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Christina Lupton

Immersing the Network in Time: from the Where to the When of Print Reading

Low-Life: or One Half of the World, Knows not how the Other Half Live, first published in 1759, is a fictional pamphlet reporting on 24 hours in the life of a cross-section of Londoners. Between Saturday night and Monday morning, prostitutes rise from magistrates' beds, journeymen hunt for work, children kill flies, apprentices skip church, plays are rehearsed, clothes washed, bread baked, cards played, and walks taken. Written in the continuous present tense, the anonymous pamphlet draws all these incongruous actions together as one gently rhythmical stream of prose: "Old gossips in Alleys, Yards, etc. meeting with their Dabs of stinking meat fixed upon three bits of stick stuck over dirty Pudding," become proximate with "Mothers and nurses of young children in and about this metropolis, hushing and coaxing the children under their care to sleep" and "Authors of both prose and verse, whose Wives and Children's clamorous Tongues prevent their studying in their own apartments, . . . walking about the Remote Parts of the Town, with Memorandum books and Pencils in their hands."¹

If there's a rhythm this style of description imposes, the text also draws attention to one its characters collectively manage to ignore. According to the author, who dedicates his work to Hogarth, *Low-Life* is:

a true Deliniation of the various methods, which People in and about this Metropolis, have ingeniously contrived to murder not only common Time, but

that Portion of it, which is more immediately consecrated to the Glory of their great creator.²

“London,” he goes on, “is so utterly absorbed by Places of Entertainment, and Inventions...as to destroy that inestimable Jewel, TIME.”³ Wasting Sunday involves, then, the erasure of an intermittent pulse that *Low-Life* aims to restore.

Perhaps the most obvious way to respond to *Low-Life* as a literary historian is to see it organizing the day into a sequence of hourly intervals, the shape its twenty-four chapters take.⁴ We know that clock time was being introduced to a general population in the 1700s: historians and critics including Foucault, E.P Thompson, Benedict Anderson, and Stuart Sherman have argued for its centrality to eighteenth-century life. Anderson’s emphasis on “homogenous empty time” as the container of the nation as a social organism might, for instance, explain *Low-Life*’s arrangement of bodies not physically present to each other as the joint occupants of hours described in prose.⁵ Sherman argues in depth for the applicability of the clock’s language—the “series within series, concentric and cumulative, beginning with small intervals clicked out at the clock’s core, and radiating outward to the markings on the dial, to encompass a whole system of measurement and calibration”—to what he calls the diurnal form, the sequentially narrated life commensurate with a series of pages.⁶ In these terms, *Low-Life*’s sequence of hours might be seen as corresponding to the space of the codex book, making print itself an antidote to the “wasting” of time the text derides. “Attempting,” as the narrator claims, “to deliver the actions of every Hour as they really pass; omitting nothing, however trifling it may seem,” *Low-Life* conforms closely to the logic Sherman finds governing diary keeping and daily news early in the century.⁷

But neither Anderson nor Sherman's approach can account for *Low-Life*'s emphasis on Sunday as a *refuge* from the tick-tick-tick of modern existence and its routine forms of entertainment. Set on a Whitsunday at Midsummer, *Low-Life* focuses on a constellation of bodies extraordinary because so many workers are freed momentarily from paid employment. The author presents his own text to this audience of potential part-time readers, hoping that it will not be just "one instance among the many I have endeavored to stigmatize, of the misemployment of time."⁸ But what role has a secular satire like this to play in what, in eighteenth-century terms, would be called the "redeeming of time"? How does a text's alignment with the pattern of the week serve its disdain for quotidian entertainment as a form of waste? My hunch—the one driving this argument—is that *Low-Life*, like many texts of this period, makes legible the idea of reading as a break with the clock's newly regularized beat; that tick, tick, tick to which Sherman and Anderson hinge the turn of the page. While the eighteenth-century use of print made language more sequential, more present and physically continuous than it had been before (or has been since), it also gave the reader access to new forms of discontinuity, making the *read book* an instrument for gathering together and foregrounding non-continuous points in time, such as Sundays.

In what follows I want to invoke an eighteenth and nineteenth-century awareness of what Eviatar Zerubavel calls "the discontinuity of the pulsating week" and David Henkin, the "hebdomadal cycle" to pare down and solidify my larger claim, which is that thinking about reading in light of time will reveal print to have been a medium as good at breaking circuits and sequences as connecting them.⁹ By studying the *read book* as something selectivity apparent, I hope to show that print can be usefully affiliated with

the emergence of productive systems of partial understanding, as Luhmann might call them, and with the Modes of Existence that Latour describes in his most recent work. I'll be making this argument with one eye to some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts that represent Sunday as an occasion for particular and intermittent ways of engaging the *read book* as an antidote to quotidian time, and another to the horizons of Systems and Actor Network Theory as models that support the idea of the medium as broker of differentiation.

1. Two Adjustments

I want, first, to extend this introduction by spelling out two conceptual adjustments associated with my attempt to read reading as something conjugated in time. One is to the idea of the medium currently dominant in the field of literary history. In eighteenth-century studies, agreement has mounted over the last years that mediation, defined by Cliff Siskin and Bill Warner, as including “everything that intervenes, enables, supplements, or is simply in-between,” is a useful category to scholars of the book.¹⁰ The history of mediation, which Siskin and Warner define as the field properly occupied by literary scholars, becomes in their terms one to which writing, postal communication, digital archiving, and disciplinarity itself all belong. It's a history we are part of, one to which intellectual and genre history can be sublated, and one that connects the present and the age of print as key moments. Media, as John Guillory argues more precisely, afford historians an opportunity to think about the moment at which the overcoming of separation becomes the defining feature of communication.

“Distanciation,” by which he refers not just to actual distances but also to the kind of distance that occurs when two people in the same room start writing to each other, “creates the possibility of media, which become both ends and means in themselves.”¹¹

The endeavor to theorize media in this way becomes circular, however, when the concepts and the tools designed to collate and connect texts begin themselves to evidence a history of connection and collection. Digitally led bibliography can produce new evidence of books having traversed distances and languages and editions; and mining large datasets can, as scholars in the field are now proving, yield evidence of surprising patterns of textual affiliation.¹² It’s much harder, however, to use these large datasets to visualize a landscape of print-mediated *disconnections*. This is partly because today’s dominant representations of textual history tend to be spatially based.¹³ The “networks,” “atlases” and “topographies” that give form to literary history are now routinely visualised within the digital humanities, make it harder than ever to represent the spacing out of events in time; the encounters that intervene in a reader’s contact with a text; the lapses that occur because texts are things to which time must be given.

Yet time has long been a theoretical challenge to those describing material objects in circulation. A largely anthropological discussion of the gift, taken up by Levi-Strauss, Marcel Maus, Pierre Bourdieu, and Derrida, points out that an event’s directionality and separability in time lie at the heart of gift-giving. Referring to Maus, Derrida writes:

The difference between a gift and every other operation of pure and simple exchange is that the gift gives time. *There where there is gift, there is time*. What it gives, the gift, is time, but this gift is also a demand of time. The thing must not

be restituted immediately and right away. There must be time, it must last, there must be waiting without forgetting.¹⁴

For Derrida, this giving and taking of time links the gift to the poetics of narrative, opening up new ways to think the timing and duration of a story. For Bourdieu, the more material point is that acts of giving are always alloyed by occasion and opportunity.¹⁵ Both arguments suggest why we might approach the way we visualize print circulation more theoretically. They illuminate the way a *read book* might be seen as demanding the cadence Derrida sees as called into being by the gift, “a delimited time, neither an instant nor an infinite time, but a time determined by a term, in other words, a rhythm, a cadence.”¹⁶

This discussion of the gift overlaps with another conversation in France, between Michel Serres and Bruno Latour. Serres, speaking to Latour in a conversation published 25 years ago, warns against using networks as models of the material world on grounds very similar to the ones on which Bourdieu warns against abstract models of exchange. “Networks,” Serres argues, leave an image that is almost too stable. But you immerse it in time, this network itself is going to fluctuate, become very unstable, and bifurcate endlessly.”¹⁷ Serres appears here as a champion of non-chronological thinking. He describes his own historical method in terms of the crumpled handkerchief whose material points only meet in time, not when it is laid out flat in space. His invitation to think of the network “immersed in time” is a challenge Latour takes up, I’ll argue shortly, in his later work. But it applies more immediately to the task of thinking of the print network as one to which reading introduces an unstable dimension. Once immersed in time, a network of books would have to show the capacity of reading to pull Sundays, or

evenings, or distant lifetimes out of chronological time and to put them together like the points in Serres crumpled handkerchief.¹⁸

This essay aims to adjust also the way literary critics think of reading. Reading is routinely understood as something that happens downstream of a text's creation; a late, difficult-to-monitor, even, as Leah Price has recently shown, an optional stage of its being.¹⁹ Approached from this angle, Sunday reading becomes something that conduct books say one should do, that religious orthodoxy proscribes, that institutions like Sunday schools evidence, that certain readers leave traces of having done, but which even a book designed to be read on Sundays may never occasion. Here, however, I want to background the question of reading as something that happens to a text, and to think of it more as a figure for the way all kinds of texts anticipate their own reception as something intermittent in time. The read text competes in this respect with the materiality of the book as self-evidently present and favorable to sequence and chronology. As a figure of intermittent meaning, it interferes with the consistency upon which the materiality of the printed book insists. Understood as an imaginative engagement of the book's bifurcated presence, of an author's creative engagement with the book as an object conjugated in time, the *read book* belongs in this sense to writing rather than to its afterlife.²⁰ I will carry this claim forwards by turning at the end of my argument to *Wuthering Heights* as a novel giving narrative form to the phenomenology of the read text as an intermittent signal; a textual disturbance of the book's steady signal of communication.

2. Sunday Readers

Before doing this, however, let me come back to my Sunday example and introduce some eighteenth-century readers who divided up their time on a weekly scale. The first of these is Elizabeth Talbot, whose popular *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*, published just after her death in 1770, became a bestseller of its kind. *Reflections*, a series of homilies describing the pious life, emphasizes the governance of a woman's time and advocates a pattern of industry that will culminate in the reader's taking communion on Sunday. In Tuesday's installment we read, for instance, that "constant activity, and extensive usefulness is the perception of a spiritual being" and on Wednesday that "Industry makes the world look beautiful around us."²¹ Talbot's emphasis on activity complicates the kind of meditation that the text itself is written to encourage. Although the text is arranged as daily readings, it's only on Sunday that Talbot writes: "I may spend some Hours in that Day, either in good Discourse, with such as are able to instruct me, or in reading such religious books as are put in my hands."²² The daily portions of *Reflections*, like the hourly ones of *Low-Life*, nevertheless suggest that once reading is divided up it might be spliced into a life reported as full. Many eighteenth-century conduct books carve reading up in this way, presenting themselves through chapters or other regular measures of text as compatible with the life of regular and active duty they prescribe.²³

Regular reading was not, however, what Talbot herself relished. Talbot grew up after her father's death as an honorary member of the household of Thomas Secker, a distinguished scholar and critic who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1758. In this context, she was well educated and recognized, but also kept busy as secretary, hostess, Sunday school teacher, and household manager. Her diary and letters, many written to

more prominent members of the Bluestocking circle, show her consumed with the desire to make more time to read and write. “One is always in a hurry,” she writes in one of her regular letters to Elizabeth Carter: “Even of a Sunday I have folks to speak to, children to school, and many such matters to dispatch.”²⁴ In the *Reflections* she sounds almost peevish in stressing at one moment that she has “scarce a moment free from the necessary engagement of Business and Bodily Labours” and declaring at the next: “Sometime I must needs have on Sundays.”²⁵

Sunday was clearly Talbot’s favorite day. “London has its quiet hours,” she writes, “for people who keep out of the impertinent racket of it.” In this letter she describes Sunday evening as the time allotted by herself and her mother to staying home, contrasting their positions favorably to that of the “fine ladies” who are on their way to “drums and plays” as part of the Sunday crowd we know from *Low-Life*.²⁶ At the one time of the week in which she chooses to fall out of step with public life, Talbot is able to read—not so much in the efficient terms the projected reader of *Reflections* or a sermon would—but under the protection from active duty, and her belief that Sunday is the day on which God himself reads the world. “When I have spare time,” she states, “I shall gladly spend it in reading, with Reverence and Attention.”²⁷

The concentration she lavishes on books on Sundays is affirmed in one of her few published essays, which describes a young woman of privilege passing a workman repairing a roof. Why, she asks rhetorically, would such a woman envy such a man? She answers by describing the workman’s singularity of purpose and his having one discrete task before him.²⁸ Although Talbot doesn’t connect this experience of envy directly to women lacking time they can devote to study, her essay can be read, in conjunction with

her letters, as anticipating more famous essays by Florence Nightingale and Virginia Woolf that make this case explicit.²⁹ Despite *Reflection's* diurnal form, Talbot's signals her awareness of the tension between the modest reading schedule it proposes and the intermittently deep kind of "Reverence and Attention" Sunday's cadence allows her to give to books.

Thomas Turner, Sussex grocer and diligent diarist, also welcomes Sundays as an escape from the synchronization of worker's clock and diarist's page. Turner is several rungs down the ladder of economic privilege from Talbot but he is surprisingly well exposed to books, with several of his diary entries mentioning casually that he's read two Shakespeare plays or a great chunk of *Tristram Shandy* in one sitting.³⁰ As a minute chronicler of his own life, Turner comes across in his writing as business like and pragmatic. But he shares with Talbot a longing for his reading to be less so. He describes books as "the only diversion that I have any appetite for. Reading and study (might I be allowed the phrase) would in a manner be both meat and drink to me, were my circumstances but independent."³¹ On Sundays, which Turner regularly spends reading and reading aloud, he allows himself to pick up books in this spirit as a true "diversion" from business.

Turner, like Talbot, reads mostly pious literature on Sunday. Although he prefers authors like Richardson and Addison, the Sunday reading on which he reports is of Boyle, Sherlock, and Tillotson, and Young. This provides evidence, of course, of Turner attending more closely to religious than to secular texts. But his diary also suggests that timing matters greatly to how Turner picks up a book. While he inventories having a whole range of texts, including religious and moral tracts, in his hands on weekdays,

those he reads on Sundays become occasions for different kinds of reflection. Over the course of his Sunday reading in the winter of 1757, for instance, he reads Thomas Salmon on Marriage, declaring this text “an indifferent thing” before comparing it a few weeks later to another sermon, “Trust in God,” which he finds an “extreme good thing.” Although Turner is struggling at this point with the crisis of his own marriage, about which he often writes, he does not take Salmon as practical advice. Instead, he holds his Sunday posture as a man of leisure, the value of whose reading is not answerable to experience: “oh what an unspeakable pleasure it is,” he writes, “to be busied in one’s trade and at leisure now to unbend one’s mind by reading.”³² By this logic, a sermon that might have served as advice on a Tuesday becomes an instrument of unbending when it is given time.

Talbot and Turner are using reading to mark a difference between Sunday and the rest of the week that was becoming pronounced in new ways in eighteenth-century Britain. During this period, Sunday went from being just one of the days of rest taken every week by most professions, to being the only day protected from work. In his vivid description of the imposition of “time work-discipline” during the century, E. P. Thomson documents “mercantilists and moralists” from the seventeenth century onwards struggling with workers’ habit of keeping several days a week clear as days of reduced effort or play. Even late in the 1780s, he reports, “there are few trades which are not described as honoring Saint Monday: shoemakers, tailors, colliers, printing workers, potters, weavers, hosiery workers, cutlers, all Cockneys.”³³ But the majority of less independent workers by this time found their leisure limited to a single day. More recent research drawing on court testimony to show the long hours that Londoners worked in the

1700s confirms that, largely because of the loss of Monday as a holiday, working hours in the city increased by one fifth during the second half of the century.³⁴ As long as Monday and Tuesday had been unofficial holidays, the pressure to use Sunday as a day of leisure remained moderate; but in a weekly economy more tightly defined it became a day on which a range of diverse and competing activities took place. The role of Sunday in the newly conceived eighteenth-century calendar was complicated, in other words, by its having to do double duty as the most significant stretch of free time granted to working people, and as the day on which the discourse concerning the moral governance of workers reached its highest pitch. While workers clamored for the time of leisure that was being docked from their lives, evangelical Christians and old-school Anglicans alike worried about the kinds of sin that were increasingly likely to be committed in the small portion of time still designated to piety.

Even at a glance, these debates help show why reading was important as an activity favored by different groups of people arguing for the importance of keeping Sunday free of paid work. The eighteenth-century poems, pamphlets, papers, and sermons addressing the Sunday question concur in performing to an audience for whom reading and writing are recognized positively as activities that need time designated to them; as gifts that, in Derrida's terms, "demand to have, to give, or to take time—and time as a rhythm... that does not befall a homogenous time but that structures it originally."³⁵ Sermons need time to be read; but so too do the kind of political debates associated with the rise of the public sphere. And while church and state may both help institutionalize what we now think of as homogenous and regular time, the texts representing their positions also kept, as reading matter, another kind of time. Thus, while

Turner and Talbot read in general conformity with Christian tradition, their reading on Sundays marks a distinctively modern break between work and leisure in which all kinds of texts can be seen to participate. Books in this configuration flare intermittently to life in the hands of weekend reader, and get laid aside when this reader becomes a worker again on Monday.

3. Systems

I said earlier that recent discussions of eighteenth-century media have focused on imagining and visualizing an expanding network of communication, a map that stabilizes time across the places it connects. Yet we do not lack models for imagining how the *medium* might be described more in terms of the kinds of selectivity and difference-making at work in these examples of eighteenth-century readers reading. One example of such a model is Systems Theory. Luhmann's account of an eighteenth century where traditional forms of division and stratification give way to 'systems' that filter out the increasing complexity of modernity is the native counterpoint account to Habermas's emphasis on rational communication as a uniting force. As understood in Systems Theory, media provide a counterpoint to theories of mediation that emphasize the role of spaces, printing presses, and material institutions as the connective tissue of the Enlightenment.

For Luhmann, all systems begin as sites of differentiation—between, for instance, the inside and the outside of the body or the sentence—and emerge as ways of maintaining this difference over time. Love, Media, Law and Art systems depend in his

terms on the “operational closure” that makes interaction with the world possible by screening its plurality from view. In the most banal terms, this means I can be at court as a jury member in the morning, talking with my child’s kindergarten teacher in the afternoon, and giving a literary lecture in the evening. The systems in which such events become elements, while not impenetrable to each other, work as almost autonomous unfolding engines of difference making, operations calming down the paradoxes of a world that would be contradictory from a single, rational standpoint. This work of distinction is more powerful in a Systems Theoretical perspective than any textual or ideational content that might define a system, any communicative link that rational subjectivity might forge, or any material or spatial environment that a system might share or use.

Although this is not a usual line of application, one of the things I’m trying to do here is suggest that histories of reading and of the book might take from Systems Theory a sense of time, not space, being the field of freedom in which a system emerges. William Rasch describes Luhmann’s systems in these terms:

For an element to link onto another element, it must be able to distinguish among various elements and “choose” one over the others---and this “choice” must be made in time. This element A must link onto element X now, and not later, or element Y later and not now.³⁶

It is because of what Luhmann would call “temporal autonomy” that distinctions between a system and its environment can be made in the system’s terms, at its pace rather than the environment’s (if you want an example, you might think of the legal system in *Bleak House*). The theoretical benefits of defining a system’s freedom as a relation to time

become clear in Luhmann's description of the art system, which he is able to nail down as a distinctive giving of time to objects on which the ability to make the experience of perception into something communicable depends. Writing becomes important in this context as "a spectrum of disparate and yet coordinated ways of using time." In Luhmann's terms, this spectrum is what allows a text that might participate simply as information or advice in one system to be picked up and studied as art at another.

The reappearance of a piece of writing at intermittent, but dedicated points in time also makes it more likely to become part of the art system. "The artwork," Luhmann argues, "must be a temporally abstracted structure. It is a program for repeated usage which...blocks access to what is actually going on during the execution of the operation."³⁷ Although this temporal abstraction holds true for all systems, movements whose pushing forwards into and pulling back from an environment happen at their own pace, a text read at intervals, or re-read at different points time, exemplifies what is special about the art system as a *deliberate* giving and reorganizing of time through attention to objects.³⁸ With this insight, Systems Theory, though not made to do this, might help make practices like Sunday reading, or leisure reading, or re-reading, legible sites of conscious differentiation and disconnection, "interaction sequences" that help pull books and readers together in a constellation associated with the giving (as opposed to the wasting) of time.

But Systems Theory is also a way to get back to the 1990 conversation between Serres and Latour, in which Serres warns Latour against thinking of objects as mobile in space but stable in time. Latour's writings of the 1990s are best known for emphasizing the endurance and agency of objects, and the relationships into which they enter with

people as foundational to, but systematically disavowed by, modernity. However, Latour's early writings also show him committed to the idea of that objects make meaning primarily by dividing it up. In "On Interobjectivity," a landmark article published the same year as his conversation with Serres, Latour sets out to define the distinction between human and simian interactions. After stressing the similar levels of complexity with which baboons and humans interact with each other and the material world, he arrives at the conclusion that what distinguishes humans in the end is only the way they cordon off their interactions. A counter at the post office, to use his example, creates the space of a dedicated interaction—however complicated the sale of stamps gets, what goes on there remains fenced off from the complexity of general existence.³⁹ In the same way, the covers of a book or the walls of this room can be read as much more foundational than we normally acknowledge to the shutting out that enables what goes on inside them.

Latour's post-office is not a system: it involves distinctive relations between bodies and things while supporting the idea that objects have the ability to transcend the partitions they help to erect. But Latour's insight into the work of material differentiation anticipates his most recent *Inquiry in the Modes of Existence*, a project that can be read in part as an ambitious response to Serre's invitation to imagine the "immersing" of the network time. Latour's "modes" include "Law," "Religion," "Fiction" and "Technology," as well as modes of crossing including "Preposition," "Representation." In concert, they intersect more constitutively than Luhmann's systems, and are much more strongly defined as distinct ways of relating to material infrastructure than to time. But their parallel and ongoing existence, and the fact that they are not reducible simply to a

relation to infrastructure, means that Latour's account of them must take discontinuity into account. Of the mode's duration, Latour writes, "there is always a leap, a fault line, a lag, a risk, a difference between one stage and the next, one mediation and the next, $n+n1$, all along a path of alterations. Continuity is always lacking."⁴⁰ The axis of transcendence Latour describes here is proximate with the one Serres asked him to imagine 25 years earlier as the reorganizing and instability of objects in time; the flame; the rugby game in action, in which players as well as the ball they pass must move.

Like the Art System, Latour's mode of "Fiction" is defined in this new context as a focusing on and returning to objects that stand out as a fierce but not always present candidates for attention. The beings of fictions, he argues, arise from the raw materials of page, stage, or screen being treated differently to the way they would be in fact seeking modes. Fiction is:

a mode of existence like no other, defined by hesitation, vacillation, back-and-forth movements, the establishment of resonance between successive layers of raw material from which are drawn, provisionally, figurations that nevertheless cannot separate themselves from this material.⁴¹

Latour's celebration of fiction arises from his sense that the handling of objects in this mode involves a path of conscious return; a dedication of time to the book, for instance, that follows from the awareness that "you have to keep holding it so that it will keep holding you."⁴² Fiction becomes in this sense a meta-mode; the mode in which the kinds of intertwining of objects and people that is constitutive of all modes is most fully acknowledged as needing time, but also as being unsustainable as quotidian activity.

This, I hope, does not take us too far from the Sunday reading habits of Talbot and Turner, and the question of how their engagement with books on this day might be understood theoretically as a relation to and in time. I have had them in mind as test cases for the question whether such definitively human habits as theirs can be illuminated by theories that have cared little for people. Systems Theory and Actor Network Theory are more obviously useful in relation to digital and large scale processes, as opposed to scenarios in which human agency looms large. Libraries, archives, and reading habits, where choices and selections originate with someone resist—rightly, I think—being described as modes or systems. But the *read book*, not the reader, is my object here, and it is one that only really comes into its own if we are willing to let readers slide out of focus as biographical subjects and books slide away as objects that are simply there. Readers, Latour and Luhmann would both tell us, are only readers when they are reading. They need books. But books also need people, people with time to give. We, if you like, are the form that they take; a form that can only be seen to exist in time, not in space. What we are studying, then, is a very particular constellation. And while it may be anti-humanist theories that help bring it to light, its requirements are not difficult to link again to the very political question of how time has been given and distributed as a resource. It is also the case, as I promised at the outset, that the *read book* can be found in fiction as an object intermittent and emergent in time, a sign of reading a sign of discontinuous and specialized time use-age that can be handed back in this sense to the text itself.

4. Wuthering Heights

So my last example is of *Wuthering Heights*, a text published more than seventy years after Talbot and Turner were reading on Sundays. But the historical gap is important in suggesting that the habits of earlier readers who held their Sunday readings apart from their other reading practices are absorbed by later fictions as the stuff of content. I am also choosing *Wuthering Heights* as my last example because it's a novel so widely understood as drawing attention to boundaries and breaks. For Dorothy Van Ghent, this has to do with physical spaces. For D.H. Miller, with the novel structure's as a series of incomplete texts, embedded within each other in a constellation that refers to writing as a site of absence. And a series of readings that follow from these suggest that *Wuthering Heights* becomes a fiction in which these barriers, both physical and textual, perform the work of framing that is the precondition of opening up, both Catherine and Heathcliff's intimacy and the space of fiction itself.⁴³ These accounts of closure, or differentiation, being what facilitate the emergence of narrative already suggest why *Wuthering Heights* might be used to support a description of the novel's anticipating its place in a world divided by modes or systems.

But I'm also interested more specifically in how *Wuthering Heights* moves us back to Sunday reading as figure of the print network's immersion in time. For *Wuthering Heights* is constructed as a series of books that open and close intermittently in the course of the narrative. The first of these is Cathy's childhood diary, an incomplete record of turbulent events that has been written on the pages of a printed sermon by the Reverend Jabes Branderham. This text, once in use in the kitchen of the house, has formed part of mouldering stack of books on the windowsill of her bedroom at Wuthering Heights where it is found and partly read by Lockwood. The next layer of the narrative is

granted to Nelly by Lockwood when she is present with him in her “bits of spare time” during their time together at Thrushcross Grange. And then there is Lockwood’s own diary, in which these encounters are described over two long diary entries over a year apart, which we are ostensibly now reading.

Although two of the texts that convey the novel are diaries, their common feature is that they are not intended for, or do not reflect, daily use. Branderham’s sermon was given on a Sunday and circulated in a household where Sunday was singled out as the day on which to read. The portion of Cathy’s diary that Lockwood deciphers was written on one of these Sundays. This is her famous entry:

An awful Sunday...All day has been flooding with rain; we could not get to church, so Joseph must needs get up a congregation in the garret; and, while Hindley and his wife basked down stairs before a comfortable fire—doing anything but reading their Bibles, I’ll answer for it---Heathcliff, myself, and the unhappy plough-boy were ranged in a row, on a sack of corn, groaning and shivering, and hoping that Joseph would shiver too, so that he might give us a short homily for his own sake.⁴⁴

Once this three-hour domestic service is over, Cathy writes, she and Heathcliff are allowed downstairs, where they ensconce themselves behind a curtain of pinafores in the arch of a dresser. When Joseph finds them there without books in hand on a Sunday, he “compelled us so to square our positions that we might receive, from the far-off fire, a dull ray to show us the text of the lumber he thrust upon us.”⁴⁵ Rebelling against the tracts they have been given, Cathy and Heathcliff hurl away their books, and are sent to the back kitchen, or scullery, where Cathy finds Branderham’s text (possibly because

Joseph himself has been reading it) and settles down with a pot of ink into a “nook” where she records her outrage on its blank page.

This well-known Sunday scene is worth rehearsing as a reminder of Bronte’s world being one in which reading had to find both time and place. Its choreography may suggest a competition between secular and religious uses of Sunday; between time given to sermons and time one might be out playing on the moors; between paper given to sermons and paper on which creative, individual thoughts get written. But *Wuthering Heights* also provides a context in which to understand the case made by Alexis McCrossen for the nineteenth-century having been a time when “Domestic, didactic and commercial meanings for Sunday joined rather than replaced religious meanings.”⁴⁶ In general, narrative profits in *Wuthering Heights* from the religious impetus to keep the wattage turned down on activity at the farm on Sundays. Its story, which flares up on one day in seven, assumes a more normal setting in which houses and farms are kept up, food served, and animals fed on the other six. In Caroline Steedman’s terms, the novel involves a world in which servants are the substratum of an erratic, irresponsible narrative.⁴⁷

The terms of this co-existence can be at least partly explained as Nelly’s actively apportioning Sundays to imaginative rather than practical activity. We know that she approves of reading widely and also, a point emphasized by Steedman, that she happily plays the role of ecclesiastical authority in a world where no clergyman is present.⁴⁸ Thus, it is no surprise that the highlights of the story she tells Lockwood all involve events that occur on Sundays. The day on which Catherine and Heathcliff first visit Thrushcross Grange, and from which Heathcliff returns in fury is a Sunday, as is the day

on which Heathcliff and Catherine are reunited after Catherine's illness, on which Catherine dies, and on which the younger Cathy is born. The details of Catherine sitting "in a loose, white dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders, in the recess of the open window," a book spread open on the windowsill, of which "the scarcely perceptible wind fluttered its leaves at intervals," recalls scenes in which we find Jane Eyre and Catherine as children in nooks, handling open and unread books as portals through which the retreat into narrative seems to take effect. But they also show that Sunday is the time given to narrative by Nelly, a narrator whose powers of observation are defined by the intermittent access daily work allows her to her characters. This moment in her telling of the story, the hinge between the death of Catherine and the birth of Cathy, opens out as fully as it does only because it takes place on the one day she is at leisure to observe Catherine, to give her a letter, and to let Heathcliff into the house while the rest of the household is at church. Like the book on the windowsill, Nelly's story flutters to life at dedicated intervals rather than on pages animated by a constant draft of experience.

While Lockwood's diary is not pegged specifically to Sunday, its liminal relation to his regular life structure the story's affinity with moments of unusually dedicated time; time when Lockwood is sick, at ease, or imaginatively off-guard are necessary in pulling together the episodes of Catherine and Heathcliff's story. The listless Lockwood's relation to the trials of his neighbors as something to be dipped into irregularly is not in itself an ideal; but it models a future in which *Wuthering Heights* will be handled as Fiction, in Latour's terms, or as Art in Luhmann's, or simply as a book in Nelly's: a something to be read at certain times, but dusted or tidied away at many others. In this sense, the intermittent intensity of the book's read self haunts the presence of the book

that sits insistently in our hand and unfolds regularly, page by page. Like Talbot, Turner and the author of *Low-Life*, Bronte has in mind a syncopated beat for her tale that competes with its life as object; one that recreates as an irregular cadence in time the nooks Catherine and Heathcliff have made in space for their story.

Underpinning this paper have been two very different ideas about what mediation is. The first suggests it's a form of connection between different things: print, for instance, as it joins communities or people. This understanding, as Raymond Williams has points out, proceeds from the view that difference exists in the world, and that the medium exists as a way of complicating or overcoming it.⁴⁹ The other understanding of medium comes from Luhmann, and proceeds from the very different premise that the modern world exists as a complex singularity. The work of the medium in this context is to make difference possible as something around which meaning can unfold over time. Although the book, or print, is easy to represent as a medium of the former kind, the *read book*, I've been arguing, is better understood as a medium of the latter kind.

Methodologically, I've made this argument in terms that risk alienating both historians of reading and systems theorists. And yet in the end, my real investment is only in a theoretical understanding of the history of print mediation that would allow us to address a fairly practical and ongoing set of concerns about the conjugation of texts in time. When we imagine print mediation in terms of networks, connection, and affinities, it becomes easy to stress print culture having provided a surplus of reading material that now spills through digitalization into the twenty-first century. But when we immerse read books in time, it becomes evident that their success as Art or as Fiction has always depended on their giving and being given time. The particular ways print reading has

been used in this mode to mark differences within quotidian time, to rearrange it, and to insist upon its being given, cannot be studied in conjunction with Luhmann or Serres alone. But the political history of time to read being distributed, restricted, fought for, and made against the odds is not just a history of labor or gender; it is also a material history of the book needing the reader's time in order to work as a medium.

Notes

¹ *Low-life: Or One Half of the World Knows Not How the Other Half Live, Being a Critical Account of What is Transacted by the People of all Religions, Nations, Circumstances, and Sizes of Understanding in the Twenty-Four Hours Between Saturday Night and Monday Morning. In a True Description of a Sunday as it is Usually Spent Within the Bills of Mortality. Calculated for the Twenty-First of June.* Third ed. (London: Printed for John Lever, 1764) 37, 80. Carolyn Steedman offers a full account of the publication history of this piece in “Cries Unheard, Sights Unseen: Writing the Eighteenth-Century Metropolis,” *Representations*, Vol. 118, No 1 (Spring 2012), pp 28-71.

² *Low-life*, A2.

³ *Low-life*, V.

⁴ Although it's worth noting that in Steedman's reading, the form of the piece as “short nontensed units of language without a main verb” supports its uncanny withdrawal of events from calendar and clock time altogether. *Op Cit.* pp 31-2.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Ed. (London: Verso, 1991.)

⁶ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, And English Diurnal Form, 1160-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁷ *Low-life*, V

⁸ *Low-life*, V

⁹ See David Henkin, Unpublished paper on the Hebdomodal Cycle and Evtar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: the History and Meaning of the Week* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

¹⁰ Clifford Siskin and William Warner, "Introduction," in Clifford Siskin and William Warner, Eds. *This is Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5.

¹¹ John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 36, 2 (Winter 2010), 321-62. Scholars in the fields of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literary studies have rallied behind such calls to think of mediation as both representing and performing this history of language spanning and interconnecting distance. A ERC funded meeting held at Cambridge in 2013 entitled "Knowing About Mediation," promised, for instance, to "increase understanding of Enlightenment Europe" by looking in a transnational context at the history of the book trade while building a platform on which to host and share databases that would expand that network.

¹² For example, Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), Andrew Piper, "Reading's Refrain: from Bibliography to Topology," *ELH*, Vol. 80, 2 (Summer 2013), 373-99.

¹³ Drawing on projects in my own field, I'd cite here the examples of the Stanford Mapping the Republic of Letters project, (<http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/casestudies/index.html>) and the Literary Atlas of Europe Project (<http://www.literaturatlas.eu/?lang=en>).

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 41.

¹⁵ In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu argues at the anthropological level that observing a pattern of behavior as if it were objective and reversible, one must forget that “it is all a question of style, which means in this case timing and choice of occasion for the same act—giving, giving in return, offering one’s services, paying a visit, etc.—can have completely different meanings at different times” (6).

¹⁶ Derrida, *Given Time*, 41

¹⁷ Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, Trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 109.

¹⁸ Taken more politically, Bourdieu and Serres’ comments on the way networks must be subjected to temporality can also serve here as a reminder that the practice of textual engagement always has and still looms large for most as a question having time to read, and of time having become one of the commodities that capitalism has so far only made less, rather than more, plentiful. Models that visualize reading, even from a politically progressive point of view, as creating a stable point of connection between the reader and the book are often insensitive to a reality that regularly parts, not just reader from her book, but also the reader and her book as a dedicated coupling (for instance, at university, on holiday, or on Sunday), from the reader her book at other times of the life-cycle and the week, where books may cross her path or populate her world to quite different effect (as paper, gifts, sites of bad conscience).

¹⁹ Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

²⁰ In making this methodological claim, I am thinking of the kind of causality espoused in Matthew Brown's 2005 study of reading rituals in early new England, *The Pilgrim and the Bee* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) where the codex as a structure both "cyclically repetitive and linearly dramatic" (19) at the point of reading becomes a figure of the way redemption is described on the page (19). Advocating a textual studies based on the phenomenology of reading, Brown suggests that it is possible to "concentrate on how the book object organizes time and space for its readers" by attending to the textual arguments (13). This same logic is visible in Price's *How to do Things With Books*, a study that addresses Victorian books in their material, rather than textual, form of connection, contagion, and barrier making. Her method suggests that even the event of *not reading* can be discerned in the text itself.

²¹ Catherine Talbot, *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*, 2nd ed. (London: J. and F. Rivington, 1770), 10&26.

²² Talbot, *Reflections*, 8.

²³ This practice of regular, daily reading was advised frequently by authors of the period, and many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts take the form of daily installments or help establish the conventions of the chapter. Several of these were published in anticipation of the Sunday timeslot as the one in which they would be read in aloud, and sermons can be understood as a species of this kind of publication. See, for example, *The Family Preacher* (1754), which contains "Practical Discourses for Every Sunday Throughout the Year," each of which can be read aloud in half an hour. In 1783 Mary Ann Kilner published *A Course of Lecture for Sunday Evenings*. Kilner claims to have

been inspired to write these lectures by visiting a close friend and finding that his efforts in reading to his family every Sunday were being wasted because the children understood little of what they heard. Her discourses on morality are designed to keep a young audience awake during a period of reading that they are otherwise unlikely to relish.

²⁴ *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the year 1741 to 1770*, ed. Montagu Pennington, Vol. 2. (London: F and J Rivington: 1809), 105-6.

²⁵ Talbot, *Reflections*, 8, 11.

²⁶ *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, Vol. 2, 64.

²⁷ Talbot, *Reflections*, 10.

²⁸ Talbot, *Essays by Catherine Talbot* (London: Published by John Sharpe, 1820), 36.

²⁹ See Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*.

³⁰ *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, Ed. David Vaisey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 134.

³¹ Turner, *Diary*, 143.

³² Turner, *Diary*, 146.

³³ E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" *Past and Present* Vol. 38, 1967, 56-97, 73.

³⁴ See Hans-Joachim Voth, "Time Use in Eighteenth-Century London: Some Evidence from the Old Bailey" *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 57:2, 1997, 497-499.

³⁵ Derrida, *Given Time*, 41

³⁶ William Rasch, *Niklas Luhmann's Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 58.

³⁷ . Niklas Luhmann, *Art as A Social System*, Trans. Eva Knodt. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 43.

³⁸ As Luhmann puts it, optional access, systems enable “leaps within the sequence,” *Social Systems*, 79

³⁹ Bruno Latour, ”On Interobjectivity” *Mind, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 3:4, 1996, 228-244-

⁴⁰ Bruno Latour, *Inquiry into the Modes of Existence* Trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 210.

⁴¹ Latour, *Inquiry*, 244

⁴² Latour, *Inquiry*, 247

⁴³ See John Mathews, “Framing in *Wuthering Heights*,” *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 27:1 (Spring 1985), 25-61.

⁴⁴ Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (OUP, 2009), 16.

⁴⁵ Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, 17

⁴⁶ Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 16.

⁴⁷ Leo Bersani, *A Future for Asyntax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), 203

⁴⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 202.

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 56.