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## **Film remakes, the black sheep of translation**

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Film remakes have often been neglected by translation studies in favour of other forms of audio-visual translation such as subtitling and dubbing. Yet, as this article will argue, remakes are also a form of cinematic translation. Beginning with a survey of previous, ambivalent approaches to the status of remakes, it proposes that remakes are multimodal, adaptive translations: they translate the many modes of the film being remade and offer a reworking of that source text. The multimodal nature of remakes is explored through a reading of *Breathless*, Jim McBride's 1983 remake of Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1959), which shows how remade films may repeat the narrative of, but differ on multiple levels from, their source films. Due to the collaborative nature of film production, remakes involve multiple agents of

translation. As such, remakes offer an expanded understanding of audiovisual translation.

**Keywords:** film remakes; multimodal translation; *Breathless*; textual networks; corporate authorship; *À bout de souffle*

Film remakes across languages are referred to as a form of translation by some critics, particularly in film and media studies (e.g. Aufderheide 1998; Wills 1998; Grindstaff 2001; Forrest and Koos 2002a; Mandiberg 2008). In translation studies, however, remakes are seldom discussed and appear to be ignored in favour of more traditional forms of audio-visual translation such as dubbing and subtitling. Yves Gambier, for instance, mentions remakes as a form of multilingual production in his introductions to the special issues of *The Translator* and *Meta* on audiovisual translation (2003, 174; 2004, 4) but only briefly. Remakes are not mentioned in Delia Chiaro's chapter on audiovisual translation in *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies* (2009), in Eithne O'Connell's chapter on screen translation in *A Companion to Translation Studies* (2007) or in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker and Saldanha 2008). Carol O'Sullivan does make reference to remakes in her

*Translating Popular Film* (2011, 11), but focuses most of her discussion on subtitling. One reason for this may be that translation studies scholars have been most focused on the linguistic features of texts, rather than the recreation of the multiple modes of films, which include, but are not limited to, spoken and written language.

This article argues that interlingual remakes (i.e. films that remake films shot in another language) are a cinematic subset of translation characterized by key elements of multimodality, corporate authorship and norms of adaptation. After a theoretical consideration of remakes as a form of translation, I will analyse Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (France, 1959) and Jim McBride's *Breathless* (USA, 1983) to show how the American film can be read as revising, updating and exploring the French source text. These multiple changes offer a dialogue with the target text that can be found, in one form or another, in all forms of translation but which is brought to the fore by remakes.

### **Equivocal approaches to remakes as translation**

Many of the scholars who discuss remakes in relation to translation take an ambiguous approach, seeing them both as translations and not as translations. This ambiguity is significant: it suggests an uneasiness with according remakes the status of translation, perhaps

due to seeing translation as a form of linguistic transfer rather than the more global reinterpretation of the text which e.g. André Lefevere's concept of "rewriting" (1992) presupposes. When scholars discuss remaking in relation to interpretation, as Leo Braudy (1998) does, the concept is not linked with translation but rather adaptation. As Constantine Verevis notes, discussions of translation by scholars of adaptations often focus on questions of fidelity (2006, 82; cf. the discussion below of Grindstaff's and Forrest and Koos's work) and "fidelity criticism" (Hutcheon 2006, 6) remained, until recently, common in adaptation studies. Verevis himself criticizes this approach as limiting (2006, 84) and I would agree: moving beyond viewing translation and adaptation through the lens of fidelity leads to a greater understanding of the processes at play and allows a more nuanced approach to how the two texts relate to each other.

The sort of equivocal stance towards remakes that I have described can be found in Karin Wehn's work (2001). She analyses *Three Men and a Baby* (Leonard Nimoy, USA, 1987) as if it were a translation of *Trois hommes et un couffin* (Coline Serreau, France, 1985). Wehn situates her analysis in the context of a more general discussion of audio-visual forms of translating, including dubbing, editing (cutting) of films and television programmes for different national audiences, advertisement translation, and "morphing", or computer

manipulation of a character's lips to fit the dubbing of a new language (Wehn 2001, 70). Her focus is explicitly on how translation theory should "pay more attention to other than the verbal code" (ibid., 65), by which she means that it should take into account visual codes as well. Her discussion of the remake focuses on the similarities and differences between French and American versions of the film, highlighting, for example, the extra action sequences in the American version (ibid., 68-9). The two films are presented as source and translation but in fact Wehn does not use the word translation to describe the process of remaking, preferring "transformation" (ibid., 68-9). She later states that "[f]rom a traditional point of view, hardly any of these translation processes [i.e., dubbing, international versions, advertisement translation, remakes and morphing] would even be labelled as translations" (ibid., 70). Wehn's reticence here is telling: her essay offers possibilities for how visual transformations could be considered translation, but stops short of according such transformations the status of translations. Her stance can thus be considered equivocal. The ambivalent approach to the status of remakes which Wehn adopts is also present in Abé Mark Nornes's *Cinema Babel*, where he contrasts remakes with "translation" (2007, 8), meaning subtitling and dubbing, but also calls remakes "the ultimate form of free translation" (ibid.). For Nornes, then, remakes are almost too "free" to be considered translations, but at the same time can be read as in

some way translational in nature.

The film critic Laura Grindstaff (2001) explicitly uses ideas about translation to conceptualize remakes although she states unequivocally that “remakes are not translations per se” (2001, 139). Like Wehn, Grindstaff stops short of identifying remakes with translation, despite her acknowledgement that “US adaptations of foreign films certainly raise many of the same concerns about fidelity, authenticity and appropriation as do literary translations of foreign texts” (ibid.). Grindstaff’s focus on fidelity is echoed by Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos in their introduction to *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice* (2002a). Forrest and Koos state that literary translation consists of two practices, “literal” and “free” (2002a, 15), overlooking more complex theoretical understandings of translation in the discipline of translation studies. There are more complex issues at play in remakes than fidelity to the source film, which limits the possibilities for analysis and fetishizes the source film.

Lucy Mazdon’s chapters on remakes in both volumes of *On Translating French Literature and Film* (1996, 2000a) are more nuanced in their approach to remakes. Mazdon explicitly calls for reading remakes through translation theory, in order to go beyond the negative evaluation of remakes that she found prevalent. “Remakes are routinely condemned

as a commercial practice,” she writes (1996, 48). She blames this negative evaluation on the issue of authenticity, especially the perception of the relationship of the American “copy” to the French “original” (ibid., 49). The American films, she notes, are viewed as commercial products next to the “high art” (ibid., 49) of their French sources. Translation theory, specifically the work of Bassnett and Lefevere, offers ways out of this impasse, allowing Mazdon to discuss how Hollywood remakes interact with their source films as well as American film traditions and codes. She extends this analysis in her book *Encore Hollywood* (2000b), which analyses the history of remakes as well as their relationship to national identity and film genre. Although her book refers to Lawrence Venuti’s work on foreignizing translation (ibid., 27), it tends to focus on the relationship between pairs of films, describing these in terms of “intertextuality and hybridity” (ibid., 27). She does not develop a theory of remakes as translations, though her research suggests ways in which the two processes are similar. Other scholars have also explicitly applied translation theories to remaking. For example, Laurence Raw uses skopos theory to discuss the remake of *The Big Sleep* (Raw 2010) and Yiman Wang (2008), like Mazdon, refers to Lawrence Venuti’s foreignizing translation when discussing remakes.

In contrast to the ambiguity shown by the critics mentioned above, some theorists do



clearly position remakes as a form of translation. Henrik Gottlieb describes remaking as an isosemiotic, interlingual, inspirational form of translation (2007, 7). In other words, it creates a translation using the same semiotic system (film) in another language and has a “more free and less predictable” (ibid., 5) relation to the source text than more conventional forms of translation. Gottlieb suggests that this form of translation is closer to adaptation, noting that a remake “transplants the entire film, setting and all, into the target culture” (ibid., 10). Stephen Mandiberg makes a similar point about remakes replacing the signs of the source text (2008, 36), but does so in order to demonstrate that remakes remove the foreignness of the source film (ibid., 55). Mandiberg goes on to suggest an alternative form of translation that would maintain the difference inherent in the foreign film that he calls “metatitles” (ibid., 58-63), which would include on-screen comments including detailed explanations of terms. Like Gottlieb, Mandiberg defines translation as a semiotic process. I agree that remakes are a multimodal form of translation, recreating many elements of the source text, but do not accept Mandiberg’s negative appraisal of them. Like Verevis (2006, 84), I feel that the interest of remakes and translation is how they can extend and comment on the source text; in other words, the dialogue that they produce with it. In the next section, I want to theorize remakes in relation to translation, going beyond semiotic approaches to address how remakes and

translations are institutionally coded and how they are received by audiences.

### **Remakes and translations**

As my concern in this article is how remakes are a form of translation, I am focusing on those which are interlingual, i.e. that use a film in another language as a source text. Clearly not all remakes fall into this category: there are remakes of films in the same language, and there are films that remake TV series (and vice versa). There are multiple taxonomies of remakes (see Eberwein 1998; Leitch 2002; Maes 2005) and my goal here is not to add to the list, but rather to demonstrate how remakes and translations are conceptualized in similar ways. This means moving beyond a simple and all inclusive definition of remakes such as “new versions of old movies” (Leitch 2002, 37) or even “films based on an earlier screenplay” (Mazdon 2000b, 2) to a narrower definition that reflects the institutional and popular contexts in which remakes and translations are created.

Leitch argues that remakes are films that are based on the same property as earlier films (2002, 38). A property is the story, novel, treatment (a written description of the scenes of the film) or screenplay – the original film adapts this property into a cinematic text and a remake adapts the older film as well as the property. For *Breathless*, as I shall discuss later,

the property would be the story and treatment of the source film. Leitch notes that this creates a triangular structure of reference, with the two filmic texts referring to a third written text (ibid., 39). If this written text is a literary work, then the public has access to it and can make comparisons with both films. In the case of films which are not literary adaptations, however, it is unlikely the public will be able to view this third point of reference for remakes, as most treatments, screenplays, etc., are not published; only the films are made public in most cases. It is equally possible that filmmakers do not access the property directly but use the earlier film as the sole source. Yet Leitch also points out that generally speaking, adaptation fees are paid to the owners of the original property and not to the copyright owners of the film which is being remade (ibid., 38). The primary material is thus the property and not the first film. Leitch's observation about where adaptation fees go also highlights the legal aspect of remakes and their status as derivative works under American law (US Code 17 Section 101). They are not necessary legally derivative of the earlier films to which they relate, as the adaptation fees go to the owners of the property. Here, as in retranslation, the third term (in the form of the earlier film/translation) is ignored: the source text is where the intellectual property rights are invested. Following Leitch's point about the legal connection between the films, remakes can therefore be considered intersemiotic retranslations: intersemiotic,

following Roman Jakobson's (1959) terminology, as they translate a written text into a film; retranslations as another film has already performed this translation process.

Whatever the theoretical and legal relationship between the texts, for the audience the new film relates to the earlier film. As the audience seldom has access to the property – the source text – they only see the remaking of the earlier film (the earlier target text) by the later film/target text. Remaking is therefore as much a textual category as it is a legal/institutional one, relying on the audience's recognition of the status of the new film as a remake as much as on any legal status it might have. Verevis highlights one of the ways that an audience recognizes remakes when he states that they “are highly particular in their repetition of *narrative units*” (2006, 21; original emphasis): they tell “the same story”, or much of it. This is the level that would appear to be the most immediately accessible to an audience, who may not pay attention to the paratexts (e.g. credits) of a film, but who can recognize elements of the same narrative from a film they had viewed previously. Indeed, Hans Mae argues that for a film to be considered a remake it “must in some relevant way be comparable to a previous movie” (2005, 7). This possibility for comparison echoes Andrew Chesterman's “relation norm” (1997, 69-70). Chesterman argues that “an appropriate relation of relevant similarity [should be] established and maintained between the source text and the target text” (ibid., 69).

There is scope here for a variety of possible relationships, as Chesterman himself stresses: they depend on the aims of the translation and the needs of the audience. In the same way, remakes may connect to their source films in a variety of ways, as Leitch (2002) and Robert Eberwein (1998, 29-30) have demonstrated in their taxonomies. For example, a “shot-by-shot” remake such as Michael Haneke’s *Funny Games US* (2007), discussed by Steffen Hantke (2010), is just as much a remake as a film which adapts its source text significantly, as McBride’s *Breathless* does.

Yet if one trusts the recognition of narrative repetition on its own, then remakes could include all films where there are elements of narrative repeated from other films, whether or not they could legally be considered derivative. Verevis almost takes this approach in his conclusion, “Remaking Everything” (2006, 173-8), which analyses the films of Quentin Tarantino. However, in this conclusion, each time Verevis refers to Tarantino’s “remakes” of other films, he puts the word “remake” in scare quotes, thereby making Tarantino’s allusive structures into something other than remakes. He limits the idea of remake to a more concrete relationship than just allusion or copying an element from an earlier film. Earlier in the book, however, he suggests that remakes could be “the limited repetition of a classic shot or scene” (2006, 21), which would once again open up the category to any film that could be perceived

to repeat an element of an earlier film. Potentially every film would, in some way, remake another.

Sensibly, then, there must be some sort of limit to what can be accepted as a remake.

Verevis offers a densely worded definition that combines the textual and the legal elements of remaking:

More often [...] film remakes are understood as (more particular) intertextual structures which are stabilised, or *limited*, through the naming and (usually) legally sanctioned (or copyrighted) use of a particular literary and/or cinematic source which serves as a retrospectively designated point of origin and semantic fixity. (2006, 21; original emphasis)

Verevis here suggests that as well as being intertextual structures, remakes usually credit their source. If repetition at the level of the narrative is included in the definition, it becomes clearer that a film remake can be limited to those cases where a film remakes in full an earlier film rather than solely an element of that film. Remakes, then, have an acknowledged relationship to the film they remake as well as textual and narrative correspondence. Films

that do not acknowledge their source film or source material cannot be strictly considered as remakes so much as homages or parodies or other intertextual rewritings/re-filmings of the source: the textual relationship in these cases is similar but not codified by a legal process.

There is a difference, then, between “remake” used as a metaphor (films that resemble or borrow from other films) and “remake” used in a more literal sense (films that are acknowledged remakings of previous films).

Such arguments have also been had in regard to literary translation. Theo D’haen (2007) has argued against the use of the term “translation” to refer to every form of rewriting of texts that takes place in literature. The term “rewriting” itself can also be debated; for instance, Lefevere’s (1992) use of the term, which includes translations and anthologies, differs from the use made by Christian Moraru (2001), who defines ‘rewriting’ as a critical revisiting of previous texts which is found in postmodern narratives. There are many potential relationships between texts that could be considered translations; the term is used both literally and metaphorically (D’haen 2007, 108). A more restricted sense of what a translation is would obtain within an institutional framework and might invoke copyright agreements that have been made for the publication of the text, which Theo Hermans has argued is a form of authorisation (2007, 22). In the case of translations of texts that have passed out of copyright

protection, one would expect the acknowledgement of a source text to be present even if a copyright agreement was not. Gideon Toury's notion of 'assumed translation' (1995, 32) requires a text to be 'regarded/presented as translational' (ibid.) but I am arguing here that more is necessary: the recognition of a shared narrative is not enough on its own to brand a text a translation, just as it cannot brand a film a remake: some sort of acknowledgement or legal agreement is required.

My understanding of remakes and translations, then, echoes Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptations as "openly acknowledged and extended reworkings of particular other texts" (2006, 16), and as such I would place remakes as a sub-category of adaptations, just as Hutcheon argues that translations are a form of adaptation (ibid., 171-2). Adaptation involves recontextualization (ibid., 9) of the source text: this is clearly visible in the way remakes "[insert] the text into a new network of circumstances" (Quaresima 2002, 81) through placing it in a new cinematic tradition and relocating the narrative. Yet translation also performs this recontextualization by placing a text in a new language and therefore in a new situation. The interventions in a remake may be more clearly visible (and as a consequence regarded as more acceptable), but, as Hermans (among others) has pointed out, all translations carry traces of their translator (2007, 27), leading to a different textual



experience. It is not only obviously adaptive translations such as poets' versions (see Venuti 2011) that offer this difference, but all forms of translation.

The double categorization of translation as a textual and an institutional category mirrors that of remakes. Remakes, then, and especially interlingual remakes which involve a movement between languages, are conceptually similar to translations. Both show a repetition of narrative, though there may be variation in that narrative. Both are recognised by readers or viewers as offering a full scale reworking of a previous text. Both are authorized in a copyright context. There is also a fuzzy boundary between translation as a metaphor and translation as an activity just as there is in the case of remakes (as I discussed above). However, the multiple processes and agents involved in the creation of a remake make this form of translation typically more hybrid and multiply adapted than many written texts, as I discuss in the next section.

### ***Breathless* and the multiplicity of remaking**

Jim McBride's *Breathless* (USA, 1983) is the American remake of Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (France, 1959). McBride's film has been written about extensively (e.g. Falkenberg 1985; Wills 1998; Durham 1998, 49-69; Mazdon 2000b, 79-88; Verevis 2006, 165-70) and

could be considered a canonical example of a remake, especially as the language is changed from French to (American) English. French-to-English remakes have been analysed by Lucy Mazdon (2000b) and Carolyn Durham (1998), as well as in many of the essays in *Dead Ringers* (Forrest and Koos 2002b). Mazdon lists 60 American remakes of French films in the period from 1930 to 1999 (2000b, 152-6), which she points out is by far the highest number of remakes from any country other than the USA itself (ibid., 2). In contrast, Ann White writes in an article from 2003 that *Abre los ojos* (Alejandro Amenábar, Spain, 1997) is the only Spanish film that she is aware of that has been remade in Hollywood (White 2003, 188). France could therefore be considered a privileged source culture for American remakes. Mazdon does not attribute this to any intrinsic quality of the films themselves but rather to the fact that “the French cinematic industry is significantly more healthy than those of its European neighbours” (2000b, 23). This statement she clarifies by showing how, through state investment and cultural policy, the French film industry produces and distributes more films than other European nations. And, she notes, the French film industry encourages remaking through the governmental agency UniFrance Film which was set up to facilitate the international distribution of French films (ibid., 25). In addition, the “high art” status associated with French film (ibid., 8) should not be forgotten: French films have cultural

capital in the American market. They have an allure that remakes hope to capitalize on, in a gesture that Leitch describes as “imperialistic” (2002, 56). By remaking a French film, the American producers seek to appropriate some of that cultural capital.

In this section, I want to discuss how the remake of *À bout de souffle* translates its source text. In particular, I am interested in the way that it translates not just the linguistic elements of the film but cultural allusions and cinematographic elements as well. As O’Sullivan notes, “[f]ilm and television are polysemiotic media which signify through combinations of visual, verbal and acoustic elements” (2011, 15). Films signify using more than just the linguistic code: they produce meaning through visual and audio cues, through gesture, mise-en-scène, music, dialogue, and through the interaction of these codes. Remakes translate all of these elements, offering repetition and reworking of the source text.

Godard’s *À bout de souffle* tells the story of Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a small-time crook, as he returns to Paris to collect money owed to him and also to pick up the American student journalist he is in love with, Patricia Franchini (Jean Seberg). On the way, Poiccard shoots and kills a traffic policeman. Arriving in Paris, he finds out the money he is owed has been given to him in the form of a cheque that he cannot cash. He spends the film convincing Patricia to go to Rome with him, trying to get money from various sources and

evading the police. In the end Poiccard is betrayed by Patricia and shot in the back by the police. Despite Godard's various innovations in film form, including jump-cuts and the use of a handheld camera, the narrative is not unconventional: it is more or less standard film noir fare and the story would not be out of place in any number of B-movies. Godard's appreciation of the B-movie format is shown by the fact that the film is dedicated to Monogram Pictures, a small Hollywood studio producing cheap B-movies, including series such as *Charlie Chan* (see Okuda 1999). There is further allusion throughout *À bout de souffle* to American cinema; Poiccard is obsessed with Humphrey Bogart and at one point he and Patricia go to watch a Western. Michel's obsession with Bogart can be read as a synecdoche for *À bout de souffle*'s obsession with American cinema. However, the film also constitutes itself as a film in the French tradition by its use of location and the way it emphasizes its setting. For example, an iconic scene shows Patricia selling newspapers on the Champs Élysées. Near the beginning of the film, as Poiccard drives from Marseille to Paris, he says to himself, and the viewer, "J'aime beaucoup la France" [I love France]. The film positions itself cinematically in relationship to American cinema but topographically in relation to France. The tension here can be attributed to the critique of one cinema through another that Pamela Falkenberg (1985, 44) argues that the film is performing. The film can be read as

appropriating and alluding to American cinematic and cultural tropes, but placing them in a clearly French setting, just as Godard is arguing for the adoption or appropriation of tropes of American film by the French film industry.

The combination of cultures is also found in McBride's *Breathless*, although the tension between them is less apparent. In the American film, small-time crook Jesse Lujack (Richard Gere) returns to Los Angeles to collect money owed to him and also to pick up the French architecture student he is in love with, Monica Poiccard (Valérie Kaprisky). The nationalities of the characters are reversed: he is American, she is French. The story plays out in much the same way as it does in Godard's film, with the same difficulties getting money and the same betrayal by the female character. However, as the change in location suggests, there are a number of other differences between source and target film. On a cinematographic level, the first obvious difference is the use of colour photography in the American film compared to the black and white of the French movie. Another obvious change is the use of English rather than French as the film's main language. Changes – which are a necessary part of the remaking process – are also evident in the allusions to popular culture. The references to American cinema are reduced, although not removed: at one point Jesse and Monica have sex in the cinema while *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, USA, 1950) is playing. The jazz

refrains of the French soundtrack are replaced by the rock ‘n’ roll music of Jerry Lee Lewis, notably his song “Breathless”. Bogart is replaced by the Marvel Comics character the Silver Surfer as the central character’s hero. Overall, the cultural allusions tend to stay within an American sphere, moving towards a more popular perspective, i.e. rock ‘n’ roll and comic books rather than jazz and film noir. This shift in status is in some ways attributable to changes in culture between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, where what were considered popular art forms (e.g. jazz) have been adopted by more elite audiences. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the Silver Surfer might fill a similar cultural role in the 1980s to the one Bogart filled in the 1950s. Both films are alluding to forms of expression traditionally associated with America, but in the French film this is experienced as a foreign element, whereas in *Breathless* that connotation is reduced, reducing the contrast between the cultures and making Monica the token element of French culture. Poiccard is in love in American culture and so his seduction of Patricia can be interpreted metonymically in relation to this. The relationship between Jesse and Monica is, on the other hand, less clearly related to her role as an avatar of French culture.

The way the characters dress also changes. The French film features contemporary late fifties suits and dresses. Jesse wears a stylized retro costume in McBride’s movie, which is

made more marked by the contemporary 1980s styles of Monica's clothes. Jesse's costume of a red frilled shirt and tight blue trousers can be read tentatively as an allusion to the earlier period of the French film, though it is more likely to be an allusion to Jerry Lee Lewis: either way it characterizes Jesse as out-of-sync with the world around him. This may be said about Michel Poiccard, too, though not through his clothing choices. Both male protagonists are romantic minor criminals, detached from the society that they find themselves in.

An important difference between the two movies is in the representation of sex, which takes place beneath a sheet with music turned up loud in Godard's film. There is a more graphic depiction, including frontal nudity, in the American version, although it is by no means pornographic. Michael Harney points out how American remakes tend to exaggerate the features of their French sources (2002, 73-5) and *Breathless* is obviously doing so in this sequence. This goes against the trend found in audio-visual translation towards censorship (Chiaro 2009, 150-1). One reason for the more graphic depiction in the American film may simply be that by 1983 it was permissible to show more on screen. Whatever the limits of possibility for each film, though, the French film is more playful in its depiction of sex, allowing the viewer to imagine what is happening in a way that the American movie in its explicitness does not.

In addition, there is a difference in what Robert Stam calls “celebrity intertextuality” (1999, 337n2), where the actors playing the roles are recognized by the audience. Richard Gere would be recognised from his role as Julian in *American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, USA, 1980) or Zack Mayo in *An Officer and a Gentleman* (Taylor Hackford, USA, 1982). These previous roles influence how viewers would have been likely to receive Gere and offer more connotations to his character: Jesse could be identified with the rebellious young men that Gere had previously played. These connotations will necessarily differ from those associated with Belmondo. *À bout de souffle* playfully encourages identification with one of Belmondo’s former roles when Poiccard gives his name as Lazlo Kovacs, referring to the role of the young rogue Belmondo played in Claude Chabrol’s *À double tour* (1959).

The differences between the two films have received much commentary. Durham focuses on the reversal of gender and national relations in the film (1998, 51), while Verevis characterizes the role reversals and other differences as “inversion and doubling” (2006, 168), which reimagine the intertextual implications of the cultural references and the deterritorialization that the foreign exchange student represents. Mazdon (2000b, 79-85) focuses first, like Pamela Falkenberg (1985), on national identity and cultural capital in the film. Both Falkenberg and Mazdon discuss how *À bout de souffle* could be considered to be in



opposition to mainstream cinema, whereas *Breathless* is much more of a Hollywood (mainstream) product, although it also “transgress[es] the codes of mainstream Hollywood production” (Mazdon 2000b, 84) through its lack of resolution and graphic portrayal of sex.

To see *Breathless* as an entirely commercial or mainstream movie is, however, a limited reading; as David Wills (1998) points out, *Breathless* does not entirely dispense with the heterogeneity and discontinuity present in *À bout de souffle*. Mazdon continues her discussion of *Breathless* by relating it to the postmodern and analysing its status as a simulacrum (a copy with no original) of the earlier film (2000b, 85-7). She argues that *À bout de souffle* is itself a simulation which plays intertextually with much American cinema. As such, the remake cannot be a copy of the earlier film, but a re-making of it, recreating it in another aesthetic tradition (and language).

My argument here is that the remaking procedure acts through all of these differences, which translate not only the narrative of the film, but also its allusive structure, cinematography, costume, etc. No one aspect is enough on its own to define the relationship between the texts. *Breathless* reproduces and recontextualizes *À bout de souffle* in a way that is analogous to the reproduction and recontextualization apparent in the translation of literary works, though it goes further than would normally happen in literary translation inasmuch as

it also relocates the story. It cannot be considered solely as a copy of the source text in the same way as a translation cannot. It is a new text that has a translational relationship to the earlier text. That relationship is not limited to similarity, though clearly some similarity is necessary for the text to be recognized as a remake or translation.

In the case of McBride's *Breathless*, the actual process of translation is less one of translating than one of rewriting (in a literal sense). In addition to developing and localizing the narrative, the script for the American movie was based on the treatment, rather than the dialogue of the French film. In an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma* – for which Godard wrote in the 1950s – McBride states that although he had translated the script of *À bout de souffle*, “nous les avons mis de côté et nous ne nous y sommes plus référés ensuite, quand nous nous sommes mis à écrire” [we put it [the script] to one side and didn't look at it again when we were writing] (Frank and Krohn 1983, 64). As McBride goes on to note, the film was rewritten five times afterwards and the first draft “était radicalement différente du résultat final” [was radically different to the final result] (ibid., 64). In addition to the script, the cast's performances as well as McBride's direction and the production company Orion's decisions affected how the film turned out. As is the case with remakes in general, McBride's film was not decided by a single, authorial figure, but rather by the collaboration of several agents.

In the work of all the critics mentioned above, the translated elements are compared to the source text as if the audience has had the opportunity to watch both. It would of course be possible to watch both, as they are currently available on DVD and were available on video and in the cinema before that. Indeed, the differences between them suggest that there is value in watching both movies. It is possible to read the later film in a dialogic relationship to the earlier film. The two films form what I have described in relation to adaptations of the same story as a “textual network” (Evans 2012). By altering, updating and adapting elements of Godard’s movie, McBride’s film reinterprets the source text and explores its narrative. Yet this reinterpretation is not limited to such obviously dialogic adaptations as *Breathless*: it takes place in any form of adaptation, as differences in media and the situation in which the text is made mean that the adapted text will always differ from its source. The viewer can therefore watch (or otherwise consume) the various iterations of the story and find new elements in each iteration. Part of the pleasure of watching remakes lies in this combination of novelty and familiarity. The extending of the textual network is also present in translations, as differences in languages will occasion differences in texts. Yet translations are seldom read in this fashion (especially outside of translation studies). Remakes suggest another way of reading translations, as a form of rereading across languages that can offer a deeper

interaction with the text, enhanced by the extra dimensions of the target language.

### **Remaking as a composite, visible process of translation**

As *Breathless* shows, film remakes can be seen to translate the multiple modes present in their source films. There are differences – some major, some minor – between the source and target films, but there is also a recognisable narrative similarity or repetition. Other forms of audiovisual translation perform differently: subtitles translate from sound to written text, an adaptation that Gottlieb (1994) has called “diagonal translation”, although, as Chuang Ying-Ting (2006) argues, subtitling translates more than just speech and linguistic modes, also incorporating sound effects and non-verbal communication at times. Dubbing offers a translation of the vocal performance in the film (Bosseaux 2008), including paralinguistic elements, but it does not translate as many levels of the film text as remakes do, as physical acting, dress, photography and so on are retained. Interlingual remakes are therefore a form of what Catford calls “total translation”, which he explains as “translation in which all levels of the SL text are replaced by TL material” (1965, 22).

Yet, as I discussed in the section “Remakes and Translations”, more is necessary than just a replacement of signs for one film to be considered a remake of another. In my example,

as in Leitch's (2002) description, there is a legal connection between the movies that binds the remake to its source. The titles signal this open acknowledgement: *Breathless* repeats the title used in English for Godard's *À bout de souffle*.<sup>1</sup> The remake does, however, relocate the action of the narrative and change the language, which leads to changes from the source film. These changes are more apparent in film than in literature as there are more modes being altered at once and so remakes foreground the dialogue between the two texts, but a translation will always provide a different textual experience from the source text, even though it might be a fair representation of it. Remakes – and by extension translations – expand the textual experience created by the source text. They offer new perspectives on the narrative through their recreation of it in another code. These differences are, in fact, what interest viewers who are familiar with the source text.

Remakes are a form of composite translation, which is clearly made by many individual agents. Theories of authorship in film have moved away from regarding directors as authors of films (see e.g. Petrie 2008), because of the collaborative nature of film production. The translator of the remake, like the author of a film, is seldom only the director. In fact, in an interlingual remake, the actual translator of linguistic elements of the film may be a professional translator, as was the case with the Austrian director Michael Haneke's US

remake (2007) of his own *Funny Games* (1997). The actual task of translating the script was done, according to Haneke, by two translators before he worked through it with an “American director and screenwriter” (Anon. n.d.). McBride himself produced a translation of the script of *À bout du souffle*, but he stresses how the film developed beyond this translation, both in script redrafting and through the intervention of the star, Richard Gere, and the production company, Orion (Frank and Krohn 1983, 64-5). The production of a remake is the result of a complex industrial process which cannot rely on just one person. As Stam notes, “[w]hile the poet can write poems on a napkin in prison, the filmmaker requires money, camera, film” (1999, 90). A translator can work without a huge amount of resources, but to make a remake requires much more: “[e]ven the cheapest movie costs a lot of money” (Harney 2002, 73).

The process of the translation of a film by a film is therefore more diffuse and subject to multiple influences than translation studies approaches, with their focus on the translator as an agent, have traditionally allowed for, although recent work using Actor Network Theory (e.g. Buzelin 2004, 2005, 2006; Kung 2010) shows how complex the process of publishing a translation is and how many agents are involved in getting a translation into print. The complexity of the remaking process draws attention to the complexity of the translation process and the shortcomings of research into translation that does not recognize the

collaborative nature of text production.

Unlike many translations, remakes make no attempt to hide the differences between source and target texts. They recreate the source text in a new context: the designation “remake”, literally “making again”, already makes visible this re-creation, which is also present in translation. If audiences have access to both source and target films, there is the possibility of reading the texts interculturally as explorations of the same narrative. Further consideration of remakes in translation studies will, I hope, develop understanding of how audiences approach multiple versions (translations, remakes, adaptations) of a text.

## Notes

1. The title of the French release of McBride’s *Breathless* was *À bout de souffle*, made in USA, implicitly encouraging the viewer to compare the remake to the source film (and also, arguably, suggesting that it would not measure up to it).

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