

Film Course Outlines COM 221--Neuendorf
FALL 2006

A Question of Authorship: Auteur Theory

- * Who speaks? Who is the author?
Who controls what the text "says"?
- * In film (especially in American movies) this is often difficult to establish
- 1. Auteur theory developed by French writers in Andre Bazin's journal, *Cahiers du Cinema* during the 1950's (other theories--realism, genre theory)
- 2. Auteurs have distinctive styles and preoccupations --themes, visual & production styles, ways of handling scenes, etc. . . . recurring motifs
- 3. Auteur = director?
Auteur = star?
Auteur = screenwriter?
- 4. "Film-style" shooting gives the auteur artistic power

Iconography=widely understood cultural symbols

vs.

Motif=recurring theme in a single film
(or a set of films by same auteur)

Hitchcock as Auteur - - Common Thematic Motifs

- * falsely accused man
- * "The villain doesn't kick the dog - - he's a charmer."
- * aloof blonde woman (e.g., Grace Kelly, Tippi Hedren, Eva Marie Saint) . . . sexual fire beneath a cool exterior
- * malevolent crowd
- * ironic use of religious symbols
- * use of some impt. cultural artifact (a "safe" place) at the narrative climax (e.g., Albert Hall, Mt. Rushmore, Statue of Liberty, a train, a merry-go-round)
- * "Film is life with the dull parts cut out."
- * Carefully planned mise-en-scene (memorized his storyboards)
- * Hitch's own cameo appearances--a gimmick
- * Key production techniques . . . e.g., high-angle shots, canted camera angles, CUs, tracking shots
- * Bomb theory of suspense
- * Hitch's own fears & phobias
- * MacGuffin theory of dramatic foils

Tempering Auteur Theory with Reception Theory

- * Assuming an active audience
- * "The text proposes, the viewer disposes."

Buster Keaton as Auteur - -
Common Thematic Motifs

- * The Keaton character - - stone-faced, he is considered a brainless idiot, & is kicked around (literally!) by others. . . but in all things perseveres & prevails.
- * The plot - - a young man courts a woman whose social position is more respectable than his own. Through ingenuity, & feats of daring & imagination, he wins her. (NOTE: Keaton did all his own stunts.)
- * Keaton's adversaries: machines & nature
- * Usual shot is LS, to show relation of man to nature

"FILM AS:" (A Brief History and Overview)

1. Science

- * A scientific/medical experiment (and extension of still photography; DaVinci's camera obscura, c. 1500; Louis Daguerre/daguerrotypes, c. 1840)
- * Persistence of vision (Roget, etc., 1820s)
- * Thaumatrope, Zoetrope, Magic Lantern shows (1830s)
- * Eadweard Muybridge, Cal. Gov. Stanford, \$25,000 & a running horse (1877)

2. Information
- * Documentation
 - * News

VS.

3. Art
- * Self-expression
 - * Creativity
 - * Filmmaker as auteur
 - * “European”

From the very beginning, filmmakers differentiated themselves:

Information/Documentation vs. Art/Self-expression

* Lumiere Bros. vs. Georges Melies

<----->

[realism] [formalism/expressionism]

- * Definitions of Realism vs. Formalism/Expressionism (Dennis Giles)

Realism:

- * Broad def. - - the reality outside the camera should be shown with as little distortion as possible; a

- neutral style that doesn't draw attention to itself
- * Narrow def. - - in doing the above, you use certain film techniques that minimize interference; deep focus shots, long takes (plan sequence) are used . . . as little decoupage as possible

Formalism/Expressionism:

- * Broad def. - - you don't try to reproduce the reality of the world, but construct a new reality on film
- * Narrow def. - - you do the above by distorting the image itself, so that the film image is unlike anything one would see in the real world; use of special lenses, filters, lighting, angles, etc.

4. Commerce

- * America entertains the world!
- * Thomas Edison, William Dickson & the Kinetoscope, the Black Maria (1890s), Nickelodeons
- * The U.S. Studio System & Movie moguls
- * Production/Distribution/Exhibition (Vertical integration)
- * Competition with other media, other forms of entertainment—e.g., sound, AC, drive-ins, 3D, widescreen technologies, William Castle gimmicks, color, special effects

5. A Social Force

* National cinemas (e.g., Soviet Montage; Francophone African cinema)

* Propaganda (e.g., Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*)

* A moral influence:

Censorship/self-censorship—Hays Office & Production Code (1922-45), MPAA ratings (since 1966)

Blacklisting--an assumption that off-screen activities have an influence on on-screen material (e.g., Fatty Arbuckle, Robert Downey, Jr., "Hollywood Ten" during McCarthy era, Jane Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave)