

Blockbuster Remakes

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Abstract

Like the term “blockbuster,” the phrase “blockbuster remake” can mean different things. Typically, blockbuster remake is an industrial term, one that refers to the production of large-scale movies adapted from previously filmed properties. In this definition, modest (cult) properties – such as, *Planet of the Apes* (1968, 2001), *King Kong* (1933, 1976, 2005), and *War of the Worlds* (1954, 2005) – are revived through massive production budgets as cultural juggernauts, with strong marketing campaigns and merchandising tie-ins. Less typical is a description that accounts for the way in which a blockbuster movie is *itself* remade: that is, a definition in which a blockbuster becomes the cornerstone for the entire architecture of a *blockbuster cycle*. This article explores the idea of a blockbuster remake, and blockbuster initiated cycle, in and through a case study of the prototype of all modern blockbusters: Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975). Specifically, the article interrogates the way in which “Bruce,” the great white shark of *Jaws*, initiated a rogue animal cycle consisting in the first instance of the *Jaws* franchise – *Jaws 2* (1978), *Jaws 3-D* (1983) and *Jaws 4: The Revenge* (1987) – and also a series of replicas that included *Grizzly* (1976), *Orca* (1977), and *Piranha* (1978).

Keywords Blockbusters, Film remakes, Film cycles, Rogue animal films, *Jaws*.

The blockbuster remake

This essay assesses the contemporary phenomenon of the “blockbuster remake” in and through a case study of the industrial and cultural impact of Steven Spielberg’s blockbuster prototype, *Jaws* (1975), and its various official and unofficial remakings. Although *Jaws* is based on Peter Benchley’s best-selling novel (1975), the film occupies a broader discursive space with a cycle of 1970s disaster movies (and sub-set of “revenge-of-nature” films), and additionally invites comparison with *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954), a film that it loosely remakes. Attending in the first instance to blockbuster-scale remakes of existing film properties, the essay is mainly concerned to demonstrate the way in which a blockbuster movie – specifically, *Jaws* – is *itself* remade, not only in its licensed sequel and series – the *Jaws* blockbuster cycle – but also through its many unauthorized replicas and imitations.

Like the term “blockbuster movie” the phrase “blockbuster remake” can mean different things (see, for example, a “multidimensional” definition of blockbusters in Neale, 2001, pp. 47–60). Typically, blockbuster remake is an industrial term, one that refers to the production of large-scale movies adapted and/or remade from previously filmed properties. In a commercial context, blockbuster remakes are *pre-sold* to their audience because viewers are assumed to have some prior experience with, or knowledge of, the original story – an earlier film, literary or other property – before engaging in its particular re-telling (see King, 2002, p. 55; Wyatt, 1994, pp. 113–17). Remakes of cult movies such as *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933; John Guillermin, 1976; Peter Jackson, 2005), *Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda, 1954; Roland Emmerich, 1998), and *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968; Tim Burton, 2001) are revived through massive production budgets as cultural juggernauts, with strong marketing campaigns and merchandising tie-ins (see Verevis, 2006, p. 3). Existing properties, such as *Godzilla*, are selected for blockbuster remaking not only because of their cultural circulation, and currency in local and international markets, but also because they are inherently spectacular and so suited to the developing technological powers of digital film. Roland Emmer-

ich's 1998 *Godzilla* remake is said to be as "huge and relentless" as the creature itself (Medhurst, 1998, p. 42), but – as in other instances where a small cult property has been "supersized" – critics lament that the digital makeover immediately departs from the aesthetic and iconographic tradition of Toho Studio's 1954 *Godzilla* and the series of almost 30 films that have followed (see Hollings and Newman, 1998, pp. 20–23). As one reviewer describes it: "The onslaught of exploitative digital effects effectively removes *Godzilla* from the world of juvenile pleasure" (Solman, 1998, p. 27). *Godzilla*'s \$120 million plus budget demands a gargantuan audience, leaving nothing of interest for any age: "[*Godzilla* is] not a good adult movie; it's not a good kid's movie; it's not a good movie; it's not a [even] movie. It's an Event" (Solman, 1998, p. 27).

Like *Godzilla*, Steven Spielberg's massive \$128 million version of *War of the Worlds* (2005) invests in elaborate set pieces and extravagant digital effects to deliver big on spectacle and genre, but it additionally provides a vehicle (and reunion) for Hollywood's number one star (in Tom Cruise) and director (in Steven Spielberg). Spielberg states that his long-term desire to remake *War of the Worlds* was put on hold with the appearance of Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) – itself a modernized version of *War of the Worlds* – but then revived in the shadow of September 11. Spielberg says: "post 9/11 it [a *War of the Worlds* remake] began to make more sense to me, that it could be a tremendous emotional story as well as a very entertaining one, and have some kind of current relevance" (Baughan and Sloane, 2005, p. 64). Cruise's conflicted, every-guy lead (Roy Ferrier) and complicated family situation in *War of the Worlds* recalls the nature and milieu of Spielbergian types (Chief Brody from *Jaws*, Roy Neary from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* [1977]), helping establish *War of the Worlds* as a type of authorial remake (see Newman, 2005, p. 83). At the same time, Spielberg's version echoes the dynamics of H.G. Wells's book (which it sometimes closely follows) while making necessary changes (consolidating characters, altering period and location, updating the story's technology) and alluding to Byron Haskin's 1954 film version (see Vest, 2006, pp. 67–71). In these ways, Spielberg "re-imagines" Wells' apocalyptic story – and overt critique of British colonialism – filtering it through auteur themes to reach an American (and international) audience still dealing with the events of September 11, 2001.

The era of postproduction

If one accepts Thomas Elsaesser's suggestion that global Hollywood has entered a digital or franchise era of *post-production* then a blockbuster – like Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* – can be understood as a “signature product,” an instance in which a pre-existing film or property no longer provides a (closed) narrative model but rather functions as a blueprint for “remediation,” and the blockbuster remake becomes (ideally) a prototype and basis for the generation of serial forms (sequels, series, and cycles), the production of tangible objects (DVDs, soundtracks, and books), and the occasion for commodity experiences (exhibitions, rides, and theme park attractions) (see Elsaesser, 2011, pp. 283–85, Thompson, 2011). Extending this line of argument, one can describe the way in which new millennial filmmakers – not only new Hollywood auteurs such as Spielberg, but *post-auteurs* such as David Fincher, Christopher Nolan, and Steven Soderbergh (in examples such as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* [2011], *Batman Begins* [2005], *Ocean's Eleven* [2001]) – seek to insert themselves into the innumerable flows of global film and media production, not by setting out to create something that is new (original) but rather by re-making that which exists: revising it, inhabiting it, and *putting it to use* (see Bourriaud, 2002, pp. 13–20). In a global marketplace, available forms are remade and remodeled, and then “serialized” and “multiplied” – in sequels, series, and cycles – across expanding territories and media platforms.

More could be said about blockbuster remakes adapted from previously filmed properties – *Godzilla* and *War of the Worlds*, *King Kong* and *Planet of the Apes* – and about blockbuster themes – “world war, disaster, end of the planet, monster from [beyond], holocaust, death-battle in the galaxy” (Elsaesser, 2011, p. 276). Another approach, however, examines the way in which the blockbuster *itself* is “re-made”: that is, those cases in which a blockbuster movie becomes the cornerstone for the entire architecture of a blockbuster cycle. This type of approach attends to the way in which the blockbuster is positioned within a larger marketplace through strategies of *serialization* and *multiplication* (see Lewis, 2001, p. 66). This is not simply the case – as in the example of *Godzilla* – of the movie spinning out through an animated TV series, video games, and additional installments in the Japanese film series – but also the way in which blockbuster remakes – for example, *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, 1999;

Karl Freund, 1932) and its sequel, *The Mummy Returns* (Stephen Sommers, 2001) – can be positioned in a series (or *cycle*) that reaches back, through *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001) and *Lara Croft: The Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003) to *Romancing the Stone* (Robert Zemeckis, 1984) and *Jewel of the Nile* (Lewis Teague, 1985), and then on back to the Indiana Jones series that was initiated by a key blockbuster and genre prototype in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) and culminates in *Indiana Jones and Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). To consider this phenomenon of blockbuster sequelization it is instructive to turn to the “prototype of all modern blockbusters” (Elsaesser, 2011, p. 278) – that is, *Jaws* – and to the idea of a *blockbuster cycle*.

In *American Film Cycles*, Amanda Ann Klein writes that cycles are like film genres in so far as they are “a series [a set] of films associated with each other through shared images, characters, settings, plots, or themes” (2011, pp. 3–4). But, she adds, “while film genres are primarily defined by the repetition of key images (their semantics) and themes (their syntax), film cycles are primarily defined by how they are used (their pragmatics)” (2011, pp. 3–4). In work foundational to Klein’s, Rick Altman describes the role played by film cycles in the process of genre formation. Taking Hollywood studio era films as his example, Altman argues that by analyzing and imitating their most lucrative films, studios seek to establish cycles (sets) that are proprietary and exploitable, and exclusive to that studio. He writes, when conditions are favorable, single studio cycles can become sharable industry-wide patterns, and play a role in exhibition and reception, but this movement toward genre (sharability) works against the economic interests of the studio that initiated the cycle (1990, pp. 59–61). This description – that cycles are a *set* of films associated with a single studio and which contain easily exploitable characteristics – is consistent with Altman’s assertion that generic claims have never really constituted a substantial portion of studio publicity campaigns (unless seeking to capitalize on another studio’s success), and that this strategy (of exclusivity) continues into the post-classical (or post-*Jaws*) period in and through the legally sanctioned use of proprietary characters and brands that initiate series-oriented production (or franchises) (1990, pp. 115–21).

In his account of a “momentous,” decade-long period of (new) Hollywood filmmaking – the years 1975 to 1985 – Jim Hoberman

begins by describing a particular type of set. He says that June 1975 offered up two “key movies,” each of which in its own way was a “brilliant modification of the current disaster cycle that had its real-world equivalents in Vietnam and Watergate” (1985, p. 35). The first of these – *Nashville* (Robert Altman, 1975) – “exploded” the “multi-star, mounting-doom, intersecting-plot format” of disaster films such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972), *Earthquake* (Mark Robson, 1974), and *The Towering Inferno* (John Guillermin, 1974) to elaborate and politicize the cycle. By contrast, the second film – Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* – “imploded” the disaster film, paring the narrative and effects of the disaster cycle back to “pure mechanism,” and – as the (then) top-grossing movie of all time – ushered in a new era of high concept, Hollywood blockbusters and franchises (Hoberman, 1985, p. 35).

The high concept blockbuster

Jaws can be seen as part of a specific set – the disaster movie (genre or cycle) – in which Vietnam and Watergate were the real life disasters (see Heath, 1976; King, 2000, pp. 143–73; Roddick, 1980), but at the same time it is part of a larger set (or periodization): the films of the 1970s. As identified in the sub-title of David Cook’s *Lost Illusions*, *Jaws* is representative of a cycle of American films made “in the shadow of Watergate and Vietnam”: a set of films that is either implicitly or explicitly critical of American society (*Nashville* is probably the limit case), and one that “expresses a fear of powerlessness or loss of control ... at a time when leadership at every level of society [was] believed to be wanting” (2000, pp. 251). As described by Cook, the disaster film of the 1970s was a commercial form “rich in possibilities” – one that remained popular throughout the decade (and beyond) and that translated well into international markets – but the cycle “mutated in 1975 (like everything else in American cinema) with the appearance of Universal’s *Jaws*” (2000, pp. 255).

The massive commercial success of *Jaws* is typically attributed to what Universal Studios (and its boss, Lew Wasserman) described as the establishment of a “*Jaws* consciousness” (Cook, 2000, pp. 41–43; Gomery, 2001, pp. 74–77), one facilitated through a saturation advertising campaign and a wide opening pattern of theatrical release (see also Andrews, 1999, p. 114; Schatz, 1993, p. 18). Although *Jaws* was a multi-million dollar summer blockbuster based on Peter

Benchley's best-selling novel, produced at a negative cost of around \$12 million and with a promotional budget of more than \$2.5 million (Cook, 2000, p. 41), the film was distributed and marketed *as if it were* exploitation product: that is, it was "hyped for a quick weekend's profit (*Jaws* grossed \$7.061 million in its opening weekend) and sold on the basis of a single sensational image" (Cook, 2000, p. 43). A film crucial to the blockbuster mentality, *Jaws* is at once a landmark and an *aberration* in the disaster movie cycle because it combines motifs from *several* sets to create a *new kind of disaster film*. *Jaws* is an *event film*, one that associates new types of material with an existing genre: an *action-adventure* film and a *conspiracy thriller*, a film that combines elements of monster movies (with a revenge-of-nature subtext), high gore slasher films, homo-social westerns, and so on (see Cook, 2000, p. 256; Schatz, 1993, p. 18).

Jaws is a prototype or blueprint for a new set – the high concept blockbuster or event film. The property was later extended through its 1976 theatrical reissue and several official sequels, and has been maintained (decades beyond its initial release) through such events as the thirtieth anniversary "Jaws Fest" (June 3–5, 2005), during which Martha's Vineyard (location of the original shoot) once again displayed Amity signage and welcomed back over 25 members of the original cast and crew – including Peter Benchley, screenwriter Carl Gottlieb, and production designer Joe Alves – for a weekend of celebrations (Jaws Fest, 2005). The most *immediate* "sequel" to the blockbuster *Jaws* was, however, *The Deep* (Peter Yates, 1977), an action-adventure story about a couple, David Sanders (Nick Nolte) and Gail Berke (Jacqueline Bisset), who – with the help of local expert Romer Treece (Robert Shaw, from *Jaws*) – find Spanish treasure when diving near Bermuda. Based on Peter Benchley's first post-*Jaws* novel, *The Deep* was produced by Peter Guber for a *rival* studio in Columbia Pictures, released to coincide with the paperback publication of the book, and promoted through its merchandising and a \$3 million advertising campaign that featured a vertical poster design (modeled on the one for *Jaws*) which depicted a near naked female diver rising up through deep blue sea toward a horizontal surface logo (see Cook, 2000, pp. 45–46; Combs, 1977, pp. 257–58; Hall and Neale, 2010, p. 213). Although unable to sustain the record breaking (\$8.124 million) takings of its opening long weekend – that is, it was a film whose "marketability" exceeded its "playability"

(Lewis, 2001, p. 69) – the example of *The Deep* nonetheless begins to demonstrate the way in which strategies of serialization position a blockbuster in the marketplace.

Family resemblances

Jaws is an aberration and a mutant: an A-list action-adventure film which goes on to have an enormous impact on films of the later 1970s and beyond (see Cook, 2000, p. 256), but *generically* and *genetically* speaking *Jaws* also has much in common with B-movie sci-fi/horror and exploitation films of the 1950s (see Hunter, 2009). As a Universal Studios picture, *Jaws*' family resemblance leads most directly back to Universal International's 1954 release, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (and its sequels), and before that to its structural analogue in *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) (see Verevis, 2012, p. 85). The identification of *Jaws* as part of a creature-feature or revenge-of-nature cycle (set) is consistent with its position in disaster movie sub-sets – natural attack and ecology of the elements (see Roddick, 1980, pp. 247–49) – and is, for instance, further supported by a *New York Times* review headline – “Jaws and Bug – The only Difference is the Hype” – which equates Spielberg's film with producer William Castle's low budget swarm film, *Bug* (Jeannot Szwarc, 1975) (see Andrews, 1999, p. 117). This type of remark enables some commentators to draw a line from earlier 1970s “revenge-of-nature” films – titles such as *Frogs* (George McCowan, 1972), *Night of the Lepus* (William F. Claxton, 1972), and *SSSSnake* (Bernard L. Kowalski, 1973) – through *Jaws*, and on to later 1970s films such as *Squirm* (Jeff Lieberman, 1976), *Empire of the Ants* (Bert I. Gordon, 1977), and *Kingdom of the Spiders* (John “Bud” Cardos, 1977) (see Cook, 2000, pp. 255–56; Yacowar, 2003, pp. 277–78). Again, this classification is consistent with disaster cycle sub-sets, but it ignores *Jaws*' co-producer David Brown's comment (itself a part-paraphrase of the prologue to *Creature from the Black Lagoon*) that: “The fear in *Jaws* is [not just] of being eaten.... The phobia [of] *Jaws* ... goes right back to the moment when marine life left the sea and grew legs to stand on land.... It is a very primal fear and you don't need to be in a country with a shark-infested coastline to feel yourself involved in *Jaws*” (qtd. in Andrews, 1999, p. 63).

Jaws' most exploitable feature – a primal fear of being eaten – was immediately taken up in *Grizzly* (William Girdler, 1976), a *calque* or

replica which opens with two young female campers eaten alive by a mammoth grizzly bear. For viewers of *Jaws*, the scenario is familiar: Park ranger Michael Kelly (played by Christopher George) is called in to investigate the girls' disappearance and when he discovers the teenagers' half-eaten remains Kelly is joined in his investigation by naturalist Arthur Scott (Richard Jaeckel) who explains that the bear is the survivor of a prehistoric breed. Kelly's endeavor to track and kill the bear is, however, hindered by park supervisor Kittridge (Joe Dorsey), whose refusal to close the park to holiday campers leads to further attacks. One of the first in a set of *rogue animal* films to follow *Jaws*, *Grizzly* was immediately recognized as an obvious rip-off of *Jaws* – "Jaws with Claws" – but was a film whose semantics differed substantially enough from *Jaws* to avoid incurring the wrath of Universal's legal department. A knock-off from Atlanta-based Film Ventures International, a production house which specialized in "cheap, ineptly-executed imitations" of blockbusters (Sege, 1976, p. 18), *Grizzly* was directed by William Girdler, who had already made *Abby* (1974), a version of another graphic and sensationalist blockbuster in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). Girdler later extended the "nature-on-the offensive" theme through *Day of the Animals* (1978), a film in which veteran guide Steve Buckner (Christopher George, again) leads holiday makers through the High Sierra's where they are attacked by wolves, birds of prey, coyotes, rattle snakes, and – again – grizzlies (see Pulleine, 1977, pp. 166–67).

The French-language title for *Jaws* – *Dents de la Mer* (*Teeth of the Sea*) – understands the *Jaws* prototype perfectly, as does Nigel Andrews when he writes: "Sharks have teeth [as] do aliens, gremlins and werewolves.... *Jaws* started it all. The role of teeth as a Vietnam-inspired guerilla war symbolism – deadly weapon concealed behind soft beguiling body part" (1999, pp. 105–07). This comes into sharper focus when *Jaws* is understood as a prototype for a calqued set, the *proprietary series*: *Jaws 2* (Jeannot Szwarc, 1978), *Jaws 3-D* (Joe Alves, 1983) and *Jaws: The Revenge* aka *Jaws 4* (Joseph Sargent, 1987). The first of these – *Jaws 2* – is often described as a *virtual remake* of *Jaws*, a film in which the community of Amity Island is threatened – *again* – by a great white shark. In the film's climactic sea chase, Chief Martin Brody (Roy Scheider) comes to the rescue of his sons and (once again) dispatches the rogue shark,

this time by causing it to bite through a high voltage underwater cable. However (as noted by reviewers at the time), the fact that the events – the shark attacks – of the first film are acknowledged (sequelized) makes the refusal of Mayor Vaughan (Murray Hamilton) to act on Chief Brody’s warning a second time around appear idiotic to a degree that sabotages any real dramatic interest (Pulleine, 1982, p. 330).

As the official sequel to *Jaws*, and (with rentals of \$50.4 million) the fifth-highest grossing film of 1978 (Cook, 2000, p. 501), *Jaws 2* demonstrates that the process of *continuation* (of sequelization) is always also one of *repetition*: of characters and actors, plots and scenarios, themes and styles, and importantly title terms (see Perkins and Verevis, 2012, pp. 2–3). More pointedly, the *Jaws* set (Jaws 1–4) constitutes a *restricted blockbuster cycle*: it is “identified with only a single studio” and “retain[s] one or more apparent money-making features from [the] previous success” even if *Jaws 2* and (especially) subsequent sequels immediately fall into so “fully imitable [a] pattern” as to limit the cycle’s commercial sustainability (Altman, 1990, p. 59). *Jaws* and its progeny constitute a set, advertized as a proprietary cycle – the famous tagline for *Jaws 2*: “just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...” – and based on characters, plot and stars of the blueprint. This set overlaps with a second, *unauthorized set*, one that, “anxious to benefit from the success of the proprietary cycle,” produces similar films – a *generic rogue animal set* – and seeks to advertize or have the films associated with the success of the *Jaws* prototype and set (Altman, 1990, p. 59). The limit case would appear to be *The Last Shark (L’Ultimo Squalo)* aka *Great White* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1981), an unacknowledged remake and “carbon copy” of *Jaws* that Universal Studios insisted be withdrawn from theaters for breach of copyright (see Combs, 1982, p. 138). Specifically, the Italian-produced *The Last Shark* follows local shark expert Peter Benton (James Franciscus) and veteran fisherman Ron Hammer (Vic Morrow), whose endeavor to capture a great white shark that is menacing a resort town in a lead up the town’s centennial celebrations is retarded by local politician William Wells (Joshua Sinclair). If *Jaws*’ success for Universal exemplifies the strategy of producing a “signature product” through which to sell a set of films (a *cycle*) and associated merchandise (a *Jaws franchise*), then Uti/Horizon Productions’ *The Last Shark* exemplifies that instance in

which it is “more lucrative simply to steal a [blockbuster] property already developed by another studio” (Altman, 1990, p. 121).

The Last Shark is (arguably) no less a “cod homage” than a film such as *Bacalhau* (Codfish, Adriano Stuart, 1975), the Brazilian movie (hastily released to cash in on the *Jaws* consciousness) which reimagined police chief Brody (Roy Scheider) as the distinctly unheroic Breda, Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfus) as the Portuguese oceanographer Matos, and Quint (Robert Shaw) as the Brazilian fisherman Quico, who attempts to kill the codfish with an archaic bow and arrow (see Vieira and Stam, 1985, pp. 31–36). Another was *Tentacles* (*Tentacoli*, 1976), an American International Pictures-Esse Ci Cinematografica co-production, produced and directed (under the pseudonym Oliver Hellman) by Ovidio G. Assonitis, an exploitation filmmaker who had already made a version of *The Exorcist – Beyond the Door* (*Chi Sei?/Who Are You?* 1974) – and would follow *Tentacles* with another “nature-on-the offensive” production in *Piranha II: The Spawning* (James Cameron, 1981). Variousy described as a “post-*Jaws* opus” (Pit, 1977, p. 20) and “devastatingly silly rehash of the *Jaws* formula” (Milne, 1977, p. 129), *Tentacles* follows reporter Ned Turner (John Huston) and marine specialist Will Gleason (Bo Hopkins), who find themselves drawn into the investigation of several mysterious deaths at a Californian harbor-side town. Turner believes the deaths are related to testing for an underwater tunnel and Gleason gradually realizes they are dealing with a giant (pre-historic) octopus that has been disturbed by accelerated underwater tunneling authorized by wealthy industrialist Whitehead (Henry Fonda). Later – in a scene apparently gifted to *Jaws 2* – the octopus attacks a sailing regatta in which Turner’s young nephew is a participant. In the final confrontation, Gleason – whose wife Vicky (Delia Boccardo), along with her sister Judy, husband Don, and friend Chuck have all been taken by the giant octopus – implores his two trained Orcas (killer whales) to help him destroy the monster.

The revenge motif of *Tentacles* is drawn out most evidently in *Jaws 4* – sub-titled, *The Revenge* – in which Chief Brody’s son Sean, the survivor of shark attacks in both *Jaws* and *Jaws 2* – is killed by a great white shark, convincing Chief Brody’s widow Ellen (Lorraine Gary) that the creature has a grudge against her family which leads her finally (like her late husband, and with the help of eldest son, Michael) to confront and kill the shark. The revenge motif is in turn

inverted in Dino De Laurentiis' epic production (and follow up to his 1976 *King Kong* remake), *Orca: Killer Whale* (Michael Anderson, 1977), a film headlined in *Variety* as a "pizza version of *Moby Dick* out of *Jaws*" (Murf, 1977, p.18). At the start of *Orca*, Newfoundland boat captain Nolan (Richard Harris) realizes the commercial value of a killer whale when he witnesses one repel a great white shark that threatens the life of a diver. Although marine biologist Rachel Bedrod (Charlotte Rampling) tries to dissuade him, Nolan undertakes to capture a large male orca for a marine park, but in the process Nolan accidentally harpoons its mate, killing both the female and the unborn calf. The male orca recognizes Nolan as the aggressor and begins to seek vengeance, assailing the local fishing village until it can lure Nolan out to sea, and then north where they duel to death on the frozen ocean. *Orca* has been described as "another entry in the *Jaws* stakes," but unlike the low rent examples of *Grizzly* and *The Last Shark*, *Orca* is a film "that attempts to go one better, at least or bigger," not only by centering its action around a killer whale, but also by investing in international stars (Harris, Rampling), a swelling Ennio Morricone soundtrack, and – in and through its portentous prologue – themes that are "both epic and ecological" (Glaessner, 1977, p. 171).

Perhaps the most enduring recalibration of the *Jaws* formula – maybe also the point at which the cycle exhausts (*or* reinvents) itself – is the example of Roger Corman's (\$676,000) production of *Piranha* (1978), written by John Sayles and directed by Joe Dante (see Alexander, 2010; Warren, 1999). Like *Grizzly*, *Piranha* begins with the investigation of the disappearance of two teenage hikers. Private detective Maggie McKeown (Heather Waxman) enlists recently divorced recluse Paul Grogan (Bradford Dillman) as her guide, and discovers that the teenage couple has gone missing at a disused military facility. At the site, they find Dr Robert Hoak (Kevin McCarthy), who explains that he was employed during the Vietnam War to develop a man-eating strain of piranha to pollute North Vietnam's waterways. It transpires that the fish have been accidentally released into local waters where – in part due to the failure of local officials to heed the warning – the killer fish attack a children's summer camp, which Grogan's own daughter is attending. Like other films in the rogue animal set, *Piranha* shadows the plotline of *Jaws* – investing in a vicious cycle of marauding sea borne creatures, in this case small

and multiple – to deliver another *knowing* entry into the exploitation movie set from which *Jaws* itself emerged. *Piranha* does this right from the outset, with one character referring to the Creature from the Black Lagoon, and another playing a video game labeled “Jaws.” The film’s humor mediates both *Piranha*’s horror-science fiction elements and its social commentary of corporate greed and aggressive militarism to produce a film that – again, like *Jaws* – is “a family film inexplicably floundering with an ‘X’ certificate” (Forbes, 1976, p. 224). The only *Jaws* imitation endorsed by Spielberg,¹ *Piranha* did well enough commercially to initiate a *new set*: a sequel, *Piranha II: The Spawning* aka *Flying Killers* (1981); a \$24 million theatrically-released, remake *Piranha 3D* (Alexandre Aja, 2010); and a sequel to the remake, *Piranha 3DD* (John Gulager, 2012).

Conclusion

To conclude, twenty-five years after *Jaws*, Renny Harlin’s (estimated) \$78 million blockbuster, *Deep Blue Sea* (1999), looks in on an underwater research center off the coast of Mexico, where experiments on three Mako sharks have seen them grow to forty feet in length and demonstrate intelligent behavior. A violent storm floods the facility trapping a team of researchers led by Dr Susan McAlister (Saffron Burrows) three stories under the surface and unleashing the sharks which undertake to stalk and kill their makers. The fact that the scientists must descend through the compound’s submerged levels before ascending to surface safety is a return to the *disaster movie* realm of *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), and the genetic engineering and digital effects make *Deep Blue Sea* a post-*Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) rogue animal film. Curious then that one reviewer writes: “It is inevitable that any film featuring giant man-eating sharks will be compared to *Jaws*,” but then – somehow failing to recognize *Jaws*’ genealogy and intertextual relay – goes on to say: “*Deep Blue Sea* is ultimately more of a disaster movie teetering on ‘B’-movie legs than a *Jaws* rip-off or bizarre slasher-film hybrid” (Graham, 1999, pp. 41–42).

Like *Piranha* before it – or the contemporaneous *Godzilla* remake which takes its bite from *Jaws*, *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), and *Jurassic Park* – *Deep Blue Sea* dips into its gene pool, not only through its “*Jaws* prologue” (with the twist that the shark *doesn’t* get the bikini-clad girl), but also the fact that the three Mako sharks are killed

in the same ways as the sharks in *Jaws*, *Jaws 2*, and *Jaws 3*: that is (respectively) blown up, electrocuted and incinerated (see Koehler, 1999, p. 18). Poised at the tip of the millennium, the example of *Deep Blue Sea* seems to indicate once again the way in which Spielberg's prototype, *Jaws*, functions not just as a cornerstone for a revenge-of-nature or rogue animal set but also as an "operational manual" (Elsaesser, 2011, p. 287) for all modern blockbusters. As this essay has sought to establish, *Jaws* and its progeny – legitimate and otherwise – suggest the way in which the blockbuster property is positioned – serialized and multiplied – in a global marketplace and media-sphere. Ultimately, *Jaws* is not a closed set of image-sounds to be repeated, but – as is evidenced in the recent example of the tsunami-shark movie, *Bait* (Kimble Rendall, 2012) – an open whole, one that is endlessly remade and remodeled.

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Notes

- 1 The Swedish poster for *Piranha* quotes Spielberg: "the best film inspired by *Jaws* [Hajen]."