The Effects of Remediation in the Real World

In their seminal work, "Remediation: Understanding New Media," Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin address Marshall McLuhan's claim that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium," adapting the claim into the age of digital media with their theory of "immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation" (45, 20). The theory of remediation focuses on the idea that new mediums evolve from aspects inspired by older mediums, and has sparked discussion regarding "various new media, […] phenomena [created by remediation, and…] the risks and opportunities associated with new media," as observed by Francis L. F. Lee in his paper "Contents and Effects of Newspaper Coverage of Talk Radio in Hong Kong: A Study of Remediation Through Content Adaptation" (224-225). However, Lee notes that "there has not been research examining the presence of "remediation effects" empirically," which is what this paper aims to do, in conjunction with the ideas brought up by Laura M. F. Bertens in her paper "Playing and Dying Between the Real and the Hyperreal" (242). Lee and Bertens link Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation to new theories of content adaptation and the hyperreal. This paper aims at using these theories to examine how remediation has changed the way the world is viewed and the implications of these changes, ultimately taking a cautiously optimistic standpoint.

Bolter and Grusin breaks down their concept of remediation into two main types: immediacy, a medium "whose purpose is to disappear," and hypermediacy, a medium that draws attention to itself (21). In the digital age, Bolter and Grusin observe that there is a "desire for immediacy," which is especially evident in the film and video game industry (23). There is a huge focus on photorealistic CGI in summer blockbusters, where bad CGI is greatly frowned

upon and CGI created spectacles are praised, as well as big investments being put into triple A video game titles featuring near realistic characters and environments. However, our desire for realism makes us focus on the aspects that make the content seem realistic; James Cameron's 2009 film, Avatar, was praised for it's realistic CGI effects, and thus, many viewers focused on the film's use of CGI when watching the movie. In this case, it can be argued that our "desire for immediacy" is actually a misinformed desire for hypermediacy (23). A true "desire for immediacy" theoretically can only be fulfilled to the very well informed (or the bonus feature-watching audience), because in order for immediacy to exist, it cannot be noticed (23). To continue with the example of CGI, true immediacy can be found in many works created by director David Fincher, such as Fight Club, Zodiac, and The Social Network. Fincher's movies incorporate heavy use of CGI, with nearly every scene in Zodiac digitally altered to match the time period and the Winklevoss twins in The Social Network not being acted by actual twins. However, Fincher never calls attention to his CGI effects, instead only using them to service his story. Thus, it can be said that immediacy can be a trait to be desired, but is unbeknownst to the desirer when achieved. While this may make for a great movie watching experience, I believe that used in the wrong ways, immediacy can be dangerous. In fact, as Bertens reports, it has cost lives. However, before we can discuss Berten's theory of the hyperreal, an understanding of Lee's content adaptation theory is crucial.

In his study, Lee analyses the effect newspapers have on the content of phone-in talk radio in Hong Kong. Talk radio gives a voice to the "common people" who critique their government in an attempt to enact change, with the medium becoming especially popular after Hong Kong, under British rule for 156 years, returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 (223).

Hong Kong's mainstream media, specifically newspapers, regularly cover phone-in talk radio content, greatly increasing the "influence and significance of the [talk radio] medium" (223). However, Lee argues that "the power of talk radio depends on the mainstream media's willingness to respond to it," citing Bolter and Grusin as he label this phenomenon as selective "remediation through content adaptation" (223). Lee defines content adaptation as "the process through which a media platform appropriates the materials and discourses from another media platform, incorporating them into its own content," noting that content adaptation is important "because it can amplify and potentially redefine the significance of a medium and/or its message" (225). At first glance, this is can be seen as a good thing. It allows "wider circulation and a longer life span" of the public's voice, while simultaneously benefiting the mainstream media by saving them interview work, allowing them to avoid political pressures by not having to take a political stance, and preventing potential damage to their professionalism (225). However, the needs of mainstream media always come first, meaning that more likely than not, they'll choose to cover less risky content. Lee suggests that "in reality, newspapers' appropriation of talk radio contents may actually affect the organization and contents of radio talk shows," meaning that if the mainstream media is reluctant to cover certain topics, a radio talk show may be discouraged from talking about those topics in the future, ultimately silencing speech (242). In reality, a case like this is far and few, but Lee's theory of content adaption gives us a huge insight into the bigger idea of the hyperreal that Bertens tackles.

In "Playing and Dying Between the Real and the Hyperreal," Bertens examines *The Pixelated Revolution*, a 5 minute video that focuses on "amateur documentation of the[…] Syrian civil war" and "the use of mobile phones by civilians, who 'shoot' the enemies and the events of

this war, and who themselves are shot and wounded or killed in the process" (91). Bertens

attempts to answer the director's question: "why did he or she continue filming in the face of

imminent and life-threatening danger?" (91) Bertens observes that "our perception of reality has

become remediated through our experiences with media," noting that in today's society, "digital

mass media have shaped our communication and societies to such an extent that at times they

seem to take precedence over the mediated content" (92, 91). Thus, Bertens introduces the

concept of the hyperreal, where "reality is no longer that which can be reproduced, but the

reproduction itself," blurring the lines between reality and content that aim to be realistic (95).

For example, *The Pixelated Revolution* features a video of a victim looking around a war scene,

pointing the camera up, down, right, and left before slowly framing a sniper. The victim and the

sniper make eye contact, and the victim is shot. The director of *The Pixelated Revolution* notes

that the movement of the camera mimics the movements of an eye, and Bertens expands on this

idea by examining uses of immediacy and hypermediacy in media, commenting that "the view of

one's outstretched hand holding up a device towards an enemy is reminiscent of the First-Person

Shooter image and the shaky hand-held camera feeling of the recording resembles many well-

known films and videos" (93). In the victim's case, the camera act's as a remediation of his eyes,

and he feels a sensation of safety behind a screen, a feeling we all subconsciously feel when

watching movies or playing video games. Of course, the victim must be aware of their actual

situation and the danger they're in, "but in the split-second required to correctly assess the

situation and take cover, these unconscious processes of distancing and false perception will

slow the victim's reflexes and impair his/her judgement just slight too long… preceiv[ing] the

scene as hyperreal" (96). Ultimately, media has implanted ideas of a false reality into our lizard

brain, and while it lead the victim of the video "to make assumptions and decisions in the wrong reality," costing him his life, Bertens suggests that it leads the everyday person to live their lives in hyperreal mediums, such as social media where users choose to record experiences instead of experiencing them.

Immediacy, hypermediacy, content adaptation, and the hyperreal is allowing new mediums and their content to become more realistic and immersive then ever before. However, the subconscious effects are certainly something to be aware of. Facebook has admitted to using selective content adaptation during the 2016 presidential election. It was in their interests to keep users on their site with clicks, so showing them an echo chamber of political remediations in the form of articles and videos that the user would agree with was beneficial for Facebook. However, the hyperreal effect is that the user is exposed to one candidate's views more than the other, and thus, the user is more likely to be swayed or have a bias to one party, resulting in current government investigations into possible tampering of the election vote. Now imagine corporations using this idea to sell their products. Is this type of remediation ok? Do the benefits outweigh the effects? How do different generations react to this type of remediation? In the age of digital innovation, this has become a pressing issue that nobody really has answers to. Remediation is not an evil, corrupting entity, nor are new mediums. They are beneficial to our everyday lives and are certainly improving our quality of life. However, it doesn't help to be cautious about the media you consume, because in the most extreme case, it can lead to a split-second decision between life and death.

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