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## 12 Relocating the Western in *Jaws*

Matthew Melia

### Introduction

During the *Jaws* 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium<sup>1</sup> Carl Gottlieb, the film's screenwriter, refuted the suggestion that *Jaws* was a 'Revisionist' or 'Post' Western, and claimed that the influence of the Western genre had not entered the screenwriting or production processes. Yet the Western is such a ubiquitous presence in American visual culture that its narratives, tropes, style and forms can be broadly transposed across a variety of non-Western genre films, including *Jaws*. *Star Wars* (1977), for instance, a film with which *Jaws* shares a similar intermedial cultural position between the Hollywood Renaissance and the New Blockbuster, was a 'Western movie set in Outer Space'.<sup>2</sup> Matthew Carter has noted the ubiquitous presence of the frontier mythos in US popular culture and how contemporary 'film scholars have recently taken account of the "migration" of the themes of frontier mythology from the Western into numerous other Hollywood genres'.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will not claim that *Jaws* is a Western, but that the Western is a distinct yet largely unrecognised part of its extensive cross-generic hybridity. Gottlieb has admitted the influence of the 'Sensorama' pictures of proto-exploitation auteur William Castle (the shocking appearance of Ben Gardner's head is testament to this) as well as *The Thing from Another World* (1951),<sup>4</sup> while Spielberg suggested that they were simply trying to make a Roger Corman picture.<sup>5</sup> Critical writing on *Jaws* has tended to exclude the Western from the film's generic DNA. Frederick Wasser, for example, filters his discussion of the film through the prism of the disaster movie, while Warren Buckland, in his meticulous formal analysis of Spielberg's cinema, suggests that *Jaws* was 'the first film to conform to [...] blockbuster qualities'<sup>6</sup> and notes that the film combines elements of the slasher film, the monster movie,

the thriller, the buddy-cop movie ('the bonding between three men at the end of the film was a popular subject in the 1970s') and the car chase movie – a sub-genre which gained popularity in the 1970s off the back of *The French Connection* (1971) and in which *Jaws* star Roy Scheider played a supporting role to Gene Hackman's Detective Jimmy 'Popeye' Doyle'.<sup>7</sup> Although neither Wasser nor Buckland (nor indeed most writers on *Jaws*) cite the Western as a part of the film's generic matrix, *Jaws* appropriates the genre's visual and linguistic grammar and specifically references classic Hollywood Westerns such as *High Noon* (1952) and *Rio Bravo* (1959). Like many other New Hollywood films, *Jaws* takes the Western as a point of reference for critiquing a set of heroic male myths that were increasingly under scrutiny during the late 1960s and early to 1970s as a result of the trauma of the Vietnam War and the apparent failure of male authority as evidenced by the Watergate scandal. Moreover, through intertextual references to classical Westerns, *Jaws* relocates and displaces the genre's frontier landscapes and both interrogates and reaffirms romantic and heroic frontier mythologies.

### **The revisionist or 'post-Western' in the New Hollywood**

Matthew Carter has observed the rise and fall of the symbiotic relationship between frontier mythology and cinema in the twentieth century noting that it was through the medium of cinema that 'frontier mythology was popularised'<sup>8</sup> and romanticised. In the second half of the century, Carter notes, however, that 'The grand narrative of the frontier had splintered under the weight of historical revisionism, so too was the cinematic Western understood to be anachronistic, leading to the common appellation of 'post', as in 'post-Western'.<sup>9</sup> The 'Post' or 'Revisionist' Western began to emerge in the early 1960s and became increasingly present across the 1960s and 1970s in the work of the young directors who made up the 'New Hollywood'. While these cine-literate 'Movie Brats' still celebrated the once dominant form

of the Western, it was nevertheless perceived to be culturally dead: a cinematic relic whose reactionary white, male, colonialist frontier mythologies no longer chimed ideologically with the (counter)-cultural zeitgeist – especially given the contemporary US political climate and military intervention in Vietnam.<sup>10</sup> Commenting on this shift in perception, Carter observes that the frontier ideologies of

‘The domestication of the wilderness’ and ‘Manifest destiny’ have been largely discredited. Many analyses of the politics of Westward expansion have interpreted the process of ‘Nation building’ as nothing short of imperialism motivated by economic forces: imperialism that often resulted in wars of expansion against America’s indigenous population.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Schatz further proposes that by the 1960s the Western had run its course as a ‘viable Hollywood commodity’<sup>12</sup> and that the importance of its national myth was dwindling as a result of ‘market saturation and generic exhaustion’.<sup>13</sup> It was also finding new life within art cinema and as an object of film/genre parody, as in *Blazing Saddles* (1974),

The Western myth of the monumental and charismatic, stoic, strong male hero – the kind of hero epitomized by actors like John Wayne, Henry Fonda or Gary Cooper – was deemed increasingly obsolete in the immediate post-studio years (see, for example, the tragic depiction of obsolescence and cultural displacement in *Lonely Are The Brave* [1962]). The Western frontier mythos had been a utopian and hopeful one, defined by a sense of ‘Adventure, optimism for the future, the beauty of the land, and the courage of the individuals who won the land.’<sup>14</sup> But by the end of the 1960s the genre had moved further away from any traditional or romantic representations of male heroism or redemptive narratives. In Italy and Spain, countries with first-hand experience of Fascism, the genre was appropriated and given

a nihilistic and existential overhaul – the Italian ‘Spaghetti’ western popularised by Sergio Leone’s ‘Dollars’ trilogy (1964-1966), for instance; *Django* (Corbucci, 1966); the array of ‘Zapata’ Westerns which gained popularity during the period, or even the surreal nihilism of Alejandro Jodorowsky’s avant garde Mexican ‘Western’ *El Topo* (1970). US films of the period like *Soldier Blue* (1970) and *A Man Called Horse* (1970) critiqued the treatment of the Native Americans by a racist white (male) military through representations of extreme confrontational, nihilistic violence and brutality. Directors of the ‘New Hollywood’, such as Robert Altman in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), were also pre-occupied with updating and displacing the traditions of the Western with new locales, landscapes, environments and frontier spaces within which to recontextualize traditional Western ideologies. They were also concerned with demythologising (or at least re-interrogating) the ‘heroic’ male myth, often borrowing and re-imagining the iconography of the genre within the context of a new frontier: the city where anti-heroic, violent cops replaced the noble cowboy.

## **Brody**

So how does *Jaws* refit and relocate the western?

Richard Torry avoids directly identifying *Jaws* as a Western (or indeed ‘Post Western’) but he does discuss the film alongside Sam Peckinpah’s violent revisionist film, *The Wild Bunch* (1969). He uses the two films as a prism through which to examine the collective trauma of the conflict in Vietnam. *The Wild Bunch*, Torry claims, aims to deconstruct the mythology of romantic heroism which pervades the classical Hollywood Western by replacing its heroic protagonists with violent, brutal slayers. Referring to John Cawelti’s analysis of *The Wild Bunch*, he notes how the film’s deconstruction of “‘the conventional Western’s heroic struggle’” is closer to the truth when he discovers in *The Wild Bunch* a ‘coherent example of the deconstruction and reaffirmation of myth’.<sup>15</sup> *Jaws* works

in a similar way: it both repositions and relocates the Western according to the paradigm of the New Hollywood, calling into question but also reaffirming traditional approaches to mythic male heroism, for example in Quint's *USS Indianapolis* monologue and through the character arc of the family-oriented, conflicted, outsider/everyman persona of Chief Martin Brody.

Brody is a New York City cop who has relocated with his family to the white picket fenced, WASPish New England seaside island town of Amity. Given the preponderance of anti-heroic cops/ urban cowboys and sheriffs across the American New Wave ('Popeye' Doyle, 'Dirty' Harry Callaghan [Clint Eastwood]) and the depiction of the tough contemporary crime ridden urban landscape as the new Wild West, it is possible to read Brody's outsider position here as a meta-textual (and intertextual) repositioning of this new (urban) 'western' cop-hero outside of his 'natural environment' (much like the 'rogue' shark). That Roy Scheider, had previously played, Detective Buddy 'Cloudy' Rousso in the urban (anti/post) western/cop thriller *The French Connection*, four years earlier contributes to the intertextual composition of his (post) Western character in *Jaws*. Nevertheless Brody is presented throughout as an everyman who must rise above his own limitations, and the film questions his 'heroic' status. In the final third of the film when Ahab-esque fisherman Quint (Robert Shaw) and wealthy ichthyologist Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) fraternally compare their scars accrued from various struggles with the sea, in manly tests of endurance (Quint's 'arm wrestling competition in an Okie bar in San Francisco') or romantic interludes ('Mary Anne Moffat – she broke my heart'). Brody, however, has only an appendectomy scar (which he attempts to hide out of embarrassment) and not a hard earned wound as a signifier of grizzled and authentic masculinity.

Furthermore, setting off to investigate the shark's apparent hunting ground, Brody drunkenly tells Hooper,

I'm tellin ya, the crime rate in New York will kill ya. There's so many problems, you never feel like you're accomplishing anything. Violence, rip offs, muggings. The kids can't leave the house. You gotta walk 'em to school. But in Amity, one man can make a difference!

This payoff line has echoes of the Western, presenting Brody as the lone Sheriff, the heroic individual come from outside to clean up the town. It harks back to the mythos of one man being able to make a difference. This is a clear aspiration for Brody as New York appears to have defeated him. It also gives insight into the less noble or 'charismatic' aspects of his character: he has been unable to 'make a difference' in New York, but in the supposedly genteel, 'civilised' and 'respectable' environment of Amity, where the most pressing problems are karate chopped picket fences, errant parking of garbage trucks and Harry's 'bad hat', 'making a difference' is a distinct possibility. This quaint representation of Amity contrasts with Peter Benchley's novel where the Mayor is threatened by the presence of the Irish mafia and the townspeople are themselves alarmed by the presence of Polish drug dealers and an alleged black rapist in their midst. Here the 'rogue' shark becomes a cipher for the town's white middle class anxiety (and racism) over the presence of outsiders and non-Islanders. Brody seems to have given up on New York and opted for what seems like the easier, softer option, perhaps trying to evade his responsibilities (and reality)? The arrival of the shark becomes a 'test' of manhood for Brody, forcing him to overcome the obstacles which face him (his terror of the sea) and confront his professional, family and masculine duties.

If Carl Gottlieb seemed keen to play down the relationship of *Jaws* to the Western and its tropes, producers Daryl Zanuck and David Brown offered a contrary perspective,

claiming, 'It's a Cowboy myth. For the folk on the beach have to hire the local fisherman, the Sheriff in other words, who is a hard boiled and salty tongued...maniacal bastard'.<sup>16</sup> This suggests that, at a studio level, the film had been at least partly imagined in terms of the Western 'myth' and also that Quint seems to have been viewed in terms of 'The Sheriff', not Brody (as might be imagined). Brody is the 'Chief' (a term by which he is referred to even by his wife Ellen [Lorraine Gary]) – an ambiguous and ironic term which not only connotes the role of 'Sheriff' with all its associations of patriarchal and paternal authority (and authoritativeness – a quality Brody seems to lack given that no one seems to listen to him – least of all his own family) but also Native American-ness – raising questions over land ownership, belonging and marginalisation (Brody as the head of a marginalised 'tribe' of non-Islanders). When Ellen asks 'When do I get to become an Islander?' she is cut to the quick by her friend: 'Ellen, never. Never. If you're not born here you're not an Islander. That's it.'

Throughout the film Brody's outsider position is formally suggested by the way he is positioned to either side of the shot, rarely centrally. Brody exists not only on the margins of the town both figuratively (as a non-Islander) and literally, but also on the margins of the frame. What is more, throughout the film, this 'Sheriff's' authority is constantly belittled and downgraded – by Hooper who admonishes him for smoking in the morgue and for disturbing the compressed air canisters on board the *Orca*; by Ellen who sends him off like a mother packing a child off on a school trip: 'Did you take your Dramamine? I put an extra pair of glasses in black socks, and the stuff for your nose'; by Quint, who when Brody fails to tie his sheepshank patronises him: 'Well, nothing's easy, is it Chief?' (as Brody sits at his feet rather like a young child sitting at the feet of his grandfather). This infantilization and diminishment of authority is embellished in the sequence in which Brody and his infant son Sean (Joe Mello) play at copying each other – one becoming a mirror for the other. In the



Western, romantic masculinity is directly associated with power, law and order, with decisive action, protecting the home and family, and preserving consensus and community. Later, as he and Hooper go off to autopsy the shark the mob has caught, Brody has to reaffirm his own position of authority to Ellen when she questions his authority to make such a split decision: ‘I can do anything – I’m the Chief of police!’ He has, nevertheless, earlier been powerless to stop young Alex Kintner (Jeffrey Voorhees) being devoured on his watch; his horror, disorientation and confusion at both what is happening and his inability to act in time, is signified by the famous dolly / zoom. Here the film draws attention to a moment of historical crisis. The death of Alex Kintner on his inflatable raft anticipates the *USS Indianapolis* speech. Alex’s gruesome death may read as a signifier of the brutalisation of American male youth in the wake of Vietnam (his mother is left anxiously waiting on the edge of the home front/beach for her lost son). The death is pushed to the back of the frame, almost unnoticed at first by the bathers and, to an extent by the viewer, until we are shocked into gory realisation along with Brody. There is an implicit parallel here in the way this formal arrangement of the shot anticipates Quint’s later statement about how the *USS Indianapolis* and another generation of expendable young men who went to their deaths were similarly unnoticed until it was too late: ‘What we didn’t know was our bomb mission was so secret, no distress signal had been sent...They didn’t even list us as overdue for a week.’

Brody’s seemingly impotent authority is later reinforced by the resounding slap in the face given to him by Alex’s mother, Mrs Kintner (Lee Fierro), for not closing the beach, the frontier space between the safety of the home and the savagery of the wilderness (‘My son is dead..I wanted you to know that’). It is a wakeup call to responsibility and duty, and a catalyst in Brody’s decision to take action.

Brody’s closest cinematic antecedent is Marshall Will Kane (Gary Cooper) in *High Noon*, a film which ‘celebrated the nobility of the individual in the face of failed public

morality.’<sup>17</sup> Both Kane and Brody are confronted not only with outlaw Frank Miller/the rogue shark, but also with a wave of public and official opposition. Neither is able to preserve the consensus. Kane is blamed for Miller coming back to town, something that will damage the town’s reputation and as McGee notes:

One of the public officials of Hadleyville turns on him and blames him for the inevitable gunfight that must take place and will ruin the reputation of the town...To justify this view, Henderson explains that ‘People up North are thinking about this town...about sending money down here to put up stores and factories’...Frank Miller [the film’s antagonist] is in alliance with those ‘People up North’ who have money to invest in the town<sup>18</sup>

Like Kane, Brody clashes with the community fathers (and mothers), who are unable to maintain a consensus of opinion. There are similarities between the church scene in *High Noon* in which Kane faces down the town elders and the town hall sequence in *Jaws* during which Brody states his intention to close the beaches. He too is met with opposition from the town’s captains of industry who think that closing the beaches will ruin their businesses. It is only later when Mayor Vaughn’s hand is forced (‘My kids were on that beach too’) that Brody is able to act. In this instance it is not as a traditional Western hero that Brody succeeds, but as an everyman, like Marshal Kane, willing to take a stand.

### **Landscape and masculinity**

*Jaws* can be aligned with the Western not only in its representation of Brody as a sheriff but also in its reworking of Western tropes of the landscape (relocated, obviously, to the ocean); in its treatment of masculinity; and its depiction of Amity as a frontier town. During his

professional career Spielberg has never made a Western. The only outright Western he made was as an aspiring filmmaker aged thirteen: a three minute, 8mm film titled *The Last Gunfighter* (1959).<sup>19</sup> As an American youth in the immediate post-war years he (and indeed screenwriter Carl Gottlieb) would certainly have been exposed to not only the twilight years of the classical Hollywood Western, but also the serialised Western on the emergent medium of television. Nevertheless, despite the genre's absence in his professional canon, it is iconographically present in a number of his films. Take, for example, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), during whose opening sequence Young Indy (River Phoenix) attempts to rescue the fabled 'Cross of Coronado' from the clutches of 'Fedora' (Richard Young). The sequence is a genre pastiche bearing the iconographic hallmarks of the Western, ('yee-hawing' villains; an abandoned mine shaft; a cross country horse / locomotive chase, and so on), and was filmed in Moab, Utah, which had also served as the location for several John Ford Westerns including *Rio Grande* (1950), *Wagon Master* (1949) and *Cheyenne Autumn*, (1964). *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) also draws on the Western in its landscapes (the Devils Tower National Monument: Wyoming plays a key narrative role and was the backdrop of Ford's *My Darling Clementine* [1949]) and its themes. Lester Friedman observes how *Close Encounters* 'reaffirms America's historical sense of Manifest Destiny, substituting Space for the western frontier'<sup>20</sup> and 'clearly reconnects American culture to the lofty sense of national purpose that characterized, at least in retrospect, the Kennedy era.'<sup>21</sup> In discussing *Jurassic Park* (1993), he observes how the film reworks the classic Western opposition of the desert and the garden and how the film's narrative structure calls to mind 'a western more than a conventional monster movie'<sup>22</sup> recalling the clash between 'civilisation and savagery'<sup>23</sup> that typified the Hollywood representation of the American frontier. He notes how 'The dinosaurs represent the forces of unrestrained nature, usually embodied by fierce

and uncivilized Indians, who oppose the forces of progress; Sattler is the civilizing female presence'.<sup>24</sup>

This reaffirmation of 'traditional' and the 'recapitulation' of the 'battle between civilisation and savagery' is anticipated by *Jaws*, which itself also may be viewed as the third part of an early 'trilogy' of films comprising *Duel* (1971) (whose opening point of view shot anticipates that of *Jaws*) and *The Sugarland Express* (1974). Robert Cumbow proposes a thematic overlap across these films: 'the mechanization of the animal' and the role of the machine across these films with *Jaws* as the culmination of Spielberg's exploration of this theme (up to that point).<sup>25</sup> These films establish an obsession with presenting the American landscape and wilderness as a nostalgic and romantic space as well as a disorienting and threatening one. In each, there is a dramatic chase across a natural, monumental terrain (or oceanscape in the case of *Jaws*), a wild no-man's land which recalls the untamed space of Geronimo, in which the passengers of the *Stagecoach* (1949) are impelled to travel through. *Duel* also looks to the frontier tension between civilised and savage, filtering it through the prism of contemporary class politics. Furthermore the rusting, monstrous truck which relentlessly pursues David (Every) Mann (Dennis Weaver) is adorned with plates from Nevada, Wyoming, New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho, Montana and California: all frontier states which had been home to a wide variety of native American tribes (thus, from a Western genre perspective, further embellishing its 'savagery').

Spielberg frames the ocean in much the same way as John Ford panoramically frames the monolithic landscape of the West with a prominent horizon line stretching fully across the frame. In the film's third act, Spielberg presents the *Orca* in long shot much like a Fordian 'stagecoach' set against the expansive panoramic landscape.

Moreover, Michael Budd has noted the oppositional nature of the genre which pits 'civilisation and savagery, culture and nature, East and West, settlement and Wilderness'.<sup>26</sup>

These binary oppositions (as Budd notes) are the foundations of the genre and ‘Every director who has constructed a distinctive Western world in his films has made images with which to visualise and particularize the meanings latent in these abstract elements’.<sup>27</sup> *Jaws*, too, is constructed too from binary oppositional narrative, (inter)textual and visual structures. The pond adjacent to the beach, for instance, may be read as ‘Garden’, a ring-fenced (via a sea wall/barrier) and supposedly tamed wilderness-space. The violent death of the fisherman, devoured coming to young Michael Brody’s (Chris Rebbello) aid, indicates that *this* (oceanic) wilderness will not be tamed or colonised. Amity itself is a frontier township, an island, which occupies an inter-medial space between city (as represented by Brody) and sea (as represented by Quint and to a lesser extent Hooper who is associated with both spaces – ‘you got city hands Mr Hooper, you’ve been counting money all your life’). Spielberg transposes, relocates and rebuilds the Western town/settlement in this oceanside locale. In doing so he supplies the viewer with a series of iconographic and recognisable tropes. Mrs Kintner putting a bounty of \$3000 on the shark calls to mind the image of the outlaw with a bounty on his head.

Furthermore, leading into the Town Hall sequence the viewer is presented with a shot of what amounts to a ‘Wanted’ sign. This generic Western imagery is later compounded by the flotilla of boats / lynch mob that leave the harbour to hunt down the (wrong) shark. The lynching and hanging of the innocent tiger shark (‘from Southern Waters’) not only has Western connotations (here the rule of law is removed from the hands of the Sherriff by the mob) but, this ‘lynching’ carried out by braying white men with metal hooks recalls the end sequence of another Hollywood Renaissance horror film: George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

As with the poetic Golden Age studio Westerns of Hawks and Ford in which the untamed and uncivilised landscape of the American west becomes a testing ground for a set of ‘natural’ (White American) male virtues: heroism, chivalry, stoicism, self sacrifice,

honour, competition and brotherhood, in *Jaws* the ocean plays a similar role. Jim Kitses defines the typical Fordian male protagonist and suggests that Ford's films celebrate 'strong masculine leadership'.<sup>28</sup> The retiring Captain Nathan Cutting Brittles (John Wayne) in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), for instance, embodies this approach to masculinity – his name connoting the duality of strength and fragility typical of the Fordian hero. For Kitses, the Fordian hero is one 'poised between individualism and the community'<sup>29</sup> and who 'acted not for himself but for larger causes – duty, honour, loyalty'.<sup>30</sup> Patrick Brereton develops this analysis stating, 'John Ford embodies the western ideal. In his extensive use of Monument Valley he recognised in nature the true romantic spirit of adventure. Out there, men could "be" themselves and act out their true masculine selves'.<sup>31</sup>

In *Jaws* Spielberg offers both a celebration of this mythic and romantic conception of masculinity as well as a study of contemporary masculinity in crisis. This is established in the opening campfire sequence prior to poor Chrissie Watkins's (Susie Backlinie) violent demise. The camera pans from the harmonica player across a scene of counter-cultural permissiveness (kids making out, others smoking joints etc) and comes to rest on a medium close up of young lothario Tom Cassidy (Jonathan Filley), whose attention is fixed with shark like predatory attention on someone off screen. The shot cuts to the object of his attention: Chrissie, and the viewer notes immediately that they are almost an identical match with their long blond hair. This juxtaposition feminizes Cassidy diminishing his masculinity. He is at one extreme end of the film's spectrum of manliness, while the uber-maleness of the working class John Wayne-esque Quint (a frontiersman) is positioned at the other. Cassidy displays none of the romantic Fordian notions of masculinity, un-chivalrously falling asleep drunk on the beach, too incapacitated to either fulfil his sexual ambitions with his mate and or protect her from her impending doom out in the wild ocean-space. Here we see the first example of the wilderness as testing space for the male values – a test that Cassidy fails.

On their run down to the water, Chrissie and Cassidy's route is dictated by ragged fence (whose posts resemble jagged teeth – a 'signpost' towards the fate that is about to befall Chrissie).<sup>32</sup> Fences mark and define space and territory, and later in the film Polly (Peggy Scott) will complain to Brody about the youngsters from the karate school 'karate-ing the picket fences' – such boundaries and territorial demarcation in *Jaws* are continuously contested. This fence also has a visual prominence in the subsequent sequence in which Chrissie's body is discovered (we may also note here that her bag, collected by Brody is of Native American design), a visual reminder of the tension between the home front and untamed ocean wilderness. Fences also feed into the film's concern with 'territoriality' (also a prominent theme of the Western). They demarcate property and indicate ownership, and separate neighbours (we see a prominent picket fence around Brody's house). As part of the film's visual language they prompt us to raise questions of ownership and colonisation, reminding us of the enclosed nature of 'civilised' space and the uninhibited nature of the wilderness.

In his analysis of *Stagecoach*, Michael Budd also comments on the role of fences in Ford's film: '*Stagecoach* marks the journey from Tonto to Lordsburg with images of gates and fences which spatially separate the relative safety of the towns and way stations from the open desert where the stagecoach is vulnerable to Indian attack.'<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Budd also comments on the framing of the shot in Ford's films, suggesting that

Shots looking through doors, through windows, gates, porches and canopies bring indoors and outdoors into juxtaposition. Such images are sufficiently pervasive to suggest a structuring vision of the nature of the frontier itself. Images using a frame are a central aspect of the visual organization which complements the narrative in every film.<sup>34</sup>

Spielberg consciously adopts this visual language across his film: in the sequence in which Brody and Ellen relax at home and plan to 'get drunk and fool around' as Michael and friends play in the boat outside. The ocean is present throughout the scene, framed in the background through the window of their home, juxtaposing the supposed safety of the 'homestead' and the wilderness outside. We are introduced to Brody as he wakes up, framed in extreme close up from behind looking out through the window to the sea that fills the frame (in this shot even the window frame is eliminated). Later, Deputy Hendricks (Jeffrey C. Kramer) is also viewed through the window of the harbourmaster's cabin wearing a Stetson and smoking a cigarette / cheroot.

This framing device is used as 'the posse' of Brody, Quint and Hooper ride out in the *Orca* to confront the shark. As it departs, the boat is framed through the jawbone of a shark adorning the window of Quint's workshop, and earlier in the film, after the fisherman is devoured in the boating pond, the wilderness of the ocean is framed through the supporting pillars of the pier. All of these shots present the threshold between the wild unknown and the safety of home. These 'safe' domestic spaces, however, are threatened by the rogue shark. We know from films like *The Searchers* that the safety of the home is often illusory, especially when it exists on the frontier with nature. As Budd reminds of the Fordian western:

The complex of home-wilderness images seems central to the similarities among Ford's Westerns: not only does it bring together the underlying elements of the genre, connecting the dynamics of the Western to the specific concerns of the director, but it also permeates the formal pattern and texture of the films. The meeting of home and Wilderness, the edge of the frontier, is constituted in the design of the images itself.<sup>35</sup>



Budd reminds us that the idea of civilisation is encoded through images of family and community (e.g., during the square dance sequence in *My Darling Clementine*) and is associated with the homestead, settlement or cavalry fort; with stagecoaches, or covered wagons, 'Home and Shelter is juxtaposed with its opposite, the desert wilderness, within single images.'<sup>36</sup> Throughout *Jaws* there is an emphasis on such spaces and structures: the cabin of the *Orca* or the Brody's home for instance, a white clapboard house by the water which is situated on the outside of the town rather than in it. Brody has to drive some distance at the start of the film to enter the town. This underlines the Brodys' status as outsiders / non Islanders as well as the Chief's own marginal position. Spielberg establishes their home as a 'Western homestead' from which he 'rides out' at the start of the film. From the start Brody is associated with paternalism, patriarchy, domesticity and the drive to protect the family. He embodies these normative 'male' virtues, but the ocean, a territory where he is least in his comfort zone, becomes the testing ground for these values.

### **Three men in a boat**

Throughout *Jaws* Spielberg foregrounds a series of fraternal and paternal, familial and platonic male relationships: Quint and Hooper bonding over their scars and drinking to their legs in a moment of friendly, fraternal competition, and setting aside their class differences aboard the *Orca*; young Sean Brody calling for his big brother Michael on the beach; Brody and Sean sharing an affectionate moment around the dinner table; Brody sitting at the feet of Quint (in his rocking/fishing chair like a grandfather) trying unsuccessfully to tie a sheepshank. These are moments where the film reaffirms the romantic and mythic idea of masculinity. These are, however, fleeting moments of amicability which are followed by moments of trauma or crisis which textually rupture this romanticism: the revelation of

Quint's experience on the *USS Indianapolis*; Michael's narrow escape in the boating pond, where male experience. At the table Brody asks his young Sean to give him a hug when asked why he replies 'Because I need it', immediately bringing into question assumptions about the solid, impregnable and monumental nature of masculinity.

If *High Noon* is one point of reference for *Jaws*, then in its presentation of masculinity and brotherhood, the film looks to Hawks' *Rio Bravo*, a film about both redemption and fraternal male relationships and comradeship. *Jaws* in that sense unites two ideologically opposed Westerns:

Director Fred Zinnemann and star Gary Cooper shared the view that the film celebrated the nobility of the individual in the face of failed public morality. John Wayne, *the* film star and conservative archetype of the period declared it un-American.<sup>37</sup>

Aboard the *Orca*, in a moment of respite Hooper and Quint attempt to 'man off' against each other comparing scars and, after the pivotal moment of Quint's *USS Indianapolis* speech, join in drinking and the comradely singing of 'Show Me The Way To Go Home'. Here there are clear echoes of *Rio Bravo* in which, waiting for the final standoff, Sheriff John T Chance (John Wayne) is positioned at one side of the frame with a coffee (like Brody) while Colorado Ryan (Ricky Nelson), Stumpy (Walter Brennan) and Chance's deputy, Dude (Dean Martin) join together in singing the similarly comradely 'My Rifle, My Pony and Me', a wistful tune about companionship. In *Rio Bravo*, drinking and singing play important roles (as they do here) – for Dude, alcoholism is an obstacle, a test, he must overcome with the help of his comrades to earn back his guns and allowing him to overcome Joe Burdette (Claude Atkins), towards the end of the film. Furthermore, Nathan Burdette (John Russell), pays the men in the saloon to play 'The Cutthroat song', a song dating from the Alamo and

connoting 'No Quarter' to one's enemies. In *Jaws* 'Show Me the Way to Go Home' signifies here not only a moment of male bonding, a recapitulation of the jailhouse sequence from *Rio Bravo*, but inverts Hawks' sentiment with a song about dislocation and masculinity in crisis (post Vietnam), all lost at sea. It indicates a desire to go back, to return home, and to take comfort in what is familiar and traditional. This song also works on a meta-textual level – when considering the film's recapitulation of the romantic Hollywood Western and its male ideals, it is a call to return to this more (culturally) comforting and traditional cinematic zeitgeist. The final third of *Jaws*, which plays out like an aquatic gunfight at the O.K. Corral, and here finally re-affirms and rehabilitates the 'lost' Western male virtues it has been seeking to re-establish. It is here on the ocean, at the end of the film, that Brody finally occupies the centre of the frame. Forced to overcome his fear of the water, his individualism and resourcefulness are tested as he confronts the shark alone (like Kane in *High Noon* facing Frank Miller). Leaning against the mast of the sinking *Orca*, he (significantly) uses a rifle to finally dispatch the shark via a well placed shot to a compressed air canister, which he ineptly knocked over earlier. He has passed the test the film has set him. Leaning against the sinking mast Brody also takes on the shark sightless in the final standoff / shootout – he has lost his glasses in the earlier chaos and the spare pair so carefully packed by Ellen are nowhere to be seen (presumably gone down with the ship). Brody's vanquishing of the shark, the 'outlaw' opponent, is an act of blind faith (a test not unlike that of Odysseus firing an arrow through the axe heads at the end of Homer's *The Odyssey*) in both himself and the true aim of the rifle (returning us to 'my rifle, my pony and me'). Brody is ultimately redeemed as heroic (not unlike Dean Martin's 'Dude' in *Rio Bravo*) emerging from the margins to conquer his enemy. He is the one who ultimately rehabilitates the romantic and heroic male values of the western.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the rarely discussed presence of the Western in *Jaws*, and how the film engages both iconographically, textually and thematically with the genre. Spielberg's Hollywood Renaissance film engages with both the tenets of the New Hollywood and its approach to genre revisionsism as well as nostalgically recalling and reaffirming the classical Hollywood western's romantic approach to masculinity and the landscape. Certainly Spielberg softens Benchley's source material. In the novel, Quint has no *USS Indianapolis* backstory to justify his obsession with the shark; he is a pure sadist, gruesomely eviscerating a Blue Shark, relishing feeding it to itself and gleefully revealing his 'special' shark bait: a foetal porpoise cut from the living belly of its mother. Spielberg, who famously didn't like any of the characters in the novel, aligns them to the more romantic, noble and (in the wake of the trauma of Vietnam), more optimistic mythos espoused by directors like Hawks or Ford. The film concludes with a moment of brotherhood and camaraderie as Hooper and Brody (re-emerged from the depths and the dead), share a moment over their fallen brother, Quint, and swim back to land (they ride off into the sunset). It finally closes as the credits roll on an image of the beach, a reminder of and return to the frontier space with which it opened.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> De Montfort University, Leicester, UK 17 June 2015. See <https://www.dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/news/2015/june/film-academics-mark-40th-anniversary-of-blockbuster-jaws.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kaminski, *The Secret History of Star Wars: The Art of Story Telling and the Making of a Modern Epic* (Ontario: Legacy Books, 2008), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Carter, *New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 2.

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<sup>4</sup> Emilio Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music: Jaws, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and the Return of the Classical Hollywood Music Style* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 108.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Biskind, *East Riders Raging Bulls: How The Sex 'N' Drugs 'N' Rock 'N' Roll Generation Saved the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 265.

<sup>6</sup> Warren Buckland, *Directed by Steven Spielberg, Poetics of the Contemporary Blockbuster* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Carter, *New Perspectives*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Pye and Linda Myles, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took over Hollywood* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> Carter, *New Perspectives*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Schatz, 'Cowboy Business', *The New York Times Magazine (Film Issue)*, November, 10<sup>th</sup> 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/10/magazine/11schatz.html>. Accessed 26/6/2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Malgorzata Martynuska, "The Evolution of the Western Genre Resulting from Social Change in the USA", *International English Studies Journal* 6 (2009): 66.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Torry, 'Therapeutic Narrative: *The Wild Bunch*, *Jaws*, and Vietnam,' *The Velvet Light Trap* 31 (Spring 1993): 27-38.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Nigel Andrew, *Nigel Andrew on Jaws: A Bloomsbury Movie Guide* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 1999), 21.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Costello, 'Rewriting *High Noon*: Transformations in American Popular Political Culture during the Cold War 1952-1968' in Peter Collins and John E. O'Connor, eds,

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*Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television & History* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), 175.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick McGee, *From Shane to Kill Bill: Rethinking The Western* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 115.

<sup>19</sup> Lester D Friedman and Brent Notbohm, eds., *Steven Spielberg Interviews* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 66.

<sup>20</sup> Lester D. Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Cumbow, 'The Great White Eating Machine' *Movietone News* 52, October 1976.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Budd, 'A Home in the Wilderness: Visual Imagery in John Ford's Westerns' *Cinema Journal* 16. 1 (autumn 1976): 62-75.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 30.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Brereton, *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2004), 92.

<sup>32</sup> There will be a similar 'signpost' shortly, when young Michael enters the Brody residence with a bloody hand

<sup>33</sup> Budd, 'A Home in the Wilderness', 63.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 62.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Costello, 'Rewriting High Noon', 175.