

**Chinatown** (Roman Polanski, 1974; 135 minutes)

Producer: Robert Evans, C. O. Erickson

Cinematography: John A. Alonzo

Editor: Sam O'Steen

Production Design: Richard Sylbert

Art Direction: W. Stewart Campbell

Set Direction: Ruby R. Levitt

Costumes: Althea Sylbert

Music: Jerry Goldsmith

Screenplay: Robert Towne

Sound Editor: Robert Cornett

**Abstract** (adapted from IMDB.com):

Hollis Mulwray is a wealthy California landowner and the L.A. Water Department Commissioner. Jake Gittes, a former cop turned private investigator, is hired by Mrs. Evelyn Mulwray to investigate her husband's adulterous ways. Sure enough, Jake takes photos of Hollis with an elusive young lady. Hollis then turns up murdered, which Jake decides to investigate; he finds more than he was looking for. He discovers a devious plot to buy cheap desert land for low prices, then irrigate the land and sell it for millions of dollars. This scheme is masterminded by one Noah Cross, who is Evelyn's father and Hollis' one-time business partner at the Water Department. The investigation leads Jake to an affair with Evelyn and an increasing wariness of Noah Cross, both of whom seem suspiciously interested in the girl with whom Hollis was last seen.

**Cast:**

J.J. (Jake) Gittes (Jack Nicholson)

Evelyn Cross Mulwray (Faye Dunaway)

Noah Cross (John Huston)

Yelburton (John Hillerman)

Lt. Lou Escobar (Perry Lopez)

Hollis Mulwray (Darrell Zwerling)

Ida Sessions (Diane Ladd)

Claude Mulvihill (Roy Jensen)

Man with knife (Roman Polanski)

Loach (Richard Bakalyan)

Walsh (Joe Mantell)

Duffy (Bruce Glover)

Sophie (Mandu Hinds)

Lawyer (James O'Rear)

Kan, Evelyn's butler (James Hong)

Curly (Burt Young)

Katherine (Belinda Palmer)

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. As you watch the film, note the motifs, parallelisms, and contrasts created among settings, characters, and sounds.
2. What do you interpret as the film's explicit, implicit, and symptomatic meanings?
3. How does Polanski use elements of mise-en-scène (color, lighting, setting, costumes, actor blocking/gesture/performance) to convey meanings not overtly spoken?
4. In *Chinatown*, Polanski refers to several classical Hollywood film genres, such as the detective film, film noir, etc. Why do you think Polanski choose to shoot this film in color, rather than in black-and-white as so many noir films were shot?
5. Consider Cawelti's article on generic transformation. How does *Chinatown* exemplify Cawelti's category of demythologization? Does it also qualify as any of the other categories he proposes for generic transformation? Which ones? Why?

**Genre Transformation and Ideology Terms**

American Ideologies of 1960s-1970s

Cawelti's 4 Modes:

1) Burlesque/parody 2) Nostalgia 3) Demythologization 4) Reaffirmation of Myths  
Contemporary Genre Mixing