



Map of the Pacific Islands, reproduced from the *Pacific Islands Year Book* (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1935).

Expanding Horizons: A Retrospective Introduction

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The following essays result from a one-day BSANZ conference held in Dunedin on 10 September 2002. The full programme is provided at the end of this introduction. Not all of the papers could be accommodated in this issue, and some were destined for other locations, but these essays provide an intriguing glimpse of the aims and interests of the conference.

It is unusual to be able to review a conference with the advantages of hindsight and reflection, and in this instance it is both pleasant and instructive: The title for the conference, besides expressing a general inclusivity that might serve to encourage potential speakers, was originally intended to signal two aims of the conference – to take seriously the term ‘print culture’ as it manifests itself in the Pacific and to urge those of us attending to peer above the parapets of our own national projects to seek a comparative perspective. Both aims are realised in these papers, and I hope that ultimately this collection will encourage further comparative work, in the Pacific and elsewhere.

Taking the term ‘print culture’ seriously is no slight undertaking. As a relatively new field of research, the subject displays a somewhat brash hubris in claiming such a grand scope of investigation and in arguing that print conclusively shapes culture (though the term also acknowledges the reverse influence, and Sydney Shep’s paper perhaps best highlights that bi-directionality). Linda Crowl’s essay provides an impressive overview of the topic, showing that the cultures that drifted into the Pacific were both highly varied and not necessarily very civilised. She argues that print’s most pervasive effect in the Pacific was to foster centralisation of power, resulting in profound changes to island cultures. But print did not necessarily have an immediate impact, as beachcombers adapted to oral societies and the region developed a blend of oral and literate culture. Nor did the transformative power of print always embed itself as deeply as the term ‘print culture’ might imply, as Susan Woodburn reveals in her discussion of some of the missionary activities in the Pacific.

Two particular manifestations of print in the Pacific that have not previously been discussed as print activities concern the ‘legibility’ of tattoos and of tapa cloth. Sarah Jones reviews the specificity of Maori male facial scarification and instances of other distant tribes recognising and interpreting the symbolic value of the carvings. Since moko were intended to encode details of lineage, social status and martial achievements, it is not theoretically surprising that such details should be ‘readable’, but when the recent Dumont D’Urville exhibition at

the Museum of Sydney can display three shrunken Maori warrior heads, covered in moko, with no further information, we have to assume that Maoridom, possibly as a result of adopting western print literacy, has lost this form of literacy.

Louise Wilson and Ian Morrison's studies of Cook's collection of tapa cloth record a different sort of visual literacy, identifying patterns, colours and substrates with particular places. Cook's collection embodies all the efforts of categorisation, order, and control associated with the imposition of print culture. Like Cook's geographic charts, these volumes provided subsequent students of the region with a means of understanding and arranging the vast array of islands of the Pacific. Louise Wilson's research explains the diversity of knowledges required to 'read' these samples, while Morrison's intriguing history of the collection probes the ironic acculturation of print. Surviving in up to 45 copies spread over four continents, the tapa book reflects the imperial history that drove the formation of such collections. But Morrison's history also examines the fortuitous compilation of the collection, originally acquired through a host of complex social exchanges, and ultimately made available to readers in an act of economic opportunism by an impecunious Alexander Shaw, who had amassed his various samples at estate sales. From this collection readers learned to appreciate one aspect of Pacific island culture just as that cultural heritage was being supplanted by European trade.

The final four essays in this issue confront more typical print history topics – distribution, serialisation and readership – and all reveal just how much work is both possible and needed in order to create an adequate picture of specific print cultures. Wallace Kirsop, as always, presents a persuasive case for local studies contextualised through comparison with studies in other countries, both English-speaking and non-English-speaking, and demonstrates how much can be gleaned simply from directories. His call for further work in this area is essential for colonial Australasia, where printers, booksellers and newspaper editors roamed fairly unpredictably, chasing riches, love, land or just empty dreams. Yet, as Ross Harvey's study shows, by the end of the nineteenth century there was a well-established publishing infrastructure, at least for newspapers, linking Australia and New Zealand with Britain and contemporary popular literature. Paul Hunt enumerates the significant amounts of serialised fiction reaching colonial readers in Dunedin and its hinterland, some of it serialised, some original, and some incomplete. Once we have fuller indices of major newspapers, it will be fascinating to examine the relationship between selections for serialisation and the presence of those same titles in circulating libraries and bookseller advertisements, and to compare the amounts of time required for the latest fiction to reach the colonies in various print formats.

The most unusual print format discussed here is the modern boutique brewery beer label. Sydney Shep has argued consistently for the broadest possible history of print, including ephemera, and her essay wittily displays the value of such material. While the labels cannot shape the historical culture they purport to recover, the labels' design (in consultation with an official historian) and content engage with existing Australian folklore about its convict heritage to create a new history. Whether beer labels, not necessarily read in any narrative order, make a significant contribution to culture remains to be seen, but this study inventively enriches both the methodology and scope of print culture studies.

The Expanding Horizons conference was a delightful day, intimate enough for meaningful discussion and wide-ranging enough to fend off afternoon drowsiness. I hope this set of essays affords readers with a similar sense of the interrelationships and creativity that mark print culture studies, and that the calls for further study and greater comparative analysis appeal to scholars working outside the Pacific. If so, the conference and this collection will have truly achieved their aims.

Conference Programme

- 9:00-9:10 – Welcome and orientation
- 9:10-10:30 – Sydney Shep on Australian beer labels; Wallace Kirsop on Australian commercial circulating libraries in the 19th century
- 11:00-12:00 – Sarah Jones on Maori moko in relation to print culture; Ian Morrison on Captain Cook's tapa cloth books
- 1:00-2:00 – Ross Harvey on sources of copy for New Zealand newspapers in the late 19th century; Paul Hunt on serial fiction in the *Otago Witness*, 1861-1906
- 2:00-3:00 – Susan Woodburn on the Melanesian Mission Press, Norfolk Island and the London Mission Press, Gilbert Islands; Linda Crowl on the arrival of print in the Pacific islands
- 3:30-4:30 – Paul Eggert on Dutch-Westralian anarchist poet Willem Siebenhaar's meeting with D. H. Lawrence in 1922; John Ross on the difficulties of compiling a descriptive bibliography of the writings of Harold Pinter
- 4:30-5:00 – BSANZ AGM
- 5:00-5:30 – Guided tour of the new University of Otago Central Library
- 5:30-6:30 – Reception in Charles Brasch Court of the Central Library