BRON/BROEN, THE PILOT EPISODE AS SPACE BETWEEN CULTURES, AND (RE)NEGOTIATIONS OF NORDIC NOIR

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OUTLINE

1. Television Format?
2. Format and Cultural Studies
3. Format Adaptation in Scandinavia: Nordic Noir
   - Premise, basic features
   - Global reach and format adaptations: The Bridge (US), The Tunnel
   - Format as Performance: cases
5. Conclusion
TELEVISION FORMAT?

“[A]n essential component of the very logic of television.”
(Oren & Shahaf, 2012: 2)

a ‘significant worldwide business’”
(cf. Moran, 2013)

Formatting as a ‘global trading system that is characterized by [...] rapid international expansion [...] and the emergence] of a global value chain’. ”
(Chalaby 2016, 65)
Questions of Cultural Transfer

Every ‘adaptation must go beyond copycat television and reactualize the script for a new audience’ (Chalaby 2016: 170)

Adaptation: a ‘mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty’ (Hutcheon & O’Flynn 2013: 114)

Transcultural Remake: adaptation ‘of a given story to a new discursive incarnation within the same mode of representation’ (Leitch 1990: 138) in the context of intricate ‘multi-layered processes of transculturation’ (Hepp 2015: 154) that take place in the realm of global television.
FORMAT, CULTURAL STUDIES, AND THE TV PILOT

PERFORMANCE THEORY: perspective change away from a econo-centric focus on
generic reproduction towards a more Cultural Studies-based focus on the processes
at play when artifacts travel from one cultural context to another.

(cf. Navarro, 2012)

TELEVISION PILOTS ‘must orient viewers to
the intrinsic norms that the series will employ,
presenting its narrative strategies so we can
attune ourselves to its storytelling style.’
(Mittell 2015: 56)

TRANSCULTURAL REMAKE PILOTS:
Extended register:
- Must uphold the memory of the base text
- Must also envision the derivation that the
  new show is going to become

Pilot as manifest ‘space between cultures’
Format Adaptation in Scandinavia

Four Dogmas:
One Vision, Double Story, Crossover, Producers Choice

Scandinavian adaptation of narrative strategies known from American television, as well as an incorporation of the US showrunner system since the late 90s, and a focus on exchange between in-house and independent production.

(c.f. Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011:103
Waade & Jensen, 2013:198)
WHAT EXACTLY IS ‘NORDIC NOIR’?

Scandinavia-themed crime/thriller subgenre, blend of:

1940s/50s FILM NOIR:
“melancholic and desperate antiheroes, low-key lighting, striking use of light and shadow, unusual camera placement and often tragic endings”


1970s NEO NOIR:
“… in which modern themes reflecting the surrounding society were at play – for example, technological problems and their social ramifications, identity crisis, memory issues and subjectivity.”


NORDIC NOIR: “uses recognisably Nordic phenomena, settings, light, climate and seasonal conditions as well as language(s), characters and themes such as gender equality, provincial culture and the social democratic welfare state”

ENTER BRON/BROEN

Danish-Swedish coproduction (SVT1/DR1, 2011-)
Production: Filmiance International (SWE) & Nimbus Film (DEN)
Funding: NRK (NOR), ZDF (DE) and others.

Original: sold to more than 150 countries

Translated/dubbed versions for:

- UK: The Bridge (BBC4 2012-)
- Germany: Die Brücke – Transit in den Tod (ZDF 2012-)

Successful format adaptations:

**The Bridge (US) (FX 2013-2014)**
US/Mexican border context:
Bridge of the Americas

**The Tunnel (Canal+/Sky Atlantic 2013-)**
French/British border in the Channel Tunnel between Calais, France, and Folkestone, UK
I'm on my way. It went black for... 
...45 seconds
# BRON/BROEN & ITS ITERATIONS: COLOR & ATMOSPHERE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRON / BROEN</th>
<th>THE BRIDGE (US)</th>
<th>THE TUNNEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Killer approaches the crime scene</strong></td>
<td>dark blue-grey-green; foggy, gritty, cold</td>
<td>Color palette similar to the original’s palette, more towards grey-green-brown tones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dark-brown-red-yellow; richer contrast, more polished, warm</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Confusion in the control room

SHOT COMPARISON:

Differences: US version always standard close-up w. full head framing

Bron/Broen zooms closer, even breaks the close-up’s frame

The Tunnel superimposes the control room’s digital map, creates more distance through artificial layer
**BRON/BROEN & ITS ITERATIONS**

*First encounter with the victim*

**SHOT COMPARISON:**

**Differences:** Each version uses different angle

US version: victim's dead body is mediated via surveillance screen, creates more distance

The Tunnel: more distanced than the original version, through windshield
## BRON/BROEN & ITS ITERATIONS

**Cut to title sequence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SHOT COMPARISON:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split animation of title fonts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differences:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bron/Broen</em> dark, low contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>US version:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more vibrant, tending towards the extreme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Tunnel:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not as colorful as the US version, blinding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The detectives’ first encounter

SHOT COMPARISON:

Differences:

Bron/Broen: Over-the-shoulder shot,

US version: standardized medium close-up, flags in the background mark nationalities

The Tunnel: Team France vs. Team UK – multiple persons present, distanced surveillance camera shot
**BRON/BROEN & ITS ITERATIONS**

"Who’s the boss?"

**SHOT COMPARISON:**

**Differences:**
- stark contrast in lighting, point-of-view

**Bron/Broen:** over-shoulder

**US version:** Detective Cross framed by headlights

**The Tunnel:** medium shot encompassing not only the detective, but also two French colleagues

She’s Swedish, and the car came from Sweden. I assume I’m in charge.

She’s American. The car came from El Paso.

so it remains a French investigation.
PILOT EPISODES: FURTHER POINTS OF DIVERGENCE

Crucial Nordic Noir production values: places, buildings, languages

>> Dissolution in the US- and the British/French version

Different ways of editing, length of sequences with same content
• Bron/Broen: ~ 2:10 minutes
• The Bridge (US): 1:30 minutes - increased narrative pace of >25%, achieved via faster cut rates and fewer 'lingering shots'
• The Tunnel: ~ 5 minutes: Change of overall setup, includes more narrative details
Format adaptations inhabit a sort of

‘space between cultures, a site in which difference emerges out of imitation, where hierarchical distinctions are both upheld and upset, and from where one culture looks at and interprets another’ (Navarro 2012: 34)

Transcultural remakes cite, adapt, and thus transform the ‘original’ show’s template.

>> Television Pilots as manifest ‘space between cultures’
AND THERE’S MORE . . .
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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Key Works Used: