gillen had command of the Arrernte language and the over-reliance on young Aboriginal men as translators (Mulvaney & Calaby 1985:174). Others have seen the ethnographic emphasis on photography in this period as part of the colonial gaze that, in the case of Aboriginal peoples, was dedicated to demonstrating their place in the evolutionary hierarchy (e.g. Maxwell 1999:142; Willis 1988:205).

In this paper I argue that these, and other views (e.g. Wolfe 1999) on Spencer and Gillen's involvement with photography, are limiting half-truths that fail to engage photography on its own terms and are anachronistic in their understanding of Spencer and Gillen, and indeed of other ethnographers of the period.<sup>5</sup>

## Involvement with photography

Spencer and Gillen were both interested in photography, quite independently of their collaboration. Mulvaney and Calaby (1985:165) recorded that Gillen was already a keen photographer before meeting Spencer but that, following their meeting, he increased the number of ethnographic subjects and paid greater attention to the technical aspects of camera use and developing. The level of commitment is suggested by the fact that, in April 1896, Gillen had half a ton of photographic materials arriving in Alice Springs by camel (Mulvaney et al. 1997:114).

Spencer himself had a commitment to photography before he came to Australia, having taken photographs during a holiday in the Alps in 1884 (Mulvaney & Calaby 1985:50). His interest in photography went along with a strong visual imagination that made him

an accomplished draughtsman and amateur sketcher and even led him to attend art school for a while when in Manchester (Mulvaney & Calaby 1985:28). He apparently used visual material in both his university and public lectures to good effect (1985:28) and illustrated many of his publications with his own zoological drawings (1985:29). In 1894 he joined the Horn Expedition to Central Australia, not just as the expedition biologist but also as the photographer (1985:118), and in editing the expedition report not only wrote half the text himself but was the source of most of the photographs, and supplied 23 line illustrations and eight pages of colour drawings (1985:117).

From Gillen's correspondence it is clear that the two men constantly exchanged prints of photographs they had taken. As early as September 1894, Gillen wrote (Mulvaney et al. 1997:52):<sup>6</sup>

I am sending you a few Prints this mail, most of which you and I developed...Have not yet had time to try silver printing but hope to have some results to send you next mail. Have taken a number of Corroboree pictures since you left and shall get some more in a few days. If I am successful in printing you shall have a copy of anything I consider sufficiently interesting. If there is any picture that you would specially like to have you can let me know.

In November 1894 he sent Spencer 34 plates, that is negatives, which he described as 'all the best I have on hand' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:58), and later wrote to Spencer: 'Make whatever use you like of the plates and return them thro Winnecke<sup>7</sup> when you have finished with them' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:61). He also allowed Stirling to use his photographs, as selected by Spencer (Mulvaney et al. 1997:81).

In return, Spencer sent copies of his photographs to Gillen (Mulvaney et al. 1997:67, also 70, 71, 124, 151, 188, 258).<sup>8</sup> Gillen was much struck by the time Spencer put into printing and toning the photographs and commented that his Glen of Palms picture was 'the most beautiful photograph I have ever seen' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:124). This makes it clear, as Mulvaney comments, that precise attribution of particular images to one or other of the men has to be done with care (Mulvaney et al. 1997:239). Indeed, in October 1895 Gillen wrote to Spencer (1997:82, also 239) saying:

The Negatives in your possession are not to be used...[by Stirling for making lantern slides] until after publication...Of course if you want slides for yourself take them by all means, I look upon these negatives as our joint

property—You can tell Stirling, if you like, that we are joint owners, you possess your interest by right virtue, or in consideration, of having supplied me with an instantaneous lens and shutter.

By comparing published images with unpublished images and original negatives, and drawing on old and new archival sources, Philip Jones (2005) has gone some considerable way to disentangling the work of these men, and he thinks that more can be done; he demonstrates that the pictorial contribution to *The native tribes* was about 50-50. For the purposes of this paper, however, unless otherwise specified, the attitudes of Spencer and Gillen to photography will be taken to be similar and no attempt will be made to distinguish between them.<sup>9</sup>

### Use of the photographs

Two broad public uses were made of the photographs taken up to the time of the publication of the 1899 volume. They were used in publications such as newspapers and articles and some of them were made into lantern slides.

It was Spencer who made the greater use of lantern slides for lectures, giving no less than 60 public lectures with them from the time of the Horn Expedition onwards (Mulvaney & Calaby 1985:181). Gillen also gave a smaller number of public lectures using them, but with texts prepared for him by Spencer (Mulvaney et al. 1997:16, 156). Gillen made another, more interesting, use of his slides. In November 1895 he wrote to Spencer indicating that he was acquiring the 'machine' for making them (1997:86), and within a few weeks of the machine arriving he was using it to prepare slides for a show specifically for Aboriginal viewing. In his letter of 20 December 1895, Gillen (1997:91) wrote:

My lantern is a great success, we had an exhibition in the Courtyard [of the Telegraph Station] one night—attended by an enthusiastic audience of Niggers<sup>10</sup> whose respect for my magic powers have been thereby greatly enhanced.

This must have been his first showing but not his only one, for in a letter dated 5 June 1896 he states: 'My lantern entertainments are greatly appreciated by the Niggers...' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:125).

These reports are of particular interest because they provide clear evidence that, even at this period, some Aborigines had already developed a photographic literacy. Other evidence comes from comments

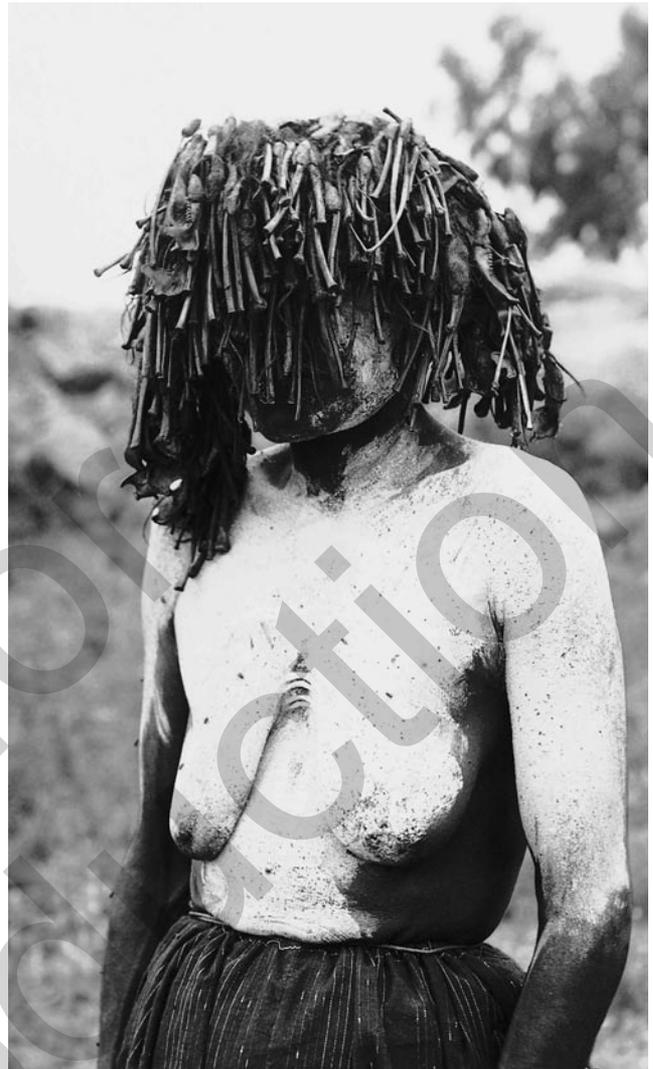


Figure 1  
Arnernte widow covered with pipe clay and wearing a *tyemurrelye* to scare the spirit of her husband away from the camp and into his grave. This striking picture provides knowledge beyond the grasp of words. The headdress covering the widow's face and the white paint mark the symbolic erasure of the woman's personal identity at a key moment in the mourning process. Courtesy of Museum Victoria (BS610)

in Gillen's letters to Spencer, in one of which he says he has had Spencer's picture of the Corroboree heads framed and that 'the Niggers were delighted with them' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:124), in another (1997:70) that 'Your picture of the Cutting Operation (mock) at Tempe has greatly interested my niggers and I have arranged to take a series of pictures giving different stages of the ceremony etc shortly', and then there is the opening account of Sambo placing the images in the churinga storehouse. The interest arises because

it has been reported that some people who have not seen photographs before, and who know nothing of the camera, find it hard to make sense of black-and-white images at first, especially when the subject matter requires the longer edge of the photograph to be held vertically.<sup>11</sup> Just how these Arrernte had acquired this competence, or how long it took them to acquire it, cannot be answered from the material available, but it is clear that it could not have been all that long.

The use of the published photographs in *The native tribes* stands out from contemporary use in two ways: first, there is the sheer quantity of images (Table 1) and, second, there is their relationship to the text.

There are 119 photographs in the text, a number that far exceeded any other ethnography of the time, which Gillen felt 'must sell' the book (Mulvaney et al. 1997:186). Of these, 71 are of ritual performances or directly related to them. All the photographs are embedded in or near to the relevant text,<sup>12</sup> placed in the middle of the page, and 82% on the right-hand side so that they catch the reader's eye as the page is turned. The ceremonial images are not merely illustrative, with only a loose connection to the text, but are actually part of the ethnographic documentation of the events being described. Indeed, without them the continuous dense description of ceremonial acts would be much less easy to digest and conceive.

Table 1 Photographs in *The native tribes of Central Australia*, classified by content

| Classification               | Number |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Ceremonial                   | 71     |
| Artefacts                    | 16     |
| Portraits (1–2 people)       | 11     |
| Site                         | 7      |
| Activity                     | 4      |
| Group with housing structure | 2      |
| Healer                       | 2      |
| Mortuary                     | 2      |
| Witchcraft                   | 2      |
| Portrait (group)             | 1      |
| Rock painting                | 1      |
| Total                        | 119    |

## Photographic practice

Spencer and Gillen's photographic practice marked a major break with that of the limited number of their contemporaries who were taking photographs of Aborigines in the last decade of the nineteenth century and that had public circulation at that time. Broadly

speaking, three categories of contemporary photographer can be distinguished:<sup>13</sup> professional commercial photographers such as Nicholas Caire, Charles Kerry, Henry King, JW Lindt and Charles Walter; explorers/travellers such as those on the Elder Expedition, the Horn Expedition and the South Australian North-West Expedition (Basedow 1914); and those surprisingly few people with an ethnographic orientation who were interested in photography, such as Paul Foelsche and Walter Roth. The majority of the photographs taken at that time, other than by the explorers/travellers, were studio photographs although, increasingly, outdoor photographs of Aborigines were being taken from 1889 onwards because of developments in technology.

Spencer and Gillen's photographic corpus in *The native tribes* stands out from the work of these others for a range of reasons. The photographic and technical quality of their field photographs was greatly superior to those of all but the professional photographers; a much higher proportion of their photographs were un-posed;<sup>14</sup> the quantity of images produced that relate to a single language group and set of related events; and the fact that their subject matter was primarily ceremonial life. Indeed, prior to the publication of *The native tribes*, no other substantial corpus of ceremonial photographs from Australia was so accessible. Those published by Roth were small in number and not always taken by him, and none of the other photographers, either commercial or ethnographic, had a similar corpus. Only Kerry's series on the bora, held on the Lower Macquarie River in New South Wales in 1898, comes close, but it totals less than 20 photographs, and these have a stiff and stagey quality about them, reflecting, in part no doubt, the documented reluctance of the people to be photographed on the ceremonial ground (Kerry 1899).

In *The Arunta*, the 1927 update of *The native tribes*, Spencer introduced a 'Note on illustrations' (1927: xiii–xiv) in which he discussed the photographic techniques used to secure the illustrations. Some of the images were staged for the purposes of illustration, such as those dealing with the Kurdaitcha man (Spencer & Gillen 1899:482) and the Illapurinja woman (1899:487).<sup>15</sup> They were set-up and photographed by Gillen, who wrote to Spencer commenting that he 'had great difficulty in procuring the Kurdaitcha pictures and greater still in getting the Illapurinja' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:90). Elsewhere Gillen commented that he persuaded the men to go through the rain ceremony so that he 'might photograph them' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:102), and that



Figure 2

Arernte welcoming dance. Entrance of the strangers. Alice Springs, 9 May 1901. Spencer and Gillen (1912:249) wrote that the visitors, after being apparently ignored for half an hour, were invited to come to the camp. They 'formed themselves into a solid square and approached at a fairly quick run, every man with his spear aloft and all of them adopting the curious high knee action'. A picture of the 'curious high knee action' is much more informative than the verbal description, if one knows nothing of it, but more importantly the picture also informs uniquely about the tenor of the whole event. Courtesy of Museum Victoria (BS786)

on his work travels he would 'take the Camera and arrange beforehand with the Missionaries to organise some Corroborees and Ceremonies...Next May I shall go North to Attack Creek, a series of Corroborees will be organized at and photographed at Barrow and Tennants [Creek]' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:86). Likewise Spencer had staged, among others, the picture referred to above of a subincision operation at Tempe Downs during the Horn Expedition (Mulvaney et al. 1997:70) because the original operation, like many other ritual acts, took place in the dark. For such night-time events, photographs were taken during (Spencer & Gillen 1927:xiii):

...daylight rehearsals that were held at our request, so that we might photograph them...All the illustrations dealing with the Engwura represent either the decoration of the performers, the latter actually arranged in position for the ceremony, or the performance itself. The great majority of illustrations representing ceremonies of various kinds are reproductions of instantaneous photographs, often taken under difficult

conditions in regard to light and position, but, in all cases, they represent the actual scene.

The photography cannot, necessarily, be assumed to have been imposed on people. Mulvaney considered that the Arernte may have agreed to the Engwura ceremony being photographed in part because they were grateful to Gillen for having prosecuted the murderous Constable Willshire and secured his removal from the district. Gillen reported both the right to photograph a ceremony being exchanged for a payment of food, and of a request to take pictures being turned down. In his letter of 7 November 1895, Gillen (Mulvaney et al. 1997:89) wrote that:

[a] deputation of greasy Udnirringeeta brethren just arrived, inform me that they are prepared to allow me to photograph a Corroboree this afternoon in return for a blow out of flour, tea and sugar. I have accepted their terms, generously adding sundry half sticks of tobacco if their get up be satisfactory.

What effect such a request would have had on the preparation is hard to say, but it seems unlikely that

it would have had much impact if the ceremony were part of something they were doing for themselves and part of their ongoing religious life. This makes Spencer's reference to 'rehearsals' problematic. However, there is no indication that they re-performed exactly the same increase rites in the evening, although they may have done so with the male initiation rites. Radical change would have probably created considerable political problems, if present-day experience is anything to go by. On the other hand, one can presume that Gillen would not have made the request if he had not thought that people had skimped in the past.

The occasion on which Gillen was turned down is reported in the same letter (Mulvaney et al. 1997: 89–90):

Your parcel of tobacco was duly conveyed to old Poll whom it has utterly demoralised. She bids me Yabba, 'Thank you long Puff-fessa, me big fellow look out longa rat and all about lizard by and bye long cold weather.' I hoped to send you a photo of her au naturel by this mail but when, after handing her your tobacco, I approached her on the subject with exceeding delicacy, she gave me a look which I shall never forget and scathingly remarked, 'You all same Euro, you canta shame! You no big fellow master! You piccaninny master'. The emphasis on the piccaninny was something to remember for ones lifetime. Since then she reverted to the subject to tell me that, 'That one big fellow master Puff fessa no yabba like it that him no poto-grafum, poto-grafum, poto-grafum lubra all day. Very good long bushie lubra, no good longa station lubra' and in a final burst of indignation she wound up saying, 'No good no good poto-grafum lubra cock!'.<sup>16</sup>

Spencer and Gillen say little about the aesthetic aspects of their photographic practice. The spatial and organisational aspects of this could be derived from a detailed analysis of the image composition, which is not attempted here, but it is evident from even a casual perusal of the book that there is nothing particularly distinctive about the aesthetic aspects. Because the camera was being used within a scientific framework, pictures of many of the 'stationary' dances in which the performer is kneeling are taken holding the camera at a low angle (e.g. 1899:figures 66, 70, 71, 74, 83, 103, 104), which is somewhat unusual as it means getting down on the ground, something that many field photographers were not prepared to do. In keeping with an interest in social context, approximately 60% of the photographs are medium shots and usually include others than the performers. Jones

(2005:14) has suggested that there is a slight difference in the photographic practice of the two men, with Spencer taking wider and more panoramic views of ceremonies, and concentrating on composed portraits of individual ceremonial performers, while Gillen took less formal images.

It is evident that both of the photographers were keen to exclude European materials from the photographs since none are included; yet many of their subjects would have almost certainly worn European clothing, although whether they would actually have kept it on in a ceremonial context at that time is more doubtful.<sup>17</sup> Gillen is explicit about photographing around such items, apologising for 'the tin pot in Erkita, it escaped my notice, the Negative is not a good one' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:187).<sup>18</sup> And the original photograph (874 in Museum Victoria's Spencer Collection) for the gold image impressed into the cover of *Across Australia*, of a man and a youth sitting down, has been modified to replace the two tin cans with two small circular containers beside the man, the like of which never existed among the Arrernte.

Doubtless there was both an aesthetic appreciation and influence at work in the photography: at one point Spencer comments that 'the whole scene with the decorated men in front and the group of interested natives in the background was by no means devoid of picturesqueness' (Spencer & Gillen 1899:297). Yet it is of some interest that despite colour playing quite an important part in Arrernte body decoration, no regret was expressed by Gillen in his letters at not being able to take photographs in colour.<sup>19</sup> There are several points in the book, however, where aesthetic colour judgements are made. They comment on the artistic capacity on the part of the makers of a ceremonial structure fashioned with red-and-white colouring and adorned with the red-banded black cockatoo feathers (1899:308). Elsewhere they (1899:298) wrote:

The area occupied by these bands was first of all rubbed with grease and then with powdered wad, an ore of manganese which gives, when used in this way, a peculiar pear-gray tint, which harmonises well with the chocolate-coloured skin and stands out in strong contrast to the edging of white down which everywhere margins the bands

and that (1899:318):

The dark chocolate colour of the skin, the black and red feathers, the gray bands on the body and the white and pink down, together with the light yellow sand on which the man sat, formed a striking mixture of colours

which was by no means unpleasing, and the whole decoration was extremely quaint.

## Why was photography so important?

The foregoing evidence, not to say the text of the book itself, makes it clear that the commitment to photography had little or nothing to do with the practical difficulties in communication with the Arrernte about what was going on in the Engwura ceremony. It arose out of the intersection of the limits that face verbal communication when in the presence of complex performance, and the significance of visual information within the context of the emerging natural-science fieldwork orientation.<sup>20</sup>

Until World War I, photography was seen as a generator of anthropological knowledge, particularly in respect of the study of human variation. However, it was not until the latter part of the 1880s that printing technology developed to the point where it was possible to include mechanically printed photographs in books, and it took ten years before photographic illustration became commonplace in them. The proliferation of photographs in *The native tribes of Central Australia* reflects these changed circumstances. The number of photographs in the book is emphasised by the fact that photographs largely disappeared from anthropological monographs following World War I, as has been observed by several people (e.g. de Heusch 1962; MacDougall 2006:228; Pinney 1992). The principal reason advanced for this is the emergence of structural-functionalism, with its emphasis on abstract thinking and on non-visible social relationships in social analysis (MacDougall 2006:229).

It also seems hard to sustain the argument that the purpose of the lavish use of photography was to demonstrate the people's place in the evolutionary hierarchy. While it might be argued in respect of the first 14 photographs, taken alone, this neglects the other 105 images. The book opens with an authorising image of seven old men, whom the reader is presumably meant to assume number among those who provided the information. This is followed by four photographs that emphasise the hunting and gathering culture—a family at home in a small ephemeral structure, two pictures of a man throwing a spear and another throwing a boomerang. These in turn are followed by nine photographs designed to show the physiognomy of the head. The majority of the remaining photographs are used to build up

a visual narrative chain (Pinney, following Saussure, 1992:87), giving embodiment to the carefully described complexity of the ceremonies.

## Conclusion: dealing with the evidence

While there are no great mysteries or hidden agendas behind the commitment of Spencer and Gillen to photography, there is an intriguing hint that it created an unresolved tension for them. They could not bring themselves to believe their eyes because the evidence they provided, not just to themselves but also to others, did not fit the prevailing framework for understanding otherness. In the Preface to *The northern tribes of Central Australia* (1904:xiii–xv), they commented that:

At present time the natives of Central Australia carry on their ceremonies in secrecy, without the few white men who are scattered over the country knowing, as a general rule, anything about [this] elaborate ritual...A word of warning must, however, be written in regard to this 'elaborate ritual'. To a certain extent it is without doubt elaborate, but at the same time it is eminently crude and savage in all essential points. It must be remembered that these ceremonies are performed by naked, howling savages, who have no idea of permanent abodes, no clothing, no knowledge of any implements save those fashioned out of wood, bone and stone...no belief in anything like a supreme being. Apart from the simple but often decorative nature of the design drawn on the bodies of the performers, or on the ground during the performance of ceremonies, the later are crude in the extreme...[however] It is difficult, if not impossible, to write an account of the ceremonies of these tribes without conveying the impression that they have reached a higher stage of culture than is actually the case.

Although there is no mention of the photographs it seems highly likely that they might have been thought to help create this impression in readers' minds, since the visual impact of the designs on the bodies and on the ground is acknowledged. Indeed, the use of the phrase 'designs drawn on the bodies' is misleading since it downplays the decorations which are much more than designs painted on the body. Rather, they add a three-dimensional texture to the skin, blurring its outline, as is apparent even from the photographs. When feather down is used, in place of plant down, it shimmers in the slightest breeze making it seem that the decorated person is radiating power (cf. Morphy



Figure 3

Arrernte Erkita corroboree. Alice Springs, c. 1896. This photograph shows men decorated for a public entertainment and only gives a hint of the richness of the body decoration and the complexity of headdresses used in men's restricted ceremonies. The plant or bird down in such ceremonies covers the whole torso and can completely transform the appearance of a person. Courtesy of Museum Victoria (XP9285)

1989) and transforming them into fantastic figures that are scarcely recognisable as human beings (e.g. Spencer & Gillen 1899:plate 74).

These images, it seems, along with the text, may have misled contemporary readers about the complexity and sophistication of Arrernte religion, in turn disrupting the readers' understanding of how the Arrernte related to Western civilisation and Victorian England: they were assumed to be humans in the 'chrysalis phase' of social evolution, not the advanced sophisticates documented in the images.

Howard Morphy has suggested that there is evidence that it was Sir James Frazer who thought it necessary to combat this impression, and who inserted the reference to 'howling savages', and so on. Whether he did or not, the possible existence of this impression, I would suggest, is a tribute to the power of visual knowledge. This is not a visual knowledge that subverts the text but one that, in the case of Spencer and Gillen's photographs, enriches and enlarges it, giving embodiment to the dry and dull descriptions, of unknown peoples, in faraway places, performing hard-to-imagine actions, no matter the richness of the verbal description.

Sambo and Spencer and Gillen shared a common-sense view of these photographs: they were reality transcripts. It is possible that Sambo thought they were more than this, partaking of the essence of the people in the photograph in some way. Although today most Arrernte use the term *putewe*<sup>21</sup> for a photograph, older Arrernte speakers use the words for shadow (*ntulye*) and less commonly shade (*ulye*). There is no evidence that a form meaning 'spirit' was ever used by Arrernte in relation to photographs or the process of taking them, as is common in some parts of Australia. However, there is linguistic evidence that when Arrernte speakers refer to photographs of persons, they can be treated as inalienable parts of a person; that is, as in the same way as the face, name or spirit.<sup>22</sup>

Spencer and Gillen probably did not share this view but they too had to confront the evidential qualities of the photographic transcription. That they failed to do so in terms of their commitment to natural science, preferring to try to undermine the evidence of the images, rather than modify their intellectual understandings, underlines just how difficult it is, at any period of time, to make sense of a radically different, coeval, Other.

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## NOTES

1. According to John Morton (pers. comm.), this was the storehouse at Simpson's Gap.
2. On the occasions when I have visited storehouses I have been struck by the presence of boards that have been badly damaged or all but destroyed by termites. I have also been struck by the fact that the Aboriginal persons present were not distressed by this, indeed they seemed, in every case, to be quite accepting that it could happen to very old boards. I am unclear if this is just a recent phenomenon which has resulted because of movement off the country and a consequent inability to curate the contents of remote storehouses, or whether such destruction was always the case. It does, however, give one cause to reflect on the idea of archiving and how that relates to the storehouses.
3. I thank John Morton for this information about the relationship.
4. Kimber (1998:50) has also documented the intense emotions that can be evoked by photographs of deceased people.
5. Patrick Wolfe (1999:151–62) has mounted an argument about the consequences of the emergence of field photography for the demise of the significance of 'survivals' in social evolutionary anthropology, and as posing a threat to anthropological authority, since travellers and others could equally well provide the same photographic 'scientific evidence'. Photographing the secret, he argued, protected ethnographic authority generally, and specifically that of Spencer and Gillen from their competitor, the missionary Carl Strehlow, who excluded himself from ceremonies, and whose own published photographs were ones that showed only the impact of the Lutheran civilising mission.
6. Also Mulvaney et al. (1997:56, 63, 70, 71, 86, 135, 151, 159, 174, 187, 188, 190, 213, 239).
7. Charles Winnecke was the surveyor on the Horn Expedition.

8. Sometimes it seems that these were prints from Gillen's negatives but not in this case, I think, because Spencer asked that duplicates be handed on to a third person (Mulvaney et al. 1997:67).
9. Some differences in the images taken would emerge from a detailed study.
10. In respect of the use of this word, Morphy (Mulvaney et al. 1997:48) has commented that 'there is evidence that they treated Aboriginal people with much more respect than any other Europeans in the region and that this was recognised and appreciated by the Arrernte themselves. The constant use of the word "nigger" is oppressive, even though in the context of the times it was routinely used without quite the same insulting connotations that it later acquired.'
11. In 1967 when showing footage of a ceremony filmed at Yuendumu to the men who were in the ceremony, it was evident that at least one man did not initially recognise himself in the film, although he was easily able to recognise others. Given the absence of mirrors and photographs it may not be all that surprising that some older people did not have a clear body image of themselves.
12. Curiously, however, figure numbers in the text only appear in Chapter 19 'Clothing, weapons, implements, decorative art'.
13. This is only a general and indicative division; de Lorenzo (1993) has provided a more detailed analysis of photographs of Aboriginal persons.
14. Catherine Rogers (1995:36) has overemphasised the number of images posed, perhaps unaware of the way the performances were staged.
15. Gillen commented of other photographs that they 'are excellent, and they are genuine—I developed the Waninga pictures in fear and trembling knowing that if they did not turn out well I might never have another chance' (Mulvaney et al. 1997:174).
16. Timothy Masson (n.d.) has suggested that one possibility for her refusal to disrobe may have been that she was menstruating. However, I see no reason not to be attentive to what Poll herself says: she is not a 'bushie lubra'.
17. Even in the 1970s at Yuendumu, when men were holding restricted ceremonies, many of the main participants and performers were entirely naked during particular ceremonial acts. Some wore shorts or loin-cloths, but only rarely trousers. As Spencer and Gillen moved north to Tennant Creek, in 1901, many more of their photographs include men in so called 'cock-rags', strips of cloth hanging from a belt covering the genitals. While among the Arrernte most of the belts were hair-string, by the time they were working with groups in the heart of cattle station country, most of the belts were leather.
18. Jones (2005:12–14) documented the elimination of shadows from various photographs by retouching and cropping.
19. A screen-plate colour process was patented in 1897 that Haddon intended to use in the Torres Strait but the equipment failed to arrive. The first colour photographs were taken in Australia in 1899 (Edwards 1998:107).
20. See, for example, Schwartz and Ryan (2003) in respect of geography.

21. A transcription of the Arrernte English pronunciation of 'photo'.

22. I am indebted for this information on Arrernte linguistic usage to David Wilkins, of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in the Netherlands, who responded to a call for help with a detailed, insightful and informative reply of which this is only a part. During the 1901 expedition, when at Tennant Creek on 13 September, Gillen recorded the following event in his diary (Mulvaney et al. 1997:348):

A morose old fellow, who has been ill ever since we arrived here but is now recovering and able to take part in the ceremonies, expressed it as his opinion that our object in taking photographs was to extract the heart and liver of the blackfellows. His opinion had some weight with a few of the old men and there was much discussion about it. I arrived on the scene when the discussion was at its height and seeing that something was wrong made enquiry and quickly discovered the cause. For an instant I didn't know what to do, the old men were watching me intently and on the spur of the moment I roared with laughter in which they presently joined. To laugh was, as it turned out, the very best thing I could have done, for in five minutes the air of frightened seriousness had left their faces...This, however, is the first occasion upon which I have met with the same curious superstition amongst the Central Australian Aborigines and it is not without interest.

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