

## Typographical Journals & the Printers' Web: a Global Communication Network

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### DRAFT – PLEASE DO NOT CITE

On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1898, delegates from South Africa's seven typographical societies met at the Oriental Hotel in Johannesburg to discuss the formation of a Typographical Union. Two days later, they elected the SATU's first president, **Jack Farrell**. Known colloquially as "Australian Jack", "Johannesburg Jack," or "Transvaal Jack," Farrell was a keen trade unionist and advocate for workers' rights in the volatile printing industry. He was also a recent migrant from the "Land of Kangaroos," Australia.<sup>1</sup> When offered the position, he initially refused, suggesting that "they should strive to get a president more acquainted with South Africa, and more in touch with the different branches." The minutes go on to record, however, that "the Chairman and every delegate spoke in highly eulogistic terms of Mr. Farrell's eminent qualifications for the position. He was, they averred, known by repute throughout the entire sub-continent, and his popularity and unstinted labours at the conference proved him a man of worth, and one capable of filling the office of president with dignity and honour."<sup>2</sup> Farrell was duly prevailed upon and elected unanimously.

'**Australian Jack**' is not an isolated instance of the 'tramping typographer' who helped to change the face of trade in his adopted country. Throughout the long nineteenth century, printers regularly migrated between the eastern seaboard of AUS and NZ following well-established whale-roads between the port cities of Melbourne and Dunedin, Sydney and Wellington as well as betwixt and between Canada, USA, South Africa, India, China, and beyond. Printers followed the gold rushes and set up presses in these transient places; they also printed on board ships, in battle fields, and on mobile carts, wagons, and vans. Despite the sheer physical weight of equipment, print production itself was surprisingly transportable. Print followed people and people carried print. "Imperial careerists"<sup>3</sup> such as Australian Jack were exemplars of a highly mobile, transnational workforce who colony-hopped in search of freedom, employment and adventure.<sup>4</sup> **Like the emigrant Scots**, who perpetuated the clan instinct wherever they settled, printers joined together in the workplace to preserve trade principles and practices. They imported new ideas, brought different skills, naturalized their 'mysteries' and helped to shape industrial relations in their own trade as well as in others. Their private lives were extensions of their public interface as socio-cultural customs such as parades, processions, wayzgooses, picnics, dinners, smoking concerts, sporting activities, libraries, religious affiliations, and civic responsibilities were a fundamental part of their trade identities. We can track their global peregrinations, their local influences, and their consolidation of time-honoured traditions through their specialized print organ, the typographical journal.

The **typographical journal** is a rich miscellany of domestic and international printological news from the sublime to the eccentric. It includes trade union and technical information, pension and benefit schemes, book reviews and notices of printers' library acquisitions, trade advertisements, reports of social activities, the results of sporting events, literary works and quotations, lists of typos and howlers, and memorials of one sort or another to the human fragment – obituaries, biographies of prominent trade personalities, lists of union members in arrears, and information purveyed or solicited about mobile members and friends. All in all, the journals build up a picture of a profession comfortable in the skin of writing and reading, and conscious of its aristocratic heritage amongst skilled artisans. At times, they also suggest a cabinet of curiosities, housing the bizarre, the eclectic, and the fantastic, smelling of vaudeville, the country fair, the carnival, and the grotesque.

**Typographical journals** connected journeymen in what the historical geographer Alan Lester has termed the “trans-imperial discourse of colonialism” which produced an “imagined geography of empire” facilitated by an ever-expanding suite of communication technologies. The mobility of printers and their instruments of global communication challenge us to think beyond the “British World” with its lexicon of centre and periphery as a unit of historical analysis, and to think beyond and outside the conventional, so-called white settler colonies. It also encourages us to rethink, for example, the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean World as a set of richly multi-layered, geo-temporal contact zones expanding eastwards from Africa, India, and China to embrace Australia and New Zealand,<sup>5</sup> connecting and intersecting with various geographical, political, and intellectual spaces, places, and formations. Such a printers’ “web of empire,” a phrase coined by Tony Ballantyne to describe “the integrative nature of ... cultural traffic, the ways in which imperial institutions and structures connected disparate points in space into a complex mesh of networks”<sup>6</sup> was facilitated by typographical journals which, in turn, shaped what I term, following the lead of Simon Potter, “the typographical press system.”<sup>7</sup>

**Like printing chapels** and trade unions, wayzgooses and printers’ libraries, typographical journals linked memory to place and familiarized the new by evoking nostalgia and continuity. At the same time, they participated in the widespread habit of exchanging, reprinting, and circulating snippets of textual information common to the Victorian periodical press and characteristic of the so-called ‘new journalism.’ Such ‘scissors-and-paste’ journalism, whether authorised or illicit, and its attendant impulse, ‘scrapbooking,’ created an integrated network which connected imperial centres and colonial margins, and erased the distinction between editors and readers. Notably, the typographical press also helped foster a new kind of “globalizing sensibility”<sup>8</sup> which was simultaneously local, national, imperial *and* extra-imperial.

**It is therefore fitting** that once the SATU was formally established, the second item of business on the inaugural conference agenda was the publication of a journal. “As one of the first practical results of the formation of the Union, we have but to point to ourselves. One great complaint hitherto existing has been that no definite information was to be readily obtained as to the state of the printing trade, and other details in the various towns of South Africa” (SATJ March 1898). Similar aims were promulgated by The **Scottish Typographical Circular**, established in 1857 for “the dissemination of printing intelligence, and the consideration of the various measures likely to affect his position for better or worse” including

“Emigration, Arbitration, and Tramping.” [STC No. 1 September 1857, 1]. Its contemporary, the *Australasian Typographical Circular* confirmed the need for new collectives to adopt a communication forum. By contrast, despite the founding of the New York Typographical Society in 1809, the editor of the newly-launched journal *The Printer* complained in 1858: “We have literary and scientific journals and periodicals in abundance; we have newspapers as thick as the locusts in Egypt; every political party and every religious sect, every profession and every art, except the art of printing, must have its *organ*. And why is it that this ‘art preservative of all arts’ has not its organ?” [STC, No.IV June 1858, 30].

*The SATU’s Journal* was far more than a parochial production for local consumption. The Johannesburg correspondent of April 1898 observed that “there is a great space between this sub-continent and the metropolis of England, and matters relative to print, sometimes of no small importance, are the talk of comps. in their respective centres of habitation; but are totally unknown to those at a distance. Through the medium of the South African Typographical Journal, however, we can do our small share in permitting the ‘printological’ world to take a glimpse at our situation here, and in affording it a means of gleaning a little of our doings” (SATJ April 1898). *Australian Jack* not only endorsed the proposal to establish a monthly union publication, but remained a regular contributor to the Melbourne-based *Australasian Typographical Journal*, even after his relocation to South Africa. Furthermore, by reading its monthly columns, he was kept informed about the most important trade issues worldwide through scrapbooked snippets from the *British and Colonial Printer and Stationer*, the *Printing Times and Lithographer*, *The Inland Printer*, and the *Scottish Typographical Journal*, to name only a few of the overseas publications recycled in its pages. Once the *South African Typographical Journal* was up and running from **March 1898**, Farrell contributed articles on various topical issues: government vs overseas contract printing; the arrival of the linotype and both its impact on the local trade and its role as a catalyst for global migration; the desirability of direct trade union representation in Parliament; the futility of strikes; the necessity of adopting the union label to prevent the spread of closed sweatshops. In 1900, he drew on his Australian experiences to write “What Ails Australia,” citing “it seems a most marvelous thing that ... she should have single man out of work, or that her artisans should be forced to emigrate to South Africa. Yet such is the lamentable fact. For three or four years prior to the outbreak of hostilities there was a steady stream of mechanics from the Island Continent – amongst whom, of course, was a fair proportion of comps. – and it is now reported by late arrivals that berths for South Africa are booked up six months ahead (SATJ June 1900).

Like Robert Patrick and John Pratt, also Australian émigrés to South Africa, or Robert Coupland Harding and Tom L. Mills who remained in New Zealand but wrote for many journals around the world, *Australian Jack* was one of those indispensable foreign correspondents who maintained the printers’ web in body as well as in copy. As nodes of the “printological” world linking “hands across the sea” (SATJ April 1898), these printer-journalists could, with authority, describe local trade conditions and warn against emigration; help solicit financial assistance from members of the overseas printing fraternity during strikes and war; and advocate for universal trade unionism. They could also report in extraordinary detail about local social, cultural and sporting events. Finally, they were frequently responsible for memorializing their colleagues and the trade in biographical sketches, memoirs, eulogies, poems, and short stories.

This ability for the typographical press to look simultaneously inwards and outwards is visually rendered in the evolving masthead of the *South African Typographical Journal*. Although the journal began by imitating the usual designs of its overseas siblings, by number 13 of July 1899, on the eve of the South African War, it had adopted a crude but potent symbol of its place in the printological world. **The hand-carved woodblock** depicts a map of the African continent within a rondelle, much like a magic lantern slide or a globe, supported and framed by two classically-posed Roman maidens. The journal's title is freely drawn in a bold, exuberant hand reminiscent of Parisian art nouveau, fin-de-siècle, lithographed posters. We could, and perhaps should, read much into this masthead, not the least of which is the irony that it represents a country where boy labour and girl compositors were anathema, and where proto-apartheid policies in the printing trades were frequently invoked to ostracise "coloured" labour, "Kaffir and Asiatic" alike. Despite the journal functioning within a global information economy, the masthead suggests that its messages are by and for a white, imperial, and male, settler audience. When the South African War caused massive displacement and military deployment, and many older members of the profession like Australian Jack headed to the "Fighting Port" (SATJ January 1900), then on to Durban in search of work, the SATJ became, by default, the information conduit for updates about these 'typo. warriors': "What a smash-up this war has caused to our craft on the Rand! From their daily avocations they are scattered to the four winds. ... This business will prove a very difficult one to minimize its untoward effects, and we should all of us do our mite towards smoothing the way for the wanderers. ... we must all endeavour to make the best of it, and keep closely in touch with our scattered fragments. The various Secretaries should kindly forward the whereabouts of any Rand men" (SATJ January 1900).

**These internal networks** were complemented and sustained by overseas journal subscriptions and journal exchanges which played a critical role in maintaining communication networks between mobile members and trade organizations. Like the individual sorts of the compositor's type case which combine to produce texts, typographical journalism is manufactured from scraps: oral reports, personal manuscript correspondence, printed trade exchanges. As a case in point, the majority of the 500 monthly copies of Robert Coupland Harding's New Zealand journal *Typo. A Monthly Newspaper and Literary Review* was part of an international exchange network, English- and non-English-speaking alike. In any one monthly issue, for example, he could refer to and/or quote from at least fourteen trade journals published in three or four different languages whether French, German, Spanish, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, or Danish [April 1890]; in any one year, he could cite at least eighty different journals. Some, such as *The Inland Printer*, *The Printing World*, *The Paper and Printing Trades Journal*, *The Pacific Printer*, and *The British Printer* also appeared as regular, paid advertisements. **Here's Typo's roll call for 1889**. What motivated the selection of specific items? How were they repurposed? How did editorial re-framing give them a different timbre in the 'adoptive' text? What made one item more frequently recycled than another and did the importance of a specific journal in the global hierarchy give that item greater currency, resonance and longevity? Was the perceived value of a journal a function of its ability to create a coherent menu out of a table of scraps? Or is the sensemaking pursuit of some kind of wholeness, completeness, or coherence the utopian fallacy of the genre? My current research involves developing a methodology for mapping, analyzing and visualizing this system of structured communication using tools from digital humanities, historic GIS, and the semantic web. I am

documenting the patterns of exchange in a variety of journals in order to identify the most important nodes based on citation frequency, as well as the kinds of textual circulations reported in the pages of the journals, whether by genre (that is, private letter, reported conversation, journal article quoted verbatim or paraphrased with or without editorial annotation) or by theme, issue, or idea. This kind of network analysis will also be extended to capture social relationships and trade mobility,<sup>9</sup> and as such, shifts the printers' web concept from being metaphorical and heuristic to graphical and concrete. The goal is to develop an extended, multi-dimensional methodology which combines an analysis of social network relations correlated with mobility patterns, the practice of textual scrapbooking with the circulation of ideas, and the mechanics of a global information economy mediated through the printological world of the typographical journal.

The example of Australian Jack suggests that subject and space are nodal points in a large, interconnected network of commerce and culture, information and technology where, to quote Peter Putnis, "systems of communication construct communities of knowledge and experience and hence shape political and cultural values."<sup>10</sup> As one of Pierre Nora's "lieux de mémoire" or sites of memory, the typographical press functions as "a vehicle for collective memory, forging a community's self-definition in relation to its past."<sup>11</sup> The practice of scissoring and scrapbooking is intimately related to the archival project of recovering context by marking the sites of informational exchange and transmission. As Walter Benjamin notes in relation to the archaeological record: "the man who merely makes an inventory of his findings, while failing to establish the exact location of where in today's ground the ancient treasures have been stored up, cheats himself of his richest prize. In this sense, for authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them." Likewise, the "continuum model" of contemporary archive theory emphasizes the evidentiary, transactional, and contextual basis of recorded information, rather than merely its subject content or informational value. The archive is conceived as a living organism rather than a dead monument, continually modified and repurposed through physical and/or digital handling and ongoing intellectual engagement. Thus, reading the archive of the typographical press relies upon reading these material objects through the legacy of their collection, organization, and interpretive (re)constructions.

I'd like to conclude with an anecdote penned by the New Zealand journalist, Pat Lawlor, in 1935. Reminiscing about his induction into the mysteries of the Evening Post editorial room, he writes: "My mind travelled back twenty-five years when, as a nervous boy in knickers, I mounted the rickety stairs leading to the editorial department in the old building. The whole scene came back to me vividly. At a narrow turn in the stairs I passed a little old man with slightly bent shoulders. He was scrupulously dressed in black and carried a brief bag. ... Reaching the head of the stairs, I nervously knocked on the half-open door of a room on the right. I was rather awed as I read a notice on it, 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here.' ... A deep voice bellowed 'Come in!' and I stood in the presence of John Gibbons, chief reporter. Mr Gibbons had a mighty shears in his hand, and so closely was he running his eyes down the columns of the paper in front of him, that sometimes his nose seemed to touch the newsprint. As he worked, he clicked his shears vigorously and whistled with shrill tonal perfection 'Pop Goes the Weasel.'

Every now and then he would annihilate the whistle with a triumphant snort and pounce on an item with his scissors, transferring the clipping to one or other of several empty envelope boxes.”

The *South African Printer and Stationer* has a marvellous term for the scrapbooking impulse of the typographical press: “pars.” Obsolete since the early seventeenth century, and coextensive with ‘parse’ and ‘parsing’ which have since been refashioned into the language of computer programming, “pars” provides us with a new metaphor suggesting a potential grammar of scissoring and scrapbooking and one which is far more complex and nuanced than de Certeau’s notion of poaching. ‘Pars’ referring to ‘parts’ of speech also enables us to think through and beyond the material manifestations of scraps into speech acts, that world of captured orality released through the performative act of reading and reading as a kind of writing. As Roger Chartier reminds us: “Reading is not a solely abstract intellectual operation; it involves the body, is inscribed within a space, and implies a relationship to oneself or to others.” Even across media forms, as Paul Eggert suggests, “whether the textual carrier be the physical page, a computational capacity, or the sound waves that transmit orally declaimed verse, there is always a material condition for the existence of text.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the practice of scissoring and scrapbooking creates a legacy of marks which can be simultaneously read, parsed, punctuated, and enacted. The printers’ web spun by the typographical press is a global communication network whose tales of mobility and change, custom and professional practice, ultimately offer the illusion of stability and connectedness amidst a world rushing into modernity.

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<sup>1</sup> One John Farrell (the name used in Australia) is recorded in the Scottish Typographical Union records [NLS, Accession 4068, no. 87] as working for Neills of Edinburgh (August 1872) and lifting his card during the 1872 strike; he is next listed as working for Murray and Gibb in July 1873, then lifting his card in Cupar in March 1874. He left the Union in 1873/4, a common occurrence upon emigration. At the moment it is not yet determined whether these two instances refer to the same man and/or whether they indeed refer to Australian Jack. More biographical research is required, particularly to verify the information about Farrell’s peregrinations published in the SATU Journal in 1900, quoted later.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the inaugural SATU conference, reprinted in A.J. Downes, *Printers’ Saga being a History of the South African Typographical Union* (Johannesburg, SATU, 19523), 813.

<sup>3</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>4</sup> There was also great mobility by continental European printers during this period, and fascinating intersections with English-language printers, though this has been little documented in part because scholarship tends to migrate along language lines and in part because of the nature of historic recordkeeping and the contemporary archive. Similarly, apart from indigenous printers trained by missionaries, we know little of non-European figures moving around non-European settlements or transporting and transferring print technologies other than western movable type.

<sup>5</sup> In the usual spatial configuration of the Indian Ocean world, western Australia merits a token inclusion. I would argue, however, there was far more commercial, human, and intellectual traffic between the eastern seaboard of Australia and New Zealand and Indian Ocean ports in the nineteenth century than has hitherto been documented and analysed.

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<sup>6</sup> in *Orientalism and Race. Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 39 and discussed in “What Difference Does Colonialism Make” in *Agent of Change. Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, ed. Baron, Lindquist & Shevlin (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 342-352.

<sup>7</sup> This term is inspired by Simon Potter’s conception of an imperial press system which refers specifically to the newspaper industry rather than the periodical press, and to imperial communication networks rather than extra-imperial and global ones.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan Bell, cited by Peter Putnis, “The British transoceanic steamship press in nineteenth-century India and Australia: an overview,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 91 (March 2007): 69.

<sup>9</sup> Social network analysis emerged in the 1930s in the domains of psychology, anthropology and mathematics. Today it is a key component of organizational management theory and practice and is used to analyse group dynamics in the workplace; it is most often associated with the work of Robert A. Hanneman and Mark Riddle. Historical geography, particularly with its recent move into historical GIS [geographic information systems] relies implicitly on network analysis through its use of relational databases. Canadian book historians Fiona Black and Bertrum H. Macdonald have proposed using GIS to document the production of and trade in print [*Book History* 1 (1998)] and have piloted its use in Volume 3 of the *History of the Book in Canada*. My aim is to merge these filaments into a version of network analysis suitable for visualizing and exploring the interrelated domains of migration, textual circulation, and the commerce and culture of ideas.

<sup>10</sup> Putnis, 70-1.

<sup>11</sup> Heather Gaunt, “History and memory in the public library: the curious case of *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land*,” in *History Australia* forthcoming, 2009 and as a longer version in *Library History*.

<sup>12</sup> in Manoff, 319