

Reading *Walkabout* in Osaka

Travel, mobility, and place-making

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Travelling by nostalgically hyper-modern monorail, I arrived at Suita in Osaka in search of Australian modernity. The Expo 1970 site is now a commemorative park, dotted with concrete infrastructure and brutalist architecture amongst gardens filled with autumnal colour, or spring *sakura*, depending on season. Its entrance is marked by an enormous two-armed primitivist sculpture—*The Tower of the Sun* (1970) by Tarō Okamoto—that looms 70 metres above the viewer, with three faces whose light-up eyes prove a disconcerting sight for night-time arrivals. The Osaka Commemorative Park is also home to the National Museum of Ethnology (known as Minpaku), which houses an extraordinary collection of ethnological artefacts from around the world and a well-stocked anthropology library.

Amongst myriad other holdings, the Minpaku Library contains a full 50-year run of *Walkabout* magazine, the mid-twentieth-century magazine (1934–74) that sought to introduce armchair readers to remote Australian regions and the Asia-Pacific, and to encourage Australians, through travel, to develop a sense of belonging and place. Caught between home and abroad myself, I was finishing a book co-authored between Hobart and Tokyo, and Minpaku's concrete bowels provided the venue to finish my writing in comparative isolation and to refresh my sense of the magazine as a whole.² Skimming across the pages of *Walkabout*, I felt like one of the magazine's original readers: dipping into issues at random or intrigued by contents pages; finding connections between writers whose names were surprising to see side-by-side; and reading selected issues cover-to-cover to reveal an astonishing panorama of mid-century Australian concerns and diversions. Like those earlier readers, I was both at home in the world conjured by *Walkabout* and distanced from it; literally, on this particular reading occasion, by the geographical divide between Japan and Australia, but also temporarily, in my imagined re-habitation of an older Australia, several generations previously.

Reading *Walkabout* in Osaka proved to be a self-reflexive affair.³ Like much of my recent work on middlebrow cultural forms, *Walkabout* provides access to the thinking of my grandparents' generation. Writers with whom I became familiar through my grandparents' suburban Brisbane bookshelves—rather than my university English major—inhabit the pages of *Walkabout*: Ernestine Hill, Ion Idriess, and Frank Clune, amongst others. My great-grandmother's collection of Clune's Australian travels exemplifies how aspirational middle-class readers used these books to discover their own country: neat ticks beside Clune's descriptions of the Mount Kosciuszko State Park show that Ivy Norma Tickle used Clune as a travel guide.⁴ Hill herself always reminds me of my crimplene-trouser suited grandmother Agnes Anne Johnston: the two independent-minded women shared a childhood in provincial Queensland, a determinedly modern secretarial career in Sydney, and a later life in Queensland, my grandmother widowed young but embedded in family and Hill, never married, keeping herself and her son in a kind of peripatetic and precarious respectability. Reading the books and magazines of mid-century Australia enables me to imagine how this mid-century generation learnt about themselves and their country, how their own ideas and impressions were thickened through reading practices central to self-improvement. It also helps to bridge the gap between my own presentist, postcolonial concerns and earlier forms of settler Australian self-fashioning.

Thinking about readership, and about the forms of accessible culture that the majority consumed, brings recent scholarship on middlebrow culture together with that on periodical print culture. *Walkabout* was a popular magazine (circulation figures began at 20,000 copies, reaching a one-time maximum of 65,000 in December 1965): it was read in family living rooms, on trains, in dentists' and doctors' waiting rooms, in holiday houses, and in public libraries. Readers remember the magazine with great fondness, as do those writers, journalists, and editors who worked on it. *Walkabout* paid well for articles and for photographs, supporting a raft of writers and photographers with income that often underwrote less commercial projects.

Walkabout made a significant contribution to Australia's sense of itself, by addressing diverse range of topics: geology; distinctive native flora and fauna; the outback and its people; the Pacific region; and a distinctively Australian modernity. It also formed an integral component of what David Carter has identified as Australia's long overlooked and neglected middlebrow literature.⁵ *Walkabout* is an ideal magazine through which to engage with recent scholarship that analyses periodical print culture with the kind of forensic close reading that literature scholars usually undertake with fiction and poetry. Most importantly, such approaches insist that we analyse the magazine as a whole rather than simply mining it for its constituent parts.⁶ The magazine also provides important insights into debates about Australian identity during the mid-twentieth-century, and the ways in which these debates were played out in accessible forms. Key to these debates were settler Australian attachments to place, and *Walkabout's* middlebrow writing provides insights into the ways in which white Australians negotiated their relationship to landscapes, both literal and emotional, including those marked by Aboriginal occupation and belonging.

Walkabout's managing editor Charles Holmes extolled the virtues of travel in his November 1935 editorial:

Travel is the most successful of outdoor sports. It conditions the body, informs the mind, inspires the heart, and imparts a grace to our social intercourse. It is a university of experience. It teaches that the bigger drama of life is played in the open—out where ships speak as they pass in the night—where the glory of the mountain, plain, and desert awe us with a mystery that is forever new to the responsive traveller.⁷

Walkabout was the ideal vehicle for promoting travel as a means to perfect the Australian body and mind, in the view of its founders. Charles Lloyd Jones, from the sponsoring organisation Australian National Travel Association (ANTA), declared in the first issue that

we have embarked on an educational crusade which will enable Australians and the people of other lands to learn more of the romantic Australia that exists beyond the cities and the enchanted South Sea Islands and New Zealand.⁸

Walkabout sought to bring about the modern Australian citizen and the modern nation. Travel as a peculiarly modern practice was posited as a means by which unique Australian subjectivities would emerge: specifically, the idealised modernity of the white settler Australian.

Development and diversity

Walkabout's surveys of places and peoples brought to its readers a diverse and complex picture of Australia and its region. Jones confidently predicted the appeal of *Walkabout's* 'novel and arresting story' from the first issue. The magazine contains so many diverse voices and perspectives. Some staff writers produced the kind of copy that collapsed distinctions between the articles and the advertising that was crucial to the magazine's purpose as an organ of ANTA, but other writers were not particularly concerned with ANTA's interests in value-adding the tourist industry. Indeed, the magazine regularly featured articles that warned of the negative aspects of tourism (this was particularly common in articles about Pacific island travel), and of development more generally. The teacher, adventurer, and photographer John Bechervaise, visiting the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric scheme with Geelong College in 1949, collected plant specimens and appreciated the region's scenic gorges as much as the transformation of the landscape.⁹

While working as assistant editor for *Walkabout*, Bechervaise contributed a pointedly titled article 'How Shall We Reckon Their Value?' (1950) that surveyed the significance of wildlife reserves in Australia and warned that it was important to learn from past environmental mistakes and to think carefully about the 'arbitrary destruction of plant or animal species'.¹⁰ He cautioned against economic exploitation, and the article concluded with recommendations for development of national parks and reserves. National parks were a favourite topic for *Walkabout*, mostly accounts of individual experiences in various locations, or arguments for establishing more parks.

Australian optimism in the post-war period was high, and articles extolling the benefit of large-scale development were regularly published in *Walkabout*. Libby Robin notes that, in the 1950s, the 'combination of booming emigration, major national projects like the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electricity Scheme, and extraordinary wool prices gave Australians a sense of limitless possibilities for the land, and an unshakeable faith in large-scale initiatives'.¹¹ *Walkabout* shared the boosterism typical of the mid-century in its modernist celebration of development. The magazine's articles and photographs regularly featured massive development projects, celebrating the coming of modernity and featuring images when new technologies arrived in rural landscapes. Yet such sentiments were included alongside more sober assessments.

In June-December 1955, the magazine featured an editorial column entitled 'The Country Grows...', inspired by a poetic epigraph:

The country grows
Into the image of the people,
And the people grow
Into the likeness of the country
Till to the soul's geographer
Each becomes the symbol of the other.

Attributed to the idiosyncratic Irish writer and Buddhist Max Dunn, the poem prefaced a monthly meditation on various aspects of Australian industrial development. Commencing with the beef cattle industry,¹² the editorial covered timely (and still prescient) issues. In June, growing demands on Murray River water for both domestic and industrial usage; in July, the achingly slow development of natural resource schemes such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electricity Project; in August, live exports of cattle to Port Moresby and the state of the South Australian motor car industry; in September, South Australian steel manufacturing; in October, air freight from King Island across Bass Strait; in November, a special discussion 'Science and the Australian Environment,' reporting on a recent speech by CSIRO chairman Sir Ian Clunies Ross, concerning rainfall and soil science. In December, *Walkabout* published a Special Map Supplement: a double-page spread that comprehensively detailed projects under development throughout Australia. 'A glance at this, together with a reading of the notes highlighting advances in each State, will show how, indeed, the country grows.'¹³

Yet alongside approving notice of industrial development, 'The Country Grows...' expressed keen disappointment that cultural development was not keeping pace with economics. The slow rate of establishing national parks, heritage concerns including vandalism of both Aboriginal and settler sites of significance, the paucity of funds for museums and other cultural institutions were all noted as troubling issues. These are nationally important matters: 'Most Australians combine their ideals of loyalty and patriotism with a true respect for all of their country — rock, soil and vegetation as well as bronze, brick and mortar. But there are still too many in our midst who have not yet caught the American spirit of doing honour to one's land.'¹⁴ Economic development was not sufficient, in and of itself, without equal attention to cultural matters.

Culture and critique

Poetry and agriculture may now seem unlikely bed-fellows, but the kind of well-rounded reader that *Walkabout* addressed would have found this a congenial mix, in what Carter describes as the kind of 'virtuous citizenship and "nationed" modernity' that middlebrow culture offered more broadly.¹⁵ Regular commentary about Australian literature was pub-

lished in the magazine—including the ‘Our Authors’ Page’ series in the early-1950s, which each month featured a leading Australian writer, only some of whom were contributors. Advocacy for culture thus took place in the pages of the magazine, literalized in its layout. In the same issue, a reader could encounter a celebration of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area—a complex new system around the towns of Griffith and Leeton—and a feature on the adventure fiction writer Ion Idriess.¹⁶ Notably, the irrigation article was penned by Bernard Cronin, novelist and inaugural president of the Society of Australian Authors, who contributed 20 *Walkabout* articles alongside a raft of novels and short stories, the best known of which are *Bracken* (1929) and *The Sow’s Ear* (1933). *Walkabout* writers, like their readers, were curious and informed about a range of issues, rather than exclusively literary or pragmatic. So too, another issue might see an impassioned argument for ‘Planning More and Better Hotels’ by Charles Holmes, alongside Eric Lowe’s feature on the author Eleanor Dark.¹⁷

Tourism and culture were shared concerns for the magazine, and Dark’s own article for *Walkabout* succinctly assessed the benefits and limitations of a tourist industry. Writing about the Centre, Dark travelled the North–South Road that was eulogized elsewhere in the magazine. ‘That road! It is impossible to say whether one loves or loathes it. It performs all that is desirable and necessary from a practical point of view. It has ‘opened up’ the country; it facilitates transport, defence and the tourist trade.’ Yet the cost of such industrialised travel comes at the detriment of understanding the country, its temporality, and its distinctiveness. She notes that travelling by coach—as most tourists would—changes the experience of the Centre, and negates its nature:

So the traveller by tourist coach is left with the nagging thought that he himself has introduced the one jarring note into this symphony of newly discovered beauty; he has committed the extreme solecism of being in a hurry. And he pays for it. A landscape in which he should be still to feel its stillness is branded forever on his memory as a straight ribbon of road endlessly unrolling, and on either side of it a whizzing streak of colour in which the aboriginal reds, browns and ochres of the earth and the dull greens of the low-growing vegetation run together in a blur. A scene whose essence is its remoteness is hurled at him in chunks at a velocity of almost a mile a minute.¹⁸

Dark’s exquisite evocations of place here are mixed with concerns that had troubled travel writers since the nineteenth century. Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes how railways transformed European landscapes and changed how people understood their environment, marking an industrialized vision of time and space that eroded older notions of countryside and its use value.¹⁹

Dark’s quiet mention of ‘aboriginal reds, browns and ochres’ reminds us that many settler Australians were well aware that the country was integral to indigenous identity; indeed, that the two were intimately linked. In other 1951 issues, for example, *Walkabout* readers could read the Tasmanian bushwalker Jessie Luckman’s article on an expedition to Mount Cameron West on Tasmania’s west coast to document Aboriginal rock carvings. Luckman concluded that this is important work, and readers agreed.²⁰ Another Tasmanian reader, Rosamond McCulloch, wrote a letter to the editor in response, which was published the following year, revealing considerable community knowledge of and interest in local Aboriginal culture. (McCulloch was an artist who taught at the Tasmanian College of the Arts during the 1950s and 1960s). Bill Harney wrote often for *Walkabout* in 1951 too, in one article describing his experiences working on the road patrol south-west of Alice Springs; in another, explaining the arrival of dingoes in Australia through Aboriginal legend; in another, detailing the ‘importance of the snake in aboriginal ritual and custom,’ providing examples of legends from a number of different Aboriginal groups from whom he had learnt in his life-long quest for information about Aboriginal culture.²¹ 1951 is just an indicative year, rather than an exceptional one. Such articles in *Walkabout* provide compelling evidence that settler Australians were told about Aboriginal culture in accessible forms, and that they were interested. This provides something of a corrective to thin readings of the past that intimate that white Australians were wilfully ignorant of the Aboriginal cultures that pre-dated European occupation, or that magazines such as *Walkabout* were inherently racist and derogatory.

Tom Griffiths has described how 'nationalist anxieties and prophecies were played out in debates about environment, population, and race, often on a backdrop of central and northern Australia. There, according to much of the rhetoric of visionaries, were the 'vast, empty spaces', the beckoning potential of Australia'.²² Such spaces were the grist to *Walkabout's* mill, and they raised complex questions about development, race, co-existence, and modernity. Of course, not all representations of race and difference in *Walkabout* were as subtle as Dark's, or as informed by personal experience as Harney's. It is possible to mine the magazine selectively and find crass, derogatory, dated, and frankly racist representations of Aborigines, or Pacific Islanders, or Papua New Guineans.²³ But even these now-dated representations reveal the intense curiosity that middlebrow readers experienced about traditional tribal cultures, and about modernising indigenous communities at home and in the region. *Walkabout's* readers shared with international modernists more generally a belief that non-Western cultures had something important to contribute to new ways of understanding the self, society, and the future. Even if such curiosity resulted in some crass primitivism, such as invoked by the Tower of the Sun sculpture in Osaka, we need to take that interest seriously because it complicates stories about binary cultural divides and presumed ignorance of difference. It also enables us to understand modern Australian culture not as derivative, but as a vernacular modernism with its own local strains and character.²⁴

Writing about *National Geographic*— the American magazine that shares many characteristics with *Walkabout*— Stephen Greenblatt argues against the condemnatory analysis performed by Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins in their book *Reading National Geographic* (1993).²⁵ Greenblatt argues that the magazine did include signs of non-Western subjects' accommodation to modernity, thus contradicting a key argument of *Reading National Geographic*, and elucidates an analytical path away from ideologically bound censure.²⁶ So too, *Walkabout* taps into a reader's sense of curiosity: akin to the feelings of wonder—'thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilising, charged at once with desire, ignorance and fear'—associated with first encounters in colonial spaces.²⁷ Greenblatt's work on Renaissance travel writing (drawing upon Marxist analysis of capital) demonstrates that representations need to be taken seriously, not only because they reflect or produce social realities, but because they are in themselves social relations. That is, representations 'are not only products but producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being'.²⁸ Working to link collective understandings to individual experiences, to outline hierarchies of society and cultures, to reveal the resistances and conflicts that operated through modern Australian culture, *Walkabout's* articles sought to bring about a new national consciousness and sense of place, realized through the middlebrow reader. Settler Australians undoubtedly benefitted from dispossessive colonialism, and it has become a truism that that they suffered from a correlative sense of dislocation from the landscapes in which they dwelt. Reading *Walkabout* from its inception in 1934 reveals another side to national and regional debates about place, identity, and race during this period, and a rich archive of evidence that many writers and their readers considered these issues in accessible forms.

Notes

1. Anna Johnston is an ARC Future Fellow and Associate Professor of English at the University of Queensland. In 2014-15, she was Visiting Professor of Australian Studies at the University of Tokyo. Email: anna.johnston@uq.edu.au
2. The forthcoming book is: Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston, *Travelling Home: Walkabout Magazine and Modern Australia*, Anthem, London.
3. Azar Nafisi's beautiful and thought-provoking *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) evokes a similar sense of self-reflexive reading, and I have invoked her title in my own for this article.
4. Frank Clune's *Journey to Kosciusko by Road from Sydney, with Deviations in Search of History, Geography and Curiosa* (1965) was a condensed and amalgated version of two earlier books *Across the Snowy Mountains* (1961) and *Journey to Canberra* (1960). This kind of cavalier repackaging of material in various forms, and various media, was typical of Clune's pragmatic approach to writing and determined interest in his market rather than highbrow literary values. See Robert Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation and Colonial Governance* (St Lucia, QLD.: U of Queensland P, 2001); 'What Was Travel Writing? Frank Hurley and the Media Contexts of Early Twentieth-Century Australian Travel Writing,' *Studies in Travel Writing* 11 no. 1 (2007). See also Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters: The Story of P.R.. Stephenson* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1984).
5. David Carter, 'The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow: Or the C(o)urse of Good Taste,' in *Imagining Aus-*

- tralia: Literature and Culture in the New New World*, ed. Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2004).
6. See Sean Latham, and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies,' *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006).
 7. Charles Holmes, *Walkabout*, March 1935, 9.
 8. Chas. Lloyd Jones Jones, 'The Why and Wherefore,' *Walkabout* 1, no. 1 (1934).
 9. John Mayston Bechervaise, 'Snowy River Gorges,' February 1949, 36-8, 41.
 10. 'How Shall We Reckon Their Value', *ibid.*, June 1950, 29.
 11. Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (Sydney: Univ. of New South Wales Press, 2007), 57.
 12. 'The Country Grows', *Walkabout*, June 1955, 9.
 13. 'Some Important Australian Developmental Projects', *ibid.*, December 1955, 24-5.
 14. 'The Country Grows', *ibid.*
 15. Carter, 'The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow,' 184.
 16. Bernard Cronin, 'Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area,' *Walkabout* 17, no. 4 (1951); Colin Roderick, 'Our Authors' Page: Ion L. Idriess,' *Walkabout* 17, no. 4 (1951).
 17. Charles H. Holmes, 'Planning More and Better Hotels,' *ibid.*, no. 5.; Eric Lowe, 'Our Authors' Page: Eleanor Dark,' *ibid.*
 18. Eleanor Dark, 'They All Come Back,' *ibid.*, no. 1: 19-20.
 19. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, new. ed. (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014).
 20. Jessie S. Luckman, 'Tasmanian Aboriginal Carvings,' *Walkabout* 17, no. 9 (1951).
 21. W. E. Harney, 'South-Western Road Patrol (Northern Territory),' *ibid.*, no. 5; 'The Dingo,' *Walkabout* 17, no. 7 (1951); 'Snakes and Aboriginal Lore,' *Walkabout* 17, no. 11 (1951).
 22. Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 186.
 23. See, for example, Jillian Barnes, 'Tourism's Role in the Struggle for the Intellectual and Material Possession of 'the Centre' of Australia at Uluru, 1929-2011,' *Journal of Tourism History* 3, no. 2 (2011); Jillian E. Barnes, 'Resisting the Captured Image: How Gwoja Tjungurrayi, 'One Pound Jimmy', Escaped the 'Stone Age', in *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, ed. Ingereth Macfarlane and Mark Hannah, *Aboriginal History Monograph 16* (ANU E-Press and Aboriginal History Inc, 2007).; Max Quanchi, 'Contrary Images: Photographing the New Pacific in *Walkabout Magazine*,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 79 (2003).
 24. For an excellent article on the Jindyworobak poetic movement as a form of vernacular modernism, see Ellen Smith, 'Local Moderns: The Jindyworobak Movement and Australian Modernism,' *Australian Literary Studies* 27, no. 1 (2012).
 25. Catherine A. Lutz, and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
 26. Greenblatt, S. (1993) 'Kindly Visions', *New Yorker*, Vol 69 No 33, pp.112-20.
 27. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*(Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 20.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 6.