**The Importance of Piracy in Preventing Lost Media and Ensuring Academic Access to Information**

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What is your first thought when you hear the word piracy? Chances are it’s sailing the seven seas or, in the context of this paper, how digital piracy is against the law and a bad thing to do. I’m here to convince you that piracy is not strictly something that should be looked down upon as bad, there are situations where piracy is genuinely good for everyone including those whose stuff is being “stolen”. First off let’s set one thing straight, while strictly legally speaking piracy is considered theft, but it’s not the same thing as literally taking something from someone because copying one thing 1000 times is not theft. It's replication. This difference between replication and taking someone’s possessions is the redeeming characteristic of piracy for the purpose of archival, and information equity is not only ethical, but a benefit to society.

In our culture there’s a concept called “Lost Media”, this is anything ranging from music to movies and tv shows that has been experienced by the public but was never archived. The holy grail of lost media is “London After Midnight”, it was a silent mystery film released in 1927. London After Midnight is considered the first vampire film to hit Hollywood, it was lost in a fire at the production company’s vault. (Wikipedia, 2024c) Had someone produced an unauthorized replica of the film we would still have this part of human history and culture. A historical vampire film we were lucky enough to save was Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau’s Nosferatu. The film debuted in 1922 in Germany to great acclaim. Unfortunately, the film was based off Bram Stoker’s book Dracula without permission, this led to a lawsuit and a court ruling that all copies of the film must be destroyed. The film survived and was later restored due to unauthorized bootlegs. (Valjak, 2017) Some of these films deviations from the original material are iconic traits of vampires today such as vampires dying in sunlight and sleeping during the day. (Wikipedia, 2024b) We can thank piracy of multiple kinds for the modern mythos of vampires.

Now let’s turn our sights to a different creature of the night, Werewolves, or more specifically the game social game Werewolf (originally known as Mafia). (Wikipedia, 2024a) This game was made in 1986 by Dimitry Davidoff while studying psychology at Moscow university. The game was made because “[Davidoff] was trying to find an activity for students - so it would produce a biggest time spending with the smallest input (and i wouldn't have to prepare for classes that much =).” (Plotkin, 2010, “History” section), since then the game has spread across the world and changed form. “Players made many additional modifications of the game rules, but the basic principle (informed minority vs. uninformed majority) is still intact.” (Davidoff, 1998, para. 1). The core idea of the game is that an informed minority can easily manipulate, control, and win against an uninformed majority. Now how would the game change if one of the honest villagers cheated to find out who the werewolves were then secretly shared it? Suddenly, the game falls apart and the informed minority don’t have control over the masses. This fact of society, that is so well illustrated with this game, is why the piracy of educational information is an ethical and beneficial activity for society. The illicit distribution of information ensures that everyone can be informed and educated regardless of their access to wealth and private information.

Now this is not a defense of all piracy, many pirates moonlight as vampires sucking compensation from creators who deserve something for their creation. Pirating forms of digital art, while not taking property from the creator, is in fact robbing them of compensation for their work. Which we can agree is unethical and something that should be looked down upon. On top of that, pirating art has little benefit to society aside from my points about archival. We know the people pirating the newest movies and shows aren’t doing it in the name of culture and history, but were the people who made the bootlegs of Nosferatu? I don’t think they were, and yet they saved some of our most important cultural history.

In conclusion, the act of piracy, especially for archival and educational purposes, is far from black and white. It can’t be denied that piracy can deprive creators of just compensation, yet it also plays a crucial role in preserving our common human culture as seen with cases such as Nosferatu and other lost media. In the end it doesn’t come down to legality but ethics, and is it ethical to not preserve human culture for future generations? I implore you to download your favorite movies and shows from your favorite streaming services, who knows when they’ll be unceremoniously removed from the internet for tax write offs. (Chapman, 2022) You just might save an important piece of culture by doing so.

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