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

5. Can identify an auteur empirically? (Janstova, 2008—Jane Campion case)

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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, 3D revival, 4D
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:
  Payne Fund studies—set of 1930s studies that examined content and effects of movies on national morals (possible impact on the young)
  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)