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Recommendation: Fan Edits
WC: 758

After one particularly long, difficult day in the dead of winter, my roommate settled into the deepest couch cushion in our living room for her favorite decompression activity. She opened her laptop, plugged in her earbuds, and set a 15-minute timer to scroll through her saved [“Severance”](#) fan edits. About 5 minutes in she started to cry. I watched her carefully from the other corner of the sofa and resisted the urge to check in, unwilling to disrupt her sacred space. When the timer went off, she wiped her tears, took a deep breath, closed the TikTok tab in Google Chrome, and got back to work with a newfound vigor.

I’ve always been a self-proclaimed fangirl—likely kickstarted by my unrestricted access to YouTube in the 2010s—and by the time I downloaded iMovie onto my blue iPod Touch, I knew exactly what I was going to use my new technology to do. The first edit I ever made was approximately two minutes long, using clips from a 2015 [Dan and Phil](#) vlog, set to [“Closer” by The Chainsmokers and Halsey](#). An artifact.

Ten years later, [fan edits](#)—compilations or montages of TV shows, movies, celebrities, and more set to a particular song to pull out a chosen theme—still act as that kind of recognizable time capsule. Every fangirl who spent time on the internet in the spring and summer of 2020 knows exactly what I’m referring to when I talk about that one [Timothée Chalamet edit to “Playdate” by Melanie Martinez](#), which we all not-so-secretly watched on repeat. Oftentimes, they’ll respond by leaning in, grinning with their eyes ablaze, and referencing one of a few edits of similar caliber: *But have you seen the [Pedro Pascal edit](#)? Or the [Jacob Elordi one](#)?* It’s the excited look of understanding and found community, a secret handshake in plain sight, an open-armed gesture toward connection.

Fan edits don’t shame you. They don’t look down on you for the irreparable parasocial relationship you formed with your favorite singer while you were being bullied in middle school. They don’t turn up their nose at your guilty pleasures, forcing you to constantly apologize to the cinephiles around you for [your love of the CW](#). They’re indulgent and cathartic. They add depth and creativity to the media we already feel deeply connected to, making for the perfect short-form comfort movies. If you think you have a soul tie to Hermione Granger now, just wait until you see her [edited to “American Teenager” by Ethel Cain](#). The moment in the Prisoner of Azkaban when she punches Draco Malfoy in the face layered over Cain begging you to “say it like you mean it / with your fist for once” is absolute cinema.

My roommates and I spend evenings AirPlaying fan edits on our television, laughing and crying in quick succession: an [edit of Gabe Duncan from Disney Channel’s Good Luck Charlie](#) set to “My Own Worst Enemy” by Lit directly preceding an [edit of Steve Carell and Timothée Chalamet in Beautiful Boy](#) (dir. Felix Van Groeningen) set to “The Great Divide” by Noah Kahan could only exist in a 20-something’s TikTok edit folder. We lament love and loserhood, gushing about [Fleabag](#) and [Freaks and Geeks](#). We [worship HBO’s Girls through the lens of “Dance Yrself Clean”](#) by LCD Soundsystem. There is no other context in which these things belong together. It shouldn’t work, and yet it always does.

Fan edits exercise an inspiring level of creativity and production value. They make one wonder how anyone was able to draw such a profound yet niche connection between song and visual. [They put media](#)

[on the map](#), popularizing songs and movies that have long fizzled out of our collective memories. Those teenage girls with nothing but Adobe After Effects and a dream are, in some ways, better at advertising than advertisements themselves, with [Lionsgate even hiring fan editors](#) to help them market movies back in October. But I'm not interested in what these edits do for The Man, for the mass media conglomerates profiting off of the labor of fangirls everywhere.

While my personal fan edit account never garnered much attention, I've been raised up in the sentiment that nothing I put online will ever go away, and I firmly believe that wherever my creations reside on the internet today should be classified as a sanctified cultural tomb. And if they were to resurface, unlike many other things I said and did in middle school and high school, I like to think I'd be entirely unembarrassed, proud of my hard work, and even prouder of the larger culture I participated in. And when my 15-minute timer goes off, I'll get right back to work.