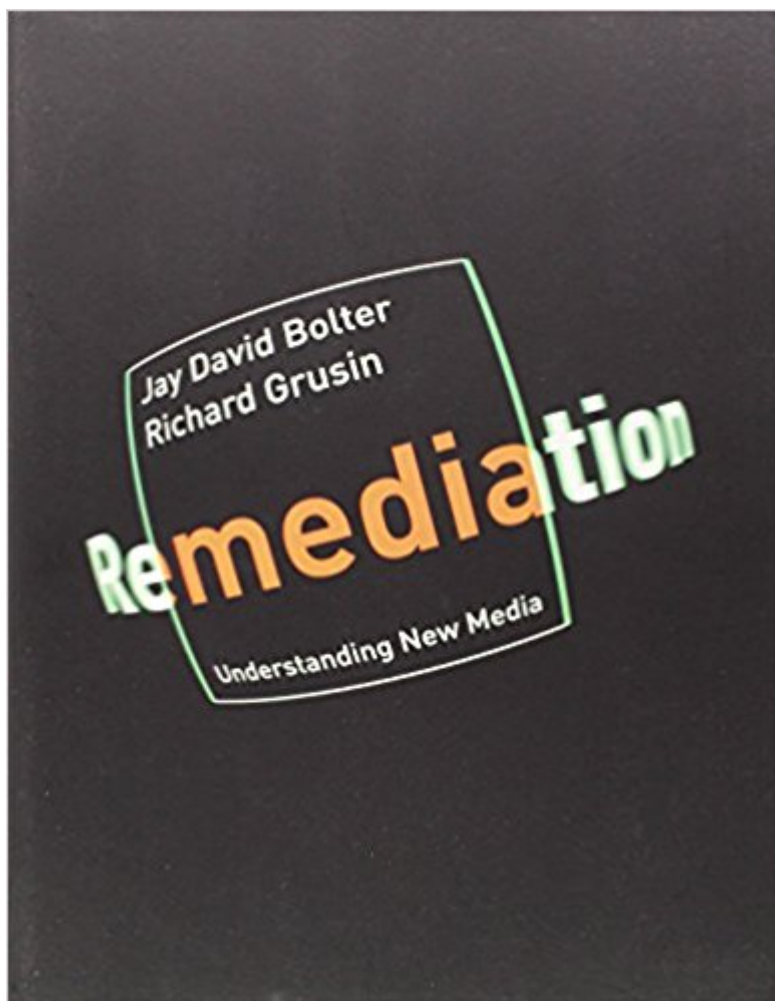


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Remediation: Understanding New Media



Synopsis

Media critics remain captivated by the modernist myth of the new: they assume that digital technologies such as the World Wide Web, virtual reality, and computer graphics must divorce themselves from earlier media for a new set of aesthetic and cultural principles. In this richly illustrated study, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin offer a theory of mediation for our digital age that challenges this assumption. They argue that new visual media achieve their cultural significance precisely by paying homage to, rivaling, and refashioning such earlier media as perspective painting, photography, film, and television. They call this process of refashioning "remediation," and they note that earlier media have also refashioned one another: photography remediated painting, film remediated stage production and photography, and television remediated film, vaudeville, and radio.

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Customer Reviews

The authors do a splendid job of showing precisely how technologies like computer games, digital photography, film television, the Web, and virtual reality all turn on the mutually constructive strategies of generating immediacy and making users hyperaware of the media themselves...The authors lay out a provocative theory of contemporary selfhood, one that draws on and modifies current notions of the 'virtual' and 'networked' human subject. Clearly written and not overly technical, this book will interest general readers, students, and scholars engaged with current trends

in technology. (Choice)

Jay David Bolter is Wesley Professor of New Media and Director, Center for New Media Research and Education in the School of Literature, Communication, and Culture at Georgia Tech University. Richard Grusin is Professor and Chair of English at Wayne State University in Detroit.

In *Remediation*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin analyze new technologies and their implications for American society. Although the book emphasizes the ways in which new media can be conceived in terms of recent literary and cultural theory, the theoretical discussions do not pervade the work. Therefore, the book can still be quite useful to those who don't wish to delve too deeply into theory. In fact, Bolter and Grusin acknowledge the different emphases of the book's chapters in their introduction and offer readers a guide to help them make the most of their experience with the book, with respect to the readers' goals. The three sections of the book discuss the authors' theory of remediation, the place of new media in American society, and the place of the Self within the context of new media. In the first section of the book, Bolter and Grusin offer the notion of "remediation" as a way of thinking about new media. What they term "remediation" is "the formal logic by which new media technologies refashion prior media forms" (273). Bolter and Grusin attempt to contextualize their theories about new media within the framework of modern preoccupations with what they term "immediacy" and "hypermediacy." The desire for immediacy is a desire for a transparency in media that obliterates or lessens the perception of the media themselves in the viewer's mind. The reality of hypermediacy is the preoccupation with media itself and a hyper-awareness of the media through which our information comes. Bolter and Grusin place the logic of remediation within the context of our historical preoccupation with these trends. The new media discussed are primarily the visual: computer games, digital photography, photorealistic graphics, digital art, film, Virtual Reality, mediated spaces, television, and the World Wide Web. Discussing each of these media in great detail, the authors devote the second section of the book to demonstrating the way that the idea of remediation plays itself out in each. Bolter and Grusin examine how each new medium refashions older media and how they are often refashioned themselves. For example, they show that animated computer graphics draw upon the tradition of film and that film is now starting to draw upon the new offerings of computer graphics. They cite as their evidence a film such as *Toy Story*. Another example they point out is the remediation that occurs between television and the Internet. The Internet uses patterns established by television in order to determine how to appeal to viewers, and television uses new strategies of windowing

images with the scrolling tickertapes and texts it has borrowed from Internet styles. Within the remediations that both new and old media undergo, Bolter and Grusin demonstrate how the twin desires for immediacy and hypermediacy are at work. The final section on the Self attempts to discuss how the presence of the new media in our society affects individuals' perceptions of their own identities. By allowing people to engage in different discourse communities with different levels of immediacy and hypermediacy, the new media allow for a remediation of the notion of self and community. Bolter and Grusin specifically point to the immediacy of Virtual Reality as a starting point for empathy with other people and beings. If a person can use Virtual Reality to play the role of a gorilla, that person gains a new concept of his or her identity with respect to his or her experience as set apart from that of a gorilla. Bolter and Grusin also examine in detail whether the new media have implications for the mind-body split that is central to the theory of Cartesian dualism. Some argue that technologies such as Virtual Reality emphasize the split by creating a disembodied environment for the mind to inhabit. Bolter and Grusin, however, ultimately claim that such technologies cannot allow people to escape the perception of their own bodies. In fact, by allowing for new ways to conceive of the body and the mind, new media allow for a remediation of the body that is parallel to the remediation of the Self. Overall this book offers interesting theories about the way technology functions in our society. It is, therefore, a good starting point for anyone who wants to consider the implications of using this technology and thereby becoming complicit in the culture's striving for immediacy and hypermediacy in our interactions with technology. Those implications would continue further for us as we remediate our old styles of teaching or otherwise interacting with technology to suit the newer forms that will inevitably appear. Of course, to be concerned about how your use of technology fits into this framework, you must first be convinced by Bolter's and Grusin's arguments that remediation is a force at work in our society. Personally, I find their arguments convincing in their simplicity of structure and in their wealth of evidence. Although the discussions of Lacanian, Freudian, feminist, Marxist, and other theoretical approaches can be at times heavy-handed, underneath there is an insightful commentary on the way technology functions in our society.

This book was most enlightening, it explained in a very structured form, what it is we were doing when creating content for new medias. As Moliere said, "doing prose without knowing it", I have used my newly acquired epistemology of remediation extensively to better explain to our young designers what it is they were doing when "re-mediating" clients' content for a new media application, be it Web, Multimedia apps or art-tech. The authors are themselves

professors/researchers and use a very didactical stream of thoughts which has been exceedingly useful to me, to better convey concepts for which I had a feeling, but nowhere near the "theory of remediation" that the authors convey. As an art/tech buff, who happens to earn a living with technical content remediation and hard core applications programming, the book reconciled me with a new perspective on the similarities between these activities. Grusin and Bolter are challenging us to excellence in remediation whatever the final purpose. The most important concept that the authors brought to me, was that more and better remediation has often nothing to do with more technology, and much more to do with better and more effective (or intelligent) ways to communicate. In my view this book is a must reading, and a reference book for anyone producing content with a certain degree of awareness. If you believe that the new media demand a "different" attitude, this is a textbook for you.

This book is a hard read.

Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation* is a book typical of its genre and time, except worse, implicitly reassuring digital humanists that nothing really has changed while also suggesting that everything has. In order to do so, Walter Benjamin's seminal "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is invoked only to be dismissed for encouraging a utopian desire for unmediated reality and/or claims of either a new form of democracy in the digital age or the alleged technological determinism of Marxism. How conservative are these ideas? Well, I cannot speak for Grusin, but shortly after the publication of this book Bolter held a six-figure endowed chair at Georgia Tech in which he was responsible for overseeing the Brittain Fellows, who, despite their illustrious title, were underpaid full-time teachers. When I asked as their elected representative for better working conditions, Bolter attempted (unsuccessfully) to have me fired for spurious, unrelated reasons.

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