

THE TRUTH IS ONLINE: DIGITAL REALITY  
AND REMEDIATING THE X-FILES

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THE TRUTH IS ONLINE: DIGITAL REALITY  
AND REMEDIATING THE X-FILES

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THESIS ABSTRACT  
THE TRUTH IS ONLINE: DIGITAL REALITY  
AND REMEDIATING THE X-FILES

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In my MA thesis, I argue that the remediation of cultural artifacts enables users of web 2.0 technologies to redefine their interactive experiences with mass media and to blur the line between digital and real. My research traces the way audiences have used internet technology to remediate *The X-Files* from its original television incarnation into a multimodal digital presence that illuminates and critiques fans' relationship with the series. Through my study of an *X-Files* discussion board community and *X-Files YouTube* videos, we can understand how fans of a television show can use this sort of cultural artifact to create new communities that transcend the original artifact, and that take the new, digital artifact and make it useful offline. If we can understand how these artifacts are being remediated, we will have the ability to help students approach a variety of texts and make skillful, critical decisions about how to use them in their own lives.

Style Manual Used: Modern Language Association

Computer Software Used: Microsoft Word

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## Chapter One: Remediation and Reality

*Something old, something new, something borrowed...*

This folk saying comprises part of a Victorian wedding tradition meant to bring luck to the bride in her new life. However, it is applicable to the way people are now interacting with technology, both old and new. While the advent of the internet and computer technology has changed the way people access information, that has not eliminated the need or desire for older forms of media technology—television is still viable, as are music and movies. What has changed, is that through the advances of digital media, people are able to take music, video, images, etc., and transform them into new, user-determined genres. They can utilize pre-existing material, re-edit that material, and the result is something that has become resplendent with new meanings and neither resembles, nor denies, what has come before it—a process called remediation<sup>i</sup>. Suddenly, the original cultural artifact has taken on new life and is now emerging into a new identity that neither denies its cultural inheritance nor its future. And ultimately, this new artifact is as significant and real as the original incarnation.

In this thesis, I argue that the remediation of cultural artifacts heightens human interaction with web 2.0 technologies, which in turn helps web users to understand how technological interactions and digital artifacts are as real online as they are offline.

My research traces the way audiences have used internet technology to remediate *The X-Files*<sup>ii</sup> from its original television incarnation into a multimodal digital presence that illuminates the tangible human relationships that are formed with and through digital

media. Through my study of an *X-Files* discussion board community and an *X-Files* *YouTube* video, we can understand how fans of a television show can use a cultural artifact to create new communities that transcend the original artifact and the digital artifact, and we can also see how these fans' interactions are not bound by media and are taken up in the real world. By understanding how remediation operates as a force that redefines the boundary between digital and real, we can help our students approach a variety of texts in order to make skillful, critical decisions about how to use them in their own lives.

### **Literature Review**

Roughly ten years ago, a decade into the spread of internet accessibility, Diana George and John Trimbur stated that communication and rhetorical interpretation are not bound by written text, and that mass media challenges understood forms of literacy. They lamented that potentially, "allegiances to the verbal over the visual [would hold] the intellectual authority of written text over the presumably derivative and immature character of visual communication, thereby making the image subservient to the word" (697). The concern at the time was that digital media would never be widely understood and acknowledged as a relevant cultural artifact. Around the same time as George and Trimbur's article, in Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe's edited collection of essays, *Global Literacies and the World-Wide Web*, Hawisher and Selfe stated that digital media not only was relevant as a composition practice, but can also express "cultural values and literacy practices" (10), making it a viable cultural artifact. These early works effectively looked ahead to how digital media could and would foster the creation of new texts that are as relevant and valuable as print media.

By 2006, in works like Iswari Pandey's "Literate Lives Across the Digital Divide," the evolution of digital media had already demonstrated that digital media operates as a literate and globalizing force shaped by culture and politics. Pandey and others have found that in authoring digital texts, authors are just as much influenced by the social and political tensions of their environment as when they author print texts. These socio-political tensions, however, also include the experience of being surrounded by mass media and popular culture. A study by Bronwyn Williams, "What South Park Character Are You?: Popular Culture, Literacy, and Online Performances of Identity," shows that students understand themselves and their peers through the lens of popular culture. When posting digital materials, students would use references to South Park and other pop culture icons to construct their identities and to create meanings for themselves. Digital texts, then, are artifacts of the culture in which they are produced, whether that "culture" is digital or print, popular or elite.

Because digital texts are the result of the written production of enculturated authors, it can be said that digital media "express[es] and reinforce[s] dominant cultural values and relations" (Wiley par. 12). If the authors are immersed in their culture, then the digital texts they produce are imbued with that culture's standards as well as their responses to those standards. As these varying cultural representations come into contact online, Steve Wiley writes in the *Ideals* section of his article "Identification, Please: Communication and Control in an Online Learning Environment" that "computer-mediated interaction, and software itself, can be sites of struggle" (par. 12). When users of digital media interact, it is inevitable that conflict will occur, because they are constantly negotiating a multicultural digital universe. However, it is through this

continual negotiation that they begin to have conversations. These negotiations can take place through message boards, blogs, YouTube videos, etc., effectively creating a multimodal conversation that responds to and constructs knowledge about cultural struggle (Miller and Brunk-Chavez 5). Digital media, then, is both a product and a cause of that cultural struggle.

As online users negotiate the cultural space of the digital world, they use the pieces of culture that are readily available to them to create digital texts. In his work, *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins traces how old media formats like radio, television, etc, are being taken up and repackaged by digital media authors into online formats. Accordingly, Jenkins writes that “Convergence is, in that sense, an old concept taking on new meanings” (6). Digital media then allows for a creative inscription process where people can express themselves using a hybrid of technologies and cultural influences. However, this has not made old media obsolete, he argues. Instead, these cultural artifacts, much like socio-political artifacts, are a way for digital authors to assert themselves and to help them navigate and engage with hegemony. Thus, digital media can help online composers build knowledge and navigate culture by using cultural artifacts in new, but relevant ways.

The larger picture this scholarship gives us is that digital media has come a long way in being acknowledged as a valuable composition practice. It is readily accepted as being increasingly relevant in an increasingly digital world, even though there still is an active debate within academia over the validity of scholarly publishing in the digital space. At any rate, it is a foregone conclusion that digital media is a relevant entity that is imbued with cultural power, and that by its very nature, it interacts at many levels with

other modes of media. Online users readily remediate old media, creating new meanings and new genres, constantly redefining their interactive experiences and negotiating cultural struggle. As a result, the digital world is a place where people are writing themselves and old media into a new culture with new meanings.

However, what the scholarship overlooks is the tangible, human reality of the digital experience. Digital culture is largely understood as mirroring what already exists in our world, in terms of socio-political culture, as well as popular culture. What is offline goes online. These digital productions are generally seen as valuable, but these productions are more than just representations of our physical world—they are catalysts for real interaction; they are increasingly seen as being the “real deal.” Remediation has enabled digital media authors to become even more interactive with web 2.0 technologies, and as a result, they can make more changes and therefore more commentary on the cultural artifacts they are working with. Where the redefinition works is that these changes and commentary are not necessarily staying digital; these changes and commentary are based in real human experience. Remediation creates cultural critiques that can manifest digitally and materially. This process also causes reinterpretations and redefinitions of media—what may be seen as a discussion board can also serve as a form of “memory” that is both digital and real. At any rate, the fact that users remediate cultural artifacts in a digital setting does not mean that users are necessarily interested in staying in the digital setting.

Therefore, it is more important than ever for college composition classes to undertake teaching students a full range of communication modes, both print and digital. We live in a society that is increasingly digitized and that asks for individuals to be able

to convey their ideas online as well as offline. Maintaining a static, print environment does allow for the consideration of opinion, but ultimately, it does not go far enough in asking the student to engage with the material. By encouraging students to take part in the digital realm, instructors are helping students to see that rhetorical decisions can be made on more than the printed page. Thus, it is important that both these modes of communication are accepted in the classroom, because in a society where ubiquitous computing (arguably) exists, the digital experience is more and more frequently blending, overlapping, and co-existing with the “real” lived experience. Students, then, need to be able to fully comprehend the wealth of rhetorical choices they have in order that they may critique and redefine culture on their own terms.

### **Theoretical Framework**

My consideration of how the digital remediation of cultural artifacts redefines web users’ interactive experiences with mass media both on and offline is informed by a framework that emphasizes how digital media is a remediation of older forms of media and how digital media speaks to the encouragement of cultural critiques that take place both offline and online. Central to the idea of digital media’s function as a remediating force is J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, where they state that “New digital media . . . emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts” (19). Digital media, then, are understood as a force that contains a pastiche of other media, altering a linear understanding of new and old for web users. This new understanding leads to cultural critique, which is best explored through the work of James Berlin. Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* is central to the ideas of authorial agency and

cultural critique. His work places writing and textual production at the center of training students to assess hegemonic power structures and perform cultural critiques. Berlin sees culture as a lived experience, with people representing the culmination and agency of their life experiences and unique skill sets (xix). In digital media, where online users are navigating and interacting with cultural artifacts and remediating them, it is their particular cultural context that will shape the interaction. To this end, web users are enculturated and culture-producing, taking what they know and remaking it for their own needs, whether it is on the web or off the web.

Remediation, then, is an act of cultural appropriation. Its goal is “to refashion or rehabilitate other media” (Bolter and Grusin 56), and to “borrow avidly from each other as well as from their analog predecessors” (9). The choice to take up media predecessors is based on the digital author’s particular desires in creating a text. When this happens, the digital media that users navigate is comprised of much older pieces that may come from other technologies. Television, radio, magazines, and other entities have turned digital; and through the use of online archiving, even memory has turned digital. Accordingly, digital creations such as message boards and YouTube videos are composites of collected and assembled cultural fragments. Nothing, then, is entirely new; the technology of new media is not shaped around invention, so much as it is shaped around fashioning and refashioning a text (53). The entire purpose in remediating texts, however, is to eliminate the mistakes of past texts and to make them more accessible; in other words, the end result of a remediated text is to have a more easily approached digital experience. It is supposed to make available, in a simpler or more pleasing format, the original product. Remediation, essentially, is about immediacy.

However, remediation is not simply a digital process. According to Bolter and Grusin, it “can also be understood as a process of reforming reality as well” (56). As new media technologies are introduced, there is always the vague process of making the technology simpler and more transparent. In turn, this is supposed to immerse a user in the world of the technology through a more authentic emotional experience (19). If digital media is immediate, and if we are unaware of the media transaction taking place, then the experience of the text is real. After all, “[m]edia have the same claim to reality as more tangible cultural artifacts; photographs, films, and computer applications are as real as airplanes and buildings” (19). It’s through this lived experience of digital media that gives remediated content its cultural value. If the user accepts the digital content and the way it has leveraged past content, then the newly remediated cultural artifact has become real, and it will “function as [an] objects within the world—within systems of linguistic, cultural, social, and economic exchange” (58).

In the creation of a remediated text, authors operate as cultural critics. Berlin writes, “Culture is pluralistic, so that everyone is ‘cultured,’ whether their behavior reflects that associated with high culture or not” (xix). Therefore, all acts of remediation are imbued with meaning—from *The X-Files* to *Romeo and Juliet* to message boards to *YouTube* videos—which makes digital authors critics of their own work, as well as of others. Digital artifacts are then the result of culture—a culture that begins offline and moves online. In reviewing offline media with cultured eyes, digital media authors choose to remediate; however, this doesn’t mitigate the tangible function of thought, expression, and composition that took place in the remediation process. When they go on to make editorial choices, these choices are based on their “real world” cultural insights,

as well as the interactions they have had with other digital media users and other digital media artifacts. Creating a meaningful text, therefore, is based on the ability to navigate through online and offline settings, making rhetorical choices, and interacting with other people. To succeed at remediating a text, a cultural critic must possess the ability to make choices about other texts and leverage multiple kinds of media in order to create meaning. Because culture is imbued in all we do, digital media is no less real; it is part of a lived experience.

In remediating cultural artifacts, the act of changing/editing what is already in existence is a demand for a change in the artifact's purpose, which is a demonstration of how offline cultural critiques foster authorial agency. Berlin writes that while an audience's reaction to a text can vary, "negotiation is the most common response, as audiences appropriate messages in the service of their own interests and desires" (90). Remediation, then, is another form of negotiation; when an audience has a very real, lived experience in interacting with one media form and remakes it into another media form, they have negotiated the content of the original media. In adapting it between offline and online forms, they are actively critiquing it and demonstrating the fluidity that exists between textual genres. When people create their own productions of a cultural artifact, they "become active agents of social and political change" (121). As a result, new media composition technologies provide an avenue for those interactions, enabling people to more and more easily rewrite cultural artifacts that they find to be imperfect and in the process, create new knowledge and understanding of the cultural artifacts. Rather than simply absorbing culture, these active agents are participants in culture, contributing to it, and extending its reach in new media genres like discussion boards and

*YouTube* videos. Berlin suggests that interpretation, in itself, is as powerful a force as production. These new understandings, then, are important and function as a new resource of knowledge in a society that frequently moves back and forth between the digital and offline media settings.

My exploration of how the digital remediation of offline cultural artifacts is fostered by cultural critique, helps to define the way an individual is able to navigate the cultural significance of an artifact as well as to provide his or her own assessment of that artifact's meaning and value in a multitude of media formats. This framework provides a way to understand how the creation of discussion groups and *YouTube* videos, essentially, the remediation of already extant cultural artifacts, can illuminate and critique a fan's relationship with a television series, both on and offline. In my case study of the NewSpace XPhiles Forum and the *Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet YouTube* video, I explore how these two new media cultural artifacts were created in response to, and in negotiation with, the original television series, *The X-Files*, demonstrating not just the show's significance to the fan base, but more importantly, showing how digital remediation is rooted in offline activity.

## **Methodology**

The first part of my case study samples the top 25 posters<sup>iii</sup> of the NewSpace XPhile forum. As of April 18, 2008, there were 256 members of the NewSpace XPhile Forum, but the top 25 posters were responsible for 88% of the 120, 334 total posts. Most of the top 25 posters are in their 20s or 30s, and there are twice as many women as men.<sup>iv</sup> Most forum members are from the United States; however, there are some international members. I am a member of this forum, and I have acted as a participant/observer. For

the most part, the participants of my research are people with whom I am already acquainted through my own membership on the NewSpace XPhiles Forum. I view them as equals who participate in the same fandom that I do, and I allow them to guide the conversations and to indicate the subtleties of how they have reshaped the cultural artifact for their own needs.

Data collection began in February 2008 and continued through April 2009. My data comes from three sources: posting statistics, e-mail based surveys/interviews, and the forum's discussion threads. Each interview addressed the members' connection to The X-Files, the forum, the forum members, and the internet. I have collected the survey responses, and I have taken screenshots of the pertinent discussion posts. The interview questions were open ended, and all participants were permitted as much time as they required to complete the survey. All participants were guaranteed their anonymity. In respect of their rights as research subjects, I have also followed the Internal Review Board protocol for Human Research Subjects.

The second part of my case study focuses on the Mulder + Scully / Romeo + Juliet YouTube video. I analyze the video not in terms of its content, so much as its connections with online and offline textual practices. By understanding the way the variant media types interact, I track the development and remediation of *The X-Files* as an intertextual artifact. I did not conduct any interviews with the author of this video. I approached the video as an observer, and I did not ask for more feedback than what is provided on the YouTube video's URL and other websites linked on the author's webpage. This information includes the author's description of the video, and it is also

inclusive of the comments other viewers have left on the video, as well as the linked videos.

### **Overview of Chapters Two, Three, and Four**

In this thesis, I seek to explore two quite different digital genres—the discussion board and the YouTube video. Chapter Two is about the NewSpace XPhiles Forum and how this discussion board has remediated *The X-Files* as an online entity open for critique and conversation. This chapter will also chronicle how the fans have used a discussion board to leverage the series into a close-knit community that exists both online and offline. Chapter Three is about the “Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet” *YouTube* video and how videos like this one remediate *The X-Files* into smaller fan videos that create new narratives for the show. The fan activity takes place both online and offline, however, calling into question the nature of remediation in the online setting. Chapter Four discusses the potential for further research in the field of digital studies, and it also examines the teaching possibilities available with a new understanding of remediation and the relationship between digital and non-digital remediated texts.

## Chapter Two: Using *The X-Files* to Carve a NewSpace

*“Originally, [going on the forum] was to just gab about XF, check out cool pictures, catch up on info about the show, but now that I know a lot of people on the board better, I like talking to them about anything. They're fun to hang out with.” - Okobogee*

The above quote from a NewSpace XPhile Forum<sup>v</sup> member is indicative of how even in the midst of fan-based discussion, there is a push to create something that moves beyond the original cultural artifact. Rather than stay solely focused on *The X-Files*, the membership of the NewSpace XPhile Forum chose to create their own online community of *X-Files* fans, which led to using the show as a way of making offline social connections as well. Since the advent of the Internet, people have been attempting to take offline entities such as television shows and to put them online as a way of increasing their interaction with these cultural artifacts. A byproduct, however, of this remediation activity, is the development of online fan communities. These fan communities develop around a cultural artifact, and as the fans perform cultural critique, they are also developing tangible relationships to the show, the show's creators, and to the other fans. Similarly, The NewSpace XPhile Forum was started as a place where conversation about *The X-Files* could take place uninterrupted; however, it also became place where conversations beyond *The X-Files* could also occur and go offline into the “real” world.

In this chapter, I argue that NewSpace XPhile Forum members have redefined their experience with *The X-Files* by creating an online message board community that

serves as a place of cultural critique, but also, more significantly, as a place where the digital fan experience has become a part of real life<sup>vi</sup>. Through my study, we can understand how this fan forum creates and maintains online content in order to build *X-Files* fan discourse, as well as how this online content has manifested in real world friendship, demonstrating the tangible effects digital communication has on real life. *The X-Files*, in becoming a message board where this has occurred, has been remediated, as such, by the fans of the show. David Bolter and Richard Grusin describe remediation as taking one form of media and reshaping it as another form of media. They write, “The goal of remediation is to refashion and rehabilitate other media” (56), meaning that the NewSpace XPhiles Forum has purposefully taken *The X-Files* and refashioned it as a discussion. However, the remediation of *The X-Files* as a discussion board makes it no less *The X-Files*; “The very act of remediation ... ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependant on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways” (47). Therefore, *The X-Files* has merely changed shape in this remediation, but it has not lost its effectiveness as a cultural artifact. It is still capable of fostering emotional responses that in turn aid the development of cultural critique and other real world activities like the building of friendships.

Bolter and Grusin’s argument, however, extends beyond the mere statement that media formats continually remediate other media formats. They further their argument by focusing on the interconnectedness of all media; it is the necessity of media to remediate in order to exist. One form builds upon another form, and this is represented in digital media, which leverages video, audio, text, etc, in order to make a new sort of

virtual text (55). The NewSpace discussion board, therein, could not exist without *The X-Files* or the text and graphics its users post; however, the discussion also can't exist without the very real presence of humans. That is why Bolter and Grusin also write: "...because all mediations are both real and mediations of the real, remediation can also be understood as the process of reforming reality as well" (56). So accordingly, the very real, human responses to the television are also remediated to a discussion board. The digitization of their interactions is no less real, then, than when they speak in person. Therefore, by remediating *The X-Files* as a discussion board, the forum members have not only imbued the show with new meanings, they have also changed the meaning of what the show is for the fans on a personal level. NewSpace is, ostensibly, about *The X-Files*, but the members of this forum have determined that in this form, the artifact is about The X-Philes.

### **Introducing NewSpace**

After facing aggression on other online fan forums, Sheila Holman created NewSpace in November 2006 so she and other fans of *The X-Files* could meet to discuss the episodes, movies, characters, as well as to socialize<sup>vii</sup>, without the presence of flammers, trolls, and post deleters. Many fans find that the show's focus on the unknown leaves room for discussion, but that they must go online in order to have conversations about it. To that end, Okobogee says: "Not many people here in my 'real life' watch the show and it gets pretty frustrating to have such a passion for something and no one to talk to." Essentially, watching the show was not enough; *The X-Files* was a discussion that needed to be held. However, *The X-Files* didn't stay on the discussion board, either. Through the conversations taking place on the forum, some members have formed more

personal friendships. Members post photographs of themselves, completed art projects, fan fiction, *YouTube* videos, and even favorite recipes. Forum members visit each other, send Christmas cards, care packages, and txt messages, and give each other phone calls. In July 2008, a contingent of members attended the premiere of the second *X-Files* film, *I Want to Believe*, and they were able to meet some of the cast, crew, and creators of the television series. The following members agreed to participate in my research:

<b>Name</b> <sup>viii</sup>
Clint Erikson
Okobogee
Anastasia
Eve 6
Mrs. Peacock
Invisigoth
Gypsy
Sheila Holman

### **The X-Files: Remediated/Mediated**

On NewSpace, *The X-Files* has been remediated as a discussion. Forum member Invisigoth feels that “As a television show, *The X-Files* is great entertainment, and it’s thought-provoking. But through the forum, it becomes a lively topic of discussion, a reason for people all over the world to interact.” Online users are seeing continued possibilities through web 2.0 for engaging with cultural artifacts; as Henry Jenkins writes, “Consumers ... are asserting a right to participate in the culture, on their own terms, when and where they wish” (169). Forum members have the power to access full-length scripts online, post photographs and screenshots from the show, pictures of artwork they have made, videos, weblinks, as well as write their own opinions about the episodes. Through the remediation process, *The X-Files* has become a dialogue between fans as

well as various posted images. In describing this process, J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin write, “The ultimate ambition of the Web designer seems to be to integrate and absorb all other media” (209). This is assuredly at work on the forum, where the discussion has never remained devoted entirely to text. Discussion just as frequently is conducted through icons and pictures. On NewSpace all these aspects of *The X-Files*, the news articles and interviews, the graphics and photos, the books and comics, and even the greeting cards, have been taken up and placed on the forum as part of the discourse surrounding the show. These representations in addition to the fan commentary are accepted as salient productions of *The X-Files*. The fans then, are not just talking *The X-Files*; they are writing and discussing *The X-Files*, as well as looking at *The X-Files*. *The X-Files*, then, has been remediated as a multimodal conversation without losing any of its authenticity or value.

In pursuing *The X-Files* as an ongoing discussion, it is important to acknowledge how the show has already operated in an official<sup>ix</sup> capacity across multiple media platforms. *The X-Files* has been a television show, two movies, a comic book series, action figures, posters, calendars, novels, greeting cards, websites, clothing, video games, music, and even now, an iPod, among many other media incarnations. With so many media platforms, both online and offline, available to the fan base, *The X-Files* has been omnipresent in fans’ lives, and developed into what Jenkins refers to as a “cultural activator” (95), something that inspires them to act on behalf of their favored cultural artifact. The fans have “[set] into motion their decipherment, speculation, and elaboration,” and they “get more out of the experience if they compare notes and share resources than if they try to go it alone” (95). This is what happens on the forum; the

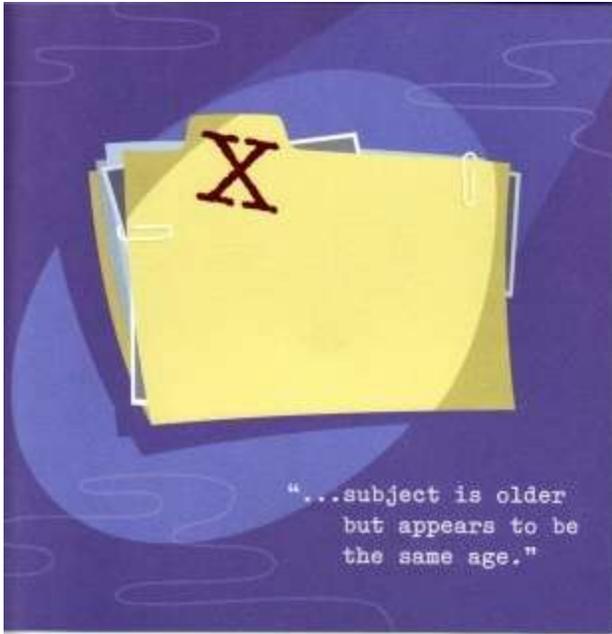
experience of discussing the show makes it more real for them, even if that interaction happens in a digital setting. They review episodes, they guess at what happened in between scenes or what might take place in the future, or guess what music Mulder and Scully would keep on their iPods, and they create new stories, art, and friendships, all based on the show. The fans are actively participating in the remediation of the show; after all as “Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media” (Bolter and Grusin 55), is the human influence that drives that remediation. As the show has been promoted across multiple modes of media, the NewSpace forum members have also taken on this task as they discuss the show. For them, discussion is digital and real, just as *The X-Files* is digital and real, and it’s through these discussions that the fans can redefine their experience with the show.

### **The X-Files: Offline/Online**

In *The X-Files*’ remediation from a television show to an online discussion board, it has received more than just a switch from an audio/visual narrative format to a message board where people post their ideas. *The X-Files* has also taken on an over-archingly playful tone on the forum. Even though *The X-Files* is considered a drama because of its dealing with monsters and government conspiracies, for the NewSpace members, it is a source of fun. Anastasia asserts that a fan of the show needs “a brain and a sick sense of humor to understand.” Okobogee reaffirms this lightheartedness, when discussing how “laid back” NewSpace is in comparison to other forums, where people may be treated with disdain by other posters. As a result, in weaving together conversations and discussions about the show, the fans here have found that “To create is much more fun

and meaningful if you can share what you can create with others and the Web, built for collaboration within the scientific community, provides an infrastructure for sharing the things average Americans are making in their rec rooms (Jenkins 136). NewSpace, then, takes *The X-Files* and in putting it online, redefines it as something more light-hearted than was originally intended<sup>x</sup>. However, the act of redefining the show and thereby critiquing the show does more than simply alter the cultural artifact; it also redefines the online user's experience with the artifact. If *The X-Files* is seen as something fun and endearing online, then as the user goes offline, that experience remains with the user; as Bolter and Grusin write, "Just as there is no getting rid of mediation, there is no getting rid of the real" (56). *X-Files* fans may remediate the show, but that experience of remediation doesn't change the value inherent in the experience of remediation. In other words, all levels of remediation are equal in value to one another; the original artifact, the act of changing the artifact, and the artifact's new incarnation are all inherently valuable.

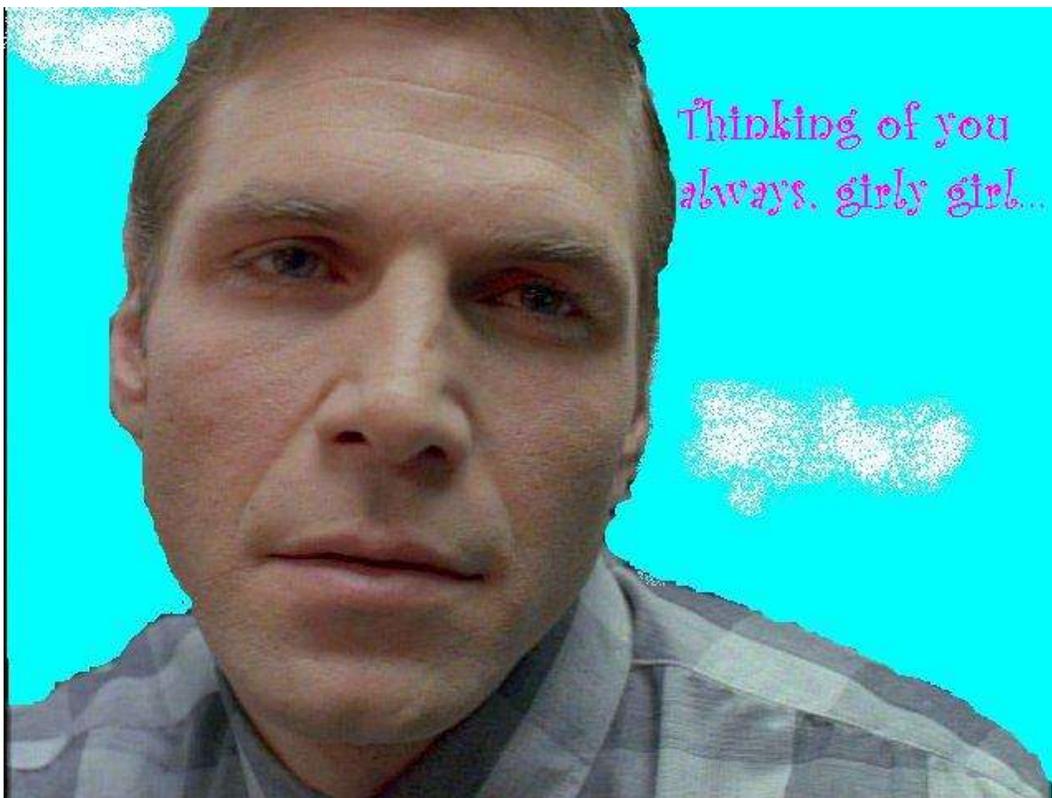
As mentioned previously, *The X-Files* is a show that exists in many media incarnations, inclusive of Hallmark greeting cards. The card in question is purple and green and opens up to play *The X-Files*' theme song. The card is pictured here:



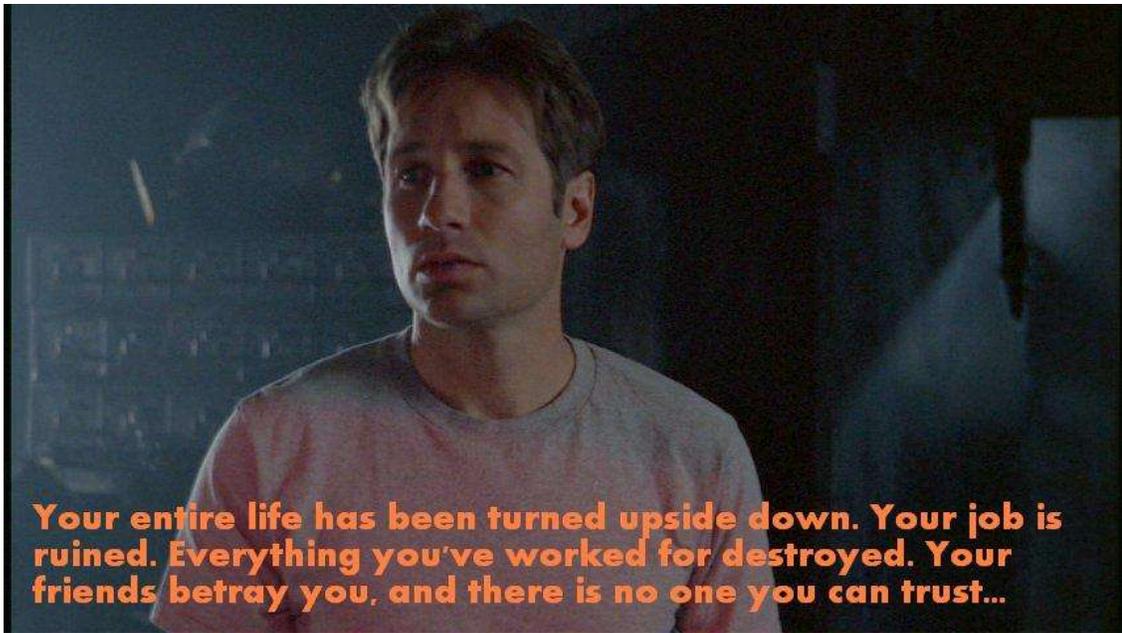
Like just about any other card with sound, the theme song itself is a punchline, referencing the mystery of the recipient's age. Even though the card was kitschy, the forum members wanted it, and they wanted to talk online about acquiring the card. It is Okobogee who, upon finding out about the existence of the card, began a thread called "Hallmark you so awesome!" in the *Random X-Files Talk* section, where the card's existence was shared digitally. Most of the fans were delighted with the news and swore to go find the birthday card and purchase it; the online chatter and information sharing was resulting in real world action as the forum members began going to Hallmark stores and searching for the card. They'd report back with their findings, and the fortunate fans would post photos of themselves holding the much-desired greeting card. In this way, the mere existence of an *X-Files* greeting card led to both online and offline activities, essentially indicating that online activity has real actions and real emotions attached to it.

However, as the fans were online discussing the greeting card, their interaction with the offline media did not stop with discussing the logistics of acquiring the card.

Instead, the members began remediating the greeting card to the discussion forum. Using *Adobe Photoshop* and *Microsoft Paint*, they created their own greeting cards that leveraged screenshots, dialogue, and fan in-jokes about *The X-Files*, then uploaded them in the discussion thread, mirroring the idea that “interactive media move the locus of control to the individual” (Bolter and Grusin 60). The digital cards were rudimentary; one rectangle represented the front/outside cover of the card, and the second rectangle represented the inside of the card, following the genre conventions of nearly all greeting cards. Each digital card demonstrated a bawdy or blackly humorous, and in some cases, romantic, bent. I have included some of the cards below:







**Happy Birthday!!**



What makes the cards interesting, is that while the forum members followed the format conventions of the greeting cards, their subject matter moved beyond the clichéd, sentimental cards Hallmark is known for. Their cards were resoundingly edgy and non-Hallmark-ish, making light of necrophilia, incest, double-murders, with some members' cards making references to handcuffs and erections (Mulder's). In remediating the genre of Hallmark cards and in remediating *The X-Files* as a Hallmark card, the forum members created cards that would not be seen as fit for mass production; however, the forum members did create cards that effectively critiqued Hallmark cards as a genre. This was made possible by the act of remediation; Because the forum members were able to, as Bolter and Grusin write, "[tear the cards] out of context [they] makes us aware of the artificiality of both the digital version and the original..." (47). And in doing so, their critique becomes truer than the actual cards.

Their remediated Hallmark cards call to attention the way regular Hallmark cards are generic and lack true, emotional poignancy. These cards are neither real nor authentic, emotional experiences for the people who read them. On the other hand, the X-Files' cards are authentic, if dark and disturbing. In acknowledging the original Hallmark card's deficiencies, the forum members had not stopped at interpretation; as James Berlin writes, "interpretation involves production as well as reproduction" (139). The fans have more of an emotional connection with *The X-Files* and its value system and sensibilities, and in remediating *The X-Files* as a greeting card, they defined that attachment to the show as being a very real and tangible experience. They didn't have to say directly that there needed to be "better" cards, but by creating the new cards, it was implied. Perhaps there need not be a card for incestuous mothers on Mother's Day, or Valentines featuring necrophiliac serial killers, but the sensibilities portrayed are, at least to the X-Files, more authentic than the Hallmark cards, and truer to the frame of reference of their particular fandom. After all, "...all television programs present the experience of watching television as itself authentic and immediate" (Bolter and Grusin 187). Therefore, forum members have built the expectation that other forms of media will be as true to their cultural context as *The X-Files*, both offline in watching the show, and online in discussing the show.

### **The X-Files: Personal Experience**

The greeting cards, however, are just one example of how the remediation of *The X-Files* as an online discussion board is both a digital and a visceral experience. Because remediation reshapes other media, it can be argued "that media reform reality itself" and that "it is not [true] that media merely reform the appearance of reality" (61). Therefore,

digital media has a strong claim on reality. For example, in creating the discussion board, the purpose, ostensibly, was to be able to talk about *The X-Files* and to analyze it, bringing a host of cultural critiques to the table. This did happen; however, what became privileged in any online discussion of the show was the forum member's lived experience of this television fandom, in other words, their 'reality'. Television shows "are themselves embedded in material and social environments" (Bolter and Grusin 183), which suggests that personal experience and emotional attachment are the norm in old media. So when "cyberspace refashions and extends earlier media" (183), this same connection will still exist, regardless of the remediation process. Even in areas of the forum that were intended for focused critique, such as *Reviews in the Key of X*, many of the reviews were based on emotional reactions and reminiscences of what was going on/happening at the time of the initial viewing of the episode. *The X-Files*, then, in its remediated form on the online discussion board, isn't necessarily about the show; it is about the offline experience of fans watching the show.

In reviewing episodes in *Reviews in the Key of X*, the forum members exemplify how they are the true subject matter of *The X-Files* as it exists on the forum. While James Berlin writes, "For democracy to function . . . , citizens must actively engage in public debate, applying reading and writing practices in the service of articulating their positions and their critiques of the positions of others" (110), the fans are more concerned with exploring their reactions to episodes, rather than in engaging in debate. Fans are eager to recount their history with the show, because "as cyberspace broadens the sphere of our social interactions, it becomes even more important to be able to talk about people we share in common via the media than people from our local community who will not

be known ...” (Jenkins 84). Because everyone knows the show, the show becomes an extension of letting other people know us. Gypsy, in reviewing the episode “Genderbender,” states why she likes the episode clearly, but for her, it is more important to link it back to her personal experience. She writes, considering a minor role in the episode that was played by future series regular, Nick Lea: “How funny to think of that now...I'd already seen this ep maybe 5x's by Sleepless, thanks to re-runs, and yet when Krycek came on the scene I didn't recognize him [Shocked emoticon]. Where the heck was my little adolescent memory?!? Obviously not in all the wrong places at that point [Laughing emoticon].” In connecting with the show, then, in determining how she likes it, Gypsy seeks her memory, her own pre-existing, offline attachment, rather than a neutral, unbiased critique.

Reviews, however, are not the only means by which NewSpace remediates *The X-Files* as a simultaneously digital and nondigital entity. One thread in *Random X-Files Talk* called “Fun XF Memories” is used to collect the Philes’ favorite memories from watching the series. Anastasia began the discussion thread with this memory:

“A few girlfriends and I were having a sleepover at my house back in the day. So it's 9pm on Sunday and we all watch XF. It was the eppy where horseface<sup>xi</sup> kisses Mulder. ... But anyways, we all screamed our heads off when she kissed him!!”

*The X-Files*, remediated, then, is defined by the experience of having watched the show. Henry Jenkins cites these experiences as fueling media convergence/remediation: “The specific content of [personal communication] is often less important than the social ties created through the exchange of secrets between participants—and for that reason, the

social functions of [personal communication] hold when dealing with television content” (84). Accordingly, the function of forming friendship is more significant than the show itself. Authentic experience is based on emotions and memories, and this experience makes the show and talking about it online as real as houses and airplanes. By authentic, however, I do not mean that in the sense Peter Elbow would use it, in terms of authentic self expression. I do mean authentic in the sense that it is a real, lived experience, one that leaves memories and has a physical trail of miles crossed, sleepovers attended, words shared. Bolter and Grusin share this sense of remediation, in that all “[m]edia are hybrids in Latour’s sense and are therefore real for the cultures that create and use them” (58). So a discussion board, then, is not fake, and the interactions, the mediation of thoughts into words on an online message board, are not fake, either. They are authentic.

As *The X-Files* is remediated as an online discussion, it is through the connections the fans make with the show and with each other that this discussion is even possible. However, this is not a case of new media making “a good thing even better” (60), as far as internet technologies facilitating friendly discussion; it is actually a case of how “remediation favors immediacy and transparency...” (60). The platform of the discussion board has become almost invisible; the forum members see the conversations and not necessarily the digital construction of the forum. It is not about the technology, instead, it is about what they do with the technology; they are not thinking about it. Beyond this issue, *The X-Files* gives them a frame of reference, but that shared knowledge is not where the interaction and discussion stops. Anastasia first came to the forum for information about the series, but as she began to interact more, she found that

“...[NewSpace] made it OK for me to be a fan. What I mean by that is, this forum helped me come out of my shell and be myself. ... But this forum made me open my eyes. YES! There really were normal, socially functioning people who loved the XF. And most were girls! And I also value this forum because it helped me meet some genuine friends.”

The discussions available on the forum, whether about *The X-Files* or a fan’s personal life, created a situation where it was okay for fans to bond with one another. Anastasia came online for information, but the online interactions fostered friendship. In turn, the online friendships moved into the offline realm, deepening her connection with *The X-files*. If NewSpace remediated *The X-Files*, it also remediated her attachment to the show. This demonstrates what Bolter and Grusin say about the way media is interdependent: “Despite the fact that all media depend on other media in cycles of remediation, our culture still needs to acknowledge that all media remediate the real” (56). There was the interweaving of technologies with the creation and maintenance of the NewSpace XPhiles Forum, but at the same time, the very real people and personalities were also remediated. This is because *The X-Files* gave them something to talk about, and the playful attitude of the forum, the variety of conversation and critique, made it possible for forum members to see each other as multi-faceted individuals, and to see their fandom as socially acceptable and valuable.

As members converse on NewSpace, they move past digital interactions, and they begin to form offline bonds of friendship. Even though, as Henry Jenkins writes, “social groups can learn more about how they each see the world ... there is a real value in [personal communication] that extends into virtual rather than face-to-face communities”

(84-85), these communications also eventually go back offline as well. Through sharing their opinions and finding that other people had had similar reactions to the show, they were able to forge a strong bond. Clint Erikson, who joined the forum at its inception, says about his friendship with the other forum members: “I know more about some of them than I do about most of the people I know in ‘real’ life.” If Erikson believes he has a deeper knowledge of his online peers, then that necessarily makes them more real to him than some people he may see every day. They are certainly not more fake than those individuals. Just as media is real and “the experience of media” (Bolter and Grusin 59) is also real, that means that the remediation of *The X-Files* from offline to online, and the socialization around the show from online to offline, speaks to the way Erikson sees friendships being built. The digitization of the fan experience doesn’t make it any less tangible. Media is real, and so are the people who remediate. Many of the NewSpace friendships have moved offline; Sheila Holman, Anastasia, Invisigoth, Mrs. Peacock, and Gypsy have all met other NewSpace forum members. They take trips together, eat dinner together, send each other holiday cards, and they call each other on the phone. The digital friendship, in all actuality, is a real friendship with real value, and *The X-Files*’ remediation has allowed both online and offline relationships to take place.

### **The X-Files: Online Memory/Offline Socialization**

One aspect of NewSpace that has allowed the fans to maintain a bond with one another both online and offline is that all of their posted content is maintained in an archive<sup>xii</sup>. While *The X-Files*’ characters faced the prospect of constantly having evidence taken from them and their archives and databases deleted or set on fire, NewSpace forum members can keep their content. Everything they post remains on the

forum, creating a history of interactions, a database of their conversations. *The X-Files* may have been wobbly and uncertain ground, but the NewSpace XPhiles have built a stable discussion ground in the unstable terrain of the web. Okobogee writes that she loves having archived material: “It’s like having a board memory book. I like going back and reading old posts and remembering some funny moments.” The forum, then, is not just a place for creating conversations; it also operates as a place where conversations are preserved and valued. This significance attached to the old posts, then, is another avenue through which the fans can connect with one another.

Having all of the content produced by the forum members saved in this manner fosters a sort of digital memory bank where members can look back on past conversations and photo postings. However, it’s important to remember that “the Web can fulfill an archival function without giving up its own claim to being revolutionary” (Bolter and Grusin 202), because the archival function of NewSpace is not merely to hold on to items. The archive is based on allowing individuals to build their identities in an online setting without the fear of erasure, and to use convergent technologies as tools aiding personal definition (237). The very act of remediation, of making *The X-Files* an archiveable conversation, aids the online users in knowing themselves. In this way, the digital archive remediates actual memory. The words they’ve put online and the photos they’ve posted, as well as the way others have responded all amount to what they understand of themselves and their role on the forum. The archive serves as a record, as much as a human memory does—while nothing is supposed to be deleted on the archive, it does occasionally happen, an activity that mirrors forgetting.

These remediated memories also function to inspire a sense of community, and through this, the NewSpace members have been able to connect and form relationships with each other. If Bolter and Grusin say that “We inhabit cyberspace just as previous generations inhabited nature” (181), then the forum members who inhabit NewSpace essentially live there and utilize the flora and fauna of the conversations for their own survival. The archival nature of NewSpace subsequently serves as part of the sustenance on which the forum members survive. They treat the space as if it were a physical place, with physical items to take away; When Bolter and Grusin describe how tourists taking photos have a line of sight between their camera and the object, and how people avoid impeding that line of sight, it is the same as how we treat media and remediation. We are actively remediating, and our product—media—is a physical entity of that process. So, as they write, “Mediations are real not only because the objects produced . . . circulate in the real world, but also because the act of mediation itself functions as a hybrid and is treated much like a physical object” (59). Therefore, the artifacts produced on NewSpace are as real as the process of making them. If these artifacts are memories, so be it. Without a collection of past conversations, the forum of today would not exist. The sense of shared memory is so strong, in fact, that as previously mentioned, a number of forum members have taken their friendships offline as well. Effectively, the virtual memory is a catalyst for them to make real memories, and in doing so, they are using a real life space to reaffirm the virtual connection that already exists between them.

With that in consideration, an online discussion board that adopts many forms of media from the offline world also transmits this media back into the offline world through the individual discussion board participants. The real experience of fandom

cannot be categorized as an online or an offline experience—it happens in both places. Fans want to take their personal experiences online, but at the same time, the connections they make virtually end up offline as well. The digital world, then, is in a state of fluctuation with the real world, and there is so much overlap between the two, it is difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. As Bolter and Grusin write, “digital media... function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced” (50). As a result, the idea of digital media being effectively different from other media experiences is becoming a thing of the past. Media is media, and the same emotional attachments can happen in front of a computer screen as in front of a television screen. Remediating *The X-Files* as a discussion board has permitted the forum members to operate both online and offline as fans of the show, making meaning out of experiences had offline, and making online experiences more meaningful by taking them offline. Essentially, the discussion found on the forum had the ability to create a sense of *The X-Files* as an authentic emotional experience, regardless of whether the experience was digital or otherwise.

### Chapter Three: The Gentle Sin is YouTube

*If I profane with my unworhiest hand,  
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,  
My lips two blushing Pilgrims ready stand,  
To smooth the rough touch with a gentle kiss.*

- Act I, scene 5, *Romeo and Juliet*

And so it is with fans of television shows who take it into their own hands to “profane” or alter what they have been given, whether it is through writing fan fiction, editing fan videos, or engineering other kinds of creative fan projects. The objects of their affections are frequently taken up, handled and manipulated, and turned into something new that retains some characteristics of the original text. To take something and remediate it, making it fit into a new form with new values and meanings, is an act of reverence. These changes would not happen without the devotion or attention paid by a fan. These remediations are frequently on *YouTube* where countless fans have posted videos of heavily edited and remixed movies, television shows, combined with music and special effects, all to portray their favored fandom through a particular lens, highlighting one theme or character or aspect of their interest. A *YouTube* video titled “Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet<sup>xiii</sup>” has done this—the author, requiemx43, has remediated *The X-Files*’ main characters, Mulder and Scully as Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, highlighting what many fans see as the series’ main point—the relationship between the two FBI Agents.

Aside from merely stating what the vidder—a popular slang term for people who make online fan videos—sees as being a significant aspect of the show, this *YouTube*

video also implies engagement with a larger network of real world activity. The video is part of a system of online composition, fan interaction, critique, and negotiation with offline legal entities. Authoring a fan video is never isolated—they are anticipated events in the fan community, it takes many drafts and incisive editorial choice, and it also involves the tangible relationship to legal and economic reality in the form of copyright infringement. These videos, then, are part of a network of situated fan discourse that are still being shaped by offline interactions and interests. Remediation videos, then, are not solely digital experiences; the fans do not quietly absorb them, and it takes real world production effort to produce these sorts of texts. If a television show's content is being remediated into something new, then the system by which we interpret texts, as well as the interpretations, are changing. Accordingly, through YouTube videos like Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet, new understandings of remediation are found in the offline attachments.

In this chapter, I argue that through *YouTube* videos like Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet, fans of *The X-Files* establish how offline influences intersect and merge with online interactions and online composition processes. Through my study, we can understand how this video implicates authentic, real world action as being inherent in every digital media text. Through her remediation of *The X-Files* as a *YouTube* video, requiemx43 has created not just an online text, but a piece of media that fosters relationships, observable composing practices, and is connected to tangible legal concerns. Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet is, ostensibly, about *The X-Files* and its connection with Shakespeare's play, but this remediated cultural artifact also suggests that by putting something in a new, digital form does not disconnect it from the very real

and authentic attachments it has to offline composition practices and personal and legal relationships. By understanding how creating a *YouTube* video remediates a cultural artifact but does not necessarily remove it from the scope of real world activity, composition instructors interested in digital literacy will have the ability to help students see that digital media is not only significant, but it is as “serious” and real as print media. Essentially, they should help their students to see that there is no true boundary between the media forms.

### **Introducing Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet**

The Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet *YouTube* video is an edited, blended narrative of video clips, text, and music from *The X-Files* and the movie William Shakespeare’s *Romeo + Juliet* (1995), that was submitted by the *YouTube* user requiemx43 for the 2008 fan-run “Alternate Universe (AU) X-Files Video” completion. In this contest, fans were to borrow clips from *The X-Files* and create a new storyline for the series that took up a theme of the show but moved beyond the canonical *X-Files* experience into new territory. Requiemx43 has uploaded (and ostensibly authored) around fifteen *X-Files* fan videos, and some of these videos containing smaller parts of the larger nine and a half minute *Romeo + Juliet* video, and this vidder also shares links on her *YouTube* profile to other websites containing her vidding work. Requiemx43’s contribution to the Alternate Universe Contest was a video project originally begun around 2006, two years before the actual contest, but the *Romeo + Juliet* video ultimately won first place in the contest through an open vote, via the comment section on the *YouTube* page hosting the contest announcement video. That page has since been edited to demonstrate the contest is now closed, with Requiem43x’s video referenced in the

right-hand information panel as the winner, along with the second and third place winners.

There are three separate sections to the Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet YouTube video: the prologue, the main narrative, and the authorial sign-off. Each section of the video speaks to the author's different literate skills in navigating mass media and repackaging it for her own purposes. Through her editorial work, requiemx43 has been able to take up *The X-Files* and to remake it into an entity that demonstrates her ability to understand and replicate the format of movie trailers, to assess and recraft the characters of Mulder and Scully, to appropriate, make connections between, and edit old media texts, to tread the fine line of authorial ownership and agency, to enter a digital dialogue with other fan video authors and to effectively leverage web 2.0 technologies to make all of these things happen simultaneously. Because of efforts like requiemx43's, *The X-Files* has been remediated into a digital experience that is the culmination of both online technology and offline interests.

### **YouTube and YouRelationships**

In my investigation of requiemx43's *YouTube* video, my goal was not to perform a specific analysis of the forms of cultural critique available within the video's content. Rather, my goal has been to assess the convergence of digital and nondigital associations the video's existence implies. To that end, my first goal was to identify and situate the author within the online discourse community of X-Files fandom. I wanted to know who she was, how she was using *YouTube*, and how she<sup>xiv</sup> was relating to other fans/*YouTube* users. The video page contained her hyperlinked username in the grey box on the right, so when I clicked on it, the web browser took me to her profile page. Requiemx43 has

been a member since October 8, 2007; she has watched more than 8,000 videos while logged in under this username, posted 17 of her own videos, and 403 other users have subscribed to her video feed. This user, then, is reasonably active in her role as a participant on *YouTube*, watching videos and also posting videos. *YouTube*, however, can be considered a ‘non-place’ as described by David Bolter and Richard Grusin, based on how its detachment from its surroundings have left it as a “free-floating, hypermediated experience” (169). Using Bolter and Grusin’s analogy, *YouTube* is like a shopping mall where many people go to buy various items, but it is not a place where people reside. However, that does not make *YouTube* or a shopping mall less real; they are both physical places where human interaction takes place (179). To that end, requiemx43’s experience as a *YouTube* user necessitates an understanding of her as being a simultaneously digital and nondigital internet user. Her username has various attributes attached to it through her user profile, but that does not make her any less real a human contributing to those attributes from her offline position in a chair, in front of a computer. Essentially, the physical act of clicking on and viewing *YouTube* videos and uploading videos has resulted in an electronic record of real world participation.

Going back to the main video page for *Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet*, another record of participation is linked below the video itself. Her video is a response to a contest; on *YouTube*, if you wish to directly respond to someone else’s video with one of your own, you can do so. This leaves a link between your video and the original, allowing people to navigate back to the original source, which also serves to create a digital dialogue between the videos where one serves as the prompt, and the other serves as the response. In Jonathan Alexander’s editorial, “Media Convergence: Creating

Content, Questioning Relationships,” he suggests that “the creation and discussion of media convergent texts becomes an important way for people to understand, and critique, current political systems, situations, and trends” (5). While this is true, that textual production inherently implies critique, the convergence of texts or the remediation of texts needs to be understood as less of a digitization of interactions, but a part of real world conversation. To that end, clicking on the video response link sends me to the original video, which is the prompt for the *Alternate Universe Video Contest*, and which in the last few seconds, thanks requiemx43 for her contest suggestion. Requiemx43, at some point, had a tangible conversation, whether it was through *YouTube*’s message system or through e-mail or through communication on *The Idealists’ Haven*, a message board community where she is active, according to her *YouTube* profile. This conversation, then, resulted in a digital video that in its own turn operated as a prompt for other individuals who make *X-Files YouTube* videos. Requiemx43’s participation on *YouTube* is therefore resulting in the production of cultural artifacts—not just her own, also those of other *YouTube* videomakers. These interactions are no less real than when composition instructors give each other ideas and then disseminate those ideas in the form of a writing prompt for their students.

The prompt and response of the Alternate Universe X-Files Video Contest, however, implies more than a dialogue where videos are the eventual result. A number of people submitted videos to the contest, and even more viewed the videos affiliated with the contest. However, this isn’t the only contest that has taken place; simply by performing a search for one video on *YouTube*, I learned that there have been multiple *X-Files YouTube* video contests, all run under by a person under the username

MostUnwantedContests. This implies that there was a ready community to take up these challenges and make videos for the contests, and that there was enough of a community to warrant the creation of a username for these contests. Many of these vidders are members of various *X-Files* fan communities, based on requiemx43's inclusion of a link to The Idealists' Haven for the FBI's Most Unwanted on her profile, as well as her links to her *LiveJournal* and her profile on the *Big Light Productions* social networking site, as well as her link to *The X Filing: A Place for Vidders* website. She is hooked in to the fandom, which mirrors what Bolter and Grusin say about how "Cyberspace is not ... a parallel universe. It is not a place of escape from contemporary society, or indeed from the physical world" (179). Requiex43 isn't online to precisely mirror her own private life, but she is also not there to avoid interaction with other humans or to avoid the production/interaction of digital texts. Instead, she's in a tangible community of other fans and vidders, trading notes and video clips and making suggestions about what kinds of videos to make in the future. She has become part of a hobbyist group where digital compositions are produced with the aid of interpersonal communication on various forums.

These interactions between requiemx43 and the other videomaking/watching fans of *X-Files YouTube* videos are resulting in the creation of a public space where reality and virtual reality are the same thing. In a setting where "participants can share content quickly and spread a popular video text to thousands upon thousands of other 'users,' ... we may be witnessing a changing public sphere" (Alexander 5). Just as I mentioned previously in describing YouTube as a non-place, people are present, making transactions that have real-world results; if a call to make a video results in more than 1,300 views of

the prompt, 11 submitted videos, and other videos acknowledging the winners of the contest, then one digital text has resulted in physical responses—viewing, editing, and posting—activities that take place offline but whose fruits are seen online. As Bolter and Grusin write, “...as virtual reality, [cyberspace] remediates the visual spaces of painting, film, and television; and as a social space, it remediates such historical places as cities and parks and such nonplaces as theme parks and shopping malls” (183). *YouTube* has done both; with the videos themselves remediating film and television, and with the function of responding and hyperlinking remediating the tangible social interactions that result in the remediation of film and television. Accordingly, “cyberspace is both a reflection and an extension of these public media spaces” (169); it is neither online nor offline. It is both.

### **Composition Practices**

In producing *Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet* for *YouTube*, requiemx43 has made the writing process more visible, even though her primary production activities are taking place offline where her audience cannot see them. Instead, producing a digital text has made her real world composition process more visible and tangible to the people following her work. As Jonathan Alexander writes, “In the re-mixing and re-matching of media convergence, the ways in which we have organized composing (i.e., how we have ‘composed’ authoring) are called into question and reconsideration” (3). Composition is changing because of technology, making the process different, and certainly more visible in some ways. However, it also complicates the process by blurring some of the traditionally segregated writing process steps together. To use requiemx43’s video as an example, she has smaller fragments of her final *Romeo and Juliet* video published. This

shows that she composed the video gradually. However, these clips are also published the same way as the larger video, with the same level of value accorded to them. It would take an examination of the archive of her work to see that they are actually part of a larger composition process. Therefore, it subverts the idea of a linear process of writing steps (brainstorm, draft, revise, edit) by elevating all of the drafting stages and publishing them. This shift calls into mind a series of questions. If a video is online, can it be considered published? Are digital texts final? And to what degree can we see the process recorded in a tangible and quantifiable sense? At any rate, “with technological tools for remixing a variety of media becoming more commonplace and more widely used, some of our basic assumptions about reading, writing, and literacy may change” (3).

In exploring requiemx43’s video composition process, it’s important to start with what can be discerned of her invention process. On the page for the Mulder + Scully video, she describes in a sidebar a few details about the work; significantly for the consideration of invention, she says that Mulder and Scully reminded her of the star cross’d lovers, and that this video dates back to 2006. Interestingly, this means that the 2008 Alternate Universe contest was an afterthought—she had already created this piece before suggesting the contest idea to MostUnwantedContests. This work, then, was not created in response to the prompt; it was a pre-existing artifact of her fandom, just as the video and music she used to produce her text were pre-existing in the form of film and television. Invention, for requiemx43 implies that she was cobbling together multiple clips and arranging them, brainstorming on how to preserve the narrative trajectory of Romeo and Juliet through *X-Files* clips. When Henry Jenkins writes, “More ... literacy

experts are recognizing that enacting, reciting, and appropriating elements from preexisting stories is a valuable and organic part of the process by which [people] develop cultural literacy” (177), he essentially is saying that remediation of cultural artifacts is an inventive process that results in real world meaning. She is using real literature, real media, in order to create a real video that represents her cultural insights into *The X-Files*. This invention process, then, involved very concrete and authentic activities and critiques.

What makes requiemx43’s digital composition process more opaque than some print composition processes is the way *YouTube* maintains all of her videos in a small archive/portfolio on her user profile page. In this portfolio, all seventeen of requiemx43’s videos are available for viewing, in order from newest to oldest. While her Mulder + Scully video is one of the older ones present, there are two older which constitute smaller parts of the larger Mulder + Scully video. The Prologue is its own YouTube video, as is the “Kissing You” romance/dancing segment. Both predate the nine and a half minute version. Effectively, this demonstrates that requiemx43 spent some time drafting her video—it has smaller fragments that she built into the larger, finished product. She also saw the value in posting the smaller pieces alongside the complete video, which suggests a sentiment that the process in composing was as significant as the final version, making it possible to view her work from the “point of view of production as well as consumption” (Berlin 138). What her viewers would get to see was important; but so was the production process of creating her digital text. She didn’t just post a final product, which makes her YouTube portfolio operate as an artifact of her video creation process. What makes this process tangible isn’t just the fact that she

has a portfolio; it is the sense that she worked gradually over a period of time, making videos until she had a final product video. Through the date and time stamps on uploaded videos, users are able to see the evolution of her work. It may not give a whole picture, since she says she has worked on this video since 2006, but it helps viewers to see the cobbling process of digital text creation in a chronological way.

Digital media publishing may seem like a solely virtual experience, with digital texts put on websites to be reviewed remotely, but this last stage of the composing process actually works to create real world access to the text. As stated previously, YouTube videos, including Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet, are linked and hyperlinked and referenced by each other on a regular basis. In publishing a YouTube video, the network of videos expands. The strands of the web grow to accommodate one more work while that work, in turn, creates new associations between the other videos. Because “Web and Internet applications refashion the newer perceptual media of radio, television, and telephone more aggressively than they refashion print” (Bolter and Grusin 202), publishing on the web is always changing the public sphere of the web. Digital publishing necessitates an alteration in the canon of digital texts as one gets linked to another. What makes this real, however, is that just as much as print publication, these works add another entry in the library. Books reference other books, just as much as videos reference other videos. By anticipating that viewers will want another text like the one they’ve just experience, these links and references give them a tangible way to acquire what they want. The emotional and intellectual impetus to find more of what they like is not in any way diminished by the digital format. And additionally, through the links requiemx43 provides on her user profile, it is possible to go to various webpages

she has set up in order to download her work, placing it on your own computer. By publishing in more places than YouTube, she has made her work more accessible to her viewing public. The digital composing process, then, is no less interactive and physical than is the print composing process.

### **Legal Reality**

Of course, the material reality of digital media is frequently called into question, even though it is often the subject of real world legal battles. With media convergence and the remediation process, there is a great deal of controversy over the legal right of these digital texts to take up published, copyrighted materials and to turn them into something new. Pondering the same issue, Jonathan Alexander writes, "...the proliferation of media convergent texts using copyrighted material raises basic questions: When does copyrighted material become part of the common culture, open to fair use and compositional recasting?" (4). These concerns affect all digital media authors, including requiemx43, who put a disclaimer at the end of Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet, stating that she did not own the characters, and that disclaimer was mirrored in the video page's informational sidebar when she said, "None of these characters belong to me, no infringement intended. This was just for fun." Requiemx43's remediation of the show and of Baz Luhrmann's movie is potentially contentious—if she did not have that disclaimer, legally, it could have been assumed that she felt she owned these characters. From the corporate point of view, she, even in her online existence, is considered real enough to be authoring texts and challenging their authority. Therein, the intersection between online media and earthly interests have collided.

This same battle has been going on since the beginning of widespread internet usage. *The X-Files* began at a time when the internet was relatively young and relatively misunderstood by users and corporations. The fans of the show were prolific in creating newsgroups, listserves, fan pages, and also, notoriously, copious amounts of fan fiction about Mulder and Scully. Fan fiction flourished on the internet; everyone seemed to be writing it and reading it, until, that is, around 1996/7, Twentieth Century Fox attempted to shut down all of the fan fiction websites, stating copyright infringement. A legal battle ensued, as lawyers wrestled to figure out what to do with these texts. Eventually, however, the battle ended, and fan fiction writers put their work back online. So what happened? Well, Fox determined that as long as the writers were not making money and publicly declared that they did not own Mulder and Scully, it was alright for fans to use the characters and ideas of the show. The fans, essentially, had to agree that they had no right and no control over *The X-Files*. Other studios and copyright holders vary<sup>xv</sup>—George Lucas is notorious for maintaining control over his media empire, and that includes keeping a very close watch on fan activity to make sure they are not overstepping their bounds. But at any rate, Fox permits fan activity to take place—as long as it isn't making them any money.

All of this, of course, calls into play the materiality of *X-Files* fan activities, *YouTube* videos, included. If digital media is not real media; or if it's more transient, somehow, than print or film, then why are so many media corporations afraid? As Henry Jenkins writes, "Studios often defend their actions against fans on the grounds that if they do not actively enforce their copyrights they will be vulnerable to commercial competitors encroaching on their content" (189). *Requiemx43*'s video is exactly the kind

of digital media product that frightens production studios—she had remediated their work. The fear, more than anything else, seems to be over the potential money lost by allowing these fan activities to go on. Accordingly, requiemx43's video mentions that both *The X-Files* and *Romeo + Juliet* are available on DVD, after she is finished disclaiming her rights to the content. She understands that the issue is about money—a tangible, real world thing that is exceedingly concerned with digital media. To that end, then, her video, like others and fan fiction, causes a real world concern with litigation. Lawyers respond to these sorts of videos because something very real to them is at stake. The authentic value of digital media productions like Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet is inherent; the video may be online, but it questions official channels of authorship and it also puts into question what money can be made from such productions.

Digital media, as seen through YouTube videos and other artifacts, do not just possess the capability of representing real world scenarios, they are real world scenarios. Even through one YouTube video, an online user has access to building relationships with other humans, demonstrating a composition process with more immediate visibility, and challenging legal and monetary institutions. All of these practices occur simultaneously in the online setting, as people respond, think, and watch videos, because there is no way to not have a reaction to a text, whether it is digital or print. All of the relationships we attribute to print media are the same as the relationships we attribute to digital media. The computer-mediated world is not disconnected from the physical world where we eat, sleep, and play. As a result, we cannot consider videos like Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet to be simple entertainment or of less significance than short films produced for a film festival. Its existence, as such, has all the same implications.

## Chapter Four: Research and Teaching Implications

If remediating cultural artifacts into a digital setting does not actually render them fully digital, then the line between modes of media is being increasingly blurred in the modern age. New media, then, is really not so new as far as the value and interactivity it is providing for texts. So what then, is the focus and potential of new media? Grigar writes that "...new media offered rhetoric the chance to comprehend the breadth of textuality, and rhetoric offered new media the mechanism for putting our experience with text into words" (214). Accordingly, new media is not simply about technological advances—it doesn't change text so much as it provides extra avenues for the comprehension of text. The experience of a digital text is no less earthbound than print. The goal of the new media researcher, then, is to navigate how "...convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to ... make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins 3). This means seeing the relationship between print, video, audio, and the online forms of these, and understanding how remediation and convergence speak to the way new media is actually blended with, rather than separate from, old media. After all, as Bolter and Grusin write, "The true novelty would be a new medium that did not refer for its meaning to other media at all. For our culture, such mediation without remediation seems to be impossible" (271).

That said, new media communication is not merely a stepping stone that ignores what has come before, technologically. One technology's capability interacts with the

technology's capability that came before it, but only so far as users navigate that technology. Accordingly, television hasn't died in its remediation as discussion boards and YouTube videos; instead, it has become something different while maintaining its real world immediacy and authenticity. Technology, then, has turned media hybrid, rather than creating something new. What becomes important, then, is the "convergence ... between person and machine, the human and the technological, as the mixing and converging of media offers yet more sophisticated, potentially more nuanced forms of communication, representation, community building, and reflection on our own subjectivity" (Alexander 6). Thus, the relationship between technology and humans implies that no technology is isolated from human relationships and activity.

Technological interactions are always grounded in some kind of earthly reality. We then, must progress as researchers, in understanding that new media technology does not constitute a separate or alien composition process. Remediation has a lot to do with adaptability to new settings, but these settings are not foreign nor do they eradicate our personal ties to text.

However, the idea that remediated texts have a human component has not quite yet reached the college composition classroom in any meaningful way. There is currently a call to increase multimodal learning, but it is all based in the production of digital text, rather than an exploration of the particular human relationships that arise from those digital texts. Just the same, college composition classes have long privileged the written text over that of digital video, audio, and static image, but this position of priority need not exist. Even if students' understanding of remediation and "media convergence need not be high-tech" (7), writing should not be in opposition to new media. Text itself is

visual, which helps to alleviate the tension between written media and visual media, allowing for a setting in which the production of digital media is acknowledged as being relevant to composition practices, whether inside or outside of the classroom. Because of this, new media “offer[s] a way of seeing that allows for vistas beyond the print artifact and beyond the orator’s podium” (Grigar 216). New media composition lets students see more than a text does; it is not just an avenue of play before getting down to the real work of writing papers. Therefore, the intersection of new media communication with traditional composition practices promises for more fluid and multi-faceted learning. New media communication is neither derivative nor immature; rather, it is a sophisticated new apparatus for the interpretation of cultural artifacts, without giving up the corporeal relationship older media platforms have with their users. Students, then, through remediation studies, would learn to see possibilities between text and technology, rather than division.

Because clean division does not exist between composition categories, the need for incorporating new media into classrooms is more important than ever, even as it becomes more fraught with tension than ever. How best to teach students about the human relationship with digital media and the “reality” of digital “playtime,” is something that has yet to be determined. Just the same, it’s critical that educators work to build curriculums that are inclusive of the idea that media boundaries are fluid, regardless of the media platform, because of the real world relationships people have with that media. Bolter and Grusin’s work states the crucial need for this when they write, “Media hybrids (the affiliations of technical artifacts, rhetorical justifications, and social relationships) are as real as the objects of science” (61), which indicates the level of

seriousness with which new media should be approached by students and educators alike. They are correct in stating the reality of media hybrids; people are attached to media in a variety of ways, which speaks to its reality. Accordingly, their work forms the backbone of this call to accept hybrid media reality. If all media is hybrid, whether it is digital or print, online, or offline, then the real richness of composition is in the places where new and old media overlap and mingle with each other; the value is in the similarity of the media formats, rather than their differences. Students, in navigating this hybridity, will learn the cultural implications of how new media is a remediation rather than something entirely new and foreign. They'll be able to see and interpret a world of interconnected media, rather than see a series of technological binaries. However, students will also see that in hybridity, their options for composing have expanded, allowing them the ability to find the channel through which they wish to express their ideas.

In approaching the way remediated texts change the way new media is interpreted, it also calls into question the way writing processes are also changed. Drafting in the new media setting is still drafting—however, it can be more visible, more apparent in the changes that being made. Just as Bolter and Grusin demonstrate in their work, because “[t]he digital medium can be more aggressive in its remediation ..., [i]t can try to refashion the older medium or media entirely, while still marking the present of the older media...” (46). This strengthened approach to refashioning media effectively leaves a trace in the digital world; it shows more of a progress between drafts because of the way material is uploaded and posted to various websites. YouTube videos may have more than one version, and discussion boards may have evolving conversation. But through digital media, people can watch this progress take shape and direction in a way

that can be harder to see in non-digital media. However, the fact that we can see the process and its trail through cyberspace indicates that there is real work taking place. The work is offline, but the product is online—bringing scholars back to the concept of hybrid, remediated media. As Bolter and Grusin assert, there is no duality between digital media and offline media; “... all mediation remediates the real. Mediation is the remediation of reality because media themselves are real” (59). Accordingly, it matters little whether that remediation is computerized or otherwise. Media is media.

## End Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Bolter & Grusin. Remediating is pronounced *REmediating*. It is about repackaging media, rather than fixing media. It is not to be seen as a “remedy.” See theoretical framework for more info.
- <sup>ii</sup> The X-Files (1993-2002) is one of the first shows that garnered a web-based fandom. In fact, it is largely considered to have “come of age” with the Internet over the course of its nine season run. It was and still is one of the most active Internet fandoms, with the largest archives of fan fiction, and with a highly interactive fan base—with other fans, and with creative powers for the series as well.
- <sup>iii</sup> Many of the Top 25 NewSpace members are moderators or administrators for the forum. They are the most active members, and they also have the most duties. They are therefore more invested in the activities and conversations taking place.
- <sup>iv</sup> Because not all 256 members post, preferring to lurk or having lost interest, there is no way to tell how old they are, where they’re from, or what their gender is. I have only been able to confirm this information with the top 25 and some of the other frequent posters.
- <sup>v</sup> NewSpace XPhile Forum: <http://anewspace.forumer.20.com>. This is a forum devoted to the popular television series, The X-Files. The X-Files ran on the Fox network from 1993 through 2002, as well as being made into the 1998 feature film *The X-Files: Fight the Future*. The show is considered one of the television icons of the 1990s. An X-Phile is a fan of the series. A second feature film, *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*, was released on July 25, 2008.
- <sup>vi</sup> By “real life” I simply mean the offline world. Tangible, physical, emotional existences are part of real life as the term is normally understood. However, as my project progresses, I intend to state that real life is not able to be defined, and that the digital is as real as reality.
- <sup>vii</sup> Most socialization takes place in the “Hot Cocoa Talk” thread. The Hot Cocoa Talk (HCT) is the most popular section of the NewSpace XPhiles forum. It is for all conversations that do not pertain to The X-Files or one of the other concrete categories.
- <sup>viii</sup> All forum members’ user names have been changed to protect their identities.
- <sup>ix</sup> By official, I am referring to the approved merchandise sold by the Fox corporation in support of the show.
- <sup>x</sup> The creator of the series, Chris Carter, has oft stated that his intention in creating the show was to make a television program that was truly frightening.
- <sup>xi</sup> Diana Fowley is frequently referred to as Horseface. She is one of the least popular characters in X-Files history. Consider her the JarJar Binks of the series, if you will.
- <sup>xii</sup> Archive, here, is defined as a place of perpetual storage. There is very little that’s systematic about the “archiving” system on NewSpace. There is, however, a search box that is handy when looking for key terms in past conversations/posts.
- <sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC1MLOLG-6M>
- <sup>xiv</sup> I assume requiemx43 is female; in the Mulder + Scully/Romeo + Juliet video, she refers to herself as both “Yvonne” and “requiem\_x.” From the livejournal links she has provided on her YouTube profile, as well as her linked Big Light profile, I ascertain that requiemx43 is a 22 year old college student in Scotland.
- <sup>xv</sup> Henry Jenkins writes, “Current copyright law doesn’t have a category for dealing with amateur creative expression... Judges... don’t know what to do with amateurs, or people they deem to be amateurs” (189).

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