The Verbal and the Visual in Nineteenth-Century Culture,
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Workshop

A picture or a thousand words? The use of images in the nineteenth-century periodical press, and how they are reproduced today.

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Abstract:

This workshop invites participants to consider two sets of issues: drawing on the wealth of material buried within the six journals that constitute the Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition (**ncse**) for examples it will explore the differing ways visual images were used in the nineteenth century periodical press and the nature of the relationships between different types of content in the serials; it then reflects how much of this rich information should be represented in digital editions in the twenty first century and by which means this might best be achieved.

Many archiving projects use optical character recognition (OCR) to produce a transcript of the text which can be manipulated, enriched and processed. However, such technology cannot identify pictures – or even fancy letterpress – and so creators of digital resources have to compensate for this bias. Like our nineteenth-century predecessors, we also have to decide how to balance the differing demands of the visual and verbal. The workshop will invite participants to consider the rival demands of the visual and verbal in the material culture of the nineteenth century press and how these should be represented and discuss how scholars might negotiate the textual bias inherent in aspects of digital scholarship in republishing this material in digital form.

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ncse is the *Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition*, an AHRC-funded collaborative project between the British Library, King's College London and Birkbeck College. Its remit is to produce a digital edition of six periodicals:

Monthly Repository (1806-1838)
Northern Star (1837-1852)
Leader (1850-1860)
English Woman's Journal (1858-1864)
Tomahawk (1867-1871)
Publishers' Circular (1880-1890)

The edition will include metadata and concept maps, providing sophisticated access to the journals and exploring the relationships between them, and the wider print culture of which they are a part.

Workshop Materials:

This document contains an outline of some of the issues we hope to cover in our workshop. As the focus is on the relationship between the visual and the verbal, we have also included the "Concept Map" of these issues that we produced while planning the workshop. There is an accompanying document that contains, describes and discusses the images that we will provide in the workshop, and all references below refer to that

document. The following discussion is divided into two: Part One explores the significance of visual material in nineteenth-century serials; Part Two outlines some issues surrounding the handling of these in the digital domain. The Concept Map is included as an appendix.

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Part One: The significance of visual material in nineteenth-century serials

The visual and the verbal meet at the level of the page. We read with our eyes, and words have to be written and positioned somewhere. In the constant search for readers in the crowded periodical marketplace, the page became a site of constant negotiation between what was said and how it looked. This division, of course, is arbitrary: the word on the page cannot be separated from its meaning any more than from its appearance. Nineteenth-century editors and publishers exploited both the semantic and visual aspects of words and images in order to identify content (and so readers), and then sustain interest over time. Illustrations could be offered as incentives, a masthead provides a recognizable logo, and the number of columns might signal the seriousness of a title even before reading the words. As technological factors altered over the century, so the availability of images and the appearance of periodicals also changed, reconfiguring the relationship between form and content even while maintaining the link between them. Recognition of these issues is vital in order to create digital editions of nineteenth-century serials which are sensitive to this embedded data. Digitization has the potential not only to preserve these elements of visual material but to enrich their users' engagement with them.

Workshop participants are encouraged to engage in discussion about the important features of visual material and to consider with us what might be preserved and enriched by digital editions and how this might be achieved.

Discussion questions:

- What have we missed from the list that follows?
- Which elements of this should scholars aim to reproduce or re-present in digital editions and how might we do this?

1.1.   Layout, format, typography

1.1.1   Where things on the page are gives them meaning: for instance headlines and headings, signatures etc.

1.1.2   Sometimes the way things are written gives words visual meaning aside from their semantic meaning. See for instance the "word pictures" in the reports of Wellington's funeral in **figure 1.1.**

1.1.3. Typography can signal the place of text in the hierarchy that structures content. For instance the *Leader* prints its department headings in gothic type, and uses the figure of a griffin to herald its correspondence section "Open Council" – see **figure 4.1.**

1.1.4 Illustrations were valuable throughout the nineteenth century, although their value in terms of novelty and expense shifted with technological developments. The *Monthly Repository* only featured illustrations as supplements. In the *Northern Star* a comprehensive series of supplementary portraits complemented occasional engravings in the letterpress; however, most illustrations were in the adverts. *Tomahawk* featured a cartoon in every number, whose importance was signalled by the special paper it was printed on (see **figure 2.1**).

1.2.   **Words and Images**

1.2.1 The relationship between images and accompanying letterpress varies. Sometimes images are illustrative, stock images that simply buttress the letterpress. Alternatively, especially earlier in the century when engraved images were expensive and difficult to produce, the letterpress was devoted to describing an image, even though the image is present. Equally, there are articles that describe absent images, for instance in the reviews of exhibitions.

1.2.2 Captions are situated in a dialogic relationship with their accompanying images. The same is often true of discrete articles: see **figures 2.3** and **2.4**.

1.3   **Economy of images**

1.3.1 Different reproductive technologies have different costs and different means of production. Photographic reproduction, for instance, allows publishers and editors to resize visual material with an ease that was not possible with engravings. The division of labour between draftsman and engraver was also reconfigured: photo-engraving, for instance, replaced the need for a draftsman. The final numbers of the *Publishers' Circular* included in **ncse** have colour printing in the advertisements.

1.3.2 The scarcity of images in the early nineteenth century made their inclusion in the periodical valuable, increasing a number's worth as a commodity. Of course, a trade in images existed separately, and readers often cut out the images from numbers. However, by including images in paginated letterpress, the relationship between word and image is foregrounded.

1.3.3 The inclusion of illustrations was also culturally coded. The *English Woman's Journal* was unillustrated, using a sober presentation to underlie its seriousness as high-culture review despite its feminine audience.

1.3.4 The value and meaning of an illustration can change depending where it features. The *Monthly Repository* and *Northern Star's* supplementary portraits are rewards for loyal subscribers that also memorialize important figures for their respective readerships. The advertisements that close (and take up most of) each number of the *Publishers' Circular* are lavish affairs, especially in the large Christmas numbers where publishers would send examples of their illustrations to the *Publishers' Circular* in order to advertise them to booksellers and distributors. Even though these are advertisements, and might be considered inferior to the "authored" letterpress, they are actually what reader would buy the title for: it is the advertisements that are being sold.

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Part Two: Digital rendering

We consider the creation of digital editions as a form of textual editing that reproduces historical objects for readers today. As such, we have a responsibility to both users and the material itself. This section outlines some of the issues regarding the processing and publishing of digital images.

Discussion questions:

- We invite workshop participants to consider some of the challenges and thorny practical and conceptual problems that the digitization of visual material poses and how these might be best addressed.
- How can the 'embedded' data (e.g. the complex relationships between image and context) be preserved and enriched in digital editions?

2.1 Marking up images

2.1.1 What is an image? What should be included – is it everything that is not text, or just clear illustrations? Any digital edition relying on OCR transcripts to provide searchable indices would need to provide some way to index images, and this necessarily includes anything the OCR could not "read" such as fancy typography or unconventional formatting. Is this bottom-up approach to defining images appropriate for digital editions?

2.1.2 Should content not part of the printed text be marked up so that they can be easily identified and searched by users? Marginalia (or indeed library stamps) often provides important signs of the provenance of the object that has been digitized.

2.2. Preserving and re-presenting images

2.2.1 The republication of visual material involved technical challenges. Bitmap images can misread engravings: see **figure 2.2.**

2.2.2 Some data can be lost in reproduction. For instance although digital editions need not operate in black and white, many – like **ncse** – do because they rely on microfilms to generate digital images, and so lose any information about colour. For us this means that aside from the late advertisements in the *Publishers' Circular*, we cannot reproduce the colours of the covers of the *Monthly Repository* (blue in the early period, orange at the end) or the ink washes of the *Tomahawk* cartoons.

2.2.3 The size of an image is an important marker of its cost and importance. If we represent images separately from their context then not only is accompanying material lost, but there are no comparative markers through which to gauge size. Equally, as paper size is not only linked to the economics of production but also signifies certain readerships, how might this be recorded through digital facsimiles?

2.3 Classification systems for image mark-up and searching

2.3.1 For images to be searchable, some sort of textual equivalent must be provided. This could be a description, or bibliographic metadata. Standards exist (Dublin Core, Icon Class), but these must be adapted to interact with the rest of the digital content. How should digital editions delineate and record the data embedded in visual material?

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Summary and Conclusion

The white space in the *Northern Star* (see **figure 3.1**) functions as visual material, even though it ostensibly exists to record its absence. There are clear links between this space, and the engraving that should fill it, but it would not be appropriate to "restore" the image to its place. Instead, publishing this material in digital form invites us to acknowledge some sort of relationship between the multiple editions of the title. Serial literature is not just a linear succession of numbers, but is also constituted by collections of items, departments, numbers and editions that might or might not intentionally be grouped together. As all material in periodicals is in some sense visual, the division imposed by OCR transcripts enforces an arbitrary distinction that drastically reduces the information that is present. Without the facsimile pages, and the accompanying data structures, elements such as typography, layout, illustration, hand-written notes, and other non-verbal elements such as icons are lost.

Appendix: Concept Map

Although it has resulted in a written document (with illustrations), our process involved a combination of visual and verbal interactions. This concept map was produced with Cmap software [http://cmap.ihmc.us/], and reveals that process.

Please see following page.

Part One: Nineteenth Century Significance

Part Two: Digital Rendering of Visual Material

There is an economy of images

The position of an image affects its meaning

For instance supplementary portraits, advertisements etc.

In Tomahawk often the caption seems to have nothing to do with the image

What is the relationship between captions and images?

Do illustrations illustrate letterpress, or the reverse?

Role of images changes over time

Do facsimiles adequately capture textual relationships, or should they be acknowledged in metadata structures etc...?

The visual is a self evident category as words must be read, and placed somewhere on the page

Role of illustrations

Illustrations in advertisements

layout/format/typography

Words as Pictures

Mastheads are words and pictures

Tomahawk cartoons have words in

Wellington's funeral lays out words as pictures

metadata

Standards? Schema?

classification

searching

con(text)

what is an image?

mastheads

marginalia

non-textual marks such as fingerposts

How do we acknowledge the contextual nature of serial literature, and where do you stop?

Should pictures be considered discrete units?

Preservation of textual hierarchies (volume, number, department, item), or simply a collection of discrete units?

Northern Star's white space example Figure 3.1

Production

Their status

Image type

lithography

engraving

photography

size

colour

context

Captured by metadata?