

Damon BLALACK

Shadows and Gigabytes: The History of Fan-Edits of Hollywood Films

Abstract. Like the technological-advances of the late nineteenth-century, one similar modern effect of emerging technology on artistic-expression concerns the changing question of film adaptation, given the democratisation of filmmaking via new digital media. With sophisticated and affordable software and internet portals such as BitTorrent applications, YouTube, and Vimeo making anyone's professional-level edits of major film releases freely-accessible by millions, the line defining the original director's intent becomes muddled. With a coming-age of these fan-edits being many people's introduction to classic film characters and series, there is a new-level of discourse about the fidelity to not only the very original sources (novels, games, comics, plays), but to the films as they had been originally released in the theatres, on home-formats, or on television.

Though many directors have released their own differing cuts of their same-films, notably Ridley Scott, Oliver Stone and George Lucas, it is new-territory to have critics' cuts, or as many different-cuts of a film as there are audience members. In a nutshell, the film experience is more fluid than it's ever-been, ever-malleable to suit the unique tastes of the participants.

My intent is to prove what is gained or lost for traditional film presentation. Surely the auteur theory is rendered-obsolete in such context, and many iconic characters may be seen as "less-than" what they may have ordinarily-been through experiencing a subpar cut of a film from an ineffective editor. Giorgio Moroder was able to fill mainstream cinema seats to view the 56 year-old film *Metropolis* (1928) by swapping-out the soundtrack for a more-modern one, making it amongst the first of its kind. And surely it opened the minds of hundreds of thousands of cinemagoers in 1984; but what was lost in the translation, if anything? And how will this technology affect the future of film audiences?

Keywords: fan-edit, film-remix, Hollywood, YouTube, copyright.

Introduction

"Because if the filmmakers themselves
can't cut it, the fans will".¹

Over the past fifteen years the phenomenon of fan-edits has increasingly taken hold online, offering viewers the opportunity to be entertained by a myriad number of "recut"

Damon BLALACK

Queen's University Belfast,
School of Creative Arts
email: dblack01@qub.ac.uk

EKPHRASIS, 1/2016
EXTREME STORYTELLING
pp. 48-62

versions of their favourite Hollywood films. These “fan-edits” are shaped by the personal preferences of each fan-editor, and sometimes reflective of a widespread criticism many “fans” may have voiced towards the original, official studio releases. Sometimes they are simply remixed for fun, entertaining a seemingly endless series of notions anyone can imagine in regards to their favourite film properties.

Since the 1920s, the domain of film editing is one which until recent years had been largely out-of-the-hands of the general populace, due to the sheer cost involved with the equipment needed to edit film reels. There are also the larger issues of studio held copyrights and a general lack of access to popular films that kept such a phenomenon from occurring. Outside of major studio editing rooms, mainly only projectionists had access to film-splicing tables, and even for those people who purchased the home editing kits that were eventually made available for 16mm and Super 8 home movie reels, the lack of commercial content in a home environment certainly kept the phenomenon from ever even becoming a concept. Even with these tools and access in-place, who would go to the extreme of re-editing whole feature-length films for personal enjoyment?

Enter the explosion of the home video market in the mid-1980s, coupled with the introduction of non-linear editing systems beginning in the mid-1990s, and finally, and most importantly, the easy and freely available distribution platforms afforded by YouTube², Vimeo³, and other similar avenues around 2005 that have made it infinitely easier than ever for a layperson to exhibit their creative editing expression with well-known properties. Over this thirty-year spread, the groundwork was laid towards an aspect of the digital-media revolution, the rise of the “fan-edit”, when a passionate fan of a genre film property uses such editing tools to re-appropriate and re-contextualise their favourite films that may have been produced by a major industry studio, starring popular actors, and by which much of the public will be familiar with. These fan-edits are ripe for an already built-in audience, via the fandom that exists surrounding such major film properties, and which have hundreds-of-thousands of viewers on average.

The sort of official hub cataloguing many of these interpretations online is fanedit.org⁴, where fan-editors can list information about their work, and communicate with each other via the forum. Aside from this curiosity of seeing how films might have been, or in the case of serialised films, heavily-condensed versions of a popular series, the rise of an increasing number of fan-edits brings up this larger question concerning the nature of adaptation. This had not been a consideration outside of projectionists altering and trimming studio film reels based on their own predilections, or on a much more widespread discourse through the introduction of “Director’s Cuts” of major films on home video beginning in the 1990s.

I propose that embedded Flash video sites such as YouTube, particularly after the site began allowing uploads longer than 10 minutes in length in mid-to-late 2010, have encouraged and enabled the rise of fan-edits. Such a platform enables potentially

millions of viewers to take part in the exhibitionism afforded by passionate editors who wish to display their own storytelling conceits, as applied to film properties they wish to modify in varying ways.

Why This Research?

Such an explosion in film presentation dramatically changes the nature of adaptation studies as modern audiences have a new way to engage with genre films, wherein traditional context is removed even further from the primary source; in some cases, the fan-edit may be multiple interpretations down the line of adaptation from the source work. This phenomenon represents the new wave of how film audiences will increasingly encounter “classic” films and television series, also changing how studios and independent producers alike may choose to adapt to this change by repackaging their archive projects.

There is also the question of ethics to be explored, wherein changing *Jaws* can be akin to changing the expression of the Mona Lisa painting. Who has the right to effect such changes, especially when they had no relation to the creation of the original artwork, and are merely part of the audience? Changing technology, copyright laws, and spectatorship all come into question here.

Additionally, on a practical level there is a possible corollary in terms of audience consumptive habits that affect the global film industry. Aside from the pervasive fear in Hollywood and with cable-providers about piracy, and how this affects theatrical and home viewing of studio-distributed content, there is also the question of how such viewing habits are instead shifting the media power to YouTube and like sites in terms of viewership, and accordingly, the monetary revenue for all the corporate sponsors who advertise in, around, and through the content.

Survey of Existing Literature

One cannot begin researching the concept of one person re-editing another’s film without referring to the re-editing work of Soviet editing pioneer Sergei Eisenstein, which he exercised while honing his craft in the 1920s, re-editing footage from films by American filmmaker D.W. Griffith. Then there is the landmark example of film pioneer Edwin S. Porter’s film *Life of an American Fireman* (1903)⁵, which was eventually used to explore the possibilities of parallel cutting techniques by an unknown editor decades after its “completion” and release. Charles Musser, in his book *Before the Nickelodeon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1991), highlights the importance of such a technological change to the realm of film presentation: “Such a transformation involved changes in the methods of representation, film production, exhibition, reception, and distribution. Yet Porter barely participated in this process. As a result, his standing and the standing of his films were on the wane”.⁶

These famous film re-edits are known due to the legendary status attributed to Eisenstein, who made film history as not only as a successful filmmaker and film

theorist on editing, revolutionising the concept of the form with his experiments in montage, and to Musser, for having discovered that Porter himself had not actually been the one to introduce parallel editing in his *Life of an American Fireman* short subject; his findings helped break forth new understanding in the realm of film annals' history. Through Eisenstein's 1920s' experiments with Griffith's much earlier films, we have an instance of high-profile editing of another's work that would not be seen again until the Charles Musser reveal of someone having experimented with Porter's creation, as it has been demonstrated to have happened circa the 1930s.

While there undoubtedly may have been some other instances of this sort of thing occurring in the intervening eighty years before fan-edits became a known quantity, they would have been no more than mere educational exercises, nothing like the concept today of mass-sharing a new approach on an old work purely for exhibition sake. Despite the aforementioned high cost of editing equipment and pre-home video era lack of access to studio-owned film prints, there simply was no exhibition outlet for such works, and certainly not on a medium that as we shall see begins to supersede copyright, but also makes the material accessible to an unlimited number of viewers, some having already gained over a half-million views each.

Given this reason, apart from Eisenstein's writings on the subject, such as *Towards a Theory of Montage: Sergei Eisenstein Selected Works* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010)⁷, and Musser's *Before the Nickelodeon*, most of the resources I am referencing in my research are concerned with facets such as copyright domain: *Hollywood's copyright wars from Edison to the Internet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)⁸; postmodernist thought: *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)⁹; art ethics, collage art, and the concept of artistic "ownership": *Cutting across media appropriation art, interventionist collage, and copyright law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011)¹⁰; vital books considering New Film History: *The new film history: sources, methods, approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)¹¹; and my own statistical analyses of such sites as YouTube. With fan-edits being such a fairly recent phenomenon, the reliance on such a wide-range of exhaustive resources is necessary for presenting the first thesis on this topic; this includes dozens of the actual film titles in question, as well as reports in popular media, and public opinion in addition to the type of critical studies previously mentioned.

Of great note here, however, is the fact that the fan-edit phenomenon is so very recent, that there really has been no singular academic explorations of its impact upon the sphere of Media or Film Studies, outside of a very few journal articles. As such, all my resources are rather diverse, ranging from New Film History, to post-modernist theory and Adaptation studies, to comparisons of the films with their originating sources, alongside the posted viewer comments and viewership numbers of the most popular examples within this new genre.

Research Methodology and Sources

I am utilising a New Film History Methodology in examining fan-edits because of its revisionist and postmodernist view of established films and related literature in the context of emerging media, which applies directly to the notion of re-contextualising widely-known and revered films of the past. Film, video, the internet, and post-modernist forms all converge when discussing this growing topic, and as I have previously mentioned, I aim to present new findings in my ongoing research in analysing the historiographic as well as current impact this sort of genre holds in the area of new media; the sources are expansive and as of yet untested. In example, I shall illustrate the findings from a closed analysis of the comments section from any number of fan-edit sites for a given title. Charted visual representation of such findings will bear out useful information in grounding this area of study, providing a solid template from which to extrapolate future avenues of study in the field.

Another example is the number of comments for a given fan-edit film and the number of views, which will help bear out insights. Additionally, the tone of comments, their response to the effectiveness of the given edit, and other occasional comments may provide key points for assessing the online culture of this new phenomenon.

Though re-editing someone else's film to different authorial effect has been a known quantity since Eisenstein's experiments with Griffith's works as early as the 1920s, it is clear that three major pieces had to fall into place over the past one hundred years of cinema history, to bring the modern fan-edit movement to fruition: the home video revolution of the 1980s, followed by the introduction of affordable nonlinear editing systems a decade later, followed finally by the introduction of free, Flash-based video distribution websites a decade after that. Just as these three things came about in the last third of the whole of cinema history, the last of these, the exhibition format of YouTube-like sites, is likely the most revolutionary and primary-key enabling the widespread proliferation of shared re-edits. I hypothesise that this technology not only circumvents the legal implications that would have prevented screenings of such shared works in the past, but also actively encourages the formation of such shared activity; I seek to prove this through my deep research into the fan-edit culture, via academic insight, popular journalistic reporting on the growing trend, and also through the interactions of fans on the forums and sites that represent the domain of the rising fan-edit genre.

Context

Aside from the technological impetus for fan-editing, the first clear example of a creative demonstration of re-ordering a film's scenes for a new purpose on a widespread audience release could be said to have begun with Francis Ford Coppola's own *Godfather I* and *II* films (1972, 1974) in *The Godfather Saga* as a television mini-series in 1977 (and released on VHS home video in 1981), and then again as slightly

different re-editing as *The Godfather 1902-1959: The Complete Epic*, then as *The Godfather Trilogy: 1901-1980* as a cut that is inclusive of Part III, and finally the more recent *The Godfather Epic* for HBO Now, a slightly different recut of the 1977 *Saga* miniseries (but which confusingly lists a 1991 copyright-date in the credits). Unlike the more artistic pursuits of re-editing a film for obsessiveness sake, Coppola first began the series recuts with an eye towards drawing in more money, specifically to help fund the then flailing production of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), a film which he would also revisit years later with a newly ordered and expanded release as *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2001).

Directors Ridley Scott, Oliver Stone, and George Lucas have all famously pursued the same explorations, though mostly in the charge of artistic license, rather than specifically for money. In fact, Ridley Scott's first foray into reshaping his previous work *Blade Runner* (1982) in 1991, was also perhaps the first commercially marketed "Director's Cut" labelled as-such and creating a trend, thus introducing to the mass public such a concept that a major film director could be at creative odds with the financially driven studio who released their movie. Shortly after *Blade Runner: The Director's Cut* was released on home video in 1993, there was a very noticeable trend in home video releasing where the term "Director's Cut" became a badge of honour that the release in question would ostensibly be more artistically cutting-edge, as in the case of the one for *Blade Runner*, where the theatrical voice-over narration had been removed, and the ending scene now offered an esoteric cliff-hanger that even nearly two decades' later was powerful enough to be similarly used in the Chris Nolan film, *Inception* (2010). Since that first notable "Director's Cut" release however, Scott went on to later complete *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (2007), which he maintains is his perfect and final say on the matter, before moving on to its forthcoming sequels.

Oliver Stone similarly released his own director's cut for his controversial film, *Natural Born Killers* (1994) merely two years later, but it was his struggle with *Alexander* (2004) which provides a fascinating look at how directors can be just as driven to reorder their films as the fan editors that do it for fellow cineastes. Apart from the expected *Alexander: The Director's Cut* (2005) which came a year later, *Alexander, Revisited: The Final Cut* premiered two years after that, in 2007. Quite surprisingly, the absolute final cut, *Alexander, The Ultimate Cut* (2014) was released ten years after the original; this fourth incarnation within a single decade seems to have not only satiated Stone's obsessive quest with portraying the history of the titular character, a passion-project he had spent most of his career waiting to produce, but also satisfied the critics, who generally agree that this cut provides all the depth and drama one could desire about the character; one such critic considered it one of the best films of 2014, despite being released on home video¹².

One cannot discuss the domain and ethics of director's cuts without discussing the similar trajectory of George Lucas' revisions to his own *Star Wars* films (1977-1983), which in-turn have not only helped give impetus to the idea of the fan-edit phenomenon, but also to the consideration of directors continuing to tinker with

their projects through multiple revisions, long after the films have been taken to heart by fanatics that assume a large degree of ownership over the films due to their passionate association with them. Halfway between the revisionist approaches for art's sake like with Stone, and halfway between the financial gain employed by his old mentor Coppola, Lucas permanently changed his classic film trilogy. As he wanted the original *Star Wars* film trilogy to be aesthetically balanced with that of his then upcoming prequel trilogy by restoring the film elements, but also by livening up and correcting some minor moments that had long bothered him about it, the three films were given an unprecedented amount of restoration work, and fitted with some brand new effects and occasional "newly-added scenes".

These so-called "Special Editions" (1997) were meant to be a step beyond the by then ubiquitously-used "Director's Cut" label. To Lucas they were very-much director's cuts, as he had long-felt only 50-60% satisfaction with the first film (*A New Hope*, 1977)¹³, and with this Special Edition release, he felt a greater sense of completion. Beyond the desire to right old-perceived wrongs, Lucas also chose to employ a strategy he had used to fund the first two sequels, which was re-releasing the films in theatres, this time to help fund the upcoming prequel films. Even after the prequels had almost quite come and gone, *A New Hope* would change a slight bit more for the DVD release in 2004, and then again ever-so-slightly for the 2011 Blu-Ray editions. Those three recuts of *A New Hope* match the number of drafts that also took Stone to find creative satisfaction with his *Alexander* recuts.

Lucas' journey towards personal contentment led to much strife in the fan-communities. Very vocal fans of the series have endlessly debated and derided the director's decisions regarding most of the changes, to what they considered perfect to begin with. Though the cleaned up and polished visuals and audio were appreciated on a great level, it was the inclusion of new creatures and a modification to a primary character's action that frustrated many. To add to their annoyance, the original theatrical versions of the films cannot be purchased or seen on a modern high-definition format; according to Lucas the original negatives were in-such a state of decomposition that the restoration process destroyed the negatives, thus leaving only the current versions.

Authorship

In terms of the modern usage of the term "fan-edit", the first major exercise to make a large scale impact in the mainstream media was *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Edit*, released in early 2001. Amongst the many older *Star Wars* fans who had harshly objected to several tenets of the parent-film, *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), it was a baffling new age of cinematic fandom to have such an extensively recut version of a major feature-film release. This recut, unlike the Super 8 Castle films of the 1960s, which included condensed digest-versions of classic Universal Studios' monster films of the 1930s and 40s, actually introduced the concept of major

editing work not for the sole purpose of whittling down running time as with those movies, but for the purpose of changing the tone or direction of a major work.

As many *Star Wars* fans decry and argue Lucas' explanation of the original film negatives having been destroyed as part of the heavy restoration work, fan-editors have stepped into the demand for the original, unaltered films. There are expectantly many, from the versions that present the original films as they were exhibited in May 1977 when *Star Wars* became the pop-cultural phenomenon it has remained the past 40 years, mono-soundtrack and all, to ones that make use of the Special Edition cleaned-up presentation, but without the occasionally controversially changed instances. A few editors even out-did the Special Edition clean-up efforts by painstakingly re-colouring certain sequences frame-by-frame to correct colour-timing differences, and to fix minute effects gaffes that were still present in all the original films, even after the official restorations. Such a labour of love has been particularly put into these last examples that many purists have printed the films to disc as their preferred versions and placed inside the respective commercial movie cases in-replacement over the official discs.

Aside from the degree of source fidelity in these new adaptations, there is a larger issue posed about the question of ownership of these "new" films. To whom does the copyright of a fan-edit belong, since they are originally the property of major film studios, and whose very makeup is not classified in the Creative Commons? The credit of such a film squarely goes to the editor, but as such there can be no claim of ownership; in this regard, these "remixed" films are constructed and disseminated in quite the same fashion that a music DJ splices and overlays music with complementary bridging and new arrangements. As such, these sort of very postmodernist constructs can be consumed freely within our culture, but never presented for profit.

Despite the obvious copyrights held by the major studios, many fan conventions across the world have routinely had vendor booths that specialise in selling DVDs of such recuts. To be fair, most of the views of fan-edits are from within the online fan-edit communities, traded via file-share programs such as BitTorrent. And then there are the aforementioned ones which exist on YouTube and Vimeo, such as recuts of the *Star Wars* prequels, where millions of people freely-access them.

It is most-illuminating that the first well-known fan-edit in existence, *The Phantom Edit*, was seen by its source's creative author to be a progressive exploration. George Lucas, as creator of the *Star Wars* saga, and director of the maligned film that gave impetus to the famous fan-edit phenomenon, acknowledged its validity: "The internet is a new medium, it's all about doing things like that". Jeanne Cole, a representative for his Lucasfilm production company opined, "At the end of the day, this is about everyone just having fun with *Star Wars*".¹⁴

Historically, the silence from other Hollywood moguls whose films have been reinterpreted and distributed online seems to echo the sentiments of Lucas and his company. The trend-setting of Lucas' reaction was par for a career-spanning series

of monumental industry revolutions and advances he initiated, and for his newest directed film to be directly responsible for the rise of the fan-edit frontier is nothing more than fitting, even if the fan-edit had been borne-out of a general disappointment with Lucas' newest offering.

Because fan-edits are usually a direct response from a fan, usually as a means of better aligning a property to its earlier chapter entries or in-tone with the actual source material, there is a strong consideration of the nature of fidelity in these adaptive works. While these fan-edits are they in themselves new translations of an earlier translation, the concept becomes a bit more blurred when attempting to identify issues of authorship. Academic researcher Joshua Wille writes, "Admittedly, fan edits are partially reactive, because they are inherently comparable to their source texts and could be said to challenge traditional perspectives of authorship by demonstrating the malleability of digital media".¹⁵

As much as Hollywood is either silent or occasionally against such remixes, some high-profile members of that community have begun to embrace the activity. Well-known actor Topher Grace has famously screened his very own recut of the *Star Wars* prequels¹⁶, and acclaimed director Steven Soderbergh, in addition to a recut of Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980) also created one of the most discussed fan-edits thus-far in terms of post-modernist exploration with his *Psychos* mash-up¹⁷. In it, he takes the original 1960 Hitchcock classic, and mixes it with the 1998 shot-for-shot Gus Van Sant remake. Director Van Sant had said his reason for remaking a hallowed classic shot-for-shot, which seems pointless enough, was because he foresaw a day when the majority of films being released would be remakes of earlier films, and he wanted to try to prove that it is pointless for studios to continue the trend. "So no one else would have to"¹⁸, was his answer to why he took on the project. He was making a point, which was not heeded, for within years his outlook began to become exceedingly true. Soderbergh takes it one-step further in 2014 and drains the colour of the remake to black-and-white, matching the original's look, and then intercuts back and forth, throttling between the shots of each film, as one actress replaces the other in the same position and vice-versa, much like the Bond character in the James Bond 50th Anniversary (2012) 22 film mash-up fan-edit on YouTube involving six different James Bond actors. Van Sant tried to herald his point in a vaguely sarcastic way, and here Soderbergh embraces the post-modernity of the mass-media-drenched culture we live in, where anything old can be reworked towards a more-modern sensibility.

The question of ownership here is superseded by the ubiquity of the technology that allows for anyone to produce their own cuts that agree with their own nostalgia, ethics, or merely fun experiments. Fan-edits seem to be tolerated by the major film studios as sort of a video disc-jockey hobby, and so long as there is no money exchanging hands, there appears to be an acknowledgement that the remix culture we live in encompasses such "fair-use" of studio output, explored in such ways out of faithful love and devotion to their works.

Production and Distribution

Whereas the level of remoulding a film work was exclusive to early cinema projectionists or wealthy cineastes capable of purchasing the equipment and film reels, the technology of the early 21st Century has afforded virtually everyone the ability to re-contextualise any film media imaginable, even entirely on ubiquitous devices such as smartphones that even very young children carry daily. Very simple apps can be freely downloaded and installed, with changes to editing, titles, music, et cetera, only taking a mere fraction of the time it would require with standard studio equipment. As discussed before, such an ability of creative ability in the hands of nearly every layperson who desires it presents some very weighty theoretical and ethical questions about how established films are affected.

As postmodernist philosopher Lyotard asserted in 1984, "Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange".¹⁹ Still largely traded on BitTorrent links, fan-edits usually require some amount of work to find and download, but depending on the respective studios' policies on removal requests, they may be easily viewed on free and very accessible sites like YouTube (it is not surprising that *Star Wars* fan edits are among the latter that have not been pulled from such sites due to Lucas' stance towards the original *Phantom Edit*, as well as countless fan-films using his characters, plotlines, and soundtracks).

The growing interest here is the matter by which these films are becoming increasingly-made available to millions of people on YouTube, Vimeo, and other similar free Flash-media sites. By my working hypothesis, it is this engine by which fan-edits are even now becoming a matter of relevancy because of their newfound accessibility and offering the broadest audience-base a film-editor could hope to target. Though certainly not an endeavour by-which a lay-editor could make a career (though a side-stream of income is a given with the continual ad-revenue on a site like YouTube), for many this form of distribution is a great calling-card for entering into a professional career.

Take for example the very popular trailer recut of *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) from 2005, which uses cheery voice-over narration and music, select footage and common romantic-comedy editing tropes to re-present the Stanley Kubrick horror film, *The Shining*, into a trailer for a romantic-comedy entitled, *Shining*. A similar approach was used with footage from *Mary Poppins* (Stevenson, 1964) to deliver a theoretical trailer for a horror version of the tale, entitled, *Scary Mary*. The fan-editor of the first example had created the work in-competition for the International Association of Creative Editors, and received much acclaim for the piece²⁰.

Whereas the original BitTorrent applications were the primary method of access to these sort of films, it was only the most media savvy and daring internet searchers who would have encountered them, due to the shaky legality of files freely traded via

the programs; once YouTube established a more open-market of video that relies on embedded instant-streaming as opposed to having to download tremendously large files sight-unseen over the course of hours, this post-modern age of Hollywood film remixing has concretely entered into the mainstream.

Reception

As far as online film redistribution goes for actual studio-produced film releases, the MPAA and FBI have made occasional examples against online film piracy. In sharp contrast to Lucasfilm's relaxed and even encouraging stance on *The Phantom Edit* fan-recut of *Star Wars Episode I*, that same company pressed charges against one of their employees who simply showed the influential film journalist Harry Knowles a copy of the next film, *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002) in a hotel room two months' prior to its extremely anticipated release. Even though the sneak-peek garnered a very positive review for the number-one website that fits the film's core demographic, it was seen as a serious infraction which led to jail-time for the employee.²¹

This budding phenomenon of unofficial film releases in light of a proliferous new technology continued to see larger stakes that would establish legal modus operandi: an early workprint of Ang Lee's 2003 film, *Hulk*, showed up on BitTorrent links two weeks before the film's formal theatrical release, and the individual responsible for the leak was also summarily jailed²². The escalation here was the access many thousands had to the material before official release, and thus souring the initial critical reception with early lukewarm reviews that the studio believed hurt its box-office weekend roll-out. Though several other high-profile films were similarly leaked throughout the early 2000s, the desperate approach of studios losing a raging battle against piracy peaked in 2010 when Sylvester Stallone's *The Expendables* was released online while it was in its theatrical run. This time it was not merely a company employee who faced prosecution for sharing, but a large sample of the online audience members; in total 23,322 downloaders were subpoenaed. After a year's time the charges were dropped due to court ruling²³, but these early online-film precedents sent a clear message: such instances further emboldened the notion that while freely-distributed fan-edits are fine, circulation of the "official" studio version is punishable by-law, with or without a financial exchange.

Because of the new technological nature by how quickly these films can be uploaded, and with the sheer number of internet users exchanging such files, it is clear that the fan-edit may continue to grow in popularity. The apparent stance towards legal action for copyright infringement has maintained a trajectory of becoming more comfortable with the "Remix Culture" we increasingly live in, and as far as the sociological and psychological implications of the fan-edit revolution goes, such findings will be explored in-depth with a qualitative statistical analysis afforded by information that can be gleaned from the site platforms and their many users.

Conclusion

Throughout roughly the first one hundred years of the motion picture medium, there was a continuity of media, shared from one generation to the next²⁴. Children growing up on very popular series such as *Popeye* and *Looney Tunes* cartoons in the 1930s, likely then shared those cartoons with their children of the fifties, grandchildren of the seventies, and so on. A child in the early-nineteen-eighties may have had just as much knowledge of the classic television series of their grandparents' and parents' generations as they did those of his or her own. The same could be said to be true of classic films, whether televised or watched on home formats. Around the Millennial year media began to change-up drastically²⁵, largely because of those same tools that allow for media dissemination such as fan-edits, that the options became so vast and increasingly-so, that the only continuity of a shared mutual experience is likely whatever happens to break all boundaries of marketing and communal interest. Even then, as with a recent example being *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (2015) which broke all box-office records to become the highest grossing film of all cinema history, and which rates the highest critically of all previous *Star Wars* films at a 92% "fresh" consensus on Rotten Tomatoes' aggregate review-scoring²⁶, the impact lasted roughly only a month after the film's release in the print and advertising media; most films today, and only the very popular ones, now only have a single weekend on average to make an impact due to all the competing media²⁷. Compare this to twenty years ago when a "hit" film like *Ghostbusters* (Reitman, 1984) remained in first run theatres for much of 1984, and then immediately received a 1985 re-release due to sheer-popularity²⁸.

Through condensing media libraries of the past, it might be practical for future generations to be able to contextualise a previous generation's collective dreams, hopes, history and cultural identities, just as much as pre-21st century generations were able to share and understand of their forebears' lives through a more limited palette. For example, a young child of today may have a difficult inclination or lack of time to watch all 725 hour-long episodes of *Star Trek* if that is a property he/she wants to seek out. That may be a conundrum for a new fan coming into a heavily-marketed and still-known property today; even the intricacies of shared-community storylines linking beloved comedy shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971) with *Green Acres* (1965-1971) to *Petticoat Junction* (1963-1970) may not be enough anymore to have cemented their place with future audiences. What was once highly-rated viewing to an entire generation could be seen as seemingly disposable when buried under the weight of a now infinite number of choices. This is where I believe that samplers of past media will be essential; and that even then, should an interested viewer select to explore beyond a 30 second preview, the options of the three best episodes according to popularity or critical consensus may be the only footage of said series that will be readily-consumed. Such brevity could likely be the only way to explore the width-and-breadth of previous generations' media.

Though Lucas first recut his own supposedly “finished” films, which no-doubt helped encourage the notion of audience members taking the editorial reigns for their own selves, his attitude towards the first big fan-edit, *The Phantom Edit*, set a precedent for the industry. As pointed out, these film remixes can help condense and act as a guide to longer form series, or it can merely confuse those who first experience a film such as perhaps *War of the Stars: A New Hope Grindhoused* (The Man Behind The Mask, 2010) as their first introduction to those characters and scenarios of long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.

My ongoing thesis will demonstrate the effect that YouTube and similar sites have fully enabled the fan-edit genre to enter the mainstream consciousness; following the introduction of home video and the ubiquity of non-linear home editing equipment, this fairly recent technological staple of Flash video-based sites (YouTube alone reaches one billion users, a third of all internet users²⁹) concludes the final step-progression in an evolutionary chain of invention that makes widespread fan-edits possible. Because there has been no substantial academic exploration of this progression and its resultant impact upon the nature of viewing well-known films in these new configurations, such research is vital to the field of New Film History.

Aside from compiling the most comprehensive history and exploration of this relatively new genre, these findings will effectively show the impact such new film versions are having upon the viewing-public. How are film fans responding? What of the reactions of lay-viewers? Do the remixed introductions of classic film plotlines and characters to an audience experiencing them for the first time enhance, or tarnish those films’ legacy? A study of YouTube, Vimeo, and other video platforms will likely yield not only the statistical impact of such film remixes, but also qualitative responses over time to such works via aggregate comments in-light of their viewership numbers.

As we progress into a media-saturated society, further research is necessary to the field of New Film History to identify and demonstrate the impact of fan-edit work. The history, theoretical discourse of ownership, audience reception and the practical impact upon the film industry, both monetarily and in terms of studios preserving their legacies are all affected. Such a body of codified findings will provide the very first groundwork in New Film History to begin to acknowledge, examine, and offer up findings for this field of research.

Notes

- 1 Salon. “The Phantom Edit: How One Fan Nearly Fixed the Episode 1 Disaster, and Why George Lucas is Indirectly Stoking Another Kind of Digital Revolution.” Last accessed 09-11-2015, http://www.salon.com/2001/11/05/phantom_edit/.
- 2 YouTube. Last accessed 22-05-2016, <http://www.youtube.com>.
- 3 Vimeo. Last accessed 22-05-2016, <http://www.vimeo.com>.
- 4 Fan-edit.org. Last accessed 22-05-2016, <http://www.fan-edit.org>.

- 5 *Life of an American Fireman* is available on the DVD entitled *More Treasures from American Film Archives, 1894-1931*. San Francisco, CA: the National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004.
- 6 Charles Musser. *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1991. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3q2nb2gw/>.
- 7 Sergei Eisenstein, Michael Glenny, and Richard Taylor. 2010. *Sergei Eisenstein selected works*. Volume II. London: I.B. Tauris. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=334935>.
- 8 Peter Decherney. 2012. *Hollywood's copyright wars from Edison to the Internet*. New York: Columbia University Press. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=895258>.
- 9 Jean-François Lyotard, Geoffrey Bennington, and Brian Massumi. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 10 Kembrew McLeod, and Rudolf E. Kuenzli. 2011. *Cutting across media appropriation art, interventionist collage, and copyright law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1172260>.
- 11 James Chapman, H. Mark Glancy, and Sue Harper. 2007. *The new film history: sources, methods, approaches*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- 12 The Talkhouse. "(The Trouble with the Truth) Talks Oliver Stone's Alexander: The Ultimate Cut". Last accessed 23-05-2016. <http://thetalkhouse.com/jim-hemphill-the-trouble-with-the-truth-on-oliver-stones-alexander-the-ultimate-cut/>.
- 13 Tom Shone. 2014. *Blockbuster how hollywood learned to stop worrying and love the summer*. [Place of publication not identified]: Free Press, pp. 285. <http://rbdigital.oneclickdigital.com>.
- 14 BBC News. Last accessed 28-04-2015. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1375742.stm>.
- 15 Joshua Wille. "Praxis: Fan-edits and the legacy of The Phantom Edit." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 17 (2014): Accessed 26-04-2016.
- 16 No Film School. "'Star Wars' Like You've Never Seen It: All Three Prequels Edited Into One 85-Minute Film" Last accessed 15-06-16, <http://nofilmschool.com/2014/05/topher-grace-star-wars-editor-strikes-back-redux-jedi>.
- 17 Open Culture. "Watch Steven Soderbergh's Creative Mashup of Hitchcock and Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* Films" Last accessed 15-06-2016, <http://www.openculture.com/2014/03/steven-soderberghs-psycho-mashup.html>.
- 18 Internet Movie Database. Last accessed 23-05-2016, <http://m.imdb.com/name/nm0001814/quotes>.
- 19 Jean-François Lyotard, Geoffrey Bennington, and Brian Massumi. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 20 Wikipedia. "Association of Independent Creative Editors". Last accessed 15-06-2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_of_Independent_Creative_Editors.
- 21 Sfgate. "Former Lucasfilm employee arrested / Man accused of stealing 'Star Wars' collectible items". Last accessed 23-05-2016, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Former-Lucasfilm-employee-arrested-Man-accused-2783500.php>
- 22 Film Journal International. "A Brief History of Movies Being Leaked Onto the Internet". Last accessed 23-05-2016, <http://www.filmjournal.com/content/brief-history-movies-being-leaked-internet>.
- 23 TorrentFreak. "The Expendables Makers Dismiss Massive Bittorrent Lawsuit". Last accessed 23-05-2016, <https://torrentfreak.com/the-expendables-makers-dismiss-massive-bittorrent-lawsuit-110825/>.

- 24 Göran Bolin. "Media Generations: Objective and subjective media landscapes and nostalgia among generations of media users." *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014): 108-131. Last accessed 15-06-2016, <http://www.participations.org/Volume%2011/Issue%202/8.pdf>.
- 25 New York Times. "Millennials and Cutting the Cord". Last accessed 15-06-16, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/03/business/media/changing-media-consumption-millennials-cord-cutters.html>.
- 26 Rotten Tomatoes. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Last accessed 23-05-2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_wars_episode_vii_the_force_awakens/.
- 27 How Stuff Works. "Why is a movie's first week box office so important?". Last accessed 15-06-16, <http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/why-is-movie-first-week-box-office-important.htm>.
- 28 Wikipedia. "Ghostbusters (1984). Box office". Last accessed 23-05-2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghostbusters#Box_office.
- 29 YouTube. "Statistics". Last accessed 22-05-2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

References

1. CHAPMAN, James, H. Mark GLANCY, and Sue HARPER. 2007. *The new film history: sources, methods, approaches*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. DECHERNEY, Peter. 2012. *Hollywood's copyright wars from Edison to the Internet*. New York: Columbia University Press.
3. EISENSTEIN, Sergei, Michael GLENNY, and Richard TAYLOR. 2010. *Sergei Eisenstein selected works*. Volume II. London: I.B. Tauris.
4. LYOTARD, Jean-François, Geoffrey BENNINGTON, and Brian MASSUMI. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
5. McLEOD, Kembrew, and Rudolf E. KUENZLI. 2011. *Cutting across media appropriation art, interventionist collage, and copyright law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
6. MUSSER, Charles. *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1991.