



To the Letter: Contemporary Perspectives on Epistolarity

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“The Australian Memory Project: Postcards from the Edge of South Australia”.

Postcards are curious objects. Offering such a small space for communication, existing as quasi-public documents in that they could be read, unlike envelope-enclosed letters, by numbers of people before arriving at their destination, communicating not only through the written text but also by the picture chosen to be written on, postcards are items that have more to tell us about the sender than one might think. There is a vibrant collecting community around postcards, but mostly the interest of collectors lies in the picture or in the stamp. The Australian Memory Project, led by Dr Kate Douglas, has chosen postcards to form the basis of its first digital archive exhibition because the entirety of these little communiqués – the picture, the message, the handwriting, the addresses – gives us clues about domestic Australian lives over the last hundred or so years and the way people store moments and memories in the small cardboard rectangle. In short, we seek to contextualize postcards as a life writing practice.

This paper will establish the purpose, reasoning, research context, and initial findings of the Australian Memory Project’s “Postcards in South Australia” digital archive and exhibition. Placing our project in the framework of similar “memory” projects, and describing some of the theoretical underpinnings and outcomes of such projects, goes some way towards building a picture of memory work in the Australian context and the place of our project within that broader framework.

