

## REMAKING AS A PRACTICE: SOME PROBLEMS OF TRANSMEDIALITY

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### From repetition to replica practices

In 1984, Francesco Casetti edited *L'immagine al plurale* and wrote in the introduction about trends in the audiovisual landscape that had been present in cinema and in the cultural industry since their inception, but were only coming to the fore in the 1980s.

These tendencies are the three mainstays of the film and video textuality framework, described as media operations, or as an “ensemble of procedures” in given social situations of communication. Casetti suggested thinking of practices and symbolic strategies as being the result of a dialogue between identity and difference, and the relationship between time and space in discourse or better the problems of “temporalisation” and “spatialisation” in a narrative sense. These three tendencies could be summarized in the key words: *repetition*, *seriality*, *expansion*.<sup>1</sup>

In regards to *repetition*, Eco defines it as “a return of what is at the same time similar and different from what came before;”<sup>2</sup> and so it is never a re-proposition of the same, but rather a new occurrence that mixes a return of something already known with something original. *Seriality* is a product of various factors. A series is a process of enumeration, a list; according to Casetti,<sup>3</sup> seriality gives a sort of “feeble” repetition, appearing in many items with a common background of references, to allow a displacement in time and space. It could be linear and “rational” or a “placing side by side of many variations,”<sup>4</sup> which is what occurs in postmodern seriality, as in Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) for example. Expansion is “an ending [...] [which is] always postponed;”<sup>5</sup> it seems to represent the length of time or duration produced by the serial progression. This is not a problem of frequency but that of “a hypertrophy in which every element is forced [...] to an occupation of the narrative time and space, and to an excess of presence of every single idea.”<sup>6</sup> It is this extension that represents both an effect of *redundancy* and a process of positive evaluation.

In *Innovation and Repetition*, Umberto Eco stated:

*According to the modern aesthetics, the principal features of the mass-media products were repetition, iteration, obedience to a pre-established schema, and redundancy (as opposed to information). The device of iteration is typical, for instance, of television commercials [...] Likewise, the reading of a traditional detective story presumes the enjoyment of a scheme [...] the writer plays upon a continuous series of connotations (for example the detective and his*

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*immediate “entourage”) to such an extent that their reappearance in each story is an essential condition of its reading pleasure.<sup>7</sup>*

When dealing with serial forms in modern and postmodern aesthetics, Eco suggests a “typology of repetition.” Since the 1980s, there has been a flourishing debate about a “new aesthetic of seriality.”<sup>8</sup> However, Eco felt that “seriality and repetition are largely inflated concepts.”<sup>9</sup> He does not consider “repetition” in the philosophical way Kierkegaard and Deleuze do, or in the contemporary musical sense of dodecaphonic. Eco defines it as making a replica “of the same *abstract type*.”<sup>10</sup> it is a point of view of industrial mass production, in which “two *tokens* can be considered as *replicas* [*copies*] of the same *type* [...] [and so] two copies of a film or of a book are *replicas* [*tokens*] of the same type.”<sup>11</sup> However, this is a question of terminology. In his original article, Eco uses “replica” to mean both *copies* and *tokens*, but these are two different words in English. Goodman makes a distinction between “copy” and “replica” that Eco will use some years later.<sup>12</sup> A *replica*, in our discussion, is *not a simple copy* of a source text in a type/token model, but it is the more fluid result of translations and re-interpretations, which lead to differences. This is why Eco suggests a second meaning of repetition, which increases its relevance to media studies: “The repetitiveness and the seriality that interests us here looks instead at something that at first glance does not appear the same as (equal to) something else.”<sup>13</sup>

Eco classifies forms of seriality putting *retake* at the top of the list. It is “recycle[ing] the characters of a previous successful story in order to exploit them, by telling what happened to them after the end of their first adventure,”<sup>14</sup> i.e. Dumas’s *Twenty Years Later* (*Vingt ans après*, 1845); or the second and third *Superman* (Richard Lester, 1980, 1983). The retake is dependent on a commercial decision and so can be serious or a spoof and it “is not strictly condemned to repetition.”<sup>15</sup> We can call it simply a *sequel*, like in *The Matrix* series (Andy and Lana Wachowski, 1999-2003).

Then he considers the *remake*, which is a retelling of a previously successful story. Eco’s definition of the remake within “replica practices” is *an explicit re-telling of something*. It may be *ironic*, like Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns, or *retelling a story* setting it in another cultural context or as *homage* to a classic movie. There are *free* remakes that maintain the forms of the content of the first text, or may simply transform the invariant of the expression; this could be simply remaking a black and white film in colour. Whereas a *false remake*, such in Jorge Luis Borges’s story “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” (“Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*,” 1939) rewrites word for word, in this case, the novel by Cervantes. I will give other examples and more specific definitions of *remake* in later paragraphs. Eco describes as a *continuum of strategies of seriality*, graded according to the sophistication of the serial product, examples from literature, comic strips or other films and television genres, from soaps to situation comedies or detective stories. This might entail the spectators becoming involved in the process of forecasting, or challenging the critical spectator to discover innovative aspects of the text. Eco, thus, signals, “the seriality is not necessarily opposed to innovation;”<sup>16</sup> not finding the differences may depend on our “horizon(s) of expectations and sensibilities.”<sup>17</sup> The aesthetic of serial forms always depends on the contexts of our interpretation and on our historical and anthropological knowledge.

There are a variety of different forms of seriality. There is the *flashback* also called *loop-series*; or the *spiral form*; there are forms “motivated less by the narrative structure than by the nature of

the actor himself;”<sup>18</sup> or the *saga*, in which characters, or better the actors, age as time passes. A saga can have a continuous age-line where the characters portrayed get older. A good example is *The Godfather* by Francis Ford Coppola, which was made in 1972, with the *Part II* in 1974 and *Part III* in 1990, or the characters in *Harry Potter*. A saga might be “treelike” such as *Dallas*, which Eco calls “a series in disguise.”<sup>19</sup> He goes on to highlight cases of “inter-textual dialogue” that is to say “the phenomenon by which a given text echoes previous texts.”<sup>20</sup> Of the many forms of inter-textuality, from stylistic quotations to plagiarism, Eco prefers the quotation to be “explicit and recognizable as occurs in literature or postmodern art [and concerning, in every other media,] the ironic quotation of the commonplace (*topos*),”<sup>21</sup> in order to elicit or frustrate the inter-textual encyclopaedia of the spectator.

There are more sophisticated phenomena, which might trigger a critical side effect: “[being] aware of the quotation, the spectator is brought to elaborate ironically on the nature of such a device and to acknowledge the fact that he has been invited to play upon his encyclopedic [sic] competence.”<sup>22</sup> There are cases of a broad-based inter-textuality, such as *genre embedding*, or self-irony with which postmodern works *speak of themselves*.<sup>23</sup> Serial narration implies a continuum of contracts of interpretation and negotiation between texts and their model readers. Eco believes we “must not only question the phenomenon of repetition within a single work or a series of works, but *all the phenomena that make various strategies of repetition producible, understandable, and commercially possible*.”<sup>24</sup>

## Typologies of the remake

Recent accounts of cinematic remakes have variously defined them as institutionalized forms of the structure of repetition. According to Verevis, remakes are particular textual structures, but film remakes always exceed the corpus of works.<sup>25</sup> Film remaking depends on outside factors, such as the existence of audience activity, and it is enabled and limited by factors such as copyright law, canon formation, film reviews; thus: “Film remaking is not simply a quality of texts or viewers, but a ‘by-product’ or the secondary result of broader discursive activity.”<sup>26</sup> We can think of the remake as a textual category such as texts, plots, structures and taxonomies; or as an industrial one of production, commerce and authorship; or even as a critical category of reception and audience.<sup>27</sup>

There are a lot of taxonomies in textual category. There are films which refer explicitly to their source, i.e. a direct remake, and films which do not, i.e. a *disguised* remake. There is the *non-remake*, which might be a new film with the same title but with an entirely new plot.<sup>28</sup> The *acknowledged remake* is a replica of the original with little or no changes to the narrative. While the *transformed remake* has substantial transformations of character, time and setting, the *unacknowledged remake* transformations of the source are unknown (or not declared) to the audience.<sup>29</sup> Leitch mentions *re/adaptations*, which adapt original literary texts as faithfully as possible. He points out that there is also the *update* remake, or *switch*, of a previous film which can compete directly with the literary source, as is the case with Adrian Lyne’s (1997) and Stanley Kubrick’s *Lolita* (1962).<sup>30</sup> There are remakes which are made as *homage* to a previous film: both Brian De Palma’s *Obsession* (1976), and *Body Double* (1984) are tributes to Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958).

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There is also the so-called *true remake*, which claims to be just like the original, only better.<sup>31</sup> The remake process is potentially never-ending. Take for example Bob Rafelson's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), which is a remake of Tay Garnett's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), which in return is a *re-adaptation* James M. Cain's novel (1934), which was the source for both *Le Dernier tournant* (Pierre Chenal, 1939) and Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943).

Despite all the distinctions and categories, these taxonomies do not help explain the practice of the remake or help us understand repetition features any better. The case of a transposition which is also a remake gives us a *double inter-textual perspective*. In other words, if a remake transposes a literary source, it might recall another film on the same subject. Although the link may only be encyclopaedic, it will stimulate us to seek out comparisons. There are inevitably some *rebound effects*, or an inter-textual *resonance*.<sup>32</sup> Lyne's *Lolita* is more faithful to the Nabokov novel and it makes no reference whatsoever to the film previously made by Kubrick, yet there are various allusions, though disguised and implicit, which allow us to talk about a relation of remake between the two films.

### Parodies and pastiches: remake or not?

In the manner of modern and postmodern inter-textuality, the remaking practice has a set of rules, in particular when it comes to *parodies* and *pastiches*. According to Genette,<sup>33</sup> remaking is conceived in a "hyper-textual" dimension in which a second, "derivative" (hypo)text is bound to a first (hyper)text, which I prefer to call "source text". A *parody* diverts from the original meaning of the source text, yet at the same time, as if to compensate, it respects its literal meaning. If *parody* is a ludic "transformation" of the first text, *pastiche* is a ludic "imitation" and "re-creation" that can become a *caricature*.

Not everybody agrees that these ludic forms can be classified as "remakes" because they "use" rather than strictly "interpret" the source text.<sup>34</sup> In a recent article, Augusto Sainati<sup>35</sup> proposes eight "rules" of the remake. According to Sainati, a true "remake" has to have *two original texts*, and not a variant such as a director's cut. Furthermore, a remake must have an *inter-subjective acknowledgment* of the formal and/or thematic interdependence between the two texts, both in terms of its production and its reception. There must be a *double relation* with the first movie, both *static and dynamic*. It must refer back to the source text explicitly, but have a dynamic possibility to change the plot, style and genre. Problems of *persistence* and *variation* are, however, always present to varying degrees. Sainati states that a remake has as sort of *textual overlap* with the previous film in which they refer to each other, and one may have more (or less) to say than the other.<sup>36</sup> It is essential that a second text overlaps with the source to create a *double textual exposure*: it must produce a *relief effect* of the source film. Finally, there is a rule of *affective homology*, which states that should the source film and its derivative not be of the same "pathemic" disposition, or affective mood, the second film would no longer be a remake but a parody.<sup>37</sup>

I agree with most of Sainati's rules, though I take issue with the last two. I believe that the "relief effect" does not necessarily have to be present to be a *remaking textual production*. As for the "affective homology", it does not take into account all the derivative texts that change the

genre and the point of view of the previous story, in cognitive and affective ways, as parodies do. I see the process of enunciation and textual production as part of the “remaking practices”, whereas Sainati takes them to be final products. The remake is above all a problem of *social agreement*; one cannot establish textual or material conditions *a priori*. Should there be no agreement in the social “semiosphere”<sup>38</sup> about the communality of the two films, then, it is simply not a remake. It is a question of social negotiation, “even though a certain number of qualities of the text might cause there to be such an agreement.”<sup>39</sup> In the case of *parodies* the remake does not look for equivalences; on the contrary, it seeks to create a totally different communicative effect.

## Manipulation and the creation of a classic pantheon

I’d like to make some suggestions with regards to the larger mechanism of *re-creation*, *reworking* and *remaking* that I will call re-production, or “replica.” If we accept that a *remake* is always a new “hypo-text,” with an inter-textual and translational relationship with the previous movie, we can say that in the new text, which I call a “target text,” some things remain the same (invariant) and some things change. These changes produce new meanings and new interpretations in relation to the so-called “source text.”

In contemporary *Translation Studies*,<sup>40</sup> the relation between source and target text has been completely revised. According to Hermans, the traditional source oriented theory:

*[Takes] the supremacy of the original for granted from the start, [and so] the study of translation [...] serves merely to demonstrate that original's outstanding qualities by highlighting the errors and inadequacies of any number of translation of it. The outcome, needless to say, is an invariably source-oriented exercise.*<sup>41</sup>

Hermans proposes turning the perspective upside down, saying that the starting point should be the target text. Inevitably, “all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose.”<sup>42</sup> The remake is quite often a way of turning the “source text” into a *classic*. This is possibly what happened when Brian De Palma used Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-up* (1966) as source for *Blow-out* (1981). De Palma’s *Scarface* (1983) did the same with Howard Hawks’s movie *Scarface* (1932), by using special effects and advanced technology to improve it. This is how the producer of the target text, the remake, enhances what he considers valuable in his cultural context, the methods he uses, and his construction of a dialogue with the new audience.

Identities and differences are basic to the meaning and the value of a sign or a text according to the theories of translation. An *inter-media perspective* will have a plethora of texts with a network of references and translations, which will partially overlap and be made of *déjà-vues* and reinterpretations. Inter-textuality, or “trans-textuality” as Genette calls it,<sup>43</sup> has to be understood as part of the flexible definition and construction of the identity of any text, any (poly)system of texts and practices, and of any culture. A single text or a group of texts will have a series of references, which are constantly in translation with each other. As Lotman would argue,<sup>44</sup> translation constructs and at the same time dynamises cultural universes. He calls these *semio-spheres* and they are, in some way, a result of comparisons, crashes and partial assimilations between texts, discourses and practices.

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## Remaking as a controlled difference process

To consider a remake in terms of contemporary textual semiotics, means to accept that a film, like any text, has some identifiable *invariant structures*. Therefore, they can be traced and *repeated*. This is true of the level of narrative structures, or thematic isotopes (or that of *topics*, in pragmatics terms), or even for the organizations of values. Semiotics regards texts as layered objects, formed by mutually dependent levels. Whatever textual layer one chooses will determine the way he will translate a text into another.

In Jakobson's theory of translation,<sup>45</sup> a distinction was made between an *intra-lingual translation* or *rewording*, an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; an *inter-lingual translation* or *translation proper*, as an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; and *intersemiotic translation* or *transmutation*, as an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of a nonverbal signs system. I believe the practice of remaking is similar to *rewording*, making it an *intra-language translation*.

Eco collocates the "remake" among the features of an "endo-semiotic interpretation," as we see in his *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*.<sup>46</sup> To talk about an intra (or endo)-semiotic translation means an interpretative and transforming relation between similar semiotic systems that have the same "matters of expression." It also means that any aesthetic text whether literary, musical, visual or audiovisual can re-make a previous text with some systematic variations. This would be a sort of *controlled difference*. In these cases, the new text, despite the obvious connection with the source text it is transposing, will create a new and independent poetic world in agreement with the new target culture. As in any case of transposition, the remaking is a "complex form of action." Indeed, remakes are trans-cultural communication processes, target oriented, with a dynamic and functional approach.<sup>47</sup> As with every good translation, remaking can transform both the source and the target language, enriching both, endowing new inter-textual relations and a wider and shared *encyclopaedia*.<sup>48</sup>

The remake, considered as *a form of transposition*, has to take into account the main motifs and figures of the original film: the plot, the narrators, who may lead or mislead us, and the cinematic forms of expression. A syncretic text, such as a film, contains multiple languages; hence, transposition entails changes in substance and the form at different levels of expression. For these reasons, it is necessary to remember that every film must always be regarded as an *aesthetic text*, in which the plan of expression and the plan of content both determine the overall construction of meaning. The translations and interpretations that the new text proposes by staging them explicitly or constructing them implicitly will therefore include all levels of the text.

For this reason, when we analyse an adaptation or a remake (or a double bound re-adaptation), it is necessary, first of all, to clarify which level of relevance we will adhere to. One might choose to limit the analysis to a comparison of narrative structures, and along that line retrace the elements that were deleted, added, expanded or condensed in the film. Alternatively, one might opt to consider the series of enunciative strategies and the overall construction of the story. Such a construction can be regarded as a mediation of the discourse production, whether actorial, spatial, or temporal, activated by the enunciation within the texts. Thanks to this mediation, the themes and abstract values, which make up the universe of meaning in the literary work or in the previous film, are converted into concrete and recognizable values, themes and icons. In other words,



they are transformed into some new discursive configurations (whether literary or audiovisual), which will always be represented through specific points of view.

The target text is thus transformed according to the strategies and translation techniques one chooses to adopt, and even more so, when translating from single-medium texts to syncretic texts, which are inevitably different from the source text, even in the construction of meaning effects. In a remaking practice, we will have *a new syncretic text*, another film, with its new meaning effects, which will offer new interpretative paths that can become actual re-semantisations of the source novel and/or of the previous film. Such structures being culturally determined will interconnect with the “skin” of the film. It is on the textual level that the *récit* becomes explicit, as a construction of variable fictional world with discourses that change according to contexts and different historical periods. It is at this level of the film that we will find all figurative dimensions of space, time and characters, iconic solutions and plastic features, but also an interlacing with sound design and the use of new technologies for new special effects. All these aspects together will create the kind of “coherent deformation” that, according to Metz,<sup>49</sup> is the style of a filmic text.

Remaking means, then, to work the degrees of transformation at the level of *content*, an example might be the modernization of the cultural and historical context, and the various levels of *expression*, through the forms of audiovisual interconnections, the editing and all the syncretic boundaries between different languages. It is said that a remake will provide something new to its source film. It will be something visible and evident for the spectator, i.e. new interpreters, new producer, and a new point of view; however, these will not make it any better or worse than the previous film.<sup>50</sup> The remake requires not just re-adaption of the spatial and temporal background contexts to the actors’ action, but also the aesthetic necessity transforms (“updates”) the use of forms and substances of expression, such as rhythm, colour, locations and sound tracks. Even the decision to follow word for word the instructions of the source film, as Gus Van Sant did in *Psycho* (1998), will bring about inevitable changes. Although he used the original scenario written by Joseph Stefano for Hitchcock (*Psycho*, 1960) and the music by Bernard Hermann, he still decided to renew the figurative choices. The actors, space and time became contemporary, and the film was shot in colour.

### Narrative design of replica<sup>51</sup>

Ruggero Eugeni and Andrea Bellavita suggest that the “narrative design” of a text will depend on a culture’s “textual experience” and so do the practices of textual remaking.<sup>52</sup> This will lead to textual objects having *different narrative practices*. The *static, fixed model* always comes first. This is a traditional text, where the strategies of production of the text clearly define narrative methods, discursive levels and the interpretative (inferential) acts of the users.<sup>53</sup> Here textuality, or *remaking* and *reworking* are strictly defined. There are more than fifty adaptations, remakes and reworks (re-adaptations), retakes and parodies of the Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (*Don Quijote de la Mancha*, 1605-1615) including those that failed, like Jess Franco’s edition of filmic materials by Orson Welles (*Don Quijote de Orson Welles*, 1992), or *Lost in La Mancha* by Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe (2002), a documentary on Gilliam’s making of a failed film.

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Then there is the *variable, hypertextual model*. The narration, though pre-defined, offers multiple interrelated (but limited) possibilities; examples of this are *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) or *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006). In the *variable model*, the textual strategy is open to seriality and repetition, but defines *a priori* the narrative design, as in *Run Lola Run* (*Lola rennt*, Tom Tykwer, 1998) or in *The Five Obstructions* by Lars Von Trier and Jørgen Leth (*De fem bænd*, 2003), or in second generation videogames, where the *remaking* becomes part of the textual strategy.

Lastly, there is the *dynamic model*, where the textual strategy becomes a *matrix of possibilities*, flexible in its contexts and with its users' decisions. Here the narration can change and the rules of the game can be redefined by the users, who through their interaction choose the perspective and the modality of the narration. Eugeni and Bellavita believe this is what happens inside the framework of reality shows such as *Big Brother*, videogames like *The Sims*, or in the virtual world of *Second Life*. Fans web-productions of "shipper's videos" from the TV serials, or a film such as *Be Kind Rewind* by Michel Gondry (2008), with its active promotional website, can also be collocated here. In this model, *practices of reworking* become part of the *textual apparatus* and facts and decisions become micro-events and possible narrative acts.

## Practices of replica

The advent of new digital technologies has opened up a whole new world of "*replica practices*." In popular music, they have given us cover versions and remixes of "golden oldies" as well as of new songs, and there appears to be no limit to the transformations of the myth of the source text. This is true also for the myth of the original film. These replica practices can be defined as "creative and shared practices of remaking and reworking that may come from encyclopaedia, archives or libraries of music, images, audiovisual and multi-medial cultural products."<sup>54</sup>

This *embodied knowledge* is made up of praxis of production, praxis of interpretation<sup>55</sup> and of practices of use.<sup>56</sup> We can have well defined texts, cultural products with a specific "narrative design", which can be *static*, *dynamic* or *variable*.<sup>57</sup> However, there are also *texts in action* that are part of a dynamic process, as they represent a series of interactions and practices, for example of a DJ or VJ performance or a YouTube video by a fan of TV serials.

It is inevitable that the practices of interpretation will revise known texts and generate new texts. These practices can be exemplified by the multitude of films containing variations, or sequels, remixes, cover versions, as *The Five Obstructions*. Furthermore, some texts, or parts of a text, become a sort of "matrix", generating other texts, versions and practices, new interconnections and so on. For example, *Run Lola Run*, like many of its contemporaries, is a film about variations that invites us to compare the film proper with its teaser trailer and video-clip trailer by putting both clips in the same DVD.<sup>58</sup> Texts can generate a variety of practices from "bastard pop" to "mash up" in music, and from reworking to remaking in film and video. This is exactly what happens in *Be Kind Rewind*, which is about "how to swede" a movie, i.e. how to make a remake. The film gives us details of the practice and so does the film's website, which shows lots of fans' "sweeded" short films.

*Inter-semiotic translations* or transpositions, from novel to film or even from comic strip to



film, are possible since source text and target text are analysed in terms of *what is not a variation*. In the case of audiovisual replica practices, as remake or reworking, a *controlled difference* between texts is best. I would make a distinction between: *remaking*, i.e. a “cover” version in popular music; *reworking*, intended as “remixing;” *inter-textual* expansions, like sequels; *intra-textual* expansions, like director’s cuts; and, finally, repetition as a *variation*. Generally speaking, in most remakes, like in musical covers, the remake does not change the *forms* of content and expression and their mutual bounds (*agencements énonciatives*), but works on the *substances* of the two levels.<sup>59</sup> Although it is true that meaning changes, even partially, with each new interpretation, renewing contexts of time and place, a *structural pattern* can still be found and analysed. Most sequels, sagas or other textual expansions follow this pattern. However, there are remakes which provide a *totally new version* (something like a music *remix*). Steven Soderbergh’s *Solaris* (2002) gives Stanislaw Lem’s novel a contemporary setting and simplifies the universe of values of Andrej Tarkowskij’s *Solaris* (*Solyaris*, 1972). In these cases, replica practices *heavily* transform substances and matters of expression, and *partially*, forms of content and expression. Even an expansion like the director’s cut *Apocalypse Now Redux* by Francis Ford Coppola (2001) is a *new version*, a remake that reworks materials and forms.

Talking about internal variations, *Run Lola Run* has an *incipit* that becomes a *matrix of invariants* to provide three versions of the same narrative. Each version replicates the same forms of content and expression as the first one, changing only the “figurative” level and some moments of the action. Though different, each story is bound to the others. It employs the same logic as of a *videogame* and so the three versions are a sort of implicit sequel, in which the hero is gaining new strength and skills. Like the spectator, the hero is also learning in the repetition, so by the second and the third game Lola knows always better what is about to happen and can act, and at last win.

*The Five Obstructions* starts with a short film called *The Perfect Human* (*Det perfekte menneske*, 1967) by Jørgen Leth, which is the source text. It provides a matrix of invariants that Lars Von Trier uses to throw up a series “obstructions” and “constraints,” or rather a new set of game rules of the textual strategy for Leth to respect while making his new versions. There are three *variations*. The first two are shot in different locations, though not on a set. The Cuban version is akin to a video-clip. Then Leth plays into a sort of re-enactment of the previous short film in Bombay. The third is a *switch*, a free, but *up-to-date*, version in Brussels of Leth’s short film. These are in fact three reinterpretations that we can call *cover remakes*. The fifth and final version is a sort of mashed up *docu-fiction* filmed by Von Trier himself with Jørgen Leth as lead actor. However, it is only the fourth short film, a cartoon, which can be called a true remake. In this last version, Leth explains that he will be not shooting any new footage because he intends to use old material. This is not to be a recycled film nor a repetition but something like *found-footage film* that he wishes to use in an active way, adapting it to a new text, a new context. This cartoon version is indeed a *remake*, which *remixes all the others*. It changes forms and matters of expression and content completely, using what we have seen until that moment, even throws in scenes transposed from the first short film. It is the only really *new version*, with its own new invariants, that summarizes or expands the potentialities of the first short film of 1967 transforming its latent properties in explicit ones, while comparing itself to the three previous versions.

Gondry’s *Be Kind Rewind* uses the problem of replica practices as a sub plot. A cult scene in the film deals with a video from a rental store that will not work because it has become demag-

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netized. The whole story is exploited to lament the end of an era that started in the 1990s with the first DVDs. They talk about replica practices, even zero budget short remakes. The film exemplifies at least three practices: first, the homemade movie as a form of expression; second, the reuse of some key scenes which is the inter-textual translation of a *topos* of the source film; third, the *pastiche* form of this re-creation makes it a *caricature*. Although neither *Be Kind Rewind* nor *The Five Obstructions* show a whole homemade remake, Gondry does make explicit references to the various original texts using para-textual markers like the source text title used as a brand name. It is thus a postmodern aesthetic of fragments and variations, verging on the cult, making the film a myth in the fan's affective memory; a remake of the narrative level and of the "figurative" instructions of setting, costumes, characters, music, screen directions, etc. Once mixed with a clever mash up of everything that could be useful to the story, in a sort of *bricolage*, textual strategy collapses on itself. Thus, the film becomes a series of caricatures. These new short remakes give a re-interpretation of the dominant guidelines (isotopies) of their source film alongside a simplification. It is the nature of any caricature to exalt some main features and highlight them. It is a *re-semantization* of the source text which makes it impossible to see the original film without harking back to the new rendition and to the second text's point of view.

*Be Kind Rewind* has a rich website, with a video of instructions on how to re-create "your own film," which mixes the backstage genre and a direct interaction with the spectator. Anybody can shoot a digital short film and post it on this website; an increasing number of people is making homemade remakes, whether they are ludic re-interpretations, pastiches or parodies or following any other replica practice. They have entered the collective sphere and circulate almost anonymously. They have become the new "ways of doing"<sup>60</sup> and most of them are practices of "over-interpretation."<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusions. Remaking as a transmedial strategy<sup>62</sup>

Any film considered as a text already contains a discursive strategy that will limit its interpretation.<sup>63</sup> However, as Bazin said,<sup>64</sup> a remake could be useful to *multiply the sense* of the source text. In an *aesthetic of repetition*, the remake becomes the "typical mutant object of the post-modern era."<sup>65</sup> Remaking seems therefore to feature like an *intertextual*, *interpretative* and *transforming* strategy, or better a *translating* and *transmedial* strategy that, to greater or lesser degrees, can construct and maintain explicit ties with a source text using it as a storehouse or archive of structural invariants, levels of the expression and of the content.

In our contemporary media-scape, digital media offer to us new remaking and reworking opportunities, sometime even as a simple and ludic practice of consumption and re-appropriation of texts.

- 1 Francesco Casetti (ed.), *L'immagine al plurale. La ripetitività e la serializzazione nel cinema e nella televisione*, Marsilio, Venezia 1984, p. 10.
- 2 Umberto Eco, *Tipologia della ripetizione*, in Francesco Casetti (ed.), *L'immagine al plurale. La ripetitività e la serializzazione nel cinema e nella televisione*, cit. (eng. ed. "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics," in *Daedalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, vol. 134, no. 4, Fall 2005, p. 192).
- 3 Francesco Casetti (ed.), *L'immagine al plurale. La ripetitività e la serializzazione nel cinema e nella televisione*, cit., p. 10.
- 4 *Ibidem.*
- 5 *Ibidem.*
- 6 *Ibidem.*
- 7 Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics," cit., p. 192.
- 8 See Omar Calabrese, *L'età neobarocca*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1989 (eng. ed. *Neo-baroque: A Sign of the Times*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992).
- 9 Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics," cit., p. 195.
- 10 *Ibidem.*
- 11 *Ibidem.*
- 12 See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis 1968; Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, Bompiani, Milano 1990 (eng. ed. *The Limits of Interpretation*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1990).
- 13 Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics," cit., p. 195.
- 14 *Ibidem.*
- 15 *Ibidem.*
- 16 *Ibidem.*
- 17 *Ibidem.*
- 18 *Idem*, p. 197.
- 19 *Ibidem.*
- 20 *Ibidem.*
- 21 *Ibidem.*
- 22 *Idem*, p. 198.
- 23 *Idem*, p. 200.
- 24 *Idem*, p. 199 (my emphasis).
- 25 Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006. Verevis refers to the work of Rick Altman about movie genres: see Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, BFI, London 1999.
- 26 Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes*, cit., p. 2.
- 27 *Idem*, pp. 1-34.
- 28 Michael B. Druxman, *Make It Again, Sam! A Survey of Movie Remakes*, A. S. Barnes, South Brunswick 1975.
- 29 Harvey R. Greenberg, *Raiders of the Lost Text: Remaking as Contested Homage in Always*, in Andrew Horton, Stuart Y. McDougal (eds.), *Play it Again, Sam. Retakes on Remakes*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1998, pp. 115-130.
- 30 Thomas Leitch, *Twice-Told Tales: Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the Remake*, in Jennifer Forrest, Leonard R. Koos (eds.), *Dead Ringers: the Remake in Theory and Practice*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2002, pp. 37-62.
- 31 Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes*, cit., p. 107.
- 32 About the "rebound effect," see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Seuil, Paris 1982 (eng. ed. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln-London 1997); Antonio Costa, *Immagine di un'immagine. Cinema e letteratura*, UTET, Torino 1993.
- 33 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, cit.
- 34 Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, cit.

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- 35 Augusto Sainati, *Jour de fête, il colore progressivo per una teoria del remake*, in Nicola Dusi, Lucio Spaziante (eds.), *Remix-Remake. Pratiche di replicabilità*, Meltemi, Roma 2006, pp. 197-208.
- 36 About textual overlapping among remakes, see Nicola Dusi, *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema, pittura*, UTET, Torino 2003.
- 37 Augusto Sainati, *Jour de fête, il colore progressivo per una teoria del remake*, cit., p. 204.
- 38 Juri Lotman, "O semiosfere," in *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, vol. 17, 1984, pp. 5-23 (eng. ed. "On the Semiosphere," in *Sign Systems Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2005, pp. 205-229).
- 39 Augusto Sainati, *Jour de fête, il colore progressivo per una teoria del remake*, cit., p. 206 (my translation).
- 40 See, for example, Theo Hermans (ed.), *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, Croom Helm, London-Sidney 1985; Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 1995; Patrick Cattrysse, "Media Translation: Plea for an Interdisciplinary Approach," in *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici, Sulla traduzione intersemiotica* (edited by Nicola Dusi, Siri Nergaard), no. 85-86-87, January-December 2000, pp. 251-270.
- 41 Theo Hermans, *Introduction: Translation Studies and a New Paradigm*, in Id. (ed.), *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, cit., pp. 8-9.
- 42 *Idem*, p. 11.
- 43 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, cit.
- 44 Juri Lotman, "The Dinamic Model of a Semiotic System," in *Semiotica*, vol. 21, no. 3-4, pp. 193-210.
- 45 Roman Jakobson, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, in Reuben Arthur Brower (ed.), *On translation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1959, pp. 232-239; now in Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, Mouton, Den Haag-Paris 1971.
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- 47 See Katharina Reiss, Hans J. Vermeer, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, M. Niemeyer, Tübingen 1984.
- 48 See Nicola Dusi, *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema, pittura*, cit.
- 49 See Christian Metz, *L'Enonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, Klincksieck, Paris 1991.
- 50 Daniel Protopopoff, "Qu'est-ce qu'un remake?," in *CinémAction, Le remake et l'adaptation* (edited by Guy Hennebelle), no. 53, 1989, pp. 13-20.
- 51 For a more detailed version of these theories and case-studies, see Nicola Dusi, *Replicabilità audiovisiva*, in Nicola Dusi, Lucio Spaziante (eds.), *Remix-Remake. Pratiche di replicabilità*, cit., pp. 95-156.
- 52 Ruggero Eugeni, Andrea Bellavita, *Mondi negoziabili. Il reworking del racconto nell'era del design narrativo dinamico*, in Nicola Dusi, Lucio Spaziante (eds.), *Remix-Remake. Pratiche di replicabilità*, cit., p. 158.
- 53 Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, cit.
- 54 Nicola Dusi, Lucio Spaziante, *Introduzione. Pratiche di replicabilità*, in Id. (eds.), *Remix-Remake. Pratiche di replicabilità*, cit., p. 10 (my translation).
- 55 Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, cit.
- 56 Michel De Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien. I Arts de faire*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1980 (eng. ed. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984).
- 57 Ruggero Eugeni, Andrea Bellavita, *Mondi negoziabili. Il reworking del racconto nell'era del design narrativo dinamico*, cit.
- 58 See Nicola Dusi, *La variante interna. Modularità e ripetizione nell'epitesto audiovisivo*, in Isabella Pezzini, Romana Rutelli (eds.), *Mutazioni audiovisive. Sociosemiotica, attualità e tendenze nei linguaggi dei media*, ETS, Pisa 2005, pp. 149-160.
- 59 The terms "forms of expression," "forms of content" and the idea of an original project as a "textual strategy" are notions drawn from film semiotics. See Louis Hjelmslev, *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse*, B. Lunos bogtrykkeri a/s, København 1943 (eng. ed. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, Waverly Press, Baltimore 1953); Christian Metz, *Language et cinéma*, Larousse, Paris 1971 (eng. ed. *Language and Cinema*, Mouton, Den Haag 1974); Gianfranco Bettetini, *La conversazione audiovisiva. Problemi dell'enunciazione filmica e televisiva*, Bompiani, Milano 1984.

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- 60 See Michel De Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien. I Arts de faire*, cit.
- 61 See Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and overinterpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York 1992.
- 62 About remaking, see also Nicola Dusi, "Zorro. Ein transmedialer Held. Übertragung, Neudeutung und Remake einer Figur," in *Montage AV. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation, Figur und Perspektive (2)*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2007, pp. 121-139.
- 63 Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, cit.
- 64 André Bazin, "Remade in USA," in *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 11, April 1952, p. 54.
- 65 Gianni Canova, *L'alieno e il pipistrello. La crisi della forma nel cinema contemporaneo*, Bompiani, Milano 2000, p. 14 (my translation).