

# Towards an Integrative Methodological Approach of Film Remake Studies

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**Abstract** This article argues that, after decades of pointing towards the importance of including production and reception research into the study of film remakes, we should actually start addressing production and reception methodologies and investigate why this is necessary for the sustainability and future development of the field. I argue that a lot can be learned from the insights coming from the existing methodologies that are being used in, that is, format studies, (critical) media industry studies, (audiovisual) translation studies, and more recently the study of cultural transduction. The first section of the article mainly deals with the importance of investigating the different cultural mediators that take part in the production lifecycle of the film remake. It is contended that the analysis of film remakes should start examining the different individuals or institutions that mediate or intervene between the production of cultural artefacts and the generation of consumer preferences. The second part of the article points towards the importance of investigating the reception, experience, and interpretation of film remakes. It is shown that crucial questions like '(why) do audiences prefer the domestic remake over the foreign film?', 'how do audiences experience, interpret, and explain differences and similarities between source films and remakes?', but also 'how do audiences define and assess film remakes?' remain yet to be asked. The article concludes that if the field of remake studies wishes to break out of its disciplinary boundaries, adopting a multi-methodological approach will help to further brush off its dusty character of textual analysis.

**Keywords:** *Film remake, methodology, production research, reception research*

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of the almost synchronous birth of cinema itself and the practice of remaking films at the end of the 19th century (e.g., Forrest), it was only in the 1970s–1980s that systematic and coherent scholarly research on the subject of film remakes started appearing. The then small number of studies provided the young field with general overviews and filmographies, offering, for example, general information on which films were remade, while not making any substantial attempts at conceptualizing the film remake, theoretically nor methodologically. Despite the early adoption of the idea of intertextuality and approaching remakes as self-contained artistic artefacts (Horton and McDougal; Mazdon), theoretical scholarly works on the remake remained scarce in number and were mostly, if not solely, based on textual research methods in the form of

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‘limited comparative analyses of paired texts, carried out according to the most diverse and unsystematic criteria’ (Quaresima 78).

In 2006, however, Constantine Verevis published the highly influential book *Film Remakes*. With this important work, he proposed to approach cinematic remaking through a three-level framework: as an industrial category (dealing with issues of production), a textual category (looking at genres, plots, and structures), and a critical category (including reception research). Verevis convincingly argued that if one wants to understand and define the film remake, this should not only be done textually. Instead, he contended, the film remake (as a noun), or remaking film (as a process or practice), ‘is created and sustained through the repeated use of terminology [which, moreover, suggests that] the very limited direct intertextual referentiality between the remake and its original is organized according to an extratextual referentiality, located in historically specific discursive formations’ (Verevis, *Film remakes* 28). This observation signalled a welcome ‘discursive shift’ in the field, while simultaneously spurring the idea of the remake as a kind of prism ‘through which one can analyse the complex nature of the film medium on both the textual and contextual levels’ (Cuelenaere, Joye, and Willems 264).

In the following years, many different aspects were examined through the prismatic remake, resulting in a vast body of critical literature on the remake. However, though this discursive shift delivered a myriad of critical and more holistic conceptualisations of the remake, it did not necessarily lead to methodological innovation, nor to empirical research other than textual analyses—which explains the field’s still very limited methodological toolbox. Attempting to advance the research domain in this respect, a valuable effort at yielding a methodological model was undertaken by Smith in 2016. His scalable model, built on the idea of the ‘meme’, considers the interrelationship between production, text, and reception, ‘utilising insights from across political economic, ethnographic, cultural studies and textualist approaches to media’ (Smith 22). As such, Smith pointed towards the importance of embedding a close analysis of film remakes—being hybrid cultural texts—in their socio-historical context(s) by using the meme as a theoretical metaphor—hinting at a possible ‘sociology of remakes’ (cf. Murray). However valuable these attempts at materializing and methodologizing the field of remake studies have been, I would argue that we might not have gone far enough in this endeavour.

During the process of remaking films, decisions are made that are founded on many different aspects, that is, genre conventions, personal preferences, specific socio-political engagements, historical circumstances, etc. Though, as advanced by Hutcheon in the context of adaptations, ‘[t]hese decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic’ (108). She continues that, when analysing and comparing texts, contexts are actually made attainable in two different ways: first, a text always ‘bears the marks of these choices, marks that betray the assumptions of the creator—at the very least insofar as those assumptions can be inferred from the text’ (Hutcheon 108–09). Second, one should also notice that ‘extratextual statements of intent and motive often do exist to round out our sense of the context of creation’ (Hutcheon 109)—when embedded in the analysis, one should, therefore, confront such extratextual assertions with the textual findings. Hence, next to a contextualized interpretation, research on film remakes also necessitates a

so-called ‘rational interpretation’, which focuses on ‘the unresolved differences between the interpreter’s and the actor’s points of view and carefully compares and evaluates them’ (Bohman 143). In a similar vein, yet in the context of television formats, Moran argues that ‘it seems preferable to approach TV format remaking at a more concrete middle-range level in terms of using categories drawn from the self-understanding of some of those involved in the process of format adaptation’ (43). In conclusion, contrary to the contextualized interpretation, rational interpretation draws from outsider knowledge (held by, e.g., cultural producers and audiences), which can be gathered through production and reception research—convinced that analysing the intersubjectively shared ideas on a specific subject creates knowledge.

Therefore, I will argue that, after decades of pointing towards the importance of including production and reception research into the study of film remakes, the time has come to *actually* address production and reception methodologies and investigate why this is necessary for the sustainability and future development of the field. It will be shown that a lot can be learned from the many insights coming from the existing methodologies that are being used in format studies, (critical) media industry studies, television (remake) studies, adaptation studies, (audiovisual) translation studies, and more recently the study of cultural transduction—which are all, except for adaptation and arguably translation studies, more heavily grounded in social sciences. As argued by Heinze and Krämer: ‘the greatest hermeneutic potential lies in [ . . . ] an analysis of how the levels of production, text, reception, and context are negotiated by those involved in creating, marketing, evaluating, and analyzing remakes’ (9). Therefore, the study of film remakes should commence looking into an approach that genuinely connects textual findings to a methodology that employs the analysis of the different (social and industrial) contexts, gatekeepers, cultural intermediaries, and audiences.

One might wonder whether this article’s plea—overtly aimed at the field of remake studies—is equally applicable to the field of adaptation studies. First of all, instead of clearly demarcating both study fields, I follow Naremore in claiming that ‘[t]he study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication’ (15). Additionally, though academics have argued that film remakes should be seen as a specific form of adaptation (e.g., Hutcheon) it might be more productive to regard both artefacts (and others, like reboots<sup>1</sup>) as part of the same post-production and post-celluloid media culture: such an account ‘signals new media transformations of replica practices and frustrates those approaches that seek to differentiate processes of adaptation and remaking by appealing to the relationship between a new version (an adaptation or remake) and the medium of the original artifact’ (Verevis, *Oxford Handbook* 268). Moreover, as both remakes and adaptations are part of the same streams of global media industries where both, in se, attempt to render repetition into innovation, they ‘are best understood as historical varieties of [the same] serial practice’ (Kelleter and Look 125). Hence, though this article mainly addresses the methodological myopia of remake studies, the claims and ensuing research propositions that will be made in the following are not solely applicable to the film remake as such and could provide useful insights for other, closely related fields.

This article should, however, not be considered as an end in itself, but as one of the possible means to a possible end. I decided to, for instance, mostly address qualitatively oriented research. Quantitative research is, arguably, more aimed towards descriptive methods (i.e., through surveys, questionnaires with closed answers), looking for patterns in data, and proves to be more easily replicable and generalizable, which could be highly interesting for the field as well (see, e.g., Monk's work on *Heritage Film Audiences*). Such research could, for example, map the flows of film remakes and prove or contest the claims made by theories such as cultural proximity (cf. Straubhaar) or cultural discount (cf. Hoskins and Mirus). It could yield network analyses, showing which institutions, studios, actors, or individuals are key factors in the remake process. It would also be able to address the quantity of film remakes throughout history, and show in which times and contexts it increases and decreases. Before embarking on such applied research, however, it seems preferable to first sketch out the advantages and hypothetical possibilities of a multi-methodological approach to the study of film remakes.

#### CULTURAL MEDIATORS AND THE PRODUCTION LIFECYCLE OF FILM REMAKES

As recently observed by Labayen and Morán, though the vast majority of research in the field of remake studies recognizes the importance of the industrial context, actual empirical research that investigates the industrial dimensions of film remakes (e.g., financial and contractual processes or the overall business side of remakes) still hardly exists. Consequently, 'the vast majority of analyses understands film remakes as processes of narrative, aesthetic, and cultural adaptation' (Labayen and Morán). For the field of adaptation studies, Murray contends that production studies have had so little impact because of its 'common institutional separation from social science-based programmes in media studies' (15), which, I claim, could arguably also be said for the field of remake studies. As this article pleads for a multi-methodological approach, which will, in a next step, also include reception analyses, it will be shown that a thorough consideration of the producers' (taken broadly) intents, convictions, and behaviour is necessary, as 'knowledge about the "maker's mind and personality" can actually affect the audience members' interpretation' (Hutcheon 110). Therefore, if one wants to grasp the remake process better, it is essential also to question why and how film remakes are being manufactured from an industrial perspective.

When attempting to understand the production context of film remakes, the field of political economy media research is particularly relevant. Acknowledging the role and impact of structures of and (digital) evolutions in both global and local film and media industries as well as the interplay between political and economic considerations are essential when one wants to, for example, understand how cultural and industry policies become incentives for the production of specific films (O'Regan), as well as their specific content. Yet, I agree with Smith who claims that such macro perspectives on the film remake process should be combined with the micro perspectives of cultural studies,<sup>2</sup> as these instead focus 'on how cultures receive and transform imported cultural forms' (13)—thereby acknowledging the important element of agency. Cultural studies crystallized the idea that 'real' or actual audiences and producers should be studied, and that they should be seen as 'consisting of socially, culturally and historically located

individuals who actively negotiate hegemonic discourses in society' (Biltereyst and Meers 25). This in-between position (shifting between political economy and cultural studies) implies that, for example, both the regimes of copyright, film policy measures, broader transnational and/or local networks, and financial structures are taken into account when analysing a specific case, as well as how individual and institutionalized cultural mediators deal with such contextual aspects and work their way through these broader circumstances.

This is where the insights from Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production might come in handy, as he wishes to install a middle ground between the two opposite stances of, on the one hand, what he calls, 'charismatic ideology', which perceives cultural agents as individual geniuses (subjectivism), downplaying the impact of other involved actors, and, on the other hand, the more Marxist driven idea that understands artistic artefacts almost entirely as the direct (and only) result of their (economic) surroundings—that is, excluding human agency. Murray contends that what is specifically attractive in Bourdieu's formulation, is his focus on these cultural mediators 'who maintain some degree of willed decision-making within an overall context of a given cultural field' (19). As such, it makes sense to, for example, confront the director or editor with specific changes that were found between the source text(s) and the remake, and ask what the motives or incentives behind the transformations were. Yet, one should always keep in mind that the author's intents or incentives should not be placed in some kind of higher hierarchical order—above the analyst's interpretation, for instance. The conception of meaning itself should namely be seen as an ever-changing site of struggle, embedded in many different discourses.

Hence, to further investigate the production context of film remakes, it is useful to implement the notion of cultural mediators into the field. Considering remakes as a form of composite translation (made by many different agents), Evans argues that '[t]he production of a remake is the result of a complex industrial process which cannot rely on just one person' (311). These cultural gatekeepers or mediators are considered as those individuals or institutions that mediate or intervene between the production of cultural artefacts and the generation of consumer preferences. Moreover, these mediators 'became vital agents to artists, not only with respect to the immediate problem of economic survival and reaching an audience, but also for the valuation of their work and the establishment of their reputations' (Janssen and Verboord 440). They also, for instance, play an important role by scouting and selecting creative talents, deciding which works are to be developed in marketable products and which of these artefacts will finally reach (broad) audiences. On top of that, through their selection and evaluation—through the production, distribution, and evaluation of cultural material—they add, or indeed, omit, symbolic value to cultural artefacts (Janssen and Verboord). Although insights from both the political economy and cultural studies have left their impression on the field of remake studies, arguably, this has not been done systematically, nor has it actually led to an adequate focus on cultural mediators.

Convinced by the idea that these cultural mediators actually perform highly distinct activities from those carried out by, for instance, artists and consumers, Janssen and Verboord distinguish between seven mediating practices in the production cycle of cultural products: selection (gatekeeping), co-creation or editing, connecting or networking,

selling or marketing, distributing, evaluating (classification, meaning making, and attribution of value), and finally the policy-related practices (censoring, protecting, and supporting). Applied to film remake research, the analysis of selecting practices could, for instance, investigate what the specific incentives and rationalisations are behind the decision to remake a specific film, that is, defining its ‘remake potential’. As mentioned by Janssen and Verboord, ‘cultural industries [ . . . ] regularly make decisions other than choose/reject, altering or recontextualizing works at different stages of the production process’ (441), which, is, naturally, highly relevant for the remake process. Important to mention here is that there may be many different driving forces at work behind such decision-making processes, implying that research on film remakes should look beyond localisation processes and take into account the more personal, ideological, moral, commercial, as well as the artistically or aesthetically driven motives.

A useful theoretical conceptualization that could also help frame such a study of cultural mediators is Uribe-Jongbloed and Espinosa-Medina’s categorization of the different people who are involved in the process of cultural transformation—which is part of their broader framework dubbed ‘cultural transduction’. They differentiate between the allegorical figures of ‘scouts’, ‘merchants’, and ‘alchemists’. In the context of international audiovisual trade markets, ‘[t]he scouts travel far and wide looking for new products to bring into their markets, the merchants participate in international or regional trade fairs to negotiate these contents or their copyrights, and finally the alchemists are responsible for adjusting the product, whether by modifying it superficially or altering it completely to fit in the new market’ (Uribe-Jongbloed and Corredor Aristizábal 47).<sup>3</sup> The advantage of this broadly defined typology is that it is easily transposable to other industrial and cultural contexts, which makes it, for instance, highly (but not solely) applicable to the remake industry. In conclusion, remake studies should start to acknowledge these figures more and investigate their roles, motives, and decision-making processes, acknowledging that, for instance, ‘screenwriters themselves may be carrying out an act of hermeneutical interpretation as a part of their praxis’ (Delgado and Avis 3).

Because of the lack of in-depth and empirical research that investigates the roles of directors, producers, scriptwriters (and script adaptors), distributors, and others, who all act as gatekeepers in the global remake market, it remains difficult to define the different stages of the remake process, ‘which gives rise to an inability to establish agreed, standard concepts in this field’ (Delgado and Avis 3). When considering actors like distributors and buyers in the analysis of the remake process, it is implied that ‘their own tastes and preferences together with preconceived notions of their audiences’ tastes and preferences determine the fate of any content in the international market, and especially content from unknown territories, producers and/or broadcasters’ (Jensen and Jacobson 436). Indeed, not only their tastes, but also the manners in which they perceive originality, authorship, commerciality, art, but also cultural identity, the importance of recognizability, representation, diversity, or even the definition of a film remake itself, impacts the process of creation, circulation and reception of film remakes. Recently conducted research by Labayen and Morán demonstrated that the specialized professional profile of remake rights representatives in the production, distribution, and circulation of local-language comedy remakes has ‘interesting implications both for

how remakes get done (i.e., the business model of the remake trade), but also for which kind of remakes are done' (284). Next to the latter elements, scholars must also consider the different texts these gatekeepers construct: press material, film posters, trailers, teasers, merchandising, making-ofs, festivals, special events, etc.

As mentioned above, Janssen and Verboord also regard the evaluation of cultural products as one of the important mediating practices in the production process of cultural artefacts. In a similar vein, Jensen and Jacobsen note that one should take into account the influence and role of so-called cultural intermediaries (e.g., journalists, critics, review-aggregation websites, podcasts, influencers) who act as agenda-setters and arbiters of taste. Cultural intermediaries are defined by both their (claims to) expertise within their fields, as well as in their interpretive and transformative operations. Exemplary of the latter is Herbert's study of the specific function(s) of film criticism in the shaping and comprehending of transnational film remakes. He showed that, from the 1930s on, critics have generally associated foreign source films and remakes with auteurs, stars and genres, and lesser in terms of their origins or nations, which, 'might help us reflect on how and why we construct the very corpus of "transnational film remakes"' (213). Additionally, as shown by several studies (e.g., Gemser, van Oostrum, and Leenders; Hollbrook and Addis), audience attendances of art films generally depend more on the amount of positive critical reviews, while the success of mainstream films generally relies more on the sheer quantity of media coverage—independently of the content of reviews. One can only wonder if this also counts for film remakes, which are, in many cases, catered towards large audiences.

#### THE RECEPTION, EXPERIENCE, AND INTERPRETATION OF FILM REMAKES

Jensen and Jacobsen claim that, in the context of international TV content, 'regular viewers' should also be analysed. In conjunction with Staiger's historical materialist approach, I, therefore, plead for an approach that also attempts to 'reconstruct the viewer's horizon of expectation' (Biltreyst and Meers 31), aiming to include audience research in the field of remake studies. In the context of audiovisual translation studies, Gambier contends that '[i]t is important to set aside assumptions about audiences and conduct research with people, to make the human side of audience research centre stage' (18), not in the least because 'the perceptions, uses and readings of [ . . . ] films by their audiences are diverse in ways that cannot validly be viewed as textually determined' (Monk *Heritage Film Audiences* 162). As such, both these authors (the latter in the field of adaptation studies) aim for a bottom-up process that, instead of assuming what audiences think or how they interpret texts and act, directly studies audiences—thereby investigating the subjective experiences and interpretations. Moreover, given that not only the intended viewers are taken into account in such an endeavour, but equally so the actual viewers, one also includes the alternative or oppositional interpretations of a media text—which consequently considers the polysemic nature of texts. In summary, '[s]tudying reception means to investigate the way(s) in which AV products/performances are processed, consumed, absorbed, accepted, appreciated, interpreted, understood and remembered by the viewers, under specific contextual/socio-cultural conditions and with their memories of their experience as cinema going' (Gambier 56).

Hitherto, little audience research has been conducted in the field of remake studies, which is symptomatic for the lack of audience research in other (often humanities-oriented) disciplines. Indeed, Zhang contends that an ‘audience study does not fit the respected forms of text-based research in film, history, and literature [ . . . ], whereas communication scholars skilled in statistical analysis and industry research may not be familiar with the language and culture involved’ (31). Another explanation is the inevitable complexity of audience studies, as it requires, for instance, extensive fieldwork, the organisation of focus groups, archival research, etc. Zhang concludes that this apparent weakness—being the marginality of audience research—can be turned into a strength: ‘thanks to its marginalisation in academic borders, audience study can thrive on interdisciplinarity, drawing upon a variety of disciplinary methodologies from quantitative and empirical to historical and even speculative’ (31–32). Given that audience research is heavily underexplored in the field of remake studies, it is worthwhile to take a look at ancillary disciplines and traditions and look at how audience research could be integrated into the field of remakes and finally which results this could yield.

Mee has made a first attempt at incorporating audience research in the field of remake studies by drawing on both critical and audience responses to horror remakes. An important finding was that ‘while adaptation scholarship continues to distance itself from fidelity as an evaluative strategy, it is clear that an adaptation’s faithfulness to its source remains a key concern for audiences’ (Mee 194). This shows that, when considering reception contexts, we are confronted with new, alternative frames, which will aid us to better understand the different cultural values that are being attributed to (film) texts. Connected to this, even though film critics (not academics) almost unanimously agree that film remakes are in almost all cases derivative or less original (cf. Verevis and Smith 2), and therefore, ‘inferior’ to their source materials, it is to be questioned if audiences are likeminded. Connected to this, it is also unclear whether or not the awareness of a film’s label as remake influences the judgement of the film, and whether this works similarly to, for instance, genre expectations and preconceptions. Moreover, as Mee asserts, ‘it is the practice of remaking itself, rather than any resulting films, which is deemed pointless, as evidenced by the outright rejection of versions not even in production’ (200).

It is of equal importance to also investigate the audiences’ actual experiences, interpretations, and judgements of film remakes. Here, a study of fan appreciation of the Batman film franchise (Joye and Van de Walle) could be of interest. It shows how the distinct fans’ reactions to the different Batman instalments ‘are as diverse as is the range of retellings of the Batman story’ (37). For example, these authors argue that the majority of fans deemed it more important that the different adaptations of the Batman story were faithful towards the ‘essence’ of the character(s), whereas the actors’ physical resemblance to the ‘original’ representations were of less importance. This, moreover, raises the question whether or not there are significant differences to be found between knowing (e.g., fans) and unknowing audiences’ (cf. Hutcheon) interpretations of, for example, fidelity and originality in film remakes. Additionally, one could also wonder if and how the shared communities of fan bases (fully) determine the individual fans’ experiences and interpretations of film remakes. It also remains to be studied if the so-called built-in audiences actually appreciate the remake of their favourite film,



independently of both the critical reviews (or, indeed, the opinions of their peers) they might (not) have read and of the fact they went to actually see it or not.

One also wonders, given the digital turn, in what ways Web 2.0's seemingly metamorphic nature affects the methodological frameworks of audience research. Here, it might be illuminating to summon Claire Monk's insights of audience and fan activity around (mainly) heritage films and period dramas. First of all, she convincingly argues that even though the digital turn unarguably caused a proliferation of 'diverse forms of online fan activity, interactivity, (virtual) community, and productivity' (Monk "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0" 445), none of these are actually highly novel or unique to the new digital environment. Yet, this is not to say that there is no such thing as a digital shift, rather on the contrary: these 'new' online media and technological instruments have clearly had their impact on the 'dissemination and reception, but also production, interaction and even demographics'; indeed, 'technology is complicit in the generation of fan texts' (Busse and Hellekson cited in: Monk "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0" 446). She continues to argue that audience and fan behaviour has, since the Web 2.0 era, become a convoluted field wherein differentiated, sometimes participatory, and both respectful and disrespectful types of fandom and reception exist side-by-side. Trying to get a grip on these distinct kinds of online reception activity, one of the first possible routes is perhaps to 'map the latter [ . . . ] in terms of the types of websites where film-related audience/fan activity can be observed' (Monk "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0" 451). In the context of film remakes, this might include, that is, film blogs, video-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo), discussion and review boards such as IMDb and Letterboxd, or broader (e.g., r/movies on Reddit) and more specific forums or online groups that specifically focus on film remakes. However, as observed by Monk "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0", it is probably more sensible to 'map this field in terms of the forms of audience/fan activity and/or user-generated content themselves' (452), which could range from the discussion, appreciation, or hatred around film remakes in the form of (e.g., Twitter) comments to YouTube fan videos—think, for example, of some of the many homages in the form of a film remake that can be found online.<sup>4</sup>

Looking beyond the study of fans<sup>5</sup> by, for example, glimpsing at research conducted in the field of audiovisual translation studies, it might prove worthwhile to investigate the similarities and differences that occur between audiences' understandings of cultural references in film tandems. There are, for instance, studies that explore how the understanding of specific textual elements seems to assume familiarity with aspects of a specific culture, presenting an audience of a different culture 'with substantial difficulties' (Desilla 194). These research strands also look at which cultural elements specifically appear to presuppose higher degrees of familiarity or proximity (i.e., for instance, humour, and eroticism). Another interesting finding is that, although, for instance, Greek respondents missed quite some cultural and intertextual references from a British film, this did not necessarily imply that they did not understand the underlying meanings (Desilla)—which, naturally, has to do with the context in which these references were used. When applied to film remakes, one could, for example, look at how such 'cultural bumps' are circumscribed in the remake process, but equally so how different audiences interpret these bumps: do audiences actually perceive these cultural references as bumps, and, do they consequently misunderstand the intended

meanings? Such questions tap into theories of cultural proximity, cultural negotiation, but also look into the debates on local, national, transnational, global, or glocal cinema. Moreover, looking at the multi-methodological approach proposed in this article, audiences' interpretations could be juxtaposed with the intentions and decisions made by the producers, as well as with the analyst's viewpoints.

Tapping into recent audience research conducted in the field of format studies yields other directions, questioning, for example, the often assumed preference for own national adaptations (Esser et al.). Additionally, recent developments in online streaming platforms and services seem to have accelerated the process of 'hyperawareness', that is, the growing consciousness 'of the existence of multiple national versions of televisual properties' (Hogg), towards global format flows. This tendency has, in some cases, resulted in hostility of audiences towards adaptations of television content, and problematizes the unproven, yet broadly acknowledged assumption that the appeal of adaptation often lies in the possibilities they offer to be localized (Waisbord). The research by Esser et al. also shows that, apparently, when audiences are asked to make comparisons between different versions of a format, they are not only inclined to think in terms of an 'us' and 'them' mindset, but also mainly mention differences instead of similarities. Additionally, they found that their respondents displayed forms of banal cosmopolitanism while simultaneously holding several stereotypical visions of their own and other national cultures when interpreting and explaining differences. This mirrors Higson's statement that analysing film texts should look into 'how actual audiences construct their identity in relation to the various products of the national and international film and television industries, and the condition under which this is achieved' (46). Finally, studies in the field of television studies demonstrate that the scholarly understanding or defining of specific genres, for instance, 'may also be all sorts of other things to people outside the realm of film and media research' (Bondebjerg et al. 155–56).

Hence, questions like '(why) do audiences prefer the domestic remake over the foreign film?', 'how do audiences experience, interpret, and explain differences and similarities between source films and remakes?', but also 'how do audiences define and assess film remakes?' remain yet to be asked—let alone answered. Concerning the latter, again, the link could be made with the findings of production research, looking into the definitions (of, e.g., a film remake itself) held by those who actually produce, distribute, and evaluate film remakes. An example of such an integrative methodological approach (in the field of audiovisual translation studies) is the research conducted by Caniato, who combined results from a study of gatekeepers with audience research. By merging two different methods, she was able to reveal links between Flemish audiences' interpretations and experiences of Italian films (through focus groups) on the one hand, and the judgements and decisions related to both the translation and distribution of those films (through expert interviews) on the other: first, she found that the different selection criteria employed by the gatekeepers (here the importers and distributors of Italian cinema) were highly akin to those that viewers finally apply when selecting films, second, the study also showed how the viewers' personal interpretations of textual elements could often be explained by looking at the specific subtitling procedures (Caniato).

## CONCLUSION

With its interdisciplinary background, it is difficult to accuse the field of remake studies of being parochial, blinkered, or theoretically narrow-sighted. Moreover, it has quickly adopted many important insights from other, closely related fields, which prevented, among other things, stepping in some of the well-known pitfalls from the earliest research conducted in adaptation studies and translation studies (e.g., Evans). Additionally, the idea that the study of film remakes should be materialized—that is, should always acknowledge the specific production and reception contexts—was fully acknowledged somewhere in the first decennium of the new millennium. Even though this resulted in a myriad of (comparative) textual analyses, with its specific findings analysed through many different theoretical lenses, and often embedded in its different contexts, I argue that the field has, unfortunately, been blind towards conducting and integrating actual, empirical production and reception research. Consequently, there are still a lot of questions to be posed. Convinced that meanings are always intersubjectively and continuously constructed, it is the scholar's task to not only investigate the cultural artefact 'itself', but also its surrounding discourses, industrial mechanisms, or experiences. Therefore, this article wishes to plead for a more thorough analysis of those who actively and passively participate in the remake process, who create, transform, and receive film remakes. Instead of assuming how, for example, audiences interpret and experience these serial film texts, we should start by asking them. The same goes for those who produce these films, distribute them, exploit, and comment on them.

In the concluding remarks of a paper on (audiovisual) translation studies combined with reception research, Gambier remarks that the film remake could be an intriguing case when incorporated in translation studies: 'if a film is completely recontextualised according to the values, ideology and narrative conventions of the new target culture, do we have a translation or a local production which has sucked the lifeblood from a foreign production?' (63). The same could be said for much of the research that is being conducted in, for instance, format studies, television studies, or the recent research tradition of cultural transduction. Therefore, if the field of remake studies wishes to break out of its disciplinary boundaries, adopting a multi-methodological approach will help to further brush off its dusty character of textual analysis. The time has come to set our main object of research free and show the world what the advantages, possibilities, and challenges are of researching film remakes. Such an endeavour will equally underscore the idea that today's modern media environment and behaviour simply cannot be fully grasped without seriously reckoning with serialized texts like film remakes.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Here, Proctor's research on the reboot could be helpful. He argues that the film remake and reboot both share quite some commonalities (e.g., regarding the repetition of narrative units), yet 'a film remake is a singular text bound within a self-contained narrative schema; whereas a reboot attempts to forge a series of films, to begin a franchise anew from the ashes of an old or failed property' (4). However, as I will argue further on, though textually defining cultural artefacts might be a helpful starting point for scholarly research, it does not suffice if one wishes to grasp the phenomenon more holistically.

<sup>2</sup> This reminds of Bennett's work on how texts (in the broad sense) are not stable entities that pre-exist their interpretation(s), but are 'productively activated' when 'read'. Consequently, a text does not necessarily contain a meaning, as it is actively produced in 'reading formations that regulate the encounters between

texts and readers' (Bennett 8), resulting in 'an interaction between the culturally activated text and the culturally activated reader, [ . . . ] that is structured by the material, social, ideological and institutional relationships in which both text and readers are inescapably inscribed' (Bennett 12).

<sup>3</sup> Of course, the aforementioned concepts should not be seen as mutually exclusive but rather as overlapping.

<sup>4</sup> See (especially) the third section of Looock and Verevis' volume titled 'Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions: Remake/Remodel' which 'engages with non-commercial fan-made productions such as fan-films, fanvids, mash-up or recut trailers, and machinima' (9).

<sup>5</sup> Though there is quite some scholarly work on fandom and fan communities in, that is, franchises, sequels, and reboots (e.g., Hills; Proctor and Kies), these studies do not really consider the film remake. Apart from that, the field should definitely equally so look beyond fan practices and integrate research that analyses all sorts of audiences.

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