

**Introduction: Verbal and Visual Interactions in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture**  
**Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello**

Volumes of George Cruikshank's *Scraps and Sketches*, a publication of miscellaneous images vaguely intended to be cut and pasted in home-made albums and scrapbooks; a catalogue of the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition customised by the doodles and marginalia of its owner and her friends; a job-lot of nineteenth-century illustrated children's publications, in which the magic lantern show is miniaturized into the format of the book – the objects featured in the lead articles of this issue of *19* evoke the contents of a house sale more than a scholarly journal. Akin to the type of material described by Walter Benjamin as 'booklike creations from fringe areas',<sup>1</sup> they don't add up to any of the cohesive themes featured in previous issues, such as history, literature, or sentimentality. They have been, however, 'salvaged' by collectors and thus given a chance to 'renew the old world'.<sup>2</sup>

The essays and reviews in this issue have been selected or developed from papers and workshops given at the conference *The Verbal and the Visual in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (23-24 June 2006) organised by the Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies. Given the wealth of papers on far more canonical literary and visual practices featured at that conference, our selection might seem perverse in its insistence on odds and ends. Yet what these essays have in common is precisely their attention to 'marginalia', to the bits and pieces that have ended up at the margins of histories and collections: the humorous printed scraps, which Brian Maidment bought from second-hand rather than antiques dealers, are not yet coherently represented in public collections; the annotated catalogue featured in Catherine Flood's paper has been kept at the Victoria and Albert Museum because some of the drawings added to it are by the well-known illustrator Richard Doyle, rather than because it documents the exhibition-viewing practices and experiences of a young Victorian woman; the children's books discussed in John Plunkett's paper are an unexpected feature of Bill Douglas and Peter Jewell's collection of books, artefacts and ephemera on the history and prehistory of cinema. As editors, we have 'collected' essays about material 'collected' by the writers,

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who have salvaged from underused corners of repositories objects that themselves ‘collect’, and, in the term adopted by John Plunkett, ‘remediate’ previous productions:<sup>3</sup> old printing plates in the case of *Scraps and Sketches*; paintings in the case of catalogues, which offered the wider public a form of art collecting reduced to lists of artists and titles; and magic lantern and peep shows, remediated from speech into writing by children’s books. This issue of *19*, then, demonstrates how ‘the true, unrecognised passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive [...] by loyalty to the thing, the individual thing, salvaged by him, he evokes an obstinate, subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable’.<sup>4</sup> It showcases the porous-ness of the boundaries between collecting and archiving, and between collecting as an acquisitive practice – a matter of identifying and purchasing existing items – and collecting as an expressive medium, which creates something new from the debris of print culture.

The image of the collector here becomes telescoped through diverse histories and practices: the printmaker, who collects and re-uses old plates; the album collector, who uses these scraps in albums and decorative arrangements; the exhibition-goer, who turns the official catalogue into a personal commentary of observations and a souvenir of visits and friends; the private collector, whose personal obsessions become part of academia (in this case the Bill Douglas Centre at Exeter University); writers and editors who collect papers and scraps of information; and, finally, you, the reader and spectator of this journal, who no doubt will use the browsing and interactive facilities offered by the electronic format to reassemble a completely different issue from the one we had in mind. This interactivity, we suggest, has been a feature of print culture since the nineteenth century if not earlier. The papers in this issue all consider practices that were not exclusively of reading or looking, but involved manipulating and interacting with the material provided by printers: images to be selected, cut out and collated in new contexts; margins and blank sheets to be filled in by hand with annotations and illustrations; and pages that demanded not only turning, but also folding out to view panoramas, pulling at tabs to make pictures change, and holding up to the light to be affected by coloured transparencies.

Our focus on interactivity also follows from the conference workshops on

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nineteenth-century verbal and visual practices and their representations then and now. Some forms of ‘interactivity’ that were common-place in the past, such as dressing-up to visit exhibitions, turning viewers into visual attractions competing with the art objects on display, continue in the present but as exceptional – Goths dressed up in their full regalia were one of the unplanned features of *Gothic Nightmares*, the exhibition at Tate Britain discussed by Heather Tilley. A similar reversal, but from producer to performative attraction in which labour, like glass, becomes invisible, happened to the glass-workers in the representations considered by Katherine Inglis’s review ‘Working with Glass’.

With this issue we also launch a new section entitled *Scraps on the Album*, which we hope will continue to appear from time to time in future issues, offering occasional papers on individual albums as well as album collections. In this issue, Louis James introduces William Hone’s *Everyday Book*. This section will provide an informal forum in which to share scraps of information, shorter papers, and generally foster discussion around new research, collections and projects on albums, trying to make a more immediate use of the electronic format.

As Anna Everett points out in her reflections on ‘digitextuality’:

New digital media technologies make meaning not only by building a new text through translation and absorption of other texts, but also by embedding the entirety of other texts (digital and analogue) seamlessly within the new. What this means is that earlier practices of collage, bricolage and other modernist and postmodernist hybrid representational strategies and literary gestures of intertextual referentiality have been expanded for the new demands and technological wizardry of the digital age.<sup>5</sup>

If, as Laura Mulvey has argued, new digital technologies have, in the realm of film and the cinema, blurred the boundaries between mainstream and avant-garde production, between producers and consumers, and between passive and active modes of spectatorship, the essays in this issue of *19* suggest that something similar had been going on in print culture even before collage and ‘intertextual referentiality’ became avant-garde artistic practices.<sup>6</sup> Modernism, after all, replaced as much as questioned the existing distinctions between the fine and the not-so-fine arts by recuperating collage and bricolage as an aesthetic practice.

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The nineteenth-century interactions sampled in this issue reconfigure a domain of art that had long been associated with passive forms of reception. Despite the embodied and multi-sensorial origins of the term ‘aesthetic’, aesthetic experience emerged in the course of the eighteenth century as an ethos defining the domain of art in terms of distance, detachment, and the purification of sight from the other senses.<sup>7</sup> When museums opened to the public, art was structured by a series of protocols of viewing based on the autonomy of the mind from the body and the specificity of the medium exhibited.<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin summarized this approach through Adolf Loos’ reading of Goethe: ‘what may be touched cannot be a work of art, [...] a work of art must be out of reach’.<sup>9</sup> Against this view of art and perception, Benjamin posits an alternative form of engagement, which emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when art became more widely and cheaply accessible through innovations in processes of mechanical reproduction.<sup>10</sup> These technical innovations fostered the desire to ‘bring things “closer” spatially and humanly [...] to get hold of an object at close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction’. Lost is the distance, uniqueness, permanence – in one word, the aura. The new culture of contact extracts sameness even from what is unique. Yet it would be wrong to assume that such ‘sameness’ leads to a homogenisation of culture of the kind denounced by T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, a negative process in which perceivers are subjected to the role of passive consumers in what they termed ‘the culture industry’.<sup>11</sup> Against this powerful view of mass culture, Benjamin’s reflections on the nineteenth century allow us to access an alternative, emancipatory view of the relationship between industrial production and consumption. For Benjamin the destruction of the aura of tradition opens up the potential for an interactive and creative cultural practice. Reproduction obscures the heterogeneity of the original, homogenizing its medium and size to fit the printed page or the cinema screen, and this sameness involves the exchange value of objects seen as commodities; yet thanks to their circulation in cheaper and more manageable formats, art reproductions can be owned and further manipulated. In a comparison between collectors and children, Benjamin points to the rebirth of such materials through processes such as ‘the painting of objects, the cutting out of figures,

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the application of decals – the whole range of childlike modes of acquisition, from touching things to giving them names’.<sup>12</sup>

Benjamin’s interest in nineteenth-century modes of mechanical reproduction marks a particular moment in the 1930s when nineteenth-century media innovations gave an impulse to a new way of thinking about art. Aby Warburg’s atlas of memory and André Malraux’s imaginary museum without walls depend on the nineteenth-century development of printing techniques and the invention of photography, which made it possible ‘to transform a wide range of mediums into a system of *image-text* – a database of digital terms, an archive without museums’.<sup>13</sup> For Benjamin these nineteenth-century technical innovations change the nature of the work of art, which becomes ‘designed for reproducibility’.<sup>14</sup> This line of thinking has fed theorists of virtual culture and Baudrillardian notions of the simulacrum.<sup>15</sup> Yet reproducibility involves a dialectic of seeing in which disembodiment is in tension with touch. Much as the late eighteenth-century ethos of detached viewing coincided with the development of printing techniques that would allow viewers to get closer to objects and touch them, so too did the early twentieth century see the rise of reproduction as a crucial instrument for art and cultural history, while an alternative tradition, best exemplified in the writings of Clement Greenberg, emphasized artistic autonomy in terms of medium specificity.<sup>16</sup> Yet are reproduction and medium specificity two alternatives? Perhaps it would be better to keep the two options in a dialectical tension. As Rosalind Krauss points out, once photographic reproduction has done away with definitions of art based on specific material supports, there is a need to reinvent the medium.<sup>17</sup> Rather than positing either a medium-specific approach to art or a self-effacing notion of art based on medium transparency, Benjamin’s focus on touch, appropriation and manipulation suggests a material form of engagement in which aesthetic experience is conceived as a production, a practice, rather than a contemplative and detached form of perception.

This interest in an interactive and multisensorial approach to culture characterises the essays published in this issue of *19*, which address the verbal and the visual not through encounters between different media, but through forms of appropriation and remediation of one medium into another. In his *Arcades Project*

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Benjamin remarks upon the emergence of a literature ‘whose stylistic character forms an exact counterpart to the dioramas, panoramas, and so forth’.<sup>18</sup> Visiting the nineteenth-century archive with Benjamin’s telescoping interest in print culture, we were fascinated by how visual media and visual experiences were shaped within nineteenth-century printed materials. Indeed, well before Aby Warburg and André Malraux, viewers were complementing, augmenting, and memorizing their experiences of viewing in the form of paper galleries and paper panoramas.

This issue focuses on ‘marginal’ and interactive practices: scrapbooking is a practice of uncertain status between production and consumption, in which printed and handmade, off-the-peg and bespoke, popular culture and fine art (or artiness), are referenced and recycled into an endless loop; annotating exhibition catalogues gives occasion for haptic satisfaction, even revenge, over the imperative to ‘just look’ enacted by exhibition protocols;<sup>19</sup> children’s books not only evoke in their visual and verbal narrative the experience of being a captivated spectator at a magic lantern show, but also enable the fantasy of becoming the showman conjuring the magic, by giving the reader the manual control of the show.<sup>20</sup> Interactivity is inherently ephemeral. All reading and looking involve activity, physical as well as mental (pages need to be turned for the reading self to be propelled forward into a narrative, while the rest of the body should ideally be parked on a comfy seat; the viewing body has to negotiate the gallery space and other viewers to look at an exhibition). Yet these experiences are most often lost, gone unrecorded for history. This is why annotated catalogues or scrapbooks can be fascinating, as they allow us to see not only how culture was produced but also how it was used.

These themes seemed to us particularly appropriate to an e-journal, a format that allows us to include a high visual content and an element of show-and-tell, but also one that seems inherently less ‘bossy’ than paper journals, as readers can navigate the issue in any order, concentrate on the visual archive, and respond by contributing their own annotations and marginalia online.<sup>21</sup> The issue in itself is a kind of archive or album, selected according to serendipity and the quirks of chance, as much as intellectual coherence. Its on-line dimension reminds us that interactivity is not only a solitary

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encounter between the reader/spectator and the album, catalogue or book, but also a form of sociability: making and looking at scrapbooks and albums were and are collective activities, enacting as much as recording social situations;<sup>22</sup> exhibitions and their memories are occasions to be shared amongst friends; books and journals address not only the individual reader but an actual or imaginary community. We hope this issue of *I9* will captivate and involve the community of scholars and students it addresses.

Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting' (1931), in *Illuminations* ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Collins, 1973), pp. 59-67 (p. 66).

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', p. 61. For Benjamin the task of the historian is to 'brush history against the grain', break down the continuum of cultural treasures produced by the spoils of victory (Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History, *Illuminations*, pp. 253-264). Instead, the historian is like a collector who 'salvages' the 'debris' of history, or like children drawn to the 'detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry'; through their redemptive grasp, 'in waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them', see 'Old Forgotten Children's Books', *Selected Writings*, 4 vols, ed. by Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1996-2003), I, p. 408.

<sup>3</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> 'In praise of the Doll', *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972-1989), III, p. 216, quoted in Esther Leslie, 'Telescoping the Microscopic Object: Benjamin the Collector', in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), pp. 58-91 (p. 68).

<sup>5</sup> Anna Everett, 'Digitextuality and Click Theory', in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. by Anna Everett and John Caldwell (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 3-29 (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006).

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Steffen W. Gross, 'The Neglected Programme of Aesthetics', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42:4 (2002), 403-414. A still relevant discussion of the meanings of the term can be found in Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (Fontana / Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> Touching, however, became routinely prohibited in museums only in the eighteenth century. For a wonderfully evocative description of a highly tactile visit to the British Museum, in which she was allowed as a matter of course to handle, carry around and finger through a display of precious ancient Roman objects, see *Sophie in London, 1786: Being the Diary of Sophie von la Roche*, trans. C. Williams (London, 1933), quoted by Marcia Pointon in 'Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body' in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), pp. 39-58 (p. 41).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 258-77 (p. 259); see Leslie, 'Telescoping the Microscopic Object: Benjamin the Collector', p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973), pp. 219-253 (p. 225).

<sup>11</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry', *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 120-167; see also Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library', p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Hal Foster, 'The Archive Without Museum', *October*, 77 (1996), 97-119 (p. 97); see also Rosalind Krauss, 'Postmodernism's Museum without Walls', in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 141-147.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, 'Work of Art', p. 226.

<sup>15</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St Louis, MO.: Telos Press, 1981); Id., *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), and Rosalind Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium', *Critical Inquiry*, 25:2 (Winter 1999), 289-305.

<sup>16</sup> This revaluation of the medium as technical support is most evident in Clement Greenberg's 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', *Partisan Review*, 7 (1940), which engages with G. E. Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766), the foundational essay on the differences between media, which stated that verbal arts are temporal and visual arts spatial: see G. E. Lessing, *Laocoön*, trans. by E. A. McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 77. Lessing's text exerted its influence in the nineteenth-century British art world through translations by De Quincey (*Blackwood's Magazine*, 19 (1826)), E. C. Beasley in 1853, R. Phillimore and E. Frothingham in 1874.

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<sup>17</sup> Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium'; see also Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Q: Panorama', *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1999), fragment Q2, 6, p. 531.

<sup>19</sup> On this prohibition to touch, see also Susan Stewart, 'Prologue: From the Museum of Touch', *Material Memories. Design and Evocation*, ed. by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), pp.17-36.

<sup>20</sup> In 'A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books' (1926), *Selected Writings*, I, 435-43: 436, Benjamin suggests that 'when children think up stories, they are like theatre-producers who refuse to be bound by "sense"'.

<sup>21</sup> On the authoritarian language of newspapers and its creative transformation by avant-garde poetry and collage see Rosalind Krauss, 'The Circulation of the Sign', in *The Picasso Papers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), pp. 23–85.

<sup>22</sup> On early-nineteenth century albums, see also Patrizia Di Bello, 'Mrs Birkbeck's Album: the Hand-Written and the Printed in Early Nineteenth-Century Feminine Culture', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 1 (2005) <[www.19.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk)> and Vicky Mills, 'The Album as Museum? A Response to Patrizia Di Bello on an Interdisciplinary Approach to Mrs Birkbeck's Album', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2 (2006) <[www.19.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk)>.

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**19:** *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 5 (2007) [www.19.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk)