

## From the Nordic police procedural to American Border Drama

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Analyzing “genre bending” in remakes presupposes that genres in entertainment television are uniform and consistent formulas with delimited frontiers. Unlike literary genres, genres in TV series are determined by aesthetic, ideological and commercial factors. Jason Mittell accounts for the difficulty of generic definitions by the fact that genres in entertainment TV can be defined by a broad range of criteria (235). He goes as far as considering genre as a mere taxonomic shortcut meant to make a program fit in a time slot and therefore to ensure distribution and to appeal to a target audience<sup>1</sup>.

The role of commercial factors in generic definition has been raised by Steve Neale who considers genre a part of the commodification of mass culture. According to him, a cultural product needs to be identified with a genre in order to respond to “a market pressure to *differentiate* to a limited degree in order to cater to various sectors of consumers and to *repeat* commercially successful patterns, ingredients and formulas” (in Stam 172, my italics). There is no denying that differentiation and novelty motivate productions and repetitions/remakes, yet it would be naïve to limit this to marketing determinations. Aesthetic and ideological factors are also at work to create a genre and to ensure its survival, bending or blending.

Focusing on the ideological determination of genres, Geoff King compares them to “a form of mythology [...] one of the products through which a culture works out some of its difficulties through the construction of fictional narrative” (127). This explains why

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<sup>1</sup> Mittell says: “genres provide a shorthand set of assumptions and conventions that producers can use to make a new program familiar to audiences and easier to produce. Genre often serve as baseline formulas for producers, creating a core set of assumptions and patterns that make the production of so many hours of original programming more efficient and streamlined.” (236)

some genres were very popular at a particular period of a nation's history and disappeared afterwards. Richard Stoltin notices this evolution and concludes that "within the structured marketplace of myths, the continuity and persistence of particular genres may be seen as keys in identifying the culture's deepest and most persistent concerns. Likewise, major breaks in the development of important genres may signal the presence of a significant crisis of cultural value and organization" (quoted in King, 116). This evolution explains genre bending in remakes: a genre which is used by a nation to work out a local crisis may not fit in another socio-cultural context; hence the need for fitting<sup>2</sup> or what Constantine Verevis calls "cultural translation" (2). The happy outcome is very often a mosaic of genres, despite (or at times, because of) recurrent traces of disavowal or resistance. Actually, Mittell considers the profusion of genres within the same TV show as inherent to the nature of entertainment TV and warns against overstating the uniformity of any given genre (240).

In this paper I will try to show that *The Bridge*, the American remake of *Broen*, transforms the Nordic police procedural into a Border drama whose ingredients are adopted and then disrupted to question and subvert the binary oppositions characteristic of the genre. My contention is to show that marketing concerns about differentiation and appeal to different audiences are at the heart of genre bending in *The Bridge*. The American remake breathes new life into a traditional American genre and yields a series permeated with ingredients of other genres dear to the American audience. The remake proves to be not only a remake of the original series, but also a deconstruction of the Border drama genre as a whole.

The pilot of the two series establishes the same narrative line. A woman's corpse is found straddling the frontier line separating two countries. When trying to lift the corpse, the police find it cut in two halves. The forensic experts' conclusion reveals that the upper part of the body belongs to a Swede deputy/ American judge and the lower part to a Danish/Mexican prostitute. Saga Noren (Sophia Helin) from Malmo police and Martin Rhude (Kim Bodina) from Copenhagen police have to collaborate to clear the case. Sonya Cross (Diane Kruger) and Marco Ruiz (Damien Bechir) are their counterparts in *The Bridge*.

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow this expression from Linda Hutcheon who assimilates adaptation to the "Darwinian theory of evolution, where genetic adaptation is presented as the biological process by which something is fitted to a given environment." *A Theory of Adaptation*, 31.

The core chase of the serial killer is at times almost duplicated shot for shot and at other moments strays far from the original to cut a new path for itself. In *The Bridge* aesthetic and ideological hints alluding to Border drama, to the Western, and to police thrillers overlap with the noir film aesthetics of *Broen*.

To set the frame of my analysis I would like first to define the concepts of Nordic police procedurals and Border drama, while emphasizing that these overarching labels are often shot through with ingredients belonging to other genres.

In a very enlightening article, Jeremy Megraw underlines the socialist roots of the Nordic noir: “an important element of the Scandicrime genre is its traditional willingness to incorporate larger social issues into the narrative of police work. Immigration, xenophobia, misogyny, racism, and larger issues of intolerance and social inequality are recurring themes that often form the core of the mystery at hand”. Many critics relate this to the fact that Nordic countries were associated with the liberal utopia of a welfare state for all, which “failed to live up to expectations” (in Murphy, 23)<sup>3</sup>. As a consequence, writers such as Maja Sjöwall and Per Wahloo started to work on crime novels “using detective fiction to analyze the state of the nation” (in Murphy, 23-24).

In Nordic noir the characters are examples of the victims left behind by the social democratic system (Murphy, 25-26). The detective “is not in any sense heroic” (Val McDermid, in Murphy, 28) but is rather life-size. Laura Miller says that “the stern, bare-boned simplicity of its problem-solving methods is one of the form’s austere pleasures” and “charm and glamour barely exist” (*The Wall Street Journal* 15 January 2010. Web). The action is often confined to indoor research. *Broen* comfortably fits into aesthetic and ideological grounding of the Nordic noir.

A similar ideological grounding can be traced back to the 1940’s American film noir and hard-boiled fiction. Indeed, the genre emphasized the violence and anxiety of contemporary USA. Foster Hirsh points that “in its pervasive aura of defeat and despair, its images of entrapment, the escalating derangement of its leading characters, noir registers, in general way, the country’s sour postwar mood” (in Neale, 157). Although *The Bridge* adopts the mood of the film noir, its location in the outskirts of the urban life marks its difference from the film noir (Bourget, in Royot, 53). In addition, *The Bridge* did not advertize its affiliation to the American noir as much as its

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<sup>3</sup> These are the words of Mariella Frostrup, the narrator of the documentary film *Time Shift - Nordic Noir: the Story of Scandinavian crime Fiction*, directed by Robert Murphy. I will mention between brackets the minutes when the statement was made.

affiliation to the Border Drama.<sup>4</sup> Yet some critics underline that, on a syntactic level, both genres have much in common.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, *The Bridge*, reproduces many of the ingredients of the Border Drama such as the setting (the border/frontier) and the narrative arc (the conflicting relation between people from opposite sides of the divide). The genre is often considered a descendant of the traditional Western genre. It is true that early Westerns are defined with regard to their setting on the western frontiers of the USA. However, some Westerns were relocated into the southern frontier<sup>6</sup>. Famous examples include *Rio Grande* (1950) starring John Wayne and *Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), starring Tommy Lee Jones.<sup>7</sup> The Border drama genre shares with the Western its concern for the frontier as a topographical icon of the American national identity and security. According to Camilla Fojas, “Hollywood Border cinema offers a vision of the USA at its defining limits, and its popularity roughly corresponds to the crises and mood swings of national immigration and border policies. The border acts as a political symbol of national order and control, namely, the control of the national labor market and immigration from the south” (11-12). Border drama has been invested with the ideological content that foregrounds the collective imagination. Indeed, starting from the Reagan years, Border drama has identified and represented one of America’s deepest concerns, namely the war against drugs and illegal immigration. On a wider scale, Border drama has been seen as a metonymical

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<sup>4</sup>Although I adopt a text-based approach, I find interesting Weissmann’s definition of genre as a discursive construct that builds on the discursive practices of critics, producers and audience. (Weissmann, 95) The critics and the producers of *The Bridge* insisted on the border as a key ideological and aesthetic ingredient. (see footnotes 7, 12 and 14)

<sup>5</sup>According to Sean MacCann, “less directly, hard boiled fiction invoked the closely related tradition of the western, importing the conventions of the frontier adventure to the territory of industrial metropolis. Combining those two narrative strands, hard boiled crime fiction imagined the city as a labyrinthine world of dark mysterious powers and, at the same time, as an urban frontier, where the rule of law came into confrontation with disorder. The detective’s often overwhelming task was to lay the hidden places open to light and, ultimately through mortal combat, to bring a savage world under control.” (44)

<sup>6</sup>“By the early twentieth century, the western frontier had lost some of its representational power to the southern frontier. The southern line replaced the western frontier as major organizing symbol of popular culture because it defined the nation on different, more modern terms: the US was now limited, bounded and exclusive. [...] By the 1980’s the tone of the border Western had shifted toward a new emphasis on the internal politics of national defense against an unwanted immigrant invasion. These films were not outright westerns in the strict sense of the genre, but shared in its themes. *Borderline*, *the Border*, and *Flashpoint* trade the Texas ranger and cavalry for the US border patrol, the new unit of southern policing.” (Fojas, Camilla, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008, 184-185)

<sup>7</sup> It is true that many films make up the corpus of the Border Drama Genre, but no series has so far been produced in this genre. FOX president, John Landgraf says: “for years, networks have been trying to develop a drama series set on American/Mexican borders without success. I’m thrilled to say that Meredith Stiehm and Elwood Reid have become the first to crack that creative code and have done so magnificently. There have been great films set in that world – *No Country For Old Men*, and *Lone Star* come to mind – but never a TV series.” Interview by Andrea Nellie, *Deadline.com*, February 12<sup>th</sup> 2013. The border as a genre is an expanding niche. *Dallas* (2013) borrows the motifs and themes of the Border drama, by having the Ewings entangled in dirty traffic and money laundering with Mexican drug cartels.

representation of the deeply anchored fear of the uncivilized other which was represented in many movies about the South. Fojas draws attention to this when she notes that “border narratives displace the internal conflict between the North and South of the United States onto the north-south continental divide” (Fojas, 17). This is not surprising especially as the South, as well as the Frontier countries were often represented as foils for the American nation. In *Le Sud au Cinema, de The Birth of a Nation à Cold Mountain*, Taina Tuhkunen explains that the south is a “mental rather than geographical space” (17) that can be identified only in an oppositional dynamic to the north. In the same vein, Steve Neale argues that the West is not a geographical space but a mental space defined by the frontier themes:

The West has in this sense never been confined to a single location: different places, spaces and regions in America have served as its incarnation; and different periods in American history have served as its temporal site. Given that the idea of the West can be evoked by the signs of any period in which frontier conditions obtained, and by any landscape, region, mode of behaviour, speech or dress associated with it, worries over whether or not westerns set in the eighteenth or twentieth centuries or East of Missouri or South of the Mexican border are really westerns therefore tend not only to be restrictive, as Buscombe (1988b:17) points out, but to miss the point.” (Neale, 148)

The border, be it to the west or to the south is a mental space in which are inscribed the fears of the other. No wonder then that the border and its neighboring cities are often cast peopled with rednecks, haunted by violence, and the threatening return of the uncanny in the form of the physically or morally degenerate.

In this paper I will examine how genre bending accounts for the major changes brought to the character’s typology, the setting, the pace, the lighting, the camera shots and the plot of the original series. In other words, I will study how *The Bridge* transforms a Nordic noir, steeped in social and political realism, into a Border drama that not only represents the real and the mythical chasm separating the USA from its southern neighbor, but also questions and undermines the stereotypical representations of the border in traditional Border drama.

## I. The Setting

### 1/ Meeting point vs dividing line

The settings in *Broen* and *The Bridge* reflect different generic identities and are consequently invested with different ideological dimensions. In *Broen*, the establishing scenes in the opening credit sequence and epilogues convey an overall bleak mood. The *Bridge* on the other hand, uses the establishing scene as visual allegory of the chasm separating the US from Mexico. The setting becomes a “stereotypical space whose function is interfacing (what is considered to be) the self with (what is considered to be) the other”, to quote Elena Dell’Agnese (204-205). In each case, the setting (landscape, mood, music, sounds) reminds the viewers of the different genre to which the series belongs. For instance, a bleak mood informs the setting of *Broen*. The arial shot of the Orsund Bridge in the opening credit shows the slow traffic going both ways on the bridge. Cross cutting from the left hand angle to the right hand angle of the same shot portrays the movement either to Denmark or to Sweden and reinforces the idea of a geographical and hence cultural continuity. However, the obsessive repetition of the same scene introduces from the very outset the idea of fatality, which will cast its shadow over the other episodes, since partial cuts of this very same shot are often used as bridging scenes. The ominously grinding nature of time is signaled in the opening credit sequence by the successive cuts of daylight wiped out by cuts of night fall and vice versa.

Along with this bleak mood, the shadow of social and political discontent hangs from the opening credit sequence, reminding us of the socio-political determination of the Nordic police procedurals. Even a seemingly innocuous shot like that of the little Mermaid Statue in the middle of the night brings to the audience’s attention a history of a disputed fairy tale icon in Denmark. In fact, this statue inspired from Danish writer Hans Christian Anderson’s fairy tale, “The Little Mermaid”, has been the subject of vandalism by both left and right wing activists since the 1960’s. Some vandalize it to show the disillusionment with a fairy-like model that didn’t live up to its promises and others to show racist and xenophobic attitudes. Both subjects are focal parts of the storyline of the series. (Plates 1 and 1’)



Plate1



Plate 1'

Other than the low-key lighting of the urban setting, the downbeat tone of the opening credit sequence is carried through music. “Hollow Talk”, the theme music played by the Choir of Young Believers, bespeaks the grief of a disappointed generation. The theme is in G minor with a persistent pedal note in 'D' in the background. This dominant note makes us feel that the piece isn't really going anywhere and adds to a haunting feeling of uneasiness and loneliness. The high-pitched percussion and the repetition of a simple chord structure against the melody add to this feeling of uneasiness; a feeling of being trapped in a vicious circle as denoted by the refrain, which intones, “back to the beginning”. As soon as the bridge appears on screen, the music changes in texture, with the addition of the moaning sound of the cello. This score conveys an impression of melancholy that will be maintained over the different episodes. Opera music is also used as the theme music for Stephen Linder, one of the main characters, to reinforce his isolation and the loneliness that overwhelms most of the characters. The marriage of repeated scenes, sad music, and almost black and white landscape build up the bleak mood characteristic of the Nordic noir, but also reminds the viewers of the loneliness and helplessness characteristic of the works of Ingmar Bergman<sup>8</sup>.

The setting in *The Bridge* answers to a different aesthetic and ideological project, aiming at using the tropes of the Border drama but also at subverting them. Three levels of representation can be defined: the stark binary opposition; the fleeting closeness and the underlying overlapping.

The opening credit sequence in *The Bridge* emphasizes the major divide separating the two countries and cultures. Long shots showing barbed wires and the fences

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<sup>8</sup> It is not at random that the name of Ingmar Bergman is mentioned in the very first episode when Martin says to Saga: “No wonder Ingmar Bergman and Lars Noren are from Sweden” (S01 E01, 38)

separating the two countries represent the geographical and political separation of the two countries (Plates 2 and 2').



Plates 2

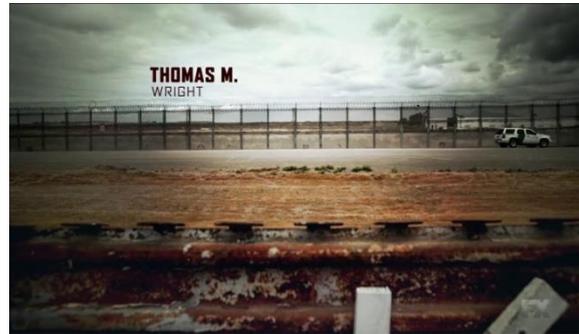


Plate 2'

This separation is portrayed metaphorically too. The overall impression that the opening credit sequence builds is of that of a place out of time. Dusty, unpaved streets, rusty ramshackle buses, run down federal buildings, kids playing football and errant dogs running beside them are all depicted through sepia-toned shots meant to enhance the dramatic effect of an antique appearance in keeping with the stereotypical representation of the South in general and the city of Juarez in particular (Plates 2 and 2'). This explains the insert of a stock shot showing an old wagon with a Mexican shoe-shiner (Plate 3).



Plate 3

Recurrent visual and aural motifs encode danger as an organic part of the city of Juarez. The hanging tree motif that haunts the Western film turns into a stake on which Hector Calaca is displayed to the horrified gaze of the passersby in the streets of Juarez (Plate 4). A shoot-out explodes in the streets, leaving blood splashing on the pavement (Plate 5). Background sounds of wailing sirens are heard in every episode,

denoting police interventions. A large billboard, placed right next to the “Welcome to Mexico” billboard, reads “No More Weapons” (S01 E08, 5:25).



Plate 4



Plate 5

Juarez is also the place where young teenager Gina flees parental authority in search of adventure, and older Americans go to pay a visit to the “Juanitas”, as Stephen says to the Customs and Border Police officer<sup>9</sup>. If we limit our analysis to these images, it would seem that the landscape corresponds to a stereotypical pattern, recurrent in the Border drama genre which depicts: “the border (as) ... a symbolic zone, a line between opposing forces and values, a line separating barbarism from civilization, the horizon of modernity, and the outer limit of a nation.” (Fojas, 25)

## 2/ *The Dividing line undermined*

However, the very first scene of the opening credit sequence, which works as a frame for our perception, is an impressionist shot showing the mirage-like effect of the noon sun. This scene brackets the representation into a subjective point of view and acts as a metafictional comment on its unreliability. Then, alongside this subjective camera eye focusing on the stereotypes of the South and playing with film grain to reinforce the idea of a town out of time, a contrapuntal point of view seems to exist. An aerial shot shows the heavy traffic going both ways of the bridge, hence illustrating the interconnectedness of these neighboring countries. The melancholy theme song “Till I’m one with you”, reinforces this idea. Ryan Bingham who wrote the theme song says: “I had the idea of writing a love song about the back and forth between the U.S.

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<sup>9</sup> “Though the “frontier” typically connotes its western incarnation and the uncivilized “Indian” territory beyond it, the southern Frontier, Mexico, and the Mexican past of the Us are of equal relevance in the construction of the moral universe of the Western. ... Mexico is the radicalized and primitive wilderness where western male heroes go to reinvigorate their masculinity—often with the help of Mexican women—and where mixed race characters and relationships are common, and it often represents the uncivilized past of the US...” (Fojas, 16-17)

and Mexico and bridging them together. I worked at this conflict to create a message of peace and tranquility” (Gallo, Phil).

More than a wishful dream of a poet, the bridging motif seems to be an inherent part of the landscape. The viewer is often unable to decide whether the scene is taking place in the American South or in Mexico. El Paso is as “out of time” as Juarez, given the sepia-toned image of the American frontier. In addition, the violence that reigns in Juarez is paralleled by a similar violence in The USA. The rattlesnake, the coyote, and the vultures towering over Maria’s body are samples of the visual encoding of the American South as a hazardous landscape. The extended wilderness, the blinding sun and sweating heat reinforce our feeling of helplessness before this evil surrounding. The camera conveys this idea many times through pull-back shots, in which the zoom moves back slowly from the subject, be they victim (S01 E03, 3: 39:45-55) or killer (S01 E03: 17:10), reducing the character to an insignificant speck in the immense engulfing dusty space (Plates 6, 6’,6’’).



Plate 6



Plate 6'



Plate 6''

To sum up, true to the aesthetics of the Nordic noir, *Broen* uses the setting to shed some light on a deep feeling of helplessness and discontent which will be the background for the depiction of the failure of the social democratic system in Sweden and Denmark. *The Bridge*, on the other hand, draws on visual and aural patterns of

the Border drama to show the chasm separating the American and Mexican landscapes. However, by showing the darkness and the dangers lurking everywhere, the series deconstructs the clear-cut binary opposition and points to the common destiny and ineluctable interconnectedness of both countries.

## **II. Character typology**

### *1/ From Social Realism to the Fetishized Other*

In *Broen*, the aesthetic choices are at the service of a socially committed work. Realist characterization and sequence arrangement contribute to exposing the social ills eating at Nordic societies. Each episode pays tribute to one of the serial killer's victims, who are also victims of the social democratic system. The visual and aural representation of prostitutes, homeless people, immigrants and the psychologically ill, bear witness to the aesthetic and ideological determination of the Nordic police procedural.

For instance, in episode 1, a whole sequence is devoted to Pernille, a prostitute who was the roommate of Catherin Brumer, the first victim of the killer. She is depicted as a frail child-like teenager. As the camera tracks slowly the room and a close up shows her toys and teddy bears, soft piano scores are played (Plate 7). The same theme music is again played for teenage Anja when her father tells her that there is no place for her in his new house that night (S01 E04, 45). The musical symmetry points to the fact that both characters are let down by their fathers, be it the institutional or the biological father.



Plate 7

The documentary approach is another strategy used to shed light on the character's plight. This is to be seen both through the reports broadcast on TV news and the statistics sent by the killer. Thus, to denounce the social and institutional injustice suffered by the Huranis, *Broen* devotes many scenes to TV reports and news

broadcasts about the release of the three policemen involved in deadly violence against Hedi Hurani, the immigrant teenager (Plate 8). Having this incident represented through the press, comparing it to previous similar incidents, and having human rights defenders and police unions comment on it, turns it into a national phenomenon. This angle is very specific to *Broen* and adds up to the reality effect that the series tries to convey.



Plate 8

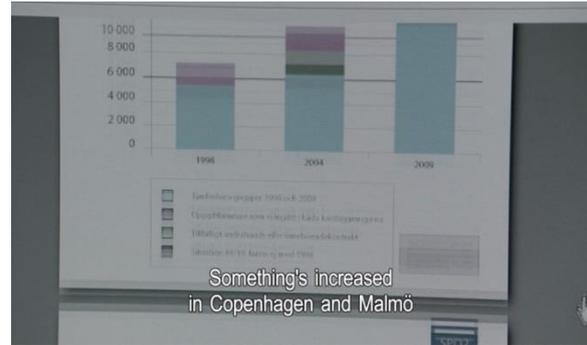


Plate 9

This same effect is reached through shots of files containing reports, statistics, and facts about the institutional failure of which the main characters are the victims (Plate 9). In almost every episode, a zoom is made on a file in support of a new problem. “Unequal before the law” (S01 E02,26) is the first file containing hundreds of pages of statistics and partial conclusions with headings such as “Investigations depend on where the crime is committed” (S01 E02, 26); “Statistics do not reflect everyone” (S01 E02,27). The telling strategy along with the reality effect build up the political message that the series tries to hammer home over its 10 episodes.<sup>10</sup>

The sequencing also confirms that the characters as victims represent a focal priority in *Broen*. Very often, they are portrayed in the teaser that precedes the opening credit sequence, thus announced as the mainstay of the episode. In the epilogue of episode 2, a moving camera follows Sonya, a homeless addict, in her daily ordeal. Almost naked under a tattered leather coat, she picks up cigarette butts from the ground and steals to eat. An extreme close up shows Sonya’s dirty scarred hand lying on her torn jeans. Thus, the homeless are portrayed before they become a subject of

<sup>10</sup> I borrow this expression from narratology. Wayne C. Booth points that representation can rely on telling and/or showing. The telling technique shows the author’s tendency “to intrude upon the narrative to make explicit his philosophy or his judgement of the characters or the events in which they are involved.” (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 27) The statements displayed on the TV screens and the partial conclusions are similar to an authorial intrusion that reveals to the viewer the main ideology carried in the film.

investigation. Slow tracking shots show their derelict shelters in empty factories, or dumping sites. The low-key lighting and the naturally grey color contribute to building an austere and unflinching realistic characterization that draws the viewer's attention to these victims; and in a way make a parallel between the killer's and the institutions' crimes.

While the characterization in *Broen* aims at exposing the ills festering behind the elegant façade of developed, rich countries, characterization in *The Bridge* reproduces some of the essentializing patterns of the Border drama, though at times it undermines these very stereotypes. The American remake introduces new stock characters that fit more into the Border drama typology. The Mexicans we encounter in episodes 1 and 2 are illegal immigrants, transported like cattle in a cattle truck by an American coyote. Fausto Galvan the kingpin and Graziella Riviera the Mexican woman who traffics arms and illegals through Charlotte Millright's tunnel are two representatives of the fantasized other. Fausto Galvan's violence is amplified in the barbarian way he orders his henchmen to thrust their whetted knives in the corpse of dead Calaca. The camera emphasizes his threatening side in his nightmarish appearance in Stephen's dreams. The camera shoots an extreme close up on his face making his protruding teeth occupy a large part of the screen. Graziella is the female counterpart of Galvan. The fact that she handles her business from a back office in a butcher's shop associates her traffic in arms and illegals with slaughter and bloodshed. In an emblematic gesture, she orders her man to slaughter Rio, Charlotte Millright's horse, to punish her for refusing to let her use the tunnel.

Other than dangerous criminals, corrupt officers people the police offices in Mexico. Colonel Robles is first seen at night, gambling in Fausto Galvan's house. Little does he care about clearing cases. Instead, he hides any evidence that risks upsetting Galvan's plan. For, instance when he found the corpse of Galvan's brother among 23 bodies in a dump house, he gave the corpse back to Galvan and omitted any reference to its presence in his report.

These characters seem to cast the Mexicans as threatening, dangerous creatures, intent on illegal business and immoral activities. This is much in keeping with the essentializing and fetishized other represented in Border drama. Camilla Fojas analyses the character typology in this genre and explains its role as a foil: "US popular culture defines national identity against the borderlands and their mythologized

inhabitants: an inchoate mass of criminals, sexual deviants, and radicalized outsiders” (Fojas, 13).

## 2/ *Otherness Revisited*

This stereotypical division between the “us”, the civilized Americans with whom the audience is meant to identify, and “them”, the criminals the viewer deplored, is debunked through various strategies, thus destabilizing the narrative genre that has spawned it.

The narrative line reveals that the representation of Mexicans is part of a fantasized perception partly represented through the texts of American journalists such as Daniel Frye. Adriana, his Mexican colleague is commissioned by their boss to accompany him, in order to ensure that his reports are “honest”. This move warns us to the biased representation of the other (S01 E03,15). The series offers also two key scenes to explain the life dynamics in Mexico and wipe away the prejudices against police corruption:

Sonya: Did you take money from that woman?

Marco: What woman?

Sonya: The one you let cross the bridge!

Marco: No!

Sonya: They say you are all corrupt, you all take bribes

Marco: The cartel threatens every one. They tell us take our silver or take our lead...(S01E01,40)

The scene offers an opportunity for the world-weary Mexican cop to explain that what outsiders call corruption is in fact a self-defense strategy. Charlotte Millright later repeats similar clichés; when Marco comes to ask her to sign a document proving that he didn’t take money from her, she says: “I’m surprised they (i.e. his hierarchy) care. I thought all Mexican cops took bribes” (S01 E03, 32:45). The narrative line shows that Americans also may be involved into illegal acts when threatened: the examples of Charles Millright and his wife Charlotte are a case in point. Indeed, unable to resist Graziella’s threats, they let her use their tunnel to smuggle drugs and arms.

The narrative line illustrates also that moral degeneration is not specific to Mexicans, but is part of the fantasized landscape known as the South. *The Bridge* shows Americans involved in unlawful actions, thus suggesting that greed and corruption are not geographically determined, as is the case with the character of Ralph Guedman, the FBI agent who abuses prostitutes and is beheaded like a pimp, or that of the

psychologist Meadow who deals in drugs and is killed like a narcotics dealer with a Colombian necktie.

The best illustration of moral degeneration is the paranoid Childress who best fits the typology of Southern redneck. He is a former soldier, who believes Mexico should be part of the USA (S01 E07, 31). The book he is writing is entitled *On the Extraterrestrial Origins of Mexican People*, thus denying the Mexicans the right to their land. He tells Sonya “Elpaso Del Norte has been falsely split by borders, by cultures, by history ...there is a war happening on the border and no one seems to notice it” (S01 E07, 31). His delirious speech cannot explain why he has killed so many Mexicans. Though Childress has little importance in the storyline, his narrative function is to undermine geographical displacement of otherness and to show it lurking inside us too.

As a conclusion, we can say that although the characterization in *The Bridge* appears to be mired in cultural stereotypes and myths about the other, deeper scrutiny shows that the stereotypes are reproduced but also subverted by showing the other face of the coin. The twofold project of the American remake – transforming the Nordic procedural into a Border drama and questioning the genre’s ideological import – makes characterization in the *Bridge* more complex.

### 3/ *From the Bergmanesque to the Western*

The characterization of Stephen Lindberg who became Stephen Linder is an interesting illustration of the different project carried by each series. Both Stephens are loners, taciturn and uncomfortable with social contact. Both of them try to help asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, and bartered women by sidestepping the law. They kill a violent pimp boyfriend or husband to protect a woman. However, the visual representations of these characters carry different values and relate differently to the cultural heritage from which each remake descends and to the audience that each series wants to appeal.

In *Broen*, Stephen is cast in a Bergmanesque tradition: brooding in front of his window on cold nights while opera music is played as a soundtrack. His moral and existential torment is captured in the scene when he kills Jorgen, the violent husband of Veronika, and is surprised by detective Martin knocking at his door. The side lighting expresses Stephen’s dilemma about his crime, showing it as a result of a dialectics of justice/injustice. The chiaroscuro effect produced by the side lighting denotes

Stephen's turmoil as he has betrayed his engagement to fight violence by being himself trapped into a violent killing. The lines he addresses to Martin bespeak his bitterness as to the failures of the social institution: "we wouldn't have met if Ekwall or some other VIP had not been murdered", he says. As the camera tilts to the back, we hear Stephen off screen saying "In my job, you can't help but notice how unfair society is. But violence isn't the answer" (S01 E05, 17). Meanwhile a high angle shot shows Jorgen lying in a pool of blood. The arrest of Stephen in episode 7 represents the restoring of order and law that the Nordic drama emphasizes.

In the American version, Stephen experiences little moral ambiguity compared to his Nordic counterpart. Instead, his outfit and many other hints situate him in the Western hero tradition. Stephen is often cast in the wilderness, where he has a truck. The murder of Hector Calacas by Stephen Lindberg is presented as self-defense and part of a pattern in which a hero has to follow moral laws. Stephen is never arrested for his crime. Instead, Calaca's body was seized by Fausto Galvan and displayed on a stake in the streets of Juarez, in an implicit iconographic reference to the hanging tree that haunts the landscape of many Western films.

A modern western hero, Stephen seeks freedom from the corrupt world of Mexico and the bureaucracy of USA in the spiritual world offered in the ranch of his friend and mentor Reverend Bob to whom he delivers his protégé Eva. Their language teems with Biblical references. Thus, according to Stephen, Bob is a 'red-handed god' who will protect his people, and Bob tells Eva that she will "find grace and the right path" if she joins his flock (ep4: 23-25). In fact, Biblical inscriptions on the gate of Bob's ranch reads "He will rise" (Luke 18:33) (plate 10). The quote of Romans 3:23 can also be read on the façade of the ranch: "For All Have Sinned and All Have Fallen Short of the Glory of God" (Plate 10'). By helping errant girls get away from prostitution and find a new life cultivating the land, Stephen and Bob inscribe in the series the western skepticism about the civilized world corruption and the idealized exaltation of the values of nature<sup>11</sup>. The religious aspect in *Broen* is limited to one sentence in which Stephen mentions that a priest knows that he is helping illegal immigrants.

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<sup>11</sup>Steve Neale refers to Buscombe's studies which underline that one of the tenets of the frontier mythology was to chart the racial and cultural superiority of the Anglo-Americans. He also refers to the syntactic approach to genres that reads the western film in terms of opposition between the settled world of civilization and that of the frontier wilderness. However, later western films debunk this binary opposition. Neale, Steve, *Genre and Hollywood, London and New York*: Routledge, 2000, 133-142. Guy Dubois, "Histoire, actualité et idéologie dans le Western", in Daniel Royot, *Hollywood: Réflexion sur l'écran*, Université de Provence, 1984.



Plate 10



Plate 10'

All these changes derive from the generic bending of the Nordic noir into a Border drama, with fleeting references to the ancestral Western tradition. Meredith Stiehm, who was cued to set the action in the frontier separating the USA and Canada, opted for the Mexican frontier which, she says, was ripe for narrative exploitation<sup>12</sup>. Other factors account for Stiehm's generic bending. By choosing the southern frontier, she distances her work from the northern setting (Seattle) where *The Killing*, another Nordic police procedural was remade. In this way, she responds to a marketing request that Rick Altman calls "the capitalist need for product differentiation" (in King, 116). However, she also draws on generic elements familiar enough to allow the remake to

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<sup>12</sup> "you see it in the headlines every day. There's massive crime and corruption and immigration is such a hotbed issue [...] and these stories, they are right there happening in our country and right across the border every day. So I hope that will translate into some drama about the people that are facing those issues" Meredith Stein interviewed by Liz Raftery, "FX's *The Bridge* is More than your Average Serial Killer Drama", TV GUIDE, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

“have a clear home in the market place” (Mittell, 26). In fact, through *The Bridge*, she breathes new life in a genre that captures the ideological discourse in which the American-Mexican relations are currently embedded<sup>13</sup>. However she also cashes on a successful formula by having the issue of national security a major stake<sup>14</sup>. Thus, genre bending proves to be a means to fit the original story into an aesthetic and ideological mould locally recognizable.

### III. The plot<sup>15</sup>

The generic bending in *The Bridge* has largely influenced the organization of the structure of the plot, the pace and the tone. However, the aesthetic choices are sometimes the result of commercial demands<sup>16</sup>, hence the different approaches to suspenseful moments.

#### 1/ *The Teasers*

Both *Broen* and *The Bridge* are serial narratives based on storylines running through multiple episodes and an ongoing diegesis. However, in *The Bridge*, along with the main storyline of the serial killer, there is a parallel ongoing runner related to the tunnel through which illegals, drugs and arms are smuggled. This runner plot transforms the generic identity of the original and builds a complex multilayered plot with more hooks and more potential for suspense.

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<sup>13</sup> “Genre frameworks [...] can also be understood as playing a more active role in the production of the mythic and ideological discourse in which our lives are embedded” (King, 123).

<sup>14</sup> Stiehm who wrote *Homeland*, declared: “it is politics that are very Scandinavian and a lot about humanity and how we treat it – it is just politics that America doesn’t relate to very well. But there is a lot of politics on the US Mexico Border which we do. [...] To me it sort of felt like what *Homeland* had done with the Middle East and terrorism and what was in the headlines and they dramatized it”. Sepinwal, Alan, “*The Bridge*’ producer Meredith Stiehm on translating Denmark/Sweden into U.S./Mexico”, HIT FIX, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013

<sup>15</sup> “The story of television narrative consists of all events and characters within the world of a show, whether they are shown on-screen or not. A program’s plot is the way the story is told, consisting only of events shown on the screen, and the particular choices used to present that material, such as chronological order, omission of key details, and retelling event from multiple perspectives. Plot also includes nondiegetic material that guides our understanding of the story, such as musical scores, captions and voiceover narration.” (Jason Mittell, 217)

<sup>16</sup> “Commercial American TV is far more constrained. Programs are almost always designed to fit precisely into thirty or thirty-six minute schedule blocks, and networks and channels demand regular commercial breaks to structure plots, providing markers for suspenseful moments and signaling act breaks within the story. Producers realize that a commercial break offers viewers a chance to surf channels or turn off a program, so they aim to end each act with a compelling narrative hook to sustain the viewers’ interest throughout the break; this is especially important in the pre-credit sequence segment called the teaser, which strives to capture viewers for the rest of the program using a particularly exciting enigma or amusing taste of the episode. [...] But typically, the institutional constraints of commercial television help structure how stories are narrated, forcing creators to follow strict guidelines and narrative routines.” (Jason Mittell, 232)

This generic transformation can already be felt from the teasers that precede the opening credit sequence<sup>17</sup>. Actually, 4 out of the 13 teasers preceding the opening credit are about the tunnel that was found in Charles Millright's property and which was used to traffic drugs, arms and illegals between El Paso and Juarez. The teaser of episode 2 shows Charlotte's discovery of the tunnel; the teaser of episode 4 shows Fausto Galvan dragging the corpse of Hector Calaca from USA to Mexico through the tunnel; the teaser to episode 6 shows Graziella negotiating arm transactions through the tunnel; and the teaser to episode 11 shows Charlotte's boyfriend dragging Tim's corpse through the tunnel to Mexico.

It is true that these teasers precede the very first commercial break and are staged to heighten suspense in order to captivate the viewers for the remaining part of the show. However, teasers also "set the episodes within a genre, a tone and a specific aesthetics and associate the episode with the narrative and visual identity of the series as a whole" (Cornillon, 34). In the case of *The Bridge*, these teasers, along with their suspenseful potential, are also a metonymic visual and aural representation of the underworld of crime and violence staged in Border Drama.

Teasers in *Broen* bear no similar concern for establishing a compelling narrative hook. Instead, they set the series in the mood and context of the realist aesthetics of Nordic police procedurals. They are often introductions to a new social category, targeted as a victim of the failure of the social democratic system. The teaser to episode 2 focuses on Sonya, a representative of the homeless. The teaser to episode 3 shows Saga investigating a site for homeless people. The teaser to episode 4 shows Bjorn in captivity with blood dripping from his arms. This is no big news, because we have already seen this in the previous episode. The teaser to episode 5 shows Lars in the psychologist office. These teasers are meant to highlight the topic of the episode and therefore anchor the series in the Nordic police procedural genre and its outspoken concern for social problems.

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<sup>17</sup>"Plus encore, la séquence pré-générique est le seuil qui porte l'identité de la série, puisqu'elle plonge le spectateur dans les codes d'un genre, dans une certaine spécificité de l'image, de la mise en scène et de la musique, tout en renouvelant constamment l'intérêt pour la série." (Claire Cornillon, « L'Art du teaser », *TV Series*, 6, Décembre 2014, 28).

## 2/ Spoilers

The plot of the *Bridge* builds up sturdier spoilers because the series tries to carve spaces for commercial breaks by using hooks to ensure that the viewer will not tune out. To illustrate my argument, I'll compare 2 sequences related to the same event but staged differently. Both in *Broen* and *The Bridge*, Stephen Linder and Stephen Lindberg help a woman in need. In *Broen*, we see Stephen Lindberg drive his protégé, Veronika, to a house in the countryside. The welcoming setting, the kids playing on the green ground, the inviting gesture of Stephen giving her the keys, and the soft music all contributes to staging a scene that conveys the idea of a peaceful resolution (Plate 11). The same event is staged differently in *The Bridge*. In fact, in previous scenes we have seen Stephen kidnap Eva and smuggle her into the US in the boot of his car. Then instead of the welcoming countryside cottage, Stephen shuts Eva in a truck parked in the middle of the desert, and leaves her shouting for help from behind the bars of the truck window (Plates 12 and 12'). The whole sequence is staged to make us suspect him of being the killer. All these elements turn the sequence into a captivating narrative spoiler that precedes the second commercial break.



Plate 11

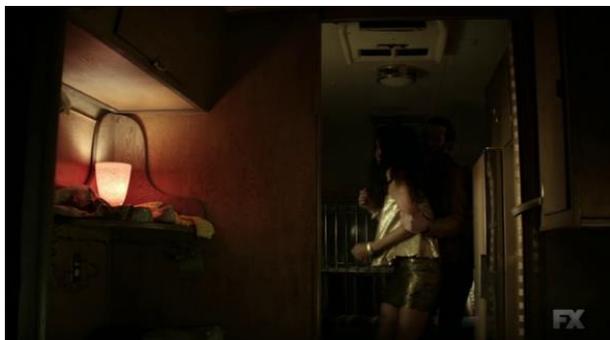


Plate 12



Plate 12'

The commercial concern for more suspenseful moments in the American series contrasts with the ideological concern the Nordic series reserves for denouncing

political problems. These contrasting concerns determine also the fast-moving pace of the one and the slower pace of the other.

### 3/ Pace

A striking visual feature of *Broen* consists of the recurrence of bridging scenes showing the still water under the Orsund Bridge by night, cranes towering the city of Malmo by night, foggy cities by night. Major key sequences are systematically followed by one of these bridging scenes. Other than slowing down the pace of the plotline, these scenes create a kind of narrative break as if to invite the viewer to ponder what he is watching.

The slow pace in *Broen* is also implemented through long takes that turn the series into a cultural forum where burning issues are discussed. Another role played by these long takes relate to the deductive approach of the police work. For instance S01 E01, 26-33 is meant to get the viewers immersed into the deductive approach elegantly carried in question and answer scenes, where the team is literally invited to think aloud. This becomes the main source of pleasure for the viewer.

On the other hand, *The Bridge* is a fast-paced drama. The ransom drop scene added by the American remake shows a taste for action thrillers. This scene contains a maximum number of shots and cuts and repetition of shots from different angles to create the effect of dense and fast-moving action and build up suspense. While Marco Ruiz, FBI agent Ralph Guedman and journalist Daniel Frye go to drop off the million-dollar ransom in the bar indicated by the killer, Sonya Cross and Hank try to find the jack pump in the desert where Maria is tied to a stake. Cross-cutting these different sequences leads to alternating two narrative lines happening simultaneously in two different locations. The audience is held breathless as they want at the same time to see if Sonya finds Maria and if the FBI agent Guedman succeeds in trapping the killer. But each sequence is repeatedly interrupted to give way to the other, thus producing the effect of an interminable chase and an insurmountable tension. The detectives in this sequence look bigger than life, racing against time and fate. This editing choice is in keeping with the aesthetic choice for the spectacular which we will consider when analyzing the tone.

#### 4/ Tone

If I had to choose a figure to describe the aesthetics of *Broen* and of *The Bridge*, I would choose metonymy for the first and overstatement for the second. Indeed, many critics point to the spectacular as a salient feature of the American cinema and television. In *Transnational Television Drama*, Elke Weissmann underlines that the spectacles of wealth in *Dallas* and *Dynasty* and the spectacle of fashion in *Miami Vice* and *Sex and the City* offer a level of excess that becomes a source of pleasure. This excess has also a narrative function in so far as it translates elements that cannot be scripted because of shorter running time allowed for US series compared to UK series (Weissmann, 91). Michael Harney speaking about American remakes of French films comes to a similar conclusion. He says: “the rule is not really to ameliorate, but to amplify — to produce something that is the same, only, more so ... Whether by opulence or squalor, transcendence of the mundane is the objective” (74 - 75)<sup>18</sup>. Exuberance versus austerity can be seen at the level of the image of the cop, the depiction of violence and feelings.

In fact, in *The Bridge*, most of the pleasure comes from the spectacular<sup>19</sup>. The open office in which most of the action takes place in *Broen* gives way to the sprawling wilderness or the dusty and derelict urban spaces of Juarez. The repeated shot/counter shot sequences that mark the dialogues between the different team members in *Broen* give way to long shots and moving cameras tracking the actors as they chase suspects.

The image of the cop shows the American penchant for extraordinary fearless and individualist heroes contrary to the Nordic attachment to a life-size hero. For instance, when the actor, who recorded the first message released online by the killer, came to the police station to give information, Saga asks him to put his hands up and goes slowly to check if he wasn't armed. Sonya on the other hand immediately points her gun to him and Marco and Hank immobilize him. *The Bridge's* staging option responds to the need to make the action more thrilling and spectacular.

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<sup>18</sup>It is true that this remark applies to American films, but no one can ignore that series use the Hollywood connexion and expertise as high production values and therefore develop aesthetics similar to those of films (Weissmann, 80). *The Bridge* is not an exception; filming techniques and the choice of Hollywood stars such as Diane Kruger and Ted Levine bear witness to this Hollywood connexion.

<sup>19</sup> Geoff King explains that the spectacular can be located in an action such as a chase, in a performance such as elaborate stunts, in a spectacular vista, such as the landscape of Monument Valley, in an emotional intensity such as fear and horror... He even considers the choice of a superstar as part of the building up of the spectacular (King, 181).

Other scenes are added in *The Bridge* to make Detective Sonya fit into the mould of a bigger-than-life hero. Her duel with Childress is a case in point (Plates 13 and 13'). This scene shows Sonya negotiating single handedly with Childress, while the other colleagues were kept off stage. Sonya's overstated heroism finds no equivalent in *Broen*. Instead, the heroism of Saga is depicted as a mere phantasm entertained by teenage August, the son of detective Martin. In an emblematic scene, we see him staring at Saga's photos on the internet and then he zooms on one in which she is pointing her gun at a target.



Plate 13



Plate 13'

The scene of the death of the runaway teenager illustrates the Nordic drama's preference for austere realistic representation as opposed to the American preference for the spectacular. When Anja was shot by the serial killer, Saga and the audience hear the sound of gunfire and a medium shot shows the young teenager laying on the ground and Saga kneeling next to her. Apart from the background music which echoes fast heart beats, the shooting scene is very brief and its violence is kept off-screen. The immediate bridging shot showing the quiet water under a low-key lighting is an austere metonymy of Saga's sadness (Plates 14). In the American version, the same accident is depicted with far more visual and aural exuberance. Detective Sonya is seen running in the streets looking for Gina; the swirling camera movement shows her turning around, thus amplifying her efforts. Then, Gina's shrieking voice warns us that she is being attacked. Sonya kneels next to her and presses her hands on her bleeding chest. A close up shows Sonya's wavering hand trying to stop the oozing blood, and the next sequence focuses on Sonya's hysteric reaction, turning around herself, breathless and asking Hans for help (Plate 15). Sonya's sadness answers the

audience's need for the spectacular, reinforced here by the star presence of Diane Kruger<sup>20</sup>.



Plate 14



Plate 15

### Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can say that the American remake disrupts the conventional generic framework. Elements of the Border drama and of the Western are used and subverted; the American spectacular thrillers are exploited alongside with the traditional crime fiction. According to Rick Altman's observations, this generic multi-layering can be accounted for by the appeal that these different generic characteristics have on different segments of the American audience.

Although the major storyline of *Broen* was faithfully respected, its plot, characters and aesthetics were subject of disavowal. The original series turns out a pretext to revisit and review popular American genres and to shed new light on them. It was also a starting point to delve into a political issue dear to the heart of the writers, whose political concerns for American foreign policies have long been outspoken through their major work *Homeland*. This exercise shows that a remake is not a one way movement from an "original" to a "copy"; it is rather a constellation of choices sparked by the original which awakens feelings nurtured by our cultural and personal heritage. "The landscape of remake-as-translation is no *aller simple*, not only because the concept of authorship, authenticity and originality are themselves complex cultural constructs, but because the relationship between the subject and object, self and other, original and copy is never simply a mirroring; it is also (...) a projection" (Grindstaff, 303).

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<sup>20</sup> Geoff Kind says: "Hollywood blockbusters trade to a large extent on the appeal of big spectacular audio-visual effects: scale and impact". (178) He adds that the "superstar remains a highly desired commodity" (146). Here Diane Kruger is playing against type, with less glitz, thus frustrating the typecast assumption of the audience; hence the need for a heightened representation of the Asperger's syndrome.

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