

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.

Film movement: American 1990s postmodernism

The postmodernist movement started in the second half of the 20th century as a reaction to the prevalence of modernist ideals (an obsession with reason and homogenous ideas about human nature). Some of its elements are intertextuality, style over substance, homage, irony, self-reference and distortions of time.

Pulp Fiction is one of the first high-profile films to start the postmodernist trend in American cinema. It develops from the following:

Indiewood: This was the trend towards subsidiaries or independent production companies making mid-budget films that combine indie and mainstream cinema, appealing to a cine-literate audience who also want to be entertained.

1990s irony and intertextuality: This was the trend towards irony and popular culture based on textual references to other popular texts. It appealed to the Gen X young audience.

The film fan director: Best described as film obsessives, these filmmakers want to pay homage to their favourite films and mine cinema history. Quentin Tarantino is an example of a film fan director.

Pulp Fiction (Tarantino, 1994)

Tarantino: A postmodernist auteur, all his films are homages to various genres, film movements and/or directors of the past, with a focus on low-brow crowd pleasers and dialogue-heavy writing. ‘I steal from every single movie ever made’, he famously claimed.

Pulp Fiction pays homage to **French New Wave** cinema throughout, with use of long takes, non-heroic characters, genre revision, freeze-frame and characters having seemingly banal conversations.

Narrative: The film has a non-linear narrative, and a typical postmodernist approach is used, with chapter headings and on-screen text to guide the spectator. The narrative is also circular and we see Tarantino’s trademark-rich characterisations. This reflects the trend for postmodern films to reward active spectatorship – the pleasure comes from piecing together the plot in story order.

Intertextual references: The film is layered with references to 20th-century popular culture. The Jack Rabbit Slims diner is a homage to a mythic 1950s, with waiters dressed as iconic figures such as Marilyn Monroe. Mia Wallace’s bobbed hair and white shirt evoke French New Wave star Anna Karina.

Aesthetics: The film is set in a mythic, hyperreal Los Angeles with no specific time setting.