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FROM TV TO FILM

Mining the Box: Adaptation, Nostalgia and Generation X

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This article identifies the television to film phenomenon by cataloguing contemporary films adapted from popular television shows of the 1960s and 1970s. This trend is located within the context of Generation X and considered within the framework of nostalgia and Linda Hutcheon's (2006) conception of adaptation. The history of re-visiting existing texts in screen culture is explored, and the distinction between remakes and adaptation is determined. The specificity of the television format is discussed, as are aspects of audience engagement with television in terms of identity and identification. Acknowledging television as the collective experience that binds Generation X, the broader trend for nostalgic engagement with the past is shown to be an impetus for the trend in contemporary films and further shown to provide an opportunity for active audience reflexivity. *Get Smart* (2008) and *The Avengers* (1998) are discussed in terms of such reflexivity; and issues of gender are highlighted to demonstrate the role of filmic adaptations in contemporary negotiations of past and present ideals. In doing so, this article confirms the socio-cultural significance of the television to film phenomenon beyond industrial considerations, and posits the critical appeal of mining the box.

Introduction

While popular culture is pervasive, television has traditionally held a particular place in the lives of its audience. As a screen medium, domestic fixture and unifying feature for Generation X, television is the perfect source for contemporary films not only to appropriate tried and tested narratives, but also to capitalise on the nostalgia associated with popular television shows from Generation X's childhood. Beyond industrial and commercial considerations, the trend of films adapted from television suggests they offer a broader cultural value, social commentary and site for active audience reflexivity. Interrogating how source material is adapted gives insight into its original context, contemporary ideals, and the changes that have taken place over the period between the two texts' production. This article acknowledges the role of adaptations in screen culture and the specificity of television texts and nostalgia, as well as the significance of generational factors. It addresses the television to film phenomenon by contextualising the influx of popular 1960s and 1970s television shows adapted into film in relation to Generation X (the generation following the baby boomers and broadly defined as those born between 1965 and 1976); and that audience's relationship with television and nostalgia. Utilising Hutcheon's (2006) conception of adaptation, it is suggested that a significant part of the appeal of these texts is that they offer audiences an opportunity to critically engage with past and present ideals, including those around gender and representations of womanhood. *Get Smart* (2008) and *The Avengers* (1998) are offered as exemplars of this engagement.

Remakes and Adaptations

The motion picture industry has a long history of re-telling tales, with remakes and adaptations featuring prominently in film history. Remakes date back to the silent era with Sigmund 'Pop' Lubin's release of *The Bold Bank Robbery* (1904), a hasty and unauthorised version of *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) directed by Edwin S. Porter (Atkins, 1974: 216). Ongoing technological advances in the filmmaking industry – the most notable being the introduction of sound – facilitated a culture of remakes. As D.A. Doran, Paramount's executive assistant for stories in 1947 observed, '[w]e began to run dry [of stories] in 1928 but the invention of sound, to our great joy, allowed

us to do them all over again' (cited in Pierce, 2007: 130). Technicolor provided a similar impetus (and this is seen again with digital re-mastering, surround sound and 3D remakes). Budget-conscious studios capitalised on retained story rights, saved on scriptwriting and banked on proven audience appeal. In this environment, remakes – a term conventionally reserved for films remade as films (see Leitch, 1990) – tended to retain strong similarities with their predecessors. While the advent of video and possibility of re-releasing films put remakes in more direct competition with earlier incarnations and subsequently curbed the practice, the remake maintains connotations of replication and simulation. Contemporary film examples include *Arthur* (2011), *Carrie* (2013), *Footloose* (2011), *The Karate Kid* (2010), *Point Break* (2015), *Robocop* (2014) and *Total Recall* (2012). The new millennium has also seen television producers undertake remakes, with short runs of *Bionic Woman* (2007), *Charlie's Angels* (2011), *Dallas* (2012–2014), *Dragnet* (2003–2004), *The Fugitive* (2000–2001) and *The Twilight Zone* (2002–2003) returning to the small screen, as well as the more successful *90210* (2008–2013) and *Hawaii Five-0* (2010–). Consistent with an historical focus on replication, remakes are defined here by their consistency of medium, i.e. a text that is remade in the same medium – a film remade as a film or a television show remade as a television show.

The term 'adaptation', however, is a broader one and implies that not only is the source material from a different medium (a key distinction between remake and adaptation), but also that a degree of licence has been invoked in its translation. As Susan Hayward identifies, an adaptation 'creates a new story; it is not the same as the original but takes on a new life, as indeed do the characters. Narrative and characters become independent of the original even though both are based – in terms of genesis – on the original' (Hayward, 2006: 11). Here, Hayward is referring to literary adaptations to film, which she acknowledges as a long-established tradition in cinema. From early adaptations of the Bible (*La vie et la passion de Jésus Christ* [1897] by the Lumière brothers and *La Vie du Christ,* [1899] by Alice Guy), to Charles Dickens (*Scrooge*, or, *Marley's Ghost* [1901] by R.W. Paul) and Lewis Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland* [1903] directed by Percy Stow and Cecil Hepworth), Ewan Davidson determines that 'filmmakers chose to adapt an already well-known story, assuming the audience's

familiarity with the tale meant less need for excessive inter-titles' (Davidson, 2011: n. pag.). However, Hayward suggests the trend during the 1910s of adapting from the literary canon was a 'marketing ploy' by producers and exhibitors to legitimise the cinema and attract the respectable middle classes to their theatres (2006: 10–11). Some of the films produced during this time include: *Frankenstein* (1910), directed by J. Searle Dawley and produced by the Edison Film Company; *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1913), also directed by J. Searle Dawley and produced by the Famous Players Film Co; *Sherlock Holmes* (1916), starring William Gillette and made by Essanay Studios; and *Tom Sawyer* (1917) and *The Further Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1918), directed by William Desmond Taylor and starring Jack Pickford.[1] A similar alignment with the literary canon as a means of legitimising cinema can also be seen in academic realms later in the twentieth century with the evolution of adaptation theory.

George Bluestone established adaptations as an area of study with *Novels Into Film* in 1957, which focused on close case studies of film adaptations and became the discipline's standard reference for some decades. Historically more closely related to literary studies than film theory (Leitch, 2007: 3), the galvanising approach to adaptation studies has been fidelity criticism, which works on the assumption that the source text has 'a single, correct "meaning"' and the success of a film adaptation was reliant on its adherence to that meaning (McFarlane, 1996: 8). However, while continuing to examine films based on literary works, Brian McFarlane identifies a range of influences on film adaptation beyond literary sources in *Novel to Film* (1996), including the condition of the film industry and the social and cultural climate at the time of production, and acknowledges the risk of marginalising these contexts when focusing only on the literary source (as had been the practice in fidelity criticism). More theorists within the field began to break ranks, including James Naremore (2000), Robert Stam (2000), Thomas Leitch (2003) and Kamilla Elliott (2003), all of whom Simone Murray identifies as dissatisfied with the limitations of fidelity criticism and its narrow field of view, and active in calling for new approaches

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[1] These film adaptations were based on: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1823), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's character Sherlock Holmes, who first appeared in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).

to accommodate the rapidly changing media environment of the twenty-first century (2008: 4).

In *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, Leitch devotes his second last chapter to 'postliterary adaptations – that is, movies based on originals that have neither the cachet of literature nor the armature of a single narrative plot that might seem to make them natural Hollywood material' (2007: 258). He uses films adapted from video games (*Mortal Kombat* [1995], *Double Dragon* [1994] and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* [2001]), a board game (*Clue* [1985]) and theme park rides (*Pirates of the Caribbean* [2003] and *The Haunted Mansion* [2003]) to make the point that it need not be the plot or characters that are borrowed in an adaptation. Instead, Leitch argues that '[w]hatever particular features they borrow, the feature that is most important is the marketing aura of the original' (2007: 260). This point is certainly relevant when considering the TV-bred, merchandise-ready Generation X audience (whose significance is discussed below), and acknowledges the commercial considerations that arguably drive the production of adaptations. However, it also opens up the theoretical framework around which adaptation studies have traditionally operated.

Linda Hutcheon takes this encompassing spirit on board and includes everything from music videos, computer games, opera and plays to poems, graphic novels and websites in her examination of adaptations, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). Moreover, she looks beyond 'what' should be categorised as an adaptation to challenge the core assumption that adaptations are inferior to the material upon which they are based and also endeavours to understand the experience of adaptation, i.e. the ways texts adapt and how they are consumed. Hutcheon replaces the notion of fidelity with culture and adopts a Darwinian analogy whereby narrative adaptation is understood in terms of a story's 'process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment' (2006: 31). She contends that '[s]ometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favourable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In short, stories adapt just as they are adapted' (Hutcheon, 2006: 31). The implication of Hutcheon's 'survival of the fittest' approach is that the stories that adapt to survive do so because they serve

a purpose, and consequently these are the stories that deserve particular attention. It is both this imperative and the broader, more fluid, version of 'adaptation' (as identified by Hutcheon) that is hereto employed by this article when referring to texts based on earlier texts – specifically films based on popular TV shows.

Adapting Television

The production of films based on popular TV shows is not new. During the 1970s, the UK spawned many films in conjunction with top-rated TV shows of the day. Some examples include: *Dad's Army* (1971) based on the BBC series (1968 to 1977); *Man About the House* (1974) based on the ITV series (1973–1976); *Are You Being Served* (1977) based on its BBC series (1972–1985) and *Porridge* (1979), which extended the popular BBC series (1974–1977). With the exception of *Porridge*, these films came out during the television series' first run, and all utilised the same actors playing their TV characters in starring roles. This suggests the films were driven by a commercial imperative that capitalised on the shows' popularity and sought to satisfy an established audience's appetite beyond the bounds of televisual engagement.[2] However, over the last twenty-five years a different trend has emerged. Nostalgic adaptations are defined by their basis on, but chronological distinction from, earlier television shows, specifically those originally aired from the late 1960s to early 1980s – see **Table 1** below. This began with a few films in the early 1990s, including *The Addams Family* (1991), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1993), *The Brady Bunch Movie* (1995) and *The Flintstones* (1994). The preference for using children's and family shows continued, with a concentration of films released in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including *Charlie's Angels* (2000), *Hulk* (2003), *Inspector Gadget* (1999), *Josie and the Pussycats* (2001), *Lost in Space* (1998), *Mission: Impossible* (1996), and *The Saint* (1997). While Barbie Zelizer suggests the impending new millennium makes looking back more

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[2] Around the same time in the US, where cable television and syndication were firmly entrenched, film versions of popular TV shows starring original cast members were more often produced after the series' first run and in a made-for-television format. For example, *Rescue from Gilligan's Island* (1978), *The Castaways on Gilligan's Island* (1979) and *The Harlem Globetrotters on Gilligan's Island* (1981) extended the narrative of the original series, *Gilligan's Island* (1964–1967), and capitalised on its ongoing (syndicated) popularity.

Table 1: Nostalgic Adaptations.

TELEVISION	FILM	RATING
21 Jump Street (1987–1991)	*21 Jump Street* (2012)	R
	22 Jump Street (2014)	R
The A-Team (1983–1987)	*The A-Team* (2010)	PG-13
The Addams Family (1964–1966)	*The Addams Family* (1991)	PG-13
	The Addams Family Values (1993)	PG
The Alvin Show (1961–1962) A	*Alvin and the Chipmunks* (2007)	PG
	Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (2009)	PG
	Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chip-Wrecked (2011)	G
	Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip (2015)	PG
The Avengers (1961–1969)	*The Avengers* (1998)	PG-13
The Beverly Hillbillies (1962–1971)	*The Beverly Hillbillies* (1993)	PG
Bewitched (1964–1972)	*Bewitched* (2005)	PG-13
The Brady Bunch (1969–1974)	*The Brady Bunch* (1995)	PG-13
	A Very Brady Sequel (1996)	PG
The Bullwinkle Show (1961–1964) A	*The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (2000)	PG
Charlie's Angels (1976–1981)	*Charlie's Angels* (2000)	PG-13
	Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle (2003)	PG-13
CHiPs (1977–1983)	*CHiPs* (2017)	
Dad's Army (1968–1977)	*Dad's Army* (2016)	PG
Dragnet (1951–1959)	*Dragnet* (1987)	PG-13
The Dudley Do-Right Show (1969–1970) A	*Dudley Do-Right* (1999)	PG
The Dukes of Hazzard (1979–1985)	*The Dukes of Hazzard* (2005)	PG-13
Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids (1972–1985) A	*Fat Albert* (2004)	PG
The Flintstones (1959–1966) A	*The Flintstones* (1994)	PG
	The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas (2000)	PG
The Fugitive (1963–1967)	*The Fugitive* (1993)	PG-13
Garfield and Friends (1988–1995) A	*Garfield* (2004)	PG
	Garfield 2 (2006)	PG

(Contd.)

TELEVISION	FILM	RATING
George of the Jungle (1967–1970) A	*George of the Jungle* (1997)	PG
	George of the Jungle 2 (2003)	PG
Get Smart (1965–1970)	*Get Smart* (2008)	PG-13
The Green Hornet (1966–1967)	*The Green Hornet* (2011)	PG-13
The Honeymooners (1955–1956)	*The Honeymooners* (2005)	PG
Inspector Gadget (1983–1986) A	*Inspector Gadget* (1999)	PG
	Inspector Gadget 2 (2003)	G
The Jetsons (1962–1988) A	*Jetsons: The Movie* (1990) A	G
Josie and the Pussycats (1970–1972)	*Josie and the Pussycats* (2001)	PG-13
Land of the Lost (1974–1977)	*Land of the Lost* (2009)	PG-13
Leave it to Beaver (1957–1963)	*Leave it to Beaver* (1997)	PG
Lost in Space (1965–1968)	*Lost in Space* (1998)	PG-13
The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (1964–1968)	*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (2015)	PG-13
Maverick (1957–1962)	*Maverick* (1994)	PG
McHale's Navy (1962–1966)	*McHale's Navy* (1997)	PG
Miami Vice (1984–1990)	*Miami Vice* (2006)	R
Mission: Impossible (1966–1973)	*Mission: Impossible* (1996)	PG-13
	Mission: Impossible II (2000)	PG-13
	Mission: Impossible III (2006)	PG-13
	Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol (2011)	PG-13
	Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation (2015)	PG-13
The Mod Squad (1968–1973)	*The Mod Squad* (1999)	R
The Famous Adventures of Mr Magoo (1964–1965) A	*Mr Magoo* (1997)	PG
The Muppet Show (1976–1981)	*The Muppets* (2011)	PG
	Muppets Most Wanted (2014)	PG
My Favorite Martian (1963–1966)	*My Favorite Martian* (1999)	PG
The Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries (1977–1979)	*Nancy Drew* (2007)	PG
The Pink Panther Show (1969–1976) A	*The Pink Panther* (2006)	PG
	The Pink Panther 2 (2009)	PG
The Saint (1962–1969)	*The Saint* (1997)	PG-13

(Contd.)

TELEVISION	FILM	RATING
Scooby-Doo, Where Are You! (1969–1972) A	*Scooby-Doo* (2002)	PG
	Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed (2004)	PG
The Smurfs (1981–1990) A	*The Smurfs* (2011)	PG
	The Smurfs 2 (2013)	PG
	Smurfs: The Lost Village (2017)	PG
Speed Racer (Mahha GoGoGo) (1967–1968) A	*Speed Racer* (2008)	PG
Star Trek (1966–1969)	*Star Trek* (2009)	PG-13
	Star Trek Into Darkness (2013)	PG-13
	Star Trek Beyond (2016)	PG-13
Starsky and Hutch (1975–1979)	*Starsky and Hutch* (2004)	PG-13
S.W.A.T. (1975–1976)	*S.W.A.T.* (2003)	PG-13
The Sweeney (1975–1978)	*The Sweeney* (2012)	R
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (1987–1996) A	*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990)	PG
	TMNT (2007)	PG
	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (2014)	PG-13
Thunderbirds (1965–1966)	*Thunderbirds* (2004)	PG
The Transformers (1984–1987) A	*Transformers* (2007)	PG-13
	Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (2009)	PG-13
	Transformers: Dark of the Moon (2011)	PG-13
	Transformers: Age of Extinction (2014)	PG-13
	Transformers: The Last Knight (2017)	PG-13
The Twilight Zone (1959–1964)	*Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983)	PG
Underdog (1964–1973) A	*Underdog* (2007)	PG
The Untouchables (1959–1963)	*The Untouchables* (1987)	R
The Wild Wild West (1965–1969)	*Wild Wild West* (1999)	PG-13
The Yogi Bear Show (1961–1988) A	*Yogi Bear* (2010)	PG

A = animated.

appealing (1995: 216), this trend for nostalgic adaptations continues well into the second decade of the twenty-first century. *21 Jump Street* (2012), *The A-Team* (2010), *The Green Hornet* (2011), *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (2015), *The Smurfs* (2011) and *Yogi Bear* (2010) are some of the latest offerings (at the time of writing), along with the third and fourth instalments of ongoing franchises. Sequels and franchises appear to be a feature of TV adaptations with the production of a significant number of sequels, such as those for *The Addams Family, Charlie's Angels, George of the Jungle, The Flintstones, Inspector Gadget* and *The Smurfs*, and franchises for *Mission: Impossible, Transformers* and *Alvin and the Chipmunks*. Two further features of this group of adaptations are that the overwhelming majority are rated PG or PG-13,[3] so they maintain a family audience, and the films generally keep the same name as the television show on which they are based. In these ways, adapted texts capitalise on nostalgia for original shows.

Table 1 catalogues the extent of nostalgic film adaptations produced over the last two and a half decades by listing television series from Generation X's child-hood[4] alongside the contemporary movies adapted from those shows. Sequels, franchises and multiple adaptations (such as the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movies) have been included.[5]

The Television Format

As a screen medium, television presents itself as naturally compatible with film for adaptation; however, in addition to viewing conditions there are significant narrative differences between the two formats. Traditionally, standard Hollywood or mainstream film is narrative-driven, with motivated, goal-orientated central protagonists

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[3] Exceptions are *21 Jump Street* (2012), *22 Jump Street* (2014), *CHiPs* (2017), *Miami Vice, The Mod Squad* (1999) and *The Sweeney* (2012), which are all rated R in the US.

[4] Importantly, due to syndication, re-runs and scheduling blocks such as Nick at Nite (which debuted on Nickelodeon in 1985), the shows significant to Generation X in terms of childhood and nostalgia are not limited to those first aired during the 1970s and 1980s.

[5] Note that while arguably part of the broader trend of screen adaptations, television shows and films based on Marvel and DC Comics material have not been included in this discussion due to the films' origins in the comics rather than the television series, and ongoing complexity in terms of fan culture.

who move through the narrative following a cause and effect chain to achieve a resolution. Closure is both significant and usually socially conscious in feature films, whereby good triumphs over bad, and the hero gets the girl (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009: 172). Recent changes in the production, distribution and reception of television have meant that a number of conventionally filmic qualities have migrated to the small screen. And as Amanda D. Lotz observes, due to 'these changing technologies and modes of viewing, television has become increasingly complicated, deliberate, and individualized' (2014: 3). Freed from the constraints of the broadcast system, digitised twenty-first century television has taken on a newfound legitimacy that attracts creators better known for their work in film, and fosters a narrative complexity that redefines its conventionally episodic form (Mittell, 2006). However, as the focus of this discussion is television shows and audiences from the late 1960s to early 1980s, conventional understandings of the television form and format are employed. To this end, television is understood as being more character-driven than film, and storylines less goal-orientated due to the disrupted, segmented nature of broadcast television programming. Information about characters, their relationships with one another and ongoing plotlines are constantly revisited so viewers can watch regardless of whether or not they have seen previous episodes. As Nicholas Abercrombie contends, '[t]elevision replaces the linear form of film narrative with serial form, whether it is a series or a continuing serial, and a major effect is the diversion of interest from events to character' (1996: 24). Therefore, characters provide continuity despite the fragmentation of the format. This concentration on character lends itself to focusing on the familiar or on 'ordinary life', which is also consistent with television's historical link with 'liveness', immediacy and reality based on the industry's origins in live broadcasting. Moreover, with (traditionally) lower budgets, smaller crews and shorter deadlines, television shows are restricted to fewer locations than feature films, further reinforcing the exploration of characters (they discuss where they have been and what they have done rather than show the location and activity itself) and emphasising the (relatable) 'every day' through sense of place.

Thus, conventional television is defined by a focus on character, lack of narrative closure and fragmentation (broken into ongoing episodes which, for commercial television, are then broken into segments punctuated by ad breaks), and seeks to counter fragmentation by employing strategies to maintain a 'flow' to keep audiences tuned to the show (and station) (see Thompson, 2003). Subsequently, television is marked by both fragmentation and flow, thereby producing a 'decentered experience of viewing, which is characteristic of the postmodern experience' (Abercrombie, 1996: 16–17). Abercrombie suggests this aligns with the social and domestic context in which TV is consumed, whereby the audience's attention is dispersed (between domestic duties, familial interactions, mealtimes etc.). This is another of the main differences between film and conventional television – the mode of reception. Jane Stadler and Kelly McWilliams suggest that '[d]iffering contexts of reception of film and television texts mean that audience members tend to *glance* at the TV and *gaze* with sustained attention at film' (2009: 176, emphasis in original).[6] These differences are significant because they also explain why TV shows are so appealing for film adaptation. Television's social immediacy, focus on characters, and relationship with domesticity all directly contribute to the degree of nostalgia and cultural consequence TV shows accrue. This in turn translates to commercial viability in terms of producing feature films for a ready-made audience.

Television's focus on character fosters para-social relationships, i.e. the audience develop relationships with fictional characters. As Chris Rojek explains, '[t]he term "para-social interaction" is used to refer to relations of intimacy constructed through the mass-media rather than direct experience and face-to-face meetings' (2007: 171). The term was coined by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956, then used in relation to TV news presenters (see Levy, 1979), and more recently linked with celebrity studies (for example, Rojek relates mythologies around religion and shamanism to those around celebrity in a secular society). Television's mode of

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[6] It is noted that contexts of reception are changing in the digital era, with film increasingly consumed on the small screen via streaming or online applications, and complex TV (Mittell, 2015) demanding more of its audience.

address further contributes: its use of direct address, presenters' conversational tone and prolonged exposure that tend to increase perceived intimacy (Levy, 1979). Later studies of soap operas similarly supported the link between media consumption and audiences' involvement with media characters (Chia & Poo, 2009: 26). In a sociological study of how people remember television, Jérôme Bourdon (2003) refers to para-sociality when identifying how television hosts and celebrities are distinct from Hollywood stars. He contends, '[t]hey present themselves (and are perceived) as living ordinary lives in comfortable but not luxurious houses, surrounded by their families' and that 'they evoke feelings … [of] a mild attachment to an old family friend' (2003: 20). As his study focuses on remembering, feelings of warmth and familiarity associated with recollections of television personalities are relevant in terms of nostalgic impact. What is most significant for this article is Bourdon's acknowledgment of television as 'deeply embedded in everyday life and the family' (2003: 32).

John Ellis identified this critical feature of television in 1982, stating in *Visible Fictions* that 'TV has achieved a centrality in everyday life which outstrips anything that cinema could achieve' (1982: 227). Helen Wood and Lisa Taylor similarly argue that television is 'durably and consistently located in the fabric of everyday life' (2008: 144). This relationship with domesticity is another characteristic that distinguishes television from film while reinforcing its cultural significance and nostalgic impact. Together with an intimate mode of address (which facilitates para-social interactions), the television format favours close-ups, is largely concerned with domestic issues and is also a constant physical presence in the home. In *Make Room for TV* (1992), Lynn Spigel examines the installation of television in the post-war American home. Investigating the representation of television in women's home magazines, she notes, while initially viewed as intrusive and a potential threat to family life, the television set was quickly integrated into interior design, the daily household routine and even came to symbolise family life. The advent of television was a distinctly domestic phenomenon. However, an important consequence of its infiltration into the domestic realm was that television effectively eroded the

ideological division between public and private spheres by bringing the world into the home and 'promoting the new family theatres as a substitute for traditional forms of community life and social relations' (Spigel, 1992: 10). Thus, as Spigel indicates in her expanded examination of television in post-war suburbia, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* (2001), the domestically-situated television becomes a gateway through which broader social and cultural ideas are accessed. She notes:

> Television and suburbs are both engineered spaces, designed and planned by people who are engaged in giving material reality to wider cultural belief systems. In addition, media and suburbs are sites where meanings are produced and created; they are spaces (whether material or electronic) in which people make sense of their social relationships to each other, their communities, their nation, and the world at large. (Spigel, 2001: 15)

It follows that, along with making sense of each other, television functions as an important mechanism by which viewers also make sense of themselves, i.e. through the formation of identity and process of identification.

Diana Fuss contends that identity is an on-going process. In *Identification Papers,* she defines identity as 'the self that identifies itself' and identification as 'the psychical mechanism that produces self-recognition' (Fuss, 1995: 2). Fuss argues that identification 'operates as a mark of self-difference, opening up a space for the self to relate to itself as self, a self that is perpetually other' in a 'process that keeps identity at a distance' (1995: 2). While the theoretical model for this process is founded on the Lacanian dynamic of recognition and misrecognition associated with the formation of identity and subjectivity, it is Fuss's clarification of the subject as complex, plural and 'profoundly unstable' that ensures this model's relevance (1995: 2–3). The process of identification sees the subject recognise as significant – and take on board – aspects of the 'other' or that which is outside the self. What is seen on television is one such aspect and, with multiple, relatable images available, it is a medium particularly susceptible to identification. Moreover, recognising the consistent presence of television in the context of an evolving subject

is to acknowledge the ongoing and profound influence of television in terms of identity formation. As noted earlier, the majority of popular television shows adapted to film were aimed at children and families. Social attitudes and developing sense of class, gender and sexuality demonstrated through evolving television series thereby take on a marked significance to a young (evolving) audience. Moreover, many of the shows were syndicated and so assume a degree of reinforcement through repetition. The argument then follows that when these series are re-visited in contemporary filmic adaptations, the subject taps into those deeply embedded images and ideals; and works to update and re-negotiate the parameters of social and cultural ideals along with the characters on screen.[7] In this way, adapted films draw heavily on the nostalgia created by the domesticity of television, and rely on temporarily accessing the established cultural attitudes partly formed through its mode of consumption.

Finally, television's immediacy is important in both setting it apart from film and guaranteeing its appeal in terms of later adaptations. It is instrumental in ensuring television is an effective *zeitgeist*. In part this relates to television's ready coverage of news, current affairs and broadcasting of special events such as royal weddings, election results and international sporting events like the Olympic Games. It is also because television production is a collaborative process that typically employs teams of writers and multiple directors on any given series (and thereby evolves from a more broadly representative social group), which ultimately impacts on its ability to appeal to a mass audience. Therefore, when a show is successful (a concept largely measured by ratings) it can be identified as having resonated with a significant section of society and having tuned in to current ideals. Television's connection with ordinary life, along with its tight production schedules, also allows it to engage with the social climate of the day. As entertainment (drama, comedy etc.) shows are intermingled on the weekly programme with news and other real world events, specific shows are tied

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[7] Perhaps this is why film adaptations are more successful than television remakes. Tapping into nostalgia and offering updated versions of established characters is more appealing than trying to replace characters, which may interfere too much with nostalgia and key points of identification.

in with broader television memories from any given era. This ensures these shows or series are anchored in nostalgia.

Thus, television's social immediacy, together with its domesticity and focus on character, imprint it as a format distinct from film yet rich with cultural references, thick with nostalgia and ripe for adaptation. Since the late 1990s, and often prefaced by the successful release of original TV series on DVD, the trend of films based on popular TV shows has actively tapped into this nostalgia. For Alex Bevan (2013), the trend of remaking what she terms 'boomer TV sitcoms' is grounded in both archiving and interrogating images of the American home and family. Defining the boomer period as being from 1946 to 1964, she argues that filmic texts based on boomer TV are reflexive in their juxtaposition of early images of American suburbia against contemporary ideals, and consideration of the historical accuracy and authenticity of television's own materiality (Bevan, 2013: 305–6). Taking the end of Bevan's boomer period as a starting point, this article recognises and catalogues the trend of adaptations of children's and family shows from the late 1960s to early 1980s (see **Table 1**). While similarly acknowledging an inherent reflexivity in the filmic texts, it clarifies the significance of this period as one that represents the formative years for Generation X – a generation for whom television holds particular importance.

Generation X and Newstalgia

Most often defined as those born between 1965 and 1976 (Shugart, 2001; Williams et al., 1997), although at times extended to include anyone born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss & Howe, 1991), Generation X is demographically marked by its relationship to the Baby Boomers. They are categorised as the children of the boomers, and are sometimes referred to as the busters. The term Generation X or 'Xers' is credited to Douglas Coupland, whose 1991 novel *Generation X* is populated by cynical, somewhat anti-social, media-savvy and pop-culture obsessed characters. Subsequently, it is a term that now incorporates more than simple demographics, as Generation X is more broadly understood as 'an aesthetic that is simultaneously alternative to and heavily steeped in popular culture' (Shugart, 2001: 136). In terms

of marketing, this is a significant and defining feature. The new millennium brought a trend for all things retro on a broad cultural level (certainly in first world, Western societies), encompassing fashion, music, toys, films, television and advertising. Marketers call it 'newstalgia' (Thomas, 2007: 148). Defined as 'the love of old things from the past revived in what designers call "the contemporary classics" from cars to TV shows', it is a term that has long been used by the music industry and car hobbyists in relation to new products reflecting a 1950s or 1960s styling (Thomas, 2007: 148). However, today it is most often employed in marketing to Generation X. In *Buy, Buy Baby* (2007), Susan Gregory Thomas credits newstalgia with the return of the Care Bears and Strawberry Shortcake, and renewed interest in mini-skirts, ballet shoes and preppy fashion from Lacoste and Lily Pulitzer. She includes Nickelodeon's shift in programming on their popular Nick at Nite network from nostalgic reruns aimed at Baby Boomers (such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* [1961–1966]) to sitcoms from Generation X's childhood (including *The Facts of Life* [1979–1988] and *Three's Company* [1976–1984]) as part of this trend, as well as 'film revivals of such 1970s and 1980s lightweight classics as *Scooby Doo, Charlie's Angels, Starsky and Hutch, The Incredible Hulk,* and *The Dukes of Hazard'* (Thomas, 2007: 149). Moreover, Thomas maintains that marketers' success lies in their recognition of the significance of television for Generation X (and for her purposes its nostalgic connection with childhood).[8] She notes that:

> Previous generations' nostalgia is rooted in achievement, triumph over hardship, social activism – some authentic, galvanizing experience. "Greatest Generation" nostalgia, for example, is centered on World War II, sacrifice at home, and the heyday of Big Band music; Baby Boomers gloat over memories of the civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements. Not Generation X . . .

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[8] Thomas's book closely examines contemporary marketing practices aimed at products for babies and toddlers. Her discussion of Generation X is as parents and consumers motivated by branding and licensing connected with their own (TV-influenced) childhood.

the latchkey kids of Generation X had just one galvanizing collective experi-
ence: TV. (Thomas, 2007: 150)[9]

Recognised as a collective, unifying experience, the television Generation X watched
therefore takes on a greater significance than for earlier generations. In 'Reading the
Past Against the Grain' (1995), Zelizer discusses collective memory and the involve-
ment of self with environmental and external factors, including the influence of
popular culture. She asserts that:

> Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as
> much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms,
> and social interaction as with the simple act of recall. Its full understanding
> thus requires an appropriation of memory as social, cultural, and political
> action at its broadest level. (Zelizer, 1995: 214)

As television is Generation X's collective experience, broader implications of a desire
to remember – in the form of a proliferation of film adaptations based on popular
television shows from Generation X's childhood – should be acknowledged. Together
with Hutcheon's 'survival of the fittest' approach to adaptation, this rationale supports
a closer examination of this group of filmic adaptations. Zelizer also identifies the
media as a form of storage for collective memory (1995: 233), which is consistent
with the notion of television as an effective *zeitgeist*. With shows rerun on free-to-air
side-channels, on cable, and increasingly available on DVD and/or online streaming
services, these are easily accessible memories. And while Generation X are the clear
market for reworked TV 'classics' on film, it is important to note that as writers,
directors and producers, Generation X are also responsible for getting these
adaptations made.

Revisiting popular television shows as films, then, serves a purpose for Generation
X. It is an experience that taps into some core, formative ideals and, in a contemporary

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[9] Thomas's observations are based on the US experience but are applicable (and specific) to developed,
    Western countries.

(postmodern and postfeminist) world fraught with conflicting imagery it provides an opportunity to re-evaluate those ideals. While the cultural, social and historical contexts in which an adaptation is consumed should always be considered, Hutcheon suggests part of the pleasure for audiences 'comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise' (2006: 4). She observes that an audience who perceives 'adaptations *as adaptations*' will interpret and respond differently to those not familiar with the antecedent text/s, and describes the knowing audience as being involved in 'an interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing' (Hutcheon, 2006: 139). While Hutcheon maintains that an adaptation must not rely too heavily on its audience to 'fill in the gaps' and should make sense to both its knowing and unknowing audience in order to be considered successful, the acknowledgement of an active oscillation between texts is critical.

Nostalgia can be similarly understood as an active process. Having evolved from a medical to an emotional and aesthetic concept (Grainge, 2000; Starobinski, 1966; Turner, 1987), the contemporary use of nostalgia incorporates a further shift from essentially longing to return to a place to longing to return to a time. As one can never actually return to a time already passed, nostalgia takes on a fundamentally contradictory quality. A bittersweet emotion, it is necessarily unsatisfiable. But what distinguishes today's nostalgia is the way it is employed by the modern subject. Nostalgia is an active process: 'Feeling nostalgia, expressing and experiencing nostalgia – this requires active reconstruction of the past – active selection of what to remember and how to remember it' (Wilson, 1999: 299). Moreover, nostalgia 'acquires its significance from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present lives' (Davis, 1979: 13). In this way, it is a function of identity construction, as the nostalgic subject actively uses the past to situate the self in the present. Within a popular culture context, nostalgia and adaptation can thereby work together to highlight issues of representation and re-presentation in a postmodern society.

One key element of the postmodern subject and formative area is gender, particularly notions of womanhood and femininity, and this is the area upon which this article will now focus. For the texts being considered, the period the original television shows upon which contemporary adaptations are based coincides with second wave feminism, while the adapted films can be interpreted as products of postfeminism. Postfeminism is a highly contested term (Braithwaite, 2004; Gamble, 2001; Lotz, 2001), yet like nostalgia and adaptation, its strength lies in its multiplicity. For the purposes of this discussion, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra's functional definition will be adopted:

> Postfeminism broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the "pastness" of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated. (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 1)

Thus, working within the sphere of popular media, contemporary adaptations of popular television shows function as spaces in which audiences actively engage with and negotiate competing gender ideals from the past and present.

Get Smart and *The Avengers*

Two contemporary film adaptations that demonstrate negotiations between competing and multiple gender ideals are *Get Smart* (2008) and *The Avengers* (1998). *Get Smart* is a strongly nostalgic adaptation that employs intertextuality to support audiences' experience of it as an adaptation. While structured around the two central characters from the TV show, 86 and 99, the film's revision of their dynamic and drive for narrative closure highlights contested gender ideals. Television's *Get Smart* (1965–1970) was created by Mel Brooks and Buck Henry, with 138 episodes produced over five seasons. Following the spy trend of the era, exemplified by *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–1968) and the original James Bond franchise (1962–1967), the series centres on Maxwell Smart as Agent 86 (Don Adams), who is an operative for the government spy agency CONTROL. As Brooks describes it, the comedy revolves around Smart's 'earnest stupidity' (cited in Day, 2008), as he is

both a top agent and absurdly incompetent. Tall, elegant and beautiful, 99's (Barbara Feldon) appearance is utilised in undercover operations, for example when Smart and 99 pose as a married couple. However, within their partnership, 99 is shown to be the more competent and capable agent as she is more alert and informed than Smart, and regularly saves him from disaster. Importantly, she does so without undermining his authority, i.e. without challenging his ego or claiming credit for successful outcomes. The show's humour is derived from Smart thinking he is the superior agent, while 99 (and the audience) knows otherwise. Moreover, 99's ability to operate as an effective agent without overtly disrupting or threatening patriarchal expectations – and the structure of a (fictional) government agency – can be seen to facilitate her presence as an empowered female figure on screen at a time when such representations are relevantly aberrant. The Chief's acclamation of Smart as CONTROL's top agent, despite incompetency, further highlights the inequity of gender bias of the era. And while 99 ultimately conforms to the conventions of the day – she dotes on Max throughout the series and eventually marries him – her competency as an agent serves to advocate broader roles for women outside those traditionally defined by gender.

In the 2008 movie, 99's role is significantly altered when she is introduced as a competitive, top agent who sees being partnered with the inexperienced 86 as an encumbrance. A long-time analyst with CONTROL, Smart only becomes a field agent when CONTROL headquarters is attacked and all agents are compromised. 99 is the only other operative available because she has just undergone plastic surgery (later revealed to be necessary because a personal relationship with another agent compromised her professional capacity). The suggestion of poor judgement (the relationship was with Agent 23 who turns out to be a double agent) and a spill over between public and private lives weakens her position in the film. Despite being instrumental in Smart's success, 99's role is subordinated by the end of the film when she is celebrated as Smart's submissive girlfriend. As the Chief congratulates Smart on a job well done at the end of the movie, a small dog nips at his heels. The camera pans up 99's legs as she bends down to pick up the dog. Wearing a short, tight, red dress, high heels and with the dog tucked under her arm – reminiscent of

Reece Witherspoon's character, Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde* (2001) – 99 leans over to coyly kiss the triumphant Smart. The issue of physical appearance is raised earlier in the movie, and a pointed commentary on women, plastic surgery and age is made when 99 confesses to having 'a few years taken off' while undergoing plastic surgery to change her identity. Like the stereotypical representation of her at the end of the film, this narrative device reinforces a regressive portrayal of women and woman-hood. While Smart is shown to have lost weight to become a field agent, a positive and healthy transformation, 99 has plastic surgery and goes from being a stereotypically 'gorgeous blonde' to 'stunning brunette' in a transformation only made necessary in the first place because of her poor judgement. In the typical Hollywood drive for closure and 'hero gets the girl' trope, the progressive possibilities of the TV series are undermined by the filmic adaptation.

This disjuncture, or comparison between old and new gender ideals, is facilitated by the adaptation process. The audience is invited to critically and actively reflect on cultural values through strong intertextual references. Examples include: catchphrases; a cameo by the original actor who played Siegfried, Bernie Kopell; the car and shoe phone from the television series are displayed as museum items; the cone of silence is deployed; Agent 13 (Bill Murray) appears in a tree trunk; and the original theme music and opening sequence are recreated (walking down the corridor with doors closing and a phone booth elevator). These identifiable trigger points facilitate both nostalgia and the audience's oscillation between the adapted and original texts, providing a site on which the regressive nature of the film and progressive nature of the TV series can be considered. This adaptation thereby calls into questions the claims of postfeminism and promotes social commentary on and cultural evaluation of such representations and texts.

The Avengers (1998) film adaptation is even more direct in its celebration of the style, aesthetics and gender relations for which the 1960s television series was known. Produced in the UK between 1961 and 1969, TV's *The Avengers* had a succession of female leads partnering John Steed (Patrick McNee) – most notably Catherine Gale (Honor Blackman), Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) and Tara King (Linda Thornson). As the

show was introduced to US audiences in 1965 with Steed and Peel, it is Emma Peel with whom US audiences are most familiar, and thus the character upon whom the film was based. The TV show foregrounds an aestheticism that relies on 'exclusive knowledge about fashionable texts, clothes and manners that, oxymoronically, was conceived for and supplied to mass audiences' (Miller, 1997: 27). Sitting comfortably with the aesthetics and interests of Generation X, the surreal and absurdist show routinely privileged style over content or adherence to reality. Osgerby and Gough-Yates note the recurrence of these features across action series from the sixties and seventies, 'seen as a kind of "lifestyle" television in the way they combine fantasies of thrilling adventure with mythologies of affluence and consumption' (2001: 3). This not only reflects the influence of Bond (looking good and enjoying yourself along the way), but like the fantastical context of another progressively female-centric show from that era, *Bewitched* (1964–1972), suggests the 'pop' stylisation of *The Avengers* is a necessary condition for the subversive appropriation of femininity.

In the contemporary film adaptation, British secret agent John Steed (Ralph Fiennes) and Dr Emma Peel (Uma Thurman) are charged with finding and stopping Sir August de Wynter (Sean Connery) from destroying the world with his weather control system. The presence of Connery (who played James Bond in the 1960s) is a reminder of the television show's era and relationship with the spy genre. The opening sequence for *The Avengers* movie is reminiscent of the iconic styling in title sequences for Bond films mixed with monochromatic patterns and swirls character-istic of the 1960s. The first few shots of the movie, which are close-ups and sharply cantered angles, establish a shooting style consistent with the television show. Although the movie is set in the modern day it maintains a distinct aestheticism with Steed and Peel's costuming (closely modelled on the original show) and formal man-ner of speech that ensures the film maintains a clear connection with the popular television series. This again provides an opportunity for critical engagement by audi-ences and an oscillation between past and present gender ideals. Unlike *Get Smart*, *The Avengers* uses its contemporary context to celebrate the progressive representa-tion of femininity offered by Peel's characterisation in the original television series.

Both texts present Peel as particularly strong, capable, independent and self-assured. In an early scene in the film adaptation, Peel walks into Boodle's (an infamous men's only club in London), past staff and shocked club members. A porter says: 'You are female . . . you can't come in'. She replies while continuing up the stairs, 'I have an appointment'. An exasperated porter calls after her, 'No women, not in Boodle's since 1762'. She then walks into the steam room where Steed casually says, 'Dr Peel I presume'. This scene demonstrates Peel's unabashed confrontation of established inequality and provides a direct reference to social and political activism during the 1960s, while also showing Steed as complicit in her actions. However, like *Get Smart*, the end of the film sees Peel and Steed kiss in a conventional coupling (and a pseudo wedding implied with both dressed in white, standing under a rotunda on a roof-top garden toasting each other). While this is at odds with the TV series and consistent with Hollywood film convention, the dominance of points at which the audience is invited to make active comparisons between the two texts suggest this jarring final scene is itself somewhat ironic and absurdist, ultimately functioning to draw attention to the adaptation *as adaptation*.

Conclusion

As shown in the discussion of these two films, examining filmic adaptations of popular television shows from Generation X's childhood highlights opportunities for those audiences to actively engage with representations and ideals (in these cases around gender) foundational to their sense of self, and consider how that engagement is facilitated by both the adaptation format and nostalgia. Identification of this trend of adapting films from popular 1960s and 1970s television shows reinforces that contemporary film producers are not only mining the box for already-proven narratives, familiar characters and established brands, but drawing on nostalgia to interrogate changing ideals and offer audiences the opportunity to critically reflect on broader cultural mores.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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