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Remediating the Past: Doing “Periodical Studies” in the Digital Era

Maria DiCenzo
Wilfrid Laurier University

Every revolution in communication technology—from papyrus to the printing press to Twitter—is as much an opportunity to be drawn away from something as it is be drawn toward something. And yet, as we embrace technology’s gifts, we usually fail to consider what we’re giving up in the process.

Michael Harris

The End of Absence

IN HIS RECENT AWARD-WINNING BOOK, *The End of Absence*, Canadian journalist Michael Harris ponders the implications of the digital age from the perspective of the generation that has known life before and after the advent of the Internet, asking fundamental questions about what is lost in the world of constant connection. As I consider recent developments and debates in periodical research, it seems that a similar divide between the pre- and postdigital worlds has manifested itself. This is not a generational divide in the limited sense of age; instead, it is related to the formation of academic fields and the impact of the large-scale digitization of newspa-

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pers, periodicals, and magazines on approaches to scholarship.¹ Assessments of that impact vary depending not just on when but also on why one has come to these media. The archival materials, once difficult to access, now seem all too available, creating (with the aid of computational tools) a range of new opportunities for researchers and students. Methodological shifts are redefining what it means to “read” periodicals. “Distant reading” and studying the materialities of media represent significant departures from textual analysis, expanding the perspectives we apply to media in useful ways. At the same time, reading periodicals (closely or deeply) for their discursive and visual content—for how they may have generated meanings, for whom and why—remains central to research engaged in expanding historical and cultural fields.

Many issues raised in the wake of the digital revolution are not new at all, even if they seem more urgent or couched in new terminology. The very claims to disciplinary and methodological newness, while rhetorically effective, have contributed to obscuring earlier, yet highly relevant, scholarship. For all the promise of interdisciplinarity and collaboration, research communities often operate in discipline- and period-based silos. Rivaling the “vast and unwieldy” periodical archives is the equally daunting body of critical work that has accumulated over decades and continues to proliferate with every new book and special issue. Our roles and responsibilities as researchers and teachers are complicated as we (re)mediate the past, the archival *and* the critical heritage, in a postdigital world. How do we negotiate the expanding databases and the qualitative and quantitative methodological options while initiating newcomers along the way? In the following, I focus on some recent developments in the study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periodicals in order to look both back and forward, to argue for a longer-term perspective and transdisciplinary approach to the existing research, and for a more productive dialogue across the digital divide through methodological pluralism.

Periodical Studies as a Field

I have followed tendencies in newspaper and periodical research since my first forays into the field in the mid 1990s.² I use *field* here as an umbrella

1 I use these three terms here—newspapers, periodicals, magazines—to signal the range of genres, formats, and sectors of the press relevant to the following discussion. These include everything from daily newspapers and literary reviews to pulp and glossy magazines. They are all forms of serial publication and there is overlap in the meanings of these terms, but usage varies in different scholarly communities.

2 I started to investigate suffrage periodicals for evidence of early feminist theatre

term for the study of the newspaper and periodical press more generally, encompassing the various disciplinary and period-defined groups who share an interest in early forms of serial publication. In many ways the term “field” is a misnomer, given how various the disciplinary communities and locations for this work are, including Victorian studies, American/Canadian studies, newspaper and periodical/media history, women’s history, communication/media studies, literary and modernist studies, rhetoric studies, journalism history, book history, cultural studies, to name the most obvious. Working at the intersection of some of these areas, I am continually struck by how much repetition and how little crossover there is, with a few notable exceptions, in spite of how similar are the objects of study. All of these constituencies, which share an interest in early forms of print media, have scholarly and professional associations (many of which meet annually), dedicated journals, books series, and web resources, generating enormous quantities of research and commentary, including annual bibliographies, reviews of developments, and forecasts of new directions.³ It is no surprise that there is overlap and repetition, both among areas and over time.

Many of these areas, as the frequent use of “studies” signals, are themselves interdisciplinary spinoffs or subfields of more traditional disciplines, often responding to challenges or opportunities (whether or not they are internal or external to their academic contexts).⁴ Donald Hambrick and Ming-Jer Chen explain how scholarly communities emerge or form,

and quickly abandoned my theatre history work to concentrate on the suffrage movement and its press. The formative experience of the Feminist Forerunners periodicals conference at Manchester Metropolitan in 2000, and the networks and collaborations that were forged there, opened up opportunities to participate in and learn from different research communities.

³ The point here is not to offer an exhaustive list but to indicate the scope of some of the more prominent and active journals and associations devoted to “periodical” research: *Victorian Periodicals Review*, formerly *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* since 1968 (The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals); *American Periodicals* since 1991 (Research Society for American Periodicals); *Media History*, formerly *Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History* from 1984, then *Studies in Newspaper and Periodical History* from 1993; and, more recently, *JEPS: The Journal of European Periodical Studies* (European Society for Periodical Research) and *JMPS: Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*.

⁴ Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur points to the wide range of explanations for the emergence of new disciplines in higher education in the context of examining the role of contention in new knowledge movements linked to social movements and political goals outside the university, such as Women’s Studies and Asian American Studies in the U.S. (see Arthur 2009).

by means of differentiation, mobilization, and legitimacy building, into recognized fields in accordance with familiar patterns of academic discipline formation. They note that “There are no definitive indicators that an informal community has aspirations to become an academic field, but partial signals include the following: the community adopts a name that essentially all members use; members start referring to the community as a ‘field’; and significant investments are made in new community structures, such as associations, journals, and conferences” (35). While fields may initially form around a set of goals, theories/analytical perspectives, or objects of study, these founding principles can be sources of contention and subject to change over time. Changes, like field formation itself, may happen in response to new methodological opportunities (for example, new technologies) or through conflict and confrontation. New critical paradigms not only displace those that came before; sometimes they work to discredit or challenge their legitimacy. A striking recent example of the latter is the v21 Collective that published its ten-thesis manifesto criticizing (in the most vitriolic of terms) the current state of Victorian Studies.⁵

In the context of discipline formation more generally, the case of “periodical studies” deserves some explanation.⁶ The origins and contours of periodical studies as a field will vary depending on whom you ask. As a descriptive term denoting a practice, like “periodical research,” it has been used to indicate the study of various forms of serial publication, for many years, in different national and disciplinary contexts.⁷ But in a recent iteration, “periodical studies” was used to identify and name an “emerging” field. The now frequently cited 2006 article by Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” proved to be an influential, if controversial, intervention into the scholarship. In its repeated stress on “new,” it generated an account of an emerging field, replete with uncharted data,

5 The debate that has emerged in response to the manifesto is beyond the scope of this paper, but the v21 Collective’s attack on historicism (characterized in the most reductive of terms) and its call for “theory” is an example of how groups work to define and promote their interests by differentiating themselves from the status quo. The website indicates it plans its first symposium for autumn 2015. See the manifesto at <http://v21collective.org/manifesto-of-the-v21-collective-ten-theses> and some initial responses at <http://v21collective.org/responses-to-the-v21-manifesto>.

6 I use quotation marks here and in the title to foreground the distinctions I make below between generic and period-specific usages. Unless otherwise specified, my own use of the term is to indicate the wider field of periodical research.

7 Before 2006, for instance, the term is used occasionally in Victorian periodical research and more frequently in *American Periodicals* to indicate both a practice and a field.

unanswered questions, and ready for new kinds of inquiry, largely due to the digitization of archives. They note, but never engage with, the work of long-standing associations such as RSVP and RSAP.⁸ Drawing initially on their impressive and valuable Modernist Journals Project as a database, the Modernist Studies Association as a scholarly forum, followed by the launch in 2010 of the *Journal of Modernist Periodical Studies*, “modern periodical studies” was quickly established. I emphasize “modern” (even “modernist”) here, because it captures more accurately the recovery and mapping of early twentieth-century or specifically modernist-related periodicals that form the actual basis of this development.⁹ Patrick Collier, in the companion special issue to this volume, offers a detailed analysis of the contribution of *JMPS* to modern periodical studies, noting the extent to which literary modernism functions as a frame of reference.

Modern periodical studies have made a significant contribution to the expansion of the corpus and critical practices in “new modernist studies” more generally, where (apart from earlier attention to little magazines) the pioneering work in the study of the periodical press has been relatively more recent.¹⁰ What is interesting to note, however, is how the rhetoric of newness, the self-reinforcing narratives about emergence and innovation, and its online presence have affected the entry of this term into the critical language, if we consider how frequently “The Rise of Periodical Studies” is used as a starting point for periodical research in recent publications and on course syllabi. In the digital era, online presence has become part of the process of institutionalizing new fields. When combined with the unreliability of online searching, the effect of ahistorical approaches to

8 I should clarify here that the article does not attempt to delegitimize these other venues for periodical research, but the account of the “rise of periodical studies” nevertheless identifies itself as a significant departure rather than seeing itself as part of a larger and diverse set of scholarly approaches to the press, especially those operating beyond departments of literary studies. It is interesting to note that *PMLA* (121.5 [2006]: 1743) published a letter from Richard Kopley in response to the Latham and Scholes article, clarifying some points about the Research Society for American Periodicals and calling for acknowledgement of the print collections that make digital projects possible. The letter is followed by a reply from Latham and Scholes stressing that “This field is just now taking shape, largely because of the stunning changes in the reproduction and dissemination of archival materials made possible by digital technologies” (1743).

9 In a recent article on how copyright affects the digital corpus of periodicals published after 1923, Roxanne Shirazi makes deliberate use of the label “modernist periodicals studies,” situating it as a recent phenomenon in periodical research.

10 For an account of the “new modernist studies” see Mao and Walkowitz (2008), and for the intersection between modernism and digital humanities see Ross and Sayers (2014).

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the criticism (of looking only forward and not back) is to miss or dismiss decades of valuable scholarship. In order not to keep starting from scratch, it is important to highlight the longer history and discourage the idea that period- and discipline-specific or nationally-based studies might preclude our interest. Current critical frameworks are frequently applied to historical material, but criticism generated in earlier decades is often assumed obsolete. As the ever-emerging *new* replaces the *old*, new norms of evaluation arise in the process and have the potential to limit or monopolize what is considered valuable or worthy. Those new to the field are always the most vulnerable and benefit the most from genealogical approaches. Ironically, what we see enacted in the academic field is what periodicals have been doing for centuries. Natalie Houston and Margaret Beetham note that “Periodicals were designed, edited, published, and marketed within existing publishing traditions and also set themselves apart from their competitors in new ways: through their content, organization, and material format” (535).

Professional imperatives to generate new, original knowledge on a continual basis exert pressure to innovate—to seek new objects of study and new ways to analyze them. Without precluding the pleasures and satisfaction of the enterprise, it is important to recognize how much being at the cutting edge is also part of the job. It is part of the dynamic in what Pierre Bourdieu identifies as a restricted field of production which “can never be dominated by one orthodoxy without continuously being dominated by the general question of orthodoxy itself” (117). He highlights the need to generate “a specifically cultural type of scarcity and value” and notes how the greater the competition for cultural legitimacy, the greater “individual production must be oriented towards the search for culturally pertinent features endowed with value in the field’s own economy” (117). The politics of hierarchy, competition, even antagonism in the academic sphere are intensified by shrinking resources. The processes of evaluation become ways of exercising forms of control. Creativity and talent are not in short supply, but invention is also fueled by the market logic driving the criteria for grants and promotion, for those fortunate enough even to compete now in the restricted field of production that is academia. This alone should make us skeptical about the rhetoric of newness. Methodological differentiation and new-field formation are usually framed in epistemological rather than in professional/career terms. Nevertheless, new knowledge movements and disciplinary formations are increasingly the product of “audit culture” in universities (Beck and Young 184) and financially-driven institutional restructuring, particularly in the humani-

ties (de Zepetnek 57–58). These factors invariably play a role in emerging trends and methodological debates within and among disciplines.

To Read or Not to Read: Issues and Trends in Periodical Studies

Using a few examples of current trends and past efforts, I would like to speculate about how and why we keep coming back to similar questions and problems in periodical research to consider some of the factors driving recent developments in the wider field, as part of making a case for more comprehensive perspectives. The digital revolution has facilitated profound and positive changes in the mediation of, and access to, archival holdings and critical commentary, in addition to generating new interpretive tools. In the case of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspaper and periodical history, the rapid transformation and reproduction of even small portions of the print archive into electronic, searchable formats has provided a stimulus for research. We may be at a new pivotal moment, but this transformation has been happening for a long time, if through different means, as the early decades of *Victorian Periodicals Review* indicate. The journal (then the *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*) encouraged and monitored developments, starting with microform collections in the late 1960s (another remediation of “originals” that were already not originals in bound volume form) and eventually moving to digital projects.

Digitization has proven to be both a gift and a burden. This conflicted response is now a commonplace in the literature. In his introduction to the current issue of the *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, devoted to periodical networks, J. Stephen Murphy describes the sheer volume of available data as “the blessing and the curse of periodical studies,” admitting that “the potential for revelation is great, but so too is the potential for getting completely lost in the archive or for being too intimidated to even enter” (vi). Michael Woolf, in his “Golden Stream” articles, used the metaphor of finding pearls to capture the idea of the potential for revelation. The first article (published in 1971) envisioned charting the golden stream by creating a directory of Victorian periodicals, and the second (roughly twenty years later) began more pessimistically by “damning” the golden stream because the “information explosion” seemed to render the goal of the systematic study of the Victorian press impossible (126–27). Far from giving up, he ended that same article with a call to form a *discipline* of periodical studies: “But if a greater interest could be taken in a theoretical analysis of the problems inhibiting such work and if that were to go hand in hand with the establishing of something like a discipline, then my

pessimism might be proved short sighted and a ‘Directory of Victorian Periodicals’ might well begin to be within reach” (129). And so it was.

The availability of more documents and more advanced technologies means there are so many new things to do, ushering in new methods and areas of focus. Informing one branch of postdigital research is what Mark Sample terms “non-consumptive reading.” He describes “non-consumptive research” by digital humanities scholars as “the large-scale analysis of a texts—say topic modeling millions of books or data-mining tens of thousands of court cases,” explaining that “a text is not read by a scholar so much as it is processed by a machine.” He also notes the coining of recent terms such as “non-expressive use.” Perhaps more familiar by now is Franco Moretti’s concept of “distant reading.” Texts become things not to read but to process through computational methods. Also relevant here are the opportunities to treat the statistics generated by databases as findings in their own right—data about data (Liddle 230). The methods are qualitative as well as quantitative, drawing on various forms of software and visualization tools in order to identify networks of association and to gain structural insights into cultures and systems of production. Murphy claims “With this new expansiveness has come the need for new methodologies, which is where network analysis comes in” (iv). For skeptics who suggest we have been here before with earlier forms of humanities computing, Franco Moretti assures us it is different this time: “In the last few years, literary studies have experienced what we could call the rise of quantitative evidence. This had happened before of course, without producing lasting effects, but this time it’s probably going to be different, because this time we have digital databases, and automated data retrieval” (2). Murphy is clear that the contributors to his special issue “share a commitment to *not*-reading magazines, as well as to reading them” and, justifying why “reading will not suffice,” he asserts “we will need alternatives to reading texts, which is why visualization is becoming a key practice of the digital humanities” (vii).

Network analysis and visualization tools offer macro perspectives and seem driven by an impulse toward synthesizing and totalizing, taking us outside rather than inside the texts of periodicals. They are remote from more content/textually-oriented concerns (self-consciously and deliberately so), in spite of how much network analysis relies on categories and subjects derived by those critical practices. These approaches have potential for identifying patterns, both textual and image-based, but whether they serve as a means to an end or an end in themselves will depend on the research questions they set out to answer.

If digitization has brought gains, it has also generated an awareness of loss, notably of paper artifacts, foregrounding issues of materiality. The remediation of print artifacts in digitized form has underscored the need to understand the production, circulation, and uses of material forms, including paper itself as well as print media as objects. Developments in periodicals studies and book history are linked in these ways to a wider material turn in research. Leah Price classifies the material approach as another form of “not reading,” that is, by focusing on the text as a material thing with a variety of uses rather than primarily as a linguistic structure (120). Similarly, John Nerone draws attention to the “materialities of communication” in a recent special issue of *Media History* on paper scarcity and print culture.¹¹ Identifying the history of and disciplinary locations for the origins of this approach, he argues that it evolved variously as “a much-needed antidote to an infatuation with theory in the age of post-structuralism,” as part of “medium theory and history of technology,” and “posed by some as a corrective to the habit of scholars, like rhetoricians, and practitioners, like journalists, to think of communication as a spiritual activity that overcomes material and economic boundaries” (Nerone 2). Implied in the focus on materiality is a response or corrective to the disproportionate emphasis on the discursive dimension of media. While Patrick Leary stresses the importance of exposing students to actual publications as a way to reintroduce what digital facsimiles have stripped away, Laurel Brake suggests recognizing the digital itself, with its features and functionalities, as a form of material culture (223). Historian William Turkel speculates that advances in technology may lead to new ways of moving between the analog and the digital (such as simulating scents and reproducing formats) in the process of trying to remediate the material past (288). The value of material analyses, occurring across a range of disciplinary venues, is in how they situate print media contextually, in systems and markets of production and reproduction.

There is a tension in recent trends in periodical research between an expansion of new approaches, on one hand, and efforts to establish common methodological ground, on the other. Special issues of journals devoted to topics such as digitization, visualization, and the history of paper illustrate the expansionist or diversifying tendency, while the 2013 MLA special session on “What is a Journal? Towards a Theory of Periodical Studies” and Patrick Collier’s “What is Modern Periodical Studies?” in the

11 See also Matt Huculak’s contribution, “Modernist Papers and Canadian Pulp,” in the companion special issue to this volume.

companion special issue to this volume represent synthesizing approaches to features and questions informing research in the field. The description of the 2013 MLA panel signals a frustration with the “disciplinary fragmentation” that “hinder[s] the synthesising perspective necessary to develop” “the kind of typological and conceptual leap that Latham and Scholes identified as the next stage in the development of periodical studies”—a field described as “emergent,” “vibrant,” and “new.”¹² The questions posed, such as “How far can we synthesise the primarily internal and qualitative readings of conventional literary scholarship with the external and quantitative approaches of publishing history?,” “How can cultural and media theory help us to conceptualise the distinctive textual and paratextual dynamics of the periodical?,” and “How can we construct typological and comparative categories that capture the full range of aesthetic, material, and social features of the periodical?” are all important and ongoing concerns but not *new* ones. Laurel Brake and Anne Humpherys expressed a similar need to move beyond the “monumental” task of recovery work and looked to theory as a way to “gain control” over the field of Victorian periodical research rather than through “the accumulation of empirical studies alone” (94). That pivotal 1989 issue of *VPR* on “Critical Theory and Periodical Research” included what remain some of the most informative essays in the field on topics ranging from typology, seriality, paratextual elements, missing elements, preservation, heterogeneity, authorship, and reading practices to the impact of poststructuralism on historical and literary methodologies.¹³ These essays are still relevant to periodical studies in all contexts. Digitization may have made some of these concerns more acute, but it has not affected fundamental questions about the periodical as object of study.

A long-term view offers some distance and perspective (“distanced reading” if you will). The history of these questions and dilemmas in the academic literature are instructive. The fact is that generations of knowledgeable, experienced specialists have been trying to solve similar problems for a long time and only getting so far. Rather than asking what can we do that is new, we might consider how to avoid reinventing the wheel, how to acknowledge and work with the scaffolding already in place across a variety of disciplines. Surely, by now, it is not a dearth of theory that is the

12 For a description of the session and copies of presentations see <http://blogs.tandf.co.uk/jvc/2012/12/24/what-is-a-journal-mla2013>.

13 I would highlight specifically Margaret Beetham’s “Open and Closed: the Periodical as a Publishing Genre,” and Lyn Pykett’s “Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context,” both in *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22.3 (1989).

problem, as “isms” and “turns” continue to proliferate. The methodological silver bullet will continue to elude us.

Periodical Studies and Pedagogy

These concerns are relevant to how we initiate new generations of periodical readers. The last important trend I want to point to here is the critical attention in recent years to pedagogy in the wake of digitization, in book studies, articles, special issues of journals, and web-based resources.¹⁴ Web resources have the capacity to incorporate critical material that is directly relevant to the periodicals and indexes reproduced. The number of university courses that now focus on or include periodicals as part of the study of cultures and periods continues to grow, particularly as materials are more available and accessible for classroom use. Students are also getting opportunities to work on the development of digital projects. Limited time and resources will influence choices about how to introduce them to both the objects of study and to the methodological approaches, not to mention historiographies, of a diverse and dispersed field. While digitization has facilitated the use of historical periodicals for teaching purposes, the mode of delivery has also distorted the options for reading and browsing. Something as simple as keyword searching presents a minefield of problems without a basic familiarity with the language and terms of reference in a given historical, cultural context (Bingham 230). Brake outlines some of the dangers of working from search-hits, particularly in platforms that offer searching across multiple titles (“Half Full” 224).

The growing tensions in the scholarship between reading and not reading will inform what we do in the classroom. Should we encourage students to select methods appropriate to the research questions they ask or let the methods determine those questions? Using his metaphor of the golden stream of periodicals, Woolf suggested that “pearls cannot be properly enjoyed or studied if they are in an indiscriminate heap” (“Damn-

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14 The literature related to pedagogy has expanded in recent years. A few sources, listed in the works cited, include James Mussell’s “Teaching” and Suzanne Churchill. Papers by a range of Victorian scholars are available in “Forum: Teaching and Learning in the Digital Humanities Classroom,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45.2 (2012): 200–38. The RSVP website has announced a forthcoming paper by Clare Horrocks on “Digital Pedagogies: Building Learning Communities for Studying Victorian Periodicals,” *Victorian Studies* 48.2 (Summer 2015). A few of the open access websites offering essays, descriptions, or timelines for the periodicals they reproduce include nineteenth-century serials edition; Modernist Journals Project; Magazines, Travel and Middlebrow Culture in Canada 1925 to 1960.

ing” 126). Periodical specialists often describe their formative encounters with periodical literature (Nicholson, Leary), and I worry that the option of “not reading” periodicals may reduce, even discourage, the opportunities to engage with the content of periodicals. The taxonomies and metadata informing computational methods in many cases derive from detailed analyses of the letterpress and contextual information derived from the media themselves. In my experience of working with students and research assistants in the context of early feminist periodicals, the texts of these publications never fail to fascinate them, even those who do not expect to be interested. No doubt that in the repeated journeys from the micro to the macro levels of analysis, more insights will continue to emerge, as new and different readers encounter periodicals and try to synthesize the unsynthesizable. Those insights are worth the effort.

Remediating the Archival and Critical Heritage

One of the ongoing challenges in periodical studies involves the proliferation of categories and typologies in defining objects of study. Categories and definitions invariably involve assigning value, whether in positive or pejorative terms (highbrow, middlebrow, pulp, popular, alternative, political). Here the disciplinary and period contexts vary and involve different debates if we consider that Victorian studies and media history have always dealt with all sectors of the press, across the political spectrum (daily newspapers, agenda-setting monthlies and quarterlies, Sunday papers, popular and specialized magazines) whereas the expansion currently taking place in modern periodical studies grows in part as a reaction to what began as a focus on highbrow modernist journals and little magazines. While multi- or cross-genre studies and collections are becoming the norm, there will always be media operating at or relegated to the margins. Categories related to genres and features within periodicals are useful and necessary to provide a frame of reference (Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman’s *Victorian Women’s Magazines: An Anthology* comes to mind). But we need to be alert to what Beverley Skeggs terms “(dis)identifications” in the struggle *against* classification and to recognize attempts on the part of figures or groups to define themselves against what is often imposed from above, by more powerful voices and institutions. “Brows,” after all, presuppose cultural criteria defined from the top down—“highbrow” defines the other brows as something that it excludes or devalues.

The attribution of value will continue to inform the visibility, availability, and accessibility of sources in periodical studies. Unfortunately, knowing something existed (such as a particular publication) does not

ensure it will still be available (at all, let alone in its entirety), particularly since “valuing” has also informed the process of collecting, indexing, preservation, and remediation. Visibility is rooted, in part, in questions of historiography and the historical narratives on which you rely in searching out sources that will invariably shape your findings.¹⁵ Alternative and oppositional discourses are the most vulnerable to oversight and omission. This is not to suggest that there is *a* history to discover/reveal, but it is fair to say that if you think or assume something does not exist, you will not look for it, let alone find it. Things have to be important enough to look for. History/historiography and periodical studies are inextricably linked, which is why periodicals are so valuable in telling different stories about the past in a specific period or national contexts or comparatively. Transatlantic and transnational periodical research is encouraging comparative work across linguistic as well as national lines.

Specialists long-immersed in the paper and microform archives offer cautionary words about the limits of digitized collections, both in terms of content and user features. One of the risks with digitization in the increasingly online-oriented world is that if it is not there many assume it does not exist. Selection processes, canonical privileging of digital projects, and the minuscule percentage of material actually available in digital form suggests serious implications for online-based research methods and quantitative approaches relying on digital data. Some critics stress not how *much* but, rather, how *little* is available in digital form. Laurel Brake reminds us that of the fifty-thousand nineteenth-century serial titles indexed, “the percentage digitized in the first decade of the twenty-first century is tiny, although in numbers, and from a basis of zero, some 400 digitized nineteenth-century serials may appear overwhelming to researchers” (“Half Full” 225). She points to pragmatic and commercial factors, such as the role of market demand in the decisions publishers make about digitizing and bundling titles (227). Similarly, in relation to newspaper archives, Adrian Bingham warns about “the way that research may be distorted by the availability of certain titles and the absence of others;” given the appeal and convenience of working with digital archives, and how the availability of the *Times Digital Archive* has “encourage[d] some to present *The Times* as being representative of ‘press opinion,’ even when there is little justification for so doing” (229). This is the “offline penumbra” Patrick Leary identifies, “that increasingly remote and unvisited

15 I deal with this problem in detail in a response to James Curran. See DiCenzo 2004.

shadowland into which even quite important texts fall if they cannot yet be explored, or perhaps even identified, by any electronic means” (82). He adds, “At a time when even accomplished researchers rely heavily upon online searching, and when many students and interested members of the public rely on little or nothing else, the offline penumbra represents one side of a ‘digital divide’ that I suspect will subtly affect the ways in which we think, teach, and write about the nineteenth century for years to come” (83). All of these statements presuppose full online access (including pay per use resources), and it is sobering to remember that the broader global goal of information sharing promised by digitization is fraught by social disparities in the information world (Southwell).

The critical, contextual work undertaken by those who continue to work with print and manuscript sources will play a central role in keeping the offline penumbra on the radar, helping new readers/users to find, understand, and situate those media. It is in the constant interaction between the existing literature and the data that new research questions will be generated. Much of what I have been discussing involves choices (about periodical forms, methodologies, pedagogies, structuring, and evaluating scholarship), and with those choices come responsibilities.¹⁶ We are all “history-makers,” to use Marnie Hughes-Warrington’s term (2), and all engaged in “narrativizing” or “historizing,” to use Alun Munslow’s (569). Rhetoric historian Cheryl Glenn considers questions of knowledge, ethics, and power as they pertain to the act of history writing, and she includes the role of evidence:

At the nexus of these questions reside issues of historical evidence: What counts? What is available? Who provided and preserved it—and why? How and to what end has it been used? and by whom? Thus history is not frozen, not merely the past. It provides an approachable, disruptable ground for engaging and transforming traditional memory or practice in the interest of both the present and the future. (389)

It is important to consider how we treat and what we say about periodicals as we mediate large, often obscure, inaccessible archives for other researchers but also for a wider range of readers (a growing part of our mandate of accountability as academics). Our claims about these kinds

¹⁶ Note the extensive literature in the field of history on the concept of “responsibility.”

of sources are often more difficult to assess and challenge, in spite of peer review.

As history makers we make choices about the options we offer our readers and how reflexive we choose to be about our interests and agendas. Hughes-Warrington uses Roland Barthes's terms to discuss the difference between writerly and readerly approaches to history writing, namely forms that efface their own constructedness versus those that draw attention to the conventions they employ and encourage readers to participate in the construction of meaning. She prefers the terms "rewritable" to "readerly" or "writable" to signal that history is an open-ended activity, whether revision takes the form of new information or of attempts to correct existing histories (109–10). It prompts us to consider the extent to which researchers acknowledge the critical contexts in which they work and consciously situate themselves, in relation to competing or opposing voices and approaches, without trying to render them obsolete. The "review of the literature" as an exercise seems to have gone the way of other old things, rather than remaining an important process through which we develop our research questions, situate our work, and justify appropriate methodological tools. The challenge is significant in the field of periodical studies because it overlaps with a range of disciplines. Our bibliographic responsibilities are overwhelming, but that is all the more reason to build the pathways and opportunity structures, by widening the frame of reference. There may be numerous ways to respond to the now ubiquitous call for more interdisciplinary and collaborative work in periodical studies. One of them is to ensure that we do not have to keep "recovering the scaffolding," and this is possible in both individual and collaborative work. The critical history should be part of how we mediate and remediate the periodical past, even if that means "mediating" in that other sense of the word, as in working to resolve conflicts and differences.

Looking Ahead

Like "new," "future" is a ubiquitous term in academic discourse, increasingly ominous in its usages (future of history, future of the book, future of the humanities, future of the university), occasioned by threats in a rapidly changing present. These futures depend on many things, including how we choose to negotiate the impact of technologies on the way people live, learn, and communicate. The wider debates about technology and education or the social world are well beyond the scope of this paper, but their relevance to academic research is profound. I think again here of Michael Harris's idea of a generation straddling two eras as we confront the rapid

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transformation of the print archive and, with it, our ways of working. What have we lost and what have we gained? Leary argues:

One result of the growing ubiquity of the online world that is already widely evident, particularly among our students, is a blindness to the limitations of the internet generally, an often disheartening credulity about the information to be found there, and a reluctance to do the serious work among print and manuscript sources in libraries and archives that remains essential to scholarship. Yet this same occlusion of vision threatens all of us who find ourselves drawn online by the expanded range and sophistication of resources and the comparative ease of gaining access to them. (82)

Similarly, Bingham urges us not to let the “convenience of digitization” make us “lazy researchers” (229). For those trained in time-intensive (and yes, occasionally time-wasting) practices of the analog world, digitization is a value added—no one in their right mind would go back to card catalogues and huge bound volumes of the *MLA* index to find sources. For a younger generation the online world is mainly what they know, determining how and where they search for material. Brake reminds us not to overlook the “Browse function” in “the rush to ‘search’” and its role in “facilitating serendipitous research through page turning” (“Tacking”)

James Mussell has been a significant voice in theorizing the digital turn in periodical studies and approaches the logistical and substantive issues with eyes wide open. He is under no illusions about the supposed competencies of digital natives and highlights our pedagogical responsibilities: “if scholars neglect to develop and pass on the skills required to become critical users, then these resources, despite all their potential, will function as article-retrieving tools that privilege text over image while positioning their users as passive consumers of content” (“Teaching” 207). His point in this context is about teaching digital literacy, but it is equally relevant and urgent in terms of preserving non-digital skills and methods. Ever-provocative Mark Bauerlein envisions a “contrary space” in the otherwise wired schools of the future, with no devices or connectivity, “only pencils, books, old newspapers and magazines, blackboards and slide rules,” where students will do things by hand and use only books and microfilm. He argues that this non-digital space will be not an “antitechnology reaction” but a “nontechnology complement,” an acknowledgement that “aspects of intelligence are best developed with a *mixture* of digital and nondigital tools” in productive tension. Just because we have cars does not mean we give up walking. The findings of neuroplasticity research and the grow-

ing attention to slow teaching and unplugging movements offer reason to pause and signal the challenges ahead. I will resist calling them new; they are actually about continuing to value things that have always been important, at least to some.

Periodicals offer rich opportunities to engage critically and productively with the tensions between analog and digital skills. The focus on periodicals as objects of study in social, cultural, and political history remains strong. In their introduction to a special issue of *Media History* (2013) devoted to the launch of the Centre for the Study of Journalism and History (CSJH) at the University of Sheffield, Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy outline some of the common assumptions underlying the special issue and the aims of the centre more generally, namely “that journalism reflects and shapes the politics and culture of the societies of which it is a part in important and often understudied ways; that newspapers and periodicals play a significant role in articulating, reinforcing and challenging political and social identities; and that changes over time in the language and content of the press can help us understand the complex dynamics of past societies” (2). As long as the “past” remains a site of contention, the periodical press will be relevant to historiographical debates and much of this research will continue to take the form of “samplings and soundings” combined with attempts at comprehensive and synthetic analyses.¹⁷ Periodicals produced as part of early reform campaigns or social movements, and by marginalized and oppressed groups, are not likely candidates for digitization on a large scale, so detailed critical studies are crucial to making them visible. If the focus on the discursive dimension of media does not seem strikingly new, the findings are. The other papers in this special issue are good examples of that. Whether it means working to expand and map the literary field (as Patrick Collier discusses in the companion special issue) or to expand the historical field, periodicals have the power to “capsize and contradict” as Manushag Powell argues in her discussion of the rewards of periodical studies (441). She too notes the “double-edged sword” of digital research, endorsing the choice to “read” periodicals ourselves and to keep trying to discuss them “coherently” in spite of how difficult that is (446).

In the process of analyzing media forms, it is possible to acknowledge the methodological challenges, by being reflexive about, rather than by

17 The phrase is from Joanne Shattock and Michael Woolf’s 1982 edited volume. What they wanted to achieve was a history of the Victorian press, “embracing all its constituent parts” (xvi). Realizing that was not possible, the best alternative was a collection of original essays as models for future studies.

effacing, the systems of value at work. In other words, we can do in the scholarly sphere what some of these media were trying to do in the larger public sphere. There are no value-free procedures or approaches and no one way to “do” periodical studies. If we accept that we will never “squeeze the universe into a ball,” how do we find our way through the sheer mass of primary and secondary documents and the myriad options they represent? In her contribution to the 2013 MLA session, Ann Ardis calls for a “post-disciplinary convergence of methodologies” that might “supplement/complement the text-based close reading practices of literary studies with the object-based methodologies of visual studies, book history, and material culture studies” (1). I think constructive divergence is more likely than “convergence” or consensus. But Ardis’s concept of the “media ecology of modernity” might be usefully extended to describe an *ecology of methods*, in which we aim for biodiversity instead of monocultures—for diversity and pluralism. In the meantime, I plan to keep straddling the digital divide, hanging on to my precious photocopies in case the power goes out.

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