Destruction and Remediation in Video Game Rhetorics

As we move into an age where our understanding of remediation involves looking at composition in the terms of new media, expert Rhetoric and Composition scholars like Cynthia Selfe are quick to address that we should consider technology and the ways that advancements do and should affect classrooms. In her chapter of *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies* entitled, “Lest We Think the Revolution is a Revolution: Images of Technology and the Nature of Change,” Selfe says, “When English studies teachers get together to talk about technology, we generally end up talking about change. It is common sense, after all to link computers with change when . . . media generations flash by in less time than it takes to uncrate a faculty workstation and get rid of the styrofoam packing.” The field of Rhetoric and Composition is already looking to video games as a new frontier for advancing composition and literacy studies. By thinking of video games in terms of remediation and convergence, we can understand how remediation plays a crucial role in content sustaining and remaining current during times of convergence and technological advancement; but in this refashioning we come to realize how parts of the original content become lost and that destruction is inevitable.

Remediation, as described by Bolter and Grusin, is “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (273). Video game remediation would then be the act of repurposing or remaking older video games to accommodate new or advanced media as a way to bring older content into the current mainstream. Companies usually remediate their games so that they are still playable when the gaming industry experiences new generations of consoles or when screens and devices encompass higher graphic resolutions, which results in the need for the games to be remade in high definition in order to keep pace. These remakes
are usually aimed to appeal to veteran players who are nostalgic for the older content and to attract new players that may not have experienced the game in its first release or platform. Another way that this is done is through transitioning board or card games into digitized versions as seen with games like Chess or the genre of Trading Card Games. A third way that videogames are repurposed is seen when gamers stream or broadcast themselves playing the games so that other gamers can watch, a trend that is becoming popular on sites like YouTube and Twitch.

Henry Jenkins complicates our understanding of remediation in video games through his discussion of media convergence in his book *Convergence Culture* when saying, “history teaches us that old media never die—and they don’t even necessarily fade away. What dies are simply the tools we use to access media content—the 8-track, the Beta tape. These are what media scholars call delivery technologies . . . . Delivery technologies become obsolete and get replaced; media, on the other hand, evolve” (13). An example that he uses is a word processor converging from the typewriter to computers. Like the typewriter, Nintendo Entertainment Systems, Nintendo’s first 8-bit cartridge console, still exist, but they are becoming more obsolete as better technology and next generation consoles replace them. As a result, the media does not die it evolves. The improvement of these technologies forces companies to refashion the games to include better graphics, which make them more sustainable via higher resolution screens and devices.

In his book *The Medium of the Video Game*, Mark J. P. Wolf illustrates how video games generally remediate film and television in an attempt to become more realistic, lending to Bolter’s and Grusin’s discussion of immediacy. He argues “embedding video clips . . . relying on
video sequences . . . [using] recorded sounds rather than just computer-generated ones . . . [having] elaborate opening and closing sequences . . . [are all attempts] to create a more cinematic experience” (loc. 184). Nintendo, who also publishes games such as *The Legend of Zelda* and *Super Mario Brothers*, remediate, or refashion, film techniques into these games in a way to make them more realistic. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* started out as a 2-dimensional game with flip-screen graphics <Image to explain flip screen; rooms in zelda would scroll, but areas flipped> Games have since evolved to contain 3-dimensional graphics with film-like camera angles or sidescrolling <image to explain side scrolling>. According to Wolf, “It is perhaps due to the desire to measure up to the standards of visual realism set by film and television that the video game evolved as it has” (12).

But remaking games, or even creating new games within the current deluge of new media, does not stop at creating better graphics. Oftentimes, companies incorporate additional fixes or content into games, or even the consoles, with the purpose of making them more immediate or realistic. As video games evolve, one of their goals rest on becoming more immersive, an idea that Bolter and Grusin describe through the concept of immediacy, which requires that the medium evolves so that the medium becomes more transparent. In this case, controllers for console games are part of the delivery technology that allows video games to become immediate. Remakes of games like the *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* and *Mario Kart*, when played on the Nintendo Wii, incorporate motion sensor technology in the controllers that respond to players’ movements. Playing this version of Zelda requires players to purchase and equip the Wii MotionPlus accessory. When players swing the controller, the game remediates this action and Link, the character whose adventure the gamers are joining,
swings his sword in a manner that mimics these movements. In earlier versions of Mario Kart, specifically when played on Nintendo’s GameCube, it was not uncommon for those playing to turn the controllers when rounding corners even though the game did not respond to these actions. These behaviors innately developed from standard driving practices, and developers for *Mario Kart Wii* took this practice and added the technology into the game so that players are able to use the controllers as though they are steering wheels.

Trading Card Games, like Pokemon and Yu-gi-oh, are collectible card games that involve players building custom decks of cards to play against opponents based on the game-specific rules. Cards generally picture characters that have specific attacks or abilities that counter attacks and abilities of other cards. *Card image*. Blizzard Entertainment took the principles of Trading Card Games and refashioned them into a computer game called *Hearthstone*. Moved to this new medium, Trading Card Games become more immersive since visual and aural elements are added into the games that are not found in the traditional versions. In standard versions of trading card games, players place the cards on a table and narrate the attacks of the cards. In digital versions, the cards visually respond to command of the player and actually poses an attack on another card. The cards may also play with their own animation, which is obviously not something that can be performed in a non-digital medium. *clip*

The soundscapes for digital versions of these games also serve to make the games more immersive. Anytime a player places a card minion, which is a card that has an attack ability, or uses the card to attack, the minion acknowledges the command with remarks such as "is someone injured" or "right away." Whenever a player plays a "spell" card a digitally produced sound can be heard. Sounds of a mouse clicking becomes the biggest tale tell soundmark for
any gamer who is accustomed to using this technology to interact with games. The sounds of clicking set the pace for the rest of the sounds throughout the game as the voices or sounds of a card being played always follows the sound of clicking. While all of these sounds are not part of the soundscape of physical versions of similar games, *Hearthstone* does include traditional sounds like cards being shuffled and drawn, which stays true to essential soundmarks of the original form of Trading Card Games.

In his comparison of film and video games, Wolf says, “Though we may refer to film spectatorship as ‘active,’ due to the viewer’s ongoing attempt to make sense of the film, the video game player is even more active, making sense of the game as well as causing and reacting to the events depicted” (loc 208). But a newer trend in the gaming community blurs this line. As of recent, gamers have started to broadcast or stream their gameplay via websites like YouTube and Twitch. In this form of remediation, someone who is generally an active player of a game takes on a more passive role of a viewer as she watches the game being played on a different medium. <Twitch example> Another example of this would be the esports scene, which goes through additional remediation processes to encompass elements of standard sporting events, including commentary and play by plays. <League example>.

Despite the many beneficial and innovative ways that games evolve to remediate film and practices not originally built into the game, and media converges to deliver content through different technologies, aspects of the original game are essentially lost; and in this case, remediation can lead to destruction. When live scenes are remediated through photographs, videos, and paintings, certain elements of the original experience cannot be captured in the different medium. A photograph can not incorporate wind blowing or the
feeling of rain hitting your skin, nor could it depict the sound of either of those two instances. You could record concert footage, but unless you have high-tech equipment, the audio of the video will inevitably come out distorted. And even advanced technology can not do justice to actually experiencing the concert, or any other moment, first-hand.

Similarly in video games, the original experience cannot be reexperienced when the game is remediated. Many in the community would argue that as being an important and justified factor for rereleasing or remaking games. If a game has flaws or glitches or contains graphics that do not translate well when played on advanced devices, the original experience may not be enjoyable, and a remake that dismisses these older features may be worthwhile. The advancement of technology to evolve video games to sidescrolling graphics means that flip-screen graphics are no longer the standard way to produce games, and developers have more options for construction without being tied to one form. In these cases, the loss of the original may be welcomed, but it should not deter away from the fact that, despite the improvements in the remediated version, parts of the original no longer exist in later editions or advanced versions of the games.

Remediated versions of trading card games do not affect the original forms of the games in the attempt to make traditional games digitized and more immersive, but the new medium can never fully achieve the same level of social experience that the original version had. In this case, the content of the older medium is not destroyed or lost, but the remediation process loses factors that made the older medium of the game more appealing to its community. Digital Trading Card Games do not allow for the opportunity of sitting around a table playing cards with friends and acquaintances. Even attempting to recreate this experience through local area
networks, or LAN parties, does not allow for face-to-face, but face-to-screen engagements. Additionally, the player is not able to actually feel the weight of the cards in her hand, instead, her physical connection to the game is based solely on her interactions with her computer mouse.

When video games are broadcasted or streamed, the game remediates back to film and the active user becomes the passive viewer. In this medium, the role of the traditional gamer changes and active participation is lost. When we were younger, my sister would watch me play video games, but even in these moments she still had the opportunity to participate on some level be it through discussing strategy or taking over the controller during some particularly frustrating stages of the games. A member of an esport or streaming audience can not impact the storyline of the game just like an audience in a theatre cannot control the events of the movie. In these instances, the traditional understanding of what it means to be a gamer breaks down as gamers move from a time of playing the game to watching others play instead.

Every time a video game remediates or converges with other media, part of the original game is destroyed either through loss of content, experience, or roles. Oftentimes this process is a response to improved or newer delivery technologies, such as the release of newer console platforms, or a way to become more realistic by converging with media like films. Despite the loss and destruction, sometimes this process is the only way for a game to still be accessible years after its production. Scholars implementing and assessing the importance of new media in classrooms can look to the medium of video games as a resource on how to keep current older content or media in a world that is constantly being presented with and challenged by
technological advancement.