

Planetary Material Modernisms Research Group

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Lantern Slide - Map of the Pacific Ocean, Circa 1924

Source: Museums Victoria

<https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/248797>

Inspired by George Bornstein's breakthrough work (2001) drawing on editorial theory, cultural studies, and the history of the book, **planetary material modernisms** argues for a historicised, globalised reading of modernity and the relationship of modernist texts and authors and other agents to their modes of production, reception, and circulation through the world.

Instead of taking texts and authors as disembodied words and set-apart auteurs, material modernism considers their material contexts. By studying modern textual practices in their original sites of production and in the continually shifting physicality of texts' various iterations of production and reception, this approach emphasises historical contingency, the sociability of authorship and reading, as well as the material features of the text.

The global nature of "planetary modernisms" (a term first coined by Susan Stanford Friedman in 2010, and expanded in her 2015 book) means that this group emphasises the networked, world-systems nature of production, distribution, and dissemination. It also means that we pay particular attention to the local nodes of reception and sociability that co-produce modernity and modern print culture.

An emphasis on overlooked regions of modernism and modernity, such as the Global South, the Oceans, Islands, and the Pacific in particular, as well as their participation in complex "cultural flows" (Appadurai 1998), seeks to counter Eurocentric understandings of modernism and modernity in its various forms. The urgency of these practices is suggested by Naomi Milthorpe's notion of "modernisms adjacent" (2018) and by the emphasis on non-European modernities in Robert Fraser's *Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes* (2008). Moreover, the

environment and the role of space and place emerge here as key agents, rather than overlooked backdrops of the modern scene.

This research group is ambitiously, but also necessarily, interdisciplinary in scope. It seeks to include scholars of diverse backgrounds including literature, history, mobility, human geography, environmental humanities, media, technology, fashion, art and design, politics, print culture, and other areas of disciplinary expertise that speak to innovative ways to understand the material contexts of print culture and modernity, broadly conceived.

As Susan Stanford Friedman has observed, “Modernity, of course, has no single meaning, not even in one location” (2010). Nor of course does modernity delineate a set period but rather “a reflection and engagement with a wide spectrum of historical changes, including intensified and alienating urbanization; the cataclysms of world war and technological progress run amok; the rise and fall of European empires; changing gender, class, and race relations; and technological innovations that radically changed the nature of everyday life” (2010).

This research group is also inspired by, and loosely affiliated with, the Material Modernisms Seminar of the Modernist Studies Association (Toronto 2019), and the new series published by Palgrave MacMillan, *Material Modernisms*, edited by Faye Hammill, Andrew Thacker, and Celia Marshik.

This new series focuses on modern literature and its relationship to, among other topics, contemporary print culture, technology, media, fashion, art and design, and of course, objects and material culture. Because books and periodicals are themselves material objects, the series will explore, as well, the changing ways in which print culture was produced.

Our aim is to curate a supportive and nurturing space for scholarly exchange across disciplines and across the globe for scholars at all stages of their career. While we understand time zones make the prospect of regular meeting for all an almost impossibility, we will use digital tools and agile date/time booking systems to maximise our ability to meet in real time, while recording and setting up platforms that support scholars unable to meet in person.

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Meetings determined by Doodle Poll for time availability (in most months during the Australian teaching term, i.e. excepting December, January, and July), will be hosted by Zoom, using OneDrive or Dropbox to share material. These platforms will seek to facilitate work-in-progress; to distribute pertinent foundational and emerging research; and support other forms of knowledge exchange and collaboration.