

Cinema and immortality : Hollywood classics in an intermediated world

Autor(en): **Klinger, Barbara**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature**

Band (Jahr): **29 (2013)**

PDF erstellt am: **11.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-390807>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

Cinema and Immortality: Hollywood Classics in an Intermediated World

Barbara Klinger

In our Darwinian media universe, some texts will disappear from view, while others survive, sometimes to become “immortal.” Rather than consider immortality as produced by a text’s aesthetic qualities, I focus on the phenomenon of the film reissue – the re-release of new versions – as vital to a film’s successful circulation through time. The re-release of a film in various venues, from movie theaters to television, involves its transformation to suit the requirements of new technologies and media. Hence, investigating the reissue means theorizing the significance these transformations have for textual study. In the process, we confront not only cinema’s immortality as opposed to its mortality, but other conceptual conflicts as well: the film text’s stability versus its instability; the essential cinematic versus intermediated cinema; and authenticity versus the copy. These conflicts lead to disciplinary questions: what kind of film history and film aesthetics best respond to cinema’s intermediality through decades of recycling? How does the appraisal of cinema’s intermediality – its constitutional relationships to other media involved in its circulation – shift accordingly? How might this shift ultimately result in new approaches to adaptation? To address these issues, I examine a group of Hollywood mainstays, including *Gone with the Wind* and *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

*Cultures exhaust themselves; civilizations die. . . . This is nothing we do not already know.
There is however a more interesting question: what is it that causes life to perdure?”*
(Maffesoli 114-115)

When the issue of mortality is raised in relation to cinema, scholars usually examine it with respect to two concerns: the cinematic heritage, that

Cultures in Conflict / Conflicting Cultures. SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 29. Ed. Christina Ljungberg and Mario Klarer. Tübingen: Narr, 2013. 17-29.

is, the lost or disintegrating films that threaten the archive and a full understanding of film history; and the so-called “death of cinema” caused by the displacement of celluloid by digital technologies. While both of these concerns will rightfully continue to generate discussion and debate, what is left unexamined is the opposite destiny for some films: that they endure over decades as highly visible exemplars of cinema to generations of audiences. We could attribute the longevity of such films to their essences, reasoning that each has commanded the public stage for so long because of its intrinsic merits. In my view, however, the picture is more complex. Certain older films have circulated historically through a series of versions distributed through an increasingly broad network of media platforms that re-release these films in some form. This circulation occurs within changing industrial and cultural circumstances that continually subject films to makeovers for old and new audiences alike.

The alterations that films undergo as they are serially reissued in new versions occur subsequent to theatrical premieres in what is called the “aftermarket.” A film can materialize in different forms during its initial theatrical release, but post-premiere recycling through a range of media technologies and across exhibition venues makes its lasting impact possible. Although films have long reappeared, the heady universe that surrounds us now, with proliferating versions of films after their theatrical debuts on screens as diverse as room-engulfing HDTVs and palm-sized iPhones, makes the centrality of this type of film migration evident. Moreover, the aftermarket is the only dimension of cinema capable of sustaining or, conversely, marginalizing a film’s claim on public attention over time. Aftermarkets provide the conditions necessary for films to become memorable or to be forgotten, to rise or fall in canonical rank, to find or lose audiences, to persist in or disappear from the crowded media marketplace.

To pursue the significance of the aftermarket to the study of film, I will examine the reappearances of a small group of Hollywood films made during the height of the classic studio era. These include *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942), and *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946). Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), another enduring classic from a different period and nation, will also prove to be instructive here. The choice of these films allows me to concentrate on what I call the “popular immortals.” Popular immortals are celebrity texts that have earned critical accolades and, frequently, cult adoration. But they have also gained long-term, widespread fame among generations of mainstream viewers through television and cable reruns, reissue in movie theaters, and VHS, DVD, and Blu-ray editions, among other venues.

As fixtures of the American cinematic lexicon that have been recycled for more than seventy years, significant “old” Hollywood films help to expose the range of industry practices, modes of exhibition, and types of technologies and media responsible for keeping a title in the public eye over the long haul. In doing so, they reveal the textual transformations involved in its reissue – the revamping of a film’s audio-visual style and story to suit the requirements of new circumstances of exhibition and circulation. I argue that these films’ staying power owes in large part to their historical reappearance in multiple versions that have not only acted as life support systems, but have emblazoned them in the public imagination as representations of what cinema itself – at its best – was and is. I contend as well that all such versions are essentially adaptations. When movies are re-released, they are substantially modified, just as, in the case of more traditional forms of adaptation, texts must inevitably undergo change when translated into other media.¹

Cinema’s iteration in the aftermarket ultimately has ramifications for the nature of the object we study as film and for disciplinary approaches in the field itself. As we shall see, reckoning with reissues means confronting not only cinema’s immortality as opposed to its mortality, but a number of other conceptual conflicts as well: the stability versus the instability of the film text; the essential cinematic versus intermediated cinema; authenticity versus the copy; and the apparent primacy of versions of films that premiere in movie theaters versus those that appear afterward. These conflicts lead to disciplinary questions. What kind of film history and film aesthetics best respond to cinema’s intermediality through decades of recycling? Put another way, what modifications must film history and film aesthetics undergo to grasp cinema’s circulation and emphatic diachrony? How does the appraisal of cinema’s intermediality² – its constitutional relationships to other technologies and

¹ Adaptation studies have been reinvigorated by the simultaneous awareness of the text’s place in multimedia networks of intertextuality and of the insufficiency of fidelity-driven, “books into film” comparisons for analyzing this situation (Iain Smith’s edited collection is a strong example of this kind of scholarship). While pursuing a broader agenda, though, new adaptation studies concentrate on contemporary phenomena where a text’s transmedia proliferation (a novel becomes a film which becomes a video game, etc.) is most evident. Further, these studies do not consider a film’s literal reissue as a mode of adaptation worth investigating as such.

² Acknowledging that many different kinds of intermediality exist, my analysis presents the relationship between cinema and its transformative public re-presentations as a specific type of “intermedial configuration” (Rajewsky 43). As opposed, for instance, to identifying affinities between aural or optical technologies (Fullerton and Olsson), here the term signifies the material incorporation and muscular redefinition of the film text by fellow media and technologies involved in its serial reappearances over history.

media in its life cycle – shift accordingly? How might this shift result in reconceived approaches to adaptation?

Of course, my essay cannot exhaustively address all of these issues. But I mean to reflect upon facets of each of them through a series of mini-case studies of the “popular immortals,” particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to television – long one of the most significant and contentious venues of re-release for films. Let me begin, though, by clarifying the place the aftermarket typically occupies in the film industry and in the field, and addressing further why it deserves more scrutiny.

The Aftermarket

In debates in 2010 about the biggest box-office film of all time in North America, instigated by *Avatar's* (2009) success, *Gone with the Wind* emerged victorious at no. 1 in both US and Canadian markets with close to 2 billion dollars in revenues, once grosses were adjusted for inflation (“All Time Box Office”). By another measure – the number of tickets sold – David O. Selznick’s classic still merited first place. Domestic moviegoers purchased 25 million tickets during *Gone with the Wind's* first run; however, in theatrical reissue, the film sold an additional 180 million tickets, making its total more than 200 million admissions over its seventy year history in US theaters alone (Young). Even given frequent reruns on television and reissue on video, including, most recently, its seventieth anniversary Blu-ray edition, *Gone with the Wind's* spectacular showing on NBC in 1976 is still noteworthy: its two-night broadcast drew almost half of US households, making it the highest-rated Hollywood feature film ever to appear on a network (Gorman). Even with the grand public visibility *Avatar* earned as a theatrical object of wonder economically, technologically, and experientially, with 62 million tickets sold in its first domestic run (Young), it clearly needed to get a second life. This process commenced quickly with Cameron’s venture selling millions of DVDs on its first day on the home market in April 2010. The film also reappeared in theaters with additional footage in August 2010 and in multiple special DVD editions in time for the holidays, with a wide-release 3D Blu-ray edition in Fall 2012 (Finke).

Industry statistics like these often represent the aftermarket as nothing more than a cash cow. When film historians address the aftermarket, they tend to investigate the industrial, technical, economic, and legal developments that have underwritten film recycling: for example, the development of analog video or the ensuing Sony court case as it de-

terminated whether the VCR was an instrument of media piracy.³ When aesthetic judgments are woven into these accounts (especially before DVD, which, along with HDTV and home theater, improved the audio-visual quality of watching films on television), historians and critics often concentrate on the violence done to cinema as an art form on the “small screen,” a point to which I shall return.

For now, the *Gone with the Wind* / *Avatar* face-off raises awareness of different matters. It demonstrates that textual proliferation is not simply a contemporary phenomenon; that films rely absolutely on a network of fellow media for their continued visibility and cultural status; and that cinema’s multi-mediated life cycles oblige textual change and cultural resituating. Even in theatrical re-release, a film is not the same as it was when it debuted. For instance, like other titles originally shot in Academy ratio and reissued in the 1950s, *Gone with the Wind* was “stretched” to widescreen dimensions to accommodate the times – to meet standards of theatrical spectacle meant to compete with television. It was also presented in an improved Technicolor transfer and changed to stereophonic sound. In 1967-68, the film was re-released in 70mm, Metrocolor (MGM’s brand of Eastman Color), and six-track sound, presentational modes that again magnified its epic stature through technological updates. Ironically, both reissues involved severe cropping of the top and bottom of the image, actually providing less of the film in the midst of what otherwise appeared to be visual and audio plentitude. Along with print alterations, the heightened spectacle of *Gone with the Wind*’s version of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods in the 1950s and 1960s raise questions about the meanings it generated during crucial eras of the American Civil Rights movement.

While each of the popular immortals I have mentioned has been resurrected through myriad means, each has also been strongly identified with television in their ancillary lives. Since films have been shown via television for more than sixty years, cinema’s *televisual* presence – its exhibition on TV monitors in the home from the early post-WWII broadcast days to the DVD and HD eras – illuminates cinema’s story as a major mass entertainment form and as a medium extensively shaped by the post-premiere distribution of its titles.

³ The Supreme Court ruled on the “Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc.,” also known as the “Betamax Case” in 1984 in favor of Sony. This meant the Chief Justices found, among other things, that the VCR’s use to record movies was not in violation of copyright.

Television

In terms of social fortunes, the place that Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* occupies in the American consciousness would be impossible to gauge without taking stock of the role that TV – local, network, and cable stations – played in its destiny. In fact, the film itself would not have had such a wonderful life were it not for its fellow medium. When it was released after WWII, critical opinion was divided, with some lamenting the film's embarrassing display of sentimentality (Crowther). The film might never have caught the eye of later audiences had it not appeared to enter the public domain in 1974. Until 1994 when Republic Pictures legally regained copyright on the film and licensed NBC to show it, many channels broadcast *It's a Wonderful Life* innumerable times during the holidays, making it, as Ernest Mathijs has remarked, into a "seasonal cult" film (Mathijs). With its Christmastime denouement and seasonally appropriate uplifting message, reruns transformed the film's once slightly radioactive sentimentality into a cherished mode of affect that embodied the holiday spirit. Television programming thus suggests how film affect can be redefined over time, as well as how the household TV set could become a holiday destination for families. Incessant replay also led to a shift in the magnitude of the film's cultural presence and fueled its enduring crossover into popular and critical canons. Television has helped to make this and many other films what they are in the public imagination.

Yet, pre-HDTV's alterations of cinema have often been met with such negative reactions that television's importance to film circulation and the cinematic heritage more generally has been obscured. As Douglas Gomery once wrote: "Reliance on television for the presentation of motion pictures has extracted a high price in terms of viewing conditions" (259). He and other historians have noted the extensive changes films have undergone to suit the requirements of TV: movies have been cut for length, censored for content, interrupted by ads, and, in the case of widescreen films, altered to fit the smaller screen. As a result, plots have been changed, scenes added or deleted, expletives removed or replaced with harmless words, and original visual elements transformed – at times, making the film in question unintelligible. By the 1980s, when outrage at the horrors networks visited upon cinema was at its height, concerns ranged from the aesthetic to the patriotic: for scholars, filmmakers, and film critics, TV's "mutilation" of films showed "contempt for content" motivated by "programming needs" (Segrave 129-130). Further, by destroying authentic works rooted in the nation's history, the networks' avarice left "an art form defenseless" and tampered with "the hearts and minds of America" (Segrave 131, 133).

In terms of perceptions of destruction, perhaps colorization – a computerized process used in the 1980s and afterward to transform black-and-white films into color – is the most controversial of offenders at this time. In a familiar story, Ted Turner emerged in the 1980s as the infamous advocate of this process, “repainting” dozens of the pre-1950s films in his library, including *Casablanca*, to cablecast, initially, on TBS. He and other industry executives believed that colorization would make older films more viable for new audiences and more profitable for studios that leased them. Indeed, when Hal Roach Studios released *It's a Wonderful Life* on VHS during this decade, color cassettes retailed successfully at more than four times the price of black-and-white copies (Segrave 156). Meanwhile, the community that opposed colorization regarded it as yet another act of aesthetic sabotage directed at theatrical cinema by aftermarket forces. With economics once again pitted against aesthetics, colorization desecrated the original film and was compared to putting lipstick on a Greek statue.

While the colorization controversy eventually subsided, colorization itself did not disappear. In 2007 Paramount Pictures, current owner of the film's ancillary rights, released *It's a Wonderful Life* in a new version marked by improved colorization technologies. Further, in terms of reception, colorized transfers have found a place in popular canons: fans collect them and a piracy market exists for hard-to-find titles that have attained the status of rare objects. There are also holiday viewers in North America that keep Capra's film running all day on Christmas on two TVs – one for the black-and-white and one for the colorized video, mustering a peaceful coexistence between versions otherwise often seen as at war.

In both its controversial and “quieter” appearances, colorization has thus entered the print stream of *It's a Wonderful Life* and other films, becoming part of their patterns of circulation. In fact, colorization is not an anomaly; it lies distinctly within practices common to a broader spectrum of versions: recall the manipulation of *Gone with the Wind's* images via enhanced Technicolor and Metrocolor in its big-screen reappearances. More recently, with its digital footprint and economic logic, colorization is an antecedent of DVD. Industry executives view DVD too as a way of “recycling old films for maximum profits through a new technology.” DVD technology also updates or “freshens” films through a “more contemporary look” that will “appeal to a new generation of viewers” (Segrave 157). Moreover, DVD reprocesses and changes prints through the work of colorists and color correction technologies. These operations alter not only color and tone, but the image's resolution, producing versions of the same film that look quite different.

However, colorization lacks the critical cache associated with the DVD transfer. Despite its parallels with colorization, DVD – with its imprimatur of quality, the apparently authentic sheen of its revived images, and seductive packaging – seems the superior mode of repurposing. Introduced into a climate that embraces almost anything digital, DVD is among digital media that have rehabilitated TV for cinema screenings. In terms of cinema’s televisual history, then, there are “good” and “bad” aftermarkets, with aesthetic judgments informing analysis of the changes films undergo as they travel through their post-premiere lives.

This marriage of film history and aesthetics has meant that earlier eras of the recycling of Hollywood films on network and cable TV and videocassette have not been fully mined in terms of their implications for the field. One possible direction here is to delve more deeply into a historical moment to examine the bases of aesthetic claims about film versions. Paul Grainge’s meta-critical take on the colorization controversies of the 1980s is instructive in this respect. He examines the controversies as rooted in the culture wars of the time, wherein perceptions of the increasing influence of big business over art, television’s degrading effects on art and culture, and the waning of US power in the face of globalization, fueled vigorous protest over the fate of classic black-and-white film as emblems of American heritage vulnerable to all of these forces (155-176). As Grainge points out, colorization did not actually destroy the original; it visually reconfigured it, representing a “modification rather than a mutilation” (161). Colorization is in principle, then, no different than other versions that define film circulation. Moreover, by excavating the foundations of an aesthetic panic, Grainge sheds light on the contingency of aesthetic claims, demonstrating their origins in a matrix of social concerns. To come to terms with the versions that comprise the material migration of films across time, historians likewise must reconsider aesthetic claims that marginalize the place of a particular version in a film’s history of circulation.

The Aftermarket and Intermediality

Once film history is decoupled from traditional aesthetics that are based on notions of authenticity and quality, from judgments about savory and unsavory re-releases, aftermarket scholarship can approach an aesthetic better equipped to explore the film version’s place in the field – an aesthetic of circulation. This alternative approach identifies and conceptualizes the architectures of transformation that distinguish how films have been reformulated for ancillary venues and contexts over time. These range from the activities of organizations that participate in re-

presenting films, including media industries and archives, to the critical and cultural contexts in which films reappear. The transformations that occur in this mobilization of films are wide-ranging, affecting potentially the print's physical attributes, film narrative and style, generic categorization, the canon, and meaning.

No matter which mode of circulation is explored, however, research entails coming to terms with the import of cinema's intermedia alliances. As we have seen, the case of *It's a Wonderful Life* demonstrates how repetitive programming on TV strategically planned for the holidays can promote sentimental affect, cult canonicity, and membership in the family film genre. How a title becomes a family film is also, of course, subject to more finely grained aspects of programming. In his work on the TV rerun, Derek Kompare argues that this staple of programming is involved in an enterprise that is as semiotic as it is economic. On the one hand, the rerun is the "lifeblood" of a channel, forming the core of its appeal to advertisers and audiences alike. On the other, rerunning generates an active process that "grooms" content for TV: "in presenting familiar programming . . . networks do not merely run it; they strip it, promote it, repackage it, and recombine it" (171-172). Accordingly, when TV networks exhibit a Hollywood film, they not only transform the print's physicality and the film's textuality to conform to television's standards, they also reframe it for consumption.

A brief look at what we might call the "host effect" in *The Wizard of Oz* reruns offers one mode of reframing that characterized the film's serial make-overs. In its televised showings from the 1950s to the 1990s on CBS alone, a number of small screen personalities who had their own shows on the network – comedy, variety, or drama – introduced the film. These hosts were often accompanied by their real-life families and/or situated in their own homes or in "homey" surroundings. In this case, hosting, a widely practiced presentational mode on TV, enabled CBS to promote its stars and programming, as well as itself by opening and closing the film's telecast with CBS-branded credits and music. Meanwhile, the host's presence with children in domestic settings identified the film unambiguously as not just a musical, but as family fare. Further, the host-effect during *Oz*'s TV circulation came to define it as a canonical entry into the family genre.

By the 1990s when Angela Lansbury – an actress associated with musical theater and star of *Murder, She Wrote*, a mystery series aimed at older viewers – hosted its telecast, the film's place in this canon is on display, as is its appeal to nostalgia. Lansbury is in a room festooned with *The Wizard of Oz* posters. She wears casual clothing and sits in a comfortable-looking chair with a copy of the Frank Baum book opened on her lap. She is the portrait of a grandmotherly type ready for her

grandchildren and their parents to enjoy the story. In this straightforward way, economic imperatives associated with the network's promotion of its own brand and of the telecast translate into a multilayered semiotics of presentation. Through Lansbury's persona and its association with older viewers and through the setting, *The Wizard of Oz's* broadcast is framed in terms of memories of the novel and the film understood as a familial experience. Combined with Lansbury's association with musical theater, the framing also helps to cement *Oz's* generic hybridity as both musical and family film. By the time of the Lansbury telecast, the film has also clearly achieved cultural presence and authority.

Reflecting upon cinema's televisual history thus allows us to recalibrate notions of the canon to include popular tastes and affective modalities that develop through film recycling and to investigate the mechanisms by which films come to acquire status and an intimate place in culture and in audiences' lives. Once we regard the aftermarket as more than an economic or legal zone or a place of aesthetic promise or danger for films, a title's various iterations emerge as an intimate part of its history. With iterability identified as a prime moving force in a film's historical trajectory, issues of aura and authenticity – the director's cut, the restoration of never-before-seen footage – become part of the semiotic web woven by studios and other companies as they repurpose films for new venues and audiences. At the same time, unseemly alterations, such as the awkwardly censored or colorized print, assume their place as equally central to circulation. This aesthetics denuded of traditional associations with art and authenticity is defined, then, with respect to the expansive worlds of cinema's material existence as a disseminated entity – an existence marked by its incorporation into other venues with their own technological and media-specific imperatives. As the grounding principle of film circulation and survival, this reconceived aesthetic provides the keys to a more robust understanding of film history that takes stock of cinema's intermedia affiliations as part of its fundamental script.

The Film Text and Adaptation

Ultimately, the persistence of rerun films across exhibition forums raises broader questions about the protean nature of cinema itself. Like other media, film is a shifting prospect in its production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. The aftermarket – televisual and otherwise – is not really a separate sphere from first-run production and exhibition: it is part of a vital continuum that marks cinema as iterable and changeable

from the start; the aftermarket simply makes this state of affairs strikingly visible.

To wit, Thomas Elsaesser's study of *Metropolis*, a classic with one of the highest re-release profiles, demonstrates that director Fritz Lang's extravaganza "from its inception, existed in different release versions" (32). These include, in 1927 alone, its short-lived premiere in Berlin, the US re-edit, and another altered version for broader German distribution. Since then the film has been repeatedly reborn in versions that have cobbled together or reconstructed its elements, from intertitles and narrative to image and sound. At the time Elsaesser's book was published in 2000, perhaps the most famous of these re-imaginings was Giorgio Moroder's 1984 version that boasted a New Wave musical soundtrack and restored and tinted images. As Elsaesser points out, this version converted the movie from a film of historical importance to a cult sensation (37). He muses further that Moroder's re-issue can be seen "either as merely another business venture in the life-cycle of a film, or an adaptation, somewhere between a remake and a postmodern appropriation" (37).

The new digital restoration in 2010 enhances this sense of category confusion. It was fashioned after a 16mm dupe negative discovered in Buenos Aires that contained twenty-five minutes of lost footage thought to hail from the film's 1927 Berlin premiere cut. It also featured Gottfried Huppertz's 1927 score in 5.1 Surround Sound stereo in theaters or in live orchestral performance. Hence, a 16mm version of the film, itself a copy, forms the basis of a digital theatrical restoration, another copy, presented to the public in varied exhibition circumstances. Acknowledging the difficulties that a carnival of prints poses for assertions of authenticity, Elsaesser's summary question on this matter applies to any film with sustained cultural visibility. Is *Metropolis* a "strange torso or changeling of a film . . . [is it] mutilated or merely mutated?" (34).

Our choice is between regarding a film as a "mutating strange torso," a volatile foundation that will be appropriated and transformed, or a fixed, original entity subject to the production of "mutilated changelings," that is, ruined imposters. If we, reflecting on an aesthetics of circulation, opt for the first route, alterations to a film and its contexts become significant markers on an historical trail central to understanding that film. Pushed further, this pursuit of history over the long haul, as it foregrounds the inherent changeability of the film body, suggests the textual validity of the version, as well as its function as an appropriation with potentially substantial effects on a film's meaning and cultural status. Once the version is thus doubly conceived, it gains legitimacy as both a text and a part of an intertextual network that dynamically rear-

ticulates a title. Hence, it assumes a place in relation to other forms of adaptation that scholars have regarded as having clear analytical and conceptual value.

The dictionary definition of adaptation – “the modification of an organism or its parts that make it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment” – suggests that reissues are exemplary of this process. If every reissued version of a film is considered an adaptation of sorts, then the principles of change at work become a starting point for examining how a film is reiterated and reformulated for aftermarket technologies and media – from celluloid gauges to online streaming – as well as for new cultural contexts and audiences. In its afterlife, a film is thus always remade and adapted to new circumstances of “living.” Accordingly, our study of this phenomenon would be a revived mode of adaptation study, free from concerns with fidelity, with the primacy of one medium over another, with questions of comparative aesthetics. Moreover, versions of the same film can be firmly recognized as participating in the textual proliferation and extension that have long characterized media culture in the more customary forms of sequels, prequels, and remakes.⁴ The version thus becomes a vital textual phenomenon that enters into the filmic shape-shifting that occurs across media, without which a film’s history would be radically incomplete, its reputation a matter of memory, its intimate place in audience’s lives over time unfathomable. Paradoxically, textual immortality, far from signifying a kind of imperturbable stasis, relies on persistent, dynamic modifications to the textual body by forces to which this body is inextricably bound as it circulates. These forces may seem grand, as in the case of a digital restoration, or prosaic, as in the case of a programming strategy on TV. Whatever their appearance to the critical eye, they are vital to understanding the reissue as a mode of textual variation without which texts would fail to navigate the vast expanses of time necessary to become legends.

⁴ Daniel Herbert has coined the term *versionality* as a means of grasping the “intertextual, intermedial, and intramedial nexus” that surrounds any text and results in “repetitions and variations” (*Cinemascope*). If we push this concept further, we can consider any iteration of a text (e.g., a remake or a sequel) not only as a version, but as an adaptation understood in the broader sense that I pursue here. That is, versions represent the adaptations a text must undergo as it travels through industrial channels, culture, and history.

References

- “All Time Box Office: Domestic Grosses.” Box Office Mojo, 13 January 2013. <http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/domestic.htm>.
- Crowther, Bosley. “It’s a Wonderful Life.” *New York Times*, 23 December 1946. <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E00EF-DE163DEE3BBC4B51DFB467838D659EDE>.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. *Metropolis*. London: British Film Institute, 2000.
- Finke, Nikki. “19.7 Million ‘Avatar’ Blu-ray and DVDs Sold.” *Deadline.com*. 11 May 2010. <http://www.deadline.com/2010/19-7-million-avatar-blu-ray-dvds-sold/>.
- Fullerton, John and Jan Olsson. *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital*. Rome: John Libbey, 2004.
- Gomery, Douglas. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- Gorman, Bill. “Top 100 Rated TV Shows of all Time.” *TV by the Numbers*. 21 March 2009. <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2009/03-21/top-100-rated-tv-shows-of-all-time>.
- Grainge, Paul. *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002.
- Herbert, Daniel. “Horrors Derived: *The Thing* as Adaptation, Remake, and Version.” *Cinemascope 2* (2005). <http://www.cinema-scope.net>.
- Kompare, Derek. *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television*. New York and London: Routledge, 2005.
- Maffesoli, Michel. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. Trans. Don Smith. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996.
- Mathijs, Ernest. “Television and the Yuletide Cult.” *FlowTV 11* (2010). <http://flowtv.org/?p=4683>.
- Rajewsky, Irina O. “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality.” *Intermedialités 6* (2005): 43-64.
- Segrave, Kerry. *Movies at Home: How Hollywood Came to Television*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 1999.
- Smith, Iain R., ed. *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*. A Scope E-Book. *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*. Nottingham: Institute of Film and Television Studies, 2009. www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/cultborr/index.php.
- Young, John. “‘Avatar’ vs. ‘Gone with the Wind’.” *Entertainment Weekly*. 5 February 2010. <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/o,,20341730,-00.html>.

