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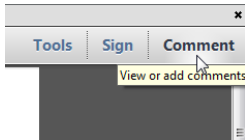
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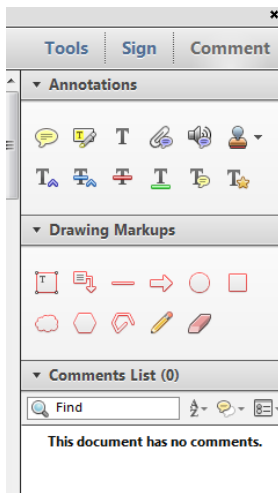
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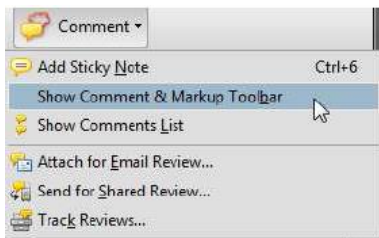


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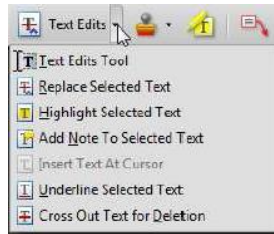
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AQ1–AQ4

4. Intro-/Inter-: Laurel Brake and the Political Epistemology of the Introduction 1990–2016

AQ5

Andrew King*

Laurel Brake has been introducing us to nineteenth-century periodicals since the dazzling 1990 collection *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, co-edited with Aled Jones and Lionel Madden.¹ Since then almost all her monographs, edited collections and the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* have had ‘Introductions’. Only her three volumes on other subjects – two on Pater and one on the connections and differences between the 1890s and 1990s – have initial chapters that use other headings: the two on Pater use his name; the *Ending of Epochs* starts with a ‘Preface’. Why this repeated emphasis on ‘Introductions’ – on ‘leading into’ – I wondered, and what changes and continuities might we find ourselves led to if we read just these introductory signposts in Laurel’s output? That is what these few words attempt to find out.

Laurel did not have a piece of her own in *Investigating Victorian Periodicals* (neither did Lionel) but her stamp was unmistakable, as the volume was closely linked to what was, at the time, a controversial issue of *Victorian Periodicals Review* on ‘Theory’ that she had guest-edited with Anne Humpherys the previous year (versions of two of the essays in that special number were printed in the book). The polemical, electrifying, editorial called ‘Critical Theory and Periodical Research’ that Laurel and Anne had written for the ‘Theory’ number called for a shift away from the bibliographical, from the wide survey and from accounts of editors, authors and periodicals based on comfortable categories and procedures we already knew, to reflect instead on what we thought we knew – to ‘metacriticism’ in Foucauldian mould, assisted by Bakhtin (who will appear a few times in subsequent Introductions), Derrida and Gerald Prince (who won’t). This call to arms demanded a focus on *how* we make meaning, not just on *what* meanings. As the 1994 *Subjugated Knowledges* makes clear, Laurel’s enterprise is to get us to re-evaluate the devalued and defeated, to see the hitherto invisible and hear the silenced. The ‘Introduction’ to *Investigating Victorian Journalism* was quieter in tone but no less combative in its similar appeals to interrogate not just the study but the practices of journalism through an interdisciplinary mix of English literary studies, bibliography, history and economics.

The energizing core of these early, co-written Introductions, the question of the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’, has continued to propel Laurel’s Introductions. Such general clarions are easy to trumpet but Laurel’s involves a rigorous and consistent method: she wants us to think the world anew by getting us to put into conversation discourses and disciplines that we had previously kept apart, whether historical and descriptive bibliography dialoguing with poststructuralism and cultural studies,² the popular and postmodernism,³ and especially *then* and *now*, the nineteenth-century and today, a dialogue that is constant from 1989 on. If there is one table where these all meet it is the ‘sociology of the text’, a term that occurs three times

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¹ *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990).

² *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 1.

³ *Essays and Studies*, 49 (1995): *The Endings of Epochs*, ed. by Laurel Brake, p. x.

in Laurel's Introductions, twice with explicit reference to D. F. McKenzie's 1985 inaugural Panizzi lecture.⁴ It is in the third of these, *Encounters in the Victorian Press*, edited with Julie Codell in 2005, where McKenzie's contribution is most closely specified. It is summed up in two words: 'inclusiveness' and 'welcome'.⁵ For surely Laurel's call to get us to think is fuelled, at its core, by her drive to create dialogue between differences around a table that offers the possibility of international, interdisciplinary, intertextual interests, interrogations, interactions.

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Such hospitality is not easy; neither does it follow fixed paths. The Introduction of *Print in Transition* (2001) signals, indeed, a rupture with her earlier work. If, as she wrote there, 'Print is, of course, *always*, in transition', so is she: 'Where I once saw "periodicals", I now see the wider and deeper category of "serials", which includes newspapers and part-issues'.⁶ She revises her previous idea of what the 'archive' is, talking now of 'media history' as well as 'book history', and extends her invitation to an apparently new topic that will henceforth recur: the effect of communications technologies. Whereas once Laurel had been concerned to make stories about someone else's then and now, the new millennium causes reflection on her own.

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Yet it is not as if her past energy to bring together had collapsed in on itself into phenomenological analysis: other collaborations were in the offing, not least the vast, collectively cooked feast of the 2009 *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*. In its Introduction, once more, inclusivity and diversity, exchange, collaboration and conversation about our knowledge of the field are dominant themes, as they are in the introduction to *The Lure of Illustration*, again co-edited with Marysa Demoor in the same year.⁷ It is in this latter, though, more than in previous Introductions, that we read of the possibility of multivocality leading to debates at cross purposes, of rhetorics sliding past one another without real interaction: perhaps guests may not leave the table energized and enriched after all, but merely at odds with one another. This hint of pessimism is not sustained, for even if the Introduction to the 2016 volume on *The News of the World*, co-edited with Mark Turner and Chandrika Kaul, stresses absences from the historical record, invisibility and silence, and the language of 'welcome' is no more, McKenzie's sociology of texts is still there, transformed, updated and now called – no doubt as a result of discussion over dinner with the editor of the eponymous journal – 'Media History'.⁸

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How then are we to summarize Laurel's 'Introductions'? Read intertextually, their 'leadings into' show a profound commitment to the 'inter', to the co-creation of knowledge, to the eternally mobile encounter of Bakhtinian dialogue, to process rather than product, as well as a rejection of the idea and practice of the 'intro' as a way into arcane knowledge that a Sage possesses. Laurel's Introductions are an invitation to think *together*, not a promise of enlightenment. This is the political epistemology of Laurel's Introductions: not a call to arms, a singular *fiat* or assertion, but an acknowledgement of the need for welcome.

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AQ6

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

AQ7

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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⁴ D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (The Panizzi Lectures; 1985) (London: British Library, 1986), re-issued by Cambridge University Press in 1999.

⁵ *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie Codell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 4.

⁶ Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition, 1850–1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. xiv, xiii.

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⁷ *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁸ *The News of the World and the British Press, 1843–2011: 'Journalism for the Rich, Journalism for the Poor'*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Chandrika Kaul and Mark Turner (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).