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## Visual Mapping and Cultural Authority: Design Changes in U.S. Newspapers, 1920–1940

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The direction of design change in newspapers through the twentieth century, as in much else, was from Victorian to modern. The “primitive” front page had consisted of a cascade of items, organized in thin columns on a very broad sheet. Headlines consisted of multiple tiers stacked like an outline on top of a story (see Fig. 1). These front pages often had symmetry but little hierarchy (note the alternating heads on top of columns in Fig. 2). One exemplar of this type of design in English-speaking countries was the *Times* of London (Fig. 3); in the United States, imitating the *Times* signaled a newspaper’s seriousness—though no U.S. newspaper could quite match the *Times* in overall monochromatic reserve. A second quite different exemplar was the *San Francisco Examiner*, which used a variety of headline typographies to present a loud, jumbled presence (Fig. 4). So there are styles in Victorian papers: *Examiner* style was emphatic, where *Times* style was low-key.

The modern front page was quite the opposite. Fewer items occupied more space; there was a clear hierarchy, so that the front page constituted a map of the day’s events; headlines told the point of an item rather than outlining its content. Again we can divide modern style into two families. In this case, low-key design is exemplified by the prestige broadsheets—the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*, while the emphatic style is represented best by the tabloids. (*USA Today* is sometimes said to represent a next phase—the postmodern newspaper. In fact, in terms of design, one might as readily understand it as a throwback to *Examiner* style—an emphatic Victorianism.)

These designations—Victorian and modern, low-key and emphatic, *Times* and *Examiner*, broadsheet and tabloid—apply not just to front pages but to the whole form of the newspaper

Conventional wisdom holds that modern newspaper redesign began with a fear of television and relied on the introduction of new technologies, with the key decade of change occurring in the 1970s. Our previous content analysis of front page design elements over a century, from 1885 to 1985 (Barnhurst & Nerone, 1991), showed that the long-term change in design strategies did not center in the 1970s, although there was an acceleration of change in that decade. In fact, the direction of change had been established much earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s. Both the modern broadsheet and the modern tabloid seem to have developed in those two decades between the world wars, at a time when much else was happening in U.S. culture. Two elements of change deserve attention: authority and space.

The design change accompanied shifts in the location of authority general to the culture and linked to the rise of a cult of expertise. The rise of the professions as locations of authority in the Progressive era is a familiar theme in U.S. history. In the realm of journalism, the professionalizing impulse is apparent in the appearance of journalism degree programs at universities nationwide, in muckraking indictments of the newspapers of the industrial era, like Upton Sinclair's (1919) *The Brass Check* and Will Irwin's (1969; originally published in 1906) *The American Newspaper*, and in Walter Lippmann's (1922) call for "intelligence bureaus" to supplement newspaper reportage in his *Public Opinion*. Michael Schudson (1978) has usefully summarized the development of a stance of professionalism and the concomitant rise of an ethos of objectivity in *Discovering the News*. The textual aspects of this shift have been debated and discussed, but generally without reference to the visual history of the media (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Epstein, 1973; Leonard, 1986). Yet clearly individual expert accounts by professional journalists—the content of the newspaper—were embedded within a larger visual map, the visual form of the paper. Also, clearly, readers read newspapers and not reporters. And the visual changes affected not just the elite press but were perhaps more strongly felt in the demotic world of the tabloids, which were novel in the 1920s.

Cultural historians have noted that modernism has been associated with changes in the organization of space and time (Kern, 1983). Such shifts, associated with new communication and transportation technologies, have long interested communications scholars (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1964; Carey, 1988). In a common-sense fashion, we assume that modernism and industrialization have altered physical space in ways which should be taken note of by social theory. We also accept that social transformations associated with first modernization and then postmodernism have challenged existing configurations of cultural space (Soja, 1989; Jameson, 1991). Commentators on the postmodern condition have argued that postmodern folk, for a variety of reasons, are unable to construct adequate maps of their social worlds. It's clear that the "modernist" newspaper style that came into existence in the 1920s and 1930s presented itself as just such a social map, one to be re-drawn on a daily basis, that is, one with a spatial rather than a temporal bias, to borrow terms from Innis. (A medium with a temporal bias allows preservation through time—clay tablets are a good example. One with a spatial bias allows for broad dissemination through space—network television is a good example. The biases of communications media are thought by Innis and others to have important consequences for social and cultural coherence and for the creation and erosion of centers of control.)

The particular set of bottlenecks that allowed for the creation of professionalism in journalism came into existence at roughly the time that the visual shape of the newspaper changed, i.e., the period between the world wars. This explains an anomaly in press history, namely that a series of design elements—typographic styles, banner headlines, photographs and other illustrations, bylines, indexes, and sectioning—which had been used sporadically for decades, congealed into a particular form. Another way to put this would be to refer to the design elements as a kind of grammar, and the form as a map expressed through that grammar.

Scholars have used the term “grammar” in studying a variety of media. Scholars in cinema studies, for instance, have traced the development of a series of techniques (close-ups, montage, camera angles) as a kind of visual grammar that critics can use to analyze visual communication (Messaris, 1993). This approach has been adopted in some studies of television. A similar approach is used in Jonathan Crary’s critical history of photography (1990). The respectability of this grammatical approach to visual communication has been enhanced by a connection to semiotics and post structuralism—the debt to Roland Barthes is especially noteworthy.

The notion of grammar has been applied to the visual world of the newspaper only rarely—Barnhurst explores this approach in *Seeing the Newspaper* (1994), as does LeMahieu in *A Culture for Democracy* (1988). There is no question that the visual elements of the newspaper can be analyzed using a kind of grammar, but that is not the main avenue to be explored here. Rather, this paper focuses on the larger form of the newspaper. Again, “map” is a better term than “grammar” for this level of analysis.

Another approach to studying news media is “frame analysis.” Associated with the work of Erving Goffman (1974), frame analysis has been adapted to media analysis by Todd Gitlin (1980) and others. Contrary to grammar analysis, frame analysis uses a visual metaphor to describe non-visual conventions and routines. It is perhaps useful to understand the visual form of the newspaper as a frame too, though this is not what Goffman had in mind. Obviously, on a common-sense level, the visual form of the newspaper frames the news contained therein; but close analysis will show that a deeper kind of framing is also involved.

What we’ve said to this point suggests a neat narrative of design change in the 1920s and 1930s. A messy form was reconstrued into a tidier, more didactic form through the agency of professionals newly empowered by conditions of monopoly and a cult of expertise; the modern newspaper, then, is a kind of visual tool of social control. But this social control narrative is only one among several other possible narratives.

A second available narrative could be driven by the popular. In this narrative, the same elements that formed the social control narrative take on a different, sunnier aspect. The streamlining of the front page enabled readers to navigate their world with more confidence and efficiency; the appearance of new clusters of interests—sports pages, women’s pages, entertainment pages—indicated a liberation of popular energy in leisure, a creation of a cultural superhighway. This narrative of the popular reflects other histories of the period as well—the

Not least was the friction between journalism and design. We've phrased this dispute broadly in order to capture two kinds of conflict—one between the messiness of news and the tidiness of typographical design, the other between the material interests of reporters and those of designers. It seems to us that news by definition is messy—the very category, as it's socially constructed, emphasizes novelty, conflict, and timeliness (among other things). The news is weird; the news is new; the news is dramatic. It's a jumble. But modern design, by definition, is rational, functional, and premeditated; it tames the mess by artifice. On the modern front page, the absence of disorder might be taken to signal the triumph of design over journalism, or the triumph of designers over reporters. But that is too simple a story.

In fact, the modern front page is also a reporter's front page, for a different kind of reporter. The modern reporter—the professional journalist—is an expert, not an author. The expert explains the news, while the old reporter animated it. The virtue of the professional journalist is expertise and discernment—finding the timeless moral or the historical significance of a rush of events; while the virtue of the old reporter was making the rush seem urgent and compelling. One finds sense where the other finds drama. An inexact measure of these differing journalisms is the use of bylines and signatures, a design element that we will explore in some detail.

This paper is based on our reading of five newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s: the *Denver Post*, the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Boston Evening Transcript*, the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, and the *Syracuse Bugle*. These newspapers were chosen to reflect the varieties of newspaper design and patterns of design change in the period. The *Denver Post* was a notoriously sensational paper in a booming western city; the *Chicago Daily News* was a bastion of popular journalism in an established midwestern metropolis; its competitor, the *Herald and Examiner*, was a Hearst paper that evolved into a tabloid; the *Boston Evening Transcript* was a relatively staid paper that first adopted some of the grammar of emphatic style and then dramatically streamlined; and the *Syracuse Bugle* was a short-lived weekly tabloid in a small eastern city. No selection of newspapers would have yielded a “representative sample” of the era's design; this selection does allow us to discuss a broad range of patterns and shifts beyond those exemplified in the era's elite papers. (It's worth noting that elite papers tend not to be leaders in design innovation—obviously, today's *New York Times* retains many elements of traditional design.)

In what follows we will first summarize the range of patterns and changes that we found; afterwards we will discuss the significance of these patterns and changes in terms of cultural authority and mapping the social.

### Layout and Sections

A couple of gross generalizations apply to all of the papers studied. All of them experimented with design. All of them used more horizontal design, and made their stories wider rather than taller, as the decades passed. All of them became somewhat more streamlined. All of them began to package stories that shared a topical similarity, and all began to compartmentalize into pages and then sections. These gross changes confirm our expectations that newspapers became more

for example, the whirlpool effect of an early *Denver Post* front page with a later front, organized in a more top-down fashion [Figs. 5–6].)

The era saw a wide variation in the size and scale of design elements. Photographs, for instance, started out fairly large, due to their novelty, and then got both bigger and smaller, so that by the end of the period some papers—especially tabloids—could virtually fill the front page with a single photo (Fig. 7), while at the same time half-column mug shots became more common (Fig. 8). Increasing variations in size and scale meant a broader graphic vocabulary.

Visual symmetry became less of an overriding concern at most papers. In early years, especially on front pages, there was an attempt to achieve some kind of symmetry—usually a left-to-right balance (Fig. 9), but also often a stable diagonal or pyramid shape (Figs. 10–11). This kind of naive symmetry indicates a concern with visual appearance typical of vernacular, rather than professional, design. Symmetry is not something that artists have valued in the modern era; generally, it is associated with the amateur, while professional designers and photographers tend to frame things off center and to avoid obvious balance. On the other hand, it's not likely that journalists would fetishize a forced visual symmetry for content that is clearly asymmetrical. To be true to a world that demands the ministrations of the professional reporter, the page would have to assign places asymmetrically to a swarm of disparate elements. The diminishing concern with symmetry, then, reflects the mentality of the professional reporter as well as the aesthetic values of mature design professionals.

As symmetry declined, hierarchy generally advanced. By the beginning of the period under study, most papers distinguished top stories by using either a banner headline (Fig. 12) or a dizzy stack of subheads (Fig. 13), but beyond that, at least in visual terms, they did not clearly signify the importance of individual items. Throughout the period, experimentation in hierarchy is evident, as a variety of different patterns were deployed and discarded. Some were confusing—the *Post's* whirlpool, for example (Fig. 14), or the stacked banner heads on the *Herald and Examiner* (Fig. 15). By the end of the 1930s, however, most papers had come to a modern sense of hierarchy, with a banner head and right-hand-column placement for the top story, often accompanied by an illustration or packaged with related stories, as well as a hard-vs.-soft distinction between above and below the fold.

All of the papers we studied grew more concerned with topical packaging and segmentation through the course of the two decades, but this was not a unilinear process. There were regressions in some papers. The *Boston Evening Transcript* began the decade with a system of topical banner heads for inside pages, so that a page with a couple of stories on politics would be headlined “Politics.” These heads were ad hoc, changing day to day and page to page, but they were meant to tell the domain of the news and not the substance of it (Fig. 16). These heads yielded first to a more random grouping—a regression, one prompted probably by the crowded pages that resulted from the shrinking size of the paper in the depression years—and then to permanent, consistent topical heads like “International News” which were clearly differentiated typographically from the rest of the page (Fig. 17). The *Transcript* thus achieved topical regularity

which generally advanced ahead of the weekday editions in their design). Typically, a section began its evolution as a page, then grew into several pages; the number of pages in most of the papers we studied increased through the 1920s, but the number of pages in sections increased far more rapidly, so that overall there was a process of colonization. All of the newspapers we studied had a sports section and a business section in their weekday papers; all had various kinds of entertainment pages, but they did not always cohere into a section (though there seemed to be movement in this direction over the period); all had women's pages; all had a Sunday magazine of some sort (and the *Denver Post* had a daily magazine); most featured occasional travel, real estate, automobile, and book sections.

The sections typically shared two features. First, they were all concerned with "civil society" as opposed to the "state" or the "public sphere" (Habermas, 1963/1989). That is, they all centered on matters that involved the private sphere, whether intimate matters, cultural matters, or financial matters. One might say that they all dealt in soft, not hard, news (although the business section might be called hard news). Second, each had some kind of advertising infrastructure. Obviously, newspapers developed automobile sections because auto manufacturers and retailers began to advertise. Likewise, radio and movie pages, travel sections, and the rest. The only exception here might be sports, but clearly the evolving sports sections were themselves de facto advertisements for professional leagues.

The sports section is an example that will bear detailed discussion. At the beginning of the period of our study, newspapers carried sports pages, but usually they were untitled, and often they would include non-sports items; at the same time, sports news wasn't confined to the sports page, but could even be the top story of the day (Fig. 19). More commonly, sports news was associated with schools and colleges, and might be mixed in with other educational news. By the mid-1920s, though, sports had become clearly segregated into sections of at least two pages in the dailies we studied. At the same time, the content of the sports section had come to emphasize professional rather than amateur sports. One loser in this transition was women. Women had been fairly frequently (by sports standards) featured as amateur athletes; photos of women athletes in assertive poses stood in vivid contrast to the demure portraits on the society or women's pages. As sports sections modernized, however, the woman speed skater was replaced by the male baseball team (Figs. 20–21).

A similar but contrasting story can be told about women's sections. In 1920, newspapers all carried a "society" or "personals" page which featured the doings of upscale women. These pages kept the matriarchs of the local "first families" in the public eye, not least by regularly running photo essays of individual women. The photos in these essays were invariably done in highly stylized poses and conventional dress, which had the effect of minimizing each woman's distinctiveness until they all blurred into one unending Mrs. Claypool (Fig. 22). This sort of page was not a good carrier for the more practical concerns of women, however—at least as conceived by advertisers. One would not associate these matrons with pricing pork cutlets or buying dress patterns; for such mundane concerns a different sort of women's page was required.

Changes in women's pages are obviously tied to the marketing concerns of the newspaper and to broader social changes. The same is true of other sections, of which entertainment pages are an apt example.

In 1920, the dailies we examined featured usually one page that included ads for live theater and movies plus a (usually bylined) review or two and occasionally a photograph. A couple of features of these pages seem dated. First, neither the editorial matter nor the ads distinguished between live and filmed theater. Second, the page was dominated by the printed word. In the course of time, the stuff of the entertainment section changed, but not in any very clear direction. A radio page was added to all of the dailies we studied in 1922. This page featured a nationally syndicated column, generally concerned with equipment rather than programming and written for the enthusiast rather than the general public, and ads for radio sets and equipment. Within a few years, this page was dominated by programming, with extensive schedules as well as previews of coming shows and articles on radio celebrities. In some papers, the radio page merged with other entertainments; in some it remained distinct. Likewise, some papers added book reviews, comics, crossword and other puzzles, and/or serialized fiction, all of which were usually present somewhere in the paper, to form a larger "amusements" section.

Through all these changes there was a clear direction of change from text to visuals. Photos proliferated in entertainment sections. These photos were mostly publicity shots of stars, taken from a movie, for instance; they weren't "journalistic" in the sense of capturing news or developments or in representing a journalist's vision of someone or something. In short, the entertainment page came to feature a cult of celebrity.

The sections were ghettos partitioned by the journalist's ideology of the public mission of the newspaper. They carried stuff that dealt with the concern of specific sub-groups (like women and children) or special interest groups (like businessmen and baseball fans), stuff that didn't pretend to be of general concern to the common public. One senses that "serious" journalists came to shun the sections more and more over time. This allowed the sections to be centers for design innovation.

The sections pioneered design innovation by imitating national magazines. This was a logical development, as the sections were fully developed first in the Sunday editions (and were thus weekly, appearing in the same time frame as many of the magazines, allowing more time for design) and dealt with matters that were readily divorced from a local context. Indeed, items in the sections were often nationally syndicated, including bylined columns.

Bylines appeared earlier and oftener in the sections than on the front page. This is surprising because of subsequent elaborations of the significance of the byline. Schudson (1978) includes bylines as one of a series of devices instituted in the 1920s and 1930s that facilitated objectivity. If one understands objectivity as the rigorous attempt to separate one's own values from what one reports, then bylining a story helps the reader know that an item was in fact written by a specific individual with specific values and a reputation. The byline is a tacit acknowledgment then of

centuries) where reporters were paid by the line or by the inch, and so vulnerable to the copy-editor's scalpel (Solomon, n.d.).

If bylines are understood as a by-product of rising objectivity, one would expect to see them first in those parts of the newspaper where objectivity was most important—in the front page, especially. But front page bylines remained the exception rather than the rule through the early part of the period under study, while they teemed in the sections. Why?

Our sense is that the byline appeared as a signature of an author rather than of an expert. Bylines indicated that what followed would be a performance by a literary celebrity and that it would be inimitable, whereas experts' work is expert only because it can be replicated by any other qualified expert. (Is this why doctors' signatures are illegible—so they can blur into one un-signature for the whole profession?) So writers in the sections acquired stardom because they did things that journalists on the front page weren't supposed to do—they voiced opinions and expressed themselves in idiomatic fashion and so forth. Serious journalists wanted stardom but had ideological and practical reservations about acquiring it by writing as if they were writing for the sections. Public affairs should be treated more decorously, and editors wouldn't allow reporters to cover the state house as if it were Fenway Park.

Hence the delay between the use of bylines in the sections and their adoption on the front page. Serious journalists needed a more fully developed and ideologically secure justification for appropriating this artifact of literary stardom. Accordingly, bylines appeared first on the front pages of papers that were the least concerned with professionalism and objectivity, and apparently migrated to the elite press somewhat later, although today's elite papers are more likely than others to byline a front-page story.

### *Typography*

Typographic changes in the newspapers were not random or highly individualistic. They conformed to what appear to be larger constructs about how a newspaper ought to look. Newspapers differentiate themselves, and choose typography to match their self-definitions. We encountered two general models in the initial years under study: The low-key Times model derived from the Victorian era, the emphatic Examiner model of the turn of the century.

The *Boston Evening Transcript* of the 1920s, as a serious newspaper of record, wore headlines in several decks, stacked above a single column of text. Heads were middling to small in a mixture of three typefaces (a light sans serif a square serif "Egyptian," and an "oldstyle" serif, serifs being the foot-like projections from the main arms and stems of the letterforms). Although it strayed quite far from its roots in the low-key Victorianism of the London *Times*, all of its subsequent design changes, mentioned in what follows, conform to expectations that the *Transcript* was serious about important matters.

continued to invoke both these declarative and the exclamatory modes, even as it shifted toward modern styles of type.

In contrast, the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* began the period with type that leaned strongly toward the emphatic model. Banner headlines (in a bold sans serif) topped the pages, and subordinate headlines were made of moderately sized contrasting typefaces, including Cheltenham (in bold italic). This exclamatory and energetic quality makes intelligible some later design decisions that would otherwise be surprising.

Finally, the *Denver Post* and the *Syracuse Bugle* are firmly in the emphatic camp. The *Post* typography has a wild energy produced by extreme contrasts, not only of typefaces (including a sans serif, a two-weight face with vestigial serifs, and an oldstyle serif) but also of fonts: bold and light, capital and small, condensed and expanded, and italic and regular letters. The *Bugle* provided constant surprises with its type, some days using a completely new headline face for a single story. Despite some variations, both these newspaper are quite stable in their display typography, that is, for all their energy, the type did not go through the great changes found in the other newspapers.

Looking closely at the record, we found that most of the changes in typography were wavelike, that is, variations that came and went with fashion or with daily practice. For example, the popular Cheltenham first appeared on feature pages of the *Transcript* in 1920s, disappeared in 1928, reappeared in 1930, grew in importance to become the principal headline face in 1935, dwindled in 1937, and reappeared in 1940 as a banner headline only.

Other changes in these newspaper's type had an overall direction that produced a ratchet effect, leaving something permanently behind and redefining the newspaper and the role of typography in it. In the *Transcript* example, another typeface, Bodoni (a high-contrast "modern" roman with hairline serifs), became the standard head dress in 1928 (more on that later). Although its use also waxed and waned, the typefont in upper and lowercase had to be larger and use more space to be legible. After it was superseded by Cheltenham in the 1930s, the short period of Bodoni use left a residual effect: headlines remained larger in scale and used upper and lowercase letters thereafter.

The vector of innovation was consistent in all the papers. Front pages, news pages, and sports pages (in that order) were more or less sacrosanct, ruled by conservatism and resistant to typographic change. Feature pages, such as radio books, entertainment, and women (in roughly that order) were more open to typographic variation, available for experimentation. A typical example occurred in the *Chicago Daily News*. Bodoni first appeared in 1929 on feature pages, then moved to news pages, made the front page by 1931, and became one of the three largest headlines in 1932. As it traveled from women's stories, through local news, to page one, Bodoni appeared in increasingly strident fonts, such as boldface, condensed, italics, and all-capitals for emphasis.

Change itself was a constant, much of it day-to-day tinkering. Beyond those wobbles in the trajectory, two general processes of change are clear. Most of the changes, like those just

However, the study papers also had their share of abrupt typographic redesigns. These were sudden breaks, which in some cases left only the newspaper's nameplate intact. For example, in 1928 the *Boston Evening Transcript* suddenly abandoned its Victorian-inspired head dress in favor of streamlined Bodoni. The new, purist typography lasted until 1930. The paper underwent another complete facelift in 1940.

The forces driving typographic changes can be only surmised from the printed record. Two are most salient: the influence of artistic styles, contemporaneous and antecedent, and the influence of the underlying political economy, found in general histories and in events reported in the newspaper.

Art styles had an interesting influence. In the more serious papers, hard news pages seem to be most influenced by newspaper fashion. The typeface Bodoni in streamlined (upper and lowercase) headlines became established as the height of newspaper fashion in 1931, when the Ayer & Sons advertising agency gave its first newspaper design award to the *New York Herald Tribune* (designed by Ben Sherbow, see Hutt, 1973). The *Boston Evening Transcript* had made the shift to Bodoni in 1928, and the *Chicago Daily News* moved the face from feature pages onto the front page in 1931.

The soft news or feature pages were more open to design styles found in the fine as well as commercial arts. This is especially true at the emphatic-model papers. The *Herald and Examiner* played with art deco-inspired types. The *Post* tried on unusual fonts (such as outline versions and a cursive based on Roman lettering) for full-page features. Other newspapers were less likely to venture into the art realm. In the *Chicago Daily News*, art deco inspired nameplates for feature sections appeared in 1932 but lasted only a year before being replaced with something more classical. The low-key *Transcript* was the least experimental, using such conservative devices as a blackletter ("old English") label for its Genealogical column.

Feature typography was also influenced by magazine design. European émigré artists entered the United States in large numbers during each of the major wars of the period, and some took jobs as magazine art directors. As newspapers redesigned their special sections, the influence of these artists was felt second hand. When the *Daily News* "Midweek Features" section separated from the broadsheet paper and became tabloid size, it acquired a magazine-style logotype (in an engraved "in-line" serif typeface). The book review section of the *Transcript* came out in 1937 with a typeface entirely unrelated to anything in the newspaper—an odd, sinewy echo of art nouveau designs.

Within the twenty years studied, the rate of change generally increased. That is, and relative stability of the early 1920s crumbled into a churning boil of change by the late 1930s. This may spring from all of the foregoing but also relates to the trend, emerging in design in the 1930s, toward planned obsolescence (Arens and Sheldon, 1932). In 1932, the *Chicago Daily News* introduced modern, standardized section headings. In place of the vernacular newspaper notion that type for each section should match the news content, the redesign imposed a modern notion of consistency and uniformity of design throughout. The change did not set up a new standard

most dramatic of these (setting aside the *Herald and Examiner* conversion to tabloid) was the *Transcript's* move in 1940 from a standard front page to a summary front page, with a set of authoritative modernist typefaces (such as Futura). This change followed a proposal by Herbert Brucker (1937), a Columbia University professor who experimented with the format by converting a front page of the *New York Herald Tribune* into a front page he called “Gist.”

Another overall trend was toward greater emphasis and hierarchy. This can be seen in the increase in contrast between typefaces used together, between fonts (such as bold or light, condensed or expanded, italic or roman versions) of the same typeface, and between headline sizes. Greater hierarchy was present by the end of the period in the *Transcript*, the *Daily News*, and the *Herald and Examiner*. Hierarchy can also be seen in the way the news pages determined the pecking order of typography, not only defining an inner sanctum to which typefaces slowly gained entry, but also establishing a standard presence beneath the veneer of typographic flourishes on the feature pages.

Finally, the trend was toward a grander scale overall. Typography, on the whole, got larger, and big headlines occupied more space on the page. This was true for all the newspapers, but especially the *Herald and Examiner* and the *Bugle*. These trends bear the clear markers of the shift from Victorian to modern design and from vernacular (journalistic) to professional (artistic) design.

At the end of the score of years under study, two new—that is, modern—typographic models had emerged. One, the model for serious papers, included streamlined large-scale headlines (in upper- and lowercase) typically in Bodoni, with standardized nameplates for section headings, and in some cases, for the logos and “sigs” used to mark regular columns. The other, a model for popular broadsheets and tabloids, included the brash “circus” of high-contrast typefaces descended from the turn-of-the-century emphatic Victorian style.

### *Hand-made Imagery*

In their non-photographic imagery, the papers we studied followed a similar pattern of change. In 1920, there was a fair amount of vernacular imagery in the sections, and not much other than an editorial cartoon on the front page or the editorial page. By 1940, the influence of professional designers was evident in changes in logos, while photography (discussed below) became more journalistic, with pictures accompanying news stories and not infrequently appearing on the front page.

Logos in the newspapers followed a pattern similar to that found in the typographic standing elements. There was activity but very little change during the 1920s. In the *Daily News*, some sports columnists appeared with their own column heads in distinctive type in 1920. Financial columns did the same in 1929, when the sports columns acquired pictorial logos. The *Herald and Examiner* had a general preference for simple boxed typography above regular columnists. Many

appeared from 1930 to 1938. The least active was page one, and there the changes sometimes involve sports as well.

While the logos graphic designers created increased in number and variety over the two decades, the use of other handmade illustrations declined, at least on the front page. Although the early London *Times* style front pages of the 1920s often carried a political cartoon, these were the exception in the 1930s.

A transition from vernacular to professional design is evident at most of the papers we studied. In the 1930s especially, redesigns by professionals tried to regularize and streamline the newspaper's imagery. Apparently some resisted. At the *Daily News*, for instance, despite the fairly complete design overhaul in 1933, when all section heads acquired similar illustrated nameplates, other standing heads survived or reappeared. For example, a sports column retained its 1929 "sig" after the redesign, which suggests that the authority of the columnist overruled the designer's authority to control and unify the appearance of all standing elements.

In other sections, illustrations were more common. Cartoons, small line cuts and illustrations decorated pages for women (and, later, for children), appeared as diagrams on the radio page, and also pop up on the sports page. There are a few maps, tables, diagrams, and even some reproduced documents sprinkled through the sample pages of softer news and features.

Over the period, papers adopted more and more comics, strips, single panels, and decorative cartoon-style flourishes in "sigs" and as "ears" next to section nameplates. A full page of comics in Sunday editions in 1920 (in every paper except the *Transcript*) expanded to a full section by the 1930s; apparently color was added in the process. Daily editions picked up a strip or two in the mid 1920s and then added more until by the 1930s they ran a full page (again except the *Transcript*, which didn't acquire a strip until the 1930s, although its comics had grown to a full page in 1936). Editorial cartoons were common on early front pages of the *Daily News*, *Herald and Examiner*, and *Post*; eventually, they moved to the editorial page, where even the *Transcript* ran a daily cartoon in the 1930s.

### Photography

Low-key Victorian (so-called literary) journalism of the nineteenth century was typography centered (Baynes, 1971). In the *Boston Evening Transcript*, photographs of the 1920s appear in a low-key mode. Pictures are not as common on news pages as on feature pages, where wedding pictures, for example, appear surrounded by demure embellishments.

The emphatic form of Victorian design used pictures more freely, to decorate the page, and employed elaborate frames: hand-drawn borders, bric-a-brac, and space (left by showing the figure in silhouette, with the background removed). In the *Daily News*, the *Herald and Examiner*,

frequently at the other papers) but died out completely during the early 1930s, along with borders and silhouettes in all the papers we read.

Modern photojournalism, emerging by the 1930s, eschewed decoration. The rise of tabloids and small-format “spy” cameras redefined pictures as content. According to Hicks (1952), easy-to-operate cameras encouraged sequences of pictures and gave rise to the picture essay. As they took on greater authority, pictures got larger on the page, portraying action and detail. Our previous study of the emergence of modern design from 1895 to 1985 also found a trend toward more stand-alone pictures.

Although sequences were not unheard of in the 1920s, they were rare. The *Denver Post* ran a series of close ups from a motion picture camera in 1922. But dramatic, action sequences, like the series of six pictures of a bombing raid in the *Daily News* of 1937, emerged in dramatic sizes on news pages only after the advent of modern photojournalism.

In general, the scale of pictures increased over the period. Although large photos appeared in the 1920s, the contrast of scale between small shots and large increased over the period. The shots were mostly long and medium range at first. Closer shots (or cropping) got more frequent in the late 1920s, and longer shots declined after 1936. These shifts are consonant with the emergence of modern photojournalism, which values events and emotive detail.

The vast majority of photos, throughout the period, were posed: wedding portraits, celebrity shots, sports-hero poses, group portraits, and a few scenes of historic significance. Action shots quietly entered the *Herald and Examiner* in 1931 and the *Daily News* in 1935, after the wire services were operating, and generally gained prominence in the newspapers by the end of the decade. Photographers of the 1920s attempted to illustrate events by assembling story-like montages; modernists shot the events in action. The *Daily News* picture of two divers on a 1929 sports page illustrates the transition between the two: the divers hover mid-air, in modern action, but the picture is obviously staged, evidence of Victorian photographic habits.

Although modernists disparage similar posing as cliché (“the handshake,” “chalk-talk,” “me and my prop”), the road to modernism was not entirely clear in the 1920s and 1930s. The long-term trend toward stand-alone pictures, for example, appears muddled. *Transcript* editors showed no clear preference for running photographs with or without an accompanying story. The *Daily News* meandered between the two options. Only the *Herald and Examiner* moved smartly toward modernism: stand-alones accompanied features exclusively in the 1920s, invaded news pages by the mid-1930s, and took over the front page in 1938.

The conversion of the *Herald and Examiner* to tabloid intensified the use of photography and other imagery. The tabloid ran many more pictures than in previous years, often several to a much smaller page. Unlike the modern broadsheet, which moved to unadorned rectangles for pictures, tabloids gave play to vernacular journalistic design, cutting pictures into irregular shapes, retouching a photograph of a teacher to show her shaking hands with a cartoon-style John Q.

discover a constant and ever more shrill concern with fairies and perverts, along with the usual mass of tabloid murders, corruption, and sexual naughtiness.)

On the whole, the newspapers moved, with many reversals and contradictions, in the direction of modernism. Pictures become larger and showed more action, emotion, and detail, shedding the elaborate poses and abundant decoration of Victorianism.

### *Concluding Remarks*

How does the visual form of the newspaper—both on the level of frame and grammar—map the social world? While any satisfactory answer to this question will emerge only after intensive study, some suggestions can be offered here. In broad terms, the “primitive” or “Victorian” form did little to construct the world for its readers, as has already been mentioned. Rather, it subjected readers to a bombardment of undigested stuff; it was copious and busy; design elements were used inconsistently and in a way that ordinary readers would not be expected to decode.

In the interwar years, two fairly definite newspaper forms were constructed. One was the low-key broadsheet form still exemplified by the *New York Times*. Here a clear hierarchy of news items was established with a grammar of design elements like story placement and headline size: the most important story is located in the right-hand column at the top and had a headline (usually) in all caps; “soft” news appears in the lower half of the front page (“below the fold”) and has headlines in upper and lower case type. Beyond the front page, the newspaper is segregated into sections (local, sports, features, classifieds) in which news is given further hierarchy. A separate editorial section employs distinct typographic styles for the newspaper’s editorials, letters to the editor, and op-ed pieces. Crudely put, this newspaper form carves the social world up into separate domains and assigns affairs differential import within these domains. To a habitual reader of a paper like the *New York Times*, this form seems self-evidently to correspond to the world, and the newspaper’s function in mapping the world is taken for granted.

An emphatic newspaper form also congealed in the interwar years, exemplified in its extreme version by the tabloid. While some contemporary tabloids differ from broadsheets only superficially (*Newsday*, the *Sun-Times*), the classic tabloid embodied a strikingly different form. The front page featured a single story with a huge headline; the content inside was not segregated in separate sections; throughout photographs and other illustrations were emphasized. The tabloid’s map of the social was less nuanced and intelligible than was the broadsheet’s, perhaps, but it was more morally charged, full of heroes and villains. Put another way, where the broadsheet form told readers what was important, the tabloid told readers what was evil.

Clearly these alternate newspaper forms incorporated different relationships between news producers and consumers. The broadsheet was the professional form par excellence; the reporter was an apparently value-free discriminator and explainer, and the reader was a pupil. The tabloid

It should be kept in mind that these remarks are exploratory. The visual form of the newspaper has not previously been studied in this fashion, and the research reported here is a first attempt. Detailed study of a broader range of newspapers in the interwar years will allow a more adequate understanding of the gradual accretion of these forms from existing grammatical elements; it will also allow an assessment of the significance of design innovations as indicators and embodiments of larger shifts in cultural authority. As LeMahieu has pointed out in the case of Great Britain, these years marked the creation of a “culture for democracy” that was broadly shared across regions and social classes, even while established patterns underwent severe strain.

This period and these developments are of more than antiquarian interest. As was pointed out previously, changes in newspaper form came about in large part because some bottlenecks had been established in the media. Recently these bottlenecks have begun to shift and erode. Not television per se but the abundance of new televisual outlets on cable, along with the rise of talk radio and computer networks, have begun to challenge the authority of journalism professionals. On a less visible level, newspapers have lost longstanding monopolies in classified advertising, financial information, and sports news. Not coincidentally, newspaper design specialists are again talking about design revolutions. This sort of change is best understood within the long-term historical context of the rise of the modernist newspaper; it is poorly understood by hyperbolic denunciations of MTV and *USA Today*.

If in fact we are facing another period of design change like the 1920s and 1930s, then there are some basic points about the history of that period that might apply more generally:

Change was neither sudden nor simple. It came about only through experimentation—the wilder the better. One of the crueler ironies is that usually after a period of experimental playfulness ends, its memory is condensed into a notion of sudden heroic revolution or suppressed as a kind of juvenile rebellion against historical inevitability. We hope that our history shows that a broad range of outcomes were possible.

Outcomes weren't determined by technology. Sometimes a technology facilitated a particular feature, but every feature we've identified here was in play before the “breakthrough” technologies were introduced. Going back a century, news digests were a common feature before the telegraph became the preeminent tool for constructing columns labeled “The Latest News.” Likewise, photos were all over the newspaper before the wire services started distributing them, and sequence shots ran before the advent of the small-format Leica.

Design innovations were resisted most sternly by journalists; their best technique for doing so was to shuffle them into an emerging “soft news” ghetto. Journalists protected the seriousness of their domain and buttressed their command over it by keeping a regressive control over design. Even in jazzed up newspapers the editorial page was low-key, and every significant design innovation was common in inside sections before it was allowed to infect the front page. This is a counterintuitive finding; because journalists tend to think of the front above anything else, we expected the front pages to be the leading edge of design change. We were thinking of design

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