Remake as an object of history – Thoughts on Jentery Sayers' writings

For the probe, I chose to discuss the writings from Jentery Sayers, especially his thoughts on *The Relevance of Remaking* which is close to my own research interests. I will, of course, make some notions on the other two writings as well but the main focus lies in the practice of remaking and remakes.

The key question Sayers claims he has to answer every time regarding remaking is, how is remaking scholarship. The definition of remaking according to Sayers is as follows:

- need not to be an exact replication of artifacts (appeals to authentic not required)
- remake doesn't necessarily lack something the original doesn't
- what isn't at hand, or what we don't know, or what we are willing to conjecture
- an attempt to better understand history (can provide a lot of information about the social expectations of a given period)

Sayers focuses on technological objects, or at least he mentions especially the type of technological objects that have become obsolete (they no longer exist), or never existed. Sayers offers a comparison of methods as an answer:

- materials of the remake
- assembly (processes)
- interface (interactions)
- failure – success
- abstraction (through what media was it expressed and how)

- instrumentalism (through what standards was it found, constructed, and archived)
- speculation (what do we know)

What I wish to study here is how do we understand remake, remaking, and other concepts related to remake such as re-version, and how they serve as useful concepts for media archaeology. Note that these two (remake and re-version) are used in the movie industry. I will exclude concepts such as re-release, re-edition, and cover from this probe since they are usually associated with music industry, even though I find those equally important and part of media archaeology.

Although strongly advocating for the careful use of Wikipedia or other websites as a reference, I will point only that Wikipedia definitions of remake is seen as *"film or television series based on an earlier produced work and tells the same, or very similar, story*". Vocabulary.com defines remaking as *creation that is created again or anew"*. And, for instance, video game remake is defined on Wikipedia as *a video game closely adapted from an earlier title*. [1] My research toolbox revolves around the concept of re-version by which I mean, in short, an updated version of an individual cultural object or a product. In other words, remake is a new object or a product, whereas re-version is the same object or product in a new costume so to speak. [2] These two concepts, despite the difference, serve as a tool for history and archive, depending on what kind of an object we are looking at. By keeping the focus on movies or television series I will offer some aspects by using one example.

Writing history is in one sense remaking of the past. History is defined as the representation of the past. Such as a photograph is a representation about a certain event that took place in the past, history is what is left of the past (see for instance Sivula.) Following these ideas, remaking is seen as the replication of the object of the past. An attempt to understand history, not an exact replica, something that isn't

at hand. Then again, remake in itself becomes an object of the past, a representation of the past, something that can be re-remade in the future. By creating remakes, or by remaking, we study the past technologies and try to understand them in the present yet at the same time we will tell something about ourselves in another time, in the future. The questions asked in the future will be like “Why were they remaking stuff from their past or from another past?”. We are telling what we were interested in, why, and maybe even what we found out about the past.

It is the same thing with the concept of re-version, yet the re-version, or the whole process of re-versioning, can be regarded more as the history of an individual object while the remaking of technological objects, for instance, can open doors to various aspects such as finding out why some things failed. Re-version is more about success, although I argue that sometimes by looking at success you will be able to find answers why other things failed.

The example I want to use here is the Finnish television show BumtsiBum. In short, BumtsiBum is a song contest where four celebrities (mainly artists) form two teams with pianists and try to guess the songs either from lyrics, pictures, or from the melody. In order to move on, the contestants have to sing the songs. BumtsiBum was extremely popular in Finland during its original appearance from 1997 to 2005. The show was remade in 2017, but wasn’t as successful as the original. Some of the Bumtsibum’s episodes were rerun in 2009. No updates where made but there was partly new audience and some nostalgia involved. [3]

BumtsiBum serves as an example of both the concept of remake and the concept of re-version. Both the original and the remake are objects of the past and also archives. By comparing the original and the remake we will be able to determine, for instance, why the remake wasn’t a success. The remake is said to have failed because of the change of the host, easily

guessed songs, and the replacement of score booklets by digital screens. The original was claimed to be much more difficult for the contestants. The original and the remake also tell us what was valued before and why the show was remade in the first place. They both provide information of their own time: how popular the show actually was, what songs and celebrities where in, what technology was used, and how technology has developed. This is the archive point of view since the television series save information about things. The object in itself serves as an archive. If studied from the re-version point of view, the reruns mark the craving for nostalgia since they weren't updated in any ways.

I would also like to address the fact that here I have been using a commercial television show as an example, not technological object per se although technology is involved. Remakes can be divided into three sectors depending on the user: the maker, the scholarly, and the commercial. The maker remakes are done for individual, hobbyist purposes, and the scholarly for research purposes. Commercially produced remakes are aimed at a big market and for entertainment. They are not produced for better understandings of the history, yet, if used for scholarly purposes, they can provide that information.

References

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[1] See the following Wikipedia websites for remake <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remake> (26.5.2017), video game remake <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_game_remake> (26.5.2017) and the Vocabulary.com for remaking <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/remaking> (26.5.2017).

[2] I have so far defined and used the Finnish concept of re-version (uusversio) in my master’s thesis. See Sihvonen 2014.

[3] See the original Bumtsibum from Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1rdFJtm7ew> (26.5.2017) and the remake Bumtsibum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=derbCEfvcQc> (26.5.2017).