

Preface

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The current glut of remakes, reboots, and adaptations in contemporary Western media is—perhaps ironically—opening exciting new avenues for media scholarship. Remakes are a complex issue. The field is wide and fluctuating; indeed, it seems as though the greatest challenge facing remake studies today is the need to answer two basic questions: first, how do we determine exactly what a remake is? Second, what analytical approaches to remakes yield the richest discussion?

Remakes are not an exclusively twenty-first-century phenomenon; film and television have been reaching for and recycling popular culture since their invention (Klein and Palmer 8-10). But remakes also show no signs of fading in popularity or as an ongoing area of study, and it seems that recently, there is an exceptional multitude of media from which to choose. 2016 film remakes have included *Ghostbusters*, *Ben Hur*, *The Magnificent Seven*, and *Pete's Dragon*, and recent entertainment news has announced upcoming revisitations for *Aladdin*, *Clue*, *Ocean's 11* ... there are 111 upcoming film remake projects currently listed on Den of Geek (Brew). The fall 2016 television landscape has included relaunches of *MacGyver* and *Lethal Weapon*, as well as ongoing remade series like *Hawaii Five-0*, *The Odd Couple*, and *Jane the Virgin*. We revisited *The X-Files* in 2016 (and appear likely to do so again). Upcoming television projects include *Enemy of the State*, *Heathers*, and *Magnum, P.I.*, as well as *Star Trek: Discovery* and a miniseries sequel to *Prison Break*.

Even from this highly incomplete list, it should already be clear that the boundaries defining “remakes” are not well marked. We could be discussing sequels, prequels, “re-imaginings,” trans-cultural productions, franchise spinoffs, or the links between any number of texts. Other avenues are provided by adaptation studies and film versions of novels or comic books (recently, *Captain America: Civil War* or *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*), comic book versions of television series (the ongoing *Buffy* season 10) or television series distilled from film, novel, or comic

(we could talk exclusively about comic books on television, if desired—we could even limit the examples to The CW and mention *iZombie*, *The Flash*, *Arrow*, and *Supergirl*). A transmedia series like *The Walking Dead* is an empire unto itself—not only a televised adaptation (of Robert Kirkman's successful graphic series, with its additional nods to George Romero and other foundational zombie horror), but one which has already spawned a spinoff (*Fear the Walking Dead*), a video game, a board game, Halloween costumes, shirts, and its own convention, not to mention the 11,000-plus fan stories currently on Archive of Our Own. Merely defining “remake” is a herculean task. We are dealing not with easily isolated media products but rather with a continuous, interrelated flow of textual “multiplicities” (Klein and Palmer 1).

This malleability of definition is not a weakness of the field; rather, it denotes rich possibility and broad opportunities for theoretical approach. We might call to Jameson's postmodern pastiche and Baudrillard's “desert of the real,” questioning our mediated notions of identity, nostalgia and society; we must also examine these texts through lenses such as feminism, queer theory, and race and disability studies. My own approaches are inevitably inflected by gender concerns. Recently, however, when I consider remakes, I've also been looking at the abandoned television series revived by Netflix (*Gilmore Girls*, *Full House*, *Arrested Development*, *The Killing*, *Longmire*) and thinking of Marshall McLuhan's pronouncements on new media: “When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future” (74-75). If we accept McLuhan's assertions that we judge new media based on the standards of the old—or if old media inevitably form the first content of new communications technologies—then online content providers rescuing former broadcast and cable properties take on a new light. This is certainly one of many signs of continued media convergence, in which old media are “forced to coexist” with new technologies (Jenkins 14); however, it also seems that in using the internet to watch (and recreate) television, we may be adjusting to the poten-

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tial of a medium that we're still figuring out, applying our knowledge and expectations of television as a necessary but transitory starting point.

Even confining my musings to Netflix, these thoughts are distinctly narrow. Industry tensions demand acknowledgment: Netflix has revived these series and invested in other adaptations (*Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage*), and also more “original” content, in part to compete with the same television networks and cable companies whose products it otherwise re-streams. The war for viewers is not only over the millennials who are cutting cable in droves (Ferrerás), but also over the older members of Generation X attracted to *Fuller House* and *Gilmore Girls*. Debates surrounding originality, technological determinism, and media convergence would be incomplete without analyses of corporate concerns regarding transmedia texts. Further, we must interrogate how shifts in our media texts illustrate sociocultural changes over decades or across national borders—and such examinations inevitably invite questions of content, which include questions about casting, aesthetics, and translation.

Academics examining remakes, reincarnations, and re-imaginings are grappling with an abundance of possibilities. This is not to bemoan the lack of definition in remake studies, but rather to celebrate its potential. Today's media scholars have the intimidating—but rewarding—task of sorting through mountains of recycled texts. I am delighted to read more of their thoughts here.

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