

‘Material Encounters’

Abstracts

KEYNOTE 1

Material Memories of Travel: the Albums of a Victorian Naval Surgeon

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This paper considers the visual archives of maritime scientific exploration, from coastal sketches to ethnographic observations. It focuses on the albums of John Linton Palmer, a British naval surgeon who served in the Pacific in the 1850s and 1860s, which are today part of the collections of the Royal Geographical Society in London. Through their drawing, recording, and collecting, naval surgeons like Linton Palmer played a significant role in the development of natural history and ethnology during the 19th century. The paper discusses the historical significance and potential contemporary uses of these albums and associated materials, in the context of three forms of memory-making: the recording of topographic, antiquarian, ethnographic, microscopic, and other data by means of sketches; the assembling of such materials into personalized albums, part of a distinctive 19th-century naval tradition; and the possible uses of such forms of visual heritage in a postcolonial context, notably in the context of the Pacific northwest coast.

KEYNOTE 2

Encounters with Skull Inscriptions

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This paper will explore the significance of human remains as a place of anthropological inscription. Museum collections of human remains usually include a set of associated documentation, archival data, and paper records. Yet, human remains and, particularly, human skulls are themselves also sites of scientific inscription. They often bear catalogue numbers; often they also bear words and names. As objects of anthropological value, I argue, human remains have become miniaturized sites for inscribing racial taxonomies, geographies, life-stories, and wider theories and forms of reasoning about human difference and affinity. I draw on case studies from the history of craniology and sociocultural anthropology of Oceania in 19th- and 20th-century Europe to reflect particularly on the history and meaning of place names as inscriptions on human skulls and their webs of documentation. I ask why the materiality of these inscriptions matters and what we may learn from studying the complex histories of their trajectories and encounters.

Marginal Histories

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Inspired by Klaus Neumann's call for a critical approach to Pacific history which attends to the 'trash' of the past ('the irrelevant, the insignificant, the marginal, and the negligible'), this paper revisits the margins of our sources. Captions, doodles, annotations, footnotes, scribbles, graffiti, edits, off-cuts, out-takes, and other forms of marginal trash are addressed in their own right and for the light that they might shed on the main body of source materials, whether these are textual, audio-visual, or artefactual. The large folio drawings produced by the Russian anthropologist Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay during his travels through Oceania between 1871 and 1883 offer an exemplary platform from which to consider the interplay of the central and the marginal and of the visual and the textual. Detailed field journals are no longer available for many of Maclay's voyages. However, the visual richness of his sketches, and the scope they offer for historical analysis and reconstruction, are considerably enhanced and extended by focusing on his many marginal scribbles which include obvious captions as well as stray observations, word-lists, and other commentaries.

Common Knowledge as State Secrets in the Supreme Court Files of Myanmar

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On a trip to Myanmar in 2012, I came across dozens of discarded Supreme Court files from the 1990s. Earmarked 'secret', the files – which are now in the National Library of Australia's collection – had the allure of the forbidden. Yet, they contain little that is not public knowledge. Lacking sinister directives to imprison dissidents or pursue enemies, they are instead taken up with prosaic narratives of wayward judges and untrustworthy court clerks. Their contents are the stuff of teashop conversations; commonplaces that in the folds of cardboard folders are fetishized through the act of concealment. In this paper I explore how state secrecy functions in the Supreme Court files not to conceal but to designate and demarcate matters of common knowledge. Reading the files as a repository of encounters among and between postcolonial institutions and the familiar, I concentrate on the repertoires of bureaucratic practice and procedure aimed at gaining material control both over court personnel and over a sanctioned version of the truth through mastery of the written record. Observing that the fact of the archive is in many respects more remarkable than its contents, I ask whether its secret might not, in this case, be ontological rather than epistemic.

Embedding Encounters: the Drawings of Jean Piron

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La Recherche and *L'Espérance*, under the command of *contre-amiral* Joseph Antoine Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, left Brest in 1791. The dual aims of the expedition were to search for the lost vessels of La Pérouse and to conduct scientific and commercial research in the Pacific. The neoclassically trained artist Jean Piron accompanied the voyage. Equipped with paper, gouache, brushes, and pencils, he executed his appointed task of drawing the geographical features and natural produce of places visited and the costumes, customs, and portraits of people encountered. These drawings were to be an adjunct to the textual descriptions of the same subjects by the savants accompanying the voyage. Several references in the expedition's journal accounts commend Piron's ability to fulfil his duty. However, Piron's drawings and the engravings produced from them are not simply visual records of outward appearances. Rather they are subtle, nuanced representations, reflecting Enlightenment ideals and direct experiences with indigenous peoples. This paper discusses a body of artwork I have made in response to the complex information these visual records reveal. Utilizing a process of quotation and transformation, I re-present Piron's imagery melded with neoclassical and Oceanic ornamental forms. This strategy alerts the viewer to the conditions under which these primary representations were created, namely that of embodied encounter.

Mapping the Once and Future Strait: Space, Time, and Torres Strait from the 16th Century to the Pleistocene

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The geographical focus of this paper is the space separating modern Papua New Guinea and Australia, called Torres Strait since the late 18th century. The paper is a non-teleological history of the imagining, 'discovery', naming, and mapping of that space from the mid-16th century and the encounters with places and people that underpinned such knowing. I try to suspend awareness of later outcomes and nomenclatures in order to approximate pasts as they might have seemed to diverse contemporary protagonists, both foreign and local. This existential approach recognizes the pragmatic materiality of time and space which can only be known historically through the material or embodied residues of past encounters: maps, charts, drawings, writings, and transcribed memories. Such materials were also appropriated by savants as empirical fodder for deductive reasoning. My history of the erratic accretion of materialized, embodied, or objectified knowledge about a place and its inhabitants follows a mostly sequential chronology. However, enfolding that trajectory is another chronologic in which expanding geological or archaeological deep time and the modern ironies of virtual materiality disrupt history's linear temporality. In this sense, the historicized 16th century precedes the Pleistocene which was not invented and named until 1839-1840.

**'With the Consent of the Tribe':
Marking Lands on Tanna and Erromango, New Hebrides (Vanuatu)**

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It is now something of a cliché to talk about the sale of indigenous lands for what is seen as a pittance in contemporary terms (a few hatchets, some cloth, maybe a pig), and to ask whether 'the natives' really understood what was being sold. Yet this refrain from much of colonial history bears a good deal of unpacking to understand just what happened to the lands of the south Pacific over the centuries and millennia of human interaction in the region. A variety of sources, from archival (including remarkable deeds of sale from the National Archive of Vanuatu), to archaeological (actual sites where people lived in the past), to oral historical (the ways people remember these places in the present) can be brought to bear on the history of relationships to the land on Tanna and Erromango, in the southern New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). Focusing especially on the missionary records, though also bringing in other perspectives, we can begin to disentangle the ways that people in the past and the present marked places on the landscape in different media to carve out political, economic, and religious relationships with the islands on which they lived.

**Land, Colonialism, Encounter, and the Post:
Materiality and Absence in the Sources of Lorimer Fison**

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In 1880, the Methodist missionary Lorimer Fison, with A.W. Howitt, published *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, a study of the social organisation of Aboriginal Australians based on written materials collected from their many European collaborators. That year, in Levuka, Fiji, Fison delivered a public lecture on 'Land Tenure in Fiji' which was published locally in government gazettes as well as in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*. In an early example of applied anthropology, this work shaped the codification of Fijian land. It drew on recorded interviews with Fison's students at the Methodist Training College for pastors and colonial administrators. I compare Fison's detailed analysis of land tenure in Fiji, based on prolonged personal encounters, to his oblique references to Aboriginal land ownership in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, based on responses to brief questions in the schedule on kinship and social organisation sent to Europeans in contact with Aboriginal people. These varied methods of engagement with indigenous people involved very different materialities: personal in Fiji and postal in the Australian colonies. I further argue that Fison's physical mobility across colonial borders placed him between two very different official positions on land and indigenous rights. His anthropologies were thus framed by the specificities of colonial rule and by his differential status within the colonies: settler in Australia, sojourner in Fiji. I conclude by considering the remembering of Fison in the distinct historiographies of Fiji and Australia.

Derivation, Innovation, and Encounters in the Russian Mapping of Oceania

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This paper highlights a paradox in the Russian mapping of Oceania. The recognition and incorporation of the fifth part of the world, or Oceania, into Russian global cartography was late and highly derivative. In contrast, Russian scientific voyagers to Oceania in 1803-1840 made important original contributions to charting the far north Pacific coastlines and the small islands of Polynesia and Micronesia. The first Russian circumnavigator, Adam Johann von Krusenstern, inscribed wide Oceanic experience and deep familiarity with his predecessors' work in a two-volume *Atlas luzhnogo Moria/Atlas de l'Océan pacifique* (1824-1827), the earliest atlas devoted exclusively to the Pacific. We show the material significance of Krusenstern's *Atlas*, both as template for subsequent hydrographers, notably the Frenchman Dumont d'Urville, and in wider cartography. Krusenstern's 1835 amendments to his *Atlas*, incorporating innovative toponymy and his responses to Dumont d'Urville's charting of Fiji and the Loyalty Islands in 1827, graphically illustrate the complex entanglement of invention, encounters, and material appropriation inherent in all cartography. We conclude by investigating the materiality of maps, their interrelationships, and the spatial or personal encounters that generated them in a further, highly localized dimension of Russian Oceanic cartography: the overlay of Russian metropolitan nomenclatures on the Indigenous names inscribed in sketch maps by Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, the earliest European to undertake extended fieldwork in an Oceanic setting.

Seeing Red and Making Marks: Inscriptions on Frontier Objects

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Australian Aboriginal material culture – spearthrowers and wooden bowls, shields, woven bags, and necklaces – underwent many changes in the face of rapid change and cultural trauma during the period of frontier contact. A conventional view suggests that these objects retained their original forms and designs for a period and then drifted from those parameters, either disappearing or becoming misshapen tourist facsimiles. A closer look at objects fashioned during the contact period suggests another fascinating variant, not only reflecting particular encounters between maker and collector but revealing Aboriginal attempts at incorporating motifs and materials judged to contain the essence of European power and influence. This paper examines the addition of European materials such as red turkey twill and sealing wax to Aboriginal objects, as enhanced alternatives to red ochre. The paper then turns to a consideration of the way in which Aboriginal carvers began incising letters of the alphabet and branding designs onto their carved weapons. Were these acts haphazard or were Aboriginal people understanding something vital about the sources of European power, attempting their own appropriation and manipulation of these symbols?

Intertextual Encounters: Aboriginal People through Explorers' Eyes

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In examining European ethnographic studies of Indigenous people, scholars have long distinguished between accounts produced by the explorer in the field and those of the armchair philosopher in Europe who drew on first-hand ethnographic accounts in formulating broader theories on humanity. Knowing their field notes would be avidly read by metropolitan savants, some explorers attempted to bridge the divide and personify the 'philosophical traveller' themselves, producing more elaborate theories in the field. Explorers' ethnographic accounts also reached popular audiences with many explorers and travellers securing publishing contracts before embarking on their voyages. Scholars have observed how commercialization influenced published accounts and encouraged their incorporation of lurid, tantalizing details and images. This paper will also consider the effects of such publications on subsequent explorers, particularly their fieldwork practice. I examine how explorers' accounts of Aboriginal people were mediated by those of their predecessors, from quibbling over details recorded and refuting observations and arguments, to reiterating earlier accounts in lieu of conducting their own ethnographic study. By charting these diverse intertextual ethnographic encounters, I aim to throw light on the canon of 18th- and 19th-century explorers' ethnographic accounts – who was most often cited, engaged with, and why? what was the significance of Indigenous agency in these accounts? did disquieting Aboriginal agency lead some explorers to prefer to engage with 'the natives' on the page, rather than in the field?

The New Guinea Photographs of Reverend William G. Lawes: the Making of

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Missionaries were often the first Europeans to enter regions in countries that had been annexed by imperial powers. The relationships they established with the local populations are particularly fascinating due to the intensity of their interactions with the people they were trying to convert. Yet it was not until relatively recently that missionaries' photographic output began to be examined in more detail and for ends not solely related to the telling of mission stories or the vilification of the mission project. Reverend William G. Lawes of the London Missionary Society and other missionaries in New Guinea were sought out by anthropologists to provide them with evidence from the field and they also supplied photographs for the secular press. But exactly how these images were created has yet to be examined in any great detail. This paper focuses on the photographic encounter itself – the moments in which Lawes captured New Guinea and its inhabitants on glass-plate negatives. I highlight some of the ways in which the indigenous population shaped the visual conception of their land through a close examination of the missionary's photographs and the journal entries and letters he wrote while in New Guinea.

The Animal Parts of Objects

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Between 1870 and 1890, anthropologists, explorers, missionaries, traders, and government officers pursued the fauna of southeast coastal Papua New Guinea. In doing so, they also collected objects made by the people they encountered. Thousands of animal skins were sold and donated to museums along with such objects. Within the museum, however, the relationship between animal and object was severed. Frequently museum processes also led to a slow displacement between collector-information and museum item. In this paper, I examine the kinds of information collectors of Central Province material and specimens maintained with their collections and in their correspondence with receiving museums, including labels, notes, and drawings, to determine how this information was transformed within the museum. I am particularly concerned with the ways museum systems of categorization made explicit physical relationships between objects and peoples while largely divorcing similar connections between peoples and animals.

Smoke and Mirrors: the Mystery of the Stolen Tobacco on the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition

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In May 1948, the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land was stationed at the small Aboriginal settlement of Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria. On 14 May, the cook and quartermaster John Bray discovered to his consternation that nearly all the expedition's supply of tobacco had disappeared. The crisis caused by this theft and the ham-fisted attempt by the expedition leader Charles Mountford to bring a perpetrator to 'justice' provide exceptional insight into the processes of material exchange that enabled a large-scale anthropological and scientific expedition to go about its business in the mid-20th century. The great collections of Aboriginal art and natural-history specimens generated by this expedition are fairly well known but the ways in which Aboriginal artists and guides were drawn into the expedition's economy of food and tobacco distribution are not. The 'mirrors' in my title refers to the mimetic impulse of the expedition: its ambition of capturing likenesses of the land and its inhabitants through photography, sound recording, collection building, and other media. The 'smoke' refers to the tobacco – highly addictive and redolent with intercultural associations – that was the expedition's chief currency. Although I do not expect to solve the mystery of who stole the tobacco, I hope that analysis of this incident will clear some smoke around the relationship between economics, expeditions, and the production of knowledge in cross-cultural situations.