

**From remediation to premediation: or how the affective immediacy of late 90's digital society evolves to an continuous affectivity anticipation of future in the 21th century**

Interview with Richard Grusin<sup>1</sup>

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Richard Grusin one of the most well known on media studies researchers and a pioneer on this area. His work concerns historical, theoretical, and aesthetic aspects of media technologies. With Jay David Bolter he is the author of *Remediation: Understanding New Meda* (MIT, 1999), which sketches out a genealogy of new media, beginning with the contradictory visual logics underlying contemporary digital media; Remediation has a remarkable connection with his fourth book, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (Palgrave, 2010), which argues that in an era of heightened securitization, socially networked US and global media work to pre-mediate collective affects of anticipation and connectivity, while also perpetuating low levels of apprehension or fear. The richness of his analysis is the connection between our daily and real life to the digital ambiances that underlies our society. Richard Grusin had recently visited many Brazilian Universities and research groups for a series of conferences and master classes focusing on the dark side of the digital humanities, and also the discussion on premediation social state-of-life.

**MATRIZes:** There are some basic concepts, which are essentials to understand remediation and premediation: mediality, mediatization and hypermediality; could you explain the relationship among them and their role on the re/pre-mediation processes? (although their Portuguese translations differences)

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**Grusin:** First, it is crucial to distinguish remediation from premediation. Although both logics of mediation are at play in the 21st century, they operate differently and with different concepts. The double logic of remediation emerged in the late 20th century, in response to the rampant proliferation of digital media technologies that often goes under the name of “mediatization.” Remediation, the refashioning or re-mediation, of one medium by another, operated in two contradictory ways, seeking on the one hand to erase all signs of mediation in providing an immediate encounter with the real and on the other hand to multiply or call attention to remediation in what Jay Bolter and I referred to as hypermediacy. Remediation differs from mediatization, which refers to the technical and social transformation of contemporary culture, politics, economy, etc., into a media culture. Remediation on the other hand refers to the logics of mediation that are enabled by and that enable mediatization.

Premediation is one of the predominant ways in which remediation manifests itself in the 21st century. Premediation does not displace remediation but deploys it in different aesthetic, sociotechnical, or political formations. The double logic of remediation still obtains, but its conflicting media logics are formally different. Unlike remediation, which seeks a kind of perceptual or affective immediacy, premediation works to produce an affectivity of anticipation by remediating future events or occurrences which may or may not ever happen. The media regime of premediation marks not the 1990s desire for a virtual reality but an engagement with the reality of the virtual, what Deleuze understands as “potentiality.” Premediation describes the temporal and affective formation of today’s socially networked society. Where remediation spoke to the more individualized networked model of immediacy and hypermediacy that prevailed in the cyberculture of the 80s and 90s, premediation speaks to the anticipatory temporality of the 21st century, the way in which we are always already moving through social networks that are premediated into the future, or how we use our networked media to mobilize ourselves and others (our friends or social networks) so that we come together and disperse in heterogeneous temporal and spatial media events—whether online via Facebook or Twitter or in geographical space through the linking of mobile technologies with GPS and other spatial technologies.

Finally you allude to the translation problems from English to Portuguese in regard to remediation. Specifically, the question is whether to translate remediation with an “i” or an “e.” For in English the noun “media” and the verb “mediate” are spelled the same; hence one remediates a painting and one remediates a problem. So in English remediation can mean both refashioning and reform. In Portuguese these two different meanings have two different spellings; they are two different words. So the pun or play on words in English does not work the same in Portuguese. Perhaps remediation should be translated with both letters, e.g., “i/e.”

**MATRIZes:** Can we understand that remediation and premediation are combined and interchangeable processes, typical of our contemporaneity?

**Grusin:** Yes, as I mention above, both remediation and premediation are at work in the contemporary media environment. Although historical differences always obtain at different moments in time, in no historical formation is the predominant media logic totalizing. There are always competing logics and practices of mediation at work. In the 21st century we are still interested in immediacy, or the now, just as in the last decades of the 20th century new digital media technologies brought into play new imaginings of the future, new interest in alternative, future-oriented temporalities. But in each case predominant affective and medial formations are connected with predominant technical and medial formations. Thus the obsessive digitization of all prior media forms in the late 20th century fostered an orientation towards renewing the past, which resulted in the nearly universal claims of the “newness” of digital media. In the 21st century the temporality of premediation is also connected to the predominant forms of technical mediation, which at the start of the second decade of the 21st century are mobile, socially networked media and the big data whose mining and capitalization they enable.

**MATRIZes:** Affectivity is core to premediation. As so, can we characterize remediation as a process related to media objects and its technologies and “how to”, and

premediation as a process related to people using media and its infos and contents to establish social relationships?

**Grusin:** Well, at first glance this might make sense. The double logic of remediation is in the first instance a formal logic, focusing both on transparent immediacy, in which the screen or picture plane is conceived as a window through which a viewer can see an unmediated world, and on hypermediacy in which the screen or picture plane calls attention to its own mediation, often by fragmenting itself as in a web browser, a computer desktop, or the televisual screen of cable news networks like CNN. But remediation has an affective dimension as well, particularly in relation to the concept of immediacy, which in addition to referring to the visual logic of transparency also refers to the embodied, affective response generated by transparent immediacy and hypermediacy, which produce something like the feeling or affectivity of the real.

Premediation, as you note, is much more explicitly concerned with affectivity, which is one of the key concepts I develop in the *Premediation* book. And while it is true that premediation concerns the way in which people use media to establish social relationships, this is not how I would choose to formulate this process. Following Bruno Latour, I see social relationships as technical as well as social, nonhuman as well as human. What is so interesting about our relationships to technical media today is that they are increasingly and intensely affective. We are totally involved in what I have called “the affective life of media,” in which we do not use media simply as tools or instruments to relate to others or to society generally, but rather in which we engage affectively with technical media themselves, through what I call “affective feedback loops” between our media and ourselves. Although this concept was sketchily alluded to in *Remediation*, *Premediation* goes much further in developing our affective relationships with our technical media.

**MATRIZes:** Most of your explanations on premediation are based on big or catastrophic global events. The idea of collectivity and common sense are evident on global events. How can we exemplify premediation on the daily routine of the cyber

society? President's Obama inauguration, or American Idol final commented via Facebook and Twitter, or here in Brazilian telenovela second screen commentaries are also proper examples?

**Grusin:** You are right that premediation is most dramatically evident in relation to catastrophic global events like 9/11 or the war in Iraq or the Fukushima Daichi disaster. But all of these events have quotidian effects and indeed in some sense premediation operates more powerfully in our everyday transactions with digital media than in these global events. In my book I define three senses of premediation: as the remediation of future media forms and technologies; as the remediation of future events; and (most powerfully) as the extension of socio-technical media networks into the future. It is this last sense that operates on the level of the media everyday in the 21st century, particularly in structuring an affectivity and temporality of anticipation.

The proliferation of premediated social networks of people and things is a powerful force in the daily life of 21st century digital media users. Social media networks exist almost exclusively for the purpose of premediating connectivity, by promoting an anticipation that a connection will be made—that somebody will comment on your Facebook status or on the photo you share, that your Tweet will be favorite or retweeted, that you will hear the distinctive ringtone of one of your favorites, or that your computer, tablet, or mobile phone will alert you that you have new mail or that you have been texted. These everyday premediations do not operate only in discreet one-to-one interactions between individuals and particular networked media but generate a fluid and ever-changing field of affective temporal interactions among premediated networks of humans and non-humans, of technical and embodied mediators. This temporal and affective anticipation produces a present that is always divided, that is oriented towards the immediate moment and the very near future, that is neither present to itself nor ever completely gone. This anticipatory temporality sometimes creates a heightened sense of alertness, while at other times (and perhaps more often) generates a muted or low-level affect of waiting or passing time. Anticipation names the temporal state appropriate to premediation, as well as the

affective quality fostered by the proliferation of mobile social networks or the creation of an internet of things in which people and their mobile devices navigate through social networks made up not only of humans and their sociotechnical media but, through technologies like GPS and RFID, of localities and objects as well.

**MATRIZes:** Could you talk us a little bit more about the relationship of premediation and mobility?

**Grusin:** In the 21st century the affective and temporal focus of our socially networked media is increasingly on futurity or anticipation, on what is to come, where we are to go, when we are to meet. The affective temporality of premediation is the temporality of anticipation, in which our mobile, socially networked media work together to produce, satisfy, and maintain individual and collective affective states of anticipation towards a potential, virtual, and thereby already real futurity. On the level of individual users, this anticipatory temporality keeps users attached to and engaged with their mobile media, and in fact puts a premium on temporal and spatial mobility. The integration of GPS-related media formats into our social media—check-ins, for example, in FB, Google Maps into our phones, geolocation in photos, or FourSquare more generally—all work together both to encourage us to declare our location and to make mobility easier and more social than ever. But this mobility for individual users also has benefits for business and the state. Businesses can use geolocation to market products and services in a targeted and geospatially pertinent manner. The state can archive and mine all of the transaction data generated by our mobile interactions to create a comprehensive record of individual behavior that can be accessed and mobilized as needed in protecting the interests of the state. More so than in remediation at the end of the 20th century, mobility is key to the functioning of premediation in the 21st century.

**MATRIZes:** In Premediation you say that “prefigurative imaginative experiences” are a good way that we use to protect ourselves over future catastrophic events. Don’t you think that this practice could lead us to a fantasy or a dream life?

**Grusin:** The concern that new media will lead people to withdraw from the vicissitudes of reality into fantasy or dream lives is one that reappears with regularity. When print novels first became readily affordable and accessible in the 19th century, many adults worried that young people would become absorbed in the fictional worlds depicted on the pages of their favorite books and turn away from the practicalities of everyday living. Films prompted similar fears, as did television and now the internet and social media more generally. What this recurrent fear responds to is that all new media refashion or remediate our relation to reality; to those unfamiliar with these new media the affective engagement by (especially) young people with these new forms of technical media devices looks like a withdrawal from reality into fantasy or dream lives. But I would argue that it represents more accurately a different engagement with the world, one which (to cite McLuhan) changes the ratio not only of our senses but of our embodied interactions with both humans and nonhumans, with the natural and the built environment. In fact because of the increased mobility of our media devices and their complex networking with geophysical space and objects in the world, our new media devices (and the premediation they foster) could be said to be less involved in fantasy or dreams than older media like novels or film or television.

**MATRIZes:** Journalism is one of the communication areas that are directly affected by all these cyber-social changes. As so, is there any space for a mass-media production? If Journalism deals with facts and if we are trying to premeditate facts to accept them easier, how come this to journalism? Recent cases as NSA leak or the Wikileaks practices are positioned as premediation acts?

**Grusin:** Journalism, especially news, is one of the key institutions of communication that are impacted by media change and which can make evident the shifting media logics and temporalities that have occurred over the past centuries. While it is obvious that news media today focus more on what will come or what might happen than on what is happening or has already occurred, news has always involved a mixture of past

and future events as well as of the near and the far. In its earliest manifestation, news was transmitted orally by someone like the praefatos of ancient Roman times or the town criers of medieval England. News would be both of significant actions that had happened and of coming events, but the predominant focus was on local occurrences. With the advent of print news, the focus on reporting on the past continued, even while newspapers worked in concert with government agencies in announcing upcoming deadlines and official events. The introduction of photography to newspapers, even while adding indexicality and facticity, increased the focus on the past, as photographs (like cinema later on) could only represent events that had already happened. The major temporal breakthrough came with the advent of television news, initially in the return to the oral tradition with live newscasters but then, through the introduction of globally networked live video coverage by CNN and later others, with the shift to temporal immediacy and instantaneity, real-time news, as the highest goal of news coverage. At the end of the 20th century, and culminating with the live global news broadcasts of the tragic events of 9/11, the gold standard of news coverage was the transparent immediacy of liveness, although always coupled with the hypermediacy that makes up the other half of remediation's double logic.

After 9/11, as I argue in *Premediation*, the predominant logic and temporality of news media shifted from the remediation of the present to the premediation of the future. Prompted initially by the desire to avoid the traumatic journalistic immediacy experienced on 9/11, news media began to shift their focus from remediating what had already happened or what was happening live towards premediating what might happen or be about to happen. Journalism began to take on as its key task the premediation of potential future catastrophes—not just the next terrorist attack, but future threats like climate change, global pandemics, financial crises, or infrastructural collapse. At the same time, however, social media networks as we now know them were beginning to evolve; there was no Facebook or Twitter or Instagram on 9/11. The emergence of these networks, with their anticipatory media temporalities, added another dimension to journalism, as evidenced most dramatically with the role of social media in the “Arab Spring” of 2011. Not only did the print, televisual, and networked news media find



themselves covering social media as the story, but they began to integrate social media into their own premediation of the future, further intensifying the temporal shift from reporting on the past to reporting on the present to reporting on the future. In tracing this shift of journalistic temporality I want to make it clear that it is not a matter of one media temporality being replaced by another but rather of new modes of media temporality being added on to existing ones, shifting the temporal ratio of news coverage but not doing away with reporting on what has already happened or on what is happening now.

**MATRIZes:** Your methodological proposals explained on the introduction of Premediation emphasize the interconnected relationship of different areas and knowledge needed for Internet studies and researches. How do you evaluate the traditional academic rituals over these issues?

**Grusin:** Academic research and disciplines are in the midst of fundamental transformations, some of which were initiated internally and some of which come from external challenges posed by the increasing neoliberalization of education.

Internally, at least since the last third of the 20th century, academics have become convinced that the intellectual and practical problems of postmodern, postindustrial capitalism cannot be addressed only within traditional disciplinary frameworks that go back to the 19th century and earlier. In the humanities and social sciences programs like area studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, media studies, environmental studies, and the like emerged as a way to bring together different research traditions to address new kinds of problems. Perhaps the most transformative of these new interdisciplinary areas was science and technology studies (STS), particularly the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, which insisted on refusing categorical distinctions between human and nonhuman actors and on following the actants wherever they went throughout the heterogeneous sociotechnical networks that began to proliferate in the late 20th century. When applied to the study of digital media

technologies this methodology demands that researchers ignore or actively transgress traditional disciplinary boundaries in their pursuit of knowledge.

Externally this same sociotechnical transformation has led to what has come to be understood as the neoliberal university in which traditional disciplinary formations are actively dispensed with or ignored in the pursuit of economic goals. This new technocratic interdisciplinary deploys a rhetoric of newness, radical reform, and the avant garde to dispense with any traditional academic institutions and practices that are not economically efficient, that do not lead to an immediate, bottom-line profit. Paradoxically the same rhetoric used in the late 20th century to argue that new digital media would enable liberation, freedom, and radically new forms of thought is used in the 21st century to reduce education to training students for jobs at the lowest possible cost to society. In Brazil I did not see this happening as intensively as in the US or the UK, where Silicon Valley entrepreneurs are promoting a revolution in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), but it will not be long before you will see something similar happening here.

The solution to this problem is not to return to a time before interdisciplinarity or before the introduction of digital technology into teaching and research in the university. Rather the solution is to find ways to use these new technologies in the service of some of the crucial values of research in the university, particularly the freedom to pursue research questions wherever they might lead and no matter what their immediate (or even long-term) financial payoff might be.

**MATRIZes:** Your production shows a very interesting dialogue with European authors as Deleuze, Latour, Baudrillard, Virillio, Benjamin, etc. something special?

**Grusin:** You are right to have noticed a marked change in my post-*Remediation* engagement with European (and non-European) philosophers and critical theorists. This is due to two things. First, the fact that *Remediation* was co-authored meant that each of us brought our own strengths (and weaknesses) to the project. What Bolter brought to *Remediation* was a sophisticated understanding of new media technology and

online culture, as well as a track record in the field of computers and humanities, evidenced in his two prior books, *Turing's Man* and *Writing Space*. He also brought a clarity of thought and prose, which is evident throughout our work together. I brought to the collaboration a much more extensive knowledge of and engagement with critical theory and philosophy as well as a background in the visual arts from the 18th-20th centuries. In *Remediation* we were fortunate that the whole proved to be greater than the sum of its parts. And what made that come about was that each of us had to sacrifice some of our own interests and concerns in the service of the project as a whole.

This has not been the case in our work after *Remediation*. Thus my work in new media has become increasingly theoretical and philosophical, while Bolter's work has focused more on design and practice. But it is also the case that my reading as well has become more theoretically and philosophically inclined. Bolter had been working in humanities computing before he arrived at Georgia Tech in the early 1990s; I only began to work in new media after I had been at Georgia Tech for five years. Having moved to Wayne State University in 2001, my engagement with digital media design and practice became less a part of my scholarly research and my engagement with theory and philosophy became again more central to my research.

Currently I am working on the concept of mediation itself, trying to challenge the way in which mediation has been defined and deployed conventionally as a secondary (or tertiary) concept or category, as something that enters the scene belatedly, after the world has already been divided up into objects and subjects, humans and nonhumans, representation and reality. In such more or less traditional accounts mediation has been seen to come between, in the middle of, already pre-formed, pre-existent subjects or objects, actants or entities. Especially in post-Hegelian, Marxian thought, mediation has been seen as epistemological or ideological, as something that is opposed to immediacy, as what might be called an agent of correlation which filters, limits, constrains, or distorts an immediate perception or knowledge of or engagement with the world, the real, other people, power, and so forth. Moving forward I will continue to engage with the Western theoretical and philosophical tradition in order to argue for the immediacy of mediation, as that which makes possible the "direct and

*immediate*” relation with the world which Brian Massumi insists upon as a fundamental component of human and nonhuman experience.