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If This Is Enlightenment Then What Is Romanticism?

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If This Is Enlightenment Then What Is Romanticism?

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Building on our published argument that Enlightenment is an event in the history of mediation (*This Is Enlightenment*, 2010), this essay ventures into the problem of periodization by putting Romanticism *into* that history. Arguing that Kant's famous 1784 formulation of a self that dares to know is less a description of Enlightenment than a product of it, we examine the specific mediations that yielded that product – including changes in infrastructure, genres and formats, associational practices, and protocols. We show how Enlightenment emerged as a historical event from those changes as the very medium of mediation – its architecture of forms and tools, people and practices – became load-bearing: a "platform" for a cumulative, collaborative, and ongoing enterprise. And, we argue, what happened after that event, happened on that platform. The relationship of the Romantic period to Enlightenment is that of an eventuality to an event: Romanticism took shape as a contingent possibility, a coming to terms with what had just happened in the terms that event had platformed – that is, had turned into a platform. We offer the American Revolution as a particularly useful example of the event of Enlightenment becoming a platform for Romantic eventualities. By thus extracting Romanticism from the history of ideas, we can offer new kinds of arguments about the period we call Romantic (the Romantic subject is, from the perspective offered by the history of mediation, the self on the platform of Enlightenment) and periodization itself (all changes and thus all periods are not the same – if this is Enlightenment scaled to a hierarchy of change [*open hands wide*] then this is Romanticism [*open hands not as wide*].

Tonight we want to put Romanticism somewhere where it hasn't been before – *in* what we call the "history of mediation." To enact the difference that we think a history of mediation makes, we'll begin by *re*-mediating the genre we've been invited to perform. In fact, by just standing up here together, we're already deflecting the standard vector of plenaries: all to one. And there are actually more minds up here than meet the eye: our host Alex Dick, for example, supplied our title; and during discussion we will acknowledge and invoke many others who have helped us to think through concepts such as "platform" and "eventuality."[1]

The first part of Alex's title, "If This Is Enlightenment," refers to the volume we've just published with Chicago. Its assertiveness – *This Is Enlightenment* – is a response to Francis Bacon's strange observation about questions and answers. Sometimes, Bacon remarked, "a question *remains* a mere question" for "centuries."[2] What *keeps* a question a question, we asked ourselves? And what, after centuries, can transform a question *into* its answer? *This Is Enlightenment* is, in part, an experiment in the history of questions, for it points to a perfect test case for addressing Bacon's

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observation: the query Kant made famous, "What is Enlightenment?"[3] With Kant's essay, a conversation started that has now dominated inquiries into Enlightenment for over 200 years. And much of that conversation for those *centuries* has entailed, per Bacon, *repeating* the question: What is Enlightenment? What was Enlightenment? What's left of Enlightenment? We've learned much, including the fact that asking that question again, and yet again, turns Enlightenment into a *problem* – into something that is guilty from the get-go of being hard to find and easy to judge. And the more times we pose the question, the more the mystery deepens: "When did Enlightenment occur?" "Where did it occur?" "Did it really occur at all?" If we go cold turkey and stop the repetition, we can, with the help of our new databases, identify the early 1730s as the moment of the first clustering articulation of the term and concept of Enlightenment in Britain, France, and Germany, as well as growing testimony to a sense at the time of a new kind of knowledge environment. We argue that by the time Kant wrote his essay in 1784, his formulation of a self that dares to know – that has the courage to use – as he emphasized – its own understanding – is less a description of Enlightenment than a product of it.

To provide a sense of what's at stake in making this claim, we contrast the ways that Francis Bacon and Kant use the word "machine." To push his readers into taking the dare to know, Kant ends "What is Enlightenment?" with a before-and-after of what they will become: if they use their own reason, "men" will be "more than machines" (Kant 2007, 37). This binary – man vs. machine – became, of course, a staple of modernity, and thus a barrier to our thinking of Enlightenment in terms that precede Kant's ideal of individual, courageous selves – a model for knowing that we still hold dear. In Bacon, those terms are radically different: machines are not what we don't want to be; they are the means for men to do what they should be doing – making "advances worthy of mankind" (Bacon 1994, 8).

Whether moving a "heavy obelisk" or "advancing" knowledge, daring to depend on one's own strength or one's own understanding, as Kant demands, was not courageous in Bacon's view, but an "act of utter lunacy" (Bacon 2000, 28–29). Sanity, for Bacon, then, was accepting the necessity of tools – tools that work. We can't create – at least create very well – on our own. The problem of the "renewal" of knowledge – of why knowledge had stalled and what to do about it – was thus fundamentally for Bacon a problem of "mediation." We use "mediation" here in its broadest sense as shorthand for the work done by tools, by what we would now call "media" of every kind – everything that intervenes, enables, supplements, or is simply in-between – emphasizing the Baconian stipulation that media of some kind are always at work.

By casting knowledge as necessarily mediated, Bacon found a way to identify and articulate change: mediation was always necessary but the forms of mediation differ over time. There *is* a history of mediation. "Mediation," we want to emphasize, is the *inclusive* term for the history we propose; it can include what we now call "media," but, as the Chicago volume's breadth of reference demonstrates, it is not restricted to them. The history of mediation can thus engage "media history" and "media theory," but its wide range of objects, forms, technologies, agency, and interactions – and thus its chronological scope – differentiates it from both of those established enterprises.

So how can we put Romanticism into this history in 50 minutes? Our strategy is to do some mediating of our own: not just in number – putting our two heads together with many others – but in kind. Genres change by mixing with *other* genres, so let's fill up this plenary with other forms, starting with one that many of us have read, and

All Histories Are Not One OR There Is A History of Mediation

I. The title of this Conference tells us, at least grammatically, that some mediations are Romantic and others are not.

II. To the extent that "Romantic" references temporality, "Romantic Mediations" needs a "*history of mediation*"—everything is always already mediated, but the forms of mediation change.

III. Since mediation embraces both the technological and the human—it does not discriminate between any particular form of agency—the *history of mediation* steers us clear of the unproductive binaries of the "technodeterminism" debate. (Print technology and Samuel Johnson are both forms of mediation.)

IV. The *history of mediation* turns instead to how mediations of all kinds interact. Because they can be more easily pinned down to particular times and places than "ideas," we can track mediations more accurately—and thus more readily identify changes in their interactions.

V. The *history of ideas*, like classical physics, gets its stories wrong when it tries to scale too far up or too far down. Our narratives and anthologies record those stumbles as "periods." ("Enlightenment," for example, has been either one idea extended across thousands of years, as in the Frankfort School version, or it has been fragmented into multiple Enlightenments, each one tied to different ideas and/or different locations (e.g., "Radical Enlightenment" or "Scottish Enlightenment."))

VI. The *history of mediation*, like post-classical physics, foregrounds the notion of an "event" to clarify the contingencies of time, place, and scale.

VII. In science, an event is a single coordinate in the fabric of four-dimensional spacetime; the "universe" is mapped as "just the set of all events—every point in space, at every moment of time."

VIII. In the *history of mediation*, an event is a singularity in a multidimensional fabric of mediation; the past is mapped as the set of events that are the effects, not the products, of those mediations.

IX. The relationship of "effect," by foregrounding contingency of time and place, admits the multiplicity and specificity of that contingency without sacrificing both to the reductive linearity of causality.

APPLICATION. "Enlightenment is an event in the history of mediation" (This Is Enlightenment, Chicago, 2010).

CONCLUSION. When the "Study of Romanticism" focuses on ideas and themes, the "Romantic" becomes as we are, so that we may be as it was. In order not to repeat the same dull round over again, "Romantic Mediations" requires a *history of mediation* that links mediations to each other, to the events they effect, and to the effects that one event has on what follows. (We are here focusing upon the specific ways an event ends (Enlightenment)—i.e., how something e-vents, "comes out"—and how the outcome of one event mediates what follows. At stake is the problem of change: on a local scale, how to describe the continuities and discontinuities between Enlightenment and the Romantic; on a larger scale, how to establish a hierarchy of change.)

Figure 1.   An abstract in the form of an argument.

even taught, but rarely use. If you clicked on our title on the Conference website, you would have seen this tractate: *see Figure 1 above*.

A tractate is a form that "handles" a particular topic, one that manages it in a particular way. For William Blake, it was a particularly useful form for manhandling what he saw as an intellectual bad habit of the late eighteenth century: natural religion. We've updated it here to provide the means of managing a bad habit of our own – the tendency to naturalize Romanticism: to be Romantic rather than to put Romanticism into history. The message of our parody is that there's no need to go into rehab: the remedy is not to change ourselves – that's exactly what Romantic discourse prescribes – but to change our histories.

Turning to a history of mediation, then, allows us to bring very different kinds of questions to the problem of periodization. In the case of Enlightenment, we have to ask "how do we describe an event?" In the case of Romanticism, the central question is "how do we describe the condition of being *after* an event?" *This Is Enlightenment*

provides a detailed framework for answering the first question. For each of three chronological markers for the event, we engage a particular kind of change:

(1) To map the "delay" between Bacon's formulations in the early seventeenth century and the conventional start of Enlightenment in the 1730s/40s we project a historical hierarchy of mediations. It is historical in that it highlights certain forms of mediation as not inherently "better" but as enabling – in particular times and particular places – of others. We call those mediations cardinal mediations.

(2) To identify Enlightenment as a chronologically-specific "event" – one that conventionally occupies roughly a half century between the 1730s/40s and the 1780s – we take a quantitative turn, focusing on the number as well as the kinds of mediation enabled by the early eighteenth century. Enlightenment emerged, we argue, as an effect of mediations proliferating and coalescing.

(3) To understand how that event came to an end – and why it was at that same moment retroactively labeled by Kant's subject – we couple the concept of saturation to proliferation. The Enlightenment, we argue, can be best understood not as failed, or interrupted by revolution or Romanticism, but as an event that was "successful" in two ways. First, it performed as our label for it advertises: Enlightenment mediations produced change. Second, in detailing the effects of saturation on key mediations, we show how Enlightenment contained the formal conditions for its own demise: in a strange way, it succeeded in ending itself.

We won't test your patience here by reciting detailed analyses of these kinds of mediations, but here's a very brief sampling. The cardinal mediations include changes in infrastructure, genres and formats, associational practices, and protocols:

- *Infrastructure*, for example, entails the formation of the postal system, including the setting of uniform postal rates, the development of fixed mail routes, and the formation of private trusts to fund and administer the turnpikes. In addition to new tools for mediating motion, the second half of the seventeenth century also saw new forms for gathering in one place, including the number and kinds of public houses from inns to coffee houses.
- New *genres and formats* were developed that extended the reach of print and speech and enabled more of both. These became the "content" for the new infrastructures: the newspapers not only provided much of the discourse that circulated through the new infrastructure of the post and turnpike and coffee houses, they also became a new interface for mediating the users' knowledge of events, opinions, and even the speech of public figures.
- New infrastructure and new genres and formats became crucial to the promotion of new *associational practices*. The Enlightenment emerged in part from the creation of a remarkable number and variety of voluntary associations, each promoting a distinctive discourse: from political gatherings (like the Whig Kit Kat club) and secret societies (like the Freemasons) to scientific corresponding societies, political committees of correspondence and gendered intellectual clubs.
- New *protocols* also emerged to underwrite the infrastructure, genres, formats, and associational practices we describe. Protocols are enabling constraints: the rules, codes, and habitual practices that help to secure the channels, spaces, and

means of production and communication. They control for the sake of growth. We address, in particular, the postal principle, public credit, and the regime of copyright.

The "magazines" that first proliferated in Britain during the 1730s, such as *The Gentleman's Magazine* founded by Edward Cave in 1731, exemplify how these cardinal mediations then enabled the proliferation of other kinds of mediations. As "storehouses" of previously printed materials, magazines were literally filled with the output of the mediations described above, including the newspaper and the periodical and the new clubs and coffeehouses in which they circulated. What the scope and gathering intensity of all of these proliferations demonstrate is that the mediations we describe had not only enabled many new forms of mediation; they had also added a new dimension to the very act of mediation itself. With new channels and stopping places for new genres and formats to circulate through new social matrices sustained by new protocols, possibilities and expectations for what mediation could accomplish changed. The very medium of mediation – its architecture of forms and tools, people and practices – became load-bearing. On this new *platform*, each individual act came to be understood – and the result deployed – as working not only in its own terms, but as a part of a cumulative, collaborative, and ongoing enterprise.

What emerged, that is, was the experience of Enlightenment as a historical event – an event *in* the history of mediation. And what happened after that event, happened *on* that platform. The relationship of the Romantic period to Enlightenment is that of an eventuality to an event: Romanticism took shape as a contingent possibility, a coming to terms with what had just happened *in* the terms that event had platformed – had turned into a platform.

The American Revolution offers a particularly useful example of the event of Enlightenment becoming a platform for Romantic eventualities. Yes, the American Revolution not the French. With good reason, given the impact of events in France on Britain, Romanticists have habitually gazed across the Channel in their efforts to make sense of Romanticism. But underwriting the many valuable results has been an assumption about the nature of the political: that we can best use it in order to map British politics into "radicals" and "conservatives." We argue, however, that if one turns from ideas to mediations, one finds that it was the communications innovations of the American Whigs as they coalesced during the American Revolution that became a new platform for the very practice of politics in Britain.

This new politics of change was grounded in the cardinal mediations we have described. It began with a new associational practice. In the fall of 1772, the Town of Boston appointed the first standing committee of correspondence. This committee and the many committees that followed were based in town, county and provincial government, but because they were "standing committees", that is committees that convene at any time and on their own authority, they separated themselves from the instituted hierarchies of Royal government. The main activity of these committees was to write: to each other and to the public. To do this, the Boston committee also invented a new genre, the popular declaration. There are two decisive features of this genre. First, they incorporate two elements of the ancient petition of authority: a statement of rights and a list of grievances (violations of those rights). But the declaration was not, like the petition, written with humility toward an addressee whose authority the petition gracefully affirmed: Royal Governor, King or Parliament. Instead, the declaration was addressed to "the people" in a bold and fearless tone. The change of the direction of

address in the rewriting of the petition as a declaration – from vertical to horizontal, from up to out – carried revolutionary potential.

What made this public address possible were the infrastructure of a post and the public and open formats of public print: newspaper, pamphlet, and broadside. Secondly, the popular declarations observe certain protocols: of legal procedure, of corporate action, of public access, of a systematic and general address to the people, and of evidencing virtuous initiative. Between 1772–76, Whig committees wrote and distributed literally hundreds of declarations. While each declaration offered its own remix of Whig political ideas, the binding effect of these declarations came from the common protocols they observed. And, crucially, that binding effect produced a new associational practice: a *network* of American Whigs that successfully acted together in opposing the measures of the King, Whitehall, and Parliament.

While the committee had written declarations that had used the first person plural "we," it was the transformation of number into network that gave the "we" the operational power to make revolution. The successful scaling up of this network was signaled by what happened in the weeks before 4 July 1776. The group that had formed to resist administration and Parliament morphed into a new institution of government. Separation from Britain became operationally possible.

We describe the Revolution in this way and in these terms for a very specific purpose: to develop a high-contrast picture of the roles ideas play in the history of ideas versus the history of mediation. In the history of ideas, ideas themselves are seen as operational. The revolutions in North America, France, and Haiti have thus been portrayed primarily as wellsprings of ideas – of the modern value of critiquing authority; of liberty, equality and popular sovereignty; and of a distinctly modern experimental and optimistic orientation toward the future. These ideas are either granted their own agency or put into the hands of agents – heroic subjects who change the world.[4] Foregrounding mediation offers a fundamental revision of this picture. It is the open media-communications of British America that is the condition of the possibility of the public resistance to British rule in America; it is the committee of correspondence that launches the decisive critique of instituted systems of authority; it is the new genre of the popular declaration that gives the ideas of liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty articulate force; and, it is the inter-colonial Whig network of committees that pulls off an experimental and optimistic orientation toward the future by forming a committee of committees, the Continental Congress, which organized the colonies in its struggle with Britain, and eventually evolve into the United States.

The American Revolution became, in a sense, an operating system for Romantic political change in Britain. The operational success of the American Revolution meant that by 1780 – even before the end of the war – its innovations in communication could serve as a platform for the Association movements that begin in Ireland and England and received new force in the wake of the start of the French revolution. These include the formation of committees, the writing of declarations, the observation in both meetings and declarations of the five protocols of legal procedure, corporate action, public access, a systematic address to the people, performed to evidence virtuous initiative. Finally, these committees seek to associate so that they can become a dispersed network that can act together.

Our turn to the Revolution that has been less central to the study of Romanticism – the American rather than the French – and our focus in turning to that Revolution on how specific cardinal mediations coalesced into an operational platform are strategies with a twofold purpose. First, we're trying to get us and you used to thinking

about the Romantic as something that comes after: an eventuality that comes after an event. Second, by specifying that this is an event in the history of mediation, we are trying to highlight what we see as the advantages of that history versus our conventional histories of ideas. Given the time that we're spending – and this Conference is spending – on mediation, we don't want to be accused of mounting a straw-man argument against the history of ideas. So just as we turned back to Bacon and Kant to make our argument about the history of mediation, let's take a moment to put the history of ideas *into* history.

We can take advantage here of recent work on historiography, especially Pomata and Siraisi's *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (2005). This remarkable volume forcefully reminds us of the importance of understanding "history" as consisting historically of different kinds with different functions – history is, that is, a genre that, like all genres, is always already mixed. And those mixtures of features and uses change over time. *Historia* is extraordinarily helpful in its tracking of the genre's shifting mix of the empirical and the chronological. The volume as a whole demonstrates in detail that it was not until the late eighteenth century that temporality "moved" to the "core" of history. Many kinds of histories were simply not concerned with the passage of time. As late as 1771, *Encyclopædia Britannica* defined "history" as "a description or recital of things as they are, or have been" (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 788).

Notice that "have been" – the past tense – is only an option. In the last decades of the eighteenth century that began to change as the primary use of historia moved from the plural to a collective singular – a singularity that was energized by the notion that "'history' might itself have a 'story.'" The playing out of this self-reflexivity brackets the Romantic period, from the stadial conceptions of civil society, with its built-in story of stages that surfaced in late eighteenth-century Scotland to the large-scale teleological and dialectical epics of Hegel and Marx in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

As history's own stories of historical change stretched temporally and geographically from local reports on things as they *are* to universalizing tales of things as they *were*, are, and must become, gaps in the narratives were filled in two primary ways. "Ideas," which had been, in Donald Kelley's words, "rational and universally valid concepts independent of time," became, in the context of these new kinds of history, things that "lived in time" – and thus capable of explaining how times changed.[5] In retrospect, all that was necessary to give us that most familiar form of modern history – the "history of ideas" – was a companion for this new form of life: a subject capable of generating and carrying ideas forward *in* time.

That developmental subject – a subject now defined and made deep by the capacity to change *over* time – advertised its newly intimate relationship with ideas in a wide range of genres, from the philosophical – as in Kant's "dare to know" "motto" for Enlightenment – to the lyric forms *we* Romanticists know so well.[6] But here's where the history of ideas is deeply implicated in Romanticism itself. We've known for some time that there's something funny in the fact the essay so many of us use to periodize Enlightenment – based on Kant's claim that Enlightenment was in process – appeared at the very moment that we think Enlightenment ended and the Romantic period began. The answer that we argue in detail in *This Is Enlightenment* is that Kant's daring subject was *not* in need of Enlightenment; it was the *product* of Enlightenment. By 1784, the year of Kant's famous essay, man had already become, in Bacon's terms, a new kind of tool – a tool whose power after so

many Enlightenment mediations now lay in its insistence on using its own understanding to change itself.

This embodiment of agency – what we know as the Romantic subject – is, from the perspective offered by the history of mediation, *the self on the platform of Enlightenment*. Let us say that again: the Romantic subject is the self on the platform of Enlightenment. As it used that platform as a bully pulpit *for* itself, the hegemony of agency over history – the assumption that history was something that told of causal relationships between past and present – was secured. And the history of ideas became the dominant form of this causal history as its narratives came, during the Romantic period, to be driven by two kinds of persons: personifications of ideas themselves, such as "liberty" and "capitalism," and individuals whose own, daring ideas changed history: Marx and Carlyle. And that's exactly the shape our own literary histories of that time have taken: an "ism" – "Romanticism" – of daring individuals.

Variations on the history of ideas can't solve the problem of historicizing Romanticism because it is itself Romantic. The history of mediation provides us with distance now even as it helps us to reassess the proximity back then of Romanticism to Enlightenment: the Romantic is about the condition of being after an event – about what happens after the coalescing of a new operational platform. To grasp what it means to think of the Romantic as being on that platform, just visit Wordsworth and Coleridge trying to decide what to do with themselves during the 1790s. The "what" turned out to be the easy part – almost a given: "to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy," a task that Coleridge later simply referred to as "what I have been all my life doing."[7] Philosophical system-making, of course, was exactly what the Enlightenment had been doing. The real choice was how to mediate that effort so that it could be delivered with maximum authority in a crowded marketplace. The answer was to mediate through generic change – to switch from prose to verse. When, years later, Hazlitt singled out Wordsworth's "genius" as a "pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age," the pedestal he put him on was that same platform: Wordsworth's "genius," Hazlitt claimed, was "to compound a new system of poetry." Being on an operational platform makes new kinds and compounding of mediations possible. Everything can and does operate differently; even when you're trying to repeat, you can't. Enlightenment proceeded in different ways . . . and this is Romanticism.

Let's be as clear as possible about what is at stake here. We don't need a history of mediation to tell us what came chronologically first. But chronology is just the start. What are we sequencing? What are the things that change in that sequence? Are all changes on the same scale? In the histories of ideas, Enlightenment and Romanticism are periods, and periods are marked by changes in ideas, and – with ideas as the common denominator across periods – the issue of a hierarchy of changes just doesn't come up. And that has kept the peace between period specialists: we can all make equal claims of difference from each other – Victorian as different from Romantic as Romantic from Enlightenment.

The big irony here is that the flip side of idea-based periods is that assumptions of difference easily collapse into claims of continuity or of outright *a*historicity, especially when, for example, our favorite ideas appear to pop up at different times. Let's mix another genre into this talk – the thought experiment – to help us to visualize this problem: *see Figure 2 on the next page.*

A history of mediation does not ignore ideas but adds another dimension to our encounter with them. Instead of engaging them in the standard terms of representation and interpretation: it always asks, "In what?" How are they always already mediated?

Can Periodization Be Aperiodic?
According to the Physics arXiv Blog of March 25, 2010:

> the problem of tiling a plane has fascinated builders and mathematicians alike since time immemorial. At first glance, the task is straightforward: squares, triangles, hexagons all do the trick producing well known periodic structures. Ditto any number of irregular shapes and combinations of them. A much trickier question is to ask which shapes can tile a plane in a pattern that does not repeat. . . . The problem of finding a single tile that can do the job is called the einstein problem; nothing to do with the great man but from the German for one-- "ein"-- and for tile--"stein". But the search for an einstein has proven fruitless. Until now.

The solution required quite literally thinking out of the box— allowing the tile a 3D shape:

Claiming no value beyond the heuristic, what if we thought of our history-making as tiling the past with periods? So many of our efforts would point to the same problem of repetition—of the various ways our laying out of periods has turned out to be periodic. Think of how many histories have been constructed of Aristotle and Plato tiles. Think of how many histories find themselves finding modernity in earlier periods (e.g., the modern self is Shakespearean). In fact, it's hard to think of a kind of period that doesn't repeat—that is aperiodic. So let's take a clue from the einstein solution: what dimension can we bring to our tiling that will get the job of difference done? [Hint from Siskin and Warner: how would attention to medium and mediation change the shape of our histories?]

Figure 2.   An abstract in the form of a thought experiment.

And if the history of mediation points to an event where the out-come is on the scale of a new operational platform, as we have just described, then we can begin to talk about the elephant in the room: some of the changes that we have been using to mark periods are bigger than other changes. And the difference in scale and scope can and should alter how we understand the periods themselves.

So let's acknowledge the elephant in the room: all changes and thus all periods are *not* one. If this is Enlightenment scaled to a hierarchy of change [*open hands wide*] then this is Romanticism [*open hands not as wide*]. Enlightenment is an event, Romanticism is an eventuality, and the Victorian is a variation. This is *not* a judgment of how important the study of any of these periods should be to any of us. Depending on when we're working and to what ends, attention to any one of these kinds can be equally or more valuable. Let's put this concluding point in compact and practical terms.

From the vantage point of the long history of mediation, not all periods have the same purchase upon change. If one scales up – scaling up being a challenge felt across all of the disciplines today – from decades, with which we usually divide periods, to centuries, and if one focuses on one axis of the history of mediation – changes in the technium, the domain of tools – one can discern two first-order transformations over

the past few hundred years in the West. First, what we are calling the event of Enlightenment saw the coalescing of a new operational platform from mediations that had first appeared during the Renaissance. This entailed the formation of what we now call print cultures – societies saturated by what Raymond Williams called "writing," his shorthand for the forms and practices of writing, silent reading, and print. The momentum of that change, one that was crucial to the formation of literary study, has extended through every subsequent period to the present day. At the same time, starting with the electronic telegraph in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, electronic tools began to take hold, but their transformative power did not coalesce until they became computable – that is, uploaded onto a new operational platform in the late twentieth century.

Now, for the first time since the Enlightenment, many of the institutions that started back then – modern disciplines and their departments, schools and universities, libraries and galleries, clubs and learned societies, journals and presses – all find themselves experiencing the vertigo of being *up* on a new load-bearing platform. That's why a group of us have joined together to pursue what we see as a historic opportunity: the opportunity to play a role in the transformation of our Enlightenment inheritance. The Re:Enlightenment Project is using the history we presented to you tonight as a map of mediations past and present – a guide to how, like the Romantics, to find our way into and through the aftermath of an event. To figure out what runs on the new operating system, we are recovering and remediating associational practices, by conducting protocoled exchanges, and repurposing genres, including the declarations that will make up a sister genre to this talk: *The Re:Enlightenment Report*. We thank our hosts for providing this opportunity to take another step toward that goal.

Notes

1. We would like to acknowledge in particular the conversational contributions of Robert Miles, Anthony Jarrells, and Philip Martin.
2. Bacon 2000, 7. We have used two different translations of Bacon (1994 and 2000) to help us best capture what we understand to be the meaning and force of his arguments. For the full version of our argument about Bacon and Kant see *This Is Enlightenment*.
3. We quote from Lewis White Beck's translation of "Was ist Aufklärung," originally published in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, but now conveniently reprinted together with Foucault's lectures on *Kant and Enlightenment* in Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*. Hereafter cited as Kant 2007.
4. For an influential example of the intellectual history of the American Revolution see Bailyn 1967; for an example of blending intellectual history with founder studies, see Wills 1978.
5. Donald R. Kelley, "Between History and System" in Pomata and Siraisi 231.
6. See Siskin 3–36.
7. Coleridge 14.2: 177.

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