

Atalya de Cock; Eduard Cuelenaere; Gertjan Willems; Stijn Joye
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Rewind, recycle, revive! An investigation into nostalgia-driven sequel and requel practices in small European film industries: The case of Flanders



Atalya de Cock, Eduard Cuelenaere, Gertjan Willems, and Stijn Joye

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Abstract

In the last decade, nostalgia-driven imitative filmmaking – characterised by reuels and ‘belated’ sequels – has become ubiquitous in commercial cinema globally. While the transgenerational appeal of nostalgia in Hollywood has been researched extensively, smaller European film industries like Flanders remain underexplored in this regard. This article focuses on three case studies to investigate how Flemish nostalgia-driven sequels and reuels employ transgenerational nostalgia both within the films and in their marketing endeavours. Compared to Hollywood’s consistent 1980s nostalgia strategy, Flemish cinema employs nostalgia as a short-term commemorative tactic, celebrating Flemish pop culture artefacts of the recent past instead of the past itself.

Keywords

Flemish cinema, reboots, transgenerational nostalgia, nostalgia cycle

Cinema is taking a trip down memory lane. Harrison Ford came out of retirement for ‘one last adventure’ in *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (2023) while Tom Cruise returned after more than thirty years as *Maverick in Top Gun Maverick* (2022). This resurgence of nostalgia-driven films is part of a broader ‘recycle film cultures’ trend, and while Hollywood is often synonymous with this phenomenon, European film industries are increasingly embracing it as well.

Contrary to the popular cliché that Europe predominantly produces highbrow art cinema, European film industries have a thriving popular film production as well, albeit on a smaller scale and with less financial means than Hollywood and often less internationally oriented. Since the early 2000s, major European film industries such as France have seen a

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

significant increase in recycle film cultures, which, according to Christopher Meir,[1] is modelled on typical Hollywood practices. Also in smaller European film industries such as Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern region of Belgium, a recycle film culture has flourished.[2]

Characterised by forms of imitative filmmaking including remakes, sequels, and spin-offs, recycle film cultures have become an essential part of mainstream cinema.[3] Importantly, the concept of recycle film cultures encompasses various types of audiovisual adaptation, extending beyond the recycling of films. In the Flemish context, there are particularly many films based on television series.

Drawing upon Kathleen Loock and Ryan Lizardi's work on nostalgia-driven recycle films and transgenerational bonding,[4] this article offers an exploratory investigation into the emergence of nostalgia-driven sequels and requels in the Flemish film industry. More precisely, we focus on franchises that originate from popular Flemish (youth) television series. This contribution aims to bolster the nascent field of research into nostalgia-driven recycle film cultures in European cinema, while comparing it to the extensive body of work dedicated to this practice in Hollywood.[5]

While nostalgia is a complex phenomenon that translates to media in various ways, we are particularly interested in how nostalgia has become a key feature of transmedial adaptation, specifically within the realm of nostalgia-driven sequels and requels. Nostalgia in this context is mainly displayed through intertextual references to specific pop-culture artefacts in order to bond generations to a franchise. Hollywood has turned nostalgia-driven recycling into a profitable industry strategy by mainly reviving dormant 1980s franchises (and most recently of the 1990s and early 2000s as well). However, this does not translate one-to-one to the smaller local film industry of Flanders.

We argue that while Flemish cinema employs the same nostalgia-driven recycled filmmaking, it adopts a different approach, using it as a short-term tactic rather than a long-term strategy. Compared to Hollywood's global appeal, Flemish nostalgia-driven recycle films maintain their 'localness' by sourcing material from the Flemish public broadcaster VRT. Interestingly, Flemish source texts do not adhere to one period as is the case for Hollywood, making it more difficult to maintain a cohesive strategy targeting one generation's nostalgia and taking younger generations for the ride. Instead, Flanders approaches nostalgic recycling as an opportunistic commemorative tactic to revive a popular Flemish cultural artefact for its anniversary.

Using three Flemish nostalgia-driven sequels and requels as our case studies, we will investigate how Flemish popular cinema employs transgenerational nostalgia through the films' intertextual dependency and their marketing strategies, compared to nostalgic

Hollywood practices. Adopting a multi-methodological approach, this article presents a textual analysis of the three cases, an extratextual analysis of their promotional paratexts (including titles, social media, and trailers), and a reception analysis of audience and critic responses.

The nostalgia factory: Manufacturing commodified yearning

Nostalgia is a multi-layered concept. Over time, it evolved from an individual emotional state of wistful longing for the past into a part of the postmodern human condition, exploited by capitalism and the entertainment industry.[6] In her seminal work *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym discusses nostalgia as a 'symptom of our age' that amounts to a longing for an unattainable past, which the entertainment industry attempts to make accessible through pop culture artefacts.[7] Frederic Jameson's equally influential concept of the 'nostalgia film' refers to pastiche where history is reduced to 'glossy images' exploited for their aesthetics and style, rather than for their content.[8] Andrew Higson elaborates on Boym's and Jameson's ideas, suggesting that contemporary nostalgia has become a 'vital means of marketing consumer items from the recent past [...] if there is any lingering tension between past and present, it is easily overcome'.[9] The unattainable past becomes attainable through pop culture artefacts.

Following Boym's, Jameson's, and Higson's observations, nostalgia continues to be a symptom of our age, extending its presence as pastiche further as pop culture and (audiovisual) media become more and more self-referential. As the media industry exploits people's nostalgia for the recent past, it has become commodified. There is no longer any distance between the past and the present since a re-experience of the past (and by extension one's youth) is now accessible through capitalist consumption of objects and brands.[10] Accordingly, nostalgia transformed from a wistful yearning into a consumable celebration of itself and cultural artefacts of the recent past.[11] No longer is nostalgia exclusive to people who experienced the past – now it is also available to those who did not; [12] it has become nostalgia for nostalgia's sake.

Nostalgia has arguably become one of the most dominant presences in contemporary cinema, notably through recycle films. Jason Sperb argues: '[the] era of sequels, prequels and reboots certainly suggests a more conscious industrial effort to exploit nostalgia's economic potential'.[13] Recycle films such as sequels and reboots, characterised by returning characters, cinematic universes, and reused plotlines, serve as an ideal vessel for nostalgic exploitation. Therefore, we argue that commodified nostalgia is exemplified by recycle film cultures, such as nostalgia-driven sequels and resequels. The commercial viability of these types of filmmaking is clear, as film studios consider presold formats such as sequels and reboots a safer financial bet than introducing new IP, since they come with a

presumed 'built-in' audiences.[14] Moreover, the incorporation of nostalgia enhances this appeal, by resonating with different generations simultaneously. Particularly requels and belated sequels strike a balance between sentimentality and renewal, aiming to attract new audiences to an established franchise while honouring the original to avoid alienating existing fans.[15]

When we look at textual and paratextual analyses of nostalgia-driven media, scholars like Higson and Pam Cook explore the role of *mise-en-scène* (e.g. costumes, landscapes) and cinematography (e.g. soft focus, flashbacks) in constructing a romanticised image of the past.[16] We argue that for 'nostalgia-driven recycle filmmaking', the emphasis shifts from merely aestheticising the past through cinematic style to incorporating intertextual references to pop culture artefacts. This approach aims to evoke a sense of familiarity, potentially reviving viewers' childhood memories. Furthermore, within the context of recycle film cultures, the power of nostalgia extends beyond reconnecting older generations to the franchises of their youth. It also fosters transgenerational bonding, connecting younger generations to the same cultural icons enjoyed by their (grand)parents.[17]

Recycle film cultures and nostalgia

While recycle film cultures have arguably existed since the beginning of cinema, Look argues that the shift to nostalgia-driven recycling has only become persistent during the last decade with the resurrection of dormant franchises such as *Star Wars* (1977-) and *Jurassic Park* (1993-).[18] Although nostalgia films are not new, their cultural dominance in mainstream cinema today and the role recycle film cultures play in it present an intriguing development. A new hybrid form of recycle film cultures emerged which journalists and academics have coined the 'requel': a nostalgia-driven film that combines elements of both sequels and reboots.[19]

Remakes, and by extension reboots, are often compared to parasites, preying on the success of their source text. Thomas Leitch argues the paradox of fidelity and revision lies at the core of all remakes. [20] This can manifest in different ways, such as the 'true remake' which seeks to improve its predecessor. Reboots similarly tend to 'disrupt the continuity of a franchise to start over with radically redesigned characters and storylines',[21] reinventing and rejecting their predecessors. Requels, however, are reluctant to disavow their predecessor(s) and remain heavily intertextually dependent on them. While they reboot their source material with new characters, plotlines, and settings, they simultaneously – similarly to sequels – preserve the continuity of the original with cameos, references, and similar themes.[22] Requels maintain continuity to avoid the negative perception reboots and true remakes often face for 'undermining' their predecessors. Instead, requels enhance the legacy of the source material.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

Initially, requels may not differ much from other recycle film practices, as they share a dynamic of balancing continuity and renewal. However, the novelty lies in requels' employment of nostalgia by rebooting franchises that have been inactive for decades. The decades-long interval between the source text and its follow-up does not only aim to instil nostalgia in its original audience but also tries to lure in new generations. Lookk argues that requels 'rely on the return of beloved characters (and actors) as well as on recognisable narrative and aesthetic elements from their respective franchise pasts in order to bind successive generations of viewers to their ongoing, decades-spanning storylines'.^[23] These nostalgia-driven hybrids, therefore, create a transgenerational appeal by attracting nostalgic fans with intertextual continuity while also acting as an entry point for new (younger) audiences. Thus, binding generations to the same franchise perpetuates the cultural relevance of an IP and creates 'an aura of cultural legitimacy'^[24] around the requel, reinforcing its own importance by association. D.G. Green's *Halloween* trilogy (2018-2022), for example, are requels which ignore the previous instalments, thus rebooting the franchise and posing as direct sequels to the original 1978 film.

Legacyquels (also known as legacy sequels), a subtype of requels, intensify this generational connection further. While requels often include cameos of characters from previous instalments – frequently played by the original actors – in legacyquels these characters take on an active mentor role for the new leads (e.g. Rocky Balboa in *Creed* [2015]). This is both a textual strategy to emphasise the continuity between the original film(s) and the legacyquel but also serves a symbolic purpose. Legacyquels deliberately thematise their function in the text, honouring their predecessors while advancing the franchise.^[25] The most recent *Star Wars* legacyquel-trilogy (2015-2019) is exemplary for this type of nostalgia-driven transgenerational bonding experience.

Lizardi mentions that Gen X, millennials, and zoomers are often regarded as the most nostalgic generations.^[26] This is perhaps unsurprising, given the abundance of nostalgic media surrounding them. Notably, current Hollywood nostalgia-driven requels often derive from popular 1980s and, to a lesser extent, 1970s franchises, hence directly targeting Gen X nostalgia (born 1960-1980) and aiming to bind millennials (born 1980s to mid-1990s) and zoomers (born mid-1990s-early 2000s) to their cultural heritage.

While requels are a noticeable new development of nostalgia-driven recycle film cultures, they are not the only way imitative filmmaking embraces nostalgia. Direct 'belated' sequels to films and television series arising decades after their last instalment are also gaining traction. While belated sequels may not attract as much scholarly attention as requels, they equally employ nostalgia through intertextual continuity (e.g. returning actors). Yet, their primary focus is to entertain existing fans rather than attract new audiences. Belated sequels appear both as blockbusters (e.g. *Zoolander 2* [2016]) and as smaller made-for-

streaming productions (e.g. *Zoey 102* [2023]), highlighting how nostalgia infuses all types of recycle film cultures.

Bring back the 1990s: Flemish millennial nostalgia and Ketnet-adults

While the 1980s nostalgia cycle currently dominates Hollywood, film studios are also capitalising on millennials' and zoomers' 1990s and 2000s nostalgia. This is illustrated by the recent surge of 1990s Disney live-action remakes. By faithfully remaking the source film, they celebrate the cultural icons of nostalgic millennials' and zoomers' childhoods. This is noteworthy since nostalgic audiences are assumed to celebrate the cultural icons of their young adulthood, not their childhood. The period most people usually feel nostalgic for, known as the reminiscence bump, occurs between the ages of 14 and 29,[27] an age not all millennials have reached yet.

This trend extends beyond Disney remakes, however, as Flanders is currently fascinated with reviving local franchises from the 1990s and 2000s. In the Flemish media industry, this cycle has taken hold since 2016, almost coinciding with the start of the 1980s cycle in the US in 2015.[28] Ketnet and Studio 100, major Flemish producers of children's content, chiefly tap into millennials' and zoomers' youth sentiment, reviving several beloved children's television series and media from those periods through reboots, reunion series, and concerts celebrating 'Ketnetters' nostalgia. This is especially interesting since Ketnet is part of the Flemish public service broadcaster VRT, formerly known as BRT.

This nostalgia cycle gained momentum when Studio 100 and Ketnet collaborated to organise *Throwback Thursday in het Sportpladijs*, a concert series commemorating Ketnet's twentieth anniversary. Marketed as a celebration for the first generation of Ketnetters, the event lured Ketnet-fans in with 'exclusive' reunions featuring casts of beloved Ketnet television series. The event explicitly targeted (young) adults who were part of Ketnet's initial viewer base, despite Ketnet's primary audience encompassing children up to the age of 14. In 2022, Studio 100 repeated this idea with the *Studio 100 rewind party*, a 16+ event celebrating its 25th anniversary. In sum, Ketnet and Studio 100 strategically and successfully commodified the nostalgia of millennials (and the older end of zoomers).

In response to this emerging trend, journalists wondered why millennials, even in their twenties, already wanted to reconnect with their childhood.[29] Hence, similarly to Disney adults who continue to engage with Disney content from their childhood into adulthood, we argue that a Flemish equivalent exists in the form of 'Ketnet-adults' based on the success and quantity of nostalgic Ketnet and Studio 100 content. Additionally, comparable

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

to Disney, Studio 100 and Ketnet extend the transgenerational appeal of their franchises, providing new entry points through, for example, follow-up series. A significant portion of their content holds inherent transgenerational appeal, thanks to their continuous reruns and availability on streaming platforms, making them available to both Ketnet-adults and new audiences simultaneously.

Nostalgia-driven recycle film cultures in Flanders

Being a rather novel development in recycle film cultures, European film industries eagerly embraced the lucrative phenomenon of nostalgia-driven sequels and requals. Nevertheless, research on this trend, and arguably on European recycle film cultures in general, remains limited, although they pose an interesting commercial opportunity, especially for small film industries such as Flanders.[30] With its modest domestic market of 6.5 million inhabitants and heavy dependence on governmental support, recycle film cultures offer the Flemish industry the opportunity to have a steady influx of financially viable mainstream popular cinema.[31]

Since the early 2000s, Flanders has witnessed a surge in the production of recycle films, achieving local success. Currently, popular Flemish television series serve as a significant source for film sequels, often produced while the original series is still ongoing or shortly after its conclusion. Nostalgia-driven sequels and requals – capitalising on the recognisability inherent to imitative film practices by presenting a pre-sold idea, and intensified by the presence of nostalgia – are finding their footing in Flanders as well.

Recently, three films have emerged that illustrate this phenomenon, with the interval between the source text and its follow-up spanning over several decades (see table). First, *Zeppos het Mercatorspoor* (2022) is a legacyquel to the 1960s BRT children's series *Kapitein Zeppos* (1964-1969). Second, *De Collega's 2.0* (2018) is a requel of late 1970s, early 1980s BRT comedy series *De Collega's* (1978-1981). Third, *Beraf!* (2021) is a belated direct sequel to early 2000s young adult series *W817* (1999-2003), a Ketnet production that fits the millennial and zoomer nostalgia cycle.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

Overview consulted materials			
Title and director(s)	Type of content	Release dates	Medium
<i>Kapitein Zeppos</i> [<i>Captain Zeppos</i>] (Dir. Bert Struys; Jef Demedts; Senne Rouffaer)	Source text	Season 1: 1964 Season 2: 1968 Season 3: 1968	Television series Total episodes: 31
<i>Zeppos het Mercatorspoor</i> [<i>The Mercator Trail</i>] (Dir. Douglas Boswell)	Legacyquel	2022	Film
<i>De Collega's</i> [<i>The Colleagues</i>] (Dir. Jan Mattered; Vincent Rouffaer)	Source text	Season 1:1978-1979 Season 2:1979-1980 Season 3: 1980-1981	Television Series Total episodes: 36
<i>De Collega's maken de Brug!</i> [<i>The Colleagues have a Bank Holiday!</i>] (Dir. Vincent Rouffaer)	Source text	1988	Film
<i>De Collega's 2.0</i> [<i>The Colleagues 2.0</i>] (Dir. Jan Verheyen)	Requel	2018	Film
<i>W&I7</i> (Dir. Pietje Horstens)	Source text	Season 1: 1999 Season 2: 2000 Season 3: 2001 Season 4: 2002 Season 5: 2003	Television series Total episodes: *131
<i>Beraf!</i> (Dir. Pietje Horstens)	Belated Sequel	2021	Film

*This analysis consulted the 129 available episodes. Due to offensive language two of the original episodes are no longer accessible on streaming services.

Table 1: Overview of consulted materials.

What sets these cases apart is their heavy intertextual dependence on their source texts, exploiting the nostalgia factor both on and off screen. Furthermore, the three cases, each drawing upon a television series produced by the Flemish public broadcaster VRT, elicit different transgenerational appeals: family film *Zeppos het Mercatorspoor* engages with baby boomer (born between 1946-1964) and Gen X nostalgia, simultaneously targeting young children, whereas *De Collega's 2.0* targets Gen X nostalgia and aims to include millennials. *Beraf!* resonates primarily with millennials and zoomers. In essence, these cases provide a relevant and intriguing starting point to investigate how regional film industries use transgenerational nostalgia in their recycle films and how their strategies diverge from or mirror those of Hollywood.

Methodology

For our analysis, we adopt a multi-methodological approach. First, a textual analysis of the three cases explores whether they display similar tropes seen in other requels and nostalgia-driven sequels. This mainly concerns their intertextual dependence on predecessors, since according to Loock, '[d]irect references and allusions function as orienting devices for audiences'.^[32] This includes narrative repetition and aesthetic codes such as visual references, returning actors, and re-used musical themes.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

Second, an extratextual analysis of their promotional paratexts (e.g. social media and trailers) has been conducted. According to Jonathan Gray,[33] these promotional efforts play a crucial role in shaping audience interpretations, making them a valuable angle for investigating how nostalgia is implemented to hook existing fans and new audiences alike, with attention to any transgenerational appeal.

Finally, Higson and Stefanie Armbruster argue that media studies often overlook the agency of audiences in their viewing processes when it comes to nostalgia. Their actual responses often are assumed instead of actively studied.[34] Therefore, this article conducts a reception analysis, examining news coverage, professional reviews (*8erafl* professional reviews n=1; *De Collega's 2.0* n=6; and *Zeppos het Mercatorspoor* n=4), and independent user reviews posted on the review platform Letterboxd (*8erafl* user reviews n=99; *De Collega's 2.0* n=17; and *Zeppos het Mercatorspoor* n=14). This approach aims to gauge whether the nostalgia displayed on screen and through promotional efforts resonates with the audience as intended.

Nostalgia-driven sequels: *8erafl* made for and by the fans

W817 was a comedic young adult series depicting the life of friends sharing a student house. The show ran for 131 episodes over five seasons, becoming one of Ketnet's most popular programs. Debuting in 1999, *W817* premiered at a pivotal point in Ketnet's history when the television channel was still shaping its target audience. The first season targeted viewers between 12 and 16 years old, featuring explicit language and references to mature themes. Subsequent seasons shifted towards more child-friendly humour, aligning with Ketnet's target audience of 8 to 14-year-olds. Despite this shift, the series' popularity kept growing, expanding to include a comic book series and a band. Reruns of *W817* aired until 2020 on Ketnet and episodes are (at time of writing) still available on streaming platforms, guaranteeing ongoing engagement with new audiences. The show garnered a cult following of Ketnet-adults, solidifying its position in the collective memory of Flemish millennials.

In 2016, *W817* returned for the Sportpladijs concerts, sparking rumours of a possible revival. Eventually in 2020, *8erafl* was announced, a belated sequel film reuniting the friends after eighteen years. In a social media post, *8erafl* was revealed by *W817* cast members, highlighting the return of (most of) the cast and its original director. However, the film's financing was incomplete, as the reveal also announced a crowdfunding campaign. Whoever purchased one of the 50,000 tickets needed to finish the film could attend one of its exclusive screenings, as it was announced the film would not be part of regular programming. This marketing campaign leveraged fans' nostalgia to finance *8erafl*,

a strategy Matt Hills describes as 'fan-ancing'. By emotionally engaging the crowdfund backers, fan-ancing transformed the film from a commercial product into an authentic project that fans actively could contribute to.[35] In interviews, the *8erafl* cast emphasised how the crowdfunding campaign aligned with the rebellious spirit of *W817* and promised 'pure nostalgia' for its fans, portraying the film as a labour of love made for the fans by the fans. Remarkably, *8erafl* was not funded through typical crowdfunding platforms but through directly pre-selling tickets for the film at a fixed price. Newspapers continuously reported on the crowdfunding campaign, referring to *W817* as a 'legendary' series, underscoring its enduring place in the collective memory.

8erafl attempted to further engage fans' sentimental nostalgic attachment through social media. The actors delivered crowdfunding campaign updates 'in character', using catchphrases, musical cues, and a set reminiscent of the original series. Its social media campaign contained an abundance of throwback content such as old photoshoots, clips, and links to rewatch the original series online, encouraging audiences to re-engage with *W817*. The crowdfunding reached its goal within a month. However, the *8erafl* screening would not remain exclusive for the 'fan-ancers' as promised. The film was put into theatres' regular programming several months after the exclusive screenings were finished. Over 100,000 people went to see it, making *8erafl* the second-highest-grossing Flemish film domestically in 2021. Afterwards, the film became freely available on VRT's streaming platform and was broadcast on television channel VRT 1 as well, which disappointed some of its 'fan-ancers'. Nonetheless, *8erafl* proved that its intensive nostalgic marketing campaign paid off. By capitalising on its nostalgic Ketnet-adult appeal and deliberately playing into the reinvigorated popularity of *W817* spurred by the Sportpladijs-concerts, *8erafl* was able to overcome the limitations of a regional film industry.

Textually, *8erafl* is heavily intertextually dependent on nostalgia as well. The setup of the belated sequel, a reunion eighteen years after the characters parted ways, provides an ideal stage for a nostalgia-driven transmedial sequel. *8erafl* incorporates numerous references to *W817*, including a shot-for-shot remake of the *W817* intro, and the reuse of catchphrases and sound effects. Narratively, unresolved storylines of *W817* were picked up in *8erafl* with the film's overarching plot revolving around the romance between main characters Carlo and Birgit.

A significant intertextual nostalgic connection to the show is the reveal of Carlo's secret 'safe space', a re-creation of the original *W817* living room including its 'iconic' couch. This is significant since Carlo's favourite space was also the central set of the show. Moreover, the couch is the centrepiece of the series' intro, further establishing it as an object of senti-

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

mental value for both the characters and the audience. The film wraps up with all the friends reunited on this couch as well, attempting to trigger the audience's nostalgia one last time. Something remarkable about this living room re-creation – next to its explicit artificiality as Carlo's nostalgic creation – is its sterile look (Fig. 1) compared to the lively clutter it was surrounded by in *W817* (Fig. 2). Although the layout is roughly the same, the original living room was plastered with 1990s and 2000s references such as a large cutout of Tomb Raider and posters of popular contemporary bands. *W817* distinctly captured the essence of the early 2000s by referencing popular culture and aesthetics both visually and in dialogue. The *Beraf!* living room, however, is stripped of any such references, which reflects the film's commodified nostalgia, celebrating only the nostalgic artefact, becoming nostalgia for nostalgia's sake. *Beraf!* presents a non-reflective submersion into pure nostalgia, as was promised to its fans.



Fig. 1: The sterile living room as seen in *Beraf!*.



Fig. 2: The cluttered living room as seen in *W817*.

Instead of trying to attract new audiences with some element of renewal, the belated sequel fully focused on evoking sentimentality in fans through intertextual references. This approach seemed to resonate with user film reviews on Letterboxd. *Beraf!* mostly received (mildly) positive ratings, often explicitly mentioning nostalgia. Many favourable reviews pointed out its shortcomings in terms of a weak plot, humour and so forth, but felt that

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

these were compensated by its nostalgic appeal. This appeal was invoked solely through its intertextuality with *W817* (e.g. returning characters, gags, sound bites) as a cultural artefact of the audience's childhood.

Notably, while the Flemish press closely followed the updates on the crowdfunding campaign of *8erafl*, only Humo magazine published a review of the film. Similarly to the fan reactions, Humo seemed willing to overlook many of the film's perceived flaws due to its nostalgic appeal, rating it three stars and dubbing it sarcastically as 'the reference porn the Pokémon generation paid for'.^[36] In sum, the intertextual nostalgic appeal of the text appeared to be able to positively impact the audience's reception, even when the actual content was not considered up to par.

Similar to other nostalgic Ketnet productions, *8erafl* was focused on fans of the series. Its transgenerational appeal was limited to those who watched it during its original run or reruns. By promoting itself as a film for and by the fans, *8erafl* did not try to engage other generations by offering a new entry point into the franchise as requels would do. As a belated sequel, it fully indulged in its nostalgic intertextual dependency.

While *8erafl* and Ketnet play into similar millennial and zoomer audiences as Disney's recycle films, its appeal is obviously more local and limited. Lacking the infrastructure to transform this success into a long-term strategy – at the time of writing no further attempts to revive similar millennial franchises into belated film sequels have been made – *8erafl* was 'lightning in a bottle'. By (financially) playing into the childhood nostalgia generated by the commemoration of Ketnet's twentieth anniversary (and implicitly the *W817* anniversary), *8erafl* was a risk-averse short-term tactical manoeuvre instead of the start of a larger strategy of Ketnet to create other Ketnet belated sequels. The next two case studies similarly resulted in isolated nostalgic transmedial film adaptations following an anniversary of their respective franchises.

Nostalgia-driven requels in Flanders

Contrary to *8erafl*, nostalgia-driven requels *Zeppos het Mercatorspoor* and *De Collega's 2.0* aimed at both a nostalgic (Gen X and/or baby boomer generations) and a new audience. The cases' source texts originate from the 1960s and 1970s respectively, a departure from the 1990s and 2000s nostalgia cycle that currently characterises Flemish media, including *8erafl*. Typical for requels, both films navigate the balance between sentimentality and renewal, carrying the cultural weight of their predecessors while adopting distinct marketing and film textual approaches.

Zeppos Het Mercatorspoor: Legacyquels and generational bonding

Kapitein Zeppos, a Flemish children's series from the 1960s, follows the adventures of Captain Zeppos and his young companion Ben Kurrel. Originally aired and produced by BRT, the show spanned three seasons. The series is celebrated for starting a 'golden age' of Flemish youth programming, with its writer Louis De Groof and his crew continuing to create popular children's series including *De Kat* (The Cat, 1973). Zeppos became Flanders' first action hero, a James Bond-like figure who relies more on his wits than his fists, although his fencing skills come in handy when confronting antagonists. Elements such as the theme tune and Zeppos' iconic amphicar – a car that could float in water – quickly found their place in the collective memory.

Being an adventure film, the transmedial legacyquel *Zeppos Het Mercatorspoor* follows orphan Benjamin Kurrel, a tech-savvy teenager, and his friend Slien as they unravel a conspiracy tied to a treasure map Benjamin inherited from his long-missing father Ben. The treasure map reveals the location of the mythical Golden Fleece. Assisted by the enigmatic Zeppos, now an elderly man, they stop tech mogul Barral from obtaining the Fleece.

Plans for a Zeppos film already emerged in 2006, since the production company saw its potential after popular reruns of the series in 2004 – to celebrate 50 years of Flemish television. *Mercatorspoor*, however, only materialised over a decade later. Interestingly, the cast and crew consistently emphasised that *Mercatorspoor* was not a remake but an homage. This approach aimed at upholding the 'legendary' status of *Kapitein Zeppos* while developing its own identity as a new adventure family film, catering to both the original fans and a new child audience. Although the cast and crew do not use the term requel or legacyquel, their description does reflect their key traits: renewal and sentimental continuity. Additionally, *Mercatorspoor* is a legacyquel due to the generational renewal, textually and extratextually, central to the film, with an ageing Zeppos becoming the mentor of Benjamin, the son of his previous prodigy Ben Kurrel, preparing him as the new lead character of the franchise.

Its promotional paratexts mainly emphasised renewal, with *Mercatorspoor* operating as a new entry point to the Zeppos brand and as an exciting new family film. For example, the word 'Kapitein' is excluded from the title. This concurrently makes the title snappier and distances it slightly from the series. Its social media content similarly emphasised this newness, foregrounding the stunts and action scenes.

In contrast to *Beraft*, *Mercatorspoor* minimised its nostalgic content. This is unsurprising, as its primary audience is children aged 9 and up, who do not have a nostalgic connection to the original. Still, its transgenerational appeal was not untapped. To attend its avant-

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

première, viewers had to come with two generations: presumably the target audience (children) and a (grand)parent who possibly watched the original series. While not straightforwardly appealing to nostalgic audiences with throwback content on the history of *Kapitein Zeppos*, implicitly it uses nostalgia as a transgenerational bonding experience, with the prospect of two generations consuming their own iteration of Zeppos.

On a textual level, *Mercatorspoor* similarly leaned towards renewal, but it also incorporated nostalgic intertextual references. Original actor Senne Rouffaer – as most of the original cast – passed away years before filming started. Instead of reintroducing Zeppos as a young action hero, *Mercatorspoor* decided to cast an older actor (Carry Goossens) for the role. While older and less agile, his characterisation remains faithful by showcasing his intellect and fencing abilities. The acknowledgement of Ben Kurrel's existence, both as Zeppos' companion and as Benjamin's late father, reinforces the bridge between the series and the legacyquel.

Many aesthetic nostalgic intertextual references are present, including the original Zeppos, his residency and amphicar, the re-use of the theme tune, and character names. However, these references are only implemented loosely. This is exemplified by the colour of the amphicar, which is red in *Mercatorspoor* (Fig. 3) instead of the original blue (Fig. 4). This might not faze fans of the black-and-white show, yet it is interesting the actors also describe it as the series' iconic red car. Hence, *Mercatorspoor* seems to appeal mostly to the superficial recollections of *Kapitein Zeppos* shared by the Flemish collective memory. The intertextual details being insignificant to the legacyquel's nostalgic appeal illustrates commodified nostalgia celebrating solely the object of nostalgia outside of its actual context.



Fig. 3: The amphicar as seen in *Zeppos het Mercatorspoor*.



Fig. 4: The amphicar as seen in *Kapitein Zeppos*.

Critics and audience reviews of *Mercatorspoor* did not seem to mind this superficiality. None of the professional critics mentioned the intergenerational connection between Ben and Benjamin Kurrel, implying the memory of *Kapitein Zeppos* mostly survives through cultural collective memories instead of through dedicated fan nostalgia, as is the case for *8erafl* and Hollywood-produced legacyquels.

Although *Kapitein Zeppos* is available on VRT's streaming service, reruns of the series are few and far between. This raises the question of whether the 'localness' of *Kapitein Zeppos* and limited availability could explain the superficiality of the intertextuality in *Mercatorspoor* garnering no backlash from original fans. Instead of leaning into fandom-nostalgia as *8erafl* did, this risk-averse tactic tapped into the audience's limited knowledge of its source text, even poking fun at its potential 'uncoolness' (cf. *infra*). Its sentimental nostalgic appeal did not seem to sway critics' opinions on the overall quality of the film, which contrasts greatly with *8erafl*. This is mainly due to its different focus: *Mercatorspoor* on renewal and *8erafl* on sentimentality.

Interestingly, the post-credit scene in *Mercatorspoor* did seem to attract nostalgic enthusiasm among user reviews, but not for *Kapitein Zeppos*. In this scene, Benjamin finds a catlike mask in a box, which Zeppos remarks belonged to the notorious 'De Kat', a reference to another major VRT youth series: De Kat. This teaser appeared to be tailored for the older audience accompanying the young target viewers. It seeks to incite their excitement, as the reference holds no significance for children. The teasing worked, with several user reviews stating their excitement for a potential film adaptation of De Kat. Although no concrete project has been announced at the time of writing, Eyeworks, the production company behind *Mercatorspoor*, did acquire the rights to De Kat, which could mean the teaser was

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

more than just an easter egg for fans of the original series. The teaser successfully stirred nostalgic enthusiasm, as several Letterboxd reviews expressed curiosity about its potential revival.

Narratively and thematically, the transgenerational connection in *Mercatorspoor* propels both intertextual continuity and intergenerational clashing. At its core, the film is a clash between technology and history, old and young, reflecting how legacyquels balance renewal and sentimentality. Benjamin's character arc centres on him learning to value history and the wisdom of older generations, personified by Zeppos. As a tech-obsessed geek, he is disinterested in anything Zeppos does, believing he is a grumpy know-it-all who drives around in an outdated 'uncool' car. Benjamin similarly seems immune to the reverence nostalgic references should evoke. When Zeppos reveals he is a captain, Benjamin reacts with disinterest. Similarly, when the amphicar makes its appearance, musical cues indicate to the audience that this is a special moment that could trigger nostalgia. Benjamin, however, says he refuses to drive the vintage car, explicitly rejecting something that would typically be met with reverence in a legacyquel.

Other aesthetic references to the series get treated similarly. When they drive around with the amphicar for the first time, the original theme tune plays for a couple of seconds before being drowned out by a truck horn, not incidentally from a Barral Technologies truck. This underlines the film trying to set itself apart as a contemporary update distancing itself from its predecessor. However, *Mercatorspoor* does not fully reject it either, with Benjamin eventually seeing the value in his mentor's wisdom. Zeppos himself also learns to embrace technology. Benjamin's hacking skills help them retrieve the last part of the treasure map, which makes Zeppos realise that modern gadgets have their benefits. Most blatantly, the amphicar gets replaced at the end of the film by a futuristic flying car, signifying the film's intention to step forward into the future.

The textual relationship between *Mercatorspoor* and *Kapitein Zeppos* reflects the struggle of requals to balance nostalgic sentimentality and renewal. It aspires to step out of the shadow of its predecessor while respecting the source material. As a nostalgia-driven reboot, *Mercatorspoor* does provide an entry point for a new young audience to engage with a franchise their (grand)parents are familiar with. The film binds the different generations thematically with its textual themes of transgenerational clashes as well as through meta-textually passing the torch to a new protagonist. The intertextual references potentially triggering the older generation's nostalgia remain superficial, generally referring to elements that are remembered in the collective memory. This did not seem to offend either critics or audience members who appreciated the little nods to the original,

regardless of their accuracy. The post-credit scene, in particular, managed to ignite nostalgia, showing that different forms of nostalgia can be triggered within one film.

De Collega's 2.0: A requel with an identity crisis

Of the three case studies, *De Collega's 2.0* has the longest adaptation history. Originating as a play in the 1970s, it transitioned into a television series on BRT (1978-1981). The tragicomical series revolves around the conflicts of colleagues within the Ministry of Finance. Over three seasons, *De Collega's* garnered acclaim for its relatable humane portrayal of work life. The characters embodied office archetypes including the nonsense boss, the naive good guy, and the party animal. Although mostly remembered as a comedy, the series also tackled serious topics such as domestic violence and alcoholism.

Following the series' conclusion, more adaptations emerged: the sequel film *De Kollega's maken de Brug!* (1988) and a stage reprisal for its 30th anniversary. The play, initiated by actor Ben Segers, kept the original setting and characters, earning praise as a sincere homage. Finally, for its 40th anniversary, Segers spearheaded *De Collega's 2.0* as a contemporary cinematic homage. In accordance with the other two case studies, it also originated as a celebration of its source texts. Likewise, press coverage consistently called the source text of the requel 'legendary', aiming to solidify the series' cultural significance in Flemish collective memory. Like *Mercatorspoor*, the cast and crew avoided terming the film a reboot or remake, opting for terms such as 'update' and 'homage' to sidestep negative 'parasitic' connotations.

While not exact replicas, the new colleagues in *De Collega's 2.0* reflect the archetypal traits of their original counterparts. In several interviews, the actors even referred to their roles as the 'new version of [name original counterpart]'. The requel positioned itself as a spiritual successor to *De Collega's*, establishing continuity through parallel character portrayals. Its connection also endures through more concrete intertextual dependency. A reworking of the original theme song was used throughout the requel, and cameos of original characters show a shared narrative universe. Although these intertextual elements are less pronounced compared to *Mercatorspoor* and especially *Beraj!*, they still evoke a sense of nostalgia. However, while the original cast appears in the requel, their impact on and interaction with the new cast remains limited. Therefore, among the three case studies, *De Collega's 2.0* stands out as the most distinct departure from its source while also being the sole case study where the source text and the requel both target adults. Nevertheless, nostalgia still plays a (conflicted) part in its transgenerational appeal.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

The requel's promotional paratexts struggled to balance sentimentality and renewal, ending up with a confused marketing campaign that created conflicting audience expectations. Illustrative of the latter is the title's inclusion of '2.0'. While being a nod to computer updates, implying the film is an improved version of its predecessor, it cannot be dissociated from classic numerical sequel titling. The film's social media campaign opted for two different approaches, causing further confusion. Initially, the focus was on transgenerational appeal, invoking Gen X nostalgia while serving as an entry point for newcomers. For instance, the first trailer featured actors from *De Collega's* clearing their desks, to the backdrop of the original theme song. While waiting for the elevator, one of them ponders: 'I wonder who will replace us?' The teaser concludes with the title *De Collega's* being pushed away by *De Collega's 2.0*, accompanied by the question: 'Who will be the new colleagues?' This trailer effectively conveys a generational shift. A similar marketing tactic can be recognised in several behind-the-scenes pictures posted on the requel's social media, showing the original actors visiting the set. Exemplary is the post where the actor playing Philemon visits. Its caption reads: 'Philemon Persez and René Verreth [the actor] visited the office to give their blessing.'^[37] This reinforces the textual and metatextual approval of the requel by the original characters (and actors), valorising the film's existence.

As the film's release approached, the promotional strategy shifted. It distanced itself from its transgenerational appeal to position the film as a modern comedy, relatable to office workers today. This was evident in the promotion of its avant-premiere as an after-work event and the release of a T-shirt line featuring film-related catchphrases, none of which were from the original series. This shift muddled its initial transgenerational intent, mirroring the film's own identity crisis.

The requel was critically panned by audiences and critics alike, particularly for its 'outdated' humour. Despite attempting to capture the edgy dark humour of , it failed to resonate, likely because the series was often misremembered as pure comedy. Remarkably, professional reviews mostly neglected its intertextual connection to *De Collega's*, suggesting that perhaps its nostalgic appeal was overestimated, despite the series' place in Flemish collective memory. This mirrors the reception of *Mercatorspoor*. Nevertheless, some reviews did engage with its intertextuality, albeit negatively. One review titled 'Keep your hands off our heritage' called the requel disrespectful and even blasphemous, while the critic admits to not having seen the original series since childhood.^[38] Coupled with reactions to *Berafl*, this shows nostalgic reverence for a source text can influence opinions about its successor regardless of the quality of the new product.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

In conclusion, as a requel, *De Collega's 2.0* shares similarities with *Mercatorspoor* including its promotion mostly focusing on the films as stand-alone concepts. Still, the latter integrated its themes of generational renewal more cohesively. *De Collega's 2.0* instilled nostalgic expectations it did not meet, resulting in an unclear target audience and a muddled identity. Falling somewhere between the risk-averse tactic of *Mercatorspoor* relying on a superficial nostalgic collective understanding of the source text, and the fandom-oriented nostalgia tactic of *Berafl*, *De Collega's 2.0* reached neither a new audience nor its original fans.

Conclusion: The future of nostalgia?

This study examined Flemish cinema's ongoing exploration of nostalgic recycle film cultures, specifically in the form of transmedial adaptations, targeting diverse generations including Gen Xers and millennials. Similarly to Hollywood, the interplay between imitative filmmaking and cinematic nostalgia reinforces and extends their inherent dynamics of renewal and continuity by playing into sentimental yearnings for the past. Its potential to revive dormant (childhood) franchises not only benefits Hollywood but also, as we claim in this article, local film industries with limited resources

The belated sequel *Berafl*, which fully embraces nostalgia, employs it as a crowdfunding tactic, making Ketnet-adults feel they contribute to their childhood revival, while at the same time further mitigating the financial risks of sequels. Requels *Mercatorspoor* and *De Collega's 2.0* rejuvenate 'outdated' Flemish cultural landmarks by driving their franchises forward. Echoing the broader scarcity of diachronic remakes in Europe,[39] both films avoid labels such as reboot and remake. By integrating nostalgic intertextual nods, requels give directors a way to interact with Flemish cultural heritage without risking disavowal. Interestingly, these intertextual connections do not need to be entirely accurate to instill sentimentality, underscoring the commodification of nostalgia.

Commodified nostalgia is thus not limited to global Hollywood cinema. In concordance with Meir's vision of European film industries, Flanders imitates Hollywood's trend of nostalgia-driven requels and belated sequels, providing nostalgia solely through intertextual referencing, reducing the past to its cultural artefacts. The emergence of Flemish nostalgia-driven transmedial adaptations reinforces Boym's notion that nostalgia continues to be a symptom of the 21st century.

While its employment of intertextual dependency is a Hollywood-like strategy, Flemish nostalgia-driven recycle filmmaking exhibits distinct characteristics. Notably, Flanders

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

experiments with sources from different decades, showing Hollywood's current 1980s cycle and the appeal of Gen X franchises is not universal. A movement towards a Flemish 1990s and 2000s cycle appears likely given Ketnet and Studio 100's current nostalgia-driven output. For further research, it is worth examining which (local) nostalgia cycles other European countries adopt. Moreover, the Flemish audiovisual industry prefers to revive television series instead of film franchises. Since all of them originate from public broadcaster VRT they play into the Flemish – rather than Belgian – collective memory specifically. While limiting its appeal abroad it does reinforce the cultural status of Flemish television icons.

Furthermore, contrary to global Hollywood cinema's ever-growing franchises, the Flemish film industry has not (yet) managed to turn nostalgia-driven recycle film cultures into a long-term industry strategy. While the films share a local source (the VRT) the discussed transmedial case studies all originated as isolated cases, as celebratory homages to the source texts. This, coupled with the source texts originating from diverse eras, indicates that nostalgia-driven sequels and requels in the small local Flemish industry arise more as a short-term risk-averse tactical manoeuvre than a consistent industrial strategy.

Due to limited financial means typical for small European film industries, nostalgia-driven sequels and requels are in essence a viable commercial venue to explore – but Flanders lacks the foundation to develop it into a consistent industrial strategy at present. With a relatively small number of case studies, this phenomenon is still finding its footing in Flanders. Nonetheless, the success of *Beraf!* and *Zeppos Het Mercatorspoor* teasing the return of another VRT franchise suggests there is a future for commodified nostalgia in Flanders.

Authors

Atalya De Cock is a PhD candidate at Ghent University and the University of Antwerp (Belgium). Her research investigates how recycle film cultures emerge in small Western European film industries.

Eduard Cuelenaere is postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication Sciences at Ghent University and visiting professor at the University of Antwerp and the Free University of Brussels.

Gertjan Willems is associate professor at the University of Antwerp and guest professor at Ghent University.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

Stijn Joye is associate professor at the Department of Communication Sciences at Ghent University.

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REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

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Notes

- [1] Meir 2019.
- [2] Cuelenaere & Willems & Joye 2021b.
- [3] Cuelenaere & Willems & Joye 2021a.
- [4] Loock 2021; Lizardi 2017.
- [5] Leggatt 2022; Lizardi 2017.
- [6] Boym 2001; Chrostowska 2010.
- [7] Boym 2001.
- [8] Jameson 1984
- [9] Higson 2014, p. 125.
- [10] Lizardi 2017.
- [11] Loock 2016.
- [12] Chrostowska 2010; Higson 2014.
- [13] Sperb 2022, p. 23.
- [14] Leggatt 2022.
- [15] Lizardi 2017; Loock 2021.
- [16] Higson 2014; Cook 2005.
- [17] Lizardi 2017.
- [18] Loock 2021, p. 173.
- [19] Ibid., p. 174.
- [20] Leitch 2002 pp. 44-53.
- [21] Loock 2021, p. 173.
- [22] Ibid. pp. 173-187.
- [23] Loock 2021, p. 173.
- [24] Ibid., p. 177.
- [25] Ibid.
- [26] Lizardi 2017, p. 2.
- [27] Ibid., p. 11.
- [28] Loock 2021, pp. 173-176.
- [29] Dumon 2021, p. 13.
- [30] Cuelenaere & Willems & Joye 2021a; Cook 2005; Higson 2014.
- [31] Cuelenaere & Willems & Joye 2021b.

REWIND, RECYCLE, REVIVE! AN INVESTIGATION INTO NOSTALGIA-DRIVEN SEQUEL AND REQUEL PRACTICES IN SMALL EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF FLANDERS

- [32] Looock 2021, p. 177.
- [33] Gray 2010.
- [34] Higson 2014; Armbruster 2016.
- [35] Hills 2015, pp. 183-185.
- [36] Van Loy 2022.
- [37] De Collega's 2.0 2018.
- [38] Heremans 2018, p. 5.
- [39] Cuelenaere & Willems & Joye 2021a.