around the problems of sedition and ‘hate speech’ and the ongoing question of secrecy, whistle-blowers and access to information. The Northern Territory ‘intervention’ is another example of state-orchestrated censorship built around race. It can sometimes seem as if everything is permitted now, as if there is nothing that cannot be shown to us. But Nicole Moore’s thorough and impressive study shows us that Australian censors are still, one way or another, shaping our lives.

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Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity: Frank Hurley’s Synchronized Lecture Entertainments.

The Diaries of Frank Hurley 1912–1941.

In 1924 the famous photographer and explorer Captain Frank Hurley made quite a splash in New York: appearing ‘unheralded’ with his travelogue The Lost Tribe, he was described as a ‘strongly built man of thirty-four, bronzed and lean, with the look of a pioneer in his eye and the cock of an adventurer in his broad shoulders’ (193). A kind of Crocodile Dundee (or perhaps more accurately, his maker Paul Hogan), Hurley combined exotic appeal as a ‘professional Australian’ with international media experience, allowing him to mediate the colonial frontier for this metropolitan market.

In this important and entertaining book Robert Dixon reconstructs the visual culture of the early decades of the twentieth century, when the multi-media travelogue constituted one of the main forms of middle-class international amusement. Dixon explores Hurley’s work not in conventional biographical terms but rather through the social life of ‘the many and marvellous things he made: negatives, photographic prints, lantern slides, stereographs, films, diaries and newspaper articles that once enjoyed a very active life of their own’ (xxi), and the insight they provide into Australia’s engagement with the romance and wonder of international modernity. By reviving Hurley’s own term, ‘synchronized lecture entertainments’, Dixon emphasises the performance-centred, fluid dimensions of the multimedia shows orchestrated by the celebrity lecturer, and the promiscuous intertextuality of the new popular culture forms.

Dixon uses the concept of colonial modernity to refer to the early twentieth century’s rapidly internationalising mass-media landscape, a space in which cosmopolitan and local were mutually constitutive. This explosion of ideas, technologies and movement was characterised by multi-temporal, uneven connections between past, present and future, and aesthetics of presentationalism, in which the format itself was the main attraction. Audiences in both Australia and elsewhere had cosmopolitan tastes, fed by the impression of simultaneity permitted by mass communication. In line with these insights Dixon canvasses now well-established transnational approaches that argue for complex and interdependent webs and horizontal linkages, rather than unequal relations between an original metropolis and its provincial imitators.

The book is organised according to the five chief media events Hurley staged at the height of his career during the 1920s, based upon Douglas Mawson’s Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE), Ernest Shackleton’s Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, the Great War, the England to Australia air race of 1919–20, and Hurley’s two expeditions to Torres Strait and Papua in the early 1920s. Chapter one addresses The Home of the Blizzard, which we now remember as Hurley’s 1913 film about the AAE—in fact, as Dixon points out, it was produced by ‘a loose and shifting aggregation of personnel and corporate entities spread over three continents’ (16), a ‘dispersed entertainment’ comprising film, live performance, photography and print that was presented in diverse combinations according to local context.

Chapter two follows the wide circulation of Hurley’s photographs of the Great War, including a brief review of the famous clash between Hurley and C. E. W. Bean, director of the Australian War Records Section, who objected to what he termed ‘fakes’ and Hurley’s ‘commercial’ agenda. For Hurley, argues Dixon, documentary accuracy was less significant than ‘a kind of emotional realism’ (57), achieved through his composite images combining
multiple negatives. Chapter three explores Hurley’s emergence as a show business entrepreneur. In London in late 1916, Hurley worked hard to secure rights to three Antarctic films (from Mawson’s 1911–14, Shackleton’s 1914–17 and Scott’s 1910–13 expeditions), that would establish his business in Australia after the war. At this time, exploration was of great public interest—and largely funded by media exploitation. The experience of touring across regional and urban Australia is vividly evoked by quotes from Hurley’s Diaries, a companion volume to Dixon’s book—for example when he spoke at Melbourne’s St Kilda Palais he had to compete with sometimes incongruous screams from the neighbouring Luna Park switchback ride, but ‘When the dogs were killed it synchronised remarkably’ (131). In chapter four, through the example of Hurley’s filming aboard Captain Ross Smith’s England–Australia air race, Dixon argues that new forms of visual technology and representation that originated in war—notably aerial photography—were then applied to other domains after the war, such as entertainment, tourism and colonial administration. Dixon suggests that the final years of the Great War marked a crisis in visual representation, and Hurley struggled to preserve a space for nature and humanity that was outside the amoral, abstract spaces of industrial modernity.

As chapter five explores, Hurley’s 1920s Papua travelogue, Pearls and Savages, was his most nationally-based, yet internationally most successful venture. Drawing upon an older visual tradition of popular ethnographic film that turned faraway places and people into commodities, colonial territory became a space of entertainment owing much to fairground sensation. Despite its success, the tour had failed to gain sponsorship in Hollywood, lost £8,000, and was balked by the logistics of an American tour—leading Dixon to conclude that decentralised conceptions of imperial relations do not adequately account for the uneven distribution of cultural authority or opportunities after all.

Dixon draws very extensive archival research and empirical evidence—including the Diaries, themselves a significant new resource—into lively conversation with scholars working across transnational and colonial history, theorists and historians of early cinema and modernity, and the substantial work already conducted around Hurley’s life and works. One minor criticism is that sometimes Dixon assumes that we already know the stories and timing of the events that were the stuff of Hurley’s representations—and the chronology of Hurley’s extremely energetic years during the Great War is sometimes confusing. Yet Dixon successfully evokes the exciting, cosmopolitan visual culture of this turbulent period, producing a nuanced, perceptive account that will remain an essential reference for students and researchers in this field.

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The Flash of Recognition: Photography and the Emergence of Indigenous Rights.

Jane Lydon’s Flash of Recognition is an ambitious attempt to co-examine Aboriginal representation and Indigenous rights across a range of visual media from 1900 to today. Since federation and for much of the twentieth century, the occasional bursts of interest by settler Australians in Indigenous issues were typically accompanied by images of curiously exotic or stubbornly intransigent peoples—images that are widely seen now as an indictment of the society that produced them. Today, not only via image making but the interpretation of images—whether through photo elicitation, visual reinter-pretation or contemporary artistic invention—Aboriginal Australians play a strong role in the making and control of images. As Lydon makes clear, Australia’s photographic history of Aboriginal representation is contested and thus a difficult and important topic for analysis.

Flash of Recognition is an ethical argument based on a set of questions that seek to understand how and when certain images (neck-chained Aboriginals, assimilation propaganda) came to be seen as inhumane, ‘complicit with injustice’, and thus evidence for reform. Alert to the dangers of a kind of humanitarian empathy that provokes sensational headlines but little action, Lydon’s trawl through much confronting material stems from a belief that ‘invisibility is the easiest form of racism’ (17): facing up to the
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