TRANSMEDIA PRACTICES IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

Edited by
Christina Meyer and Monika Pietrzak-Franger

"[An] outstanding project [that] allows us to see both the forest and the trees, the particular as a way into mapping a broader ecology of media practices in the long nineteenth century.

The editors [do] a spectacular job of [...] describing why this period is important to our understanding of transmedia, why transmedia as a frame helps us to understand this period, why a practice-focus approach is valuable, and how the various contributors fit within this larger framework."

Henry Jenkins, *Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts and Education at the University of Southern California, USA*

Transmedia Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century

This volume provides engaging accounts with transmedia practices in the long nineteenth century and offers model analyses of Victorian media (e.g., theater, advertising, books, games, newspapers) alongside the technological, economic, and cultural conditions under which they emerged in the Anglophone world.

By exploring engagement tactics and forms of audience participation, the book affords insight into the role that social agents – e.g., individual authors, publishing houses, theater show producers, lithograph companies, toy manufacturers, newspaper syndicates, or advertisers – played in the production, distribution, and consumption of Victorian media. It considers such examples as Sherlock Holmes, Kewpie Dolls, media forms and practices such as cut-outs, popular lectures, telephone conversations or early theater broadcasting, and such authors as Nellie Bly, Mark Twain, and Walter Besant, offering insight into the variety of transmedia practices present in the long nineteenth century.

The book brings together methods and theories from comics studies, communication and media studies, English and American studies, narratology and more, and proposes fresh ways to think about transmediality. Though the target audiences are students, teachers, and scholars in the humanities, the book will also resonate with non-academic readers interested in how media contents are produced, disseminated, and consumed, and with what implications.

Christina Meyer is Associate Professor of American Studies, currently working at the TU Braunschweig, Germany. She is the author of *Producing Mass Entertainment: The Serial Life of the Yellow Kid* (2019).

Monika Pietrzak-Franger is Professor of British Cultural and Literary Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. She has published on adaptation, transmediality, medicine and culture, (neo-)Victorianism, science, and globalization.

Routledge Advances in Transmedia Studies
Series Editor: Matthew Freeman

This series publishes monographs and edited collections that sit at the cutting-edge of today's interdisciplinary cross-platform media landscape. Topics should consider emerging transmedia applications in and across industries, cultures, arts, practices, or research methodologies. The series is especially interested in research exploring the future possibilities of an interconnected media landscape that looks beyond the field of media studies, notably broadening to include socio-political contexts, education, experience design, mixed-reality, journalism, the proliferation of screens, as well as art- and writing-based dimensions to do with the role of digital platforms like VR, apps and iDocs to tell new stories and express new ideas across multiple platforms in ways that join up with the social world.

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Contributors

Ian Gordon teaches cultural history and media studies in Singapore. His books include *Superman: The Persistence of an American Icon* (2017), the Eisner-nominated *The Comics of Charles Schultz* (2017), *Ben Katchor Conversations* (2018), *Kid Comic Strips: A Genre Across Four Countries* (2016), and *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture* (1998).

Heidi Lucja Liedke is Assistant Professor and Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany. She has recently submitted her second monograph (Habilitation) on *Spectacle, Materiality, Engagement – Livecasting in the Twenty-First-Century British Theatre*. From 2018 to 2020 she was a Humboldt Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London. She is the author of *The Experience of Idling in Victorian Travel Texts, 1850–1901* (2018).

Martin Lüthe received his doctorate from the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture in Gießen, Germany. He is currently Einstein Junior fellow and Assistant Professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Lüthe published the monographs *"We Missed a Lot of Church, So the Music Is Our Confessional": Rap and Religion* (2008) and *Color-Line and Crossing-Over: Motown and Performances of Blackness in 1960s American Culture* (2011).

Ann McClellan works as Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at the Plymouth State University, USA, since June 2020. Before, she served as Professor of Twentieth-century British literature at Plymouth State University. Her book *Sherlock's World: Fanfiction and the Reimagining of BBC's Sherlock* was published in 2018.

Christina Meyer is Associate Professor of American Studies at TU Braunschweig, Germany. Her Eisner-nominated *Producing Mass Entertainment: The Serial Life of the Yellow Kid* was published in 2019. She has co-edited *New Perspectives on American Comic Books and Graphic Novels* (a special issue of *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 2011) and

Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Cross-roads (2013).

Roberta Pearson is Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham, UK. Among her most recent publications are the co-authored *Star Trek and American Television* (2014) and the co-edited *Many More Lives of the Batman* (2015), *Storytelling in the Media Convergence Age: Exploring Screen Narratives* (2015), and *Contemporary Transatlantic Television Drama* (2018).

Monika Pietrzak-Franger is Professor of British Culture and Literature at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her works include, as co-editor: *Adaptations–Performing across Media and Genres* (2009), *Mash-Ups* (2017), *Globalisation: Transnational Dissemination of Nineteenth-Century Cultural Texts* (2014), *Transforming Cities* (2018), *Handbook of the English Novel* (2020); as editor: *Women, Beauty, and Fashion* (2014), and as author: *Syphilis in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2017).

Eckart Voigts is Professor of English Literature and Culture at TU Braunschweig, Germany. He is co-editor of *Companion to Adaptation* (2018), *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse* (2015), *Reflecting on Darwin* (2014), and a special issue of *Adaptation* on *Transmedia Storytelling* (2013). He also co-edited *Transforming Cities: Discourses of Urban Change* (2018).

Lisanna Wiele is Research Associate and PhD candidate at the University of Siegen, Germany. She was a member of the DFG-funded research unit "Popular Seriality – Aesthetics and Practice." She has most recently co-edited/co-authored *Nineteenth-Century Serial Narrative in Transnational Perspective, 1830s–1860s* (2019). Her research interests focus on aspects of US American popular culture from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries.

Anne-Julia Zwierlein is Chair of English Literature and Culture at the University of Regensburg, Germany. In 2005 she was one of the recipients of the Heinz Maier Leibnitz prize, awarded by the DFG (German Research Foundation). Her main areas of research are early modern English literature and culture, Victorianism, and contemporary British writing. Further research interests include Jacobean City Comedy, early modern women writers, early modern law and literature as well as science and literature studies.

Foreword

I am thrilled to write the foreword for a book that promises to make such a rich contribution to our understanding of transmedia practices. Its aim to explore the workings of transmedia in the nineteenth century is in some regards long overdue, given that so many of the narrative, production, and cultural practices from that era share enormous similarities with what we now understand to be transmedia storytelling. Reading *Transmedia Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century* and the concepts analyzed here was like reviewing the study of transmediality, in which I became involved about a decade ago. When I first started researching the history of transmedia practices, which I think was around 2011, I was only looking at the US in the twentieth century in terms of geographical context and historical context. At that time, I was interested in the idea of looking to the past to help us better understand the present. Whenever people would ask me about my research I tended not even to frame it as a history project, but rather as a historicization project – which is about taking the phenomena of the present moment and reimagining it through the lens of a bygone past. As I say in *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling* (2016), "there is something exciting about digging into the past, not just to examine that past per se, but also to better understand the workings of the present" (ix).

Going back to 2011, I remember feeling quite alone in my own interests in thinking about the role or form of transmedia practices in a historical context. The term was very much seen as synonymous with contemporary media developments, like industrial or technological convergence. I would sometimes find myself needing to defend my use of the term 'transmedia' outside of such contemporary settings, as if I were somehow being anachronistic by using it in relation to early cinema, or the rise of radio. My feeling on this issue now is much the same as it was back then: transmedia is a practice, or a series of practices, that can be informed by a whole range of industrial and cultural factors – only some of which involve digital media. Our role as scholars, therefore, is to understand how such a significant practice like transmedia can be shaped by an array of different factors and context. We now see this thinking across the field of transmedia studies, be it studies of transmedia museums (see, for example, Kidd) or socio-political applications of transmedia storytelling in different countries around the

world (see Freeman and Proctor). I have argued elsewhere that, regardless of what form it takes or context in which it operates, the practice of transmedia works best as a series of alignments across industries, cultures, and audiences. In other words, transmedia practices emerge out of the alignments between these things. It is therefore a process of understanding where those alignments are and how they are formed, and indeed how those particular alignments inform specific opportunities for transmedia stories to be created. But if my aforementioned *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling* (2016) book revealed anything, it is that those all-important alignments can come from practically anywhere. In the twentieth century, I argued that that century's major developments towards industrialization, consumer culture and media regulation all provided the necessary industrial-cultural structures to enable literary authors, theater playwrights, film directors, and even newspaper cartoonists to craft their fictions across multiple media platforms. We see this in early transmedia storytelling pioneers like L. Frank Baum and his *Wizard of Oz* world, and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*.

But past builders of fictional storyworlds employed many different strategies for telling their stories across media, which showcase just how many possibilities there are for telling tales across multiple media. Much more work is needed to map the many faces of transmedia, and while I previously chose to start my own historicization at 1900, this was never about laying down a marker. Instead, I started at 1900 because it was important to pinpoint the *industrial* rise of transmedia storytelling, but transmedia practices long precede that particular date.

Which brings me to this collection. *Transmedia Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century* provides the field of transmedia studies with a vibrant analysis of Victorian media, be it theater, advertising, books, games newspapers or comics, and uncovers the technological, economic, and cultural conditions under which they formed emerging transmedia practices. These and other practices and their implications I have not broached make the book an invaluable source for scholars from different academic disciplines as well as for non-academic readers. Meyer and Pietrzak-Franger offer us a selection of excellent papers that touch on under-researched phenomena in the long nineteenth century. The overarching parts in which the chapters are placed are "Technology, Culture, Democracy," "Crossroads of Fact and Fiction," and "Transmedia Sherlock." The book is also transnational in its scope, which is much-needed, as well as offering specific insights into key case studies, such as Sherlock Holmes and Kewpie Dolls. I myself have a vested interest in penny dreadfuls, the kinds of cheap but enormously popular serial literature produced during the nineteenth century in the UK. By looking across a range of examples, including work of Gothic thrillers and vampire fiction, one might argue that the industrial tendency for penny dreadfuls to publish reprints, rewrites, or even thinly-disguised plagiarisms of other popular literature from the era, established many of the world-building principles now associated with the art of transmedia

storytelling. For example, the penny dreadful format, informed by the era of publishing at that time, gave way to tropes of cameo introductions for characters, such as the non-renowned Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street, as well as encouraging migratory practices for many working-class readers who, not being able to afford a penny a week, instead formed clubs where they could pass the flimsy booklets from reader to reader, sharing and building the story. Through analyzing cases such as this, this important collection proposes new ways to think about transmedia. Let us hope that *Transmedia Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century* will be the driving force for further research leading to the uncovering and a better understanding of cultural practices of the past; research that in turn might inform the scholarship on transmedia practices of the present.

<div align="right">Matthew Freeman</div>

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1 Nineteenth-century transmedia practices

An introduction

Christina Meyer and Monika Pietrzak-Franger

Transmedia practices have a history. In the nineteenth century, they spanned a variety of phenomena that were spurred by growing industrialization, technologization, and urbanization of life. They encompassed diverse actants and networks that included individuals, institutions, particular types of materials along with a number of processes and everyday practices of production, dissemination, and consumption, which, in their complexity, created a *transmedia experience*. Three vignettes illustrate the range of these practices. What they also show is that it is necessary to study these time- and culturally specific tendencies in their complex contextualizations.

Vignette One

In February 1883, readers of the children's magazine *St. Nicholas* were introduced to the first installment of a new, illustrated series with the so-called Brownies: a group of unnamed elf-like creatures with the same immediately recognizable body shape (a round stomach, a round face with big eyes, pointed shoes, thin legs, and most of them wearing a pointed cap). The Canadian American illustrator and writer Palmer Cox penned the little sprites and wrote verses about them (in couplet rhyme scheme). Shortly after their first appearance in the juvenile magazine, the Brownies expanded beyond their original carrier medium and proliferated in different media formats, such as books, theater plays, musical compositions, and toys. Images of them appeared on all kinds of household and stationery items (see Cummins, esp. 101–102; 226–229; see also Meyer, "The Brownies"). The Brownie Kodak, introduced by the Eastman Kodak Company in 1900 as an affordable, mass-produced hand-held camera, was named after them. The Brownies were copied multiple times in two- and three-dimensional formats, and their popularity transgressed national borders (the stories and Brownie consumer items traveled to Canada and as far as Australia and Russia, for example). They moved between and

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migrated across different media but always remained identifiable and allowed for different forms of (repeated, continued, extended) investment and experience for both children and adults. Letters sent to the editor of the *St. Nicholas* magazine suggest that children re-enacted the Brownies by playfully imitating the clothing style of the goblins and by emulating their behaviors and actions – that is, the pranks as described in the verses and depicted in the illustrations (see C., Theodora "Dear St. Nicholas"). As these developments make clear, the Brownies were a node that allowed for/was created by a convergence of various 'actants.' They are largely forgotten today but their history invites us to think about interconnected production and consumption practices in the nineteenth century, about all the instances when, where, and how a *figure* (its specific design) dispersed across multiple media channels and with what effects.

Vignette Two

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or, Life Among the Lowly* was originally published as a serialized, evolving narrative in the weekly abolitionist newspaper *The National Era* between June 5, 1851 and April 1, 1852. It circulated in different (print) media formats in the US, Britain, and continental Europe, as well as South America, East Asia, South Africa, and Australia, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth (and beyond; see Davis and Mihaylova, esp. 7–9, and 225–388). Plot elements of the story such as the scene of Eliza crossing the ice and characters like Topsy transcended the original carrier medium and expanded in the form of songs, poems, play-scripts (and posters advertising the plays), photographic plates, busts, and numerous consumer wares such as handkerchiefs, trinkets, and dolls (see Bernstein, esp. 14).[1] Different, competing theatrical compositions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were produced throughout the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, and Tom Show troupes toured through the US and around the world. In her study *Racial Innocence* (2011), Robin Bernstein claims that the storyworld of Stowe's narrative "existed in multiple genres (parlor performance, prose, poetry, visual art, and material culture) and physical practices (reading, looking, singing, showing, weeping, drying tears, and masking, to name only the actions scripted by the handkerchief)" (13). Bernstein uses the concept of the "repertoire" to describe these sets of entangled, simultaneous (sometimes repeated) activities and "stylized gestures […] in

everyday life" (14; see also Hughes; Tompkins). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (in print and beyond the written page) showcases how *tropes* in both words and images were passed on across different media simultaneously (or almost simultaneously) and created what might be called immersive realm(s) for a heterogeneous audience. It invites investigations of the transnational dispersal of media content, the transformations the tropes have undergone as they moved from one medium to another since their emergence in the 1850s, and the moments of audiences and their active expansion of the storyworld.

Vignette Three

Aware of the public controversies that their 'cause' had spurred over the years, suffragettes launched a series of practices to gain more followers and supporters. They engaged in – what from contemporary perspective resembles – a carefully orchestrated transmedia campaign. Next to pamphlets and periodicals, suffragettes organized public events, assemblies, and lectures. They also produced particular objects, jewelry, and memorabilia not only to target a variety of women but also to establish a community. While their distinct color coding was cleverly used to make participants easily recognizable; the performative marches and public events strengthened their visibility, the plethora of games (cards, board, etc.) they issued, together with the (short-lived) shops that they opened, became integral to their program. In this context, cups, cutlery, stamps, scarves, pins etc. should not simply be seen as trademarked consumables essentially unrelated to other activities. Rather, they may be seen as part of the vast 'assemblage' of suffrage: outcomes, products, and participants in various transmedia practices. As this example makes clear, these were not only fictional characters or particular tropes that spread through multiple media channels. Activist organizations also used a variety of practices to offer a (consumable) transmedia experience. This was a cleverly crafted-out scheme to build up a strategic community, and make the message palatable to broader audiences.

These three vignettes signal the guiding goals of this collection, which seeks to flesh out moments, dynamisms, and implications of pre-digital transmedia practices. It aims to provide historically-oriented approaches to transmediality, and to create an archive of tools and texts that will help to understand the structural, material, cultural, and medial forces in/of the past that enabled – and constrained – products to radiate outwards, across multiple platforms, and that enabled participatory practices.

This volume is an outgrowth of two novel tendencies in the field of Transmedia Studies: an emergent emphasis 1) on transmedia *practices* rather than *storytelling* and 2) on historicization, or *early histories* of transmedia practices. In 2006 Henry Jenkins penned the famous, albeit idealized, definition of transmedia storytelling as the flow of content(s) across multiple media formats and platforms in the digital era that spurs extended audience engagements.[2] Over the next decades, a variety of perspectives have emerged. Narratologists (esp. Thon, "Toward"; Thon, "Subjectivity"; Ryan; Ryan and Thon; Elleström; Wolf) have investigated, among other things, how audiences shape and expand fictional worlds (over longer periods of time), and how specific textual elements (e.g. characters) have the propensity to travel (redundantly) across multiple media formats. Media Studies scholars have punctually spotlighted specific media/platforms, their functions and social usages (e.g. Atkinson on film, Evans on television); there has also been extensive work in the migratory behavior of audiences or transmediality as a strategy leading to audience engagement (e.g. Mittell; Atkinson and Kennedy; Evans, *Transmedia Television*, and Evans, "Transmedia"; Bruns; Jenkins, esp. *Convergence*; Johnston; Ryan). Media archaeologists (e.g. Huhtamo and Parikka; Zielinski; Elsaesser; Ernst) have influenced the study of transmedia practices by drawing attention to 'old media' (e.g. the flipbook) that have often been marginalized in research but that are nonetheless culturally significant, by re-reading the relations between old and new media and by writing "alternate histories" of old media "that do not point teleologically to the present media-cultural condition as their 'perfection'" (Huhtamo and Parikka 3).

Moreover, in recent years, such terms as transmediality, transmediatization and transfictionality have been introduced to differentiate between the particular type of storytelling and other practices that are characteristic of the contemporary media environment. Scholars such as, for instance, Henry Jenkins (2010) and Elizabeth Evans (2018), have stressed the importance of treating the adjective 'transmedia' as a meaningful modifier in order to describe changes in existing processes and practices, thus allowing for a more in-depth study of particular developments while ensuring classificatory precision. Next to transmedia *marketing* and transmedia *engagement*, there has been talk of transmedia *franchises* or transmedia *adaptations* (most recently: Lopez Szwydky). In line with this tendency, our collection goes beyond the study of transmedia storytelling in order to indicate that it is not always a story and not only fictional worlds that move through and span across different media platforms. Instead, these tendencies include a variety of actions, practices, and networks that generate what we could – retrospectively – call *transmedia experiences*.

By spotlighting the long nineteenth century, we are hoping to offer an unprecedented, more systematic look at transmedia practices that accompanied the birth of Western modernity. In this, we follow Matthew Freeman's call for historical perspectives: "only by understanding those longer histories of production and consumption" he has claimed, "can we begin to

make sense of the contingencies and the affordances of our contemporary transmedia landscape" (Freeman, *Historicising* 7). This type of – what has become known as transmedia archaeology – attempts to identify "textual networks," by looking for "textual 'fossils'" in order to reconstruct "production and consumption practices" (Scolari, Baretti and Freeman 6) that they were involved in at the time. In fact, for Freeman, "industrial contingencies," historically-bound "technological affordances," along with "the constitution of audiences and the conditions of reception, or the thematic and narrative conventions of the period" are crucial to understanding the specificity of historical transmedia practices (qtd. in Jenkins, "Yes, Transmedia […] (Part Two)" n. pag.; in this context see also Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling"). Unlike most historical studies of transmedia, which have gone back to the late nineteenth and the beginnings of the twentieth century, the focus of this volume is on the long nineteenth century, which famously saw the birth of the mass media and brought the "frenzy of the visible" (Comolli 122).

In order to offer a variety of perspectives on the study of historical transmedia practices and to enrich cross-disciplinary research, contributors to this volume include a number of international experts from literary, cultural, and media studies, as well as periodical studies, creative writing, and fan studies, with different types of expertise that can and will draw on one another. They offer historicized narratives of the variety of visual and verbal forms of expression and experience and the affordances of the different media forms, the conditions under which specific media options emerged (and converged), and the multiple agents involved in the spreading of content across multiple media. Our objective is to provide new insights into the studies of transmedia engagement and spread. The chapters in our volume also aim to offer further answers to how content in multiple media circulated across cultures, and the technologies that made this possible and contribute to the refining of existing methods and theories in the field. Tracing the processes, economies, and technologies involved in transmedia practices and the aesthetics of expansion and transgression in the long nineteenth century will allow for an enhanced understanding of specific configurations in the past that will then allow us to reflect on and reconsider the reconfigurations in our present moment.

Nineteenth-century Anglophone mediascapes

It is worth exploring the nineteenth century in its *longue durée* to highlight the evolution and complexities of various transmedial – and transnational – entanglements. Our focus in this volume is on networks, overlappings, "patterns of circulation […and] zigzagging movements" (Levine, "From Nation" 657), in particular in and between the United Kingdom and North America. The contributions in this volume seek to trace transmedia practices in the context of the industrial revolutions (beginning at around 1780) and the concomitant urbanization and technologization, the increasing

literacy and access to knowledge, and an "emergent globality" (Osterhammel xvi). This includes the growing importance of consumption,[3] which accompanied the expansion of the transnational markets of diverse print products and manufacture, for example, and new forms and channels of advertising, marketing, and merchandising. This includes furthermore an expansive – colorful – visual landscape (see Freeman, *Historicising*, esp. 74) and entertainment industry, which brought about the birth of mass-produced, commercialized popular culture as we know it (see Storey).

It is especially in the decades 1860–1880 that we witness, borrowing from Osterhammel, "time-convergent" and "space-divergent" developments in different areas of cultural life in the UK and North America and an acceleration of these developments after 1890 (xviii). Our volume acknowledges the advances and changes during those years but wishes to widen the perspective and take into account also earlier medial, technological, economic, and social environments in which transmedia practices were enmeshed and with the help of which they were made possible. In the first half of the nineteenth century great transformations in the UK and the US had been possible due to a number of new scientific discoveries, technological innovations, their practical application and their regulation as well as due to the introduction of new regimes of consumption, for example.[4] Technologies such as telegraphy and the expanding and improving transportation infrastructure (of railways and seaways) and extended postal service had an impact not only on work-life, enabling faster, wider, safer, and regular distribution of news and goods (and passenger traffic), and altering the conditions of communication and social interaction.[5] They also transformed recreational and community life: "technology changed the way Americans [and Britons] amused themselves" (Boyer 215). Traveling shows such as magic lantern-slide lectures and circuses reached broader audiences, beginning roughly in the mid-nineteenth century. Popular – commercial, affordable – forms of entertainment included, among others: Minstrel shows,[6] public museums, freakshows, the diverse and growing numbers of periodicals, newspapers, cheap fictions, trade cards, melodrama and vaudeville, and, towards the turn of the twentieth century, cinema, amusement parks, as well as phonograph and kinetoscope parlors. In this context, one should not forget the cultural significance of world exhibitions that saw their advent in 1851 when the Great Exhibition opened in London's Hyde Park. They had an impact not only on the mobility of people – the international "'expo tourism' of the future" (Osterhammel 14) – but also on the traveling of goods and ideas and, thus, on the formation of knowledge and knowledge transfer.

The increasingly transnational and competitive print market, too, saw great changes with respect to production, distribution, and consumption. As Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway have pointed out, "the mobility of print forms not only was intensified and sped up but also extended geographically" (21). Different reading material and the carrier media in which it circulated – be that in the form of weekly or daily newspapers (such as the emergent penny press in the 1830s), in the form of pamphlets, periodicals,