

# The and narrative with reference



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Auteurism, or 'authorship' is a concept that has become an integral pillar of film-studies. Certain key writers attempted to rate the skills of various directors by casting them in a new light - that of the director as the ultimate creator of a film. So, what then is the purpose of an author, or auteur? What does this concept serve to prove? In his text, *The Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes examines the role traditionally created by the author. He claims that the author is a construct of modernity, that in order to appreciate a piece of art; we must be able to attribute a specific person to its creation. It is this that gives the art its meaning, the label attached to it, rather than the work itself.

We need to have everything rationalised: What is it that lay behind the creation of that work? Barthes notes the way, for instance, in which Van Gogh's genius in painting is frequently attributed to his madness." The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child." OHP(Barthes, 1977: 210/211) Barthes is looking primarily at the author of literature here, but his theory is equally as applicable to film. His view of the traditional role of the author (for this is not the entirety of his theory) is mirrored by the text, *What is an Author*, by Michel Foucault. Foucault makes the point that a name constitutes a description of a body of work. This makes the name not a reference to the author, but to their work, thus it is not a proper name.

To illustrate his point, Foucault points out how unimportant the authors actual personae is: If it were discovered that Shakespeare had not in fact lived in his famous house, it would be incidental. If, however, we learnt that

he had not actually written his literature, we would feel outraged. Thus, as this example illustrates, the work is of more consequence than the man. All the man - in this case Shakespeare - represents is a name behind the work:" An Author's name is not merely an element of speech " Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus distinguish them from others.

"(Foucault, 1977: 284) OHPIf then this is the case, we can assume that there are certain characteristics, or traits that link together different texts created by the same author - or auteur. A normal name would move out of the discourse so that it might come to associate the person behind it. The name of an auteur remains firmly entrenched in the discourse, circulating from one text to another (Foucault, 1977). Read the answer each question by dragging the correct label to the appropriate location Foucault firmly believed that the purpose of having an author in this way, served four important elements.

Firstly, that of appropriation - that by using the name, we can accurately state who the art belongs to. Secondly, science has changed the old system of folklore, where a stories age was indicative of its importance. Now, to consider something valid, we need a name behind it, a name which carries enough weight to serve as an authentication of the text. Thirdly, as expressed earlier with the Van Gogh example, we consider the work to be an expression of the author, something which is so unique that only they could have created it. Finally, we construct the author.

We assign certain traits to them based on their work where we can see patterns, ignoring other traits where we cannot. Thus, this construction is

based only on the work and not on the person at all. So, how can this be applied to the essay title? In order to gain meaning from a film, according to these theories on auteurship, a study of them will present recurrent themes that can be attributed to the film's director - the auteur. In this essay, I intend to concentrate upon the works of the British director, Alfred Hitchcock (1899 - 1980), particularly his American films from the 1950s - 1960s. Hitchcock proved to me to be a sturdy choice in the concept of auteurism due the dynamic nature of his films, which I intend to examine in some detail, and the sheer magnitude written about them:" Hitchcock, to be sure, remains a constant reference point (the films could not possibly have come into existence without him and his presence remains their strongest connecting link). But the films do not belong only to him: they belong also to commercial cinema (British and American), its conventions and constraints, both what it enables and what it prohibits, its various systems (studio, star, genre); and they belong to culture, its institutions, its values, its ideology, its internal conflicts and struggles.

"(Wood, 1989: 5) - OHPHitchcock as a director has been analysed numerous times for recurrent themes in his work, often successfully. These themes were inserts through the film's production; it's making, by their creator - auteur. In his book, Hitchcock's Films Revisited, Robin Wood attempts to pin down a number of these themes that seemed to underlie in Hitchcock's work. The position occupied by Mothers was of particular concern to Wood, as there are numerous examples mothers as a hindrance (this is often an understatement). In North by Northwest (1959), the character of Thornhill (Cary Grant) is doubted and treated with suspicion by his mother, who has

no intention of believing his protests of being hunted by spies mistaking him for a spy himself. As Wood notes, this climaxes when his mother enquires to the two, unbeknownst to her, killers behind her: "You're not really trying to kill my son, are you?" This results in laughter and humiliation falling upon Thornhill.

The position occupied by Mrs Thornhill is positively charming when contrasted against that of Mrs Bates, mother of the infamous Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960). Mrs Bates appears only to us as a multiple personality of Norman's, first dominating him, later murdering the character, Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), in the film's notorious shower scene. Wood notes that he does not believe this portrayal of mothers - "A boy's best friend." (*Psycho*, 1960) as being in any way indicative of Hitchcock's own upbringing, or any Freudian/Lacanian theories applying thereto. Wood states that these mother figures appear only in Hitchcock's American films, also noting that in this period of American history, child raising was left entirely up to the mother. It is this claustrophobic relationship that turns sour.

This can be further strengthened by the absence of fathers in these films. Wood therefore believes that culture in the environment has gone into shaping Hitchcock's work, thus affecting our reading of it. It is the presence of Hitchcock, the auteur that expresses this all to us: "All directors, and not just in Hollywood, are imprisoned by the conditions of their craft and culture" (Sarris, A. in, Lapsley and Westlake: 113) A more in depth analysis of *Rear Window*, provided by Robin Wood, reveals a new underlying interpretation of the film's text - that of the fear of castration.

The fear of castration derives from the Freudian Oedipus complex, and is based on the moment of the young boy's realisation that a girl does not have a penis - the lack - which he believes has been castrated. From thence, he fears that his may similarly be removed. Taking this theory into everyday life, the phallus may be represented by whatever it is that gives any man power. Castration therefore is the removal of this of power.

Wood demonstrates his theory that both James Stewart's broken camera and leg in *Rear Window* have a phallic value for they provided him with power (Stewart plays a reckless photo-journalist). The breaking of both renders him impotent: "Jefferies' potency as male expressing itself as much in his role as news photographer as in anything directly sexual, his recklessness and initiative taken as the guarantee of "masculinity". It is the fear of castration and the drive to reaffirm "potency" with which the male spectator is invited to identify." (Wood, 1989: 378) This impotence is proven when, from his apartment he sees the villain - who he has been watching over the course of days, suspecting him of murder - Thorwald, attack his girlfriend, Lisa (Grace Kelly), who has gone to spy on Jefferies' behalf. From his position he can only watch.

This impotence then recurs when Thorwald enters his own apartment intent on murder. We can connect this theory to a recurrent theme in Hitchcock's work - the desire to 'look' - scopophilia. The 'look' can be interpreted as an act of power. Throughout the movie, *Rear Window*, Jefferies spies on his unsuspecting neighbours through his window, an act which Wood likens to the position occupied by the spectator of the film in a cinema. This ties in with the theory put forward by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative*

Cinema:" The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia (pleasure in looking).

There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is a pleasure in being looked at.(Mulvey, 1989: 16)She traces this desire through Freudian psychosexual theory to the desire held by children to see and explore the private arena that is forbidden to them - namely other people's genital regions. Thus, the desire to look is an extremely sexual phenomenon. Mulvey also notes *Rear Window* as having strong connections to scopophilia. She notes that Hitchcock investigated the "investigative side of voyeurism" (Mulvey, 1973), and provided the male protagonist in his film with the same viewpoint the audience has - the point-of-view shot being of paramount importance here. Mulvey cites Douchet's analysis of the film in that sexual desire is as important as the action in the film.

This is especially pertinent with Jefferies relationship with Lisa which had proven in the film to be stale. The plot offers a reason for this - fear of commitment into marriage, the same handicap possessed by Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*. Mulvey offers a fresh perspective on this relationship:" His girlfriend Lisa had been of little sexual interest to him, more or less a drag, so long as she remained on the spectator side. When she crosses the barrier between his room and the block opposite, their relationship is reborn erotically."(Mulvey, 1989: 23)Mulvey notes the voyeuristic nature of the entire film pointing out that Jefferies is a photographer. This does not make him all that different from Thornhill in *North by Northwest* who spends a great deal of the film in espionage - spying, looking.

I would compare this now to Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) in Psycho, someone for whom scopophilia plays such an integral part that he has drilled a peephole in the wall of the room which becomes occupied by Marion Crane. It is through this hole we are invited to a point-of-view shot, seeing her as Norman sees her - just before he makes his final expression of power over her - murder. So, if these factors have affected the film's production, what effect, if any, have they impacted upon its meaning? Or, alternatively, if these factors have affected the film's meaning, what effect, if any, have they impacted upon the film's production? I would propose that it is for all of these reasons. It is because we believe Hitchcock's work is the work of an auteur as opposed to a metteur-en-scene that we attempt to study his work.

There are thousands of films produced each year by just as many directors, though there is no attempt to study the films of directors such as Albert Pyun for meaning (although it is my contention that this is hardly surprising owing to the fact of the complete lack of talent exhibited in his films, which include such video fodder as Cyborg, Down Twisted, and Nemesis) The theory of auteur structuralism as exemplified by Peter Wollen demonstrates how meaning is only available due to the auteur's method of production. It is not by chance that we are able to locate similarities in the works of auteurs such as Hitchcock since, as Wollen states in reference to the similarities in John Ford's work (My Darling Clementine, The Searchers, etc.): "They all act within the recognisable Ford world, governed by a set of oppositions, but their loci within that world are very different. The relevant pairs of opposites overlap; different pairs are foregrounded in different movies." (Wollen, 1969: 138) Wollen is illustrating that the same principle themes reoccur in different



manifestations throughout Ford's work, just as I hope to have demonstrated is evident in Hitchcock's work. Wollen went on to create a distinction between John Ford, the man (who he actually was), and John Ford the auteur (the structure built up around his name).

I would propose that this is also another factor of production - the commodification of the director. The more images and notions the name can summon up, the easier it is to use the name to sell the film, e. g. we might watch *North by Northwest* principally because it is a Hitchcock film and because we know what to expect from him. Hitchcock though, proves to be not as straight forward as John Ford in this argument, for Hitchcock was far too much of an extrovert in this: evidence of this is clear in his cameo in *North by Northwest* as the man who misses the bus.

We laugh because it's funny, and we also laugh because we know it is Hitchcock. These cameos were frequent amongst his films, in addition to his appearances on television with his deliberately slow, pronounced, idiosyncratic speech.