Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century

Caroline Sumpter, 'The great event of modern history': The Victorian Press Visualizes its Infrastructure. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 35 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.10189>

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'The great event of modern history': The Victorian Press Visualizes its Infrastructure

Caroline Sumpter

From images of periodical subdivision and recycled papers on the move, to perfect machines, disruptive compositors, strikes and disasters, the press had many different ways of visualizing its infrastructure. Drawing on a wide range of British and Irish sources, including national, local and trade papers, quarterlies, mid-Victorian monthlies, socialist magazines, and the New Journalism of the 1890s, this article asks what was politically at stake when the press put its materiality and mobility on display. Focusing on evolutionary trees, bodies, and machines, on recycling, circuits, and networks, and on protest, disruption, and breakdown, I seek to bring nineteenth- and twenty-first century ways of seeing press infrastructure into dialogue, considering how the metaphors we use can define the object in view. The analysis concludes by linking these debates to the revolutionary collapse of capitalist newspaper production in William Morris's 'News from Nowhere', serialized in the *Commonweal* (1890), and to the Martian destruction of press infrastructure in H. G. Wells's *Pearson's Magazine* serial 'The War of the Worlds' (1897).

It sounds like a riddle: what object describes its own repeated production, circulation, and breakdown?[1] If defining infrastructure is, as Brian Larkin maintains, a 'categorizing moment', in which exclusion is as politically revealing as inclusion, nineteenth-century journalism that visualized the press was faced with its own categorizing dilemma.[2] Could newspapers and magazines, through which news, advertisements, political ideas, and literary genres moved, be understood in structural terms? If so, should journalists focus on production processes, the impact of reading, or on papers in transit? Should they observe the work of bodies or the functions of machines? Nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines offered deeply contested understandings of the ways their own power relations operated; they were not in agreement about whose labour should be acknowledged, or how. Larkin's expansive definition of infrastructure is useful in this context:

> Infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter. Their peculiar ontology lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things. As things they are present to the senses, yet they are also displaced in the focus on the matter they move around. (p. 329)

This article looks at a peculiarly self-aware kind of matter that both moved things and was moved around, and which, rather than displacing its own infrastructural relationships, sometimes put them centre stage. It was not just the new penny magazines of the 1830s, the shilling mid-Victorian monthlies, and the long-established quarterlies, but national, local, and trade newspapers, the penny socialist press and the mass-market monthlies, weeklies, and dailies of the 1890s that tapped into a fascination with how papers were made, how they travelled, and what they could do. In what follows the emphasis is placed on British and Irish newspapers and magazines, to consider the different political ends that such self-reflexive narratives could serve. Focusing on evolutionary trees, bodies, and machines, on recycling, circuits, and networks, and on protest, disruption, and breakdown, I seek to bring nineteenth- and twenty-first century visualizations of the press into dialogue, considering how the models and metaphors that we use might change what we see. I conclude with the dramatic collapse of newspapers in William Morris's 'News from Nowhere' (1890), serialized weekly in the *Commonweal*, and in H. G. Wells's 'The War of the Worlds' (1897), which appeared monthly in *Pearson's Magazine*. Whether a socialist revolution or Martians were the

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[1] This article is written in memory of and with thanks to my father, John Sumpter (1929–2021): inveterate newspaper reader, trade unionist, and compositor.

[2] Brian Larkin, 'The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42 (2013), 327–43 (p. 330).

agents of destruction, both fictions found inventive ways of bringing the instability of press infrastructure and labour relations into view.

Evolutionary trees, bodies, machines

Writing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1859, E. S. Dallas declared that 'the rise of the periodical press is the great event of modern history'.[3] Seeking to capture the convergence of technological and cultural changes that he saw as collectively revolutionary, Dallas charted intimate connections between telegraphs, trains, and electricity, the penny post, steam printing, stereotyping (the casting of solid type from moulds), education, cheap paper, and the repeal of newspaper taxes, seeing a complex infrastructure underpinning that 'great event'. 'What is to be the destiny of all this popular literature which is now produced in almost incredible quantities, and of which the so-called "press" is but a single branch?', Dallas asked (p. 99). In his attempt to visualize a monumental shift in the scale of print production, Dallas also reached for an evolutionary metaphor: 'with the multiplication of its issues, have come also their division and subdivision. There is no such thing in nature as mere multiplication; multiplication always entails a difference; increase in quantity necessitates change of kind.'[4]

Dallas's envisioning of periodical subdivision in evolutionary terms, as a branching tree, might make us think of Charles Darwin: the year in which Dallas was writing was also the year in which Darwin published the bestseller *On the Origin of Species*, which included just one illustration: his famous tree diagram. More than a hundred and forty years later, Franco Moretti would turn to Darwin's evolutionary tree to visualize a subdivision and a struggle for existence within popular literature — his example was detective fiction in the 1890s — in his article 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature' (2000). Moretti argued that Darwin's tree was, in fact, the real protagonist of his essay: 'I began using it merely as a shorthand visualization, but after a while realized that it was more than that: it functioned like a cognitive metaphor, which made me quite literally *see* literary history in a new way.'[5]

It would be a convenient argument to claim that Dallas and Moretti were using the same Darwinian metaphor because it has a descriptive validity that works across

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[3] [E. S. Dallas], 'Popular Literature — The Periodical Press (No. 1)', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1859, pp. 96–112 (p. 100).

[4] [E. S. Dallas], 'Popular Literature — The Periodical Press (No. 2)', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, February 1859, pp. 180–95 (p. 181).

[5] Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 76 (first publ. in *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61 (2000), 207–27), emphasis in original.

history; that it enables writers from different centuries to see truths about the way the infrastructure of the nineteenth-century literary marketplace worked. It would, however, be wrong, because Dallas's evolutionary inspiration was not Darwin. Dallas argued instead that the expansion of the press followed

> the principle which Mr Herbert Spencer has most ably illustrated in his essay on *The Law of Progress*, and which our physiologists, with whom it is a favourite, call the law of differentiation — that the enormous increase of periodical literature causes division and endless subdivision. ('Periodical Press (No. 2)', p. 181)

For Dallas, the subdivision was not random, but directed and progressive — a Spencerian movement from homogeneity to heterogeneity. For this anonymous but self-identified Tory writer, writing in an expensive, conservative monthly, the press's representation of an increasing number of 'class' and trade interests also made it a mechanism for political inclusion and signalled a movement towards a more democratic public sphere. Snippets of news were recycled and given new life in different 'class' papers, which (along with local papers and letters to the editor) led Dallas to conclude that divisions between writers and readers were also becoming blurred. For Dallas, Spencer was mobilized to claim that the press *was* democratic participation; Moretti preferred a metaphor of Darwinian contingency that imagined readers as comparable to the operations of natural selection ('blind canon makers').[6] In Moretti's article it is literary genres, not Dallas's periodicals, that are imagined as the struggling organisms: the *Strand Magazine* can provide the textual corpus without becoming an explicit focus as a material or literary object. Whether we use visualizations from evolutionary biology, sociology, geography, or computer science (Moretti is drawn to graphs, maps, and network analysis as well as to evolutionary trees), the use of 'cognitive metaphors' to see political and literary infrastructure has a long cultural history.

What happens if we are asked to dramatically reduce the scale — moving from Dallas's evolutionary tree, that asks readers to visualize the dizzying division and subdivision of all existing magazines and newspapers (a nineteenth-century periodical equivalent of Moretti's 'distant reading'), to imagining one magazine, one article, and one reading body? In 'Our Readers', published in the shilling monthly *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1863, Charles Allston Collins opened with an arresting image. Travelling on the top deck of a London omnibus, the narrator keeps pace for some distance with a carriage and suggests that 'it was natural that I should look into that brougham as

[6] Moretti, p. 70. In a period in which the male franchise was limited, Dallas's claims for the democratic function of the press might also be seen as a way of attempting to sidestep arguments for its extension.

we drove along by the side of it, and take note of what was going on inside'.[7] What he encounters in his act of furtive watching is curious: a woman is reading a copy of *Macmillan's Magazine.* Scrutinizing the leaves that she has turned in the text, Collins surmises that she is reading one of his own articles.

He gives a mocking account of the woman's desultory reading, claiming 'we travelled side by side from the Circus to Portman Street [...]. I watched like a lynx, and I firmly believe that in that time the lady of the brougham did not advance a single paragraph' (p. 161). Collins's article, playful, metafictional, and misogynistic, places *Macmillan's* real female readers in the position of both voyeurs and objects of voyeurism — infringing a fictional reader's private space, while finding Collins's lynx-like gaze on their own reading practices. Yet they are also encouraged to see their own copy of *Macmillan's* as a material object on the move with different functions and meanings as it passes through different hands. It is not just the work of writing, but the work of turning metal type into print that is presented as a gentle rebuke to the imagined brougham reader: why, Collins mused, 'did that lady go through the form of holding up before her eyes a page of print that had cost a considerable amount of labour to the compositor who set it up?' (p. 161).

Glancing at a newspaper might enable us to shift our focus again, to the perspective of one compositor. Collins did not elaborate on the precise nature of the labour for the printworker whose job was to arrange the tiny metal types backwards on a composing stick, but a compositor writing to the *Daily News* in the same year spoke of both mental and physical toil: 'the brain is equally active with the busy fingers that are engaged with picking up and placing together the types that are to furnish forth the world's news for the morrow's breakfast table.' Petitioning for legal provision for a tavern or coffee house to be kept open in the early hours of the morning for the use of press workmen, the compositor described the newspaper room's 'close stifling atmosphere', the 'glare of argand gas burners', and the 'foetid odour of the heated type sending out its fumes laden with arsenical and antimonial poisons'.[8] When Emily Faithfull set up the Victoria Press, her assertion in the *English Woman's Journal* that female compositors would be a healthier workforce due to their avoidance of alcohol and snuff-taking could not quite offset her admission that the average age of death for a compositor — forty-eight, with almost sixty per cent dying of lung disorders — had some less easily addressed causes than drinking and poor ventilation. The Victoria Press's female compositors set the *English Woman's Journal* from 1860 and both were intimately connected to the

[7] Charles Allston Collins, 'Our Audience', *Macmillan's Magazine*, June 1863, pp. 161–66 (p. 161).

[8] 'Sir George Grey's Bill and the morning newspaper compositors' from *Daily News*, reprinted in the *Westmoreland Gazette*, 3 September 1863, p. 6.

Society for the Promotion of Employment for Women. In her article in the magazine on the Victoria Press (1860), Faithfull did acknowledge that both setting and casting type were not without risk. In this article the Victoria Press's female compositors found themselves spelling out their own working conditions in the very material that constituted the danger:

> The inhalation of dust from the types, which are composed of antimony and lead, is an evil less capable of remedy. The type when heated emits a noxious fume, injurious to respiration, which in course of years occasionally produces a partial palsy of the hands.[9]

Faithfull thought snuff-taking the most likely cause of the frequently injured sight of compositors, although also acknowledged the possible role of the 'close application to minute type' and the effect of the gas lamps (p. 125). Henry Mayhew was less equivocal: he described an encounter with a former compositor in *London Labour and the London Poor*, 'half-blind' from 'late-hours and glaring gas lights in the printing office', now reduced to street trading in old papers.[10] Working condition for compositors look much more pleasant in the illustration of the Victoria Press from the *Illustrated London News*, including for its clearly depicted child workers (*Fig. 1*). Four employees at the press, Faithfull noted, were 'very young': under the age of fifteen (p. 124). If the type cases are still familiar, by 1892 the *Strand Magazine* was showing off more recent technology: its 'little regiment of compositors' under a 'forest of electric lamps' (*Fig.* 2). Electricity, linked here to both nature and modernity, was now also harnessed in the electrotyping room. In that casting of type, however, powdered lead was acknowledged to be 'everywhere': it was visualized, paradoxically, as 'clean dirt'.[11]

Compositors and other printworkers are hidden in plain sight in the nineteenth-century press, but whether we see them as bodies, political agents, or as infrastructural functions depends on how and where we look. If we turn to one of Dallas's subdividing branches — the two-penny 'class' paper the *Compositor's Chronicle* — we are asked to focus, not on a struggle between authors or genres, but on a struggle to maintain the wage scales of a highly skilled trade in the face of new machinery and cheaper labour that

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[9] Emily Faithfull, 'Victoria Press', *English Woman's Journal*, October 1860, pp. 121–26 (p. 125), reproduced by Jeremy Norman, *History of Information* <https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=4429>. Norman's is an invaluable resource on the history of compositing. See also, Jim Mussell, 'The *English Woman's Journal* (1858–1864)', *NCSE* <https://ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html> [both accessed 14 July 2023].

[10] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols (London: Griffin Bohn, 1861–62), I: *The London Street-Folk* (1861), p. 289.

[11] 'A Description of the Offices of the Strand Magazine', *Strand Magazine*, 4 (1892), 594–606 (p. 601).

Fig. 1: 'Printing-Office (the Victoria Press) in Great Coram-Street, for the Employment of Women as Compositors', *Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1861, p. 555.

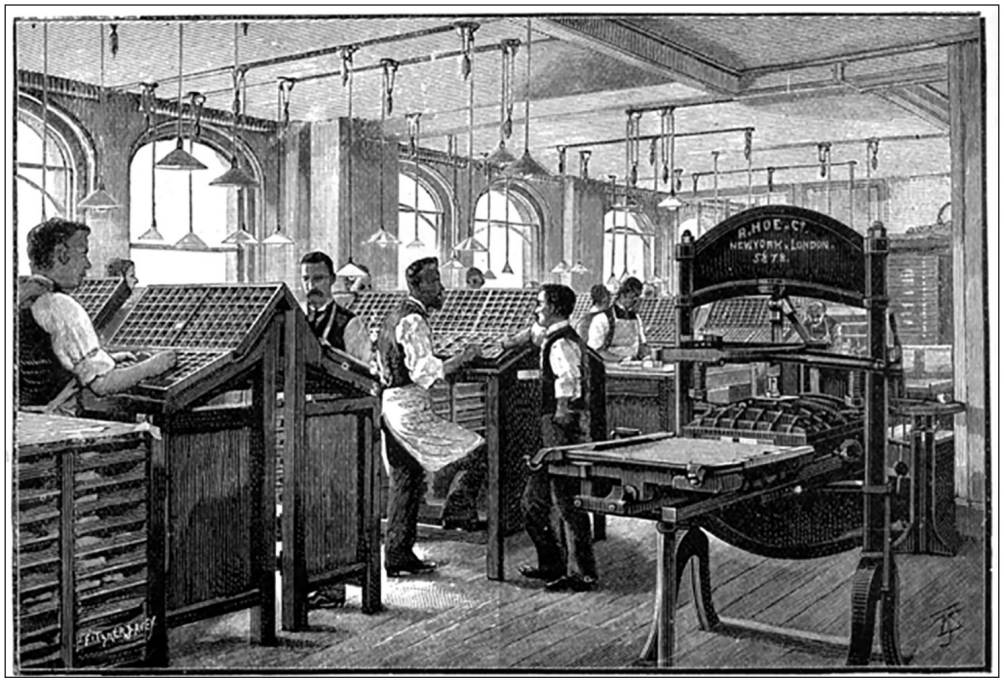

Fig. 2: 'The Composing Room', *Strand Magazine*, 4 (1892), p. 600.

could work in tandem to undermine them. This included, in 1842, a report of a composing machine that could be operated by women; the writer lamented how the status of compositors had fallen, so that they no longer held 'their proper place amongst men of letters and members of the learned professions'.[12] In 1870 the *Morning Post* reported that the Vienna compositors' strike had been ended by using female compositors.[13]

For A. Innes Shand, the anonymous producer of a series of eight articles on 'Contemporary Literature' for *Blackwood's* from 1878 to 1879, the press looked quite different when seen from the perspective of readers or from that of politically trusted proprietors. If the invention of printing for Shand was a mixed blessing, a development as socially explosive as gunpowder, the production of *The Times* offered a far more orderly picture: its perfectly disciplined, drilled workforce was depicted as engaged in pleasant manual labour, no longer subjected to the 'pestilential' conditions produced by gas lighting, with their social needs catered for as if they were in a gentleman's club. What Shand did with reading and producing bodies was far from consistent: if print could be imagined as bodily disease and contagion, newspaper production could also be seen as both a perfect mechanism and a social organism. Watching a newspaper office at midnight, Shand wrote, it is possible to see 'a waste of work that is continually repairing itself, like the tissues and fibres of the human body'.[14]

At *The Times*, for which Shand also wrote, the operations of that social body were depicted as far from wasteful. Linking the paper's spatial divisions to organic functions, the editorial office was imagined by Shand as 'the intellect' (and simultaneously the 'pivot' of the machine) with *The Times*'s own Walter printing presses the pulse and the beating heart. Compositors and other printworkers become the hands. While Shand claimed that in a newspaper office 'the raw material is the impalpable essence of active brains', reducing printworkers to manual function was also part of an industrial fantasy in which order and efficiency become inevitable in the face of mechanical power.[15] In a series of supplements in 1833, Charles Knight had celebrated the 'beautiful operations' of the printing machinery that produced the *Penny Magazine*; far more enthusiastic about cheap print than Shand, Knight could still, as Sarah Wadsworth has shown, allow the wonder of machinery to effect the 'elision' and 'diminution' of the magazine's own

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[12] 'Composing and Distributing Machine', *Compositor's Chronicle*, 1 March 1842, pp. 145–46 (p. 146).

[13] 'The Compositors' Strike at Vienna', *Morning Post*, 24 March 1870, p. 7.

[14] [A. Innes Shand], 'Contemporary Literature VII: Readers', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1879, pp. 235–56 (p. 241).

[15] [A. Innes Shand], 'Contemporary Literature VIII: Newspaper Offices', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1879, pp. 472–93 (p. 473). On Shand's constructions of journalism (rather than newspaper production), see Laurel Brake's important *Print in Transition, 1850–1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 6–26.

printworkers.[16] Shand found unashamed aesthetic pleasure in machinery that facilitated compliance: 'the beauty of the "Times" [printing] machine is, that it dispenses with skilled labour altogether', leading to 'an enormous saving in wages'. Pay at *The Times* was 'lavish', however, because 'the conductors refuse to be fettered by the tyranny of trade-unions': 'the working hands of a daily paper can bring awkward pressure to bear on their employers.'[17] Shand's compositors (whether arranging type by hand or pressing keys on a pianotype machine that ordered its sequence — both forms of setting were used by this date on *The Times*) are largely deemed translators of the intellect of others. 'Nimble fingers are moving by instinct about the compartment of the type-boxes, mechanically translating thought into metal', Shand wrote ('Readers', p. 240). Look elsewhere in the press, as we will see, and compositors emerge as political actors rather than fingers, hands, and functions: as critics of the words that they put into type, as adept disruptors of the machinery and infrastructure that moved those words around.

Recycling, circuits, networks

In 1857 the *Morning Chronicle*, which had published Henry Mayhew's 'Letters' (1849 to 1850), reported on 'a semi-dramatic "Conversazione"' that had taken place in St Martin's Hall the previous night. Costermongers and 'street patterers', including sellers of cheap print, were 'produce[d] [...] before the audience, dressed in appropriate costume, and giving utterance, in reply to imaginary questions, to the various peculiarities of dialect and idea which constitute the distinguishing features of each class'. While admiring Mayhew's mastery of his audience, the reviewer was ill at ease with his subject matter: 'Mr Henry Mayhew might, like a French rag-picker can, pick out a living and a moral from dirt', but it felt unwholesome to dwell on the 'dark side of nature'.[18] As Mayhew and his readers well knew, it was not just the French rag-picker who picked out a precarious living in this way: one of Mayhew's own *Morning Chronicle* letters had described the London 'Rag-Gatherers', 'Bone-Pickers', and '"Pure" Collectors': different names, he claimed, for 'one and the same class'.[19] As scissor-and-paste journalism, *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* did its own form of recycling, reproducing Mayhew's section on rag-

[16] 'The Commercial History of a Penny Magazine: No. IV', *Monthly Supplement of the Penny Magazine*, 30 November–31 December 1833, pp. 505–11 (p. 510); Sarah Wadsworth, 'Charles Knight and Sir Francis Bond Head: Two Early Victorian Perspectives on Printing and the Allied Trades', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 31 (1998), 369–86 (p. 374).

[17] [Shand], 'Newspaper Offices', pp. 482, 483, 478. A pianotype machine was in use at *The Times* from 1872. Monotype and linotype machines that could cast type were not employed until the 1880s. See Melissa Score, 'Interred in Printing House Vaults: Pianotype Composing Machines of the 1840s', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 49 (2016), 578–97.

[18] 'Some Curious Characters', *Morning Chronicle*, 28 July 1857, p. 5. The 'Letters' were the foundation of the weekly parts and subsequent three volumes of *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). A fourth volume appeared in 1861.

[19] [Henry Mayhew], 'Labour and the Poor: Letter XV', *Morning Chronicle*, 7 December 1849, pp. 5–6 (p. 5).

pickers and mudlarks from the *Morning Chronicle* without acknowledgement, and, just over a decade later, reproducing large sections of the *Cassell's Family Magazine* article 'Rag-Pickers: A Suggestion', in which 'ragged children' were encouraged to become collectors of rags for paper. Here, child labourers were moralized as part of a virtuous commercial cycle, the destitute conflated with the magazine's raw materials.[20]

If *Bell's* and *Cassell's* sought to 'pick out' their own redemptive moral from Mayhew's descriptions of the impoverished forced to scrape a living from rags, bones, and dung, there were others whose livelihoods depended directly on the newspapers in which Mayhew first recorded his words. He had talked with many 'street-traffickers' formerly connected to 'the paper, newspaper, or publishing trade' whose work was now the recirculation and sale of newspapers and magazines (*London Labour*, I, 289): collecting papers from coffee shops and pubs, selling copies of *Punch*, the *London Journal*, and the *Family Herald* on the steam piers on the Thames, selling papers at railway stations, supplying copies of *The Times* 'cleverly damped' to the fish stalls at Billingsgate Market (I, 290). He found forty London vendors of periodical 'back-numbers' alone. Magazines could be picked out of waste, as rags could be picked out of dirt, through a complex set of transactions: the 'collectors of waste-paper frequently find back numbers of periodicals in "a lot" they may have purchased at a coffee-shop', Mayhew noted, commenting 'These they sell to warehousemen who serve the street-sellers' (I, 289). Mayhew recorded one seller at steamboat piers on the Thames commenting that he did a 'fairish' trade in 'Lloyd's and Reynolds's pennies' (I, 291). His customers who chanced a penny on *Reynolds's*, a weekly paper with a large working-class readership and radical political sympathies, could read not only reprinted sections of Mayhew's *London Labour*, but also a highly critical series of letters about Mayhew by George Martin, secretary to the Street Traders' Protection Association.[21] Martin claimed that Mayhew had professed the 'sincerest friendship' for street traders while 'painting them in colours so odious, that if his readers universally believed him the street-seller would starve'.[22]

Ole Münch has argued that print interactions with Mayhew's writing shaped costermongers' sense of their own cultural identity; he suggests that this could have had a material effect in widening 'social inequalities' between costermongers and lower status street traders (p. 66). Martin, however, argued for Mayhew's more direct ability to change the processes that he set out to describe, by damaging traders' relationships with the customers who read his words. Dallas, too, saw popular literature as having

[20] 'Rag Gatherers and Bone Pickers', *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 16 December 1849, p. 3; 'Rag Collectors', *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 26 April 1862, p. 3. Asparto grass was used from the 1860s (including in Lloyd's papers).

[21] Ole Münch, 'Henry Mayhew and the Street Traders of Victorian London: A Cultural Exchange with Material Consequences', *London Journal*, 43 (2018), 53–71.

[22] George Martin, 'London Labour and the London Poor', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 7 September 1851, p. 7.

a 'reflex action': it was 'itself a great force that reacts on the life that it represents, half creating what it professes only [to] reflect' ('Periodical Press (No. 1)', p. 97). What conceptual models, then, can get to grips with journalism that can simultaneously describe and affect its own processes of circulation?

Focusing on the idea of 'urban ecology' in *London Labour* (including Mayhew's reuse of his *Morning Chronicle* journalism), Barbara Leckie has argued that Mayhew's own natural cycle imagery is inadequate to capture 'the many fissures in the open recycling circuit' that he describes. She sees his London as 'not a bounded whole' or a 'closed circuit' but as a 'dynamic, mobile, and open network of relations'.[23] Periodical scholarship also frequently moves between the language of cycles and circuits and the language of networks: it is not unusual for critics to work simultaneously with both closed and open visualizations of print connection and movement. Robert Darnton's highly influential model of the book communications circuit (1982) which seeks to capture the feedback loop between agents that include papermakers, printers, and shippers as well as publishers, authors, and readers, has been critiqued and adapted by many subsequent scholars. These include (as well as Darnton himself), theorists of digital media and book historians seeking to map the ways printed objects as well as human actors can function as agents of change.[24]

The explosion in the use of the term *network* in twenty-first century periodical studies has also entailed many different practices: like circuits, networks have been viewed as metaphors, methodologies, and empirical objects. Valuable theoretical engagements with networks have acknowledged a movement between quite different scales and foci, from structures (as in Laurel Brake's use of Friedrich Kittler), the micro-scale interactions between human and non-human actants (Nathan K. Hensley's engagement with Bruno Latour, for example), and the visualizing devices and methodologies made possible by the digital humanities (Miranda Marraccini's use of network analysis to capture the 'circle' of working relations in the Victoria Press).[25] In business history meanings might look different again: Paul Duguid has cautioned that the use of network in that context has frequently been 'inexact, whiggish, and technologically driven'.[26] Some Victorian readers of the local press in 1846 were already familiar with the bodily metaphor of the electric telegraph as 'gradually spreading its network of nerves throughout the land'. In

[23] Barbara Leckie, 'Henry Mayhew, Urban Ecologist', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 48 (2020), 219–41 (pp. 223, 227).

[24] See Robert Darnton, '"What is the History of Books" Revisited', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (2007), 495–508. Darnton's model was first published in 'What is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, 111 (1982), 65–83 (p. 68).

[25] See Nathan K. Hensley, 'Network: Andrew Lang and the Distributed Agencies of Literary Production', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 48 (2015), 359–82; Laurel Brake, '"Time's Turbulence": Mapping Journalism Networks', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44 (2011), 115–27; Alexis Easley's introduction to that special issue (pp. 111–14); and Miranda Marraccini, *Victoria Press Circle* <http://www.victoriapresscircle.org/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

[26] Paul Duguid, 'Introduction: The Changing Organization of Industry', *Business History Review*, 79 (2005), 453–66 (p. 454).

1848 the *Athenaeum* also offered a progressive vision of telegraph networks: 'to write by hand — to print by hand — to print by steam — to print by lightning — these have been the four stages of inter-communing of thought. When will we get to a fifth stage, and what will it be?'.[27] It was the railway system, however, that was most frequently visualized as a network in the press, and it is also in this context, from at least the 1870s onwards, that we also see the use of the term *infrastructure*.[28] These connections are perhaps not surprising, for as Duguid has suggested,

> Another modern twist on a Victorian trope further elucidates the difficulties that business historians might have with the concept of network. Throughout Victorian literature, new technologies were used as metaphors for social transformation. The principal vehicle for this idea was, of course, the train, whose tracks run throughout nineteenth-century books, essays, and treatises. Modern discussions of networks not only echo this trope; they often go beyond simple metaphor to suggest that we have entered the network age courtesy of technology. (p. 455)

Hints of that technological determinism might be seen in a popular account of the arrival of W. H. Smith's bookstalls from 1998, in which the selling of 'disreputable publications or soiled newspapers' by 'superannuated or disabled railway employees' is superseded by 'a more professional business selling papers and cheap books to the thronging passengers'.[29] Railway reading, however, even when obtained from W. H. Smith's network of railway bookstalls, was often still recycled reading. In 1851 the *Morning Chronicle* depicted 'John Bull' arriving for his train, hurriedly perusing bookstall fiction before settling for a second edition of the morning paper.[30] If Mayhew's street traders sold old volumes of the *Spectator* at bookstalls, John Bull could also read them in transit, newly repackaged as part of Longman's Railway Library, just as he could buy *Tales from Blackwood's* and *Essays from the Times* (the latter part of Murray's two-shilling railway library). If the *Times*'s journalism was distinctly old news, it could create new meanings in transit: the anthology included the articles 'Literature of the Rail' and 'Railway Novels'.[31]

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[27] See 'The Electric Telegraph', *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 11 December 1846, p. 2; and the *Athenaeum* excerpted in the *Hereford Journal*, 2 February 1848, p. 6.

[28] My early examples of the use of this term relate to French government investment in the land used by railway companies. See 'Railway Construction in France', *Bradford Observer*, 9 April 1874, p. 7.

[29] Richard Cavendish, 'The First WH Smith Railway Bookstall', *History Today*, 48.11 (1998) <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/first-wh-smith-railway-bookstall> [accessed 14 July 2023]. The first W. H. Smith bookstall was established at Euston in 1848.

[30] 'Railway Reading', *Morning Chronicle*, 29 December 1851, p. 7.

[31] Advertisement in *John Bull*, 29 May 1854, p. 2.

In 1890 Francis Hitchman wrote in the *Quarterly Review* of a complex process of literary recycling: he described the 'enterprising proprietor' of the penny weekly who could get a 'hack' to 'transmogrify' fiction from a cheap American magazine which can pass through a periodical of the lower class, and [...] afterwards [blaze] forth in all the glory of chromo-printed boards for sale at the railway stations (price 2s)'.[32] The image of both the bookstall and the railway as spaces that could blur literary and class distinctions was expressed by Shand in *Blackwood's* in 1879: 'the bookstall, like poverty or a third-class carriage, introduces a man to a strange medley of companions' ('Readers', p. 244).

When Hitchman expressed concerns about the plagiarized and miscellaneous content of the penny weeklies, his discussion of recycling and textual mingling also suggested that such literature did not simply end up at, but owned its genesis to the second-hand bookstall:

> Verses and miscellaneous paragraphs, which fill up the odd corners of the minor prints of the day, are raked together from all conceivable sources: ancient jest books, collections of anecdotes, defunct and abortive magazines, and the boxes of odd volumes which may be seen outside secondhand bookstalls and brokers' shops, are all put under contribution. (p. 159)

Long after the arrival of W. H. Smith, 'soiled newspapers' also continued to circulate through the railway system. Glancing into the carriages of one of the London suburban trains heading into the city before morning business, Shand claimed that it was already possible to see that

> floors and cushions are covered with the penny papers that have been roughly torn open and hurriedly skimmed; acquaintances have exchanged the 'Standard' for the 'Telegraph;' [...] there is a liberal sprinkling of the 'Sportsman' and 'Sporting News' left by gentlemen who, as a matter of business, are interested in the latest odds. The railway servants gather so rich a harvest that they can afford to become generous benefactors, in their turn, of the cabmen on the rank and the patients in the hospitals. ('Readers', p. 242)

In 1873 the *Leamington Spa Courier* reprinted an appeal from the *Lancet* for readers to collect old newspapers for hospital patients.[33] In the *Review of Reviews*, W. T. Stead also sought to formalize these print encounters, setting up a magazine exchange so

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[32] [Francis Hitchman], 'Penny Fiction', *Quarterly Review*, July 1890, pp. 150–71 (p. 158).

[33] 'Newspapers for Hospitals', *Leamington Spa Courier*, 18 January 1873, p. 9.

that readers could swap expensive middle-class monthlies with each other by post, while also encouraging 'helpers' to collect newspapers and magazines from public receiving boxes for inmates of local workhouses.[34] Stead's sixpenny monthly attracted a significant working-class readership: here, there was a recognition that the literary marketplace looked quite different if seen from the perspective of the struggling readers whose class or location limited their access to print. If coffee shops, libraries, street sellers, travelling readers, railway workers, and cab drivers all played a role in the distribution infrastructure that kept old papers in motion, so too did newspapers themselves. Advertisements for a wide range of half-price newspapers and magazines (posted after their use by reading rooms) and for newspaper borrowing abounded in the Scottish and English local press.[35] Whether we imagine these largely forgotten print exchanges as part of a communications circuit, a network, or an urban (and rural) 'ecology' of recycled print, we need a vocabulary that also captures the role of journalism in affecting the structural relations that it (selectively) brought into view.

Protest, disruption, breakdown

Why, in our digital age, does the physical disruption of newsprint still feel symbolically resonant? In September 2020 a blockade by Extinction Rebellion protesters at two printworks in England owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp delayed the circulation of physical copies of newspapers including *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail.* In its wake the British government considered classifying newspapers as 'critical national infrastructure'. The Home Secretary at the time, Priti Patel, used a subsequent article in one of the disrupted titles — the *Daily Mail* — to justify legal powers that could result in future five-year prison sentences for such protestors, who she deemed to be attacking 'the tenets of democracy'. This resulted in the drafting of the 2022 Public Order Bill.[36]

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[34] See W. T. Stead, 'A Magazine Exchange', *Review of Reviews*, January 1890, pp. 51–53; and W. T. Stead, 'The Association of Helpers. Service for April. The Supply of Reading for the Workhouses', *Review of Reviews*, April 1890, p. 274.

[35] See, for example, 'Newspaper Readers', *Stonehaven Journal*, 2 April 1857, p. 1.

[36] See 'Eco zealots could face FIVE YEARS in jail', *Mail Online*, 6 September 2020 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8703879/Priti-Patel-threatens-change-law-Extinction-Rebellion-zealots-face-five-years-jail.html>; and 'Public Order Bill: Factsheet', GOV.UK, 16 May 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-order-bill-overarching-documents/public-order-bill-factsheet>. Designating newspapers as infrastructure is not always connected to government attempts to curb protests. In 2021 Victor Pickard argued that inclusion in Joe Biden's Infrastructure Bill could halt the decline of local newspapers, which he saw as 'a core infrastructure that facilitates democracy. A future without local journalism is as dire as a society without roads and bridges.' See Victor Pickard, 'Why local journalism must be considered infrastructure', *The Hill*, 18 April 2021 <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/548626-why-local-journalism-must-be-considered-infrastructure/> [all accessed 15 July 2023].

In the 2020 protest Extinction Rebellion drew attention to what was absent on newspaper pages by seeking to stop the lorries that moved those pages around. In the *Daily Mail* (targeted, like the other titles, for its perceived failure to report on the impact of climate change), the protestors were described, as they fully anticipated, as 'eco-zealots' and 'environmental extremists'. The *Guardian*, aligned with the liberal left, whose own home delivery service had suffered collateral disruption in the protest, was unwilling to condone the restriction of access to newspapers, but was prepared to quote the very different definition of a free and democratic press employed by Extinction Rebellion itself, which counted a former journalist among its protesters. 'Our captive press is failing in its democratic responsibility', the activists asserted: they pointed to five billionaires with majority shares in most of the UK's national newspapers.[37]

A time traveller from the late 1890s, disorientated by so many aspects of our own age, would still recognize *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail* (and, indeed the family name of Harmsworth — the *Mail* remains in the hands of co-founder Harold's great-grandson). Behind the seemingly smooth continuity of those titles, however, lies a history of turbulent labour relations as well as revolutionary technological transformation.[38] Our late nineteenth-century time traveller would certainly also be familiar with newspaper stoppages and strikes, but how the stoppage at News Corp would be seen would very much depend on who was doing the travelling. For William Morris in his utopian romance 'News from Nowhere', serialized in 1890 in the weekly penny paper of the Socialist League, the *Commonweal*, the future collapse of 'the very violent, reactionary' *Daily Telegraph* is a potent symbol.[39] It is part of the triumphant infrastructural breakdown that signals the revolutionary moment. The Fabian socialist H. G. Wells would have his own fun with the destruction of the infrastructure behind the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* in his *Pearson's Magazine* serialization of 'The War of the Worlds' (1897).

Like the twenty-first century *Daily Mail*, nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines had the peculiar capacity to create grand narratives about the democratic significance of the press, while also seeking to micromanage the stories of their own

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[37] Helen Pidd and agencies, 'Six Extinction Rebellion protesters found guilty of blocking news printers', *Guardian*, 16 July 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/16/six-extinction-rebellion-protesters-found-guilty-of-blocking-news-printers;>; and '51 Extinction Rebellion members in court for Murdoch Printworks action', Extinction Rebellion, 5 October 2020 <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2020/10/05/51-extinction-rebellion-members-in-court-for-murdoch-printworks-action> [both accessed 15 July 2023].

[38] This included the bitter year-long Wapping dispute in 1986, when Rupert Murdoch's News International sacked almost six thousand striking printworkers after clandestinely building a new digital plant that would allow journalists on all of its titles to directly input copy.

[39] William Morris, 'News from Nowhere', *Commonweal*, 7 June 1890, p. 179. The serial ran from 11 January to 4 October 1890.

breakdowns. It was not just in the journalistic subgenre that offered readers an insider's view of the synchronized wonders of newspaper and magazine production, but also in the short paragraphs that baldly recorded actual press disruptions due to strikes, rail stoppages, telegraph failures, and natural disasters, that the mechanisms and social relationships underpinning the press were brought into view.

In 1850 the *Meath and Cavan Advertiser* reported on a hurricane that swept through a Dublin newspaper office: the 'windows of the printing office of the *Warder* newspaper were shattered, and the hail tumbled down upon compositors, types printers devils and all'.[40] The fascination in the press with 'Newspaper Production under Difficulties' was not limited to local contexts. In 1897 the *Liverpool Weekly Courier* reported on an earthquake in Calcutta (Kolkata) that had forced the staff of the *Indian Daily News* to flee to another paper, fearful of collapsing masonry. Working with borrowed type, the editor was quoted as noting that 'when the formes were going to press, one of them accidentally broke; hence the absence of the third page, the type of which now lies in Bentinck Street'.[41] It was a news story in the Irish *Drogheda Conservative* that a Queensland journal had been printed on brown wrapping paper: the Australian editor explained that a bale of white paper had been stranded for three months, immovable due to 'the state of the river and the roads'.[42] In 1893 the *Gloucester Citizen* reported that the *Cardiff Western Mail* was forced by a conflagration that buried its press to slowly move its weighty type by horse and cart to Newport. Telegraphing to a manufacturer for a printing machine as the blaze raged so that the paper could continue production from its new location, stereotyping and printing machinery were set up in the street.[43] Not all articles focused on human ingenuity and technological triumph against the odds, however. Not all breakdowns were accidental.

While trade unions were not legally recognized until 1871, and the New Unionism of the 1880s and 1890s saw a marked escalation in the scale of strike activity, the withdrawal of labour by unionized compositors and printworkers were regular news stories long before this date. In 1852 *Reynolds's Newspaper* actively encouraged readers to boycott the professedly 'ultra-liberal' *Sun* newspaper (which, it claimed, was far from liberal in following the *Morning Chronicle* in dismissing its compositors for not accepting 'a great reduction in the ordinary scale of wages'). *Reynolds's* included a long letter from the striking compositors and printed a message of solidarity from the stonemasons of London, who reminded their members of strategies they could use

[40] *Meath and Cavan Advertiser*, 27 April 1850, p. 3.

[41] 'Newspaper Production under Difficulties', *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 10 July 1897. p. 8.

[42] 'Newspaper Production', *Drogheda Conservative*, 28 May 1898, p. 3.

[43] 'Newspaper Production under Difficulties', *Gloucester Citizen*, 6 June 1893, p. 4.

to bring the compositors' 'struggle' to an end: 'support no house of whatever kind, whether public-house or coffee-house, where hostile journals are taken in.'[44]

In 1872 the *Scotsman* (one of the papers, Shand noted, that employed the high-speed *Times* printing presses) explained its own decision to turn the paper into a non-union workplace after the walkout of its compositors. While the former compositors were accused of 'shamming' work with the aim of bringing the paper to a standstill, it was not just working conditions but the politics of the paper that the workers had challenged. The *Scotsman*'s journalist noted that, in a public meeting of the paper's former workers, 'preposterous accusations' had been made 'against the general character of this paper as to its feelings towards the working classes and its fairness in news and reports'. The report concluded with an assertion of the need to wrest back control from compositors who were deemed to be demanding the authority of editors: 'control in the proper hands alone can prevent failure and anarchy.'[45]

In 'News from Nowhere' Morris joyfully narrated a future socialist revolution: 1952 is the year that sees the breakdown of capitalist newspaper production. After a government-directed militia massacres protestors in Trafalgar Square and the workers who are leading a 'Committee of Public Safety' are arrested, a General Strike ensues, and civil war begins. Morris was clear about the role of newspapers in the suppression of workers' rights: 'newspapers — then, as always hitherto, almost entirely in the hands of the masters — clamoured to the Government for repressive measures.'[46] While one newspaper editor '[finds] his manhood' and speaks out against the massacre, the breakdown of the infrastructure of the press marks a decisive moment:

> The next morning, when the leaders of the reaction were chuckling at the effect which the report in the newspapers of their stroke would have upon the public — no newspapers appeared; and it was only towards noon that a few straggling sheets, about the size of the gazettes of the seventeenth century, worked by policemen, soldiers, managers, and press-writers, were dribbled through the streets. They were greedily seized on and read; but by this time the serious part of their news was stale, and people did not need to be told that the GENERAL STRIKE had begun. The railways did not run, the telegraph-wires were unserved; flesh, fish, and green stuff brought to market was allowed to lie there still packed and perishing.[47]

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[44] See 'The "Sun" Newspaper and its Compositors', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 7 November 1852, p. 9; 'The Compositors and the "Sun" Newspaper', 20 February 1853, p. 16; 'The "Sun" Newspaper and its Compositors', 1 May 1853, p. 4.

[45] 'The Scotsman and its Late Compositors', *Scotsman*, 21 August 1872, p. 4.

[46] 'News from Nowhere', *Commonweal*, 24 May 1890, p. 161.

[47] *Commonweal*, 31 May 1890, p. 169; 7 June 1890, p. 179.

Morris asked his readers to see the press as the product of a complex set of infrastructural relationships that are defined, at every level, by class struggle. Readers of the *Dalkeith Advertiser* in 1870 would have had knowledge of the compositors' strike in Vienna, which caused owners 'to suppress all their newspapers but one, that to be conducted in the common interest of associated proprietors'.[48] In 1885 the *London Evening Standard* reported on the strike of compositors in Budapest, where the official journal had to be brought forth 'on paper of reduced size'.[49] The *Commonweal* pledged its support for international revolutionary socialism. As Morris's paper reported on the unionization and industrial action of infrastructural workers at home and abroad (including railway employees, tram workers, dockers, and miners), newspaper workers in Morris's projected future also strike a decisive blow. Old Hammond tells Guest that during the General Strike, it was only the 'Socialist papers' that 'came out full to the throat of well-printed matter'.[50] Such action, on a localized scale at least, was far from inconceivable: a few years after Morris's serialization, the *Cork Daily Herald* inserted a short paragraph of telegraphed news informing its readers that a compositors' strike in Ghent meant that 'the whole of the local newspapers except the *Socialist* have been obliged to suspend publication'. Employers' threat 'to retaliate' by bringing in composing machines from abroad meant 'much bitterness' and 'excitement' prevailed: police had been drafted in and 'trouble' was feared.[51] For Morris, these local struggles were an expected and necessary stage in an inevitable and increasingly violent revolutionary socialist trajectory.

In the *Commonweal* Morris joyfully narrated the moment when 'the ordinary newspapers gave up the struggle'. It is not just the 'reactionary' *Daily Telegraph*, but the communication technology from which it took its name that is brought down in 'News from Nowhere'. Christine Woody has noted that the *Commonweal* distrusted the neutrality of telegraph agencies, favouring instead its own special correspondents, even if this slowed the speed at which news was delivered.[52] In a review of the book republication of 'News from Nowhere' in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the journalist noted that in Morris's future 'railways are things of the past' and also speculated on the fate of modern communication technologies: 'whether the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph survive, we do not know. Probably not — for Mr Morris infinitely prefers

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[48] 'The Great Strike of Compositors at Vienna', *Dalkeith Advertiser*, 2 March 1870, p. 3.

[49] *London Evening Standard*, 16 December 1885, p. 5.

[50] *Commonweal*, 7 June 1890, p. 179.

[51] 'A Compositors' Strike', *Cork Daily Herald*, 6 November 1895, p. 5.

[52] Christine Marie Woody, 'The Newspaper and the Novel: William Morris's *News from Nowhere* in *Commonweal*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 50 (2017), 139–56.

the folklore of the Brothers Grimm to the fairy tales of science.'[53] While a resurgent socialist press marks the transition to the new post-capitalist society, in a future that no longer makes history through class struggle, there is no news: socialist newspapers as well as the capitalist-owned press become historical curiosities. Yet there is no doubt that Morris's text created its most urgent political meanings as journalism, in a paper that repeatedly drew attention to the infrastructures that underpinned its own circulation. In 'Anti-Parliamentary', published in June 1890, Morris argued that it was destruction of capitalist infrastructure that would herald the socialist dawn:

> In short, the true weapon of the workers as against Parliament is not the ballot-box but the *Boycott*. Ignore Parliament; let it alone, and strengthen your own organisations to deal directly with your masters in the present, and to learn how to manage your own affairs both now and for the future, and keep steadily in mind, and work for, the day when you will have to use the great weapon which your own wretched position of unrewarded toil puts into your hands, the weapon of *the general strike*.[54]

As each weekly instalment was published, Morris's paper drew attention to its own status as both a chronicle of the strikes and stoppages that augured the future dissolution of capitalism, and as a fragile printed object dependent on the agency of its readers. During the serialization of the chapter describing 'How the Change Came', readers were encouraged to 'help to spread the '*Weal*' by asking those who had obtained the paper 'by free distribution in our streets and public conveyances' to name newsagents who might stock it and readers to whom it could be sent. Newsagents where the paper could be obtained were printed in the weekly issues. Readers were exhorted to either support the paper's propagandist work or 'oppose us and prove us wrong on every platform and in every paper to which you can gain access'.[55] That the struggle that would dispense with news in the future would be fought in the present — in part through the mobilization of newsprint — was clear in the published letter from correspondent 'W. L. M.', who claimed to have been a proselytizer for the paper ever since the *Commonweal* published a 'sympathetic notice' of a strike in the works in which he was employed three years previously. After seeing the report of his own strike, he claimed that he had bought a copy of the paper and

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[53] 'The Latest Utopia', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 March 1891, pp. 1–2 (pp. 1, 1–2).

[54] William Morris, 'Anti-Parliamentary', *Commonweal*, 7 June 1890, pp. 180–81 (pp. 180–81, emphases in original).

[55] *Commonweal*, 31 May 1890, pp. 171, 173.

> have always continued to do, and I have either read the various articles aloud to groups of my fellow-workmen or given them copies to take home and read themselves, and in that way have sown the seed in a quiet way; and I am glad to say, seeing that we live in a very hotbed of Radicalism, with a considerable amount of success.[56]

Morris's attempts to balance democratic dialogue and propaganda were, however, precarious. After he was deposed from the editorship of the paper by the anarchist faction in the Socialist League in late May 1890, quite different accounts of that event appeared in the mainstream press, *Freedom*, and *Commonweal*.[57] What democracy really meant, and how it could be achieved, was a question at the heart of the paper, played out not only in its copy but by the shifting power relations between Morris as editor, financier, and journalist, the anarchist contributors (and would-be editors), and the small but committed cadre of activist working- and middle-class readers.

H. G. Wells reminisced in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) about picking up the radical papers the *Freethinker* and the *Malthusian* in an 'obscure but spirited' backstreet newspaper shop: the sort of place where those in the know might have found the *Commonweal* a few years later. In the 1880s Wells attended Morris's Sunday night gatherings at Kelmscott House; he was a careful (if critical) reader of 'News from Nowhere'.[58] Long before Extinction Rebellion, Wells, in 'The War of the Worlds', would include the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* as among the papers unable to report what is actually happening: leader writers in both offer comforting reassurance that the Martians are unable to leave their pit, leaving Londoners oblivious to their devastation of Woking.[59] The narrator initially finds out about the cylinder in his own locality not from a neighbour but from his newspaper boy (Henderson has already telegraphed to his London paper). He is on his way, in the serial text, to get the morning paper the *Daily News* (to which Wells was also a contributor).[60] It does not take long for Wells, like Morris, to reveal how quickly the synchronized infrastructural wonders of telegraph systems, trains, and newspapers can break down. In 1897 the *Globe* reported that 'the developments of Senior Marconi's wireless telegraphy, as reported from Rome, ought

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[56] *Commonweal*, 31 May 1890, p. 174.

[57] 'William Morris', *Freedom*, 1 June 1891, p. 4.

[58] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967), pp. 127, 193. For Wells's criticisms of *News from Nowhere*, see *A Modern Utopia* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), p. 7.

[59] Wells's text was serialized in *Pearson's Magazine* from April to December 1897. For these episodes see April 1897 (p. 369) and May 1897 (p. 494).

[60] Wells substitutes the *Daily Chronicle* in the book version — both were London papers with reformist credentials. On differences between the serialization and book, see Madeline B. Gangnes, *The (De)collected War of the Worlds* <https://decollected.net/> [accessed 15 July 2023].

to have been made before, for they would give quite another colour to Mr. Wells' stirring tale "The War of the Worlds," in "Pearson's Magazine"'. The *Globe* noted that while technology that could remotely explode gunpower on ships would 'doubtless upset the martians considerably', the prospect of 'automatically and simultaneously' setting 'all the watches in the pockets of the inhabitants in a town' spoke to human mastery of time.[61] Yet Darwinian evolutionary struggle, wholly undirected and operating on a timescale beyond the human, is indifferent to the technological achievements of humans or Martians, exposing the hubris of both in 'The War of the Worlds'. This is another timescale underpinning the text, in addition to those identified by Ian Sinclair, who attracted the *Guardian* newspaper's attention in 2004 with his discussion of Wells's use of 'tabloid speed'. Sinclair wrote:

> The page-turning impact of Wells's narrative of invasion comes in short sharp bursts, breathless dispatches, as he lays bare the three strands of time: the now-submerged rustic past of captured agricultural land; the present of imperialism in its boastful pomp (trains that run on time, swift communication, a splendid capital city); and a vividly imagined future of endless wars, ever-improving weapons of destruction, incompetent and mendacious government and media hungry to report everything that isn't happening.[62]

Wells, writing from his semi in Woking opposite the clattering railway line, was aware of the frisson for the readers of the popular monthly *Pearson's Magazine* who might absorb his reflections on the breakdown of newspapers and railways at W. H. Smith's railway bookstall, or as they commuted through the suburban towns laid waste by his Martians. It is the New Journalism that becomes, in Wells's revised book republication of the text, the ultimate conflicted emblem of the return of human civilization. Wells's playful use of 'last man' narrative shows us the work of possibly the last remaining (and certainly the first post-Martian) London compositor:

> At the corner of the bridge, too, I saw one of the common contrasts of that grotesque time: a sheet of paper flaunting against a thicket of the Red Weed, transfixed by a stick that kept it in place. It was the placard of the first newspaper to resume publication — the *Daily Mail*. I bought a copy for a blackened shilling I found in my pocket. Most of it was in blank, but the solitary compositor who did the thing had amused

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[61] *Globe*, 27 July 1897, p. 1.

[62] Iain Sinclair, 'Woking at War', *Guardian*, 26 June 2004 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jun/26/classics.hgwells> [accessed 15 July 2023]. This article is an edited extract from the introduction to the Folio Society edition of *The War of the Worlds*.

> himself by making a grotesque scheme of advertisement stereo on the back page. The matter he printed was emotion; the news organisation had not as yet found its way back.[63]

Like Morris, Wells was all too aware of the press reports of actual newspaper disruptions, but there are perhaps more personal reminiscences at play. In *Experiment in Autobiography*, Wells described a boy at the minor public school in which he later taught science, who at 'about the age of twelve', had become 'possessed of a jelly-graph for the reproduction of MS. in violet ink, and with this he set himself to produce a mock newspaper' (p. 268). Encouraged to continue with the *Henley House Magazine* (to which Wells also later contributed) the boy 'violet with copying ink, and not quite sure whether he had done well or ill' went on to change the face of newspapers (p. 268). The former pupil was Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, who began his professional editing career with *Answers to Correspondents* (which also provided Wells with 'a few useful shillings a week during its first year of issue'). Wells felt he could

> not even summarize the headlong uprush of Alfred C. Harmsworth and his brother Harold; how presently they had acquired the *Evening News*, started the *Daily Mail* and gone from strength to strength until at last Alfred sat on the highest throne in British journalism, *The Times*, and Harold was one of the richest men in the world. (p. 269)

Deemed morally unforgiveable for producing the 'nasty, taste destroying' half-penny weekly *Comic Cuts* (p. 270), as mentally unstable and as an emblem of the ethical and cultural vacuum of a minor public-school education, Harmsworth is depicted as pursuing print 'as if by instinct' (p. 269). Wells nevertheless claimed to maintain an 'intermittent friendship' with the 'ruffian' Harmsworth/Northcliffe, who triggered all the complexities of Wells's feelings towards his own career as a magazine and newspaper writer profiting from the New Journalism (p. 271). Wells would write a series of articles on labour unrest for Northcliffe in the *Daily Mail* (1912) and would later work under him in the First World War for the Ministry of Propaganda. It is a strange moment when the compositor in *The War of the Worlds* provides a newspaper which is eagerly bought but from which little new information is gleaned: as in 'News from Nowhere', the news is already stale. Wells offered his own unique spin on the relationship between evolution, bodies and machines, newspapers, and infrastructural breakdown. He had no doubt that the *Daily Mail* would find its way back.

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[63] H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: Heinemann, 1898), p. 292.

The anthropologists Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta have asked, 'when the infrastructures of history continue to reverberate in our figurations of the future, what kinds of structures and limits do they leave us with?'.[64] Social actors in the nineteenth-century press engaged in different sorts of infrastructural thinking; not all of them reinforced Whiggish histories. Historians and literary scholars might see some promise in drawing on Larkin's anthropological approach, in which media becomes 'a wider networked infrastructure that facilitates and mediates the goods that travel along its paths'.[65] Entering into an international dialogue about our 'cognitive metaphors' and the historical baggage they carry might be another valuable way to discover our 'structures and limits': to see our own inevitable omissions, exclusions, and blind spots.

[64] Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta, 'Introduction: Temporality, Politics, and the Promise of Infrastructure', in *The Promise of Infrastructure*, ed. by Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 1–38 (p. 30).

[65] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 5.