

TRAVELLING MINIATURES

Kerry & Co.'s Postcards of the Pacific
(1893–1917)

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A Marco

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines postcards of Pacific peoples that were produced in Sydney by the photographic firm Kerry & Co. during the first decade of the twentieth century. Like other visual images and technologies of that period, postcards have played an important role in shaping contemporary understandings of indigenous peoples, and, despite created for commercial purposes, they also relate to the production of anthropological knowledge at the turn of the century. This study is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which the Kerry & Co. postcards are embedded. Particular attention will be given to the company's postcard sample book around which the discussion of the Kerry postcards body will revolve. The second part, focusing on the three Aboriginal series, is characterised by a microhistorical approach to a photographic encounter on Wailwan land, and by the consideration of 'contact zones' for the understanding of the social dynamics in front of Kerry's camera. The focus of both chapters is on the excavation of the origins and identities of the nameless Aboriginal 'postcard people', and on the identification of their agency during the shared moment of the postcard imagery's production. The third part of the thesis focuses on the Samoan series which, for the 'recycled' nature of its twelve motifs, assumes an even more 'exotic' role within Kerry's body of indigenous people. The headdress *tuiga* becomes a cultural marker for Samoa in Kerry's stereotyping apparatus, and the whole series can be considered as born as a metaphor – their motifs being stripped of personal meanings already before entering Kerry's factory. I argue that, focusing on postcards as material objects in their own right, discloses many aspects of the dynamic relationships between societies, and reveals how active they are in creating meanings about cultures.

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WARNING FOR ABORIGINAL READERS

I wish to advise that the present thesis includes images of deceased individuals and other subject matter which may offend some viewers.

The thesis includes images of indigenous communities and individuals from the following areas of Australia:

Queensland

New South Wales

Torres Strait Islands

Please contact the author if you wish to discuss any specific concerns regarding images that form part of this thesis.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my studies at the Institute of Social Anthropology in Basel (1997–2004), I developed an interest in the anthropology of the Pacific, which I was able to deepen by working as a scientific assistant in the Oceania Department of the Museum der Kulturen Basel (2000–2002, 2005). This experience brought me into contact not only with the fantastic Pacific collections the museum is renowned for; it also made me more aware of the relevance of photographic objects in anthropology. I had the privilege to assist numerous researchers in the museum's photographic archive, and the conversations that framed these encounters prompted me to become more deeply engaged in visual anthropology. My master's thesis dealt with the representation of Pacific people in two missionary books published in 1864 and 1875, which, in turn, made me discover the rich archives of the mission 21/Basel Mission. After having completed my studies, I did a three-month internship at this institution's Collection of Historical Photographs, during which I dealt with stunning objects such as albums, daguerreotypes or albumen prints from all over the (Basel Mission's) world. This experience inspired me to develop a PhD thesis out of a research project that, at the same time, I had submitted to the fellowship program of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and that had crystallised from conversations with various curators and archivists of photography. The project, based on the study of historical postcards of the Pacific, and carried out at the Photograph Study Collection of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas (AAOA) (2005–2006), laid the foundations for this PhD thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Topic and research questions

This thesis examines postcards of Pacific peoples produced in Sydney by the photographic firm Kerry & Co. during the first decade of the 20th century. Like other visual images and technologies of that period, postcards have played an important role in shaping contemporary understandings of indigenous peoples. However, until recently, they have been marginalised in anthropological research, and this rich archive remains under-explored. This is probably due to the postcards' ambiguous and complex nature that necessitates an interdisciplinary approach in order to excavate the multiplicity of agencies and subjectivities at work. I argue that, focusing on postcards as objects in their own right and considering the various contexts of their creation, use and consumption, much more information about dynamic relationships between cultures may emerge. Postcards are, indeed, objects that not only describe and mirror what goes on in a society and in our interactions with other people and cultures; they also construe relationships, and thus, realities (cf. Östman 2004: 430).

Various reasons made me chose Kerry & Co.'s postcards as the focus of my thesis. The first is a methodological one. There are indeed two approaches that seem to me suitable for the study of historical postcards of the Pacific. One is the consideration of how a particular place or island was represented on postcards produced by different photographers or photographic companies during the so-called postcard craze (1895–1915). The advantage of this approach is that the researcher can plunge straight into the Pacific; the disadvantage is that the context of creation and production of the single postcards take a back seat in favour of the comparison and interpretation of the subjects featured. The other option of approaching postcards

is to focus on a single photographer and explore the specific context in which a particular body of postcards is embedded. In so doing, one follows paths that may also bring one provisionally away from the actual centre of the discussion. However, the details concerning the circumstances and timing of the production of a group of postcards are required before more definitive and grounded answers about the representation of a particular place can be proposed. This is the approach I have chosen for my thesis.

Why specifically Kerry & Co.? To date, little or no attention has been given to the 'behind the scene' of the postcard business initiated by the Sydney photographer Charles Kerry. The only book on him is David P. Millar's *Charles Kerry's Federation Australia* (1981) that coincided with the namesake exhibition organised at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Despite the legitimate critique by Lendon (1982: 144–147) and Thomas (1989: 10, 59), this publication was the first to provide a biography of Kerry, combined with a sketch of the studio's evolution as well as a short presentation of the surviving body of glass plate negatives. The descriptive part, however, constitutes only a third of the book. The other two thirds are conceived as a catalogue where, instead of offering a representative selection of Kerry's photographic work, Millar restricts himself to presenting photos showing the transformations that characterised urban and rural Australia at the turn of the century, while little space is given to those featuring Aboriginal people and absolutely none to those showing other indigenous people of the Pacific. Indeed, of about hundred plates and images presented in full and half-page format, few represent Kerry's portraiture, three remember his work with Aboriginal people, and only one shows a postcard. Considering that the selection in Millar's book represents less than one percent of the negatives in the Tyrrell Collection and that ninety percent of the negatives were made for the postcard industry, it becomes evident how little representative Millar's selection is (cf. Lendon 1982: 142 and Willis 1988: 258).

Various scholars have chosen one or the other Kerry & Co. Aboriginal postcard to elucidate the politics of representation in commercial photography (for example Cook 1986: 31; Peterson 1985: 169, 171–172 and 2003: 128; Stephen 1993: 41). However, these studies use Kerry postcard as examples of a mode of representation and do not engage with their specific creation contexts and with the discussion of these cards as multilayered objects. Of course, Kerry's postcard

production was a well-defined strategic choice aimed at boosting business; not considering the processes revolving around this innovation, however, simply reinforces the silences that so often characterise visual material from the colonial period.

The existence of the Tyrrell Collection at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney was another reason for me to choose Kerry as the focus of the thesis. The collection holds many original prints produced by the company – 7,903 to be precise –, and thus offered a good point of departure for the analysis of the Kerry postcards that I already had identified at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The fourth reason is related to the nature of the Kerry & Co. ‘exotic postcards’. As an Australian photographer, Charles Kerry understood the postcard business mainly as an alternative way of promoting his photographs of Australian subjects taken during the last decades of the 19th century. A considerable part of his photographic archive, however, comprises images of indigenous people of the Pacific, which, in turn, were selected as postcard motifs. Interestingly, the series devoted to indigenous peoples features only Aboriginal and Samoan people. An analysis based on the comparative examination of these two postcard groups – Australian and Polynesian – seemed to me a fertile field for teasing out the various dynamics and agencies at work in the creation of Kerry & Co.’s ‘Pacific subjects’, and the role of the materiality of postcards in shedding light on the vast Pacific visual economy.

Nested within the examination of these dynamics and materiality aspects, I explore the following questions:

- 1) Which socio-cultural and historical contexts shaped the production of Kerry & Co.’s postcards of Pacific people, and who participated in this process?
- 2) Who are the Aboriginal and Samoan people appearing on Kerry & Co.’s postcards, whose nameless portraits circulated widely across the world, shaping the image of *the* Aboriginal and *the* Samoan in particular, and of *the* Pacific people in general? In doing this I am following Croft’s passionate outcry:

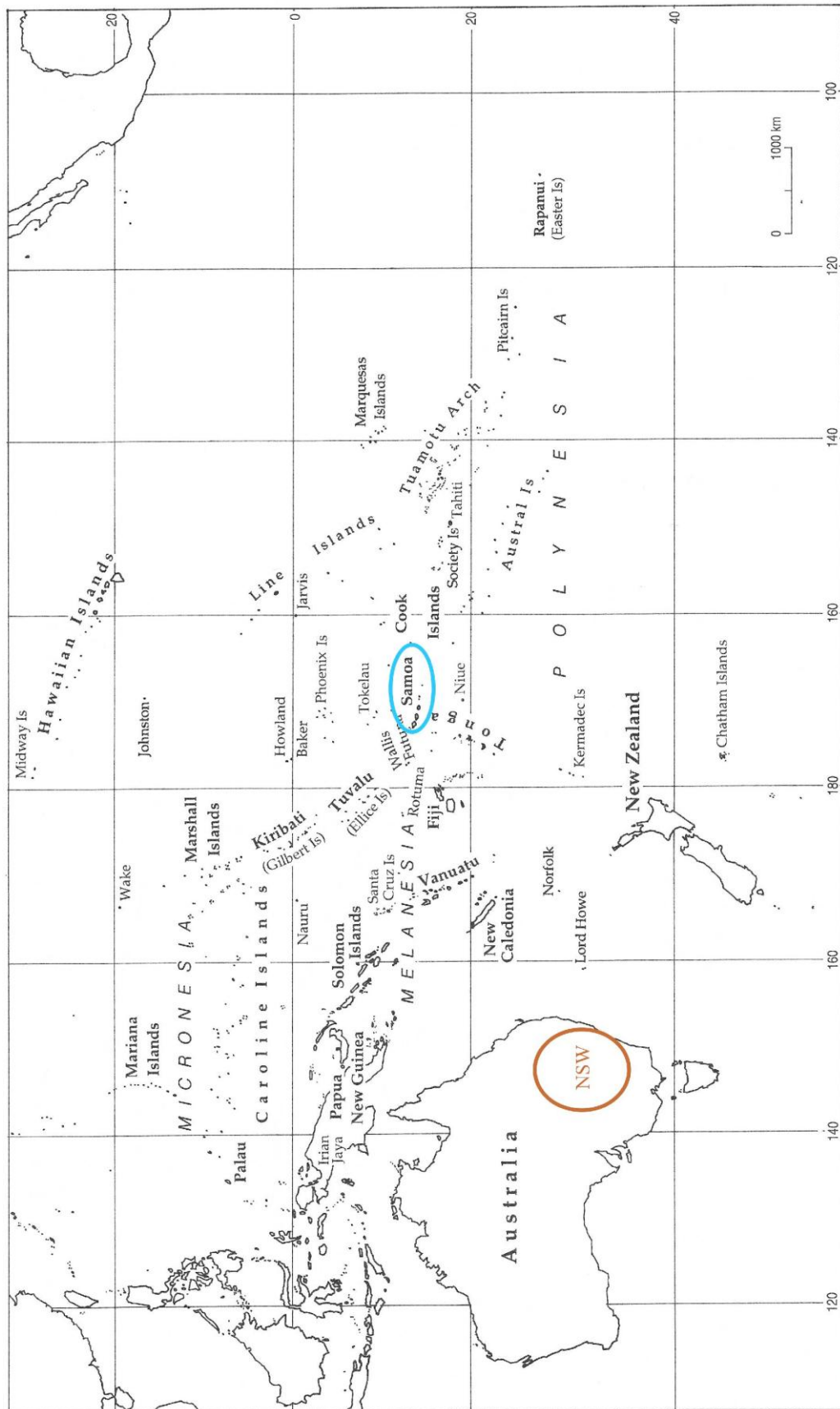
I want to know who they were, where they were from, what became of them. Their names should be invoked, although this acts against traditional cultural practice, these people deserve to be commemorated as the individuals, community members and elders they were; not disembodied, cut off from their traditions, their spirits never to rest. (Croft 1997: 11)

3) To what extent is it possible to excavate the indigenous agency at work during the photographic encounters that generated the ‘subjects’ for Kerry & Co.’s postcard industry?

4) Are historical postcards, as artefacts created in diverse cross-cultural encounters, fruitful sources for anthropological research?

To examine these issues I draw on data accumulated during fifteen months of archival research in the United States, Australia, England, Fiji as well as in a two-month stay in Apia, Samoa. Utilising the outcomes of this research, my dissertation analyses the intricate layering of relationships, motivations and needs that brought Kerry & Co.’s postcards of Aboriginal and Samoan people into existence and into circulation, beyond the boundaries of Australia at the beginning of the 20th century. In so doing, I would like to abandon the theoretical discourse of ‘the gaze’ as a one-sided instrument of domination and control. The concept of the ‘gaze’ or “the tourist gaze” to use John Urry’s (1990) formulation, creates a dichotomy between the one who is looking, assumed to be familiar, and that which is looked at, assumed to be different and strange. As I will discuss below, this implies an objectification of the person looked at who is considered passive and is made speechless. This discourse obviously silences the indigenous voices and agencies that enlivened the photographic encounter and that I am interested to excavate.

In the remainder of this introduction I provide a discussion of the project’s research context, the sources and the methodologies; I review the relevant theoretical literature; I outline the dissertation’s core themes including materiality of images, visual economy and social biography, and conclude with a summary of subsequent chapters.



Map 1 Oceania. The two regions discussed in the thesis are emphasised through the coloured circles (Denoon 1997: 7, changes by author)

Research context, sources and methodology

The most frequent question I was asked when stating that my dissertation focused on historical postcards of the Pacific, was “But where are these postcards?” Obviously, postcards are not the classical objects one would associate with museums or archives. If at all, then more as purchasable souvenirs representing the works of art displayed in the galleries than as valuable objects as such. Fortunately, during the last decade some public institutions have started to consider historical postcards as objects worthy of attention, as they proved to be interesting sources for (art-)historical, anthropological and linguistic research. Christraud Geary identifies the most influential development that has generated an academic interest in postcards and in visual materials in general, in the “avalanche known as postmodernism” (Geary 1991_a: 36). Postmodernist thinking, characterised by its emphasis on reflexivity and on a critical exploration of the various representational modes of non-European peoples, applied itself with great facility to the visual domain. Postcards, as ‘ultimate frozen stereotypes’, attracted the attention of postmodernist scholars because they seemed to better reflect and enforce the preoccupations of their creators and viewers along with demonstrating how these invented the represented cultures (Geary 1991_a: 36–37). As a consequence, collections of postcards were created through either purchasing private collections or groups of postcards from dealers, or by elevating postcards kept in messy mystery-boxes from the status of uncatalogued ‘pieces of paper’ to museum objects in their own right. Parallel to these organisational and technical advances (digitalisation and computerised cataloguing), professionalization also played a crucial role in the archiving of photographic material. Without these innovations and the recent revaluation of historical postcards by public institutions, a research project such as mine would never have been feasible. In fact, the biggest practical problem in postcard research is the detection of the source, and private collections are not always easy to identify and access.

The preliminary research for my PhD was carried out during a nine-month study of the postcard collection held by the Photograph Study Collection (PSC) of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This experience was not only important because it introduced me to a vast body of Oceanic historical postcards; through the numbering and cataloguing of a great part of this collection by me, I could better explore the

material aspects and so became aware of the multiple layers that constitute these rather ambiguous objects.

The PSC collection devoted to the Pacific cultures consists of about 2,000 historical postcards, among them 62 postcards produced by Kerry & Co. After having decided to focus on the Kerry postcards, I also studied other collections, both



Figure 1.1 Blackburn Collection, Honolulu, December 2007

in public and private hands, in order to fill the gaps and complete the narratives of the various series. Among the collections I worked on, are two public ones held by the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Hawai'i (c. 3,000 postcards), and one privately owned by the collector Mark Blackburn, Honolulu. Totalling about 15,000 objects the latter is the most extensive collection of Polynesian historical postcards worldwide. Although I sometimes consider private collections 'too dynamic' and hence 'dangerous' – they can be sold and moved in an instant, and so accessibility is not guaranteed as in the case of public collections –, I wish to emphasise their importance as rich archives for the exploration of different regimes of value. Taken together, the body of about 20,000 postcards, including also some single postcards or small groups of postcards identified in various archives or found at sales fairs,

constitutes the main source for my project. Although I have always preserved modern postcards sent to me by family and friends,¹ I had never developed a particular interest in the collecting of historical postcards. It was only during my researches that I adopted this practice in order, on the one hand, to fill in the gaps that emerged from the collections studied, and on the other, to gain access to the original materiality of Kerry's original postcards. This introduces the issue how the various visual materials are presented in this thesis. The reader will notice that the reproduction quality differs according to the type of access I had to the various materials. While I could work with high-quality scans of the PSC postcards, in most other cases I had to rely on digital photographs taken by myself in not always ideal conditions. For this reason, postcards belonging to the same series, but coming from different collections, appear in the figures in slightly different colours despite the similar materiality of the object.

Theoretical orientation

Postcards served as souvenirs for tourists, as collectibles, as vehicles of communication, and as mediums of artistic and documentary interest; these multiple functions and their particular materiality combining text and image, generate different ways to interpret them within their appropriate context as well as within contemporary thinking. They can be approached from a linguistic and semiotic perspective as a form of communication (Baranowska 1995, Östman 2004, Rogan 2005, Jhala 2000), from an art historical perspective as popular art (Brown 2004) or from a social historical perspective (for example Gardi 1995, 1997, Rydell 1984, 1993, 1998 or Peterson 1985). Östman emphasises the extensive variation across postcards and their variability, an inherent feature of potential change that “like an amoeba adapts to whatever circumstances it encounters. This is why research on postcards, on postcarding [the act of sending postcards], and on socio-cultural significance of this phenomenon requires a true polydisciplinary approach” (Östman 2004: 425).

¹ During a recent tidying-up in my parents' attic I discovered, to my great surprise and amusement, several ring binders containing hundreds of postcards ordered by geographical region, which I had 'catalogued' during my childhood.

Like other photographic formats, postcards can be used for two related but separate types of visual analysis in ethnography. They can serve as documents of a people's lived experience (Collier 1986), and they are evidence of image-making, for understanding how photographers and their public visually interpret a people's culture and history (Peterson 1985, Alloula 1986, Albers and James 1988). In this thesis on the representation of Pacific cultures in Kerry & Co. postcards I will be concerned with the latter type of analysis, and will concentrate above all on the postcards' images – one of the multiple layers that form the postcard as a manufactured object (cf. Webb 1998: 115), and the decisive element for the choice of a postcard. The theoretical issues are of importance because to date only limited consideration has been given to postcards, with the consequence that today there are very few theoretical frameworks readily available. There are many books illustrating postcards, but they rarely rise above the descriptive (for example Blackburn 2005, Main and Jackson 2005, Stephenson 1997). Postcard images are treated simply as evidence of how things were. Impressed by the actuality of the images, these publications fail to consider the social and political circumstances that made their creation possible.

I will use the contemporary approach to picture postcards outlined by Christraud Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb in their book *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Historical Postcards* (1998). This is the first over-regional study on historical postcards framed by an epistemological and technical context. Geary and Webb suggest as a first step the identification of the photographers, sponsors, producers, printers and printing methods. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the picture, caption, message, design, stamp, and, finally, of the cancellation mark. From this study information emerges that allows us to determine the postcard's date and to reconstruct the precise circumstances and chronology of production. This is fundamental for the second step: the interpretation of the image. Drawing on the anthropological approach to photographs formulated by Joanna Scherer (1990, 1992), Geary and Webb suggest that the interpretation of the postcard's image includes the study of the photographer's view of the indigenous subject, the academic's perspective on the photographer, the study of the subjects' influence over the image and an analysis of the subjects themselves. The study of the viewer's construction of the indigenous subject and the audience's use of the image are also

aspects that should be considered in postcard research (Geary and Webb 1998: 8, 115). This can be excavated through the study of the various traces left by the user on a postcard (message, comments written on the picture, manipulation of the image); through the analysis of the single imageries that constitute a collection; and through the reconstruction of a postcard's imagery dissemination (private/public spheres, commercial/scientific environment). The difficulty in acquiring this information about the circumstances of its creation and consumption discouraged postcard-based research, to the effect that postcards were neglected as they were considered unreliable sources. Through the analysis of Kerry & Co.'s postcards representing Aboriginal and Samoan people, this thesis demonstrates that the sifting of archives helps reconstruct, even if only partially, the necessary information for shedding new light on aspects of postcards considered inexplorable.

Parallel histories: photographs and postcards

Although printed postcards have been denied a place in the official history of photography (cf. Jeffrey 1981, Newhall 1981), probably as a consequence of their 'copy' and 'reproduction' status that is presumed to annihilate the 'aura' of the 'unique' work of art (Benjamin 1969[1936]), it is obvious that their evolution is interwoven with the one of the photographic medium. As a consequence, photographs and postcards share a similar development that characterised the interpretation of the images displayed on their surfaces (cf. Edwards 2001, Pinney 1992). As Edwards explains, the power of the still photograph lies in its spatio-temporal dislocation of nature, which causes the decontextualisation and recontextualisation of those that exist within it (Edwards 1996: 200). Fragments work as a *pars pro toto*, they become symbolic structures that transform into 'objects', culturally formed images.

In this process the signifier and the signified collapse into one another, the physical subject itself becomes indivisible from its symbolic or metaphorical meaning, the symbol becomes reality. Yet the relationship between signifier and signified is not fixed but arbitrary; thus the meaning of images becomes impermanent, free-floating, appropriated into the viewer's cultural discourse. (Edwards 1996: 200)

My approach to the Kerry postcards is informed by the groundbreaking research that emerged in the 1980s in England, USA and in Germany from the interest in the

historical relationship between anthropology and photography. In conjunction with the exhibitions that preceded or followed them, the books *From Site to Sight* (Banta and Hinsley 1986), *Der Geraubte Schatten* (Theye 1989_a) and *Anthropology and Photography 1860–1920* (Edwards 1992_a)² presented for the first time a focus on methodological issues concerning the analysis of historical visual material in anthropology. As Elizabeth Edwards states, “photographs suggest meaning through the way in which they are structured, for representational form makes an image accessible and comprehensible to the mind, informing and informed by a whole hidden corpus of knowledge that is called on through the signifiers of the image.” (Edwards 1992_a: 8) Referring to the semiotic approach in Edward’s anthology and in following studies, Christopher Pinney has stated that central to an understanding of the controlled photographic encounter, classification and display of indigenous people, is the “salvage paradigm”, a form of “archaeology” that considered actual living people as belonging to another era (Pinney 1992, 1997). As Morton and Edwards explain (2009: 2–3), the earlier work on photography had been informed by models developed in relation to text which criticised how anthropology constructed its object (for example Fabian 1983, Clifford and Marcus 1986). The view that emerged has been that the photographic methods of early anthropologists were constrained by the theoretical paradigms that they adhered to and by the power relations of nineteenth-century colonialism. There is much evidence to show how, in specific cases, images were constructed to fit a particular scientific paradigm. This is the case, for example, with the anatomical portraits inspired by T.H. Huxley’s biological anthropology, which simultaneously objectified the powerlessness and subject status of the people captured by the camera (Edwards 1988, 1990), or with the photographs by E.H. Man arranged to illustrate pages out of *Notes and Queries* that fitted in with the culture trait concept (Edwards 1992_c). Especially for European managers of Victorian Aboriginal reserves, photography was intended to be a disciplinary apparatus, a form of surveillance and panoptical control, and as a consequence it has been common to regard photographs of indigenous people as trophies bagged by the colonial hunter in a relationship characterised by distance, exploitation, and coercion. A classic example in postcard research is the contribution by the Algerian poet Malek Alloula, who, in his book *The Colonial Harem*, describes

² This book is based on a project that the British Royal Anthropological Institute had initiated in 1984 with the intent to analyse its anthropological visual archive.

the postcard as the fertilizer of colonial vision, because “it produces stereotypes in the manner that great seabirds produce guano” (1986: 4). Alloula reads postcards exclusively in the context of assimilation politics. He discusses the images of Algerian Harem women taken by French studio photographers in Algeria, and considers the subjects as victims of the reigning power relations – the same that constitute the norm in colonial discourse and that have already decided on the truth of the images. Other authors (Greenhalgh 1988, Coombes 1994, Dibley 1997, Maxwell 1999, Hooper-Greenhill 2000 and Levell 2000), adopting elements from influential postcolonial critics such as Edward Said (1978)³ and Homi Bhabha (1994_a),⁴ have criticised the display of indigenous peoples from colonial peripheries in imperial exhibitions focussing on the relations of dominance through which ‘the colonial other’ could be visually retailed – in a metaphorical sense, but also in a literal sense through the postcard medium. Under the influence of theorists such as Susan Sontag (1979) and John Tagg (1993[1988]) who followed a Foucaultian-derived configuration of surveillance, gaze and objectification, indigenous people had a passive attitude in the photographic moment and were incapable of speaking and acting. This model, aimed at giving back a voice to indigenous people, failed because the strong focus on the unbalanced power relations⁵ provoked that much writing on photography lost sight of the dialogic space that frequently emerges

³ With his most influential work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward W. Said (1935–2003) profoundly challenged the Marxist perspectives which, for most of the twentieth century, had dominated the study of colonialism. Said looks at the coherence of Western discourses about ‘the Orient’ arguing that the way Westerners discussed the Orient developed a set of discourses which located the West in a higher position in relation to an inferior non-Western other. Considering that when the West was studying the Orient it was also the time of colonial expansion and domination, Said says that Orientalism – which tells us less about the Orient than it does about the West – creates an object that could be manipulated for political and economic purposes. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault to highlight the ways in which orientalist discourse hangs together of its own accord, with little or no reference to the actually existing Orient, Said’s work remains a striking indictment of Western racism, misrepresentation, and ignorance towards the East. Alongside *Orientalism*, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) are also important books of criticism.

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha (1949–) is interested in a psychoanalytic approach to colonial power. He suggests that colonial discourse only seems to be successful in its domination of the colonised, because in reality it is marked by radical anxiety. Bhabha’s close textual analysis finds the hidden gaps present in the colonial situation marking moments in which the colonizer was less powerful than was apparent, or when the colonised were able to resist the dominance exercised over them. Like Said, Bhabha suggests that traditional ways of thinking about the world have often been complicit with longstanding inequalities between nations and people. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994_a) creates a series of concepts such as, for example, the “hybridity” of cultures that works to undermine the polarization of the world into self and other (see Chapter Six).

⁵ The focus on the unequal power relationship between the white photographer and the, usually, black colonised subject, is an element that characterises many studies published in the 1990s (among them Freedman 1990, Prochaska 1991, Schildkrout 1991 or Bate 1993).

during the process of picture making (Pinney 2003: 14). As a consequence those voices became even more silenced despite best intentions on the part of Said, Bhabha and other post-colonial theorists (cf. Morton and Edwards 2009: 3).

In recent years, a number of scholars have studied ‘ethnic image-making’ using postcards as their primary source of evidence. From the 1980s to present, Patricia Albers and James William have focussed on the representation of Plains Indians and published extensively.⁶ Nicholas Peterson (1985) reflected upon some of the ways in which the belief in the passing of the Aborigines affected photography and the postcard industry in Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As we have seen, Malik Alloula (1986) has examined the voyeuristic and colonial mentality hidden in Algerian postcards based on photographs taken by French photographers. Annelies Moors and Steven Machlin (1987) have shown how picture postcards of pre-1948 Palestine were made for the Euro-American audience to promote imperialism. Ellen Handy (1988, 1998) has investigated the depiction of Japan, describing the Western invention of the Japanese geisha. Postcards representing African people have been the research focus of Raymond Corbey⁷ (1988), David Prochaska⁸ (1991) and Christraud Geary⁹ (1991b, 1998), who also presented examples of indigenous postcard photography and sponsorship from the West African coast. Although there are several publications dealing with historical postcards from the Pacific (for example Blackburn 2005, Cook 1986, Noury 1996, Quanchi 2004, Spennemann 2006, Stephenson 1997), few authors have studied ethnic image-making in Oceania. Virginia-Lee Webb (1998) has discussed the exotic/erotic depiction of people, especially of women, in the Pacific, and Elizabeth

⁶ See bibliography under ‘Albers & James’.

⁷ Corbey’s work was published in Dutch and German and focused on the use of photographic materials as historical sources (see Corbey 1989, 1990_a, 1990_b).

⁸ Prochaska bases his study on the excellent work by Philippe David who catalogued the Fortier postcard collection. Edmond Fortier was based in Dakar, Senegal, and became the single largest and most important postcard producer in colonial West Africa (see David 1978, 1984, 1986).

⁹ An important corpus of postcards Geary has extensively worked on is the historical Postcard Collection at the Eliot Elisofon Archives of the National Museum of African Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.. Geary has given particular attention to the missionary postcards that “monotonously repeat established tropes, revolving around and articulating the ideals of the colonial/missionary enterprise [in Africa]. They construct binary oppositions of a political and racial nature between the white missionary and his changes, repeating in essence one of the salient characteristics of the Africanist discourse, which was built on dichotomies such as ‘savage’/‘civilised’, chaos/order, naked/clothed, and, perhaps the most persistent of all, dark/light.” (Geary 1991_b: 49; see also Müller 1984 and Wirz 1982).

Cory-Pearce (2005) has used early postcard photography to describe some ways in which clothing introduced by Europeans was taken up by Maori.

Whilst the nature of picture postcards depicting indigenous people offers a fertile field for applying the conventional model of the colonial gaze, and although this approach has introduced critical readings of photography and postcards in anthropology, the ensuing analytical compression reinforces the silences and denies the emergence of many of the histories contained in the postcards' images. In my analysis of Kerry & Co. postcards of Aboriginal and Samoan people, I will apply alternative analytical strategies suggested by authors interested in the material and referential working and meaning of images as objects rather than as representations (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986, Poole 1997, Edwards and Hart 2004_a). I am considering postcards as spaces and moments of complex interaction and negotiated relationships, where the subjects of the images actively participated and influenced the process of picture taking/making. As an artefact created in diverse personal cross-cultural encounters, postcards are indeed interesting for sociology and anthropology, and through a "thick description" (Geertz 1973_a) they can acquire eloquency and reveal much about the subjects of the postcard image or about other people involved in a 'postcard project'. Elizabeth Edwards (2001) speaks of the rawness of images because we expect them to tell us something, but find them not particularly generous at first glance. They have different layers of meaning, which must first be removed, one by one. She encourages re-interpreting and re-engaging historical images from radically different perspectives in order to articulate various forms of truth value attributed to photographs over time and space. Like other photographic reprints, postcard pictures are indeed ambivalent and can be interpreted in myriad and often contradictory ways, depending on who is viewing the picture and in what context (Sontag 1979, Berger 1972). It is this potential ambivalence or, rather, multiplicity that makes postcards at once daunting and very productive to study.

Visual economy and agency

The inequalities that characterise representational domains have been explored by Deborah Poole in her book on Andean photography *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (1997). She introduces the term "visual economy" preferring it to "visual culture", which is one way of thinking about the

relationships and sentiments that grant images their meaning. Because the term ‘culture’ carries a sense of shared meanings and symbolic codes that can create communities of people, and tends to be seen erroneously as a bounded entity (cf. Gupta & Ferguson 1997), Poole finds the concept of “visual economy” more useful for thinking about visual images as part of a comprehensive organisation of people, ideas and objects. This concept captures at the same time the sense of movement and value and the potential for transformation and exchange. She writes (1997: 8) that “[i]n the more specific sense of a political economy the word ‘economy’ suggests that this organisation bears some relationship to the political and class structure of society as well as to the production and exchange of the material goods or commodities that form the life blood of modernity.” Another intention Poole follows in using the concept ‘visual economy’ is to stress the global flow of images across national and cultural boundaries (1997: 7–8), which fits very well with postcards’ worldly nature. With the term “image world” Poole goes a step further to refer to the social and discursive relations that connect those who make and produce images with those who consume them (1997: 8). Applying the idea of a visual economy to my project implies an understanding of the specificity of postcards; how Westerners imagined the Pacific through them, and the role that Pacific people played in the creation of those images. Therefore, the main question is not “what specific postcards mean”, rather we should ask “how postcard accrue their value through the social processes of accumulation, possession, circulation, and exchange” (Poole 1997: 10). Despite the fact that among the visual materials analysed by Poole postcards are not included,¹⁰ her analytical method is useful for my project because the three levels of visual economy she develops – organization of production, circulation, and shifting in meaning and value (1997: 9–10) – are central to the understanding of the working of a postcard in Alfred Gell’s sense (1998). This implies that postcards, like persons, have their own agency, and *do* something, because they are not just representations or reflections, but ‘agents’ embodying capacities to cause social effects in the world and act upon ‘patients’ – the recipients of the effects of action. Although the notion of agency had been raised by Mitchell

¹⁰ She looks at 18th-century images, 19th-century engravings, cartes-de-visite, anthropometric photography, paintings and photography from the 1910s and 1920s.

(1996), and also addressed by Layton (1981),¹¹ Gell, building on previous publications (e.g. 1992, 1993, 1996), posited that art is not about meaning, symbolism, aesthetic, or putting objects into social contexts; it is about the workings of social relations, which are made manifest through action. Because agency can proliferate through multiple agentic relationships,¹² objects such as postcards can be regarded as material extensions of the agency of those who create or use them.¹³

With the intention of emphasising the search for elements that will confer identity to the indigenous people represented in the postcards' imagery, I use the term 'agency' also to refer to their active participation in the photographic encounters with Kerry, as well as to the practice of naming them. 'Naming' in this thesis acquires the significance of transforming the objectified postcard people, designated "Aboriginal Chief" or "Aboriginal Princess", into historical subjects with real names, histories and lives. Yet names are often more than identity markers; they can be inextricably linked with kinship and with a community's history, and are able to convey past events into the present and even the future (Brown and Peers 2006: 111). Historical images are therefore particularly important for people who hold those names today (Brown and Peers 2006: 115).

The materiality of images

From the delicate singularity of the jewel-like daguerreotype to the mass-production of the light and coloured pictured postcard, personal engagements with the image changed over time. The American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes articulated around 1864, how the invention of the stereoscope prompted a tactile engagement with, and a physical movement into, the image, leading to the unification of the subject with the object (cited in Trachtenberg 1980: 75). Through their portability and faculty of being *owned*, the first photographic prints such as stereographs, cartes-de-visite or cabinet cards revolutionised people's way of seeing and dealing with memory.¹⁴ This

¹¹ Arthur Maurice Hocart, "the neglected master" (see Beidelman 1972), had also addressed this notion in his 1936 published *Kings and Councillors* to ask why human beings do things (Hocart 1970[1936]).

¹² Artists create 'indexes', e.g., postcards that can also be vehicles for the agency of others, such as patrons. See Strathern's notion of 'personified objects' in 1988.

¹³ This is a similar concept to Strathern's notion of Melanesian 'partible persons' and Wagner's notion of 'fractal personhood' which conceive of objects as body parts, or spatially and temporally extended personhood (Strathern 1988; Wagner 1991).

¹⁴ Stereographs were a pairs of photographs mounted on cards that could be looked at through a stereoscope, a cabinet-style viewer. The pictures were taken from different viewpoints corresponding

is an important aspect of understanding the meaning of postcards, especially in a colonial context. Michael Taussig (1993: 25) contends that modernity is characterised by a tactile mode of experience, linked with the impulse towards mimetically embracing the other through visual reproduction. The invention of photography recharged the mimetic impulse, and the camera provided a way for colonists to reach out, to touch the object of their regard. When postcards – like those by Kerry & Co. – arrived on the market, they rapidly multiplied the number of circulating images and thus contributed to the colonial fascination of looking at, sending and collecting the ‘other’.¹⁵

The ‘material turn’ in anthropology has increasingly stressed the centrality and complexity of social meaning in relation to objects and their sociability. Similarly, some theoretical positions that have emerged from history, philosophy and critical theory have concentrated on the mundane social existence of objects (Miller 1998) and have argued that discussions of artefacts should be separated from Saussurian linguistic models applied in structuralist approaches in anthropology (Saussure 1959; Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1966). A material culture analysis, starting out from an anthropological position of direct observation, allows excavating objects’ hidden meanings that can be considered as bridges between mental and physical worlds (Miller 1987: 96–99). Recent developments in visual anthropology also point in this direction (Banks and Morphy 1987). In *Photographs, Objects, Histories* (2004_a), Edwards and Hart suggest shifting the methodological focus in the analysis of images away from content exclusively in favour of a deeper consideration of the material and presentational forms and the uses to which photographs are put. The forms are indeed central to the function of a photograph as a socially salient object. “The material characteristics have a profound impact on the way images are ‘read’,

to the spacing of the eyes, and the stereoscope was constructed so that each eye only sees one photograph, giving the impression of a three-dimensional image. Cartes-de-visite are small paper prints – usually collodion or albumen prints – measuring 6.4 cm × 10.2 cm mounted on a thicker paper card with the photographer’s details on the reverse. The idea of producing photographs for sale was developed in Paris by André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri in 1854. He patented a method of taking eight or more separate negatives on a single plate through the use of a special camera with several lenses and a moving plate-holder. By the early 1870s, cartes-de-visite were supplanted by cabinet cards, in answer to the demand for publicity photographs by actors and actresses. The prints – 14 cm × 10.2 cm – were mounted on cardboard backs measuring 11.4 cm × 16.5 cm (Newhall 1981: 49–50, 57, 72).

¹⁵ The term ‘other’ is used here in the sense that Stocking outlined in his introduction to *Objects and Others*, where he defines ‘others’ as human beings “whose similarity or difference is experienced by alien observers as in some profound way problematic” (Stocking 1985: 4).

different material forms both signal and determine different expectations and use patterns.” (Edwards and Hart 2004_b: 2–3) This is particularly true in postcard research, for there is a multiplicity of different ‘looking experiences’ at work that accordingly generate different understandings. I am thinking, for example, of viewing a postcard’s image that, on one occasion, appears as a collotype picture on a postcard’s surface, then maybe as an albumen print pasted in an album or even as a digital image on the computer screen, while we are looking at the original glass plate or at the lantern slide in an archive. At the same time a postcard may appear in a private decorated album or be substituted by a miniaturisation in a sample book that has a public function (see Kerry’s sample book presented in Chapter Three). These forms of materiality are dictated by the social uses of a specific image, in this case of a postcard’s picture, and serve to shed light on the various types of social relations in which the image is entangled but also active, performing its work (Banks 2001: 51). Edwards and Hart (2004_b: 15) have argued that without divorcing the materiality of an image from the image itself it is useful to adopt an approach that acknowledges the centrality of materiality because it “allows one to look at and use images as socially salient objects, as active and reciprocal rather than simply implications of authority, control and passive consumption on the one hand, or of aesthetic discourses and the supremacy of individual vision on the other.”

Social biography: trajectories and world lines

If we consider that a ‘thinking materially’ approach about photography encompasses also processes of intention, creation, dissemination, consumption, discarding or recycling (Attfield 2000: 3), it becomes evident that an object’s materiality is closely related to its social biography. Indeed, according to this concept formulated by Kopytoff (1986), an object, in order to be understood, must be seen as belonging to the processes listed above. It is impossible to understand its function or meaning by analysing a single point in its existence, as it is constantly enmeshed in social relations that, in turn, make it active in these processes (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987, 1998; Gosden and Marshall 1999). This methodological approach leads to the exploration of an object’s trajectories that can reveal a myriad of interesting stories related to its status changes, as for example the oscillation of a picture postcard between public and private spheres. A possible scenario could be that a postcard in a

shop (public) is bought by a person who writes on it (private), is sent to his/her relative or friend through the mail (public), is pasted by the receiver in an album (private), put in the attic by a descendant (very private), rediscovered and brought to a flea market (public), purchased by a collector (private), sold to a museum (public), catalogued and maybe exhibited (very public). What Appadurai (1986: 15) calls “regimes of value” entails exploring these conditions under which objects circulate in different cultural and historical milieus. Studying Kerry postcards’ biographies I hope to detect meaningful phases of their existence in which they interacted with different people, creating invisible bridges through their exchange and becoming caught up in the politics of value (cf. Kopytoff 1986: 69). I will explore this especially in Chapter Seven, where, in order to better differentiate between a postcard’s geographical moving from one ‘life station’ to the other and its overall spatial-temporal travelling during its social life, I will use Appadurai’s term “trajectory” (1986) and Minkowski’s concept of “world line” (1909), respectively. A ‘world line’ is defined in physics as the unique path that an object travels through space, with the addition of the time dimension. I find it therefore particularly useful to highlight the temporal aspect – problematic to identify with precision in microhistory (Peltonen 2001: 349–350) – in the displacement of a postcard. Additionally, the conjunction of spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority characterising photography – Barthes’ description “the there-then becoming here-now” (1977: 44) – is even more strongly emphasised through a postcard as multilayered object. In my use of these two termini I will consider the trajectory as a pattern of movement corresponding to a segment in a postcard’s world line.

Outline of the dissertation

This thesis is divided in three parts comprising two chapters each. The first part is a historical analysis of Charles Kerry’s biography and of the genesis of his firm Kerry & Co. The second and the third parts are devoted to the study of Kerry & Co.’s postcards of Aboriginal people and Samoan people respectively.

In Chapter Two I situate Kerry and his photographic legacy in a socio-historical framework by using as main sources various articles and advertisements that appeared in the magazines *Australian Photographic Journal* and the

Australasian Photo-Review between the 1880s and the 1950s. These publications report in a detailed way all the news about photographers and technical innovations in photography, thus providing the context in which Kerry lived and worked, and in which his photographic eye was informed.

In Chapter Three I present where and how Charles Kerry implemented his most productive ideas and stunning innovations that led to the creation of postcards depicting indigenous people of the Pacific. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Kerry succeeded in establishing a ‘factory of curiosities’ in which almost all production steps, from the creation to the finishing of a product, could take place. This chapter discusses the processes of Kerry & Co.’s postcards, and, through the presentation of the studio’s postcard sample book, situates the group of postcards discussed in Parts II and III.

Chapter Four examines an event based on an Aboriginal *bora* ceremony photographed by Kerry in Quambone, N.S.W, in 1898, using microhistorical methods. By reassessing the photographic material of the Quambone event through the study of contemporary sources which, to date, have only been partially considered, or even neglected, I aim to draw inferences about more general processes and interpretations related to the nature of colonial photographic encounters.

In Chapter Five I first discuss Kerry & Co.’s Aboriginal images by treating the motifs, the processes of the series’ compilation, and the postcard captions. To obtain insight into these three aspects, I have undertaken a comparative study of various material and presentational forms of the postcard pictures’ supports. In the second part of the chapter I trace the socio-cultural frames in which the various photographic encounters presented on the postcards took place, and the nameless postcard people ‘performed’. The aim is to excavate the indigenous identities and the agencies resulting from such encounters by applying the concept of “contact zones” coined by Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 1992), and later borrowed by James Clifford for his critique of museum practice (1997).

In Chapter Six I analyse the imagery of “Series No. 30. Samoa” by applying the notion of stereotypes formulated by Homi Bhabha (Bhabha 1994_b) who maintains that the stereotype is a phenomenon in which both coloniser and colonised participated. This helps to consider photographic sessions at the turn of the century as real encounters, and not simply as episodes of domination by one group of

another. I will discuss how in Kerry's stereotyping apparatus the headdress *tuiga* becomes a cultural marker for Samoa, and how the whole series can be considered as born as a metaphor because their motifs were not created by Kerry himself but recycled from the wider Pacific visual economy.

In Chapter Seven I first discuss aspects of the Samoan postcards' appearance and materiality that shed light on Kerry's choices with regard to the processes of manufacture and production. Then I look at postcards' most distinguishing characteristic: the ability to move through time and space and weave a network of relationships across continents. The analysis of their physical displacement, caused by diverse interests or needs in the visual economy, allows us to identify the meanings and the values attached to postcards in the course of their social existence.

In the conclusion I revisit the central questions related to the identity of Kerry's subjects, their contribution in the photographic process, and the role of historical postcards as subjects of anthropological research. I argue that in order to excavate the dynamic relationships between societies that postcards engender at various levels, it is necessary to focus on them as material and socially salient objects.

PART I

A FACTORY OF CURIOSITIES

The first postcards to come into use in Australia were issued by the New South Wales postal authorities in December 1875. They had a pre-printed stamp with the words ‘Post Card’ at top centre, the Royal Coat of Arms and the instruction ‘the address only to be written on this side’ on one side, while the reverse was left blank for the message (Cook 1986: 19). On 19th November 1898 the New South Wales Postal and Telegraph Department issued the first series of picture postcards, which immediately became so popular that within six weeks 117,000 postcards were sold (Cook 1986: 21). Despite the fact that the number dropped drastically after Christmas and New Year, it soon became evident that illustrated cards were going to be the answer to a growing tourism market.

The Sydney photographer Charles Henry Kerry was among the first in Australia to realise the potential of the small, illustrated card (Figure 2.1). His business, originally based on portraiture and later on the so-called views (see Chapter One), boomed after he introduced the picture postcard, making him the most successful Australian photographer of his time. Drawing on a large collection of photographs taken during the last decades of the 19th century, Kerry first launched postcards presenting views of the Australian outback and of Sydney streets. Later, he introduced series displaying Aboriginal people and indigenous people of the Pacific, usually wearing traditional dress and carrying weapons or objects considered typical of their culture. In order to understand which role these postcards – discussed in depth in Parts II and III – played in the representation of the cultures depicted, and which processes characterised their creation, circulation and consumption, I present in Part I a biographical discussion of Charles Kerry (Chapter Two) followed by the presentation of the photographic company Kerry & Co. that he founded in 1893 (Chapter Three).



Figure 2.1 Charles Henry Kerry (1857–1928) (Anon. 1898a: 61)

CHAPTER TWO

Charles Henry Kerry (1857–1928) and his time

As an influential personality active in several fields, Charles Kerry attracted the attention of various authors during the last century. Especially in the early 1980s, when photographic history started to interest scholars, quite a few studies mentioned Kerry's photographs of New South Wales (e.g. Thomas 1989, Willis 1988) and of the Aboriginal and other indigenous peoples of the Pacific (see Annear 1997, Conrad 2003, Cooper & Harris 1997, Croft 1997, Davies 2004, Mesenhöller 1989, Nordström 1995, and Theye 1989_b). Even if not extensively, some articles and book chapters also discussed groups of postcards produced by Kerry's studio, featuring both aspects of Australian life (Cook 1986) and 'seemingly exotic' subjects of Oceania (Peterson 1985 and 2003, Edwards 1988, Stephen 1993, Stephenson 1997, Webb 1998). In all these publications the reference to Kerry is generally limited to single aspects and, with the exceptions of Nordström (1995) and Stephenson (1997), is not framed by a biographical sketch of Kerry. Kerry and his photographic work are presented as a comparative element in a wider discussion that mostly focuses on the representation of indigenous people at the turn of the 20th century. As mentioned in Chapter One, the only study presenting an analysis entirely dedicated to Kerry and his photographic work is David P. Millar's *Charles Kerry's Federation Australia* (Millar 1981) that offers a short biographical introduction and a wide selection of Kerry's studio photographs, but completely neglects the company's postcard production.

To situate Kerry and his photographic legacy in a socio-historical framework, I use as main sources various articles and advertisements that appeared in the magazines *Australian Photographic Journal* and the *Australasian Photo-Review*

between the 1880s and the 1950s.¹⁶ As leading publications on Australian photography, these magazines published by supply companies report in a detailed way all the news about photographers and technical innovations in photography, thus providing the context in which Kerry lived and worked, and in which his photographic eye was informed. Administrative documents related to Kerry & Co., information given by staff members in Kerry's firm and a multitude of photographic and printed material from his photographic career disseminated in public and private collections all over the world, constitute the other body of sources used for this biographical sketch.

Early life

Charles Henry Kerry was born on 3rd April 1857¹⁷ on his father's sheep property Bobundara station south of Cooma, a town in the Monaro region of south-eastern New South Wales. His father Samuel Kerry was a commissioner's orderly and later grazier from Derbyshire, England, while his mother was the native-born Margaret Blay (Burke Q. 1952: 142, Burke K. 1983: 577). Growing-up in a rural environment characterised by open spaces must have considerably shaped Kerry's sensitiveness towards the Australian landscape and its natural phenomena – elements that re-emerged later on in his photographic work. An anonymous writer and Kerry's contemporary, emphasised how the nature around Bobundara contributed to forge Kerry's character:

It has often been contended that mountain air has a marked influence on the character and energies of a man, and develops a vigorous constitution and a powerful mind. These indeed are some of the characteristics of Mr. Kerry, and another influence peculiar to the mountain-bred man is the great love with which he clings to the soil of his childhood. It is the air of liberty and freedom that is dwelling in these higher regions and that inspires the mountaineer for a lifetime. (Anon. 1898b: 62)

¹⁶ In Sydney the publishing houses Bray and Lichtner put out nine issues of the *Australian Photographic Journal* in 1886, while Harringtons put out a journal of the same name from 1892 on. Baker and Rouse of Melbourne published in 1894 the first issue of *The Australasian Photo-Review*, which was the Australian edition of the British *Photographic Review of Reviews* (cf. Newton 1988: 69).

¹⁷ Various sources (Cato 1977 [1955], Millar 1981 and Stephenson 1997) rely on Quentin Burke's article of 1952, which wrongly gives 1858 as Charles Kerry's year of birth. The *New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages* (www.bdm.nsw.gov.au) cites 1857, which was also used by Keast Burke for the entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1983: 577–578).

Despite his strong attachment to his homeland, Kerry had always been intrigued by what he could find outside his familiar environment. It seems that he developed quite early an interest in exploring places, what may explain why he decided to become a surveyor. He imagined himself gaining field practice and working in a drafting department, learning also the theoretical aspects of surveying (Anon. 1898_b: 62). His experience at primary school in Bombala, however, did not really correspond to what he had imagined as the start of his ‘career’. He must have been about twelve years old, but already had clear ideas regarding his future. He soon realised that Bombala could not offer him the necessary knowhow to become what he wanted. So Kerry decided to convince his father to send him to a secondary school in Sydney. He arrived there in the late 1860s. The new environment fascinated him so much that, instead of cementing his interests for surveying, it orientated him towards photography. As a teenager Kerry took his first photograph on his father’s property Bobundara (Burke Q. 1952: 142), and soon after had the opportunity to accompany a travelling photographer¹⁸ on a country tour. Because he enjoyed this photographic experience – even if mainly focused on portrait work – he decided to drop the idea of becoming a surveyor and to embark on a photographic career instead (Anon. 1898_b: 62).

Establishing a photographic career

Charles Kerry started his photographic career at a time when Australia was experiencing a rapid economic growth due to the influx of free settlers during the gold rushes. In 1875, at the age of seventeen and after having left school, he joined the portrait studio of Alexander Henry Lamartinière at 308 George Street, Sydney (Figure 2.2). This was going to be the first of a series of collaborations that characterised Kerry’s early career before opening his big photographic establishment in 1893. Lamartinière was a portrait photographer of considerable experience from whom Kerry had the opportunity to learn all technical secrets.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, it has not been possible so far to identify the travelling photographer who introduced Kerry to photography. I would like to remember at this point that it was thanks to many travelling photographers that the new medium could flourish in Australia by quickly expanding also to rural towns (see Ennis 2007).



Figure 2.2 A. H. Lamartinière, 320. George Street. Sydney. Photograph of George Darrell, actor & playwright, portrait 1872–1873, carte-de-visite, 10.6 cm x 6.4 cm, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: P1/443 (AS/ML6)

Not only did Lamartinière unexpectedly force Kerry to take over the task of the studio's management, after four years of collaboration Lamartinière deserted the firm with all the liquid assets, leaving Kerry – at that time unaware of the firm's real financial situation – burdened with debts. Instead of giving up, however, Kerry decided to stay on and to improve the portrait business (Burke Q. 1952: 142). Working under the name of 'Lamartinière & Kerry, photographers' (cf. Sand's Directory 1883: 401), Kerry photographed important events, distinguished visitors, but also hundreds of wedding groups and babies. Greatly facilitated by the introduction of the dry-plate process in the 1880s,¹⁹ he could develop and process prints over night at his George Street store and put copies on sale the morning after (Burke Q. 1952: 142). On the back of his cartes-de-visite Kerry informed his customers that copies of portraits could be ordered at any time, and that portraits enlarged to life size, painted in oil or water colours were also available (Figure 2.3). His total commitment and perseverance turned out to be rewarding; indeed, by 1883, he had managed to get out of debt after having even insisted on paying the interest that had accrued on them (Burke Q. 1952: 142). The new start was emphasised by the firm being renamed 'Chas. H. Kerry, Photographer and Artist, 308 George Street'

¹⁹ Using the gelatine dry-plates, all landscape photographers needed to carry was a camera, a tripod and a box of plates. Indeed it was no longer necessary to travel with a darkroom and a range of chemicals and trays, as used to be the case before with the collodion-coated glass plates that had to be developed immediately. According to Newton (1988: 48), the complete equipment for wet-plate work could weigh over twenty-two kilos.

in 1884 (Sand's Directory 1884: 635). During the following years his business boomed and he considerably extended his network of customers, becoming one of the most appreciated photographers in New South Wales.

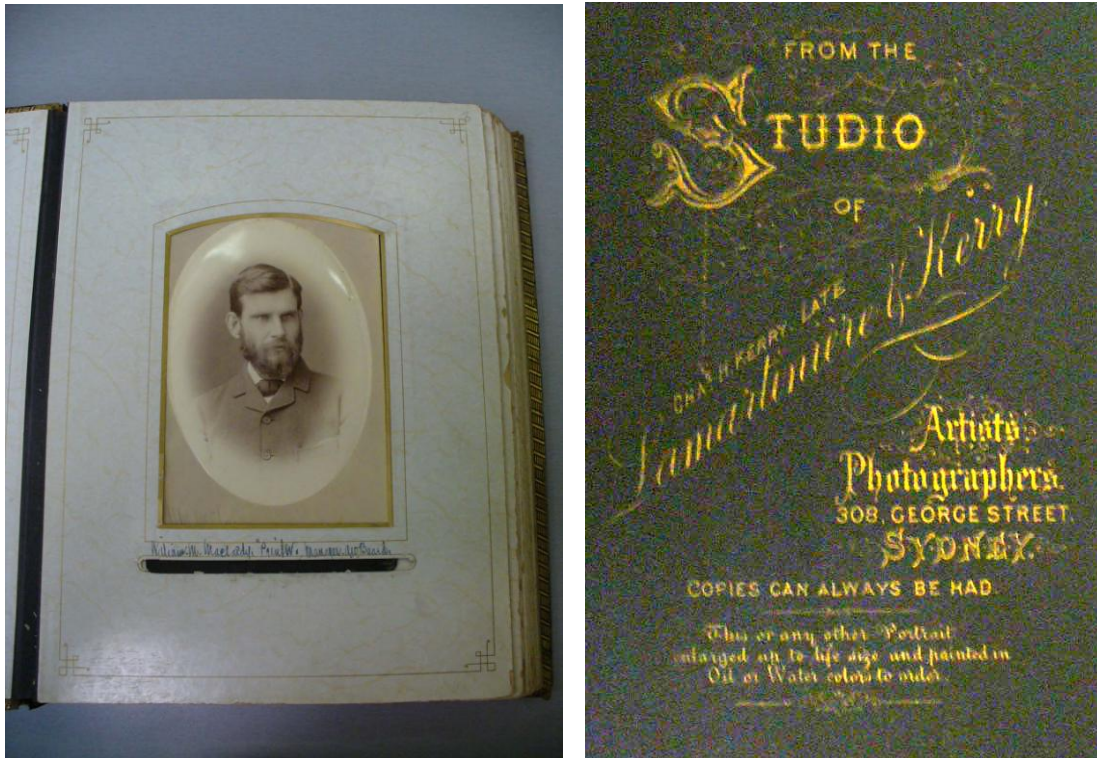


Figure 2.3 Portrait of William M. Maclaidy, Printer & Manager, A. W. Beard. [c.1883] by Lamartinière & Kerry. Part of an album of portraits collected by John William Richard Clarke, ca.1866–1909. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PXA 549/3 (AS/ML7)

In order to cope with the increasing amount of work, Kerry decided in 1886 to go into partnership with another photographer, C. D. Jones (unknown dates). The new studio named 'Kerry & Jones' (Sand's Directory 1886: 603) was among the first to introduce the dry plate²⁰ for every-day work (1898_a: 62), and specialised in portraits of sportsmen, graziers, businessmen and children (Figure 2.4). Another successful studio in Sydney, and main rival of Kerry & Jones, was Falk Studios set up by Henry Walter Barnett (1862–1934) in 1885. Barnett always offered the newest techniques which helped him to monopolise society people's and artists' portraiture (Millar 1981: 14, 24 and Newton 1988: 75). Despite that each studio had its regular customers, there were sitters of one studio who also had their portraits taken by the rival studio. One of these was Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) who apparently visited Kerry's studio every time he returned to Sydney from Samoa (Figures 2.5 and

²⁰ Kerry & Jones used the brand 'Thomas', and the quality of the resulting negatives was much appreciated for newspaper illustrations (Anon. 1898_b: 62).

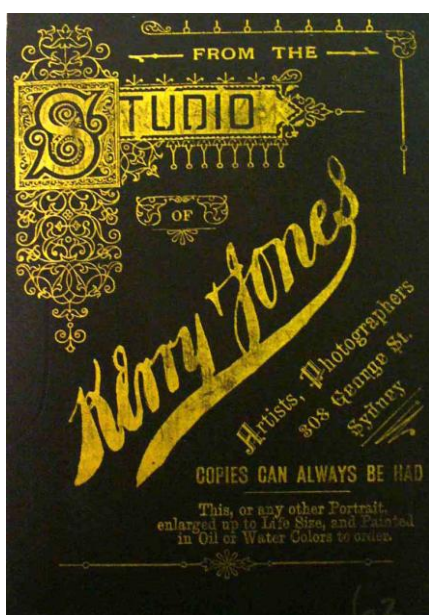
2.6) (Cato 1977[1955]: 67). Because Kerry was an open-minded person always interested in what was happening abroad, we can imagine that during the sessions with the Scottish novelist he took every opportunity to have a conversation and ask about the situation in Samoa. As a ‘Tusitala’ – Stevenson’s Samoan name meaning ‘storyteller’ – the writer must certainly have had enough material to entertain Kerry, and, maybe, Kerry’s idea of issuing a series of postcards completely devoted to Samoa (c. 1905) may have originated from these encounters (see Chapter Three).



Figure 2.4a



Figure 2.4b



Back of Figures 2.4a and 2.4b

Figure 2.4 Cartes-de-visite produced by Kerry & Jones, c. 1886–1892 (AS/NLA3): **a)** By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: PIC 24/J2 (P 804/3); **b)** By Permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: PIC 25/J2 (P 804/2)



Figure 2.5 Robert Louis Stevenson portraited on a carte-de-visite by Kerry & Jones “By appointment to His Excellency Lord Carrington” (c.1889–1890). Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: MLMSS Ashton family – papers, folder 11 (AS/ML8)



Figure 2.6 Carte-de-visite of Robert Louis Stevenson photographed by Falk Studios, c.1880. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: MLMSS Ashton family – papers folder 11 (AS/ML9)

Another famous sitter of Kerry & Jones was the Governor of New South Wales, Lord Carrington, who arrived in Sydney in 1885 and soon accepted Kerry into his circle. His wife took a photography course with Kerry, and on one occasion the Governor even accepted the request of some members of the Photographic Society of N.S.W. to hold an exhibition of amateur photography in the lobby of the Sydney Town Hall. Progressing from booth to booth, Lord Carrington must have actually commented “What magnificent frames!” (Burke Q. 1952: 142). Not having learned the technique of enlargement yet, the amateur photographers could only exhibit comparatively small prints rendered a bit more imposing by wide oak and copper frames.

In 1890 Lord Carrington appointed Kerry as the official Government photographer. The Sand’s Directory records that he was working as ‘Kerry & Jones, Photographers. By Appointment to His Excellency Lord Carrington, 308 George St.’ (Figure 2.7) (Sand’s Directory 1890: 718). Some cartes-de-visite and cabinet cards held by the Mitchell Library in Sydney and the National Library of Australia in Canberra, show that Kerry & Jones used more than one single formula on the cards’

back to advertise their studio. On some cards, the two men called themselves ‘Portrait & landscape photographers’ (Figure 2.8), while on others ‘Artists, Photographers’ (Figure 2.7). The portrait trade that had sustained photography

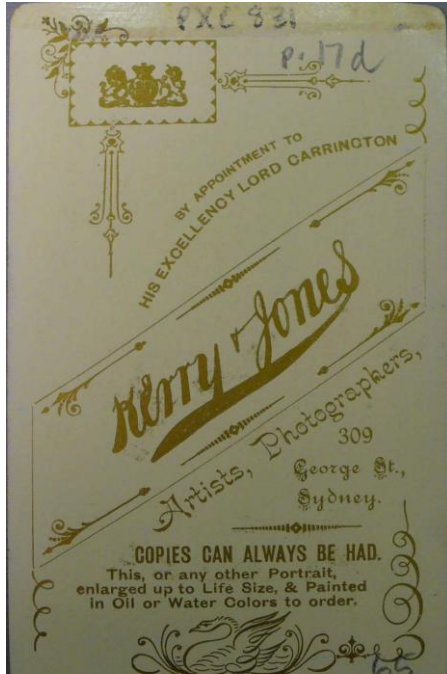


Figure 2.7 Carte-de-visite by Kerry & Jones “By appointment to His Excellency Lord Carrington” (c.1889–1890). From an album (c.1863–1892) possibly compiled by David Scott Mitchell. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PXC 831/17d (AS/ML10)



Figure 2.8 Cabinet card by Kerry & Jones portraying Cecilia Margaret Carrington carrying “J.S.M. Carrington 2 months old 1889”. Despite *Sand’s Directory* recorded “Kerry & Jones photographers. By appointment to His Excellency Lord Carrington” for 1890, this card reveals that they were appointed official photographers already in 1889. This card is part of the Stephen family’s collection of four albums containing mainly studio portraits (c. 1858–1900). Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PXA 1025/Box4/Album3/9 (AS/ML11)

studios during the 1840s and 1850s and which was based on the personal and private relationship between subject and buyer was supplemented in the late 1860s by the view trade. Comprising both landscape photography and views of urban scenes, the view trade became enormously popular through the stereographic²¹ views, and, addressing a wider public, emerged quickly as a very lucrative business (Newton 1988: 50, Ennis 2007: 17). At a time when pastoral expansion declined and people went back to the city to live,²² the bush became a romanticised place, both in literature and in the arts. The citizens, who did not have to struggle for survival anymore, were suddenly confronted with ‘free time’ which they preferred to spend in the countryside as a place for recreation and relaxing. The consequence was that the photographers also moved outside the city to take pictures of people picnicking, sleeping or reading.²³ Kerry & Jones enhanced their range by

²¹ Among the prominent exponents of stereo photography in Australia was William Hetzer in Sydney (Ennis 2007: 17). For detailed information on the medium of stereography see Holmes (1861, 1859 and 1863).

²² According to Newton, by the 1880s about a third of the Australian population lived in the main cities (1988: 68).

²³ This practice paralleled the one of the Heidelberg School considered the Australian Impressionism. Inspired by the scenic beauties and the unique light of Australia painters such as Tom Roberts (1856–

also working in this field of photography, so that they could add the words ‘landscape photographers’ in their slogan.

Concerning the formula ‘Artists, Photographers’, Kerry and Jones may have considered their portraits and views as a result of the artistic application of photography – after customers like Stevenson appreciated their unique portraiture style. As McCauley has highlighted in her study of mid-nineteenth-century commercial photography in Paris, it was not simply the perspectives and desires of the customers who encouraged the reproduction in photography of the conventions already established in painted portraiture;²⁴ it was also the owners of small photographic studios who wished to establish themselves as part of a bourgeois class (McCauley 1994). Additionally, many contemporary photographers successfully emphasised the artistic aspect of their profession, and it could be that Kerry and Jones simply decided to follow the fashion by using this combination of words. In any case, the question whether or not photography could be considered as a branch of art had been the focus of an heated debate during Kerry’s photographic activity. “Do not call yourself an ‘artist photographer’ and make ‘artist painters’ and ‘artist sculptors’ laugh; call yourself a photographer and wait for artists to call you brother” wrote the Scottish photographer John Thomson advocating more humility among his colleague photographers (Thomson 1899: 36–37).²⁵ Comments like this possibly left photographers such as Kerry indifferent who, without any presumption of being considered artists in the classical sense, may have used the word ‘artists’ mainly in response to the massive democratisation of photography²⁶ and with the intention of distinguishing themselves from the ordinary amateur, but also, as Newton argues, from “the crass professional concerned only with money” (1988: 72).

1931), Frederick McCubbin (1855–1917) or Arthur Streeton (1867–1943) went into the landscape and painted *plein-air* in the French impressionist tradition of the 1860s and the 1870s. The people shown in the landscape by the Heidelberg School artists or photographed by the pictorialists were ‘new’ natives whose skin was white instead of black (Newton 1988: 65, 70).

²⁴ According to Suren Lalvani, nineteenth-century photographic portraiture contributed, together with disciplines such as physiognomy and phrenology, to the creation of the bourgeois ideal (Lalvani 1996: 164–168); it constitutes an example of the development of “a regime of the spectacle” (Lalvani 1996: 82). Indeed, with the craze for cartes-de-visite, these images were frequently produced for public consumption; collecting and exchanging them was exploited by the political leaders and the royalty in order to promote their own popularity (Lalvani 1996: 128).

²⁵ John Thomson (1837–1921) was Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society. He wrote extensively on technical aspects of photography and also instructed explorers in the use of photography (see Reeves 2005[1906]: 51–62). Thomson considered photography as a necessary tool for good research and vehemently rejected its association to art (Thomson 1899: 36–37).

²⁶ The introduction of the Kodak box brownie camera in 1900 accelerated the democratisation process, enabling everyone to take their own landscapes and portraits.

Due to the large demand, Kerry and Jones's business expanded rapidly, so that more photographers and darkroom experts had to be employed (Burke Q. 1952: 143). In 1893 the company was renamed 'Kerry & Company, photographers, 308 George St' (Sand's Directory 1893: 708), which suggests that Kerry must have assumed a prominent role in the firm's management (Figure 2.9). Different from the



Figure 2.9 Robert Louis Stevenson photographed by Kerry and Co. in 1893 or 1894. Cabinet card from a collection of photographs compiled by Rose Scott. Scott Family photographs, c.1864–1900. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: MLMSS 38, PXB189 (AS/ML12)

previous partnerships, Kerry & Company was predestined to exist for twenty-five years, during which thousands of photographs in all formats, cartes-de-visite and postcards circulated both within and outside Australia.²⁷ Beside observing the local development of the tourist industry – favoured by increasing leisure time and money on the part of the city dwellers – Kerry kept an eye on the overseas developments in photography by subscribing to various photographic publications (Anon. 1898b: 62 and Millar 1981: 9–10). One of the most influential

articles was a paper on magnesium flashlight read by Dr. Vogel to the Berlin Society in 1887. Combining the theoretical knowledge presented by Vogel with the experiences of his colleague Henry King (1855–1923),²⁸ Kerry had begun using this new technique already in 1888. The first important project was carried out in 1890 by candlelight and magnesium flashes when the New South Wales Governor commissioned him to photograph the Jenolan and Yarrangobilly Caves.²⁹ His efforts paid off a few years later when the caves' images – produced under prohibitive

²⁷ Several bromide enlargements depicting scenes from New South Wales were actually exhibited at the 1893 Chicago International Exhibition.

²⁸ Henry King, who set up his own business in 1880 with William Slade, produced the same basic fare as Kerry, although he took on only few commissions that were related to 'news' coverage in which Kerry's studio specialised (Newton 1988: 83).

²⁹ Some of the original glass plate negatives are now at the Macleay Museum of the University of Sydney.

circumstances³⁰ – were used to promote tourism in New South Wales, and became the first, appreciated, subjects for Kerry & Co.’s new product: the view-card, or picture postcard (Figure 2.10).

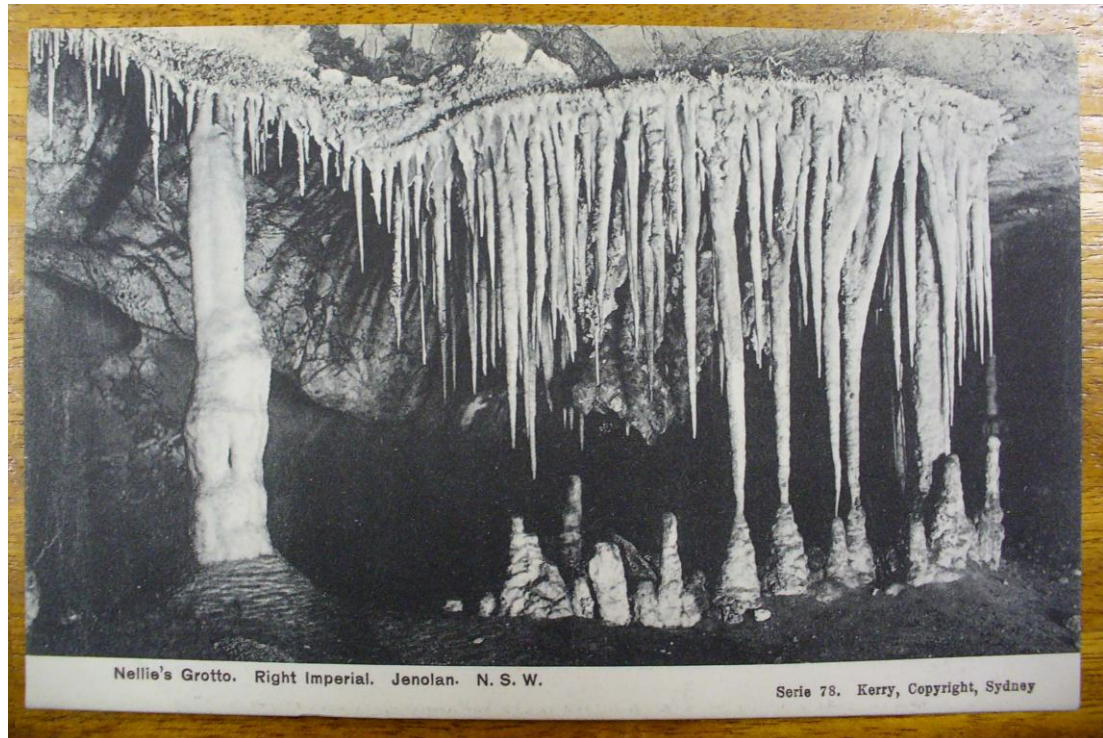


Figure 2.10 “Nellie’s Grotto. Right Imperial. Jenolan. N. S. W.”, postcard by Kerry & Co. (c. 1907). By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: LOC: J2 (AS/NLA4)

Kerry’s projects were followed with great attention by the public, and the local press soon started to comment on his work. “Kerry & Co. are just now tempting the public with a fetching series of the best of the New South Wales Art gallery pictures. They are most effectively coloured, in addition to being excellent photographs” appeared in 1894 in *The Photographic Review of Reviews* (Anon. 1894_a: 10). A series of assignments followed in 1895. The company documented the National Park for the New South Wales Government, photographed the big aquatic fete in Sydney Harbour (see Burke Q. 1952 and Cato 1977[1955]), and offered, free of cost, portraits of all the seven hundred soldiers who decided to join the British Expeditionary Force in Sudan as volunteers. Their departure was characterised by a strong feeling of nationhood, and thousands of Australians witnessed the troops’

³⁰ It was difficult to move from one cave to the other, and to reach a specific place Kerry often had to crawl on all fours with all his technical equipment. Additionally, after every shot taken with magnesium flashlight, it was necessary to wait a few hours until the air was clean again for the next shot. In caves the black cloud of dust generated by the burnt magnesium sank to the ground considerably slower than outdoors.

farewell on 3rd March at Sydney Harbour (Newton 1988: 61). In the same year Kerry was also commissioned to travel through New South Wales to document the life of Australia's wealthiest landowners, the so-called squatters – sheep or cattle farmers on a large scale that were occupying a tract of pastoral land as tenants of the Crown. This experience, carried out by train and on horseback in company of his staff, allowed him not only to collect many photographs of herds of sheep and cattle, artesian bores or windmills, but also to expand his social network, collecting, as Cato suggested, many friends and customers (Cato 1977[1955]: 66). Indeed, Kerry photographed every station he visited and took portraits of the owner's family (Figure 2.11). Because of the long travels, Kerry developed the negatives on the spot in order to have 'contacts' to show to his customers. The final pictures were then sent from Sydney on his return (Burke Q. 1952: 143).



Figure 2.11 Homestead, Memagong Station in Southern New South Wales photographed by Kerry & Co. The station was owned by the Young brothers, who kept 27,000 sheep and 260 cattle (Millar 1981: 102).

Also in 1895, or possibly a year before, Kerry participated in an expedition to the interior of New South Wales with a group of senators who, four years before the Australian Premiers' Conference agreed that Australia's capital should be located between Sydney and Melbourne, visited the site where later Canberra would arise. As Ennis mentions, folkloric images played an important role in shaping national sentiment (Ennis 2007: 60–61), and Kerry's photographs of the site of the future capital clearly contributed to the patriotic enthusiasm that culminated in 1901 in the Federation (Figures 2.12 and 2.13).



Figure 2.12 Tour of Senators to Federal Capital Site, Canberra. Photographed by Kerry & Co. in 1894 or 1895. By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: LOC 75/J2 (AS/NL5)



Figure 2.13 "Federal Capital Site. N. S. Wales", Canberra. Photographed by Kerry & Co. before 1897. By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: PIC Album 64 (AS/NLA6)

Reporting what Burke formulated in 1952, several authors mention that during his numerous travels in 1895 Kerry also secured a set of portraits of Aboriginal people and corroboree scenes from both inland and coastal districts in New South Wales. These images must have been of outstanding quality because they were exhibited at the British Empire Indian and Colonial Exhibition, attracting great

attention from continental ethnologists (Burke Q. 1952: 143). While the opportunity to take these photographs may have certainly existed, there is still some confusion as to where and when this body of images was taken. Indeed, a well-known set depicting a *corroboree* was taken by Kerry in 1898 in Quambone near Coonamble and registered under copyright on 6th October. The official album containing the same images is now held by the National Library of Australia and is also, erroneously, attributed to the year 1895 (PIC Album 394 *) (see details in Chapter Four).

Despite that Kerry was running a successful studio, he not only focused on his personal business. He considered it important to establish an organized group of professionals, stock dealers and process workers in order to exchange technical knowhow and organise exhibitions. There was already the N.S.W. Photographic Society but for Kerry its rules “were not elastic enough to take in several sections of photographic workers who desired an opportunity to experiment together” (Kerry 1897: 153). With this in mind, between 1896 and 1897, he made an attempt to establish the ‘Photographic Union of New South Wales’. The first information meeting was held on 29th May 1896 at the Exchange Hotel in Sydney (Anon. 1896_a: 10), and a document containing goals and conditions was subsequently prepared by the Honorary Secretaries Charles Kerry and J. R. Yorke (Anon. 1896_b: 143, 145–146). In September Kerry published a circular in the *Australian Photographic Journal* giving further details about the new association:

The Union is founded on a broad and cosmopolitan basis, with the object of cementing together, in one powerful organization, all the best and cleverest workers in the various branches of the New South Wales Photographic world. It has been formed for the purpose of advancing and elevating all matters in connection with photography; and with this end in view, monthly meetings will be held, and lectures and practical demonstrations will be given in the methods of work in various branches of the Art. A grand Intercolonial Photographic Exhibition will be held in Sydney, at an early date—and thereafter at regular intervals. Comfortable Rooms, suitable for both ladies and gentlemen, have been secured at Nos. 10 and 12 Hunter Street, and developing and enlarging rooms fitted up for the use of members. A Library, containing all the standard works on Photography, has been secured, and arrangements have been made for a regular supply of the principal Photographic periodicals of the world. (Kerry 1896: 217)

With Henry King representing the professional photographers, James C. Cruden and George Bell³¹ for the employees of photographic establishments and ‘Harrington and Rouse’ for the stock dealers, the new association could boast influential committee members (Anon. 1896_c: 169). All was set for a great future and the promises made to the members were carried out within a few months. In December, five months after the Union’s establishment and when everything was going full sail, Kerry resigned as secretary. His announcement came unexpected, but members of the committee did not succeed in convincing him to reconsider his decision. Kerry explained “that besides business reasons, a marriage engagement had to be kept in a little over a month” (Anon. 1896_d: 295). While preparations for the marriage may certainly have cost a considerable amount of time, it is difficult to believe that this was the main reason for Kerry’s resignation. He was a man of great energy who was used to investing time for hobbies and other activities, alongside his professional business. Maybe the cause of his decision was some kind of disappointment related with the Union. Having achieved almost everything alone, he possibly hoped for more support from the other members, and, this not happening, he decided to leave. A sign of missing willingness is the fact that no successor could be found. With his typical diplomacy, Kerry announced that the majority of the members had businesses of their own to run and that none had “sufficient leisure” to take over the management of the society (Kerry 1897: 153). Without a manager, the Union collapsed after a few months, and the project of amalgamating the Photographic Union with the Photographic Society to create a “strong association open to all photographic workers” could not be realised (Kerry 1897: 153).

On 20th January 1897, Kerry married Delphine Hilda Vivian – the daughter of a former Sydney town clerk – at St Mark’s Church, Darling Point (Burke K. 1983: 577). Four years later the couple had a child named Geoffrey Marni Eudra K. (1901–1974), who became one of Australia’s first aviators.

1898 was another special year for Kerry. At the opening of his new three-floor photographic studio in 310 George Street on February 23rd (see details in Chapter Three), Kerry was the best-known figure in New South Wales. Hundreds of people from Sydney and visitors from the outback had stopped at his studio to have their portrait taken. If not he himself, one of his field operators was always present at

³¹ Both Bell and Cruden were already working for Kerry’s photographic studio, the former as field photographer and the latter as senior operator and sub-manager (see Chapter Three).

important events all across the state, lending the images of Kerry & Co. omnipresence in the local press. The studio received a special assignment when the then leading illustrated weekly *The Town and Country Journal* decided to publish fifty wood-cuts of Sydney from the 1850s and to juxtapose them to fifty new photographs of the same subjects printed in the new half-tone technique. Kerry & Co. got the job, and the pictures were taken in 1899 by the operator Willem van der Velden (Chapter Four), who used a special outfit designed by Kerry's friend, the railway inspecting engineer H. J. Quodling. It consisted of a four-wheel lorry drawn by a horse. On the lorry was mounted a stepladder (c. 457 cm) in form of a tower that ended in a platform bearing a heavy brass plate. Into this plate was fitted a ball and a rod with a lead weight attached. The camera was mounted on top of the ball, and the heavy plumb-bob construction acted as a stabiliser. In this way, even if the lorry had to be parked unevenly, the camera on its base would remain aligned (Burke Q. 1952: 155, Curnow 1954: 469) (Figure 2.14).



Figure 2.14 George Street near the General post Office (Millar 1981: 48)

While Kerry's business was very successful, many owners of small photographic studios struggled to survive at the end of the 19th century. Especially

during the depression of the 1890s, competition had been fierce, and, for many, price-cutting had been the only way to save their business. Kerry initially insisted on supplying the best work without cutting the already low prices. On 1st January 1894 his company signed, together with Crown Studios, Falk Studios, Henry King and forty other photographers an agreement to maintain the same prices in the city of Sydney and its suburbs (Figure 2.15).

Lowest prices ³² for	Burnished	Enamelled
CABINETS	3 for 5s.	3 for 6s.
	6 for 6s. 6d.	6 for 8s. 6d.
	12 for 10s.	12 for 13s. 6d.
WHOLE PLATES	3 for 10s.	3 for 12s. 6d.
	6 for 12s. 6d.	6 for 16s.
	12 for 17s. 6d.	12 for 22s. 6d.

Figure 2.15 Lowest prices for cabinet cards and whole plates in N.S.W. (Anon. 1894_b: 148)

“Any photographer is earnestly requested not to make any change in his prices without first communicating with the undersigned” (Anon. 1894_b: 148). The agreement held for four years. When Falk Studio was able to work at very low prices due to its success in celebrity portraiture, Kerry had to give up his policy and started cutting the prices as well. In so doing, he ‘lost’ his partner Jones, who did not agree with his decision and withdrew from the business. Realising that the situation was not going to improve in the short-run, and anticipating a further decline in portraiture, Kerry decided to re-orientate his business. He began specialising on the view trade (Anon. 1898_b: 62), using a stock of outdoor negatives. The views were sold both as photographic prints to be included in albums, and later as postcards. Kerry could not have chosen a better moment for this change. The new railway network favoured mobility and people soon also started to travel for leisure. Close contact with Australia’s beautiful scenery developed the desire to take home a piece of this experience by means of view cards. In 1901, the six separate, British self-governing colonies (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania,

³² 12d (12 pence) = 1s (1 shilling); 20s (20 shillings) = £1 (1 pound); 21s (21 shillings) = 1 guinea.

Victoria and Western Australia) were federated into the Commonwealth of Australia, and the circulation of view cards depicting different Australian locations reinforced



Figure 2.16 '1504. Cascades above Katoomba Fall, Australian Parroquets', Kerry & Co. Reproduced from the original glass plate of the Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, accession number: 78.7 (AS/MAC2)

national pride (Figure 2.16).

The new object gained the interest of customers from all social classes. As a cheap means of communication, as a collector item or as souvenirs, the postcards introduced a new form of relationship between people and images. As these images were about the world, we could even say that Kerry helped to push people to rethink their relationship with their environment, to Aboriginal Australians, etc.

Through this more democratic form of visual economy – his postcards carried reproductions of 'works of art' that suddenly

circulated freely in society – Kerry helped to usher in new image worlds, and thus perceptions (Benjamin 1969[1936], 1980[1931]). Much easier to get and less sensitive in handling than a gelatin photograph, the postcard became in its Golden Age (1890–1915), I would argue, the most touched and circulated object after money. Kerry immediately understood the potential of the little paper card and was able to make the most of this innovation, soon acquiring the monopoly in New South Wales (see details in Chapter Four). Yet would Kerry also have accepted the challenge of the postcard business at such an early stage if there had been no price crisis? As mentioned above, Kerry had an incredible nose for deals and could anticipate whether an innovation was predestined to have a future or not. Additionally, he did not embark on new adventures only for business purposes; he was genuinely interested in every innovation in photography. It was this curiosity

that characterised him, and which at the same time distinguished him from his colleagues. But back to the question: we may assume that, even if maybe a little later and under less pressure, Kerry would in any case have ventured into the postcard business. The news from Europe left no doubt about the success that the postcard was going to have in every corner of the world. So we can say that the price crisis only accelerated Kerry's decision, and that it contributed in an indirect way to his rise to leadership.

Parallel to the postcard production, Kerry continued to send his photographers to document important events. The arrival of the American fleet in Sydney harbour and the Burns-Johnson boxing match in 1908 were both covered by Kerry & Co. To gain an aerial view of the arrival of the Great White Fleet, Kerry mounted on box kites the Cirkut, the first model of a panorama camera that Charles Kerry had imported for this purpose. The kite idea did not really work out as expected, but many panorama pictures (11.7 cm × 50.8 cm) were successfully taken by the operators Harold Bradley and William van der Velden (Burke Q. 1952: 156). Equally successful were the photographs of the Burns-Johnson³³ match that took place on 26th December at Rushcutters Bay Stadium in Sydney. Kerry & Co. purchased exclusive rights to document the fight with four cameras at the ringside and a massive panoramic Kodak Cirkut capable of making negatives 1.83 metres long and 40 centimetres wide (Davies 2004: 98). The panoramic photo of the ring surrounded by over 20,000 spectators was published on a half page in *The Daily Telegraph* the day after the match (Figure 2.17). In order to have all the match photographs ready for the press and for the display window, Kerry & Co. staff members had to work all night. To keep up the work spirit Kerry started singing songs around three o'clock in the morning, and at six o'clock he offered his workers a breakfast at a Hunter Street cafe (Burke Q. 1952: 156–157).

Robin Cale, one of the staff members, described Kerry as “always immaculately dressed” (Figures 2.1 and 2.18), and revealed that he was a hard employer, who expected utmost from himself and from his staff (Cale in Burke Q. 1952: 157). Nevertheless, his staff appreciated Kerry's fairness because he praised

³³ Jack Johnson, the first black world heavyweight champion (1908–1915) had taunted the Canadian world champion Tommy Burns for two years in the press for a match. The fight lasted fourteen rounds before being stopped by the police. The title was awarded to Johnson.

and credited someone who distinguished himself through personal achievement (Cale in Burke Q. 1952: 157). At Kerry's time, the way of acknowledging a merit was very different to today. A member of Kerry & Co.'s staff considered himself honoured to be praised by his employee and did not expect his name to appear on a photograph or album. In this context it is useful to consider that after the turn of the century, when Kerry was mainly busy managing the company rather than taking photographs, the majority of the images were shot by his field operators; their names neither appeared on the 'end product' nor on any document listing which staff member photographed or printed what. It is therefore more correct to ascribe the authorship of the unidentified images to Kerry & Co. rather than to Charles Kerry himself.



Figure 2.17 Panorama of the Burns - Johnson match. Detail of the gelatin silver print 39 cm x 94.5 cm held by the Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney (Davies 2004: 79)



Figure 2.18 Charles Kerry in his fifties (Burke 1952: 157)



Figure 2.19 Kerry posing with a rifle (1896_d: 295)

Not only photography

In 1913 Kerry left his photographic company. During the years preceding his departure he had begun to train a young relative – probably William Kerry – to take over the management of the enterprise (Curnow 1952: 562). Yet Kerry's life after 1913 was not going to change completely. Indeed, already during his photographic career, Kerry had always been active in many different fields. In the 1880s he joined the Sydney Lancers and won twenty-five prizes in cavalry sports in five years. In the 1890s he took up clay pigeon shooting, won the New South Wales open handicap for twelve consecutive months in 1893–94 and was a founder of the New South Wales Gun Club (Figure 2.19). But he was also a keen angler as well as the first person to promote the Kiandra Snow Shoe carnival outside Monaro District (1881); he also

introduced Sydney visitors to skiing in the Snowy Mountains.³⁴ He personally guided groups of visitors every winter, and in 1895 he took a series of photos of the region (Welch 1896_a: 14, 1896_b: 14) which drew the attention of the N.S.W. Government Tourist Bureau.³⁵ Regular ski trips were organised for the general public after that, and a weather station was established on the summit of Mt. Kosciuszko,³⁶ Australia's highest mountain (2.228 m). It was Kerry who persuaded the government to open up the Kosciuszko area as a holiday region, and in 1909 he was elected as the first president of the Alpine Club. After Kerry's death, the founder of the N.S.W. Government Tourist Bureau, Percy Hunter, paid tribute to his visions, nominating him as 'the father of Australian skiing'. The still-existing main ski competition 'Kerry Course' was named after him (Australian Alpine Club 2010; Burke Q. 1952: 144). His identification with the highest mountain was so strong that Kerry chose the pseudonym 'Kosciusko'³⁷ when competing as a fisherman and as a member of the Sydney Gun Club (Anon. 1928_a: 12).

It was also after having left the photographic company in 1913 that Kerry managed to travel to the Pacific Islands. During a photographic tour he visited the Polynesian Islands Tonga, Samoa, Fiji as well as the Melanesian New Caledonia, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. According to the National Library of Australia website photographs taken during this trip are his own work (<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/3099009>); it remains to be found out, however, where the material is located.³⁸ In 1927 Kerry joined a scientific party of thirty scientists and professionals – among them Melbourne ('Mel') Ward, a collector for the Australian Museum – on an expedition to the Bunker and Capricorn Islands in the Great Barrier Reef. The journalist Elliot Napier, who accompanied the researchers and reported their experiences and findings in a series of fifteen articles

³⁴ For a picture of Kerry on a photographic expedition in the Snowy Mountains see Davies 1985: 100–101.

³⁵ These images became extremely popular through lantern-slide shows organised by the Photographic Union (see Anon. 1897: 5).

³⁶ Before the Geographical Names Board of New South Wales adopted the Polish spelling 'Mount Kosciuszko' in 1997, the name was spelt in its Anglicised form as 'Mount Kosciusko'. (<http://www.gnb.nsw.gov.au>).

³⁷ This pseudonym appears even in Sand's Directory for the years from 1909 to 1912 (Sand's Directory 1909: 1058, 1910: 1106, 1911: 1154, 1912: 1214).

³⁸ For a discussion on the authorship of Kerry & Co.'s Pacific photographs see Chapter Seven.

published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*,³⁹ described Kerry as a man of wide interests. As an excellent fisherman, poet and collector, Kerry evaded any attempt of classification, which led Napier to coin the word ‘Everything-ologist’ for him. We don’t know whether Kerry developed an interest for postcard collecting during the first decade of the 20th century. What we know from Napier, however, is that Kerry assiduously collected everything “that was not screwed down” during the expedition. “How he ever got them [shells, turtle-eggs, crabs etc.] home without being suspected of association with some horrible crime is a mystery.” (Napier 1927_g: 7)

A few months after his return from the Great Barrier Reef, Kerry, at the age of seventy, suddenly died at his residence Cottesmore on Kurraba-Road in Neutral Bay, Sydney, leaving his wife Delphine and their son Marni behind (Figure 2.20). It was 26th May 1928, and, according to the obituary published by *Sydney Morning Herald*, Kerry was in good health and had spent the morning in the city (Anon. 1928_a: 10, 12). It is interesting to note that, apart from one sentence relating to his successful photographic career, the obituary does not remember Kerry as one of the most prominent Australia’s photographers. Having left his company in the early 1910s, Kerry was rather remembered as an eclectic personality and as a successful entrepreneur in numerous fields (see also Anon. 1928_b: 17).⁴⁰ The obituary published in the *Australian Photographic Review*, on the other hand, remembered Kerry as the great photographer of George Street, who, more than for his portrait work, had been particularly appreciated for his outdoor work. The author of the article mentions the great physical energy Kerry commanded. Indeed, during his excursions and expeditions he used to carry a 12 × 10 plate outfit through a “country over which most people would consider it amply sufficient to carry themselves” (Anon. 1928_c: 291).

³⁹ The fifteen articles, all introduced by the headlines “Great Barrier Reef” were published between 3rd December 1927 and 21st January 1928. There are singly listed in the bibliography under Napier 1927_a–1928_f.

⁴⁰ The following list mentioning the names of the people who attended Kerry’s funeral reflects the various circles in which Kerry was active and esteemed: Messrs. E. S. Marks, M.L.A., Percy Hunter (manager in the Pacific for the Pacific Cable Board), H. J. Lambie (director) and J. C. Cocks (assistant, director) of the Government Tourist Bureau; I. D. Coombes (vice-president, Metropolitan Rifle Clubs’ Union), Emblem (secretary, New South Wales Gun Club), F. G. Pratten (Alluvial Tin, Malaya, Ltd.), H. G. Pratten, A. J. Thompson (Kodak Australasia, Ltd.), J. C. Cruden (Cruden Studios), R. D. Hartwell (F. O. Furner and Co.), W. E. H. Nicolle, G. W. Poole, and W. Graham (Poole and Steel, Ltd.), I. J. Fielding (J. Fielding and Co., Ltd.), Frank E. Tilley, Joseph Tomlinson, W. J. McCaghern I (C. H. Smith and McCaghern), Eric F. Griffin (Philip Pring and Docker), William Tilley, Milton C. Kent, H. S. Hawkins, W. H. Watton, H. Baddeley, R. H. Spencer, W. A. Ander, H. H. Cutter, A. A. McCoy, and F. Y. Wilson (Anon. 1928_d: 12).



Figure 2.20 Kerry in his late sixties (Anon. 1928_c: 291)

When Kerry left the photographic studio in 1913, handing it over to his nephew, it seemed that the main reason for his withdrawal was his interest in geology and mineralogy which he had already indulged in for several years. Indeed, Kerry first mined a silver-lead deposit at Yerranderie (N.S.W.), and then floated tin-mining companies – the ‘Rabaul Tin Dredging Co.’ and the ‘Takuapa Tin Dredging Co.’ – in Siam and the Federated Malay States respectively (Anon. 1924: 11, Anon. 1927: 13, Burke Q. 1952: 158). However, given the great passion and energy he devoted to his photographic establishment, and his ability to conduct numerous tasks simultaneously, it is difficult to believe that Kerry left his studio only for mining concerns. Already at the beginning of the century, when his photographic studio was prosperous, he was involved in this kind of activities as the chairman of directors of the Feldworth Silver-mining Company (Anon. 1901_a: 9; see also Anon. 1905_a: 9 and Anon. 1905_b: 9). Considering his good nose for business, and great sense for

anticipation, it is well possible that he saw a difficult time ahead for the photographic studio, and decided to leave ‘before the ship sank’. In fact, after he left, his nephew failed to maintain Kerry & Co.’s quality level, and in 1917 the firm closed down. It is difficult to believe that this was only due to William Kerry’s bad management; his uncle would have probably helped and offered his assistance if there had been the need. It seems more probable that the firm, as many other photographic studios during the war, was predestined not to survive up to the 1920s. But why would the ship go down? In the 1910s, two developments, one related to postcards, the other to photography, could possibly have alarmed and driven him to quit ‘Kerry & Co.’. First, Kerry must have felt that the postcard craze could not last for many more years. Despite that the official end of the postcard fashion is considered to coincide with the beginning of World War I, its decline started already in the early 1910s. As a manager with the supervision over various sectors of the business, Kerry would have certainly been one of the first to perceive impending changes. Secondly, photography was undergoing drastic changes. Pictorial photographers like John Kauffman (1864–1942) or Norman C. Deck (1882–1980) were gaining considerable coverage in the *Australian Photographic Journal*. Their black-and-white and sepia-toned pictures – emulating contemporary painting and etching using soft focus and heavy manipulation in the darkroom – represented a turning away from the classical clichéd portraits, the sentimental genre and the reportage pictures of the self-made photographers (Millar 1981: 30). But it was also a turning away from the old system and practices. In 1909 Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953), a Freeman’s Studios employee, refusing to print his own work under the name of his employer, mounted in the rooms of the Photographic Society of New South Wales an exhibition that has been described as “the first to establish the idea of the photographer artist” (Newton in Millar 1981: 27). These changes were just beyond what Kerry and his operators could offer (cf. Lendon 1982: 146).

With the intention of showing the context in which the Kerry & Co. postcards discussed in the following chapters are embedded, I presented first the man, photographer and entrepreneur, from whom the idea of these postcards grew. In Chapter Three I expand the contextual frame and focus on the ‘factory of curiosities’ Kerry & Co. where Kerry’s postcard idea developed and materialised.

CHAPTER THREE

Kerry & Company (1893–1917)

In this chapter I present where and how Charles Kerry realised his most productive ideas and stunning innovations that led to the creation of postcards depicting indigenous people of the Pacific. Different from most of his contemporaries, Kerry succeeded in establishing a ‘factory of curiosities’ in which almost all production steps, from the creation to the finishing of a product, could take place. Outsourcing became necessary only for the collotype printing of his postcards. This chapter has two main sections: the first presents the ‘curiosities’ related to the firm’s organisation and production. The second discusses Kerry & Co.’s postcards in general, paving the way for the core analyses of the postcards showing indigenous people; these follow in Parts II and III.

The premises

We do not have much information about Kerry & Co.’s early premises at 308 George Street but we know that for many years business was carried out in an establishment that adjoined the premises of Lloyd and Collins (Anon. 1898_d: 3). At that time, studios often occupied the top of a house and consisted of a walled-in space with a glass roof. To reach the modest accommodation the sitters had to go up narrow and steep spiral stairs (cf. Anon. 1898_b: 62). Thanks to a curious description (see citation below), we know that in 1895 Kerry’s premises had been extended, occupying already two floors. Indeed, according to an anonymous writer, the trainer of a horse called ‘Mahomet’ – famous in the city because he performed with the Fitzgerald’s’ circus – stated that the animal understood everything that was said and would do anything he was told. Doubting the validity of this, a journalist waged the bet that the

horse could not go upstairs to Mr. Kerry's studio and have its photograph taken. To the great astonishment of the public the horse

arrived at the entrance of the studio, ascended the precipitous staircase leading to the gallery, walked through the reception room, ascended another flight of steps leading to the studio and marched into position as directed before a suitable background, and without even the assistance of a headrest, had an excellent portrait of himself taken. (Anon. 1895_b: 115)

Mahomet's portrait could not be identified. This anecdote shows, however, that Kerry & Co. offered already in the mid-1890s a separation between the reception room and the actual photograph studio. Yet Kerry understood that, given the rapid expansion of his business, even the two-store premises were not going to guarantee the necessary standard for many more years. So he commissioned the architect H. C. Kent to design a completely new photographic studio to be erected at 310 George Street, almost immediately opposite the old premises. The four-floor building was realised by Alex Dean & Sons, and, at the official opening on 23rd February 1898, Kerry stated that, among other things, this had only been made possible by the increased artistic feelings and tastes of the community (Anon. 1898_b: 62). The Minister for Works, J. H. Young, inaugurated the new building in front of many representative citizens who paid Kerry numerous compliments. In return, the photographer took the opportunity to express his gratitude to his employees, who, with great ability and loyalty, had contributed to the success of Kerry & Co. (Anon. 1898_b: 61). Despite the official nature of the inauguration, it seems that no photograph of the building's façade, described as 'attractive' (Anon. 1898_a: 28) and as conveying "the idea of breadth and magnitude" (Anon. 1898_b: 61) found its way into a public institution. We have, on the other hand, interesting details regarding the interior that "arrange[d] to meet the latest requirements of the art and afford[ed] a large amount of elegant accommodation to the public" (Anon. 1898_a: 28). According to the contemporary press and to the memoirs of Robin Cale, a Kerry & Co.'s staff member from 1907 to 1912, the ground floor constituted the attraction point for potential customers promenading on George Street. The large vestibule was decorated with hundreds of framed pictures covering the walls from floor to ceiling (Anon. 1898_b: 61). The display showed portraiture work, 75 cm × 100 cm enlargements of Australian landscapes and images of Aboriginal life. A grand staircase of polished cedar led the visitor to the reception room on the first floor

(Burke Q. 1952: 144), which, thanks to its dimensions and the fine collection of photographs, was popularly known as the ‘Kerry Gallery’ (Anon. 1898_b: 61). In addition to the images hanging on the walls and ready for sale, the gallery boasted round tables made of polished cedar and rosewood on which various albums were displayed. As Cale remembers, “a note of colour was given by aquaria containing gaily coloured tropical fish, and by the varied hues of light from the stained glass windows and circular alcoves on the street frontage” (Burke Q. 1952: 144). On the second floor there were elegantly furnished dressing rooms and the photographic studio itself with the dark rooms. Because of its dimensions, the studio was sufficiently large to photograph a group of about fifty persons⁴¹ (Burke Q. 1952: 144), and the lighting could be regulated by means of opaque curtains (Anon. 1898_b: 61). The third floor was devoted to the technical operations of photography – enlarging, printing, mounting, etc. – (Anon. 1898_b: 62), while the roof was equipped with water pipes to keep the temperature down on hot days (Anon. 1898_b: 61). Because of the abundance of light the ‘promenade roof’ (Anon. 1898_d: 3) also had the equipment for outdoor printing as well as a fernery that allowed production in loco of green studio props (Burke Q. 1952: 144) (Figure 3.1).

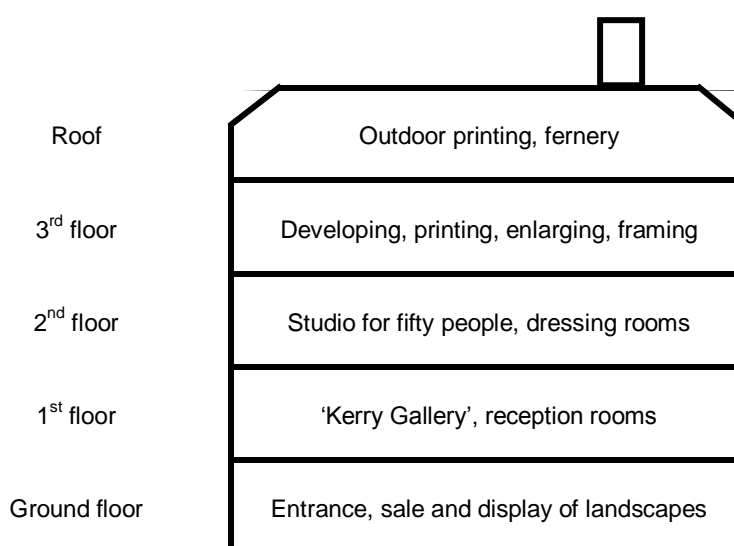


Figure 3.1 Kerry & Co.'s building at 310 George Street, Sydney

⁴¹ According to some articles published just after the opening of the premises, the studio was supposed to have space for even seventy people (Anon. 1898_b: 61; Anon. 1898_d: 3).

Two photographs of the ‘Kerry Gallery’ taken from both ends were published in the *Australian Photographic Journal* a month after the opening: one depicted the out-door department (Figure 3.2), the other offered a view of the booking and portrait department (Figure 3.3). The two images convey well the spirit of organization and professionalism that characterised Kerry & Co. In addition to the display of pictures on the walls, the Gallery offered enough space for customers to sit down and look at the various products unhurriedly. In the outdoor department there was also a big counter on which dozens of albums ready for sale were displayed.⁴²

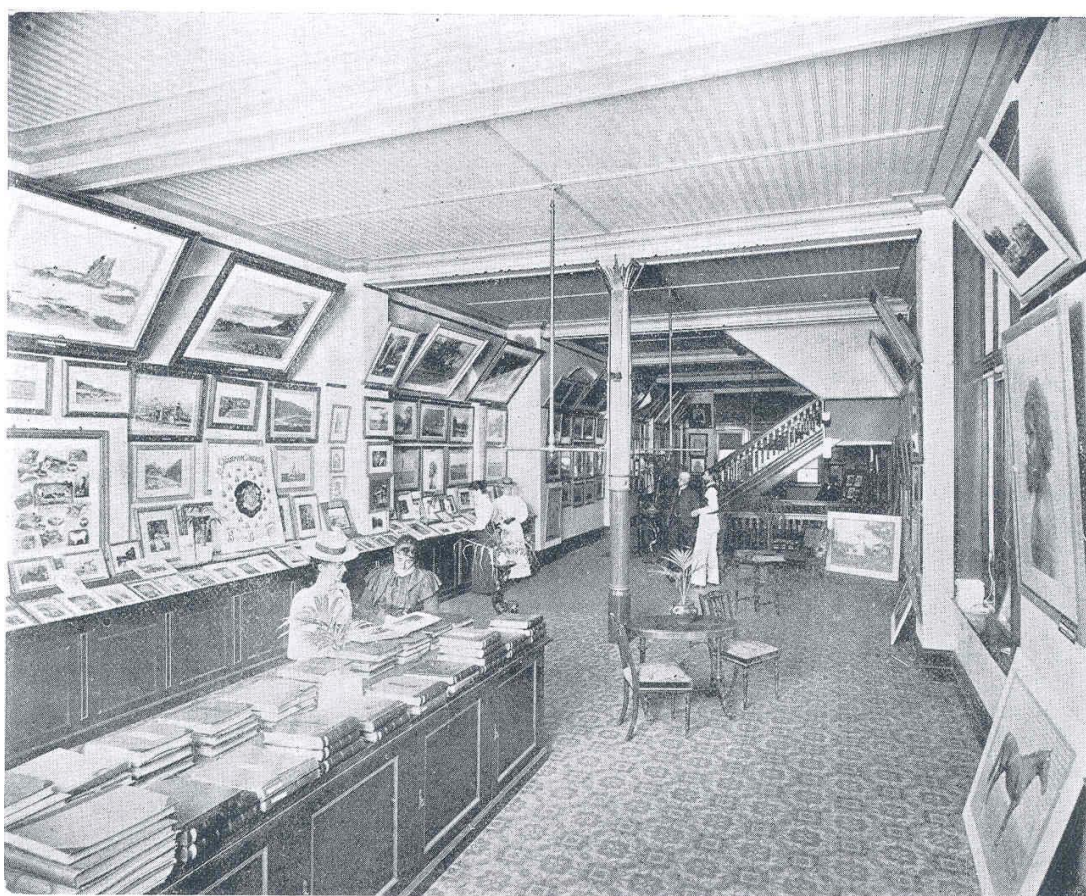


Figure 3.2 Outdoor department, 1st floor, Kerry & Co.'s building (Anon. 1898_b: 64)

⁴² A frequent customer of Kerry & Co. around 1898 was Mr. J. Dunmore Lang, the son of Rev. Dunmore Lang. He commissioned many albums to Kerry, and, according to Burke, if these could be located, we would gain fascinating insights into the company's marketing strategies and into customer interests and wishes (see Burke Q. 1952: 156).



Figure 3.3 Booking and portrait department, 1st floor, Kerry & Co.'s building (Anon. 1898_b: 65)



Figure 3.4 "Narimboo", Chief of Workii tribe, Queensland", photo no. 135 in Kerry & Co.'s album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/135 (AS/ML2)

Among the identified subjects there is an Aboriginal man whose portrait is presented twice in enlargement: on the left wall in front of the woman in the dark skirt and, on the right, over the photo of a horse (Figure 3.2). According to the information registered by Kerry in the album *Australian Aborigines*, now held by the Mitchell Library (AS/ML2), the man is Narimboo from the Workii tribe (Figure 3.4). Kerry seems to have particularly liked this portrait as he had chosen it both for a reproduction in postcard series no. 5 (see Chapter Five) and as element for the pictorial composition of the official letterhead (Figure 3.5).

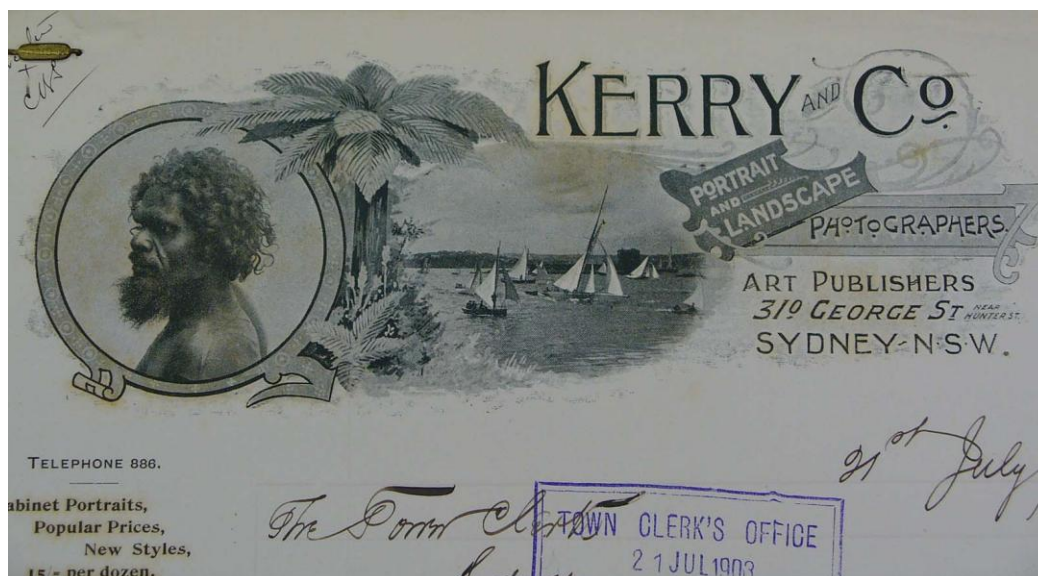


Figure 3.5 Letterhead of Kerry & Co., detail of letter (AS/SA1)

The strong miniaturisation of the images makes it difficult to identify with precision the subjects of the smaller photographs. We may presume, though, that the pictures pinned onto the board on the trestle in Figure 3.3 (bottom left) were examples of the first ‘Gruss aus’ cards (Greeting Cards) issued by Kerry & Co. (Figure 3.6).

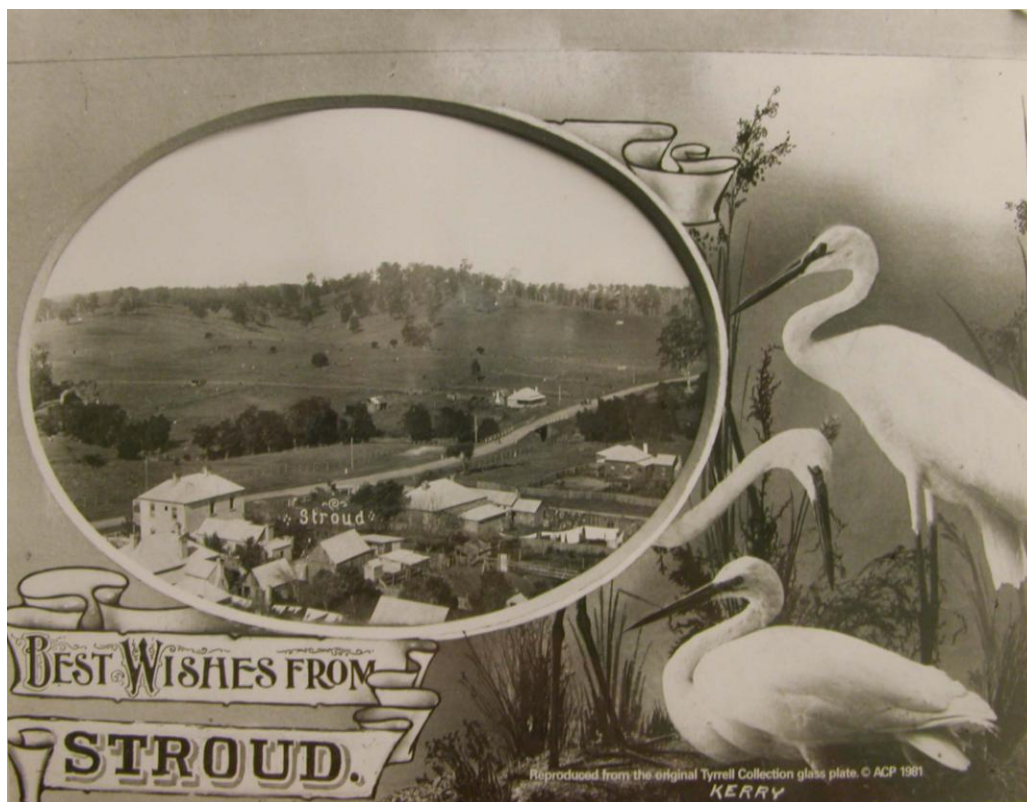


Figure 3.6 “Best Wishes from Stroud”, “Gruss aus” card by Kerry & Co., c. 1900. Reproduced from the original glass plate of the Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, accession number: 78.426 (AS/MAC2)

Charles Kerry – present on both Figures 3.2 and 3.3 dressed in white and with a black waistcoat – could certainly be proud of his new building made of “stone, brick and iron” as the entry in the assessment book reports (AS/SA2). Because many buildings were still made of wood, in case of fire the damages were often total. Kerry’s premises was ahead of the others. Indeed, security would be guaranteed up to November 1915 when a fire, which originated in a clothing factory at the back of Kerry & Co.’s building, reached the photographic studio, damaging the walls (Anon. 1915: 10). Whether this incident contributed to the closure of Kerry & Co. in 1917 is difficult to say. The studio was covered by insurance and the damages were certainly not as severe as those caused by the fire that almost completely destroyed the studio of the Tasmanian photographer Beattie in Hobart in 1905 (Anon. 1905c: 260). Good administration and care for detail helped to maintain the premises in excellent conditions for almost two decades. The mounting of an awning in front of the premises combined with the erection of an ornamental open grill at each end was approved by the City Building Surveyor on the condition that the foundations of the grill would reach down through the sidewalk to a solid concrete foundation, and that drawn steel pipes were “inserted in the core of the cast iron columns for security in case of breakage” (AS/SA1). To keep a high standard of tidiness and cleanliness both in front of and inside the premises Kerry asked the town hall twice for help. The first time in 1907 when the adjacent tenements refused to pay for the removal of rubbish, and Kerry & Co. had to meet the costs alone (AS/SA2). The second time in 1912, when the premises was invaded by rats (AS/SA3). In both cases the Town Clerk assisted Kerry peremptorily so that the work of the studio could proceed without serious disruption.

The excellent accommodation of Kerry’s studio was not only a nice place that customers could admire during their visits. Interior organisation also played a decisive role in the success of the company because it allowed for great efficiency in the technical realisation of the images. An article that appeared in the *Australian Photographic Journal* in 1901 reported that Kerry & Co. could well compete with the best photographers in Washington and New York, being the only Australian studio capable of preparing making, developing, drying, printing and enlarging 15 exposures in two hours (Anon. 1901b: c.170). The rapidity with which Kerry & Co. could prepare photographs for the local press, however, was not only a sign of great

efficiency and professionalism, it also constituted an important contribution to the visual culture in the pre-television era.

Organisation and structure

In parts, Kerry & Co.'s success can certainly be put down to the ideal conditions that Kerry created for a professional activity as well to the structure he gave the photographic studio. In 1904 Kerry reached an agreement with the Employees Association – a union established under the Industrial Arbitration Act of 1901⁴³ – in which he presented a classification of the various employee groups, the definition of wages and holidays, and the prices of the work done by Kerry & Co. (Anon. 1904_a: 234–236, Anon. 1904_b: 388–390). With the detailed document Kerry contributed to the regulation, and therefore professionalisation, of the photographic activity. He stated that, firstly, “any person (...) be deemed a photographic employee who is engaged in any photographic work, namely, developing, operating (outdoor or indoor), retouching, printing, enlarging, finishing, trimming, mounting, spotting, burnishing, enamelling, sorting, or making up orders, attending to negatives in any way, working up in black and white, monochrome or colour.” (Anon. 1904_a: 234) Secondly, the employees should be classified as probationers (with a view to legal apprenticeship), apprentices (legally indentured), junior (after apprenticeship), and seniors (after apprenticeship and juniorship or at attained seniority). The apprenticeships for mounting, finishing and spotting, including care of negatives, should last two years; for retouching negatives three years; and for operating, developing, retouching, printing and enlarging five years (Anon. 1904_a: 234). Figure 3.7 presents the salaries that Kerry & Co. paid weekly to its employees while Figure 3.8 shows the hour of works of the various teams. Everybody had a 45-minute break during lunchtime and was guaranteed payment for overtime. The hours between 6 and 10 p.m. were paid one and a half the normal rate, while work after 10 p.m. got, as did Sunday work, double remuneration.

⁴³ The Industrial Arbitration Act was a court of record consisting of a president (a Supreme Court judge) and two members representing employers and employees respectively. The Court had jurisdiction to hear and determine any industrial dispute or matter referred to it by an industrial union or the Registrar, prescribe minimum wages and make orders or awards pursuant to such a hearing or determination.

Finishing & Reception room	Apprentices 1 st /2 nd year Juniors 1 st /2 nd year Seniors' minimum	5/10 shillings 15/20 shillings 25 shillings
Retouching negatives	Apprentices 1 st /2 nd /3 rd year Juniors 1 st /2 nd year Seniors' minimum	2/10/20 shillings 30/40 shillings 50 shillings
General photography⁴⁴	Apprentices 1 st /2 nd /3 rd /4 th /5 th year Juniors 1 st /2 nd /3 rd year Seniors' minimum	5/10/15/20/25 shillings 30/40/50 shillings 60 shillings
Artistic retouching⁴⁵	Minimum	50 shillings
Operator	Minimum	70 shillings

Figure 3.7 Wages per week (Anon. 1904a: 234)

Reception room	8.30–6.00: 1 st October–31 st March 8.30–5.00: 1 st April–30 th September
Retouchers and artists	9.00–5.30: 1 st October–31 st March 8.30–5.00: 1 st April–30 th September
Operators	9.00–5.30: 1 st October–31 st March 9.00–5.00: 1 st April–30 th September
Printing room, contact printers, enlargers, finishing room, dark-room hands and apprentices	8.30–5.30: 1 st October–31 st March 8.30–5.00: 1 st April–30 th September

Figure 3.8 Hours of work (Anon. 1904a: 235)

⁴⁴ Operating, printing, enlarging and developing.

⁴⁵ Working up in b/w, monochrome or colour.

Every employee had one half-day off per week and the public holidays. Who worked on a public holiday had one day off within seven days. After working two years consecutively every employee was entitled to one week's holiday annually on full pay. Additionally to the regulations regarding the staff, the agreement also presented the minimal prices that every establishment accepting it should work for (Figure 3.9).

Retouching panels	Bust head: 1s 6d–2s ¾ figure: 1s–1s 6d Full length: 6d–9d
Cabinets (portraits)	Bust head: 1s–1s 3d ¾ figure: 6d–9d
Miniature	10 midgets on whole plate ⁴⁶ : 2s per plate 4 Work Panels on whole plate: 2s per plate 2, 3, 4, or 8, on Cabinet plate: 1s per plate
Groups – studio or outdoor	Whole Plate: 2s 6d 10 cm × 8 cm: 3s 6s 12 cm × 10 cm: 4s 15 cm × 12 cm: 6s
Printing and enlarging	Baker & Rouse's quotation nett, in 1904 catalogue
Working up enlargements	10 cm × 8 cm: 4s monochrome, b/w 7s 6d oil or water colour 12 cm × 10 cm: 4s monochrome, b/w 7s 6d oil or water colour 15 cm × 12 cm: 5s monochrome, b/w 10s oil or water colour 17 cm × 23 cm: 10s monochrome, b/w –

Figure 3.9 Prices (Anon. 1904a: 235)

Kerry's transparent presentation of his conditions raised a storm of protest among several professional photographers, who, in November 1904, organised a meeting to oppose the Industrial Agreement met by Kerry & Co. and the Photographic

⁴⁶ About 16.5 cm × 21.5 cm.

Employees Association. According to the new association, the agreement “would force a number of large employers into establishing work-rooms in an adjacent State” and represented an “unreasonable attempt to reduce the profession to so low a level”, the prices suggested by Kerry being about the half that of the usual ones (Anon. 1904c: 420). Despite the harsh criticism, Kerry and the subscribers of the agreement maintained the standard announced, showing that it was also possible to be successful with prices which – for their time – can be considered fair. If a person at the turn of the century earned on average 40 shillings, and had to pay at least one shilling for a bust portrait (cf. Figure 3.9), we realise that a “photographic likeness”⁴⁷ cost about one fourteenth of a salary (or about 75£ for a salary of 3,000£).⁴⁸

Kerry & Co. staff members

A great part of the company’s success was certainly due to the individual competence and ability of the Kerry & Co. staff members. Indeed, after the numerous travels undertaken in 1895, Kerry was increasingly based in Sydney in order to concentrate on the studios’ management. Although not completely abandoning photography,⁴⁹ Kerry took only few photographs himself after the establishment of Kerry & Co. So, thousands of images produced by the studio during the twenty years of Kerry’s administration (1893–1913) were taken by numerous operators, whose work was put on the market under the label ‘Kerry & Co.’. Figure 3.10 shows a list of nineteen Kerry & Co. employees based on information found in Burke Q. (1952) and Barrie (1992). Of course this list is not complete; considering the various categories of employment listed in the agreement of 1904, I estimate that Kerry & Co. employed regularly between twenty and thirty people. Despite the difficulty of identifying the persons behind most of the Kerry & Co. images, there are some photographic projects that can be associated with specific names, such as George Bell, Harold Bradley, Willem van der Velden or James Charles Cruden.

⁴⁷ This is the expression used by Kerry to advertise the photographs taken of the Sudan volunteers in 1895 (Burke Q. 1952: 143).

⁴⁸ Group portraits were more expensive, but luckily Kerry was fairer than Australia’s first professional photographer George Goodman (c.1820–?), who, fifty years earlier, taking advantage of the public’s ignorance of photography, charged a guinea extra for each additional person in a daguerreotype (Davies 2004: 8).

⁴⁹ See for example the series of photographs taken in 1898 during an Aboriginal secret ceremony (Chapter Five).

These were the most productive field photographers employed by Kerry, who took many photographs both in Sydney and in the N.S.W. countryside. Bell, Bradley and Cruden were already working for him when Kerry founded his studio, while van der Velden joined the company during the years of the postcard boom.

George Bell (1887–c.1920) was born in Cornwall, England, and became the first of Kerry’s photographers (Figure 3.11). He had travelled to sea as a surveyor for the Victorian Government Engineers (Valdon 1908: 359) and, having developed an interest in photography, he was allowed to participate in an expedition on board the *Victory* to New Guinea in 1887, which was sponsored by the N.S.W. Government and Burns Philp & Co. (Valdon 1908: 360). On his return Bell started to work for Kerry where he improved his technical knowledge and became a field operator. Between 1890 and 1900 Bell produced thousands of images for Kerry & Co., some of which became really famous: ‘The Waterbag’, ‘Rounding-up’, ‘The Farmer’s Daughter’, ‘Pioneers’ and ‘Counting out’ (Valdon 1908: 359, 361–62, 367–68, see also Barker 2008) (Figure 3.12). In 1900, Bell decided to join the art staff of the ‘Sydney Mail’ and became a press photographer.⁵⁰



Figure 3.11 George Bell (1887–c.1920) (Vallon 1908: 358) **Figure 3.12** “Counting Out”, photograph by George Bell, c.1885 (Valdon 1908: 368)

⁵⁰ Talking about the challenges of his new activity, Bell confessed that a press photographer is constantly under pressure. There is no excuse if he fails to take a good picture of an event or ceremony. “The Public is merciless. I am sorry to say it in this Christian age, but the Public thumb twitches down as quickly to-day as it did in the old fighting age.” (Valdon 1908: 358)

Born in England like Bell, Harold Bradley (1875–1953) was the operator who worked the longest at Kerry & Co.’s premises (Figure 3.13). Arriving in Australia to recover from a virulent rheumatic fever that had debilitated him since he was thirteen, Bradley first worked for a couple of years at Falk Studios as a retoucher (Curnow 1952: 558) – a much appreciated function in every photographic studio.



Figure 3.13 Harold Bradley (1875–1953), photographer unknown. By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: PIC/6426 LOC Box PIC/6426 (AS/NLA7)

The plates used then were sensitive to only about one-third of the spectrum, causing freckles to come out as black specks, whereas all other face blemishes were greatly exaggerated. In 1893 Bradley switched to Kerry & Co. where, besides continuing with retouching, he also studied other photographic techniques under the senior operator James Charles Cruden. After a few months he had mastered the enlarging technique,⁵¹ and soon afterwards he was promoted to indoor studio operating and subsequently to outdoor photography. When Cruden left in 1899, Bradley became the senior operator and studio sub-manager (Curnow 1952: 558). As a field operator

⁵¹ Enlarging was not easy to learn, and articles explaining the technique and giving tips to self-taught photographers appeared regularly in specialised journals. See for example the contributions “Reproducing and enlarging negatives” (Rau 1899: 176–177), or “Lectures to Young Photographers: Enlarging” (Rom 1902: 244–245), which both appeared in *The Australian Photographic Journal*.

he photographed the fire at Anthony Hordern & Sons Ltd. store in 1901, the embarkation of the troops for the Boer War (1899–1902), and the panoramas of the American fleet in 1908. A Kerry & Co. leaflet advertising the “wonderfully attractive pictures” of the “visit from [the] democratic cousins far away” invited the customers to call in at the premises and see for themselves “the merit of these special productions” (Figure 3.14). Of course Bradley’s name did not appear. Also in 1908, Bradley covered the boxing match between Burns and Johnson using a whole-plate camera (Figure 2.18 Chapter Two) (Curnow 1952: 559). Harold Bradley was ever present during Kerry & Co.’s two successful decades, and, possibly, he may have continued to work for the studio had Kerry not decided to leave the management in his nephew’s hands.

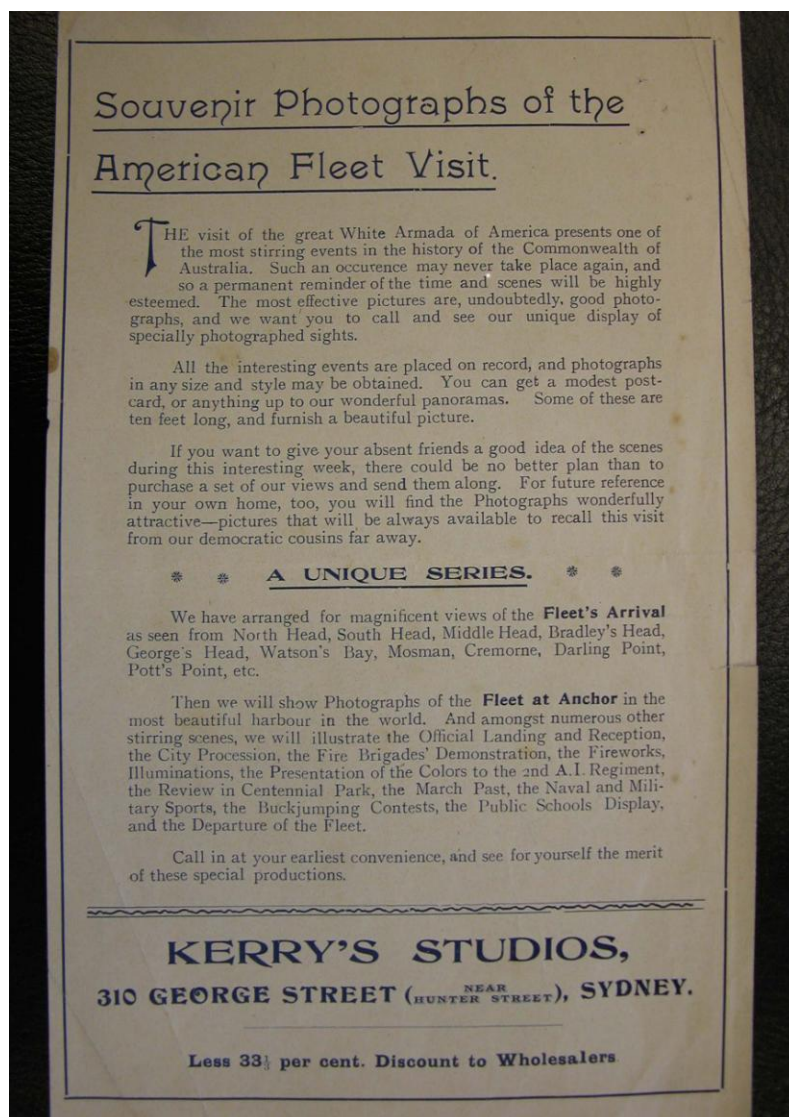


Figure 3.14 “Souvenir Photographs of the American Fleet Visit”. Advertising leaflet by Kerry & Co. Tyrrell’s Limited – business records, 1907–1970, with personal papers of James R. Tyrrell, 1897–1959, and his father, George Tyrrell, 1917. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: ML MSS 4465 Box H6049 (AS/ML13)

A man to leave the studio at the same time as Bradley was the other field operator, Willem van der Velden (1877–1954), who had worked for Kerry & Co. since 1906 (Figure 3.15). The Dutch van der Velden learned photography from Walter Burke in New Zealand where his family had moved to in the late 1880s, before arriving in Australia in 1898 (Curnow 1954: 464–467). In Sydney, he and his



Figure 3.15 Willem van der Velden (1877–1954), photographer unknown (Curnow 1954: 469)

father set up a photographic studio; van der Velden spent long hours exploring the other photographic studios in the city to see how they were organised and how they presented their work. In general, van der Velden seems to have been disappointed by the many studios that boasted “outward grandeur” but “more often than not [had] a grubby and even dirty interior” (Curnow 1954: 468). It is not surprising that the newly built premises of Kerry & Co. impressed van der Velden who, after having asked Kerry for a job, was given a few assignments. One of these was the documentation of Sydney streets realised with the camera mounted on a

lorry (discussed in Chapter Three). His street views were not only reproduced in the local journals; the company also issued them as a postcard series in 1903. Under Bradley’s guidance, van der Velden also mastered the art of controlling groups (Curnow 1954: 469), and in 1907 he joined the firm as a permanent operator. Because Bradley had to make frequent long trips to the country, ‘Van’ – as his colleagues called van der Velden – carried out the outdoor work closer at hand with the assistance of the young Robin Cale (Curnow 1954: 470).

The other staff members at Kerry & Co. listed in Figure 3.10 and those still missing were certainly no less important than Bell, Bradley and van der Velden. Yet more research needs to be done on their biographies to ascertain what contribution

can be attributed to each one of them. According to Sandy Barrie, for example, a certain W. Billington took several images for Kerry & Co. in 1889, but the specific photographs have not been identified yet (Barrie 1992: vi). James Charles Cruden, George Locke, H. R. Maxwell, P. A. Peachey, Trevor G. Powys, Richard Read, Hartwell Roberts, Rozelle and Russell Stevens also produced – as operators – hundreds of images between 1893 and 1913 (see Barrie 1992, Burke Q. 1952: 143). A part of this body was sold on the market in the form of postcards. In addition to the photographs produced by the studio's operators, Kerry also used, especially for the postcard production (Barrie 1992: vi), quality negatives which he purchased from local photographers. Actually, already in 1903 he advertised in *The Australasian Photographic Review*:

To Country Photographers and Amateurs. We are purchasers of Original Negatives, 1/2 and 1/1 size, of country life and incidents, and will quote prices we are prepared to give on receipt of sample prints of subjects as above. KERRY & CO., 310 George St., Sydney. (Anon. 1903_a: vi)

No matter whether they were taken by a studio operator or bought from local photographers, all the negatives ended up on the third floor of the Kerry & Co. building where John Coleman worked. The silver printer and darkroom manager Coleman worked at Kerry & Co. even longer than Kerry himself. In fact, he joined the studio in 1893 and continued his activity on the 'technical floor' till 1917, when Kerry's nephew left the studio and P. W. Fallaise became proprietor for the last two years – the studio finally closed down in 1918. Coleman's role was crucial for the success of the company, for, under his control, the images were transformed from 'raw' to 'ready to consume', or, in the case of postcards, to 'ready to be printed' (see next section). An important role in the finishing of these products was played by numerous women, who, next to working in the sales department and taking care of the customers, were employed in colouring photographs. They included Ms Brown, Ms Compton, Ms R. Cutter, Ms Dobson, Ms Kingsbury, Ms Morris, Ms N. Noakes, Ms Walker, Ms Betty Watt, Ms Florence Watt, and Ms P. Wilson (Burke Q. 1952: 143).⁵² These women had two distinct methods of colouring prints: either from the front – preferable but more difficult – or, more easily, from the back. The materials

⁵² As the women working in photographic establishments were usually young, I assume that those employed by Kerry were also unmarried, hence the abbreviation 'Ms.' instead of 'Mrs.'

used were, on the one hand, either water or oil colours⁵³ or, on the other, aniline dyes. For water colours, red-sable brushes were used, while for oils, “one or two flat hog-hair of medium size, one or two smaller ones, one or two stumpy ditto, and one or two small flat sables.” (Anon. 1899: 158) (Figure 3.16)



Figure 3.16 Painting was a pastime which most young ladies undertook. Some made notable contributions to the postcard record (Cook 1986: 52)

The staff members mentioned above and others who still need to be identified, contributed in different ways and with various skills to the creation, production and dissemination of the object that made Charles Kerry’s fortune: the picture postcard.

⁵³ For water and oil colour painting the following colours are common: Chinese white, light red, vermilion, carmine de Garance, madder lake, cadmium yellow, aureolin, cobalt, emerald green, sepia, burnt sienna, raw sienna, lemon-yellow, ultramarine, terre verte, yellow ochre (Anon. 1899: 158).

“A Few Words about Post Cards from Kerry’s”⁵⁴

The early cards

Already a few years before the establishment of the new photographic studio in 1898, Kerry introduced the so-called ‘Christmas Card’, a product that appears to have been well appreciated, because, instead of religious themes, it featured views of Australia and its people (Figure 3.17). Especially during the period that preceded the Federation of the Australian States, these new themes relating to landscape photography began to intersect with ideas of an emerging nationalism, and played an important role in the construction of an Australian identity (Willis 1988: 74). Kerry’s views were no longer mere representations of a specific place, building or scenic feature. His postcards’ images became active in constructing notions of the “typically Australian”, and “came to signify “Australianness”” (Willis 1988: 78–79). For this reason I think that they strongly contributed to the growth of national pride and reinforced the patriotic spirit.



Figure 3.17 “X Mas Greetings”, Kerry & Co.’s Christmas card. Positive scan of a glass plate negative. Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, accession number: Box 189 No. 30 (AS/MAC3)

⁵⁴ This title appears on a Kerry & Co.’s leaflet advertising the company’s postcards (see figure 3.27).

Illustrated with non-religious subjects, Kerry & Co.'s cards could be used throughout the year as "Gruss aus" cards (Greetings cards); all the studio had to do, was to substitute the motto "Xmas Greetings".

We have seen some very fine specimens in this class of photographic work produced at the studios of Messrs. Kerry and Co., George Street, Sydney. Considerable artistic skill has been displayed in the arranging of characteristic views of Australian scenery on cards, and surrounding the views with sprays of native flowers and ferns, reducing these again by photographic means to suitable size with artistically designed mottos, the whole being suitably coloured in natural tints by hands. One set of twelve, illustrative of life on the Western Australian gold-fields have been specially prepared for the mining pioneers in that distant colony. (Anon. 1895_a: 115)

Figure 3.18 shows an example of an early Kerry & Co. card comprising a photograph of a view framed by a floral composition and a motto. The flowers surrounding the oval image are real and not painted as in Figure 3.17. These compositions were not only used for Christmas cards. When at the turn of the century, Kerry decided to venture into the postcard business, he recycled the 'Christmas card' ornaments. Inserting other views into the old frames and adapting the format of the cards to the standard size of 14 cm × 9 cm introduced in Great Britain in November 1899 (Figure 3.19), he created a new product.

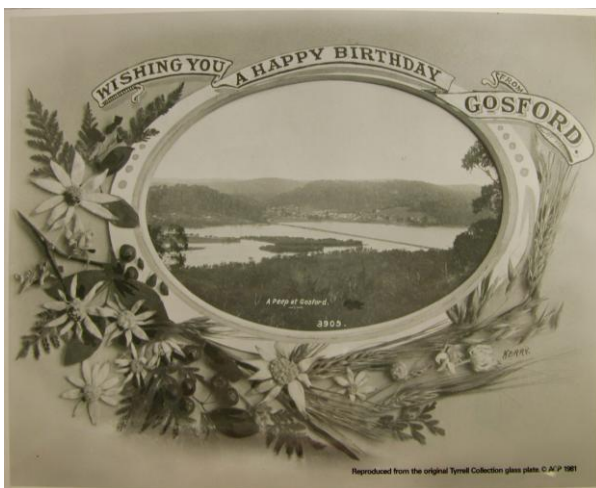
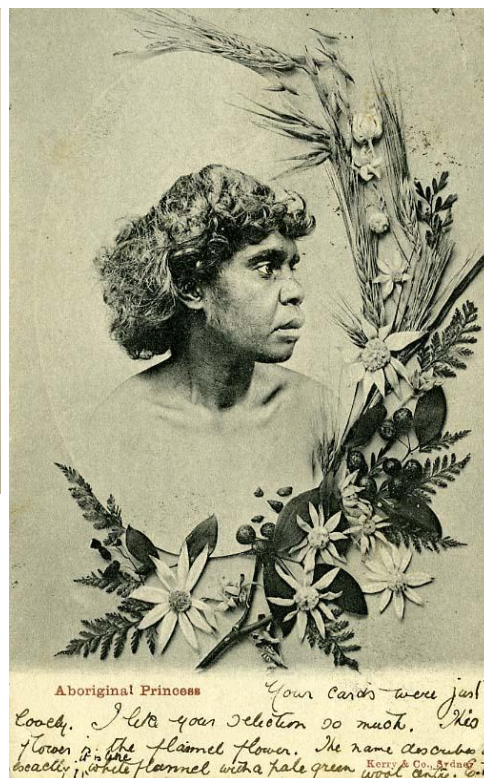


Figure 3.18 "Wishing You a Happy Birthday. Gosford.", card by Kerry & Co., c. 1900. Reproduced from the original glass plate of the Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, accession number: 78.317 (AS/MAC2)

Figure 3.19 "Aboriginal Princess", collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: PSC 2006.76.659 (AS/PC2)



The postcards

It appears that Kerry & Co. started ‘experimenting’ with postcards in 1903, launching on the market a considerable number of ‘pictures’:

Messrs. Kerry and Co. are experimenting in quite a new line in their view trade. A series of 37 good colonial subjects have been reproduced, some in single and some in three-color process. These are all mounted on dark green and brown cards with margins suitable for framing, and will shortly reach the public per medium of a well-known city distributing house. About 50,000 of the pictures have been successfully placed, and will be retailed at prices to ensure ready sale, and we are informed that another series will follow shortly. We describe the move as an “experiment”, since the publishing of colonial views in this form in quantities has not to our knowledge before been tried. We regard this enterprising scheme with every favour, predicting that it will prove a great success, and with their immense collection of view negatives to fall back on, Kerry’s should make a success of it if anyone could. (Anon. 1903b: 112)

Despite his large collection of photographs, Kerry would never have issued so many postcards at the same time if he had not been convinced that the postcard would conquer the market. Indeed, 50,000 ‘pictures’ means about 1,350 postcards per subject – a considerable number for an ‘experiment’. Of course, this number was influenced by the standards of the collotype technique that was used for at least 1,000 prints, but could guarantee good quality only for the first 1,500 prints per plate (Schindler 1904: 222). In this regard, the quantity chosen by Kerry can be considered as a good compromise, and the fact that in the same year he issued another group of cards proves that his estimations were solid.

All the company’s postcards issued from 1903 to the end of 1904 featured an undivided address side. In fact, they were produced during the so-called ‘undivided-back period’, which ended in Australia on 1st January 1905 with the introduction of two distinguished sections on the address side, one for the address, and the other for the message (Figure 3.20). The term ‘undivided-back’, introduced by various countries at different points in time,⁵⁵ refers today to the side of the postcard that was then considered to be the front of the object. Before the postcard could be printed with a picture, the address side was indeed the most important part, and it maintained this role even long after the introduction of the picture postcard (Figure 3.21).

⁵⁵ The divided back was introduced in England in 1902, in Canada in 1903, in France and Austria in 1904, in Germany and Australia in 1905, and in Switzerland and the United States in 1906.

Collectors, generally more interested in the pictorial aspects, started to privilege the image rather than the – often blank – address side, calling the graphic side ‘front’ and the address side ‘back’.

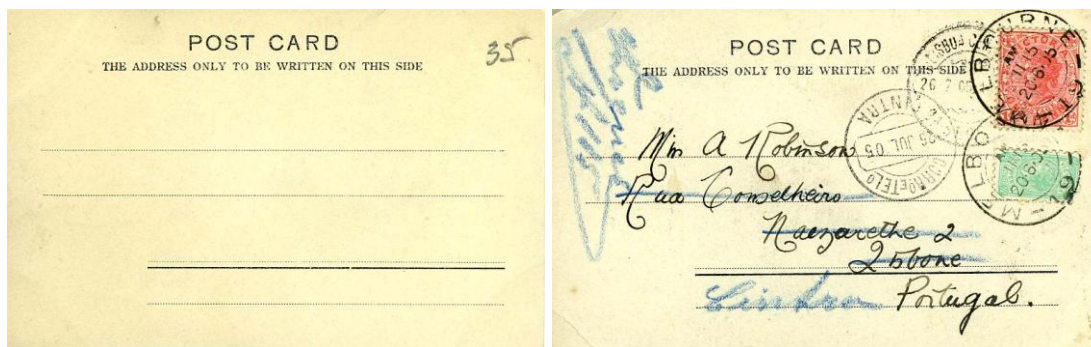


Figure 3.20 Unused and used postcard back of the ‘undivided-back’ period. Both are the address side of a postcard featuring the subject of Figure 3.19. The image on the right shows the back of the postcard presented in Figure 3.19. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: PSC 2006.76.659 (AS/PC2)

Austral Post Cards

WITH CHRISTMAS GREETING.

Here is an illustration of the front of the Cards.

They are supplied in the popular Austral papers, “Sun, P.O.P.” Glossy or Matte, packet of 12 cards, 8d.; gross box, 7/-. Pearl Bromide or Gaslight, packet of 12 cards, 1/-; gross box, 10/6.

POST CARD.

The Address only to be written here.

STAMP.

Figure 3.21 This advertisement published in the *Australasian Photo-Review* in 1905 shows what is now considered to be the postcard back. At the beginning of the century it was still referred to as the postcard front (Anon. 1905b: 471)

The Kerry & Co. series referred to in the citation above, and those that followed up to 1905, did not only have an undivided back; they were also unnumbered (cf. Figure 3.19). This makes it difficult to determine how many subjects were produced, and how many postcards constituted a series. Because the early Christmas cards were sold in sets of twelve (Anon. 1895_a: 115), and the ‘Austral’ postcards advertised by Baker & Rouse – the distributing house furnishing Kerry & Co. (see below) – were also sold in packets of twelve (Anon. 1905_d: 471), it is probable that Kerry & Co. also chose this quantity for their series. As regards the number of subjects issued before 1905, we know that shortly after the production of this first body of thirty-seven postcards, another one followed (Anon. 1903_b: 112), so that by the end of 1904 Kerry & Co. had put on the market at least about seventy postcard subjects, or about six series of twelve postcards each.

The postcard sample book

Thanks to a surviving postcard sample book of the Kerry studio titled *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards* held by the Powerhouse Museum (AS/PHM2) (Figure 3.22), it is even possible to correct this number. The analysis of the subjects revealed that the album was compiled around 1905, and that the majority of the fifty numbered series presented in it belong to the ‘divided back’ period. Only eight series seem to have been recycled from the ‘undivided back’ period (series no. 2, no. 3, no. 4, no. 6, no. 9, no. 12, no. 13 and no. 14). The prints chosen to represent these series show indeed that they feature a layout typical of the pre-1905 period, characterised by the absence of the series’ numbering in the printed caption. Because these series are among the first in Kerry’s album, we may presume that they were produced during 1903 and 1904, and that they were reused with no changes to the front layout during the ‘divided back’ period. If we now calculate that each of the eight series based on the early issues contained twelve postcards, we obtain a total of ninety-six subjects. If 1,350 prints were produced for each subject – the average calculation above – the overall postcard production of Kerry & Co. during the ‘undivided back’ period may be not far from 130,000 postcards.



Figure 3.22 Postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*. Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

With such a vast range in supply, it is evident that Kerry & Co. had to create a compilation to offer its potential customers an overview of the available postcard series. The Powerhouse's postcard album must have passed through many hands, as the signs of usage at the corners suggest. According to the museum's file card, the album was used by the company's travelling salesmen to advertise the studio's postcards and to collect orders (<http://www.dhub.org/object/133712>). The big sample book (52 cm height by 27.5 cm width) comprises eight loose pages and a ninth page glued to the inside back cover (Figure 3.23). On each page there are three series, each presented by three elements pasted onto the dark album pages: a title, an albumen enlargement of one of the series' subjects, and an albumen print with the miniatures of the postcards (Figure 3.24). Each of the fifty series consists of twelve postcards, which, to grant a general overview, were pinned to a board in rows of three and four to be photographed (Figure 3.25). As mentioned before, the analysis of several postcards from these 'divided back' series showed that the album must have been compiled around 1905. To give a sense of its content, and to help contextualise the series dedicated to the indigenous people – the focus of my discussion in Parts II and III – I present in Figure 3.26 a list of the album's fifty series accompanied by the subject chosen by Kerry & Co. for the enlargements.



Figure 3.23 While eight pages are loose, the ninth is glued to the inside back cover. Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)



Figure 3.24 Back of page 6 featuring series no. 37 "Natural Color", no. 38 "Illawarra & The South Coast" and no. 39 "By Lagoon & Creek". Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

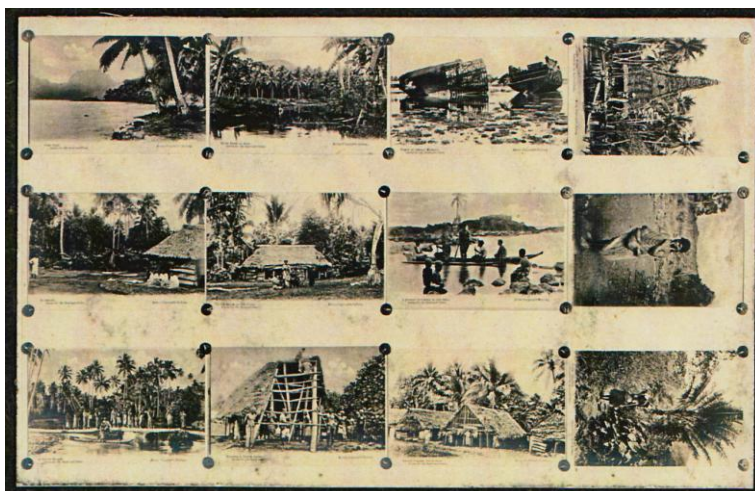




















































Figure 3.25 Albumen print featuring the miniatures of series no. 50 "By Reef and Palm" of the sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*. The single postcards have been pinned to a board to be photographed. Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

Figure 3.26 The fifty series contained in the sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards (AS/PHM2)* accompanied by the subject chosen by Kerry to represent each series (Aboriginal series on an orange background and Polynesian series on a green background)

			
1. Jenolan Caves A	2. Blue Mountains	3. Blue Mountains	4. Aboriginal Life
			
5. Australian Warriors & Gins	6. Station Life in Australia	7. Sheep Farming in Australia	8. Country Life
			
9. Pioneer Life	10. With the Settler	11. By the Wayside	12. Picturesque Sydney A
			
13. Picturesque Sydney B	14. Picturesque Sydney C	15. Bush Sketches	16. Snowland in Australia
			
17. The Australian Alps	18. Birds and Animals of Australia A	19. Beautiful Illawarra	20. Bowral District
			
21. Birds and Animals of Australia B	22. Athletics and Sporting	23. By Forest and Plain	24. Youthful Australia

			
25. Studies from Life	26. Wombeyan Caves	27. Yarrangobilly Caves	28. Combination Series
			
29. Souvenir Series	30. Samoa	31. Jenolan Caves B	32. Moss Vale District
			
33. Canine Friends	34. Australian Buds and Flowers	35. Sydney by Moonlight	36. Under the Southern Cross
			
37. Natural Colour	38. Illawarra and the South Coast	39. By Lagoon and Creek	40. History of the Golden Fleece
			
41. Hawkesbury River	42. Norfolk Island	43. Fiji	44. Public Buildings of Sydney
			
45. Historic Churches of N.S.W.	46. Gold Getting – History of an Australian Merino	47. National Park N.S.W.	48. Botanic Gardens, Sydney
			
49. Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony	50. By Reef and Palm		

As one can note, there is a vast range of subjects presented in the first numbered series, considering the general focus on Australia. Indeed, apart from four series presenting views of Samoa (no. 30 and 50), Fiji (no. 43) and the Norfolk Islands (no. 42), the body of Kerry's postcards is mainly devoted to the Australian landscape and its geological features, to Australian flora and fauna, to indigenous Aboriginal people as well as to the life and changes in both rural and urban Australia, which occurred after the arrival of the Europeans in the 19th century. From this group of series emerges an overall impression of Australia as a beautiful young nation ready to welcome people from all over the world. The innovations introduced by the settlers such as the new city buildings, the exploitation of natural resources or the introduction of tourist activities are well documented. Behind this choice may hide the intention of proving the success of the colonial enterprise, and of conveying an image of Australia as an open and future-oriented country. The focus on the harmonious present and the promising future is dictated by the absence in Australia of antiquated architecture. South America and Asia, for example, offered imposing architecture as a postcard subject, and this, as suggested by Ennis, was used "as evidence of an ancient civilisation and romantic past" (2007: 23) which Australia seemed not to have. The southern continent could not proffer palaces or ruins as tangible historical traces; except for the caves, which could be seen as cathedrals of the past, Australia's most historical element in this regard is the presence of Aboriginal people. Indeed, according to contemporary opinion, they were considered the last survivors of a civilisation doomed to die out in few decades (see Chapter Five).

Advertising

Far from being doomed to die out were Kerry & Co.'s postcards, as a leaflet by the studio announced around 1905:

As a useful medium for short correspondence, the modern Post Card exactly fills a long-felt want: and when, in addition to its own usefulness, there was provided the means of distributing graphic illustrations of scenery and the general life of the people of civilised countries, it became a certainty that the illustrated Post Card would never die out. Realising this, we have not hesitated to replenish our well known Australian Series with new issues from time to time as the demand for same arose.

Our Collotype Cards are absolutely the most artistic and the best value ever offered in Australia, in addition to which the assortment covers a very wide range of subjects, each of which is a game in itself... (AS/ML1)

This incomplete document titled “*A Few Words about Post Cards from Kerry’s*” which still bears traces of being crumpled before someone unfolded and archived it, reveals Kerry’s attitude toward the picture postcard as his new ‘product’ (Figure 3.27). The postcard is not only something “useful” – Kerry repeats the adjective twice – but something necessary “that fills a long-felt want”. The driving force behind the postcard as a means of communication was the need for a practical, cheap and quick medium for sending short messages. Writing letters was for the élite, not for ordinary people; and for women more than for men. The telegraph, introduced in the 1860s, was until around World War I an expensive way of communicating, and was used mostly for business purposes (Rogan 2005: 5). As

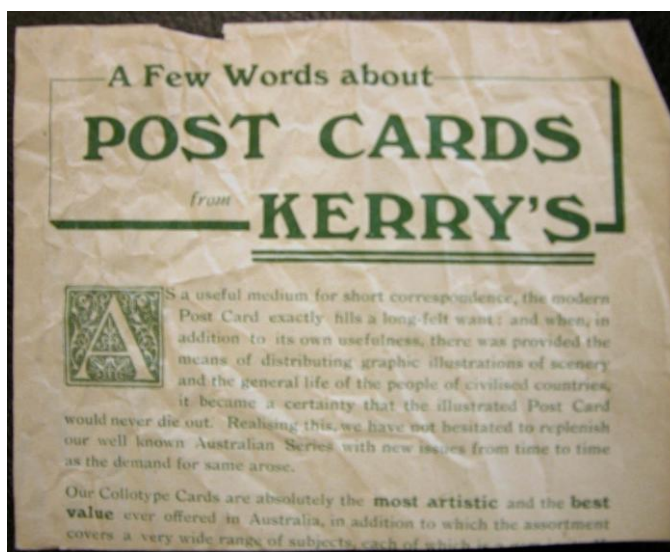


Figure 3.27 “A Few Words about Post Cards from Kerry’s”, leaflet advertising Kerry & Co.’s postcards. Tyrrell’s Limited – business records, 1907–1970, with personal papers of James R. Tyrrell, 1897–1959, and his father, George Tyrrell, 1917. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: MSS 4465/H6049 (AS/ML1)

a postcard producer, Kerry obviously had a commercial interest in this new photographic format. However, my impression is that when he mentions that the postcard “would never die out”, Kerry was indirectly commenting on a potential longer existence of the postcard format, compared to the limited existence of its predecessors such as the carte-de-visite or the cabinet card. The carte-de-visite (6.5 cm × 10 cm) had been in use for about twenty years (c.1859–1880), while the cabinet card (16.5 cm × 11.5 cm) had a slightly longer existence, having been introduced in 1866 and used until 1900. The stereograph (9 cm x 18 cm), invented in 1856, enjoyed an even longer life and survived as a photographic format till the 1940s. The picture postcard still exists today, and Kerry’s prophecy, in a way, came true. The following figures summarize the evolution that characterised the use of postcards

during the first years of Kerry's postcard activity. In 1902 1,734,340 postcards were sent through the post in New South Wales – this corresponded to one postcard for every 86 letters. By 1906 the number of the mailed postcards rose to 12,621,096, or one postcard for every nine letters, which was over nine postcards per head of population (Clark 1963: 154).⁵⁶ In England, a report by the Postmaster-General claimed that the number of postcards delivered in the United Kingdom during 1905 and 1906 was 800,300,000, that is, 18.5 postcards per individual per annum, twice as much as in Australia.

The constant new issue of cards proves that the trade is one which permits of stock being very rapidly disposed of, and there need be no pessimistic feeling as to a consumption which represents over £1,200,000 spent in postage alone. Assuming that the average price of cards sold is 1½d, the amount expended in the retail purchase of cards is £3,600,000. (Anon. 1906: 255)

The prices were not much different in Australia. The advertisement of the 'Austral' postcards shown in Figure 3.21 announced that, depending on the quality of the paper, a series of twelve postcards cost between 8 dimes and a shilling. This would correspond to Kerry & Co.'s prices, as the studio used the 'Austral' photographic material produced by Baker & Rouse, the well-known Australian distributing house.⁵⁷

Postcard production

When a publisher like Kerry & Co. decided to issue a postcard series, the first thing was to choose the subjects and prepare regular 13 cm × 18 cm photographs that could be sent to a printer. Sometimes printers were chosen by the publishers themselves,

⁵⁶ One has to consider, however, that these numbers refer only to those postcards that were posted and are therefore traceable. If we consider that many postcards were bought and kept and that others were sent singly or in batches in an envelope, we realise that the actual consumption of postcards was even higher than these figures indicate.

⁵⁷ In June 1903 the senior operator J. C. Cruden wrote a testimonial about Baker & Rouse's 'Austral' dry plates, stating that Kerry & Co. had been using them for years and found them to be "very rapid, clear and crisp, giving a beautiful gradation of light and shade, and altogether free from any sign of clogging or greying over the shadows" (Anon. 1903c: 217). Next to Kerry & Co. other leading photographers in Sydney also wrote testimonials for the 'Austral' plates: J. Hubert Newman, Alfred George, Creelman and Company, Talma and Company (Edward E. Gray), Charlemont and Co., G. A. Hills, W. C. Farran, The Swiss Studio, S. J. Hood, William Johnson, Mark Blow (Anon. 1903c: 216–217).

sometimes a salesman would be paid to act as middleman between the printer and his client, for whom he tried to get the best quality for the lowest price. Once a suitable printer had been found, the publisher had to sign the contract, stipulating the number of postcards and the price. The image sent by the publisher would then be passed on to the printer's production manager, who decided on how to alter it for postcard production. Usually, instructions were given by the customer ordering the card, but, if no note was given, the production managers could take these decision on his own. The photo would then be passed on to the retoucher to carry out the instructions. During this process the retoucher would remove any feature deemed unattractive. The retouched negative would be given, via the production manager, to the printer, who copied it onto a photo sensitive tissue. Depending on the process by which the postcard was to be printed, this tissue would then be adhered to a plate (for the collotype process) or a litho-stone (for the lithographic process) and the image chemically transferred. For coloured postcards this process would be repeated with a new plate for every colour. At this point, much of the retouching work was done directly on the printing surface, just before paper was fed over each plate on the press. Many subjects could be printed at a time on a single sheet. After the captions had been added and the sheet was dry, the postcards were cut to size by means of a guillotine and prepared for delivery and distribution (see Woody 1998) (Figure 3.28).



Figure 3.28 “View of an Interior Section of the Daylight Plant, Chilton Printing Company, Market and 49th Sts., Phil.,” ca. 1910. Postcard, chromo-half-tone, colour lithograph (four hues). Printed by Chilton Printing Company, Philadelphia (Woody 1998: 28)

In the leaflet “A Few Words about Post Cards from Kerry’s” Kerry advertises his “artistic” collotype postcards. Particular to the collotype process⁵⁸ was that a glass plate was coated with sensitised gelatin and exposed under a negative. The light passed through the negative and hardened the gelatin on the glass plate. The glass plate would then be washed, with the unexposed soft gelatin absorbing the water and the exposed hard gelatin repelling it. The washed glass plate was then coated with ink, which adhered to the exposed gelatin, allowing the subject to be printed onto fine paper (cf. Gascoigne 2004[1986]).

It is incontestable that the results obtained by the processes of Collotype have never been approached by any other method, and that the extension and improvement of these will contribute powerfully to the development of taste and of artistic education. I cannot possibly describe my feelings of ecstasy when I saw the first impression of a collotype picture... (Niven 1895: 55)

said a certain H. W. Niven at the Intercolonial Photographic Congress in Geelong.⁵⁹ Kerry’s collotype cards were indeed the best the firm issued. Although he preferred a plain postcard back without any serial numbers and other information, often added during the printing process, there are some cards that reveal that they had been printed in Germany (see below Figure 3.29) (cf. Burke Q. 1952: 142, Millar 1981: 14–15, Cook 1986: 203). Germany was indeed the leading country for collotype printing at the turn of the century, and about thirty firms active in postcard printing expanded into the international market (Woody 1998: 32). “12,000 hands” were employed in Frankfurt am Main alone, and it is estimated that every day in Germany about a hundred new postcard subjects were put on the market during the first years of the 20th century (Anon. 1900: 17). Reckoning that about 1,000 cards per subject were printed, the German annual production must have exceeded 30,000,000.

The fact that not all postcards bear the same imprint, and that no original correspondence of Kerry with the printer(s) emerged from my archival research, makes it difficult to say with precision who was involved in the printing of Kerry’s collotype cards. It is certain that Kerry had to outsource the specialised job of printing the postcards. If the company wanted to issue postcards featuring local

⁵⁸ Also known as Lichtdruck, Albertype, Phototype, and Heliotype.

⁵⁹ For a detailed description of the collotype and the other printing processes used in postcard production, see the article by Schindler ‘Der Lichtdruck und die Postkarten-Industrie’ (1904) as well as the study by Albert *Die verschiedenen Methoden des Lichtdruckes* (1900).

events with short-term interest, it is probable that the photographs taken by the operators were given to a local printer who would produce a halftone card in about a week. For subjects that merely contributed to the expansion of the range of motifs, orders were usually placed four times a year, as the production and delivery of both lithographic and collotype postcards required three to five months (Woody 1998: 29–30). To date, we have neither precise information about the potential printers of Kerry’s cards in Australia, nor about those abroad. However, we have a few clues proving that Kerry & Co. outsourced the printing of some of the series to Germany. Figure 3.29 shows three different imprints “Printed in Germany”. Additionally, with the help of Helmfried Luers, a German expert in printing techniques and owner of a huge collection of about 20,000 postcards, I was able to identify two additional imprints suggesting Germany as the country where the cards were printed. One is the full stop behind ‘POST CARD’, which is not a regular type, but a Fraktur type font (Figure 3.29d).⁶⁰ Luers noted a similar mix-up of fonts on cards for the US market, printed by the large collotype company E. Pinkau, Leipzig, but more research would be needed to confirm that this firm also printed some of Kerry’s cards (pers. comm. January 2010). The last sample (Figure 3.29e) bears instead an overprint that was usually applied to cover “Printed in Germany” at the outbreak of World War I. Again according to Luers, this kind of imprint was also used when a publisher was taken over by another firm, which then overprinted the old name on a stock of cards before distribution (pers. comm. April 2010). To determine with precision who printed Kerry’s postcards remains problematic. The address sides do not bear any imprints or trademarks that would facilitate the identification of the printer, and we are also confronted with several different layouts. According to Luers, this suggests that Kerry ordered from several printers. Indeed, because, especially from about 1905–06 onward, there was a harsh competition between collotype printers, publishers took advantage of the situation, shopping around in search of the best price (pers. comm. April 2010). Thus, besides E. Pinkau of Leipzig, it is possible that also the big collotype printing companies Rob. Prager in Berlin, A. Adolph in Zittau (then Passau, Bavaria) or J. Beyer, who took over Adolph’s business, were involved in the production of Kerry & Co.’s postcards. This notion is based on the fact that these firms were – already before 1900 – the largest in Germany and that they had

⁶⁰ The back of the postcards of Samoan series no. 30 features this layout with the Fraktur stop (Part III).

customers worldwide (pers. comm. April 2010). For a definite judgement on the identity of the printer(s) it would be necessary to single out a considerable sample of all the collotype firms that show the same layout details as Kerry & Co.'s cards. This time-consuming enterprise, implying the access to sources mainly in private hands, obviously goes far beyond the scope of my thesis. However, thanks to the help offered by Helmfried Luers – creator of the online project and sharing platform “The Postcard Album”⁶¹ – the search for Kerry & Co. postcards’ printer(s) will continue.



Figure 3.29a

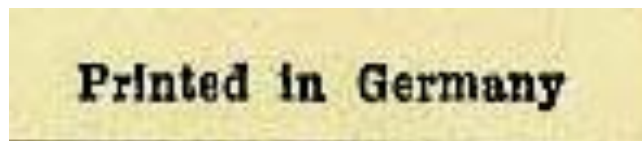


Figure 3.29b

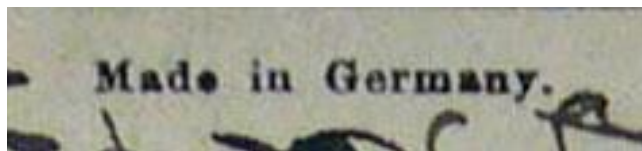


Figure 3.29c

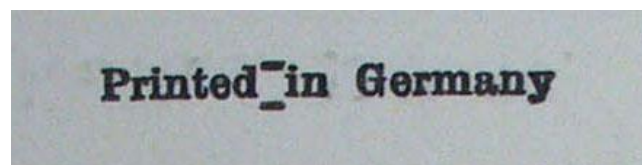


Figure 3.29d

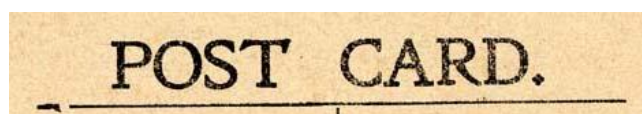


Figure 3.29e



Figure 3.29 Imprints suggesting Germany as the printing country for Kerry & Co.'s collotype postcards

⁶¹ See the details under The Postcard Album: <http://www.tpa-project.info>.

Kerry & Co.'s body of postcards

Four of the postcards appearing in Figure 3.29 belong to the Kerry & Co.'s numbered series no. 70, no. 79, no. 97 and no. 98. Unfortunately, to date, no album similar to the one presenting the first fifty series could be identified for the following series. With the results of my archival research, however, and comparing them with a list by Cook (1986: 202, 206), later updated by Thomas (1989: 51–52), it was possible to fill in most of the gaps on the list, and to determine the subject matter of the 107 numbered series issued by Kerry & Co. (Figure 3.30). The list does not include those unnumbered series that were printed before and after the numbered ones, although, as mentioned above, the early subjects were reprinted with no or few changes on a divided back after 1905.

As the registers of postcard negatives held by the Mitchell Library (AS/ML4) (Figure 3.31) and the Powerhouse Museum (AS/PHM1) (Figure 3.32) in Sydney show, Kerry & Co.'s body of postcard subjects was quite rich. The postcard lists are part of two similar bound volumes that include also registers of 6 × 8 stock prints, 10 × 12 stock prints, stereos and cabinets. There is also a third register held by the Macleay Museum, which turned out to be a xerox copy of the Powerhouse's one (AS/MAC1) (Figure 3.33).⁶² The two original registers were both created during the 'undivided back' period and are dated c.1905 and c.1900 respectively. Both present the same numbering and titling for the postcard negatives, the only difference being the number of the postcard negative entries. The Mitchell Library's register contains 1,663 entries, while the Powerhouse Museum's one with 5,650 entries is more complete. As the numerous gaps in all sections suggest, and also according to the analysis of the museum's register by Warren Wickman, it is possible that the registers combine original entries with later additions (AS/PHM3). While I agree with Wickman that many entries may have been added later, maybe even after Kerry & Co.'s closure in 1917 – the numerous gaps could correspond to the physical absence of the negatives –, I reject Wickman's hypothesis that the museum's register could also be a later compilation. Several entries in this register were indeed written by Kerry, and also the first entries of the postcard register held by the Mitchell Library show Charles Kerry's personal handwriting (Figure 3.31).

⁶² This register presents only the section with the postcard entries. It is uncatalogued and consists of spiral bounded A4 pages that have been enclosed in red cardboard sheets.

Figure 3.30 Kerry & Co.'s postcard series

NO.	TITLES / SUBJECT MATTER	NO.	TITLES / SUBJECT MATTER	NO.	TITLES / SUBJECT MATTER
1	Jenolan Caves	37	Natural Colour Series	73	Picturesque Brisbane
2	Blue Mountains A	38	Illawarra and South Coast	74	Picturesque Brisbane
3	Blue Mountains B	39	By Lagoon and Creek	75	Untitled (Jenolan views and Brisbane)
4	Aboriginal Life	40	History of the Golden Fleece	76	Untitled (Jenolan views)
5	Australian Aboriginals	41	Hawkesbury River	77	Untitled (Jenolan views)
6	Station Life in Australia	42	Norfolk Island	78	Untitled (Jenolan views)
7	Sheep Farming in Australia	43	Fiji	79	Untitled (Jenolan views)
8	Country Life	44	Public Buildings of Sydney	80	Untitled (Jenolan views, Jubilee Cave)
9	Pioneer Life	45	Historic Churches of N.S.W.	81	Untitled (Jenolan views, Nettle and Arch Cave)
10	With the Settler	46	Gold Getting - History of an Australian Merino	82	Untitled (Jenolan views, Skeleton Cave)
11	By the Wayside	47	National Park [sometimes with 'Sydney']	83	Untitled (Jenolan views, Orient Cave)
12	Picturesque Sydney A	48	Botanic Gardens, Sydney	84	Untitled (Jenolan views, Temple of Baal)
13	Picturesque Sydney B	49	Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony	85	Untitled (Jenolan views, River Cave)
14	Picturesque Sydney C	50	By Reef and Palm	86	Untitled (Public Buildings, Sydney)
15	Bush Sketches	51	West Coast, New Zealand	87	Untitled (Sussex St., Sydney, N.S.W.)
16	Snowland in Australia	52	On the West Coast, N.Z. - By Sounds and Lakes, N.Z.	88	Untitled
17	Australian Alps	53	Hot Lakes District, N.Z.	89	Untitled
18	Birds and Animals of Australia	54	Geysers and Hot Springs, N.Z.	90	Untitled
19	Illawarra	55	Picturesque [sometimes 'Tropical'] Queensland	91	Untitled (Katoomba)
20	Bowral District	56	Sydney Streets	92	Untitled (Leura)
21	Birds and Animals of Australia B	57	Sydney Pleasure Resorts	93	Untitled (Wentworth Falls)
22	Athletics and Sporting	58	Sydney Pleasure Resorts	94	Untitled (Blackheath)
23	By Forest and Plain	59	The Engadine of Australia	95	Untitled (Sydney Harbour)
24	Young Australia	60	Haunts of the Trout	96	Untitled (Sydney Harbour)
25	Studies from Life	61	Child Studies No. I	97	Untitled (Australian Aboriginals)
26	Wombeyan Caves	62	Child Studies No. II	98	Untitled (Australian Aboriginals)
27	Yarrangobilly Caves	63	Fair Australians A	99	Untitled (Northern Illawarra)
28	Combination Series	64	Fair Australians B	100	Untitled (Southern Illawarra)
29	Souvenir	65	—	101	Untitled
30	Samoa	66	Coast Scenes Sydney	102	Untitled (Yarrangobilly Caves)
31	Jenolan Caves B	67	Views of Sydney	103	Untitled (Fitzroy Falls District)
32	Moss Vale	68	Katoomba and Leura A	104	Untitled (By Forest and Plain)
33	Canine Friends	69	Katoomba and Leura B	105	Untitled (Australian Life)
34	Australian Buds and Flowers	70	Wentworth Falls	106	Untitled (Australian Farming)
35	Sydney by Moonlight	71	Blackheath	107	Untitled (Australian Park)
36	Under the Southern Cross	72	—	—	—

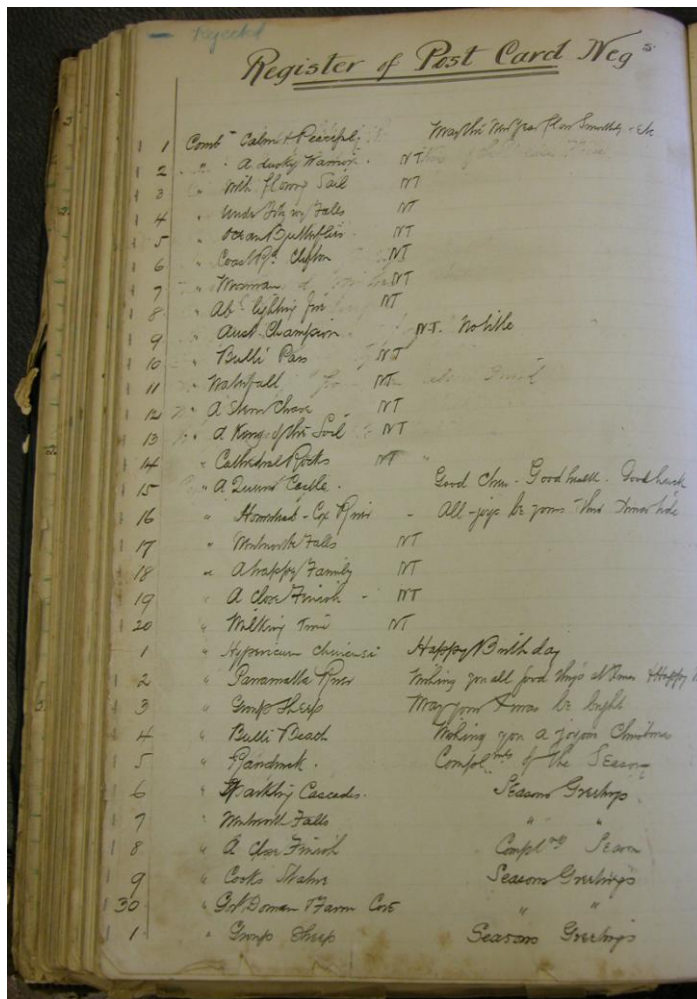


Figure 3.31 Kerry & Co.'s register of negatives held by the Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: MSS 4465/H6049 (AS/ML4)



Figure 3.32 Kerry & Co.'s register of negatives held by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/280/1 (AS/PHM1)



Figure 3.33 Uncatalogued Xerox copy of the negatives register (PHM 93/280/1) held by the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney (AS/MAC1)

The subjects used by Kerry & Co. for its postcard production were not only recorded under the section 'postcards'. Among the 3,532 entries in the section '6 x 8 views', 565 are related to a subject presenting either Aboriginal people or Pacific Islanders. Considering the vast range of motifs the company had at its disposal, it is interesting that as much as one sixth had been dedicated to the so-called 'ethnic subjects'. It is therefore not exaggerated to argue that Kerry & Co. also specialised in subjects showing indigenous peoples. It was a marketing strategy geared to meet both the growing popular and scientific demand for 'exotic' subjects and 'types' respectively.

The views' register contains entries related to Aboriginal people (250), Samoa (145), Tonga (35), the Solomon Islands (31), New Guinea (30), New Caledonia (30), Fiji (24), Borneo (10), the 'New Hebrides' (6), Tahiti (3) and to New Zealand Maori (1). The numbers in brackets reflect in part also the use of the subjects in postcard production. Aboriginal and Samoan people are much better represented in the numbered series than people from the other islands. Series no. 4, no. 5 and no. 49, no. 97 and no. 98 are entirely dedicated to Australian Aborigines, while series no. 30 is dedicated to Samoa. Additionally, there are also mixed series in which portraits of Aboriginal people or Samoan views appear along with other topics.

Because of the role these series played in creating the image of the indigenous people of Australia and Samoa in the first decade of the 20th century, they will be the focus of the discussions that follow. In Part II I analyse the series presenting Aboriginal people, while in Part III I discuss the Samoan postcards.

PART II

“MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR”⁶³ FROM AUSTRALIA!

When photography arrived in Australia in 1846, the interior of the continent had still to be explored and the colonial settlement consolidated. In these processes photography played an important role, as it helped the settlers’ communities in their perception of the landscape, the continent, and in their identity building (Willis 1988: 78). Yet, European scientists too made the most of the new medium’s documentary possibilities in Australia. As a result of Western technological achievements, photography became an irreplaceable device in the encounters with the ‘non-civilised’ Aboriginal people (cf. Edwards 1988: 27). Aboriginal society was considered static and degraded, with no outlook towards the future and hence doomed to extinction. Documenting in photographs the ‘reality’⁶⁴ of the ‘dying race’ before it was too late,⁶⁵ became the aim for many photographers. In order to fit the need for precise data into the classificatory and evolutionary schemes of the nineteenth century, some professional and amateur photographers, such as the Inspector of Police in the Northern Territories, Paul Foelsche (1831–1914), produced photographs following the photometric methods developed by the Oxford professor Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) and by John Lamprey (active 1870s).⁶⁶ The

⁶³ This phrase is taken from a Kerry & Co. postcard sent from Sydney to Montréal in 1905 (see Figure 4.22).

⁶⁴ After the invention of the wet-collodion method in the 1850s, scientists considered the photographic image no longer merely as convenient tool to enhance the objectivity of an ethnological narrative; they employed it as a ‘measurable’ scientific datum (Spencer 1992: 99).

⁶⁵ According to estimations, there were around 750,000 Aboriginal people when the first Europeans arrived in Australia in 1788. By 1901 their number had dropped dramatically to 67,000 (Ennis 2007: 36).

⁶⁶ As a distinguished biologist and president of the Ethnographical Society, Huxley, a famous Darwinist, was involved in a project that sought to compile a large corpus of anthropometric

indigenous people posed full face and in profile in front of an objectifying plain background with a measuring rod which they often had to hold themselves (see for example Edwards 1990 and Spencer 1992). However, despite pressure on the part of scientists, a systematic project to anthropometrically record as many Aboriginal societies as possible never materialised (Edwards 1988: 36). This is maybe the reason why not only those photographs taken by anthropologists became ‘scientific material’; also cartes-de-visite, studio portraits and postcards, originally created for commercial purposes, became of scientific interest (cf. Edwards 1988: 35).

The ill-defined boundaries of what was and was not considered “scientific” reflects not only the fact that the production of most visual material was outside the control of those who sought to use it as data but also in imprecise ideas as to exactly what that data should be. (Edwards 1988: 44)

It is indicative that the album presented in the exhibition “Portraits of Oceania” in 1997 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales comprises a series of photographs originally bound together and all assumed to be from Kerry & Co. Through a closer analysis it emerged that, along with Charles Kerry, Paul Foelsche and Henry King (1855–1923) too had contributed to the album’s photographs (Annear 1997: 5). The list of professional or amateur photographers who took a stab at photographing Aboriginal people is quite long (see for example De Lorenzo 1993). Important contributions were made by Antoine Fauchery (1823–1861), John Hunter Kerr (c.1821–1874), Thomas Washbourne (active late 1860s), Townsend Duryea (1823–1888), Bernard Goode (active 1860s–1880s). Among these, three German immigrants also helped to document Aboriginal society: Charles Walter (1831–1907), Johann Friedrich Carl Kruger, called Fred Kruger (1831–1888), and the well-known John W. Lindt (1845–1926) together with his father-in-law, Conrad Wagner (c.1818–1910). A few years before Huxley’s and Lamprey’s development of the standardised anthropometric methodology, Charles Walter produced a series of portraits of Aboriginal people at Coranderrk Aboriginal Mission Station, near Melbourne, intended to provide comparable morphometric data (Lydon 2005). His fellow-countryman Fred Kruger also worked at Coranderrk, after the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines commissioned him to produce a series of portraits.

photographs with the aim of improving the classificatory value of ethnographic documentation (see Edwards 1990: 245–248).

Poignant notes that these portraits do not present the then-common ‘Passing Aborigine’ narrative; instead they feature the surviving Aborigines who are posing mainly in European clothes while playing cricket or fishing. Because representing Aboriginal people in this mode was unusual, the material in anthropological collections is quite rare (Poignant 1992: 54).

The third German photographer, John W. Lindt’s, is the one most frequently compared with Charles Kerry.⁶⁷ He has been considered as one of the commercially more successful studio portrait photographers to have documented indigenous Australians during the second half of the nineteenth. His highly constructed studio tableaux photographs entitled *Australian Aborigines* taken between 1873 and 1874 in the Clarence River region were the most widely distributed images of Aboriginal subjects in that period; in recent years, too, they rank among the most reproduced images in the history of Australian photography (Orchard 1999: 164). In the context of the ‘dying race’ ideology, Lindt retrieved the concept of the ‘noble savage’ (Edwards 1988: 38). His images feature the subjects against a romantic landscape backdrop, surrounded by a multitude of various items considered as ‘typically Aboriginal’. These images are, according to Edwards (1988: 40), powerfully sympathetic, yet this sympathy has a bitter aftertaste because it reflects a romantic sentiment for a ‘dying race’. Scholars such as Smith (1960: 158–76), Urry (1985: 63) and Edwards (1988) have noted that Aboriginal people were denied a meaningful place in early settler landscape. Poignant argues that the process of their factual displacement as the owners of the land is completed in Lindt’s photographs, where the indigenous people are removed from the bush to the constructed studio set, and where they are transformed into specimens. “Although these are not anthropometric portraits, their intention is anthropological” (Poignant 1992: 54).⁶⁸ Of a different nature are Lindt’s cartes-de-visite which, despite inferior aesthetic composition suggesting also less sympathy for the subject produced, were printed by the thousands and became an integral part of the popular image of the Aboriginal people (Peterson 1985). Besides the demand from the national and international scientific

⁶⁷ The Berlin Ethnological Museum organised in 2004 an exhibition entitled “Australia through the eye of the camera: Selected photos of Charles Kerry (1858[sic]–1928) and John W. Lindt (1845–1926)” where the works of the two prominent photographers were presented and compared.

⁶⁸ Lindt was in contact with many distinguished scientists, anthropologists and government officials, such as the botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller (1825–1896), the anthropologist Sir Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929), and Sir Peter Scratchley (1835–1885) (Orchard 1999: 163–164; for Scratchley see chapter Seven).

community for photographs of Aboriginal ‘types’ (Edwards 1990) – to which cartes-de-visite strongly contributed⁶⁹ – the general public also became interested in a more popular visual representation of Aboriginal people that finally materialised in the postcard format. Contributions to this genre were made by various photographers and publishers such as, for example, Nicholas Caire (1837–1918) in Melbourne,⁷⁰ James and Donald Taylor in Adelaide, the still existing Rose Stereograph Co. in Victoria, Valentine & Sons’ Publishing Co. in Melbourne and Sydney, as well as Swain & Co., Star Photo Co. and Falk Studio in Sydney.

Spencer and Gillen used photographs as a source of information rather than for decorative purposes for their in 1899 published *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* – the first major anthropological text on Aboriginal people. De Lorenzo notes that given the outstanding commercial success this book had, “illustrated ethnographies were considered to be both commercially and epistemologically valid” (De Lorenzo 1993: 6).

In this vibrant and competitive visual economy stood Kerry’s Aboriginal postcards, which I shall present over the next two chapters. The postcard sample book from the archives of the Powerhouse Museum, used as a catalogue for potential customers, revealed that Kerry & Co. brought on to the market in 1905 three series entirely devoted to indigenous people of Australia. This compilation – a real jewel in postcard research – helps us reconstruct various contextual levels of the visual economy embedding single postcards. The aim of Part II is to tease out the micro- and macro-narratives contained in the various Aboriginal series assembled, by weaving together published material and archival sources. The main goal here is to bring into focus a range of aspects relating to the identity of the Aboriginal people “reduced to a state of perpetual anonymity” (Orchard 1999: 164), and to the photographic encounters on which Kerry & Co.’s postcards are based. The second goal is to examine the different regimes of value Kerry’s postcard motifs had during their existence.

⁶⁹ Among the notorious scientists who collected cartes-de-visite as evidence for their racial theories were the Swiss polygenist Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz (1807–1873), the British zoologist and ethnologist Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940) and the French physical anthropologist Arthur Chervin (Poole 1997: 134).

⁷⁰ In chapter four of her book *Eye Contact* (2005), Jane Lydon discusses how Coranderrk Station became a showplace for visitors because Aboriginal people were not visible otherwise in wider society. In this context, the postcards produced by Caire “circulated stereotypical symbols of Aboriginality that also played a role in defining new national identity, reflecting an ambivalent colonial relationship” (Lydon 2005: xxii).

CHAPTER FOUR

Between Secret Ceremonies and Camp Life

Introduction

In 1898 – the same year in which Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940) led the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits,⁷¹ and the first published Australian picture postcard was patented in Adelaide by Ernest Ziegler⁷² – Charles Kerry was given permission to participate as a photographer in an initiation ceremony on a sacred Aboriginal ground near Quambone in N.S.W.. Various scholars have already mentioned this encounter in their analysis of the representation of Aboriginal people in early photographs and postcards (Stephen 2000, Peterson 1985, 2003, De Lorenzo 1993). However, with the exception of the project *Sharing a Wailwan Story* initiated by Steve Miller from the Powerhouse Museum (Miller 1999), there have only been few attempts to analyse this material beyond the classical consideration of the politics of representation in a colonial context.

The aim of this chapter is to reconsider the photographic material produced by Kerry during his visit to Quambone by studying contemporary sources which, to date, have only partially been considered or even neglected. In the analysis I want to include notions of size, relying on the insight formulated by Susan Stewart in *On Longing* (1993) that scale has a powerful bearing on the kinds of affective and psychological response we have to both accounts of and objects from the past (Stewart 1993: 95). As she explains,

⁷¹ The Cambridge Torres Straits expedition is now regarded as one of the founding events of anthropology as a distinct discipline. Along with fieldwork, scholarly analysis and the development of the genealogical method, the use of film and photography also emerged as a methodological tool during the expedition (see Herle & Rouse 1998).

⁷² Ernest Ziegler (1862–1937) was employed as a photographer's printer by Mrs Davis of the Adelaide Photographic Company. In May 1898 he registered under copyright five postcard views of Adelaide which were reproduced in half-tone (http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/noye/Photogs/Phot_set.htm).

We cannot speak of the small, or miniature, work independent of the social values expressed towards private space – particularly, of the ways the domestic and the interior imply the social formation of an interior subject. And we cannot speak of the grand and the gigantic independent of the social values expressed toward nature and the public and exterior life of the city. Aesthetic size cannot be divorced from social function and social values. (Stewart 1993: 95)

Because small-scale histories stand in a complex relation to these issues of scale, I adopt a microhistorical approach for the analysis of the Quambone photographic event in which Kerry participated, and which rendered possible the production of his postcard series no. 49. Microstoria, or microhistory, gained popularity especially in the 1980s and 1990s when its prominent exponents – Giovanni Levi, Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Zemon Davis and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie – shared disenchantment with the grand theories of modernisation, whether liberal or Marxist (Ginzburg 1993: 10–13). They urged a return to narrative, detailed analysis on a small scale, and the search for unforeseen meanings embedded in cases: “The unifying principle of all microhistorical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved” (Levi 1991: 101). Microhistorical methods are particularly appropriate for close analysis of highly circumscribed phenomena, such as a village community, an individual person, event or object, and hence become interesting also to anthropological studies. In contrast to the scientific criteria claimed by serial history,⁷³ the evidential approaches of microhistory are highly qualitative and aim to derive scientific knowledge from individual instances by interpreting the object of inquiry in relation to its contexts (Tomich 2008: 226).

The exceptional and unexpected document is considered by microhistorians to offer the richest interpretive potential (Ginzburg 1993: 33). I, therefore, apply, for the analysis of the Quambone event, the notions of the “exceptional normal” or “exceptional typical” coined by the Italian historian Edoardo Grendi (Grendi 1977, 1994) to describe “an event or practice that, viewed in the context of modern ‘scientific’ inquiry seems exotic, remarkable or marginal, but that, when properly investigated, i.e., placed or coded in its proper context, reveals its own logic and

⁷³ Microhistory developed as a response to serial history practiced by the French Annales School represented by Fernand Braudel. The evidentiary paradigm of serial history is concerned with repetition, regularity, and quantity; the interest is not in the individual document, but in series of documents and the relations between them (Ginzburg 1993: 18, 21; Ginzburg and Poni 1991).

order.” (Ginzburg and Poni 1991: 7) Microhistory scholars contend that the search for the so-called “normal exception” in the archives challenges the perspective that outliers are marginal to social life (Findlen 2005: 233; Magnusson 2006). The notions of the “exceptional normal” or “exceptional typical” characterised what came to be known as ‘the new microhistory’, and postulated a double bind between the micro and macro levels of phenomena.⁷⁴ The “method of clues” advocated by Ginzburg and Levi as an important common feature of the new microhistory implies starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained – in our case Kerry’s participation in a sacred Aboriginal ceremony. This peculiar event or phenomenon is taken as a design of a larger, but hidden or unknown, structure.

Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation. It is then possible to use these results to draw far wider generalizations although the initial observations were made within relatively narrow dimensions and as experiments rather than examples. (Levi 1991: 97–98)

According to Matti Peltonen it is at the intersections of the micro and macro that empirical discovery takes place. The link between these two perspectives is not simply reduction or aggregation but, rather, qualitative and the source of new information (Peltonen 2001: 357). In his well-known article ‘Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’ (1973_b) Clifford Geertz, for example, reads the institution of the Balinese cockfight as a “monadic encounter of everyday life”, referring to Walter Benjamin’s monadological idea of the micro-macro link. For his idea that “history breaks down into images, not into stories” (Benjamin 1999: 461), Benjamin had in turn been inspired by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s (1646–1716) concept of the monad stating that every idea contains the image of the world (Benjamin 1977: 48).⁷⁵ The issue is to “detect the crystal of the total event on the analysis of the small, individual moment” (Benjamin 1999: 476).⁷⁶

⁷⁴ This contrasted to the ‘old microhistory’ in which the relationship between micro and macro levels of phenomena was defined by means of the concepts of exceptionality (famous persons or important events) and typicality (individuals or events that represent a larger group) (Peltonen 2001: 347, 356).

⁷⁵ See Leibniz’s *La monadologie*. 1991[1714]. Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave.

⁷⁶ Without using the concepts of micro and macro, Walter Benjamin defined the double movement between the two dimensions when he wrote about the blasting out of the monad from the continuity of history. He referred to the moment of waking up as the beginning of another type of consciousness in which we are both able to remember and to become aware of something forgotten, as well as to form a

In this chapter I use microhistory as a framework to understand both the specific Quambone event – how could it happen that an uninitiated non-Aboriginal man like Kerry could participate in a sacred ceremony and was even allowed to take pictures? – and the mechanisms that lead to the creation of postcard imagery in Australia more generally. Carlo Ginzburg’s exemplary book *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*⁷⁷ (1980) drew its impetus “from *War and Peace*, from Tolstoy’s conviction that a historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of *all* of the persons who participated in it” (Ginzburg 1993: 24). Following this idea that history is made not by the deeds of great people but by the ensemble of collective actions of all those involved in events (see Berlin 1978), I explore both the European and the indigenous agencies at work in order to shed light on the entire process of production, circulation and consumption that enliven Kerry’s Aboriginal postcards of series no. 49.

Completing the ceremony’s series

As postulated by Levi, in microhistorical writing, readers participate in the dialogic construction of the argument insofar as they are permitted to engage in the research procedures and grasp their difficulties (Levi 1991: 103, 105–106). I, therefore, start this narrative reconstruction with the episodes linked to the identification of the Kerry postcards constituting series no. 49.

At the Photograph Study Collection, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, there is a group of seven postcards from Kerry & Co. featuring similar motifs with Aboriginal people performing on an interestingly designed ground (AS/PC2) (Figure 4.1).

new historical continuity. “In order for a past to be touched by the present instant, there must be no continuity between them” (from Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* (1999) cited in Peltonen 2001: 358).
⁷⁷ *The Cheese and the Worms* is a study of the currents running through popular culture in 16th century Italy through the lens of the experiences and thoughts of Domenico Scandella called Menocchio, a miller prosecuted by the Inquisition because his religious and cosmological views were deemed heretical (Ginzburg 1980). The cultural knowledge that informs the small world of Menocchio intersects with the social control of the church and its Inquisition trials. Efforts to enforce church discipline reveal surprising levels of literacy and beliefs about the cosmos that flourish in peasant society (Walton et al. 2008: 6). The other work often singled out as representative for microhistory is Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (1975). Also working from inquisition records, Le Roy Ladurie details the Catharist enthusiasm in a French village in the early fourteenth century, and highlights the role of social status in the drama played out in the Church’s effort to eradicate dualistic ‘heresy’ from France.

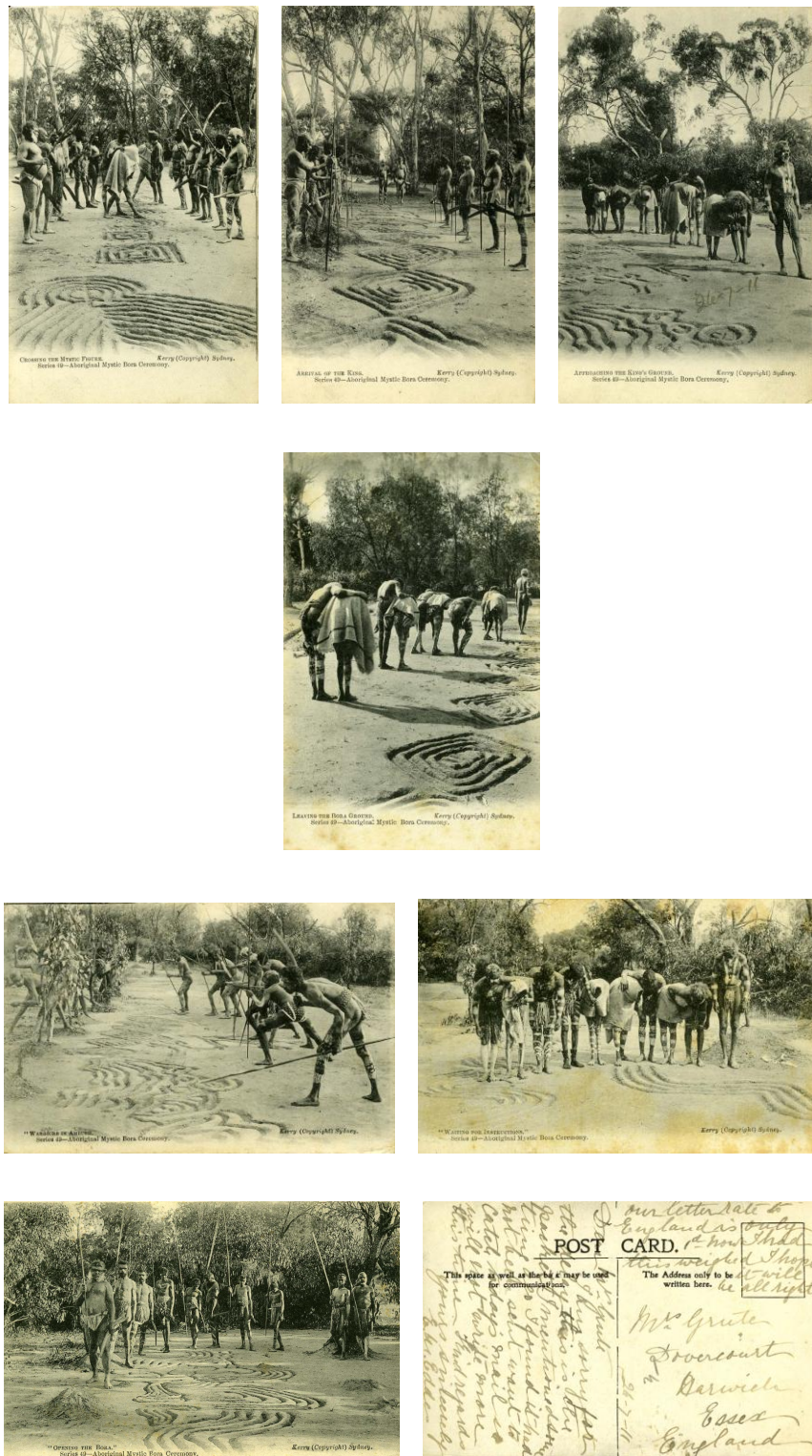


Figure 4.1 Seven Kerry & Co. postcards from “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony”. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession numbers: PSC 2006.76.674–680 (AS/PC2)

I saw them for the first time in 2004, and the printed caption “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony” informed me that they were fragments of an overarching narrative. However, the omission of an individual postcard numbering⁷⁸ did not answer my question about how many postcards constituted Kerry & Co.’s series. The complete series viewed from that period consisted of ten, twelve, sometimes of fourteen postcards. At that time, however, I was not aware of the existence of the postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards* held in the archives of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (AS/PHM2). Three years later I had the opportunity to see this rare object in Sydney and find among its fifty series, on the last page, the “Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony” (Figure 4.2). Like all other series, it is presented in two albumen prints, one featuring an enlargement of a postcard’s motif, the other presenting the miniatures of the twelve postcards in the series (Figure 4.3). The compilation of the miniatures – the original postcards were pinned to a board and then photographed – acquainted me with the details of the whole series’ corpus, and with the five motifs missing in the group from the Metropolitan Museum’s Photograph Study Collection (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.2 “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony” appears on the last page (right) of the postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

⁷⁸ We have seen in Chapter Three that Kerry, apart from the caption with motifs, series’ title and the company’s name, was reluctant to include additional numberings or information relating to the production and manufacturing of his postcards. This is also the reason why it is quite difficult to identify who printed Kerry & Co.’s postcards.

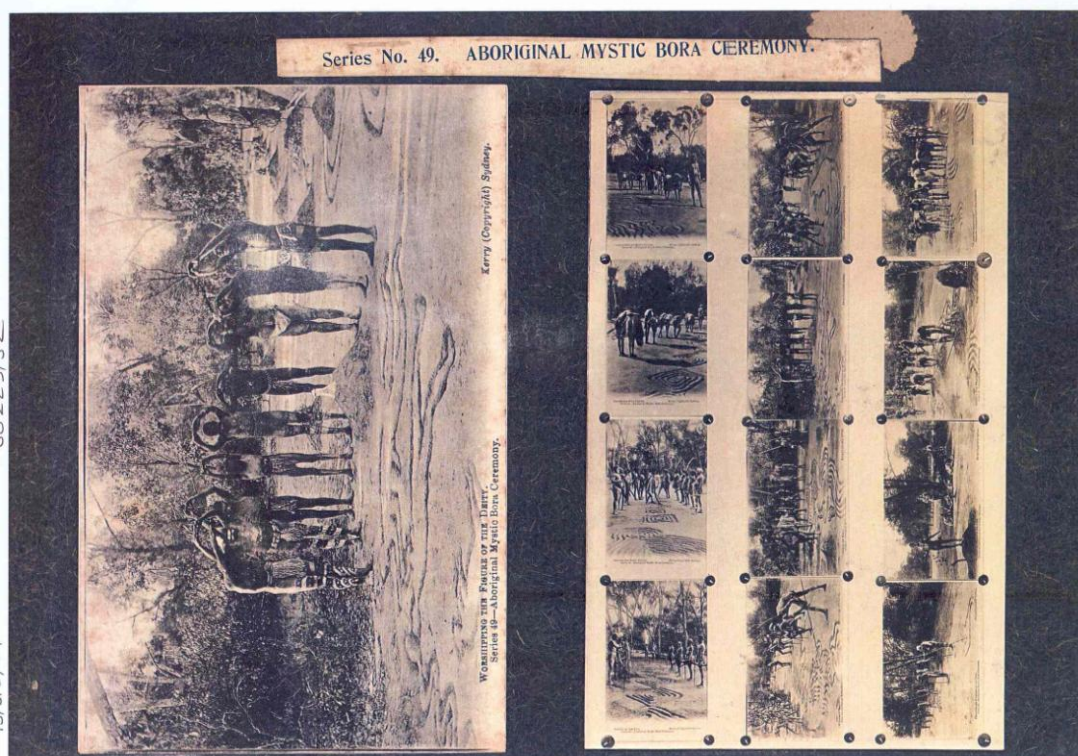


Figure 4.3 “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony” consists of two albumen prints: one presenting a postcard’s enlargement (left), the other an overview of all twelve postcards (right). Postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

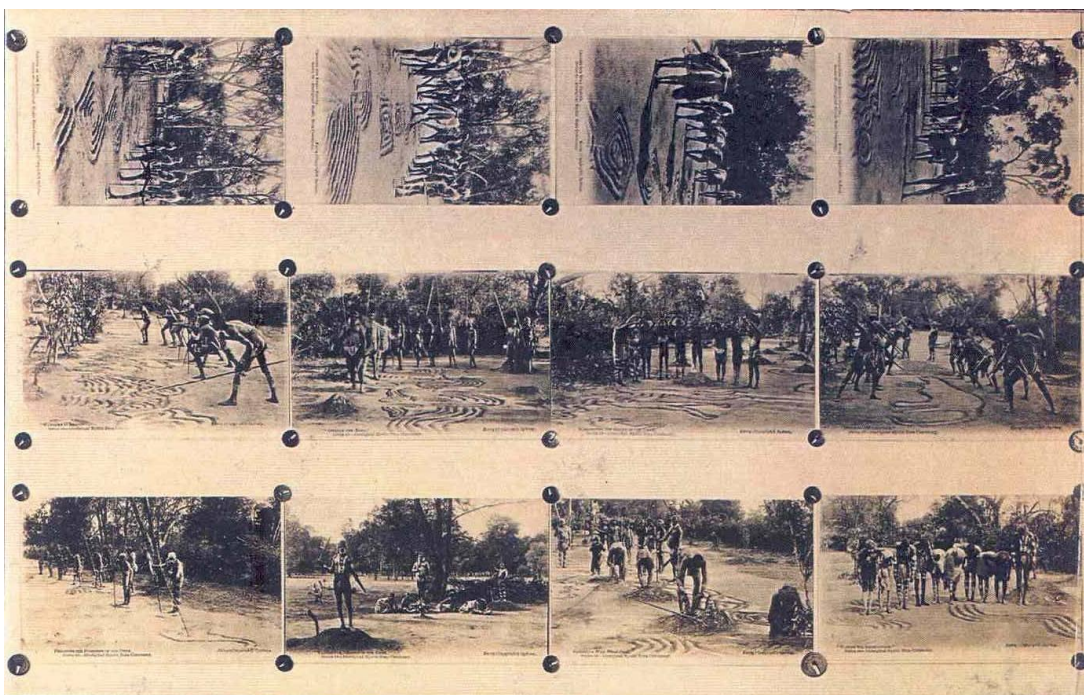


Figure 4.4 Albumen print featuring the twelve motifs of “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony” photographed after they have been pinned to a board. Postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

Considered together, the twelve aesthetically similar motifs of series no. 49 along with their captions and the series' title clearly suggest that we are dealing here with a mosaic of twelve micro-narratives that are, at the same time, elements of an overarching narrative on an Aboriginal ceremony considered 'mystic', and, implicitly, also on the centrality of land in Aboriginal culture. Indeed, all postcard motifs presented in this series feature a group of Aboriginal men performing on a particular stage outdoors: their land carved in geometrical forms.

Searching for the postcards' "use value"

Poole suggests that within the terms of the dominant realist discourse – according to which the goal of all visual representations is to narrow the gap between the image and the referent – the representational function of an image might be thought of as its "use value" (Poole 1997: 10).⁷⁹ The idea that an image's relevance and utility resides in its ability to reproduce an image of a reality characterises the dominant European value system, and is particularly pertinent in a discussion focused on objects such as postcards. Their wide circulation must be analysed in terms of the reasons that assigned them historical, scientific, and aesthetic value. In 'The Popular Image' (1985), Nicolas Peterson has investigated the extent to which the three ideological frameworks Rochelle Kolodny (1978) suggests photographers of anthropological subjects worked in – 'romanticism', 'realism' and the 'documentary mode'⁸⁰ – are encoded in a set of postcards' images representing Aboriginal people. He concluded that over eighty per cent of the analysed postcards, among which are also some Kerry

⁷⁹ Susan Sontag takes a particular position within debates about realism, stressing the referential nature of the photographic image both in terms of its iconic properties and in terms of its indexical nature. Her concern is with the extent to which the image adequately represents the moment of actuality from which it is taken. In her 1970s series of essays collected as *On Photography* she defines the photograph as a 'trace' directly stencilled off reality, like a footprint or a death mask, and emphasised the idea of the photograph as a means of freezing a moment in time (Sontag 1979). Like Sontag, Roland Barthes draws attention to the referential characteristics of the photograph, but, instead of relating this to a range of practices like Sontag does, he concludes that it is 'reference' rather than art, or communication, which is fundamental to photography (Barthes 1984_a). For critical discussions of realist discourse in photographic history, see for example Crary 1990, Mitchell 1986, Sekula 1984, Tagg 1993[1988] and Wright 1992.

⁸⁰ 'Romanticism' is the model concerned with the world of essences (ideology of idealism), 'realism' with the world of facts (positivistic ideology), and the 'documentary mode' with the world of action (implies social or political commitment) (see Peterson 1985: 165–166).

pictures, fall within realism (Peterson 1985: 179), implying the popular view that photographs capture the world as it is, and present it to our scrutiny.

Realism offers a fixity in which the signifier is treated as if it were identical with a pre-existent signified and in which the reader's role is purely that of consumer. It is this realist mode with which we are confronted when we look at the photograph as evidence. (Tagg 1993[1988]: 99)

Because this ideological framework, impressed by the actuality of the image, fails to consider the socio-political context in which the imagery is embedded, I will first try to answer questions that will enable us to shed light on the circumstances of the creation of series no. 49, and on the various regimes of value through which it later navigated. Who are the people depicted on the twelve postcards of this series? What exactly is represented on these postcards? Where, when and why were the original photographs taken? And, most importantly, who took the photographs on which these postcards are based? The new insights may offer a new perspective from which we can think of Kerry's Aboriginal postcard's imagery in terms of Kolodny's ideological models.

A bora on Wailwan land

The question related to the postcard imagery's authorship of series no. 49 may seem pointless given the information written on the lower right corner reading "Kerry (Copyright) Sydney". However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a common practice for photographic firms to appropriate images from different photographers who remained anonymous because their works were published collectively under the name of a studio (Webb 1998: 116). This happened also at Kerry & Co.'s premises, especially after 1895, when Kerry himself took few photographs and delegated the job to his field photographers. Additionally, Kerry did not only work with the photographic material collected by his operators. He also used negatives he had purchased from photographers such as Henry King (1855–1923) – one of the most appreciated Sydney photographers.⁸¹ When Kerry & Co.

⁸¹ Henry King was apprenticed to J. Hubert Newman before opening his own studio in partnership with William Slade in 1879. King travelled widely through N.S.W. and Queensland in his horse drawn caravan/studio photographing Aboriginal people. For some of these portraits King was awarded

closed in 1917, the Sydney bookseller James R. Tyrrell bought the firm's collection consisting of about 7,900 glass plate negatives by both Kerry and King, and renamed it the 'Tyrrell Collection'. In 1929 there was a project to build a floating ethnographic museum moored in Sydney Harbour and present the collection to the public. Although the project was never realised, Tyrrell kept the collection intact, eventually selling it in 1980 to Australian Consolidated Press, who in turn, donated it to the Powerhouse Museum in 1985. A document titled *King's Collection of Photographs 1880–1890*, part of the 'Tyrrell's papers' kept at the Mitchell Library in Sydney (AS/ML5), reveals that, among King's negatives purchased by Kerry, there were negatives by Rev. William George Lawes⁸² and by the German photographer J. W. Lindt who was active in Melbourne.⁸³ Kerry possibly reproduced some of the pictures of these photographers, listing them under his own studio name (cf. Millar 1981: 26–27 and Webb 1997: 17).

In a report published in 1899, Kerry wrote "the photographs of an Aboriginal Bora Ceremony which I have forwarded to the Royal Society form part of a series secured by me in the [Australian] Winter of 1898, locality Lower Macquarie River, N.S.W." (Kerry 1899: xxvii). Records at the Public Record Office KeW, London, testify that Charles Kerry registered these images on 6th October 1898 under copyright.⁸⁴ The entries under "Charles Henry Kerry" give details of the photographs' titles, original numbering and size – all approximately 152 cm × 200 cm (Davies 1986: 22–24). Twenty-four of these photographs were then mounted and presented to the Royal Society of New South Wales (Kerry 1899: xxvii). It was the

a certificate and a bronze medal at the World Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. With the invention of dry-plate techniques, King turned more to landscape photography, producing scenic views and a series of Sydney street scenes, now valued for their historic and artistic relevance (King 1983: 595–596).

⁸² Rev. Lawes (1839–1907) was a missionary who worked for the London Missionary Society in Polynesia and Melanesia (see Langmore 1989; Edwards 2001; Webb 1997).

⁸³ John William Lindt (1845–1926), born as the son of a German customs officer, ran away to sea at the age of seventeen and worked his way to Australia, where he decided to learn photography. He had long been fascinated by New Guinea, and a document titled *Picturesque New Guinea*, also archived with the 'Tyrrells' papers', shows a list of 124 photographs taken by Lindt in 1885 during Sir Peter Scratchley's Expedition. In the position of official photographer, Lindt was allowed to travel extensively throughout New Guinea, documenting the lives of various Papuan communities. He brought back to Australia many negatives, fifty of which were ultimately reproduced in the book *Picturesque New Guinea* (1887). In recognition of his book's importance, Lindt was elected to fellowship of the Victorian branch of the Royal Geographical Society, London and *Picturesque New Guinea* won wide critical acclaim in England (see Jones 1985).

⁸⁴ I would like to thank Mitchell Library curator Alan Davies for kindly sharing with me his unpublished work on *The Location and Identification of Australian photographs, particularly of the Nineteenth Century, in British Institutions* (1986).

N.S.W. Government that had commissioned Kerry to travel through the state and collect photographs of Aboriginal people and their ceremonies. Considering the rarity of Aboriginal ceremonial gatherings towards the end of the 19th century, Kerry probably had to wait for the right occasion. When in 1898 he realised that a gathering “on a more extensive scale than ordinary” was going to take place, he expressed that it “was sufficient inducement to me to take a trip of 500 miles to the western districts recently for the purpose of securing, if possible, a number of representative photographs” (Kerry 1898: 32). The official reason why Kerry was asked to take these photographs is unclear. Considering the predominance of the salvage paradigm among white Australians at Kerry’s time, it is possible that the N.S.W. government wanted the Aboriginal people to be photographed and their lifestyle documented before it was ‘too late’. Implicit to the salvage paradigm of the late 19th and early 20th century was the belief that the culture in question was on the verge of extinction and had to be therefore preserved for posterity in its most authentic form before the inevitable assimilation with European culture (see Clifford 1986: 112–113, 1987, 2002, Edwards 1998, 2000). In Australia, even the anthropologists of ‘the band of brothers’ – Lorimer Fison (1832–1907), Alfred Howitt (1830–1908), Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929) and Francis Gillen (1855–1912) – shared the opinion that Aboriginal extinction would be rapid and inevitable (cf. Fison and Howitt 1991 [1880]: 185). As Mulvaney says, a pseudo-scientific assumption prevailed in these men’s view of the fate of the Aboriginal people, despite that they also shared an evident personal humanitarian concern (Mulvaney 1985: 73). The widespread belief that Aboriginal people, in general, and those from the region visited by Kerry, in particular, were doomed to die out emerged also from the local press. Just a few months before the *bora* took place in Quambone, *The Coonamble Independent* informed that

We have to record the death of the ‘King of Terembone’, better known as ‘Youie Jimmy’, an aboriginal of very matured years, and an old identity in the district. Jimmy died at the camp on Friday last, 7th inst. [January], and was buried in the old Cemetery. The race is fast dying out, and in the course of a few years will probably be altogether extinct. (Anon. 1898i: 8)

Given the popularity of the ‘dying out-theory’, I presume that Kerry had not been immune to this way of thinking. An article in *The Town and Country Journal* of December 1898, written by Kerry himself, confirms this hypothesis:

The decadence of our aboriginal races and the absolute certainty of their utter extinction—so far as New South Wales is concerned—at an early date lends a mournful and pathetic interest to the movements of the few scattered remnants who are all that now remain to tell of the powerful tribes who ruled this continent until the advent of the pale face, a few generations back. Modern civilisation, grafted on to a savage mode of life, has always been fatal to the native races that sampled the combination. With no inherent knowledge to guide their selection of the new customs presented, they are unable to assimilate any of the higher parts of civilisation, but faithfully copy the worst of its vices. The shrinkage in the number of our full-blooded aboriginals to the small total of 3500 at the end of 1896 is sad but eloquent testimony of the fact that we are within measurable distance of the time when the last lord of the soil will have followed Tasmania’s Trucanini⁸⁵ to the great unknown. (Kerry 1898: 32)

The region Charles Kerry visited in June 1898 to take the *bora* photographs was Wailwan country, bounded by the Macquarie and Castlereagh rivers (Figure 4.5).

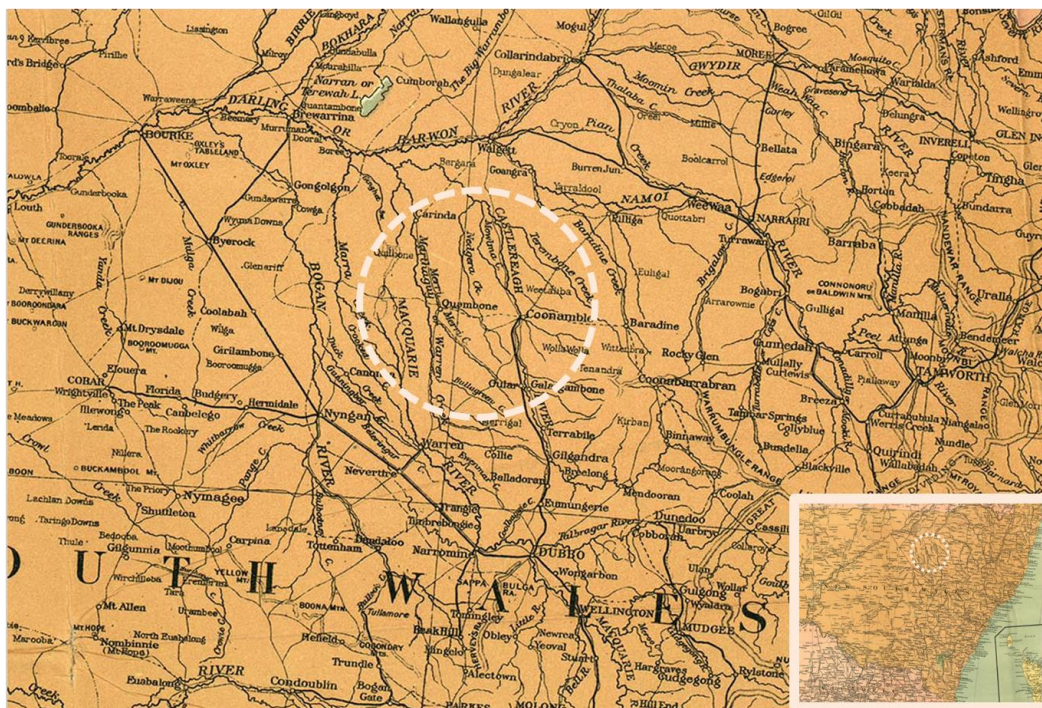


Figure 4.5 The Wailwan region visited by Charles Kerry in June 1898. From the map “Commonwealth of Australia”, published with the *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*. Melbourne: McCarron, Bird and Co., 1916

⁸⁵ For a discussion of Trucanini’s photographs, the supposedly last Tasmanian to have lived and died on the island, see for example Rae-Ellis 1981, 1992.

When he arrived there, pastoralists had been occupying Wailwan land for over half a century, and, as we will see, traces of European presence are also visible on Kerry's postcards. Local newspapers started to announce the preparation of the Aboriginal gathering in April:

Any person who may be possessed of a desire to see a really genuine corroboree can have his curiosity in that respect gratified within the next few weeks, and within the colony of New South Wales, too. (...) it appears that the blacks on the Macquarie and adjoining rivers – Barwon, Bogan and Castlereagh – are at present encamped on Bulgeregan Creek, to the number of about 50, with the object to taking part soon in a “corroboree,” or “bora” rites. (...) It was stated that certain rites were observed at these meetings, and the pure blacks are said to still attach great value to them and preserve them as the few remaining links with the past of their race. (Anon._b 1898: 4)

The same newspaper, *The Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent*, announced on 6th May that the fifty Aboriginal people preparing for the ceremony had 20,000 acres of land to hunt on for game. Because poison was laid in breeding paddocks, strangers “should remember when visiting the blacks’ camp and *corroboree* grounds that they are on purchased property and run the risk of the usual trespassing penalties” (Anon. 1898_f: 4). Four days later, on 10th May, it was stated that the Aborigines’ Protection Board – a government institution that exerted an extraordinary level of control over people’s lives, including regulation of residence, employment, marriage, social life and other aspects of daily life – had been informed by a police report that hundred and fifty Aboriginal people were about to hold a *bora* on quite an extensive scale at Bulgeregar Creek, about 20 miles from Quambone. The Board had been asked if it would assist by supplying provisions. According to the newspaper article, the constable stationed at Quambone thought they should receive small rations whilst attending the *bora*. It was expected that the gathering would last about six weeks, and that the Aboriginal people would arrive from the Bogan, Brewarrina, Walgett, and Barwon districts every day (Anon. 1898_g: 2). On 10th June 1898, the *Coonamble Independent* reported that Kerry, who had probably been alerted by the Aborigines Protection Board, arrived at Quambone to take photos of the Aboriginal *corroboree*. Three hundred Aboriginal people had gathered from the districts mentioned above (Anon. 1898_h: 8).

The public press used the terms “*bora*” and “*corroboree*” interchangeably and as synonyms for “ceremony”. A *bora*, however, was the ceremony for the initiation of

young men; it involved only one section of the community because of the secret nature and sacred symbolism of the rituals and the information they contained (cf. S. Miller 1999: 9). The *corroboree* was, on the other hand, a ceremony that could take place in front of non-initiated people, but remained, whether public or private, for invited guests only (cf. Lydon 2005: 195–199). “*Corroboree*” became a generic word coined by the European settlers to describe an Aboriginal ceremonial gathering. With respect to the events that Kerry documented, we may say that both terms are correct, as both a series of *corroboree* and a *bora* were performed during his visit.

Thanks to the postcard series produced by Kerry & Co. and the numerous prints of the original glass plates distributed to all Australian State Libraries, we can now gain a visual impression of what took place during the events that were photographically documented by Kerry. In his report to the Royal Society of N.S.W., Kerry described the *bora* ground about 400 metres from the Quambone main camp, as a compact space about 35 metres long and 13 metres wide, surrounded by a bush fence about three metres high. To permit the incising of the various figures and designs into the ground, the area was cleaned by removing small bushes and grass, and in some parts also the smaller trees. Kerry also observed that two narrow passages, protected by packed bush wood, functioned as entrance and exit; these were guarded day and night by what he described as “warriors” (Kerry 1899: xxviii). He also reported that

The young members of the tribe who were to be initiated, arrived each in charge of an older warrior, who appeared to act as sponsor, the candidates having their heads shrouded in blankets. The proceedings commenced at the end of the enclosure where a couple of large figures – male and female – had been cut in the ground and terminated at the other end where a huge mound figure of a man had been made. Before and around these and the various other symbols and figures shown in the photographs, the warriors went through certain marching and posturing, which in many instances seemed to have no connection with the device round which they were grouped. Such information as I could glean from an interpreter present, also appeared to have very little bearing on the ceremony, and the final impression I gathered was that I was being wilfully misled, or else that the ceremony itself was almost meaningless. After leaving the Bora ground the novices were taken away into a remote part of the forest, where the removing of a front tooth, and the placing of tribal marks on each was to be effected. (Kerry 1899: xxviii)

If Kerry could not see meaning in the ceremony, it should be remembered that he was not only an outsider; he was also untrained in the anthropological observation of

such rituals. In her analysis of the paradoxes historically produced through colonial encounter, Elizabeth Povinelli exposes the limit of even an anthropological understanding of custom and kinship, a problem of hermeneutics and historiography (2002: 6). Discussing the writings and research of Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen on the Aranda of central Australia at the turn of the century, Povinelli (2002: 74) shows how their translation of the moment of cultural recognition had a significant impact on how non-Aboriginal people, inside and outside Australia, imagined traditional indigenous culture and society. She examines the ways in which particular forms of indigenous corporeal practices described by Spencer and Gillen caused a crisis of reason in non-Aboriginal Australian citizens, who started to experience their intolerance as result of their own (non-Aboriginal) moral and intellectual limits.

As suggested by Steve Miller, we can be reasonably sure that access to their cultural knowledge was being strictly controlled by the Wailwan (1999: 12). During these ceremonies cultural knowledge is handed down from one generation to the next, and connection to the land is reinforced through dances, songs and images. Each ceremony involves rituals and information that are withheld from some, due to their secret nature and sacred symbolism. Knowledge, particularly when related to ceremonial and religious matters, is strictly controlled by the senior members of the Aboriginal clan, and it is not considered as common property (Peterson 2005: 129).

Kerry realised that it was very unusual for a photographer to be allowed to participate in an Aboriginal sacred ceremony. He knew that without the help of Fitz W. Hill, the owner of the Quambone station, he would not have access to a similar event “which undoubtedly [has] never before been represented in this manner in New South Wales” (Kerry 1898: 32). Because many Aboriginal people were employed by Hill, Kerry believed that they were under a heavy obligation to Hill for “protection and kindness extending over many years” (Kerry 1899: xxvii). Mr. Hill was probably the only white man who had the privilege of entering the *bora* ground and being able to introduce a friend. Despite the negotiations with the Wailwan elders that led to the exceptional concession made to the white men, Kerry’s expectations were not completely fulfilled. Indeed, he expressed irritation at the restrictions imposed on him, writing that “enormous difficulties (...) had to be overcome to break down the prejudice against allowing a white man to see this secret ceremony, and even when

successful in gaining admittance to the scene of operations we were frequently requested, sometimes ordered, to leave again” (Kerry 1899: xxvii–xxviii).

Despite the disruption of Wailwan cultural traditions caused by European settlement, major ceremonies such as this initiation of young men, remained a serious and important business. As it emerges from Kerry’s report, they allowed him to participate as a non-initiated, white man, but maintained strict control over what could be seen and recorded.⁸⁶

A methodological parenthesis – negotiating the archive

Please note – my remarks are vague – I found it difficult to get any sense out of the men who took part in this ceremony. I may have been purposely misled.

The Ceremony took place on Quambone Station – near the Macquarie Reed beds in NSW – is absolutely the last of the kind ever held in this state CK (AS/NLA1)

This undated memo handwritten by Charles Kerry in the first decade of the 20th century, is to be found at the National Library of Australia (NLA) in Canberra (Figure 4.6). Because of its physical properties and appearance, it is catalogued in the manuscript department, but in fact it is related to an album apparently compiled by Kerry & Co. in 1895 titled *Aboriginies [sic] of Australia, Religious Ceremonies* (AS/NLA2) now held in the pictorial collection (Figure 4.7). 1895 is the date that also emerged from some studies mentioning Kerry’s work with the Aboriginal people (De Lorenzo 1993, Millar 1981). This confused me, as Kerry himself stated that Aboriginal ceremonial gatherings in N.S.W. were becoming increasingly rare. How could he have devoted so much attention to the 1898 ceremony if he had already had the opportunity to participate in a similar event just three years before?

⁸⁶ The photographic encounters required a level of cooperation on the part of the Aboriginal people, considering the time required in setting up an elaborate procedure, and that the exposure times were relatively protracted. But Kerry was not the only one who had problems with photographing Aboriginal people and understanding what was going on. We know, for example, that Frank Gillen in 1895 expressed having had great difficulty with the Aranda in central Australia in procuring pictures of a *kurdaitcha*, a sorcerer who was responsible for avenging the death of a kinsman (Peterson 2005: 127). Another example documenting how sensitive Aboriginal people were to representation by outsiders, is given by the experience of the French photographer Claude-Joseph Désiré Charnay (1828–1915) who, in 1878, visited Coranderrk Aboriginal Station and encountered some difficulties in taking anthropometric photographs of Aboriginal people. The sitters first announced that they wanted five shilling per person posing, but then raised the fee until he had to give up (Lydon 2005: 1–2).

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Memo - To Mr. St. Kerry

Please note - my remarks are vague - I found it difficult to get any sense out of the men who took part in the ceremony. I may have been purposely misled -

The ceremony took place on Quamby Station - near the Macquarie River beds - NSW is absolutely the last of the kind ever held in the State

CK

Figure 4.6 Charles Kerry's handwritten memo relating to the *bora* ceremony. By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: NLA MS 9478 (AS/NLA1)

It became evident that I had to see the album in order to clear up this entanglement. Unfortunately, only men are allowed to access this object containing images of a male religious ceremony, for it had been labelled “culturally sensitive” by a group of Pitjantjatjara elders who had visited the archive’s collections in January 2007. It is very surprising that – given the rights every Aboriginal community has over material

regarding its own culture – Pitjantjatjara elders were able to decide to put photographs belonging to the Wailwan culture under restricted access.



Figure 4.7 Kerry & Co.'s album *Aboriginies [sic] of Australia, Religious Ceremonies* containing twenty photographs of the *bora* and one of a studio *corroboree*. By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: PIC Album 394, currently under restricted access (AS/NLA2)

Bolton (2003: 44) considers the influence of indigenous communities as the most important factor in bringing changes to ethnographic museum and archival practice. Following the UNESCO regional seminar held in Adelaide in 1978, at which indigenous Australians expressed their desire for access to public collections of Aboriginal material culture, indigenous communities have entered more and more museums and archives. They brought with them a series of ideas about the meaning of objects, thereby altering the understanding of ethnographic materials. Besides claiming the right to influence the presentation of their knowledge and practices in exhibitions, indigenous delegates at the UNESCO seminar raised concerns about the management of secret-sacred objects. Crucial to this discussion is the concept of cultural property that encompasses ideas of rights and ownership. The descendants of the makers and users of certain objects have a moral right to determine their meanings and uses, or prohibit certain meanings and uses.

The experience at the NLA photographic archive shows how, when details of provenance are not known, the general concept of cultural property is applied (Bolton 2003: 45). As will be explained below, I found out that Kerry's album contains indeed images of Wailwan culture, but a group of Pitjantjatjara elders could decide to put it under restricted access. This means that any indigenous community is seen to have a greater right to speak about Aboriginal objects than non-indigenous people (Bolton 2003: 46). Respecting Aboriginal sensitivities about secret material, but also realising the importance of the album for the understanding of Kerry's

photographs and postcards, I prepared a CD with scans of the images Kerry took in 1898 in Quambone. I then asked the curators if they could compare these scans with the photographs pasted into the restricted album. One of the curators not only confirmed that the images were the same and provided me with a list of the sequence of the images, he also kindly allowed my (male) partner to work on the album and collect for me the written information on the twenty-one albumen prints. Thanks to this compromise and collaboration, I could establish that the album contains twenty photographs taken by Kerry on the *bora* ground by Quambone in June 1898, and one studio photograph captioned “*corroboree*” (Figure 4.8). Realising this, I was even more surprised that this album was under restricted access. Indeed, the album’s photographs, identical with the postcard images, are easily accessible at other institutions. The Mitchell Library (ML), for example, holds an album entitled *Australian Aborigines* (AS/ML2) that contains hundred and fifty albumen prints, and eighteen of these are *bora* photographs (Figure 4.9). These photographs can all be viewed online.⁸⁷



Figure 4.8 The last photograph in the restricted album features a studio *corroboree*, which also appears in the album *1894–1895 Australia*, album of the Boileau Family, By permission of the National Library of Australia, accession number: PIC 9294/301 (AS/NLA8)

⁸⁷ Also the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (glass plates and prints), the Macleay Museum, Sydney (prints) and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (lantern slides and albumen prints) did not apply any restrictions on viewing the Wailwan images.

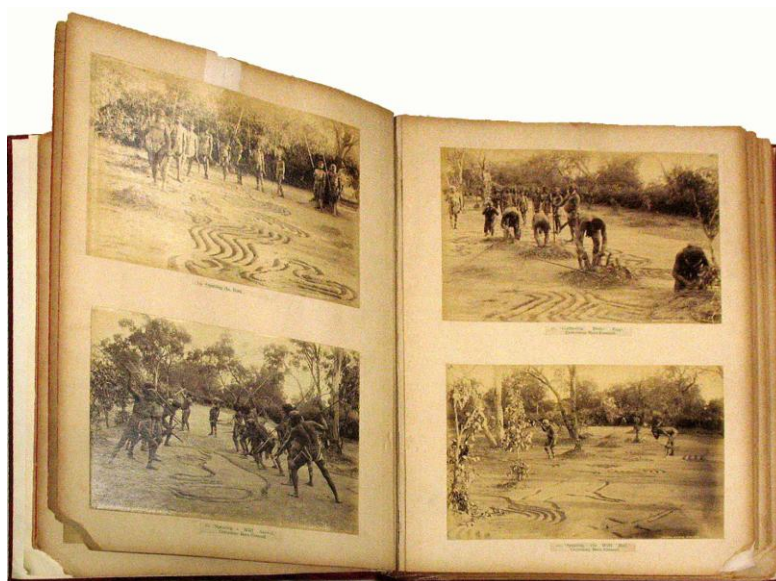


Figure 4.9 Album *Australian Aboriginals* by Kerry & Co., Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398 (AS/ML2) (Photo by Alan Davies, curator of photographs)

Comparing the *bora* narratives

The study of the NLA album revealed a few interesting aspects relating to the compilation process of postcard series no. 49. First, apart from postcard motif no. 9 (Figure 4.10), the other eleven motifs are identical with those presented in the NLA album.⁸⁸ Because in the ML album there are additional images of the *bora* not used for the restricted album or for the postcard series, we observe that the postcards are based on Kerry's preferred motifs – those presented in the official NLA album.

Secondly, series no. 49 does not reflect the sequence – supposed to be chronological – appearing in the NLA album. The criteria applied in the compilation of the postcard series are more of a material nature rather than content related. Indeed, the twelve postcards have been ordered according to their format – on the left the vertically oriented, and in the middle and right rows the horizontally oriented postcards. For reasons that I will explain later (Chapter Five), I presume that Charles Kerry chose the subjects, but did not arrange the series on the board himself. It is extraordinary that neither the sequence presented in the postcard series nor the one in the NLA album correspond to the one created in the ML album. Consequently, we

⁸⁸ I am aware that the 'operation' of numbering may alter and influence the visual impact of the series; this method, however, considerably simplifies the following analysis focusing more on the single motifs than on the series as an object.

are dealing here with a unique photographic body that was used to create three separate narratives through three different material forms. It is difficult to prove which of these narratives would best represent the actual temporal sequence. One might expect that the NLA album, compiled for an official occasion, would represent in a more ‘truthful’ way the chronology of the *bora* event. The information provided in the album, however, is too vague to allow a temporal reconstruction of the facts. Additionally, the photograph titled “Opening the Bora: first entrance of the warriors”, expectedly to come first, only ranks in the seventeenth position in the album’s narrative (Figure 4.11).

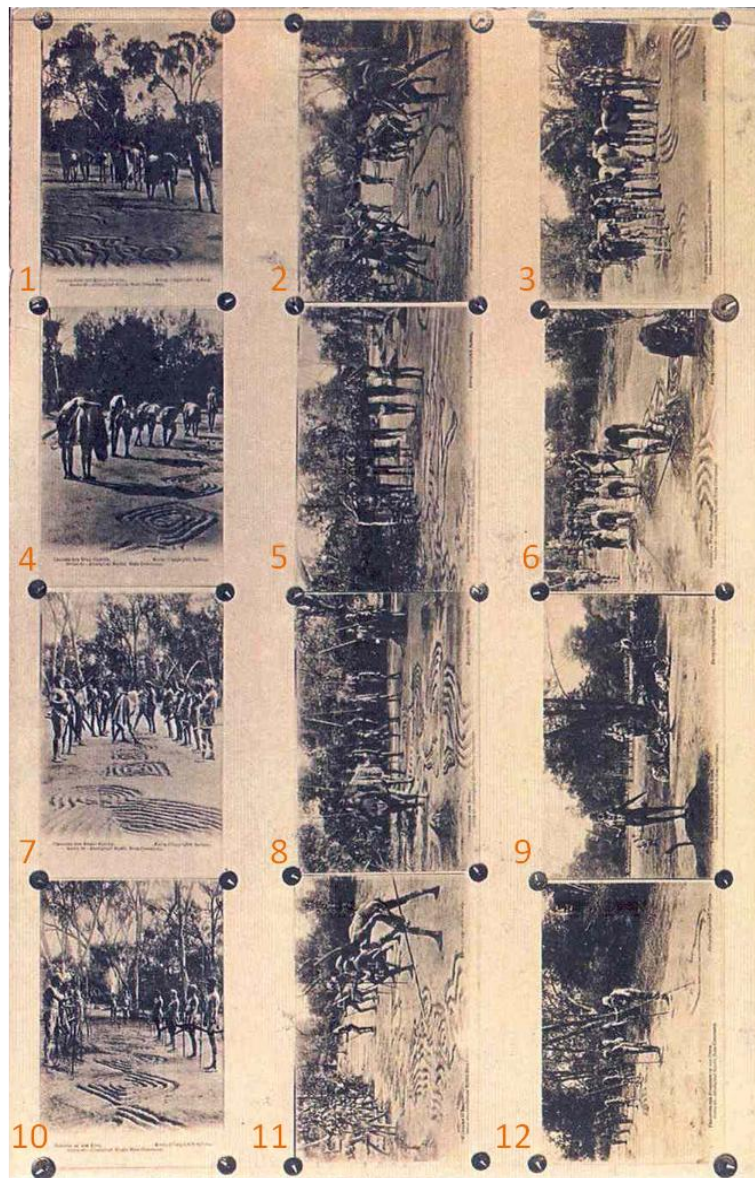


Figure 4.10 Motif no. 9 (numeration by author) is the only one not corresponding to the photographs in the restricted album of the National Library of Australia (PIC Album 394; AS/NLA2). Postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

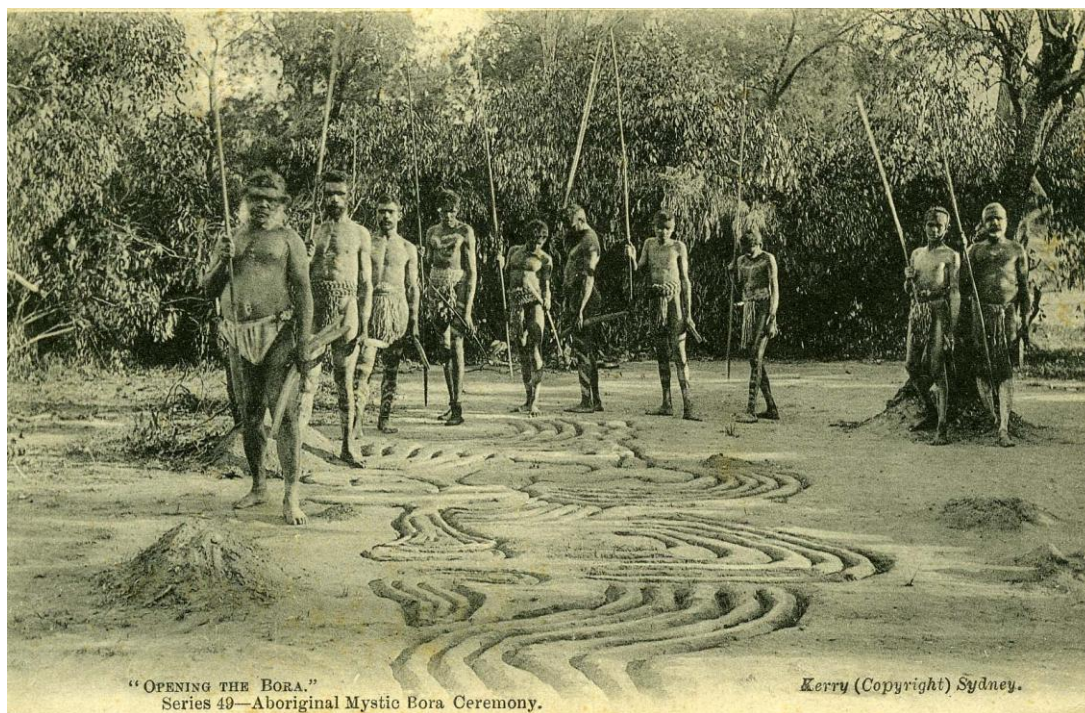


Figure 4.11 The motif “Opening the Bora” presented in “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony”. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: PSC 2006.76.680 (AS/PC2)

The third aspect I would like to address is that the comments in the NLA album reveal the degree of knowledge Kerry acquired while he was photographing the religious ceremony. The postcard captions are not very informative, and a comparison with the information of the album could well reveal marketing strategies on behalf of the Kerry & Co.

postcard business. Under sixteen images in the album Kerry wrote a short description relating to their representational content. For the remaining five images he wrote “meaning not known”.⁸⁹ We have indeed seen



that the Wailwan controlled knowledge, preventing the disclosure of secret information to non-initiated participants, and

Figure 4.12 In the restricted album the description corresponding to the postcard motif 11 is “meaning not known”. Detail of “Series 49 – Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony”. Postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

these photographs may possibly have been taken just before or after the Wailwan

⁸⁹ This comments accompany photos number 4, 5, 7, 9 and 20.

asked Kerry and Hill to leave the *bora* ground. Interestingly enough, only one of the “meaning not known”-motifs was chosen to illustrate series no. 49 (Figure 4.12), but the reason for discarding the others was probably not an aesthetic one considering the enticing details of the carved ground (Figure 4.13). On the other hand, in the NLA album there are four images suggesting that, under some circumstances, a more detailed information exchange took place between the Wailwan and Kerry. The more attentive, though not exhaustive, comments feature in four photographs which also display the particular representational designs furrowed into the *bora* ground. All four motifs were used for the postcard production and appear in series no. 49 (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.13 Albumen print no. 35 in the Kerry & Co. album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/35 (AS/ML2)

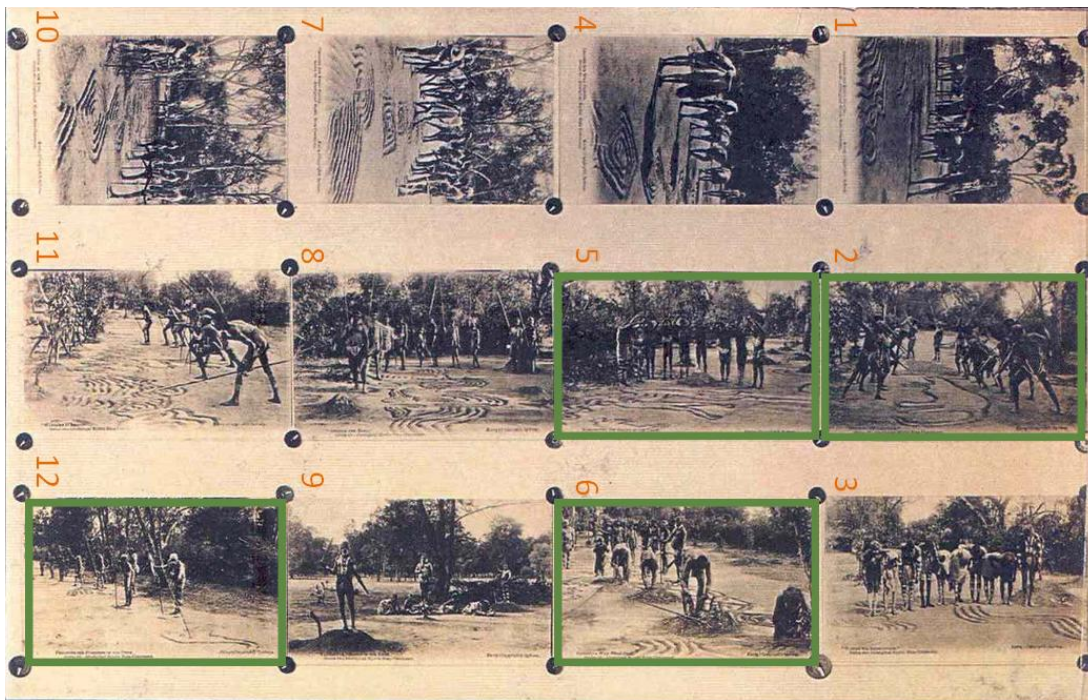


Figure 4.14 The postcards framed in green (changes by the author) shows the four motifs more extensively commented in the NLA album (PIC Album 394; AS/NLA2). Postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

Unfortunately, the real postcards based on the better-described motifs are neither among the seven held by the Metropolitan Museum nor in other private or public collections I visited. For this reason, the miniatures of the sample book are my only objects of reference. Although size does not allow reading the captions, even not through a strong magnifying lens, it appears – also from the study of the seven motifs in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection – that Kerry used a very synthetic formula on all twelve postcards of series no. 49. Thanks to the enlarged motif representative of the series and corresponding to postcard 5 in the compilation, we get a sense of the tension between the text in the NLA album and the wording of the postcard captions. While the postcard caption reads “Worshipping the Figure of the Deity” (Figure 4.15), the text accompanying image 11 in the album offers additional information:

I was told a rambling story of this design to the effect that the fore-fathers of the Aboriginal tribes were lost in a forest and found a kangaroo for food, and meeting the snake asked their way and were wrongly directed, and never again came out. Note figures are male and female.
 ABORIGINAL WORSHIPPING FIGURE OF DEITY. 2597

As these two sentences show, Kerry did not gain a deep knowledge of Wailwan mythology through the participation in the event. Beside the fact that he had been

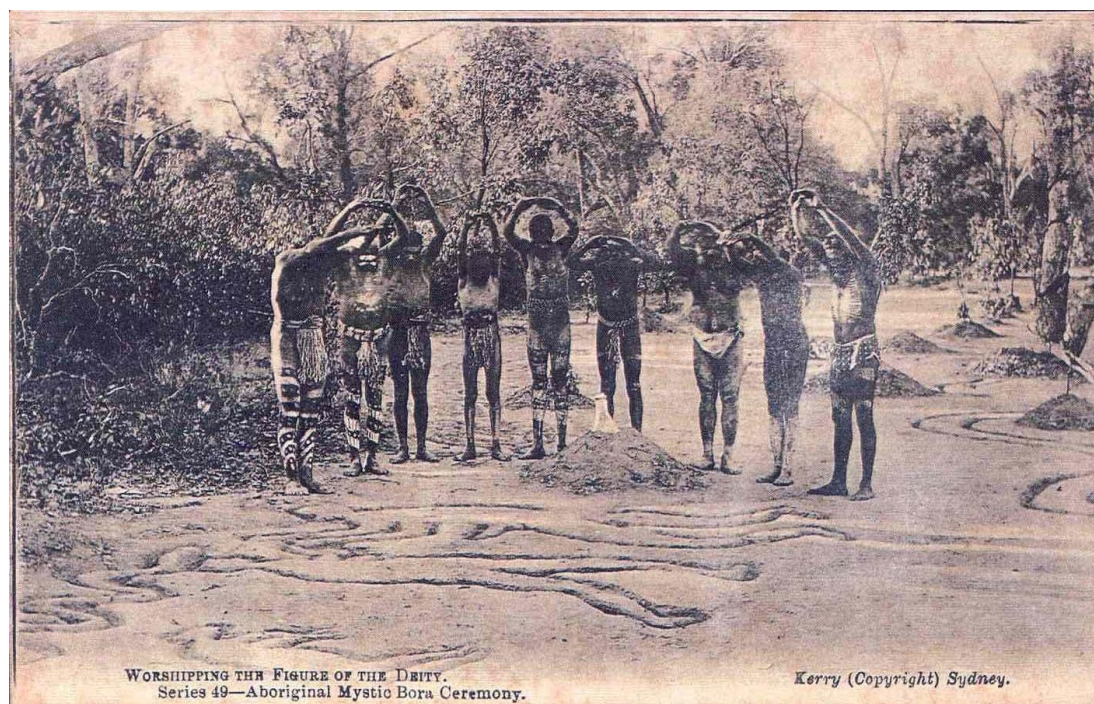


Figure 4.15 The postcard appearing as enlargement in the sample book features the motif “Worshipping the Figure of the Deity” corresponding to photograph no. 11 in the NLA album (PIC Album 394; AS/NLA2). Postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

told relatively little, he seems to have not been prepared to at least try to understand and interpret what was happening before him. Despite this, he was able to lend a contribution to anthropology through his photographs. Indeed, his visual material attracted, on one the hand, the attention of researchers who used it for their studies, on the other, his images published for the first time elements of Aboriginal culture that the public knew only from written reports by anthropologists or other researchers. Image 13 of the NLA album, for example, shows a motif that might have interested anthropologists, but was not chosen by Kerry for postcard production, maybe just because of its sensitive content (Figure 4.16). The album’s description reads: “*This mound figure was 26 feet long and about one and a half feet high.* ABORIGINAL CEREMONY. DEATH OF THE DEITY 2604.” The large figure (about 8 metres long and 45 centimetres high) made of clay on the men’s ceremonial ground represented the ‘supreme creator’ Baiamai. As documented by Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918) – a surveyor with no formal training in anthropology but whose reports on Aboriginal ceremonial life and language in

N.S.W. have been considered invaluable⁹⁰ –, the Wailwan shared with other Aboriginal people of the region a common belief in Baiamai, who cared for the spirits of the dead. In his documentations of the ceremony, Mathews describes a

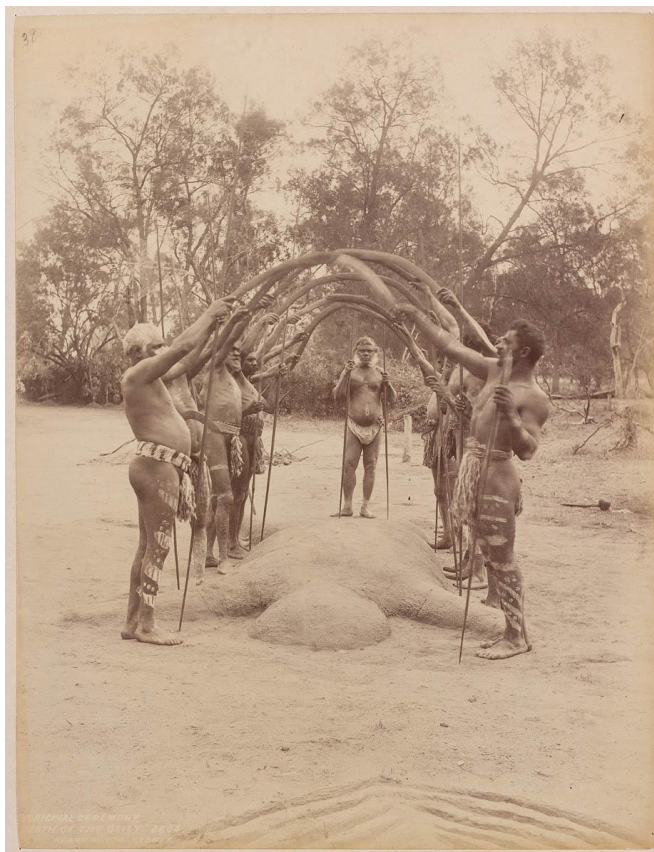


Figure 4.16 The image with *Baiamai* was not chosen for the postcard series 49. This is the photograph no. 38 appearing in the album *Australian Aboriginals* by Kerry & Co., Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/38. The motif corresponds to no. 13 in the NLA album (PIC Album 394; AS/NLA2)

representations of Baiamai similar to the one photographed by Kerry: “a horizontal representation of Baiamai, eight feet six inches [about 2.5 m] long and five feet ten inches [1.8 m] across the chest, was formed by heaping up the loose earth into human shape” (Mathews 1896: 116). According to the religious beliefs, Baiamai gave Daramulan – the one-legged ‘All-Father’ – the responsibility for initiating young men, but when it was discovered that he was killing and eating them, this sacred duty was revoked. Baiamai then instructed the men of the tribe to carry out the initiations, though the presence of Daramulan was still expressed in the ceremony by a single rod or limb (Miller 1999: 13). To acknowledge the social and spiritual connections to the land, which were created by the actions of mythical ancestral beings, the Wailwan used representations similar to those documented by Kerry. They incorporated human forms as well as depictions of animals including an emu and a kangaroo, and also a great snake-like figure known as Wahwee. Surrounding

⁹⁰ Mathews published extensively on Aboriginal cultures of northern N. S. W. and of the Northern Territory and Central Australia. His views on social structure, descent systems and marriage laws in Aboriginal society differed from those accepted by Howitt, Fison and Spencer, who questioned Mathew’s field methods and his interpretation of the data (McBryde 1974: 225–226). On Mathews’ work and publications see the edited volume by Martin Thomas *Culture in Translation* (2007).

the clearing were carved trees,⁹¹ saplings and stumps bound with cord (Miller 1999: 13).

Corroboree and the camp life

As a special guest of Mr. Hill, Kerry had the privilege to attend, next to the *bora*, also a series of *corroborees* that took place in the middle of the Wailwan camp in Quambone. Until now, there has been some uncertainty regarding the sequence of events photographed by Kerry (cf. Miller, S. 1999: 14). Thanks to an article written by Kerry and published in December 1898 in *The Town and Country Journal*, we know that the series of *corroborees* preceded the *bora* ceremony (Kerry 1898: 32). According to Kerry's description a circle of about forty yards diameter (c.36 metres) had been delineated by a trench, with the centre thoroughly cleared, levelled and swept. Kerry and Hill were asked to stay at the edge of the ring so that the light of the various fires around the *corroboree* ground would provide the best view. Additionally, an Aboriginal interpreter was organised in order to explain the meaning of the various performances that Kerry described as "theatrical representations of events" (Kerry 1898: 32). In his article "Scenes at a Recent Corroboree" (1898) accompanied by nine illustrations, Kerry describes some of the themes and stories presented in the nightly *corroborees*. According to a numbered list related to the ML album, there are eight images featuring a *corroboree*, six of them taken in Quambone. They are titled "A Battle" (no. 25), "Drafting Sheep" (no. 26), "A Tribal Fight" (no. 27), "Healing the Sick Warrior" (no. 28), "Tracking" (no. 29), and "Spearing Fish" (no. 30).

None of these images was chosen by Kerry to illustrate one of his postcards; why am I therefore mentioning them here? The first reason is to inform which motifs he privileged for the postcard production, and which he preferred to discard. *Corroborees* ironically, were rated "less exotic" than *boras*, as they were also performed in the cities by touring Aboriginal groups (see Chapter Five). The second reason is to show the varying amount and quality of knowledge that the Wailwan

⁹¹ The so-called dendroglyphs feature clan designs or refer to local myths by encoding restricted knowledge. See *The Dendroglyphs or "Carved Trees" of New South Wales* published in 1918 by Robert Etheridge, the then director of the Australian Museum, Sydney.

decided to share with Kerry during the *corroborrees* and the *bora*. While the information relating to the *bora* is definitely scarce, the stories surrounding the various *corroborrees* are more detailed. “Drafting Sheep”, for example, was the opening dance that incorporated an aspect of stock work (Figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17 A photograph of the *corroborree* “Drafting Sheep” that took place on the Quambone camp and preceded the *bora*. Kerry described it extensively but did not use the motif for the postcard production. This photograph is no. 26 and appears in the album *Australian Aborigines* by Kerry & Co., Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/26 (AS/ML2)

According to Kerry this *corroborree* was to be understood as a compliment to Mr. Hill. To give a sense of the particularly detailed description I render here Kerry’s text:

A number of warriors appeared, wearing girdles around their waists, and with their bodies and limbs most gorgeously painted in various designs of red, blue and green. At a signal from the King all dropped on hands and knees – these were the sheep. Two took up an adjacent position with boomerangs in each hand held point to the ground – these were in charge of the drafting gates. A man, representing Mr. Hill, stood by to count, and attempts were then made to drive the sheep through. But these were evidently good, strong Quambone wethers, and not inclined to obey orders readily: they rushed and backed, and bleated, and kept ringing, and would go anywhere but through the gates, until in desperation a man was sent to bring “Billy” (a pet sheep used on Quambone) as a decoy. He

rushed to the mob, seized one by the head, and in spite of violent resistance on his part, and many attempts to butt his captor, dragged him through the gate. (We were assured that the original Billy, though well trained, did sometimes object to do his work, and required strong persuasion.) Following Billy came all the mob, the counter and drafters meanwhile doing their work most carefully. An announcement of the tally showing that some sheep were missing, the mob was re-counted through the gates, and the performance with variations was repeated until a correct tally was obtained. The gins then ceased their chant, the men assumed an erect position, and the scene was over. (Kerry 1898: 32)

This text reflects the degree of secrecy that revolved around the two different kinds of ceremony. The *corroboree* dances did not appear to be secret as they were performed out in the open, in front of the camp, and in the presence of the Aboriginal women, who played an important role because they sang and kept the rhythm by beating sticks together. Of course, because corroborees often had several levels of meaning, it could well be that the above description presents the ‘story for everybody’, while the deeper, secret meaning was not revealed by the initiated Aboriginal men. The third reason why I mention the *corroboree* pictures is that these show what not necessarily emerges from postcard series no. 49: the environment and conditions in which the Wailwan lived. Like other Aboriginal people, they were dispossessed of their land by pastoralists, but continued to live on its fringes. They were stock workers for much of the year, but also took part in lengthy ceremonies as their clan law dictated. The body of Kerry’s photographs taken in Quambone reveal that the *bora* images were preceded by thirteen photographs that show families living in humpies – small temporary shelters made from bark and tree branches – on the outskirts of a pastoral station. While Kerry dedicated a complete series to the *bora* series, he only ‘transformed’ three of the thirteen photographs taken at the camp in Quambone into postcards. Two postcards were integrated into series no. 4, “Aboriginal Life”, and one into series no. 5, “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins”, which I discuss in detail in the next chapter. In series no. 4 there is a postcard showing a group of ten Wailwan children – who would have been the last generation to speak Ngemba/Ngiyampaa as their first language. This postcard has the derogatory caption “Group of Piccaninnies” (Figure 4.18). Another postcard entitled “Group of Gins” shows a group of women with children sitting in front of their houses (Figure 4.19). The only camp postcard in series no. 5 is captioned “Aboriginal Mia Mia” (see Figure 4.22) and presents an Aboriginal family in front of its *goondies* or *miamias*

(shelters). Miller writes that in the Wailwan camp there were six *goondies* grouped in a rough circle, each built by a family group. They vary in detail, though mostly people slept on the ground with a fire made at the entrance of each *goondie* (Miller 1999: 18). Elements characterising all three postcards – the contextualisation of the Aboriginal people in their living environment, their front-on artless mode of posing, European clothing and the presence of European artefacts (stock work equipment and clothing, cattle dogs, saddles and boots) – suggest that the realistic photographic framework is encoded in this group of postcards (cf. Kolodny 1978). I agree with Peterson that these realistic images showing the low status of Aboriginal people living in shabby shanties – despite that they were employed in the pastoral economy – may have been, on the one hand, bolstering ideas of racial superiority implicit in the white Australia policy, and, on the other, eased white consciences concerning their presumed dying-out (cf. Peterson 1985: 179).



Figure 4.18 “Group of Piccaninnies”, collotype postcard of series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life” from the author’s collection (AS/PC3)

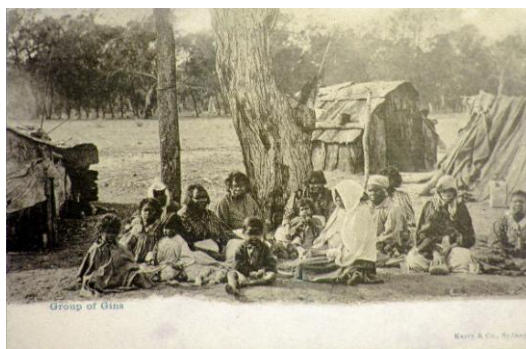


Figure 4.19 “Group of Gins”, collotype postcard of series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life” from the Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)

The images of the *corroborees* and of the *miamias* taken on the camp complete the ‘big picture’, only partially narrated by the more in a ‘romantic mode’ presented *bora* series. The Wailwan story becomes more ‘real’, as ceremonial life, rather than appearing as a remote activity of an ancient culture, reveals itself to be a persisting and strong expression of cultural identity in the face of colonial upheaval.

The Wailwan motifs in a visual economy

To show how the material forms and their narratives have been displaced and transformed over time, I will now address the circulation of Kerry’s studio postcard images. The black and white *bora* postcard series was produced during the ‘divided

back' period. To date, I have not come across a *bora* series from the 'undivided back' period, and Mr. Jonathan Dickson from the online antique gallery "Oceania Ethnographica" kindly informed me that postcards from that period probably do not exist (Dickson pers. comm. 2nd February 2008). If this series was never reproduced before 1905 – when the 'divided back' was introduced in Australia – we realise that there is a chronological gap between the date of taking the picture – 1898 – and the date of the postcard's production – 1905. During these seven years, however, the glass plates representing the events of Quambone were not left to rest in their wooden box. Kerry mounted and presented them to the Royal Society of N.S.W. (Kerry 1899: xxvii), and he was also presumably selling the prints for his studio. In December 1898 *The Town and Country Journal* published a paragraph on the *bora* ceremony accompanied by a Kerry photograph framed by a decorative drawing

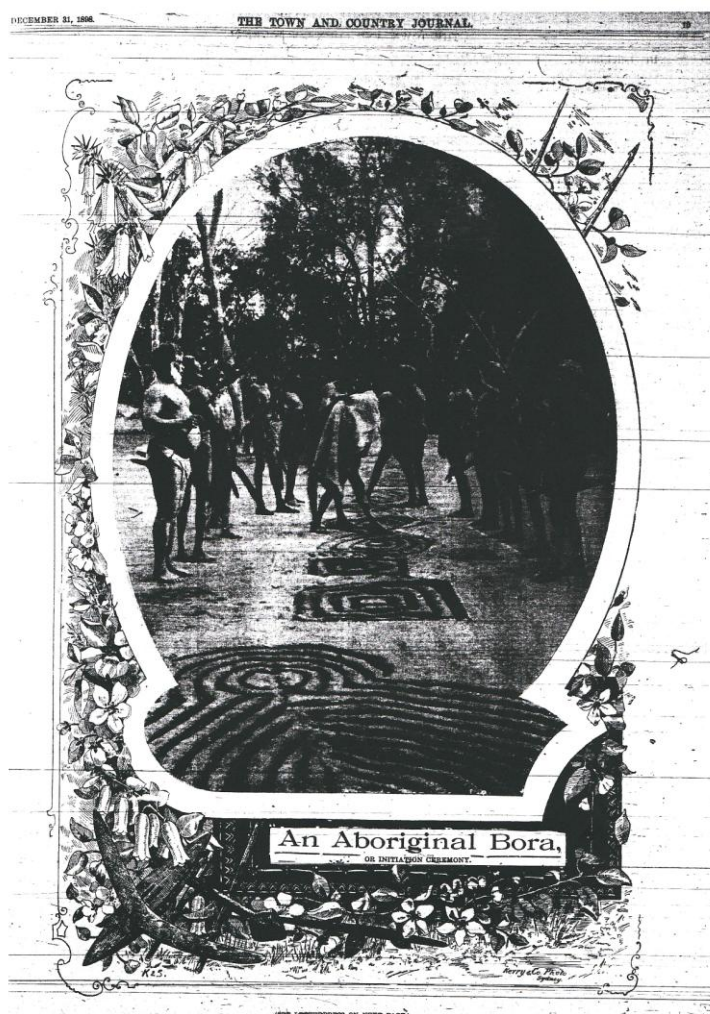


Figure 4.20 *Bora* motif appearing as an illustration in *The Town and Country Journal*, 31 December 1898

showing flowers and an Aboriginal insignia (Figure 4.20). The photograph based on the same motif used for postcard 7 was considered to be of "unique value, being from an actual photograph which, owing to exceptional circumstances, Mr. C. H. Kerry, the well-known photographer, of George-street, Sydney, was enabled to make" (Anon. 1898: 11).

The pre-circulation of the *bora* and *corroborree* motifs under different guises may have paved the

way for the postcard business. Indeed, when Kerry & Co. issued their series no. 49 in 1905, their customers, led by a sort of *déjà-vu* impulse, may have been more inclined to buy the *bora* postcards as souvenirs rather than other, “more or less exotic” subjects.

To give an idea of the “image world” – the social and discursive relations connecting image-makers and consumers (Poole 1997: 7) – constructed by Kerry & Co. through their postcards, I would like to focus on two identical postcards from the Metropolitan Museum collection captioned “Aboriginal Mia Mia”. One is blank and has not been postally used (Figure 4.21), the other carries a handwritten message that inspired the title to this chapter “Wishing you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. We are keeping fairly well and hope you are the same. Love from Hilda Banks” (Figure 4.22).

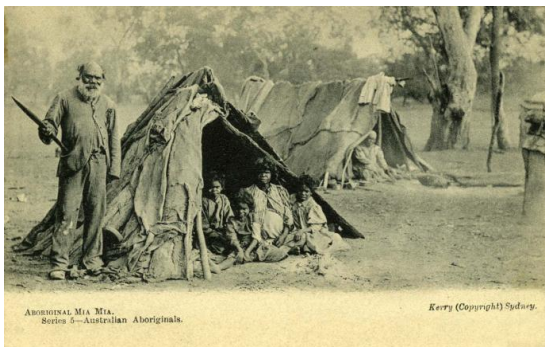


Figure 4.21 “Aboriginal Mia Mia”, collotype postcard of series no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins”, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: PSC 2006.76.672 (AS/PC2)

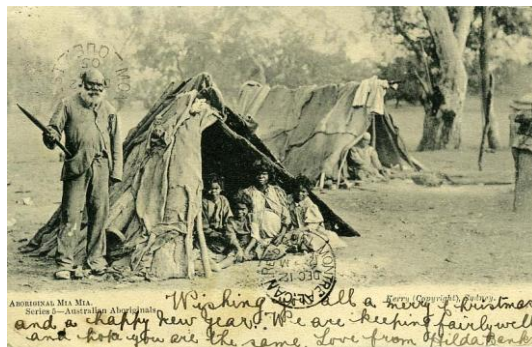


Figure 4.22 “Aboriginal Mia Mia”, collotype postcard of series no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” bearing the ‘scars’ of use and circulation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: PSC 2006.76.652 (AS/PC2)

The viewer of the blank postcard is absorbed by the motif and its content, generating thoughts about the living conditions of Aboriginal people in general, and the fate of the group depicted in this postcard, in specific. The other postcard followed a different trajectory and, as the ‘scars’ on its body reveal, constituted the crossroads for a variety of emotions and sentiments. As is often the case, the postcard subject may have influenced the choice of the object, but it played no role in the compilation of the message. The postmarks inform us that this postcard was sent from Sydney on 13th November 1905 and arrived in Montréal (Canada) one month later, on 12th December. Given the importance of the postcard as a new communication medium at the beginning of the twentieth century, we realise the atemporal quality of its information. Sending a postcard saying that everything is fine, that the trip went

smoothly and that somebody arrived safely at their destination, meant for the receiver that, one month ago, everything was fine. During the postcard's journey to its destination many things could have happened to the sender. For this reason I think that postcards distort diachronic connections. But the postmarks on the postcard "Aboriginal Mia Mia" not only inform us about spatial and temporal aspects of its social life. The position of the two arrival postmarks also has a strong visual impact on the image. It is difficult to say whether the position of these marks is the result of a random or of a calculated, deliberate act. Considering that the face of the Aboriginal man standing beside his *miamia* is at the centre of the area stamped, one could interpret the marking as a slight and a scornful act on the part of the person at the post office in Montréal. Although this may be just an over-reading of the actual circumstances, the visual impact of the postmark on the image is evident, and disturbing, and could also be interpreted as an act of violence towards the Wailwan people in particular, and the indigenous population of Australia in general.

After the issue of series no. 49, Kerry's Quambone images also continued to circulate in public in various material forms and through different channels. The popular book *Customs of the World*, published between 1912 and 1914 by Walter Hutchinson, showed in its encyclopaedic presentation of contemporary knowledge on 'world cultures' various illustrations based on Kerry's Quambone photographs. On the first page of the introduction, written by the influential British anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon, the image with Baiamai (Figure 4.23) appears, captioned

An initiation ceremony. The Bora ceremony of the aboriginal tribes of New South Wales is connected with a society whose members are pledged to secrecy. The penalty for any breach of its rules is death. (Haddon 1912: i)

The chapter on Australia, written by another anthropologist, Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955),⁹² shows even four of the *bora* photographs taken near Quambone by Kerry in 1898.

⁹² Radcliffe-Brown was the first professionally trained anthropologist to work with Aboriginal people in Australia, and eventually set up Australia's first anthropology department at the University of Sydney in 1929. This department, particularly under the later leadership of Adolphus P. Elkin (1891–1979), dominated Australian anthropology and Aboriginal studies for several decades, although there was also extensive research done in Adelaide by Theodor G. H. Strehlow (1908–1978) and in Melbourne by Donald Thomson (1901–1970) during this time. Radcliffe-Brown and Elkin later pushed the evolutionist perspective into the background by adopting what came to be known as functionalism. To gather information about contemporary Aboriginal societies, they began to undertake more intensive fieldwork studies that built up comprehensive accounts of individual

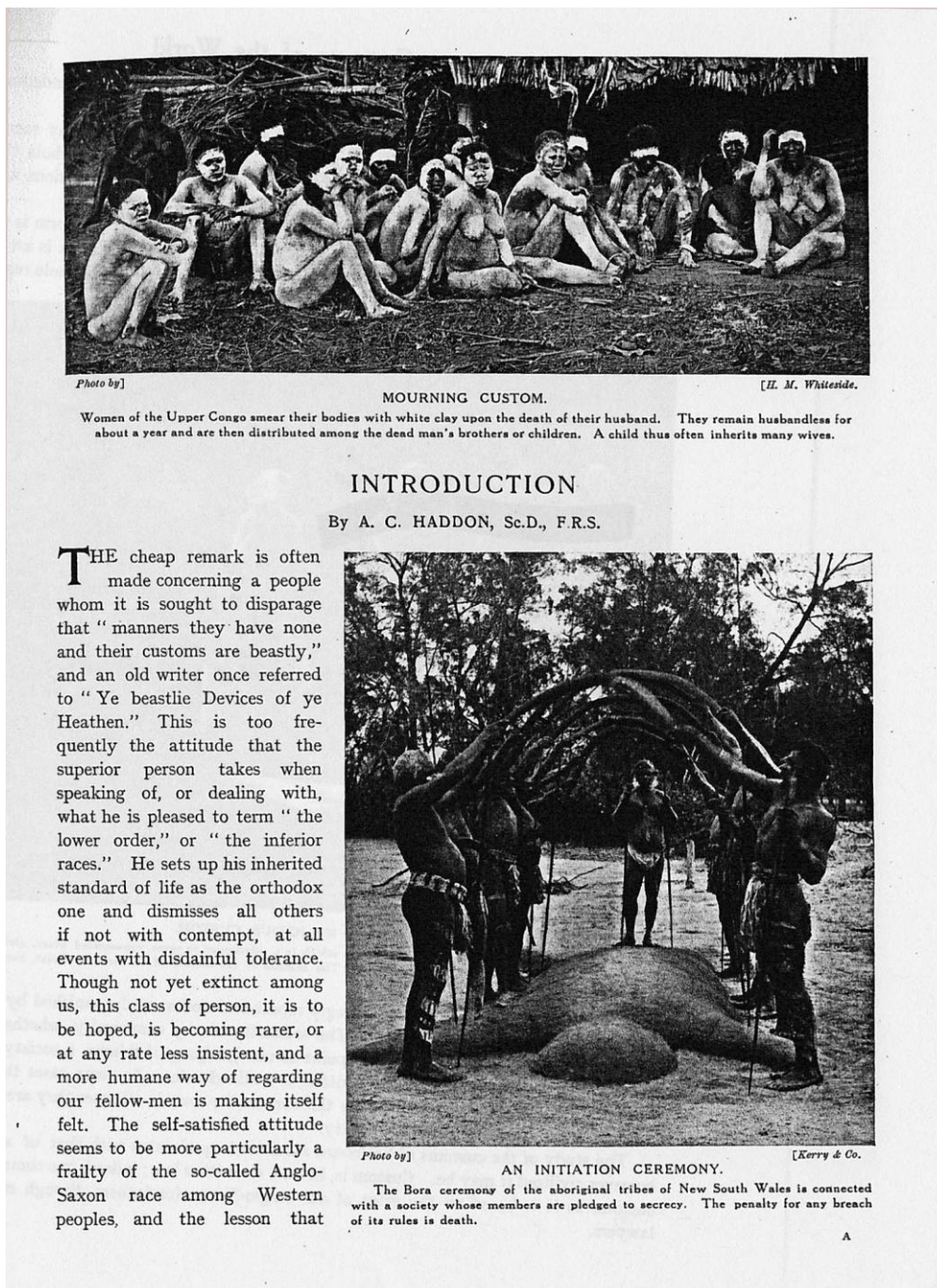


Figure 4.23 The motif with Baiamai illustrates the introduction by Alfred C. Haddon *Customs of the Worlds* edited by Walter Hutchinson (published 1912–1914)

A set of lantern slides held at the Pitt Rivers Museum revealed that Radcliffe-Brown had access to the entire collection of Kerry's Quambone motifs. Elizabeth Edwards has actually identified his handwriting on the catalogue list accompanying the slides,

societies. Based on his two-year fieldwork in Australia from 1910 to 1912, Radcliffe-Brown published *Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1931). This book applied his structural-functional paradigm to Australian kinship systems and analyzed the way it related to social organization (see Gaillard 2004: 135–137).

stating that he possibly used them to illustrate lectures on the social organisation of Australian Aboriginal groups (Edwards 2001: 50). The list is particularly interesting as it bears marks and signs emphasising the motifs that captured Radcliffe-Brown's attention (Figure 4.24).

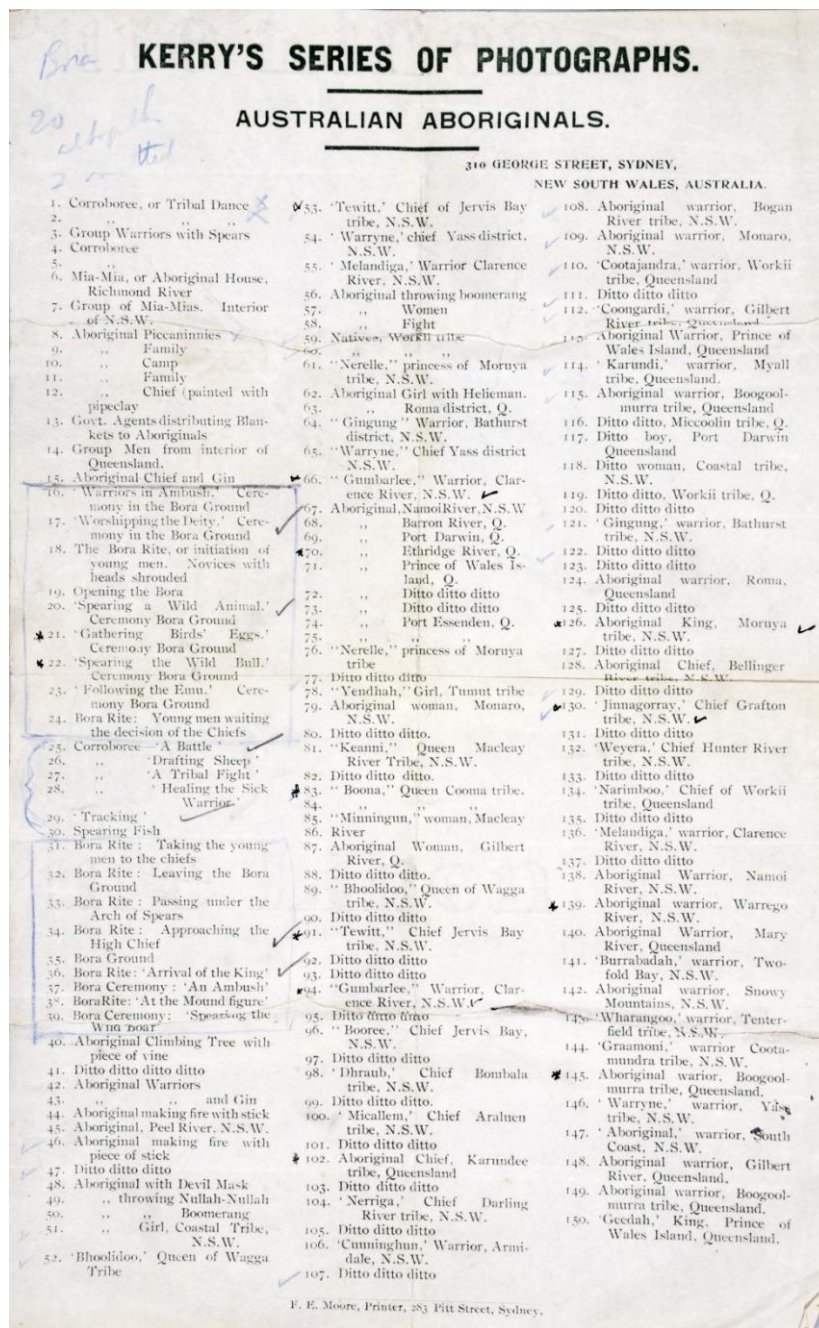


Figure 4.24 Catalogue list "Kerry's Series of Photographs. - Australian Aborigines." presenting the hundred and fifty motifs of the ML album *Australian Aborigines* (PX*D398; AS/ML2). With personal notes in black ink and blue pencil by Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown. List accompanying contact sheets. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (AS/PRM1)

The group of photographs showing the *bora* (16 to 24, and 31 to 39) and the *corroborree* (25 to 30) are indeed framed in blue pencil, and stand out from the catalogue. This list is also interesting because it is the same one as Kerry & Co. issued to accompany the hundred and fifty images presented in the ML album *Australian Aboriginals* (AS/ML2). The captions of the photographs in the album have been created by cutting out the respective number and title from the list and pasting it directly onto the album's pages under the respective photograph (Figure 4.25).

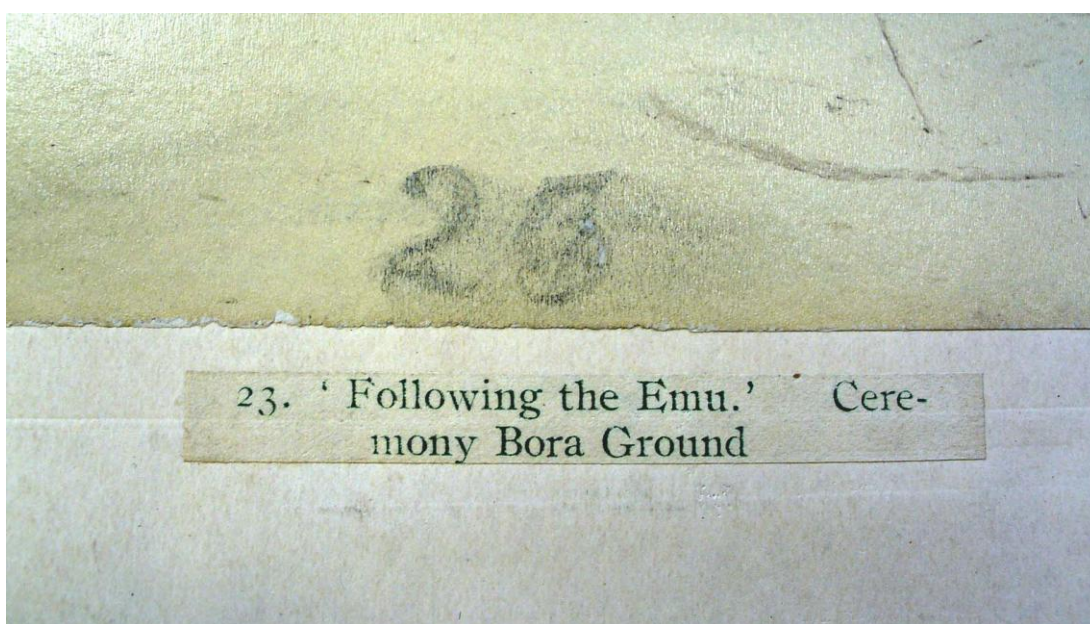


Figure 4.25 Example showing a caption in the album *Australian Aboriginals* created by cutting out the respective text from the catalogue list. Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398 (AS/ML2)

Because of the physical and cultural distance between settled and remote outback Australia, anthropologists and others continued until the late 1970s to publish photographs of restricted Aboriginal religious activity, with little thought of possible Aboriginal concerns about publication. After Kerry's death, for example, the Sydney bookseller, James R. Tyrrell, who bought Kerry & Co.'s glass plate collection in 1929, reprinted a group of *bora* and *corroborree* photographs in sepia, using rotogravure and repackaging it as "Australian Aboriginal Ceremonies", though without specifying the people's provenance (Figure 4.26). It is interesting to note that while Kerry's series do not bear any form of numeration, Tyrrell retained Kerry's original numbering system for his sepia-toned postcard series.



Figure 4.26 Set of nine sepia rotogravure postcards based on Kerry's *bora* ceremony photographs taken in 1898. These postcards were produced in the 1930s by the Sydney bookseller James R. Tyrrell who repackaged them as "Australian Aboriginal Ceremonies". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession numbers: PSC 2006.76.641–649 (AS/PC2)

In anthropological circles, the practice of reproducing photographs of restricted ceremonies seemed unproblematic, especially because the vast majority of images were published in academic journals or ethnographies, and this material was difficult to obtain. One example is Ronald Berndt who, in 1974, reproduced fifteen of Kerry's Wailwan photographs in his book *Australian Aboriginal Religion* having only "the vaguest idea of the location" (Stephen 2000: 252). There was also a great social, cultural and spatial distance between the Aboriginal people of the outback where the images were taken and the regions of settled Australia where the images circulated. These images rarely found their way back to the communities in which their viewing could cause concern. Whether the *bora* postcards ever found their way to the Quambone population is not known. Since the 1970s the situation has changed dramatically, and we can see the emergence of a public concern with image ethics in relation to photography involving indigenous people and their culture in Australia.

In the 1980s, the Powerhouse Museum initiated a project of consultation with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the Wailwan region, coordinated by curator Ann Stephen (Bolton 2003, Miller 1999, Stephen 2000). The aim of this project was to produce more than just a representation of a historical record of Aboriginal cultural practice, but to show how people may recover and reclaim their history and cultural heritage (Miller, S. 1999: 5). To locate the descendants, the Powerhouse Museum employed Joe Flick, a Yuwaalaraay man whose land borders on Wailwan country. He described the process:

When I was taking the photos out and showing them to some Aboriginal people they were just so surprised that anything like that happened in their country... Charles Kerry probably wasn't sure what he was seeing when he was looking through the lens yet through the power of the photographs and through the spirit of the Wailwan people they return to show us what their country meant to them. (Flick in Stephen 2000: 252–253)

Through consultation with the Aboriginal community two people could be identified in Kerry's photos. One is Steve Shaw, an elder identified by Brad Steadman from the Brewarrina Aboriginal Cultural Mission. The other identified person is 'Billie, King of the Macquarie', known only by the colonial title on his breastplate. He would have played a leading role in the ceremonial life of his community (Figure 4.27).

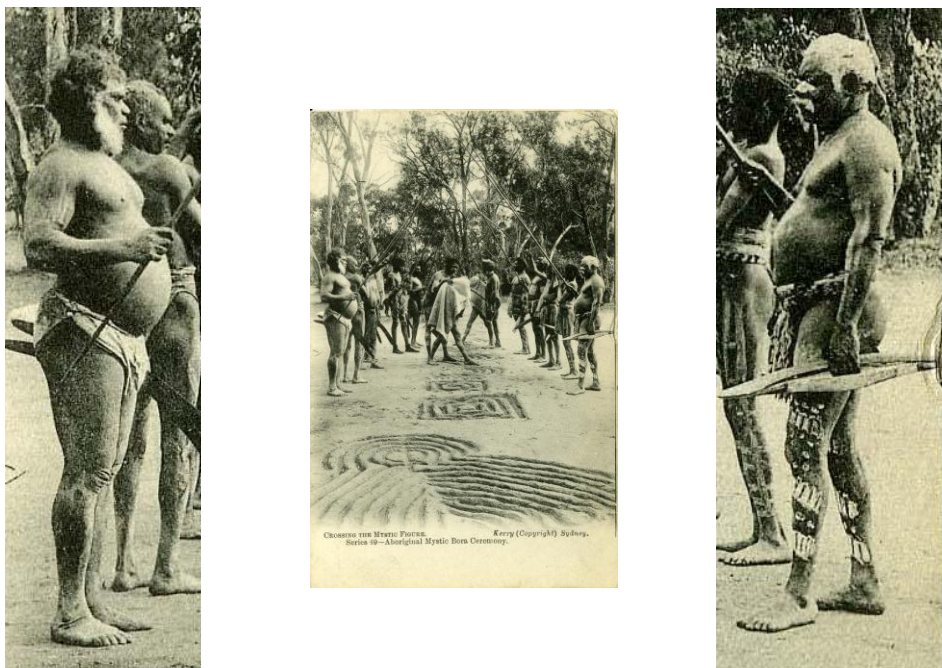


Figure 4.27 During the consultation project initiated by the Powerhouse Museum two Aboriginal men could be identified: King Billie of the Macquarie (left) and Steve Shaw (right) – depicted here on a collotype postcard of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: PSC 2006.76.674 (AS/PC2)

One of the descendants, Merle Latham (née Carney), born at Gulargambone in 1916, was proud that her people had exercised such control and had not compromised their sacred knowledge. Other elders, who had known of the ceremonial ground as children, felt that the access they had given Kerry should be respected. No descendant showed any desire to censor or withdraw the photos from general viewing. They agreed to their inclusion in an exhibition, their only request being that the subjects on the photos be recognised as Wailwan (Miller 1999: 7). The focus of the exhibition that comprised six graphic panels were the photos of Wailwan people taken by Kerry in 1898. As a legacy of the photographic encounter that took place on Wailwan land, the exhibition panels are now permanently exhibited in the library of the Quambone primary school (Figure 4.28 and 4.29).



Figure 4.28 The library of the Quambone primary school (November 2007)



Figure 4.29 The six exhibition's panels featuring Kerry's photographs of the *bora*, the *corroboree* and the camp life taken in June 1898 are still displayed in the Quambone primary school's library (November 2007)

Conclusion

The application of microhistorical methods along with their anthropological/ethnographical approaches, resulted in a “thick” description of the Quambone event. Defined as “a disjuncture between successive states of a system, so that the world before and after it is in some sense different” (Pachter 1974, see Harkin 1988), an event is the space where various agencies are performed at work. Those identified through the narrative reconstruction of the historical encounter and those at work during the following decades of the imagery circulation are the following:

a) the European agencies materialised directly through Kerry's photographic work commissioned by the N.S.W. Government, and indirectly through the journalistic advertisements and reports in the daily press; additionally Kerry and Hill actively participated in the *corroborees* for reasons of public and thematic inspiration respectively.

b) the male and female Aboriginal agencies emerged from both the performative attitude during the ceremonial dances (including the theatrical representation of European agencies in *corroborees*) and the strict social control imposed on Kerry, and from the more passive attitude presented in the realist encoded imagery of the Quambone camp;

c) the agency of the land, especially of the *bora* ground incised with representational designs, considerably influenced Kerry's postcard imagery of series no. 49. Kerry realised that through the process of 'inscription' on the landscape, the Wailwan invested place with layers of associative meanings. Despite not understanding these meanings, he became 'enchanted' by the visual result of the incision process. Kerry's sense of awe evoked by the *bora* ground may be compared to what Gell identifies as the "halo-effect" (1992) and Benjamin would connote as the "aura" (Benjamin: 1969[1936]);

d) present European and Aboriginal agencies were at work during the encompassing process of production, circulation and consumption of the postcard motifs, and are still active in the negotiation of the imagery's preservation and access.

So, what can we learn about the nature of Kerry's Aboriginal postcard's imagery and of postcard imagery in general by taking a close-grained look at one particular event such as the Quambone one? Or, in Edward Muir's words, "what can the few tell about the many, especially when the process of selection is neither random nor statistically rigorous?" (Muir cited in Blee 2008: 51).

First, by creating a postcard series based exclusively on the *bora* and not including camp motifs, Kerry compartmented the representation of Quambone's Wailwan people, quasi if the 'two worlds' he visually created could in reality not be complementary. The title "Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony" and the imagery suggest a romantic reading of series no. 49, which, according to Kolodny, was and is the dominant framework in photography of anthropological subjects. Presenting de- and re-contextualised people in their traditional attire or naked in the absence of European artefacts, hence transforming them into aesthetic phenomena, was a strategy that allowed to resolve contradictory feelings about other cultures (Kolodny in Peterson 1985: 165). On the other hand, the camp postcards appear rather to belong to a realistic mode of representation, that, as we have seen, was the

predominant framework encoded in Aboriginal postcards (Peterson 1985: 179). Despite that the ‘romantic’ and the ‘realistic’ modes seem to characterise the analytical interpretation of Kerry’s Quambone’s imagery, this frameworks should not be categorically applied to one or the other set of postcards. A postcard’s imagery presenting notions of the exotic through an artistically posed person in traditional attire performing on a beautifully carved ground, would spontaneously be encoded in the ‘romantic mode’; the same imagery, however, can also be encoded in a ‘realistic mode’ if the European boots worn by a *bora* performer become the *punctum*⁹³ of the image.

Secondly, there is a temporal tension on the macro-level characterised, in one case created by Kerry, and in the other by agents external to the Quambone event. The time lag between the creation of the motifs in Quambone in 1898 and the postcards’ production in 1905 was managed by Kerry; the continuous reproduction and dissemination of the *bora* motifs under different guises was, on the contrary, a process that escaped Kerry’s control, but that made his imagery move across the most disparate visual regimes (cf. Kopytoff 1986, Poole 1997).

Thirdly, in its broadest macro implications the close study of this micro event might lead us to move beyond regional or even national boundaries for the interpretation of the metaphoric connections of landscape to bodies in colonial discourses. In the same way that indigenous people were distanced and decontextualised, also places, for instance sacred sites, inevitably became to some degree delocalized when pulled out of their original meaningful context.

In the next chapter, I move on to the other two series produced in 1905 and dedicated entirely to the representation of Aboriginal people. Differently constructed and based mostly on studio photographs, these series suggested an analysis focused on the material transformations of the individual postcards’ motifs. I demonstrate how the consideration of material aspects can reveal hidden knowledge that relates to the identity of the people depicted.

⁹³ According to Barthes photographs arrest attention when they encompass a duality of elements: the general enthusiasm for images, the *studium*, and the *punctum*, a detail that arrests our attention and changes our reading of a photograph (Barthes 1984_a).

CHAPTER FIVE

“Sexy and Dangerous”⁹⁴

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the Kerry & Co. series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life” and no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” whose motifs gained iconic value through their wide circulation as postcard pictures. In the first part I situate the two series within Kerry’s Aboriginal postcard production before turning to the discussion of the motifs, the compilation and the captions. It is not my aim to state which of the three photographic frameworks distinguished by Kolodny (1978) – romanticism, realism, and the documentary – is encoded in the single postcards. Rather, I will consider the whole corpus of twenty-four motifs in order to assess Kerry’s ideological orientation in his construction of Aboriginality. To obtain insight into the compilation processes including the choice of the motifs and the actual arrangement of the series as presented in the postcard sample book, I have adopted a material approach that takes into consideration clues to various agencies at work. The analysis of the captions takes into consideration aspects of Clive Scott’s work *The Spoken Image* (1999), and discusses the development of the motif’s titles from the original negative to the postcard’s caption.

The second part of this chapter, ‘A catalogue of Aborigines’, is an attempt to trace the socio-cultural frames of the various photographic encounters in which the nameless postcard people ‘performed’. The aim is to excavate the indigenous identities and the agencies resulting from such encounters by applying the concept of “contact zones” coined by Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 1992), and later borrowed by James Clifford for his critique of museum practice (1997). Pratt used the term

⁹⁴ The inspiration for this title came from Brook Andrew’s work based on the transformation of one of the Kerry & Co. postcards discussed at the end of this chapter.

contact zones to refer to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism” (Pratt 1991: 33).

It is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term “contact” I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (Pratt cited in Clifford 1997: 192)

This concept of a contact zone is set in opposition to the model of the frontier, which is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is such only with respect to Europe).⁹⁵ Clifford used the contact metaphor to describe the museum as a place “constructed through reciprocal movements of people, not just of objects, messages, commodities, and money” (Clifford 1997: 194–195). His goal was to draw attention to the museum as a social and political space of ongoing relations between coloniser and colonised, a site where geographically and historically separated people came into contact with each other (Clifford 1997: 192).⁹⁶ “Contact” was in Clifford’s use not a synonym for touch, but a metaphor that interrogated the idea of equal exchange. In many senses it substituted the term “conflict”, and, when explaining why particular exhibitions became controversial, he argued that museums could become “an inescapable contact (conflict) zone” (Clifford 19: 207).

The understanding of ‘primitive’ people in ‘civilised’ places through coerced performances of identity characterised the long history of ‘exotic’ displays in the West which in turn provides a context of enduring power imbalance within and against which the contact work of travel, exhibition, and interpretation occurs. This aspect has been studied by scholars such as, for example, Rydell (1984), Bradford and Blume (1992), Corbey 1993, or Fusco (1995). The spectacularisation of

⁹⁵ In the mode of the frontier, the museum is seen as a centre of accumulation from the peripheries of the empire and as a centre of controlling the process of making meaning. From a ‘contact zone’ perspective, however, museums become “an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull” (Clifford 1997: 192).

⁹⁶ According to Feldman, however, much of the initial intent behind the idea that museums are not static containers of objects, but arenas of social encounter, has been replaced by a more general conception that museums are places about people and not things (Feldman 2006: 253–254).

‘natives’, dumb, exoticized ‘specimens’ for curious crowds, belongs to a quite extensive and continuous history of exhibitionary contacts. Characterised by racism or sometimes by paternalism, these spectacles caused a physical and moral degradation of the indigenous actors, who in some cases even died on a tour. “Exhibitions were contact zones where germs made their own connections.” (Clifford 1997: 197–198)

Exploring the history of a group of Aboriginal people depicted in series no. 4 and no. 5 who experienced such an exhibitionary contact, I consider Clifford’s affirmation that an emphasis on coercion and exploitation would not exhaust the complexities of travel and encounter. According to him, even strong ethnocentric encounters have the potential to produce reflection and cultural critique (Clifford 1997: 198). For this reason, in my analysis of Kerry’s Aboriginal postcards, I will try to identify the agency of the ‘exotic performers’. This is obviously not an easy task because the evidence is inevitably fragmentary,⁹⁷ and because of “a tendency to accord such travellers behaviour rather than independent expression” (Clifford 1997: 198). Despite that they were generally treated as passive specimens, hence not interviewed and their views seldom recorded, I will try to infer from the analysis of historical documents and visual material aspects about their active contribution and expression.

While helpful in understanding certain broad elements of colonial experience, all too often this social conception of “contact” in critical theory results in the unfortunate displacement of the sensory experience of contact, the actual feel, smell, and sound of colonialism. Theories of museums that pick up this use of contact as a heuristic tool for social interaction, thus, risk dampening the deeply embedded experience of the body in colonialism. I found it particularly interesting how Feldman considers the distinction between contact “zones” and contact “points” as a strategy for relocating the sensory within anthropological theories of colonialism. (Feldman 2006: 246). “Contact points, thus, are the sensual products of unequal encounters that materialise in the contact zone, ranging in durability from the most

⁹⁷ An exception is the story told by the Oglala Sioux Black of his trip with Buffalo Bill’s *Wild West Show* (Black Elk, 1979[1932]). Black Elk’s memories of his visit to Chicago, New York, London, and Paris provide a criticism of the Western society from a native viewpoint (Black Elk 1979[1932], DeMallie 1984). See also the account by Bradford and Blume (1992) of Ota Benga, a pygmy who was exhibited at the St. Louis World’s Fair, or the diary of an Inuit who travelled to Germany (Tylor, 1981).

fleeting sensation of sound or touch to the most durable products of colonial labour in stone or steel.” (Feldman 2006: 246–247)

The Aboriginal postcards series

Of all Kerry & Co. postcard series identified to date, six are devoted completely to Aboriginal people (no. 4, no. 5, no. 49, no. 97, no. 98 and an unnumbered coloured series), and one features three portraits of Aboriginal people as part of the general ‘Australian picture’ (series no. 29). In addition, many Aboriginal subjects were already used for the early unnumbered postcard series issued during the ‘undivided back’ period before 1905. Thanks to the postcard sample book, Kerry’s *Australian Post Cards* (AS/PHM2) presented in Chapter Three, we have a detailed overview of series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life”, no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” and, as shown in the previous chapter, also of series no. 49 “Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony”. Despite the apparent variety of Aboriginal motifs, the subjects presented in series no. 4 and no. 5 were already used for the ‘undivided back’ cards, and were also chosen to illustrate – with minor or major changes – series no. 97, no. 98 and the unnumbered coloured series. For this reason I will explore in this section the twenty-four motifs as representative for the whole of Kerry & Co.’s body of Aboriginal postcards.

Series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life” and no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” appear next to each other on the back of the first album page of the first album page (Figure 5.1), the former represented by a photograph of four Aboriginal men staring at the camera



(Figure 5.2), the latter by a portrait of a sitting man wearing a headdress and with a painted body (Figure 5.3). While the caption of the postcards of series no. 5 were adapted to the new layout

Figure 5.1 Series no. 4 (right) and no. 5 (centre) appear on the same page of the postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

with series' numbering and title introduced in 1905 by the company, the captions in series no. 4 are still those used during the 'undivided back' period for the unnumbered series. Because I did not come across postcards in this series featuring a combination of an old caption with a new divided back, I assume that series no. 4 was created by simply recycling a group of postcards previously produced, while for series no. 5 the captions and the layout were changed. The 'old fashioned' postcards of series no. 4 were mostly bought in 1905 and sent immediately afterwards. Yet 'undivided back' postcards of this kind were still accepted a few years after the introduction of the divided back, as some examples posted in 1908 show.



Figure 5.2 "Series No. 4 – Aboriginal Life". Postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)



Figure 5.3 “Series No. 5 – Aboriginal Warriors & Gins”. Postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

The motifs

If we now look at the motifs chosen for series no. 4 and no. 5 we realise that both compilations have a similar visual impact on the viewer. Both series actually present various studio portraits and outdoor scenes, the first mostly in vertical, the second in horizontal format. We also observe a similar distribution – the vertical motifs in the upper part, and the horizontal motifs in the lower part. Of course, this kind of series’ overviews was seen almost exclusively by Kerry & Co.’s customers interested in ordering hundreds of postcards to sell through their own business. However, it would be wrong to believe that most viewers saw only one motif at a time and had no simultaneous access to the whole series. Postcards belonging to a series were presented in shops as a group, and not few collectors bought the packet of twelve postcards to either keep as a collectible or to send singularly or in bunches to another collector or a family member (see example discussed in Chapter Seven). In any case, we may assume that few buyers and recipients of Kerry’s postcards saw the early Aboriginal series as presented in the postcard sample book. More than the series as a

composite object it was the single postcards with their subjects that attracted the attention of the viewer. In order to simplify the reference to the subjects of series no. 4 and no. 5 during my discussion, I decided, as I did in Chapter Four, to number the miniatures in Figure 5.4. Among the subjects of series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life” there are seven studio portraits (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9) and five outdoor scenes (1, 8, 10, 11 and 12) (Figure 5.4a) by means of which Charles Kerry decided to represent Aboriginal people and their life. To avoid repetition and to enhance the effect of dynamism, Kerry chose various types of studio portraits. There is a full-length view of a man ready to throw a boomerang (3), and one of a man wearing a mask and sitting with his arms crossed on the knees (2); there is a three-quarters portrait of a bare-breasted young woman partially covered by the Australian bush flower *waratah*⁹⁸ (4); for three postcards a half-length portrait was chosen – of a group of four young men (5), of a man with a boomerang seen from the back (7), and of a man displaying white paintings on his chest and face (9). The close-up presented on postcard 6 and partially framed by a floral composition, was originally also a half-length portrait, which had subsequently been cropped in order to be used for the postcard’s motif. The outdoor motifs present a man climbing a tree (1), two ‘fighting scenes’ (8 and 12), a group of women with children sitting in front of their dwellings (10) and a group of children (11). As the title indicates, series no. 4 presents various aspects of “Aboriginal Life”. According to Kerry’s compilation, the Aboriginal men seemed to have been the more active members of the Aboriginal community. Depicted as athletic climbers and boomerang throwers for food supply, as actors in religious ceremonies, as fighters, and, as the caption of postcard 5 suggests, as trackers, the Aboriginal men presented in this series were the movers in Aboriginal society. Women instead are depicted as passive members whose importance seems to lie in their ‘ornamental’ function, first (4 and 6), and in their role as household managers, next (10).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The *waratah* (*Telopea speciosissima*) is a species of large shrubs or small trees of the Proteaceae family native to the south-eastern parts of Australia (New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania). Its name comes from the Eora Aboriginal people who once inhabited the Sydney area. The *waratah* is the floral emblem of New South Wales and is protected by law.

⁹⁹ In her study ‘Handling Sex’, which focuses on the role of photographs in stereotypical images of women, Janice Winship has explored the contrasting way in which men’s and women’s hands have been photographed in advertisements (Winship 1987_a). Similar to what I observed for the Aboriginal postcards above, Winship concludes that men’s hand are usually photographed as active and controlling, while female hands are invariably represented as decorative and caressing.

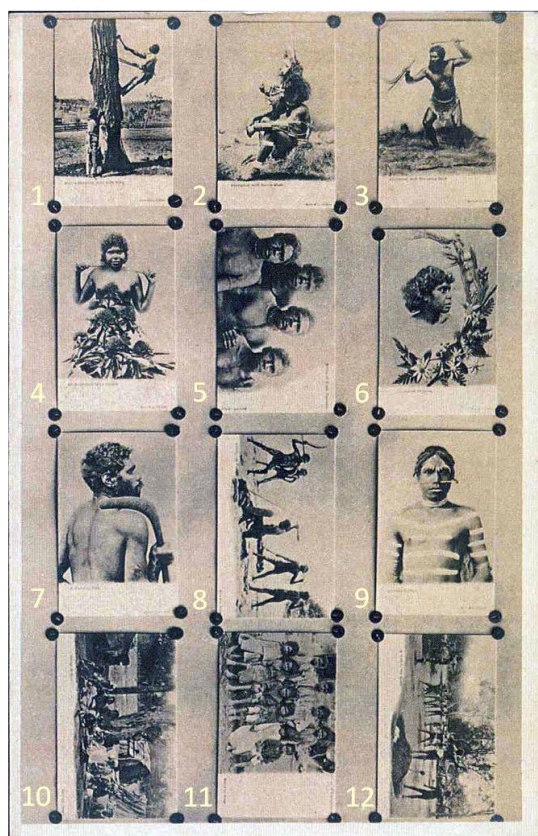


Figure 5.4a



Figure 5.4b

Figure 5.4 Postcard miniatures numbered by author. Series no. 4 (left), series no. 5 (right). Postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

If we look at the miniatures of series no. 5 we notice that the range of motifs is very similar to the one of series no. 4 (Figure 5.4b). Although the title “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” suggests that the series is made up of only two dominant motifs, the twelve subjects are as varied as in series no. 4. Among the eight photographs taken in the studio there are two full-length views of men with boomerangs (8 and 9), a group portrait of three men ceremonially painted (3), a three-quarters portrait of a man wearing a headdress and ceremonial attire (2), three bust portraits taken from different angles (1, 5, 6) as well as a close-up of a woman adorned with a *waratah* (4). Among the outdoor subjects there are two featuring a group of Aboriginal people – presumably a family – in front of their dwellings (10 and 11), and two others showing scenes of a ritual (7 and 12). It becomes evident that the title “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” is not appropriate for this set of motifs and diminishes its scope, considering the number of aspects represented on the twelve images. Charles Kerry’s knowledge of Aboriginal culture was certainly not so poor as to define these men as ‘warriors’ and the women as ‘gins’ – again a dynamic label for men versus a static

tag for women. He was possibly looking for a generic description that was marketable, but at the same time different from the one used for series no. 4. More than the single motifs it is the series' titles and the captions – to which I shall return further below – that confer the composition an individual character.

What was anticipated in Chapter Four – that the romantic and the realistic photographic frameworks (cf. Kolodny 1978) are encoded in Kerry's Aboriginal postcard imagery – becomes even more apparent in the overviews of series no. 4 and no. 5. In both series the interpretation of the motifs seems to constantly oscillate between the romantic and realistic modes of representation. In fact, while in the first mode the result is a decontextualisation of the subjects through the blank backgrounds or its recontextualisation through a bush setting, the second mode reveals a contextualisation of the subject in his/her contemporary living situation. However, despite the presence of these two representational ways I would argue that Kerry's Aboriginal postcard imagery is predominantly framed by the romantic ideology as defined above. The fact that even those 'realistic' images featuring Aboriginal people in an artistically considered, rare front-on posing – characteristic of a romantic ideology – shows the limits of such a strict categorisation. Indeed, while it may be possible to distinguish these models analytically, we are confronted with practical issues when an image can be encoded in more than one ideological model (cf. Edwards 1992_b: 9).

The compilation

From the twenty-four images featured in series no. 4 and series no. 5, seventeen are identical with the ones shown in Kerry & Co.'s album *Australian Aboriginals* (AS/ML2) as 41 cm × 28 cm albumen prints (Figure 5.5), and also with some appearing on prospectus sheets as miniatures (Figure 5.6). This correspondence and the fact that there are three other postcards featuring slightly different motifs, leads me to the conclusion that we are dealing here with three material variations of a single body of photographs. While all three groups – the postcard series, the album photographs and the prospectus sheets – exist in form of albumen prints, the postcard series and the prospectus sheets also introduce a second level of materiality. They are indeed photographs of images.

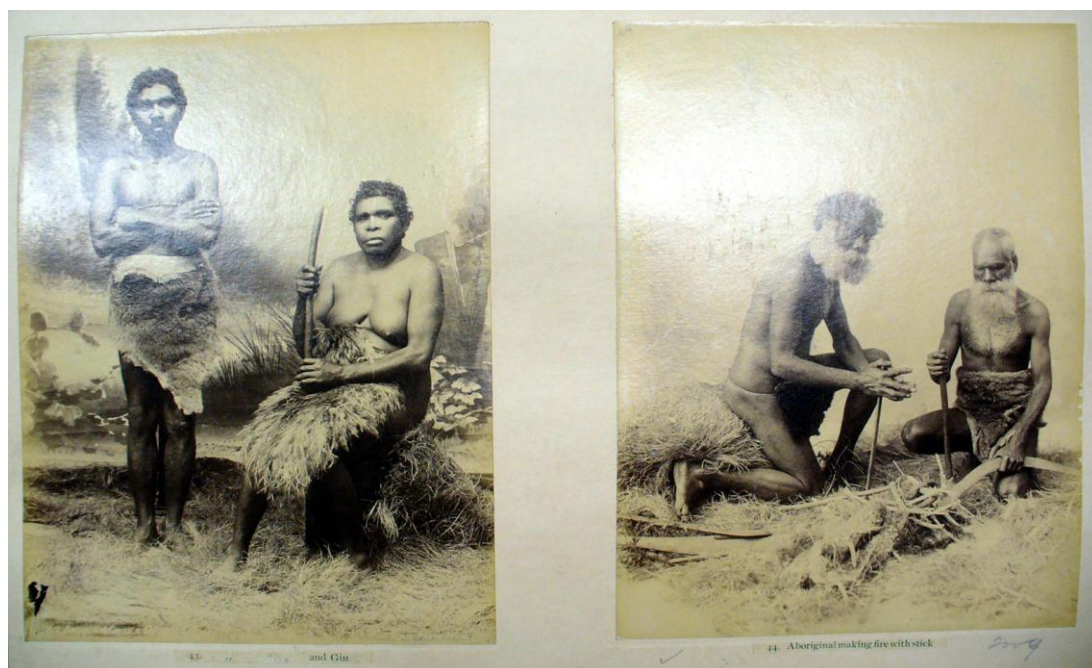


Figure 5.5 Two albumen prints in the album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/43–44 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.6 One of the ten Kerry & Co. prospectus sheets, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, accession number: 1998.249.3.1 (AS/PRM2)

In the case of the prospectus sheets, we have fifteen albumen prints pinned to a board together with the informative label “Kerry’s Studios, 310 George Street, Near Hunter Street, Sydney”, revealing that the composition was created after 1898 at the new Kerry & Co. premises (Figure 5.7a). The album *Australian Aboriginals* was, however, prepared in 1898. Indeed, the Wailwan images are already included but the embossed stamp always features the old address “308 George Street” (Figure 5.7b).

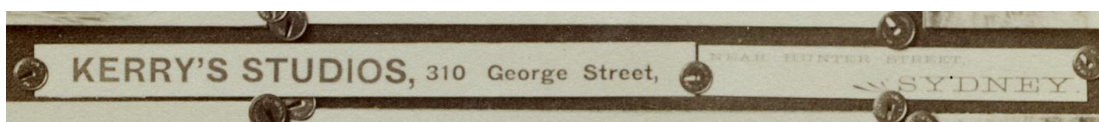


Figure 5.7a



Figure 5.7b

Figure 5.7 a) Detail of contact sheets, “Kerry’s Studios, 310 George Street.” Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, accession number: PRM 1998.249.3.1 (AS/PRM2); **b)** Detail of photo no. 1 in album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/1 (AS/ML2)

In the case of the albumen prints showing the postcard series we have twelve mechanically produced postcards pinned to a board together with the series’ title. If we look carefully at these photographs of compositions, we see, however, that the miniatures are actually not pinned or stapled to the board. The thumbtacks have been positioned a few centimetres away from the postcards’ or photographs’ corner, so that they fix the object without piercing it with their points. A detailed analysis of how the series were assembled for photography shows that the postcards of series no. 4 have been fixed with four thumbtacks, while those of series no. 5 ‘share’ two

thumbtacks with their respective neighbour (cf. Figure 5.4). This detail may well be insignificant but, on the other side, could also suggest that the fifty series of the postcard sample book were assembled and prepared by more than one person. As we saw from the negative registers, Charles Kerry actively participated in the practical work at the firm, recording the first entries into the register himself. After a few pages, however, the handwriting changes, which suggests that Kerry delegated the job to another person. The same process may have also occurred during the compilation of the postcard sample book. After having chosen the motifs and arranged the single postcards of the first four series (four thumbtacks per postcard), he later may have been assisted by one of his employees before delegating the task to him or her completely. Indeed, the ten subsequent compilations (series. no. 5 to series no. 14) show two different and intercalating ‘styles’, which could be the result of two people working simultaneously on the compilations. Of these ten compilations five are realised by using four thumbtacks per postcard and five by using two thumbtacks between two postcards. From series no. 15 up to no. 50 the ‘two-thumbtack style’ dominates, having only one series (no. 37 “Natural Color”) compiled in the ‘old style’. This kind of hypothesis may sound rather speculative. Nevertheless, these apparently irrelevant material traces of a photographic object can provide fascinating insights into the processes of creation and consumption in which images or postcards were involved.

Of considerable importance for the analysis of the creation process are certainly the hundred and fifty numbered images presented by Charles Kerry as albumen prints in the ML album (AS/ML2) and as miniatures on the prospectus sheets. They are useful because they both feature the same or similar motifs used in all Aboriginal postcard series, along with those motifs that were not chosen by Kerry for postcard production. While Kerry selected for the postcard series differently constructed images to create a balance between bust portraits, group photographs and outdoor views, the collection of the hundred and fifty photographs reveal that the dominant photographic type in this corpus is the bust portrait. Among the hundred and fifty images, eighty-four are indeed bust portraits, twenty-seven half-length and full-length portraits, while thirty-nine are outdoor views.

The captions

Walter Benjamin has suggested that without captions “all photographic construction must remain bound in coincidences” and saw them as the sine qua non of future photography: “Will not captions become the essential component of pictures?” (Benjamin 1980[1931]: 215). In his ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ he wrote:

For the first time, captions have become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting. The directives which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones. (Benjamin 1969[1936]: 226)

For Benjamin, text, is therefore essential for understanding the content and the message of photographs, an opinion shared also by Sontag, who stated that, independently of how easily understandable a given image is, a caption will eventually “be needed” to help read the image (Sontag 2003: 29).¹⁰⁰ I became particularly aware of the authority of the caption when I was showing copies of Kerry’s postcards and of the original photographs in Australia, Hawai‘i and Samoa. Almost without exception, my interlocutors wanted to read the captions and the titles first, in order to ‘understand’ how the image should be read.

The distinguishing characteristic of a caption is that it is already a step away from the image towards its assimilation by, and interpretation through, language. While a title does not belong to discourse, and is, according to Clive Scott, no more than an identifying tag, the caption is spoken; it is an intervention, a response forestalling the response of the viewer (Scott 1999: 51–52). Entitling and encaptioning exercise authority and power on the viewer; for this reason they are a delicate matter. In fact, both the reception of a photograph and the nature of the photograph’s survival depend on the title or caption assigned to it (Scott 1999: 74). Language is therefore called upon to explain, justify, give shape to the viewer’s attention, and alone it can even confer intention to a photograph (Scott 1999: 35).

As often is the case, the captions printed on the white border under the postcard’s image, rarely reveal details about the actual identity of the person

¹⁰⁰ Roland Barthes also wrote about the significance of the caption in his book on the semiotics of fashion, *Système de la Mode* (1983).

depicted. On the contrary, market labels such as “Aboriginal Gin” or “A Warrior” first neutralise a person’s identity through the cancellation of his or her name and then recreate a ‘subject’ abstracted from the flow of history and disconnected from any social and relational network. Kerry & Co. also adopted this practice, as the Aboriginal series clearly go to show. Extreme abuse of a person’s identity occurs

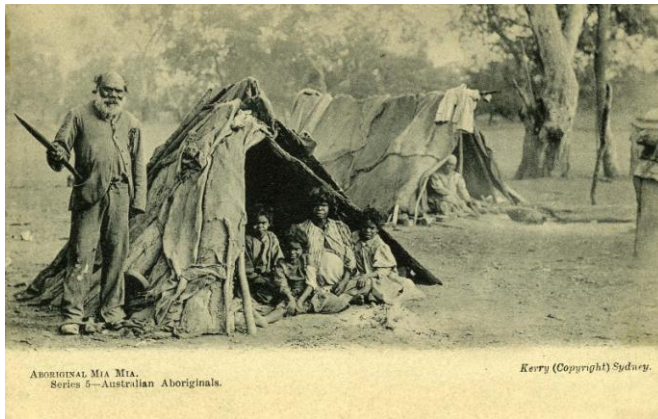


Figure 5.8 “Aboriginal Mia Mia”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.672 (AS/PC2)

when the caption, which always gives a postcard a special emphasis and generally influences reading and interpretation of a motif, dismisses the person in the background by referring to another element of the image. This is, for example, the case in postcard 11 of series no. 5 where the caption “Aboriginal Mia Mia” reflects an interest towards the Aboriginal shelters rather than towards the people posing in front of them (Figure 5.8). The same happens in postcard 4 of series no. 4; the caption reads “An Australian Wild Flower” and emphasises the *waratah* in front of the young Aboriginal woman (Figure 5.9) – the Aboriginal woman becomes the ‘wild flower’ waiting to be ‘picked’. Scott argues that “words provide the viewer with an appetite for the viewed” (Scott 1999: 21), and this is particularly true if we think of the special complicity photography had with voyeurism and erotic photography (see Chapter Six). The camera, acting as a window between the viewer and the viewed, creates a distance, a discontinuity likely to activate the reification or idolisation of the viewed. Captions imply accessibility, possibility of relationship, while the photographs purvey a distance that absolves the reader from interesting himself in

when the caption, which always gives a postcard a special emphasis and generally influences reading and interpretation of a motif, dismisses the person in the background by referring to another element of the image.

This is, for example, the case in postcard 11 of series no. 5















Figure 5.9 “An Aboriginal Wild Flower”, collotype postcard from the author’s collection (AS/PC3)

the life of another. Moreover, where an image with erotic implications is minimally titled its very muteness increases the ‘heaviness’ of the relationship between viewer and viewed (Scott 1999: 55).

Postcard captions are always the result of a strategic review of the market’s priorities. Even if an image suggests a straightforward message, it is always the caption that sets the accent and creates the filter through which an image should be seen. There are in fact many cases where a postcard producer ‘invented’ a successful caption with little or no relation to the actual content of a postcard’s image because he had not taken the photograph himself or just for marketing reasons. If we now look at the captions of Kerry’s series no. 4 and compare them with the original titles on the glass plates and with the titles subsequently given to the albumen prints of the numbered series, we observe the inverse dynamic. Kerry, who created most of the postcard motifs himself, knew the provenance of all depicted people, but when he created the series he did not use this information and opted instead for sterile and typifying labels (Figure 5.10). Additionally, Kerry also knew the name of the Aboriginal man posing with a boomerang in postcard 7; according to the list his name was ‘Gingung’ but on the caption his identity has been omitted with the consequence that he has been transformed into “A Fighting Man”. The perhaps most surprising omission of provenance is the one relating to the subjects that appear in the postcards 10, 11 and 12. Indeed, neither the postcard captions nor the photographs’ titles reveal that all three images show Wailwan people, the same people that Charles Kerry photographed in June 1898 when he entered Wailwan country to document the *bora* ceremony for the N.S.W. Government (Chapter Four). The motif of postcard 12 shows one of the photographs taken a few kilometres north-west of Quambone during the *bora*. The motifs of postcards 10 and 11 are based instead on pictures taken in the Aboriginal camp near Quambone (Figure 5.11). The postcard captions – “Group of Gins”, “Group of Piccaninnies” and “A Duel to the Death” – provide no contextual information but contribute instead even more to the alienation of the Aboriginal people from their land and origins. Also, the now offensive and disparaging terms ‘gins’ and ‘piccaninnies’¹⁰¹ give a superficial description of the image content and could be used for many other motifs featuring groups of Aboriginal women or children.

¹⁰¹ Possibly coming from Spanish ‘pequeño niño’ meaning small child.

Figure 5.10 Development of the motifs' titles from the negative to the postcard's caption (series no. 4)

Motif	Object	No.	Title/Caption	Origin
	Glass plate	535,539	"Native Climbing with Vine"	N.S.W.
	Albumen print	~40,~41	"Aboriginal Climbing Tree with piece of vine"	
	Postcard	1	"Native Climbing Tree with Vine"	
	Glass plate	1364	"Prince of Wales Island Man with Mask"	Murulujaig Island Torres Straight, Qld.
	Albumen print	48	"Aboriginal with Devil Mask"	
	Postcard	2	"Aboriginal with Devils Mask"	
	Glass plate	1884	"Aboriginal Warrior with Nullah Nullah"	N.S.W.
	Albumen print	49	"Aboriginal throwing Nullah Nullah"	
	Postcard	3	"Aboriginal with Throwing Stick"	
	Glass plate	1907	"Nerelle, Princess of Moruya Tribe N.S.W."	Moruya Group, N.S.W.
	Albumen print	61	"Nerelle, Princess of Moruya Tribe N.S.W."	
	Postcard	4	"An Australian Wild Flower"	
	Glass plate	1585	"Group of Myall Aboriginals"	Myall Group, Qld.
	Albumen print	14	"Group [of] men from interior of Queensland"	
	Postcard	5	"Group of Black Trackers"	
	Glass plate	1841	"Aboriginal Woman. Bombala N.S.W."	Bombala, Monaro Region, N.S.W.
	Albumen print	79	"Aboriginal woman, Monaro, N.S.W."	
	Postcard	6	"Aboriginal Princess"	
	Glass plate	1827	"Gingung', Bathurst. Warrior"	Bathurst Group, N.S.W.
	Albumen print	132	"Gingung, warrior, Bathurst Tribe, N.S.W."	
	Postcard	7	"A Fighting Man"	
	Glass plate	1378	"Aboriginals & Black Tracker"	Qld.
	Albumen print	—	<i>Photo not in the album's selection</i>	
	Postcard	8	"Aboriginal Fight"	
	Glass plate	611	"Barron River Native"	Barron River, Qld.
	Albumen print	68	"Aboriginal, Barron River, Q. [Queensland]"	
	Postcard	9	"Aboriginal Chief"	
	Glass plate	2589	"Aboriginal Camp – Group of Gins"	Wailwan, N.S.W.
	Albumen print	—	<i>Photo not in the album's selection</i>	
	Postcard	10	"Group of Gins"	
	Glass plate	2595	"Aboriginal Piccaninnies"	Wailwan, N.S.W.
	Albumen print	8	"Aboriginal Piccaninnies"	
	Postcard	11	"Group of Piccaninnies"	
	Glass plate	—	—	Wailwan, N.S.W.
	Albumen print	—	<i>Photo not in the album's selection</i>	
	Postcard	12	"A Duel to the Death"	

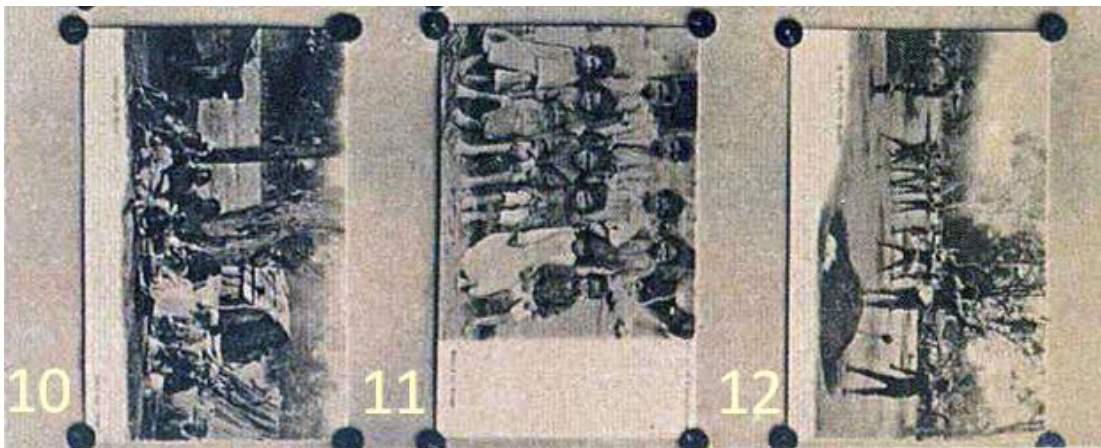


Figure 5.11 The three postcards of series no. 4 based on photographs taken by Charles Kerry on Wailwan land near Quambone in June 1898. Detail of figure 5.4a














Postcards of series no. 4		Postcards of series no. 5	
2		2	
3		8/9 ¹⁰²	 
4		4	
6		5	
8		12 ¹⁰³	
12		7 ¹⁰⁴	

Figure 5.12 Indigenous people appearing in both Kerry & Co.'s Aboriginal series

¹⁰² The same Aboriginal man appears also in series no. 97, no. 98 and in the coloured series.

¹⁰³ The same group of men appears also on a postcard featuring the motif of postcard 12 of series no. 5.

¹⁰⁴ A similar motif based on a Kerry's photograph taken in Quambone in June 1898 was used to illustrate a postcard in the coloured series.

A parallel discourse of ‘denial of identity’ emerges from the analysis of series no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins”. The motifs of this series were not only taken from the same body of Kerry’s pictorial collection and feature a similar aesthetic, in fact on six postcards people appear who were already chosen as subjects in series no. 4 (Figure 5.12).

Further evidence showing the parallels between the two series – and therefore reinforcing the thesis that they were created simultaneously by the same person – emerges when we compare the provenance of the people appearing in all twenty-four postcards of series no. 4 and no. 5. The analysis of the original captions and the information relating to Kerry’s body of Aboriginal photographs revealed that in each series there are eight postcards featuring people from New South Wales, and four featuring people from Queensland (Figure 5.13).



Figure 5.13 In each series (no. 4 left, no. 5 right) there are eight motifs featuring people from N.S.W. (framed in orange), and four featuring people from Queensland and the Torres Strait (framed in green) (AS/PHM2)

Who were these people whose portraits travelled in postcard format through countries and continents without even being aware of it? These people who were

rendered powerless by their subjection to a postcard's caption? Why did Kerry photograph them?

A catalogue of Aborigines

New South Wales

As we saw above, Kerry chose some of his photographs taken on Wailwan land also for series no. 4 and no. 5. He probably reckoned that many people knew them already as they had circulated through newspapers and journals before and had been displayed in the 'Kerry Gallery'. One could argue that, in this specific context but possibly also in a generic context of marketing strategies, the process of recognizing the postcard motifs favoured purchase on the part of the customers. I have presented the contextual frame of this photographic encounter in Chapter Four by discussing series no. 49 "Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony". Kerry chose two images of the *bora* for the postcard series (postcard 12 of series no. 4, and 7 of series no. 5), and added three views taken at the Aboriginal camp near Quambone (postcards 10 and 11 of series no. 4, and 4 and 11 of series no. 5).

The other N.S.W. postcards appearing in series no. 4 and no. 5 each feature studio portraits of Aboriginal people and an outdoor scene. In each series two motifs appear based on the same women's portraits, one motif showing a full-length view of a man posing with boomerangs, and a close-up of a man photographed from the back. These people were chosen to represent various Aboriginal cultural groups in the series. The young woman called "Nerelle" appearing on postcard 4 in the same place in each series, was a member of the Moruya tribe,¹⁰⁵ which belonged to the Yuin language group of the coastal area of Southern New South Wales. The other woman whose portraits were chosen for the motif 6 of series no. 4, and 5 of series no. 5 came from the Monaro region and was therefore a member of the Ngarigo group¹⁰⁶ that lived throughout the Snowy Mountains area. The title on the original

¹⁰⁵ Alternative names for Moruya tribe: Bargalia (place name), Bugellimanji (Aboriginal group), Thoorga, Thurga and Walbanga (Australian Aboriginal tribal database at http://www.ausanthrop.net/resources/ausanthrop_db/results.php).

¹⁰⁶ Alternative names for Ngarigo/Ngarigu language group: Bemeringal, Boombala tribe, Bradjerak, Brajerak, Brajeran, Cooma tribe, Currak-da-bidgee, Garego, Guramal, Gurmial, Menero tribe, Murring, Narigo, Ngarago, Ngaragu, Ngarego, Ngarico, Ngarroogoo, Ngarrugo (Australian Aboriginal tribal database at www.ausanthrop.net/resources/ausanthrop_db/results.php#).

glass plate negative informs us that the woman belonged to the Bombala group; because Kerry was born and grew up near Bombala, he may have personally known the woman, so that her presence possibly confers an autobiographical touch to the postcard compilation. The only N.S.W. Aboriginal man on whom we have additional information is “Gingung” who is shown on postcard 7 of series no. 4. According to Kerry’s list of numbered photographs, Gingung came from the Bathurst tribe area, and belonged therefore to the large Wiradjuri language group of central New South Wales (Figure 5.14).

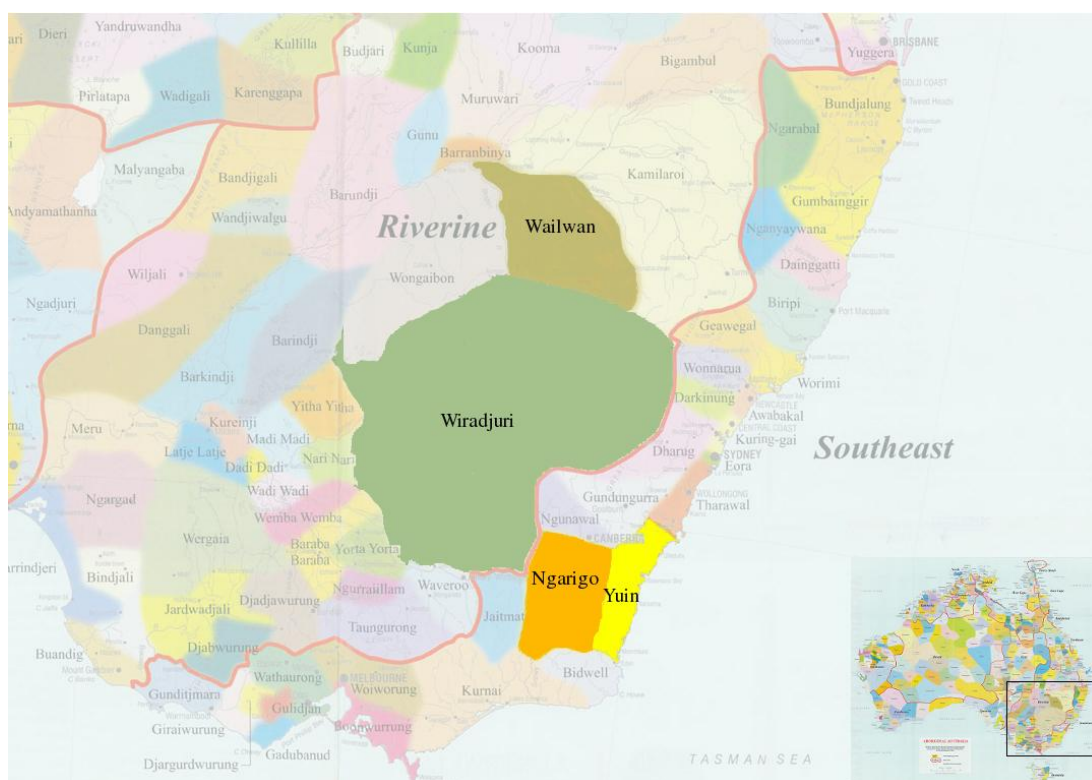


Figure 5.14 The four Aboriginal groups of N.S.W. represented in Kerry’s postcards series no. 4 and no. 5. Detail of *Map of Aboriginal Australia* elaborated by author © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS

Unfortunately, we do not know much about the circumstances that led to the photographic encounter between Kerry and the N.S.W. Aborigines appearing in the two series. Kerry could have taken their portraits during his numerous trips across the state. We certainly know that the N.S.W. government commissioned him to ‘secure’ a collection of portraits of Aboriginal people before ‘it was too late’. The common discourse of the “dying race” was ubiquitous at that time, and the contemporary notion of the photographic medium’s accuracy as a means of establishing scientific records led to the ‘collection’ of various “racial types”

presented in taxonomic orders. These were used as a tool for comparative approaches in the biological sciences (Edwards 1990). Indeed, even before Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), in debates about evolution and the nature of human difference, Australian data played an important role, and information about Aboriginal people was increasingly valued. Whereas the new ideas were almost staunchly rejected by Melbourne scientists (Spencer), they were well received in New South Wales, where Gerard Krefft of the Australian Museum promoted them (Lydon 2005: 83–84). Kerry's prospectus sheets showing various Aboriginal people in different poses, and used as main source for the postcards motifs, are reminiscent of the taxonomic orders popular in scientific circles practicing anthropometry (Figure 5.15).



Figure 5.15 Kerry & Co.'s contact sheets featuring the same motifs as in the numbered series presented in the ML's album *Australian Aboriginals* (PX*D398). Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, accession numbers: 1998.249.2.1–3, 1998.249.3.1–4, 1998.249.4.1–3 (AS/PRM2)

Moreover, presented together on the same page – a choice determined by the size-related reproduction costs – the prospectus sheets create an oppressive overview of the Aboriginal people who posed for Kerry. In this form of presentation, the sitters appear imprisoned by the black grid emerging from the arrangement of their portraits, against a white background on a dark cardboard sheet. A closer analysis of the individual portraits, however, reveals that the way Kerry photographed his Aboriginal sitters did not completely correspond to the instructions on anthropological photography at the time, which stated:

The individual to be taken must be absolutely nude and without the usual pictorial adornments. The camera must be in a perfect horizontal position. If the photograph is taken full figure, the size of the individual on the focussing screen ought to be in proportion of one to twenty, and for bust it should not be under quarter natural size. Several views of one and the same individual should be taken – say f.i., full face, profile and full back. The background should be light, and the position of the subject to be photographed upright and the arms hanging their natural way. Side by side with the subject a long pole or stick, containing a well visible division of feet and inches, ought to be fixed upon a perpendicular position and photographed together with the aborigine. The division lines should be plainly visible on the photograph, so that with the aid of this scale accurate measurements can be taken on the photograph. (...) The division must be in the same focus plane as the body, and it is a good device to accompany the photograph with some of the principal measurements of the body, which, in connection with the inch division, will be valuable. It is also a good plan to take all the photographs corresponding in size, so that the scale once adopted is always applied. Photographs of ceremonies, dances, etc., are, no doubt, of a certain interest also, if they are accompanied with reliable information, giving an insight into the life of a tribe. (...) The lighting should be the natural one without trying ‘to make a picture’. In fact, such photograms, welcome to the anthropologist, are devoid of the pictorial, but true to nature, and must not be improved by retouching. (Seitz 1898: 70–71)

That retouching was indeed a common and mastered practice at Kerry & Co., emerges particularly from the N.S.W. postcards mentioned above.¹⁰⁷ The original photographs from the numbered series evince how the changes applied for the

¹⁰⁷ See also Virginia-Lee Webb’s article ‘Transformed Images: Photographers and Postcards in the Pacific Islands’ (1998).

production of a postcard's motif considerably altered the visual impact of the image. In image 61, for example, the Aboriginal woman from the Moruya tribe is shown bare-breasted wearing only a kangaroo skin around her hips (Figure 5.16),¹⁰⁸ while on the postcard motif half of her body is hidden by a superimposed *waratah* (Figure 5.17). Usually, this practice was applied to 'embellish' an image in order to render it more attractive for buyers. In this special case, however, there could also have been a practical reason for adding such a dominant element. The original glass support, now held by the Powerhouse Museum, is actually broken, with a crack running exactly where the *waratah* flower has been placed (Figure 5.18). The continuation of the crack on the woman's upper torso toward the right shoulder was possibly manually retouched.



Figure 5.16 "Nerelle', Princess of Moruya Tribe N.S.W.", photo no. 61 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/61 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.17 "An Aboriginal Wild Flower", collotype postcard from the author's collection (AS/PC3)

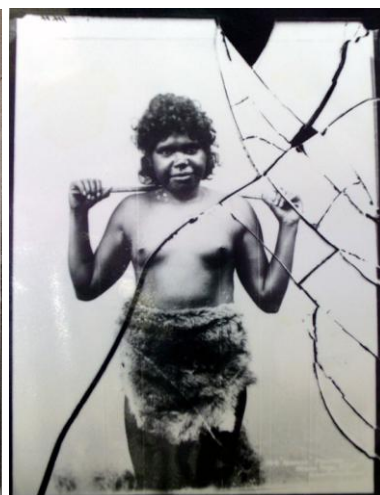


Figure 5.18 "1907. Nerelle, Princess of Moruya Tribe N.S.W.", glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.375.144a (AS/PHM4)

The other postcard motif representing the same woman from the Moruya tribe was also manipulated. In photograph 76 she appears in a profile bust portrait, again bare-breasted and wearing an animal skin (Figure 5.19), while on the postcard motif only her head looks out from behind a big *waratah* that covers her upper body up to her neck (Figure 5.20). Nudity has also been 'covered' in postcard 6 of series no. 4, where the profile portrait of the Bombala woman has been cropped and framed by a

¹⁰⁸ The same, not retouched image was published in the *Australian Photographic Journal* (Vol. VII no. 3, March 21, 1898, p. 66).

floral composition (Figure 5.21 and 5.22). Not retouched, however, is the portrait in which the same woman appears wearing European cloths (Figure 5.23). Even if some of Kerry's studio photographs showed Aboriginal women posing suggestively with animal skins draped across their bodies, and could be read as representations of the sexually innocent 'female noble savage' displaying the promise of exotic performance, the postcard motifs generally present Aboriginal women in a very discreet and respectful manner. Kerry had to take into consideration the wide circulation of his postcard motifs in comparison with the relatively limited publication of his original portraits. To reach a wider public he had to retouch those photographs that could have run up against the puritan impulse to cover nudity.¹⁰⁹



Figure 5.19 "Nerelle', Princess of Moruya Tribe N.S.W.", photo no. 76 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/76 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.20 "Nerelle", postcard 4 of series no. 5. Detail of figure 5.4b

¹⁰⁹ As Van Schendel says, in the confrontation between local and external cultural styles, whose framing happened mostly through photography, "nudity was used as a visual marker of specific, but contradictory, local characteristics. It stood variously for primitivity, underdevelopment, indecency and indigeneity." (Van Schendel cited in Price 2004: 84)



Figure 5.21 “Aboriginal woman, Monaro, N.S.W.”, photo no. 79 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/79 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.22 “Aboriginal Princess”, postcard 6 of series no. 4. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.658 (AS/PC2)



Figure 5.23 “Aboriginal Gin”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.650 (AS/PC2)

In the archives of the Australian Museum in Sydney, I came across an interesting photograph titled “Fish for the Camp” that testifies Kerry’s practice of ‘playing with pictures’.¹¹⁰ It shows an Aboriginal man carrying a wooden stick on which five big specimens of Australasian snapper (*Pagrus auratus*)¹¹¹ are hanging (Figure 5.24). Even the inexpert viewer realises that there is something strange about this image. The hand appears manipulated, as does the area around the feet, which does not merge with the ground underneath. Additionally, the stick does not rest naturally on the shoulder, but the presumably heavy load does not seem to bother the man too much. As one may expect, this is an example of a badly executed experiment, which, not surprisingly, was never used for postcard production. I am presenting it here because it shows the same N.S.W. Aboriginal man who appears on postcard 8 of series no. 5 (Figure 5.25). In fact, it is not only the same person: both the postcard motif and the photocollage are based on the same original photograph (Figure 5.26). We can see that in “Fish for the Camp” little of the original image survived. The Aboriginal man on the right has been removed along with the painted backdrop and the boomerang. The man supposedly carrying the snappers has been virtually relocated into a new outdoor setting, and from an ‘Aboriginal fighting man’

¹¹⁰ *Playing with Pictures* is also the title of a recently published book based on a touring exhibition that, for the first time, examined comprehensively the phenomenon of Victorian photocollage (Siegel 2010).

¹¹¹ I would like to thank my brother Stefano for helping me identify this species.

he has been transformed into a successful N.S.W. fisherman. This example shows how, despite experiments with motifs featuring Aboriginal men, only the heavily manipulated images displaying Aboriginal women were chosen for the final postcard series compilation. All motifs of series no. 4 and no. 5, in which Aboriginal men appear, correspond almost completely to the original photographs.



Figure 5.24 "Fish for the Camp 3520", print from glass plate. Courtesy of the Australian Museum, Sydney, accession number: AAP19/3520 (AS/AM)



Figure 5.25 “Aboriginal fighting Men”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.685 (AS/PC2)



Figure 5.26 “Aboriginal Warriors NSW”, albumen print. By permission of the National Library of Australia, Canberra, accession number: 27/J2 (AS/NLA9)

Queensland

Thanks to an illustrated article that appeared in the *Sydney Mail* on 21st January 1893, we have more information on the identity of the eight postcard people from Queensland than we have for the N.S.W. Aborigines (Anon. 1893_a). The article reports a show titled *Meston's Wild Australia* that was staged in Sydney, and in which a group of Queensland Aborigines performed (Figure 5.27). The organizer was the entrepreneur Archibald Meston whose

intention was to tour the civilised world with a band of aboriginals selected from the wild tribes of North Queensland, to deliver a series of ethnological lectures, illustrated by natives capable of rehearsing all the ceremonies and customs prevalent among the primitive Australians previous to contact with civilisation. (Anon. 1893_a: 134)

Meston embarked on this enterprise because he did not agree with the popularly held idea that Aboriginal people were a degenerated race, intellectually far inferior to settler culture. According to him Aborigines had been

grossly misrepresented on imperfect or inaccurate information, and [...] such men as Darwin, Huxley, and Haeckel have adopted an error pardonable only in people presumed ignorant of Australian ethnology. (Anon. 1893_a: 134)

Meston argued that Aboriginal people were physically superior with, and intellectually equal to, the white cultures in their 'primitive state', and that they should not be judged by their current poor condition. The Aboriginal people he had recruited from Queensland were "such as met Cook on the shores of Botany Bay in 1770, and Matthew Flinders in Moreton Bay in 1790." (Anon. 1893_a: 134)

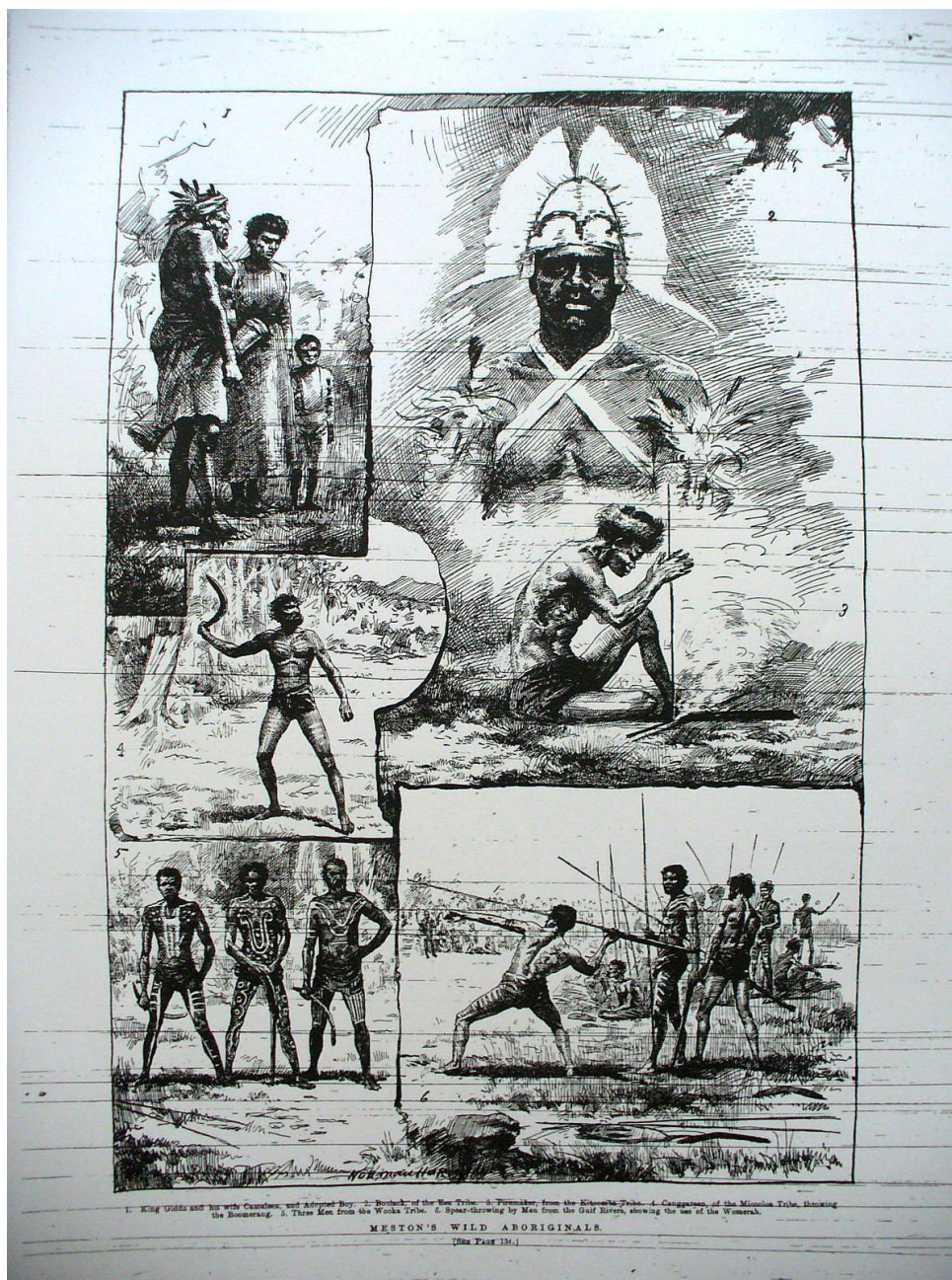


Figure 5.27 Illustrations accompanying the article *Meston's Wild Australia* Sydney Mail, 21 Jan. 1893)

At the Sydney show that took place at the Bondi Aquarium, the group of ‘genuine’ Aborigines comprised twenty-two men, five women and a boy, speaking seven distinct dialects. Fifteen of these came from the rivers of the Gulf of Carpentaria, one man represented the Kabi-Kabi group of the Wide Bay area,¹¹² three men and two women were from the region north-west of the Georgina River in central Queensland, and three men were from the Prince of Wales Island – known to the Kaurareg as Muralag, Murulag or Muralug – in the Torres Strait (Anon. 1893a: 134). Illustration no. 2 accompanying the article *Meston’s Wild Aborigines* features a bust portrait of a man wearing a feathered headdress from the Torres Strait called *dari* (Eastern Island language name) or *dhoeri* (Western Island language name) (Figure 5.28).¹¹³ This image constitutes the bridge between Meston’s crew and Kerry’s postcards. Indeed, the photograph used by the artist as base for the engraving, is part of Kerry’s photographic collection held by the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (Figure 5.29).



Figure 5.28 Detail of figure 5.27. Illustration no. 2 “Boolack, of the Eea Tribe” (Sydney Mail, 21 Jan. 1893)



Figure 5.29 “Aboriginal with Devil Headdress (1371)”, print from a glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.237.1371a (AS/PHM4)

¹¹² The Kabi Kabi people of the Sunshine Coast took their name from the pale honey gathered from the eucalypts of the hinterland. The group was made up of a number of smaller tribes inhabiting the region from Elimbah Creek in the south, to Cooloola National Park in the north.

¹¹³ The *dari* is still a strong symbol for the Torres Strait Islanders and it appears on their official flag together a five-pointed star representing the five groups of the Torres Strait. According to Rhianna Patrick Thursday (2004), many elders pass on the story that the *dari* came to the Torres Strait from Papua New Guinea as an item of trade between the two nations (last accessed: 15 October 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/messageclub/duknow/stories/s1092620.htm>).

This motif had not been selected for the numbered sequence presented in the ML album (AS/ML2) and for the prospectus sheets (AS/PRM2). There are, however, similar photographs in the numbered series in which either the same man or the same elements appear. Images 72 and 73 feature the same person photographed from different angles and with the upper part of the body decorated with white designs (Figures 5.30 and 5.31). A similar constructed picture is 71 in which the same headdress and a similar decoration is worn by another Aboriginal man (Figure 5.32) who, in turn, appears also on photo 113 with the white bands visible in the newspaper's illustration (Figure 5.32b).



Figure 5.30 “Aboriginal Prince of Wales Island, Queensland”, photo no. 73, Album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession numbers: PX*D398/73 and PX*D398/72 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.31 “Aboriginal Prince of Wales Island, Queensland”, photo no. 72. Album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession numbers: PX*D398/73 and PX*D398/72 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.32 a) “Aboriginal Prince of Wales Island, Queensland”, photo no. 71, and b) “Aboriginal Warrior, Prince of Wales Island, Queensland”, photo no. 113. Album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession numbers: PX*D398/71 and PX*D398/113 (AS/ML2)

The article mentions that the man wearing the “picturesque headdress” was named ‘Boolac’ and was one of the three “conspicuous” men from Muralag who participated to Meston’s show (Anon. 1893_a: 134). The other two were ‘Prince Dugum’, the subject of photos 71 and 113, and ‘King Gidda’, chief of Muralag and four other islands, also photographed by Charles Kerry in the Sydney studio and recorded as ‘King Geedah’ (Figure 5.33). These three men were the focus of Meston’s particular attention as, according to him, they were “remarkable for fine physique, and especially interesting ethnologically as types of a race forming a connecting link between the Australian and Papuan” (Anon. 1893_a: 134). We do not know whether Kerry developed this kind of philosophical and anthropological approach or if he simply found them interesting for aesthetic or business reasons; in any case he photographed them several times, both singularly and as a group. In Figure 5.34 they are posing in front of a

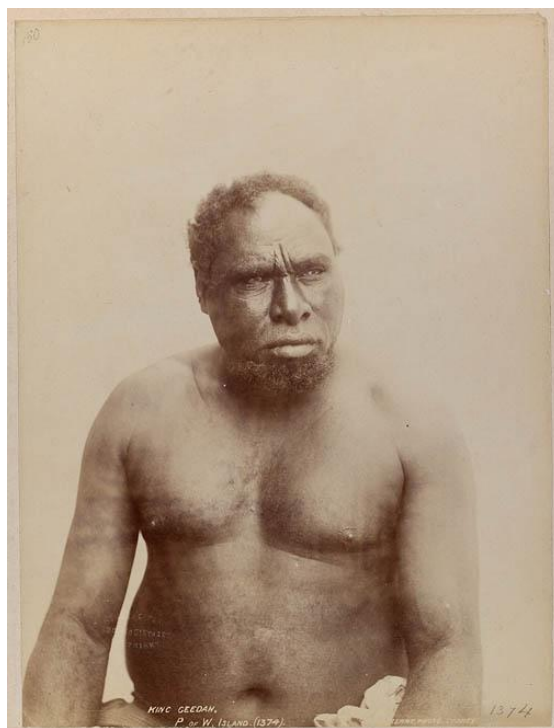


Figure 5.33 “‘Geehad’, King, Prince of Wales Island, Queensland”, photo no. 150 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/150 (AS/ML2)

Figure 5.34 they are posing in front of a painted background in Kerry & Co.’s studio at 310 George Street: Gidda is at the centre holding a waisted drum called *warup*; Boolac on the right with the white headdress *dari*; and Dugum on the left with bow and arrows and wearing an elaborate mask. The mask’s form reminds us of those complex turtle-shell masks worn in the Torres Strait Islands for initiations and mortuary rituals as emblems of the ancestors and often associated with the crocodile totem. Several curators and museum people I have shown the mask to in Australia, described it as ‘very unusual’ and difficult to classify. I would not exclude the possibility that this mask had been created by the Muralag men as a non-ceremonial object for the show, and hence with different material features. If this is the case, we can consider the mask as a specially ‘entangled object’ (Thomas 1991), enmeshed in the aims and objectives of both

Meston's colonial representation of 'the Aboriginality', and of the Torres Strait's people who created and used them during their performances in the Australian centres. As Peers and Brown (2003) have noted, we could develop Clifford's (1997) concept of "contact zones" applied to museums, to argue for the utility of regarding also artefacts as 'contact zones', as sources to study submerged and new relationships within communities. In this specific context, however, I consider more pertinent Feldman's distinction between contact "zones" and contact "points" as a strategy for relocating the sensory within anthropological theories of colonialism (Feldman 2006: 246). Hence, we can consider the Torres Strait's mask as the contact point, the sensual products of unequal encounter that have materialised in the contact zone – Meston's show.

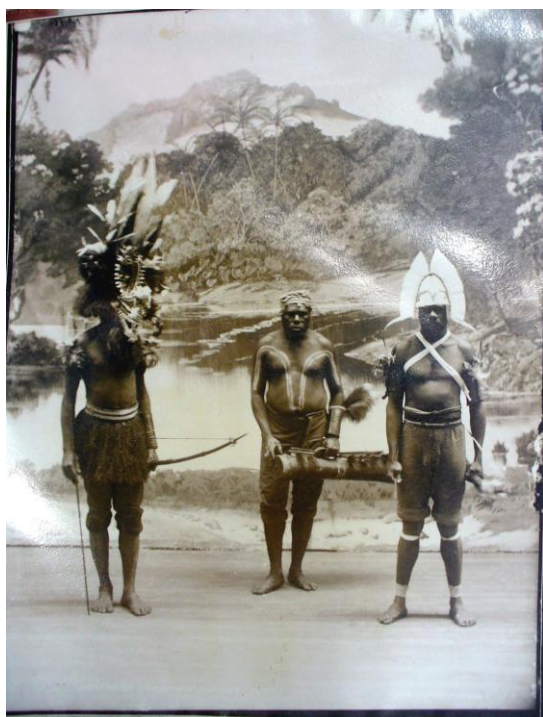


Figure 5.34 Dugum, Gidda and Boolac in Kerry & Co.'s studio. Print from a glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.518.1376 (AS/PHM4)



Figure 5.35 Boolac, Gidda, and Dugum photographed on a beach (possibly Bondi). Print from a glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.582.1366 (AS/PHM4)

A similar composition, featuring these most distinctive types of objects historically associated with Torres Strait – the *warup*, the *dari*, and the mask –, appears on a photograph taken outdoors, possibly at Bondi Beach (Figure 5.35). That Dugum is really the man under the big mask can be seen in Figures 5.36 and 5.37 in which he is posing under the mask with the same body decoration as in Figure 5.32.

This photo was chosen by Kerry as motif for a postcard in series no. 4 “Aboriginal Life” (Figure 5.38), while Boolac’s portrait 72 formed the basis for a postcard presented in series no. 5 “Aboriginal Warriors & Gins” (Figure 5.39).



Figure 5.36 “Aboriginal with Devil’s Mask (1383)”. Print from a glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.238.1383 (AS/PHM4)



Figure 5.37 “Aboriginal with Mask (1364)”. Print from a glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.48.1364 (AS/PHM4)



Figure 5.38 “Aboriginal with Devils Mask”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.651 (AS/PC2)

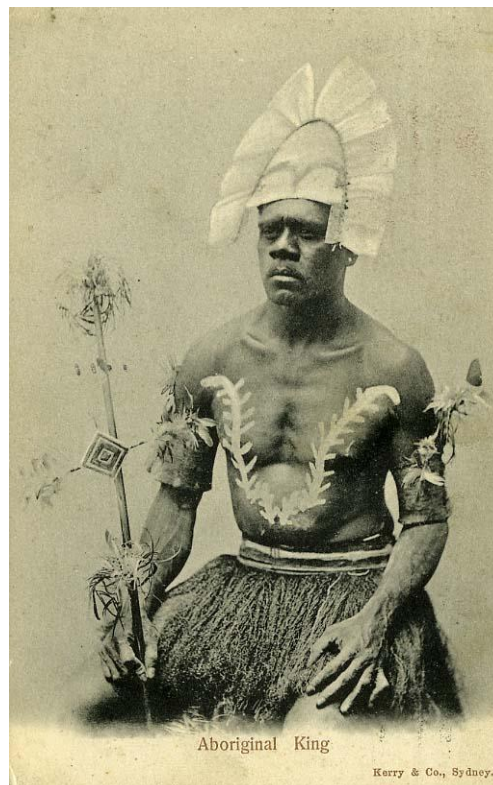


Figure 5.39 On the left the original photograph (see figure 5.31) and on the right the postcard based on the same motif (“Aboriginal King”), collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.657 (AS/PC2)

Gidda's portrait, on the other hand, was not considered as postcard subject. Without the paraphernalia worn by Dugum and Boolac, Gidda's portrait was probably rated too common and not 'exotic' enough as a postcard motif. On the two postcards, no reference to the people's identity or to their origin is made. While Boolac is presented as an "Aboriginal Chief", Dugum is reduced to an "Aboriginal with Devils Mask", with no name and face. Despite the missing information these motifs became popular; for example, the same photograph used for the postcard in which Boolac appears, was published in Walter Hutchinson's *Customs of the World* (1913: 170).

As the third photograph in the ML album (AS/ML2) shows, Charles Kerry also photographed King Gidda, Prince Dugum and Boolac together with the other Aboriginal people of Northern Queensland who performed in Meston's show. In Figure 5.40 the three men from the Torres Strait appear at the centre of the image behind the kneeling men carrying shields. Gidda is wearing a barely visible *dari*, Boolac is standing on the left with the white band across his chest, and Dugum is on his right with his belly decorated with two suns under an arch.



Figure 5.40 Boolac, Gidda and Dugum are standing at the centre. "Group Warriors with Spears", photo no. 3 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/3 (AS/ML2)

This photograph – which is part of a series that was probably taken on Bondi Beach – is particularly interesting, as it shows the fifteen men from the river area of the Gulf of Carpentaria who also visited Kerry & Co.’s studio and had their portraits taken. Some of these portraits and group photographs were chosen for the postcard production and appeared in the Aboriginal series as the postcard sample book reveals. Postcard 8 of series 4, and 12 of series 5 are based on photographs taken outdoors (Figure 5.41). The first titled “Aboriginal Fight” shows seven Aboriginal

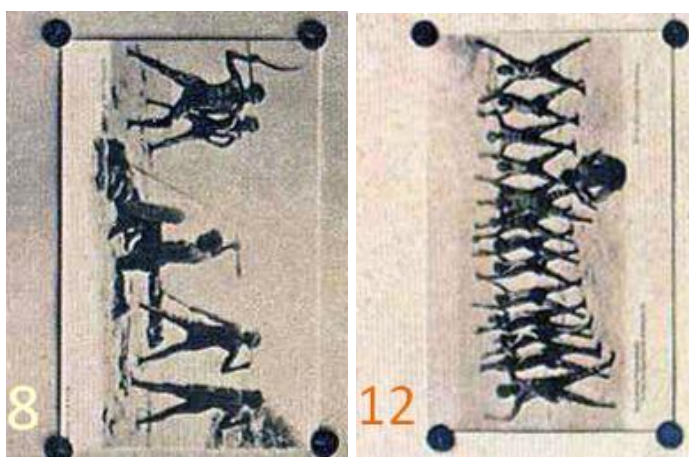


Figure 5.41 Two motifs based on photographs taken outdoors: postcard 8 of series no. 4 (left) and postcard 12 of series no. 5 (right). Details of Figure 5.4

men fighting against each other with spears, boomerangs and clubs. In the collection of lantern slides of Meston’s “Wild Australia” owned by Reverend William Bennett,¹¹⁴ there is a very similar motif with the same ‘actors’ performing a fight against an Aboriginal policeman. As Poignant

argues, this kind of tableau conveys from a present perspective the possibility of a double interpretation and narrative. On the one hand, the presence of the Aboriginal policeman suggests Aboriginal compliance with a white view of the ‘encounter’; on the other, this *mise-en-scène* could also reflect an Aboriginal re-enactment of actual events that occurred between settlers and Aboriginal people, which Meston may have even witnessed (Poignant 2004: 208–209).¹¹⁵ For his early series, Kerry excluded motifs that showed any interaction between Aboriginal people and white settlers, or Aboriginal police wearing European clothes and fighting against Aboriginal people. Only in a later, coloured series there is a postcard showing these scenes, apparently re-enacted in a tropical environment (Figure 5.42) but, as the original photograph reveals, staged actually in Kerry & Co.’s studio (Figure 5.43). The coloured variant shows the type of manipulation many motifs went through before reaching the public

¹¹⁴ This collection is now held by the John Oxley Library at the State Library of Queensland.

¹¹⁵ Against the wishes of the Victoria Police, in 1880 the Queensland government sent trackers ‘recruited’ from Aboriginal tribes in Queensland to assist the hunt for Ned Kelly’s Gang. See photograph NAA: A1200, L81522 from the collection of the National Archives of Australia (AS/NAA).

in postcard format: some elements were added (the lawn and the bushes in front of the lake), removed (the two props next to the kneeling person) or changed (the right hand of the lying man was interpreted as a decorative feather, hence painted red).

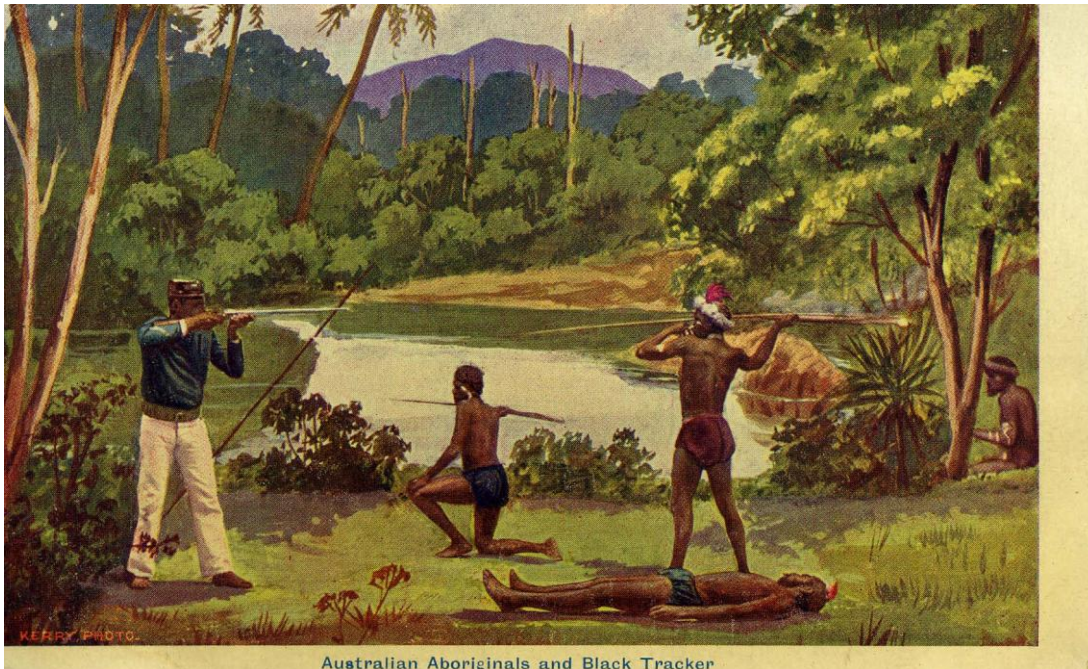


Figure 5.42 “Australian Aboriginals and Black Tracker”, postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.691 (AS/PC2)



Figure 5.43 A fight staged in Kerry & Co.'s studio. Print from a glass plate, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 75.494.1388a (AS/PHM4)

On the other postcard based on a photograph taken on the beach – no. 12 of series no. 5 – all fifteen men from the Gulf of Carpentaria appear in a scene titled “Aboriginal Corroboree”. This image corresponds to photograph 1 in Kerry’s Aboriginal album (Figure 5.44), and was also used as motif in the later Aboriginal series no. 97 (Figure 5.45). Like the ‘fight tableaux’, the *corroboree* scenes were performed on the beach as well as in Kerry & Co.’s studio. Various prints in the Tyrrell Collection show that the complete group of fifteen men visited the photographic studio in George Street (Figure 5.46). All performers, including three men from Central Queensland and five women not represented in the tableaux, were photographed individually or in small groups by Charles Kerry, as the numbered series presented in the album and on the prospectus sheets reveal.



Figure 5.44 “Corroboree, or Tribal Dance”, photo no. 1 in album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/1 (AS/ML2)

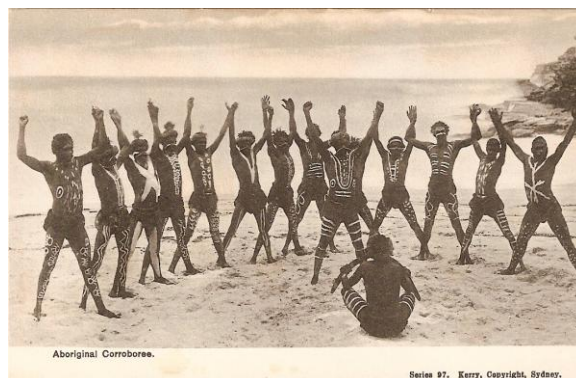


Figure 5.45 “Aboriginal Corroboree”, postcard of Kerry & Co.’s series no. 97, from the author’s collection (AS/PC3)



Figure 5.46
Corroboree staged in Kerry & Co.’s studio. Reproduced from the original glass plate of the Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, accession number: 75.2 (AS/MAC2)

Photograph 59 of the numbered series was chosen to illustrate a postcard of series no. 5 (Figures 5.47 and 5.48). It shows three men ceremonially dressed holding a boomerang; two of them are sitting on a prop covered with grass or a pallet, while the third is behind them leaning his left hand on his friend's shoulder. Although the original photograph bears the title “Workii Natives”, as in the numbered catalogue list, the postcard caption does not reveal anything about the identity or provenance of the photographed men. “Men with Devil Masks” – like “Aboriginal with Devils Mask” of postcard 2 in series 4 – emphasises instead the then current, obscure connotation of Aboriginal practices and material culture. These three men from the Workii cultural group – also called Wakaya or Wakaja¹¹⁶ – represented in Meston's show Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory's desert regions; in the group photograph taken on the beach they are posing next to each other on the right (Figure



Figure 5.47 “Natives, Workii Tribe”, photo no. 59 in album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/59 (AS/ML2)



Figure 5.48 “Men with Devil Masks”, collotype postcard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.662 (AS/PC2)

¹¹⁶ Alternative names for this Aboriginal group are: Wakaja, Wakaya, Wagaja, Waggaia, Wagai, Waagai, Wagaiau, Waagi, Warkya, Wogaia, Worgaia, Workaia, Warkaia, Workia, Workii, Woorkia, Lee-wayka, Akaja (by Kaititj), Ukkia, Arkiya (last accessed: 15th October 2010, http://www.ausanthrop.net/resources/ausanthrop_db/detail.php?id_search=513).

5.40). Thanks to a couple of bust portraits taken at Kerry & Co.'s studio, it is possible to identify two of the three men. One is Narimboo whom we already encountered in Chapter Three as the subject of Kerry & Co.'s letter heading (Figures 5.49 and 5.50). The same portrait in profile was chosen to produce postcard 6 of series no. 5 (Figure 5.51).



Figure 5.49 “Narimboo’, Chief of Workii Tribe, Queensland”, photo no. 134 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/134 (AS/ML2)

Figure 5.50 “Narimboo’, Chief of Workii Tribe, Queensland”, photo no. 135 in album *Australian Aborigines*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/135 (AS/ML2)

Figure 5.51 Narimboo on the Kerry & Co. postcard of series no. 5. Detail of figure 5.4

The other man is Cootajandra, photographed especially for the deep cicatrices on his back (Figure 5.52 and 5.53). He was also photographed by Lindt when Cootajandra went to Melbourne as a member of the show “Wild Australia” in January 1893.¹¹⁷ On the postcard motif, Narimboo is sitting on the left with a ceremonial headdress covered with feathers, while Cootajandra is standing behind him (Figure 5.48). On the Bondi photograph Narimboo and Cootajandra are on the extreme right, kneeling and standing, respectively (Figure 5.40). Given that both the representatives of the Prince of Wales Island and of the Workii cultural group are posing next to each other as a group in Figure 5.40, we may wonder whether Kerry constructed this image by assigning a precise place to each Aboriginal man according to his cultural background, or if this composition is more the result of indigenous agency – they freely posed according to their own preferences.

¹¹⁷ In a photograph by Lindt held by the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra (accession number: NGA 2005.576), Coo[n]tajandra appears together with Sanginguble, a woman from the Workii clan who also visited Kerry’s studio in Sydney. Her portrait was chosen for the numbered series presented in the album *Australian Aborigines* (Mitchell Library, accession number: PX*D398, image 119).



Figure 5.52 “‘Cootajandra’, warrior, Workii tribe, Queensland”, photo no. 110 in album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/110 (AS/ML2)

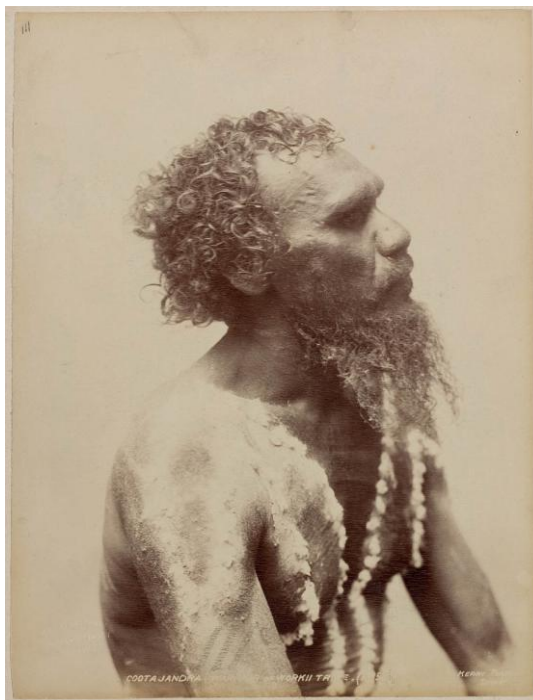


Figure 5.53 “‘Cootajandra’, warrior, Workii tribe, Queensland”, photo no. 111 in album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/111 (AS/ML2)

Kerry liked to have full control of the photographic moment, but in order to have it in this situation, it would have been necessary to be informed about the provenance of all the eighteen Aboriginal people. Even if he took this beach photograph after the studio portraits – which would imply a better knowledge of his sitters’ provenance – it seems unlikely that he decided where exactly each person had to pose; at the most he, or maybe even Meston, could have expressed the idea of having the people of each group close together and then have waited for the men’s self-posing. Apart from the example of the two groups mentioned above, the other exponents of the various tribes also seem to be organised in groups. The two men from the Gilbert River (from the left, the fourth standing and the second kneeling) or the two from the Boogoolmurra tribe (from the left, the third standing and the first kneeling) are also posing nearby, even if not in such a well-defined way as the Prince of Wales people or those from the Workii tribe (Figure 5.54). In my opinion, indigenous agency was clearly at work in the arrangement of this photograph. The Aboriginal people had the opportunity to present themselves as they wanted, and not as it was imposed on them for the show. Therefore, this photograph constitutes an example of a contact zone that should not be read within a simple binary system in

which the colonising centre dominates the colonised periphery, but rather as a social space where both photographer and photographed meet and are active in constituting the process of the encounter. It is maybe not a coincidence that this contact zone materialised on a symbolic place such as the beach – according to Greg Dening the metaphor for encounters and exchanges between people (Dening 1998, 2004).

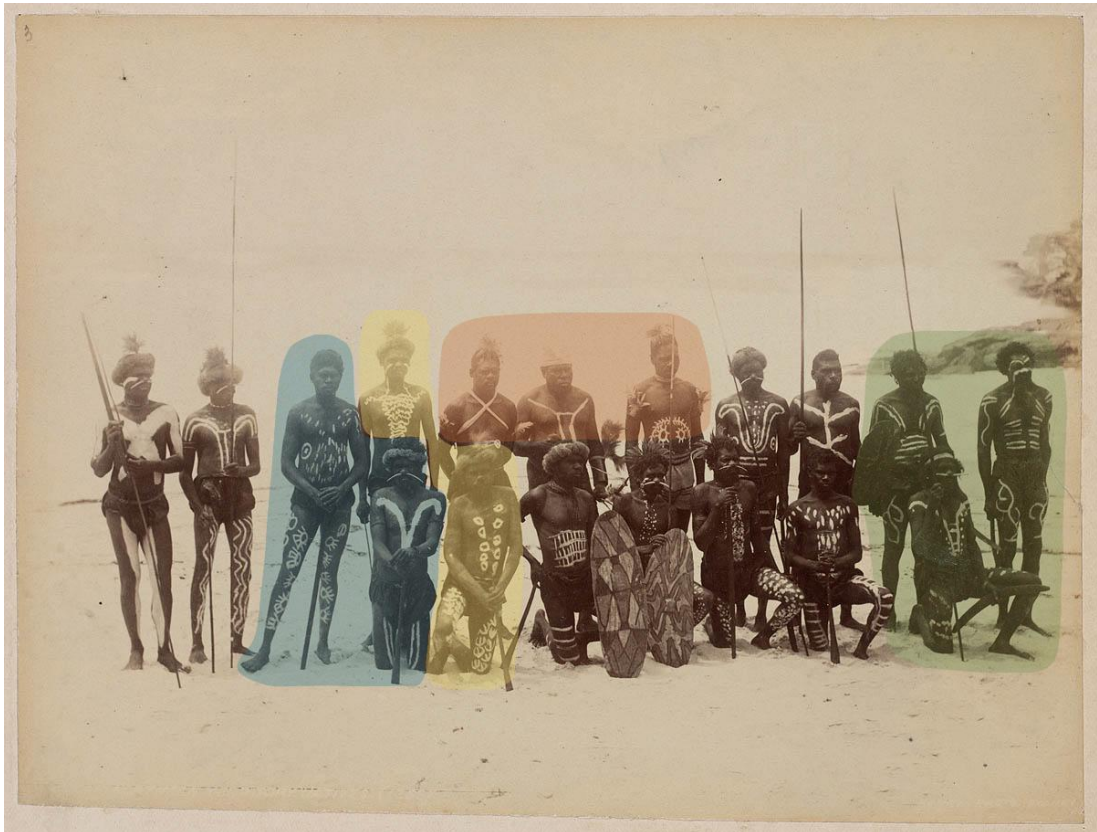


Figure 5.54 Posing according to their provenance: Boogoolmurra people in blue, Gilbert River people in yellow, Prince of Wales people in red and Workii people in green. “Group Warriors with Spears”, photo no. 3 in album *Australian Aboriginals*, Mitchell Library (SLNSW), Sydney, accession number: PX*D398/3 (AS/ML2). Elaborated by author

Sharing the “Wild Australia” story

The three men from the Torres Strait and those from the Workii group share a story with the other twelve Aboriginal men from Queensland: they were all ‘recruited’ by Archibald Meston as members for a troupe that was supposed to perform both in Australia, and overseas. The Australian project was realised, and in 1892–1893 Meston’s show “Wild Australia” was staged in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, with great success. These performances were probably planned by Meston as a kind of preparation for an even bigger adventure: the touring of the company to the 1893 World’s Colombian Exposition in Chicago. The fair’s organizers had indeed called

explicitly for living ethnographic displays, and particularly Professor Frederic Ward Putman (1839–1915), the head of the ethnological section and curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, expected a contribution from the Australian colonies. Because the state government of Queensland – despite interest in participating with a group of ‘natives’ – regrettably did not have the funds to support a contribution to the Fair, individual entrepreneurs such as Brabazon Harry Purcell and Archibald Meston decided to launch their projects (Poignant 2004: 208). Purcell, a Brisbane stock and station agent, claimed to be an expert on Aborigines, and he certainly did have considerable ethnographic knowledge on the central Australian language groups. However, at a lecture given in 1893 in Melbourne, he explained the gashes and cicatrices on Cootajandra’s back as the evidence of a ritual fighting practice, and not of initiation or scarification (Newton 2010_a and 2010_b). Meston, on his part, was a journalist and author,¹¹⁸ an explorer,¹¹⁹ had a great passion for geography, natural history and the Aborigines of Queensland, and was also a member of the Queensland Legislature. He was appointed Southern Protector for Queensland Aborigines south of the Tropic of Capricorn, and his advocacy for the segregation of Aborigines on reserves in order to ‘protect’ them led to the infamous Aboriginal protection legislation of 1897.¹²⁰

In 1891 Purcell and Meston decided to work together and seek financial supporters for their project. The idea was to form a company of ‘wild’ and still ‘uncontaminated’ Aborigines who would tour through Europe and America and perform at the Chicago Fair in 1893 (Poignant 2004: 208). Yet they were not the

¹¹⁸ From December 1875 until 1881 he was editor of the *Ipswich Observer* and in 1891 published the *Queensland Government Railway and Tourists’ Guide* (Meston 1891).

¹¹⁹ In 1889 he was the leader of the Queensland Government North Queensland Scientific Expedition to the Bellenden-Ker Range (Wooroonooran) (Stephens 1974: 244). For additional details see also Lack 1951.

¹²⁰ Considering that, in 1897, the Queensland Protection legislation added a clause prohibiting “the removal of Aborigines from one district to another or beyond the colony”, Poignant makes the point that more than “preventing kidnapping”, the government was interested in controlling “each movement, employment, and interracial mixing of Aborigines within the state” (Poignant 2004: 213). These contradictory aims of protection, removal and exploitation – the Aborigines were not moved too far away in case they were needed as labour – were expressed in the ‘Queensland Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’ of 1897, a direct consequence of an alarming report by Archibald Meston submitted to the government in 1896. Meston had stated that the condition of the Cape York Aborigines was pitiful due to the presence of unscrupulous pearlers and pastoralists who introduced diseases, the use of alcohol and opium. These people were certainly in need of help, but the measures adopted for their protection were heavy-handed. A rigid system of reserves was established all over Queensland, even if the act emerged from the specific conditions of Cape York. In 1905 this act became the model for similar legislations in Western Australia, in 1910 in the Northern Territory and in 1911 in South Australia (Broome 2001; Taylor 2003; Thorpe 1984).

only ones to have had this idea. The American showman Robert A. Cunningham (1837–1907), whom Meston had formerly assisted, returned to Queensland in mid-1892 also in search of Aboriginal people to take to Chicago.¹²¹ Because Meston and Purcell had not finished their recruiting, Cunningham's competitive presence must have quite irritated them. According to the research by Poignant, neither Meston and Purcell nor Cunningham had sought official endorsement or financial support from the organizers of the Fair (2004: 209). When Cunningham arrived in Townsville the Queensland authorities made things difficult for him, as they preferred Meston to enjoy the advantage and novelty of bringing Queensland Aborigines to Chicago (Poignant 2004: 209). Thanks to his old contacts, however, Cunningham managed to get the authorisation to remove eight Aboriginal people from Mungalla station,¹²² who were to return to their home within three years (Poignant 2000: 192; 2004: 210–211).

After finishing his recruiting, Meston prepared the Aboriginal people for a large-scale theatrical presentation of their traditional life. An article published in the *Brisbane Courier* on 30th September 1891 reports the details of the show. It consisted of a lecture by Meston divided into parts of fifteen minutes each in order to intercalate with the performances of the Aboriginal people. After having introduced the show with a talk about the origin of the Aborigines and their aptitude to civilisation and improvement, Meston also devoted a few minutes to the description of how Aboriginal people had been maltreated during the forty years preceding the show. These reflections were followed by a *corroboree* in which the representatives of the different cultural groups took part. On resuming Meston dwelt upon Aboriginal religious beliefs and traditions, addressing also the poetical character of mythology which, according to him, resembled “the legends of ancient Greece”. In the following performances the Aboriginal group presented dances claimed to precede warfare, as well as the use of various weapons such as the boomerang,

¹²¹ Cunningham, who was acting as recruiter for the circus impresario Phineas T. Barnum, had already been in Queensland in 1883 to ‘collect’ a group of nine men and women from the Palm Islands and nearby Hinchinbrook Island. Their performance in Barnum’s ‘Ethnological Congress of Strange and Savage Tribes’ began in the same year and in 1884 two members of the troupe, Tambo and Wangong, had died. Cunningham left Barnum in 1884 and began a long tour across Europe despite the deaths of Bob, Toby senior, Sussy and Jimmy in 1885. Roslyn Poignant has told the extraordinary story of Cunningham’s Aborigines in her 2004 book *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (see also Poignant 1992, 2000 and 2003).

¹²² Mungalla station is located few kilometres east of the sugar cane town of Ingham in North Queensland.

spears and the spear-thrower called *woomera*. The show ended with a dramatically staged bush tragedy: an indigenous man kills a person, but after having been tracked down he is punished for the murder (Anon. 1891: 5–6). This programme, with some variations, must have characterised Meston’s show during all performances from 1892 to 1893. Indeed, the postcard motifs based on the photographs taken by Kerry after – but also possibly during – the show at Sydney Aquarium in January 1893 feature the same elements mentioned in the above description (Figure 5.4). We have the indigenous ‘exotic people’ (postcards 2 and 9 of series no. 4 and postcards 2 and 3 of series no. 5); aspects of their singular life (postcards 1, 10 and 11 of series no. 4 and postcards 10 and 11 of series no. 5); religious ceremonies and *corroboree* (postcard 12 of series no. 4 and postcards 7 and 12 of series no. 5); boomerang throwers (postcard 3 of series no. 4 and postcards 8 and 9 of series no. 5); as well as a scene featuring a murder on the beach (postcard 8 of series no. 4). The theme of ‘tracking’ is represented only through postcard 5 titled “Group of black trackers”. There is no postcard subject of the final scene showing the tracking and punishment of the Aboriginal killer by an indigenous policeman. This event is presented only in a postcard of the coloured series captioned “Australian Aboriginals and Black Tracker” (Figure 5.42). In postcard series no. 4 and no. 5 the elements and events of the show are not presented as a linear narrative corresponding to the story told in “Wild Australia”. The sequences are mixed with other motifs, and out of this new combination and arrangement emerges a new narrative relating to the Aboriginal people. This new narrative, created by Kerry through the series, works as a dense catalogue of ‘the’ Aboriginal people. Aboriginal men, women and children are presented in the most disparate and constructed contexts (posing or acting singly or in a group) with the intention of informing about the varied Aboriginal sacred and profane activities and the related material culture and body decoration (painting, traditional or European clothing).

Despite the great success that “Wild Australia” achieved at the Brisbane Opera House in November 1892¹²³ and at the Sydney Aquarium in January 1893 (Anon. 1893_a: 134–135, 141), by the time the show reached Melbourne a few months later, the enterprise had begun to falter. An article appearing in *The Queenslander* reported:

¹²³ Various articles in the *North Queensland Herald* and the *Brisbane Courier* reported from November 2nd and through the month on Meston’s show. See, for example, Anon. 1892: 6.

A few months ago, when it was given out that these aboriginals were about to make a tour of the world, it was generally understood that Mr. A. Meston had entered into some agreement with the Government authorities to safely return the blacks to their homes at some future time. It now appears, however, that no such agreement exists, and in fact could not exist, as no law is in force to prevent the aboriginals of the colony from being taken beyond its bounds. About a month ago a communication was received by the Colonial Secretary from the New South Wales Government on the subject, and Mr. Toser replied that no agreement had been entered into for the return of the blacks. So far no official action has been taken for the purpose of bringing the stranded blackfellows from Melbourne to Queensland. (Anon. 1893_b: 478)

At this point there was already bad blood between Meston and Purcell. The two men accused each other of embezzlement and of bad faith towards the Aboriginal people. Meston blamed Purcell for having mistreated the Queensland Aborigines – especially those from Muralag in the Torres Strait. According to Meston, these islanders were brought to Brisbane against his expressed instructions, and a bill from a storekeeper in Bouliia for “9 padlocks and 2 pairs of chains” suggested to him that Purcell must have taken them away by force (Anon. 1893_c: 466). Purcell abandoned the show and Meston returned to Queensland with the result that about twenty-seven Aboriginal people had to be returned home at the Queensland state’s expense. The authorities probably wanted to quickly ‘close the case’, as the government had demanded a bond from Cunningham while Meston and Purcell were allowed to remove Aboriginal people for the show without having to provide any guarantees for their welfare or for their return home (Poignant 2004: 213).

Meston’s “Wild Australia” failed as a business enterprise and could not be exported to international stages as did Cunningham’s show. During the few months of its intense running, however, the programme with Aboriginal performances pleased the public and performed a strong disciplinary function. Based on the prevailing colonial discourse on Aborigines, “Wild Australia” was the result of a controlled and calculated programme supposedly presenting ‘genuine’ and ‘authentic’ cultural expression of Aboriginal performances by Queensland Aboriginal people. It was this supposed authenticity – the intrinsic tourism’s desire (MacCannell 1976) –, expressed through a series of symbols for otherness such as the boomerang or the body painting, that Kerry identified as exploitable element for

his postcard business. For the visitors of Meston's show, Kerry & Co.'s postcards featuring the Aboriginal 'performers', assumed a souvenir role. All major scenes and dramatic episodes could be 'collected' as miniatures, with which one could play and reconstruct one's own narrative. The 'well-shaped', athletic and exotic performers could also be 'collected' and observed more closely through Kerry's postcards. One of the most striking examples of a Queensland Aboriginal seems to have been the one portrayed on postcard 9 of series no. 4, which shows a young unidentified man from the Barron River renamed by Kerry as "Aboriginal Chief" (Figure 5.55). Postcards featuring this portrait emerged in all the public and private collections I studied during my research. One of them recently attracted the attention of the contemporary Wiradjuri artist Brook Andrew (1970–). Impressed by the sense of beauty, confidence, adornment and ritual that the Kerry postcard conveys, he transformed the motif, creating the prizewinning work entitled "Sexy and Dangerous" (1996) (Figure 5.56).

I first came across the images I used in *Sexy and Dangerous* at the Mitchell Library in Sydney. I was struck by this image and that led to an obsession with the politics of power and invisibility and how entire cultures constructed lies and fabricated histories. (Andrew in Crawford 2007)

Andrew's "Sexy and Dangerous" became very popular, and, as a consequence, its circulation as an exhibit or in media, caused also the perception of the Kerry & Co. postcard "Aboriginal Chief" to change. The price of this postcard jumped from 75 AUD – the average price around 1996 – to 300 AUD, because collectors "just want to own 'that image'" (Dickson pers. comm. 2nd February 2008). Poole explains that, in the dominant European value system, graphic images are appraised and evaluated in terms of their ability to represent or reproduce reality, and therefore their value accrues the more the gap between the image and the referent narrows (1997: 10). Because Andrew does not reveal much about the reality of the photographed subject, the appreciation of the postcard's value cannot be explained within this realist discourse. The fact that collectors "want to own 'that image'" although they are not intimately related to the image's representational content – as for example in the case of a family portrait – leads to a consideration of a general economy of vision, in which, the exchange value plays a dominant role. Indeed, more than accruing their value as representations, these specific Kerry & Co. postcards accrued value through

the social process of their possession. This, in turn, confers a special status on its owner, as Poole has formulated (1997: 11). In fact, we could consider the postcard “Aboriginal Chief” as a *pars pro toto*, an icon that stands for the complete set of characteristics contained in “Sexy and Dangerous”. As an inspiring source for the famous work of art, the Kerry postcard itself becomes imbued with an aura of authenticity that in this visual economy accrues the postcard’s value.

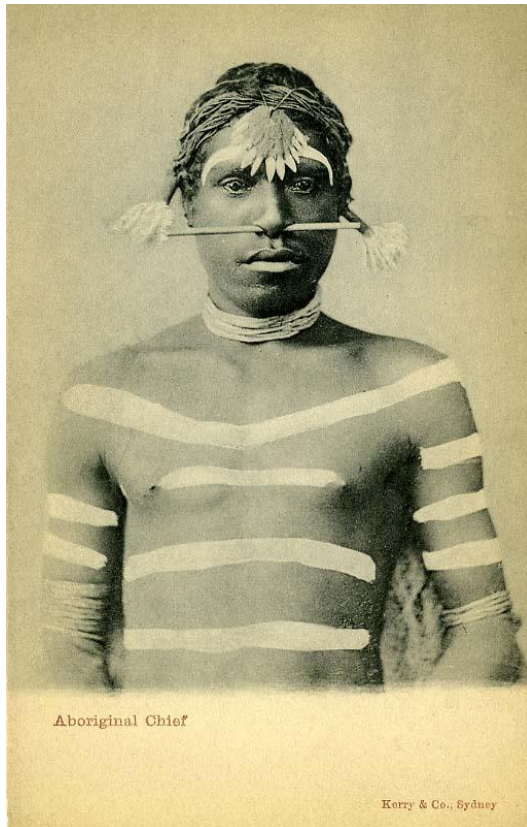


Figure 5.55 “Aboriginal Chief”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.656 (AS/PC2)



Figure 5.56 Brook Andrew, Wiradjuri born 1970, “Sexy and dangerous” 1996, computer-generated colour transparency on transparent synthetic polymer resin, 146.0 x 95.6 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Purchased, 1999 (AS/AB)

Conclusion

Hariman and Lucaites have defined the term “icon” as those

“photographic images appearing in print, electronic or digital media that are widely recognised and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.” (Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 27)

A few images meet all these criteria, and after having explored Kerry's Aboriginal imagery, I argue that some of his motifs do meet all these criteria, hence can be considered as 'iconic'. Limited aesthetically (portrait of an Aboriginal man) while also oriented toward basic topics of public concern (the 'primitive' Aboriginals, their society on the wane), icons are generally doing more than reproducing a structure of power; they reproduce an idealism essential for democratic continuity (cf. Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 3).

In the first part of this chapter I discussed through a material-focused analysis how these Kerry icons emerged from processes related to the motifs' choice, the series' compilation, and the transformation of the original titles for the creation of the postcards' captions. The highly structured captions, allowing an easy closed reading of the images, do not reveal a lot about the many circumstantial details of the motif's creation, such as its date, specific location, or the names of the participants. It is precisely this non-specificity that, as Michael Griffin argues, constitutes the factor that makes icons timeless. They are seldom analysed as informational illustrations, rather "they are celebrated on a more abstract plane as broader symbols of national valour, human courage, inconceivable inhumanity, or senseless loss" (Griffin 1999: 131).

The aim of the chapter's second part, was to excavate 'the specificity' of Kerry's Aboriginal motifs in order to transform these disconnected fragments of spatio-temporal dislocated narratives into a coherent context that would, in the best case, give back the identity to the people appearing in the postcard's imagery. Luckily, the archival work allowed to delineate some of the socio-historical contexts behind the Aboriginal postcard's imagery. I have considered the photographic encounters between Kerry and his Aboriginal 'customers' as contact zones, defined by Clifford, "as places of hybridity, possibility and political negotiation, sites of exclusion and struggle" (Clifford 1997: 212). Following Clifford's suggestion that it would be reductive to consider cultural performances in spectacles, such as Meston's "Wild Australia", as events exclusively created by those who recruited the actors and scripted the show (cf. Clifford 1997: 200), I have tried to identify a range of indigenous experiences and agencies at work in these contact zones. Of course, not all questions could be answered. But now we know at least who these people are, where they came from, and why, when and where they were photographed by Kerry.

This information proved to be crucial to the understanding of both Kerry & Co.'s marketing strategies, and to the mechanism of the firm's Aboriginal series' reception and consumption. All three postcard series examined in Part I are indeed based on images or subjects that the public already knew from the press, exhibitions or public performances. The success of Kerry & Co.'s Aboriginal postcards had been paved – purposely or not – by the pre-circulation of the same motifs under different guises, and this effect of *déjà-vu* contributed to render the exotic closer and more familiar, hence marketable.

Sometimes, as was the case for Meston's crew, people were exploited to act out a stereotype of themselves for white consumption; in other cases, people were not aware of their contribution towards the creation of their own stereotype. This will be addressed in the next chapter.

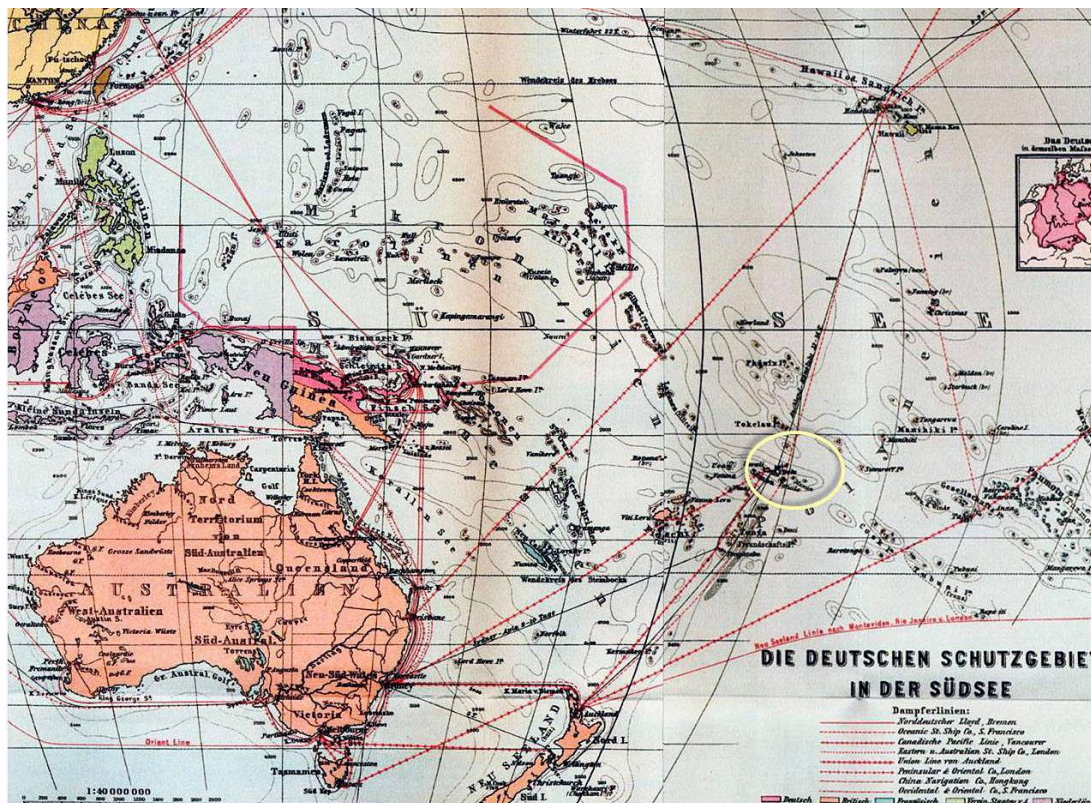
PART III

IN THE SHADE OF THE SAMOAN PALMS

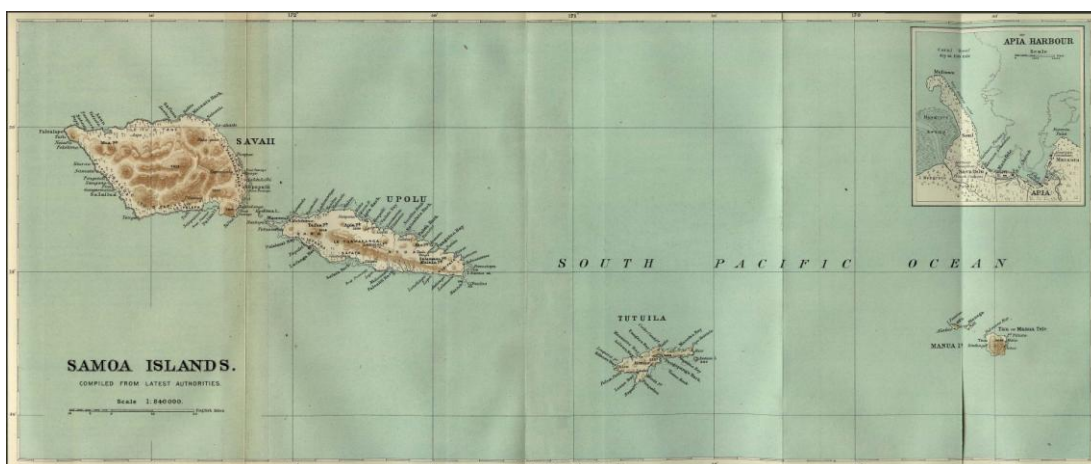
When, in 1884, the New Zealand photographer Alfred Burton (1834–1914) travelled to Apia and Pago Pago to take photographs for the *The Camera in the Coral Islands*, tourism was already flourishing in Samoa. The tourist trade benefited from the fact that the Polynesian islands of Samoa were, on the one hand, a stop-over location on the San Francisco to New Zealand steamship mail service; on the other, they had been located on the Western Polynesia triangle route Auckland-Tonga-Samoa-Fiji-Sydney since the 1880s. Both routes provided a steady flow of excursionists and short-term visitors to the islands. To these belonged photographers, especially from New Zealand, who viewed Samoa and its people as ideal subjects to express the idea of ‘paradise’ (Maps 2 and 3). In *Bilder aus dem Paradies: Koloniale Fotografie aus Samoa 1875-1925*, Engelhard and Mesenhöller (1995) have explored how the notions of ‘South Seas Belles’ and ‘Idyllic Paradise’ contributed to the creation of photographic material about Samoa (cf. Smith 1960, 1992). However, as Quanchi has argued, the archive of early Samoan photography is extensive and grew from several very different motivations, such as the insatiable demand by editors for pictorial material, the desire by early museums and repositories to develop Oceanic collections, or the colonial need for propaganda on the expansion of Western commerce, capitalism and imperial control (Quanchi 2007: 5).

As we saw in Chapter Three, Charles Kerry, possibly inspired by the numerous photographic encounters with Robert Louis Stevenson, also seems to have developed a keen interest in using Samoan images for his postcard business. Indeed, the Kerry & Co. registers of postcard negatives held by the Mitchell Library (AS/ML4) and the Powerhouse Museum (AS/PHM1) in Sydney, reveal that the Samoan motifs constitute the largest set of Kerry’s ‘exotic subjects’, following

straight after Aboriginal people. I, therefore, decided to devote the third part of the thesis to the analysis of this Samoan archive, in order to understand what role these Polynesian motifs played in the Kerry & Co. postcard economy.



Map 2 Oceania in 1902. The Samoan Islands are emphasised through the yellow circle (Hesse-Wartegg)



Map 3 The Samoan Islands represented in an historical map of 1889 from the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*

In Chapter Six, I look at the Kerry Samoan series as an object of visual consumption. Analysing its twelve stereotypical images – the most important reason why these postcards were chosen, purchased, sent or collected –, I explore the processes that contributed to the motifs' emergence and to the crystallisation of Kerry's Samoan stereotypes. In Chapter Seven, I shift the focus to examine aspects of the postcards' materiality in order to shed light on the singularity of biographies and trajectories that characterised this type of visual object.

CHAPTER SIX

A beauty spot

Introduction

During the colonial period, picture postcards, along with racist jokes and other forms of representation, strongly contributed to the creation and circulation of stereotypes. Like other types of commercial photographs, postcards took advantage of their profuse nature and of the fact that they appeared natural and eternal because “they have never sought to challenge the status quo within society” (Ramamurthy 2004: 214, see also Barthes 1977).

The term *stereotype* derives from the Greek words ‘stereos’ and ‘typos’ which mean ‘firm, solid’ and ‘impression’ respectively. This ‘solid impression’ or ‘image perpetuated without change’ emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century in connection with the world of printing, when the name ‘stereotype’ was invented to describe the duplicate impression of an original typographical element, used for printing instead of the original (Oxford English Dictionary 2011).¹²⁴ More than a century later, the American journalist Walter Lippmann, in his work *Public Opinion* (1922), coined the metaphor of a stereotype as a “picture in our heads” (Lippmann 2004[1922]). Stereotypes about the laziness or ingenuity of the supposed inferior colonised people became a stable, if false, foundation upon which colonialism based its power. Indeed, despite being a political and economic relationship, colonialism depended on cultural structures such as stereotypes for its coherence and justification (Huddart 2006: 35).

In this chapter I analyse the imagery of “Series No. 30. Samoa” by applying the notion of stereotypes formulated by Homi Bhabha in the third essay of his *The*

¹²⁴ The French for printing surface and for stereotype is the word ‘cliché’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2011).

Location of Culture entitled ‘The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism’ (1994_a). Particularly pertinent to the analysis of Kerry’s Samoan imagery is the fact that, for Bhabha, the stereotype is a phenomenon in which both coloniser and colonised participated (Bhabha 1994_b), and this helps to consider photographic sessions at the turn of the century as real encounters, and not simply as episodes of domination by one group of another. Paraphrasing Bhabha, Mitchell sees the construction of racial and racist stereotype as “the knotting of a double bind that afflicts both the subject and the object of racism” (Mitchell 1996: 74–75). Exploring the ways stereotypes and discrimination work in terms of a “theory of colonial discourse”¹²⁵ (1994_a: 66), Bhabha stresses the unexpected forms of resistance to be found in the history of the colonised, and the equally unexpected anxieties that plagued the coloniser despite his apparent mastery. This ambivalence, or anxiety, is central to Bhabha’s understanding of the stereotype, and must be seen as a necessary element for its production. Despite the changing historical and discursive situations, this ambivalence ensures the repeatability of a stereotype; it looks for individuation and at the same time causes marginalisation; it generates that effect of the stereotype’s probabilistic truth which must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved (Bhabha 1994_a: 66).

The colonial discourse is dependent on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference connotes rigidity but also coexists with an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and “daemonic repetition” (Bhabha 1994_a: 66). Normally the problem with the stereotype seems to be that it fixes individuals or groups in one place, denying their own sense of identity and presuming to understand them on the basis of prior – usually defective – knowledge.

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negotiation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the

¹²⁵ Bhabha defines the colonial discourse as “an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a ‘subject people’ through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/displeasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledge of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish system of administration and instruction.” (Bhabha 1994_a: 70)

representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (Bhabha 1994_a: 75)

Bhabha sees structural and functional connections between the theory of the stereotype and the Freudian notions of fetishism defined by him as “the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack)” (Bhabha 1994_a: 74–75).¹²⁶ According to him, the fetish, or stereotype, gives access to an ‘identity’ that, on the one hand, is based on mastery and pleasure, and on the other, on anxiety and defence. The stereotype is therefore “a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it” (Bhabha 1994_a: 74–75).

In a passage of *Black Male* (see Bhabha 1995) – where Bhabha discusses the namesake show at the Whitney Museum in New York, which through various media challenged stereotypical images of black males – he reflects on the power of the stereotyping apparatus:

The strategy of the stereotype, as a form of (mis)recognition, depends on staging the encounter with ‘otherness’ in an airless space of fixed coordinates. No mutual movement is possible in that space, because relationships there are largely predictable or reactive: the discriminated subject is reduced to a projection, an overdetermined instance, while the perpetrator of the stereotype act out only narcissistic anxiety and political paranoia. As I walked around ‘Black Male’, seeing so many images of isolated black men staring fixedly at me, I felt that despite the irony and the inversions, something of the rigor mortis of the stereotype had seeped into the show itself. Without quite knowing it, I too had been participating in the stereotype’s *danse macabre*. (Bhabha 1995: 110)

As this example shows, a mode of representation based on fixed photos of isolated individuals, not only fixes the stereotyping discourse, it also fixes the stereotyped object whose performative dimension remains frozen. Although different stereotypes share a similar structure and may work in similar ways, it might be their differences that are most interesting. As Bhabha suggests, it is therefore important that, every time we come across a stereotype, we look at it afresh, as a singular instance (Bhabha 1994_a: 67). In this chapter I will ascertain, and where necessary, re-ascertain the effects of Kerry’s Samoan stereotypes, how they were produced and what they went

¹²⁶ Metaphor is based on similarity and involves a process of selection, while metonymy derives from spatial or temporal contiguity and involves a process of combination. One of the most influential studies of these two poles is Roman Jakobson’s essay ‘Two Types of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances’ (1987) (Huddart 2006: 41).

on to produce in turn. First I examine the constitutive elements of the six vertical motifs based on studio portraits. Considering the body of photographs in the Tyrrell Collection from which the Kerry & Co. postcard motifs were chosen, I analyse the dynamics of the compilation, arguing that the headdress *tuiga* was conferred the role of a cultural marker for Samoa. The second part focuses on people ‘looking away from the camera’, that is, those who are presented in an outdoor environment during a ‘typical’ Samoan activity. Among these, we have postcards featuring a scene on ‘the beach’, a strong symbol for the Pacific, but too general to be attributed a role as a Samoan cultural marker beyond the boundary of “Series No. 30. Samoa”, in the album in question. In the last part of this chapter, I introduce aspects relating to contemporary perceptions in Samoa about the stereotyping of Kerry’s twelve Samoan motifs.

“Series No. 30. Samoa”.

Thanks to its double meaning the expression ‘beauty spot’ lends itself well to characterise Kerry’s series of Samoan postcards, which is the focus of this chapter. Of the fifty numbered postcard series in the album *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards* (AS/PHM2), series no. 30 is devoted exclusively to the Pacific islands of Samoa. On the one hand the series presents picturesque sceneries that enchanted Australian viewers and nourished an exotic longing at the beginning of the 20th Century; on the other, the Samoan group of postcards functions as a ‘beauty spot’ in the sense that it adds to the album’s appeal. Similar to an artificial beauty mark that has been applied to a face as a form of make-up to enhance appeal, the Samoan series in Kerry’s album is a sort of elegant intruder. Indeed, while the title *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards* anticipates the content of the album, whoever is leafing through it will be surprised by this series and its presentation of Samoa. All postcards produced by Kerry in Sydney should be considered as ‘Australian’ – even if part of their creation took place in other countries. However, the adjective “Australian” in the album’s title is meant to emphasise the geographical provenance of the postcard subjects, putting the ‘exotic’ Samoan series even more in evidence.

In the postcard album, the series devoted to Samoa appears at the bottom left on the back of page five (Figure 6.1). Like all the other series, it consists of a strip of paper bearing the heading and two albumen prints pasted on the black page. One albumen print presents a slightly enlarged postcard measuring 9.7 cm × 13.9 cm instead of the original 9 cm × 14 cm,¹²⁷ while the other is a photograph of the series' twelve postcards about sixteen times smaller than in original size.



Figure 6.1 “Series No. 30. Samoa” appears bottom left on page 5 of the postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)



Figure 6.2 “Series No. 30. Samoa” appearing on the loose page 5 of the postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

¹²⁷ Although 9 cm × 14 cm is the regular size of historical postcards, we encounter quite a few – also among Kerry’s postcards – that are slightly shorter or larger. This is due to technical inaccuracies during the mechanical cutting process (cf. Chapter Three).

It is difficult to explore the motifs on these mini-postcards. Nevertheless, the enlargements along with the headings indicate each series' subject and make contextualisation of "Series No. 30. Samoa" possible. On the same page there are series no. 28 "Combination Series" and series no. 29 "Souvenir Series", presenting multi-motif postcards featuring landscapes, Aboriginal people, animals or ships framed in circles or squares (Figure 6.2). The series on the opposite page, no. 31 "Jenolan Caves (B)", no. 32 "Moss Vale District" and no. 33 "Canine Friends" focus on a particular topic such as 'the cave', 'the waterfall' or 'the dog', with all motifs designed in the same manner. As we can see, the Samoan series is geographically not related to any of the other series which appear simultaneously when the viewer is thumbing through the album. We can observe, however, that there is a link between the Samoan series and those preceding or following it. In the two preceding series appear indeed some Aboriginal portraits that introduce the notion of ethnic difference and exoticism, emphasised then in the Samoan series. The two series following it are instead completely devoted to the presentation of the purity and beauty of nature (Figure 6.1). The two elements – ethnic difference and beauty of nature – recurring in the motifs chosen by Kerry as representative for the Samoan series, are in fact both linked to the idea of exoticism; they help to transmit the charm of the unfamiliar and to present something striking because it is out of the ordinary (Figure 6.3).

Due to the horizontal orientation of the enlargement, the viewer has either to turn his/her head ninety degrees to the left, or the album ninety degrees to the right, to better explore the image's content (Figure 6.4). It features a group of people close to the shore; some are sitting in a canoe, others on rocks in or just outside the water. In order to read the caption printed on the white message field one has to turn the album again; it reads "By the Reef. Series 30–Samoa, *Kerry (Copyright), Sydney*". This formula, with the flexible first part adapting to the single motifs, characterises each of the twelve miniaturised postcards appearing to the right of the enlargement. As with the Aboriginal postcards, the miniatures have not been individually attached onto the album sheet. Instead, they have been pinned to a board and then photographed as a series.

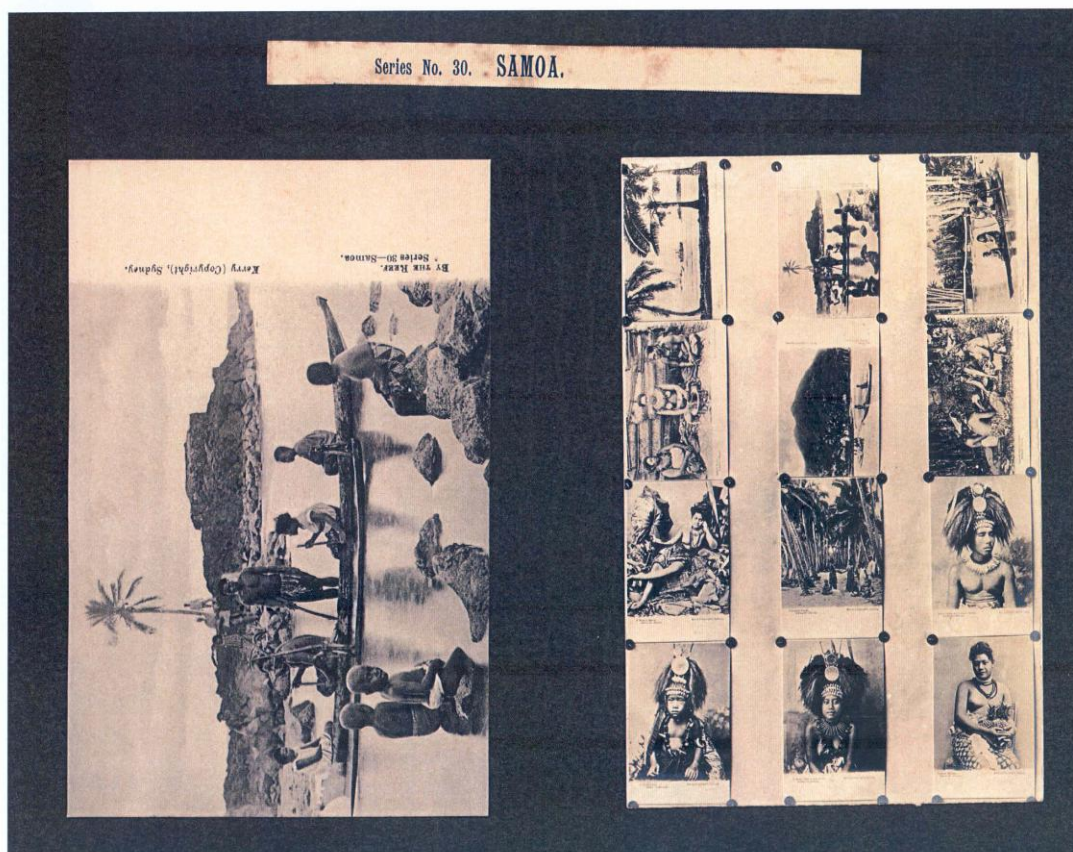


Figure 6.3 “Series No. 30. Samoa”, postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)



Figure 6.4 Albumen print with “By the Reef” motif to represent Samoan series 30, postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

If we now zoom into the overview photograph, we can distinguish between six vertically and six horizontally oriented postcards (Figure 6.5), which I have numbered for easier reference during the discussion.

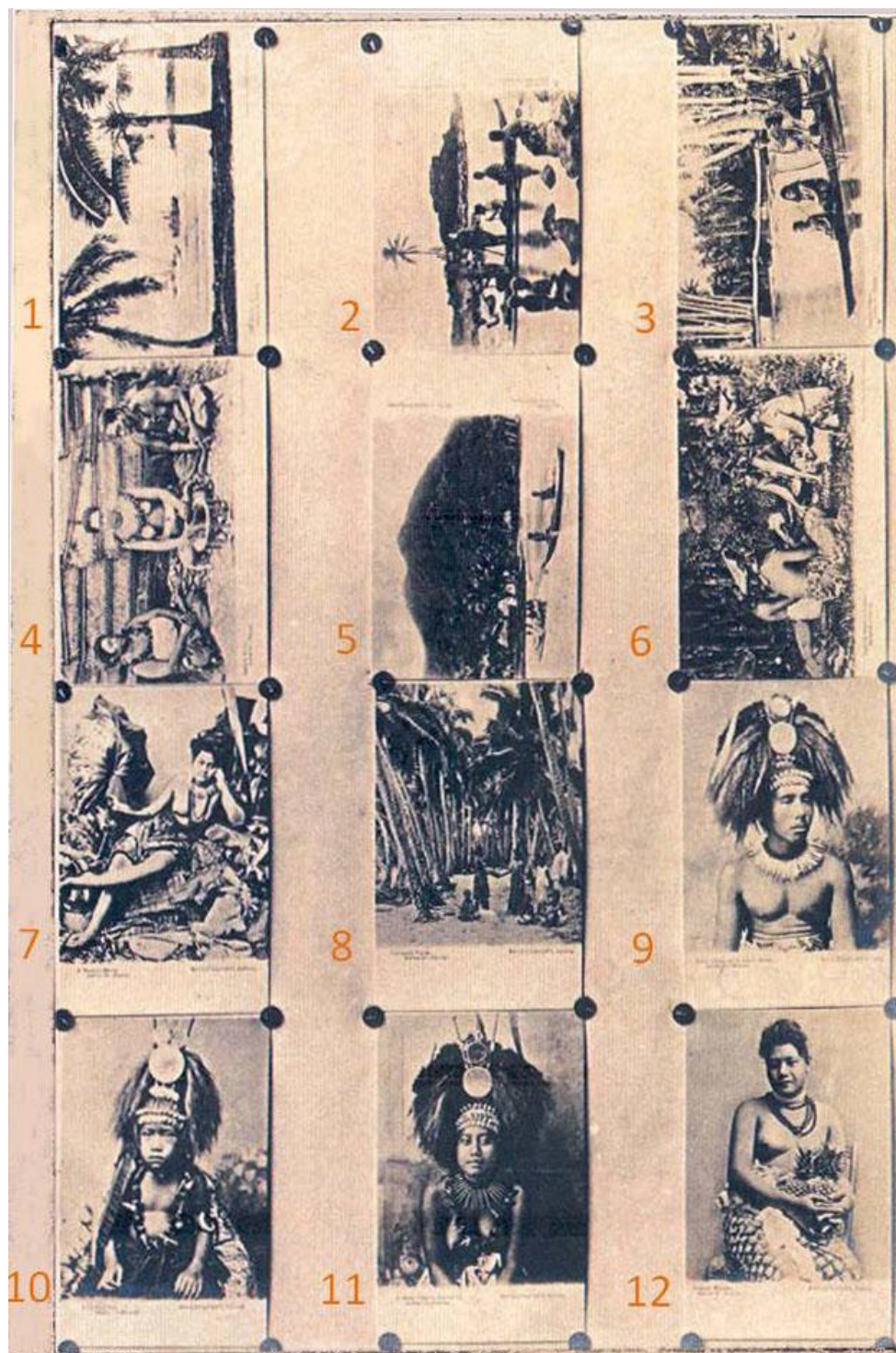


Figure 6.5 Albumen print showing the twelve postcards of Samoan series no. 30 pinned to a board, postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

After a brief look already, it is clear that we are dealing here with a more – aesthetically speaking – lively series compared to the preceding and following series. Indeed, the twelve postcards do not present a narrative or repetitive sequence of twelve similar subjects, as it is the case for most Kerry’s series. In the Samoan series there are two motifs that recur in three similar postcards: portraits of people with headdresses and beach scenes. These postcards are not aligned to constitute a compact group that reinforces a certain message; instead, they are distributed in a way that confers dynamism to the series. Liveliness is certainly also enhanced by the two different arrangements: vertical and horizontal. To attract the viewer’s attention we first have six postcards in vertical format (7–12), mainly featuring studio portraits. The horizontal postcards (1–6) display landscapes and outdoor group activities, and appear rotated. Apart from a single postcard showing a view from the Apia harbour front (1), all other postcards of Samoan series no. 30 are clearly characterised by the presence of people.

We do not know with certainty who compiled the series and pinned the postcards to the board in order to produce this overview. In view of what we saw in Chapter Five – the fifty series seem to have been compiled by two different people adopting two different ‘thumbtack-techniques’ – however, we can deduce that “Series No. 30. Samoa” was compiled by a Kerry & Co. staff member, who took over the job from Kerry and sorted the postcards according to orientation rather than to referential content.

Studio portraits

Of the postcards representing studio portraits three are half-length portraits featuring a sitting child, a woman and a man wearing the ceremonial headdress *tuiġa*¹²⁸ (10, 11 and 9), two are portraits of young women, one is a three-quarter (12), and another a full-length portrait (7). Probably the most eye-catching postcards are those featuring the three Samoans wearing the ceremonial headdress *tuiġa*. Although the postcard with the young man (9) is not lined up with the other two, the relationship between these three motifs is established by their similar composition. With a bit of imagination the viewer may assume that the subjects constitute a nuclear family, all

¹²⁸ *Tuiġa* is pronounced ‘tuġa’ with a soft ‘ng’ as ‘sing’ in English or ‘Engel’ in German.

three being ‘related’ to a chief, as the captions tell us: “A Chief’s Son”, “A High Chief’s Daughter”, and “High Chief with Head Dress”. It is not known whether the man is really a *matai* (chief), the woman a *taupou* (chief’s daughter), and the child a *manaia* (*matai*’s son). If the portraits were taken in a studio in Sydney, the sitters either had high status, or were seamen or plantation workers who looked ‘typically’ Samoan. It is unlikely that a low-status family would have been visiting Australia at that time. The people who were allowed to wear the *tuiga* were sons or daughters of the high chief *matai*, the leading figure responsible for the administration of the resources and for the security of the *’aiga*, the extended family. The *’aiga* was the nodal point of the *fa’a Samoa*, the Samoan way of life – the most important economic and social unit around which everything revolved, and still does so today. Given the non-existence of documents proving that Kerry travelled to Samoa, or at least informed himself by reading books, we can assume that his ethnographic knowledge about Samoan people was not very deep. But he was certainly the kind of person, who read the newspaper daily and was therefore aware of the unstable situation on those islands, characterised by civil wars and tensions due to Western presence. We can also take it that he was the kind of person who knew how to make the most of photographic resources that customers such as Robert Louis Stevenson brought to his studio.

The symbol of Samoa

Just as the photographers John Davis (†1893)¹²⁹, Alfred John Tattersall (1861–1951)¹³⁰ and Thomas Andrew (1855–1939)¹³¹ did in the early 1890s in their studios

¹²⁹ John Davis was the first photographer to arrive in Samoa. According to an announcement in the *Samoa Times & South Sea Advertiser* Davis established his photographic studio in 1873. In his cartes-de-visite (9.4 cm x 5.8 cm), cabinet cards (15 cm x 10 cm) and full plates (21.6 cm x 16.5 cm) he presented portraits and ‘types’. When, in the 1880s, Davis also became postmaster in Apia, he was well informed about all the ships coming and leaving; this considerably helped him to sell and distribute his photographic material and postcards (Nordström 1995: 27–29).

¹³⁰ The New Zealand born Alfred John Tattersall worked in Samoa from 1886 as the assistant of John Davis. After Davis’ death in 1893, Tattersall took over the photographic studio and ran it until 1948 (Nordström 1995: 29–30).

¹³¹ Also from New Zealand, Thomas Andrew arrived in Samoa in 1891 and opened his photographic studio in the same year. The majority of his surviving photographs are albumen prints with cardboard support (12.5 cm x 17.5 cm). Although Andrew produced commercial images, his interest in Samoan culture was more pronounced than that of his colleagues. The way he posed his subjects reveals that the Samoan people understood the studio situation and reacted similar to European sitters (Nordström 1995: 30–32).

in Apia, it is possible that Kerry also posed several anonymous people in his studio in Sydney carrying *tuiga*, necklaces, a club or a knife. Quanchi has rightly stated that studio portraits of this kind have been “repeatedly privileged by academic debate” at the expense of other images, and that “republication, indicates more about the research parameters of today’s academics than it does about turn-of-the-century Euro-American perceptions of Samoa” (Quanchi 2007: 9). In my case, the body of images available for the analysis is limited to twelve motifs. The three *tuiga* portraits clearly emerge as a connected group from the series, and for this reason I think that they constitute a fertile field to start my discussion of Kerry’s Samoan postcards, and to explore various aspects of Kerry’s photographic activity. First of all, the three portraits reflect two evident intentions. The first is a straightforward message about the country from where the people represented come: in cultural terms people who wore this kind of headdress were Samoan. The second intention was to show to Australian customers what Samoan people looked like, in juxtaposition to the more ‘familiar’ Aboriginal people. Despite this, the three *tuiga* portraits are a simplification of a given reality because they offer an arrested, fixated form of representation denying what Bhabha calls “the play of difference” (Bhabha 1994a: 75), and they constitute a incisive representational shortcut in the marketing strategy of Kerry’s postcard industry. As is often the case, without a specific material clue or a so-called ‘typical portrait’ from a specific island, it would be very difficult if not impossible to recognise a place from a postcard series. Even for the expert, identification would be challenging given the similarities of tropical environment, people and sometimes even material culture that Samoa, Tonga and Fiji share. However, the presence of the headdress *tuiga* makes a clear statement: it is Samoa. The *tuiga* is thus used as a cultural marker. In a broad sense it becomes a symbol for otherness, but, as the captions already suggest, it is also a symbol of Samoan status.

The discussions that privilege photographs of people wearing a *tuiga* revolve around the politics of representation, while the material aspects constituting the image are given less consideration. Because the *tuiga* is a key element of these photographic compositions, it deserves a closer look. In fact, the detailed analysis of its materiality as described by Augustin Krämer in *Die Samoa-Inseln* (1903: 285–288) and by Te Rangi Hiroa in *Samoan Material Culture* (1930: 615–619) reveals aspects that help to understand the dynamics of the image-making. The two authors

explain that the *tuiga*, as it was worn at the turn of the 20th century when the photographs on which Kerry's postcards are based were taken, was a composite headdress. It was made of several parts that were put together only when needed. In fact, the base of the *tuiga* was prepared straight on the head of the person wearing it. The head was wrapped with bark cloth and the ends of the cloth were tied and twisted to form a foundation (*pou*) and support for the other headdress elements that were affixed to it: strings with many long tassels of hair (*lau ulu*), the decorated framework of wooden sticks worn at the front of the headdress (*lave*), the forehead band (*pale fuiono*) and a set of red parakeet feathers mounted on top as decoration. The preferred colour of the hair was a very light brown. According to Te Rangi Hiroa the dark hair of most Samoans was lightened in colour by either rubbing the hair with coral lime and then exposing it to the sun and rain for up to several months, or by soaking the hair daily in salt water and exposing it to the sun until the hair bleached to the desired degree (1930: 616). The decorated framework was either tied together or fixed to a plate of material such as turtle shell. The individual sticks had strips of barkcloth tightly wrapped around them. The forehead band tied across the front and base of the *lave* helped to hold it in place. It once used to be made of a braided strip of coconut fibre decorated with two rows of cut nautilus shell pieces. Krämer emphasises that these nautilus shells were imported from Tonga especially for the *pale fuiono*, and were therefore very rare and valuable. In addition, as a similar forehead band made with nautilus shells did not exist in other places – not even in Tonga –, Krämer suggests that we can consider it as an “*ureigene Samoanische Erfindung*”, a genuine Samoan invention (1903: 288). What other image could, at this point, better represent Samoa in a postcard?

Charles Kerry was well aware of this, so that he decided to use even three ‘*tuiga* motifs’ for series no. 30 (Figure 6.5). For choosing the subjects Kerry could draw on a dozen of studio portraits – now part of the Tyrrell Collection at the Powerhouse Museum – representing Samoan people posing with this kind of headdress. Although the postures and clothing of the subjects are similar, a closer look at the background allows us to identify two different backdrops. If the subjects were the same, we could presume that whoever took the photographs worked with two different backdrops during a single photographic session. But the subjects are different and so are the paraphernalia, which suggests that either two groups of

Samoan people visited the studio on different occasions, or that one group was photographed by another photographer. There are reasons to believe that the photographs on which Kerry's postcards 9, 10 and 11 are based were not taken in Kerry's studio in Sydney. Because of the intricacy that characterises the authorship issue, I postpone analysis of those series to Chapter Seven. In this section I focus on those aspects that reflect the contradictory practice in photographic studios, and which lay at the basis of the stereotyping apparatus adopted by Kerry to create the vertically oriented motifs of "Series No. 30. Samoa".

The manipulation of objects

As we have seen, the *tuiga* is a composite headdress that cannot be worn and removed like, for example, a top hat. Its one-use nature requires, on the one hand, time, and, on the other, an aesthetic sense. It is necessary that all the elements are perfect as such and, at the same time, fit well into the ensemble. As Mallon points out, it was this delicate and fragile nature of the *tuiga* that encouraged the person wearing it to stand upright and dance with good posture. The effect of grace and dignity was the consequence (Mallon 2002: 175). If we look at Kerry's postcards, we notice that the man is sitting upright with the *tuiga* well fixed on his head (9). But, due to either fatigue or unease, the woman does not hold her upper body straight, as the wearing of the *tuiga* would actually require (11). An almost identical photograph with a wider frame reveals that the woman is not resting her elbows on her legs as the postcard image might imply. The lady's head sinks onto the shoulders that bend forwards, possibly with the intention of not overly exposing her naked upper body. Because her *tuiga* is identical to the one worn by the man in postcard 9 and also to those worn by three other men posing in photographs not used for the postcard production (Figures 6.6a–c), it becomes evident that whoever took the photographs recycled the same headdress several times to portray different Samoan people. The same practice can also be observed for the *tuiga* worn by the child. Characterised by one big and three small shell discs integrated into the framework of wooden sticks, this headdress was also worn by a young man posing with a fan in another Tyrrell photograph (Figure 6.7a–b).



Figure 6.6a

Figure 6.6b

Figure 6.6c

Figure 6.6 Three different men posing with the same *tuiga*: **a**) “Samoa Chiefs”, proof of glass plate negatives, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: 72F.157.2760 (AS/PHM4); **b**) “Mataafa’s Son. Samoa”, proof of glass plate negatives, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: 72F.35.2768 (AS/PHM4); **c**) “A Mataafa High Chief”, reproduced from the original glass plate of the Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, accession number: 72F.141.2846 (AS/MAC2)



Figure 6.7a

Figure 6.7b

Figure 6.7 Second type of *tuiga* worn by two different sitters: **a**) “A Chief’s Son”, collotype postcard presenting motif 10 of Samoan series no. 30, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1); **b**) “A Mataafa High Chief”, proof of glass plate negatives, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: 72F.140.2847 (AS/PHM4)

The peculiarity about the *tuiga* is that each element can be used in various combinations, making many transformations and inventions possible. Yet this characteristic seems to contrast with the practice of the artist who took the photographs used for the production of series 30; what occurred here is the recycling of a *tuiga* as a whole, rather than creating a new object by combining the single elements in alternative ways. The seven portraits of the Tyrrell Collection featuring Samoan people with a headdress were produced with the help of only two *tuiga* that were passed from one head to the next – like normal hats, and without the time-consuming ceremony of affixing one element after the other. As so often was the case, the *tuiga* were props rather than items that the Samoans brought with them to the studio.

Similar to what was said for the woman, the child too does not seem to feel comfortable in his decoration of headdress, pandanus necklace, barkcloth and boar's tusk (Figure 6.7a).¹³² The *tuiga* is leaning to the right and its weight appears to be disturbing the child who tries to keep it balanced on his head. The austere expression, the fixed gaze, possibly at the photographer himself, and the fingers of right hand tautly bent inwards are signs of unease. It is not only the situation of being in a photographic studio that irritates the small child; it is also the *tuiga* with its heavy framework and shell discs. Their material and contextual status suggest that, instead of being personal objects conferring a definite identity to the owner, they have been turned into stereotypical tools through commercial photographic practice. Their function and material peculiarity have changed, manipulated in favour of a “daemonic repetition” at the expenses of an individuation process (cf. Bhabha 1994_a: 66).

¹³² A necklace or armband made from a single boar's tusk is called *'ula nifo*. The tight curl of the tusk was achieved by extracting the opposing canines from the upper jaw of a tame boar. From the lower jaw the tusk would grow upward, and instead of grinding against the upper canines, it would continue to grow through the open gap. It was a rare object and highly prized. It was usually worn around the neck and tied with a cord or barkcloth. Occasionally a single boar's tusk was worn on the upper arm tied in place with a cord, as postcard 10 shows. The boars' tusk ornaments were an import from Melanesia in the mid 19th century – from Vanuatu in particular (see Speiser 1996[1923]).

The use of backdrops¹³³

Among the various objects collected by photographers to stage their shoots were also backdrops, indispensable elements utilised to create the illusion of a different reality.¹³⁴ Photographic backdrops were oversized paintings on an expanse of cloth – generally a heavy cotton or a thin, pliable canvas, measuring approximately 2.4 by 3 metres (Neal 1997: 1). They mostly showed idealised landscapes or architectural features, creating an illusory sensation of beauty, opulence or – as often the case in portraits of indigenous people – exoticism (Lippard 1997: 1). Backdrops were strong tools in the – mostly unconscious – stereotyping process of commercial photography, because they played a leading role in staging “the encounter with ‘otherness’” in a fixed and well-defined space (cf. Bhabha 1995: 110). It would be extremely interesting to situate Kerry’s use of various backdrops in a wider discourse about these framing devices. However, to date there is almost no literature dealing with this specific aspect of photography. Indeed, apart from a few essays¹³⁵ accompanying the travelling exhibition *From the Background to the Foreground* created at Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York,¹³⁶ there is still no in-depth study on backdrops – in Elizabeth Edwards’ words “a PhD thesis waiting to be written” (pers. comm. 17th February 2011). The difficulty in approaching this topic is probably due to the fact that, in order to understand the general role of backdrops at the end of the 19th century, it would be necessary to do a comparative analysis of the work by a considerable number of photographers who were active at the turn of the century. In the following, I would like to contribute to this aspect by exploring Kerry’s use of backdrops in the creation of the *tuija* photographs and postcards.

The three *tuija* portraits appearing in series no. 30 (postcards 9, 10 and 11, Figure 6.5) were taken in front of a backdrop featuring, on the right, a bush with

¹³³ “The history of the painted backdrop begins shortly after the invention of photography in the 1830s. When this new picture-making process caught on it spread throughout the world in an amazingly short period of time. Much of this early camera work was performed on rooftops and at other convenient outdoor locations in order to catch the greatest amount of daylight. Although basic lighting systems made it technically possible for photography to move indoors, it was the introduction of the artist’s ingenious device, an outdoor scene painted onto a canvas backdrop, that revolutionized the concept of picture making.” (Neal 1997: 22)

¹³⁴ As Neal points out, backdrops were important especially for travelling photographers as they were used to lure customers to the photographer’s booth (1997: 1).

¹³⁵ See Appadurai (1997), Lippard (1997) and Neal (1997).

¹³⁶ This exhibition was shown in Rochester, at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy Andover, Massachusetts, and at the California Museum of Photography, Riverside, in 1996 and 1997.

some white flowers in the foreground and a couple of long trunk trees in the background. The bush is supposed to grow over a balustrade that ends on the left hand side where the corner of a house begins. This does not emerge from the postcard motifs, but becomes evident through a comparison with the backdrop featuring on the four photographs not used for postcards. All portraits were taken in front of the same backdrop (cf. Figures 6.6 and 6.7). In contrast to, for example, the Aboriginal 'fighting scenes' staged in front of a large backdrop entirely visible in the photograph in order to give a sense of the 'real' environment in which the action takes place (cf. Figure 5.43), the photos on which these three Kerry postcards are based show the subjects posing in front of a selected area of the backdrop; here the backdrop had a decorative rather than a context-revealing or suggestive function. Probably more than in the case of other photographic props, backdrops are active in creating the overall impression that an image has on the viewer. Furthermore, they introduce contradictory ideas about context and location of the subject. Postcard 9, for example, is characterised by the dominant presence of the sitter who stands out against a light background. The painted section on the right evokes a natural environment, but the surround remains diffuse in contrast with the detailed display of the man's decoration and costume. In comparison the photograph in Figure 6.6b shows the sitter embedded in a broader context. We are dealing with another subject but because the poses and the situation are very similar, we may expect that what we perceive here is similar to what we would see around the man posing in postcard 9. As if the photographer had stepped back, in this photograph the hands holding the knife and a wider part of the backdrop are now visible. We recognise trees, bushes, flowers, even a baluster behind the man's right arm. Figure 6.6a goes even a step further, revealing not only the entire backdrop, but also elements 'outside the frame', such as the barkcloth segment at the top showing the characteristic Samoan motif of an over-painted dark circle with central white spot (cf. Neich and Pendergrast 1997). The floor that is covered with mats introduces a three-dimensionality that diminishes the centrality of the background as for example in Figure 6.6c. The examples go to show how photographs taken in front of the same backdrop may appear different because the camera has been moved. This difference is not only perceived at the aesthetic level, the context and the location of the subject also appear to be different with the complicity of the original captions. Appadurai (1997: 1) is right when he

says that “the original captions are part of the photo backdrop.” Together they typify the subject even if they represent individuals more realistically. For this reason both the backdrop and the captions can be defined as contradictory tools. In Figure 6.6a the broad context allows us to situate the two ‘Samoan Chiefs’ in a photo studio, or at least in a place where they are posing for a photograph. In photograph no. 2768 (Figure 6.6b) the elements ‘outside the frame’ disappear and the observer is immediately absorbed in the contemplation of the photo’s motif. The three-quarters portrait is counterbalanced by the backdrop which, in its details, suggests the context of the man’s (attributed) identity. Indeed, different to all the other six photographs taken in front of the same backdrop, in this photograph a baluster is visible. Hidden by the body of the posing subjects the baluster is revealed here as a symbol of difference and nobility. The posing subject is in fact not just a ‘Chief’; according to the caption he is “Mataafa’s Son”. Mata’afa Iosefa (1832–1912), appointed King of Samoa after his return from ten years in exile (Anon. 1898j), was a well-known personality in Australia because the daily press wrote about him and published photographs of him. Kerry, who, for lack of knowledge or choice, never mentions the names of the indigenous subjects, acknowledges here the aristocratic descent of this man by using a symbol usually reserved for Euro-American customers. Classical columns and volute balustrades have often been used as an indication for a step up in ‘civilization’. In postcard 9, none of these symbols are visible despite the fact that the man posing is supposed to be a “High Chief, with Head Dress”. In this postcard even the flowers and bushes are not clearly defined, so that the backdrop results blurred in contrast with the well-presented features of the subject and the *tuiga*. Given the strong contrast between subject and background, we may presume that whoever took the portrait asked the Samoan man to sit in front of a rather blank setting. Comparison with the other photographs, however, reveals that the backdrop behind the subject was not meant to be so light as in the postcard. It appears that Kerry retouched the background. He effaced the floral motifs behind the subject in order to allow the *tuiga* to stand out more prominently (see postcards 9 and 10). Contrary to what one might expect, the manipulation did not take place during the transfer from photography to postcard, as was often the case. The proofs of the original glass plate negatives show that the manipulation was done already on the negative. By

neutralising the backdrop Kerry foregrounds the Samoan man as such, even though the primary objective was probably to emphasise the *tuiga*.¹³⁷

In postcard 11 (Figure 6.5) instead, the portrait of the Samoan lady is supported by a strong background that overwhelms the space behind the subject. Despite the fact that the backdrop's motif is not well defined, the horizontal and vertical lines that the observer may read as balustrade and walls allude to a domestic environment. The association woman/house is particularly strong in Tyrrell's series of photographs; the portraits of the various women have been taken in front of the left-hand side of this one backdrop: the one suggesting a door and a house corner.¹³⁸

In order to transmit the message that the three people wearing the *tuiga* played a special role in Samoan society, Kerry used descriptions showing their supposed genealogical link with some chief or even high chief. Unfortunately, to date, I have not been able to find any documentation relating to the three Samoan sitters whose portraits Kerry used for the postcards. It could be that they really were of special descent, and that Kerry wanted to acknowledge this in their portraits, despite omitting their names. Still, the titles *taupou* and *manaia* appear neither on the photographs' nor on the postcards' captions. Whether this is due to ignorance or to a deliberate choice is still open.

The creation of new identities

The creation of a new identity is related to the transformation of status through the iconic use of an object, in this case the *tuiga*. We have seen that without precise information about the people who posed, possibly for money, it is difficult to say whether or not they were really related to a Samoan chief. Through the creation of a stereotype, 'common' people could be easily transformed into chiefs, chiefs' sons or daughters in a photographic studio. This happened, first, through the cancellation of their identity in the captions, and then through the use of objects such as the *tuiga* that served to confer on the subject a new identity. According to Bhabha, in the

¹³⁷ As Wyman writes, the scenery and props of most photographers of the daguerreotype era consisted of a plain background, table, chair and sometimes books (1997: 1). They made little use of painted representational backgrounds. Appadurai explains that in India "there was a gradual effort to 'singularise' the photographic subject by neutralising the backdrop". Yet he calls attention to the fact that when this occurs it does not mean a straightforward victory for realism and individualism (Appadurai 1997: 1).

¹³⁸ I will return to this particular backdrop in Chapter Seven when I discuss postcards based on photographs with the same backdrop produced by other companies and presented with another layout.

multiple and contradictory belief, which is the stereotype, this new identity encapsulates both mastery and pleasure, as well as anxiety and defence of the stereotype's creator (Bhabha 1994_a: 74–75).

Despite the fact that in the Tyrrell Collection of negative proofs I could identify only two *taupou* portraits, while many are of *manaia*, the majority of the 'tuiga postcards' produced by various photographers at Kerry's time, seems to have a *taupou* as subject. Due to her special and complex role in Samoan society, the *taupou* was *tapu*, or *sa*, for every member of the community.¹³⁹ Next to representing her village in ceremonies and functioning as a spiritual leader of her village or polity, one of her tasks was to lead the men of the village into battle. This is why *taupou* were also frequently depicted holding a large knife or club as a symbol of this role (Figure 6.8a–b).

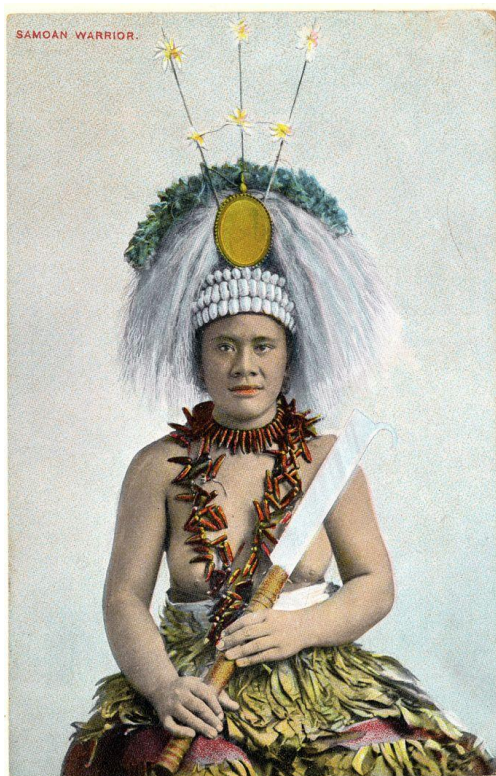


Figure 6.8a



Figure 6.8b

Figure 6.8 Two *taupos* represented on a printed and real photo postcard (RPPC) respectively: **a)** "Samoa Warrior", postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.278 (AS/PC2); **b)** "Samoa Lady", RPPC, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.365 (AS/PC2)

¹³⁹ For the implications of the notion 'tapu' and the female status in Polynesia see Bradd Shore's article 'Mana and Tapu' (1989).

Kerry avoided presenting the *taupou* from this perspective, preferring to convey the notion of femininity and grace rather than of aggressiveness. In the permanent display at the National Museum of Samoa – *Falemata'aga o Samoa*, there is a label reading:

The Taupou is not a 'dancing girl' as some old European postcards call her. She is a high chief's unmarried daughter, selected and trained to represent the village. There are always other girls of the village around her to look after her. She leads the ceremonial presentation of gifts, entertains distinguished guests and performs the closing dance (*taualuga*). In the old days only taupou and the manaia were allowed to wear the tuiga (ceremonial headdress), with a fine mat as skirt.

This label blames historical postcards for having created and perpetuated an inaccurate image of the *taupou*. With her social role misunderstood, the *taupou* has indeed been considered almost only for her appealing presence during dance performances. Rather than in printed postcards – which were mostly based on studio portraits or on staged and static outdoor scenes – dancing *taupou* were presented in real photo postcards (RPPC) (Figure 6.9). This reinforced the cliché that a *taupou*



Figure 6.9 A *taupo* performing the *taualuga* ceremonial dance with other young girls of her village. Postcard titled "Samoan Warrior", half-tone print, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.224 (AS/PC2)

was a ‘dancing girl’, a cliché that by 1907 was already available in Apia, Auckland, Sydney and Europe in the form of prints or postcards (Quanchi 2007: 3). Thus the unidentified young woman of Kerry’s postcard 11 appears in slightly different poses also in Walter Hutchinson’s *Customs of the World* (1913) and in the second volume of Augustin Krämer’s monograph *Die Samoa-Inseln* (Vol. II, 1903: 276) (Figure 6.10).¹⁴⁰ Krämer shows this image in the chapter devoted to adornment and clothes, and uses the caption to give details of what the Samoan lady is wearing: the headdress (*tuiga*), the forehead band made of nautilus shells (*pale fuiono*), the rare necklace (*‘ula lei*) produced from teeth of the sperm whale and decorated with a row of pearl-like beads, and the less rare necklace *‘ula fala* that indicated status.¹⁴¹ Krämer focuses his description on the ‘genuine’ Samoan elements, and does not mention the Victorian pocket mirror integrated in a framework of wooden sticks in place of a shell disc.



Figure 6.10 The same unidentified girl of postcard 11 also appears in Krämer’s *Die Samoa-Inseln*. She is wearing the necklace *‘ula lei* made from teeth of a sperm whale (Vol. II, 1903: 276)

¹⁴⁰ See also figures 7.16a–c in Chapter Seven.

¹⁴¹ Made from pandanus fruits and painted red it was most often worn by specialist orators (*tulafale*).

Similar to the *tuiga*, the *'ula lei* was also a significant constituent of the formal attire of people of rank. As Te Rangi Hiroa pointed out, “to complete the costume on dress occasions” (1930: 630) it was an absolutely essential element. One would therefore expect that the *'ula lei* would be considered as a strong symbol of Samoa which, similar to the *tuiga*, would be used in depictions as a cultural marker. Indeed we observe that the *'ula lei* frequently appeared on photographs and postcards around the turn of the 20th century. Nevertheless, for two reasons I argue that its efficacy as a cultural marker was weaker than in the case of the *tuiga*. First, while the *tuiga* was unique in its material constitution, the Samoan *'ula lei* shared similar appearance and identical materiality with the *wasekaseka*, a necklace associated with Fiji. Both the *'ula lei* and the *wasekaseka* were made from teeth of the sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) which were split and ground to form curved and pointed pendants.¹⁴² The scarcity of raw material in Samoa certainly influenced the appearance of the *'ula lei*, which, typically, were half the length and cut much thinner than the Fijian *wasekaseka*.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, for Krämer the more likely reason why *'ula lei* had thinner pendants was “the highly refined taste of the Samoan people.” (Krämer Vol. II, 1903: 289) Not considering the possibility that, at that time, two different styles of Samoan necklaces might have existed – a Fijian-style *'ula lei* and a Samoan-style *'ula lei*¹⁴⁴ –, Krämer’s strict distinction between Samoan *'ula lei* and Fijian *wasekaseka* contributed to a clear Euro-American definition of which necklace was Samoan, and which was not. During my research I encountered more Samoan postcards featuring a person wearing a Samoan-style *'ula lei* than such showing a person wearing the Fijian style – even though these postcards are not rare. By tendency the Samoan-style *'ula lei* appears more in commercially produced printed postcards – as is the case for Kerry’s prints –, while the Fijian-style *'ula lei* features more often on real photo postcards (Figure 6.11).

¹⁴² These were smoothed and polished, then a hole was drilled through them after which they were threaded onto a cord and worn around the neck, as shown in postcard 11.

¹⁴³ Augustin Krämer wrote that the *'ula lei* were rare and valued in Samoa because the Samoans were unable to catch sperm whales. To obtain the desired ivory they had either to wait until a carcass was washed ashore or to barter for one with people from Fiji (Vol. II, 1903: 289). Sean Mallon supports the thesis that many *'ula lei* originated in Fiji and were made for Fijian chiefs by Tongan and Samoan canoe builders, who began settling in Fiji in the late 1700s (2002: 176).

¹⁴⁴ See Tobias Sperlich’s detailed discussion of a *'ula lei* from the Cologne Museum (2006). The author describes two *'ula lei* styles and discusses the shift in Samoan artistic production that took place at the turn of the 20th century, creating a preference for the Fijian-style over the Samoan-style *'ula lei* (2006: 133–135, 137).



Figure 6.11 The young woman in the centre is wearing a Fijian-style *'ula lei*. RPPC, gelatin silver print, "Village Virgin' Samoa", The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.315 (AS/PC2)

The other reason why the *'ula lei* is not such a strong a cultural marker as the *tuiga* has to do with the fact that it can be substituted by a necklace made of the closed blossoms of the *pualulu* tree (*Fagraea berteriana*) (see Whistler and Elevitch 2006). The white blossoms resemble the slender short pendants of an *'ula lei*, and, especially when seen from a distance, it is difficult to recognise whether the necklace is made of ivory or blossoms. While among the *'tuiga* photographs' that Kerry had at his disposal to choose postcard motifs from, the majority of the subjects are wearing a *tuiga* and an ivory *'ula*

lei,¹⁴⁵ the postcards of series no. 30 do not give preference to any particular necklace. Instead, they function as a catalogue displaying the various types worn by high ranking people in combination with the *tuiga*: the child in postcard 10 has a pandanus fruit necklace (*'ula fala*) (Figure 6.12a) – usually reserved for orators –, the woman in postcard 11 an ivory *'ula lei* (Figure 6.12b) and the man in postcard 9 a blossom *'ula lei* (Figure 6.12c).

¹⁴⁵ Only one person is wearing a *tuiga* and a blossom necklace and only one person is wearing only the blossom necklace.



Figure 6.12a

Figure 6.12b

Figure 6.12c

Figure 6.12 A catalogue of Samoan necklaces: **a)** the *'ula fala* in postcard “A Chief’s Son”, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1); **b)** the ivory *'ula lei* in postcard “A High Chief’s Daughter”, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.298 (AS/PC2); **c)** the blossom *'ula lei* in postcard “A Chief, with Head Dress”, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.296 (AS/PC2)

‘Belles’

The necklaces were not only used and misused as marker of status. Sometimes they were simply worn as adornment. Postcards 7 “Samoan Girl” and 12 “Samoan Maiden” feature two girls posing without a *tuiga* (Figures 6.13 and 6.14).



Figure 6.13 Motif of postcard 7 “Samoan Girl”, collotype postcard, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)



Figure 6.14 Motif of postcard 12 “Samoan Maiden”, collotype postcard, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)

As the caption suggests, this kind of portrait falls into the category of the so-called ‘belles’ because the focus of the postcard is on the young girl rather than on a specific object or the environment. The female body is presented here in two different ways. In

Figure 6.14 the body is emphasised by neutralising the backdrop. In Figure 6.13 the body is recontextualised in a setup overloaded with props that are meant to symbolise Samoa. As suggested by Ramamurthy, it is not by chance that these type of photographs became dominant among commercial images, because through gendered relations colonial power could be more emphatically represented (Ramamurthy 2004: 224). Many critics have given attention to the stereotypical and highly coded representations of women in postcards (for example Alloula 1986, Sturma 2002, Connell 2003, Mayer 2006) and in popular culture in general (Berger 1972, Williamson 1978 and Winship 1987a, 1987b). One of the key criticisms relates to the way in which women are represented as passive and objects to satisfy sexual desires. Indigenous women were often photographed bare-breasted, whether the sitter's culture condoned it or not. That this happened for the benefit of the European male's gaze is supported by the fact that most models are looking straight into the camera, hence at the photographer.¹⁴⁶ A smiling or dreamy face is usually interpreted as expressing an obvious invitation. This kind of image was offensive to the puritan eye, since the postcard, on its entire journey from sender to addressee, stood open to public view, without an envelope to ensure the intimacy of a private correspondence. Kerry's female subjects actually do have eye contact with the viewer. While the child and the young man of postcards 10 and 9 gaze at something on the left and on the right-hand side of the camera, the girl dressed as a *taupou* sits face to face with the camera, as postcards 7 and 12 go to show. The poses and compositions that Kerry chose for his postcard series are nevertheless discrete in comparison to those presenting bare-breasted women in lascivious poses with their hair let down. As Krämer explains, before the arrival of the missionaries to Samoa in the 1830s, women, unlike men, used to have short hair. Only girls grew their hair long, but in a special style called *tutagita*, or simply *gita*. The head was clean-shaven "a couple of fingers wide" from front to back, while the hair at the sides was left long. Sometimes "a five mark big area" was left unshaven, so that a curl could hang down over the left cheek (Krämer Vol. II, 1903: 279). While it is quite often possible to encounter postcards from the end of the 19th century depicting Tongan or Fijian women with

¹⁴⁶ At the basis of feminist criticism in the 1970s and 1980s, was the questioning of existing distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate representations of women, based on degrees of explicitness of nudity and/or sexual activity (see Brown 1981). See also *Gender Advertisement* by Erving Goffman for the perpetuation of gender roles through photography of men and women's body language (Goffman 1979).

short hair combined with strands hanging down over the neck (Figure 6.15), there are no postcards showing Samoan woman with the *tutagita* hairstyle. The two ladies in

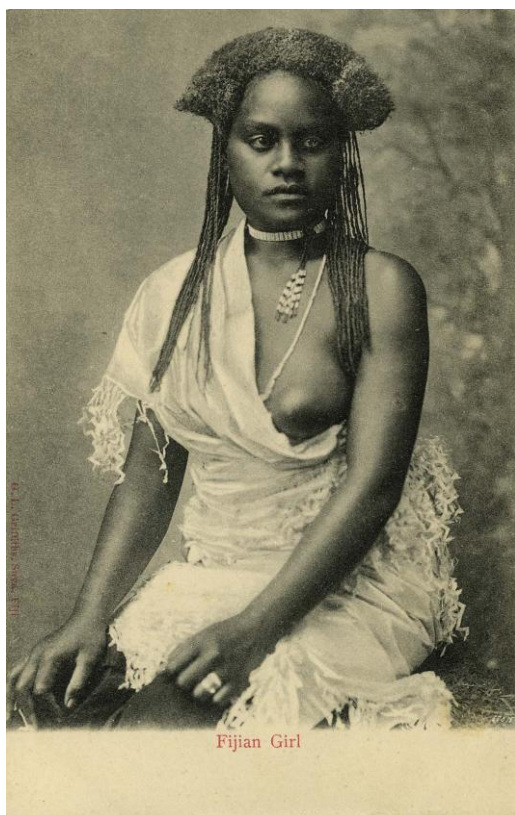


Figure 6.15 Fijian woman with short hair combined with locks hanging over her shoulders. “Fijian Girl”, postcard from unidentified producer, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.215 (AS/PC2)

postcards 7 and 12 (Figures 6.13–14) are presented with Victorian hairdos, which, like the pocket mirror in the *tuiga*, could reflect Western influence, a new value system or an appropriation of Western styles and goods. Without precise information about the social dynamics of this precise sitting, we cannot define which of these interpretations is the most accurate. On the whole, we may consider Kerry’s ‘belles’ postcards as sober and moderate in comparison with those displaying excessively naked girls lying down and gazing at the camera.

Postcard 7 (Figure 6. 13) differs from the other ones in the sense that the subject is immersed in a mass of selected props instead of posing in front of a rather neutral backdrop. It is also a good example for

exploring the imposition of an unnatural pose on the part of the sitter. Indeed, the way the girl’s right hand is holding the leaf and the way she is forced to keep her left leg bent in front of her right knee testify to a certain degree of tension in the composition. Postcard 8 captioned “Cocoanut Palms” (Figure 6.16) also shows a rather unusual posture: the two standing, bare-breasted women seem to be shaking hands – an uncommon practice in Samoa at that time. A more focused look reveals that the two ladies are simply holding hands – left hand to right hand – waiting for the photographer to take the picture. This vertically oriented postcard plays with the effect of the palm trees’ elevation, and introduces a further category of images used by Charles Kerry to represent Samoa: photographs set outdoors in order to contextualise the environment in which Samoan people lived.



Figure 6.16 “Cocoanut Palms”, collotype postcard, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)

Outdoor scenes

If one looks at the album page, the six horizontal postcards, along with the enlargement, appear rotated so that the motifs are perceived only at a second glance when the viewer either turns his/her head to the left or the entire album ninety degrees clockwise (Figure 6.3). The dominant motif of this group of cards, however, is already anticipated by the enlargement of one of the postcards. It deals with beaches, water, palm trees: the

classic and stereotypical motifs of the South Seas. Prochaska has argued that, along with images of non-European women, landscape images were also popular. They constructed Europe as a developed place by showing the ‘underdeveloped’ non-European world characterized by the dominance of nature rather than by architecture (Prochaska 1991). According to Bhabha, this kind of racist stereotypical discourse inscribes a form of governmentality that emerges from the combination of knowledge creation and the exercise of power. This constructed stereotypical knowledge leads to the definition of culture and historical differences, to the formulation of racial theories, and, on that basis, institutionalises a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial and discriminatory. Stereotypical knowledge coexists within the same apparatus of colonial power and provides the manifest justification for the project of colonialism (Bhabha 1994_a: 83).

In postcards 2, 3 and 5, the motif is constructed around a group of people in a canoe, while postcard 1 features a view of Apia harbour without people (Figure 6.5). The other two horizontal postcards present three, respectively four, people sitting on

the ground engrossed in two different activities: a ‘sacred’ one, ‘ava¹⁴⁷ making (Figure 6.17), and a more profane one, playing cards (Figure 6.18).

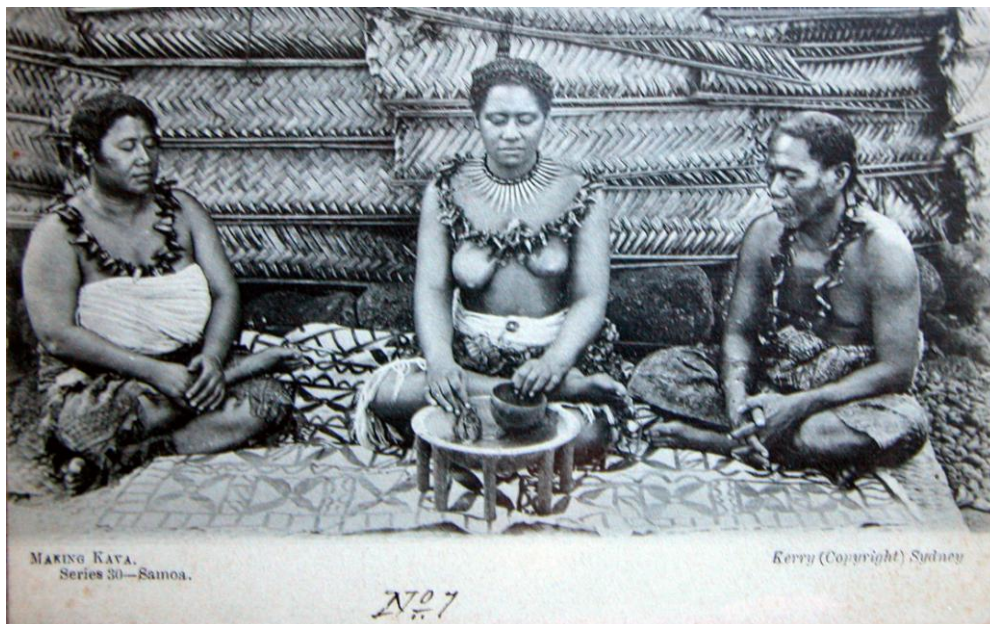


Figure 6.17 Motif of postcard 4 “Making Kava”, collotype postcard, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)



Figure 6.18 Motif of postcard 6 “Natives Playing Cards”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.293 (AS/PC2)

¹⁴⁷ ‘ava is the Samoan name for *kava*, also called ‘awa in Hawai‘i, *yaqona* in Fiji, and *sakau* in Micronesia. It is a drink made from the ground root of the pepper plant *Piper methysticum*. The root is first ground to pulp and mixed with water. A filter of hibiscus fibre is then used to remove the dregs. To finish the drink the pulp is mixed again with water in a wooden bowl standing on legs. A halved coconut shell is used to scoop the liquid and to serve it (see the film *Kava: The Drink of the Gods* by Thorolf Lipp, 2005).

Looking away from the camera

The two postcards presenting Samoan people immersed in activities have another point in common; their subjects are not gazing at the camera. Different to those studio portraits where the subjects are looking towards the camera from an angle, the people in these postcards are completely focused on something else, and their looks do not even brush the ‘mechanical eye’.¹⁴⁸ The resulting effect projects the viewer into the position of the observer more than that of the interlocutor. In addition, the partial nudity and orientation of the bodies – showing the back in the case of the postcard “Natives Playing Cards” – escalate the potential of a one-way observation, hence of voyeurism.¹⁴⁹ The perspective offered here is that of Samoan people photographed during their usual activities that take place outside, far from the studio where they have to concentrate and pose. In these images they are supposed to be free from any technical obligations and relaxed in their ‘genuine’ occupations. Postcard 6 (Figure 6.18) would indeed constitute, in an Orientalistic analysis in the manner of Said, an example for the static construction of indigenous people, happy with their ‘simple’ life, naive and more inclined to play rather than to work.

Given the various connotations card playing had towards the end of the 19th century, there are several ways of interpreting the presence of the ‘game’ element in this postcard. On the one hand, card playing was, like movie-going or smoking, an emblem of modernity that connoted leisure time (Satterfield 2002: 53).¹⁵⁰ On the other, card playing associated with games of chance were often a form of resistance to the normative, disciplining morality, and can be both “disjunctive” and “conjunctive” in Lévi-Strauss’s terms (Lévi-Strauss 1966[1962]). Police and moralists saw the more “disjunctive” effects of card playing often associated with gambling, blasphemy and episodes of public disorder. However, card playing existed also for “conjunctive” reasons; as an activity constitutive of cohesive social relations, card games contributed to the construction and maintenance of community and

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Davies and Stanbury, 1985.

¹⁴⁹ The concept of voyeurism formulated by Sigmund Freud (Freud 1905, 1927) and developed by more recent psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein and Luce Irigaray, have been influential in the analysis of images showing women as objects of the male gaze. The visual pleasure or ‘scopophilia’ of looking at such images is voyeuristic when the object of this gaze is unaware and does not look back. When a body becomes a spectacle for someone else’s pleasure this mode of looking is related to the exercise of power (Henning 2004: 170–171). Norman Bryson has argued that the “default” gender of images is feminine, “it is a constructing spectatorship around an opposition between woman as image and man as the bearer of the look” (Bryson 1994: xxv in Mitchell).

¹⁵⁰ Especially during industrialisation, work became regulated by the clock, causing leisure activities also to become increasingly temporally defined (Farr 2000: 269).

identity (Farr 2000: 274).¹⁵¹ Anthropologists of the evolutionist period, such as Edward Tylor (1958[1873]) and Richard Andree (1889), were deeply interested in the study of games as they considered playing activities in developed societies as survivors of magic-divination ritual practices of ‘primitive’ societies.¹⁵² In sum, one can therefore interpret the imported card game called *suipi* in Samoan as both a sign of European influence in the Pacific, hence as a sign of modernity, or as a symbol pointing to the childlike nature of Samoan people more inclined to leisure than to work.

In the context of this specific series, however, I see this postcard more as a kind of juxtaposition to those presenting people wearing the sophisticated *tuiga*. Visually, more than the fact that Samoan women are playing cards, what attracts attention is the kind of hat they are wearing. Called *pava*, it is made of banana leaves and was used a form of sun protection.¹⁵³ Considered together, the ‘*tuiga* postcards’ and postcard 6 constitute a dualism that reflects how the Western culture perceived the Samoan two-class society: on the one hand the ‘aristocratic elite’ symbolised by the sophisticated *tuiga*, on the other, the ‘normal people’ epitomised by the simplicity of the *pava*.

The postcard titled “Making Kava” (Figure 6.17) shows a sitting *taupou* preparing ‘ava in front of a Samoan house called *fale*. The lowered shutters made of several woven palm leaves constitute the image’s backdrop. A woman on the *taupou*’s right and a man to her left – possibly her parents – are looking down at the ‘ava bowl. The link between the *tuiga*-postcards and this was probably obvious for the souvenir buyer in Sydney. Still, also the ‘uninitiated’ consumer must have realised that this staged scene represents something more serious than a scene with a card game. The concentrated gazes and the composed postures as well as the presence of two middle-aged persons suggest that what is going on could be a ceremonial activity. Even if the dark collotype postcard does not disclose what is in the ‘ava bowl, the viewer may – not least influenced by the caption – imagine that the Samoan woman is preparing a special drink. Set in an open environment and

¹⁵¹ See Boissevain (1992) for the meaning of play/games as a promoter of identity.

¹⁵² A classical example in this sense is the continuous use of masks, from ancient rituals to contemporary carnivals. For in depth studies of play/games see for example Huizinga (1950) and Caillois (1979).

¹⁵³ Augustin Krämer presents in his ethnography a photograph of Loge, the daughter of Luamanu of Siumu wearing a *pava* (Vol. I, 1902: Plate 31).

characterised by solemnity, the photograph chosen by Kerry for postcard 4 is more ‘truthful’ to the traditional Samoan *‘ava* protocol than those used by other postcard publishers. There are indeed myriad ‘pseudo-(k)ava-making’ postcards featuring, instead of a *taupou*, groups of ‘belles’ behaving like muses in a fictitious scene set up in a photo studio (Figure 6.19).



Figure 6.19 “Kava making in Fiji” with handwritten comment “These girls are Samoan, however.”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.283 (AS/PC2)

On the beach

Of all postcard subjects, probably the most effective for transporting the viewer to the Pacific, is what I call ‘the beach motif’. The beach and its liminal position between sea and land is a densely potent space (cf. Denning 1998, 2004). For Kerry and his contemporaries the beach may have symbolised the perfect place where sun, water, palms, people and artefacts met and merged to create a picturesque scene, a beauty spot. In a similar way as the three ‘*tuiga* portraits’ – created also in a liminal and hybrid zone (the studio) – the three ‘beach postcards’ (2, 3 and 5, Figure 6.5) constitute a solid body which, through the repetition of the motif, conveys a clear message as to what Samoa and its people look like. However, while the ‘*tuiga* postcards’ – thanks to the presence of a particular object (the *tuiga*) – are able to render a specific statement about a place represented (Samoa), the ‘beach postcards’

transport the viewer to an undefined beautiful spot that could be anywhere in the Pacific. A postcard showing a palm-fringed sandy beach in front of clear¹⁵⁴ waters was and is *the* Pacific postcard, not the Samoan, the Tahitian or the Fijian. These kinds of motifs were recycled distinctly more than others, perpetuating the idea of the Pacific as a picturesque place where the islanders were believed to live in harmony with nature. The creator of the album, probably Kerry himself, also decided to use one of these ‘Pacific postcards’ to promote the Samoan series, it being the first ‘exotic’ series after twenty-nine issues featuring scenes of Australian landscapes and people. The motif on the enlargement is based on a postcard titled “By the Reef” (Figure 6.4) that features a group of people sitting in a canoe and on rocks close to a reef. Even if the image does not convey visually a straightforward message about the place where the photo was taken, the text information printed on the white field “Series 30–Samoa” grants the image a Samoan identity.

It is well known that in the early years of photography, attributions were commonly lost or deliberately omitted. Images were transferred from one company to the next and repeatedly used in postcard production by different studios, printing companies and distributors. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that another postcard company, Brodziak & Co. based in Suva/Fiji, used the identical motif of “By the Reef” to produce a Fijian postcard (Figure 6.20). This time the caption gives a new identity to the postcard, which is suddenly projected into another imaginary context: Fiji. It is interesting to note, that, on the hand-coloured Brodziak postcard there is a message written in blue ink reading: “I am standing by the tree in white uniform having a very pleasant cruise.” Because we have here a sender who recognises himself in a postcard captioned “By the Reef, Fiji”, and a stamp that proves that the card was sent from Suva, we could be inclined to assume that the original photograph was really taken in Fiji. In addition, Gustav Arnold from Suva also published a postcard titled “By the Reef, Fiji” based on the same image as Kerry’s postcard 2, which would reinforce the ‘Fiji-thesis’.

¹⁵⁴ Of course, the water does not appear blue and clear in these historical postcards. The inherent chemical problems of spectrum registration on orthochromatic plates (sensitive to only blue and green light) in the 1880s caused the disappearance of the blue tones. The first commercial panchromatic plates, i.e. sensitive to all colours, were not marketed until 1906 (Attridge 2000[1890]: 208). Kerry did not use them for his postcard production, resulting in the Pacific crystalline waters appearing more ‘milky’, therefore more typical of a lake after a rainstorm than of a lagoon.

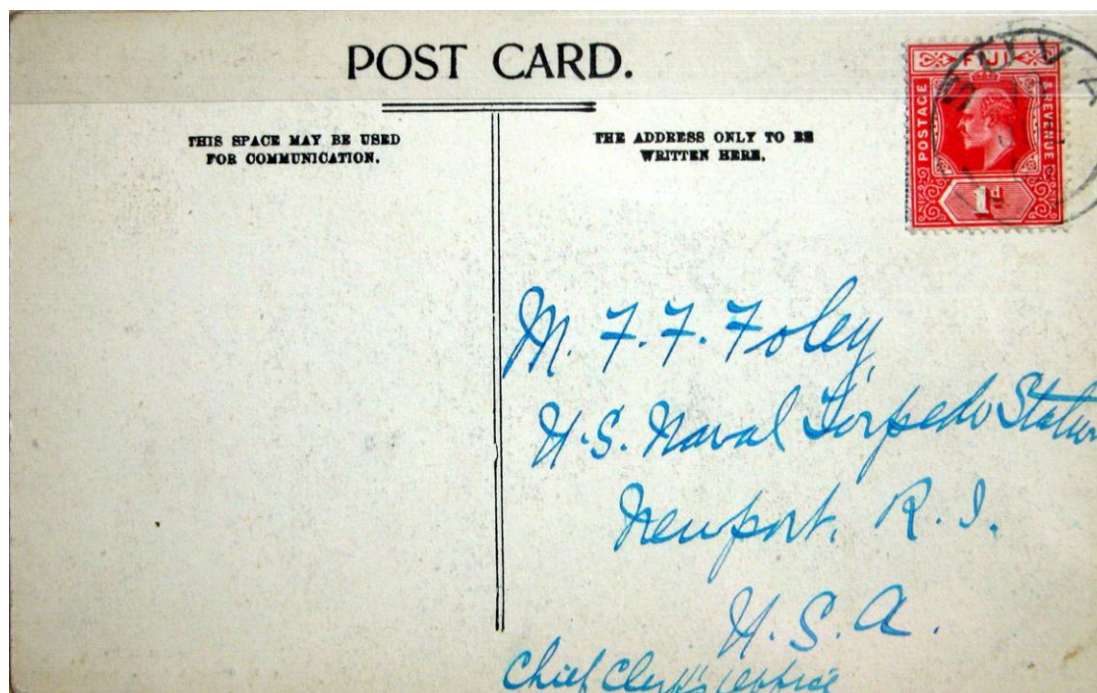
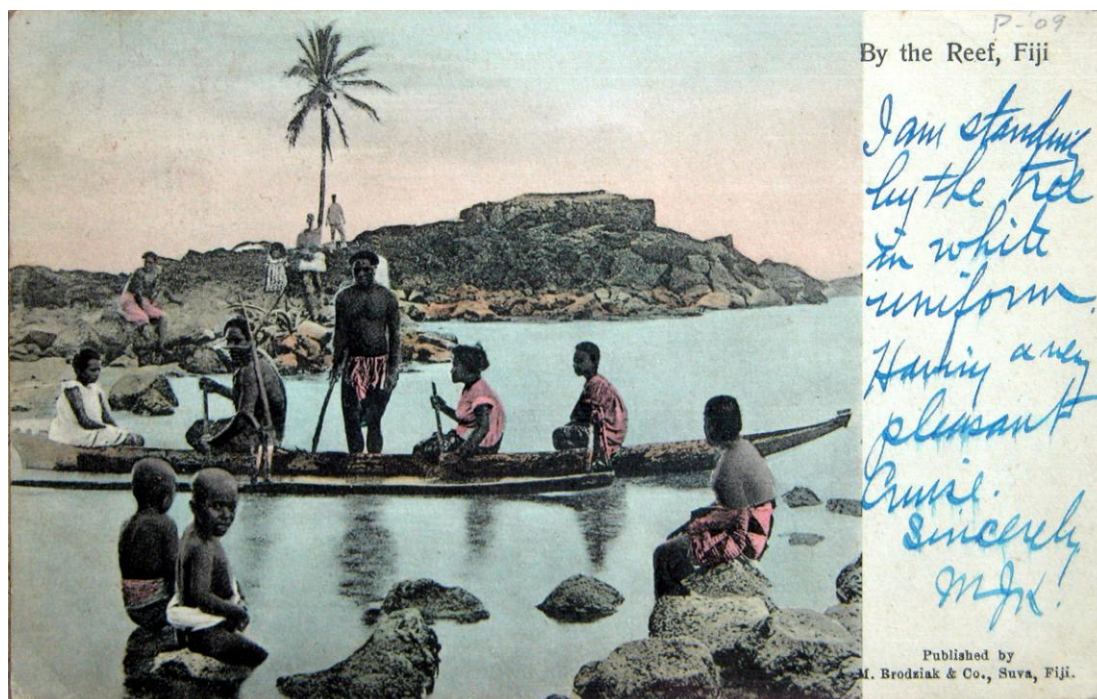


Figure 6.20 Motif of postcard 2 “By the Reef”, hand-coloured postcard published by M. Brodziak & Co., sent on 19th July 1909 from Suva, Fiji, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)

A closer look at the image, however, reveals that the canoe is a Samoan *paopao* employed for inshore fishing in the quiet water of the lagoon protected by the reef (cf. Hornell 1936: 223). As it is unlikely that a Samoan canoe was manufactured in or brought to Fiji, it is more probable that the photo was taken in Samoa. At this point we may conclude that the person who wrote the message was joking about

himself being the one in white uniform standing by the palm tree in the background. Were his information true, he would have noticed that the caption reads ‘Fiji’ and not ‘Samoa’. The interplay between text and image generates interesting and intriguing situations, but it also shows the high degree of ambiguity that characterises the postcard. Postcard 2 shows two levels of image-text ambiguity. The first results from the combination of an image with a caption created by the postcard producer to render his product more attractive for the market. Kerry & Co. associated the image with Samoa, Brodziak & Co. and Gustav Arnold with Fiji. The second level of ambiguity emerges because a handwritten message was added to the postcard, changing the way the recipient perceived the postcard as an object. In a broad sense we could interpret *handwritten* messages such as this as part of post-production, where the sender’s *manipulation* is less a distinct and deliberate act, but rather an inherent property of the postcard.

But the more classical notion of manipulation associated with postcards is the retouching of the original image. In the ‘*tuiga*-postcards’ we have seen how Kerry slightly retouched the backdrop in favour of the subject. The ‘beach-postcards’, despite presenting an image that is faithful to the original photograph, offer instead the opportunity to discuss more drastic interventions in the imagery. Postcards “By the Reef” and “Pago Pago”¹⁵⁵ present in series no. 30 an image that has not been manipulated. The same subjects, however, have been reused for later series, with the difference that this time they have undergone an alteration process. Actually, postcard 2 appears also in series no. 50 “By Reef and Palm” with the caption “A Fishing Excursion to the Reef” (Figure 6.21), and in a later unnumbered series not included in Kerry’s album with the caption “By the Reef Savii. Samoa” (Figure 6.22). The viewer may wonder what has been manipulated in these two versions, as no particular difference to the postcards in series 30 – compared with the colouration of Brodziak’s and Arnold’s postcards – is evident. About in the middle of the left hand edge on postcard 2, there is a blurred figure located partially outside the picture’s frame. A look at the proof of the original glass plate titled “Canoe and Natives Savii [Savai‘i]” reveals that this phantom-like apparition is a woman walking towards the water (Figure 6.23).

¹⁵⁵ The now capital of American Samoa is pronounced ‘Pango Pango’ also with soft ‘ng’ as ‘sing’ in English or ‘Engel’ in German.



Figure 6.21 “A Fishing Excursion to the Reef” in series no. 50 “By Reef and Palm”, collotype postcard, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 89.1425 (AS/PHM5)

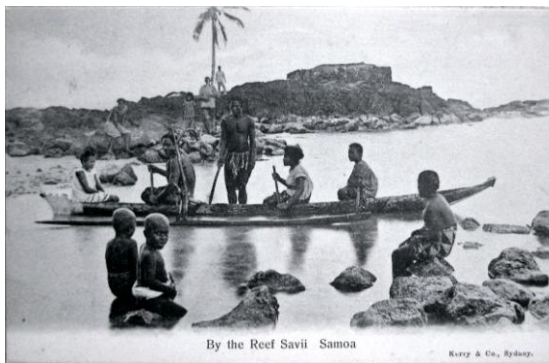


Figure 6.22 “By the Reef Savii [Savai'i]”, collotype postcard from a later series, Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)

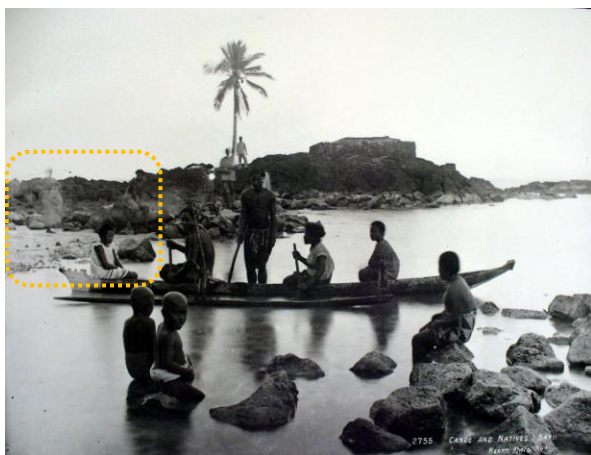


Figure 6.23 “2755. Canoe and Natives Savii [Savai'i]”, proof of glass plate negatives, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: 72F.179.2755 (AS/PHM4)

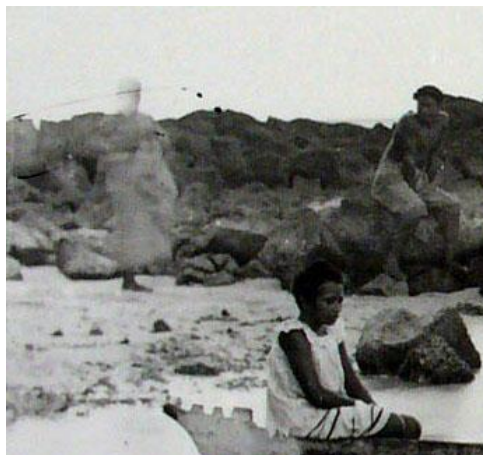


Figure 6.24a



Figure 6.24b



Figure 6.24 **a)** Detail of “By the Reef” (series 30), collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.671 (AS/PC2); **b)** Detail of “A Fishing Excursion to the Reef” (series 50), collotype postcard, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 89.1425 (AS/PHM5)

She is barely visible but present on all of Kerry's postcards in series no. 30 (Figure 6.24a). In the later Kerry series as well as in Brodziak's and Arnold's she has been neutralised and cancelled (Figure 6.24b). Because this woman is the only person moving in the image, we can presume that her presence had not been considered in the original photograph. The other actors in the foreground maintain their position, aware of the photographic session in progress. The man sitting on one of the rocks, however, betrays her presence by turning his head in her direction.

The recent visual advertising coverage of Samoa, despite the devastating tsunami of 30th September 2009, reflects in a way the situation at the beginning of the 20th century when Kerry started the production of postcards. Samoa was advertised as a paradise despite the vivid memory – visually omnipresent – of the great hurricane that swept over Apia harbour on 15, 16, and 17 March 1889. The violence of the storm took around a hundred and fifty lives and destroyed many warships, but Kerry's postcard "The Beach. Apia" (1) presents a peaceful view of the harbour (Figure 6.25). That this is a view of Apia harbour is not only suggested by



Figure 6.25 "The Beach, Apia", collotype postcard from "Series 30 – Samoa", Blackburn Collection, Honolulu (AS/PC1)

the caption. Upolu with its appreciated natural harbour was well known as an international transit point in the Pacific, and even after the hurricane of 1889 images of it circulated widely throughout Europe and Australia. If considered as an element of series no. 30, this postcard works as a bridge between dream and reality for at least two reasons. Despite offering the successful combination of palms, beach and ocean, it first anchors the observer to a precise place and then introduces a new element of the narrative: two ships that testify the presence of a non-Samoan culture. To become a dynamic and intersection point the beach has to be accessed by at least two different groups, one coming from the inland, the other from the sea by means of ship or canoe. According to Tomas (1993: 64) ships can also be regarded as liminal 'transcultural spaces'. Edwards (2001: 113–122) has shown, for example, how the quarterdeck of HMS *Miranda*, photographed in 1883 by Captain W. Acland, became a fascinating hybrid zone and dialogic space between colonial officers and two groups of Samoan people who performed a self-conscious arrangement of space. Kerry does not offer any views of intercultural encounters; for his Samoan series he has limited himself to introducing the ship as a suggestive element for the interactions that may have taken place.

Talking about Kerry's motifs in Samoa

In 2008, I spent two months in Apia, Samoa, with the intention of visiting public institutions to get a sense of the presence/absence of Kerry's traces and with the idea of making the first contacts for a future project based on photo-elicitation. After having studied the little photographic and historical material I had access to, and after having realised that Kerry's legacy in Samoa is present only in public spaces (see Chapter Seven), I decided to show copies of Kerry & Co. postcards and photographs to the dozens of people with whom I mostly interacted, to see if, from an indigenous perspective, alternative narratives relating to the twelve motifs might spontaneously emerge. I do not wish to claim that I conducted intensive fieldwork during my short stay; I just found it interesting to present this material and see, first, if, and whether at all, the 'postcard people' would be recognised and identified, and second, what kind of reactions, emotions or discussions the material would generate. Regarding the identity of the people depicted, the answer was clear: none of the

Samoan people shown in Kerry's series no. 30 was identified or a face considered familiar. However, the viewing of the motifs generated interesting discussions on a variety of aspects, depending who was viewing the Kerry material. The people who saw the images for the first time were quite attracted by the material culture appearing in the postcards' motifs as embellishments and props. The material features and designs on *tapa* pieces, mats, fans or clothing dominated the discussion. People with an academic background commented more on the politics of the colonial way of representation and on the historical relevance of this material. The third group interviewed included non-Samoan people involved in the tourism industry; they considered the images interesting especially as historical sources, because they showed 'how things were in Samoa hundred years ago'. Consequently, they were displayed in entrance halls of hotels as informative and decorative objects.

Among the people I met for the photo-elicitation, there is Momoe Malietoa von Reiche, an intellectual and prominent Samoan artist who runs the Madd Gallery in Apia. Several Samoan people pointed me in her direction, as she is considered very knowledgeable and has participated in projects related to the representation of Samoa. During my stay I had the privilege of having three rewarding conversions with her. She was interested in seeing Kerry's material and also recognised some of the motifs that had been circulating widely since their creation (cf. Chapter Seven). When I showed her the motif of postcard 7 (Figure 6.13) she laughed, and commented that this 'poor woman' seems very bored and annoyed having to hold that taro leaf. According to Momoe the lady must have been thinking something like 'come on photographer, please press the button and let me go' (pers. comm. von Reiche, November 2008). The ambivalence characterising photographs created in Samoa during the German occupation, emerged as one of the sensitive aspects that should be considered when 'bringing back' images. Indeed, Momoe confirmed what I had suspected; that for many Samoan people the confrontation with this historical material can be disturbing and hurtful, as the colonial past is still present like an open wound (pers. comm. von Reiche, November 2008). After having gone through Kerry's material, Momoe showed me a portrait supposedly taken by John Davis – one of the resident photographers in Samoa. It shows a standing Samoan Princess called Faane (Figure 6.26).



Figure 6.26 Studio portrait of Princess Fa'amusami, possibly by John Davis, c. 1895, Peabody Essex Museum, published in Nordström 1995: 74

Momoe did not know Kerry's people, but knew a lot about this young woman. Her correct name was Fa'amusami, and at the time of the photograph she was the *taupou* in the Malietoa family, Momoe's family. Fa'amusami was Momoe's grandfather's sister, the daughter of Malietoa Laupepa who was crowned King of Samoa by the German, American and British consuls in March 1881.¹⁵⁶

There are a few reasons why I consider it interesting to mention the story of Fa'amusami. First, being the king's daughter, Fa'amusami was popular at the time and was also frequently photographed.

Her images circulated widely, and Kerry presumably saw them as well. In the famous portrait by Davis Fa'amusami is shown in her full *taupou* costume, with her *tuiga* headdress and skirt of fine-plaited mat (*ie toga*) held up by a *tapa* belt. If Kerry had used Fa'amusami's portraits for his postcard series, the impact on the buyer would have been different. In contrast to Fiji, Kerry created for Samoa an atemporal image, where people without a name reinforce the idea of 'paradise'. A well-known person of royal descent would have brought the viewer back to reality, and thus 'destroyed' the dreams of his potential customers. Fa'amusami's photograph is also interesting because Momoe compared the situation of the woman in postcard 11 with the one of her aunt Fa'amusami, in the sense that she considered

¹⁵⁶ Both his son Malietoa Tanumafili I (1879–1939) – Fa'amusami's brother – and Tanumafili II (1913–2007) – Momoe's father – were Samoan Heads of State from 1898 to 1939, and from 1940 to 2007 respectively.

the camera during the first years of contact with the West like a gun, a weapon that induced fear. For her “photography became the first real form of exploitation of Samoa because the camera recorded and captured moments that were vulnerable, sensitive, and virginal” (von Reiche 1995: 69). Of course the metaphor of the camera as a gun goes back to the American philosopher Susan Sontag whose language frames photography in terms of consumption, acquisition and power (2002 [1977]: 3–24). Since then, Foucault- and Said-inspired analyses (Said 1978, Foucault 1979, Green 1984, Tagg 1993[1988]) have started to regard 19th century photographs of indigenous people as trophies bagged by the colonial hunter and characterised by distance, exploitation and coercion (Alloula 1986, Nochlin 1983). This was the dominant way of interpretation before an intellectual shift that took into consideration the various agencies, especially the indigenous one, at work during the photographic encounters. I tried to explain to Momoe that I was interested in detecting alternative ways of looking at this material in order to gain a more precise and fair ‘picture’ of the photographic encounter. Repeating that Europeans reconstructed the sexually available ‘Dusky Maidens’ of the Pacific does not really help to open up new explorative channels. Understanding in which direction I wanted to move, Momoe mentioned a poem that she wrote few years ago (von Reiche 1995: 69) inspired by the tactile experience of holding in her hands the historical portraits of her aunt.

The Reluctant Traveller

I dally like a reluctant traveller,
 Flirting with the remains
 Of the day. The sun itself
 Lingers as if to make the most
 Of frugal hours
 Before sunset, and
 I’m one with nature allowing
 The earth to caress the palpitations
 Of human uncertainties.
 There is peace finally when shadows
 Infiltrate the landscape –
 And I search for that deeper meaning
 In the spiritual resonance of land.

- Momoe Malietoa von Reiche

Conclusion

Following Bhabha's suggestion that it is important to look at a stereotype afresh every time we come across it (cf. Bhabha 1994_a: 67), I have examined in this chapter the way Kerry represented the – at his time – already much 'staged' Samoa. The purpose was to identify the stereotypical elements used by Kerry to create series no. 30.; to analyse how these elements were produced; and to see what answers their effects generate today.

From the examination of the constitutive elements of the six vertical motifs based on studio portraits, and from the analysis of the compilation's dynamics, it has emerged that the headdress *tuiga* was conferred the role of a cultural marker for Samoa. As the most influential tool in Kerry's description and definition of Samoa, the *tuiga* is the nodal point in his stereotypical apparatus around which the whole narrative about Samoa develops and revolves. The outdoor 'exotic activities', such as playing cards or fishing, presented in the horizontal format, can be read as '(stereo)typical Samoan activities', solely due to the geographical accent conferred by the *tuiga* in the vertical postcards of the same series. The single postcards work within the series more like words in a sentence; singly each word has a specific meaning, but in combination with other words the various meanings merge into a coherent message. For the Samoan series the message is a general statement on the islands' people and environment: a beauty spot. Despite the fact that value judgements of stereotypes related to ethnic minorities usually had a negative connotation (cf. Kreis 1992: 1259), the message conveyed by Kerry through the series no. 30 is clearly a positive one.

Temporal ambivalence is central to Kerry's construction of Samoa; it ensures the repeatability of the stereotypes by playing with the concept of 'fixity' despite the evident changing historical and discursive situations. The encounter with 'otherness'¹⁵⁷ has been staged "in an airless space of fixed coordinates" (Bhabha 1995: 110). When the first Samoan postcard series was issued, Samoa was by no means the untouched place Kerry liked to imagine and tried to exploit. If he had included some of the photographs documenting the ten years of war in Samoa (1889–1899), which were also part of his inventory, the image of Samoa would have been

¹⁵⁷ As mentioned above, a stereotype is for Bhabha a phenomenon in which both coloniser and colonised participated (Bhabha 1994_b).

drastically different from that of ‘paradise on earth’ (cf. Barker 2009). Kerry worked in an anachronistic way to present the traditional Samoan society, not as it actually appeared but as it must have been like ‘before contact’. For John Urry (1990: 94–124) this temporal ambiguity is one of the typical elements that characterise tourism related activities, as these are often directed at experiencing the past. It is not a historical past of prior experience, but merely an atemporal ‘pastness’ that collapses into nostalgia (cf. Edwards 1996: 203).¹⁵⁸ One can argue that this is postcards’ main ambiguity: their imagery is informed by a desire for ‘pastness’, but at the same time it denies history in human terms. As still photography, it stands diametrically opposed to the natural flow of life. When Bhabha talks about the ‘rigor mortis’ and ‘danse macabre’ of the stereotype (Bhabha 1995: 110), he is referring to this symbolic death of reality inherent to still photographs (cf. Barthes 1984_b). This is an aspect that emerges from Kerry’s Samoan postcard series; the imagery is based on photographs which were already several years old by the time the actual postcards were issued; the motifs therefore appear out-of-time, and since their consumers were not informed about the appropriate chronology, it is even more difficult to state with precision which stereotype prevailed in a defined period (cf. Quanchi 2007: 4).

Exploring the effects generated today by Kerry’s stereotyping apparatus of Samoa, I have observed that the spectrum of answers is quite large. The reactions to the twelve Samoan postcards were multiple, and depended on my interlocutors’ previous knowledge on this type of touristic object. Interestingly, some of my interlocutors called my attention to “forms of resistance of the colonised” (interpretation of body language), and to the “anxieties that plagued the coloniser despite his apparent mastery” (quirky combination of variegate elements) (cf. Bhabha 1994_a: 66). It would be intriguing to expand this study by including the analysis of statistics and market research that, according to the Swiss historian Georg Kreis (1992: 1258), have now almost replaced the popular tradition, and the press in fixing and objectifying the stereotypes. Despite images and figures supposedly acting against any form of stereotyping, they constitute a strong tool to define what is typical and predominant.

¹⁵⁸ According to Bryan Turner, the four elements of the nostalgic paradigm are a sense of historical decline; a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty; a sense of the loss of individual freedom and autonomy; and a sense of the loss of simplicity, personal authenticity, and emotional spontaneity (Turner 1987: 150–151 cited in Frow 1991: 135–136; cf. Lepenies 1972).

In this chapter I focused on the overall agency of Kerry & Co.'s no. 30 series, considered as an entity to itself in Kerry's postcards album. In the next chapter I discuss the Samoan postcards produced by Kerry & Co. which I identified during my research. Despite the serial production, I consider each of these postcards as an individual and socially salient object, and will therefore discuss the entanglement of these postcards in processes related to their production, distribution and consumption.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Life after the guillotine

Introduction

There is a precise moment when a postcard comes to exist in time and space as a socially salient and sensorially engaged object. It occurs in the factory when the guillotine's blade falls onto the sheet and frees the postcard from its original manufacturing context.¹⁵⁹ With a few cuts the blade physically creates the picture postcard as rectangular object. If this operation is performed inaccurately, however, a postcard can either lose part of its body, or even acquire a few millimetres from its neighbour's, depending where the blade falls. Should the latter happen, the black line delimiting the two areas becomes an integral part of a postcard's motif (Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1b



Figure 7.1b

Figure 7.1 When the series sheets are inaccurately cut, the black line between the two areas appears along the margins of a postcard. **a)** "Native Village. South Seas. Series 50–By Reef and Palm.", collotype postcard, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 89.1419 (AS/PHM5); **b)** "In the Shade of the Palm. Series 50–By Reef and Palm.", collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.13 (AS/PC2)

¹⁵⁹ Because the picture postcard is a multilayered object, we could also interpret this cutting as the extension of what has already happened to a postcard's image; it has been sliced from the flow of reality when the photograph was taken.

In this chapter, I examine the life of Kerry's Samoan postcards after their change of status, from an element of a series' sheet to an independent thin cardboard object measuring 9 cm × 14 cm. Using the digital archive of the postcards identified in various private and public collections, I first discuss singular aspects of these postcards' appearance and materiality that shed light on Kerry's choices with regard to the processes of manufacturing and production. Then I look at postcards' most distinguishing characteristic: the ability to move through time and space and weave a net of relationships across continents. The analysis of their physical displacement, caused by various interests or needs in the visual economy, allows us to identify the meanings and the values attached to postcards during their social existence.

We have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context. (Appadurai 1986: 5)

In the analysis of Kerry's Samoan postcards' biography I will use, along with Appadurai's term "trajectory" (1986), also the concept of a "world line" coined by Hermann Minkowski (1909). While "trajectory" will refer to a postcard's geographical moving from one 'life station' to the other, the term "world line", almost contemporary to Kerry's postcards, will instead be adopted to define a postcard's overall spatial-temporal travelling from its place of 'birth' to its actual resting place. A 'world line' is defined in physics as the unique path that an object or person travels through space, and, because of the addition of the time dimension, we can say that it is characterised by a sequence of events. I find it therefore particularly useful to highlight the temporal aspect in the displacement of a postcard, even if, as stated by Peltonen (2001: 349–350), in microhistory it is problematic to allocate with precision a complete time tag to every life 'position'. As I will show, the conjunction of spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority characterising photography – Barthes' description "the there-then becoming here-now" (1977: 44) – is indeed even more strongly emphasised through a postcard as a multilayered object. In my use of these two termini I will consider the trajectory as a pattern of movement corresponding to a segment in a postcard's world line.

The nature of a postcard is a live wire, and this brings it to oscillate between public and private spheres. Drawing on John Berger's analytical distinction between the "private" and "public" photograph (1980: 50–52), Albers and James (1990) argue that pictures taken for private use are metonymic, that is, they are "the direct appearance of some concrete phenomenon" (Albers and James 1990: 347). Real photo postcards, for example, based on an imagery that captures personal experiences, belong to this group. They are viewed by the people who knew the subject(s), and their meaning emerges from this relationship between photographer and photographed (Geary 1991_b: 49). Pictures taken and used for public display, as is the case with Kerry's Samoan postcards, are by contrast to be considered as metaphorical. The pictorial elements constituting the imagery are symbols that allude to things outside the picture; in this function the camera becomes "a vehicle for creating illusions and imaginary images" (Albers and James 1990: 347). These 'public' images were created with an official function in mind that made them circulate widely – in Kerry's case under the guise of postcards.

When one thinks of a postcard's oscillation between private and public spheres, it becomes clear that as a single object it can hold, during well-defined segments of its world line, both metonymic and metaphoric roles. Kerry's Samoan postcards, presenting an imagery that probably did not penetrate all the private sphere of the Australian viewers, became part of the more generalised discourse about Samoa. Through the exploration of the already mentioned authorship's issue revolving around the company's Samoan imagery, I aim to define the moment(s) in which, if at all, these motifs of the 'exotic' series no. 30 switched their role to work as a visual metaphor.

Combing photographic indexicality and materiality together we get a powerful mix that allows us to filter out various types of values characterising a postcard as a multilayered object. According to MacDonald, an object's value depends on "its potential to influence and determine the nature of various social outcomes" (MacDonald 2000: 96). Edwards has emphasised this performative nature of visual objects by arguing that they become entities acting and mediating between people, and that they "assume a form of agency in the way they prescribe relations and the telling of history" (Edwards 2005: 34). Following Gell (1998), Smith suggests understanding photographic images as a form of "extended personhood",

since as “distributed objects”, they are able to initiate and act in social relations (Smith 2003: 11). Agency enters into the analyses of images and visibility also in relation to the question “who ascribes value to an image-object? (Poole 1997: 20) The third level of Deborah Poole’s “visual economy” – the first being “organisation of production” and the second “circulation” – is the shifting in meaning and value (1997: 10–11), that sees photographic objects and commodities acquiring meaning and value through their social uses:

it becomes clear that the value of images is not limited to the worth they accrue as representations seen (or consumed) by individual viewers. Instead, images also accrue value through the social processes of accumulation, possession, circulation, and exchange. (Poole 1997: 11)













If we look at a postcard in terms of its representational content, we privilege a form of value related to the indexical power of the motif. If we look instead at a postcard’s exchange value, we think more of the circulation’s modalities and of the relationships engendered during this circulation through space and time (Poole 1997: 11). In a sense, postcards share with the *cartes-de-visite*, the lack of the stereograph’s three-dimensionality, but make up in terms of portability and tangibility. For this reason, both photographic formats accrue their value as objects through the social fact of ownership and display, rather than through the solitary activity of looking into a stereograph (Poole 1997: 115–116).¹⁶⁰ The difference between the ‘*cartes*’ and the ‘official’ postcards lies in the fact that, while the first retained a residual “photographic use value” as likeness of friends and relatives, the postcards of ‘exotic’ people portrayed anonymous and historyless subjects (see Chapter Five). These postcards were emptied of their “use value” of representing reality (Poole 1997: 141). Their value accrues solely through the acts of ownership, collection, accumulation, and exchange – aspects that I address in this chapter in order to give equal weight to both the representational content discussed in the previous chapters, and to the forms of negotiated relationship in which postcards existed.

¹⁶⁰ The most common use of *cartes-de-visite* was as personal calling cards (Poole 1997: 107). When entering a studio for a portrait card the requirement of the clients were that the portrait should be both a material and a moral likeness (Poole 1997: 111).

A digital archive of Kerry's Samoa

Of all Kerry's Samoan postcards produced and sold during the first decade of the 20th century, many probably ended up being destroyed together with other old documents. Others may still be waiting to be discovered in old shoeboxes up in dusty attic corners. In this regard, the fifty-eight postcards identified are survivors preserving a multitude of histories. The largest collection of Polynesian postcards held by the collector Mark Blackburn (MB) in Honolulu (AS/PC1), comprises thirty-seven Samoan postcards produced by Kerry & Co. The Photograph Study Collection of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Met) has eight (AS/PC2), while the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (PHM) holds six postcards in its archives (AS/PHM5). The Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu (BPBM) and the collectors Chris Robinson in Apia (CR) and Jane Resture on the Australian Gold Coast (JR) each hold two of Kerry's Samoan postcards, while I have at the moment only one (NP). Max Shekleton in Noumea, New Caledonia, owns a large collection of Oceanic postcards which, unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to see before the submission of the thesis. Fortunately, the collector kindly sorted and classified his Kerry postcards into a separate album, and informed me that he had identified twenty-four postcards of Samoa produced by the Sydney firm (pers. comm. Shekleton, 14th April 2010).

In contrast to other postcards produced at the turn of the century, those representing Pacific cultures, and in particular Polynesia, are becoming rare and therefore valuable (pers. comm. Blackburn, 12th March 2010). Often collectors have to pay eighty to a hundred Australian dollars just for one postcard (pers. comm. Shekleton, 16th April 2010). In this regard, objects such as the postcard sample book *Kerry's Australian Post Cards* (AS/PHM2) play an important role in filling the gaps. In Figure 7.2 I present the identified fifty-eight Samoan postcards produced by Kerry & Co. The totals per series and per subject should only inform about the quantity of postcards identified, and are not meant to indicate the popularity of a given motif. The sample is indeed too small for a statistical interpretation; the result would be definitely speculative and not significant. A low number might indicate a moderate success of a motif, but also the contrary. It could well be that a very popular motif circulated widely during the first years after issue, but then, as collectible and souvenir, remained in private hands without re-entering into public circulation.

Figure 7.2 Recycled motifs				
"Series 30–Samoa" (1905)		Subjects reused for other Kerry & Co. series		Tot
		"Series 50" (1905)	Series "Samoa" (c.1907)	
	"THE BEACH.APIA. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> " (1-MB, 1-BPBM)	[not used]	"The Beach Apia Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (1-MB)	3
	"BY THE REEF. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright), Sydney</i> ." (1-MB, 1-Met, 2-PHM)	"A FISHING EXCURSION TO THE REEF. Series 50–By Reef and Palm. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> ." (1-PHM)	"By the Reef Savii Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (1-MB)	6
	"NATIVE CANOE. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> ." (3-MB, 1-BPBM)	[not used]	"Native Canoe Savii Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (2-Met, 1-MB)	7
	"MAKING KAVA. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> " (1-MB)	[not used]	"Making Kava Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (2-MB)	3
	"PAGO PAGO. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> ." (4-MB, 1-PHM)	[not used]	"Pago Pago Kerry & Co., Sydney." (2-MB, 1-Met)	8
	"NATIVES PLAYING CARDS. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> ." (1-MB, 1-Met)	[not used]	"Samoans playing Cards Kerry & Co., Sydney." (3-MB, 1-CR)	6
	[not found]	[not used]	"Samoan Girl Kerry & Co., Sydney." (1-JR)	2
			"Samoan Girl" (1-MB)	
	"COCOANUT PALMS. Series 30–Somoa [sic]. <i>Kerry (Copyright), Sydney</i> ." (2-MB, 1-PHM, 1-NP)	[not used]	"Cocoa-nut Palms Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (2-MB)	6
	"HIGH CHIEF, WITH HEAD DRESS. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright) Sydney</i> " (2-MB, 2-Met)	[not used]	[not found]	4
	"A CHIEF'S SON. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright), Sydney</i> " (2-MB, 1-JR, 1-CR)	[not used]	"A Chief's Son Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (2-MB, 1-PHM)	7
	"A HIGH CHIEF'S DAUGHTER. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright), Sydney</i> ." (1-MB, 1-Met)	[not used]	"High Chief's Daughter Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (2-MB)	4
	"SAMOAN MAIDEN. Series 30–Samoa. <i>Kerry (Copyright), Sydney</i> " (1-MB)	[not used]	"A Native Belle Samoa Kerry & Co., Sydney." (1-MB)	2
TOTALS ¹⁶¹	33		25	58

¹⁶¹ With the sixteen Shekleton postcards of series no. 30 (10 vertical, 6 horizontal) and the eight of series "Samoa" (5 vertical, 3 horizontal) the total rises to 82.

What instead can be read from Figure 7.2 is the success of the motifs chosen by Kerry for his Samoan series no. 30 (first column left). The fifty-eight postcards can be attributed to three different series produced by Kerry & Co. Along with “Series 30–Samoa”, also “Series 50–By Reef and Palm”, and the unnumbered series “Samoa” have postcards featuring the same motifs. While the first two series were produced in 1905 and appear together in the postcard sample book, the latter was probably produced around the beginning of 1907. The firm’s repeated use of the same motifs can certainly not be ascribed to a scarcity of resources, given the large collection of Samoan photographs in Kerry & Co.’s hands. The reasons are instead of an aesthetic and technical nature. The subjects that Kerry chose for his first¹⁶² Samoan series seem to have been well appreciated. Messages such as “Eight cards accompany this” (MB 316; AS/PC1),¹⁶³ “I hope you will like this Post Card” (MB 335; AS/PC1) or “[Je] Vous envoie 2 cartes par ce courrier”¹⁶⁴ (PSC 1994.3.294; AS/PC2) testify to the aesthetic appeal of Kerry’s Samoan postcards, often a focus of fervent collecting. It is probably the success of “Series 30–Samoa” that prompted the company to issue another series based on the same subjects: the series titled “Samoa”.

As Figure 7.2 shows, in each of these two series (first and third column) there is a postcard that could not be identified (marked as ‘[not found]’). The ‘[not found]’ entry in the first column substitutes the postcard featuring the full portrait of a girl holding a taro leaf – the motif that made Momoe Malietoa von Reiche laugh (postcard 7, see Figure 6.5). The miniatures’ composition in Kerry’s album reveals that this is the missing motif, but it is too small to allow the caption to be read. Yet with the use of a strong magnifying glass it is possible to distinguish three words that could be something like “A Samoan Girl”.¹⁶⁵ I would exclude the word ‘maiden’ as it is already used to describe the motif showing a three-quarter portrait of a sitting woman holding two pineapples (postcard 12, see Figure 6.5). The ‘[not found]’ entry

¹⁶² In contrast to the Australian postcards, Kerry did not produce any Samoan postcards during the ‘undivided back’ period.

¹⁶³ As the Mark Blackburn Collection is not catalogued yet, I will use for easier reference to the single postcards the initials MB followed by the number attributed by my digital camera while taking the photographs.

¹⁶⁴ “I am sending you 2 postcards via this postal service”.

¹⁶⁵ A study based on the original postcard sample book would probably allow the miniatures’ captions to be read as well as to discover additional aspects relating to the materiality of this object. Unfortunately, during my two visits to the archives at the Powerhouse Museum, I was not allowed to spend time alone on the original Kerry & Co. album. My analysis is mainly based on the study of digital photographs taken while the curator was turning the album’s pages.

in the series “Samoa” marks instead the absence of a postcard that almost surely – eleven motifs out of twelve correspond to those of the early series – represents the motif “High Chief with Head Dress”. In brackets, under each postcard’s caption, I have added the abbreviation of the collection(s) in which a Kerry postcard was identified. A closer look at the dissemination shows that in each collection studied there is at least one Kerry & Co. postcard of “Series 30–Samoa”. A similar tendency can also be ascertained for the later series “Samoa”, which suggests a wide circulation of Kerry’s Samoan postcards in and outside Australia.

Along with the aesthetic aspect, there may also be a technical reason for the recycling of series no. 30’s motifs. When collotype postcards such as Kerry’s were produced, the technical process, based on gelatine-coated glass plates, limited the print run to 500–1,000 copies (Schindler 1904: 222). After about 1,000 prints the gelatine deteriorated causing the image to lose sharpness. Because Kerry had his bestsellers printed by collotype specialists in Germany, it could be that he trusted their expertise and ordered a higher number of runs. Indeed, as we have seen, in 1903 Kerry produced more than 50,000 postcards of thirty-seven different motifs, which runs to 1,350 prints per motif (Anon. 1903_b: 112). Assuming that Kerry ordered the same number of prints for both the series no. 30 (1905) and the series “Samoa” (1907), the total of Samoan postcards launched on the market over three years surpassed 32,000 units. If, as in the case of “Series 30–Samoa”, a series achieved the hoped-for success, the company could issue a new series based on the same subjects. This operation would cost less because the image for the printing plate only needed few changes. The juxtaposition of “Series 30–Samoa” and the series “Samoa” shows that the end-products differ in many little details despite the motifs being identical. The image in the later series (Figure 7.3b), for example, covers a larger surface on the front side in comparison to the 1905 series (Figure 7.3a). In this case, manipulation of the image was not undertaken to improve the aesthetic quality of the image; instead, the changes were dictated by the new postcard format, which reserved space for the message on the address side, allowing for an extended image at the front. Different from the early version, the caption reads horizontally and is incorporated in the image. To make the title and the inscription “Kerry & Co., Sydney.” stand out, the water in front of the canoe has been removed and the beach extended. It is interesting to note, that despite that the postcard in series no. 30

already had a ‘divided back’, the image side was still designed like those of the ‘undivided back’ period, i.e., with a large white margin reserved for the message (Figure 7.4).

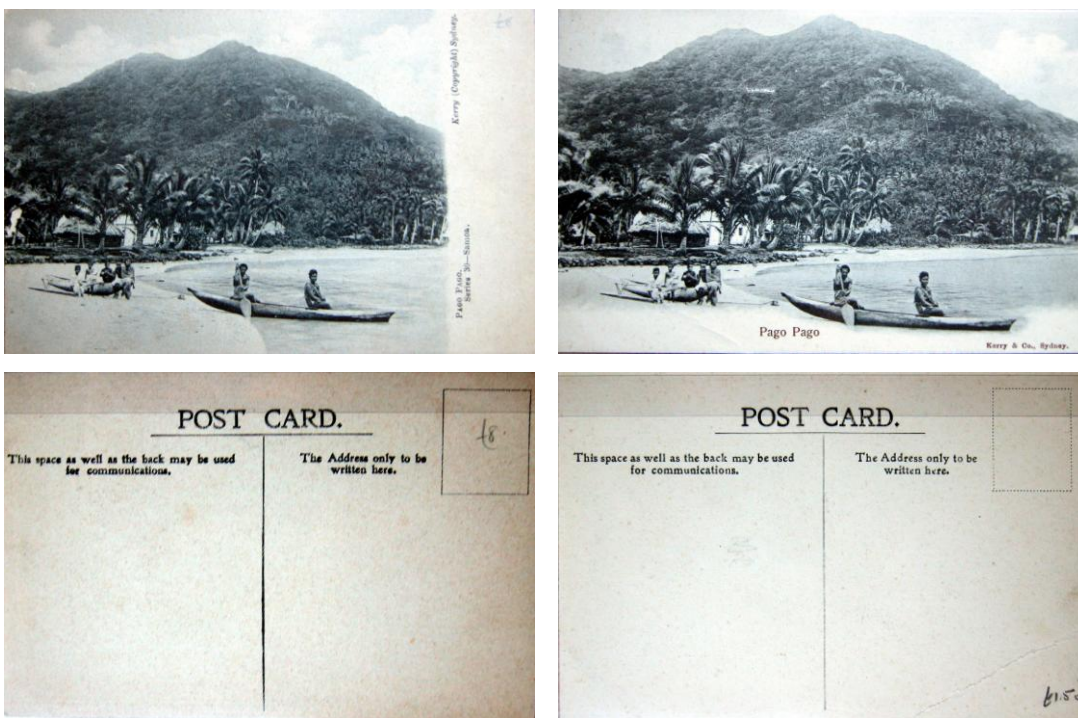


Figure 7.3a

Figure 7.3b

Figure 7.3 The same motif presented in two different series: **a)** “Series 30–Samoa” (1905), postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 120, 121; AS/PC1); **b)** “Samoa” (1907), postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 117, 118; AS/PC1)

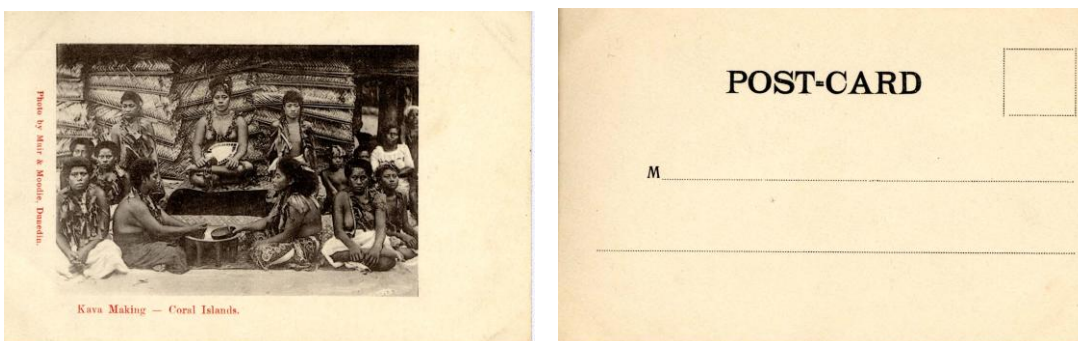


Figure 7.4 A postcard from the ‘undivided-back’ period with a small image and large margins. “Kava Making – Coral Islands. Photo by Muir & Moodie, Dunedin”. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.99 (AS/PC2)

While the layout of the address side is identical in both series, the font, colour and size of the caption have been changed. The later caption, printed in red ink, reveals that the series is unnumbered and that the title is “Samoa”. Three postcards with exactly the same features but without the word ‘Samoa’ (emphasised in Figure

7.2 through the colouring) seemed at first to belong to another series. Complementarity with the subjects of the series “Samoa”, however, as well as the fact that a collector sent these postcards from Pago Pago simultaneously (31 August 1907 at 3pm) with another card titled “Samoa”, suggests that they all belong to the same series.

Many errors occurred during the printing of postcards, and inaccuracies and mistakes in both images and texts were not rare. One only needs to take a detailed look at the twelve captions of “Series 30–Samoa” to realise how full stops and commas are not used in a coherent way, or even how, on the postcard “Cocoanut Palms”, the printers let mistakes slip into the text such as the misspelling of the word ‘Samoa’ as ‘Somoa’ (Figure 7.5). An even more evident mistake that occurred in the

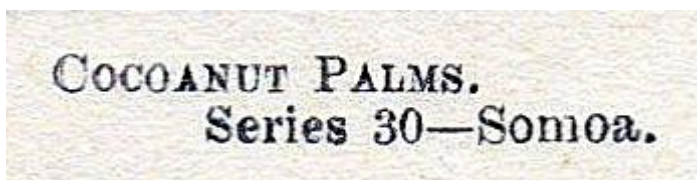
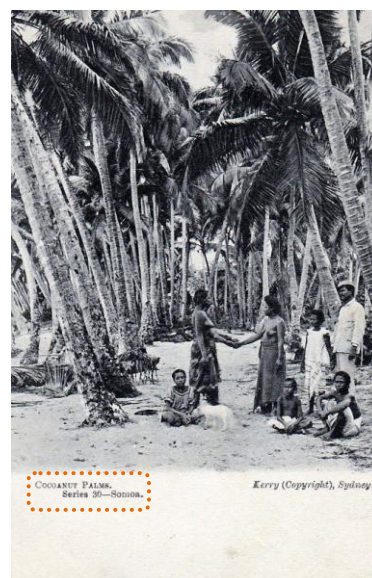


Figure 7.5 Misspelling of the word ‘Samoa’. “Cocoanut Palm. Series 30–Somoa”, collotype postcard from the author’s collection (AS/PC3)

later series is the omission of “Kerry & Co., Sydney.” on the postcard titled “Samoan Girl” (Figure 7.6). On the other hand, the omission of the word ‘Samoa’ in the captions of three postcards seems to be voluntary.



Figure 7.6 “Samoan Girl” from series “Samoa” (1907), collotype postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 257; AS/PC1)



Beside the fact that on the postcard “Pago Pago” an extension of the title would disturb the image aesthetically, there is reason to believe that the word “Samoa” was omitted simply to avoid a pleonasm (Figure 7.3b), as the geographic reference is already mentioned in the titles “Samoan Girl” and “Samoans playing Cards”. Pago Pago was a well-known harbour that almost everybody could situate on a Pacific map. Two postcards bear the name “Savii”, a misspelling of Savai‘i, the largest and most western island of the Samoan archipelago. In Australia and Europe Savai‘i was not as well known as the islands ‘Upolu and Tutuila,

which, by an international agreement of 1899, were acknowledged as German and American colonies respectively.¹⁶⁶ Possibly this is why it was necessary to add the word “Samoa” in order to identify its location. Because in the two early postcards featuring the same subject it is not specified where the scene is set, we may presume that Kerry had no information on the photographs and decided to locate the scene in the later postcards on the beautiful and less visited island Savai‘i.

Juxtaposition of the two series based on the same subjects reveals the improvements undertaken to make the new issue more appealing. In difference to the first series, for example, all twelve captions of the series “Samoa” are aligned horizontally. Also, the motifs “Pago Pago” and “By the Reef” were altered in the lower section to create a white margin for the caption (see Figures 7.3 and 7.7).



Figure 7.7a

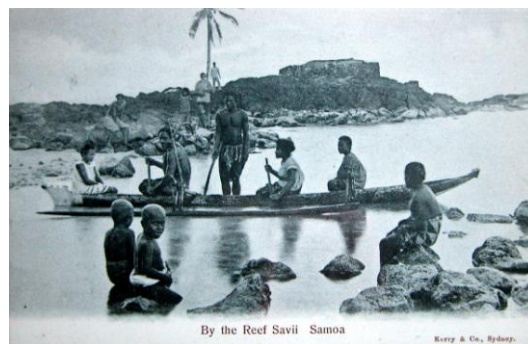


Figure 7.7b

Figure 7.7 The motif “By the Reef” presented in two different series: **a)** “Series 30–Samoa” (1905), collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 2006.76.671 (AS/PC2); **b)** “Samoa” (1907), postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 307; AS/PC1)

In compensation, the image was extended on the right-hand side. This new technology was adopted to put the image as a marketing element into the foreground. While the message could integrally be written on the back, the image should be presented in such a way that it could play a determinant role in the buyer’s choice process. With an almost completely illustrated side, the postcard worked as a nearly different object, while the printed and handwritten information lost their predominance in favour of the graphic element. The address side of the two series indeed remained almost identical. The stamp box in series no. 30 is marked off by a continuous line, while in the later series the contour is dotted (Figure 7.3). The later electrotype is much neater and sharper than the previous one, and its alignment is

¹⁶⁶ For the history of Samoa during the colonial period see Meleisea (1987), Hiery (1995, 1997, 2001).

more precise and straight. It is quite common to find electrotypes of the first series printed with a strong tilt of the texts and lines (Figure 7.8).¹⁶⁷

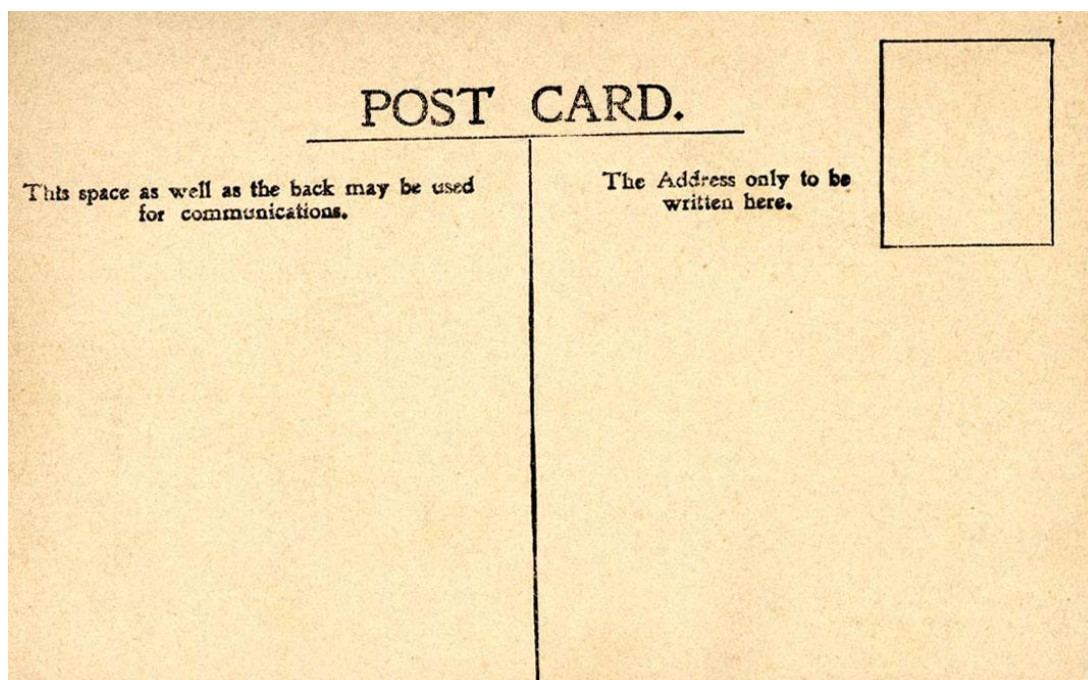


Figure 7.8 The electrotype on the back of a postcard featuring the motif “Natives Playing with Cards” has been printed with a strong tilt. Collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.293 (AS/PC2)

Trajectories and world lines

The materiality and appearance of a postcard influences how people interact with it. We have seen how the new postal regulations of the ‘divided-back’ period transformed the appearance of a postcard, and how this required a different approach by the people who wished to write a message on it. Depending on who is looking at it, a postcard gives weak or powerful responses. If immaculate, that is, not postally-used and with all four corners perfectly intact, a postcard may exert on some collectors the wish to possess it; historians or anthropologists are probably more attracted by a used postcard that bears the traces of usage. Of course a postcard does not create itself; instead, its appearance is shaped by external factors in the normal flow of life. However, I think that it is useful to see the ‘end product postcard’ – rather than as an inert object that stands only to ‘re-present’ something – as a sort of

¹⁶⁷ This kind of technical inaccuracy is even seen on postcards produced by Raphael Tuck & Sons, England’s most prominent postcard company and publisher for the Royal House.

animated being with desires, needs or ‘appetites’ of its own, as W. J. T. Mitchell, following Gell’s ideas in *Art and Agency* (1998), has explored in his *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005). Even before a postcard enters the socio-economic sphere for which it was created it has an intense social life, from its conception through the various phases of its production. The process of creation and production and the deriving trajectories (Kopytoff 1986), however, are matters that are planned, calculated and – to some extent¹⁶⁸ – controlled. However, what escapes any form of control are the trajectories a postcard follows when it leaves the factory and becomes enmeshed and active in social relations (see Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987, 1998, Gosden and Marshall 1999; Edwards 2001). In the following, I borrow Minkowski’s concept of ‘world line’ (Minkowski 1909) to highlight the temporal aspect in the displacement of postcards. In this sense I think it is useful to consider a trajectory as a pattern of movement that corresponds to a segment in an object’s world line. In my opinion, this notion also fits better into a discussion based on the examination of an ‘image-world’ and visual economy. Of course, it is impossible to reconstruct the entire world line of a postcard. Nevertheless, the traces that were stamped, pasted, imprinted or written on a postcard’s body can tell histories that, once deciphered, allow one to define at least some of its trajectories. Like scars, these signs testify to a postcard’s bodily engagement, and to a life imbued with numerous encounters (cf. Edwards 2004b: 15). Of all the traceable evidences of their social life and trajectories, two are the most common and straightforward. One is a small adhesive serrated label, the other a black ink circle containing date, time and place of delivery into the care of the postal service. In English, both objects are commonly referred to as ‘stamps’¹⁶⁹, and only the context reveals the precise identity of the object in question. In my discussion, I will use distinct words for these two rather close, but definitely different objects: ‘(postage) stamp’ for the adhesive label, and ‘postmark’ for the temporal and spatial information. The presence of a stamp and a postmark testify that

¹⁶⁸ There are indeed various factors in the lithographic process – such as, for example, the balance of the lipid content of the material used, on which the durability of the image depends – that do not allow full control over the end product and cause anxious waiting for the result, even among experts.

¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the French word ‘timbre’ refers to both stamp and postmark, as does the Spanish word ‘sello’. When clarity is required the stamp is also called ‘timbre-poste’ or ‘sello postal’ respectively. This practice of using the same term for two different objects possibly goes back to the time when the franking, signifying payment, was added to the postcard in the form of a postmark. The first stamp as adhesive label, called ‘penny black’, was introduced in England in 1840. Curiously, in both German and Italian two distinct words are used: ‘Briefmarke’ and ‘Stempel’, ‘francobollo’ and ‘timbro’ respectively.

a postcard went through the mail and that the person sending it paid for delivery. Between stamp and postmark there is a close relationship, as, to be valid, they must be displayed together on the surface of the postcard (Figure 7.9).¹⁷⁰



Figure 7.9 Detail of postcard "Native Canoe Savii [Savai'i]" from series "Samoa" (1907), collotype postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 228; AS/PC1)

Three of the eight postcards featuring the motif of a group of people sitting in a Samoan canoe were postally used, and therefore offer a good opportunity for the identification of trajectories and segments of a world line. The first postcard belongs to "Series 30–Samoa" (MB 338; AS/PC1) (Figure 7.10a). It was sent from Sydney on the 1 November 1905 at 5.30am from post office number 44 to Melbourne. The message, written the day before, reads "My very dear Harrie, many many Happy Returns of the anniversary of tomorrow (Nov 1st) With Health Wealth Happiness and Prosperity. Hoping you are all quite well and with fondest love to all from Jack 31-10-05." Jack spent one dime to send his birthday wishes to Mrs Daly in Toorak. We don't know what happened after the postcard arrived at its destination. What we know, however, is that what initially was an object that materialised a personal, emotional tie, changed its role and meanings in the decades that followed. The evidence that this postcard later left the private realm to enter the sphere of collectibles, is the information "12 \$" written in pencil on the upper margin by someone intending to sell the postcard. If this was the price paid by the collector Mr. Blackburn, then it is clear that the postcard was integrated in his collection about twenty or even thirty years ago when the prices were five or six times lower than today.¹⁷¹

The second postcard (PSC 1994.3.295; AS/PC2), this one from the later series "Samoa", was bought and written in Melbourne but was sent through the post in San Francisco (Figure 7.10b). The message reads: "Gee Whiz but things are lively

¹⁷⁰ A special or rare postmark can substantially add to the value of a stamp. In addition to everyday postmarks there are postmarks indicating the first day of issue of a particular stamp.

¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, collectors are not particularly interested in recording the details of their postcards' trajectories. While it is probable that a collector recalls the purchase date of a group of postcards or even of a collection, it is more rare that he/she can find out the exact date when a particular postcard was bought – maybe via internet – as a single object.

in Australia, if people keep on entertaining us this way it will take several years for me to recover from the effects of it. A.A.C.”. Given the enthusiastic tone, the sender could be an American soldier writing to his fiancé or sister from his ‘Australian mission’. Maybe to save time or money, he decided to entrust his ‘message’ for Miss Annie Bryant to a friend travelling aboard a steamer from Australia to the United States. Once arrived in California, this man postmarked the card with one cent and sent it to Los Angeles, on 22 September 1908.



Figure 7.10a

Figure 7.10b

Figure 7.10c

Figure 7.10 Three postally used postcards featuring the same motif “Native Canoe”: **a)** “Series 30–Samoa”, collotype postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 336, 338; AS/PC1); **b)** series “Samoa”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.295 (AS/PC2); **c)** series “Samoa”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.294 (AS/PC2)

The third postcard (PSC 1994.3.294; AS/PC2) also belongs to the later Samoan series (Figure 7.10c). It was sent in 1912 from Sydney to Roubaix in Northern France by a certain Paul to Madame Dekyvère. The message reads: “Sydney 10.9.12[,] Amitiés a tous. Vous envoie 2 cartes par ce courrier. Vous embrasse tous Paul”.¹⁷² The sender is corresponding with someone very close as the signs of affection such as “Amitiés”, “Vous embrasse” attest. Additionally, it could well be that the addressee is Paul’s family because the message is not addressed only to Madame Dekyvère, but to “tous” (you all). The two postage stamps confirm that the postcard was sent on the same day it was written – it was the 10 September 1912. Because the postcard was sent to France, hence to a country outside the British Empire, it was necessary to postmark it with one and a half pennies. The standard

¹⁷² “Sydney 10.9.12[,] Best wishes to you all. I am sending 2 cards by this mail. Lots of love [to all of you], Paul.”

postage stamp tariff for the postcards that circulated within the Empire was only half a penny. Additionally, a closer look at both stamps reveals that they were already old in 1912. Both postage stamps with the ‘Queen-Victoria-motif’ and with the ‘King-Edward VII-motif’ were substituted after the sovereigns’ death in 1901 and 1910 respectively. When this postcard was sent the new stamps illustrated with the effigy of King George V were already in circulation. The postcard arrived in Roubaix on 11 October 1912 after having travelled for a month, probably on board the ship *Malwa*, according to the note written by Paul along the left margin of the postcard. The *Malwa* was a passenger vessel launched in 1908 in London and authorised to carry mail between Australia and the United Kingdom, passing by India (Figure 7.11a-b).¹⁷³

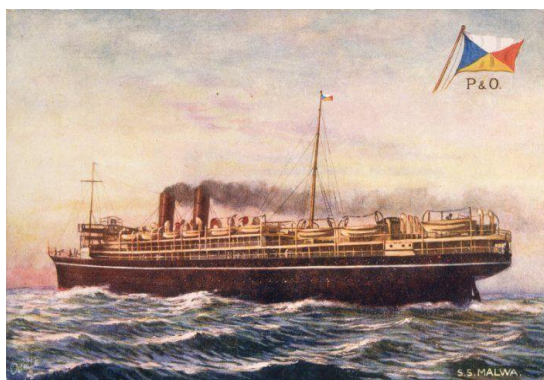


Figure 7.11a



Figure 7.11b

Figure 7.11 The steamer *Malwa* represented **a**) on a coloured postcard, c.1910, Alexander Turnbull Library, accession number: Eph-B-POSTCARD-vol-1-018, and **b**) on a photograph of its deck taken by the Swiss Arnold Heim in October 1920 during the crossing of the Indian Ocean in company of his wife Monica, ETH-Library Zürich, Photo Archive, accession number: Dia_011-058

The last two postcards, one sent from Melbourne to Los Angeles, the other from Sydney to Roubaix, share a few segments of their world lines. The first is the initial phase that includes the first few months of their conception and production as elements of series “Samoa”. The second, the final phase, includes instead the last decades of the postcards’ life during which they passed from their individual activity as single objects to a collective activity as part of a Boston collection. After an indeterminate time, the postcards moved with their owner from the American east coast to Canada, before finally being sold and integrated into the Photograph Study

¹⁷³ Among the other mail steamers travelling from Australia to England were also: *RMS Kashgar*, *RMS Karmala*, *RMS Moldavia*, *RMS Mongolia*, *RMS Mooltan*, *RMS Morea*, *RMS Orontes*, *RMS Osterley*, *RMS Persia* (Malwa, 10-03-2010).

Collection of the Metropolitan Museum's Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

It is interesting that on the basis of the two collections mentioned – the Metropolitan Museum's and Blackburn's – it is also possible to trace a segment of a world line that extends over the initial phase of production. It refers to the third postcard described above and a postcard based on the motif "Coconut Palm" from the Blackburn collection (Figure 7.12).



Figure 7.12a

Figure 7.12b

Figure 7.12 Two postcards sent by the same person to the same recipient ended up in two different collections: **a)** one is now held by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.294 (AS/PC2); **b)** the other is part of the Blackburn Collection in Honolulu (MB 238; AS/PC1)

Both postcards are from the same Kerry series produced in 1907, both were purchased by Paul, and were sent to the same person, Madame Dekyvère in Roubaix. The Blackburn card was sent six days before the Metropolitan Museum's card with the message "Sydney 4.9.12[,] Je compte partir le 22 février ou le 5 mars. Vous fixerai plus tard A Bientôt Paul."¹⁷⁴ We may assume that Paul bought the two postcards – if not the complete series "Samoa" – at the same time. The act of sending the first postcard would hence constitute a crossroads in the two postcards' histories.

¹⁷⁴ "Sydney 4.9.12[,] I intend to leave on the 22nd of February or on the 5th of March. I will confirm later. Take care Paul".

As Paul's note suggests, his first card travelled aboard the ship *Orama*,¹⁷⁵ while the second card was brought to Europe by the *Malwa*. Nevertheless, both ships followed the same route on their way to Europe (Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, via Suez to London) and hence similar trajectories can be traced for both postcards, a time difference of six days interrupting their common world line.

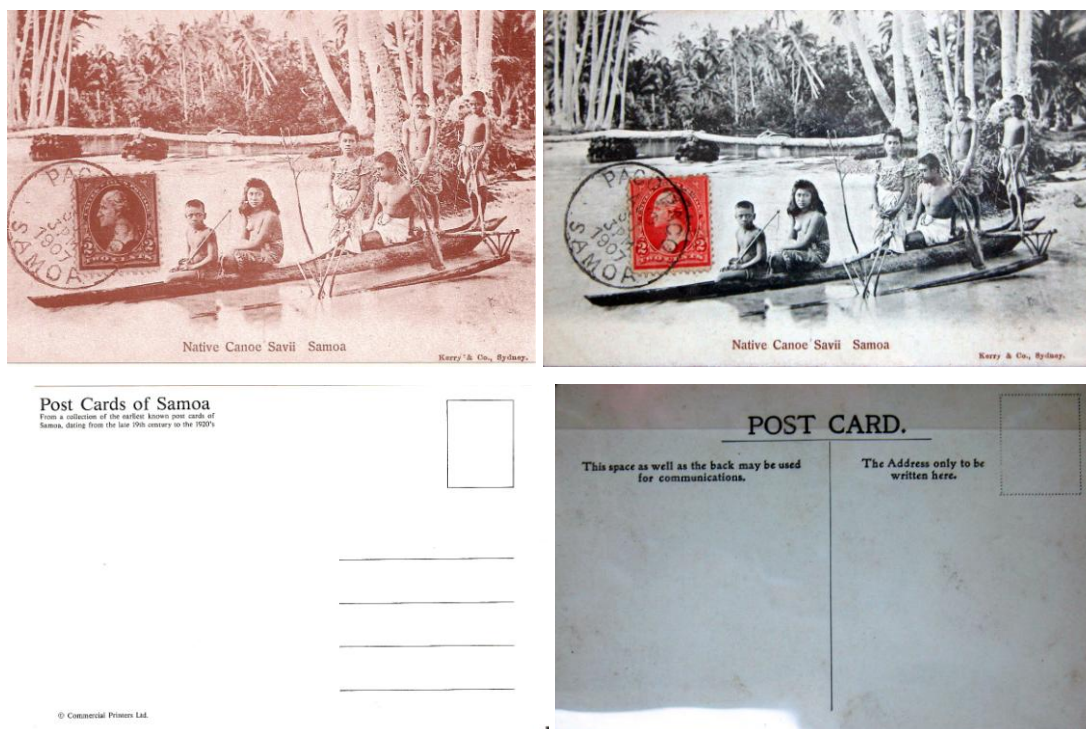


Figure 7.13a

Figure 7.13a

Figure 7.13 A Kerry & Co.'s historical postcard has been recently used to produce a 'modern clone': **a)** "Native Canoe Savii [Savai'i] Samoa", sepia toned half-tone postcard produced by Commercial Printers Ltd., Apia (1980s), author's collection (AS/PC3); **b)** "Native Canoe Savii [Savai'i]" from series "Samoa" (1907), collotype postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 228; AS/PC1)

A last history emerging from a postcard containing the motif "Native Canoe" deals with the legacy of Kerry postcards. It is represented by a sepia-toned postcard produced by Commercial Printers Ltd. in Samoa in the 1980s (Figure 7.13a). The reproduction of the motif "Native Canoe" in a recent series as well as in a mosaic of historical images of Samoa displayed in the entrance of the Tui Inn Hotel in Apia, testifies to its ongoing popularity and appeal (Figure 7.14). The front of the postcard is indeed a one-to-one reproduction of the original postcard (Figure 7.13a-b), the

¹⁷⁵ The *Orama* was a short-lived ship. She was launched for the Orient Line on 28 June 1911 and stayed in service until 1914 when she was commissioned as an Armed Merchant Cruiser. On 19 October 1917 she was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U.62 south of Ireland while escorting a convoy (<http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/descriptions/ShipsO.html>).

only differences being the half-tone instead of the collotype process, the sepia toning and, of course, the material properties of the paper support.

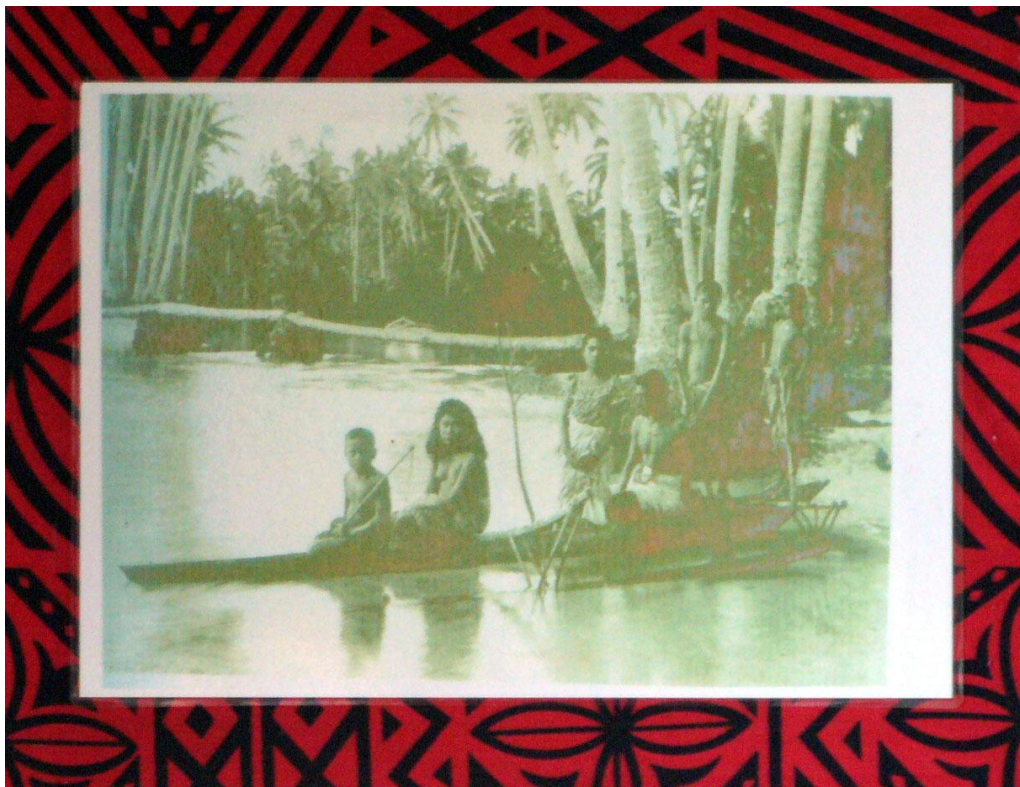


Figure 7.14 The Princess Tui Inn Hotel in Apia, Samoa, welcomes its visitors with walls decorated with copies (inkjet prints) of historical images. The postcard's motif "Native Canoe Savii [Savai'i]" appears on a board (third image in first column left) together with images of *taupos* and Samoan 'belles'. Apia, 18th November 2008

Of particular interest is the fact that this postcard was produced by combining two technologies not chosen by Kerry: the sepia and the half-tone. As a consequence, from the new product a transformation of Kerry's intentions emerges, and a message which is different from the one created by him eighty years earlier on. It is not a message about the beauty of Samoa and its people narrated through an image in greyscale; now it is a nostalgic message evoking an ancient Samoa created through the use of a brownscale. The choice of the verso's layout serves to emphasise the anachronistic dimension of this newer postcard. Indeed, it presents a completely different electrotype, characterised by the addition and omission of lines, and by the position and content of the printed text. While with the image there is the attempt of preserving and presenting an historical past, the verso introduces a temporal break by anchoring the production's moment to the present: "Post Card of Samoa. From a Collection of the earliest known post cards of Samoa, dating from the late 19th century to the 1920s". The fact that this Kerry postcard was reprinted as a consequence of an interest that the original motif was able to generate, shows the great potential visual representation has in the ongoing production of meanings and values. These meanings and values can strongly differ from those which characterised the images at their sites of production and initial use, and, with such a temporal gap, they also lay outside the control of the person who constructed them and the social groups for which they were originally made (cf. L. Bell 1992).

On another series issued by Commercial Printers and based on the same historical postcards, the name of the collection's owner is mentioned. It is Mr Floyd W. Fitzpatrick, an American businessman and a pioneer investor in the Pacific Islands.¹⁷⁶ When I first saw the half-tone reproductions of Fitzpatrick's postcards, I wished I could work on his collection but I did not know where it was stored after he passed away. When I realised that the postcard "Native Canoe Savii [Savai'i]" (Figure 7.13b) of the later series "Samoa" owned by Mark Blackburn was the original used for the reproduction, I asked Mark Blackburn if he had bought the postcard from Fitzpatrick. He confirmed this, and added that he had bought the

¹⁷⁶ Floyd W. Fitzpatrick owned Island Camera and a shopping centre in Honolulu, as well as a copra plantation in Samoa. He was the first person in the world to successfully can coconut cream. He was also active in making substantial donations to community projects such as the Schoolboys Rugby Development Programme (<http://www.bizconnections.com/pacificpersonalities2.htm>). For his collecting activity see the *Stanley Gibbons* auction catalogue *Cook Islands and Samoa: The 'Floyd W. Fitzpatrick' Collections*, Sale No. 5677 (13–14 December 1989), comprising 683 lots of Cook Islands and 767 lots of Samoa.

postcard after the issue of the recent half-tone series. Upon Fitzpatrick's death his collection went to Schuyler Auctions in San Francisco, and Blackburn bought the entire holdings of Samoan, Tongan, Tahitian and Fijian cards (pers. comm. Blackburn, 11th March 2010). Thereby, if we trace the final trajectories of the original "Native Canoe Savii [Savai'i]", now owned by Blackburn, we have the following sequence: Hawai'i (collection Fitzpatrick, 19??-1980s) – Samoa (collection Fitzpatrick, reproduction, 1980s) – Hawai'i (collection Fitzpatrick 1980s) – San Francisco (auction, 2006) – Lancaster¹⁷⁷ (collection Blackburn, 2006) – Hawai'i (collection Blackburn, 2008).

Thanks to the invisible network woven by collectors, I suddenly had access to the original postcard which was used for the sepia reproduction. Rogan argued that postcards used as souvenirs and collectibles were the central objects of a complex exchange and gift economy based on reciprocity as a central principle (2005: 19). According to classical gift theory, Kerry & Co.'s Samoan postcards are gifts that tells us something not about themselves, but about the relationship they engendered between donor and receiver (Mauss 1923–1924). The black and white collotype shows exactly like its 'clone' the traces of postal usage: a stamp and a postmark pasted and printed respectively on the motif. However, a look at the reverse reveals that there is neither an address nor a written message (Figure 7.13b). It is obvious that in this case the sender did not comply with the postal rules. Why would he spend money for a postage stamp, ask the post office worker to add a postmark, but then not add an address? These elements suggest that the sender was using the postcard in an alternative way. A common practice among collectors, indeed, was to authenticate their collectible postcards by adding a stamp and a postmark on the image side. Often a complete series was purchased and authenticated in this way, either for self-enjoyment or for sending to another collector (cf. Staff 1979 [1966]). If the postcards were sent, this was not done individually, but rather as a batch and in a closed envelope. This would explain the absence of the address and the message, as is the case for this Kerry postcard. The red two cents postage stamp depicts the first US President George Washington in profile, while the postmark reveals that the postcard was stamped in Pago Pago, American Samoa, on 31 August 1907 at 3pm.

¹⁷⁷ The first time I worked on Blackburn's Pacific postcards was in December 2005 when the entire collection was still kept at Blackburn's 'archive/museum-house' in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This was before the purchase of the postcards from the Fitzpatrick collection.

Interestingly, five other postcards of series “Samoa” bear an identical postmark. Three of them also carry the same postage stamp,¹⁷⁸ while on two of them a stamp with a full-face portrait of Washington is affixed (Figure 7.15). This information suggests that these seven postcards were purchased together and sent from a collector to another collector in a closed envelope. If the sender bought the entire series, we may expect that the other five postcards were also stamped, postmarked and sent the same way. We also have another postcard of the series “Samoa” which, despite that it features a four cents brown stamp depicting the 18th President of the United States Ulysses S. Grant¹⁷⁹ and was stamped in 1908, seems to have been purchased by the same person for the same recipient. Indeed, the date on the postmark “31st August 1908” can be considered as a hint to a form of cyclical, ritualised practice, maybe in connection with a birthday or anniversary.



Figure 7.15 Postcards from the series “Samoa” (1907) ‘authenticated’ in Pago Pago on 31 August 1907, resp. 1908. All are from the Blackburn Collection (MB 114, 122, 228, 231, 236, 246, 257; AS/PC1)

Because this group of cards arrived as a compact whole in the Blackburn collection, we may presume that its single elements – the seven Samoan Kerry postcards – not only have many trajectories, hence histories, in common, but that they also share an almost uninterrupted world line, in the course of which they contributed a stronger and more clear-cut representation and definition of Samoa and its people than a single postcard did.

¹⁷⁸ This postage stamp was part of a series depicting important American people issued in 1894.

¹⁷⁹ Both the Washington full-face portrait and the one of Ulysses S. Grant belong to a series of postage stamps that was known as the ‘1902 series’ and was issued to replace the series of 1894.

Conflation of authorships

The postcards' trajectories and world lines have been traced by a variety of people, the majority of whom will remain anonymous. Each of these trajectories and world lines, however, have a starting point which was chosen by a single person, namely the person who took the photograph. By using the expression 'conflation of authorship', I refer to the fact that many people were involved in the production of a picture postcard, but only few were acknowledged as authors. This is, of course, always the case for objects that are serially and commercially produced. Yet in these cases every step of the production-chain is well planned, the single producers are aware of being part of the whole process and they all work together towards a product that will bear the name of the company. This is in part also true of the postcard industry. However, for most of Kerry's postcards there existed a crucial phase in the process that was not planned in advance, namely the production of the original photograph. When postcard series started being issued there were already thousands of images in circulation that could easily be recycled for postcard production. Even if some of these images were taken in the 19th century with other intentions they soon became appreciated as illustrations for picture postcards. Often photographic studios and stocks changed hands; the new owner reissued the old material under his name – sometimes drastically manipulating it when being transferred to the postcard format – and the individual photographers remained anonymous (Robinson 1988: 41). As Rosalind Krauss has explained, such commercial practices resulted from the nineteenth-century idea that photography's authorship was not to be attributed to the photographer but to the photographic firm (Krauss 1985: 140). This clearly makes the work of re-linking a postcard's motif to a specific individual difficult (cf. Webb 1998: 116), and the attitude editors had towards images when publishing does not help in this sense. The majority did not seem to worry whether the images they used were their own or had been borrowed from other photographers. In fact, they recycled the photographs without acknowledging authorship. As Mayer notes (2006: 222), H. Wilfrid Walker had no qualms in adding the information "with forty-eight plates from photographs by the author and others" as a subtitle of his book *Wanderings among the South Sea savages and in Borneo and the Philippines* (1909). Augustin Krämer did the same in his *Die Samoa-Inseln* (1902–1903), though differentiating between his photographs –

marked with an asterisk – and those he had purchased. While commercial photographers were used to this practice, amateur or semi-professional photographers were upset when they discovered that one of their works had been published with no acknowledgement or, even worse, had been attributed to another photographer. A distinguished victim of these inaccuracies was Revd. George Brown (1835–1917), who, in *The Illustrated London News* of 20 April 1895, discovered an article on Papua New Guinea accompanied by two pictures attributed to the public officer A. C. English. Revd. George Brown underlined the passage writing on the margin of the newspaper “No They are mine GB” (AS/ML3).

In contrast to the ‘Wailwan case’ (see Chapter Four), there is no straightforward information that identifies a particular individual as the author of the Samoan images used by Kerry for his series no. 30. It is clear that at least half of the postcard pictures – those not taken in a studio – were shot in Samoa or on another Pacific island, but it is unlikely that Kerry visited the islands in the 1890s. In those years he was commissioned to undertake various works in New South Wales by the local Government, and, with the expansion of his business, he had to delegate most of the jobs to his field photographers.

The Bell trail

As we saw in Chapter Three, one of Kerry & Co.’s earliest field operators was George Bell. In the 1880s, before joining the Sydney company in 1890, Bell went to New Guinea as photographer on a Burns Philp & Co. expedition sponsored by the New South Wales Government (Millar 1981: 19, Newton 1988: 186). The ‘*Victory expedition*’, named after the small steamer provided by Burns Philp, was led by Theodore Francis Bevan (1860–1907) who was commissioned to make a trip up-river into the interior of British New Guinea (he was the first to travel up the Purari River) with the instruction to “cultivate and maintain friendly relations with the natives” (Buckley and Klugman 1981: 53).¹⁸⁰

According to Nordström, it is probable that George Bell took the earlier Kerry images of Samoa on that occasion, that is, on the way to or from New Guinea (Nordström 1991: 274, 1995: 26). Nevertheless, there is no evidence that during this expedition there was a stopover in Samoa. Indeed, in the 1890s Burns Philp obtained

¹⁸⁰ Bevan published various articles and books, the main one being *Toil, Travel, and Discovery in British New Guinea* (1890).

mail contracts for shipping runs from Australia to Papua, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Later the trading routes of Burns Philp Steamships expanded to Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu (known then as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands), and to the Marshall Islands (Buckley and Klugman 1986: 5). All these regions are represented in Burns Philp's images, now kept in Australian Archives. Thus there are no photographs of Samoa from the 1890s that appear to be connected either to the company Burns Philp or to George Bell (cf. Pambu 2009). In addition, Buckley and Klugman's study of Burns Philp's history reveals that only around 1906 did the company board express interest in extending copra trading to areas beyond Melanesia such as Samoa, Tahiti and Tonga (Buckley and Klugman 1981: 73, 260). Therefore, the inter-island vessels did not travel to Western Polynesia until the first decade of the 20th century. Burns Philp established the first copra depot at Apia only in 1911 (Buckley and Klugman 1981: 262), the same year Charles Kerry left his photographic company.

If George Bell took the earlier Kerry images of Samoa, then he must have left the expedition and travelled on his own from Melanesia to Western Polynesia, possibly using a regular shipping line. Independent shipping lines such as the Australasian United Steam Navigation Co. (A.U.S.N.) and the Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand were particularly prominent in operating ships in the British territories (McLean 2006). Curiously, there were no German shipping lines linking Samoa with the outside world on a regular basis despite Germany's presence on the island up to the First World War. The company providing this service was the Union Steamship Co. which inaugurated in 1894 a regular service between Sydney, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Auckland, securing the major portion of traffic with Tonga and Samoa (Buckley and Klugman 1981: 75). It is more probable that the photographs of Samoa used by Kerry for the "Series 30" followed the trajectory Samoa – New Zealand – Australia established by Union Steamship Co. rather than one by Bell leading from New Guinea to Sydney via Samoa.

The New Zealand trail

In the Blackburn collection there is a postcard bearing the red imprint "Photo by Muir & Moodie, Dunedin" and featuring the same unidentified Samoan girl that appears on Kerry's postcard 11 (Figure 7.16a). The fact that the New Zealand

company issued a postcard based on a subject almost identical to one used by Kerry raises the question as to who might have been the author of the original postcard images. Indeed, even if the facial expression, the inclination of the head and the position of the pandanus necklace *'ula fala* reveal that the two photographs are not identical, it is clear that they were taken during the same photographic session, and most probably by the same photographer. While Kerry used a bust portrait (Figure 7.16b), Muir & Moodie opted for a three-quarter portrait that includes the Samoan woman's hands as well.¹⁸¹



Figure 7.16a

Figure 7.16b

Figure 7.16c

Figure 7.16 The same unidentified Samoan woman of Kerry & Co.'s motif 11 appears also on a postcard by Muir & Moodie (left) and on a photograph used by Augustin Krämer (right): **a**) "Taipo [sic] Girl. Photo by Muir & Moodie, Dunedin", postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 164; AS/PC1); **b**) "A High Chief's Daughter. Series 30-Samoa", collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.298 (AS/PC2); **c**) reproduction in *Die Samoa-Inseln* by Augustin Krämer (Vol. II, 1903: 276)

From a comparison of these two postcard images, Kerry's way of representing the young woman as a symbol for Samoa emerges with more clarity. It is a way of representation that privileges focus on the person and establishes intimate eye contact with the Samoan woman. The re-contextualising elements of the studio disappear, or are drastically reduced (bench and backdrop), in Kerry's image, so that the viewer loses his/her observational distance and is confronted directly with the subject's

¹⁸¹ It is interesting to note that the image used by Muir & Moodie is the same one as published by Walter Hutchinson in *Customs of the World* with the caption "Photo by Muir & Moodie" (1912: 125), the sole difference being the white backdrop instead of the original one characterised by a floral motif. Augustin Krämer also used a photograph of the same Samoan woman (Vol. II, 1903: 276); a closer look reveals that it again is the same image as used by Muir & Moodie, but this time cropped to create a bust portrait as in the image used on Kerry's postcard 2 (Figure 7.16c).

gaze. Moreover, to promote this intense visual encounter, Kerry also decided to eliminate those elements that might spoil the authentic ‘native’ magic of this encounter, namely the watch and the ring on the left arm and left hand. The watch does not fit in a discourse that presents Samoans as people living in a timeless and untouched world (Fabian 1983), nor does the ring because it implies that the Christian faith had already been established on the Polynesian island. We can therefore say that the postcard created by Muir & Moodie is more ‘truthful’ than Kerry’s in the sense that the presence of the elements used in the studio stimulate a different way of thinking about the context of the photographic encounter.

The relatively small size of the Muir & Moodie image is typical for a postcard produced during the ‘undivided back’ period. Indeed, the postcard was sent from Auckland on 20 July 1903 and arrived in San Francisco twenty-eight days later at the address of a certain Mr Emil Schwartz. This shows that Muir & Moodie used the image for postcard production already two years before Kerry.¹⁸² In the Metropolitan Museum’s collection there is another postcard issued by the New Zealand firm during the ‘undivided back’ period. It features a portrait of a Samoan man looking to the right while holding a knife over his shoulder (Figure 7.17). This postcard was never used for postal purposes, but it shows an interesting piece of information in the lower right corner of the image. The magnified white text reads “6382. Burton Bros Dunedin, N.Z Protected Oct. 18[??]”, and it is similar to the text “6378. A Samoan High Chief. Burton Bros. Protected. Oct. 99” written on another of Muir & Moodie’s photographs – now in the Te Papa collection (Figure 7.18). It is evident that all the images discussed here must have been taken during the same photographic session.

¹⁸² This postcard raises also some interesting points relating to the interaction of the users with the pre-stamped elements. Here the word ‘black’ written by the sender over the word ‘fair’ unintentionally covers the red caption “Taipo Girl”, thus hiding the misspelling of “Taupo”. Also the message “A fair exchange is no robbery” signed by F. C. T. Auckland can be interpreted in relation to the sender and other elements. First it is a traditional proverb from the sixteenth century used by John Heywood in the form “Though change be no robbery for the changed case” (Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs 2003), and suggests that Mr F. C. T. was a postcard collector. The meaning of this proverb in this context can be interpreted in various ways. It could be that Mr F. C. T. meant to reciprocate a postcard received from Mr Emil Schwartz, and this proverb suggests that he valued this postcard the same as the one he received from Mr Schwartz. Knowing that many collectors took the opportunity to buy and exchange the miniaturisations of objects exhibited at fairs, we cannot exclude the possibility that the word ‘fair’ is an allusion to an exchange that took place during such an event. Finally, the presence of the word ‘black’ over ‘fair’ can be understood as a wordplay centred on the opposite meaning of the two words. ‘Fair’ could be referring to the fair skin peculiar to Polynesians, while ‘black’ is the translation of the recipient’s German name ‘Schwartz’.

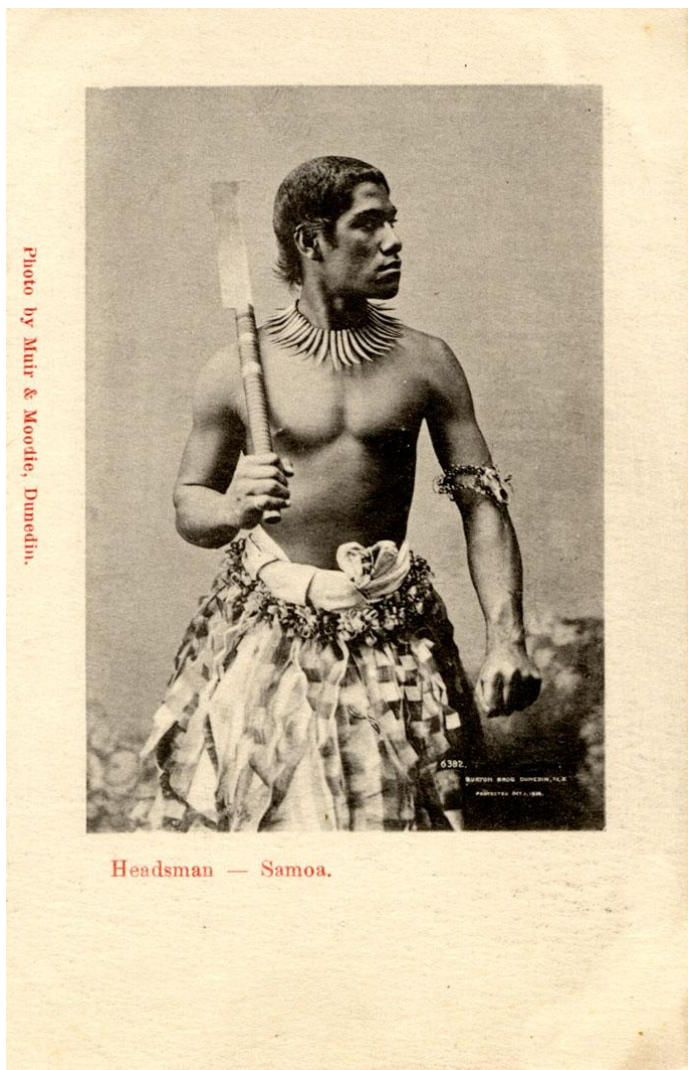


Figure 7.17 Postcard produced by Muir & Moodie (Dunedin, New Zealand) using a portrait taken in front of the same backdrop as in figure 7.16b. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.297 (AS/PC2)



Figure 7.18 "6378. A Samoan High Chief. Burton Bros. Protected. Oct. 99.", gelatin glass negative, Muir & Moodie studio, c.1899, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, accession number: C.017599 (AS/TP)

The man in the postcard image “Headsman – Samoa” is in front of the same backdrop and holds the same knife as the man in the photograph now in the Te Papa photograph. The latter, in turn, appears in almost the same position, but in conjunction with a standing man on a photograph that instead belonged to the Kerry inventory (see Figure 6.6a). Additionally, the bracelet on his right wrist is the same as worn by the Samoan woman and visible in the Muir & Moodie ‘undivided back’ postcard (Figure 7.16a). These elements, especially the two inscriptions mentioning the date of copyright protection and the inventory number, are indices that the whole set of images could well have been taken by the Burton Brothers or one of their staff at the end of the 19th century. It is more difficult to clarify whether some photographs were taken in the Burton studio in Dunedin, or in 1884 during a trip on the Union Steam Ship Company’s *Wairarapa* that Alfred Burton (1834–1914) undertook to Fiji, Samoa (19–23 July), and Tonga, taking 230 photographs that were later published with his notes as *The Camera in the Coral Islands* (Burton 1884, *Burton Brothers* 1987: 33).¹⁸³ Indeed, while Walter (1836–1880) specialised in studio portraits, Alfred travelled to take panoramic and topographical views of the beautiful New Zealand landscape. Following an argument in 1877, the brothers parted and, three years later, Walter took his life in his darkroom (*Burton Brothers* 1987: 17). The basis for the creation of the key postcard emerged in this period when Alfred replaced his brother with a new partner named George Moodie (1865–1947). After Alfred’s death, Moodie went into partnership with Thomas M. B. Muir (c.1852–1945) who had acquired the Burton Brothers’ collection of negatives. The two photographers renamed the firm “Muir & Moodie” and, especially during the ‘undivided back’ period, they transformed a multitude of Burton’s images into postcard format, as the postcards “Taipo Girl” and “Headsman – Samoa” exemplify (cf. Main and Turner 1993: 24). Muir & Moodie’s business was so profitable that they opened ‘The Great Postcard Emporium’ in Dunedin, where they produced and sold postcards until around 1916 (Knight 1971: 89).¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ See also the contributions by Brett Mason and Gavin McLean in *Innocents Abroad* (2006).

¹⁸⁴ Like Kerry & Co. and other photographers based in the Pacific, Muir and Moodie sent images to Europe for printing as postcards by German and Austrian firms (Main and Turner 1993: 24). The results are characteristic of the printing styles of the time, with the photographs reproduced by black collotype and captions in red along the edges. Muir and Moodie initially “cropped their standard whole plate (16 cm × 21 cm) views and printed them on stiffer paper” for postcards (Main and Turner 1993: 24).

The possibility cannot be excluded that Kerry purchased the ten images taken in front of the same backdrop (cf. Chapter Six) by the Burton Brothers, directly through Muir & Moodie. Because none of the photographs in the Tyrrell collection is identical to those used by Muir & Moodie, one might suspect that the New Zealand firm sold only those images that had been discarded from the postcard inventory.

Entangled trails

Despite the fact that all companies invested in bringing new products onto the market, the wide circulation of Samoan images meant that the same motif appeared on postcards produced by different firms, as is the case of the Kerry postcard “By the Reef” discussed in Chapter Six shows. This is, however, the only Samoan motif used by Kerry & Co. which, apart from the colouring, was recycled with no alteration by other postcard companies, in this case Brodziak & Co. and Gustav Arnold, both based in Suva, Fiji. To avoid the one-to-one recycling of his colleagues’ images, Kerry adopted the strategy of choosing a subject already published, presenting it under another perspective or posed in a different way. Similar to the example of the motif of “A High Chief’s Daughter”, the subject in “A Samoan Girl” – a sitting lady leaning on her left elbow and holding a giant taro leaf – is posing in the Kerry postcard in a slightly different way than in a postcard by Swain & Co., Kerry’s contemporary (Figure 7.19).

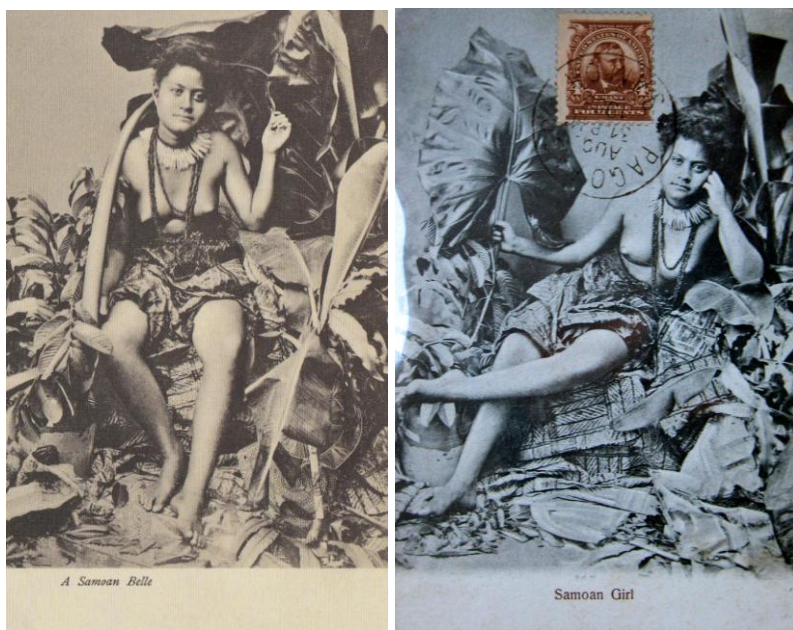


Figure 7.19a

Figure 7.19b

Figure 7.19 The same motif used by two postcard companies: **a)** “A Samoan Belle”, postcard published by Swain & Co. (pre-1905), Sydney (Blackburn 2005: 112); **b)** “Samoan Girl” from series “Samoa” (1907), collotype postcard from the Blackburn Collection (MB 257; AS/PC1)

This postcard, now in the Blackburn collection (see Blackburn 2005: 112) was published with an ‘undivided back’ in Sydney before 1905, and therefore, as in the case of the postcard by Muir & Moodie, entered the market at least a year before Kerry issued his Samoan ‘divided back’ series. It seems more probable to me that it was Kerry who acquired the images from these companies, rather than vice-versa.

A similar analysis can be made concerning the motif presented on the postcard titled “Natives Playing Cards”. John Davies, the first photographer to establish a studio in Apia (Nordström 1995: 27), used the same motif as an element for a multiple-image photograph mounted on a cabinet card (Figure 7.20, see Engelhard & Mesenhöller 1995: 153). According to Nordström, Davis himself used images taken by other photographers, and the “Natives Playing Cards” motif was probably a Kerry & Co. one (1995: 38). Should the ‘Bell-theory’ be corroborated, that is, that George Bell went to Samoa in 1890 and took photographs that he passed on to Kerry when he joined the Sydney company, then this assumption would fit. Yet, to date there is no evidence for this theory, so I am more inclined to believe that the image-flow went in the opposite direction, hence from Davis to Kerry. The cabinet card was issued just before Christmas in 1894, eleven years before Kerry produced his Samoan series. With the vast archive of Samoan images that already existed in Samoa, thanks to his images and those by the other resident photographers such as his partner and successor Alfred John Tattersall (1861–1951), Josiah Martin (1843–1916) and Thomas Andrew (1855–1939), it seems less probable that Davis would use an image of a photographic company based in Sydney. Moreover, in a Kerry & Co. register of negatives, the 147 entries under “Samoa” are attributed to plates that entered the company’s inventory between 1885 and 1895 (AS/ML5). Among these entries are all twelve motifs used for series no. 30, hence also the one “Natives Playing Cards”. It would be surprising if Davis had used a Kerry & Co. photograph one year before the company itself integrated it into its collection.



NATIVES PLAYING CARDS.
Series 30—Samoa.

Kerry (Copyright) Sydney.

Figure 7.20a

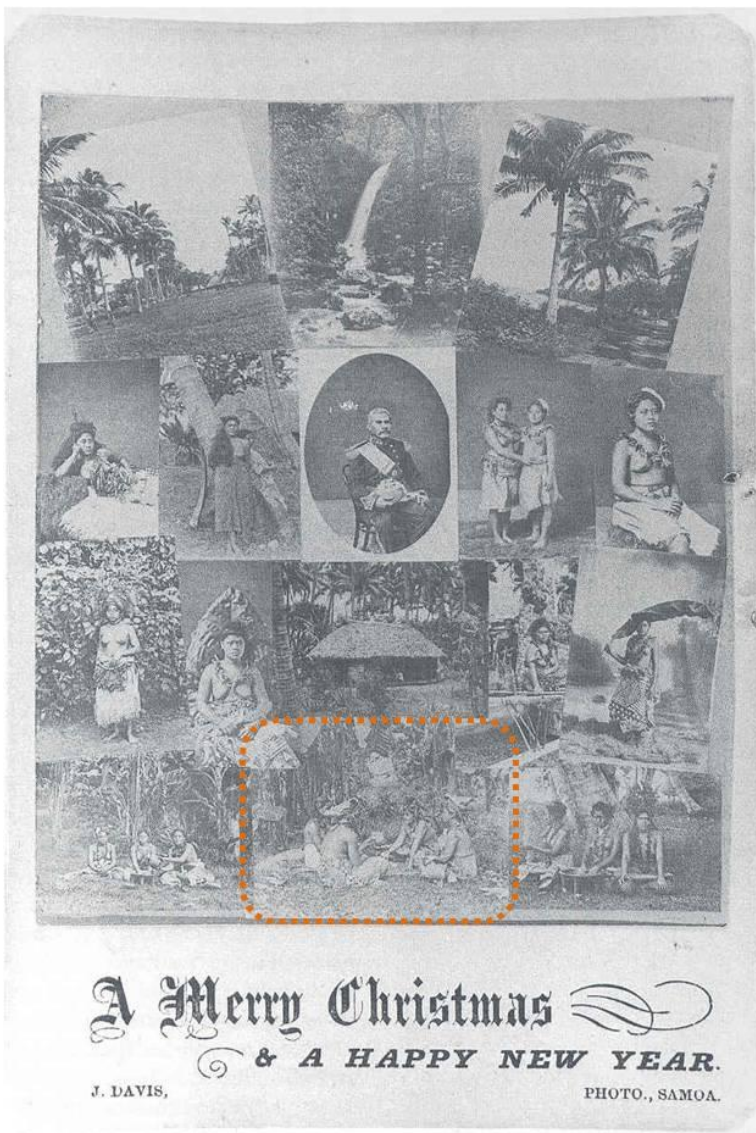


Figure 7.20b

Figure 7.20 The motif “Natives Playing Cards” appeared already on a cabinet card issued by John Davis in 1894: **a)** “Natives Playing Cards. Series 30—Samoa”, collotype postcard, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number: PSC 1994.3.293 (AS/PC2); **b)** “A Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year. J. Davis, Photo., Samoa.”, cabinet card, Apia 1894, private collection, published in Engelhard und Mesenhöller (1995: 153)

“Series 50–By Reef and Palm”, the last series of the postcard sample book, is another example to show how Kerry’s company was involved in exchange networks and integrated works of other photographers in its productions. Nine horizontal postcards of Samoa are arranged together with three vertical postcards of New Guinea (Figure 7.21).

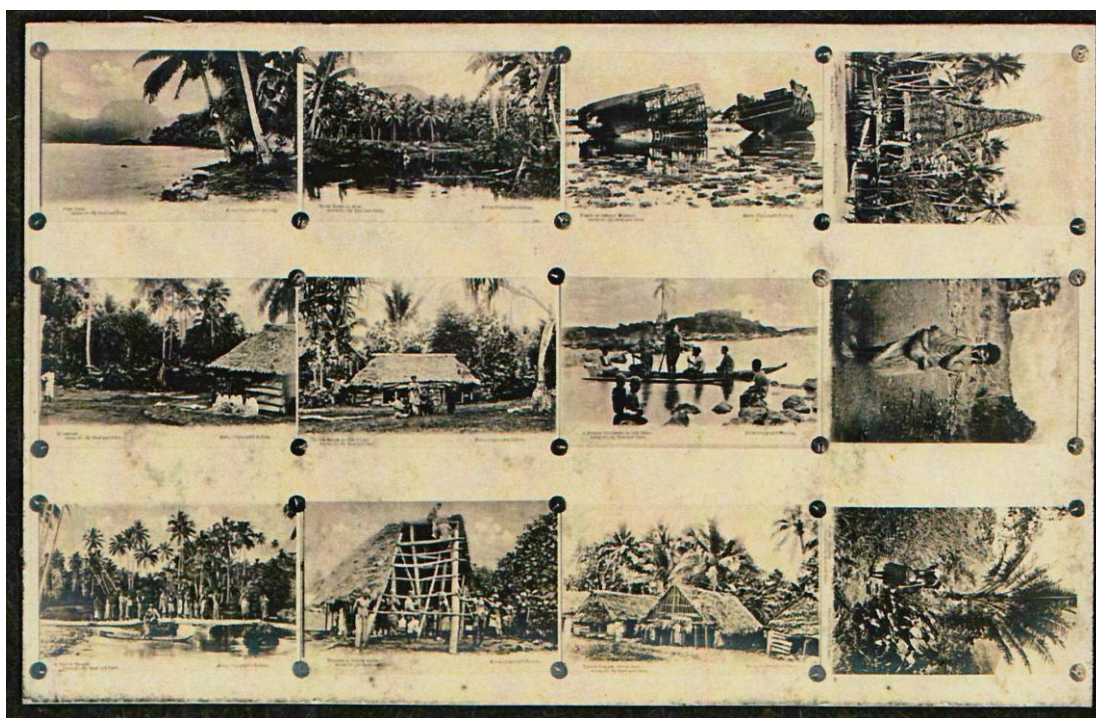


Figure 7.21 Kerry & Co.’s “Series 50–By Reef and Palm.” presenting three vertically aligned Papua New Guinea motifs (first row) along with other Samoan motifs. Postcard sample book *Kerry’s Australian Post Cards*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, accession number: PHM 93/312/29 (AS/PHM2)

Once more, if the ‘Bell-theory’ could be proved it would be relatively easy to attribute the authorship of all postcards images to George Bell. Yet this is not the case, so that we have to consider the other networks that were responsible for the presence of Melanesian images in Kerry’s collection. Among the Tyrrell papers there are various documents attributing the New Guinea negatives and photographs to the London Missionary Society missionary Revd. William George Lawes (1839–1907) and the photographer John William Lindt (1845–1926) (AS/ML5). Lindt’s photographs from *Picturesque New Guinea* – a collection assembled during Sir Peter Scratchley’s expedition to the Protectorate of British New Guinea in 1885 – were popular and easily available, so that one list with 124 images of New Guinea also ended up at Kerry & Co. The material relating to Revd. Lawes, who lived in British

New Guinea for thirty-two years,¹⁸⁵ reached Kerry via Henry King (1855–1923) who was selling the missionary’s photographs and played an important part in their wide geographical distribution (Webb 1997: 17). After King closed down his studio in 1900, Kerry purchased his negatives, which also contained Lawes’ work (Millar 1981: 26), and marketed them under his own studio name (Webb 1997: 17).¹⁸⁶ Indeed, it is probable that the three postcards of New Guinea presented in “Series 50–By Reef and Palm” in 1905 are based on photographs originally taken by Lawes or Lindt in the 1880s.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the material qualities of a postcard intervene in the world of people. Instead of being representations in the sense that meaning is projected on their cardboard surfaces, postcards are instead “compressed performances” whose significance is actualised in a specific moment of their use (cf. Pinney: 2004: 8). Thus significance and value change through time and across space when a postcard travels in its social life and passes through different cultural contexts which may modify or even transform its meaning; in Thomas’ terms “a succession of uses and recontextualisation’s” (Thomas 1991: 29).

The study of the Samoan sample has shown how interaction with multiple agents and sociability are inherent characteristics of postcards. Their extremely mobile and sensorially engaged nature confers on them the ability to create relationships both in the private and the public sphere. In a sense we could argue that postcards work as a social glue helping to avoid what could be considered one of the most insidious evils in modern society – loneliness (cf. MacDonald 2003: 232).

From the analysis of the entangled authorship’s issue that revolves around the company’s Samoan imagery, the fact emerged that Charles Kerry was probably not the author of the photographs used for the production of the motifs of series no.

¹⁸⁵ Revd. William George Lawes was ordained by the London Missionary Society in 1860, and set off to Niue with his bride Fanny Wickham. During the twelve years on Niue he translated the Bible and became involved in teaching carpentry and agriculture as well as training local pastors. In 1873 he returned to London for a year before leaving again for central Papua where he built the first training institution in 1882 and established the Vatorata Training College at Rigo in 1884 (for additional information see Langmore 1989).

¹⁸⁶ Because today Lawes negatives are not among the Tyrrell Collection’s glass plates, Webb comments that they possibly are in the Council for World Mission Archive, SOAS, London (1997: 22).

30. This means that Kerry's Samoan postcards did not, like the Aboriginal postcards, materialise as both signs and metaphors, that is, as postcards that worked in the private and the public domain respectively. Circulating in places where many people knew the specific circumstances of their production, the identity of the photographer and maybe also of the subjects, these official/published postcards could work as signs in a private sphere. In contrast, the Samoan series are characterised by the loss of this specificity, because their motifs had been stripped of personal meanings before entering Kerry's postcard factory. Kerry's Samoan postcards never switched their role to work as a visual metaphor for the Polynesian Island Samoa; they were born as metaphors for it.

CONCLUSION

In Italian, determined not to fulfil a wish of his/her (teenage) child, a parent often uses the expression “Lo vedi in cartolina!”, literally “You will see it on a postcard!” The postcard, which usually has the ability to make one dream and long for a beautiful place or experience, becomes in this specific context a perfidious symbol for a denied reality. To ‘see something on a postcard’ means to be misled, and the sufferance for the imposed ban is even prolonged by realising that what we are longing for actually exists only as an abstract – not even tangible – image. Thus the expression exemplifies postcards’ ambiguous nature.

My concern with Kerry’s postcards of indigenous people has been with their analysis as three-dimensional material and socially salient objects, rather than as representations. I hope that the four case studies focusing on Kerry’s Aboriginal and Samoan postcard series have shown that a material and referential approach to postcards, but also to related presentational forms (albums, original photograph, prints, reproductions), can help break the silences that encapsulate the relationships that Kerry’s postcards engendered and through which they could exist and perform. Because, like photographs, postcard images can be interpreted in myriad ways, depending on who is looking at them, I have argued that only through the elaboration of the various contexts is it possible to offer an interpretation that does justice, if not to all, then at least to some of the people involved in the various processes and phases of the postcards’ existence.

I wish to conclude by revisiting the central questions that I addressed in the course of the study: the identity of Kerry’s subjects, their contribution in the photographic process, and the role of historical postcards as subjects of anthropological research.

1) The first issue concerns the identity of Kerry's subjects and the relationship he had with Aboriginal and Samoan people respectively. Who are these people who appear on Kerry & Co.'s postcards, and whose nameless portraits circulated across the world, shaping the image of the Aboriginal and the Samoan, in particular, and of the Pacific people, in general?

“Even if a great deal about the visual and verbal contexts could be said to be metaphorically manufactured, they [the images] focus on *people*” (De Lorenzo 1993: 24). Despite not being created for an anthropological purpose, Kerry's postcards can be considered ‘ethnographic’. Aboriginal communities have chosen to look at them as historical documents and to concentrate on the people who are represented. Joe Gumbula, a Yolngu elder from North East Arnhem Land and research fellow at the University of Sydney Archives, explained to me that, for him and his community, the contextualisation of historical photographs and the identification of the represented people is an important contribution towards Aboriginal history, and that this should be undertaken for the future Aboriginal generations (pers. comm. February 2011).¹⁸⁷

Although many of the Kerry postcard motifs discussed in this thesis have been published repeatedly in recent academic publications and have also been reproduced for exhibitions, the ‘postcard peoples’ have remained nameless, and so has their land. In Chapter Four and Five, the analyses of the three apparently fragmented Aboriginal series unveiled narratives capable of giving back to the anonymous peoples the identity that was taken from them during the manipulative moments of the heavy studio fabrications and of the caption's ascription – in short from subject's status to object's status and back.

In the first case the identities emerged from archival research combined with the results of a consultation project with the descendents of the Wailwan people initiated by the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. In the second case, the identities of the Aboriginal people who performed for the show “Wild Australia” could be excavated thanks to an illustrated article published in the Sydney Mail in 1893. This case is of particular interest because its narrative sheds light on the processes that characterised Kerry's marketing strategy, and, indirectly, also on aspects relating the postcards' consumption. Following Meston's performing show, the postcards

¹⁸⁷ For the opportunities historical material such as postcards and the related material can provide for the transfer of cultural knowledge across generations see also Binney and Chaplin 1991, Edwards 1994 and Bell 2003.

acquired special meaning for those people who had heard about the event, or even seen it, and recognised the Aboriginal people on Kerry's postcards. For both Kerry and the consumer of the postcards there grew a direct relationship with the Aboriginal people represented in the imagery; the people were more 'real' and for those who saw their performances the postcards assumed the souvenir role.

We cannot say the same for the Samoan postcards. Indeed, the analysis of the Kerry Samoan imagery has shown how the motifs are not as strongly connected to Kerry as those of the Aboriginal series; Kerry was, in all probability, not the author of the original photographs on which they are based. This constitutes a crucial difference to the Aboriginal body of postcards, and reveals the other imaging practice adopted by Kerry which was rather common among postcard producers of that time: the use of pre-existing motifs produced by other photographers, without acknowledgement.

In this regard, we can argue that the twelve motifs chosen by Kerry as representative for Samoa in his series no. 30 were already exotic to him, not to mention his customers. The Samoan postcards never switched their role to work as a visual metaphor for the Polynesian Island Samoa. Stripped of personal meanings already before entering Kerry's factory, these postcards were born as metaphors.

In sum, while Kerry contributed to the creation of the stereotype of 'The Aboriginal' through his three series featuring the *bora* and the studio portraits of people from various Aboriginal communities, for the compilation of his Samoan series he used what we may call 'second-hand stereotypes': probably a sort of short-cut dictated by the impossibility of taking photographs of Samoan people himself and/or of going to Samoa himself or sending one of his field photographers.¹⁸⁸

2) The second point questions to what extent it is possible to extract the indigenous agency at work during the photographic encounters that generated the 'subjects' for Kerry & Co.'s postcard industry.

From the 'Wailwan-case' presented in Chapter Four, a discussion emerged concerning the influence that the Aboriginal people depicted had in the process of image making. This is of particular importance as it shows how Kerry's 'postcard

¹⁸⁸ Kreis (1992: 1258–1259) has explained how the acceleration of the life rhythm reinforced the necessity of operating through pre-existing hypotheses and representations at the expense of an accurate personal experience.

people' were active during the photographic encounter, and how they also set the parameters for Kerry's *bora* documentation. For the analysis of the agencies in Meston's "Wild Australia", I followed Clifford's suggestion that it is reductive to consider cultural performances in spectacles as events exclusively created by those who recruited the actors and scripted the show (cf. Clifford 1997: 200). I have tried to identify a range of indigenous experiences and agencies at work in what I have considered as contact zones: Kerry's studio and the beach.

The photographic studio is usually the photographer's own space on which he likes to take control when the visitor does not express a particular wish regarding the way he/she would like to be represented. To date, we do not know exactly what happened in Kerry's studio when the portraits of the Aboriginal people from the Meston show were being taken. Given the poses, we may assume the sitters had little to say in the process. However, considering the photographs featuring the fifteen men performing a *corroboree* in front of a tropical background (Figures 5.43 and 5.46), we can argue that the dances presented in front of Kerry's camera were completely controlled by the Aboriginal 'actors', who possibly perceived the studio as a sort of stage on which to present a number of Meston's show elements. In the same way I have considered the group portraits taken outside on the beach, possibly Bondi Beach; the fact that the representatives of the various cultural groups are posing next to each other in a relatively relaxed way suggests that they, rather than the photographer, decided where and how to pose for the group photograph (Figures 5.54).

The reconstruction of the contact zones' context proved to be crucial to the understanding of both Kerry & Co.'s marketing strategies and to the mechanism of the firm's Aboriginal series' reception and consumption. All three Aboriginal postcard series examined in Part I are indeed based on images or subjects that the contemporary public already knew from the press, exhibitions or public performances. The success of Kerry & Co.'s Aboriginal postcards was paved – purposely or not – by the pre-circulation of the same motifs under different guises, and this *déjà-vu* effect contributed to render the exotic closer and more familiar, hence marketable.

Excavating indigenous agencies from the Samoan series revealed to be more difficult, given the lack of contextual material. A close reading of the images, based

on the comparison of details of a group of images related to the postcards' motifs, allowed me to identify the evidence of activities and processes in which both the photographer and the Samoan sitters were involved during the photographic encounter.

3) Materiality and relatedness play a crucial role in the answer to the third question concerning the usefulness of historical postcards as subjects of anthropological research.

We have seen that as multilayered artefacts created in various cross-cultural encounters, postcards have the potential to reveal various kinds of information; this, however, often emerges only through the study of related visual materials. Taken alone, postcards are 'raw objects' (Edwards 2001) that seem impenetrable and superficial, but considered in a group and through the focus of their dialectical relation to other presentational forms, postcards reveal to be a rich source and a valid starting point for the analysis of anthropological aspects usually neglected or considered not explorable by other means. In the Wailwan case the examination of different albums and photographs helped to establish that Kerry only once documented a religious ceremony, in Quambone in 1898, and that the products of this enterprise were re-presented for decades under different guises by representatives of both commercial and scientific ventures. The scientific use of the *bora* images contributed to the increase of their value as sources for ethnographic documentation, but also played a role in reconsidering Kerry as a creator and supplier of 'useful' material.

We have also seen how the shifting in meaning and value occurs during the various social uses of a photographic object, and how the performance of an image depends on its presentational form and size. The word 'miniatures' in the thesis' title refers not only to the relatively small size of the postcards which makes them so dynamic, ubiquitous and fast in disseminating *the* image of Pacific people, next to being easy to handle and collect. It also refers to the dozens of the miniaturised postcards featured in the postcard sample book, which, instead of travelling on their own as the single postcards, were handled as a coherent group in an album and presented to many potential customers. The overview of the Aboriginal studio portraits presented in miniaturised versions of the prospectus sheets engendered

instead a more incisive impact on the viewer. A strategy adopted by the author to show as many portraits as possible and thus containing the reproduction costs, exemplifies the material-related working of an image. From this particular arrangement an oppressive overview of 'types' emerged which makes one think not only of anthropometric collections; white backdrop, very fashionable towards the end of the nineteenth century, combined with the black grid emerging from the spaces between the miniatures, even reminds us of the catalogues of prisoners and criminals (see Sekula 1989 and Tagg 1993[1988]) – a definitely different visual impact if we think of the much appreciated and ennobling portrait enlargements that decorated the 'Kerry Gallery' in George Street.

Yet the prospectus sheets are definitely interesting objects as they can be used to show how aesthetically constructed exotica produced for a popular market also became interesting for both evolutionist and functionalist scientists, such as, for example, E. B. Tylor and Radcliffe Brown, respectively (Edwards 1988, 2000, 2001). This shows how, despite that stereotypes imply a certain rigidity and repetition, the meanings and uses of commercial images are not necessarily closed or fixed. This is also the reason why I argue that a model such as the one proposed by Kolodny based on the three ideological frameworks romanticism, realism and the documentary (Peterson 1981), can establish a starting point for a postcard imagery's interpretation, but will never be flexible enough to appropriately encompass the meanings and working of a postcard in a determinate situation.

Considering the uses of Kerry's postcard images in both commercial and scientific spheres, and that they performed under different material guises, we can infer that what happened was a privileging of content over form in the production of meaning. This relationship, often tension, between content and form should make us think of the way postcards and visual materials are perceived today in the photographic archive. While indigenous people approach visual material representing their ancestors with an obvious preference for an image's indexicality over the image's format, the archiving practice still tends to make a difference between the various paper supports, as for their cataloguing and ideal preservation the focus is on their materiality. Within this material-related system there is, however, a hierarchy which sees photographs as 'originals' with an *aura* and enjoying better archiving

conditions than postcards.¹⁸⁹ Cartes-de-visite are also better placed than postcards, although real photo postcards are equally delicate objects and share with photographs the same unstable nature. These different perceptions which also lead to inconsistencies in the administration of, and access to, historical postcards of indigenous people, are a consequence of the multiple faces and functions postcard can assume. Therefore it would be reductive to consider them just as representations; they are objects with full rights and should be consequently considered as such.

It would be fascinating in this context to make all the fingerprints visible on a postcard's surface with the help of forensic research; the surface would probably be completely plastered. When guessing how many people may have come into contact with a postcard from Kerry's era, we have to consider the most probable 'world line', reconstructed through the known trajectories of many postcards. The postcards that entered this economic merry-go-round have been touched and handled by innumerable people who classified and arranged them in boxes according to the motif or postage stamp, by such who leafed through these boxes, and by individuals who bought them for their collection. Considering that some of these postcards were touched by hundreds of people, or more, while others outlived decades secluded in shoe-boxes, we may estimate that each postcard sent through the mail during the first decade of the 20th century must have collected, on average, two hundred different fingerprints. This tactile peculiarity leads me to formulate the hypothesis that postcards are second only to money as objects circulated and handled by many. This should make us reflect on the influence and the power postcard imagery such as Kerry's had on the production of anthropological knowledge at the turn of the century, and still has on the creation of ideas about non-familiar cultures.

This thesis has focused on Charles Kerry's postcards of indigenous people of Australia and Samoa. The main concern was with the reconstruction of the various contexts in which the postcards were created, disseminated and performed. The multilayered nature of postcards makes them interesting and challenging to study because they encourage us to move mentally and physically when following their trajectories in search of their world lines. Yet it is impossible to follow up all the

¹⁸⁹ Luckily there are more and more exceptions. One of these is the collection of postcards representing indigenous people kept in the Photograph Study Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

paths that depart from or lead to such worldly and entangled objects, with the consequence that many gaps cannot be filled within this framework. As a possibility for further research, I would consider interesting an in-depth exploration of other Aboriginal postcard imageries from the beginning of the twentieth century; a comparison of Kerry's postcards with, for example, those produced by Lindt, Caire or the Falk Studio could reveal insights into both the visual economy of Aboriginal motifs and the different practices and strategies adopted in the competitive field of commercial photography.

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