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# Coda

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*To be a Californian was to see oneself, if one believed the lessons the place seemed most immediately to offer, as affected only by 'nature', which in turn was seen to exist simultaneously as a source of inspiration or renewal ... Much of the California landscape has tended to present itself as metaphor ...*

—Joan Didion, *Where I was from* (2003)<sup>1</sup>

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*We can learn to appreciate kinds of landscape other than the one we grew up with, to see what is unique and a source of beauty in them. But the landscape we most deeply belong to, that connects with our senses, that glows in our consciousness, will always be the one we are born into.*

—David Malouf, *A spirit of play* (1998)<sup>2</sup>

These quotations from two renowned contemporary authors, one Californian and the other Australian, serve to refocus, to bring us back to the intentions underlying the writing of these chapters. In the visual sphere rather than the literary, I wanted in this study to consider how people of Eurocentric cultures, thrust into a new landscape, an unknown geography, were able with the aid of images to make the place their own. Ending these ruminations in 1935 was not an entirely arbitrary decision. Aesthetic exchange through reproducible images and a sharing of the emblems of popular culture continued between these two Pacific regions after this date, and continues still. But in the early twentieth century historic transformations in art and mass media changed the nature of the concepts of itinerancy, reproducibility and portability. In architecture, the worldwide Depression of the 1930s curtailed construction in Australia and limited direct interaction with the wider world, thus ending any extravagant imitation of Hollywood houses and Spanish Style fantasies. Further, the whole notion of Hollywood in this era caused a global shift in how images appeared in cultures and how they were absorbed into the vernacular psyche. Once the California-based movie industry gained global hegemony over popular culture, with animated icons such as Mickey Mouse and films using the landscape of Southern California as a backdrop, the possibilities of tracing the specific origins of a particular

aesthetic or visual strand became increasingly difficult. The nature of itinerancy changed, as moving pictures emanating out of California and driven by American marketing methods were sent around the world and consumed immediately everywhere.

These new forms of mass media—film, radio, and eventually television and the internet—have offered a mixing of cultural information that is particularly suited to the post-colonial attitudes that Australia—and yes, California—so clearly represent. These media, these ubiquitous conduits of visual imagery, can overcome that ‘tyranny of distance’—so famously described by historian Geoffrey Blainey<sup>3</sup>—more rapidly than the older printed forms of illustration and reproduction. These new technologies were by definition linked with the idea of the new, of a modernity that especially spoke to the needs of young societies. When in 1938 former Australian Prime Minister W. M. ‘Billy’ Hughes opened a direct radio telephone service with Washington, his remarks stressed the important affinities between Australia and the United States, implying that only ‘new’ cultures could fully grasp the significance of these modern developments: ‘What we are, you were; and what you are, we hope to be ... On us, the people of the new world, much of the future of civilisation depends.’<sup>4</sup> In such an outlook, Australia and California carried the responsibility for advancing Western culture, a culture that increasingly depended on images to construct its sense of meaning and belonging in the world.

Globalisation, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, has obscured any definitive origins of recent visual borrowings between Western countries. But as the evidence presented in these chapters substantiates, the previous 150 years of association between Australia and California, at a time when both regions were striving to create distinct

cultural identities, consisted of continuous exchange of all kinds of images and aesthetic ideas. As my reaction to the juxtaposition of Northfield’s Canberra poster and a California citrus-box label reveals, such reproducible images, dispersed freely from one Pacific coast to the other, sought visually to define a sense of place.

In the end, my purpose in discussing these wide-ranging topics about a shared visual culture mirrors the concerns of Joan Didion and David Malouf: to consider the idea of an aesthetics of place. My own iconography of place—my sense of what is familiar and comfortable in the landscape as rendered through images—has been determined by my experience in these two cultures of the Pacific Rim. The images and the examples presented in this book suggest that this shared visual template is not simply serendipitous, but is the result of prolonged interaction between two peoples whose societies came of age at the same time, and in an environment that had much in common.

#### NOTES

1. Joan Didion, *Where I was from*, Knopf, New York, 2003, p. 66.
2. Malouf, p. 49.
3. Geoffrey Blainey, *The tyranny of distance: How distance shaped Australia’s history*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1966.
4. In *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December 1938, quoted in F. K. Crowley, *Modern Australia in documents 1901–1939*, Wren Publishing, Melbourne, 1973, pp. 591–92.