

# Repetition: Or, “In Our Last”

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This essay originated as a conference paper for a panel entitled “What is the use of theory?”<sup>1</sup> The deliberately provocative question implied that theory might be useless, yet the existence of the panel suggested otherwise. For me, this irresistible supplementarity—that theory is both in addition to periodical studies yet periodical studies is impoverished without it—is one of the things that makes nineteenth-century periodicals so intriguing. Their appeal as objects rests on their prosaic authenticity and the putative connections to the past they enable. These were the objects that people in the period read, for many different reasons, over and over again. In his landmark essay “Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals” (1971), Michael Wolff famously characterized newspapers and periodicals as the “repositories of the general life of Victorian England,” making them the “basic unit for the study of Victorian cultural history.”<sup>2</sup> His essay begins with a long quotation from Cornelius Walford, who proposed a scheme for a dictionary of Victorian periodicals in 1883. For Walford, periodical literature constituted a “vast cemetery of unrecorded history.”<sup>3</sup> That the bibliographic impulse—whether in 1883, 1971, or today—concerns itself with resurrection, with revivifying the dead, should give us pause. Reading periodicals today is not the same as reading periodicals in the nineteenth century. The periodicals date from the past, but scholars can only work on them now, in the present, and attempt to resituate them within a historical context whose full richness is irrecoverable. When we ask what is the “use” of theory, it is implied we have no use for it. Given that these were objects designed to be read, theory seems suspicious, taking scholars away from what the periodicals actually were and were for. Yet scholars never really engage with historical objects in any unmediated way, and without theory these mediations become naturalized, producing a strange situation where the historical objects speak for themselves. What scholars do is already theoretical, but when encompassed within the aura of the archival object, we overlook the way our scholarly

resurrections of periodicals limit what they might have been. If we want to read periodicals because they were what the Victorians read, the work that must be done to bring them to life suggests they are not quite what they were.

The richness of the archive makes theory appear supplementary. It is so large, complex, and suggestive that worrying about theory seems somehow redundant. The great strength of periodical studies is the way that it is grounded in the archive, and the field has been shaped by a strong tradition of methodological reflexivity. The periodical archive is characterized by abundance (there is lots of it), fragmentation (runs are rarely complete), and complexity (material exists in different states). Why bother being theoretical, when there is so much to read? While it is essential to return to the material as it survives, each attempt to exert bibliographical control exposes how much more there is to know and how much can never be known. Every volume on the shelf signals the many different formats in which it also exists and has existed. Page after page offers references and allusions to people, texts, commodities, and publications of which there is little trace. We want an object of study, not a kaleidoscopic range of forms. We want a single ordinary source, not plural accounts of writers, editors, illustrators, engravers, publishers, printers, and readers. We want a neat set of objects, accessible and delimited, not the fragmented remains of a publishing process. The periodicals that survive in the archive are not the same as the periodicals that were read in the period. There is no choice but to be theoretical.

Recently, digitization has promised to liberate print serials from their troublesome bibliographical condition by transforming them into something new, but in doing so it has provided another way to make theory supplementary. Recent attempts to resituate theoretical approaches in the digital humanities have reminded scholars that data is never “raw,” that digital objects have a materiality, and that digital resources are subject to the same conditions as other cultural products.<sup>4</sup> One of the curious effects of the digital moment is the way it has enhanced the aura of the archive. Embodied print seems to offer a point of resistance to those who would make it disembodied, digitized, broken into bits. Yet there is no such thing as pure content, an unmediated soul, and a body of some sort is always necessary for reading to take place. What is at stake in digitizing periodicals is not the issue of loss—loss of materiality, loss of authenticity, loss of whatever aspects of the printed object one particularly cherishes, be it smell, texture, whatever—but rather that digital media make scholars rethink what exactly constitutes print. In the digital age, print becomes reborn, no matter when it was published. Print returns, Lazarus-like, with forbidden knowledge of the grave.

In order to demonstrate the necessity of theory when thinking about periodicals, I focus on the relationship between seriality and materiality, particularly the way repetitive serial forms create particular ontological conditions, both in the present as periodicals are being published and in the past once publication has ceased. The logic of print is repetition, and of all print genres it is the serial that embodies this most fully. Whereas the printed book puts its end into play (you always know how much there is to go), serial publishing, particularly for open-ended genres such as periodicals and newspapers, is predicated on not ending. “In our last” was a phrase characteristically used by periodical editors and authors to gesture back to something previous, whether an issue or a specific article. As such, it is uniquely connected to seriality, presupposing as it does a place from which to look backwards at a predecessor while implying that there is something more to come. As a retrospective gesture that keeps the past alive in the present, the phrase “in our last” has about it something of the gothic. Its provisionality—evoking a moment of becoming that will pass—raises questions of origins and endings, but it also gestures to what is disallowed in serial publication: the last, the final issue, when publication comes to an end. From our vantage point in the present, we have the last and so are able to do what its nineteenth-century readers could not: step outside the series and see the periodical or newspaper as a whole.

Digital resources make finding instances of the phrase “in our last” easy. Most of these resources reconceive the archive as a database of articles where all articles are considered equivalent to one another. Search queries return articles, one at a time, from anywhere in the collection, making it difficult to judge before and after or to work out where a particular article comes in the issue, volume, or run. Although we might usefully think a little harder about how archive material is represented, this is not necessarily a criticism. What most people want is access to articles about something, and turning serials into a database is a very effective way of achieving this. Nonetheless, this is a radical translation: if the phrase “in our last” is connected to that defining aspect of a serial, its seriality, then its difficulty in these digital resources marks the extent to which their contents have been reimagined.

What follows is in three parts. The first responds to the way “in our last” signals continuity. No issue of a serial ever exists on its own but calls up the memory of its predecessors while projecting its successors into the future. The way these gestures, both retrospective and prospective, make use of ghosts from the past is the focus of my second section, “Succession.” As one issue displaces another, a publication’s editor must avoid too much difference while supplying just the right amount of the same. My final section, “The Last” tackles a repressed aspect of periodical form: the

last issue, where the serial ends. As open-ended serials, periodicals rarely conceptualize their own end until it is upon them, usually forced by circumstance. In this final section, I will contrast the print archive, which is dead, having reached its end, with the digital resources that return it to us. In conclusion, I will argue that what these new returns reveal is how much more there is to know about print and why what we think of as print culture is something other than the objects on the library shelves.

### “In Our Last”: Continuity

The phrase “in our last” was a way of making present the past while nonetheless keeping it sufficiently passed for the article or publication to progress. The following two examples, for instance, each use “in our last” to refer to a previous article in a series, making it present before moving on. “The Leprosy of Journalism—II. The Non-Society Papers” was the second part of a series published in the *Examiner* (1878–79) bemoaning the state of the nation’s newspapers. In the first instalment, the author had condemned society papers for their hypocrisy in printing scandalous gossip under the cover of moral censure.<sup>5</sup> The second article refers back to the “faults we reprobated in our last article” in order to make them present and offer a comparison with the content of the cheap sporting or comic papers under discussion.<sup>6</sup> A similar rhetorical gesture occurs in the second of two articles on Daniel Defoe published in *All the Year Round* in 1869. The first recounts Defoe’s life up to his release from Newgate in 1703, leaving him “in the new sunshine of favour and appreciation that was bursting upon him when his prospects seemed gloomiest.”<sup>7</sup> The second instalment, published a week later, begins, “We left Defoe in our last, emerging from the chrysalis of his prison into the full-fledged butterfly state of liberty,” before continuing the tale of his life.<sup>8</sup> Again, the cursory backward glance reminds the reader sufficiently of the previous instalment but does not recapitulate it in any detail. In each case, the backward glance makes the previous article present but only to establish a point of continuity as an origin from which the present article can commence.

In its specificity—“in our last” only refers to the previous issue—this retrospective gesture differs from the regular recursive structure of periodical form. No individual issue of a periodical exists in isolation but instead locates itself in a series that both precedes the issue that is being read and extends beyond it. Even the very first issue of a periodical invokes a broader serial structure. The first article in Dickens’s *Household Words*, for instance, was his well-known “A Preliminary Word.” What is interesting is that this piece is not preliminary but the first article in the issue. Rather than preceding the “real” content, “A Preliminary Word” is part of

the sequence of articles, issues, and volumes that constitute the serial. The issue clearly states that it is the first in at least two sequences—the volume and issue number are recorded on the page—yet it is possible to imagine what its predecessors would have looked like if they had existed. Equally, when Dickens unequivocally brought *Household Words* to an end in issue 479, stating that just as the first page was “devoted to a Preliminary Word from the by whom they were projected” so the “last page of the last of these nineteen volumes is closed by the same hand,” we can, nonetheless, imagine issue 480 in volume twenty.<sup>9</sup>

No single issue exists in isolation but instead is haunted by the larger serial of which it is a part. This larger serial structure is invoked through the repetition of certain formal features, issue after issue. It insists on formal continuity, repeated from the past and projected onwards into the future, providing a mediating framework whose purpose is to reconcile difference by presenting new content in a form already known to readers. This new content, whether the next instalment of story, a one-off essay on a new subject, or a piece of news, is always tempered, regulated within a formal framework that readers have seen before. As I have argued previously, I think this can be best understood as a form of genre which has a material effect.<sup>10</sup>

Periodicals make use of genre in a number of ways. *Household Words*, for instance, looks like a periodical rather than a newspaper, and its form indicates that it is a cheap but respectable weekly rather than something more down-market.<sup>11</sup> Periodicals are inherently miscellaneous, publishing different kinds of texts, and this mix of genres often contributes to the way particular publications position themselves within the market. Some—the upmarket monthlies or W. T. Stead’s *Review of Reviews*—tended towards unity, positing a clear editorial identity across different content, whereas others—miscellanies of various kinds, trade publications, or certain intellectual monthlies—embraced heterogeneity in various ways. As Dallas Liddle argues in his contribution to this issue, there is still much to learn about these different classes of content. Readers expected particular types of writing, and writers were employed to provide them.<sup>12</sup> Yet this is not just a question of writers and readers: genre describes the way that form structures social relationships and so can be applied to all the practices that craft periodicals as objects, from the design of type to the layout of particular issues.

Genre can also help us understand the material force of formal repetition. It is easy to assume that questions of materiality only concern the tangible aspects of a periodical: paper and ink, for instance, rather than the patterns they make. However, one of the lessons learned from digital culture is that such distinctions between a material realm that is some-

how prior to representation and a symbolic realm that merely rests on the surface of objects, are difficult to sustain.<sup>13</sup> Bill Brown's thing theory, for instance, conceives of objects as the socialised threshold of an unknowable but productive materiality.<sup>14</sup> N. Katherine Hayles understands materiality as part of the way a text produces meaning, an emergent property that comes into being in moments of use rather than something given in advance.<sup>15</sup> For me, these ontologies complement Carolyn Miller's understanding of genre as social action.<sup>16</sup> According to Miller, a genre is not just classificatory, a way of attributing instances of something to a general class, eliding some differences while emphasizing others, but is instead a way of describing how people negotiate new social situations by interpreting them as instances of the familiar. For Miller, "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."<sup>17</sup> The action here is the emergence of a virtual structure in the moment of reading that has material force. The repetition of formal features (typeface, layout, tone) within an issue and between issues (plus the structure of departments and so on) provides each magazine with an identity that surpasses its partial representation in any particular article or issue. This repetitive formal framework differentiates those aspects that constitute the broader periodical (and so are abstract, extending beyond the particular issue) and those that constitute its content (and so belong to each issue alone). Seriality, then, allows readers to differentiate between form and content, regarding form as that which stays the same and allowing content, which varies, to flow.<sup>18</sup>

This is not to say that readers all necessarily read the same way or were helpless to resist the force of these repetitive forms. There is a risk of determinism, where readerly agency is subjected to these clock-work automata. Readers read differently and reading practices were structured both by individual circumstances as well as broader social conditions. Nonetheless, the dynamic of seriality entailed a sort of contract: publishers attempted to anticipate the demands of their readers by giving them more of what they had already demonstrated they wanted, and readers repeatedly spent their money on the understanding that they would not be disappointed. My point is that for each of these readers, the object that constituted the periodical was not identical with the printed material in their hands; rather, it was by doing something with that material—reading it, in most cases, but as Leah Price reminds us, doing other things with it as well—that the contours of the object took shape.<sup>19</sup> And for open-ended serials like periodicals, that object always involved the broader, abstract structures that marked it as one issue of many in a series that stretched back and presumably would continue on into the future.

**“In Our Last”: Succession**

In retrospect, all issues seem to have the same status; they are allocated a place in the series and linked by their date to a moment that has passed. However, the phrase “in our last” reminds us of another feature of this temporality. Referring back to the previous issue, the phrase emphasises the qualitative difference between the current issue, which stands for a moment that has not yet passed, and those that have come before. The temporality of these back issues means that they have all been displaced, made part of the past; they belong to a different temporal order than the one being read. Yet the repetition of formal components in the current issue means that these past issues, nevertheless, continue to have a foot in the present. And it is not just the present. Due to the forward projection of repetitive formal features, future issues are already largely written, their blank spaces already set out, waiting to be filled. On the appearance of the latest issue, its predecessor undergoes a transformation, a kind of death, as it joins the other back issues and makes way for the new. However, this is a newness transformed into structured difference, a variety of the same rather than an encounter with unmediated novelty. Periodicals have a peculiar way of moving on by staying put, offering a present that will pass only to be replaced by more of the same.

In February 1850, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published a 122-page appendix along with the usual 112-page issue. The appendix contains “at some length the opinions offered by the Press upon the article in our last number,” W. E. Aytoun’s unsigned “British Agriculture and Foreign Competition.”<sup>20</sup> If my previous examples gestured backwards to invoke the past but left it passed, the appendix in *Blackwood's* attempts to keep an issue alive by returning to it in the present. However, the virtual structure of *Blackwood's* had little room for such retrospection: certain articles were already due to appear in certain places, commitments had been made to contributors, and the appendix required more pages than were available. So the appendix occupies a supplementary space, part of the issue (it is in the table of contents) but distinct from it (it has its own pagination sequence). The appendix is an embodied response to the already-written nature of the past and the commitments made to the present. By printing reactions from the press, *Blackwood's* acknowledged the controversy that unfolded after the publication of the January number while leaving its own contribution as stated in the past.

As many scholars have noted, the repetitive appearance of nineteenth-century serials such as periodicals segmented time, providing a set of rhythms that helped structure everyday life.<sup>21</sup> Margaret Beetham, in her contribution to this issue, reminds us that these segments are not uniform

or empty of meaning. Different periods meant different things to different readers, and the overlapping rhythms of various serials combined with those of everyday life to create a host of temporal niches. Beetham, quoting Mark Turner, directs our attention to the cultural valences of moments created as times of publication are juxtaposed against represented time. However, we should also be alert to the conditions under which periodicals tell time. Nearly always numbered, they exist in a sequence that imposes an order, with one issue following another. While this sequence divides time up into periods, it also sets in play a progression. In literary studies, narrative provides the interpretive framework to understand this forward movement; periodicals, however, have a troubled relationship with beginnings and endings. Narrative mobilizes the reader's desire for the end if only to defer it over the course of twenty parts or three volumes; periodicals, on the other hand, can only offer a kind of perpetual middle, a precarious vantage point from which to view the past, neatly lined up and numbered in the form of archived back issues, and the future, also lined up, if only in virtual form.

Serial publication resists the ruptures and closures, the events that mark before and after necessary for narrative. In an account of Dickens as a haunted and haunting man, Steven Connor elaborates the difference between the frequentative tense, which is repetitive and open-ended, and the singulative tense, which marks a difference or a break.<sup>22</sup> As the first issue invokes its imaginary predecessors and the last issue is unimaginable, periodicals belong to the frequentative and so are trapped within the repetitive condition of simply carrying on. The frequentative, for Connor, is the mode of haunting and explains Dickens's desire to be everywhere, to live his characters and circulate his words into his readers' homes, as well as a whole host of nineteenth-century preoccupations with recurrence, from evolutionary theory to the various kinds of Victorian statistical analysis. In an earlier version of the paper, Connor used the distinction between the singulative and frequentative tense to develop three different temporalities. The frequentative maps onto the traditional cyclical time said to be "characteristic of religious or traditional societies," and the singulative adheres to the "urgently progressive, homogenous time of modernity, in which what matters most are not the rhythms of recurrence but the endless newness of time, and the continued, panicky dash for the future."<sup>23</sup> The third temporality is periodic time, which Connor understands as the integral of the cyclical and progressive: "In periodic time there are no clean breaks, no absolute losses; on the other hand, there are no absolutely regular recurrences either. This periodic time, which we produce but do not entirely control or even understand, is part of the 'second nature' that we have made for ourselves in a world of media and communication."<sup>24</sup> Peri-



odic time is media time—what happens when times and spaces are knotted together in mediating objects of various kinds. As Beetham sets out in this issue, the pages of magazines bring together various space-times in different material densities.<sup>25</sup> Articles about particular places at particular moments represent these space-times in the published moment of the page, but articles also represent their own time of production. They might appear under their own datelines (telegraphic news or special features, for instance) or contain spatial and temporal references that clearly signal their derivation; even the idiosyncrasies of a contributor's style mark a text as originating from somewhere beyond the unitary frame of the publication. Equally, the various print technologies that ready texts for publication also leave their traces. Although published type largely effaced manuscripts and corrected proofs, graphic media often suggested, to differing degrees, the prior states of the images from which they were derived. The pages of periodicals radiate, instellating different times and spaces to create a present that is destined to pass.

The promise of succession means magazine publication is haunted by haunting, by the threat of lapsing into repetition. Each successive issue must assert its difference from its predecessor, introducing enough singularity to disrupt the rhythm but not enough to break it entirely. Periodicals might appear to be self-regulating machines, never missing a beat, but the peculiar combination of repetition and progression that characterizes serial publication is structured by a productive tension between frequentative and singulative temporalities. On the one hand, the editor must provide more of the same, as that is what readers have paid for, while making sure the periodical does not lapse into pathological repetition. On the other, the editor must introduce enough difference to move the magazine on but not so much that it becomes, in effect, another publication entirely. Serial publication is a negotiation between sameness and difference, and, like the Freudian death drive and pleasure principle, *thanatos* and *eros*, each has its own motive force. In a turbulent market, it is tempting to keep doing the same thing. Too much sameness, however, and the magazine lapses into stasis, a kind of living death, unable to move on. If a magazine is struggling, the other option is to introduce changes. Too much innovation, though, means that its readers will not know it any more. Both have their temptations—their pleasures maybe—but both, if embraced too readily, spell a premature end.

The punctuated, successive present that characterises serial publication results from the precarious balance between these two competing fates. The engine of serial publication is a productive tension, but as the back issues accumulate and the volumes are numbered off, there remains, nonetheless, a sense of moving somewhere, even if the end remains out of view.

For Connor, the frequentative is unperfected and so “looks to some definite event to consummate or close it off, like a gathering sneeze.”<sup>26</sup> When the tense is projected into the future it becomes, he argues, the “closed infinitive of living happily ever after”; future frequentatives “are honorary singulatives.”<sup>27</sup> Periodical publication is a linearity disrupted, the return deferring an end that the periodical never conceives of coming. If periodicals ever recognize an end, it is this “happily ever after” of continued seriality, a kind of processural end, both present and future, which is partially realised with the sale of each issue.

### The Last

The most frequent use of “in our last” refers to errata, where a backward gesture is used to correct something in the present that has already taken its place in the archived run. In the quarterly *Dublin Review*, errata were produced at the close of each half-yearly volume, correcting articles published in the previous volume. In volume thirty-three, which closed with the December 1852 number, the *Dublin Review* listed four corrections to an article by Jeffrey Francis entitled “Summary of German Catholic Literature,” which had been published in June.<sup>28</sup> These changes were significant: one substituted “quantity” for “quality” to correct the claim that “we have said enough to account for the superior quality of Protestant over Catholic books”; another amended “various German translators of the Bible” to “various German translations of the Bible”; and two corrected the line “Dr Bass, who was one of the Seceders of the Catholic Party in the late Frankfurt Parliament” to “Dr Buss, who was one of the Leaders of the Catholic Party in the late Frankfurt Parliament.”<sup>29</sup> Gesturing backwards, errata depend upon a reader doing likewise, reading onwards while taking editorial care over the already-written archive. However, as the position from which corrections are made is itself destined to pass, any notion of fixity is itself provisional. Errata attempt the doubly impossible: to rewrite a past that is already written from a standpoint that might itself be rewritten in future.

The current issue might offer its contemporaries a kind of middle, teetering between the accumulating back issues and (hopefully) the many virtual issues to come, but today all we have is a dead archive, in all its inert incompleteness. This is what is disavowed by the phrase “in our last.” The archive contains “the last,” the issue that can never be referred to retrospectively as there is no subsequent issue from which to refer. Victorian periodicals often provided the apparatus to transform their back issues into an archival form—the bound volume, complete with frontispiece, contents page, and index—that could be placed on the shelf and accessed into

the future.<sup>30</sup> Partial endings, each of these volumes marks a point where the serial was closed, spatialized, and then reopened for retrospective access. Although it was possible to purchase volumes already bound, the creation of volumes from numbers often relied on whoever owned them, producing a range of idiosyncratic forms under the guise of consistency and stability. The same is true for institutions. Individual libraries have also exerted a kind of “archival function” in the way that they have selected and bound nineteenth-century serials, altering them on accession and often as part of the process of ongoing curation. The periodicals in the archive are marked by a new intentionality—they have been deliberately saved—but just as their form indicates that they have been changed for preservation, their presence conjures up the ghosts of all those that have not been so fortunate. The survivors in the archive are doubly deficient, rewritten by the processes of accession and curation that warrant their persistence through time and haunted by all those other periodicals, known and unknown, that have been lost.

Libraries and archives do not provide unmediated access to the past. Not only are historical materials necessarily shaped by their preservation, but they also exist in new sets of relationships, suggested by catalogues, shelving configurations, and the expertise of librarians and archivists. Scholars take advantage of all of these arrangements, attempting to imagine an historical context whose full richness is unrecoverable. Although scholars of newspapers and periodicals are attuned to the differences between the library form of the material—nearly always the bound volume—and any other forms in which it might have been issued, the library form often must stand in for those other forms that survive less frequently. The unbound single issue as it appeared when first published is the privileged object of study in much periodicals scholarship, but it is often only imagined on the basis of how content appears in the bound volumes that survive. If institutions such as libraries and archives are interfaces, allowing certain practices to take place while prohibiting others, so too are the objects they house, their curated forms encouraging particular conceptions of the objects to emerge. What we know of nineteenth-century periodicals arises from a compensatory scholarly practice in which supposedly pure forms—the periodical as it was read, for instance—are imagined from doing specific things (reading) with specific objects (usually volumes) in specific places (usually libraries).

The material collected in libraries and archives is not the past but a representation of it; the objects of history are not waiting there ready to be found but are produced by whatever archivists, curators, scholars, and students do with them. On these grounds, criticizing digital resources for misrepresenting print objects is a dead end. There has never been a better time to work with nineteenth-century periodicals. The mass digitization of

the nineteenth-century print archive, partial though it remains, has given us unprecedented access to this material, now subject to an unprecedented amount of bibliographical control. This has been achieved through a radical transformation of the archive so that it has not only been indexed (in a fairly rudimentary fashion) but also served to us as a completely different set of objects that mimic (to an extent) the print objects upon which they are based. However, if scholars only think of digital resources as offering surrogates for print periodicals, then these resources will always be deficient in some way. Despite their amazing capacity for simulation, a complete digital reproduction of a nondigital object is impossible. Even if it was possible to list all the material properties of a given object—a practical and theoretical impossibility, given that properties only become evident when an object comes into contact with an unpredictable world—the ontological state of an object does not just depend on its physical properties alone. The current issue of a periodical, for instance, is something distinct from its predecessors, and it, too, undergoes a transformation when its successor appears. Equally, during publication, when periodicals can use the phrase “in our last” and while their ends are still virtual, they are materially different than when publication ceases and they can become fully archival (no need to leave shelf space any more). The objects in the archive—these monuments to a present that has passed—are not the same as those that were read when published, even if they have passed through those same readers’ hands.

If the purpose of digital resources is only to reproduce print objects, then we remain trapped in the logic of deficiency. A more productive approach is to rethink digital resources as offering representations of whatever it is that the archival objects *also* represent. Working with archival material is always in some way theoretical, as the object serves to anchor aspects of an otherwise lost past. The periodicals that survive in the archive are interfaces that enable a set of prescribed practices to transform them into something else, something authentic, the raw witnesses of history. *Household Words* in the archive is an object marooned from the nineteenth century; when read it produces *Household Words* in the abstract, a theoretical entity that is reconnected with its broader historical and cultural context.

Archival objects are transformed whenever they are made to serve as witnesses of a lost past, yet the differences introduced through digitization are often understood as noise, errors to be compensated rather than part of the process of linking the archival object with what it represents. Digitized periodicals might only partially capture the print periodicals they are derived from, but the differences they introduce are what are exploited to interrogate the abstract periodical that both print periodical and digitized periodical represent. However, the digital revolution has exacerbated the

tendency to reify surviving print objects as “originals,” objects that allow the creation of stable points of origin for content that reaches us in a remediated, digital form. In this way, digital representations appear to disrupt the aura of authenticity that allows an object to link to an absent past. Yet this ability to summon up the past is not a property of the object itself but instead emerges when it is studied. The aura of historical authenticity is not produced despite mediation but because of it: the past is made present through transformation, whether digital or otherwise.

When digital resources are accused of misrepresentation, this assumes that the print objects misrepresented are those that reside on the shelves in the library or archive rather than the abstract, theoretical objects that are the products of scholarship. Our methodologies are haunted by the desire for proximity. We want the objects in the archive, whatever they may be, to be fixed, bounded, and unchanging, yet if this were the case, there would be nothing more to know. As the different instances of “in our last” show, there is more to the materiality of Victorian periodicals than can be encompassed by the volumes of the shelves. While it remains current, the issue is unperfected, addressing a present that unfolds; once it has been succeeded, it constitutes a different kind of object relegated to the past. Equally, for as long as a periodical survives it has no end; however, once it ceases it can, for the first time, be considered as a whole. These transformations might affect the form of the periodical (single issues becoming bound as volumes, for instance), but materiality constitutes more than just paper and ink.

Archival objects can only partially represent what they once were; rather than understand digitization as a further loss, jeopardizing this already partial connection to the past, as the new digital object fails to capture all the aspects of the print object on which it is based, I would rather think of it as an opportunity to get at what is glimpsed from the archive as it survives. What appears to be a deficit, a misrepresentation, in digital resources, is actually difference introduced through transformation. By making them strange, digital resources demonstrate how much more there is to know about print and print culture. Scholars are trained to look for the singular and the exceptional rather than the repetitive and generic; still enmeshed in a naturalised print culture, we readily overlook materiality until it is transformed. The nineteenth-century periodical, for instance, is not just on the library shelf but is also always somewhere else, a product of doing things with the periodicals that survive, in the present, in every form they take. Digital representations might insert themselves between the scholar and the material in the archive, but they do not necessarily take us further away from the past. Going away is also, in a gothic turn of its own, a form of coming back again.

## NOTES

1. See the archived conference material on the RSVP website, "Past Conference," *Research Society for Victorian Periodicals*, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://rs4vp.org/conferences>.
2. Wolff, "Charting the Golden Stream," 26.
3. Quoted in Wolff, "Charting the Golden Stream," 23.
4. See, for instance, the special section of *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 1 (2011), especially Cecire, "Introduction." For the rawness of data see Gitelman and Jackson, *Raw Data Is an Oxymoron*.
5. "Leprosy of Journalism. I.—The 'Society' Papers."
6. *Ibid.*, 1420.
7. "Gentleman of the Press. In Two Chapters. Chapter I," 137.
8. "Gentleman of the Press. In Two Chapters. Chapter II," 161.
9. Dickens, "Last Household Word," 620.
10. See Mussell, "Cohering Knowledge," *Nineteenth-Century Press*, 50–56, and "Elemental Forms."
11. Huett, "Among the Unknown Public."
12. Liddle, *Dynamics of Genre*.
13. Here I am thinking of N. Katherine Hayles's work, particularly *Writing Machines*, and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum's *Mechanisms*. See also Johanna Drucker's work, especially "Performative Materiality."
14. See Brown, "Thing Theory," 5.
15. Hayles, *Writing Machines*, 33.
16. Miller, "Genre as Social Action."
17. *Ibid.*, 151.
18. See Mussell, "Elemental Forms."
19. Price, *How to Do Things with Books*.
20. "Appendix to *Blackwood's Magazine*," 3.
21. See, for instance, Beetham, "Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre"; Hughes and Lund, *Victorian Serial*; Brake, *Print in Transition*; and Turner, "Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century."
22. Connor, "Dickens, The Haunting Man."
23. Connor, "Dickens, The Haunting Man (On L-iterature)," n.p.
24. *Ibid.*
25. See also Mussell, *Science, Time and Space*.
26. Connor, "Dickens, The Haunting Man," 6.
27. *Ibid.*
28. "Errata in Our Last Number." [Francis], "Summary of German Catholic Literature."
29. [Francis], "Summary of German Catholic Literature," 533, 537, 539.
30. In "Longevity of 'Ephemera,'" Brake calls these "library editions."

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