

«The Media of Life»

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THE MEDIA OF LIFE

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«In this talk, I consider the history of the term “media” in the Romantic era, focusing especially on what we would now describe as its biological sense that is, “media” understood as that which surrounds a living being and allows it to survive and thrive. This Romantic-”era sense of media was the consequence of the movement of the term from its “source” in seventeenth and eighteenth century natural philosophy into discussions of both biological and cultural phenomena, yet this vivification of media presented Romantic-”era authors with a narrative dilemma: should life and media be linked by means of narratives of perfectibility that is, were biological and cultural media means for achieving the telos of perfection or should life and media instead be linked through narratives of mediality, within which every apparent end could always become a new means? I discuss three Romantic-”era projects that each sought to address this tension Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s zoological philosophy; G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophy of nature; and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* with an eye toward the implications of these accounts for both our understanding of what “media” meant in the nineteenth century, as well as how we might understand this term today. »