

Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11

Also by Richard Grusin

CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE CREATION OF
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

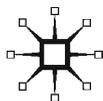
REMIEDIATION: UNDERSTANDING NEW MEDIA (co-authored)

TRANSCENDENTALIST HERMENEUTICS: INSTITUTIONAL
AUTHORITY AND THE HIGHER CRITICISM OF THE BIBLE

Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11

Richard Grusin

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*For Sarah and Sam,
whose lives have inevitably begun to unfold
in the shadow of 9/11*

*And for my father,
whose life as an ad-man first taught me
the power of premediation*

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Where were you on 9/11? Individuals around the networked world have asked and answered this question millions of times in the past decade. Like the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, or John Lennon, the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 marked something like a sacred moment in time among the individual and collective memories of the secular American public.

Where were you on 9/11? In addition to the hypermediated shock that burned this moment into the memory banks of the media public, the attacks of 9/11 were profoundly significant because they introduced a new demarcation in the Christian world's calendar. The world changed on 9/11. Coming so close upon the millennial year of 2000, 11 September 2001 in some sense began time anew. After the time before Christ and the Christian era, we were presented with a new era, the post-9/11 era of Islamic terrorism.

Where was I on 9/11? When American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 AM on 11 September 2001, I was in Beverly Hills, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, where I had moved with my family just two months earlier to take the position as chair of the English Department at Wayne State University. On my way out of the house I was stopped by my wife Ann, who was intently watching the *Today Show* on the family room TV. Together we watched as the second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, crashed into the second tower live on global cable television. Needless to say, I never made it to campus that day.

Because my life in Detroit has coincided almost completely with my life after 9/11, the sense that 9/11 marks a rupture or radical break in time has always been accentuated for me. Although I lived in Michigan for nearly two months prior to 9/11, I cannot clearly remember our life in Detroit prior to 9/11 except as an affect of shock or dismay. Indeed, our move to Detroit, which had been suffering and continues to suffer its own economic catastrophe as the result of national and global geopolitical forces, seemed even before 9/11 a move to something like a post-apocalyptic landscape. Escaping 15 years of uncontrolled growth in the Atlanta metropolitan area, accelerated by the region-wide development brought on by the city's hosting of the 1996 Olympics, my

family and I were dismayed by the deterioration and devastation in the city of Detroit, which appeared to have been moving in precisely the opposite direction of Atlanta. In less than two months before the attacks of 9/11, a post-9/11 affect had, to a much lesser extent, begun to be pre-mediated for us as a result of my move to Wayne State.

This book is a product of my life at Wayne State University in another way as well. While *Premediation* follows up on the arguments I set forth in *Remediation* (which was written during my tenure at Georgia Tech), particularly insofar as *Premediation* traces out the ways in which remediation manifested itself after 9/11, it differs from my earlier work on new media in part by its deployment of two conceptual frameworks largely absent from *Remediation*. The first is affectivity, particularly as it is developed in the work of Silvan Tomkins, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Brian Massumi. The second is mediality, especially insofar as it engages both with the Benjamin-Kracauer wing of the Frankfurt School and the Deleuzian reading of Foucauldian governmentality. Both of these conceptual frameworks were developed as a result of my move to Wayne State.

Although in some sense I have been interested in questions of affect since my undergraduate days, I was convinced of the importance of taking affect into account in my current project through the work, intellectual camaraderie, and friendship of three of the first colleagues I hired as chair of the English Department at Wayne State – Dana Seitler, Jonathan Flatley, and Steve Shaviro – each of whom in different ways addresses affectivity in their writing and teaching. I owe a strong debt of gratitude to each of them for steering me towards the rich theoretical and conceptual framework that goes under the rubric of affect theory.

These same three friends and colleagues were also instrumental in my engagement with Benjamin, Kracauer, and Deleuze, as were the more broadly political and theoretical commitments of many of my current and former colleagues at Wayne State. Among faculty colleagues I would single out Robert Aguirre, Dora Apel, Ellen Barton, Bob Burgoyne, Sarika Chandra, Lara Cohen, Alex Day, Robert Diaz, Jacalyn Harden, reneé hoogland, Ken Jackson, Donna Landry, Kathryne Lindberg, Gerald Maclean, Richard Marback, Elena Past, Jeff Pruchnic, Ross Pudaloff, Cannon Schmitt, Charles Stivale, Kirsten Thompson, Carole Vernalis, and Lisa Ze Winters. I have profited also from interactions with students from several Wayne State graduate seminars, who challenged me to more clearly define and redefine my concepts. Notable among these students were Melissa Ames, Marie Buck, Andrew Engel, Brad Flis, Amy Metcalf, Carole Piechota, Justin Prystash, Justin

Remeselnik, Michael Schmidt, and Clay Walker. Selmin Kara has been my most valuable student interlocutor as I have been developing the manuscript, in many ways as much colleague as student. Finally, expressions of gratitude to members of the English Department at Wayne State would not be complete without special mention of Kathy Zamora, who makes everything work.

The book has also benefited tremendously from numerous opportunities to share my work with colleagues in Europe and in North America. I first presented the concept of premediation in the Netherlands in March 2003, on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq, in lectures and doctoral seminars at the Universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam. The affirmative response to the concept persuaded me that I had indeed identified something distinctive about the way in which the logic of remediation was manifesting itself after 9/11. Throughout the period in which I worked on the book I returned to the Netherlands on several occasions, where I have continued to develop productive working relationships and had opportunities to test out early versions of other arguments for engaged and challenging audiences. Among my Dutch colleagues, I would single out especially Noortje Marres, Joost Raessens, Richard Rogers, and José van Dijck for their friendship and intellectual camaraderie. I want also to acknowledge the collegiality of Ansjé Van Beusekom, Keine Brillenburg-Wurth, Thomas Elsaesser, Isabella van Elferen, Frank Kessler, Sabine Niederer, Ann Rigney, and Jan Simons.

My early work on premediation also found a welcoming audience in Italy, thanks in large part to the efforts of Matteo Bittanti, who graciously hosted me in Milan when I lectured on premediation in October 2003. Matteo not only translated the original article on “Premediation” but he also arranged to have it published as a special insert in the Italian film magazine *Duellanti*. I am grateful as well to Giorgio Mariani and Stefano Rosso, who invited me to present an early version of the Abu Ghraib chapter as the keynote lecture at a symposium at Bergamo University in December 2005 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II, and who published the essay (translated into Italian by Giorgio Mariani), along with more than a half-dozen critical responses, in *Acoma*, the leading Italian journal for American Studies.

I have had several other opportunities to share my work among European academics. In December 2005 I presented the Abu Ghraib lecture in Slovenia, at the University of Ljubljana. I am particularly grateful to Bojana Kunst for organizing the visit and hosting me in Ljubljana, as well as for stimulating conversations around the ideas of affectivity

and mediality. And in early 2007 I had opportunities to present the key arguments for the book at seminars at the University of Bergen and the IT University in Copenhagen, where I was graciously hosted by Kjetil Jakobsen and Espen Aarseth, respectively.

I have also on several occasions presented early versions of the premediation argument in North America – at the Center for Writing Studies at University of Illinois; the Great Plains Alliance for Computers and Writing in Fargo, North Dakota; the Charlotte Visualization Center at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte; Humanitech at the University of California-Irvine; and the Infospace Research Lab at Ryerson University in Toronto. For support and intellectual companionship at these venues, I am grateful especially to Gale Hawisher, Robert Markley, Kevin Brooks, Alan Rauch, William Ribarsky, Barbara Cohen, Jerry Christensen, Jim Steintrager, and Greg Elmer.

Over the past seven years I have had the pleasure of working through parts of the book's arguments with many other people as well, including Corey Creekmur, Jodi Dean, Zachary Devereaux, Lauren Ellsworth, Gonzala Frasca, Anne Friedberg, Michael Gillespie, Marieke de Goede, Tom Gunning, Andrew Hoskins, Shira Kapplin, Eric Ketelaar, Brian Massumi, Sonja Neef, Dominic Pettman, Jason Sperb, and others whom I am undoubtedly forgetting. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers for Palgrave Macmillan, whose responses to the manuscript helped make its arguments stronger, and to the editorial staff at the press, including Christabel Scaife, who advocated for the book from the beginning, Penny Simmons, who provided a light but sure editorial hand to the manuscript, and Renee Takken.

Last but not of course least, I would like to acknowledge my family – Ann, Sarah, and Sam Grusin – for providing me with sympathetic ears, supportive eyes, and the network of domesticity necessary to complete the book's research and writing over the course of the past seven years. Without their love this book could never have been written.