In November 2013 an international symposium was held at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney, Australia called “Travel and the Media” (co-hosted by the National Film and Sound Archive and the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University and organized by Sofia Eriksson and Bridget Griffen-Foley). The Museum’s collections formed a fitting backdrop as a destination of travel and a site of tourist experiences, as well as a gathering of items related to the physical objects that enable people to embark on journeys to different parts of the globe. A number of the papers presented referred to a time when Australia was dependent on a maritime world, with sea-based expeditions forming the majority of travel experiences of the southern continent until the mid-twentieth century.

The definition of “travel” was left open to wide interpretation, and these select papers presented at, or inspired by, the symposium reflect this diversity. Travel can be touristic, but some travelers have seen themselves as separate and superior types of adventurers and their writing as more than mere records of tourist experience. The tourism industry also has its own set of representations that can, in turn, mediate the response of the traveler. As a category, travel is often hard to distinguish from mobility. For Australia, this is of particular significance because it was part of a mobile colonial domain where visitors, tourists, and colonial adventurers circulated throughout the empires of the world, which also included New Zealand and the Pacific. Some of these papers work to blur these categories and allow new perspectives that are not possible otherwise. There are often several competing discourses at play, such as the image being
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promoted by the tourist operators at the destination, the projected discourse of the traveler, and the tension between these caused by traveling under commission.

Varied interpretations of “media” were encouraged by the symposium hosts and the word is used here in its broadest possible sense to mean the methods with which representations of travel have been captured and communicated to different audiences. What draws this group of papers together is a focus on these representations and an interest in the varied impacts of different media filters. Thus the fact that papers explored disparate types of media—(historical) travel writing in books and newspapers, souvenir ephemera, documentary film, Hollywood cinema, leisure magazines, and responses to travel writing—counterintuitively lends this collection of papers a connecting thread. Each of these modes of presentation comes with its own expectations, assumptions, and potential agendas that are explored in the papers.

The collection’s journey begins in Europe and moves toward Australia, mirroring the processes of exploration and colonization and thus referring to one of the main areas of scholarship with regard to travel representations. Representations of travel include depictions of the journey itself, the places and people encountered, and the preoccupations of the travelers as a reflection of their own culture. Much scholarship has focused on travel representations as projections of colonial or metropolitan culture rather than a static record of the destination at a place in time. Travelers are not necessarily aware that recording their impressions also involves projecting their own culture and ideas onto a foreign landscape. Representations of travel can, however, be used a tool or agent of colonialism more overtly, or as a method of promoting a particular ideology.

The first article in this issue takes us to Australia via Germany. The author, Siegfried Mattl, makes the case that the use of travel texts and documentary film by Colin Ross to represent travel has produced a unique reimagining of Australia in geopolitical terms as Raum ohne Volk (space without people). Ross used cinematic techniques to draw out themes explored in his book The Unfinished Continent (1930), which suggests that Australia’s restrictive immigration policies were putting Australia at risk of invasion from Asia, where “Volk” were “ohne Raum.” Looking at Ross’s films and written work in combination allows a unique perspective on the portrayed message as it is enhanced and manipulated through the mode of presentation.
The next article, by Victoria Kuttainen and Sarah Galletly, takes us into the space around Australia while looking at representations of the Pacific in Australian culture and leisure magazines of the 1930s. The range of material presented in middlebrow magazines offers a unique angle on the way that “the Pacific” was presented to Australian audiences, reframing scholarly ideas that Westerners’ engagement with the Pacific was largely based on fantasy. These magazines sit at the juncture between the “real” Pacific that Australians increasingly experienced through colonialism, trade, or tourism and the “imagined” one encouraged by travel literatures, stories, and advertisements. Giving weight to the entire content of magazines reveals that fantasy and factualness are interwoven through fiction and non-fiction depictions of the Pacific alike, although the reception was very different depending on the genre of the material. The possibility of real-life engagement with South Sea fantasies presented by advertisements further highlights the ambiguity of these magazines’ engagement with the Pacific, and the importance of the concept of middlebrow orientalism to interpreting these representations.

Another media type that has informed the ideas of potential travelers is Hollywood cinema, particularly as it represents the United States to the rest of the world. As Anne Rees demonstrates in her article, for Australian audiences travel to the United States often involved a complex renegotiation of perceptions, which had largely been formed by what they saw on the silver screen. The nature of the medium meant that the impact of Hollywood cinema was more about the transmission of a general ethos of glamour and modernity as opposed to a realistic depiction of American life. Through the lens of Australian travelers’ reactions to the reality versus the projected image, we can learn much about this crucial point in history when Australians were considering their place in the world and rethinking their allegiances.

Continuing the exploration of “authenticity” and the influence of assumptions made at the point of reception, Helen Bones focuses on responses to travel writing and imaginative fiction about Australasia. Being under the shadow of global powers such as Great Britain and, later, America, means that Australia and New Zealand have historically been anxious about forging an independent, authentic, national identity. Bones’s article discusses the added benefits of looking at responses to travel representations to examine ideas about authenticity, particularly responses that came from the people and places being represented. Newspaper literary reviews
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interpret representations and have different impacts depending on the priorities of the reviewer and their own ideas about colonial and local identity (further complicated by the blurry divisions between these categories). The reception of these works at home and overseas affects the way they are interpreted more widely and the development of travel and national genres. This article compares responses to the work of traveling writers and travel writers and reveals that fictionality or authenticity is dependent on identity politics as well as genre.

Louise Prowse’s contribution further illuminates the construction of local identities from the perspective of Australian country towns through local, regional, and state tourism media productions—including tourist guides, postcards, magazines, pamphlets, and advertisements in local newspapers. Media images of rural travel produced by local tourism campaigns, regional collaborations and state tourism bureaus all point to a significant shift in how travelers partook in the rural ideal. They suggest that the country town became the central expression of the Australian countryside for the twentieth-century tourist. An examination of the representation of these towns in different types of tourist media reveals that country towns have moved from being a functional base for a wider rural experience to being the focal point of the experience itself.

Our journey ends in the small town of Gundagai, located on the road between Sydney and Melbourne in New South Wales. Gundagai has a reputation much bigger than its size might suggest, as a quintessential representation of an Australian country town. It is the inspiration for an impressive number of iconic poems and ballads in the Australian nationalist tradition, such as Banjo Paterson’s “The Road to Gundagai,” Jack Moses’s “Nine Miles from Gundagai,” and Jack O’Hagan’s song “Where the Dog Sits on the Tuckerbox (5 Miles from Gundagai).” Richard White suggests that Gundagai provides an eloquent case study for the mediation of representations of place through different kinds of souvenir ephemera, in terms of the messages projected and the folklore surrounding the place. The language of souvenirs and the message contained within dominates meanings of the past, over and above the historical reality that might be presented by the destination itself. In this article, as in the previous offerings, it is demonstrated that widening the scope of media examined allows for new angles and illuminating perspectives to be pursued.