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Introduction: Print Culture, Mobility, and the Pacific 1920-1950

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Abstract:

This Special Section considers the interconnections of print culture and mobility across the Pacific in the early twentieth century. The contributors explore how print culture was part of the practices, experiences, mediations, and representations of travel and mobility, and understand mobility in a number of ways: from the movement of people and texts across space, and the mobility of ideas to the opportunities of social mobility through travel. The Special Section moves beyond studies of travel writing and the literary analysis of travel narratives, by discussing a range of genres, by paying attention to readers and reception, and by focusing on actual mobility and its representation as well as the mediation between the two.

The first half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of mass travel, mass print, and mass consumption, and this Special Section considers how they were interlinked. In an era when sea travel massified, liner routes criss-crossed ocean spaces, and more people than ever travelled across the globe as migrants, workers, armed forces, and leisure travelers, travel and mobility came to be symbols of modernity. As Timothy

Cresswell has noted, to be modern meant to be mobile.[1] This growing preoccupation and fascination with mobility was reflected in modern print culture. At a moment when print reigned supreme – not yet overtaken by radio or television – an increasing number of books and particularly the new mass, glossy magazines were awash with faraway places and glamorous images of people and vehicles on the move. Since mass print was distributed through mass transportation networks, mobility was also central to the production of modern print culture. Conversely, print culture stimulated both real and imagined travel. As magazines, newspapers, and paperbacks brought images of the world to vast readerships, some readers were propelled to become travelers themselves, and even those who stayed at home could become armchair travelers, moved, as it were, by print, and entering into an imagined relationship with the world and modern mobility.

While the massification of print is perhaps most often associated with the rise of popular entertainment cultures, we contend that the theoretical framework of the middlebrow is well suited for investigations of the confluence of travel, mobility, and print culture between 1920 and 1950. The middlebrow, a cultural category that signaled familiarity with high cultural forms for mass audiences and readerships, emerged during this period as a key mode of address to speak to the ever-growing numbers of rapidly urbanizing, mostly middle-class consumers and readers. As Faye Hammill has explained, the "'middlebrow' may be taken to refer to a mode of circulation, reception, and consumption of cultural products' and it also refers to 'a space where art encounters consumerism, and pleasure combined productively with self-improvement."[2] In the early decades of the twentieth century, taste and consumption – of print, consumer products and leisure activities, most especially

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travel – turned into practices of cultural discrimination and hierarchy, and increasingly cultural categories aided producers and consumers of culture alike to define and express their identities.

In the Australian context, David Carter has argued that a distinct middlebrow culture emerged comparatively late, after the 1930s, strongly connected to cultural nationalism and national cultural institutions.[3] The articles in this Special Section, by focusing on themes of mobility and travel, show the emergence of a different kind of middlebrow culture that first took shape in the interwar period, in outward-looking magazines and print publications that engaged with international geographies and concerns, and strived to participate in a global culture of modernity. Kate Macdonald and Christoph Singer have recently identified elements of the middlebrow as a cultural category already emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, Macdonald and Singer have also noted the provisionality of the middlebrow during the period 1880 to 1930, paying attention to the transitional elements of culture in its own time, before the retrospectively applied labels of avante-garde or middlebrow culture became fixed.[4] While acknowledging that cultural value is always provisional and contingent, we find this attention, in middlebrow scholarship, to the intensive cultural shifts that informed international modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century a useful way to frame the cultural anxieties and aspirations the articles in this Special Section trace in Australian print media in the period 1920-1950. These articles appear to discover an outward oriented middlebrow culture– in Australian print culture and in practices of mobility – preceding the one identified by Carter, one that is far more concerned with the international.

Recent scholarship has linked print culture, mobility, and the middlebrow predominantly focusing on hemispheric travel between Europe and North America.[5] Likewise, existing middlebrow scholarship has thus far largely focused on and generalized from the literary productions of America and Britain, assessing middlebrow culture and its links to travel and broader commodity culture within paradigms of transatlantic (literary) mobility and exchange.[6] This Special Section extends this work to the Pacific, and the articles presented here draw principally on mid-range print culture produced in Australia. We thus shift the focus to a geographical arena – Australia and the Pacific as viewed from her shores – that has so far received relatively little scholarly attention not just by middlebrow scholars, but also by mobility scholars, a point also noted by Georgine Clarsen in a recent Special Section of *Transfers.*[7] The articles of our Special Section show that the Pacific is a distinct region in terms of actual and imagined mobility of people and ideas. Travel across this ocean basin developed and massified comparatively late, with Australian and New Zealand steam ship companies playing a prominent role in developing both travel infrastructure and distinct regional imaginaries of the Pacific region as their "neighbourhood".[8]

The focus on a particular ocean, and on mobility of people and ideas across it, opens up a space for comparative studies of middlebrow print culture, modernity, and mobilities, and also usefully draws attention to the sea. The last decade has seen an increased scholarly interest in oceans not just as spaces to be traversed or distances to be bridged, but also as sites of interaction and experience, and "as spaces of imaginative projection".[9] As Karen Wigen noted in 2006, "the sea is swinging back into view."[10] While this attention to maritime spaces has resulted in new work on

trans-oceanic exchange and the cultures of sea travel, maritime mobilities remain under-represented within the field of mobility studies with its predominant focus on the modalities of rail, road and air.[11] This relative lack of attention to the sea and sea travel is also apparent in literary and print culture scholarship, with the notable exception of emerging work on islands and archipelagos in literary cultures.[12]

The articles in this Special Section originated at a symposium held at The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, in November 2013, on the theme of Australasian-Pacific Travel in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1925-1950, bringing together scholars with expertise in cultural history, literary studies, periodicals and magazine culture, travel writing and narratives, Pacific studies, travel and tourism as well as visual culture. The resulting articles in this Special Section, revised to pay especial attention to the myriad meanings of mobility, thus explore how print culture was part of the practices, experiences, mediations, and representations of travel and mobility. The Special Section moves beyond studies of travel writing and the literary analysis of travel narratives, by discussing a range of genres, by paying attention to readers and reception, and by focusing on actual mobility and its representation as well as the mediation between the two. The articles consider a variety of print forms, including newspapers, magazines and books; a range of genres and text forms, from short stories, novels, travel narratives, scientific accounts and tourist guidebooks to memoirs, advertisements, images, and reviews; and finally different kinds of travelers and forms mobility. Together, they show that print culture constituted a key technology of travel and mobility, facilitating real and imagined contact for readers and travelers across the Pacific in distinct ways that remain undertheorized in mobility and print culture studies.

Mobility comes to mean different things in these articles, and they each consider notions of mobility in a variety of ways. First, the articles presented here understand mobility as actual and imagined movement of people across space, and explore the cultural meanings attached to these movements. Missionaries and scientists travelling to Melanesia, Australian writers crossing the Pacific and upper-class women cruising the world were all tangled up in the ambiguities and contestations over authority and prestige through travel, or turned into screens for the promises and anxieties associated with gendered mobility. Secondly, the articles explore the mobility of ideas and texts across space and time, and also across different kinds of print media and genres. And thirdly, they pay attention to the interconnectedness of mobility and travel to social and class mobility. What were the links between reading, middlebrow print culture, travel and social status? How did travel and participating in imagined travel through print form part of and transform social identity? As the articles in this Special Section highlight, in the early to mid-twentieth century geographical mobility increasingly became associated with the possibilities of upward social mobility. Print culture reinforced this association, with popular magazines of the period drenched in notes of traveling celebrities and travel narratives. The middlebrow aspirational aspects of such print products, finding expression also in advertisements and other content, were keyed to the aspirational aspects of geographical mobility.

While the articles thus establish links between class and gender to various notions of mobility, it needs to be stressed that race was equally tied into the possibilities and experiences of mobility. The readers, consumers and producers of the print culture products discussed here were almost exclusively white and Anglo-Saxon, and the

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narratives of mobility conveyed in books and magazines spoke to the experiences and desires of white travelers, not of Aboriginal peoples or Pacific Islanders. The travelers and readers considered in these articles encountered non-white people not as fellow travelers, but as inhabitants of places visited, and as exotic 'others' to write and read about. While the mass-market and mid-range Australian print culture of the early twentieth century presented wide-ranging and ambiguous relationships with other places and other people across the Pacific, in some cases openly questioning prevailing ideologies, this always happened from the secure standpoint of white privilege.

Nicholas Halter opens the Special Section with his analysis of the Pacific in the Australian interwar imaginary. Focusing on a diverse array of travel writing of the first decades of the twentieth century, Halter considers the ambiguous representations of indigenous Melanesians, which mixed the registers of science and fiction. The middlebrow here proves to be a productive category: Not only does Halter show how the travel writing of this region constituted a suitable genre for middlebrow culture, connecting leisure and learning, he also shows that steamships were equivalent liminal spaces, where different classes came into contact. The Pacific Islands were equally an ambiguous setting, where anxieties and aspirations of middle-class travelers played out, in particularly complex ways.

Victoria Kuttainen and Susann Liebich find the middlebrow in a different type of print media of the era: in the glossy, quality magazines of the interwar period. Kuttainen and Liebich explore notions of taste and cultural value as they relate to

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geographical imaginaries presented in two Australian magazines, *The Home* and *MAN*, each addressing gendered urban audiences, and both providing more than occasional glimpses of the Pacific. In engaging in a slice-approach to reading the magazine archive, they survey all issues of the magazines in the year 1937, finding that the Pacific offered different kinds of readers different fantasies: for the middle- to securely upper-class female Australian reader the Pacific was a space of sophisticated leisure travel, while it offered the urban male Australian reader less likely to travel in actuality a canvas for genre fiction, replete with notions of mobility, danger, sex, and escape.

The readerships of these magazines were perhaps more affluent but also overlapped with those considered by Sarah Galletly, whose article broadens the view of trans-Pacific mobility to a comparative study of Australian and Canadian popular magazines. Her analysis of the travelling woman in popular short fiction reveals how trans-Pacific travel "is represented as alternatively transformative and restrictive, enabling investigations of how gendered and racialized identities become blurred through the uptake of oceanic travel." Like Halter's contribution, Galletly's article also draws attention to the various functions of steamships, on one hand a dominant technology of mobility in the first half of the twentieth century, on the other a space in which mobility, actual and social, is lived out. In the fictional narratives of shipboard life at the heart of Galletly's article, the confinement of the ship restricts as well as enables female social mobility.

The Special Section closes with Anna Johnston's article, which also looks north-east across the Pacific, to America and Australian-American ties of publishing and book markets. Johnston's examination of prominent Australian travel writer Ernestine Hill and the ways in which she actively sought to promote her writing to an American audience highlights the mobility of texts and ideas across the Pacific. The inclusion of Hill's book *The Great Australian Loneliness,* retitled the *Australian Frontier*, in a US Army publishing scheme during World War Two underscores how ideas about Australia were mobilized for American military across the Pacific. Glossing Christina Klein's excellent study *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961*, Johnston shows how Australian middlebrow writing, from Ernestine Hill to Frank Clune, sought to inculcate in readers a new kind of imaginative community, building affective relationships across the Pacific, and into Asia, through notions of "neighborliness" and "curiosity."

What emerges from these articles is a sense of how representation and mediations of mobility in print offered ways of engagement with the Pacific, at a time when this region began to become much more accessible to Australians as a travel destination. Through middlebrow print culture Australian readers learned about the Pacific, and shaped ideas about themselves and others, while North Americans also cast their gaze westward beyond the continental frontier. It is a common misconception that the Pacific splashed into the attention of the world, including Australians, on the morning of the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In considering the interplay between print culture, mobility and the Pacific, this Special Section attests that texts, ideas and

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travelers already transported the public imagination to and across the Pacific between 1920 and 1950.

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[1] Tim Cresswell. *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World.* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 36.

[2] Faye Hammill, "The New Yorker, the middlebrow and the periodical marketplace in 1925," in *Writing for the New Yorker: Critical Essays on an American Publication*, ed. Fiona Green (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 19-35, here: 18.

[3] David Carter, "The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow or The C(o)urse of Good Taste," in *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New World,* ed. Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 173-201.

[4] Kate Macdonald and Christoph Singer, ""Introduction: Transitions and Cultural Formations," in *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing, 1880-1930*, ed. Kate Macdonald and Christoph Singer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-13.

[5] Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith, eds., "Print Culture, Mobility, and the Middlebrow", Special Issue of *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 48 (2014) and Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith, *Magazines, Travel and Middlebrow Culture: Canadian Periodicals in English and French, 1925-1960,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

[6] See for instance Ann L. Ardis and Patrick Collier, ed., *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880-1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[7] Georgine Clarsen, "Special Section on Settler-Colonial Mobilities," *Transfers* 5, no. 3 (2015): 41-48, here: 41.

[8] Victoria Kuttainen, "Trafficking Literature: Travel, Modernity, and the Middle Ground of Canadian and Australian Middlebrow Print Cultures," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 48 (2014): 85-103, here: 91. On the development of steamship travel in the Pacific see especially the work of Frances Steel, *Oceania Under Steam: Sea Transport and the Cultures of Colonialism, c.1870–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); "Via New Zealand Around the World: the Union Steam Ship Company and the Trans-Pacific Mail Lines, 1880s-1910," in *Coast to Coast: Case Histories of Modern Pacific Crossings*, ed. Chris Dixon and Prue Ahrens (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 59-75; and "Lines Across the Sea: Trans-Pacific passenger shipping in the age of steam," in *The Routledge History of Western Empires*, ed. Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (London and New York: Routledge), 315-29.

[9] Kären Wigen, "Introduction," in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. Kären Wigen, Renate Bridenthal and Jerry H. Bentley (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 1-18, here: 16.

[10] Kären Wigen, "Introduction: AHR Forum, Oceans of History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006), 117-121, here: 117. See also Glen O'Hara, "'The Sea is Swinging into View': Modern British Maritime History in a Globalised World," *English Historical Review* 510 (2009), 1109-1134.

[11] This point was already highlighted by Gijs Mom in "'Historians are bleeding too much': recent trends in the state of the art in mobility history," in *T2M Yearbook: Mobility in History, Reviews and Reflections*, ed. Peter Norton, Gijs Mom, Liz Millward and Mathieu Flonneau (Neuchatel: Editions Alphil, 2012), 15-30, here: 25. A survey of articles in *Transfers* confirms that maritime mobilities remain overlooked within mobility studies: only three research articles between 2011 and 2015 were concerned with ocean spaces.

[12] See for instance David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon, eds., *Southerly: Islands and Archipelagos* 72, no. 3 (2012), and Elizabeth McMahon, "Archipelagic Space and the Uncertain Future of National Literatures," *JASAL* 13, no. 2 (2013), http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/view/3154/3731 (accessed 12 August 2015).