

The problems that
many critics have
found in the auteur
theory essay



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The 'auteur theory' in the context of film is usually seen as a director who stamps his or her individual style onto a film. The auteur theory has evolved by the French critics at 'Cahiers Du Cinema' in the 1950s. Francis Truffaut was one of these French critics and later exposed in detail by author Andrew Sarris that then evoked respect for Hollywood Cinema. The auteur signifies a set of stylistic and thematic features in the film itself. It is a set of elements working in combination. The key elements are personal style, interior meaning.

Auteurs can be seen today, such as Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, Stephen Spielberg and Stanley Kubrick. Each director here needs a significant level of control and independence to stamp his or her signature on the film. The director is the unifying force. Over a group of films an auteur must display recurrent characteristics of style and perhaps interior meanings. Alfred Hitchcock is perhaps the most notable example of a director of auteurism. His array of films again and again portrait the same style, and themes.

Also visual style, cinematography, mise-en-scene and Narrative structures further justify Alfred Hitchcock as an auteur. The most noticeable auteurism in Hitchcock's films is that the star is always a handsome man, or a sophisticated beautiful woman. The woman is usually a woman of the era, who may smoke, smoking was popular in the sixties, and evidence of this is in 'The Birds'. This can be seen from his earlier work 'Foreign Correspondent' (1940) to 'The Birds' (1963) his later work. He uses the same actresses and actors in his films such as these actresses Ingrid Bergman and Grace Kelly.

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It is clear that throughout Hitchcock's films the themes of love, death, identity and obsession arise. I am going to examine Horror and shock in detail, horror and shock occurs frequently in Hitchcock's films. This is a clear sign of autism. In for example *Frenzy* (1972), Hitchcock uses macabre to shock his audience. The first murder scene is graphic, the victim is being raped, and we are shown bare breasts. Even for 1972 this level of nudity was shocking for an audience. This can be seen when the killer is stuck in a potato van trying to recover his pin.

As he struggles with the corpse throughout the scene we are shown limbs of the victim. He retrieves his pin by cracking the victim's fingers off the pin, this too is shocking. By not showing the audience all the details, Hitchcock in a sense is using black humour. This level of macabre again can be seen in '*Psycho*' (1964) in the infamous shower scene and for example, in '*The Birds*' (1963). In this scene the female star of the film is leading children from a school away from danger of the birds. Though as they run they're chased down the hill, the birds attack them.

Here we see blood on the faces of children, who are being pecked at by the birds, this for the time was again shocking. Another recurring theme in Hitchcock's films is suspense. This is key and can be seen in every film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. The suspense usually comes with the main character in certain situations. For example, Hitchcock again and again puts the star of the film in the position of being caught. This can be seen in '*Frenzy*', in the back of the potato van, the killer desperately trying to recover his pin and not get caught.

In 'Foreign Correspondent' (1940) as the star creeps around the windmill. Hitchcock also creates suspense by putting the star in immediate danger. Another point to add, is Hitchcock always makes maximum use of the props, for example here he hides behind the wheel, and in 'saboteur' at the statue of liberty. Further evidence of suspense can be seen in 'The Birds'. The birds gather behind the star on the climbing frame and when she and some children hide in a car. The birds try to smash into the windscreen to try and break the glass. Quick cross cutting is used here to increase suspense.

It is evident another auteurism is that Hitchcock uses the technique of the star being an anti-hero. Like in 'Frenzy' and 'The Birds' when the woman evades the police, the audience wants the star to get free to safety.

Hitchcock does this by manipulating his audience. Other camera manipulation can be seen throughout his films to build on the suspense. As in 'Foreign Correspondent', the audience knows the star is in danger immediately creating suspense. They are aware his bodyguard is actually out to kill him. Suspense builds as the bodyguard attempts in various ways to kill the man.

But in the cathedral scene in the tower, we see the quick cutting. We see him making sure the coast is clear, and then he runs to push the man out of the tower to kill him. We got a shot from a distance of a man falling from a tower, we aren't told who the killer is, this creating great suspense. In 'Frenzy' the second murder arouses suspicion by an interesting technique. We are given a back tracking shot down the stairs and away from the building, the suspense here is, that due to the first killing we know what is happening to the woman, the victim.

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The camera is telling the story, no dialogue this in a sense is his narrative structure. , voyeurism is used again and again in his other films. Hitchcock in ' Psycho' and ' vertigo' use the technique of peeking through a closed door, to build suspense and raise emotion. He uses similar camera angles in some shots, some more peculiar than others, for example, Ariel shots, in ' Psycho' at the top of the stairs, and in ' The Birds' as the birds attack and we are drawn in suspense by the petrol nearing the fire.

There is black humour here again for example where in the mists off the events unfolding Hitchcock shows an elderly man crossing the street.

Another point is Hitchcock's adverts for his movies. They tend to be monologues by him, talking about the film, very peculiar, and an obvious auteurism. All the scenes I have mentioned as examples are noticeably all storyboards. A final auteurism is that he leaves his signature on the film, usually in the credits. It is clear that the ' auteur theory' is relevant to Alfred Hitchcock's work.

Though Traffauts ' auteur theory' has been criticised for years. It has been argued, how can one ' auteur' take credit for an entire movie, when it takes a wide range of people to make the film, for example cinematographers and screenwriters. The argument is, isn't the film director considered to have complete control over the film? This is rare and if not, they will have to conform to ideals and guidelines the director may not agree with. Film critic Pauline Kael was the chief opponent of the auteur theory in the 1960's. She criticised Sarris' book and branded the theory " garbage".