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| **Cassavetes, John (1929-1989)** |
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| John Nicholas Cassavetes (1929-1989) was born to Greek parents in New York City, John Cassavetes originally trained in the theater. His acting in commercial Hollywood films such as *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) and *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), for which he received an Academy Award nomination, gave him some mainstream popularity and the means to finance his own independent projects. These were characterized by a realistic, pseudo-documentary style, loose storylines centered on quirky characters, and a strong reliance on actors’ performances. He is considered one of the pioneers of American independent cinema.  Cassavetes combined work as a Hollywood actor with a distinguished career as an independent director in complete control of his films. He had been a frequent television actor since as early as 1951. Between 1959-60, he was the male lead in the successful television series *Johnny Staccato*, a role that gave him the financial stability to make his first independent feature film, *Shadows* (1959). The film is shot cinema verité style. The realistic, often ad-libbed, performances, the high-contrast black and white cinematography, and the creative use of location sound are trademarks of American indie film to this day. Along with *Pull My Daisy* (Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, 1959), *Shadows* is credited with triggering off the New American Cinema movement of the early to mid-1960s.  His second successful independent feature, *Faces* (1968), granted Cassavetes an Academy Award nomination for best screenplay. Cassavetes tended to work with a stable cast, which included his wife Gena Rowlands, Peter Falk, Ben Gazarra, Seymour Cassell, and Timothy Carey. *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974) is often considered Cassavetes’ masterpiece; with Gena Rowlands and Peter Falk as a suburban couple, it provides a dark picture of middle-class life in 1970s America. The film earned Cassavetes yet another nomination for best director and Gena Rowlands her first nomination for best actress. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* was also a success with Ben Gazarra in the lead. The self-reflexive *Opening Night* (1977) told the story of a theater troupe in rehearsal for a play soon to open; the relationships between the actors on and off the stage intersect and become confused and the viewer is prompted to choose about the “reality” of the events on the screen. A multi-layered reflection on narrative and on the relations between representation and the real, *Opening Night* is one of Cassavetes’ most complex films.  Cassavetes kept on working as an actor through the 1980s, a decade in which he directed three films with more conventional narrative structures. *Gloria* (1980) is the story of a woman who had to take up arms to raise her child. *Love Streams* (1984) and *Big Trouble* (1986) are carefully crafted chamber pieces that in many ways lack the vigor of his earlier work.  **Filmography as Director**  *Shadows* (1959)  *Faces* (1968)  *Husbands* (1970)  *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971)  *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974)  *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976)  *Opening Night* (1977)  *Gloria* (1980)  *Love Streams* (1984)  *Big Trouble* (1986) |
| Further reading:  (Carney, Cassavetes on Cassavetes)  (Carney, The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies)  (Cassavetes)  (Fine)  (Kouvaros) |