

Foreword

Windows and Mirrors

From an ashram in Arnhem Land, October 20, 2023

A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that
the balances are correct.

Princess Irulan in *Dune*, 1965

I know, and have felt, that a curse (or boon) afflicts any thinking Aboriginal person, greater and more emotionally draining than that of Sisyphus. We are cursed to repeat our story, over and over, again. (In my case, that concerning *The Aboriginal Memorial*.)

It is a chant that leaves you empty of feeling and empathy – especially as every collaborator you worked with passes to the other side. Like the Ancient Mariner, one is called upon to tell the same story, for forty-odd years, that possibly no one really believes. Impotently, as with the lyrebird, imitating other people's sounds, racist lies, low-level curses and hatred back to them – both inside the academy and beyond.

The essays and reflections here came directly out of my time in Arnhem Land, through the period of the end of the 1970s and into the 1990s. I originally thought of the *Windows and Mirrors* title from a conversation concerning Tracey Moffatt's affective exhibition *Horizons* (2017) at the 57th Venice Biennale, and finding so many classic images by famous male artists of women sitting by a window. A colleague, Stephen Zagala, then pointed me to John Szarkowski's *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*, an exhibition at MoMA in 1978.

I was born an Aboriginal – I was born oppressed.

I was born on April 15, 1951, eleven days after the beginning of Winston Smith's 1984 diary (April 4) and two years after the novel *1984* was published (1949). My name is Djon Mundine and I am a Bandjalung man from what is now called the northern rivers of north coast New South Wales. At the age that I ceased to be a child and became a man (early 1960s), we moved to the western suburbs of Sydney. My mother said she expected that I would become an artist. I could draw reasonably well. I could also add up and quickly calculate figures, which was useful as a barman. And so, when I went to university I applied to study accountancy and economics but found them empty and, in the case of the latter, almost a fantasy. I dropped out of this fantasy twice, instead completing a cocktail barman course. Thus armed, I began working