

HOLLYWOOD/EUROPE: A TRANSNATIONAL FILM CULTURE

Part 2: Hollywood vs. European Cinema
Hollywood's "European Cinema"

Department of Film and Audiovisual Culture
Dr. Richard Nowell

Agenda

12:30-12:45

Hollywood vs. “European” Cinema

12:45 – 14:25

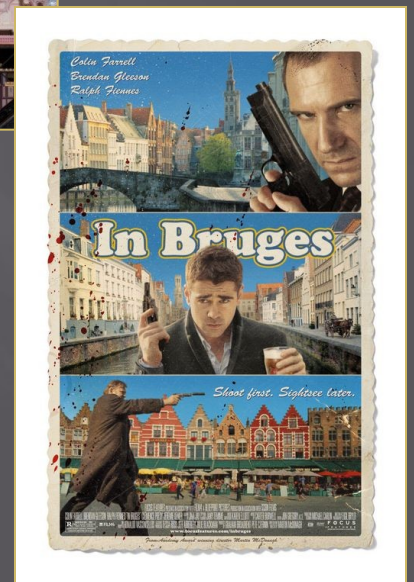
Grand Budapest Hotel (2014)

14:25–14:35

Break

14:35–15:45

Hollywood’s “European Cinema”



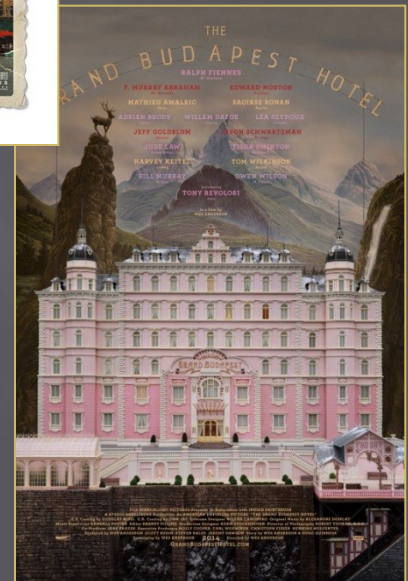
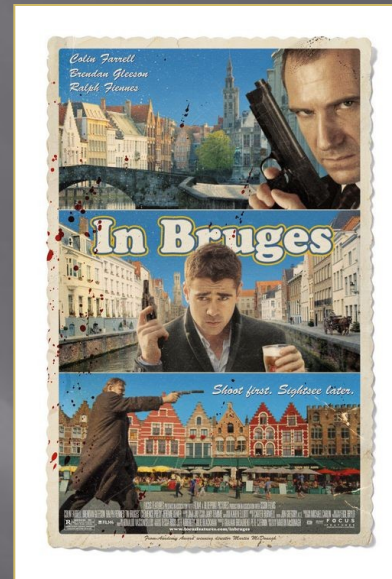
Focus

Hollywood vs. European Cinema

Conceptualizing Art Cinema

Hollywood's distribution of
“European Art cinema”

“European Art cinema” as a textual
component of Hollywood films



**Hollywood vs. European Cinema:
“The foundational myth of Film studies”
(Thomas Elsaesser) – perhaps also
Western Film Culture as a whole**

The traits you associated with a)
“Hollywood Cinema”, and b)
“European Cinema”.

Hollywood: California Producer of Celebrity Culture and High-end filmed Entertainment

Los Angeles, California. (“sign”/climate)



Big “Business”

[money/industry/]

Production

[studios/directors]



High-End Spectacular Entertainment

[“Movies”/Blockbusters/genres/pop cult]



Celebrity Culture

[Stars/fame/beauty/glamour/]



European Cinema: A marginal, low-cost, artistic, intellectual, Auteurist alternative

Quality I: Artistic

[arty/ stylish/experimental]

Quality II: Smart

[intellectual/clever/dark]

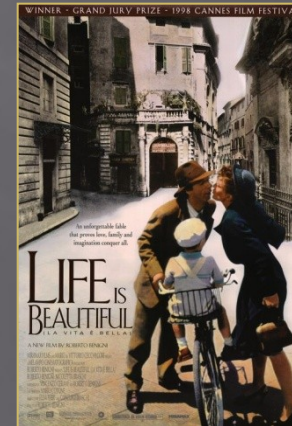
Different (... from what? Hollywood?)

Auteurs/Movements/Festivals

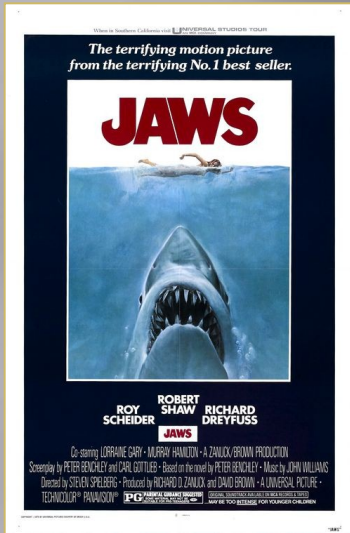
[Fellini/Godard/New Waves/Berlin]

Marginalized

[Little seen/under-appreciated/niche]



“Hollywood” vs. “European Cinema”



Corporations vs. Artisans

Commerce vs. Creativity

Entertainment vs. Art

Formula vs. Vision

Clarity vs. Ambiguity

Simplicity vs. Complexity

Storytelling vs. Themes

Spectacle vs. Aesthetics

Conservative vs. Radical

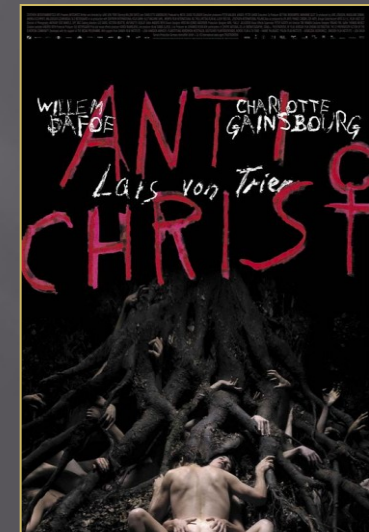
Mass vs. Connoisseurs

Accessible vs. Inaccessible

Spellbinding vs. Contemplative

Emotional vs. Cerebral

Stupefying vs. Enlightening



Grand Budapest Hotel

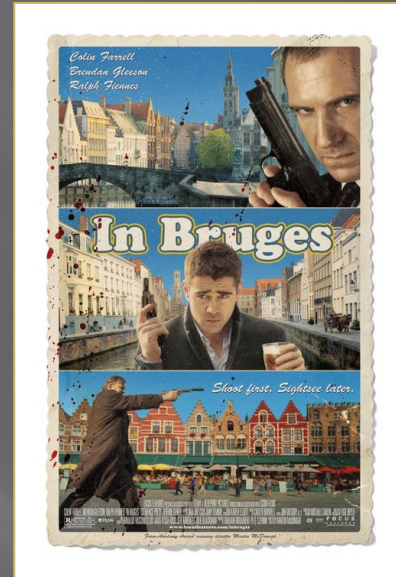
1. In what ways do the makers of this film borrow from the “Art Cinema” (as Bordwell describes it)?
2. In what ways do the makers of this film draw upon what we might think of as Hollywood conventions?
3. In what ways do the makers of this film attempt to suggest that it is a superior form of cinema; to imbue it with a sense of cultural cache or prestige?
4. Do you feel these efforts to “elevate the material” succeed?

Focus

Conceptualizing Art Cinema

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Homogenization and Selectivity

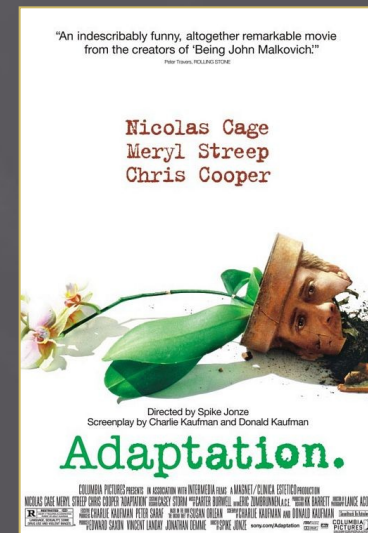
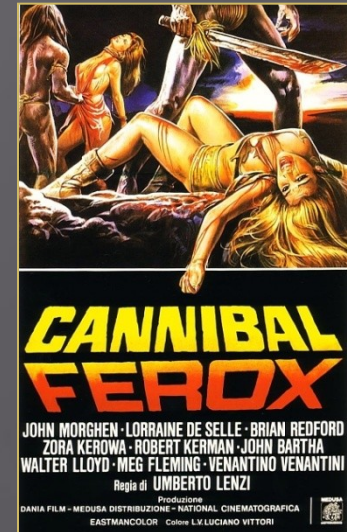
Hollywood and European Cinema are often placed in binary opposition

Involves production, intention, content, distribution, consumption, value

Pervasive, enduring but illusionary

Homogenization and selectivity distill output to a mythical essence

A high art/low art opposition is invoked



How does Bordwell explain the relationships between what he calls “Art Cinema” and “Hollywood cinema”?

What does Bordwell suggest are the key characteristics of “Art Cinema”: in terms of content and modes of address?

Art Cinema as Oppositional Cinema

Differs in various ways from an imagined cinematic mainstream:
A caricature, based on Classical Model and High Concept

Classical Model: linear cause-effect narration, non-intrusive style, goal-oriented protagonists, conservative, formulaic

High Concept: simple storytelling, easily marketable idea, transferability to other media (the look, the hook, and the book)

Art cinema changes in response to this changing “mainstream”

However, as imagined Hollywood mainstream remains partially constant, Art Cinema exhibits some trans-historical features

Fairly consistent markers of Art Cinema

Narrative: complex/loose/subjective narration disrupts linear, cause-effect, resolved storytelling associated with Hollywood

Characters: Aimless protagonists (not goal-oriented ones)

Stylistic Excess: visual and aural flourishes above and beyond that which is strictly required to advance the narrative – visual pleasure

Realism: Locations, themes, complex characterization

Authorial Expressivity: Director as organizing framework to understand meaning: “what is s/he trying to tell us?”, we might ask

The Crystallization of European Cinema as Art Cinema in the United States

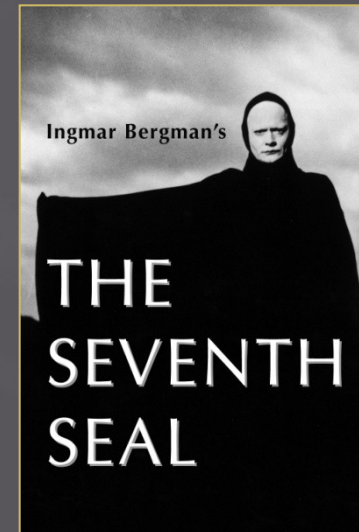
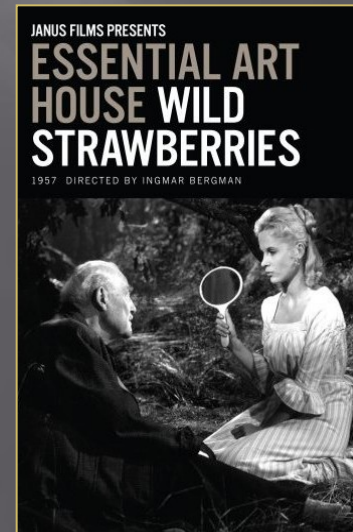
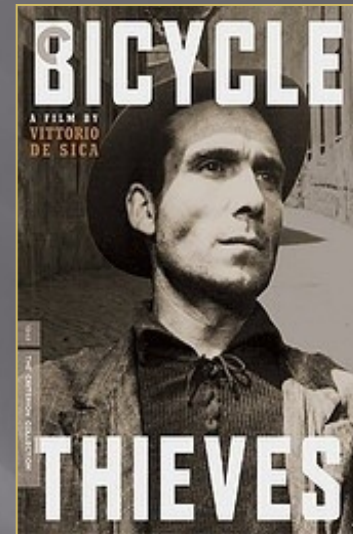
Rooted in pitching of European imports for postwar US cultural bourgeoisie

Paramount Decree sees Hollywood cut output, initiating exhibitor shortfall

Made as alternatives to Hollywood, and for international elites

Sold as an exotic, challenging, and on discourses of European high culture

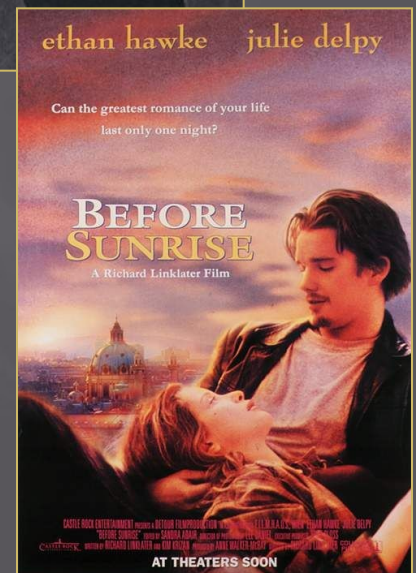
Hollywood companies handle some of these films through subsidiaries



Writer-director Richard Linklater on *Before Sunrise* (1995)

“It’s my European Arty-farty film”.

“It really has nothing to do with American Culture. I mean, it does – in a way. But it’s not pop culture.”



Commodifying Prestige

Art Cinema is an industrial product line – a genre cinema of sorts that is also governed by commercial imperatives

Not inherently “better”, but is sold as being that: this is a branding strategy based on claims of quality and superiority

This form of branding exploits that fallacy that cultural value is inherent and inarguable

However, Pierre Bourdieu argues that distinction results from invocation of prestigious people, institutions, and ideas

Superiority rests on acceptance of often tacit “indices” of quality

Reputations and Wanting to Believe: Art Cinema as branding (Michael Z. Newman)

Art Cinema emerges from the activation of 3 discourses

1. Autonomy: a film is largely untainted by commerce
2. Authenticity: a film is a product of personal vision not a formula
3. Alternative: a film challenges mainstream culture (Hollywood)

These ideas are all underpinned by fantasy or selective vision:

1. All films are products, derivative, and use “Hollywood” elements
2. Hollywood films often associated with “art cinema” traits

Authentic, Autonomous, Alternative

“Normally you get a sequel for a big blockbuster or something that made a lot of money; *Before Sunrise* didn't make that much money, but I think that it affected people so much”.

“The people that really liked it really loved it and would see it again and again, and again. [It was] the same with the actors and the director – they're so passionate about it. I think that's why we were given the opportunity to make this sequel”.

“Generally in a typical Hollywood movie you have to plan things a lot more than that”.

Anne Walker-McBay, Producer, *Before Sunset*

Richard Linklater on his perception of Hollywood's negotiation of Art Cinema ...

“There’s a weird relation. Hollywood likes that new energy: new ideas. They like to do something standard with that. So the struggle is in that space in between, taking your new idea and making it traditional and conformist. That’s how you find your place in there.”



European Imports and the Hollywood Renaissance

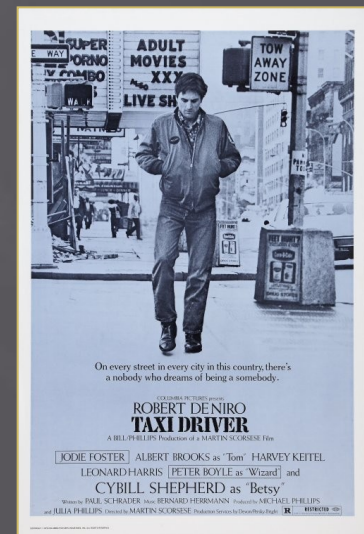
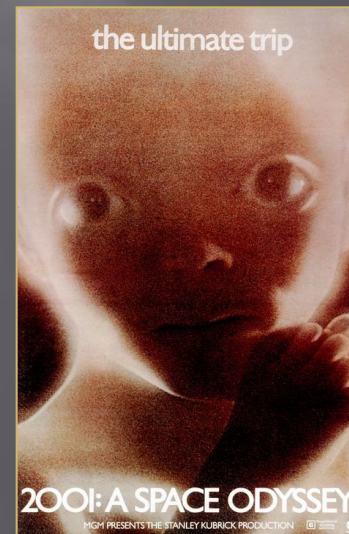
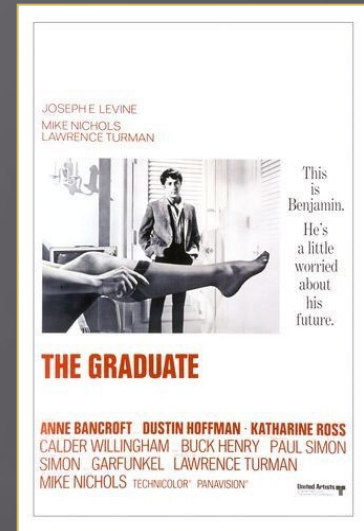
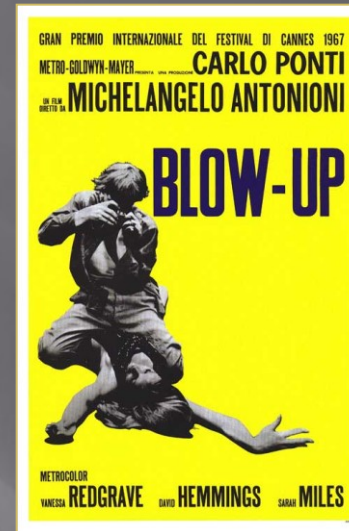
Increase in college enrollment leads to economic success of some imports

Incentives Hollywood to release US made films boasting arty flourishes

Sold as radical, melancholic, complex

Critics received these films as more innovative than they really were!

Initial hits spawns production trend of films, lasting to about 1976



Hollywood's Specialty Divisions: Indiewood Cinema as/and Art Cinema

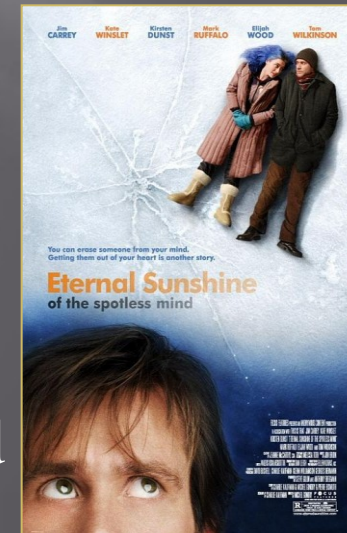
1980s sees Hollywood briefly set up divisions to handle Art cinema

Miramamax capitalizes by astutely marketing Art cinema inc. imports

1990s sees Rise of specialty divisions or Art cinema arms of Hollywood

These sister companies largely fold by the mid-2000s

European art cinema is part of Indiewood



Hollywood's Indie (or Art Cinema) Divisions

The logo for Focus Features, featuring the word "FOCUS" in large yellow letters above "FEATURES" in smaller white letters, set against a background of blurred blue and yellow bokeh lights.

FOCUS
FEATURES

The logo for Sony Pictures Classics, consisting of the text "SONY PICTURES CLASSICS" in white, centered on a solid blue background with a thin white horizontal line above and below the text.

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

The logo for Paramount Vantage, featuring the words "PARAMOUNT" and "VANTAGE" in white, outlined, serif capital letters on a dark, textured background that looks like a film strip or a sign.

PARAMOUNT
VANTAGE

The logo for Warner Independent Pictures, featuring a stylized "W" with a red and white triangle on top, followed by the text "WARNER INDEPENDENT PICTURES" in black and red.

WARNER
INDEPENDENT
PICTURES

The logo for Fine Line Features, featuring a stylized "F" followed by the text "FINE LINE FEATURES" in black, with horizontal lines above and below the text.

F FINE LINE
FEATURES

The logo for Miramax, featuring the word "MIRAMAX" in large white letters above "FILMS" in smaller white letters, all on a black background with a white horizontal line above and below the text.

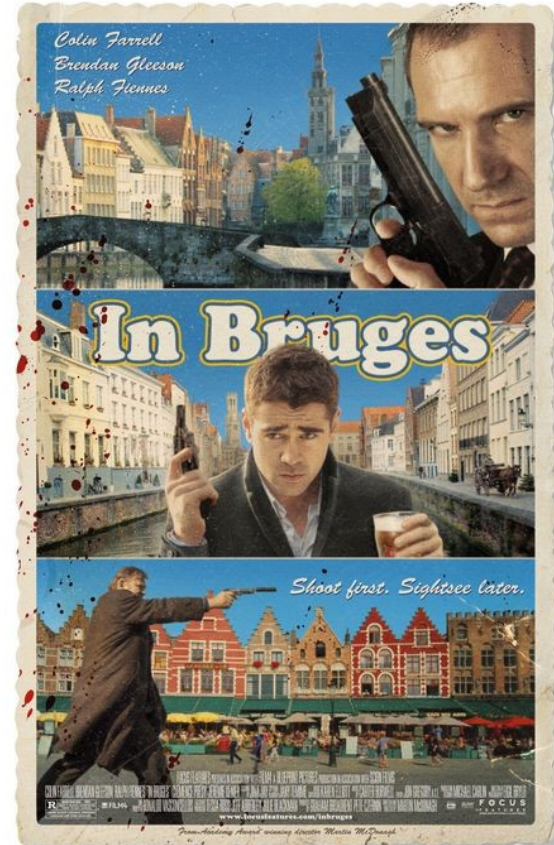
MIRAMAX
FILMS



Geoff King on *In Bruges*

How does King situate this film in relation to a) Hollywood and b) European cinema?

What are some of the general strategies and effects of this act of positioning?



“A jumped up Eurotrash piece of rip-off fucking bullshit” (!?!?!)

Explains how film was part of Hollywood’s
broader efforts to serve discerning viewers

This practice involved using subsidiaries to
handle art house imports and middlebrow fare

Film blends accessible Hollywood elements and
markers of distinction from art cinema

These included an ironic-sincere tone, low-high
generic features, and its “cultured” setting

Exemplifies Indiewood’s blurring of Hollywood
and the art cinema associated with Europe



Grand Budapest Hotel

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Grand Budapest Hotel: or, in Defense of Hollywood's Art Cinema

Ambiguous storytelling: is this real (holocaust) or fantasy (fairy tale)

Tonally undulant: sincere/touching, ironic/distanced, serious/lighthearted

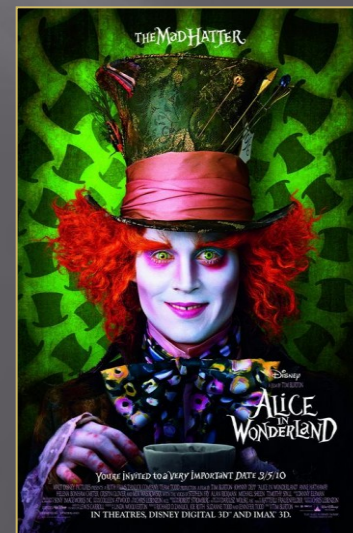
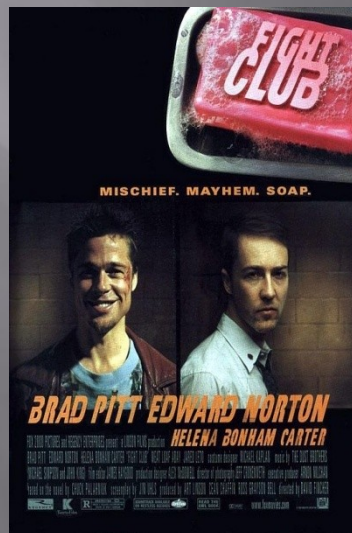
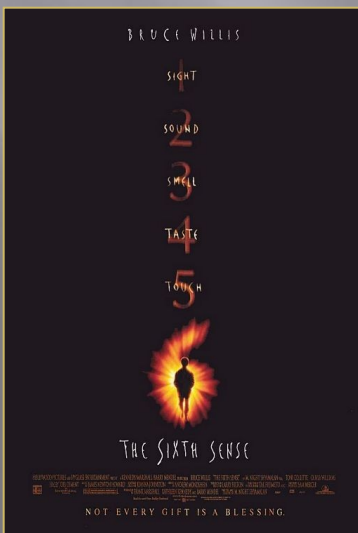
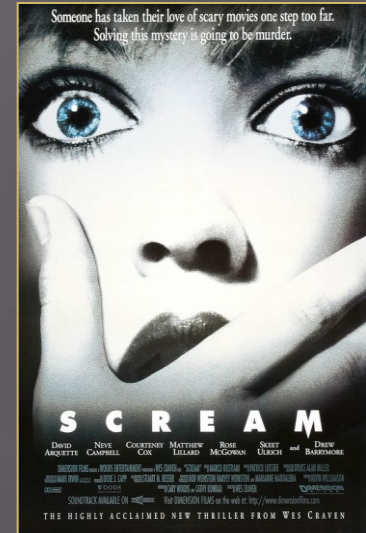
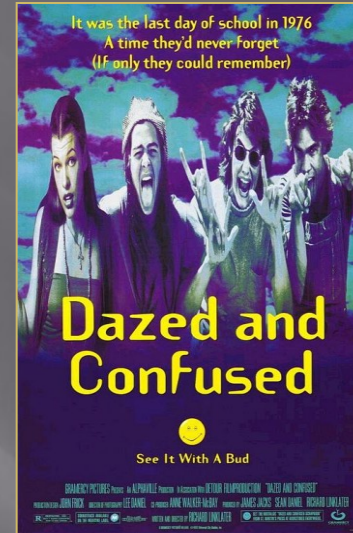
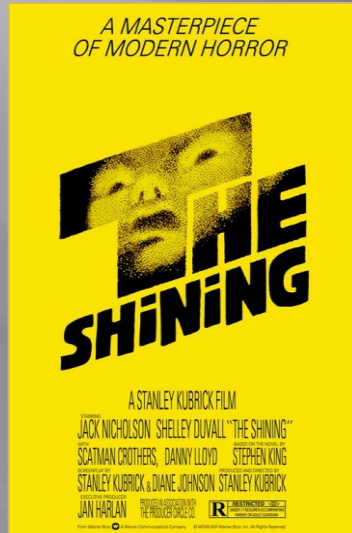
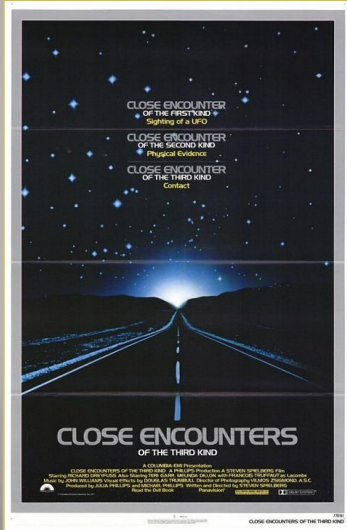
Stylistic Excess: quirky aesthetic not needed to propel the story along

Director as organizing framework: authorship thematized and style explicated

Self-reflexive “defense” of stylized cinema



Hidden in Plain Sight: Hollywood's "European Art Cinema" (?)



The Empire Strikes Back: The biggest European Art Film there (n)ever was

Framed as exemplar of corporate High Concept Hollywood (personified by Lucas)

Directed by a USC professor, with a history in esoteric, self-reflexive cinema

Employs loose and ambiguous narration to capture the existential angst of protagonist

Boasts melancholic tone, downbeat ending

Spotlights style over narrative progression: little happens aside from neurosis!



In Sum

The reputations of Hollywood and European cinema remain largely rhetorically distinct, based on several binary oppositions

Although it is often associated with European film industries, Art Cinema is also financed and distributed by Hollywood

Its conventions are also mobilized in “standard” Hollywood films

Used to elevate the material, expanding potential audiences to include cineastes who might be otherwise skeptical of Hollywood

This internationally scattered cultural bourgeoisie is reached out to via discourses of quality, authorship, realism, and style