

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and New Hollywood

### Introduction to Component

Two Hollywood films will be studied for comparison, **one** chosen from **group 1** and **one** chosen from **group 2**:

#### Group 1: Classical Hollywood (1930-1960)

- Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942), U
- The Lady from Shanghai (Welles, 1947), PG
- Johnny Guitar (Ray, 1954), PG
- Vertigo (Hitchcock, 1958), PG
- Some Like It Hot (Wilder, 1959), 12

#### Group 2: New Hollywood (1961-1990)

- Bonnie and Clyde (Penn, 1967), 15
- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Forman, 1975), 15
- Apocalypse Now (Coppola, 1979), 15
- Blade Runner (Scott, 1982), 15\*
- Do the Right Thing (Lee, 1989), 15

**\*Learners study Blade Runner in the Director's Cut version, released 1992.**

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## Core Study Areas

Learners will study all of their chosen films (eleven films in total) in relation to the following core study areas.

- Area 1. The key elements of film form: cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, sound and performance
- Area 2. Meaning and response: how film functions as both a medium of representation and as an aesthetic medium
- Area 3. The contexts of film: social, cultural, political, historical and institutional, including production.

## The Specialist Study Area is Auteur Theory

This guide will focus on debates and examples of auteurs in Hollywood 1930-1990.

The idea of the auteur as a critical approach derives from an earlier period of Film Studies when critics aimed to demonstrate that films are 'authored' by individuals, most obviously the film's director, rather than being generic products. Today, the concept of the auteur can be applied to a film or group of films in order to identify and explain its distinctive characteristics, arguing that these derive from a principal creative individual (most commonly the director, but it may also include cinematographers, performers or institutions).

Learners study the following:

- how auteurs determine the look and style of a film in relation to the collaborative approach to film production within Hollywood cinema
- how auteurs, through the imprint of their 'signature' features, can make a significant impact

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on a film's messages and values.

In relation to the idea of the auteur in Hollywood 1930 – 1990 will examine the work of filmmakers within the context of the Hollywood film institution. Learners should consider:

- To what extent it is possible to identify the distinctive contribution of creative individuals, most often directors, within a large industrial production process?
- How far it is appropriate to talk about these individuals as auteurs?
- How far it is more appropriate to consider filmmaking as a collaborative process?

## What is 'New Hollywood'?

This guide will look at theories about cinema and the work of a range of directors - as well as activities to engage learners - to answer the questions:

- What we mean by the term 'New Hollywood' (AKA the Hollywood Renaissance?)
- What are **stylistic traits** of New Hollywood?
- What are some of the **institutional contexts** of New Hollywood?
- To what extent is *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* a product of the Studio System?
- To what extent is *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* stylistically a New Hollywood film?

## What do we mean by the term 'New Hollywood'?

- period of US cinema production between 1961 and 1990
- the big studios were losing money - many had to be sold to larger corporations
- a period where new writers and directors could fund controversial or challenging films because studios were ready to take risks
- film narratives dominated by character and realistic situations

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- American auteurs, influenced by French New Wave; first generation of filmmakers who had attended film school, so formally educated in cinema
- stylistic experimentation - more expressionistic use of camera, editing, etc.

## What are the stylistic traits of New Hollywood?

Just as the French New Wave of the 1960s were inspired by the cinematic style of directors they celebrated as auteurs, so the directors of New Hollywood, would take inspiration from *Nouvelle vague* films like *Breathless* (Godard, 1960) and *Jules and Jim* (Truffaut, 1962). These films were populated by dissolute, morally ambiguous characters who embarked on casually sexual relationships with other outsiders. They also utilised lighter, more mobile cameras to increase the range of camera movement and film on location.

**Extension task:** Read this article on how the French New Wave influenced Hollywood film

<https://thefilmstage.com/features/the-classroom-french-new-wave-the-influencing-of-the-influencers/>

New Hollywood was also influenced by Italian Neo-Realism. These were films by directors like Rossellini and Visconti who portrayed a ruined Europe, devastated by two world wars, and the bleak lives of people scratching out an existence. Films like *The Bicycle Thief* (de Sica, 1948) used non-professional actors and actual locations around a bombed-out Rome to tell stories about poverty-stricken characters who try to retain their dignity. Often the scenes would involve cool observation of the characters engaged in pedestrian or un-dramatic tasks that captured a sense of 'real-life'.

'New Hollywood' films also often display these, as well as other, stylistic traits.

- frustration or challenge to 'continuity': unusual camera angles, jump-cuts, breaking 180-degree rule, breaking fourth wall, expressionistic montage. Deliberately tries to

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unsettle the spectator

- lighter cameras means there is a greater range of camera movement and unusual angles - expressionistic cinematography. More CU and extreme C or sometimes events shot in ELS to add mystery/confusion
- less use of match-on-action, shot reverse-shot or 'invisible' editing techniques
- asynchronous, looped or expressionistic sound design
- long periods without dialogue/music - or some sections that fuse music (often pop, rock or jazz not traditional score) with images
- shot on location - in real rooms, diners, hotels, on the streets etc. Creates sense of realism
- explicit sex, violence, nudity and drug taking
- naturalistic acting and performance style: 'Method' acting where the actor 'becomes' the character, not performing to the camera; dialogue in group scenes often overlaps or is mumbled. Forces spectator to concentrate.

They also have a similar narrative and thematic concerns:

- narratives are disjointed, elliptical and lack closure. Critic Tom Berliner said there is a "focus on irresolution"; plot lines and character arcs aren't concluded in a satisfying fashion
- background and subplots often intrude on main plot, unbalancing the narrative. Berliner said the films show "a perverse tendency to integrate, in narratively incidental ways, story information and stylistic devices counterproductive to the films' overt and essential narrative purposes"
- characters are often anti-heroes: daringly amoral, ambiguous, occasionally violent but also tender, vulnerable and romantic. Often criminals, homeless or other outsiders, struggling against mainstream conformist culture
- stories that attack, criticise or subvert authority - the (creative, rebellious) individual vs (oppressive, dehumanising) society is a common theme

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- challenges traditional American values and assumptions about gender, sexuality, capitalism and consumerism.

**Task:** Watch a 5 minute clip from a New Hollywood film like *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967) or *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969). Where can you see the New Hollywood style being used?

New Hollywood stylistic traits	Examples
Continuity disrupted in editing - jump cuts etc.	
Unusual use of camera distance, angle, movements	
Asynchronous or expressionistic sound design and music	
Real-life locations	
Naturalistic acting style	
Explicit language, sex, violence etc.	
Narrative Traits	
Rebellious individual(s) struggling against conformity	
Anti-heroes - morally ambiguous	
Traditional values challenged	
Critical of authority	

## Institutional Contexts

By the late 1960s, Hollywood was in crisis. The ever-growing popularity of television posed real competition to cinema, who began to resort to musicals and lavish blockbusters (often with a historical or religious theme to attract an older, conservative audience) to provide an experience

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TV could not. Films were shot on 70mm (which gives more depth-of-field and stronger colour) and new developments like Technicolor, 3D, widescreen and surround were introduced. Successful films of this period were *The Sound of Music* (Wise, 1965) and *The Longest Day* (various directors, 1962).

**Task:** Watch the trailers for these two films. Why would these attract a conservative, older audience? Why might young people not be attracted to these films?

In 1963, Warner Brothers was almost destroyed by the - at that time - most expensive film ever made: *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz, 1963). From a starting budget of \$2 million, the final film cost \$44 million but was a huge flop. It was clear that the old business models were no longer relevant.

Studio executives, desperate for films that would attract a young audience (and make a profit) began to take risks on a new generation of writers and directors. Filmmakers like Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas were graduates from film school - so had formally been educated in cinema and encouraged to experiment with short films. They also had practical experience working in exploitation cinema with producers like Roger Corman, who could make original, independent but also commercially successful films very quickly and on tiny budgets. Many British or European directors also moved to Hollywood during this period, bringing the gritty realism of 'Kitchen Sink' drama or the Czech New Wave.

Around this time the Production Code was also abandoned, and a ratings system similar to the BBFC in the UK was established. This meant filmmakers were free to explore adult material and themes, which would appeal to a younger, more rebellious audience.

**Task** Watch the 'acid trip' scene from *Easy Rider*. Why would this have not been permitted by the Production Code? How would this appeal to a younger, more liberal audience? Why is the style of the film unconventional and experimental?

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Films like *Bonnie and Clyde* only cost \$2.5 million but eventually grossed \$50 million. *Easy Rider* cost only \$40,000 and grossed \$60 million. It was clear that taking a risk and investing in edgy, daring, unconventional films had real financial value. When the X-rated *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger, 1970) won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director, and made over \$44 million it was clear that these new directors were not only commercially, but also critically successful.

## Social and Political context

**Research Task:** Use the following keywords to find out about what social and political influences shaped New Hollywood. Vietnam War, counterculture, Watergate, hippies, Greenwich Village scene, Assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Woodstock, Merry Pranksters, Manson Murders. How did these events show both the optimism and disillusionment of the late 1960s?

**Discussion:** Why might these events/movements create a climate where the themes of the New Hollywood film would be popular and critically acclaimed? How did the films of New Hollywood reflect the events of the time?

## To what extent is *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* a product of New Hollywood?

*One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* is a good example of New Hollywood for a number of reasons. Its director, Milos Forman was a successful filmmaker in Communist Czechoslovakia who fled to the USA after the Soviet invasion in 1968. For this reason, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* is a very American film in many ways, but it also has a European perspective on American society.

**Task:** Choose a focus scene from the film. You could use the two examples from *Vertigo's* factsheet, or the **Focus Sequence** section of this Study Guide. Use the chart below to identify



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some of the stylistic and narrative traits in the film (note: not every trait is used by Forman - for instance, the techniques of continuity are used throughout).

New Hollywood stylistic traits	Example from <i>One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest</i>
Continuity disrupted in editing - jump cuts etc.	
Unusual use of camera distance, angle, movements	
Asynchronous or expressionistic sound design and music	
Real-life locations	
Naturalistic acting style	
Explicit language, sex, violence etc.	
<b>Narrative Traits</b>	
Rebellious individual(s) struggling against conformity	
Anti-heroes - morally ambiguous	
Traditional values challenged	
Critical of authority	

What elements are not in the New Hollywood style? You might want to compare to another more stylistically experimental film like *Easy Rider* or *Midnight Cowboy*.

Example	Why is this not typical of New Hollywood?