

Call for Papers
International Conference 3-4 September 2026
Université Marie et Louis Pasteur (Besançon, France)

New Perspectives on the Romantic Media Concept

Keynote speaker: Brecht de Groote (Ghent University)

The Romantic period is often seen as a turning point in the dissolution of the Republic of Letters, leading to the specialization of literature, as shown in Germaine de Staël's *De la littérature* (1800). Conversely, the ambition of this international conference is to show that, by continuing to think of itself as a means of transmitting knowledge and experience, Romantic literature not only extends the didactic project of the Enlightenment but also anticipates the Victorian period's theorization of the media concept. In fact, as a growing body of scholarship attests, an emerging Romantic media concept proves crucial to understanding the Romantic reconfigurations of literature and provides a new perspective on Romanticism in its numerous international contexts.

Any evocation of a Romantic media concept has to contend with John Guillory's widely accepted account that the pluralization of the term 'medium' to designate channels of communication did not manifest itself until the audio-visual revolution of the Victorian era. Therefore, media historians generally posit that the Romantic period lacked a media concept.¹ However, Guillory admits that the concept of a medium of communication was 'wanted for the several centuries prior to its appearance': in other words, it was 'latent' during the Romantic period, and 'premodern arts' are also 'ambiguously both media and precursors to the media'.²

In the last two decades, numerous critics, including Maureen N. McLane, Celeste Langan, Angela Esterhammer and Andrew Burkett, have explored this period Guillory identifies as preceding a medial self-awareness and attempted to (re)define the Romantic media concept. Mike Goode argues representatively that before the media concept emerged in the late Victorian age, artists of 'the Romantic era saw more flexibility and diversity in their ideas about and experiments in media and mediation', thus prefiguring such a crucial evolution.³ In the same vein, Yohei Igarashi has argued that the major Romantic poets, and the hallmarks of Romantic poetic style they created, responded to the advent of a culture of communication, notably by engaging with what he terms 'the dream of communication' – a fantasy of 'a transfer of thoughts, feelings, and information between individuals made as efficient as possible, and of perfectible media that could facilitate the quickest and clearest communication'.⁴ Goode further identifies in the Romantic era the early development of the paradoxical double logic which, according to contemporary media theory, is characteristic of modern (that is, post-Victorian) media – 'a fantasy of unmediated access that effectively renders medium invisible' as well as 'media's hypermediacy, [that is,] its calling attention to media and mediation'.⁵

¹ Clifford Siskin and William Warner, eds. *This is Enlightenment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

² John Guillory, 'Genesis of the Media Concept', *Critical Inquiry* 36:2 (2010), p. 321-322.

³ Mike Goode, *Romantic Capabilities: Blake, Scott, Austen, and the New Messages of Old Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 16-18.

⁴ Yohei Igarashi, *The Connected Condition. Romanticism and the Dream of Communication* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 4.

⁵ Goode, *Romantic Capabilities*, p. 18.

However, the issue of the latency of the Romantic media concept continues to incite controversy because of the complex conjunctures of the period. The Romantic period witnessed an unprecedented expansion of a mass reading public relying on letterpress printing and an explosive proliferation of other forms and formats of mediation - spanning a dizzying spectrum of new literary genres, public speeches as mass events, popular lectures, pantomimes, dioramas, professional galleries, photography, theatrical performances, as well as a booming market in tracts, caricatures and pamphlets. Recent scholarship building on translation studies, media archaeology, media ecology, remediation, or cultural techniques, presents one of the fastest growing branches of Romantic studies today.⁶ This international conference aims to encourage a collective exploration of new definitions of the Romantic media concept and new approaches to the transformative media landscapes of the period.

We invite you to submit proposals for 20-minute papers that shed light on any aspect of the Romantic media concept and its current reappraisal.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- new conceptualizations of the Romantic media concept
- literary or cultural manifestations or discussions of mediality in the Romantic period
- Romantic media theory and the public sphere
- Romanticism and communication media
- the Romantic mediascape
- Romanticism, media theory and theories of (re)mediation and performance
- Romanticism, media theory and translation studies
- Romanticism and the transfer, communication, and storage of information
- Romanticism and intermediality
- Romanticism, war and media studies
- the materiality of Romantic media, literature and textuality
- Romantic mediality and authorship
- Romanticism and media theory in international contexts / non-anglophone Romanticism

Please send proposals of 250-300 words and a short biographical note of 100 words to the organizers by 30 March 2025: Paul Hamann-Rose (paul.hamann-rose@uni-passau.de) and Pauline Hortolland (Pauline.hortolland@umlp.fr).

Scientific committee:

Brecht de Groote (Ghent University)
Paul Hamann-Rose (University of Passau)
Pauline Hortolland (Université Marie et Louis Pasteur)

⁶ Guillory, 'Genesis of the Media Concept', p. 322, n3. See for instance, James Brooke-Smith, 'Remediating Romanticism'. *Literature Compass* 10.4 (2013), pp. 343–352. Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism* (Princeton University Press, 2017). Orrin Wang, *Techno-Magism: Media, Mediation and the Cut* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022). Ralf Haekel, 'Towards a Media Ecology of Literature: The Case of Romanticism', in *Media Ecologies of Literature*, ed. by Susanne Bayerlipp, Ralf Haekel and Johannes Schlegel (New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023). *Romanticism and Its Media: Selected Papers from the Leipzig Conference of the German Society for German Romanticism*, ed. by Ralf Haekel, Julia Heinemann (Trier: WVT, 2025).