

Pictures at a Revolution: Six Films from and about the Sixties



(Berkeley Tribe Office, 1969)

In this course we will be witnesses to a revolution. The revolution is in two parts. First, the *subject matter* of studio-made Hollywood films changed with the rise of films about youth resistance and rebellion. Second, there was a revolution in the *style* of film-making—a looser, less formal way of photographing the story and creating a narrative.

This was aided by technical developments such as lighter-weight hand-held cameras.

The interaction of these developments meant that Hollywood played a very significant role in *popularizing* images and ideas belonging to the cultural revolution of the late 1960s. We will be discussing six films that did this. But here's a warning: with the studios, it was always a matter of *money and profit*. When small, personal, counter-cultural films made many times the (small) initial investment, the studios went in that direction, even if the 60 or 70-year old men in charge of the studios didn't understand youth culture. But money and profit was always the controlling motive. This explains why Hollywood by the late 70's was returning to mainstream middlebrow blockbusters. The unheard of profits derived from Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) were turning points.

The films in this course represent a more adventurous period. As in previous courses I've done for OLLI here at Cal, my emphasis is on film as shared fantasy and social mythology. That is: we'll be seeing and discussing movies that overtly articulate ideas that communities only *felt*--films that emanated from, and returned to shape, the nation's dream life.

It was difficult to decide which films from the Sixties to show; there are so many interesting ones! But these are the six I've chosen.

We begin in 1964, with the Beatles' breakthrough frenetic fake documentary *A Hard Day's Night*. The success of the Beatles first with records and then in movies, signaled the arrival of the Baby Boomer generation as an economic powerhouse. The box-office success in 1967 of our second film, *Bonnie and Clyde*—with a 1930's bank-robber couple depicted as exemplars of youth rebellion—had a similar impact. The next film, *Monterey Pop*, is the first rock-concert documentary, and depicts the full flowering of the Bay Area hippie counter-culture. But then comes *Easy Rider*, made in 1968—with a darker view of the fate of counter-culture people. Next comes *Berkeley in the Sixties*: it depicts the spectacular trajectory of New Left politics in our own town between 1960 and 1969. Our final film is *Coming Home*—which is a re-evaluation, looking back ten years later, of the cultural and personal impact of the Vietnam War.

Syllabus:

Prelude: *A Hard Day's Night*, 1964 (dir.: Richard Lester), starring The Beatles. April 1

Bonnie and Clyde, 1967 (dir.: Arthur Penn), starring Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway. April 8.

Monterey Pop, 1968 (dir.: D. A. Pennebaker), starring The Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, and Jimi Hendrix. April 15.

Easy Rider, 1969 (dir. Dennis Hopper), starring Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper. April 22

Berkeley in the Sixties, 1990 (dir.: Mark Kitchell), April 29

Looking Back: *Coming Home*, 1978 (dir.: Hal Ashby), starring Jane Fonda, John Voight, and Bruce Dern. May 6.

This is a zoom course. The films are all available on cable or online, for free or for a small rental fee. Folks taking the course should see that week's film in the days before the session devoted to that film. For instance, people should see our first film, The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* (April 1) in the week before April 1. In each session, I'll lecture for 40 minutes or so on that week's film and its social and political background; then, after a five minute break, we'll have 45 minute discussion.

These six films are all well made, and all of them are entertaining, even when they are disturbing. Watching them and discussing them should be illuminating—and fun!

--Art Eckstein

