



# MODULE 12:

MOVIEMAKING AND PROTEST, 1980-1989

# CHAPTER 9: MEGA-ENTERTAINMENTS AND PHILOSOPHY

Read: Cousins, pgs. 391-435.

## Keywords

China's Cultural Revolution/Maoism

Taoist Cinema

Glasnost

Cinema of Moral Unrest

MTV Generation

"A New Cultural Force"/New American Consumers

"Eye of the Duck Scene"

## Directors

Tian Zhuangzhuang, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tengiz Abuladze, Kira Muratova, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Gaston Kaboré, Souleymane Cissé, Russell Mulcahy, John Sayles, Luc Besson, Leos Carax, Tony Scott, David Lynch, Pedro Almodóvar, Stephen Frears, Bill Forsyth, Terence Davies, Peter Greenaway, Derek Jarman, David Cronenberg, Spike Lee, Denys Arcand



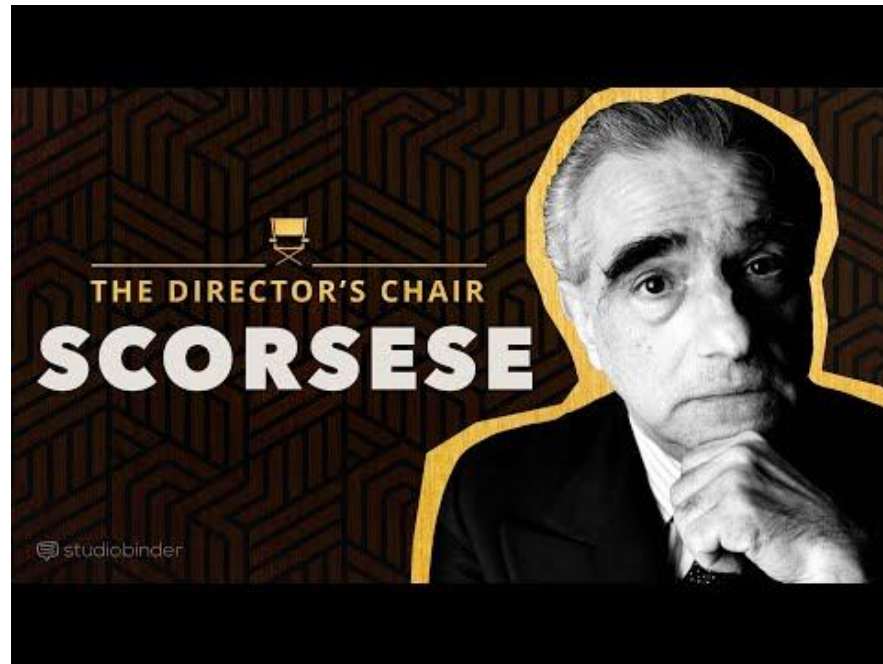
# MARTIN SCORSESE'S 1980s RENAISSANCE

Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* was his most painful story yet about spiritual fall and redemption. It is not a film about boxing but about a man with paralyzing jealousy and sexual insecurity, for whom being punished in the ring serves as confession, penance and absolution.

Scorsese: “After *New York, New York*, I thought, I’ll never have the audience of Spielberg, not even of Francis (Coppola)... Maybe I’m crazy, but rather than compromise the story and make ten other pictures afterward, I’d rather leave it done and not make any more movies after this. So what the hell!”

*Raging Bull*, along with *The King of Comedy*, was a passion project for De Niro, who first touted it to Scorsese in the book form of LaMotta’s ghost autobiography on the set of *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*. It was worth his perseverance, for this, *The King of Comedy* and *Taxi Driver*, are their holy trinity of triumphs.

He soon followed *Raging Bull* with additional 1980s classics such as *After Hours* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*.



# AMERICAN GIGOLO: LAST OF THE AMERICAN NEW WAVE

*American Gigolo* was about a male prostitute played by Richard Gere, he enjoys being both the seller and the commodity and delights in the shallow pop music, designer clothes and fast cars that were the 1980s symbols of power and success.

Like the decade itself, Schrader seemed to be saying this man has no inner life or rather, no spiritual life. Schrader's exploration of bodies and surface, combined with his interest in the transcendence of bodily experience, make him one of the most ambiguous figures in modern American cinema.



# MUSIC VIDEOS AND THE MTV REVOLUTION

The MTV Generation refers to the adolescents and young adults of the 1980s and early-mid 1990s, a time when many were influenced by the television channel MTV, which launched in 1981.

The development of MTV “had an immediate impact on popular music, visual style, and culture.” Through this impact, the MTV Generation has been defined by:

1. Members of Generation X
2. Children who were born or grew up in the 1980s
3. A select set of musical and visual preferences
4. Socially and politically progressive



# TOP GUN: A ROLLER COASTER IN THE SKY

The critics at the time hated it, some called it proof that Hollywood could polish a turd, but that didn't stop it becoming the highest-grossing film of 1986 and helping define the decade. Not only that, but for better or worse its influence is still felt at cinemas today; virtually all modern 'tentpole' blockbusters have a bit of 'Top Gun' in their DNA. But why?

Tony Scott directed *Top Gun*, but the brains behind it were the ultra-successful production team of Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson. They were pioneers of the "high concept project" — such as Eddie Murphy's *Beverly Hills Cop* and Jennifer Beals' *Flashdance*.

Some critics complained the film "was one long advert..." but that was the point. Sales of Ray Bans went up by 40% after the movie and it also boosted US Air Force and Navy applications. The Navy even started posting recruitment booths outside screenings of *Top Gun* to snare newly inspired cinemagoers.

Tony Scott started out in commercials and it was this advert for the Saab 900 Turbo (which implied that stepping into a Swedish car was like entering a fighter jet) that landed him the 'Top Gun' gig. He brought techniques from the ad world like flash cut editing and stylised lighting with him and these perfectly fit the film, shared similarities with the burgeoning music video industry and helped define the look of a modern blockbuster. Nowadays many of the directors who dominate our screens - Michael Bay, Peter Berg, David Fincher and Zack Snyder - started out making music videos and ads, rather than small independent films that provided the grounding for the previous generation. They all owe a debt to Tony Scott's work on 'Top Gun'.

When you think of the *Jurassic Park* gates, the *Batman* logo, *Transformers*' or *Pirates of the Caribbean* and the way they were marketed, these all owe a debt to *Top Gun*.





# DAVID LYNCH AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

His films protest against the rationality and understandability of everyday life. He worked with unconscious material the way that a carpenter works with wood. The key scene of many of his films, the scene that often combines the beauty of life with its terror, is the "eye of the duck scene." Because, as he put it, "when you look at a duck, the eye is always in the right place."

David Lynch had an almost abstract fear of the outside world. But he didn't try to push that fear away. He stared at it through a brilliant frame. Lynch said that as people get older, their window on the world closes. According to Lynch this is what was happening to the United States and its cinema.



# SPIKE LEE “FIGHTS THE POWER”



Spike Lee thumbed his nose at white America and bourgeois blackness and was inventive with movie form. *Do the Right Thing*, which was shot in Brooklyn. It's set on a single, sweltering day and builds like a pressure cooker as tensions between local blacks, Latinos, and whites are sparked by events at a pizzeria. Lee and his cinematographer, Ernst Dickerson, use heightened colors to match the film's boiling themes. They filmed with tilted camera angles to render things off kilter.

The film gave a distinct black narrative that could play across racial lines. Though it didn't capture that coveted Oscar, it infiltrated the minds and hearts of many non-black Americans, leaving a lasting and important impression about race politics.



# PROTEST AND REVOLUTION IN 1980s CHINA

There was a new openness in China. It was debating where it stood in the world, how modern and Democratic it wanted to be. Standing up to the old Maoist repressions. The fervent was thrilling and moving. And out of it came the greatest rebirth in filmmaking of the whole decade. Mao's cultural revolution had stamped out the fire of movie-making in China, and closed its legendary film school, the Beijing film academy.

The son of the head of the Beijing Film Studio and an actress, Tian Zhuangzhuang (1952, Beijing) was introduced to cinema when he was young. In 1978 he was admitted to the Beijing Film Academy, where he formed the so-called Fifth Generation with Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Peng Xiaolan and Wu Ziniu. His films *The Horse Thief* and *The Blue Kite* brought him international fame, but also problems with the Chinese censors that kept him from working in China. Martin Scorsese considered Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief* (1988) the best film of the decade.

*The Yellow Earth* (1984) deconstructs one of the pillars of the Communist Party's most cherished myths, that Communist ideology was widely embraced by China's peasant communities as depicted in countless propaganda films in the 1950s and 60s. It also suggests that fundamental issues of freedom and livelihood remains unresolved even today. The film's use of a stationary camera, natural lighting, a limited color palette and hauntingly soulful songs suggest that Chen and his crew employed elements of classical Chinese aesthetics in the service of modern cinema.

Such protest films would cease following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and the repressions the Chinese Communist Party imposed after the crackdowns on protest that followed.

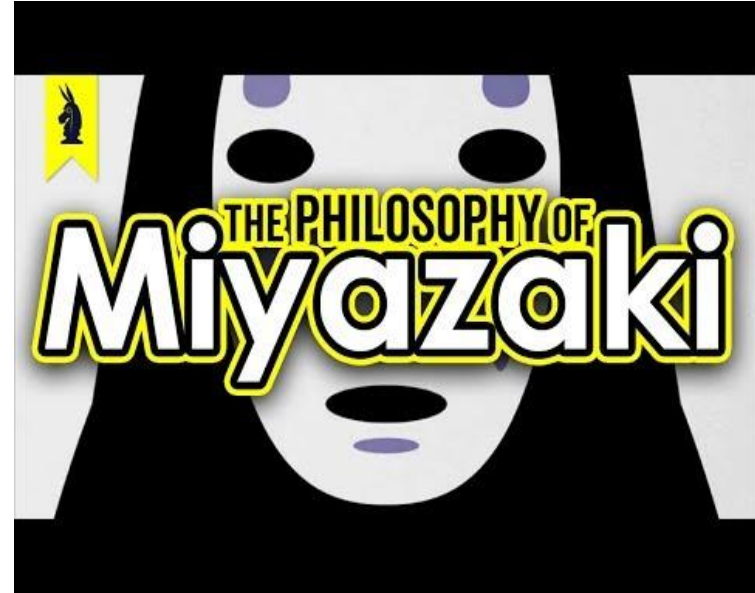


# STUDIO GHIBLI “BLOWS A NEW WIND THROUGH ANIME”

Studio Ghibli, is best known for its animated feature films, and has also produced several short subjects, television commercials, and two television films. Its mascot and most recognizable symbol is a character named Totoro, a giant catlike spirit from the 1988 anime film *My Neighbor Totoro*. Among the studio's highest-grossing films are *Spirited Away* (2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) and *Ponyo* (2008).

The studio was founded on June 15, 1985, by directors Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata and producer Toshio Suzuki, after the successful performance of Topcraft's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984). Five of the studio's films are among the ten highest-grossing anime feature films made in Japan. *Spirited Away* is second, grossing 31.68 billion yen in Japan and over US\$380 million worldwide; and *Princess Mononoke* is fourth, grossing 20.18 billion yen.

The name “Ghibli” was chosen by Miyazaki from the Italian noun ghibli (also used in English), based on the Arabic name for “hot desert wind” the idea being the studio would “blow a new wind through the anime industry.”

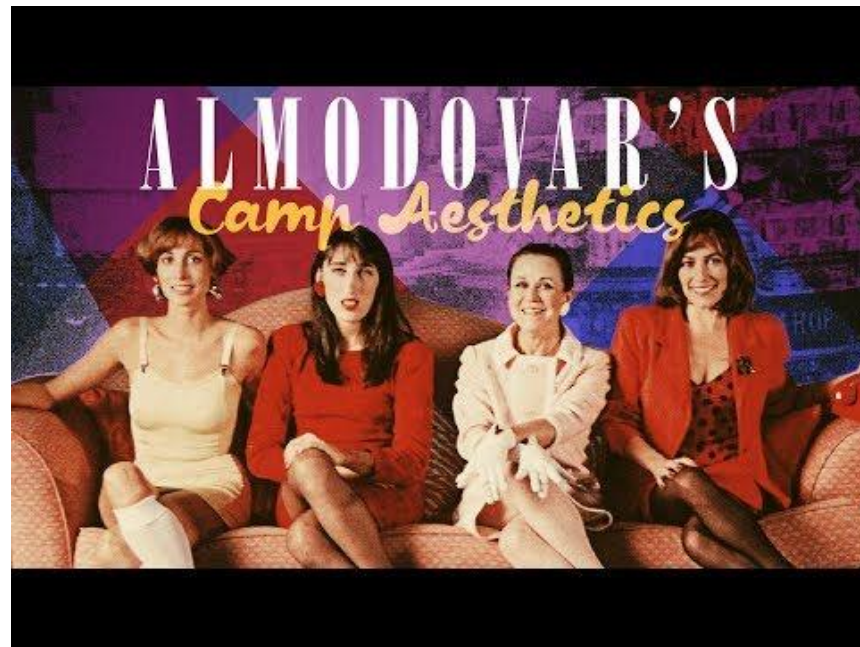


# PEDRO ALMODÓVAR'S *LABYRINTH OF PASSION*

Pedro Almodóvar's *Labyrinth of Passions* contained camp, a touch of goth in his eyeliner and purple drawn-on sideburns. Purple '80s lighting. The film was only able to be made after Spain's Dictator Francisco Franco had died. Madrid's underground culture was transgressive and anarchic. He loved its celebration of pop music, camera work that makes you feel you're there. It's youthful surface.

Almodóvar has mentioned Billy Wilder as an influence, but described his film as a "wild comedy, with lots of action and lots of characters... but without Billy Wilder's bite, because this is a very pop film."

In the context of pop he has also referred to the work of Richard Lester, of *A Hard Day's Night* fame: "Films set in the city where everything is very banal: girls and boys fall in love a lot, suffer a lot, but their suffering never involves real pain".

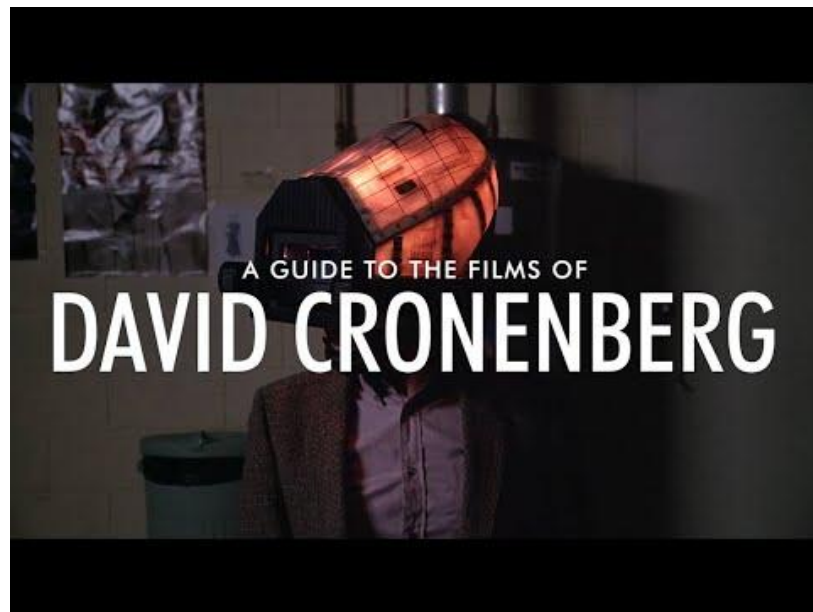


# DAVID CRONENBERG: AESTHETICS OF A NEW VISUAL CULTURE

Marking the end of the opening chapter of Cronenberg's many-phased career in vehement, astounding style, *Videodrome* is a near-perfect early encapsulation of many concerns that crop up time and again for the filmmaker: the body vs. the mind, illusion vs. reality, and the seductive, erotic power of technology. And as such it still works like a key that unlocks his filmography: it may be the most Cronenbergian Cronenberg film. It also perhaps marks the first time the director struck a convincing balance between the body-horror genre he was working within, and the sublimely chilly cerebrality of his tone.

Like John Carpenter's *The Thing*, which came out four years prior to Cronenberg's brilliant re-envisioning, *The Fly* was cutting-edge in effects and prosthetics (Chris Walas and Stephan Dupuis won the Oscar for the makeup), but most importantly it took the bare bones of an older story and grafted the flesh of the director's own unique sensibility onto them. In so doing, Cronenberg turned in the most successful and influential hybrid of his career, somehow smuggling so much of his own chilly, controlled intelligence into a tightly scripted romantic drama that plays out, with almost classical austerity as a three-act tragedy.

Reviled and banned in some territories on release, with its graphic depictions of violence and sex. *Crash* is certainly not for everyone. But for fans of both Cronenberg and Ballard, and really anyone with an adult interest in what our ever-increasing obsession with technology might be doing to our relationships and to our psyches (to our souls, perhaps), it is vital, riveting filmmaking. This a film of ideas, some ugly, some profound, all disquieting, and the film pulsates with such perverse intelligence that those ideas don't so much stay with you, as chase you out of the theater, across the parking lot... and into your car, which may or may not seem quite the same machine it was a couple of hours before.



# THE OPENING OF SOVIET CINEMA IN THE 1980s



In the Soviet Union the appointment of the modernizer Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 led to a new spirit of openness. In the same year, Elem Klimov's *Come and See* was approved by Gorbachev for distribution. Opening Soviet cinema to the world.

*Come and See* distinguishes itself as one of the greatest war movies ever made. The tragedies of real life within the Soviet Union matched those depicted in the film. The 1986 Chernobyl meltdown and 1988 Armenian earthquake presaged the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

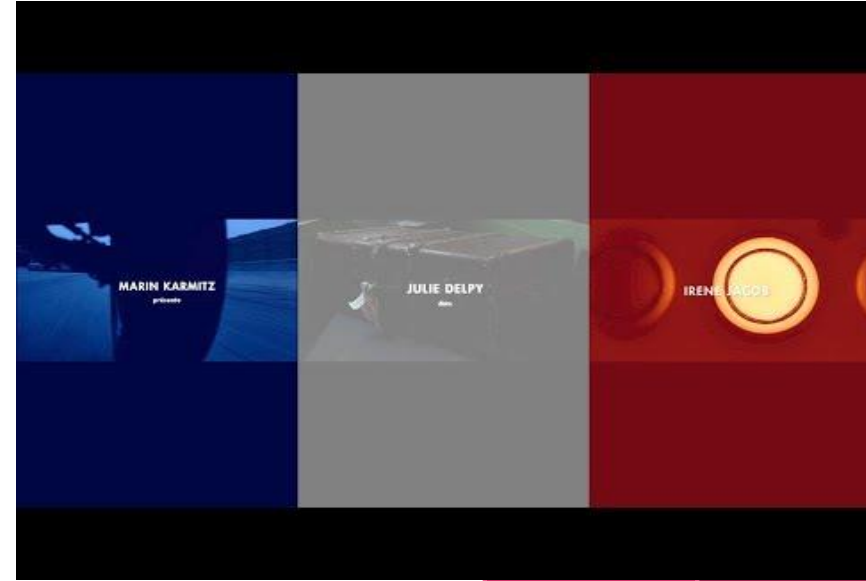
Despite his critical stance on Soviet policies, Elem Klimov was appointed the first secretary of the Union of Filmmakers of the Soviet Union, he almost immediately initiated the rehabilitation of previously banned films.



# KRZYSZTOF KIESLOWSKI'S *THREE COLORS*

Krzysztof Kieślowski studied at Poland's famous film school in Lodz, made documentary films in the 1970s, and became the most distinguished figure in the movement called "Cinema of Moral Unrest."

In the early 1990s, Kieslowski undertook a new film series the trilogy *Trois Couleurs: Bleu, Blanc, Rouge*, based on the colors of the French tricolor and the three elements of the French Revolutionary ideal of "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite."





# WEND KUUNI: A LANDMARK OF AFRICAN CINEMA



African cinema in the '80s was not undergoing such dark days as the films of Eastern Europe. Although some African countries were forced to mortgage their economies to the international monetary fund, innovation in African movies soared.

In the '70s, African films had been about society, the here and now, the immediate post-colonial world. In the 1980s, directors started to look beyond the present tense, to the horizon, the past, before colonization. A rethink of what African cinema was for.

The best example of this is *Wend Kuuni* (also known as *God's Gift*) is a 1982 Burkinabé drama film directed by Gaston Kaboré. In this film Kaboré adapts the measured rhythms of traditional African storytelling to create an authentically African cinematic language. He retells an ancient fable about a mute, memoryless orphan, driven from his homeland, who is renamed *Wend Kuuni* ("God's Gift") by the grateful village which adopts him. Kaboré uses this simple tale to demonstrate that traditional Mossi values can still provide answers to many problems besetting modern Africa, fractured by rural dislocation, refugees and political conflict.

# FILMS FEATURED IN *THE STORY OF FILM* EPISODE 12

- *The Horse Thief* (1988) dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang
- *Yellow Earth* (1985) dir. Chen Kaige
- *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) dir. Zhang Yimou
- *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) dir. Zhang Yimou
- *Repentance* (1984) dir. Tengiz Abuladze
- *Arsenal* (1929) (introduced in Episode 3) dir. Alexander Dovzhenko
- *Come and See* (1985) dir. Elem Klimov
- *The Long Farewell* (1971) dir. Kira Muratova
- *A Short Film About Killing* (1988) dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski
- *Psycho* (1960) (introduced in Episode 8) dir. Alfred Hitchcock
- *Wend Kuuni* (1983) dir. Gaston Kaboré
- *Yeelen* (1987) dir. Souleymane Cissé
- *Video Killed the Radio Star* (1979) (music video) dir. Russell Mulcahy
- *Flashdance* (1983) dir. Adrian Lyne
- *Top Gun* (1986) dir. Tony Scott
- *Blue Velvet* (1986) (introduced in Episode 3) dir. David Lynch
- *The Elephant Man* (1980) dir. David Lynch
- *Do the Right Thing* (1989) dir. Spike Lee
- *The Third Man* (1949) dir. Carol Reed (introduced in Episode 5)
- *Return of the Secaucus 7* (1980) dir. John Sayles
- *Subway* (1985) dir. Luc Besson
- *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991) dir. Leos Carax
- *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982) dir. Pedro Almodóvar
- *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992) dir. Víctor Erice
- *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) dir. Stephen Frears
- *My Childhood* (1972) dir. Bill Douglas
- *Gregory's Girl* (1981) dir. Bill Forsyth
- *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) dir. Terence Davies
- *Intolerance* (1916) dir. D. W. Griffith (introduced in Episode 1)
- *Young at Heart* (1954) dir. Gordon Douglas
- *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1986) dir. Peter Greenaway
- *The Last of England* (1988) dir. Derek Jarman
- *Videodrome* (1983) dir. David Cronenberg
- *Crash* (1996) dir. David Cronenberg
- *Neighbours* (1952) dir. Norman McLaren
- *Jesus of Montreal* (1989) dir. Denys Arcand