



Reviewing the CD-ROM edition of Cook's *Endeavour* Journal



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Brian Richardson

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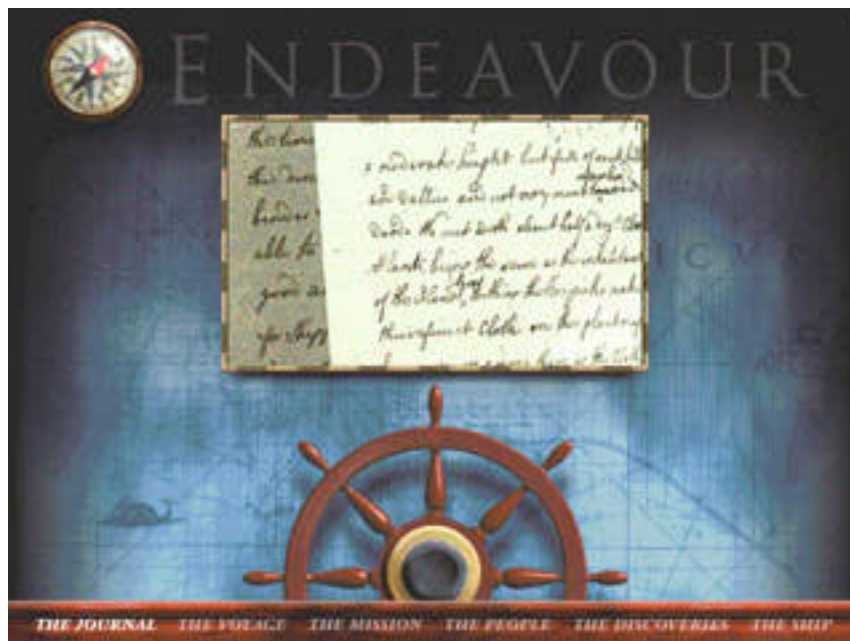
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Endeavour: Captain Cook's Journal 1768 - 71
(National Library of Australia and the National
Maritime Museum, 1999)

1. How should someone review a CD-ROM? It is obviously not the same as reviewing a book, since the digital itself vies with the text for attention, and requires its own forms of evaluation. The typical book review includes a summation of the argument, and then offers either an analysis or a reply. But very few book reviews complain about the font used or how the index is organized. There is seldom a complaint about how thick the paper is or whether page headers and footers are distracting. With the book, the design has become boring ... or at least unremarkable.
2. But not so with CD-ROMs. The organization of the CD-ROM creates a wide range of challenges that are not part of the printed page. People know how to use books, and so any concern for the usability of the book is forgotten. How we can navigate through a digital interface, on the other hand, is a central concern for CD-ROMs.
3. There is a technical aspect to reviewing CD-ROMs, which means that they ought to be written as much for the computer user as for the text reader. As a potential reader, you will probably want to know that the *Endeavour* CD-ROM works on most Windows (486/DX2 or better) and Macintosh (68040 or better) computers and that it works best with speakers and a color monitor. And, of course, it requires a CD-ROM reader with a speed of 4x or greater. Finally, you can check out the publisher's web site at < <http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/endeavour.html> > . However, while this information is important, it can also distract from other aspects of the review. There is a danger that a CD-ROM review turns into the kind of review found in computer magazines, where the CD-ROM is one computer product among many. A review should also focus attention on issues arising from the interface and the content, which

will extend beyond a concern for "usability" and also address concerns for what is included, what could have been included, and how the content is both structured and accessed.

4. The character of the interface is an important concern. Currently, there is almost nothing standard from one interface to another. Of course, the variations are not necessarily bad but the desire for standardization raises its own questions but the variation means that a CD-ROM review must consider more than what is typically understood as content. The reviewer must also be concerned with *how* the text, the pictures, and other material are presented, and how the software allows people to navigate within this digital space. The problem is not just with the interface, but also the likelihood of missing things that are included because one path was not followed or even noticed. With a book, the reader is not worried about being able to find the words. A book like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is difficult, but not because the link to chapter five is an obscure button that very few people can find. But given that CD-ROMs often cannot be read cover to cover, that their content typically cannot even be completely specified with any confidence, let alone assessed, how is it possible to offer a serious review of them? The reviewer may well be fated to respond only to the things that were noticed (or stumbled upon), while facing a persistent sense that so many other things were available, but never seen.
5. As a multimedia package this disk is fairly well done, with a wide variety of text, pictures, and video. The production is based on Macromedia and Quicktime, which has allowed them to create a graphically interesting and varied presentation. One frustrating aspect of the interfaces, which are built around graphics of different instruments on the ship, such as a compass and a magnifying glass, is that they sometimes complicate the navigation around the CD-ROM. Here, by way of example, is a view of the main menu.



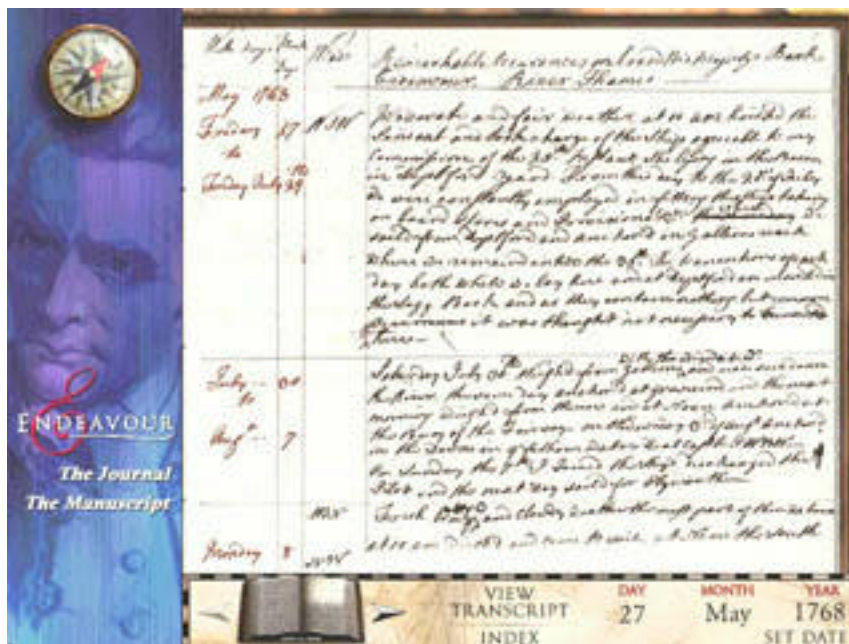
6. From a distance, and for the first time, the interface is appealing. The problem, however, is that the actual menu is limited to the small line of options at the bottom of the page.



7. Beyond the ambiguity of where the buttons will take you, they are also very small, and as the main menu is the only screen that allows the user to move from one area of the digital space to another, the interface becomes increasingly frustrating.
8. The *Endeavour* CD-ROM is centred around a transcription of Cook's journal from the first voyage, which was first printed by J. C. Beaglehole in the 1950s.



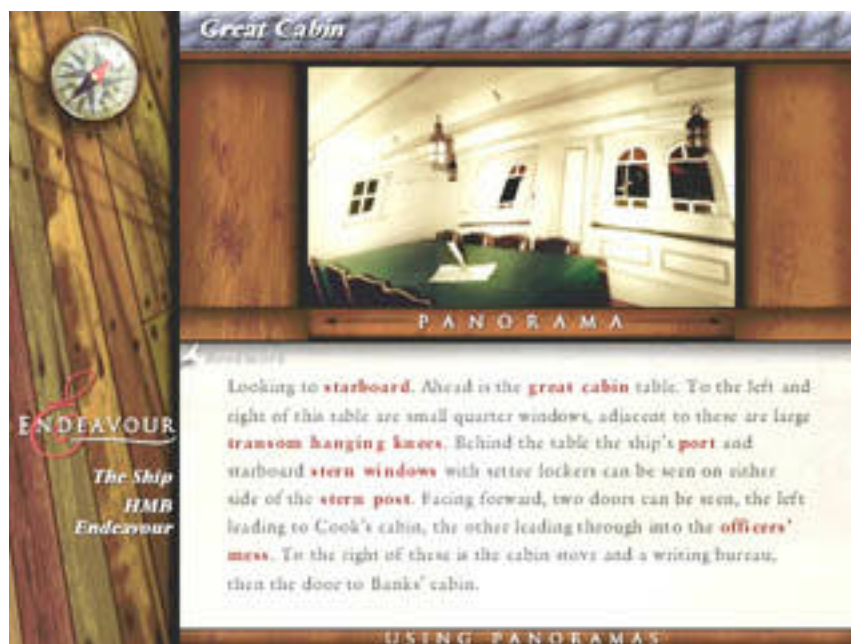
- The text is very legible and the basic navigation tools are easy to use. The text is organized by the date of the journal entry, and users can skip from one date to another. One problem here is that the dates are changed by clicking on arrows rather than pop-up menus, which would have been much faster. Users can also flip from the transcript to a picture of the manuscript, which is interesting from time to time.



- However, Cook's handwriting is hard to decipher, especially on a computer screen, and so the manuscript quickly loses its appeal. There is also a basic index of the journal, adapted from Beaglehole's edition, which allows users to navigate throughout

the text.

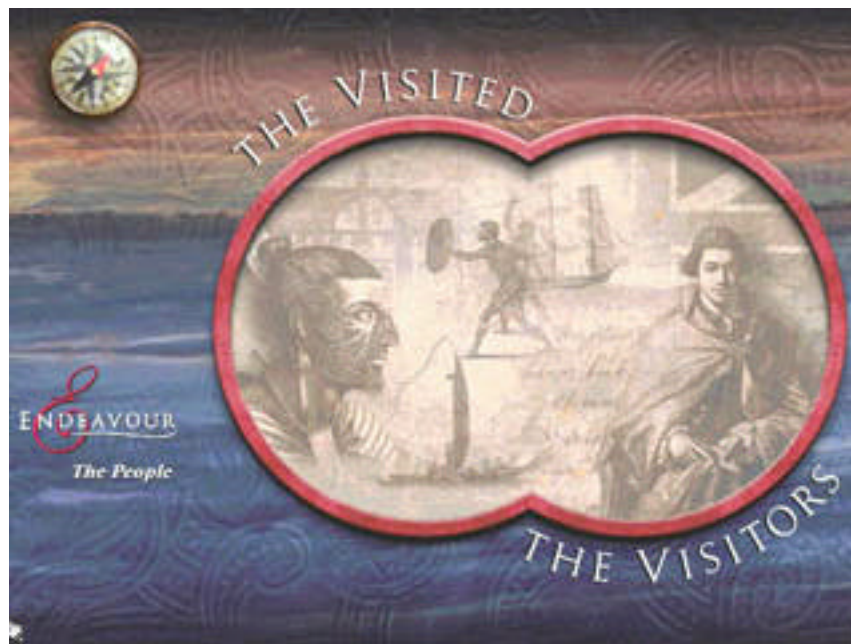
11. The *Endeavour* CD-ROM also contains a considerable amount of additional information about the voyage, the European travelers and the peoples around the world that Cook visited. Most of the other pictures included on the CD-ROM, and there are a large number of them, are engravings or paintings. The information is organized as an encyclopedia, and has clearly been toned down, with almost no critical concern for the political, military or social features of either the voyage or its long-term impact. The CD-ROM offers a celebration of Cook as an heroic explorer, and makes very little room for alternate accounts of what the voyages mean, or even the possibility that the voyages were or still could be controversial.
12. The disk also contains a "virtual *Endeavour*," which allows the user to turn around different rooms throughout the ship. On the screen, the size of the virtual *Endeavour*, which is based on the *Endeavour* replica that has been sailing around the world over the last few years, is quite small (about the size of a credit-card).



13. This screen shot is taken from the virtual great room. Unfortunately, the picture does not capture the dynamic aspect of these files. While architecturally accurate, the rooms are almost empty and give very little sense of life on board the ship. Nonetheless, woven in with the other parts of the *Endeavour* CD-ROM, the virtual *Endeavour* adds an interesting element to the overall account that takes advantage of current technology.
14. While generally very well-organized, there are several important limitations to the

interface. The window takes over the computer screen, which means that it is difficult to switch between the *Endeavour* and other programs. It would have been better to have the *Endeavour* running in a window so that other programs could be used at the same time. The interface also does not allow users to copy text out of Cook's journals, which means that if you want to extract a quote from the text, you either have to have two computers running, or write the quote out by hand. The same is true for the paintings and other pictures that are included throughout the CD-ROM. It is possible to take screen shots, such as the ones included in this review, but this is a very cumbersome way to retrieve information from the disk.

15. The interface is designed for someone who wants to read Cook's journals, more or less from beginning to end, and perhaps learn more about Cook's voyages through the additional information. Any other use is almost impossible. Someone researching Cook's voyages would be frustrated very quickly. The lack of searching and exporting tools would soon limit the value of having the digital version.
16. While the index from Beaglehole's edition is valuable, it would have been possible to include, as part of the interface, a wide assortment of different ways of organizing the journals. For instance, even though we are given biographies of the different people attached to the ship, there is no single list where all of the names can be seen at once. The same is true of the places. And other, perhaps more subversive lists could have been produced. Where are the places that Cook fires on natives? or where sailors try to escape?
17. There is a political issue at stake in the way the navigation through the digital space is organized. Any system for navigating through digital information is committed to a particular way of classifying the world. Consider, for instance, the organization of information on "the people". The first division is between The Visitor and The Visited.



18. The Visited are further divided into Madiera, Brazil, Argentina, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, South Africa and St. Helena while the Visitors are divided into the Navy, the Marines, and the Civilians. The organization of the world is very much Cook's organization, where the natives are divided and subsumed by their location in space and the Europeans are divided in terms of social and institutional status.
19. In the Civilians you can find information on Joseph Banks. But Banks's position in the classification obscures the power, however informal, that he exerted in the ship, and ends up obscuring the political aspects of his project. At times, Banks was at least as powerful as Cook. And if the classification is awkward with Joseph Banks, it is more awkward for Tupaia, a native of Tahiti who sailed on the *Endeavour* with the intention of going to Europe. Tupaia sailed with Cook to New Zealand, Australia, and finally to Batavia, where he died. Does he count as visitor or visited? Given how much he assisted Cook and the crew, should he count as a civilian?
20. With a digital interface, some organization of the information is necessary. But in a digital space, there is no reason why only one classification should be included. It would be possible, for instance, to vary the terms that are used in the interface (switching between Visitor, European, Explorer, English, Imperialist, or native words that suggests a similar division). If nothing else, this may encourage users to reflect on the nature of the divisions that are built into the interface and the information structures. It would also be possible to develop different, and competing, classification systems, which would not focus the division between explorer and native, or between navy and civilian. How, for instance, would the missionaries organize the voyages? How would

the Tahitians? Even if these classifications were questionable in their own ways, the fact that there were other systems of classification could encourage users to consider the implications of one organization, rather than to accept the self-evidence of the only one given.

21. One disappointment is the limited amount of text included. Because it is a CD-ROM, the collection could have included a wide variety of other texts associated with the voyage, from the transcription of Banks's journal (which can be downloaded free of charge from the State Library of New South Wales < <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/Banks> >) to the journals maintained by the other people who travelled with Cook, many of which had been included in the printed version of Beaglehole's edition. Also, it would have been interesting to include documents relating to the subsequent history of the places that Cook encountered. Unfortunately, rather than offering an expansive collection of documents, which a CD-ROM would have allowed, the Endeavour ends up being a digital reprint of an expurgated single book with the addition of an encyclopedia and a picture book.
22. While the CD-ROM contains the complete transcripts of Cook's journal and Beaglehole's extensive notes, it does not contain Beaglehole's large introduction or the additional texts, such as letters and secondary journals, that Beaglehole included with the printed version. The failure to include Beaglehole's introduction erases a considerable amount of discussion over the nature of Cook's journals and how they related to the versions that were eventually published. The version that is included on the CD-ROM is the version first published in the 1950s, which is very different from the versions that were printed before.
23. To make Cook's voyages more complicated, controversial, and human, one thing that should have been included is a bibliography that would point towards other reading. Books can do this as well. But with a CD-ROM, it would also have been possible to include passages from a wide range of contemporary authors who have debated many aspects of Cook's voyages. The most valuable would have included Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* , Jilian Robertson's *The Captain Cook Myth* , Alan Moorehead's *Fatal Impact* , the writings of Bernard Smith, and works connected to the recent conflict between Gananath Obeyesekere and Marshall Sahlins . In very different ways, each of these writings work against the heroic image of Cook exemplified by the *Endeavour* CD-ROM, if only by pointing out how the myths around him have been created and maintained.
24. In other words, while the CD-ROM creates a sense of Cook as an historical figure, it does so by ignoring a large number of historical and contemporary documents that

would engage with Cook's place in history. But this strategy, which would have made the voyage much more complex and ambiguous, would also have worked against the celebration of Cook as the greatest explorer of the Pacific, and all the simplification that that status entails.

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letter to the editors

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