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## MEDIUM COOL

### Remade/remodelled

BY [JASON ANDERSON](#)

There are remakes and then there are remakes. The first is the kind usually referenced when the term is used: new movies made from old ones, thereby capitalizing on the affection and reputation earned by an earlier product. The new models are often stripped of parts once considered vital (social satire in *Dawn of the Dead*, Union Jacks in *The Italian Job*) and refitted with elements more appropriate to contemporary tastes (campy humour in *The Stepford Wives*, anti-corporate paranoia in *The Manchurian Candidate*). Besides this week's *Assault on Precinct 13*, audiences will soon get newly refurbished versions of *The Pink Panther*, *The Amityville Horror*, *The Longest Yard* and *War of the Worlds*.



Raiders raiders Lamb, Strompolos, Zala

While the second kind of remake is less likely to involve craft services, it's more revealing about the relationship between movies and their viewers. Common folk are discouraged from mucking about in the dream life that cinema generates. We are encouraged to buy our favourite movies in a multitude of special collectors' editions but we cannot manipulate the contents. Forever wary of copyright infringement, the movie industry is eager to protect its investments.

But sometimes the consumers have a better understanding of the product than the sellers do. Consider the case of the so-called *Phantom Edit*, the unauthorized, Jar Jar-free cut of *Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace* that sent Lucasfilm into a tizzy yet couldn't be any worse than the authentic version -- that's just not possible. However, Lucasfilm has tacitly encouraged the internet phenomenon of fan films, as few of these amateur works (which sport names like *The Empire Strikes Backyard*) mount direct assaults on Lucas' originals.

In the art world, there are fewer restrictions when it comes to parody and fair use. In 1919, Marcel Duchamp inaugurated a century of abuses when he drew a moustache on a postcard of the Mona Lisa and called it L.H.O.O.Q., which, if you sound out the letters in French, means "she has a hot ass," a joke that highlights the vital link between Dadaism and *South Park*. The artistic practice of hijacking Hollywood iconography for personal (and preferably perverse) use was pioneered by Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith in the '50s and '60s. In 1996, Scottish artist Douglas Gordon won the Turner Prize for *24 Hour Psycho*, a piece in which the Hitchcock thriller is projected extremely slowly. Considerably more exciting are the clip films of Matthias Muller and Christoph Girardet, whose *Phoenix Tapes* disassembled the Hitchcock oeuvre by compiling shots of the master's favourite objects. The cine-collages of Canadian experimental film vets Mike Hoolboom and Richard Kerr are similarly delirious and heretical -- in Kerr's *Collage d'Hollywood*,

which screens in a program of his recent work at Cinematheque Ontario on Feb. 16, hyperbolic movie trailers are distorted and layered to histrionic effect. Most cunning of all may be the shorts of Martin Arnold, an Austrian artist who transforms seconds-long segments of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the Andy Hardy movies into maddening fugues of repression and repetition.

Another example of the unauthorized remake is at the Wynick/Tuck Gallery until Jan. 26. *Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove* is a meticulous and hilarious series of photographs by Kristan Horton. Essentially what he's done is replicate the Kubrick Cold War classic shot for shot. Since beginning the project last April, he's finished 87 shots and expects to create 300 unique images (by his count, there are 673 cut shots in the film, but many are repeats or slight variations). Though Horton closely mimics the original perspective, lighting and general composition in his revised shots, there are important differences. The massive planes in the opening sequence are now magic markers. A gun turret has been replaced by a gluestick. The Pentagon is represented by a wicker trivet. The torch-bearing woman in Columbia's logo is recast as a Tabasco bottle in a tissue-paper gown.

Kubrick's film is an excellent subject for experimentation, given that it showcased the glories of technology at the height of the Cold War. And as in many of Kubrick's films, its most predominant theme is the inability of our most advanced systems to cope with human baseness and irrationality.

In Horton's photos, Kubrick's technically masterful images are themselves befouled by the ordinary, the absurd and, perhaps most radically, the homemade. Horton's project may have less in common with the cinema appropriations of Gordon, Arnold et al. than other remakes by movie-loving amateurs with more enthusiasm than means. Horton cites *Hardware Wars* -- the 1977 parody that recast *Star Wars* as an exciting battle between household appliances -- as an antecedent. I'm also reminded of the strange story of Eric Zala, Jayson Lamb and Chris Strompolos. In 1982, these three 12-year-olds in Mississippi set out to reproduce *Raiders of the Lost Ark* shot for shot. Six years, one near house fire, countless injuries and one giant fibreglass boulder later, they finished it. Then, quite sensibly, they put it away. But in 2003, *Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Adaptation* had its public premiere in Austin, eliciting a fan letter from Steven Spielberg and news that their story was itself being adapted into a screenplay by *Ghost World's* Daniel Clowes.

While I look forward to the Charlie Kaufman-esque complexities this meta-adaptation will provoke, I have to wonder: do we really need new movies to amuse ourselves? Surely, we can come up with more imaginative uses for the crap we already have than just watching it.