

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

The films within a movement form a body with shared characteristics. A film movement emerges at a particular moment in time.

Film movements often develop within a particular country/region. However, as movements are often limited to distinct time periods, they might not reflect an overall national cinema; some movements are a reaction against existing typical styles of a national cinema.

Film movements contribute to film's moving from industry towards artistic status, with directors gaining the status of auteurs, and films being part of a cultural and social heritage.

Film movement: surrealism

Art Movement: Surrealism was a leading art movement of the 1920s-1940s, introduced by *The Surrealist Manifesto* by Andre Breton in 1924. The Surrealists sought to free themselves from the horrors experienced in Europe in WW1 through exploring the unconscious mind, to discover greater truths

and insights about themselves and the world around them. They unlocked a world of imagination, desires, and the irrational, stirred by dreams. They combined horror and humour to challenge, provoke and disrupt notions of moral decency. They were greatly influenced by Sigmund Freud's studies into psychoanalysis and dream interpretation. Notable exponents were Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel (Spain), Max Ernst (Germany) and Rene Magritte (Belgium).

Surrealism on Film: Dalí and Buñuel worked within film, with the celebrated short *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), obeying the single mantra that nothing shown could have a logical explanation. The film was a huge success, and led to a small but culturally hugely influential body of films, featuring female directors Germaine Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1927), and Maya Deren's *Meshes in the Afternoon* (1943), Jean Cocteau's *Blood of the Poet* (1930), up to Lynch's own short films (*The Grandmother*, 1970) his first feature, *Eraserhead* (1977). Surrealism still influences film makers today, notably within fantasy, like Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006).

Surrealist Cinema Conventions:

- Unexplained jumps in time, and / or in space.
- Characters that have altered states / multiple personalities.
- Deeply unnerving violent images (eg the infamous razor slicing a woman's eyeball dissolving into clouds moving across the moon in *Un Chien Andalou*).
- Sequences pushing boundaries of morality, especially religion.
- Dreams, visions.
- Ambiguous reoccurring symbols, images and motifs.

Mulholland Drive (Lynch, 2001)

Lynch: Lynch is an artist (painter) as well as film-maker. His work has always explored dreams, nightmares, reoccurring motifs, childhood memories, and a dark vision behind the surface, especially in America.

Surrealist Influences:

Mise en Scene - Genre traits/motifs/iconic images in films acting as mysterious symbols, taken from:

- noir (the gangsters, the city as corrupting for the new arrival, the Pandora's box key and safe, the femme fatale, the killings)
- Westerns (the mysterious Cowboy)
- Musicals (the curtain, performance microphone, and singers, previously seen in *Blue Velvet* (1986))
- Hollywood itself (famous road signs, landmarks, and intertextual auteur references to his own films, as well as *Vertigo* (Hitchcock 1959) and *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950)).

Cinematography The pools of darkness, long tracking shots, and points of view leading to entrances and around corners, all build an ominous aesthetic, added by the Soundtrack with often disturbing echoes or humming (recalling *Eraserhead*), an obsession with 1950s popular music, and the unnerving synth score of regular composer Angelo Badalamenti.

Narrative:

- Experimental, surreal, non-linear structure
- Hyperreality, where the protagonist (and viewer) cannot distinguish between reality and dream/nightmare
- Collaged - formed from a pilot episode for an uncommissioned TV series, which Lynch re-edited into a film with added new material from the last 40 minutes, creating some kind of circular structure
- Dual characters suggest real and dream personas
- Postmodern artifice - when performance turns to mime.