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Joining Forces: European Periodical Studies as a New Research Field

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Joining Forces: European Periodical Studies as a New Research Field

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In recent decades, periodical studies have burgeoned into a vibrant field of research. Increasing numbers of scholars working in disciplines across the humanities — literary studies, history, art history, gender studies, media studies, legal history, to name a few — are exploring the press as a key site for cultural production, public debate and the dissemination of knowledge. Their research is supported by several large international organisations, such as the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals (RSVP), the Research Society for American Periodicals (RSAP), and most recently the European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit), as well as a plethora of smaller projects and initiatives such as the research group for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Periodical Studies (SEEEPS); the French interdisciplinary Texte et Image Groupe de Recherche à l'École (TIGRE); the *History in Popular Cultures of Knowledge* group at the University of Freiburg; and the Network of Research: Movies, Magazines, Audiences (NoRMMA). Publication outlets include several well-established journals: most notably the *Victorian Periodicals Review*, now in its forty-ninth year, but also *American Periodicals* and the *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*. Studies of individual publications and themes have long been supplemented by substantial reference and bibliographic works and more recently by digitized editions, while large publicly funded research projects have ranged recently from scientific periodicals in the nineteenth century (SciPer) to *Chinese* and *British women's magazines*, and from European women editors (WeChangEd) to *travel magazines* in twentieth-century Canada.

Yet while interdisciplinary synergies are actively encouraged and fostered at conferences and seminars, in special issues and in edited volumes, periodical studies is in many ways still a highly fragmented field. For one, the linguistic diversity of the press in Europe in particular makes it virtually impossible for individual scholars to study the entire range of periodical production and read all the relevant research. We all tend to work within a particular comfort zone, and most often that comfort zone is determined by the language(s) we speak and the particular national tradition and historical period in which we chose to specialise as scholars. It is through a combination of these parameters that we define our area of expertise (the French Enlightenment, for instance, or Victorian Britain or Late Imperial Russia). But perhaps more important than language barriers are the different academic systems and theoretical-methodological paradigms that come with them. French, British, and Hungarian scholars 'do' periodical studies differently. Each subfield tends to speak its own 'language', generating its own research questions and hypotheses without testing them at a broader level of inquiry. Occasionally, political and cultural sensitivities also impede dialogue across national boundaries. Some British scholars may hesitate to participate in European initiatives such as ESPRit because they assume that 'European' means 'non-British', while scholars of non-English speaking countries are sometimes reluctant to adopt English as a *lingua franca* and are consequently less likely to share their expertise outside their national academies.

This tendency to think about the press in terms of languages, nations, and periods is further reinforced by the ways in which libraries organize and manage their periodical

collections (paper or digital). The primary sources of periodical scholarship lie scattered, in complete and partial runs, in different libraries across the world. Because collections generally focus on the press in a single national tradition, foreign titles are most at risk of being discarded when shelf space needs to be freed up for recent acquisitions. Librarians tellingly describe this practice as ‘weeding’. There is, moreover, no specialist bibliographical tool that facilitates research by documenting the location and availability of periodicals in libraries in archives across the world. At the same time, library metadata are tailored to describing books, not periodicals: even in those cases where a library catalogue accurately records the specific issues and volumes held, we will look in vain for bibliographic information on the contents of those issues, let alone many of the specific properties, such as price and page length, that define the periodical and that can vary so greatly and rapidly over their run.

Even at a time when digitization technologies are opening up exciting new possibilities for periodical research, large-scale digitization projects rarely harvest material across national boundaries. One of the main reasons for this is that these databases are almost always created and curated by, or at least developed in close collaboration with, a single national library. Gale Cengage’s 19th Century UK Periodicals is a subscription-based database offering digitized material from the British Library. [Gallica](#) is a free digital library of books, newspapers, and magazines run by the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The Dutch have [Delpher](#), developed by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in partnership with various libraries and academic institutions, and for scholars of the Spanish press, there is the [Hemeroteca Digital](#) available via the Biblioteca Nacional de España. Most of these databases have their own data models, and public access policies vary from open source to paid individual membership to expensive institutional subscriptions, making it difficult to bring them together in a single repository. It is no coincidence that one of the few transnational, multilingual databases available at present, ProQuest’s Gerritsen Collection of Women’s History, originates from a private collection that was transnational and multilingual to begin with: it contains books, pamphlets and periodicals in fifteen languages collected by the Dutch physician Aletta Jacobs and her husband C. V. Gerritsen.

Since 2008, European libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions can share digitised works via [Europeana](#), a digital platform that aims at making European cultural heritage freely accessible online. With the exception of [newspapers](#), the periodicals in its collections are not cross-searchable yet, but by collecting and connecting the metadata and developing a Europeana Data Model (EDM) to promote standardisation, Europeana has led the way in bringing together material from collections across Europe. If only there were a comparable research tool that brought together, formally and as comprehensively as possible, in a single location, existing resources for periodical studies, such as national bibliographies, major reference works, digitized editions, and electronic databases as well as scholarship on specific journals and types of journal. That tool would help to define the field in broad terms and facilitate the work of all periodical scholars, but it would also identify any bibliographical lacunae that need to be addressed.

It was in this broad spirit that ESPRit was founded in 2009 by periodical scholars from Austria, Belgium, England, the Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland, and the United States. Since then, ESPRit has taken important steps towards a more comprehensive understanding of the periodical press. Its annual, themed conferences in particular provide a lively forum to share and discuss research for scholars working in different disciplines on periodicals in the various European languages. At the first conference in Manchester in 2011, forty delegates from seven countries gathered to explore the commonalities and differences between periodical cultures in the European context,

and to begin to build a network of researchers in this field. Following conferences in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden, on topics as diverse as the magazine as medium, the production of periodicals, and politics and the periodical press, ESPRit will be back in the UK this year for a conference on ‘Periodical Counter Cultures: Tradition, Conformity and Dissent’ at Liverpool John Moores University on 7–8 July 2016. With almost seventy papers and speakers from thirteen different countries, the numbers of the inaugural gathering five years ago have almost doubled.

The foundation of the *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is the logical next step for scholars from the ESPRit community seeking to provide a publishing forum for this work and to further encourage dialogue and cross-fertilisation in European periodical research. In the words of our mission statement, we are a journal devoted to the study of periodicals and newspapers in Europe from the seventeenth century to the present. We publish research from a broad range of critical, theoretical and methodological perspectives, including, but not limited to, cultural history, literary studies, art history, gender studies, media studies, history of science, and digital humanities. We offer scholars a forum for sharing their research on any aspect of the European periodical press and for exchanging ideas across disciplinary borders. We particularly encourage comparative contributions that take the study of periodical publication beyond linguistic, cultural, and historical boundaries, that explore new theoretical and methodological paths, and that thereby open up new lines of scholarly inquiry.

We hope that our first issue lives up to these aims, delivering a set of papers that addresses primarily the theme of the ‘back-room business’ of periodical publication across a broad historical and national range, the focus of our third annual conference held in Nijmegen in April 2014, but that also reflects explicitly on the theory and methodology of periodical research. This latter aim is foregrounded most directly in our opening essay, ‘Forms of Affect, Relationality, and Periodical Encounter, or “Pine-Apple for the Million”’, in which Fionnuala Dillane focuses on the operations of affect in the open-ended, heterogeneous context of the periodical. Feelings and emotions are messy and defy integration into a single methodology, but they are also crucial to understanding the workings of the periodical press beyond its material, social, economic, and aesthetic dimensions. Tilda Maria Forselius’s article “Aber mein Lieber Schneider”: The Printer as a Media Actor and the Drama of Production in *Then Swänska Argus* (1732–34)’ shows how reflection on the role of the printer and printing technologies in *Then Swänska Argus*, a Swedish weekly in the tradition of the *Spectator*, helped shape the formation of the genre. In ‘The Draughtsman’s Contacts: Robert Seymour and the Humorous Periodical Press in the 1830s’, Brian Maidment explores the role of magazine illustration in the career of a jobbing draughtsman in early-Victorian Britain. Helleke Van den Braber’s article ‘*De Nieuwe Gids* and its Informal Patronage System’ examines the informal funding networks supporting the influential late-nineteenth-century cultural magazine *De Nieuwe Gids*. Celia Aijmer Rydsjö and AnnKatrin Jonsson in ‘Making It News: Money and Marketing in the Expatriate Modernist Little Magazine in Europe’ focuses on the precarious balancing act of expatriate little magazines in the 1920s and 30s between literary ambitions and economic concerns. Finally, *JEPS* also welcomes book reviews and shorter pieces stimulating debate. In “‘Articles’ or ‘Essays’? A View from the Bridge’, Laurel Brake discusses the usage of ‘article’ or ‘essay’ to describe one of the basic units of journalism, raising the issues of the language of the field, and the identity of the discipline — of media history. As well as presenting the latest original scholarship in European periodical studies, we shall always seek to offer this journal as an active forum in which such meta-disciplinary questions can be raised and discussed.