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“Digital Newspaper Archive Research”

A Special Edition of *Media History*

INTRODUCTION

The papers in this volume emerge from an AHRC funded conference which brought together scholars of journalism history and experts in digital newspaper archives. The purpose of the conference, held at the University of Sheffield in January 2011, was to examine a range scholarship of historical newspaper research that was coming out of the expansion in the use of digital newspaper archives (see Bingham, 2010; Mussell, 2012). The key focus of the network and the conference was the exploration of the language of popular newspapers in Anglo-American press from 1833-1988. As the conference organiser Martin Conboy notes (Conboy 2014) there is a ‘refreshing’ abundance of work which examines both British and American journalism in the 19th and 20th centuries which has ‘sketched out the mutual influences’ therein. The papers in this volume then draw on these themes as well as signal developments and opportunities in the production, use and development of digital archives themselves. The papers either explicitly address the range of challenges and opportunities of using digital newspaper archives while at the same time presenting research made possible by the archives. Other papers are less evaluative or prescriptive and demonstrate the scope and depth of analysis that such archives allow for media historians. An example of the former is the article by Clare Horrocks which highlights a number of important issues that relate to the development and scope of such resources and the diversity of their users’ needs. As both developer and user herself, Horrocks emphasises the benefits of projects which have prioritised a more collaborative and user focussed approach to their development. Significantly she draws out some of the issues which stem from the market orientated approach of commercial providers which position the

user as customer and as such has implications for those of us who use such resources in our teaching, arguing that such priorities can often raise potential barriers for student learning and collaboration. Interestingly Horrocks draws on scholarship from within the field of 'e-learning' and digital pedagogy to draw out relevant points about how we teach and learn using digital resources. Of particular concern for Horrocks is the situation of the learner as 'consumer' which she suggests limits the pedagogic scope of the resources. She argues that greater collaboration between users in the development and refinement of the resources can be undermined by commercial imperatives. Similarly Nicole Maurantonio asserts that media historians, particularly those of the 20th century, should embrace a much wider pool of resources for their historical research. In developing this argument Maurantonio focuses on the 'exquisite opportunities' which lay in encompassing the visual as well as the textual in digital archival research. Via an analysis of both newspaper (digital and analogue) and television coverage of the 1985 Philadelphia police bombing of a house occupied by MOVE – a 'radical' collective which took up residence in an area of West Philadelphia - Maurantonio suggests that a greater appreciation of the visual/pictorial would enhance or scope as well as appreciation of journalism's narrative power and would benefit media historians in their objectives of gaining a fuller sense of the contribution that journalism makes to our social history. The article by James Mussell concerns the negotiation between newspaper and readership in the production of form and genre. Dealing with nineteenth century newspapers, Mussell emphasises newspapers' form and the 'repertoire' constructed between readers and newspapers which 'constituted an interpretive structure that preceded individual issues and articles, determining in advance how they might be understood'. He also examines how the imperatives of the market in the nineteenth century press impacted upon the

form and genre of newspapers in positioning themselves as providing news as a commodity, in ways which draw out the newspapers' passivity in this construction. Such 'passive' orientation which is evident in this genre, according to Mussell, can also be applied to the genre of digital archives themselves. Mussell concludes by alerting researchers to the potential drawbacks of many digital archives which, given their relatively restrictive search criteria, can occlude the exploration of genre in the newspaper press over time and tend to prioritise that which, though useful, can be restrictive. Continuing with the theme of form and genre of newspapers, John Lee's article on Kipling's poem 'The White Man's Burden' as an aspect of Kipling's transatlantic appeal, details the resonance of Kipling's poem as America was grappling with decisions relating to its imperial expansion. Lee examines how American newspapers responded to the poem in their rallying cries for American expansion but Lee also points out that the poem had different interpretations and uses in the American and British press, thus emphasising the transnational aspect of certain newspapers. In providing this analysis, Lee is forthright in his contention that without the availability of the digital archives, such a survey and analysis of the poem's reception would have been all but impossible. Simon Potter's article also grapples with the transnational and imperial dimension of nineteenth century newspapers towards the end of the nineteenth century. Here Potter constructs a compelling and nuanced argument which details the ways in which newspapers played an important transnational role in 'imperial rivalries' of the late nineteenth century by highlighting how terms such as 'public opinion' and 'jingo' were appropriated in various ways by political elites in their attempts to negotiate with their imperial rivals via the press. Focussing on the examples of imperial contestation between Britain and France, principally with regard to the Fashoda crisis of the late 1890s and Britain's dispute with

the United States over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guinea, Potter draws attention to the role that newspapers had in international diplomacy. The final article in this collection, by Jucker and Berger, demonstrates the extensive utility of digital newspaper archives in examining developments in text over time. Their article focuses on the use and development of discourse presentation in *The Times* newspaper from 1833 to 1988. Utilizing the Times Digital Archive, the authors trace the shift in *The Times*' use of direct speech as a marker of authenticity towards a practice favoured by tabloid newspapers – that of providing summaries – which highlight a shift in discourse presentation which draws on individual statements in order to summarise an event or situation. The article details their methodological approach and highlights the opportunities of conducting longitudinal archival research via such an archive.

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