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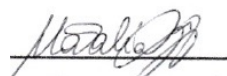
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INTRODUCTION

The increase in number of film remakes and cover songs is directly proportional to the evolution of the film and music industries. It seems to be an inevitable phenomenon, and it is so due to the passing of time. The same stories appeal to the public and it is difficult to be original with such an extensive cinematic and musical heritage, that has already covered every imaginable topic. Artists are running after innovation and creativity, but it would definitely be easier to rely on finished products, as with Duchamp's readymade pieces of art. And as in his work, there is more than meets the eye. In fact, most film remakes and cover songs carry their own cultural value and are not to be underrated or ignored just because they are not the original, classic version. Classics are defined as such because they became a canon in their respective fields. They were once so revolutionary and valuable that they became exemplary. It is to be expected that they would be celebrated by countless homages, references and citations. But one must keep in mind that there are different kinds of remakes and all have different motivations and objectives. This essay aims to analyse the cultural and economic motivations for film remakes and cover songs, referring to four cultural texts that have been reinterpreted: *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) [*Stoker* (2013)], *Psycho* (1960) [*Psycho* (1998)], *Space Oddity* (1969) [*Ragazzo Solo, Ragazza Sola* (1970)], *Across the Universe* (1969) [*Across the Universe* (2007)]. It will also explore the similarities that can be found between film remakes and cover songs.

DEFINITIONS AND CULTURAL MOTIVATIONS

The range of film remakes is quite broad. It goes from really faithful ones to the simply-inspired category. Many scholars have classified remakes in different ways. An easy yet effective classification was done by Michael B. Druxman. He identified three categories of Hollywood remakes: disguised remake, direct remake and non-remake (cited in Verevis, 2005, p. 7). The names are self-explanatory. A disguised remake would be *Stoker*, in fact, as it will be analysed later on, the film was not explicitly advertised as a reinterpretation of *Shadow of a Doubt*, yet the two films have a lot in common. As shown by this case remakes can be controversial since filmmakers might deny any association with the original or recognise very little of it.

On the other hand *Psycho* (1998) is a direct remake. Not only does it have the same title as the original, but it was conceived and planned as a shot by shot remake (filmschoolcomments, 2014). Whether the film successfully fulfilled its aim is a matter of some debate, but it was clearly advertised as a remake. So obviously *Stoker* and *Psycho* (1998) provide very different examples of the art of reinterpretation, which also means that their creators were motivated by various reasons and that each of these films has a peculiar goal, in terms of cultural value. Park Chan-wook stated that, although he has always been inspired by Alfred Hitchcock, he did not want to remake *Shadow of a Doubt*. Therefore he refused to label *Stoker* as a remake, saying that he simply took inspiration from the Master of Suspense. There are too many similarities to dismiss any remake claims. But one cannot only blame the director, since the script, written by Wentworth Miller, has plenty of references to Hitchcock's work. (Hoad, 2013)

While the motivations behind the making of *Stoker* might be blurred, Gus Van Sant provided a definite reason behind his idea. In an interview he stated that he was remaking *Psycho* (1960) in order to reintroduce people to black and white movies, since he felt audiences were growing distant from classic masterpieces. So he followed Hitchcock's footsteps and created a modernised and updated version of the story. Critics were not pleased by his idea: even though it was the fruit of curiosity, many still read it as an impossible challenge to the original. (filmschoolcomments, 2014)

Albeit *Psycho* (1998) and *Stoker* came from diverse creative ideas, they were both the expression of a filmmaker's personal need to replicate an existing story. In a way they were an attempt to a cultural mission of re-education. Both remakes shed light on two canonic films made by one of the most influential directors of all times. As stated by Leo Braudy, an artistic product can either be original or a meditation on a product of the past. Both cases contribute to the expansion of the cultural dialogue (1998, p. 331).

Cover songs are culturally significant as well. They function as a tool of preservation of popular culture, exposing new audiences and artists to classic tunes. Moreover they allow artists to experiment and are a great way for emerging singers to prove their capabilities, one needs only to think of the many talent shows on television (Plasketes, 2010, pp. 2-16). Cover songs

play with expectations and elements of surprise, since they are revisited versions of existing tunes. In Tom Bligh's words:

"Movies get remade, songs get covered. A cover song comes with history attached. The song's past blends with its present to create something surprising yet recognizable: two stories in one, two contexts, two visions. Covers are familiar enough that we know what to expect, plus there's opportunity for the unexpected, an appealing combination of same/different." (2006)

There are different kinds of covers, which serve different aims. Some of them are homages to great artists, as when famous singers celebrate and commemorate colleagues. This function reaches its extreme with tribute bands, which are usually formed by regular people obsessed with the certain look and style of a band. These cover fanatics not only replicate the songs but also the outfits (Plasketes, 2010, p.18). Good results are not always guaranteed. On the other hand there are covers with a more practical objective, such as those dedicated to musicals and biopics. Cover songs performed by actors render those films more credible and genuine. One example is *Across the Universe* (1969). The song was reinterpreted for a musical that goes by the same title. It was performed by Jim Sturgess. Throughout the entire film it is possible to see the influence of the Fab Four. It is definitely to be considered an homage, since it shows how influential their work was and how their songs can be used as a starting point to create something new, intellectually and artistically stimulating. In addition this is not the only popular cover version of *Across the Universe* used in a film, in fact it was also remade by Rufus Wainwright for *I Am Sam* (2001). (Leszczak, 2014, p. xxvii-2) In this film the Beatles' songs contribute in shaping the character and making him likable, relatable and real. Like most of humanity, Sam is fascinated by and obsessed with this band (Devenish, 2001).

On the other side of the cover spectrum there is a version of *Space Oddity* in Italian, sang by David Bowie himself, *Ragazzo Solo, Ragazza Sola* ('*Lonely Guy, Lonely Girl*'). It is a completely different situation, not only it is a translation of the song, but it is not even faithful to the original. While the original song is about an astronaut getting lost, the translated version is about the end of a love story. In this case even though the overall meaning of *Space Oddity* got literally lost in translation, the fact that a version was written in

Italian is quite relevant itself, because somehow the language barrier was taken down. People who were not familiar with the English version were able to enjoy and understand a surrogate of the latter. Furthermore to be introduced to an artist in one's own idiom definitely feels more personal and creates more attachment. The lyrics of the revisited version were written by Mogol, a famous Italian songwriter that at the time translated quite a few transnational hits, which proves it was once a common practice. (Guaitamacchi, 2009)

Cover songs today do not enjoy the same reputation. As Don Cusic explains, many fans and critics nowadays prefer authentic and original songs that reflect the singer's thoughts and feelings. On the other hand in the past there have been great examples of cover songs by incredible singers, such as Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and Ella Fitzgerald. So one might come to the realisation that at the time it was more acceptable to reinterpret other people's songs. (2010, pp. 227-228)

In the same way film remakes are perceived negatively by many. In fact remakes can be interpreted as a sign of lack of creativity and originality in the film industry, as Mark Kermode points out (cited in Verevis, 2005, p. 4). While this might be true for some remakes and covers, one cannot generalise. In fact this point of view clouds how some second-hand cultural texts successfully contribute to further develop the artistic discourse and entertain audiences, as proved before.

ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS

Another factor to keep in consideration when discussing products based on a text from the past, is nostalgia. As said before, filmmakers and singers look up to icons of the previous generations to take inspiration from and homage. But nostalgia can also be considered a powerful commodity. In fact another reason behind remakes and covers is the economic benefit: a cultural text at least partly familiar to the audience is more likely to sell well. Furthermore it will also appeal younger generations who did not experience the original version first-hand. So nostalgia allows production companies to create a maximum audience base through melancholic connection, therefore profit is almost guaranteed. (Lizardi, 2014, p. 107-108)

As Constantine Verevis points out, using established formulas minimises the risks and insures profits (cited in Lizardi, 2014, p. 110). Cover artists choose to create something new based on preconceived notions (McCallister cited in Lizardi, 2014, p.111). Like in the Hegelian dialectic, there is a constant evolution accountable of the elements of the past.

Some remakes change so much to the point of almost being considered sequels. This would be the case of *Stoker*, which represents an extension of Hitchcock's work, since it explores more of the character's background stories, developing them in different directions from the original. On the contrary *Psycho* (1998) does not require the audience to have any previous knowledge, since it leads them by hand through the same storyline and shot composition (Shannon DonaldsonMcHugh and Don Moore cited in Lizardi, 2014, p. 114). Lesley Stern identifies the paradox constituted by remakes, which are supposed to replicate the original's box office success, but at the same time are required to be innovative to attract young audiences (cited in Verevis, 2005, p. 4).

At least they can benefit from marketing and advertisement strategies that focus on nostalgic elements. Adjectives as 'timeless' and 'classic' are often used (Verevis, 2005, p.17).

On a different note, but always in regard to marketing strategies, translation is quite an effective practice, since it targets a specific audience. Inevitably people will be more familiar with a cultural text tailor made for them. While transnational texts might be attractive because different, new and exotic, people tend to reach for products they are accustomed to. When *Space Oddity* came out in 1969, David Bowie was not popular in the UK yet, let alone in Italy. A key factor to keep in mind is that not many Italians could speak or understand English in the Seventies. English became a mandatory subject in primary school only in 2003 (Educational Act 53/2003). *Ragazzo Solo, Ragazza Sola* was performed by Bowie himself for promotional reasons. Not only not much attention was being paid to *Space Oddity*, but also a band called Computers had already interpreted Mogol's lyrics. So Bowie found himself competing with a cover version of his own song but in a different language.(Guaitamacchi, 2009) And this is how the iconic artist got to sing in Italian. The song was included in the compilation album *Bowie Rare* (1982) (Morgoglione, 2012).

It is important to reiterate that, as Braudy states, even though remakes are also conceived to be profitable, simply considering them money making commodities is reductive (1998, p. 328). On this note cover songs provide for an interesting analysis. When talking about music copyright there are different licences depending on the way the song will be used: synchronisation, mechanical and master (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988).

The synchronisation licence allows a person to synchronise the lyrics and melody to a video; the mechanical licence to distribute physical copies, such as CDs; the master licence protects the actual song recording (Butler, 2017). So to use a cover song in a film, such as *Across the Universe* (2007) in the homonymous musical, a production company would have to pay the rights to the composition and to the synchronisation. The mechanical licence is required as well if the song will then be distributed. (Musicbed, 2017).

In *I Am Sam* the producers decided to use a cover of the Beatles' song since the label would not give a master licence, while the publisher had given synchronisation rights (TuneCore, 2010).

When it comes to motion pictures, caricature, parody and pastiche are allowed, therefore do not require any licences (The UK Copyright Service, 2017).

Quite different are derivative works, which, as the name suggests, are based on a pre-existing cultural text. In order to follow this path, permission must be granted by the copyright owner. There are a few exceptions to this rule: work recreated for educational purposes, so for instruction and examination; cultural texts that are in the public domain, because the copyright has expired; the original work has a licence that approves the creation of a derivative work (The UK Copyright Service, 2017).

Even though the agreements and permissions that made *Stoker* possible have not been made public, the average audience who is familiar with *Shadow of A Doubt* would definitely see a connection between the two. Therefore Park Chan-wook's work might be considered a derivative work, thus one might assume that the production company obtained a licence. But this is a mere speculation, since the production data is not in the public domain. What is sure though is that the standard procedure would be to get permission from the copyright owner.

CONCLUSION

All in all making cover songs and film remakes is a financial investment. Although the factors taken into consideration are definitely different and, in some cases, more complex than those of the film or song making-from-scratch equation, the concept behind them is ultimately the same: they require a certain amount of money to be made, which hopefully will be paid back with profits. While economic success definitely indicates how effective and popular a text is, it does not express its cultural value. Or at least its attempt to be intellectually and artistically significant.

Some artists might choose to recreate a text because it is easier to do so, but even such a trivial motivation does not necessarily lead to an equally banal reception and interpretation of said product. A film remake or a cover song might have a massive impact on society, despite its creation being the result of a gold digging expedition. The initial and final purposes of a cultural text do not have to coincide. Moreover they can be controlled only up to a certain point, since they are tied to people's reactions, which are not always predictable. In conclusion the economic motif behind the creation of new versions of pre-existing cultural texts is definitely a key factor, but it does not diminish the cultural importance and relevance some of these works had and will continue to have. As the films and songs analysed in this essay show, cultural and economic objectives do and can co-exist, and instead of limiting each other, they actually lead to creative solutions, which all in all expand society's cultural baggage.

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