

Experimental film – Film movements

Film movements

‘A film movement is constituted by a distinctive body of films, each directed by an auteur. It is often further constituted by a related body of critical or theoretical writing. A film movement will be of significance in film history because of thematic and formal/stylistic innovations which characterise the films and which are, most often, a response to wider political, social or cultural changes at a particular time and in a particular place.’ – Patrick Phillips

Film movements are a new and original style of filmmaking. The films within a movement form a body of films which may have a set of shared characteristics. A film movement emerges at a particular moment in time.

Film movements often develop within a particular country or region. However, as movements are often limited to a certain time period, they might not be reflective of an overall national cinema. Some film movements developed as a reaction against the typical style of national films.

Film movements have a high status in film studies. They contribute to the artistic and academic status of film. Film movements have the status of art and directors the status of artists/auteurs.

The 1960s’ European Avant-Garde movements, known as the cinematic new waves of Europe, were an anti-establishment answer to the tired, derivative cinema still in production during the 40s and 50s. Their boundless experimentation went on to transform cinema worldwide.

Vivre Sa Vie (Godard, 1962)

Jean-Luc Godard: The most revered auteur of the French New Wave, Godard used his vast knowledge of film (having started his career as a *Cahier du Cinéma* critic) to challenge the cinematic establishment, purposefully employing what mainstream cinema considered mistakes, such as jump cuts, unstructured narratives and breaking the fourth wall.

Vivre Sa Vie is Godard’s ‘almost melodrama’ and the first where he deliberately used Brechtian narrative techniques to emotionally distance spectators from the protagonist’s journey.

Narrative: Challenging conventional narratives, he used Brechtian techniques of alienation, such as an episodic structure and constant interruptions (quotations, voice overs telling stories, long philosophical dialogue exchanges), to distance his audience from what could have been otherwise perceived as a straightforward melodrama.

Sound: The music is repetitive and acts as a recurrent motif, rather than emphasising emotion as is typical in a Hollywood film. The sudden, abrupt breaks from music to silence constantly remind us that we are watching a film and draw our attention to the use of sound. The film’s score is used sparingly in contrast to a heavily scored Hollywood film. The sound is realistic at times, particularly during conversations. In tableau 1, the dialogue is sometimes difficult to hear as it merges with the background noise.

Film movement: the French New Wave (*la Nouvelle Vague*)

This was the most influential post-WW2 avant-garde film movement; characteristically, it was a break from classic narrative and filmmaking techniques.

Key features:

- Jump-cuts
- On location shooting
- Improvised acting
- Filming chronologically
- Loose narratives
- Homages to classical Hollywood
- Breaking 180° rule
- Low budgets
- Reworking classical genres
- Handheld camera
- Long takes
- Rejection of French literary cinema
- Ambiguous, unmotivated characters