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"Hollywood's Lingua Franca, or how China saved the cat"

In 2005 a screenwriting book was published showing us what we had already known all along: Most Hollywood movies are the same. Until then, however, it was not clear exactly why or in what way this was the case. What separated this book, Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat*, from its predecessors, was the absolute specificity of Snyder's formula, as well as its widespread adoption by the film industry. Rather than providing general advice on how to develop a unique and innovative three act story, Snyder constructed a precise formula of fifteen "beats," or specific events, that not only must happen, but that must happen on the same page of every script. This formula, known as "Save the Cat," has now become synonymous with Hollywood blockbuster filmmaking. Similar to the introduction of continuity editing to filmmaking at the beginning of cinema's history, this formula prefigures the scope of possibility within which filmmaking can operate, subconsciously training viewers with each subsequent movie what to expect and when. In short, as we argue in this paper, "Save the Cat" has become cinema's lingua franca, or common language, allowing Hollywood to transcend international cultural and linguistic differences. This lingua franca of the silver screen has never been more vital to Hollywood's success: With the turn of the new millennium, international ticket sales—especially in the ever-expanding markets of China, Russia, and Brazil—dominate American box office revenues. Of note, these new foreign markets are not buying tickets for all types of American films, but are mainly focusing on spectacle-driven action and science fiction movies in 3D and IMAX formats. To understand the role of Hollywood's lingua franca on the industry's global expansion—or rather, the effect that global expansion is having on the types of narratives that Hollywood producers are interested in making—we begin this paper by describing Snyder's formula and document its pervasiveness in American blockbuster films. Following this, we turn toward a case study of *Transformers 4: Age of Extinction*, a recent blockbuster that peaked in China, the largest of the new markets. Here, we demonstrate the application of the *Save the Cat* formula and note the emphasis that these films place on special effects and action. Finally, we argue that the continual drive for capital represented by the "Chinification" of Hollywood movies is a new form of censorship that strangles creativity by dictating what gets made. Screenplays that succeed in becoming Hollywood films are no longer complex narratives or culture-specific humor, but rather, one that provide visceral and emotional shock, fast-paced action, jarring explosions, and visually impressive special effects.

Einführung und Diskussionsleitung: Prof. Dr. Anton Escher

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