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In a 1955 passage, André Bazin writes, “The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e., not only the talent of this or that film-maker, but the genius of the system, the richness of its ever-vigorous tradition, and its fertility when it comes into contact with new elements.” Bazin, referring to Hollywood’s comprehensive and coherent style of cinematic narration, valued the “genius of the system,” emphasizing its adaptability. After World War II, a swiftly changing film industry formed the beginning of a new age of American cinema. New Hollywood, sometimes referred to as post-classical Hollywood cinema, emerged in response to the breakdown of the studio system, the advent of commercial television, and the transformation of Americans’ media consumption practices (Schatz 10).

Thomas Schatz, a film and television history and criticism author and professor at the University of Texas, argues that New Hollywood “places a very different value on their one-dimensional characters, mechanical plots, and high-gloss style” (Schatz 33), weakening the complex characters, natural narratives, and authentic visual approaches of Classical Hollywood cinema, which generally encompasses American cinema from the 1920’s to the 1960’s. However, David Bordwell, an American film scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, disagrees with Schatz, stating that “post-classical” Hollywood is not “anticlassical” (Bordwell 16). Although reshaped by the fall of the studio system, the rise of the conglomerate wave, and the introduction of the blockbuster, New Hollywood did not undermine Classical Hollywood cinema, but rather continued an “ever-vigorous tradition” by adapting to “new elements.”

After World War II, the decline of the studio system set the foundation for a “new” Hollywood. In May of 1948, the Supreme Court issued the Paramount decree, forcing
major studios to cease their monopolistic practices. This decision caused major studios to abandon their theatre chains, and instead, predominantly invest in distribution, the most profitable segment within the industry. To counter stunted exhibition revenues, major studios ventured into television. In 1955, for instance, major studios sold their pre-1948 features to television syndicators. Originally seen as competition, television was combated with historical spectacles, Westerns, and biblical epics, as well as different formats, such as Technicolor, widescreen, and 3D (Schatz 12). Unforeseen by the industry, the next generation of filmmakers would be raised watching television and enjoying programs like Saturday matinee serials, creating a new breed of artists and, in turn, a revolutionary era of cinema.

François Truffaut’s seminal 1954 essay in *Cahiers du cinéma* outlined *la politique des auteurs* or “the policy of authors,” which states “films should ideally be a means of personal artistic expression for its director” (Cook 11). Andrew Sarris later called this concept the “auteur theory,” which the American New Wave, a new generation of Hollywood inspired by the French New Wave, embraced. American critics began recognizing filmmakers of the studio system, such as Welles, Hitchcock, Hawks, and Ford, as auteurs. More importantly, however, the newfound attention to authorship demanded fresh, talented auteurs. In 1966, Hollywood’s Production Code dissolved,
and in 1968, a new rating system followed, opening filmmakers to a new realm of possibility, in which they could experiment with political, sexual, and violent content. In 1967, Arthur Penn directed *Bonnie and Clyde*, a landmark film of the American New Wave, which soon became associated with youth culture, especially violence, sex, and art. As a result, studios began hiring “younger, nontraditional producers and directors to appeal to a younger clientele” for significantly lower wages (Cook 12).

The “Hollywood Renaissance” of the 1970’s provided inspiration for the “film generation,” a group of filmmakers and aspiring auteurs, who grew up with television and received formal education in the field of film. Film historian, David A. Cook states that the “Hollywood Renaissance” not only meant a younger, more innovative, and educated class of filmmakers, but also meant a more “cine-literate” generation of movie audiences. Some of the most popular auteurs of the film generation consisted of George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, and Steven Spielberg (Cook). As the auteur behind many blockbuster hits, including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *ET: Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and *Jurassic Park* (1993), Steven Spielberg directed *Jaws* in 1975 (one of his first theatrical releases), which Schatz says, “[marks] the arrival of the New Hollywood” (Schatz 17).

The blockbuster or “megapicture,” along with new media technology and synergetic practices, often characterizes New Hollywood. Major studios, following the breakdown of the studio system, began producing larger films, instead of more films, inventing what Tino Balio calls the “ultra-high-budget” feature film (59). Schatz calls these “high-cost, high-tech, and high-stakes” productions “calculated blockbusters,” because their high promotional costs often exceed production costs to ensure higher
box-office revenues (Schatz 10). The blockbuster syndrome intensified with sophisticated advertising and marketing techniques, including summer/seasonal releases, pop-culture adaptations, television advertising, saturation booking, commercial tie-ins, and merchandising ploys.

*Jaws* serves as a preliminary and prime example of a New Hollywood blockbuster. The film, set around the 4th of July, premiered on June 20th, 1975 as a summer hit, while families around America were on vacation. The movie was an adaptation of Peter Benchley's 1974 novel. Film rights were purchased by Richard D. Zanuck and David Brown and then titled *Jaws* to coincide with the blockbuster’s far-reaching advertising campaign. Almost two million dollars were spent on promotion for the film with over one third spent on television advertising (Neil). Saturation booking also contributed to the film’s success. Saturation booking, defined by Balio, is “the practice of releasing new films simultaneously in every market of the country accompanied by a massive national advertising campaign” (Balio 59). *Jaws* revolutionized this front-loading tactic, as the movie premiered in over 400 American theatres in one day after Universal's broadly conceived and hard-hitting promotional blitz (Neil). The film also gained profits by effectively exploiting commercial tie-ins and merchandising ploys. In *The Feature Film Industry*, Graeme Turner writes:

Probably the most elaborate array of tie-ins was that surrounding the 1975 film, *Jaws*; this included a sound-track album, T-shirts, plastic tumblers, a book
about the making of the movie, the book the movie was based on, beach towels, blankets, shark costumes, toy sharks, hobby kits, iron-transfers, games, posters, shark's tooth necklaces, sleepwear, water pistols, and more. (8)

New Hollywood was able to reduce the risk of such “high-stakes” blockbusters by maximizing synergy. Synergy put “movie studios into direct play with television production companies, network and cable TV, music, and recording companies, and book, magazine, and newspaper publishers, and possibly even with games, toys, theme parks, and electronic hardware manufactures as well” (Schatz 29). Major studios found economic stability by integrating horizontally—that is, by expanding through tightly diversified media conglomerates, as well as by expanding distribution through oversea markets (Balio & Cook).

Conforming to the new marketing practices surrounding them, blockbusters were known as “high concept” vehicles for the “Lucas-Spielberg” style. High-concept films are defined as star-like stories that sell themselves with condensable storylines and eye-catching spectacles. Many film critics, such as Justin Wyatt, believe that complex plot and character psychology fell victim to the blockbuster’s “musical interludes and stereotyped characters” (Bordwell 5). Wyatt argues that blockbuster stars promote, more than perform, in order to favor “the marketing of spin-off fashions, soundtracks, and videos” (Bordwell 5). Named after the two “star auteurs” that popularized it, the “Lucas-Spielberg” style relies on plot driven narratives, visceral thrills, fast-paced visuals, and special effects. Both George Lucas, the mastermind behind the Star Wars franchise and founder of his own “hyper-realistic” special effects studio, and Steven Spielberg, the star director who surpassed his giant shark spectacle, Jaws, with his
direction of the *Indiana Jones* franchise, amazed audiences everywhere with extravagant and visceral sound and images, pushing ground-breaking visual and special effects (Cook). Balio comments on the motives behind New Hollywood’s “spectacle-narrative” where he writes:

Containing such elements as high concepts, big name stars, and visual and special effects, such pictures reduced the risk of financing because they constituted media events; they lent themselves to promotional tie-ins; they became massive engines for profit in ancillary divisions like theme parks and video; they stood to make a profit in foreign markets; and they were easy to distribute. (Balio 59)

Although the blockbuster is said to have saved the metamorphosing industry, some film critics suggest New Hollywood has diminished Classical Hollywood storytelling. “We see films that are increasingly plot-driven, increasingly visceral, kinetic, and fast-paced, increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly ‘fantastic’,” writes Thomas Schatz (23), who continues, “visual and spatial scale are downsized, action is repetitiously foregrounded and centered, pace and transitions are quicker, music and montage are more prevalent, and slick production values and special effects abound” (32). Other critics agree, proposing that the storytelling and stylistic unity of pre-1960 Hollywood was replaced by spectacle. This “collapse of narrative” is often blamed on Hollywood’s shift to horizontal integration and synergetic marketing ploys. “Post-classical” Hollywood’s products are viewed as equally fragmented as the major companies and conglomerates that merged to market and merchandise music, games, theme park rides, etc. (Bordwell 5). “One might argue,” Schatz writes, “that the new
Hollywood’s calculated blockbusters are themselves massive advertisements for their product lines” (33).

By contrast, David Bordwell believes that despite innovations in visual and special effects and increasing commercial tie-ins, post-1960 films still possess the integrity of classical Hollywood narratives. Bordwell writes:

To those who think that the blockbuster era introduced a mindless uniformity, I want to suggest that American cinema continues to host innovative narrative strategies. To those who think that the tradition collapsed…the principles of that system remain firmly in force – sometimes refined and reweighed, but not rejected. (Bordwell 16)

Even Schatz’s example of New Hollywood, Jaws, exhibits “highly coherent storytelling” (Bordwell 6). In Storytelling in the New Hollywood, Kristen Thompson refers to three “turning points” within the movie that serve as markers for Classical Hollywood’s three act structure. The first act or set-up is characterized by ex-New York cop Chief Brody’s alienation in his new community, his quest to solve the arising shark problem (indicated by two shark attacks), and the introduction of the responsible giant great white shark. The third shark attack, which indirectly threatens Brody’s son, triggers the second act or development of the film, ending with the mayor signing Quint’s contract to help hunt the shark. The reconciliation of Brody, Quint, and Hooper, as Thompson suggests, is the last turning point leading up to the climax or third act, which begins with the shark attacking an encaged Hooper, peaks with the shark eating Quint, and ends with the shark dying at the hands of Brody (Thompson 33-37).

Not only does Jaws have a three act structure, but also includes character writing methods that continue the conventions of the Classical Hollywood model. Each main
character possesses a flaw, from which they learn, change, and grow throughout the movie. For instance, Quint, a self-centered shark hunter who looks out for himself, often at the expense of others, ends up as the “sacrificial lamb” to the menacing, man-eating shark. Standards of classical Hollywood narrative, such as the three act structure and character development, found in *Jaws* support Bordwell’s summarized argument: Hollywood’s stylistic system has not changed, but its techniques have.

Classical narratives are not being replaced, but rather are adapted to new elements. The heightened production of blockbusters and other “hyperclassical” films post-1960 may have led to a steady increase in action-filled narratives, but as Geoff King argues, “this is not the same as narrative being displaced” (Bordwell 6). The classical tradition is still recognized universally, as American narratives historically rely on “physical movement, vigorous conflicts, escalating dramatic stakes, and a climax driven by time pressure” (Bordwell 13).

New Hollywood did not abandon Classical Hollywood cinema storytelling practices, but rather continued its tradition by adapting to the demise of the studio system, the spread of conglomerate activity, and the emergence of the megapicture. After the Paramount decree of 1948, the studio system fell with the mandated termination of monopolistic vertical integration practices. The auteur theory, New American Cinema, and Hollywood Renaissance inspired the film generation that would lead the “New Hollywood,” including George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Steven Spielberg’s megapicture, *Jaws*, was a result of New
Hollywood’s blockbuster syndrome. To reduce risk, studios maximized profits with synergetic marketing systems and “high concept” blockbusters with the “Lucas-Spielberg” style. From D.W. Griffith to John Ford, Hollywood innovators have adapted to the ever-changing visual medium of film, just as George Lucas and Steven Spielberg succeeded in doing. As Bordwell states, “Aware of the tradition, filmmakers could extend it, refine its premises, explore its underutilized resources, apply it to new subjects and themes…without abandoning its fundamental commitments” (16). New Hollywood, adapting to new elements such as innovative visual and special effects and groundbreaking marketing strategies, was able to maintain the coherent narrative patterns of Classical Hollywood, something André Bazin would credit to the “genius of the system.”
Works Cited


