

Definition

It is the French *masculine* word for 'author'.

It implies that there is a singular artist responsible for the piece of art.

This idea assumes that an 'auteur' has personal artistic control over the product, and that if you watch their body of work, you will be able to identify patterns, repetitions or motifs - an **auteur signature**.

Origins:

- *Cahiers du Cinema* magazine began to celebrate particular directors and hail them as 'auteur' directors in the 1950s. These directors demonstrated particular artistic skill whilst working within the studio system, notably Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles.
- *Camera stylo* - the camera is to the film director what the pen is to an author.
- Personal expression is key to being given the title of auteur.
- More concerned with the aesthetics and themes than structure & content.
- Lesser than the auteur is the 'metteur-en-scene' - a very good director and technician, but lacking in personal style.

Motif/signatures:

Can you identify repeated features in your focus film AND in other films made by the same 'auteur'?

How do you identify that the film 'belongs' to an auteur?

What is their artistic 'voice'?

Does your 'auteur' achieve all three of these? Does it matter? Does your auteur make films that are all the same? Are there any examples of your auteur moving outside of their usual style? Can you assign these motifs to the director or another member of the crew, star or studio? What does your director think about the label of 'auteur'?

**Visual Motifs
= Elements of form**

- Directors such as Wes Anderson have a clear visual style that identifies their work.
- What is your director's style and what scene shows this most clearly?
- Consider the role of cinematographer, composer and art director and their level of influence.

Thematic Motifs

- Interior meaning and message.
- A director may return to particular themes, ideologies and messages in their films.

Structural Motifs

- **Genre:** The style of a director from the early days of cinema may have become so synonymous with a genre that their style is now considered a code and convention of the genre. A director may have made innovations in a particular genre, for example Ridley Scott with his films *Blade Runner* and *Alien*.
- **Narrative:** Some directors have a narrative structure that they prefer, or a motif may be that they 'play' with narrative structures and POV's in their films. For example, Hitchcock's 'MacGuffin' or Nolan's use of narrative time and space.
- This is where you need to consider the role of editor and writer.

Pro Auteur:

- Sarris = A director must have a high level of technical competence, personal style and interior meaning to be considered an auteur.

Anti Auteur:

- Kael = Auteur theory 'glorifies trash' from directors making the same thing over and over. We should watch a film on its own merit, not because a particular person made it. 'A film is a film.'
- Film is a collaborative process; auteur theory minimises the creative role of the crew.
- Other artists may be called an auteur - the star, composer, cinematographer or studio.

The Experimental Auteur:

1. If a director's style is to make intertextual references throughout the film, is that being an original or just copying?
2. What is the director's personal vision? Is it similar to their other work?
3. Are the experiments the result of technological advances? Can the director take 'credit' for that?
4. What has inspired the director? Theatre? Art? Film?
5. What is the effect on the audience?
6. Is the director challenging mainstream ideas about what film is?

Old Hollywood

1930s

1929-1941 The Great Depression was a severe worldwide recession.

1940s

1929: Stock market crash.

1950s

1933: Nearly half the banks in the US had failed, unemployment 33%. No social welfare system.

Many smaller studios went bust, which left the market open for large studios to establish their joint control.

Unaffiliated movie theatres had to bargain with the studios: **block booking, blind bidding.**

Studios gave the audience what they want: **Escapism, Entertainment, Glamour.**



The introduction of **sound**: 'Jazz Singer' (1927). This was expensive to equip theatres; drove many out of business.



The first film in **colour** was Becky Sharp in 1935.

In 1938 an antitrust lawsuit was filed by a number of unaffiliated theatre chains.

In 1948, struggling independent movie producers and exhibitors finally triumphed in their battle against the big studios' monopolistic behaviour.



The studios were ordered to give up their theatres, opening the market to smaller producers.

Paramount studios were the 1st to comply, selling off their theatres, that is why it is called the **Paramount decree.**

This, coupled with the **advent of television** in the 1950s, seriously compromised the studio system's power and profits.

STUDIO SYSTEM:

The studios owned the lots and the theatres.

The Big 5:



Vertical Integration: describes **ownership and control.**

Hollywood controlled the flow of product through the entire market. They controlled production, distribution, and exhibition.

Oligopoly: 'a market or industry is dominated by a small number of sellers'.

'**Assembly line**' films. **Entertainment factory:** each studio had its own 'style' this included stars.

7 Year Contract:

Actors were on the '7 Year Contract'.

They were attached to a studio and not allowed to work outside of that contract (with the exception of "special one off deals").



Norma Jean Baker - Marilyn Monroe

Actors were TOLD their roles, their image was owned by the studio. They had no say at all. The studio controlled their image. They were typecast.

The Little 3:



Not vertically integrated.

Mainly, they produced films, but did not have the ability to distribute them, they had to sell or lease their films to cinemas that were owned by the big 5.

The Motion Picture Production Code / Hays Code:

A set of industry censorship guidelines from 1930 to 1968.

It is also popularly known as the Hays Code, after its creator, Will H. Hays.

It was abandoned in 1968.

1. No picture shall be produced that will **lower the moral standards of those who see it.** Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. **Correct standards of life,** subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall **sympathy be created for its violation.**

STUDIO SYSTEM = OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

Q: How is authority, ownership and control represented in the film?

Q: Was your film made in the beginning, middle or end of the 'Golden Age' era?

HAYS CODE

NO: Adultery, ridicule of religion, nudity or 'scenes of passion', 'The methods of crime could not be shown...' murder scenes, drink or drugs, homosexuality.

Q: How did the director work around these **restrictions**? How far did they 'bend the rules'?