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Editors' Introduction  
**Becoming media**

Jen Boyle<sup>a</sup> and Martin Foys<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of English, Coastal Carolina University, South Carolina.

<sup>b</sup>Department of English, Drew University, New Jersey.

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Like old science, old media also seem unacceptably unreal.

Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New*

In media studies circles, it is now almost trite to discuss the term *remediation*: the liminal, ambivalent staging of a media life caught between older and newer forms, and the functional tussle that happens between them. Nevertheless, scholars today work within this oscillating, in-between space – a space fraught with cross pressures of how we used to do things and how we ought to do things. As (post)medievalists, we study the very old with the very new, but remain constrained by the cultural logic of earlier and increasingly archaic media production. So the theme ‘Becoming Media’ applies as much to the entire process of this issue and its own immediately historical context as to its organizing theme and published product – a product realized here traditionally in print and then again, digitally and differently, on *postmedieval*’s website. This process has been in many ways a *stochastic* one, infused with prediction, probability and randomness. We guessed about the new as we studied the old: the form and function of the online crowd review for early drafts of our contributors’ essays necessarily developed out of the moment, as there was relatively little precedent for how such a process would or should



1 In the three month-long period of the online crowd review for this volume, scholars generated over 50 individual and detailed responses for the six essays, totaling some 24,000 words – nearly half the total of length of the essays themselves, and containing many ideas and suggestions which found their way into the essays' final forms (see [postmedieval.crowdreview.wordpress.com/](http://postmedieval.crowdreview.wordpress.com/)). The process and effect of the crowd review is more fully discussed in *postmedieval's* online Forum on 'Open Peer Review': [postmedievalforum.com/forums/forum-ii-open-peer-review/](http://postmedievalforum.com/forums/forum-ii-open-peer-review/).

work.<sup>1</sup> We experimented with alternatives to the standard modes of publishing scholarship, even as we here produce such scholarship in such modes.

A computer does not understand or care about the social, intellectual and economic forces which dictate that one can freely quote 50 words of somebody else's copyrighted words, but must seek permission and even pay to reproduce a small section of a manuscript image created 500 years ago. To a computer, the dominant medium by which we now produce our ideas about the old things we study, it is all just information. To the computer, it is information *transcoded* into a measurable array that in turn allows communication, the successful transmission of that information, with more signal than noise, from a new point of origin to a new destination, with a fresh facility to digitally converge and translate previously distinct media. To a computer, it is easy to include, to combine, to reproduce, to rediscover and remake the old, and to give again.

But it is not so easy otherwise. Consider an example that embodies a current reality of scholarly need, yet also reaches back to an analogous historical period of media change. The 'Terms of Service' for the Early English Books Online (EEBO) resource state:

The electronic versions of any public domain works that may be included in EEBO are the copyright of ProQuest LLC. For all works in the collection, the printing or saving of texts is permitted only for private or educational use. Further reproduction is prohibited. (EEBO, 2011)

The implications of such a policy are sizable, and suggest a change in how companies in the business of providing access to scholarly materials in the public domain are now thinking about this older media and data. The early English books – themselves new technology when first realized – EEBO provides access to in digital form are, in their original state, uncopyrightable. But as ProQuest's terms of service maintain, the digital translation of an older media form into a newer one renders it *able to be owned anew*. ProQuest, then, has signaled a shift in what it provides: EEBO is not merely a digital service though which one can access faithful typographic reproductions of public domain material; it is now a repository which claims copyright over that public-domain material, by virtue of having translated its technological form from one medium to another. As Ben Schmidt argues on his blog, *Sapping Attention*, we are experiencing a kind of 'event horizon' from a 'copyright black hole' that is beginning to expand to include more and more as online entities aggressively promote reproductive control over content that previously could not, would not, be copyrighted (Schmidt, 2011). In the provocative instance of EEBO, 'becoming media' means preserving, or rather *remediating*, older and restrictive economic modes of information control through newer forms of media earlier envisioned as providing alternatives



to them. Or, to adjust Lisa Gitelman's quotation from above, old media now seem unreal. Or, to adjust Lisa Gitelman's quotation from above, old media now seem unreal. Or, to adjust Lisa Gitelman's quotation from above, old media now seem unreal. Or, to adjust Lisa Gitelman's quotation from above, old media now seem unreal.

Let's pause there. Notice the thousands of words in this volume, and the scarcity of images that accompany them. It is not difficult to understand why; the relative ease by which we can now assemble, as we research, a rich ecology of media forms (for example, archived printed materials, blog posts and comment threads, color images, satellite photos, digitized manuscripts, electronic databases and related searches, audio files, videos, e-mail exchanges) still contrasts, sharply and unhappily, with how such forms may be used in public scholarship. This grinding of older and newer *tec(h)tonic* plates under the crust of intellectual labor is a frustrating, yet still exciting, moment of scholarly remediation. It is, really, the time of the digital incunabula. So the process of this volume – the generation of the essays, their crowd review, the online correlative essays (some of which, regrettably, might end up using black and white images because of the way in which institutions structure their permission fees) – presumptively explores the convergent logics of past and present media, as we strain and strive to express new ideas about old things.

... but the word 'medium' ... carries a number of different senses, from Aristotle's initial division of the three ways of representation, the first of which is usually translated 'by different media' (*en hetérois mimeĩsthai*), Aristotle having no abstract noun for the term. (Macksey, 2011)

The most important precondition for guaranteeing the continued existence of relatively power-free spaces in media worlds is to refrain from all claims to occupying *the* center. (Zielinski, 2006)

As Richard A. Macksey points out, as early as Aristotle mediation finds expression as events of translation across objects and actions, and as in-process modes of 'becoming media.' While we certainly have plenty of abstractions to describe media, we are still no less uncertain about whether mediation demands an object, a thing, a process or a being. The impetus for this issue was in part the fertile history of the word itself: within *medhyo*, the 'middle' (medieval), lurks a prolepsis of becoming a *thing*. Yet, the *thing* itself of mediation is evasive, and the middle is a difficult space to inhabit. The middle can be a spatial or temporal go-between in media worlds, but, as Siegfried Zielinski makes clear, the middle can also crystallize into a 'center,' as a stance of power and control.

The in-between of media and mediation is as much a historical investment as it is a phenomenological and ontological problem. On the one hand, the 'new' in our refrain of 'new media' betrays the uncritical assumption that media can appear from the ether as novel innovations unfettered by their remediations in



and through the past. On the other, there is a tendency to reify the media object as a 'lure' to 'demonstrating its past'; that is, media objects lure us toward an archeology of their present that is rooted in a chronology of progressive succession. What of historically abject media, of the object resistant entirely to a telos of mediation 'for' ...?

The essays in this issue do not form a center in their explorations of postmedieval 'becoming media.' Instead, they range across the middle (historically and beyond), and take up multiple positions on the spectrum of the in-between. The 'virtual,' conjoined epistemologically with mediation, is a concept conceived at the threshold of that which links two distinct ontological event-spaces and the projection of mediated experience as ephemeral affect. Seeta Chaganti's essay reads the *danse macabre* with contemporary theories of the virtual to show that 'danced virtuality' in the medieval context was an accommodation of bodily affect and media that made possible relational multiplicities of bodies, media forms, space, and the plurality and singularity of death. Eddie Christie takes up the seemingly paradoxical virtuality of the ephemeral as an access point back into the materiality of information. Through the 'writ in water' figure in Anglo-Saxon literature, Christie points to the impermanence of writing as mediation – suspended in a cycle of 'material substrate' and 'transcendent signs,' and amid the simultaneity of 'erasure and inscription.'

Assemblages of objects across the spectrum of the in-between inform the work of Julia Reinhard Lupton, Whitney Trettien and Arne Flaten. Lupton engages contemporary theories of object-oriented ontology and actor-network theory to conceive a framework for 'omnimedia' in the seventeenth-century cookbooks and household manuals of Hannah Woolley. 'Omnimedia' in Woolley's sense leads Lupton to discover a phenomenological circuitry of objects, bodies, text and taste as a process of judgment that defies conceptual or aesthetic formalisms. A twentieth-century Hannah, Hannah Arendt, allows Lupton to demonstrate how a phenomenology of omnimedia informs 'taste' (judgment) across political and domestic spaces. Epistemological circuitry, running across the divisions of human-animal-book, drives Whitney Trettien's exploration of Nehemiah Grew's *The Anatomy of Plants* (1682). Trettien traces Grew's striking depictions of plant-becoming animals and animal-becoming plants as media circuits, founded on and troped through a history of textual mediation. In the end, Trettien shows us an early modern formulation of the 'actual book' that has implications far beyond its abstractions in current new media debates. Early art objects re-contextualized as reproducible media are at the center of Arne Flaten's study of portrait medals, plaquettes, typefaces and art objects designed for replication. These fifteenth-century 'reproducible multiples' challenge the historical trajectory of mechanically reproduced artifacts, and, as Flaten shows, illuminate a tactility and intimacy to early reproducible media that dialogues with our own moment, caught up as it is in



nostalgia for the hand-worn book and desire for the functional aesthetics of the glass-encased Kindle.

Many of the essays in this volume take at least a momentary glance at the mystical as a property of mediation; the mystical emanates from metaphysical presence/absence. The work of Eugene Thacker goes beyond this dialectic in pursuing mysticism as mediation. In many senses, Thacker's essay functions as a response to the call of mediation as on the way to saying or becoming some-*thing*. As such, his essay asks us to consider both the function of the 'divine' and the 'dark vacuous core' within mystical mediation, read through the writings of the fourteenth-century Flemish mystic, John Ruusbroec. Thacker pushes us to consider mediation as so in excess of itself that it becomes only *immediation* – a 'nothing' that frustrates our desire for transitive meaning and interpretive resolution.

For us, there is at least another way in which this volume becomes media. One of the things we admire about these essays is the sheer range of media they perceive: the tangible and reproducible media Arne historicizes; the epistemological and phenomenological dialectics between media forms Whitney and Julia formulate; the virtual ephemerality of performative and material media Seeta and Eddie discover; and finally, the complete collapse of media into divine immediation Eugene proposes. At many points in these essays, one kind of media becomes others. As they become, the media and what they communicate run along a continuum of informational material and material abnegation. Through the material function of these essays, these media become still other media, and un-become their original forms. This volume archives the media of these becoming and unbecoming essays, and then it archives itself as another artifact of that remediation. A collection in print that should become other media, but has not, does not, really, ... yet.

## About the Authors

Jen Boyle is an Assistant Professor of English and New Media at Coastal Carolina University. In addition to articles on new media, theory and the early modern, she is the author of *Anamorphosis in Early Modern Literature: Mediation and Affect* (Ashgate, 2010) and a co-collaborator and author of the new media installation, *The Hollins Community Project*. She is currently writing a book, *The Distributed Sovereign*, on networks and theological, political and sexual sovereignty (E-mail: jboyle@coastal.edu).

Martin K. Foy is an Associate Professor of English at Drew University. His publications include the *Bayeux Tapestry Digital Edition* (2003) and *Virtually Anglo-Saxon: Old Media, New Media, and Early Medieval Studies in the Late Age of Print* (University Press of Florida, 2007). Martin is currently the



co-director, with Shannon Bradshaw, of the DM Project (<http://ada.drew.edu/dmproject/>), a digital resource for the open annotation of medieval images and texts. He is also writing a book on the nature of media in early medieval England (E-mail: [mfoys@drew.edu](mailto:mfoys@drew.edu)).

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