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| New American Cinema |
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| The New American Cinema was a movement to create independent films that expressed the countercultural moods and sensibilities of the late 1950s and early 1960s; these films represented a break away from the standardisation and conformity of corporate Hollywood and from the ideological conservatism of the American mainstream. The term refers both to the films of the period and to the independent film distribution collective of the same name which was established in New York by some New American Cinema filmmakers. |
| The New American Cinema was a movement to create independent films that expressed the countercultural moods and sensibilities of the late 1950s and early 1960s; these films represented a break away from the standardisation and conformity of corporate Hollywood and from the ideological conservatism of the American mainstream. The term refers both to the films of the period and to the independent film distribution collective of the same name which was established in New York by some New American Cinema filmmakers.  The two earliest examples of New American Cinema are John Cassavetes’ *Shadows* (1959) and Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie’s *Pull My Daisy* (1959). These films were noted for their improvisational style, their social commentary and their involvement with countercultural movements such as the Beat Generation and the subculture of jazz musicians. The films produced under the umbrella of the New American Cinema differ in style of production, scripting, and storyline; common characteristics were the attempt to establish film as art rather than purely as entertainment (Grant 2008) and the understanding of the cinema as a means of personal expression, emphasising in particular the directors’ creative freedom. Further attributes these films often shared were politically radical plots, the lack of a set script, the use of location shooting, taboo imagery, often of a sexual character and with homosexual and camp inflections, and an unpolished style of editing. Budgets tended to be low and the actors were often unknown beyond their immediate artistic circle. New American Cinema directors believed that anyone could direct or appear in a film and that film production should not be restricted to an elite group of Hollywood filmmakers and stars.  File: Shadows.jpg  Figure 1 Poster of John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959)  Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadows\_(1959\_film)#/media/File:Jc\_shadows.jpg  The New American Cinema project was formalised in 1960, when twenty-three independent filmmakers, led by Jonas Mekas and including Shirley Clarke, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, banded together to form the New American Cinema Group, and founded the Film-Makers’ Co-operative as the distributing arm of the movement, an organisation that exists to this day. The original aim of this group was to showcase independent cinema and to create a community of like-minded people, allowing independent films to be shared widely both nationally and internationally. By 1962, it had become the main experimental and independent film distributor in North America. It differed from other distribution houses in that it was run by the filmmakers themselves and had a non-selective policy: all films submitted for distribution were accepted (James 1992).  In the twenty-first century, the New American Cinema Group, or Film-makers’ Co-operative, continues to ensure that non-commercial films are still produced and distributed in the US and beyond. The Co-op holds a collection of over 5,000 films by more than 825 filmmakers which it rents out to various arts festivals and cultural institutions, making it an important archive for American Cinema (<http://film-makerscoop.com/>). The group has inspired similar local and national organisations such as the London Film-makers’ Co-operative in England the New Brunswick Filmmakers’ Co-operative in Canada. |
| Further reading:  (Battcock)  (Grant)  (James)  (Lewis)  (Mekas)  (Ruoff)  (Zryd) |