

## Remedying Remediation?

Mathilde Arrivé

The term remediation was first introduced in 1999 by Jay David Bolter and David Grusin in their now classic *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (MIT Press). They adopted the term to describe the way digital media “borrow from their analog predecessors” (Bolter and Grusin 9) such as painting, photography, film and television, and refashion their visual content—itsself the product of previous borrowings and repurposings. In the process, Bolter and Grusin argue, “new media”<sup>1</sup> inherit the cultural discourse and values attached to “old media,” whose conventions, properties and identities reciprocally end up altered and refashioned. In their book, Bolter and Grusin particularly insist on the “twin logic” and “contradictory imperatives” of mediation, namely the urge to achieve *immediacy* (the erasure of mediation) and *hypermediacy* (its multiplication)—two operations they see as mutually dependent (Bolter and Grusin 4-9).<sup>2</sup>

Bolter and Grusin’s work has effectively challenged the essentialist Greenbergian doctrine of the medium’s “purity,” “specificity” and “autonomy,” has questioned art’s master narratives of originality, uniqueness, novelty and authorship as well as certain established basic categories of image discourse such as imitation, authenticity, the copy and the counterfeit, while also complicating the idea of image or medium obsolescence. Yet, Bolter and Grusin’s book has also been the object of some criticism, notably with respect to the imprecise definition of remediation itself, the book’s technocentered approach, its lack of contextualisation and its almost exclusive focus on digital media. For, although Bolter and Grusin clearly show that “new” media will not *replace* “old” media, they still suggest that the former will somehow augment, supplement and “supersede” the latter, “fill a lack or repair a fault” and “fulfill [...] unkept promises” (Bolter and Grusin 60)—thus validating a teleological vision of media history as a linear narrative of reform and progress. While such a view is

---

<sup>1</sup> In the category of “new media,” Bolter and Grusin include and analyze computer games, digital photography, photorealistic graphics, digital art, the world wide web, computing. In his later work on premediation (2010), however, Richard Grusin admitted that “in the first decade of the twenty-first century, [...] it no longer makes sense to distinguish between ‘old media’ like print, radio, television, or cinema, and ‘new media’.” (Grusin 6)

<sup>2</sup> This tension refers to the bi-modality and paradoxical logic of mediation—an “interfaceless’ interface” (Bolter and Grusin 23), “a mediation aiming at immediacy,” “erasing [its] presence as intermediary” (Citton 11), denying not only its mediated character, but also “its dependence on the other form,” which is yet affirmed in the very act of denial (Bolter 2005 19).

typical of “the digital revolution paradigm” (Jenkins 6) of the late 1990s, it is further reinforced by the twin semantics of the term remediation, since *to remedy* means *to replace*, but also *to resolve* and *to improve*. Yet, as we shall see, the motivations behind remediation may not simply be to upgrade, but also to restore, to preserve, to reclaim, to display, to memorialize or commemorate, but also to simplify, to exemplify, to dramatize, to sensationalize (C. Rouquet)<sup>3</sup>—a wealth of cultural practices whose anthropological significance went unaddressed within the scope of their book.

Besides, while remediation, in its most basic acceptance, simply describes the practice of taking one property from a medium and re-using it for another, it is still unclear whether it is a theoretical concept, a critical tool, a trope, an artistic practice, an image operation, a technological process, a communicational and marketing strategy, a type of reception or viewing experience—or all of the above. If “*all* mediation is remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 55), the apparent ubiquity of the phenomenon is, in itself, problematic. Indeed, one could say media remediate reality; art remediates time (E. Van Alphen), but also remediates place, memory and the past (V. Ha Van); exhibitions remediate artworks;<sup>4</sup> theory remediates art but may also be remediated by artistic practices (E. Krieger).<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, media also remediate themselves. And, as François Brunet suggests, historiography is itself an elaborate form of remediation.

So where exactly, we may wonder, does remediation start and where does it end? Is there a way out of it? Can an image possibly remain insulated from it? The productivity of remediation primarily manifests itself in the vast array of questions it raises: *Why* do media remediate? What is it that they organize and structure by constantly moving, changing and remediating each other? *How* can they redeploy themselves *within* others? What is new about “new media” and how can they act retroactively on older ones? Does remediation limit or multiply meaning? Can it really imply “reform in the social or political sense” (Bolter and Grusin 59-60) and, if so, what does it remedy? What does remediation obfuscate, expose or

---

<sup>3</sup> The names in parenthesis refer to the authors of the articles published in this volume. The collection of articles derives from the international conference “What Do Pictures Do? Remediating Images” organized by Mathilde Arrivé (EMMA), Nicolas Labarre, and Helena Lamouliatte-Schmitt (CLIMAS) at Université Bordeaux Montaigne on June 1-2, 2017. Link to the event: <http://climas.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr/colloques/329-colloque-international-what-do-pictures-do-1er-et-2-juin> [13 Feb. 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Charles Joseph, “Superheroes at the Museum: Remediation through Re/collection,” International conference “What Do Pictures Do? Remediating Images,” Université Bordeaux Montaigne, June 2, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> As Ela Krieger demonstrates in her article, Jasper Johns remediated Greenberg’s doctrine, setting the modernist dogma of the specificity of painting in the printing medium.

reveal? What theoretical space does it create or occupy? And, ultimately, does remediation correspond to a paradigm shift?

While it is important to shed light on what remediation *is* (and therefore on what media are, in their constant process of becoming—something which can never be fully anticipated), we hope to understand what remediation *does*, especially to media and images, but also to institutions and to communities of viewers and users. Working on the premise that media transformation signals a moment of significant cultural transformation, and that a change in format always implies a change in imaginations, the goal of this collection is to analyze the discourses, modalities, uses, loci, and strategies of remediation, its link to iconicity and iconoclasm, its effect on participants, its impact on cultural memory and on our cultural imaginary. To address these issues, we will venture beyond the standard, accepted definition of remediation and outside the strict perimeter of media and communication studies to embrace the broader field of images and cultural circulation. As the notion of remediation has largely become autonomous from its original source, we will also try to reframe the issue in terms other than the tension initially identified by Bolter and Grusin between immediacy and hypermediacy and its host of related dichotomies—transparency/opacity, immersion/emersion, materiality/immateriality, new/old media.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, these revisions will lead to interrogate the blind spots, exteriorities, counter-practices and alternative manifestations of remediation.

### **Remediation in Theory**

Although remediation may seem to correspond to a pivotal moment in the contemporary history of media transformation, *it is not* an invention of the digital age and globalization, nor is it unique to digital media. As François Brunet suggests, the history of the media is largely a history of remediation. However tempting the millenarian rhetoric of “media (r)evolution”<sup>7</sup> may be, remediation demands to be framed diachronically as a central practice in Western visual representation which has existed since the Renaissance and the invention of perspective—a historicity acknowledged by Bolter and Grusin themselves (11, 21) despite

---

<sup>6</sup> One could argue that the dichotomy between immediacy and hypermediacy “remediates” the McLuhanist opposition between “cold” and “hot” media (McLuhan 41-42), just as the tension between “old” and “new” media, indebted to Raymond Williams’s distinction between “emergent” and “residual” forms, remediates the former “high and “low” dichotomy, displacing rather than questioning the binaries.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Macnamara. *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices*. Peter Lang Publishing, 2009.

their overall synchronic approach to remediation. Since the early days of art history, remediating the works of the Great Masters into sketches and diagrams has been a common exercise for students, a tool for teachers and a tactic for critics (D. Viva), used for propaedeutic, didactic, or epistemic purposes.

In today's intellectual landscape, remediation unfolds across disciplinary lines, bridging art history, visual studies and media studies. It impacts existing theories, as well as the constitution of methods, fields and objects, creating new critical, artistic and viewing experiences, something that Bolter and Grusin already acknowledged (21). In today's "re-culture," re-mediating is not an isolated phenomenon but comes with a host of other re-doings—recycling, retooling, reformatting, reworking, redeploying, relocating, refitting, repurposing, reclaiming, remixing—characterized by an unprecedented collaboration between images, especially with the ever-increasing wave of mashups, spin-offs, remakes, reboots of all sorts and the popularity of serialism and appropriationism.

In this context, we might ask if remediation is just another buzzword to be added to the already substantial list of notions that emerged in the 1990s, such as transmediality and interartiality. Does remediation build upon, add to, or depart from these paradigms? Like them, remediation engages with groups, series, clusters or fluxes of images (rather than isolated pictures), but significantly shifts from an iconocentric to an interactionist approach, with its concern for "the cultural lives of images" (Brunet 342) rather than their forms.

Although the discourse of remediation owes much to semiotics and to its classic definition of the medium,<sup>8</sup> the *process* of remediation is more than a simple recoding from one sign system to another. A common albeit reductive view of remediation conceives of it as mechanically detaching a form (image or story) and re-attaching it to another format, often resulting in typologies of intersemiotic transpositions—architecture remediating painting (diorama), photo remediating painting (pictorialism), painting remediating photo (photorealism), art remediating industry (ready-made), documentary news remediating entertainment (infotainment), etc. Although such typologies may be useful, even illuminating, they tend to reify and obscure the relational and processual operations involved in remediation.

---

<sup>8</sup> A medium is traditionally defined as the synergy of a technological condition, a material format, and a form (image or story) with specific conventions. See Krauss 5 and below for a discussion of the definition.

Also worthy of attention are the junctions between remediation and adaptation, as Bolter and Grusin's 1999 book coincided with reorientations in the study of adaptations and a departure from what Linda Hutcheon calls "fidelity criticism" (6) and its comparative methods—which remediation altogether eludes. In many respects, remediation resonates greatly with Hutcheon's 2006 seminal *Theory of Adaptation*, but also takes it one step further by celebrating and normalizing derivation. Because the faithfulness (or lack thereof) to some "original" or "model" is hardly ever the concern of remedial artists and critics, the traditional polarity between source and target is reversed and sometimes abolished, undermining temporal and generic hierarchies in favor of more horizontal, rhizomic networks. With remediation, the genealogy of media and images is thus understood in terms of filiations or affiliations (both social and formal, Bolter and Grusin 87), rather than origins.

Moreover, remediation operates somewhat outside art historical notions of homage and influence, but also of pastiche, parody and artistic irreverence, which all imply a one-way trajectory—from model to copy, from past to present (E. Van Alphen)<sup>9</sup>—and the seniority or authority of some media over others. Today, remediation is sometimes misconstrued as media competition, modeled on the logic of capitalism, and a struggle for cultural recognition (Bolter 2005 14), popular acceptance or economic success (Bolter and Grusin 68), attention and precedence (Natale 8). But again, such understanding posits an oppositional, (counter-) hegemonic view of media, which, we believe, remediation precisely aims to deconstruct.

Finally, remediation can be received without the viewers' acquaintance with earlier forms. Even if viewing itself can be a form of remediation, be it through connection, immersion, interaction, or participation, remediation is not necessarily received as intertextuality, even if it still relies on the "comfort" of "recognition and remembrance" and the delight—and risk—of "surprise and novelty" (Hutcheon 4, 173). And this is also true on the level of production, as the artists who engage with remediation do not necessarily define themselves as remedial artists; in fact those who do arguably tend to simply *illustrate* remediation or use it as a mere gambit. And, as Nicolas Bourriaud would have it, remediation, like other forms of "postproduction," does not deny the aura of an artwork, but displaces its origin and effect (Bourriaud 61) and transforms it into a "fascination with media" (Bolter and Grusin 74-75, 84). We could argue, however, that remediation, by dint of multiple repetitions and successive decontextualization, tends to enhance the iconicity of an image (C. Rouquet) rather than its Benjaminian aura.

---

<sup>9</sup> The notion of influence was criticized by Michael Baxandall in "Excursus Against Influence," Chapter 2, Section 6 of *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1985).

## Pure/Post/Super-medium

The term “medium” has almost become taboo today and is practically never used without a prefix. As one of many variations, “*re-media*” demand to be situated within the broader discursive shifts that have occurred over the last decades from “mono-” to “inter-” medium, from “inter-” to “mixed” medium, and from “post-” to “super-” or “uni-” medium.

In the wake of Clement Greenberg’s modernist theories, each medium was essentialized in the 1960s as a set of “pure,” specific formal features and properties, a notion reinforced by exhibitions and critical practices that further fetishized medium identities. In the 1990s, the backlash of the contemporary art world was, however, to celebrate hybridity and to deny sectorial autonomy (Bourriaud 105) with the creation of transmedial “apparatuses.” The shift from “pure” media to “mixed” media was extensively discussed by artists and experts. Adding to Latour, Krauss (12) and W.J.T. Mitchell’s claim that “all media are mixed media” (Mitchell 174), Jørgen Bruhn has recently introduced the notion of “heteromedia:”

Blending is an *a priori* condition in all texts, and the blending aspects consequently do not constitute a marginal phenomenon or a marginal subgroup: mixedness characterizes all medialities and all specific texts. Mixedness comes first, so to speak; the monomedial purity of any specific medial object is the result of active purification—instead of the other way round. (Bruhn 2016 15)<sup>10</sup>

As Bruhn suggests, a medium is fundamentally plural and heterogeneous but, paradoxically, it can only be remediated once it has secured a unified, stable cultural identity of its own<sup>11</sup>—something which is precisely achieved by way of successive remediations. Photography is a case in point: it established itself as a legitimate medium in the late nineteenth century by remediating painting, theater and *tableaux vivants* (E. Van Alphen). In so doing, photography did not remediate visual arts as much as it remediated *itself* as an art—an act of “self-remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 120) and a process of “artification,”<sup>12</sup> which in turn dramatically restructured visual arts and set new standards for artists. For remediation always boomerangs. It is a two-way, mutual process (Bolter 2005 14) in which media actively “remake *themselves and each other*” (Bolter and Grusin 5, our emphasis), in which the

---

<sup>10</sup> See also Bruhn 2010 225-236.

<sup>11</sup> “It seems that no art can acquire cultural capital until it has theorized itself as medium-specific with its own formal and signifying possibilities” (Hutcheon 34).

<sup>12</sup> Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro (eds.). *De l’artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l’art*. Paris: EHESS, 2012. Paradoxically though, remediating practices confirm rather than deny the authorship of photographers, as they “surpass” the mechanical limits of the photographic medium and thus become inserted in a discourse on intentionality that had long been the preserve of painting (E. Van Alphen).

remediating medium is always itself remediated (Bolter and Grusin 55). Like a Deleuzian fold, remediation both separates and articulates, repeats and creates.

Bolter and Grusin's definition of a medium as "that which remediates" (Bolter and Grusin 65) is deceptively simple. When framed in dynamic and relational terms, media are defined by their capacity to move, to meet and to mix. Discarding Greenbergian artistic essentialism while being more circumspect about McLuhanist technological determinism,<sup>13</sup> Bolter and Grusin claim that no medium can now "operate in isolation" (65), or "function independently and establish its own separate and purified space of cultural meaning" (55).<sup>14</sup> Thence, medium specificity, if anything, lies in a medium's *relationships* to—rather than separation from—other media, within a mediasphere functioning like an ecosystem based on interconnection, interdependence and complementarity. Media can then be pictured as "nodes" within networks rather than "terminals" on a one-way line—or as "fluxes" proliferating along rhizomic trajectories that do not, however, preclude constraints and stability (Maigret 15-16, 18). In his later works, Bolter gave a more social Darwinist turn to the notion of media ecology, saying that media "mutate and diversify" (Bolter 2006 109), suggesting they are rearticulated and reinvented with each remediating operations.

In many ways, remediation anticipates Rosalind Krauss's idea of the "post-medium condition", which she introduced in *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* in 2000, one year after Bolter and Grusin's seminal publication. A "re-medium" is, in many respects, a "post-medium," characterized, according to Krauss, by a "recursive" (6), "aggregative" (31) and "generative" (26) structure, as well as a "differential" (56) and even "self-differing" nature (44-45). This is particularly true of photography. With its self-conscious propensity to incorporate other arts and to be constantly *trans-formed* (through interventions on the negative, photo montage, collage or assemblage, and the many techniques of photo developing, printing and display), photography not only "erode[s] its own specificity" but is also likely to "attack the idea of specificity for all the arts" (Krauss 45-46). In this sense, photography has always been a post-medium.

The oxymoronic definition of media as "self-differing" leads us to consider another paradox, as remediation in the digital age seems to be driven by a double impulse: on the one hand, it embraces a *centrifugal* logic—towards transmedial dissemination (Gaudreault and Marion 30)—while, on the other hand, it obeys a *centripetal* logic—towards unimedial fusion, which Henry Jenkins derisively calls the "Black Box Fallacy" (Jenkins 14, 212, 280). Therefore, in

---

<sup>13</sup> See Bolter and Grusin 73, 76-77.

<sup>14</sup> See also Grusin 5.

today's mediascape, remediation seems to both exalt and hinder the external multiplicity and internal plurality of media, as "new media" both amplify *and* dilute older media, prolong *and* overwrite them. As cyberphiles, Bolter and Grusin welcome the accumulative and integrative logic of digital media, which has nursed utopian hopes for a super-medium capable of redeeming and perfecting its analog sources and fully actualizing their potentialities (Verevis 6). But remediation has also roused the cyberphobic view that "traditional" media would disappear, absorbed and subsumed in an all-inclusive, totalizing, iconophagic digital "uni-medium" (Maigret 6). Some are indeed tempted to view remediation as dissolution, and to announce "the death of the medium," overwritten in the web of omni-connections, interfaces, screen-based and mobile technology—which, like electricity in the mid-1960s, would be a new "milieu," without a content *but with a message* (McLuhan 12, 33), supplanting light as the conveyor of decentralization, instantaneity (McLuhan 27)—and immediacy.

Interesting in this respect is the hypermediated website, which displays a layered and interactive combination of texts, graphics, videos, windows and hyperlinks (Bolter and Grusin 9), and which, as such, exemplifies both the utopian and iconophagic dimensions of digital media, pointing to the two sides of the same old dream—that of ubiquity, i.e. the urge to either erase or transcend mediation, in a word "to overcome representation" (Bolter and Grusin 60). Another relevant example is the multimodal narrative, which aims to remediate multimedia in the printed book form. Although the digital medium is not present as such, Côme Martin argues it exists as an underlying, structural logic, since the multimodal narrative invites interactivity and immersion by remediating movement, sound, and smell in a multisensory experience. In its attempt to refashion print, cinema, literature, comics, and to address all of our five senses, multimodality might be the new super-medium, capable, according to Côme Martin, of enhancing—rather than abolishing—the printed format and the conventional reading experience.

But let us not forget that every major media development has triggered the hope or fear of unimedial fusion, just as opera and cinema, in their own heydays and ways, activated similar claims to total art. Cinema, in the words of Robert Stam, encompassed "the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the décor of architecture, and the performance of theater" (in Hutcheon 35). Ironically, Bolter argues film has now become the new rearguard, forced to reluctantly remediate digital representational practices (Bolter 2005 15). In its own way, *photo-graphy* (the term itself is a misnomer, according to Mark



Rawlinson)<sup>15</sup> has the aura of a super-medium, as it has long been regarded as a natural, transparent language,<sup>16</sup> an un-mediated medium, and a “code-less,” purely indexical image, both material and immaterial. In the wake of the digital turn, the knell of photography was tolled, but the so-called “post-photographic” era (which photography may in fact have entered more than a century ago with pictorialism) is neither “the second birth” of photography nor its death, but simply its third technological moment.

As this example clearly shows, to talk about the “death” (or apotheosis) of media, and to frame their relations in terms of replacement, rupture, revolution, or strict succession, is to forget the element of dependence, continuity and complementarity between them (Gaudreault and Marion 29, Natale 7). Media do not disappear; they disseminate. As Henry Jenkins has it:

History teaches us that old media never die—and they don't even necessarily fade away. What dies are simply the tools we use to access media content. [...] A medium's *content* may shift (as occurred when television displaced radio as a storytelling medium, freeing radio to become the primary showcase for rock and roll), its *audience* may change (as occurs when comics move from a mainstream medium in the 1950s to a niche medium today), and its *social status* may rise or fall (as occurs when theater moves from a popular form to an elite one), but once a medium establishes itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options. [...] That's why convergence seems more plausible as a way of understanding the past several decades of media change than the old digital revolution paradigm had. Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies. (Jenkins 13-14, our emphasis)

Changes in time, place, context, content, format, audience and status are fairly easy to pinpoint. But what also changes in the process of remediation is the “hermeneutic identity” (Hutcheon 21) of a medium, its “mode of address” (Krauss 29), its “relational properties” (Bourriaud 22), and the cultural imagination attached to it. What is remediated therefore is not only the way a medium *represents* the world, but the way it engages in the world and with it, the “structure of experience” (Krauss 47) and model of subjectivity it designs and induces. As Simone Natale argues, our cultural imaginary and our social *perception* of

---

<sup>15</sup> Mark Rawlinson, “‘Outmoded Technologically and Displaced Aesthetically’: Photography as Historical Media,” International conference “What Do Pictures Do? Remediating Images,” Université Bordeaux Montaigne, June 1, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Today's desire for digital immediacy could in fact be viewed as a contemporary discursive make-over (or remediation) of the old photographic dream of objectivity, transparency, and truth.

technological change are in fact what truly defines media and draws the boundary between “old” and “new” ones (Natale 2, 13).<sup>17</sup>

### **Demediation, Counter-mediation, Reflexivity**

Bolter and Grusin have analyzed immediacy (transparency) and hypermediacy (opacity) at length and with much insight, but we may add a third term to this dyad—*demediation*, or transparency as opacity. Indeed, remediation inevitably includes the possibility of its failure, misuse or dysfunction, which points to its blind spots, aberrant practices and possible counter-practices. Demediation refers to a medium which has been in some way wrecked, denatured or negated (Stewart). Yet the contours of demediation, and its links to remediation, remain unclear: are we talking about a mute material format whose message has been occluded or evacuated (Stewart 413 note 3)? Or, on the contrary, an orphan form, idea or story, whose format has been effaced? Ironically, it is the idealistic view of conceptual artists that “art transcends media” that came the closest to the rarefying of the medium and causing its quasi-disappearance in pure language.<sup>18</sup> Yet immateriality and dematerialization do not necessarily equate to demediation (since disembodiment is to some extent the immanent condition of the image as an entity). And although a medium’s trajectory from physical vehicle to purely discursive and symbolic form may signal demediation, the reverse is also true: the “materialist irony” (Stewart 431) is that demediation often occurs in sheer mass, overload and saturation, which are a form of muteness and absence that causes the loss of the medium’s communicational and social functions.

Leaving aside the conceptual and materialist scenarios, there are instances where demediation may become a creative and meaningful counter-practice. Worthy of attention in this regard is the case of monuments commemorating violent or traumatic events. Véronique Ha Van analyzes the trajectory of a civil rights photograph remediated into a public sculpture but simultaneously demediated because of reduction, decontextualization, misuse, erasure, and omission. The meaning of the original photograph is partially lost, yet the sculpture is bound to constantly go back to this loss, with no possible “beyond” of its own. In this instance, remediation as demediation produces a form of haunting—the haunting of the new

---

<sup>17</sup> “Ultimately, the notion of old media may tell us more about our relationship with media than about the media themselves [...]. The oldness of media might be sought not in the media themselves, but rather in our perception and imagination of technological change. [...] Old media are ultimately the media that we imagine as fading, superseded, or surpassed in the particular context in which we live.” (Natale 2, 13)

<sup>18</sup> About words as media see McLuhan 80.

medium by its re/demediated ghost whose presence still “shadows the one we are experiencing directly” (Hutcheon 6). This is also true when it comes to the evocation of 9/11, whose images remain vivid even when—and maybe *because*—they become invisible or are obliterated (Y. Davo). Demediation produces vacuums, not voids. And when it comes to cultural memory, one might suggest that remediation *communicates* (as in the case of a private photograph becoming an icon of photojournalism, C. Rouquet) while demediation *resonates*: because it deprives the viewer of a stable message or material format, demediation suspends or complicates immediate visual consumption, and may thus enhance the texture of attention among the audience, trigger a more self-conscious viewing experience (both engaged and detached), and invite an ethical response on top of a sensory one. Arguably then, remediation might be most creative artistically and most provocative politically when it dysfunctions in terms of information and communication.

With the concept of “premediation,” Richard Grusin embraces the broader question of reception by introducing the idea of “medial pre-emption,” a form of preconditioning of our future responses based on the dissemination of images that “precede the events themselves” “so that the future will always already have been remediated” (Grusin 2, 45, 51).<sup>19</sup> It is therefore no surprise that some artistic practices consist in deliberately *blocking* remediation, thereby resisting the loss of context, reference and anchorage—and renouncing iconicity. These practices reclaim anachronism as a signifying and creative horizon by intentionally tapping the alleged obsolescence of “old media.” Jan Baetens underlines the creative potential of “retro-mediations” or “reverse (re)mediations”, and also stresses “the virtues of failed remediations”, and the importance of delay, disruption, discontinuity, indeterminacy, excesses, lacunae, which, again, reclaim the medium’s “noise.” By creating opacity, these counter-practices undermine the illusion of immediacy and hinder totalization (Citton 12, 13). Similarly, mail art, which Miriam Kienle characterizes as “collaborative collaging,”<sup>20</sup> involves the agency of the producers and viewers, but also that of apparatuses, which fully deploy their capacity to go beyond what they were originally programmed for. The capacity of a medium to “exceed” itself and short-circuit its traditional functions disrupts conventional communication and foregrounds the very work of mediation. Similarly, Ernst

---

<sup>19</sup> See also Astrid Erll: “Premediation refers to the cognitive schemata and patterns of representation that are available in a given media culture [...], and which already preform the events that we later remember through remediation.” (in Erll and Rigney 109)

<sup>20</sup> Miriam Kienle, “Remediating Connectivity: Mail Art and the Rise of the Network Society,” International conference “What Do Pictures Do? Remediating Images,” Université Bordeaux Montaigne, June 2, 2017.

Van Alphen demonstrates that staging is a counter-practice in photography, because instead of concealing the operator, staging calls attention to the photographer's craft and foregrounds the image's constructedness, as artefact, process, and performance, resulting in an hyperreality (both real and fake) in which immediacy and hypermediacy become confused. Through posing and staging, photography displays its own status as a post-medium—but also as a *hyper-medium*, because it makes the act of mediation visible, and allows the viewer to see or *feel* mediation.

Remediation, Bolter and Grusin say, is “the representation of one medium *in* another” (Bolter and Grusin 45, our emphasis) and, they add, “[it] is the mediation of mediation” (55). Such statements imply that remediation is, at its core, a self-conscious, reflexive operation—a form of embeddedness, a “self-trope” (Stewart 436). They also suggest that a “re-medium” is always a commentary on another medium, i.e., a *meta-medium* of sorts. Reflexivity should here be carefully distinguished from self-referentiality. Self-referentiality, especially in its modernist apparel, works by reduction: it is a form of narcissistic demediation and autarkic self-criticism of and by a given medium, locked within its own limited perimeter (Ela Krieger). Reflexivity, on the contrary, works by multiplicity: it proceeds from the dialogic interplay between media, which tells us about the conditions of their formation, circulation (editing, processing, recording, etc.), intersection and reception. Remediation is reflexive because it not only materializes the passage and experience of time, but also dramatizes “its own phenomenology” (Stewart 439) and performs its own operating procedure and conveyance. Thus, remediation foregrounds the cultural transformations that accompany it—the changes in scopic regimes, in discursive practices, in cultural values, which become as visible as the images themselves. This is particularly noticeable in the digital world, whose metaphors—the screen, the window, the interface, the threshold—are all meta-iconic models. Digital media makes new ways of seeing apparent, whether or not it provides templates for them. Moreover, by dematerializing the image, digitization detaches mediality from materiality. In doing so, it brings the image back to what it is—not a thing, but an operation. In a sense, remediation helps to bring to the fore the “doing” of media and images. In the words of Garrett Stewart, the remediated/ing image “pictures [...] the tomb of its own continuous renewals” (Stewart 454).

## Conclusion

We certainly did not and *will not* “remedy remediation.” While it is no doubt more than a mere “semiotic gambit” (N. Labarre),<sup>21</sup> remediation does not mark a paradigm shift or transform the nature of vision altogether. But for all its limitations and imprecision, the notion of remediation provides a common language across fields, disciplines and objects, capable of embracing very diverse *corpi* and practices, and of making sense of a broad array of artistic and cultural circulation. Some issues, however, will only be touched upon within the scope of this volume. New avenues of research in the field include casting remediation in genealogical terms, in epistemological terms, but also in legal terms, with respect to the existing frameworks of copyright and franchise, which make it sometimes difficult today to differentiate remediation (same story lines) from transmedia (interlocking stories across media).

With the fears (of uni-media) or the promises (of super-media) it spawns, remediation may alternatively be understood as a hegemonic or a counter-hegemonic practice, sometimes consolidating, sometimes undermining “the cultural myths of ‘new media’” (Natale 13). But more important are its creative, disruptive, and reflexive potentialities, which will be the main concern in this collection of articles. By testing remediation and sounding it anew for productivity and pertinence, this volume aims to look sideways, behind and beyond the notion in order to explore what it did not seem at first to harbor.

## Works Cited

- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge (Mass.), London: The MIT Press, 1999.
- Bolter, Jay David. “Transference and Transparency: Digital Technology and the Remediation of Cinema.” *Intermédialités* 6 (Fall 2005): 13-26.
- Bolter, Jay David. “The Desire for Transparency in an Era of Hybridity.” *Leonardo* 39, 2 (2006): 109-111.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Esthétique relationnelle*. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2001.
- Brunet, François. *La Photographie, histoire et contre-histoire*. Paris: PUF, 2017.

---

<sup>21</sup> Nicolas Labarre, “Fable 3, Remédier le jeu de rôle sur table: enjeux génériques,” International conference “What Do Pictures Do? Remediating Images,” Université Bordeaux Montaigne, June 2, 2017.

- Bruhn, Jørgen. "Heteromediality" in L. Elleström (eds). *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 225-236.
- . "What is Mediality and (How) Does it Matter?," introduction to *Intermediality and Narrative Literature. Medialities Matter*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 13-40.
- Citton, Yves. "Immédialité intra-active et intermédialité esthétique." *Hal* (2016). 13 Feb. 2018, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01373092/document><sup>22</sup>
- Erl, Astrid and Ann Rigney, eds. In collab. with Laura Basu and Paulus Bijl. *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.
- Gaudreault, André and Philippe Marion. "Cinéma et généalogie des médias." *Médiamorphoses* 16 (2006): 24-30.
- Grusin, Richard. *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York, London: Routledge, 2006.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture, When Old and New Media Collide*. New York and London: New York UP, 2006.
- Krauss, Rosalind. *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Pour comprendre les médias (Understanding Media, 1964)*. Paris: Seuil, 1977.
- Maigret, Éric. "Penser la convergence et le transmédia: avec et au-delà de Jenkins." Introduction to Henry Jenkins, *La Culture de la convergence, des médias au transmédia*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2013, 6-18.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. "Showing Seeing, A Critique of Visual Culture." *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, 2 (2002): 165-181. 6 Feb. 2018, <https://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods/mitchell.pdf>
- Natale, Simone. "There Are No Old Media." *Journal of Communication* (2016): 1-19. 6 Feb. 2018, <http://www.loooker.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/There-Are-No-Old-Media.pdf>
- Stewart, Garrett. "Bookwork as Demediation." *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Spring 2010): 410-457.
- Verevis, Constantine. "The images of the world have returned ... every one of them." Preface to *Représentations dans le monde anglophone, Revue du CEMRA* (Jan. 2017): 1-9.

---

<sup>22</sup> Upcoming publication in Italian in *La Rivista italiana d'estetica*.