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Talking heads on a Murray River mission: Phrenological lecturers and their Aboriginal receptions decoded

Abstract: In contemporary Australia, the nineteenth-century science known as phrenology, which claimed that character and intellect could be judged from head shape, often serves as a metonym for the excesses of racial science. While this legacy accounts for some of its history, phrenology also functioned as a system of personal improvement and a genre of lecture entertainment that attracted diverse practitioners and audiences. Here, a close reading of the visits of phrenological lecturers to Maloga Mission (in 1884) and neighbouring Cummeragunja Station (in 1892) explores the reported positive receptions by Aboriginal residents. While acknowledging the power imbalances of these sites and inherent biases of European sources, this article decodes reported delight by considering the visits within the context of performative mission culture. Contrary to institutional goals of segregation, many residents were in fact highly mobile and enjoyed contact with visitors from around the world. These connections fed a taste for European popular culture, a connoisseurship of performance also sharpened through expectations that residents routinely perform both classical culture and 'civilisation'. This article proposes that the mixture of science and self-improvement might also have appealed to residents, resonated with traditional belief systems, and facilitated intercultural knowledge-sharing.

Keywords: (please supply up to six keywords for your article)
Phrenology, Aboriginal, Maloga, Science, Cummeragunja, Murray

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In autumn of 1884, the travelling phrenologist JB Thomas arrived at the Maloga Mission for a two-day visit with a magic lantern and racial diagrams.[1] He stepped into a community of about 100 Aboriginal people, some of whom were members of local clans connected by a shared language, while others came from further afield – including from Central Victoria, Maitland and Sydney.[2] His visit could best be characterised as two days of exchanged performance. The residents of this Murray River mission, at the behest of the missionaries and the schoolteacher, presented their neat houses and prowess in European and Aboriginal pursuits, from spear fishing to singing of hymns. Thomas, meanwhile, reciprocated with a lantern show and a phrenological lecture accompanied by charts of the "various races and difference casts and colours of the human family".

Eight years later, another phrenologist visited this group of Aboriginal people, many of whom now lived at the nearby reservation known as Cummeragunja, home to about 130 or 140 people.[3] Demonstrating an environmentalist view of human development, John Joseph Sheridan declared that the work of the missionaries and teacher proved that the residents had the

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[1] *Riverine Herald*, 21 March 1884, 3.
[2] Daniel Matthews, *Eleventh Report of the Maloga Aboriginal Mission Station*, (1886), 33–36. Copies of the annual reports are available in MS2195, National Library of Australia (NLA). Aboriginal groups within the region today identify as Yorta Yorta or Bangerang, and the historical sources vary on which term might have been used collectively for clans in the area during the nineteenth century. Heather Bowe and Stephen Morey note that the pastoralist Edward M Curr reported the use of 'Bangerang' to refer to the Wongatban and Towroonban clans, and that he suggested that other groups might have used this term to refer to the "total group" of clans. But Bowe and Morey also cite Maloga resident and key informant Thomas Schadrach James, who grouped the local clans as 'Yotta Yotta'. 'Yorta Yorta' was the collective name used by claimants in a key native title case that played out during the late 1990s and early 2000s. See: Heather Bowe and Stephen Morey, *The Yorta Yorta (Bangerang) Language of the Murray Goulburn, Including Yabulu Yabulu* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 1999), 3–8.
[3] *Riverine Herald*, 16 June 1892, 2. The average number of people at Cummeragunja were estimated to be 140 in 1890 and 130 in 1894, with the numbers increasing during particular seasons. See*: Association for the Protection of Aborigines Annual Report for 1890* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1891), 6, and *1894* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1895), 11.

potential to advance. At the same time, though, he repeated truisms about the strengths and weaknesses of Aboriginal character and ability, and – like Thomas – drew distinctions between Aboriginal people of the south-east and other parts of the continent, as well as between 'half castes' and 'full bloods'.

The visits of Thomas and Sheridan provide evidence of the objectification of Indigenous bodies that is today commonly associated with phrenology – the science of reading character and intellect from the shape of a head.[4] Created in the late-eighteenth century and reaching broad popularity during the nineteenth century, the now-discredited science holds an emotive place in public memory and historiography as a synecdoche for the horrors of skull collecting, a history explored in detail during recent decades as part of postcolonial actions for the repatriation of Indigenous remains.[5]

Thomas and Sheridan fit within a larger category of scientists and medical men who came to study the inhabitants of Maloga and its successor mission. For example, in 1880, when the crew of a French warship passed through, a doctor scribbled his opinions of the "high degree of intelligence which is enjoyed by the blackfellow" in the visitor's book.[6] In 1938, the anthropologist Norman Tindale, together with American ethnographer Joseph Birdsell and their respective wives, visited Cummeragunja to study the residents. Collecting for the South Australian Museum, they created photographic portraits, filmed an Empire

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[4] See: Henry Reynolds, 'Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 20 (1974): 45–53; Janice Evelyn Wilson, Chapter 2, 'Signs of the Mind: Science, Psychological Knowledge and Social Hegemony in Colonial Australia' (PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 1994); Paul Turnbull, 'Phrenologists and the Construction of the Aboriginal Race, c.1790–1830', *History Compass*, 5, no. 1 (2007): 26–50; Bronwen Douglas, 'Phrenology, Polygenism, & Agency in *Oceanie*', *Science, Voyages and Encounters in Oceania, 1511–1850* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Paul Turnbull, *Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Alexandra Roginski, *The Hanged Man and the Body Thief: Finding Lives in a Museum Mystery* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2015).

[5] See: Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert and Paul Turnbull, eds. *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2002); Cressida Fforde, *Collecting the Dead* (London: Duckworth, 2004); Paul Turnbull & Michael Pickering, eds., *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

[6] Nancy Cato, *Mister Maloga* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 86.

Day parade and observed schoolchildren poring over crayon drawings.[7] Even long before Maloga's establishment, in 1867, the Italian Darwinist Enrico Giglioli excitedly purchased *cartes de visite* depicting Aboriginal people living near the towns of Echuca and Moama in what he perceived as an 'authentic' state, and drew on these for his published engravings.[8] Between them, these phrenologists, anthropologists, scientists and doctors generated a mixed and often contradictory set of conclusions that confused biological markers such as skin colour and skull shape with behaviour and social organisation.

In spite of this baggage, the reports of phrenological lectures also point to these visits as moments of nuanced interaction from which the residents derived value and pleasure, rather than as straightforward impositions. Popular phrenologists of the period – driven by the commercial need to lure customers – also offered a broader system for self improvement to the general community. And while Thomas and Sheridan relied on prevalent ideas about racial and social hierarchies, the exposure to 'real' Aboriginal people challenged their preconceptions, particularly in the case of Sheridan. Furthermore, as a highly participatory form of entertainment, popular science required audience engagement to succeed. These lectures can therefore be considered as co-productions that – like ethnographic photographs, films, life masks or other symbols of colonial knowledge-gathering – emerged from uncertain moments with mixed emotions on both sides, and which relied on Indigenous informants for their success.[9] Furthermore, for Indigenous people facing the unravelling of their worlds, the lectures became vehicles for sharing culture. None of this, of course, disregards the greater power that white scientists held in such colonial encounters, a power that often saw them excising the contribution of non-

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[7] Fiona Davis, *Australian Settler Colonialism and the Cummeragunja Aboriginal Station: Redrawing Boundaries* (Eastbourne: University of Sussex Press, 2014), 94–97.
[8] Jane Lydon, 'Photography, Authenticity and Victoria's *Aborigines Protection Act* (1886)', in *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell (eds), (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 144–145.
[9] See: Elizabeth Willis, 'Strong Stories and New Traditions: The Case of 'Etched on Bark 1854'', *History Australia*, 4, no. 1 (2007): 13.1–13.11; Shino Konishi, et al, *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives* (Canberra: ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc, 2015); Simon Schaffer, et al, *The Brokered World* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2009).

European people from the published volumes on which they built their careers in distant museums or research institutions.[10] The softer, more fluid power dynamics experienced during moments of creation later solidified into harder-edged things that reinforced colonial authority.

As with many accounts from the colonial period, the perspectives of Aboriginal participants during these encounters can only be accessed by an ethnographic approach that interprets small gestures and exchanges within broader patterns of symbolic meaning, and which views them against the backdrop of other mission events.[11] Here, my analysis is buttressed by evidence of the fluency of the Maloga and Cummeragunja communities in European cultural forms, the result of their high mobility to and from and through these sites. Although missions were part of a larger genealogy of protection that sought to 'settle' Aborigines into a particular locality,[12] in reality most Maloga and Cummeragunja residents could leave and re-enter the mission when it suited them. As historian Fiona Davis observes of Cummeragunja, through school, religion, work and leisure, these people interacted "with the broader community on a daily basis, using aspects of white culture as they did so".[13] Concurrently, this site designed to segregate also became a powerful magnet for visitors from further afield (as did other missions such as Coranderrk),[14] presenting residents with further European practices for sampling and possible adoption. Some favoured Maloga residents also travelled with the missionaries across the south-eastern colonies, or as far as England, to help with fundraising and evangelism. The phrenological lecture should therefore be understood as a prominent cultural form that residents might already have seen or anticipated, either through their own travels, or through engagement with visitors. After all, by

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[10] Konishi, et al, 5.

[11] Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and Their Craft* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2016), 263.

[12] Amanda Nettlebeck, 'Creating the Aboriginal Vagrant: Protective Governance and Indigenous Mobility in Colonial Australia', *Pacific Historical Review*, 87, no. 1 (2018): 80.

[13] Davis, 146.

[14] Lydon, 'Photography, authenticity and Victoria's *Aborigines Protection Act (1886)*', 139.

1892, at least 10 phrenologists had passed through the region.[15] A positive response to travelling lecturers therefore fits the mission context.

The phrenological lecture's combination of entertainment and improvement also reflected Maloga as a performed world. Aboriginal residents at these sites played with representation and satire in a context where their difference was under constant scrutiny (a grasp of representation observed among Indigenous people in various settler-colonial contexts).[16] This nuanced understanding of showmanship arguably equipped residents to derive pleasure from encounters that to modern observers seem laced with biological determinism. A reception study of these lectures positions phrenology, racial science and rational amusement as things to be perused and potentially collected by Aboriginal people negotiating two-way living in a changing world. It offers this analysis from an intersection between the history of popular science and intercultural history, and reflects an approach that I term 'history of science from below' through which I reconstruct the experiences of often-overlooked agents of science through methods including ethnographic history and microhistory.

These lectures are part of a constellation of engagements with phrenology by non-Europeans that complicate its historiography and which – through newspapers and other traces – reveal its ubiquity in colonial life. In Australia, Aboriginal people frequented lectures about phrenology and its companion science – mesmerism – and participated as paid entertainers, as did Māori performers.[17] In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori attended lectures, sought private consultations, and – in one case – deployed phrenology for comic relief at

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[15] I base this figure on the phrenologists who advertised in the local *Riverine Herald*, or featured in its reports: 1 June 1876, 2; 26 August 1876, 2; 21 September 1876, 2; 4 October 1881, 2; 18 March 1882, 2; 4 April 1882, 2; 19 February 1884, 2; 10 March 1886, 2; 8 October 1899, 2; 14 June 1892, 2.

[16] For example, Philip Deloria's study of Native American film makers argues that "a significant group of early-twentieth-century Indian people … came rapidly to understand the power of representation and of cultural production" (*Indians in Unexpected Places*, (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2004,) 105). The prevalence of the nineteenth-century ethnographic show underpinned an understanding of Indigenous people as existing within what Roslyn Poignant terms a 'show-space' (*Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004,) 7–9).

[17] For example, see: *South Australian Register*, 7 August 1867, 3; *The Herald*, 17 August 1850, 2–3; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 23 March 1867, 2.

a meeting with the Native Affairs Minister.[18] These records warn against transferring contemporary discomfort into the period of phrenology's greatest popularity. Even while declaring racial prejudices, these lecturers offered layers of value to diverse audiences.

The visits of Thomas and Sheridan also illustrate the symbiosis often struck between phrenology and religion during the nineteenth century, despite some shrill allegations of materialism cast in its direction during earlier decades. Holy Roman Emperor Franz II banned the lectures of phrenology's founder Franz Joseph Gall in 1801, and the great Scottish populariser George Combe raised hackles with his treatise that expounded a system of natural laws that some perceived as a challenge to the elevated role of God. Yet the clergy in Gall's Vienna seemingly did not eschew his work, and the Edinburgh Phrenological Society included evangelical members.[19] In colonial Australia, phrenology became an additional skill for some ministers and preachers, and particularly those who belonged to non-conformist sects such as Wesleyan Methodism. The lecturer and science-fiction author Joseph Fraser outlined his accommodation between religion and phrenology in a lecture delivered in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1880, arguing that the presence of the 'Moral and Religious' faculties in the human brain demanded that there must be a God to worship, because "Nature never gravitates to nought".[20] The significant presence of men of the cloth among phrenological lecturers of the period might also be explained by mapping the lifestyle of scientific itinerants onto the Methodist culture of 'circuit riding', which required ministers to evangelise across vast terrains. For these men who constantly negotiated new communities, phrenology

[18] *Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 1885, 2; *Woodville Examiner*, 9 January 1892, 2; *Waikato and Waitara Native Meetings (Reports of Meetings between the Hon. The Premier, and the Hon. the Native Minister, and Natives*), presented to both houses of the New Zealand General Assembly, 1878, G–3, 9.

[19] John Van Wyhe, 'The authority of human nature: the *Schädellehre* of Franz Joseph Gall', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 35 (2002): 25; John Van Wyhe, *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 103–109, 153 and *passim*. Combe's *Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects* was first published in 1828.

[20] Joseph Fraser, 'The Religion of Phrenology: Lecture by Professor Fraser, Practical Phrenologist and Hygienic Teacher' (Auckland: Wilsons & Horton, c. 1880), 8.

possibly appealed as a useful topic to sprinkle among a sometimes punishing schedule of sermons.[21]

Lives on Display

By the mid-nineteenth century, Aboriginal people living along the great artery of the Murray River negotiated survival on country wrested from them by pastoralists. Among them were the clans whose country luxuriated north and south from the bend in the Murray met by the Campaspe and Goulburn rivers, as well as by Broken Creek. The pastoralist and amateur ethnographer Edward M Curr, who took up a squatting run on this country in 1841, identified a cluster of clans on his own and adjoining land that functioned as a tribal federation. This group included the 'Wollithiga' clan (today also spelled 'Wollīthiga'), whose language the Maloga missionary later captured as part of his own vocabulary studies.[22] Squatters streamed into this landscape, and a European river port – Echuca (thought to originate from the name 'Wollithiga) – eventually bloomed here, becoming a major point of contact between the pastoral industry of the Riverina region and Melbourne. From 1864, a new railway line between Echuca and the smouldering southern capital consolidated the town as a trade centre serviced also by steamer boats and drays.[23]

Cornishman Daniel Matthews arrived in town in the same year as the railway, when he was aged in his mid twenties.[24] Between 1865 and 1868, he and his brother purchased 800 acres on the New South Wales side of the river.[25] A devout Wesleyan Methodist and teetotaller, Matthews bristled at the abuses that he saw inflicted on Aboriginal adults and children by settlers, a stance that

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[21] Alan Atkinson, *Camden: Farm and Village Life in Early New South Wales* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008), 246–251.
[22] Samuel Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013, 37; Bowe and Morey, *The Yorta Yorta (Bangerang) Language,* 7; Appendix Two, Glossary of Aboriginal Words, in Cato, 281–284. See also Footnote 2.
[23] Bowe and Morey, 124; Susan Priestley, *Echuca: A Centenary History* (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1965), 66–67.
[24] Claire McLisky, 'Settlers on a Mission: Faith, Power and Subjectivity in the Lives of Daniel and Janet Matthews' (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2008), 80.
[25] Cato, 9.

earned him longstanding enemies.[26] Many of the local Aboriginal people whom he met, and from whom he learned aspects of language and culture, were hungry, dispossessed and economically and sexually exploited by settlers, who often paid for labour and sex with tobacco and alcohol.[27] From early in his time on the Murray, Matthews agitated for the rights of Aboriginal people, arguing that "large tracts of land should be set apart for them".[28] But his ultimate goal for such reservations was conversion and the "uplift" of residents.[29] This vision of segregation combined the common motivations of protecting Aboriginal people from degrading settler influence while inculcating them with European lifeways.[30]

In 1874, Matthews and his Scottish Baptist wife Janet (née Johnston) moved into the schoolhouse at Maloga (a name adopted from the local language) marking the starting point of their mission.[31] By the mid-1880s, the grounds included houses, huts, "a well-built dairy, wool shed, cart shed, stables, forge, and cemetery", an irrigation plant and vegetable garden.[32] Daniel and Janet Matthews framed their project as a family, an idea that lent itself to the paternalism characteristic of nineteenth-century missions. As argued by historian Claire McLisky, whose work constitutes the most sustained academic focus on Maloga in recent years, the governing idea of Christian love entangled Aboriginal people in an economy of emotion that demanded obedience and reciprocity, and which led to coercion by the missionaries when this love was rejected.[33]

The couple attracted local Aboriginal people seeking greater comfort and security than station- or town-life could offer, but also sought to

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[26] Cato, 43–44.
[27] Cato, 15–37.
[28] McLisky, 'Settlers on a Mission', 82–83.
[29] McLisky, 'All of one blood'? Race and Redemption on Maloga Mission, 1874–88, *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity,* Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus (eds), (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007), 409.
[30] Cato, 42; Nettlebeck, 86.
[31] McLisky, 'Settlers on a Mission', 128–129; Cato, 16–17.
[32] Knighley, 'A Week at Maloga', *Riverine Herald*, 16 November 2018, 3–4.
[33] McLisky, '"And They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love": Exploring the role of Christian Love on Maloga Mission, 1874–1888', *Journal of Religious History* (2014): 3, 19.

'gather in' individuals who they thought required salvation – material and spiritual. As with many other mission sites, the couple struggled to maintain the population on the mission. The diaries and annual reports of Daniel Matthews drip with complaints over people leaving, balanced by celebration at their re-appearance; at his worst, Matthews physically assaulted a 16-year-old girl from Ulupna to bend her will.[34] Historian and anthropologist Tim Rowse, citing the work of fellow scholar Peter Read, observes how, for the Wiradjuri (a group located to the east and north of the Bangerang), Maloga became one of a series of mission sites that offered food and shelter, one stop in the pathways of people maintaining a nomadic life.[35] The mission's boundaries were made even more ambiguous by the travels of long-term residents for seasonal work within the settler economy, and their accompaniment of Daniel Matthews on trips for mission business.[36] Maloga therefore enabled a life that fused classical, mobile ways, with the limited opportunities of settler society, a pattern also evident at other missions.[37]

These movements included trips by residents to seek leisure and entertainment in nearby towns. Hymnal devotion – a suitably respectable pastime – surged through the mission site, reflecting the great Methodist fidelity for song that helped to build the communal euphoria of this evangelical denomination.[38] But this improving cultural form did not satisfy all of Maloga's Aboriginal residents, many of who also sought working-class leisures. For example, in 1885, while on a ration trip with Matthews to Echuca, Alfred Morgan attended a minstrel show at the Temperance Hall that included a blackface skit.[39] Matthews was also powerless to quell the passion of some residents for

[34] Daniel Matthews, *Eleventh Report of the Maloga Aboriginal Mission Station*, (1886), 4, 11; McLisky, 'Settlers on a Mission', 146–150.
[35] Tim Rowse, *Indigenous and Other Australians Since 1901* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2017), 100, citing Peter Read, *A Hundred Years War: The Wiradjuri People and the State* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1988), 48.
[36] Matthews, *Eleventh Report*, 18; Matthews Diary, 29 May 1885, Box 1, MS2195, NLA.
[37] For the case of Ramahyuck, see: Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), Chapter 1.
[38] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 68.
[39] Matthews Diary, 29 May 1885.

horseracing, foot racing and cricket matches, leisures that he feared would expose them to drink.[40] A visitor to Maloga in 1886 observed how the residents satirised the much-loved sport in a race meeting on the mission in which "Black bookmakers plied their avocation and booked fabulous amounts with parties in patched pants … All the humours of a country racecourse were enacted in a really clever manner". [41]

Such pastimes complicated the efforts of Daniel Matthews to produce a model mission. From Maloga's early days, Matthews had devoted himself to spreading its story, publishing annual reports as pamphlets aimed at donors and Sunday schools, and submitting articles about his good works to the local *Riverine Herald* and other papers. The origins of his interest in performance can be detected from diaries scribbled during a trip to England between 1869 and 1870, where Matthews commented on the preaching styles of various non-conformist ministers.[42] He then also waded into a whirl of exhibitions and performances at the Crystal Palace, London Polytechnic Institute, and Smithfield Club Cattle Show. He marvelled at automata, induction coils, ventriloquists, hot air balloons, and even a hairless horse called Wild Rose.[43] During one rural visit, Matthews sat with a Cornish farmer, a lay preacher who offered agricultural advice on cropping and who divulged his beliefs in both phrenology and mesmerism – a prelude, perhaps, to the meeting with JB Thomas in 1884.[44]

More than a decade later, the skills of Matthews in promoting his work prompted donations from concerned readers as far away as Ireland.[45] A steady stream of visitors appeared at Maloga, including missionary John Brown Gribble, future founder of the Warangesda mission in New South Wales, but also relatives, ministers, holiday makers, members of an operatic troupe from Manchester, and "consumptive young men wishing to recuperate in the

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[40] Matthews, *Eleventh Report*, 6, 13, 15.
[41] 'Knighley', 'A Week at Maloga', *Riverine Herald*, 19 November 1886, 2.
[42] Matthews Diary, 15 August 1869, 18 November 1869.
[43] Ibid., 26 July 1869, 14 October 1869, 30 October 1869, 8 December 1869, 1 January 1870, 3 January 1870.
[44] Ibid., 22 September 1869.
[45] Matthews, *Eleventh Report*, 29.

country".[46] Far from segregating, the mission became a vector for visitors and onlookers who brought a diversity of ideas to Maloga.

The Aboriginal people who greeted these visitors understood the conflicting expectations placed on them in this performed world. The shared goals of evangelism and promoting civilisation fuelled missionary projects from the mid-nineteenth century, and visitors to Maloga wanted to see 'improved' Aborigines – a congregation singing hymns and children crunching sums.[47] But visitors also craved iterations of classical culture, which to them signified nature in its unspoiled form. This latter desire derived both from a titillation with the spectacle of a supposedly 'primitive' people, as well as the prevalent settler idea that Aboriginal people and their culture were fading.[48] The year before JB Thomas visited Maloga, when the water of the Murray River was low enough to be fringed by slanted, sandy banks, the photographer Nicholas Caire arrived. His images of the residents depict their negotiation of overlapping worlds, glorifying classical practices such as spear-fishing, while also showing the men and women in European dress, posed outside redgum slab huts.[49] In one river view, fishermen, who are just details in the foreground, wear shirts, trousers and hats, and stand poised with casual elegance in bark canoes. The time-consuming process of silver albumen photography indicates that these men were acutely aware of the contraption that Caire had positioned on the banks of the river to capture their work, this interaction serving as a kind of cross-cultural exchange.[50]

IMAGE OF 'SCENE AT MALOGA' HERE

Entertainments such as lantern shows and musical performances also arrived at the mission. Magic lanterns were common tools for evangelical

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[46] Cato, 86–87, 112–113; Daniel Matthews Diary, 4 May 1885.
[47] Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Preface.
[48] Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory*, 1880–1939 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997), ix.
[49] Nicholas Caire, 'Scene at Maloga, Native Bark Canoes', and 'Winter quarters, Maloga station', c.1883, Number H38469, albumen silver prints, State Library of Victoria.
[50] Jane Lydon, 'Introduction: The Photographic Encounter', in *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 2.

and temperance groups of the period, whether in England, where projectionists displayed images of Indigenous people for fundraising purposes, or at mission sites, where they became tools for promoting Christianity through motifs such as a popular series about the Holy Land.[51] It is unsurprising, then, that the *Riverine Herald* announced the upcoming visit of JB Thomas to Maloga with the promise that "he will give the aborigines an opportunity of seeing that which they enjoy more than anything else".[52] The beloved dazzle of lantern shows continued into the 1890s at the nearby Cummeragunja mission, where the manager noted that "a sacred concert or lantern exhibition never fail... to draw a crowded house".[53] Lanterns aside, in 1886, Maloga residents also witnessed a performance of the Jubilee Singers, a group of African American evangelical musicians from Fisk University, and later themselves performed Fisk hymns. [54] The general culture of games and performances at Maloga is apparent from the narratives of one travelling scribe, who in a week of religious camp meetings witnessed an abundance of diversions: the performance of hymns; a cricket match between visitors and residents; the impromptu race meeting; a visit from a brass band; games of swings, rounders, marbles, skipping and a tug-of-war; and displays of boomerang throwing and fire lighting.[55]

Some residents also travelled away from Maloga with Matthews to raise money for both the mission and the Aborigines' Protection Association, the philanthropic group that partially supported the site. The Maloga Missionary Band began touring through the colonies in 1885, and by 1887 leading members of the community evangelised and sang across Victoria and New South Wales.[56] In 1889, the missionary and his wife sailed to England with Paddy and Jenny Swift, long-term Maloga residents. In between singing and speaking at

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[51] Elizabeth Hartrick, 'Consuming Illusions: The Magic Lantern in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1850–1910' (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2004), 168–212; Jennifer SH Brown, 'Mission Indian Progress and Dependency: Ambiguous Images from Canadian Methodist Lantern Slides', *Arctic Anthropology*, 18, no. 2 (1981): 17–27.
[52] *Riverine Herald*, 19 March 1884, 2.
[53] *Annual Report of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association for 1894*, 12.
[54] McLisky, 'Settlers on a Mission', 233–234; 'Knighley', 16 November 1886, 2.
[55] 'Knighley', 19 November 1886, 2.
[56] Cato, 134, 170–172.

subscription meetings, the Aboriginal couple was asked to doff their usual European attire to pose for studio photos in skins and feather headpieces. One of the pair voiced their understanding of the price of such ethnographic play, demanding that "If we put on the costume, you ought to pay us half the money".[57] Whether Daniel Matthews obliged is unclear, but travels certainly destabilised the power dynamics between the two groups. The Medical Missionary to Cummeragunja, T Orde Smith, referred to the perils of venturing from the reservation in 1894. "Every effort has been made to keep the recreations *at home*, and not to send our young people travelling about to amuse the white population, the effect of which is obviously degrading in its tendency".[58] Smith perceived the control inherent to geographic containment.

Lanterns and Fishes

The phrenologist JB Thomas who visited Maloga in March of 1884 moved within non-conformist religious networks. As early as 1877, he lectured in Yackandandah with a Wesleyan Methodist minister, performing mesmeric feats on stage.[59] He arrived at Maloga with the Baptist Minister Corbet and Corbet's daughter, and came armed with magical tools of rational amusement.

Shortly after arriving at the mission, Thomas stood on the banks of the river, watching five or six Aboriginal men dive and spear fish, just as Caire did a year earlier (suggesting that this was a commonly repeated display). As the men handed over the fish to the visitors, one supposedly remarked that "it is almost too small to offer you, but we would give you bigger ones if we had them". In the evening, Thomas reciprocated with a three-hour lantern show of the Holy Land, quizzing the audience on biblical topics throughout. At appropriate points during the display, the Aboriginal people sang the hymns of the American composer Ira Sankey, accompanied by Mrs Matthews and Miss Corbet at the harmonium. When shown a projected picture of Queen Victoria, the viewers

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[57] Cato, 190–191.

[58] *Annual Report of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association for 1894*, 14.

[59] *Ballarat Star*, 19 January 1877, 2.

expressed their greatest “enthusiasm and admiration”, gave three cheers, and sang a verse from ‘God Save the Queen’. At the end of the display, Aaron Atkinson, a respected member of the community, offered a vote of thanks in his own language at the request of Thomas.[60] In the evening, visitors and residents reassembled in the meeting house for worship. The visit coincided with a revival at the mission, and – buoyed by good feeling – Martin and Matilda Simpson, who had spent the previous day at Moama Races drinking and quarrelling, now announced their conversion to Christianity.[61]

The next morning, in a nod to the dyad of cleanliness and godliness, Thomas and the Corbets inspected the huts, and “were much pleased at their orderly and tidy appearance”. They then visited the school, hosted by teacher Thomas Schadrach James, where the children impressed them with reading, writing and spelling, inviting remarks that the school compared “with the average run of country schools in the colony”. Thomas provided the evening’s programme with a “phrenological discourse” that included charts showing “the various races and different casts and colours of the human family”. According to the article in the *Riverine Herald* that recounted the visit, these images “excited no little admiration and amusement”. What this array of different human types actually looked like might be inferred from viewing the interior back cover of a pamphlet that Thomas published with the physiognomist JH Wellington, in 1887.

IMAGE OF WELLINGTON AND THOMAS PAMPHLET HERE

This lithographic schema of ‘types’ included Australian Aboriginal people, a Native American, a man from China, and – of course – the prim, tight-lipped European.[62] The ideas about Aboriginal Australians that Thomas spouted to his audience did not incorporate his observations from his visit to the mission, even though he had complimented the level of education and intelligence among the

[60] *Riverine Herald*, 21 March 1884, 3.
[61] Claire McLisky. ‘The Location of Faith: Power, Gender and Spirituality in the 1883–84 Maloga Mission Revival’, *History Australia*, 7, no. 1, (2010): 8.1; Daniel Matthews, *Ninth Report of the Aboriginal Mission School*, 1884, 36–37.
[62] ‘Self-Explanatory Phrenological and Physiological Chart and Register as Given By JH Wellington, Phrenologist and Physiognomist’ (Melbourne: Rae Bros, 1887), NLA.

children. Instead, he fell back on stereotypes, differentiating between people from various Australian regions. "In the natives of Queensland the organs of perception are largely developed, proving their value as trackers," he noted, for example, although it seems unlikely that this statement was based on any studies of his own. Thomas concluded with an observation of the biological inferiority that limited the chances of Aboriginal people "mixing and locating with the white race, at any rate in the present generation". Although the so-called 'organs' that determined friendship and attachment to place were strong, "in all the aboriginal tribes there exists a marked deficiency in firmness, self-esteem, constructiveness and inhabitiveness (attachment to place)".

The evening ended in religious devotion and exclamations by converted participants about the value of friendship. According to the *Riverine Herald*, the response to the entire visit was overwhelmingly positive, with the Aboriginal people of Maloga farewelling Thomas with "hearty hand-shaking, and in some cases by presentations of skins, feathers, grass baskets, & co".[63]

A Measure of Authority

On a winter morning in 1892, the phrenologist John Joseph Sheridan travelled out from the northern Victorian town of Nathalia, accompanied by a journalist who wanted to imbibe "expert opinion upon the phrenological features of the Australian Aboriginal". On the banks of the Murray River they met Johnnie Atkinson, the brother of the man who had thanked JB Thomas eight years earlier in Bangerang language. This sturdy man steered the visitors across the river in a flat-bottomed boat, and 20 minutes later Sheridan and the journalist found themselves in the parlour of the station manager of Cummeragunja Mission.[64]

The eight years since the visit of JB Thomas had brought turmoil to the project that Daniel Matthews founded. As early as 1882, members of the New South Wales Legislative Council, as well as the group of leading New South Wales men who formed the Aborigines Protection Association (APA) to support Daniel

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[63] *Riverine Herald*, 21 March 1884, 3.
[64] *Riverine Herald*, 16 June 1892, 2.

Matthews and fellow missionary John Gribble, began to lose faith in the Maloga administration. As Davis details, critics argued that Matthews lacked purpose. Meanwhile, the Aborigines Protection Board (APB), established by the New South Wales government in 1883, began to seek greater control over Maloga, concerned ostensibly that the station lacked adequate funding to care for its residents. Daniel Matthews felt his authority shrinking, with the appointment of an overseer and an assistant matron in 1885 and 1887 respectively. In 1887, he was also demoted to religious instructor and the APA began to seek a new site to which they could remove Maloga's cottages. Uncertainty over the mission's future caused unrest and doubt among residents, who petitioned for individual blocks of land (a successor to a similar petition made in 1881). Some began to challenge the missionary's authority. In early 1888, in the midst of uncertainty and agitation, manager George Bellenger and a group of residents began dismantling buildings and fixtures, preparing to move them to a new site. By April, most residents had left the mission and, by late 1888, about 130 people lived at the new station, named Cummeragunja. The APA and APB eventually began jostling for control of the station, and in 1891 Bellenger resigned and the farmer Bruce Ferguson replaced him as manager.[65] Sheridan therefore arrived into a community of residents struggling to find solid ground in a quicksand of quibbling settler institutions, a group of men and women used to agitating for their needs.

Recovering from the journey in the winter of 1892, the phrenologist Sheridan and companion journalist relaxed in Ferguson's parlour, entertained by the manager's impressions of the "inhabitants", a body of knowledge accrued in just six months that apparently surpassed any "dissertation or book". At 2:30pm a bell clanged an invitation to religious service. Stepping outside, the visitors found clusters of Aboriginal residents making their way towards the church building. They seemed quiet and self-possessed to the journalist, and decorously settled into the pews in church in a manner that supposedly could strike envy into the hearts of other congregations. At the close of the service, Sheridan rose and began his lecture.

[65] Davis, 14–19.

Sheridan confessed that he had never before examined the heads of Aboriginal people. His preamble therefore revealed the inner turmoil of a man expected to speak with scientific authority on matters relevant to the race of the audience while armed only with hackneyed phrenological remarks, and with his brief behavioural observations that somewhat contradicted them. He proclaimed that, while "Scientists had stated that the Australians were not capable of being brought within the pale of culture and civilization", he had seen "traits and features in them, which if properly developed would serve to put them on a much higher intellectual standard than they had hitherto got credit for". Sheridan did not clarify what these "traits and features" were. But from declaring the capacity of the Aboriginal residents for collective progress, he soon fell back on determinist scripts. He noted their "remarkable power of perception, a wonderful memory of places and faces", and their judgement "of distance and equilibrium", concluding that they were "intellectually more remarkable for visual memory than for reasoning capacity". He rounded off his summary by stating that the "natives" were "disposed to resent interference with their liberties", a truism that could apply to most humans. Sheridan's repetition of accepted racial categories in the face of evidence to the contrary is by no means unique to this story. In nineteenth-century ethnology and ethnography, fieldworkers often struggled to translate their personal experiences into a disciplinary structure framed by specialist vocabularies, entrenched epistemologies and blinkered or unwilling audiences.[66]

After securing audience attention with this prelude, Sheridan invited the audience to participate in one of phrenology's perennial rituals: public head reading.[67] At least seven people ascended the platform, including one woman, and Sheridan compared the measurements of their heads – categorised by him as

[66] Hilary Howes, '"It is not so!" Otto Finsch, Expectations and Encounters in the Pacific, 1865–85', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 22 (2011): 42–46.
[67] The public reading of heads, in which a lecturer pronounced the qualities of a living subject before an audience, became so culturally entrenched in the Anglosphere that it featured in the 1899 musical *Florodora* by Owen Hall and Leslie Stuart (London: Francis Day and Hunter). My PhD research into the history of popular phrenology follows about 130 lecturers in the Tasman world, and explores how the common format of public head reading created a mixture of pleasure, mirth, anxiety and refusal.

"halfcaste" or plain "Aboriginal" – to that of a European head, finding that "as a general rule aboriginals compare very favorably [sic] in size". The ritual evoked its desired result. As Sheridan delved into the individual qualities of each person, his success provoked "great astonishment and amusement" from the gaping audience. The teacher, James, as well as Ferguson and his assistant EW Pridham, confirmed the accuracy of each delineation. After measuring heads, and finding them not too different in size from those of Europeans, Sheridan declared that perhaps the "quality of the organization", or shape, could improve under the right conditions of good nutrition, "regular habits" (personal discipline), and "tuition". The people of Cummeragunja, overall, were infinitely superior to those of Queensland or Western Australia, and he advocated for the Government of New South Wales to provide greater assistance to support the mission.[68]

Exchange and reception

We known of the visits of Sheridan and James from two newspaper accounts written by Europeans. It was Daniel Matthews who composed the beaming *Riverine Herald* account of the visit of JB Thomas and the Corbets to Maloga. The 1892 account springs from the pen of a journalist who accompanied Sheridan but remained unnamed, although the spectator's tone implies that he or she was European.

These accounts therefore ooze authorial desires and prejudices, leading a careful reader to query whether the audience really responded with amusement. McLisky argues that such sources, filtered "through the ears and then the pen of a white missionary", are of questionable evidentiary use.[69] But at the same time, Matthews did not hide moments of friction at the mission. Just months before the visit of Thomas, he wrote in his diary, later published as an annual report, that "The women and girls become unmanageable… They refuse to work for Mrs Matthews".[70] In the autumn of 1886, he described observing at Sunday services "a wide-spread spirit of disaffection".[71] Episodes of conflict, characterised

[68] *Riverine Herald*, 16 June 1892, 2.
[69] McLisky, 'All of One Blood', 408.
[70] Matthews, *Ninth Report*, 15.
[71] Matthews, *Eleventh Report*, 27.

by the missionary as evidence of Satan's presence, in fact amplified his narrative of spiritual victory when Aboriginal people succumbed to his double-edged Christian love.[72] Therefore, while Matthews might have exaggerated the buoyant feeling that infused his report on the few days with JB Thomas and the Corbets, it would seem unlikely that he would entirely invent this spirit if the meeting was in fact riven with discontent. Meanwhile, the journalist who recorded the visit to Cummeragunja in 1892 does not reveal any strong agenda for his or her report, although the exhortations that the general public and New South Wales Government should better support the mission infused the report with a rosy glow.

Assuming that the audience did offer signs of pleasure, an against-the-grain reading of power dynamics on the mission might then question whether the participants were motivated by material benefits such as food, education and shelter. Historian Bain Attwood, in his study of power relations between missionary and residents on the Ramahyuck mission in eastern Victoria, describes the consternation of the Moravian missionary when he discovered that his conversions actually represented a performance aimed at securing rations and blankets.[73] As scholar of missions Laura Rademaker observes, settlers perennially fretted that Aboriginal people were lying to them or deceiving them (an anxiety stemming from a negative characterisation of Indigenous people as dishonest).[74] But while we cannot know whether the amusement was genuine or feigned, an assumption that the pleasure was faked risks wresting these people from their scientific modernity, and denying individual tastes and preferences. For example, historian of colonial visual culture Jane Lydon observes that Aboriginal people in the south-east eagerly collected and traded photographs. Residents of Victoria's Coranderrk mission, with which Matthews maintained close contact, decorated huts with "wood engravings and coloured pictures" and demonstrated expert

[72] McLisky recounts one particular conflict, where Daniel Matthews grabbed a young Aboriginal woman, Martha, by the wrists and then locked her in a hut, as a moment of coercion revealed in order to accentuate Martha's subsequent conversion (McLisky, 'Settlers on a Mission', 30)
[73] Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Chapter 1.
[74] Laura Rademaker, '"Only Cuppa Tea Christians": Colonisation, Authentic Indigeneity and the Missionary Linguist', *History Australia*, 13, no. 2 (2016): 233.

facial recognition when viewing portraits.[75] In 1873, Jemima Burns–Wandin, one of the first Aboriginal children taught by Matthews during the 1860s and now a resident of Coranderrk, wrote to him requesting a picture of Janet Matthews.[76] The Maloga residents similarly sampled from, and negotiated, two cultures, and did so within a space that emphasised their racial difference – a world focused on their 'uplift' from their pre-contact selves. Considering the discourses of Otherness and personal shortcoming that shaped daily life at Maloga, combined with interests in European technologies and practices, a lecture laced with declarations about Aboriginal inferiority or difference might therefore not have seemed that remarkable, or something that necessarily cancelled out its theatrical pleasures.

Attendance at these lectures was probably also not mandatory, at least in the case of the Cummeragunja performance. The annual report for 1894 notes that lantern shows and musical performance "never failed to draw a crowded house", implying that the inverse was also true.[77] In fact, the report notes the attendance of church service as approximately 30 per cent for that year.[78] Collectively, these fragments suggest that those auditors who attended Sheridan's lecture genuinely wanted to be there.

Taking the enjoyment on face value, how do we explain the reception? Considering the literacy of these Aboriginal people in European popular culture, it is likely that many in the audience attended and laughed for the same reasons as any audience outside of the mission: the pleasure of watching the phrenologist's sleight of hand (or brain) in assessing loved ones; the frisson of being touched and described. The lectures also offered a break in the monotony of mission life, particularly if combined with a much-anticipated lantern display. Although archival remnants from the visits of scientists to Maloga and Cummeragunja today symbolise surveillance and a racial chauvinism, records of their creation reveal a mix of emotions by both parties, as well as a dash of chaos. Lorna Walker (née

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[75] Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 30. The observation about huts is a direct quotation from Robert Brough Smyth of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in the organisation's fourth annual report.
[76] Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 31; Cato, 8.
[77] *Annual Report of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association for 1894*, 12.
[78] Ibid.

Charles), who was 13-years-old when Tindale measured her head in 1938, decades later recalled his visit as a bit of a lark, his “bizarre” methods becoming a point of fascination for the children. “It didn’t worry me. I mean, he was a nice man too and he always looked after the Koori people as well,” recalled Lorna, in an account that must be contrasted with other oral histories, in which residents were forced to comply with Tindale at risk of losing rations.[79] Even the measurements by the French Dr Cauvin in 1880 produced ambiguous responses. His work was “novel and entertaining, and somewhat amusing to [the] Aborigines, although tinged with fear when the doctor measured their heads, and compared with colored discs the different shades of their skin”, wrote Matthews.[80] Within this invasive world where bodies were measured and skin tones classified, some residents could still explore positive or excitable feelings that emerge when two curious groups meet.

The scientific and moral slants of phrenology might also have appealed. Maloga and Cummeragunja became famous during the twentieth century for the educated, politically engaged people who grew up on these Riverine soils, and Bain Attwood characterises Cummeragunja as the most successful station in the state of New South Wales during the early twentieth century.[81] The Aboriginal leader and civil rights activist William Cooper and his great-nephew Douglas Nicholls (future governor of South Australia) both came of age here.[82] Phrenology’s popularisation derived from the work of Scottish lawyer and phrenological convert George Combe, whose *Constitution of Man In Relation to External Objects* preached a science of moral improvement that sought to inculcate liberal middle-class virtues.[83] Such values resonate through the 1881 petition of 42 Maloga men to Governor of New South Wales Augustus Loftus, in which these men requested land grants so that they could “settl[e] down to more orderly habits of industry, that we may form homes for our families”. Outlining their dispossession, the petitioners sought the liberal and Lockean ideals

79 Interview with Lorna Walker, 24 March 2009, in Davis, 104–105.
80 Daniel Matthews, *Sixth Report of the Aboriginal Mission School*, 1881, 6.
81 Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 31.
82 McLisky, ‘Settlers on a Mission’, 24.
83 Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 121.

of "free enjoyment of our possessions" and "advancement in civilization".[84] The petitioners might have, of course, voiced these ideas in order to mirror the philosophical language of the Governor, and thus earn his favour. But even so, the petition reflects their familiarity with the discourses of progress and the stadial phases of civilisation. Phrenological lectures, which preached personal improvement, might therefore have appealed to residents, for their own self-shaping, or for extending the vocabulary available to them for future activism.

The visit of JB Thomas also offered the opportunity for the residents to share culture. The vocabulary lists drawn up by Daniel Matthews for 'Wallithica' – the language of the Wollīthiga group that lived at the meeting of the Campaspe and Goulburn rivers, form part of the handful of written sources today used for the preservation of the local language, which is often referred to as Yorta Yorta.[85] When, in 1884, Thomas, at the close of his lecture, asked if he might hear a vote of thanks in the local language. Aaron Atkinson began his response with "Nea-ne troorma, Mr Thomas, wal-a-neen a yah noli buk a bamul a-wa, colnea….", which translates to "My Dear Thomas. We are good and delighted to see the pretty pictures you have shown us tonight".[86] This is now an important archival fragment of this language, which passed from fluency as a first language by about 1960.[87] Around 1900, Atkinson also became the main informant to the ethnographer RH Mathews (not related to Daniel Matthews).[88] Perhaps his speech to Thomas was a calculated display. Atkinson's enthusiasm for trading performances on the night of the lantern show helped to enshrine the language in a written form that would survive until a period of cultural renewal and celebration in the mid-to-late twentieth century.

We should also consider the possibility that the audience saw resonances between phrenology and Indigenous forms of divination, or belief systems about relationships between body parts and metaphysical properties,

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[84] Petition for Land by Aborigines, 1881, in Cato, Appendix One.
[85] Bowe and Morey, *The Yorta Yorta (Bangerang) Language*, 7; Appendix Two, Glossary of Aboriginal Words, in Cato, 281–284.
[86] *Riverine Herald*, 21 March 1884, 3.
[87] Bowe and Morey, *The Yorta Yorta (Bangerang) Language*, 1, 109.
[88] Heather Bowe, Lois Peeler and Sharon Atkinson, *Yorta Yorta Language Heritage* (Clayton: Department of Linguistics, Monash University, 1997), 5.

finding what historian of syncretic Christianity Robert Kenny calls a "correlative idiom".[89] Indigenous understandings of the natural world across the continent spanned (and in many cases continue to span) taxonomies of flora and fauna and related creatures and spirits, as well as botanical medicine and methods for land management. In many cases, these ideas accord with Western scientific practices, or now inform them.[90] Turning to consider belief systems about specific parts of the body, members of the Victorian Kulin nations in the nineteenth century were observed to associate kidney fat with personal life force, and to speculate that inexplicable deaths might in fact have resulted from furtive excision of kidney fat by enemies.[91] The Gunai-Kurnai of eastern Victoria were known to cut the hands, or '*brets*', from dead community members, and to dry them and suspend them from a rope of possum skin; these brets were then thought to vibrate to warn the wearer when danger approached.[92] A system in which one body part – in phrenology's case a section of the brain and skull – stands in for another trait could fit with ideas perhaps already familiar to mission residents who hailed from groups with similar beliefs. Although no extant records describe the mechanics of such idiomatic translations in relation to phrenology, other examples of the incorporation of European practices or technologies into specifically local worldviews demonstrate how such accommodation can take place. For example, as Lydon explores in terms of photography, Māori beliefs about photos holding a person's spirit as a "living embodiment" led to such images supplanting carvings of individuals in specific settings.[93]

In framing the power relations of these phrenological encounters, it is important to highlight that popular science lecturers never held unmitigated

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[89] Robert Kenny, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper and the Ruptured* World (Carlton: Scribe, 2007), 235.
[90] LR Hiatt and Rhys Jones, 'Aboriginal conceptions of the workings of nature', in RW Home (ed), *Australian Science in the Making* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–22.
[91] William Westgarth, *Australia Felix, or an historical or descriptive account of the settlement of Port Phillip* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1848), 76, 91.
[92] Alfred William Howitt, *Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1904), 460.
[93] Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 8.

authority. Both Thomas and Sheridan would have known that the audience could refuse to play along, a form of disruptive audience participation rooted in Georgian traditions of theatre.[94] It was a dynamic that in one New South Wales town saw a phreno-mesmeric lecturer nearly dumped in the creek.[95] Sheridan, an ironmonger by trade, had appointed himself to the position of 'Professor' on a self-assessment of his level of experience, as well as a certificate from the so-called Phrenologists' Society of Tasmania.[96] Desperate to establish his credentials as an empirical scientist, in 1886 he proudly announced a new mathematical system for calculating the phrenological values of heads.[97] Yet in the month before his Cummeragunja trip, he found measurements unnecessary when publishing his assessment of the head of the serial killer Frederick Deeming, a judgement based on glimpses across a crowded courtroom.[98] For Sheridan, the best scientific method on any given day was that declared by Sheridan. At Cummeragunja, he therefore faced a dual task: to provide the Aboriginal audience with personalised content that piqued their interests; and to satisfy the Europeans of his invented scientific credentials. His lack of any previous contact with Aboriginal people placed him at a disadvantage, and forced him to try to reconcile the deterministic messages of phrenological orthodoxy with the evidence before him that humans were products of environment. Ultimately, of course, Sheridan was a white guest of the administrators, placing him in a position of influence. But such influence could not be taken for granted in the uncertain moment of performance that – as ever – risked derailment. Contradictions in Sheridan's phrenological practice, as well as the audience participation, provided openings for Aboriginal observers to exercise what the French scholar Michel De Certeau termed 'tactics' – the temporary seizure of power by a subordinated group.[99]

Conclusion: Modernity on Show

Visitors to Maloga and Cummeragunja missions, including those who supplied

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[94] Alison Winter, *Mesmerized* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 85, 87.
[95] *South Australian Advertiser,* 20 October 1882, 5.
[96] *The Age*, 30 August 1892, 6.
[97] *Tasmanian News*, 1 November 1886, 2.
[98] *Evening Journal*, 5 May 1892, 2.
[99] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall (*trans.*), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

rational amusement, fuelled literacy in popular culture already bolstered through the movements of residents on and off the mission. In the thick of dispossession and settler coercion, residents here picked over European popular culture for entertainment while themselves performing two versions of Aboriginality expected of them by missionaries – the Indigene on the road to civilisation, and the carrier of vanishing classical culture. Popular phrenology swooped into this mix as a piece of scientific modernity that, to paraphrase the North American scholarship of Philip Deloria, “belonged – and belongs – to [Indigenous] people, as much as it does to anyone else”.[100] The encounters of Thomas and Sheridan with these people challenged their own phrenological wisdom about inherent racial difference, forcing them to work through a tangle of ideas rooted in biological determinism and environmental evolution. No direct accounts from the Aboriginal participants survive to guide us through their experiences. Yet the supposed pleasure derived from these visits correlates with a broad pattern of tactical appropriation of European practices. Laughter and wonder sparked during these supposedly ‘rational’ recreations temporarily punctured routines of godliness and diligence, and the science also afforded the promise of improvement, or even the chance of cultural exchange. At least for a few hours, phrenology’s role as racial science became submerged in theatrical delight.

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