



Journal of European Periodical Studies

an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research

Review of Alexia Kalantzis, H el ene V edrine,
and Norbert Verdier, eds, *Les P eriodiques comme
m ediateurs culturels: Autour de la diffusion des savoirs*

B enedicte Coste

Journal of European Periodical Studies, 9.1 (Summer 2024)

ISSN 2506-6587

Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: ojs.ugent.be/jeps

To cite this article: B enedicte Coste, 'Review of Alexia Kalantzis, H el ene V edrine, and Norbert Verdier, eds, *Les P eriodiques comme m ediateurs culturels: Autour de la diffusion des savoirs*', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 9.1 (Summer 2024), 115–117

Reviews

Alexia Kalantzis, Hélène Védrine, and Norbert Verdier, eds, *Les Périodiques comme médiateurs culturels: Autour de la diffusion des savoirs* (Gif-sur-Yvette: MSH Paris-Saclay Editions, 2023). 184 pp. ISBN 9782490369096

This volume brings together some of the presentations of the PeLiAS seminar (Periodicals, Literature, Arts, Sciences) held at the MSH Paris-Saclay between 2019 and 2022. The French periodicals discussed by literary scholars as well as historians of science, education, or society range from organs of scientific popularization from the 1850s onwards to a recent ancestor of data papers through sensationalist magazines or ‘house-organs’ of the early decades of the twentieth century. Despite their different disciplinary affiliations, all envisage their object ‘both as a communication medium belonging to print culture and as multidisciplinary cultural objects’ (p. 8, translation mine) as the editors state in their introduction. All are also attentive to posit the periodicals they investigate within a specific social, scientific, and print network. The volume is divided into two parts: the first centring on the vexed issue of periodicals and popularization, and the second on their socio-professional use. It is also replete with illustrations providing readers with welcome visual representations of hitherto neglected objects of study. The editors seek to demonstrate the value of periodicals for disseminating sciences or scientific discoveries to various lay constituencies.

Axel Hohnsbein analyses the ambiguity of the discourse on science in a representative array of popular science journals (*La Science contre le préjugé*, *L’Ami des Sciences*, *Le Musée des sciences*, *La Science pour tous*, *Cosmos*, *La Nature*) between 1850 and 1900, a period when science as well as technical and industrial progress could be described as wonders which numerous illustrations lavishly displayed across periodicals. At the time,

popularizing science was an unstructured activity with editors lacking prestige and a heterogeneous editorial environment. Surprisingly, those periodicals used the readers’ appetite for wonders and the supernatural to develop a rigorous scientific discourse that was not averse to excessive praise of progress. At the end of the century, Hohnsbein argues, the unmitigated praise of the scientific wonders began to decline partly in response to the emerging specialization of scholars. Accordingly, wonderment beat an honourable retreat in literature and especially in the novel.

Among the high school mathematics journals published in the 1870s and 1880s, Aurélien Gautreau studies the *Journal de mathématiques élémentaires*, a handwritten production by the high school pupils of Sainte-Barbe, of which only three issues survive (they have been digitized and can be read on Gallica). Like the *Nouvelles annales de mathématiques* printing the annals of the competitive examinations to the Ecole Polytechnique and Normale, the students of this private institution were preparing for their admittance, also by competitive examination, to Saint-Cyr, Centrale, or their baccalaureate in science. They created a journal tailored to their needs and developed a collaborative network with other French pupils to publish the ‘maths élem’ annals and their responses before being cut short by the Franco-Prussian war. The content of the *JME* shows that the discipline was changing against a background of increasing freedom in mathematics curricula. Other similar niche journals were born under the Third Republic, this time backed by print and a

scientific publishing house, testifying to a need for adequate training for France's competitive examination system.

Mark. S. Morrisson uses the insights of anthropology to discuss the circulation and development of scientific knowledge through popular culture and popular science across several periodicals of the first half of the twentieth century, underlining the importance of periodicals in fostering scientific education. He relies on the notion of 'domaining' adapted, from anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, by Susan Merrill Squier in her *Babies in Bottles* (1994), which 'highlighted the cultural dimensions of knowledge construction and circulation, and [...] also helps us interpret the juxtaposition of images and tropes in multiple domains found not only across periodicals but within individual ones' (p. 64). Exploring the *Journal of the Alchemical Society* (1912–16), created by H. Stanley Redgrove, a Fellow of the Chemical Society, Morrisson notes that its contents were reviewed in like-minded periodicals as well as in other press organs such as the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Athenaeum*, *Knowledge*, a popular scientific periodical, and expert journals like *Nature* and the *Chemical News*. In the journal, five conflicting interpretations of alchemy, including a Jungian one, rub shoulders, illustrating how 'alchemical concepts used across multiple domains did, indeed, create new meanings' (p. 77) and how, 'across each of these domains' various understandings of alchemy 'produced new possibilities for what could be thought and imagined in each of them' (p. 78).

For his chapter, Yoann Vêrilhac is interested in *Detective* (1928–40), a magazine openly based on the development of forensic science and forensic medicine and purporting to promote 'science against crime'. However, its scientific dimension accentuates sensationalism by insisting on the supernatural element of scientific approaches; photographic illustrations,

with their spectacular framing (many striking covers are reproduced), amplify the fantastic aspect of the discoveries and scientific tools, while the extensive use of technical vocabulary creates a hermetic and strange, even poetic dimension. Bringing together reportage, horror stories, amusing anecdotes, and advertising (which Vêrilhac comments upon with great subtlety), the magazine's format and content contributed to an ironic effect, turning science into the very instrument of its questioning by the media.

As a historian interested in the socio-professional recognition of civil engineers working for private companies in the nineteenth century, Luc Rojas presents the *Bulletin de la Société de l'industrie minérale de Saint Étienne* (1855–1914), a publication that arose out of that learned society striving to develop the recognition of the title and profession of civil engineer, and which also contributed to the emergence of a scientific approach accompanied by specific professional practices. Even if information about format, periodicity, and circulation of this little-known publication is regrettably missing, some landmarks of its history are provided. For instance, the *Bulletin* had links with foreign reviews such as the *Colliery Engineers*; it also published complete or partial translations, and felt the need to create a 'Bibliography' section in 1897 and a review of reviews as well as reviews of scientific events, testifying to the internationalization of the sector.

Myriam Boucharenc provides a thorough introduction to the largely unexploited corpus of corporate periodicals or 'house-organs', the apparition of which coincided with the structuring of advertising as a new professional sector replacing publicity (*réclame*).¹ Boucharenc focuses on the 1920s and 1930s, when this type of periodical experienced 'an unprecedented deployment' at the same time as it was entering 'an experimental

1 Boucharenc's chapter showcases the result of 'LITTEPUB (Littérature publicitaire et publicité littéraire de 1830 à nos jours)', a French National Research Agency project that led to the digitization of many 'house-organs', which are now accessible on Gallica.

phase' (p. 137) with companies in the medico-pharmaceutical, tourism, transport including rail, and industry sectors creating many distinctive periodicals to communicate, educate, and entertain their readers. House-organs are hybrid advertising and cultural objects not completely codified. With their variety of formats, layouts, illustrations, print runs, and prices, those magazines were not intended to promote a product but to develop sales — hence the fact that their advertising status is not always explicit. The list of some of their literary contributors, Joseph Kessel, Paul Morand, Colette, among others, testifies to genuine links between literature and advertising, highlighting the porosity of the boundaries between journalism, advertising, and literary culture at the time of the invention of brand communication.

Finally, Sébastien Plutniak is interested in a largely neglected periodical format: the *tiré-à-part*. Relying on the series of *Archivio di tipologia analitica* (1973–98), he proposes a framework for analysing some of the historical transformations in the publication of scientific data. That independent printed publication showcased a method for documenting prehistoric lithic industries developed in the second half of the twentieth century by French archaeologist George Laplace. As implemented in the *tirés-à-part*, the typology fostered the development of a

European multilingual and multipolar space of scientific communication centring around the figure of Laplace, therefore illustrating the potential of this periodical form as a resource for the study of scientific sociability. With its typology and data, the periodical's *tirés-à-part* also stand as an intriguing but full-fledged ancestor of contemporary data papers. Interestingly, the collection underwent an early attempt at computerization in the 1990s; however, no archive from this phase survives, illustrating the current problems of interoperability of archive formats.

At first sight, such a varied corpus may appear heterogeneous to scholars trained in the usual distinction between literary and scientific periodicals. Analyses by specialists in periodical studies rubbing shoulders with the work of social historians and historians of science and institutions, perhaps more interested in the recognition of specific disciplines or networks developed through periodicals, may also appear forced. However, those apparent defects are also the strong points of the volume, which brings together scholars operating on the same print category and thus highlights how different methodologies are needed to explore those widely different corpora. The refreshing array of periodicals studied here is replete with insights for further investigations.

Bénédicte Coste
Université de Bourgogne