Hypertext, Hypermedia and the Bayeux Tapestry: A Study of Remediation

John Michael Crafton
University of West Georgia

Hypertext, Hypermedia and the Bayeux Tapestry: A Study of Remediation

By John Micheal Crafton, University of West Georgia

While browsing recently through some back issues of computer science journals to prepare for a conference talk on hypertext, I anticipated coming across many odd and indecipherable things. What I certainly did not expect to find was humor, so imagine my surprise when I came across this publication: "Hypertext – Does It Reduce Cholesterol, Too?"[1] The humorous title notwithstanding, this turned out to be quite a serious paper delivered by Norman Meyrowitz in 1987 at the first ACM[2] supported conference on hypertext. In the essay the author criticizes the overselling or overuse of hypertext in software development, likening it to oat bran that was being promoted at the time as a miracle cure for lowering cholesterol. So just as every other food product on the market was getting repackaged with oat bran and promising a cholesterol-lowering miracle, so too was hypertext being included where it need not be in order likewise to provide a touch of the miraculous. Thus Meyorwitz' central question: is hypertext the oat bran of computing?

The coupling of oat bran and hypertext has got to be one of the oddest in contemporary culture, but the promise of the hypertext-induced miracle is reminiscent of the utopian, wide-eyed enthusiasm that accompanied talk of hypertext in literary-theory circles in the 90's. George Landow's book *Hypertext*, first published in 1992 and now in its third edition, still selling well and still one of the best books on the subject, presents hypertext at every turn as the

---

[1] Reprinted in *Memex to Hypertext: Vannevar Bush and the Mind's Machine*, eds. James M. Nyce and Paul Kahn (Cambridge MA: Academic Press, 1991), 287-318.

[2] ACM is the acronym for the Association for Computing Machinery, the major organization for computer scientists.

97

concrete and pragmatic realization or instantiation of everything anticipated by post-structuralist and postmodernist literary theory. In fact, if someone were to produce a greatest hits of literary theory from the 80's, just about every author and every position could be found referenced somewhere in Landow's book. The arrival of hypertext for literary theorists, particularly in less judicious books than Landow's, is described as something like the arrival of the Messiah. With some historical distance now and a slightly reduced fervor for new technology, one cannot help but wonder, with Meyorwitz, just how much hype was in the hypertext? The answers to these questions are not easy, but the industry of exploring the effects of digital media and its accompanying technology on medieval studies is growing quite steadily, and therefore it seems appropriate that for a special edition of *Peregrinations* (an online journal afterall) on the subject of the Bayeux Tapestry, we should explore the new media version of the Tapestry which arrived in 2003 in the form of CD-ROM created by Martin K. Foys. This essay will examine, then, the question of the status of these new editions and the effects of this new media using the indispensible *Bayeux Tapestry Digital Edition* as the test case.[3] (**Figure 1)**

---

[3] Martin K. Foys, ed, *Bayeux Tapestry Digital Edition*, CD-ROM (Leicester: Scholarly Digital Editions, 2003).
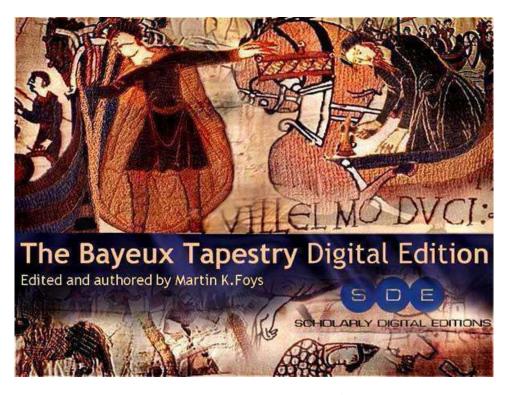
98

Figure 1: *Opening screen.*[4]

One of the first steps one might take in sorting out the hype in the hypertext is to ask the simple question what is truly new here and what is not?   But there are several claims of newness to explore, so we shall begin at the highest level of abstraction and move to the specifics of the CD and thus at the same time introduce the various features of the CD to those who still may not have used the product. The first topic to explore is that of *remediation*, defined briefly as the representation of one medium by another. The term was given currency by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in their 1998 book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Any electronic book or edition, the electronic *Beowulf* or *Canterbury Tales*, is a remediated book; in other words, it is a computer program but presented on the screen in such a way as to resemble a printed book. In any remediated book, hypermedia and hypertext play not just a significant role, but a role, I will argue, that constitutes the fundamental difference created by the new medium.

---

[4] Screen shots from the *BTDE* are here courtesy of the Martin Foys and SDE.

Bolter and Grusin include a formal definition of the term in the glossary to their book:

We define the term … to mean the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. Along with immediacy and hypermediacy, remediation is one of the three traits of our genealogy of new media.[5]

Elsewhere they add "that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media."[6] The related traits of immediacy and hypermediacy, referred to in the definition cited above, are concepts necessary for understanding remediation. Furthermore, these concepts are manifestations of what they call the "double logic of remediation," a culture's desire both to "multiply its media and to erase all trace of mediation." [7] The clearest example of new media remediation is the web page that seems to incorporate design elements, the "look and feel," of a magazine, or a book, or television. When a web page remediates something in an old medium, it will most likely reveal evidence of the older medium, especially in the early stages of remediation, and, typical of the character of hypermediacy, the new medium will actually celebrate that influence. But it works the other way too, so that in time television shows, newspapers, magazines, and books begin to look more like web pages.[8] Another development that may seem a little less obvious but forms a crucial part of their theoretical foundation is that of Virtual Reality. A Virtual Reality device is a remediation of film or television, but instead of passively observing the scene, the user seems to be an active agent inside the program. The development of VR and the evolution of web pages represent, then, expressions of the two

---

[5] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 273.

[6] Bolter and Grusin, 45.

[7] Ibid., 5.

[8] It works both ways, that is, unless the older medium is remediated out of existence. Print books remediated manuscripts so well and so completely that there was not much of an opportunity for manuscripts to reflect the effects of print.

100

desires of remediation – immediacy and hypermediacy. In the former, the new medium's goal is to provide "reality itself" or rather to conceal as much as possible the artificial apparatus of the medium. On the other hand, hypermediacy results from the desire for fullness of the mediated experience and thus not only is the medium ***not obscured*** but it is actually amplified, as in the case of the web page that appears overloaded with extra buttons and clickable hot spots. Bolter argues that both, ostensibly contradictory, sides, of this double logic are two attempts at the same desire, the desire to constitute "the real, the authentic, or the natural."[9]

But the "real," as referred to here, is not reality in any essential or ontological sense, but rather the phenomenological reality of the viewer. "The real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response."[10] Every medium (writing, drawing, sculpting, television, hypermedia and embroidery) has as its primary desire to deliver reality as transparently (immediacy) or as fully (hypermediacy) as possible. As part of their self-designated Foucauldian genealogy of these concepts, the authors trace immediacy back to Renaissance perspective painting and hypermediacy back to late medieval illuminated manuscripts.   These early instances may not seem like remediations so much as innovations in representation or technique in one medium. What is the older medium that Renaissance perspective painting is remediating?   In order to widen the scope of their conceptual framework, the authors broaden philosophically the concept of mediation in such a way that many of us would consider to be a definition of *perception*. In a similar way that Derrida claimed there could be no "outside of textuality," these scholars claim that there can be no outside of mediation. "Just as for them [postmodernists], there is nothing

---

[9] Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001), 43.

[10] Bolter and Grusin, 53.

101

prior to writing, so for our visual culture there is nothing prior to mediation."[11] Therefore every act of mediation is always already an act of remediation, and since there is nothing prior to mediation, then any grasp or experience of reality is a mediated experience or *ipso facto* a remediated experience.   With this latter theoretical twist the authors give the broadest license to talk about remediation and such pre-modern art as Renaissance perspective drawing and painting as well as medieval illuminated manuscripts.

As might not be too surprising, one of the best attempts at applying these concepts to pre-modern art is by Martin Foys. His book *Virtually Anglo-Saxon*,[12] published last year, attempts to cover more ground with regard to this theory and the number of medieval subjects to which it is applied than any other single publication in medieval studies that I know of.   Certainly, there are many items in the bibliography on this subject that we could pull from, but they are all either editorial introductions or essays published in scattered books and journals or the few specialty journals such as *Digital Medievalist*, *Forum Computerphilologie*, *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, *The Heroic Age,* or recently *Medieval Forum*. Foys' text covers a variety of subjects: *The Dream of the Rood*, Bede's finger-counting mathematical system *De computo vel loquela digitorum*, Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*, the *mappamundi* known as the Cotton Map, the Nunburnholme Cross, and, of course, the Bayeux Tapestry. Each of these chapters, however, supports the general thesis that the Anglo-Saxon cultural record, the artifacts, and the reality represented thereby, have been remediated by the print culture of the modern period. Print culture, as Elisabeth Eisenstein famously argued, in part created the scientific revolution, but was furthermore in part created by it, and thus it becomes part of modern ideology that the

---

[11] Bolter and Grusin, 56.

[12] Martin K. Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon: Old Media, New Media, and Early Medieval Studies in the Late Age of Print* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 2007).

only humanities scholarship to take seriously is that which has met all the requirements of print culture and all the attendant quality control mechanisms that are borrowed from the sciences. So in this milieu, texts of Anglo-Saxon documents begin to emerge and thus non-print Anglo-Saxon artifacts, maps, crosses, tapestries, become remediated in book form and as such their representational meaning is warped or altered or re-shaped by that print context. The *geist*, however, is changing. As Foys claims, contemporary Anglo-Saxonists are coming to a "growing understanding that centuries of printed redactions of medieval discourse have, in the end, produced material with distinctly un-medieval qualities."[13] These un-medieval qualities are ones long known and long lamented by medievalists, ones that result from reproducing a medieval manuscript in modern book form, regularized spelling, punctuation, and typography and the production of the so-called "best text" when there was none. The effect of these characteristics becoming so concretized, so reified by print culture has been to create a "textual mentality no Anglo-Saxon scribe, author, or reader would ever experience."[14] The question now is to what extent do new media remediations remedy these problems imposed by print culture?

The Remediated Bayeux Tapestry

The specific instance of the Bayeux Tapestry makes for an even clearer illustration of this larger claim against print culture than does that of a manuscript. The Tapestry has come to us moderns for the most part in a book form, but, as Foys almost shouts from the page (or Word file), the Tapestry is "manifestly a spatial document, most likely designed to be hung around the walls of a hall or other building. As such, medieval audiences experienced the work not only in

---

[13] Foys, *Virtually*, 19. These critiques are from a wide range of Anglo-Saxon scholars, from some of the most established scholars, such as Fred Robinson and Bruce Mitchell, to those of the new digiterati, such as Kevin Kiernan and Murray McGillivray.

[14] Foys, *Virtually*, 19.

103

a linear fashion but in an instantaneous, monumental, and, to use Suzanne Langer's phrase,

presentational mode."[15] But since the 18th century, the reproductions of the Tapestry and the

scholarly work written about it have actually created a reduction of the Tapestry, not only a

literal reduction in its size so it could fit in a book but also a semiotic or rhetorical reduction or

subordination of the image to text, again as part of visual culture submitting to the forces of print

culture. Foys sums this up with a memorable phrase: "The forces and contingencies of print

culture have, in effect, textualized the textile and … compromised its study as much as they

encouraged it."[16] Here again is an example of the double logic of remediation. Re-fashioning

the Tapestry to fit in book form greatly expands the number of viewers and greatly expands the

intensity of analysis, of focus, and thus enhances the understanding and appreciation of the

artifact. And this is predictably what a successful new medium does; it accelerates access. Such

re-fashioning, however, also changes the nature of the artifact, and thus the scholarship that

results is to a certain extent about a different object. And certainly none or very few medievals

would have beheld the Tapestry in the way we do via the book.

     Foys' remediated digital edition, therefore, attempts to correct the wrongs imposed upon

the Tapestry by the print culture, particularly to the degree it can reclaim the Tapestry as visual

not textual art. As he asserts:

> With hypermedia one can recenter the visual object of study and can format textual
>
> commentary to remain hidden until a user requires/desires to view it. Reproducing the
>
> Tapestry digitally also enables a spatialization of the textile that, though certainly not
>
> identical to the presence of the original work, provides for a more useful representation.

---

[15] Ibid., 97.

[16] Ibid., 102.

Such display allows for a seamless presentation of the continuous narrative on any

number of resolutions of detail, in marked contrast to the traditional conundrum of the

print medium: show longer sections of the Tapestry only at the expense of close detail, or

vice versa.

Digital technology and hypertext theory herald a reduction, if not a rejection, of

the physical and hermeneutic influence of printed scholarship.[17]

The rejection, as such, has not quite occurred, but in this period of what Jay Bolter has termed,

after Fredric Jameson, the Late Age of Print, we are not quite in the Age of Electronic Writing,

so we really must withhold judgment.[18] That new media seem suited to rescue the visual from

the textual is certainly claimed widely. Michael Joyce begins his widely disseminated essay on

hypertext with this provocative sentence: "Hypertext is, before anything else, a visual form."[19] If

the World Wide Web represents the essence of what is new media, then the visual character,

even visually centered character, we might say, is without question. In *Writing Space*, Bolter

devotes a chapter to this subject that he calls the "Breakout of the Visual."[20] For him, the close

interplay of text and image is reminiscent of medieval models. In our post-literate society, our

world of secondary orality, we are developing something like a visual literacy, what Bolter refers

to as a reverse ekphrasis, images that function for or stand for the verbal. (By contrast, a

traditional ekphrasis is a written representation of the visual, a painting for example, and thus

words stand for the visual.) In this new world, images will do the work of words. The first step

in assessing how well the *BTDE* resurrects the visual from the hegemony of print culture is to

---

[17] Ibid., 107-108.

[18] Bolter, *Writing Space*, 3-4. Bolter takes the phrase from Jameson's work on postmodernism as an effect of late age of capitalism, entitled *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

[19] Michael Joyce, *Of Two Minds: Hypertext, Pedagogy, and Poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 19.

[20] Bolter, *Writing Space,* chap. 4, pp. 47-76.

repeat our simple question: what difference does this remediation make? What do we get with this digitized version that we don't get with a paper one?

In many ways the Tapestry CD is packaged like a rather old-fashioned, scholarly variorum edition. Included are essays on the Tapestry's date, manufacturing, and purpose, essays on the background history to which the imagery on the Tapestry refers, essays on the restorations, facsimiles, and reproductions, and finally a long essay on the critical history of the Tapestry. Along with genealogical charts of the major historic figures in the Tapestry, there are two special sections of supplementary material. The first, called the Museum, contains photographs of relevant medieval art and artifacts, and the second, the Library, is basically a minor anthology of all the relevant documents students would want to read, from Norman and English sources contemporary with the Conquest to a few later ones, the latest an excerpt from Wace's *Roman de Rou*. What will especially impress anyone who uses this edition with any degree of care, however, is the critical commentary provided for every scene on the Tapestry. It is an extremely useful feature, obviously a labor of love, yet, again, very much in the vein of a traditional variorum edition. Foys divides the Tapestry into scenes and then again into panels: 40 scenes or 173 panels. The commentary accompanies each panel. By contrast, David Wilson's book edition of the Tapestry, probably the best known and most used of English editions, is organized into 73 plates.[21] So the *BTDE* chops up the Tapestry in smaller sections and is able to provide much more focused and more comprehensive commentary. The CD is wonderful work; I can't praise it enough, but we still we must note that the influence of print culture is powerful. In fact, as each small image appears on the computer screen it seems overwhelmed by text below and all around it, and even though one can toggle the commentary off the screen, I do not think

---

[21] David Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry* (1985; London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

we can say that this remediation, alone, completely liberates the visual from its Gutenbergian Captivity.

If all of these qualities, then, are still steeped in the print culture of a critical variorum edition, then what is new to print culture are the features that are familiar to us through electronic writing, and they are also the ones we often use to characterize hypermedia: search, copy-paste, toggle, scale, and hypertext. The CD's search engine works like that of a word processing document in that it will find all exact matches of a term. This feature goes far beyond that of any paper index because the search feature includes every single word in the CD.[22] The search feature does not work quite the same as that in, say Microsoft Word, which uses a floating screen that can be invoked anywhere and which takes the reader to all the locations in the text of search object. In the *BTDE* the search is launched from a special window and once the search is launched the program brings the objects of the search to the special window. It's a little different. Once there, however, the user can click a button marked "Link," and he or she is then taken the objects in their original context. **(Figure 2)** The next function is again very

---

[22] The search function is somewhat limited in that it will find only exact matches to the search term; it is not programmed to perform fuzzy-logic searches. That limitation, however, is something that can be easily amended in future editions.

107

Figure 2: *Search page.*

much like that in word processing, the copy and paste function; it may not seem very sexy, but it

eliminates the steps of Xeroxing or scanning. Thus Anglo-Saxon scholarship on art, architecture,

manuscripts, really any aspect of material culture that one is writing about, is made much more

doable if one can simply find, copy, and paste right into one's own document or presentation

software.

The next two items, toggle and scale, cannot really be duplicated at all by any normal

print edition. The *BTDE* uses toggle switches in several places. In the main panel, as mentioned

above, one can toggle a scene to display the commentary or a description of the scene (usually

comprising two to three panels) or leave the area blank. Furthermore, more interestingly, one

can toggle the depiction of the script above the Tapestry to reveal a transcription of the original

Latin with something of the original epigraphy or toggle a translation in modern English.

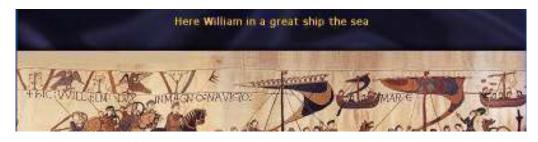Therefore, students could try to work in Latin as much as

Figure 3: Toggle of script.

possible, but easily toggle the English to help with a difficult word or phrase.[23] The *BTDE* also

uses the toggle in one other interesting area, in the special section referred to earlier called the

Museum. There, the user can toggle between an image from the Tapestry and an image from the

Museum that may have served as a model. For example, in the lower border of panel 23 (Wilson

11),[24] directly underneath the main image of William's men negotiating with Guy de Ponthieu

for the release of the captured Harold, there is an image of a man slinging stones at birds. The

image by all appearances is a very close copy of an image in Aelfric's Hexateuch (British

Library MS Claudius B.iv.) which depicts Abram slinging stones at birds in order to keep them

away from his sacrifice, illustrating the narrative in Genesis 15:11. In the Museum section, then,

both images are provided and the user can look at one or the other or both side by side to

experience the remarkable similarities.[25] **(Figure 4)**

---

[23] The toggle device would be very useful for an electronic version of any Anglo-Saxon text or any medieval text, for that matter. In a hypertext edition of Alfred's translation of Boethius, for example, the toggle could switch between Old English, Modern English, and Latin or present all three or two in columns.

[24] Since most readers use David Wilson's edition, I will add his plate reference in parentheses after the reference to the *BTDE.*

The last topic is perhaps the most important for Tapestry scholars and would be likewise for any Anglo-Saxon scholarship and that is scale. The Tapestry is presented as a continuous scroll of imagery on the computer screen. One can move forward or backward without any artificial division of scenes. A book edition cannot do this unless it creates an enormous fold-out. Failing that, it cannot avoid making an editorial decision to divide scenes and thus superimpose a kind of arbitrary punctuation on the Tapestry and

thus, too, an ordering of scenes. The other use of scaling is that any image in the Tapestry can be enlarged by two magnitudes. As Foys has pointed out, this addition is, in fact, still somewhat limited because one should be able to zoom in and out by many other levels of magnitude, and in future editions I am sure that one will be able to do just that.

Finally, Foys makes one more rather large claim for his remediation of the Tapestry based upon the scrolling and scaling function. He argues that the ability to
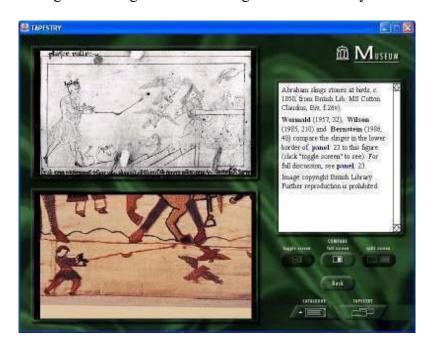

Figure 4: *Museum images.*

---

[25] This image is important not only as a possible source of the Tapestry but also in the history of Tapestry criticism; it and several others like it have been used to convince a majority of scholars that the Tapestry was designed and made or designed either near Canterbury or by monks from Canterbury.

scroll back and forth and jump from place to place that the CD affords may well present the Tapestry in a manner closer to the original presentation than anything else, including the *original*. For very good reasons, the actual artifact in Bayeux at the Centre Guillaume le Conquérant displays the Tapestry in such a way that it appears as a straight line, although it's actually laid out in a semicircular shape. The Tapestry is always on the left, waist high, under glass, and one is not encouraged to go back and forth. In fact, if one is in the museum in the midst of visiting school groups, merely slowing down is not easy. So in a sense he is correct. However, until the virtual reality version of the Tapestry is created with which the user is allowed to enter a virtual hall and look up to the Tapestry displayed around the room in three or four long stretches, there is much that the CD does not do. One negative effect of Foys' remediation for many users will be that the Tapestry appears even less material than what appears in a book and that the reductionism of the Tapestry is not only not corrected but actually worsened. Remediating the monumental Bayeux Tapestry in to a 6 by 7.5 inch window cluttered with hypermedia devices on a laptop does not present the awe-inspiring monument the we assume designers had in mind. With a future edition, however, it may be possible to project a 360 degree view of the Tapestry and with special projectors on one or even four walls (or four Smart boards). This technological development is a distinct possibility; getting the Tapestry out of the town of Bayeux with any frequency is not.

While scale partially addresses one of the CD's grand claims for hypermedia, hypertext attempts to claim another. The hypertext employed here in a somewhat limited version compared to the great expanse that we experience on the Internet. Selected words or references throughout the *BTDE* are hyperlinked to other places in the text. Now, this feature does not move us too much beyond a well-done print index and reference system except for the speed and

the potential to link to everything in the CD and in multiple ways and the potential to link beyond the CD to web sites. Still the immediacy of clicking a hyperlinked reference in the commentary to the first panel on, let's say, hairstyles that takes the user to a fair-sized entry from the glossary on hairstyles both in and out of the Tapestry with references to scholarship and with hyperlinked references to other images of hairstyles in the Tapestry is very fast and convenient. The scholar can easily click on all the references and view all the hairstyles whereas looking up each panel by turning pages in a print version may seem too time-consuming or burdensome, thus, the usefulness of the hyperlink.

Foys further considers the use of hypertext as a key feature that goes toward deconstructing my notion of the *BTDE* as a type of variorum edition:

In designing the *Bayeux Tapestry Digital Edition*, I found myself confronted with regrettable lacunae between theoretical possibility and possible praxis. For instance, though it seeks to distance the Tapestry from the limitations of print culture, the *BTDE* functions as a clearing house for the corpus of print scholarship on the Tapestry, inevitably directing students and scholars back to the academic writings referenced herein. However, to the extent that such a product may be avoided, this edition seeks to avoid fulfilling a "clear-text" strategy, that is, becoming an edition that operates under the rubric of monologic hermeneutic authority. … Similarly, the *BTDE* presents not *a* version of the Bayeux Tapestry, but instead an architecture through which the user may explore and synthesize any of a number of critical approaches to parts or the whole of the work. [26]

---

[26] Foys, *BTDE*, Introduction.

To say that the free flowing movements and connectedness of the digital edition allows for versioning of the Bayeux Tapestry is a bit of special pleading since the same kind of versioning can be had from a paper text, and in fact much of hypertext theory is being applied to medieval forms such as the *Glossa ordinaria*, the cathedral, the summa, and all forms of what critic Robert Jordan referred to as "inorganic aesthetics."[27] While there may be a will to be polyphonic in the production of any instance of "new media," this is still very much Martin Foys' edition, and it has his editorial design all over it. Producers of digital texts want to participate in the creation of this new space of hyper-reality and create what the inventor of the term, Ted Nelson, calls the docuverse of free flowing text and graphics, interactivity and the multiple multiplicities of media, meaning, and messaging. Yet this utopian or heterotopian world, as Foys himself admits in *Virtually Anglo-Saxon*, is "a long way off."[28]

The *BTDE* does make use of hypertext and hypermedia, and we must attend to what that fact entails. While there is nothing in the programming of the CD that will connect one out to the web where the most dynamic hypertext activity occurs, a future edition could easily make the connection outward. Communication theorists, however, frequently posit two types of hypertext: static and dynamic.[29] A closed system like that of an electronic book is an example of static hypertext that is self-contained, and even though the text is self-contained, it is still active in that it is clickable and thus filled with links and nodes that lead to other links and nodes and with enough of these we have the condition that provides a for all practical purposes a limitless

---

[27] David Solomon, *The Glossa Ordinaria: Medieval Hypertext* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2007); the cathedral reference is in Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation,* 34-35; Robert M. Jordan's reading of medieval poetry as inorganic and in some ways postmodern can be found in *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).
[28] Foys, *Virtually*, 200.

[29] Michael Joyce suggests another binary of hypertext, the exploratory and the constructive. In the latter instance, the use of hypertext actually changes the object in the world, like a hypertext story that is literally different after the reader has gone through it once.

number of ways that the reader can choose to navigate the text, and, in that sense, a static

hypertext document can be argued to be more like the Barthesian writerly text that was invoked

by George Landow in his text on critical theory and hypertext. This level of interactivity, though

perhaps limited by web-based and wiki standards, is certainly something that a printed book

cannot match. One can hold a book and flip from page to page, but one cannot press a word and

have an embedded text appear or rub one's finger over a text and see an image or explanatory

note appear. Furthermore, as Jay Bolter notes, the hyperlinked text will have its own hyperlinks

that then go on indefinitely, whereas rarely would a footnote have further footnotes. On the

other hand, the traditional footnote may take one on a theoretically infinite regress, yet following

that regress will require that one take many trips to many non-theoretical libraries. Furthermore,

of course, we remember that Barthes was not talking about hypertext; it did not exist when he

was writing *S/Z* in 1970. The writerly text for him exists in the phenomenological realm of the

reader's experience once unburdened by the shackles imposed by the tyranny of the Book, in the

classic sense. The physical qualities of hypertext would seem to further realize or instantiate, as

Landow says, that which Barthes hypothesized.

It is perhaps not so much the changes in physical mechanism of hypertext, especially in a

static text, that is most provocative, but rather the changes in the experience of reading, the

manner of travel in cyberspace which results from the physical change. With the Bayeux

Tapestry CD one is at an even better place to see the difference. With the opening screen the

user sees a small portion of the beginning of the Tapestry but beneath the image of the Tapestry

is a bit of an outline of the plot that is hyperlinked, so that immediately the user can switch to a

battle scene or whatever and then go from there clicking and leaping from place to place.[30] The

experience, then, of this movement in the text and of the multi-layeredness of the hyper-

connections leads to – theorists assume – a different conception of what text is and for some

perhaps a more accurate view of intertextuality. In other words, with hypertext the experience of

reading and the experience of writing may be changing, but the essence of textuality as an

endlessly linked system of signifiers has not changed; rather, the new experience of reading

hypertext merely exposes the nature of textuality for what it is.[31] Hypertext theorists like to

claim that hypertext changes all three points in the communication triangle: writer, text, reader.

The text itself is changed physically and the manner of moving through it makes our experience

of it different. Thus, the reader is changed by the inter-operability of hypertext, thereby

engendering a much more active engagement with the text. Finally, the writer is changed to

construct a much more open text; he or she must assume less control. Also, the scholar or critic

is affected by the copy, search, scale, and toggle functions of the CD. Writing with hypertext,

the theory goes, creates in the writer a sense of hybridity as a result of the inter-operability

afforded by these hypertextual functions.   The writer's agency becomes blended with the

computer's agency and the software's agency. If we add the potentialities created by networking

then we really do have something of a changed nature of the writer. The live interconnectedness

of the medium could transform the writer sitting alone in a study to something more akin to a

---

[30] This is, of course, available with an electronic book of any sort. I can see no reason that the opening of page of an electronic version of the *Great Gatsby*, say, could not include a scale of the book with links to chapters and subsections allowing users to jump to from place to place.

[31] With hypertext, the physical nature of the text is also changed; we move from paper or vellum to electronic signals and the functional equivalent of tiny light bulbs, and this change alone may heighten a the reader's awareness of textuality, intertextuality, and the semi-permeable and inescapable presence and reality of media and may lessen the sense of a monological version of the one and only edition. The experience of reading is furthermore changed by being able to move, scroll, enlarge the text at will and by the ability to at a click pull forth images of reproductions of the Tapestry, images from art and artifacts considered as sources or analogues, and the quick retrieval and search of the many historical documents possibility informing or informed by the Tapestry.   All of these added attractions may add to a fullness of the reading experience that can somewhat compensate for the emptiness that some claim resulting from ephemeral and insubstantial nature of electronic text.

musicians in a jam session whose work affects that of the others and vice versa. With hypertext we exchange the image of the solitary writer in his scriptorium for the image of Miles Davis on stage with a band.

Remediated Readings of the Bayeux Tapestry

The very fact of a remediated pre-modern text, for whatever reason, be it to rescue the visual from the textual or the non-linear from the linear, opens up the possibility of reading the original artifact as if it were modern, a product of the new media. Thus, Martin Foys refers to the Bayeux Tapestry as a "hypertextile" partly for this reason; he invites us to re-view the Tapestry in whatever new lights the equipment of the new media provides. One of those lights is simply to consider the text as a dynamic nexus of media intersections or hybridities instead of an objective, static, completed and somewhat inaccessible "other." Foys invokes this hermeneutic as he discusses the missing ending of the Tapestry and the implications of that for recent critical reception. The Tapestry as we have it is incomplete in that a ragged end reveals the lack of a concluding image or images of the visual narrative. Some scholars surmise that we are missing as much as eight feet of imagery. Furthermore, many careful readers (as well as some casual observers) of the Tapestry assume that the end must have depicted William's entry into London and his crowning at Westminster on Christmas Day of 1066, but, of course, we can never know for certain until the actual ending is found. It may have ended with an image of Bishop Odo looking like the Pope, a position he sought,[32] which might explain why that section

---

[32] Odo's story is told in many places, but a still reliable source is David Bates, "The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (1049/50-1097)," *Speculum* 50, no. 1 (1975): 1-20.

116

is missing. Most likely the final section displayed William crowned, and it is missing simply due to wear and tear.

Foys claims that the desire for the ending, the need to determine what that missing ending looked like and signified, drives (and is driven by) a particular kind of interpretive strategy. Calling upon Frank Kermode's famous essay about the importance of endings as well as New Criticism's requirements for unity, he points out that many critics sense a need for an ending in order to satisfy the demands of their critical project, so modern readers have projected one for the Tapestry. Much like a need for an order and an ending in the *Canterbury Tales* and thus one (or several) is projected. However, neither the hypertextual model nor the paradigm of a post-structuralist view of textuality needs to project such an ending. In fact, multiple endings made possible by not having the physical ending open up the Tapestry to be read again as the Barthesian writerly text, mentioned earlier, or perhaps better as a Borgesian hypertext like "The Garden of Forking Gardens" and thus the missing ending actually serves the readers of the Tapestry better. Foys writes:

> The moment the Bayeux Tapestry lost its ending, it joined the ranks of such texts, as only the reader, and not the author, can construct the possible ending. Like a hypertext, the work is now, to paraphrase Douglas, a narrative about its own structure and about its suspension of closure; its hypertextual element – its missing end and special linkages – also serve as a link to understanding the critical and technological plurality in which the visual narrative now exists."[33]

This rather beautiful peroration nonetheless runs the similar risk of a kind of over reading that we read in some texts about fragments and ruins that we might parody as thus: "when the temple lost its roof, it joined the community of postmodern sculpture that points to the roofless nature of

---

[33] Foys, *Virtually*, 101-102.

grand narratives; only in opening up to limitless religious plurality can a temple truly be a place of authentic worship." In other words, we could be overdoing it a bit; however, the argument still stands that using hypertext suggests what is always already the nature of text or media as textuality or mediation (or mediatization) and thus reading pre-modern texts with a postmodern method is appropriate if indeed the postmodern method reveals what there is to know about textuality and thus what medievals may well have perceived also. Obviously, a neoplatonic and/or Augustinian understanding carries with it the conviction not only that transcendental signifiers exist but also that our human texts participate in them, yet even Augustine was not so completely certain of possessing control of textuality[34] and with later developments in sign theory particularly among the nominalists we have even more of a distant mirror of recent textual theory.

Another dimension of the hypertext question in its role of remediation is the way it allows us to read the original Tapestry as if it were a hypertext. In the technical sense of an electronically linked text, the Tapestry is quite obviously not hypertext, but one can make the connection that the Tapestry be viewed as an instance of a non-electronic hypertext, like footnotes and references in a printed text, that set up a type of non-sequential or networked reading of the text by following links in verbal and graphic cues. The main narrative of the Tapestry seems fairly linear and sequential. In fact, we notice at least two violations of the rule of sequence and they stand out very much because of the dominant sequential mode of the Tapestry. (These are the scenes of William sending messengers to Guy of Ponthieu, and the

---

[34] John Caputo and Michael Scanlon, *The Postmodern Augustine: Confessions and Circumfession* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

118

scene of Edward's death and funeral.[35]) While there certainly are gaps in the main narrative sequence and many missing transitions still the sequence is fairly clear and easily followed. It's primarily in the script and imagery that any hypertextual element is most clearly working as well as perhaps the connection between one scene and another parallel scene. As in the case of an illuminated manuscript, wherein the image may well be in something of a dialogue with the text, setting up a resonance that deepens the meaning of the text and the imagery, so also in the Tapestry we have what we might call dialogic connections among its three bands of images and even occasionally the script.

For the most part, the script rolls along seemingly innocuously in the background and functioning largely as an index of places and people and a few events, but occasionally it does seem to play a role in the visual register. One example often pointed to is panel 59 (Wilson 26) wherein the captive Harold swears an oath on two reliquaries. In the background a smaller and unnamed figure points to the embroidered word *sacramentum*.[36] He seems to be almost putting his finger right on the text to indicate its importance, a sacred oath of loyalty from Harold to William, at this very moment **(Figure 5)**. In panel 117 (Wilson 48), where Odo in a Christ-like last supper mode is blessing the feast, there appears to be an unnamed person is sitting next to Odo who is looking directly at Odo and pointing with his left hand to the word *Odo*. Another instance may occur in panel 30 (Wilson 14) where it would seem a spear pulls down the "o" in Harold's name.

---

[35] See Jennifer Brown's essay in this volume for a suggestion that the reversed sequence may have been influenced by the anonymous *Vita* of Edward that also reverses the sequence.

[36] The image of the pointing hand is found, of course, in many medieval manuscripts and thus functions as a king of hypertextual marker. See Jonas Carlquist, "Medieval Manuscripts, Hypertext and Reading. Visions of Digital Editions," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19, no. 1 (2004): 104-118. There Carlquist analyzes some Swedish manuscripts with these images of hands and reads them as a type of primitive hypertext and that he calls "analogue links." He includes some images of the hands in the essay.

Figure 5: *Harold's Oath. Detail from the Bayeux Tapestry – 11th Century*
by special permission of the City of Bayeux.

(There are numerous places where the letters of Harold's name are punctured by a spear.) Of course, the idea suggested here is that these connections form a hyperlink, a link forward to Harold's death by an arrow in his eye.   These instances that appear to create a dialogue between text and image may well be totally accidental because they don't seem to ever form a consistent pattern. However, the great art historian Otto Pächt based a major argument about the Tapestry's departure from classical representation upon the *sacramentum* scene.

The more obvious case is the script framing or naming an image in the main narrative. Accordingly, small images that represent towns are named: Bosham, Dol, Rennes, Dinon, Mont St-Michel, Bayeux, Hastings – also an occasional architectural image is clarified as an *ecclesia* or *ceastra*. And individuals, of course, are also named: Edward, William, Harold, and Odo are the most frequently named, but also Guy of Ponthieu, Ælfgyva, Vital, Waddard, and Turold. So few people are actually named that it makes the last three quite interesting because they are not well known from other sources. In fact, they may not be known at all, but the best guess right now is that they were vassals of Bishop Odo. One instance of Harold's naming that seems perhaps a little more dialogic than merely indexical appears in his coronation scene. In two panels juxtaposed, we see a group of men, perhaps representing the Anglo-Saxon witan handing

120

Harold the crown and in the next panel Harold appears in majesty (Foys 71-72; Wilson 31). In both scenes the inscription appears to form a crown around Harold's head as if over-determining or hypermediating this indexical reference.

Unlike the inscriptions that do function primarily in an indexes, the imagery, particularly in the upper and lower panels, the so-called minor panels, hypermediates narrative moments in the main or middle panel. The idea that the minor panels add connotative depth to the narrative is something that has been pointed out and commented upon so often as to no longer require a secondary source. The most obvious visual references are those of the dead and maimed bodies in the minor panel below the battle scenes. Another one about as obvious is the image of the howling dog underneath the funeral cortege of Edward. Less obvious but more ominous is the set of ghost ships underneath the second image of the crowned Harold, an image to unsettle the new king's peace of mind. Likewise more ambiguous but provocative of much critical commentary are the nude images in the minor panels, particularly the ones associated with Ælfgyva (Foys 39; Wilson 17). The bibliography on the mystery of Ælfgyva almost equals that of the Tapestry as a whole, a mystery that is deepened exponentially by the curious nude figures in the panel below.[37] There are a few instances wherein it seems the decorative imagery in some way comments on the narrative action setting up a moment of hypermediacy. In panel 101 (Wilson 43), for example, as the first of William's ships lands at Pevensey, the birds in the upper panel appear likewise to be landing. In panel 13 (Wilson 7) as Harold exits his boat in Ponthieu for a hunting adventure (though the event gets turned around as Harold becomes the hunted and

---

[37] For one of the most theoretically sophisticated treatments of this mystery, see Gerald Bond, "Arresting Subjects: Ælfgyva and the Coloring of History," in *The Loving Subject; Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 18-41. Also for a good argument on her identity, see J. Bard McNulty, "The Lady Ælfgyva in the Bayeux Tapestry," *Speculum* 55 (1980): 659-68 and Richard D. Wissolik, "Code in the Bayeux Tapestry," in vol. 19 of *Annuale Medievale*, ed. Frank Zbozny (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979), 69-97.

captured by Guy de Pontheiu), in the panel below the narrative moment of the hunt is then amplified by smaller images of hunting.

These instances as noted above wherein the panel imagery functions to hypermediate the action or meaning of the main panel may be thought of as a pre-computer version of a static hypertext. If we can posit such a thing as a dynamic hypertext, it would perhaps be the instances of hyper-intertextuality, wherein the imagery in the panels connects to main panel by way of a narrative or reference outside the Tapestry. One such image already mentioned is the scene taken from Aelfric's Hexateuch showing Abram slinging stones at birds to chase them away from his sacrifice to God made in hopes of achieving the Promised Land. The scene from Genesis illustrates a moment in a narrative that includes a divinely ordered sacrifice that has everything to do with nation building, precisely what the Tapestry is about as well, for at this moment in the narrative action Harold is being held by Guy of Ponthieu but William is working to get him released. Thus, are Guy and his men the birds that William as Abram must shoo away from his sacrificial victim Harold? Of course, this is but speculation, and the image, which does seem to come from the Hexateuch is but one of several under this narrative sequence of William hearing the news of Harold's capture and sending messengers to Guy (panels 23-28). The other images all seem to create a series of agrarian scenes, plowing, sowing sees, and harrowing, taken from perhaps a variety of manuscripts sources including the Harley Psalter and calendar manuscripts. What does the relationship between these scenes of planting crops have to do with William freeing Harold from Guy of Ponthieu? Again one can invoke Genesis: this is the creation of a new relationship between William and Harold; it will be grown anew from the

122

ground. It's hard to know, but the scenes *do* represent the early work of creating a garden and William *is* in the early stages of creating a relationship with Harold and England. [38]

There are some references to other narratives that furthermore function to hypermediate the main narrative and they come in the form of Aesopian fables or perhaps some mythological references. The fables have been the most commented on, and most scholars agree that nine or ten of these fable identifications are pretty conclusive, whereas another twenty or so identifications are doubtful. One of the most obvious and most interesting is that often referred to as the Fox, the Crow, and the Cheese.   The image that evokes this fable appears in three different places and in three different configurations. In the first (upper border, panel 6) the cheese appears to be in flight between the crow's mouth and the fox's; in the second (lower border, panel 40) the fox has the cheese in its mouth; in the third, strangely the crow has the cheese in its mouth. In the fable, of course, the fox talks the crow into dropping the cheese and there is a lesson about paying attention, keeping one's mouth shut, and hanging on to one's property. So it would seem that the order following the narrative of the fable should be 3rd, 1st, and 2nd. This reference has been written about quite a bit and none has written more clearly than McNulty who argues that the cheese represents the English crown that has fallen from where it should be for a time; furthermore, since the fable concludes with the crow losing the cheese to the fox, the prediction then is that the crown will be lost to Normandy. That is only one way that the fable has been read. It has also been read as both as a pro-Norman and pro-English

---

[38] For much greater exploration of these possibilities, see Gale R. Owen-Crocker, "Reading the Bayeux Tapestry through Canterbury eyes," in *Anglo-Saxons. Studies Presented to Cyril Roy Hart*, ed. Simon Keynes and Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), 243-265.

propaganda, which in some ways underscores the hypertextual nature of the piece, in that, absolute sequence of the reading is not determined.[39]

One last manner of considering the Tapestry hypertextually concerns the reflection of one panel image upon that of another. Richard Brilliant's essay on reading the Tapestry in terms of its visual display is an excellent attempt to explore this semiotic dimension of the textile. It is an engaging essay that takes up the issue of the under-regarded performative aspect of the Tapestry, and after researching archaeological information about eleventh-century halls that might have hosted the Tapestry, he asks the question of how it would have been hung and what image would be across from what. In other words, he asks, how did the Tapestry remediate the space in which it was hung? What image would be behind the lord at the high table? Also, how would these images thus arranged reflect on each other?[40] This possibility of reading the imagery of the Tapestry in a completely non-sequential and theoretically continuously looped and differing repetitions is most appropriate as a pre-modern instance of hypertext. Like clicking images in a database of images over and over and in different sequences, the observer standing in the middle of the hall in which the Tapestry is hung can move from image to image and arrive at much more meaning than was perhaps planning by the designer(s).

---

[39] J. Bard McNulty, *Visual Meaning in the Bayeux Tapestry: Problems and Solutions in Picturing History* (Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 2003).

[40] Richard Brilliant, "The Bayeux Tapestry, a Stripped Narrative for Their Eyes and Ears," in *The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Richard Gameson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 111-37; Gale Owen-Crocker has posed similar questions about the arrangement of the imagery in an essay on the geometry of the Tapestry and the question of parallel or mirrored images; see Gale R. Owen-Crocker, "Brothers, rivals and the geometry of the Bayeux Tapestry," in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 109-123.

The Bayeux Tapestry as Remediater of Prior Texts

As Bolter and Grusin indicate in their genealogy of the concepts of immediacy and hypermediacy, pre-modern art can be said to result from the same desires and to have been shaped by some of the same forces and, therefore, can be better understood according to the same double logic as that of new media productions. Some pre-modern art, however, appears more obviously involved in the work of remediation than others. For example, on a very basic level, the remediation of a plain and non-illustrated codex by an illuminated codex is an example not only that Bolter and Grusin cite in their book as one of the earliest instances of hypermedia, but also it is an example that makes a good deal of sense. As a manuscript was copied into a more deluxe illuminated edition, say a Psalter, quite a bit of new work would be required in that reproduction, work involving a new design and new craftsmen and even sometimes new material, gold leaf, for example. There can be no doubt that the manuscript increased in value as well as information. Each illuminated page, whether it be the eleventh-century *Harley Psalter* (polychrome copy of the *Utrecht Psalter*) or the wonderful *Luttrell Psalter* of the fourteenth century, when hypermediated by an illustration increases the amount of information (especially in the communication theory sense of that word) on that page simply because of the addition of the visual, but also because of the dialogic information that results from the interaction between the text and visual. On the other hand, the application of the binary immediacy/hypermediacy is certainly problematic in medieval texts because that which is real may be considered quite different. In fact, the polarity may be reversed, for a neoplatonic theologian might well consider the abstract symbol in an illumination to present reality much more immediately than any photorealistic detail. The modern theorists may not care about the metaphysical implications of

125

real or not real, but I believe most medieval readers did and that difference would also constitute a difference in the phenomenological reality of the reading experience.

So now we must ask the question about the Bayeux Tapestry and in what ways it could be said to remediate prior media or prior individual works? First of all, it is quite clear that the Tapestry adopted forms, styles, and techniques of prior media, and I have argued elsewhere that the designers did so intentionally to make a point about the epic dimension of the Tapestry, its inclusiveness, its monumentality, and to suggest a point about Norman imperial intentions.[41] Setting the imperialism argument aside for the time, there does seem to be a pattern in the adoption of other media in such a way as to signify artistic traditions and peoples that extend in four different directions from Normandy: from the North, Scandinavian hangings as well as a characteristic decorative style and imagery of Viking ships; from the west, Anglo-Saxon embroidery and manuscript imagery; from the south, Roman monumental sculpture; and from the east, Byzantine silk work and imperial imagery.

Perhaps the clearest case, at least in my mind, can be made for the Tapestry as in part a remediation of Roman art, particularly that which we associate with the triumphal columns, arches, and friezes. Professor Gale Owen-Crocker's essay in this issue of *Peregrinations* makes the strongest argument recently about the influence of Roman art, particularly the art on the monumental columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, on the development of the design of the Tapestry. This same connection, however, between the Tapestry and the columns was first suggested quite early by Montfaucon during the eighteenth-century rediscovery of the Tapestry. His reproduction of the drawings of Nicholas-Joseph Foucault that he came to possess and then the drawings of Antoinne Benoît that he commissioned constitute an instance of an eighteenth-

---

[41] I have written a monograph on just this subject. See John Micheal Crafton, *The Political Artistry of the Bayeux Tapestry: A Visual Epic of Norman Imperial Ambitions* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2006).

century remediation of the Tapestry not only in a different medium, but also in service of the monarchy. He titled his two volumes of the Tapestry later drawings *Monumens de la monarchie de la française* (1729)*,* and thus I believe his connection between the Roman columns and the Tapestry informs us as to how he perceived the Tapestry, as a type of monument and as an assertion of regnal power.

While the suggestion of this connection to Rome has been in the air for two centuries, it was in the twentieth century that the scholar O. K. Werckmeister in 1976 published the first professional essay demonstrating detailed connections between the Roman world and the Tapestry.[42] He made some stunning correlations between a few scenes on the columns and the Tapestry, but he also argued more global observations of what we might consider the larger artistic design of the Roman columns and that of the Tapestry.

Both the Column of Trajan and the Bayeux Tapestry show wars that are methodically prepared, carefully directed, and strategically executed, by means of a more or less clearly readable chronological as well as topographical continuum which has been designed on the basis of the continuous picture strip format, where movement in space and progress in time interlock. Differing from the stereotyped climactic battle clashes of late antique and early Christian manuscript illumination, both religious and secular, they unfold the visual record of a campaign in stages, including the technical and logistical preparations, which are shown to be as much of an achievement as the victorious fighting itself.[43]

---

[42] O.K. Werckmeister, "The Political Ideology of the Bayeux Tapestry," *Studi Medievali* 17, no 2 (1976): 67.

[43] Werckmeister, 537.

Finally, Werckmeister tries to place all of his points about the connection between these two monuments of art in a subordinate position to the main thrust of his argument which is that both are in effect panegyrics to Caesar and to William as Caesar.

Werckmeister's arguments were not very highly regarded until recently. Peter Lasko, in a recent essay in honor of C.R. Dodwell, has given the Roman argument new life by making a case for parallel use of space in both works.[44] Finally, the two most recent books on the Tapestry published in English by Carola Hicks and Howard Bloch both present the Roman thesis as if it is no longer a critical debate. Carola Hicks states it briefly but firmly:

> The designer and his team drew on a vast range of sources from different media. The narrative strip had firm classical roots in the carved friezes of the Roman world, like those on the columns of Trajan or Marcus Aurelius. Their images of warfare would have fascinated a traveling monk-artist or a potential patron. Harold was just one of many English visitors to Rome, and Odo aspired to remain there permanently as Pope.[45]

And now Gale Owen-Crocker's essay builds upon the work of Werckmeister and Lasko in order to demonstrate the influence of Roman art on three scenes in particular: the ship building episode; the pillage and feasting before the battle panels; and the castle building and arson scene. This last one contains a parallel to an image on the column of Marcus Aurelius that is most remarkable in its similarity. Even those who are somewhat skeptical of the Roman connections, such as David Bernstein and Wolfgang Grape, have said that there is no denying the parallels.[46] The scene in question shows a woman leading a child from a burning background, a very

---

[44] Peter Lasko, "The Bayeux Tapestry and the Representation of Space," in *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives. A Memorial Tribute to C. R. Dodwell*, eds. Gale Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 26-39.

[45] Carola Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006).

[46] David Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 97.

powerful image evoking the horrors of war.[47]   Professor Owen-Crocker's very careful and detailed analysis of the scenes makes an all but iron-clad case for Roman influence, but her essay does not go so far as to suggest a purpose for the influence. However, there is no doubt that some aspect of remediation, repurposing we might say, of some of the triumphal columns to the Tapestry is irrefutable.

My surmise on the purpose of this remediation is that the designers had in mind the larger pattern as well, the genre of monumental art. The Bayeux Tapestry remediates the triumphal columns of Rome by peeling off, as it were, the narrative frieze from the column and stretching in out in a single line with the added features of two minor panels and a script. As Wolfgang Grape has argued, the Bayeux Tapestry then becomes a portable and movable monument to the Norman triumph. It remediates the triumphal column or arch but in a format that not only adds much more hypermediacy, including more text and pictures, but also in a format that can be placed inside a hall and from hall to hall, thus converting the lapidary medium of Rome to the more nomadic quality of the Normans and, perhaps, signifying a Viking connection, since the hanging as a genre, the *tjell* of textile art, would have been recognized as Viking.

Our knowledge of these Scandinavian hangings is sadly very thin; quite simply, not very much of that art has survived. The advantage of the hanging is its portability, but the disadvantage is that is so easily damaged. As a result there is not much of a record, an extant record, upon which to make secure arguments, but what little we have and combined with other evidence of the influence of Scandinavian art and artifacts may enable us to make a case for a second major effort at remediation. As with the case of the Roman influence, the case for Scandinavian is an old one that fell out of regard, but is now making something of resurgence. The French scholar Lucien Musset, late of University of Caen, has done more, perhaps, than

---

[47] Marcus column Scene XX and Tapestry panel

anyone in Normandy to build the case for the importance of Scandinavia in the Tapestry, and Professor Shirley Ann Brown is publishing in this journal an argument that builds upon Musset and others and offers a synthesis of the available evidence that demonstrates the importance of Scandinavian or Viking nationality in the consideration of the Tapestry. She writes that the importance of Scandinavia somehow got lost in the nationalistic arguments over the Tapestry's provenance.

> The question of the relationship between Scandinavia, the Vikings, the Norman Conquest of England, and the Bayeux Tapestry, has been discussed from the viewpoint of archaeology and art. It is equally necessary to investigate it from the standpoint of national attitudes and interests, for it is possible to interpret the Bayeux Tapestry, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Vikings as 19th century creations. The ways we look at these phenomena and the questions we ask of them were formulated during the post-Napoleonic period when national identity was a major concern, and many European countries were reconstructing their own early histories.[48]

And in reviewing the scholarly and some popular material on Viking and Tapestry connections, she concludes that, properly regarded, we should view the Bayeux Tapestry not as English or as French, but "as a reflection of the more nuanced society the Conquest produced, one that combined English, Anglo-Danish, and Norman cultures."[49] Professor Brown makes the larger case of moving beyond modern nationalist barriers to see the identity of the Normans as a complex blend of these Scandinavian and cross channel identities. The Northern English, Scandinavians, and Normans were in some ways one people, though separated by water boundaries and languages.

---

[48] Shirley Ann Brown's essay is the first in this volume.

[49] Brown.

In her essay, as is the case in Gale Owen-Crocker's essay, Shirley Ann Brown builds the case based upon clear and very specific pieces of evidence that demonstrate the influence of Scandinavian artistry. She quotes Musset's argument of the evidence of the Ringerinke style; she connects the "hog-backed" style of Danish houses with similar imagery in the Tapestry; and, of course, she points to the numerous connections between the ships in the Tapestry and Norse ships that have been excavated in the twentieth century. It is interesting that one of the most Danish connected scenes, according to Brown, is the ship-building scene, which is also is one of the three scenes that Owen-Crocker demonstrates to be informed by Roman art. This is not an either / or condition. The designers were consciously blending these styles, perhaps for ideological reasons, as I believe, or perhaps merely to enhance the hypermediacy, or perhaps to show off. At any rate, what we can see now is that just as the Roman column was remediated as a long horizontal, Viking style, narrative hanging, so also was the Viking hanging, which was probably more often than not a true tapestry instead of an embroidery,[50] remediated with Roman imagery and Roman triumphal purpose. Furthermore, the remediated hanging was enhanced by the technique of embroidery, the so-called *opus Anglicanum*, for which England was quite famous, figure drawings taken from English manuscripts, and imagery taken from silk weavings from Byzantium.

The Bayeux Tapestry's efforts at remediating Scandinavian hangings to become a Roman imperial narrative of conquest and remediating Roman triumphal columns to become a portable hanging with English, Norman, Viking, and Byzantine imagery is quite an artistic or media triumph. The Tapestry is a hypermediated work of art with a powerful and dominant visual narrative that is complemented by sub-narratives in the forms of Aesopian fables, by mysterious

---

[50] The major exception that we know of here is the fragment from Røn in the Oslo museum. A photographic reproduction is available in Wilson, Grape, and Bernstein, among other places.

historical allusions (for example, Aelfgyva and Turold), by a Latin script, and by English manuscript images doubtlessly replete with allegorical meanings, and finally by images from the imperial East, conjuring up Byzantine and the Ottonian dynasty. If the purpose of hypermediacy, as Bolter claims, is to create a sense of fullness in the viewer / reader, then the Bayeux Tapestry delivers on that purpose; it is almost overwhelmingly full, a fact that helps explain why it is as fascinating to twenty-first-century audiences as it must have been to eleventh-century ones.

Conclusion

The bulk of what has been written about the Tapestry has been dedicated either to ascertaining its provenance (the recent assertions by Michael Lewis and others for reclaiming the Tapestry as English art is one result of this) or solving a few of its mysteries; the result of these investigations has revealed many different styles or nationalities of art woven, as it were, into its fabric. The argument for which style or nationality is the "real" or foundational one or the official one still rages on, but it could well be that with remediation there can be no single source that stands for the base or official style in the same way that it would be hard to find one design element in a web site to indicate firmly the place of origin. Rather, the remediation is the new source, and like hypertext, seems to have no foundation, but in this case, the remediated text is produced to do what Jay Bolter and others claim that all remediations do, provide immediacy and hypermediacy. The gruesome imagery and some the domestic scenes (much like some in the *Luttrel Psalter*) as well as some of the rather crude efforts at perspective work toward immediacy, but the triple bands and the script and the extra-realistic moments of the pointing to the script all add hypermediacy. Despite some historicist claims to the contrary, analyzing the

Tapestry by analogy with contemporary media may well purchase for us a much deeper comprehension of the historical moment of the Bayeux Tapestry which may include a final indeterminacy about nationalities, settling forever, perhaps, the "English versus French" debate. Instead, we shall perhaps conclude that this hypermediated eleventh-century work of art had already exceeded that simple binary, and we are just now catching up.

133