Elemental Forms: The Newspaper as Popular Genre in the Nineteenth Century

> The newspaper is the elemental form of modern literature. Who is not interested in it? Who is not reached by it? The railway, the steamboat, and the telegraph, all add to its importance. Every improvement that is made in the art of communication and travel adds to its dignity and increases its utility. No class is beyond its influence. There is not a man, there is hardly a woman, who is not more or less dependent upon it.[1]

For E.S. Dallas, writing anonymously in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1859, the newspaper is the irreducible constitutive unit of modern textual production. Both the primacy and integrity of the newspaper in this formation are surprising. The newspaper, he implies, is the form from which other modes of literature are made and, rather than serve as channel or medium for other textual genres, constitutes a distinct form of itself. The period after the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge' has been heralded as a golden age of newspaper publishing, and Dallas's remarks can be attributed to a broader (and often hyperbolic) celebration of its role in nineteenth-century culture.[2] Certain textual genres associated with the newspaper – the leading article and the essay review – were well-established by this period and their cultural capital enabled journalism to emerge as a profession. Yet Dallas was not conflating the newspaper with the leading article – the print genre with the textual genre – but instead insisting on the primacy of newspaper form. For Dallas, there was something about the form of the newspaper, not aspects of its representative content, that made it popular.

This paper explores why the newspaper appeared to be an elemental form in mid nineteenth-century Britain. If, as Dallas maintains, the newspaper reached all classes of nineteenth-

century society then there must have been something about the newspaper that made it possible (in Dallas's mind, at least) to transcend social difference. My argument is that the newspaper's apparent universality resulted from the way its form interacted with emerging conceptions of information. As many historians have noted, the nineteenth-century witnessed the consolidation of the modern understanding of information as an immaterial entity, able to be accumulated, stored and distributed without deformation.[3] The period saw the development of new institutions designed to collect and curate information; new systems of bureaucracy for its management and interrogation; and new technologies for its capture, transmission and inscription. The newspaper, because of the way its repetitive structure managed changing content, became a material representation of informational flow, close at hand and familiar to all.

What follows is in two parts. To understand what made the newspaper appear universally accessible in the mid nineteenth century, the first section considers the newspaper as a genre. Newspapers have long been oriented to an informational economy. Since the emergence of the printed newsbooks in the seventeenth century, this print genre had been characterised by miscellaneity and seriality. These features, neither of which were unique to the newspaper, provided the mechanism for the capture and propagation of information: miscellaneity offered text in discontinuous, relatively brief units; while seriality provided a repetitive structure, represented in individual issues but extending beyond them, that demarcated and organized this changing content.[4] In this first section, I describe the generic form of the newspaper generally, while attending to the ways it was specifically adapted in response to the changing conditions of the market in the nineteenth century.

Genre, I will argue, offers a way of understanding how the newspaper functioned as a commodity, but it also provides a framework for understanding its broader cultural role as media. In Carolyn Miller's influential paper, 'Genre as Social Action', she argues that 'a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish'.[5] Miller is a discourse theorist, and so her focus is on practice rather than the form or content of an utterance. Considered in this way, Miller argues, genre 'becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action.'[6] Miller's extension of genre to social action can be used to study how media mediate: in other words, how content can be both expressed by contingent material forms and yet also transcend them.

The second section uses Miller's account of genre as social action to understand how the nineteenth-century newspaper contributed to the emerging information economy. Richard Terdiman has claimed that newspapers became the 'most characteristic informational and commercial institution of the nineteenth century', distributing not only information, but also the representative genres through which information was recognized and understood.[7] As information transcended the contingent forms that gave it substance, the material form of the newspaper only partially accounted for its role in this economy. It is when the newspaper was in action, when readers encountered its recurrent forms over time, that it produced and circulated information. Readers might have read the newspaper one article, page, or issue at a time, but the act of reading invoked the larger abstract generic forms that gave these constitutive components meaning. These abstract forms, which are always prior to any act of reading, mark content as that which changes and, in many cases, indicate its derivation

beyond the page. In this way, content becomes liberated from a complex set of recurrent formal structures, allowing information to flow.

In conclusion, I turn to the digital resources that mediate historical newspapers today. The recent digitization of large parts of the nineteenth-century newspaper archive has radically transformed the way we interact with this material, the new generic constraints of interface, encoding mechanism and system architecture imposing new modes of behaviour. These resources correspond to their own genres and, as such, redefine the newspaper as it is remediated in digital form. We now routinely search the archive on the basis of text strings and a (concealed) index, browsing long lists of hits to find and read individual articles. This reorientation (users, not readers), and the behaviours that it entails, makes it difficult to recover the generic forms of the newspaper. This difference is instructive, as it demonstrates the often occluded role that genre plays in the social meanings of the press. By delineating this difference, we can move beyond a criticism based upon deficit, with digital resources condemned to misrepresent the printed material they mediate, and instead begin to work out how this difference might be exploited, taking advantage of processable data in order to render the abstract generic forms of the newspaper newly visible.

Genre and the Newspaper in the Nineteenth Century

The study of journalistic genre remains relatively neglected.[8] Part of this neglect can be traced to the pejorative associations of the word 'generic' – there is little glamour in studying the typical, and so scholars are instead drawn to the exceptional: the particularly significant or the innovative rather than staid and predictable – but it is also a justified response to bibliographical complexity. Confronted with an archive containing millions of unindexed

pages, working on a particular case study can be the only way to draw general conclusions. However, without an understanding of genre, of the abstract forms that structure individual examples, it is impossible to establish the grounds of exceptionality. Genre exceeds and precedes whatever is under discussion. Just as no single article or issue can stand for the whole publication, so no single title can stand for the type of publication it represents. Genre is always in play, and it can only be recovered through comparison and cross-reference, both within and between publications.

For Dallas Liddle, the importance of genre extends beyond its classificatory purpose. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Liddle argues that genres 'operate strongly on meaning at the level of connotation and subtext, working to make the text they contain reflect the genre's own worldview'.[9] Genres delimit what writers can write, just as they regulate the way readers read. For this to operate successfully, both writers and readers must share the same repertoire of generic forms and be able to recognize and behave accordingly. It is this intersubjective dimension that makes genre socially significant and historically mutable. Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone recognize something similar in their conception of newspaper form. For them, form encompasses both the materiality of the individual issue and the ideal it represents; the issue that results from a particular configuration of industry and marketplace and the conditions that constrain reading. The historically contingent formations, style and types they carefully delineate in the American press from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries describe sets of relationships between sets of actors and their broader social contexts.[10] Both Liddle and Barnhurst and Nerone are wary of the dangers of formalism, where the classificatory impulse that underpins genre dominates the meaning of particular texts. For Liddle, an unsophisticated reading of genre can become a reductive version of MacLuhan's 'famous formulation', with genre replacing the medium as

the message.[11] Similarly, Banrnhurst and Nerone warn against attempts to map an essential politics onto newspaper form, instead situating it in the space between what the newspaper represents and the various material relationships that brings it into being.[12] Carolyn Miller, goes further, defining genre in terms of what it accomplishes, rather than any underlying formal properties. For Miller, genre does not simply classify types of text or structure semantic content, but describes the way recurrent forms are used by historical actors to achieve their respective ends. Miller, like Liddle and Barnhurst and Nerone, recognises the social aspect of genre, but by focusing on action she makes it fully socialised, situated within its historical moment and able to account for the relationships different genres bring into being.

Miller's conception of genre risks dissolving the object in tracing the many different uses to which it is put. The nineteenth-century newspaper, for instance, served a number of purposes. It could be educational; it could be entertaining; it was a source of news and gossip, but also a range of other content; it could be read (in a number of ways), or burnt, used as wrapping, or as waste paper. The newspaper thus enabled a wide range of social actions and, as many of these were recurrent situations (lighting a fire, for instance), created a range of genres. Yet these uses were subordinate to one specific genre. Although nineteenth-century newspapers were often shared, they were always bought by somebody, issue after issue, for the primary purpose of reading. Both publishers and readers perceived a recurrent demand for material: publishers attempted to anticipate this demand by giving readers more of what they had already demonstrated they wanted; readers repeatedly spent their money on the understanding that they would not to be disappointed. The market shaped the form of the nineteenth-century newspaper, but did not define the extent of the social interaction that underpinned each purchase. Those who contributed to the production of the newspaper had a

range of motives: it might be a commodity to be bought; a vehicle for advertising; an opportunity to wield influence; an effort at patronage; or a way to display work. Readers, too, bought the newspaper for a range of purposes: to feel part of a broader public, perhaps; for news; to obtain matter for discussion; to check the latest prices; or to pass the time. The actual printed object may have served different ends, but everyone involved with the production and consumption of the newspaper had an investment in its virtual form and the acts of reading that it enabled.

However, considering genre as social action provides a way of understanding the intersection between the material object and the wider virtual forms that give it meaning. Since the seventeenth century the newspaper has been characterised by its miscellaneity and seriality.[13] As a print form, it is inherently fragmentary, both synchronically within the issue, and diachronically through the incorporation of items linked to specific times and spaces. The repetition of formal features, both across articles within an issue and then in each issue as it appears, produces an overarching set of virtual forms that regulate the miscellany, organizing content while allowing readers to anticipate what is to come. These forms act as a centripetal force, countering the centrifugal force of miscellaneity and allowing the newspaper to maintain an existence independent of its constitutive issues. This means that no issue of a newspaper exists on its own, but instead is situated within a hierarchy of virtual forms. The issue announces itself as a newspaper (as opposed to some other printed object); as a particular type of newspaper (a provincial weekly, for instance); and as a particular newspaper (as opposed to all other publications). The issue is also situated between all the issues that have preceded it and those yet to come. On the basis of a single issue readers, because they partake in the wider genre, can imagine the form of its future issues and, even if

they have not seen the publication before, can also reconstruct its predecessors. What readers understand as 'the newspaper' extends beyond the printed object in their hands.

In the nineteenth century, the newspaper was easily recognizable, with a large masthead (usually larger than those on periodicals), no wrapper, closely printed columns encouraging skimming and then top-down patterns of reading, and an explicitly marked diversity of content. All newspapers maintained a degree of typographical and tonal consistency, ensuring that even where different types of content were printed, it all looked more or less the same. There were also structural features common to most newspapers: advertisements tended to be printed on the front and back pages; leading articles were located in what were known as 'middles'; and commercial information was situated towards the rear. However, as the newspaper shared an ancestor with the periodical miscellanies common in the period, there was considerable formal overlap, especially between weekly newspapers and periodicals.[14] The newspaper stamp helped differentiate between the two genres by clearly indicating the (paid-for) presence of news, but the long existence of the vibrant unstamped press suggests that it remained only a marker and that more formal continuities associated publications with one another. After the reduction in 1836, the stamp became increasingly important as a generic marker as more publications paid the duty in order to take advantage of the postal benefits. There remained, however, significant areas of overlap between the newspaper and the periodical. Some weekly newspapers adopted features associated with the periodical such as continuous pagination (to encourage readers to keep issues and bind them in volumes), while others abandoned news entirely in order to reposition themselves in the market.[15] Different features were associated with newspapers and periodicals – or rather, between different types of newspapers and periodicals – and these provided resources that publishers could draw upon to find and exploit niches in the crowded market for print.

Genre also operated to classify types of newspaper, allowing readers to navigate the various publications on offer. Paper size, typeface, frequency, layout, place of publication, and price all marked a publication as a particular type of newspaper. The mix of textual genres a publication contained could also situate it in a specific newspaper genre. As miscellanies, all newspapers brought together a range of textual genres, and how this content was configured on the page and through the issue structured what was available to the reader and how it might be read. Weeklies, for instance, were able to draw on a wider range of sources (especially other publications) than dailies, and often adopted review-type features associated with periodicals. They were also more expensive than the dailies (especially in London), and tended to be longer, often running to an extra sheet. Frequency played a crucial role, but so did where and when a title was published. The provincial weeklies and popular Sunday papers operated in very different markets, but both were weeklies, usually with five or six columns (*Reynolds's Newspaper's* four columns was unusual for either genre), unillustrated (except in advertisements), with their leading articles in the centre pages. Raymond Williams famously argued that the history of the popular press 'is the history of the expanding Sunday press'.[16] Whereas the provincial weeklies were aimed at middle-class readers, privileging local news, politics and commercial information and carrying advertisements for local companies and events, the Sundays were explicitly popular, aimed fairly indiscriminately at a large tranche of the upper working- and lower middle-classes. The Sundays were cheaper than the provincial weeklies, longer, tended to be radical in their politics (the *News of the World* excepted), and were closely associated with sensational reports derived from the police and law reports.[17] Both genres were marked as weekly, but their specific mixture of textual content, respective typographical styles, and orientation towards news-generating institutions (broadly conceived) clearly distinguished between the two.

As serials, newspapers also performed genre in one further way. Just as any text invokes the broader genre to which it belongs, so individual issues of a nineteenth-century serials signalled the ideal form of the publication that they represented. However, whereas all serials exploited the novelty of the new to encourage readers to keep on buying, the timeliness of news deeply encoded ephemerality into the newspaper, so that new issues rendered old issues obsolete.[18] Connected to a present that will pass, the individual issue only represented the broader publication for a moment. The repetition of formal features – both within an issue and between successive issues – structured changing content while allowing the publication to extend beyond its particular instantiation in the issue. Newspapers, like other serials, exerted their identity in the interstices between issues

Each individual newspaper, then, can also be understood as a genre: one negotiated with a particular set of readers and that constituted the publication in the intervals between issues. As this genre is negotiated, it means that newspapers can change over time. E.S. Dallas claimed that there 'is no such thing in nature as mere multiplication; multiplication always entails a difference; increase of quantity necessitates change of kind.'[19] Writing in a discourse too frequently attributed to Darwin, Dallas recognized both the mutability of species and the determining role of the environment. Publishers used existing genres to target particular groups of readers, but had to offer variation to distinguish their titles from publications already in a particular market. Genres were capacious and could accommodate variation, but readers, too, exerted their agency. Issue after issue, readers demonstrated a demand for something they defined as both a newspaper and type of newspaper, and publishers, if they wanted their material to be bought and read, had to recognize this demand. These virtual forms were negotiated and consensual; they were also malleable, reflecting

changes in the market. In this way, individual publications evolved over time; new genres developed out of old; and others began to fade away.

Just as the repetition of formal features allowed the single issue to represent the publication to which it belonged, these features also located that issue within a broader repertoire of ideal forms, allowing readers to recognize a publication as a newspaper and identify its type. Readers knew enough about newspaper genre to be able to judge which of the papers that jostled for attention was likely to be for them, while publishers could be fairly confident of the preexisting market for specific types of publication. For readers of the nineteenth-century press today, these generic features only become recognizable with repetition, whether manifested in subsequent issues of a specific paper or in different instantiations of the same features in its rivals. It is only when genre is understood in these synchronic and diachronic terms that its role in structuring seriality can be recognized. Although virtual, genre forms had real agency and social meaning, structuring the specific material forms of individual issues and lending presence to the publications that they represented. They also constituted an interpretive structure that preceded individual issues and articles, determining in advance how they might be understood. The printed newspaper, issue after issue, invoked a perfect medium – perfect because virtual – that promised to organize and make legible the complexities of everyday life.

The propagation of these generic forms enabled the newspaper to play its part in the changing nineteenth-century informational economy. As they existed prior to the appearance of any particular issue (yet were nonetheless invoked by it), they allowed certain aspects of the printed object to become associated with the broader generic framework, leaving other parts marked as content and so, potentially distinct. Mediation is a social action, involving a

number of actors (producers as well as consumers) that generates both mediating form and mediated content. A commercial product of the industrialised press, the nineteenth-century newspaper provided the perfect complement to the emerging and increasingly dominant understanding of information in the period. Just as information was being defined as an immaterial commodity, able to be communicated without deformation, the press appeared to offer a way of structuring information, granting it both material form and social presence.

Genre, the Newspaper and the Nineteenth-Century Information Economy

The nineteenth century saw the increasing dominance of what Geoffrey Nunberg has labelled 'naturalistic information'.[20] For Nunberg, this is information as an 'intentional substance that is present in the world, a sense that is no longer closely connected to the use of the verb *inform*, anchored in particular speech acts'.[21] This particular way of conceiving information is at least as old as the need to distribute prices over distance and so long predates the Victorian period.[22] However, a number of crucial developments in the eighteenth century provided the discursive foundations for this form of information to assume a new importance. These included the systematic nomenclatures of Linnaeus and Lavoisier; the standardization of various weights and measures; the development of statistics; new methods for the display and manipulation of data such as graphs and maps; technologies for communication such as the postal service and optical telegraphs; and the publication of organized storage media such dictionaries and encyclopedia.[23] The administrative demands of industrial capital and the nation state made information central to the resulting bureaucracies and increasingly important in the world beyond them. The early nineteenth century saw the implementation of the national census (1801), the requirement for a national system of civil registration (1836) and a national system of income tax (1842).[24] Although these developments can be

understood as an extension of state power, Edward Higgs has argued they were result of a managerialist logic, set up to administer a set of individual and social rights such as the transmission of property, the payment of direct taxation, and participation in civic or political society.[25] Information was connected to citizenship, but the model of citizenship advanced by the state was centered on the concerns of the middle classes. By the Victorian period, the public sphere had become informational.

The nineteenth-century newspaper was both a key infrastructure for this economy and a crucial means through which citizens could participate within it. Alexander Welsh has claimed that the newspaper 'was the institution that above all made the people of the nineteenth century aware of information and communication.'[26] For Terdiman, the newspaper united the logic of both information and capital through its form:

> In its routinized, quotidian recurrence, in its quintessential prosaicism, in its unrepentant commercialism, the newspaper almost seems to have been devised to represent the pattern of variation without change, the repetitiveness, autonomization, and commodification which, since the twin revolutions of the nineteenth century, have marked fundamental patterns of our social existence. As such, the newspaper becomes a characteristic metonym for modern life itself.[27]

The aspects of the newspaper that Terdiman claims made it modern long predated the nineteenth century. For C. John Sommerville, for instance, the seriality of the newspaper commodified news from the outset, breaking down accounts of events into discrete, ephemeral units that are equal to one another.[28] The newspaper had always been oriented towards the market and market prices and shipping information were staples of the press from the seventeenth century onwards.[29] Likewise advertising, sometimes from third parties but often for goods that could be bought directly from the newspaper's printer, meant that the

white spaces of the newspaper were themselves sold to make space for other commodities.[30] The genre of the newspaper had long commodified information, but it required broader cultural changes to create the conditions within which it appeared emblematic of what scholars call modernity today.

Although information was ideologically freighted in the nineteenth century, associated with utilitarianism and disparaged in relation to knowledge, its emerging status as an incorporeal, impersonal and autonomous entity was used to elide the newspaper's link with commodity culture. For instance, in the famous leader of 6 February 1852, *The Times* published what has become a very well-known justification for the fourth estate:

> The first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of the events of the time, and instantly, by disclosing them, to make them the common property of the nation. The statesman collects his information secretly and by secret means; he keeps back even the current intelligence of the day with ludicrous precautions. The Press lives by disclosures. For us, with whom publicity and truth are the air and light of existence, there can be no greater disgrace than to recoil from the frank and accurate disclosure of facts as they are. We are bound to tell the truth as we find it, without fear of consequences – to lend no convenient shelter to acts of injustice or oppression, but to consign them at once to the judgment of the world.[31]

For Terdiman, the information published in the newspaper represents content without context, whose only logic is that of the commodity. For *The Times*, however, the disclosure of information allowed the press to distinguish itself from the statesman while avoiding any mention of the market. Whereas the statesman acquired information secretly and did not disclose, the rationale of the newspaper was to discover information and transmit it as soon as possible. Its motives were democratic: information was a common property and so its

hoarding by one party should be challenged; luckily such disclosures provided the 'air and light' necessary for the newspaper and its staff to survive. Terdiman's critique of the newspaper rests on its seemingly indiscriminate juxtaposition of news, commentary and advertisement. Recognizing that the word 'article' could describe both an item in a newspaper and an item for sale, Terdiman argues that newspapers trained readers in their apprehension, neutralizing 'any active perception of contradiction' between them.[32] Terdiman sees the juxtaposition of an informational and commodifying logic on the page of the newspaper as both symptom and cause of a broader discursive shift that augmented 'the changeability of the discursive sign […] at the price of a coordinate decline in its commitment to any network of social or political choice.'[33] The sign began to emulate that other 'universal equivalent', money and, like money, 'began to seem colourless.'[34] The *Times's* disavowal of a commercial purpose nonetheless acknowledged its imbrication in the market: by insisting that disclosure is 'air and light', it associated the exchange of information – that elusive, ethereal substance – with the money it received in return.[35]

Terdiman's model of the newspaper overlooks the effect of the various generic structures through which changing content was related, issue after issue. Readers were not being trained to recognize articles as commodities, but rather as changing content delivered through the formal channels of the newspaper. *The Times* set out a narrative of discovery that imagined information as existing concealed somewhere in the world, awaiting only the investigative gaze of the journalist. It then complemented this investigative agency with narrative passivity: the newspaper had a 'duty' to disclose what it knew, but what it disclosed would be communicated without deformation. For newspapers like *The Times*, it was this discourse of disinterest, which depended upon the perceived passivity of the newspaper as media, that determined the value of whatever was disclosed; if the newspaper was perceived

to have interfered with its information, it risked losing its discursive authority. For Terdiman, this same passivity permitted the newspaper to perform efficiently as a commodity, presenting its miscellaneous content as a collection of unrelated reports, emptying them of any logic of connection. Yet nothing published in the newspaper appeared without such a logic. Each article was associated with the others on the page; each department invoked those that preceded it in previous issues and promised its return in those to follow; and each issue offered the same organizational structure and same formal address to its readers. The newspaper was a commodity, but what it offered readers was access to information that it marked as originating elsewhere.

The privileging of news (and other assorted varieties of fact) over politics and opinion is usually associated with the shift from the political to the commercial basis of the press in the mid to late nineteenth century.[36] Writing about journalism in an unsigned article in the *Cornhill*, Fitzjames Stephen, while acknowledging the influence of the 'original matter', especially the leading articles, maintained that news was more important 'from a commercial point of view' and has more to do with a paper's 'commercial success'.[37] The orientation of the newspaper towards the market for news redefined the print genre as a medium for information. Whereas the most news-like items used to be located towards the rear of the newspaper, where tabulated lists of market prices and lists of births, deaths, and marriages were situated alongside classified advertisements and notices of entertainments, news was increasingly inserted towards the front and clearly marked. Columns of 'intelligence' became more explicitly informational as the newspaper became integrated into broader systems of information technology. Telegraphic news, for instance, was often labelled as such, and was frequently printed in stacked columns which mimicked its abbreviated forms. John Guillory has argued that it is the time-sensitive nature of information that distinguishes

it from fact.[38] Information, he writes, 'demands to be transmitted because it has a shelf life, a momentary value that drives the development of our information technologies in their quest to speed up, economize, and maximize the effectiveness of transmission.'[39] The demand for news not only drove innovations in technology, but also meant that these technologies became increasingly visible as a way of warranting the value of what was printed. News was a commodity and telegraphic news the most expensive. By apparently offering it to readers as if unmediated, newspapers suggested that it was more valuable because raw, while also tacitly advertising that they had invested substantially to supply the reader.

News was explicitly informational: ostensibly unwritten, it presented timely information, derived from elsewhere, in a form that could be reproduced without deformation. It was thus both part of the newspaper, and separate from it. The rise of the news agencies formally acknowledged the integrity of the news, underscoring its existence as packaged commodity and so distinct from whatever newspaper eventually gave it form in print. However. with white space to fill, copy had always been valuable and so cut and paste was a well-established journalistic practice. Weeklies reproduced reports from the dailies; evening papers from those published earlier in the day; and informal agreements existed between different newspapers for the exchange of news.[40] It was not just news that marked the newspaper as a medium for information. In the provincial press, content was syndicated between publications. Preprinted sheets, for instance, provided the basis of an issue which could then be tailored for specific readers through the insertion of local news.[41] The promiscuity of advertisements in the period, crowding any available surfaces, transformed a wide range of objects into media for print. Newspapers thus became one more medium for texts that could also be seen on walls, packages, and any other available space. Even what Stephen called 'original matter' – everything that he did not consider news or advertisement –

began to appear informational.[42] As the same news became increasingly available to all who could pay for it, a premium was established in interpretation, comment and context. Leading articles retained their prestige and were increasingly demarcated from more explicitly informational parts of the newspaper. Yet these interpretive spaces were themselves subject to generic form. As Liddle notes, genres 'dramatically speed both the writer's work of composition and the reader's work of comprehension', something particularly important for prestigious items like leading articles, produced at length to tight deadlines.[43] Indeed, Stephen, in his *Cornhill* article, maintained that 'composing leading articles is merely a form of technical skill' in which the most important ability is to throw opinion 'into a precise, connected, and attractive form'.[44] The textual genres operated against the 'original' in 'original matter', making it seem like an instance of a type, reinscribing journalism as the work of mediation.

The generic forms of the newspaper enabled its structure to transcend any particular article, issue or publication. These forms, developed in a competitive marketplace in negotiation with readers, allowed the newspaper to present itself as a medium at once independent of yet constituted by whatever it printed. In this way, the newspaper anticipated another key textual technology for modernity, the memo. For Guillory, the memo is emblematic of what he calls 'the document'. This is 'the carrier of information and so the object of knowledge rather than knowledge itself' and constitutes a key textual form for modernity because 'it exists *primarily* to transmit information.'[45] According to Guillory, the memo succeeded the handwritten business letter in the nineteenth century; however, this genealogy overlooks the memo's other ancestor, the printed form. The newspaper thrived alongside both information technologies, but, because of its orientation towards information, is most closely related to the latter. The 1801 census had distributed the printed form nationwide and its continued use

throughout the period propagated the naturalistic concept of information.[46] The blank spaces of the empty form were a potential space in which anything might be written; however, for the form to function within its intended informational structure, this potential had to be circumscribed. The generic forms of the newspaper provided a structure that circumscribed what sorts of things could appear in its demarcated sections. The newspaper, then, functioned like a pre-printed form, repeated issue after issue, that was filled in by the passing events that it reported.

Conclusion

The newspaper had long been informational, but it was the increasing dominance of naturalistic information in the nineteenth century that made it possible to imagine the newspaper as an infinitely generalizable form (in both senses of the world), able to capture any set of events and mediate them transparently. In practice, of course, the agency of the press attracted considerable comment in the period; yet, the existence (and persistence) of this debate testified to the potential of the newspaper press to be a popular medium, suitable for anyone, and the possibility of a type of informational content that was independent of its mediating object. The generic structures that shaped both the production of newspapers and how they were read were vital to this perception. These structures provided the repetitive framework that enabled the newspaper to transcend any particular instantiation, offering itself instead as virtual medium distinct from its specific content. At a time when information was increasingly understood and treated as an abstract, immaterial entity, able to retain its integrity despite being encoded and transmitted across various media, the newspaper served as a key part of the informational economy, packaging information into an easily-consumable form that could persist over time.

As genres necessarily permit variation, they can only be studied by tracing repetition; equally, because they are articulated against each other, their limits can only be perceived through comparison. The critical bias towards content over form, the word over the image, and what a paper says as opposed to how it says it, means that the recurrent aspects of the newspaper tend to be subordinated to those that differ. The genre of the digital newspaper archive is not only attuned to these preferences, but endorses and entrenches them due to its reliance on the OCR-generated index. The application of OCR technology to newsprint represents a major technical triumph, allowing digital newspaper archives to overcome many of the main methodological difficulties of working with historical newspapers.[47] Early digitization projects such as the *Making of America* (1995) and the *Internet Library of Early Journals* (1999) demonstrated the applicability of these methods to the (relatively) less complex pages of nineteenth-century periodicals, and it was not long before ProQuest's *Historical Newspapers* (2001-) and Gale's *Times Digital Archive* (2002) had successfully applied them to newsprint. Ever since these early projects, the searchable, OCR-generated transcript has been at the heart of the digital newspaper archive. Today, all of the major archives offer the basic search field as the main point of access to their contents. Due to the centrality of the searchable index, the various digital archives that provide access to historical newspapers constitute a genre that reconceives the newspaper as a repository of articles about something, where 'something' is whatever is entered into a search field.

In some ways, this genre of resource makes it easy to recover aspects of newspaper genre. The use of the textual index to organize page images that are delivered to the user means that it has never been easier to see the appearance of nineteenth-century print, opening access to a range of significant non-verbal features. Equally, it is easy to trace the recurrence of text

strings, exposing the often occluded interconnectedness of the press while also making visible the operation of repetition within individual publications. Although browsing remains difficult in many resources, it is possible. For instance, the *British Newspaper Archive* (2011-) makes extensive use of page thumbnails, allowing easy comparisons to be made across a run or between titles. However, such analyses are restricted by the genre of the digital newspaper archive. Although they are underpinned by a large corpus of structured data, access to this tends to be restricted to the interface. Publishers, quite rightly, want to help users find articles relevant to their search queries; however, the way this is implemented in the interface restricts users to reading articles, one at a time. Given that genre works through repetition, it makes sense to delegate the identification of repetition to the machine rather than the user and scholars are beginning to respond to the opportunity to ask different questions of this data. Dallas Liddle and Robert Nicholson have both worked with (or rather against) interfaces to produce data for quantitative analysis.[48] Cameron Blevins and Bridget Baird's ImageGrid allows newspaper pages (or any other image) to be segmented and classified, in effect reproducing one of the stages that underpins the production of digital newspaper archives but opening it up for users.[49] Blevins has demonstrated that by marking the geographical concerns of various portions of the page, it is possible to explore whether a publication thought its readers more interested in local or national news, where its advertisers were from, and, crucially, where this content appeared within an issue and how it changed over the run (unpaginated). However, the largest scope for work in this area comes from those resources that allow computers to query their data. Tim Sherratt has taken advantage of the Application Programming Interface (API) for *Trove* to produce The Front Page, a tool that breaks down the composition of the front pages for various Australia newspapers.[50] *Trove* already categorizes content by textual genre: Sherratt harvested the data and then calculated the amount of words dedicated to each genre. From the site, *The Front Page*,

users can see how different textual genre structured this important textual space over time, while comparing these trends between different publications demonstrates how this space was also structured by newspaper genre.[51]

Just as seriality produces one particular definition of content, searchability produces another. It is only once the genre of digital resources is recognized that we can begin to understand how they shape what it is possible to know about the press. Given the high up-front costs of producing such resources, digital publishers must be certain of their market and so innovation is carefully limited in case it confronts users with too much difference. In many ways, the logic of these digital genres is similar to those that structured the nineteenth-century newspaper. The genre of the digital newspaper archive attempts to structure an encounter in which users stop perceiving the resource and start perceiving its content. In other words, like the newspaper, the resource disappears leaving only apparently unmediated information. Just as with the nineteenth-century newspaper, this moment of mediation, when content apparently overcomes form, depends upon particular social practices. What tools like The Front Page and ImageGrid allow historians to do is embed digitised newspapers within different forms of social practice to learn new things about the printed material that they model. Digital newspaper archives leverage their difference from printed newspapers in order to enable search and distribution, but conceal these processes from users, offering instead reproductions of articles that can be read in much the same way as if they were on paper. However genre, which is always abstract, does not depend on any particular article or issue but relationships between them. It can be studied using printed newspapers, but only through sampling small subsets of the archive. By exploiting the data, itself an abstraction, it is possible to produce generalisations based on larger parts of the archive, while putting such generalisations to the test.

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[1] Anonymous [E.S. Dallas], 'Popular Literature', 181.
[2] See Lee, *Origins of the Popular Press*, 8.
[3] Weller, 'Introduction', 5; Weller, *Victorians*, 11-15; Postman, 87-8; Nunberg, 111.
[4] For an account of the way form and content shaped early modern newspapers, see Sommerville, *News Revolution in Britain*.
[5] Miller, 'Genre as Social Action', 151.
[6] Ibid., 153.
[7] Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter Discourse*, 119.
[8] See Liddle, *Dynamics of Genre*, 2.
[9] Ibid., 5.
[10] Barnhurst and Nerone, *Form of News*, 5-13.
[11] Lidde, *Dynamics of Genre*, 4.
[12] Barnhurst and Nerone, *Form of News*, 8-9.
[13] For a fuller account of the role of miscellaneity and seriality in newspapers and periodicals see Mussell, *Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age*, 49-56.
[14] See Conboy, *Journalism*, pp. 26-43.
[15] For a good account of this, see Brake, '*The Leader* (1850-1859)'.

[16] Williams, *Long Revolution*, 216.
[17] In 1860, for instance, both *Reynold's Newspaper* and the *News of the World* were tuppence while *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* was a penny (all unstamped); however, all would be a penny following the repeal of the paper duty in 1861. *Reynold's* was fourteen pages of four columns; *News of the World* eight pages of six columns; and *Lloyd's* twelve pages of five columns. Despite their ambitions, these papers tended to circulate most widely around London, although there was some penetration into the provinces. See Williams, *Long Revolution*, 215-8; Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 26-53, 96; Taunton, 'Sunday Papers', 609.
[18] There is a value in old newspapers, of course, and there were important nineteenth-century attempts to make them accessible. See, for instance, Anonymous [W.T. Stead], 'A Great Index', 11 or, more recently, James, 'Indexing The Times', 209–11. For seriality and ephemerality see Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical', 19-32; Hughes and Lund, *Victorian Serial*; Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, especially pp. 83-103; Turner, 'Periodical Time', 183–196; Mussell, 'Cohering Knowledge', 93–103; Mussell, *Nineteenth-Century Press*, especially pp. 52-5.
[19] Anonymous [E.S. Dallas], 'Popular Literature', 181.
[20] Nunberg, 'Farewell to the Information Age', 108-9.
[21] Ibid, 110.
[22] For a detailed case study of scholarly information in the early modern period see Blair, *Too Much to Know*. For a long history of information more broadly see Gleick, *The Information*.
[23] See Hedrick, *When Information Came of Age*.
[24] See Higgs, *Information State in England*, 64-132.
[25] Ibid., 81.
[26] Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*, 52.
[27] Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter Discourse*, 120.
[28] Sommerville, *News Revolution in Britain*, 13-4; 20-1.
[29] Black, *English Press*, 65-70.
[30] Not all advertisements were directly paid for, but there was always an expectation of profit. Given the introduction of advertising duties in 1712 and the increases in 1757 and 1789, they were already, in effect, priced. See Black, *English Press*, 60-4.
[31] Anonymous, 'London, Friday, February 6, 1852', 4.
[32] Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter Discourse*, 122, 125.
[33] Ibid., 126.
[34] Ibid., 126.
[35] The association journalism with air and light was a commonplace. See Anonymous, 'Cheap Literature', 316.
[36] Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, 75-129; Rubery, *Novelty of Newspapers*, 5-9. Similar shifts have been traced in the American press. See Barnhurst and Nerone, *Form of News*, 17, 68-105.
[37] Anonymous [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'Journalism', 53, 59.
[38] Guillory, 'Memo and Modernity', 109.
[39] Ibid, 109.
[40] Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 115-6.
[41] Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 116-8; Hobbs, 'Provincial Press', 21-47.
[42] Anonymous [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'Journalism', 52.
[43] Liddle, 6, *Dynamics of Genre*, 29-31.
[44] Anonymous [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'Journalism', 56.
[45] Guillory, 'Memo and Modernity', 113, 111.

[46] Stiff, Dobraszczyk and Ebester, 'Designing and Gathering Information', 64-5.
[47] Deegan and Sutherland, *Transferred Illusions*, 56-7; Mussell, *Nineteenth-Century Press*, 56-67. For some of the problems of applying OCR, see Tanner, Munoz, and Ros, 'Measuring Mass Text Digitization'.
[48] Liddle, 'Reflections on 20,000 Newspapers'; Nicholson, 'Counting Culture'.
[49] Blevins, 'Coding a Middle Ground'.
[50] Sherratt, '4 Million Articles Later…'.
[51] Sherrat, *Front Page*.