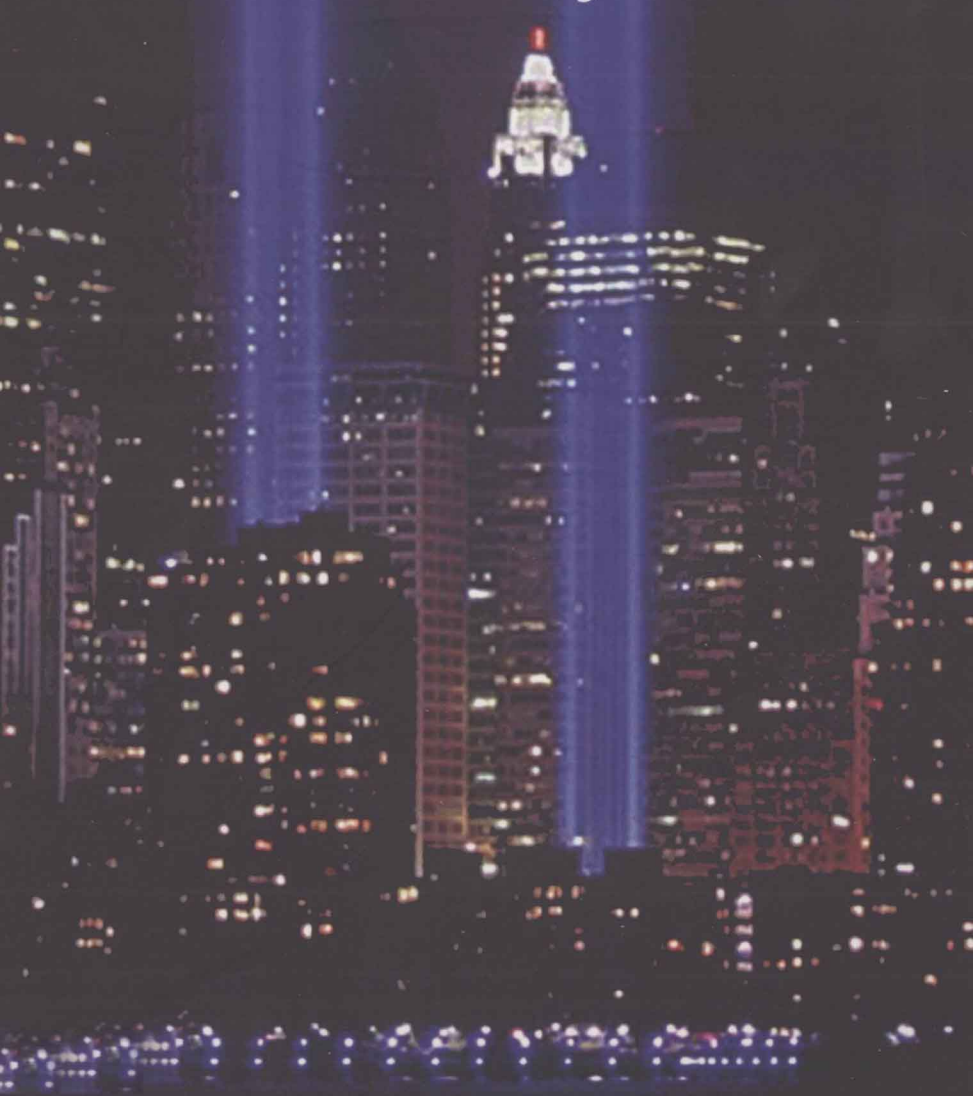
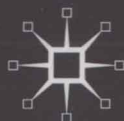


PREMEDIATION

affect and mediality after 9/11



RICHARD GRUSIN

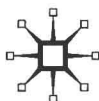


Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11

Richard Grusin



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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, Kathryn 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 Ansje 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 Infoscope 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.

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Introduction

Remediation after 9/11

This book takes up the logics and practices of mediation circulating through the United States in the period after 11 September 2001. The book traces the emergence, or more accurately the intensification, of a logic of “premediation” in post-9/11 America. Although premediation predates the event of 9/11, it became plainly evident in the run-up to the Iraq War in 2002 and 2003. Moreover, premediation has continued to proliferate throughout innumerable media practices and formations in the years following the commencement of the war in Iraq in March 2003 – through the abuses of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and indefinite detention, the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the 2008 US presidential election, the global financial crisis commencing in the fall of 2008, and the contested Iranian election in June 2009.

Premediation can be seen as a counterpart to the concept of remediation that Jay Bolter and I developed to make sense of the logics and practices of mediation circulating at the end of the previous millennium. In *Remediation* we outlined the simultaneous operation of two contradictory media logics, which aimed respectively for immediacy and hypermediacy, roughly understood at the end of the 1990s as transparency and multiplicity. This double logic of remediation, we argued, took a particular form in the last decade of the twentieth century, in which media sought simultaneously to erase themselves and to proliferate multiple forms and practices of mediation. Remediation operated at the end of the twentieth century within a logical opposition between reality and mediation. Different technologies of mediation were classified in relation to how close they came to presenting an unmediated reality. Beginning in late 2002, I have been tracing the emergence of

a media logic or formation that I call “premediation,” which intensified after 9/11 as a form of medial pre-emption. Premediation works to prevent citizens of the global mediasphere from experiencing again the kind of systemic or traumatic shock produced by the events of 9/11 by perpetuating an almost constant, low level of fear or anxiety about another terrorist attack. 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.

In the 1990s the ultimate in immediacy was conceived of along the lines of virtual realities free from the cumbersome gloves and headpieces of early VR technology. Such technology came as close to representing reality free from the distortions of mediation as technological enthusiasts could conceive. Artists, academics, and activists envisioned and pursued projects that explored and advanced military, commercial, and cultural applications and the implications of these new media technologies. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, immediacy is now epitomized in the form of IT models like cloud computing or projects like Open ID and the Open Web, which aim to make seamless one’s multiple interactions with commercial and social networking, with health and medical records, juridical and educational records, shopping and entertainment preferences. Immediacy after 9/11 materializes itself as an unconstrained connectivity so that one can access with no restrictions one’s socially networked mediated life at any time or anywhere through any of one’s media devices.

Hypermediacy in the 1990s was marked by the proliferation of mediation or by fragmentation and multiplicity – the graphic design of *Wired Magazine*, the windowed desktop or TV screen, or the audiovisual style of MTV videos and TV commercials. In the IT boom of the 1990s, the proliferation of new media forms and technologies and an increasingly hypermediated screen space was enthusiastically celebrated along with IPOs, venture capitalist funds, and Silicon Valley start-ups. After 9/11 the logic of hypermediacy is marked by the multiplication of mediation among sociotechnical, commercial, and political networks – less the hypermediacy of formal features or technologies of mediation than the hypermediacy of network connectivities, of affective participation in and distribution of one’s networked identity across multiple sociotechnical and medial networks. Hypermediacy after 9/11 operates within a paradigm of securitization, which entails the registration of every commercial, communicational, or juridical transaction by a networked media security infrastructure, the complexity and scope of

which proliferates in direct relation to the seamlessness of circulation through an increasingly open web.

In other words, remediation no longer operates within the binary logic of reality versus mediation, concerning itself instead with mobility, connectivity, and flow. The real is no longer that which is free from mediation, but that which is thoroughly enmeshed with networks of social, technical, aesthetic, political, cultural, or economic mediation. The real is defined not in terms of representational accuracy, but in terms of liquidity or mobility. In this sense the credit crisis of 2008 was a crisis precisely of the real – as the problem of capital that didn't move, of credit that didn't flow, was seen as both the cause and the consequence of the financial crisis. In the hypermediated post-capitalism of the twenty-first century, wealth is not representation but mobility.

During the 2008 US presidential campaign this new idea of immediacy appeared most explicitly (and most simply) in the rhetoric of Sarah Palin, who employed metaphors of flow, openness, and circulation to talk both about the energy she provided for the teetering McCain campaign and about the petroleum-based energy the McCain-Palin ticket would provide for America. Palin repeatedly insisted that she and John McCain would keep the energy flowing through their "Drill, Baby, Drill" platform and their endorsement of the radical expansion of nuclear power. In the aftermath of several disastrous television interviews, she also began to employ a right-wing version of the anti-establishment rhetoric of participatory media. In her campaign stump speeches she would insist that her communication with Americans should be "unfiltered by mainstream media" like ABC, Fox, or CBS, ironically echoing the claims of many net activists that the powers of social networking, smart mobs, and so forth constitute an informal media network that bypasses the mainstream media (MSM).

This shared aim of escaping the filters of the MSM points out that at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the double logic of remediation marks immediacy both in terms of uninterrupted flow and in opposition to mainstream media. And hypermediacy takes the form not of a fragmented visual screen space but of the proliferation of diverse and interconnected media formats of social networking. That is, after 9/11 the real is increasingly defined in terms of the desirability, indeed the necessity, of being on Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and the mobile web. Leaving multiple traces of yourself on socially networked media sites is seen as a necessary goal – and interacting with such sites is made pleasurable or desirable in part because they work to produce and maintain positive affective relations with their users, to set up affective

feedback loops that make one want to proliferate one's media transactions. Indeed, something as seemingly innocuous as the fact that Facebook offers its users the option to "like" or "unlike" an item but not to "dislike" it epitomizes its bias towards fostering positive individual and collective affect.

Where remediation characterized what was "new" about new media at the end of the twentieth century as its insistent re-mediation of prior media forms and practices, premediation characterizes the mediality of the first decade of the twenty-first century as focused on the cultural desire to make sure that the future has already been pre-mediated before it turns into the present (or the past) – in large part to try to prevent the media, and hence the American public, from being caught unawares as it was on the morning of 11 September 2001. As I argue in greater detail in the following chapters, however, premediation is not to be confused with prediction. Premediation is not about getting the future right, but about proliferating multiple remediations of the future both to maintain a low level of fear in the present and to prevent a recurrence of the kind of tremendous media shock that the United States and much of the networked world experienced on 9/11.

This book begins with a chapter that takes up the ways in which 9/11 remains actively engaged in the American present, looking at just a few of the many different ways in which 9/11 has been remediated in the past decade. The next chapter maps out the emergence and intensification of premediation in the run-up to the Iraq War from George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address until the war's commencement in March 2003. The third chapter introduces the concepts of affectivity and mediality to offer a medialogical explanation of why the photographs from Abu Ghraib were so disturbing and became a matter of such public concern where news of other similar abuses had not. The fourth chapter delineates what I call the affective life of media, the way in which we engage in complex affective interactions with our media technologies and practices. In the final chapter I take up the affectivity of anticipation that marks our interaction with socially networked media. I conclude with some examples of premediation beyond 9/11, culminating in the Iranian "twitter revolution" of 2009.

Brief notes on method

1. This book employs several theoretical or methodological approaches to the question of mediation after 9/11. *Premediation* begins from the perspective of media theory that informed *Remediation*, and the broader

field of new media studies that had barely begun to exist when Jay Bolter and I wrote *Remediation* and that has in some sense developed from the work that we did in that book. In developing the concept of premediation, I have relied upon and sought to contribute to the explosion of critical and theoretical work on new media in the ten years since *Remediation* was published. I operate from the assumption that all media forms and practices are interrelated. Thus I take up movies, television, and the Internet; sports, entertainment, and news; academic, journalistic, and popular texts; individual, collective, and mobile media. Media should not be studied in isolation, but placed in relation to their patterns and flows of interaction as well as to their incommensurabilities and discontinuities.

2. Just as we traced out a double logic of mediation at the end of the twentieth century, so here I lay out the logic of premediation in the first decade of the twenty-first century. My intellectual commitment to the term “logic” goes back at least to late 1980s American cultural studies, for example, “the logic of naturalism” (Michaels, 1988) or “the cultural logic of late capitalism” (Jameson, 1991). As such it is meant to hold on to the Foucauldian sense that there are rhetorical and conceptual continuities across different discursive and biopolitical formations. To take just one example, the nineteenth-century Western industrial concept of an economy of nature both enabled human exchanges with nature to be understood according to the logic of economics and helped to provide the existing capitalist economic laws of men with the force of natural law. Such “logics,” however, are not universal or *a priori* principles that govern practice, nor are they unchallengeable and unchangeable. Rather, they express tendencies that emerge from and within particular historical practices and assemblages.¹ Thus while a logic of premediation can be identified in diverse discursive and technical media formats (e.g., journalism, economics, security, entertainment, or law), competing or contradictory logics or illogics can also be identified at work in these same and other areas as well.

3. I also operate from the assumption that media are objects in the world no different in kind from any other. Even more strongly I treat mediation itself as an object – a point made in *Remediation* in terms of the way in which people would, for example, routinely walk around or pause before the line of mediation between a photographer or videographer and her subject, just as they might walk around a wire stretched across their path or wait at a traffic light. In treating media

and mediation as objects within the world, I follow Bruno Latour's distinction between intermediaries and mediators, in which mediators are not neutral means of transmission but actively involved in changing whatever they mediate. Mediation operates through what Latour characterizes as "translation," not by neutrally reproducing meaning or information but by actively transforming conceptual and affective states.²

4. Where remediation was marked by a double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy, premediation entails the affiliated concepts of affect and mediality. In *Remediation* we offered the following restatements of remediation: as the mediation of mediation; as the inseparability of mediation and reality; and as remedy or reform (Grusin and Bolter, 1999, pp. 55–62). Premediation can also be restated in three ways: as the remediation of future media forms and technologies; as the remediation of future events and affective states; and as the extension of socio-technical media networks into the future. I develop these corollaries in greater detail in the following chapters.

5. By employing the concept of "mediality" rather than the category of "new media," I mean to signal both a break with the methodological framework of *Remediation* and a dissatisfaction with the rhetoric of the "new" or the "avant-garde" that still informs a great deal of new media theory and practice. Thus while the book addresses concerns that could readily be included under the category of "new media," my use of the term "mediality" marks my insistence that, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when virtually all textual, visual, and audio media are produced, circulated, and remediated via networked digital technologies, it no longer makes sense to distinguish between "old media" like print, radio, television, or cinema, and "new media" like the World Wide Web, mobile phones, streaming video, or MP3 players.

6. As I detail more fully in the third and fourth chapters of this book, my interest in "affect" grows partly out of the affective turn in literary, cultural, and social theory in the past decade and more. The affective turn helps explain the embodied individual and collective social and medialogical response to 9/11. Affectivity offers a more fully developed way to think about what *Remediation* called "perceptual immediacy," which was produced either by the transparency of media technologies like digital photography and virtual reality or the hypermediacy of technologies like the World Wide Web and the windowed computer or televisual screen.

7. The concern with affect also helps to explain the absence of a methodological framework that has been prominent in treatments of 9/11 or the scandals of Abu Ghraib or the unlawful detention at Guantanamo Bay or at dark sites across the globe. That framework is trauma theory, which has itself become an extensive and influential methodology for the treatment of the literary and cultural response to the violence perpetrated against innocent victims by the unjust and abusive exercise of (mainly) state power. Growing initially out of the burgeoning field of Holocaust Studies, which took up the most dramatic and inhuman abuse of state power in the twentieth century, if not (by some accounts) in all of human history, trauma theory relies upon various psychoanalytical methodologies to analyze the way in which literary and cultural artifacts are both expressions of and attempts to work through traumatic events. Although I occasionally talk about the events of 9/11 as traumatic, I do not employ psychoanalytic methodologies to make sense of how media have responded and will continue to respond to these events.

8. In focusing on premediation, affect, and mediality, I have turned explicitly to methodological and theoretical frameworks that offer alternatives to some of the leading assumptions of trauma theory in the humanities.³ As my later discussions of Silvan Tomkins, Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi, and other affect theorists lay out, one of the attractions of affect theory is that it provides an alternative model of the human subject and its motivations to the post-structuralist psychoanalytic models favored by most contemporary cultural and media theorists. Affectivity helps shift the focus from representation to mediation, deploying an ontological model that refuses the dualism built into the concept of representation. Affectivity entails an ontology of multiplicity that refuses what Bruno Latour has characterized as the modern divide, variously understood in terms of such fundamental oppositions as those between human and non-human, mind and the world, culture and nature, or civilization and savagery (Latour, 1993). Drawing on varieties of what Nigel Thrift calls “non-representational theory,” I concern myself throughout with the things that mediation does rather than what media mean or represent (Thrift, 2007).

1

Remediating 9/11

“After 9/11”

Like Walter Benjamin's concept of dialectical history, premediation does not consider the future as an empty and homogeneous time into which the present moves progressively forward (Benjamin, 1940). Just as Benjamin characterizes two kinds of history, one which sees the past as dead or as autonomous, the other that sees it actively engaged with the present, so there are two ways to look at the future – one which operates on a model of prediction, which imagines the future as settled (or to-be-settled), as moving from possible to definite, and another which imagines the future as immanent in the present, as consisting of potentialities that impact or affect the present whether or not they ever come about. Premediation imagines multiple futures which are alive in the present, which always exist as not quite fully formed potentialities or possibilities. These futures are remediated not only as they might become but also as they have already been in the past. Premediation is not free from history but only from what Benjamin characterizes as “historicism.” Premediating the future entails remediating the past. Premediation is actively engaged in the process of reconstructing history, particularly the history of 9/11, in its incessant remediation of the future. Thus the historical event of 9/11 continues to live and make itself felt in the present as an event that both overshadows other recent historical events and that continues to justify and make possible certain governmental and medial practices of securitization.

In this chapter I take up some ways in which the event of 9/11 continues to live in the present by looking at a small sampling of the nearly innumerable ways that 9/11 has been remediated in the past decade. I begin by asking what it means to situate my project “after 9/11.”