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“I know where I’ve seen you before!”

Remaking Gender, Class, Nationality and Politics
from *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) into *Flightplan* (2005)

Abstract

This paper addresses the important role of remakes in film culture and their vital function in reflecting societal and cultural transformations. It looks at one particular case study of British to American cross-cultural exchange: *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan*. Comparing British stereotypes from the past in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1938 comedy with contemporary Hollywood preconceptions in Robert Schwentke’s 2005 remake, it shows how the issues of class, nationality, gender, race and politics are presented in films set almost seventy years apart, especially that each of them punctuates an important moment in history and thus inevitably becomes an expression of the then current societal concerns.

At first glance it seems that *Flightplan*’s sole purpose is entertainment. When equipped with the knowledge of the source text, however, we can see that most of the conflicts present in the earlier work resurface in the update. Even though Robert Schwentke’s *Flightplan* was openly compared to a claustrophobic Hitchcock thriller, the screenwriters, Peter A. Dowling and Billy Ray, claim to have written an original script. Still, if one googles the two titles together, it becomes obvious that in the digital era viewers spot any “hidden” remaking practices that soon become common knowledge. This indicates that the similarities between the two films are not accidental but could rather serve as reference-points. Following from that, if Hitchcock’s amusing comedy can be read as a political allegory of the Chamberlain Era, the same may apply to its remake, in which case *Flightplan* emerges as one of the critical voices of the Bush-Cheney administration.

Keywords: Remake, Hollywood, Hitchcock, *Flightplan*, *The Lady Vanishes*, gender, class, race, nationality, politics.

“I know where I’ve seen you before!” shouts the heroine of Hollywood action-packed thriller *Flightplan*, Kyle Pratt, when she spots the possible kidnapers of her daughter on board an aircraft. This feeling of déjà vu also accompanied some viewers who saw the film upon its release in September 2005 and others who have watched it since on DVD because

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Flightplan bears an uncanny resemblance in terms of narrative patterns and key scenes to Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 comedy *The Lady Vanishes*. When you google the two titles together, you get 45,700 hits that in one way or another relate to the two films' unique bond. Starting with a Wikipedia page whose entry on *Flightplan* announces in its opening paragraph that the movie was based on *The Lady Vanishes*, through to numerous film blogs, unofficial reviews, and imdb.com user comments with 38 reviews out of 584 making a direct connection between the two films and numerous others referring to Hitchcock's influence on *Flightplan's* look and atmosphere more generally. Many also point to the links between *Flightplan* and other titles, e.g *Bunny Lake is Missing*, *Into Thin Air*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Frantic*, *Dangerous Crossing*, *The Forgotten*, *Panic Room*, and even *L'Aventura*. Finally, a short mash-up video on youtube.com juxtaposes two key scenes from Hitchcock's and Schwentke's movies to show how they mirror each other.

This should not be surprising as the Hollywood film industry has always sampled ideas, attempting to capitalise on the success of earlier works. The practice is as old as the film industry itself. For instance, writing about Hollywood remakes in the 1950s Druxman notices, "Possibly the best reason for redoing classic films is to adapt these vintage stories to new screen techniques [...]. The coming of sound, for instance, inspired the studios to film their more popular pictures again [...]. The advent of colour and, later, the wide screen, prompted additional remakes of properties that would be enhanced by these new processes" (Druxman 15-18). In a similar fashion, with the development of digital technology in the 1990s came the need to revisit older titles to "do them justice" by means of special effects. Thus, while it is hard to disagree with Leo Brody's observation that "Our time is particularly heavy in remakes [...]" (Brody 332), it seems that their proliferation is not a recent phenomenon. What is new, however, is their visibility made possible thanks to the unprecedented access to digital film material and a vibrant online culture. Writing about "convergence culture," Henry Jenkins observes that "If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public" (Jenkins 19). The digital era may or may not have revolutionised cinema, but it has definitely revolutionised the extent to which viewers disseminate information. Whether seen critically as "the cult of the amateur" or positively in terms of participatory culture, the rise of the figure of "the film geek" (see: *Reinventing Cinema*) means that viewers are now often better informed when writing about films than professional critics. They too are able to judge, compare and tell others if they spot any hidden remaking practices as the case of *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan* clearly shows.

Remakes are also more visible thanks to the academic scrutiny they have enjoyed in recent years. There have been numerous publications dedicated to the study of Hollywood remakes of foreign films: Japanese (*Japanese Horror Films and their American Remakes*, 2013), French (*Encore Hollywood*, 2008 and *Double Takes: Culture and Gender in French Films and Their American Remakes*, 1998), and Norwegian ones (*Same But*

Different: The Success and Failure of Two Hollywood Remakes of Norwegian Films, 2009). Still, the linguistically and culturally complex issue of American remakes of British films has not received adequate attention. When language is no barrier and both films are still engraved in public memory, and/or are easily found online as illegal downloads/fragments on YouTube, updating is motivated by factors other than reviving an old classic, looking for a safe financial investment or exploiting unknown originals. Inevitably, film-makers, producers, stars and viewers alike become part of an intricate web of communication, knowledge and information, the process wherein the remake often beckons for comparison, containing parody, pastiche, and/or homage. Most importantly, such remakes turn out to be a particularly fertile and rewarding ground on which to examine British to American cross-cultural exchange, transformations within the film industry and the way they are reflected on the screen. In other words, as Michael Brashinsky puts it, remakes provide “us with countless clues to the medium, the culture, and ourselves [...]” (Brashinsky 163).

This paper discusses one particular case study that exists, or rather “co-exists,” within the English-speaking world: *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan*. It addresses the important role of remakes in film culture and their vital function in reflecting societal and cultural transformations on the screen and beyond. It attempts to look for reasons why particular texts are revisited at particular times and to what extent one can continue to talk about hidden remaking practices in the digital era. Furthermore, comparing British stereotypes from the past in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1938 comedy with contemporary Hollywood preconceptions in Robert Schwentke’s 2005 remake, it shows how the issues of class, nationality, race, gender and politics are depicted in films set almost seventy years apart, especially that each of them punctuates an important moment in history and thus inevitably becomes an expression of the then current societal concerns. Finally, it tries to answer if Hollywood has made any attempt to address the problem of race, gender, religion or class-based preconceptions in the modern era of political correctness.

The Lady Vanishes derives from at least two sources. It is an adaptation by Sidney Gilliat and Frank Launder of Ethel Lina White’s novel *The Wheel Spins*. Moreover, as Michael Wilmington points out, “the film’s premise has a real-life antecedent: the disappearance of a young woman’s brother during the 1880 Paris Exposition, at a hotel where everyone denied his existence because he had died of plague” (Wilmington). The film had been remade once before by Hammer Film Productions in 1979 but on that occasion the title was kept, the story followed Hitchcock’s script closely, and the project was promoted as a remake of an acknowledged classic. With *Flightplan*, the problem of remaking is more complex for a number of reasons. First of all, the screenwriters of *Flightplan*, Peter A. Dowling and Billy Ray, claim to have written an original script. Secondly, as pointed out above, viewers have traced other possible sources of Schwentke’s film, showing an intricate web of inspirations that further challenges the traditional notions of “original” and “copy.” Out of all the titles mentioned, Otto

Preminger's *Bunny Lake is Missing* is an obvious contender with the story of a mother whose sanity is gradually questioned as she is looking for her daughter whom nobody has seen. In Hitchcock's, however, there is a missing adult. Furthermore, one could argue against the link between *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan* on the grounds of their respective genres: comedy and thriller, but genre switching is not uncommon in remakes and can serve as a powerful indicator of political, social and cultural changes (see for instance the remake of *Stepford Wives* with its camp aesthetics and upbeat happy ending against the bleak vision of the earlier version). When one examines closely the two films' deeper structures, it becomes obvious that the striking similarities between them cannot be dismissed as purely accidental.

Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* is a thriller/espionage/comedy about a young woman called Iris. Most of the action takes place on a train where she befriends an old governess, Miss Froy, whose role in the film has been compared by many critics to that of Iris's surrogate mother. When Iris wakes up from a nap, she discovers that the lady has vanished without a trace. All the passengers claim that they have never seen the old woman and that Iris must have imagined her. Despite constant rebukes, she continues her search and is given a helping hand by a young man called Gilbert. When their attempts prove futile, she begins to succumb to the idea that the whole thing was just a figment of her imagination or a result of concussion caused by a flowerpot that fell on her head just before she boarded the train. Reconciled, she goes to a dining car where she previously had tea with Miss Froy and notices the old woman's writing on the compartment window. This boosts her confidence in her sanity and at the same time confirms her suspicion that the passengers are lying and must hence be part of a conspiracy. Eventually, after many mishaps, Iris's persistence allows her not only to find the whereabouts of the kidnapped elderly lady, but also to save the woman's life and possibly prevent an international conflict from being ignited.

Robert Schwentke's *Flightplan* from 2005 is about a woman in her early forties, Kyle, who is travelling with her six-year-old daughter by plane. When she wakes up from a nap, she discovers that her child is missing. Worse still, when she begins her desperate search, she is confronted by passengers and an unremitting flight crew who claim that they have never seen the girl and that she was never even on board the plane. They persuade her that she is mentally unstable and delusional and that her hallucinations are caused by the recent death of her husband and child. As Kyle begins to concede, she looks at the window pane next to her seat and notices her daughter's drawing. This prompts her to start her search all over again as now she suspects that some members of staff and passengers might be part of a conspiracy. Eventually, after many mishaps, the mother and daughter are reunited and additionally Kyle foils a potential hijack plan.

Despite significant alterations in the script: the train is substituted for a plane and the mother-daughter relationship is reversed, the essential structure remains virtually unchanged: the search for a missing person whose age connotes vulnerability, con-

spiry, kidnapping, confined space, the protagonist as a female detective, the theme of madness and falling asleep, the writing on the window pane, the reunion of two women, and the evasion of international conflict/hijacking. Additionally, the authors of the script appear to include a veiled tribute to *The Lady Vanishes*. In Hitchcock's film there is a motif of a German conspiracy to instigate global conflict in Europe (incidentally, Robert Schwentke is of German origin); in the derivative, the heroine is an aircraft engineer who travels from Berlin, where, as it later turns out, her husband was murdered. Furthermore, in both films, the vehicles are delayed due to unexpected heavy snow, which creates narrative as well as visual doubling.

The Lady Vanishes is an important work in Alfred Hitchcock's portfolio being in many ways a threshold film. To a large extent it may even be seen as both Hitchcock's farewell to England and his passport to America as it proved to be a huge hit on the other side of the Atlantic, winning the New York Critics' award in 1938. Thus, it is no surprise that the film becomes a jovial satire on his countrymen by playing with numerous stereotypes of Englishness as represented here by mostly two social classes: the middle and upper class. It also addresses the issue of class oppression and division, which Charles Barr identifies as a "dominant theme in Hitchcock's film, the basis of the savage behavior that underlies its comedic surface" (Barr). This reading is further supported when one considers Hitchcock's own background as the son of a tradesman and John Houseman's memories of him as "a man of exaggeratedly delicate sensibilities, marked by . . . the scars from a social system against which he was in perpetual revolt and which had left him suspicious and vulnerable, alternately docile and defiant" (qtd. in Barr).

The stereotypical Englishness is best exemplified by two bachelors, Caldicott and Charters, the representatives of the upper class, with their stiff-upper lip, immaculate manners even under heavy duress, pickiness, understatements, love of cricket, fear of women, xenophobia, ignorance of other cultures and languages, and, finally, fondness for routine and order. Their contempt for local cultures, languages and sensitivities is so out of place and incongruent with their circumstances that it makes for most of the comedy in the film. For instance, both men are so much into cricket that they pretend never to have seen the old lady fearing that they may miss the match in Manchester if Iris stops the train. They are also annoyed to find out that not all foreigners speak English and that abroad things do not run exactly the same way as they do at home.

To provide a variant to representatives of well-to-do classes, Hitchcock also shows local peasants from an unnamed Balkan country who appear to spend most of their time folk dancing and playing traditional instruments. Still, to challenge that stereotypical image of the happiness of simple rural life, it appears that some of them are dancing on demand, forced to perform their folk rituals for the pleasure of Gilbert, who collects rural songs – a hobby worth admiring for its importance in preserving folk art for posterity, but at the same time a possible comment on class division and class relations. Gilbert's own class status is hard to read, but judging by his easy man-

ner, lack of financial concerns and his accent, he must be a member of at least the upper middle-class.

While the representatives of various classes are humorously and/or stereotypically sketched out, Hitchcock breaks away from the stereotypical representation of gender by having a strong heroine who is an active agent rather than a passive damsel in distress in need of saving. Iris, whose telling name reveals her detective-like function, instigates the search for the lady and is prepared to go to all measures, and even risk her own life, in the pursuit of the truth. In fact, an alternative interpretation of the title could suggest that in her stubbornness to find Miss Froy, she herself loses her "ladylike-ness." Already at the beginning of the film her rich girl's panache and confidence are misinterpreted by Caldigott and Charters as an indication of her American nationality. As Barr observes, their comment "registers a gulf which is based less on class than on gender: for women to be so in control is outlandish, and thus un-English" (Barr 191). Being the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, she is about to marry a bankrupt aristocrat to help him balance the books and enable her father to climb the social ladder. At the end, she chooses to marry Gilbert, thus refusing to be a pawn in this traditional English transaction.

Hence, in more ways than one, Iris is not a conventional heroine but one of Hitchcock's most interesting women that defies many critics' assumptions of the directors' apparent misogyny. Her stubbornness, courage, persistence as well as her refusal to be subjugated to the male version of the story according to which her hysteria is unfounded and typically feminine contradict the conventional representation of gender and could be seen as indicative of changes taking place in pre-war Britain. According to Sue Harper, in the cinema of the late 1930s, Margaret Lockwood, who plays Iris, belonged to "An emergent cluster of actresses [who] counterbalanced the socially residual effect of the 'ladies'." She calls them "wholesome sensible girls" whose role was to "give the audience confidence in modernity – to let them see that women could be both brisk and pure. 'Wholesome girls' had the double function of comforting and challenging the viewers, who were being gradually acclimatised to newer, more combative female types" (Harper 142-143).

The old lady herself is another playful joke based on stereotypes. Although for most of the film we presume her to be an innocent sweet governess who always travels with her own favourite tea as an obvious sign of English peculiarities, pickiness and fondness of the beverage, at the end we discover that she is in fact an agent under cover. Thus, this apparently benign sweet old granny who carries an important message about a secret pact between two European countries that could shape the course of history is a James Bond in a skirt – or rather a comedic prototype for another Englishwoman defying gender stereotypes, M, played by Judi Dench in the James Bond franchise from 1995-2012.

When looking at other nationalities in the film, it soon becomes obvious that *The Lady Vanishes* is a clever political allegory. Other nations are as cartoon-like and ste-

reotypically drawn as the English are, providing not only comedy but also a sharp political comment on Nazi Germany and its allies. There is an evil neurosurgeon, Dr Hartz of Prague, who speaks with a German accent and is the mastermind behind the plot, and a couple of Italians, a magician and a baroness married to the Minister of Propaganda – both implicated in the kidnapping. However, Hitchcock's criticism is mostly directed at English members of the upper-class. Their complete refusal to join in the search for Miss Froy or to even admit that they have actually seen her has been interpreted as a comment on the Chamberlain Era with Britain turning a blind eye to the progressively dangerous political situation in Europe. Its ambiguous if not sympathetic attitude to Germany is also shown when Caldigott and Charters praise an ill-intentioned officer of apparent German origin for his perfect English accent and are pleased to find out that he is a fellow Oxford boy.

Still, although critical of the English at first, towards the end of the film Hitchcock has almost all of them, including Charters and Caldigott, reunite in the fight with the oppressors. The English opposition is greatly outnumbered and significantly consists of three men and three women. In this gender balance Charles Barr sees an almost prophetic vision of "the national reorientation required for the 'people's war' to come." Interestingly, the only person who refuses to help is judge Todhunter, the representative of the upper-class whose behaviour can be read as "the epitome of seedy ruling class treachery" (Barr 198-200). As Barr notices:

the year of *The Lady Vanishes*, 1938, was also the year of the Munich agreement, and it is tempting to see Todhunter's waving of the white handkerchief, in a futile attempt at appeasement, as a sharp parody of Neville Chamberlain waving the white paper of his agreement with Hitler on his return from Munich, but the film was completed early in the year, many months before Munich, so it is a case of life "reflecting" the film rather than vice versa. (Barr 202)

What happens when Hitchcock's screwball espionage romance is turned into an action-packed Hollywood thriller? At first glance it appears that the issues of class, nationality and gender seem to play a minor role in *Flightplan* whose primary concern appears to be entertainment. Contrary to expectations, when equipped with the knowledge of the earlier work, we can see that most of the conflicts resurface in the update although for obvious reasons they take on a new form and meaning.

First of all, whereas the issue of class divisions does not apply in the American remake, there are nevertheless clearly-marked divisions based on financial status. Thus, the film features numerous lingering shots emphasising differences between economic and business class. When Kyle's persistent requests to search the plane for her missing daughter are finally met by the captain, all the passengers are annoyed. Yet it is a male traveller in business class who makes a sarcastic remark, "It's not like she lost her palm pilot!" Still, whether passengers travel business or economy class, it is clear that most of them are unsympathetic and unwilling to become involved in her quest. In *The Lady Vanishes*, the passengers' refusal to help was triggered by a number of rea-

sons, from political to private and trivial such as missing a cricket match. In *Flightplan*, the lack of cooperation can be read as a bleak comment on society in the new millennium where collective responsibility and a sense of community have been replaced by self-interest and individualism.

Flightplan's most striking and most interesting re-imagining of the source film lies, however, in its treatment of gender. It shows how the representation of women has changed in seventy years and, most importantly, its current status quo in Hollywood. The film is primarily a Jodie Foster star persona vehicle. It is a continuation of her previous roles initiated by her ground-breaking portrayal of FBI agent Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), the importance of which for feminists and lesbian groups cannot be underestimated. Since then, playing roles of strong though often victimised women in a male-dominated world, Foster has established herself as a powerful feminist icon on screen and an important player in the Hollywood industry: an actor, producer and director. In *Flightplan*, in contrast to her English lady-like prototype, Kyle does not need a male companion to back her up. Her husband is dead and the paternal figures of authority on board – the captain and the Air Marshal – are shown as either weak or corrupt. Kyle is a propulsion engineer in her 40s with visible wrinkles and no make-up on to hide them from view, presenting what until recently was a very unlikely image of the main lead in an action thriller.

Still, Jodie Foster's character occasionally borders on caricature. The role was initially written for a male lead, but upon Brian Grazer's suggestion, the part was given to Foster and the script was subsequently rewritten for her. The gender ambiguous name, Kyle, was retained. The final product seems an uneasy mix of two stereotypes that do not sit comfortably with each other. On the one hand, we have Kyle with her motherly concern, warmth, gentleness, confusion, and vulnerability associated with the genre of melodrama. On the other hand, we have a bullet-dodging character whose cunning, physical strength and acrobatics are larger than life and typically associated with the over-the-top and self-reflexive style of Hollywood action flicks with their formulaic one-liners, low-angle shots and slow-motion explosions. As *Flightplan* does not shy away from such a stereotypical representation of the hero typically coded as male, the effect can be unintentionally amusing.

When it comes to the stereotypical portrayal of nationality, it made perfect sense in *The Lady Vanishes* where characters travel across Europe, allowing Hitchcock to depict passengers' reactions to and experiences of new cultures and languages as they travelled across different territories, crossing national borders. When it transpires that they have become unwilling participants in an international military conflict that they do not quite understand, they wish to escape the alien and unfriendly lands and return home to the safety represented in the penultimate sequence and the familiar sight of Victoria station. Although it is difficult to experience border crossing when in mid-air, through its focus on the passengers' fear and suspicion of racial minorities present on the plane, *Flightplan* appears to be making a comment about America's fear of border

violation as a result of post 9/11 paranoia. As Judith Butler aptly explains, the events of 9/11 led most Americans to make a new and shocking discovery that the national borders of The United States were permeable and that violence could come from the outside (Butler 39).

Upon realising that her child may have been abducted, Kyle's immediate suspicion falls on the only two Arabs on board. Although one of them reacts very passively, the other protests their innocence and is clearly enraged by her accusations. Kyle, however, insists that he be searched and interrogated. When the Air Marshal protests that he cannot accuse the only Arabs on board of a criminal conspiracy, she answers, "I don't give a shit about political correctness." Despite the fact that no evidence is found, from then onwards the Arabs are abused verbally and physically by other passengers. In reaction to their public humiliation, one of them challenges, "Anyone else have [sic] any questions for me? Then I guess you have to find a few other Arabs to harass?"

It is difficult to ascertain what the producers of the remake were trying to achieve. On the one hand, they could be accused of typical Hollywood racial profiling and political incorrectness as the Hollywood film industry has repeatedly cast Arabs in stereotypical roles of either terrorists or sex maniacs, as Jack Shaheen observes in his book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001). As the title of his recent publication indicates, *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11* (2008), the tragic events of September 11 and the ensuing governmental policies seem to have provided the movie business with a new licence to further exploit anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments.

Flightplan is extremely topical in its 9/11 allusions. At the time of its release in 2005 it was the second Hollywood film to break the taboo of cashing in on America's tragedy by bringing to the screen a story that bore similarities to real-life events. There is no doubt about the fact that the film plays on the audience's post 9/11 fears. As the screenwriter, Billy Ray, admits, "We take advantage of the level of paranoia that's out there now" (Ray). For example, Foster's character demands that the plane be searched on account of new procedures following the attacks. Passengers regard non-white ethnic minorities on board with prejudice, suspicion and fear. They also, on a smaller scale, represent and demonstrate the prerogatives of the US governmental policy of "Indefinite Detention." They are easily provoked when faced with unexpected difficulties and also quickly jump to conclusions. They react with anxiety and rage, expressing "a radical desire for security" and a need for "a heightened surveillance of Arab peoples and anyone who looks vaguely Arab in the dominant racial imaginary, anyone who looks like someone you once knew who was of Arab descent, or who you thought was" (Butler 39). According to Butler, the media and government authorise and increase racial hysteria, encouraging individuals to be on a constant look-out for alien elements without specifying what they are and how one could protect oneself from them. As a consequence "everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror" and "an amorphous racism abounds, rationalized by the claim of 'self-defense'" (Butler 39).

On the other hand, however, as the two Arabs turn out to be innocent, *Flightplan* could be praised for toying with and subverting the viewer's own prejudices and preconceptions resulting from post 9/11 trauma. When Kyle rescues her daughter from the burning plane, the only passenger to approach her is the Arab she previously mistreated. He picks up her bag, hands it over to her and they make eye contact. Kyle smiles at him gently. This could be read as a gesture of reconciliation, an expression of sympathy and a mutual recognition of what it is like to be misunderstood and unjustly abused. It also explains why *Flightplan* is on Jack Shaheen's list of recommended films in *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11* for its positive portrayal of Arabs in the post 9/11 cinematic imaginary.

Finally, if Hitchcock's amusing comedy can be read as a political allegory, can the same apply to its remake? According to Douglas Kellner, who analyses key films of the 2000s as a reaction to the horrors of the Bush-Cheney era, "Films can display social realities of the time in documentary and realist fashion, directly representing the events and phenomena of an epoch. But films can also provide allegorical representations that interpret, comment on, and indirectly portray aspects of an era" (Kellner 14). *Flightplan*, whose story pretends to be about a terrorist attack with a couple of Arabs as all too obvious contenders for the terrorists eventually features a benevolent looking, white, middle-class air marshal as the main villain of the piece. Instead of protecting the plane and its passengers against harm, he is in fact exploiting their fear and manipulates the feeling of panic on board to his own advantage. His reasons, however, do not seem to be political. They are entirely motivated by greed. Is it possible to read his condescending words to Kyle "You know, people will think what I tell them to think. That's how authority works" as a veiled comment on the Bush-Cheney administration of the period even though Kellner does not include this title in his analysis of Hollywood political critiques?

The answer may be found in Ron Suskind's article published in The New York Times exactly a year before *Flightplan* opened in America at the time when it was still in its production stage. The author of "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush" recalls:

In the summer of 2002, after I had written an article in Esquire that the White House didn't like about Bush's former communications director, Karen Hughes, I had a meeting with a senior adviser to Bush. He expressed the White House's displeasure, and then he told me something that at the time I didn't fully comprehend – but which I now believe gets to the very heart of the Bush presidency.

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judi-

ciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.” (Suskind)

It seems likely then that the creators of *Flightplan* contrived a narrative which not only echoes the events of the era but also represents its key political players. Guided by Hitchcock’s prior text, we become clued up to discover much more than is apparent at first viewing as the film can then be read less directly and more allegorically. Considering the proliferation of other works that critically engaged with the governmental policies of the time in a more or less obvious fashion, for instance, *Crash* (2005), *The Deal* (2005) and *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), it is possible to see *Flightplan* in a larger context as another such voice. It is therefore not an accident that Hitchcock’s film about a potential military conflict was revived at the point when America saw George W. Bush sworn in for his second term as President, which is poignantly reflected in the change of genre from the light mood of the earlier work into a menacing and dark thriller whose happy ending feels too forced and cliché to counterbalance the lack of security, paranoia, and a prevailing sense of loneliness, fear and corruption. Thus, remakes not only show the potential of earlier works to generate new versions but also, by introducing changes, become a comment on societal and cultural transformations.

Today’s viewers can no longer be seen as isolated individuals with a limited access to film material or knowledge who need to rely on the professional critic. They are part of a vibrant online culture whose collective intelligence and competence are a sign of modern times. Even if Roger Ebert does not spot any “hidden” remaking practices in *Flightplan*, they soon become common knowledge thanks to those viewers who circulate their findings worldwide on film blogs, forums and data bases. In the case of *Flightplan*, the producers want to have their cake and eat it. Not having obtained the rights to the earlier film, they brand their product an original work. Yet, by including all too obvious references to *The Lady Vanishes*, they have ensured that *Flightplan* enters a more interesting critical discourse by profiting from its remake-of-the-classic status with critics and audiences in the know relishing in this feminist and political Hitchcock re-write. Looking at user comments on imdb.com, it seems that this strategy has worked. On the one hand, we have viewers entertained by this action-packed movie or enraged by its convoluted plot; on the other hand, we have those who see it as a rewarding update of a known classic and those for whom it is little more than a poor Hitchcock imitation. Looking at the reviews and scores placed by people who recognize *Flightplan* as the remake of *The Lady Vanishes*, eight give it five out of ten stars, thirteen less than five stars, and eighteen six or more stars, thus showing that the film’s remake status has been generally perceived rather positively as these viewers found pleasure in the act of comparing the two works. Moving away from Druxman’s opinion that “The biggest ‘cross’ that the producer of a remake must bear

is his audience's memory" (Druxman 24), the viewers' own responses would support Linda Hutcheon's dictum that what lies at the heart of the pleasure of adaptation is exactly that: repetition with variation, recognition, remembrance and change (Hutcheon 4). The case of *Flightplan* and *The Lady Vanishes* proves above all Brody's assertion that "It is the audience, or the audiences, that decide what is variable and what is unchanging in art, what vanishes and what lasts, what can be revived and what remains dead. Only one member of that audience is the remaker, and only one is the critic" (Brody 333).

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