

Auteur Theory

The Auteur Theory is a way of reading and appraising films through the imprint of an auteur (French: author), usually meant to be the director.

In the 1954 essay *Une certaine tendance du cinéma français* François Truffaut coined the phrase "la politique des auteurs", and asserted that the worst of Jean Renoir's movies would always be more interesting than the best of Jean Delannoy's. "Politique" might very well be translated as "policy"; it involves a conscious decision to look at movies in a certain way and to value them in a certain way. Truffaut provocatively said, "There are no good and bad movies, only good and bad directors."

Truffaut and his colleagues at the magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* recognized that moviemaking was an industrial process. However, they proposed an ideal to strive for: using the commercial apparatus just the way a writer uses a pen. While recognizing that not all directors reached this ideal, they valued the work of those who neared it.

This theory espouses that all good directors (and many bad ones) have such a distinctive style that their fingerprints end up on the film. You cannot see a film by that director without recognizing their influence. The strength of this theory (and the logical penchant for directors to support it) have been blamed for the irrational lack of attention some early directors received during the heyday of film theory. Howard Hawks was argued to be a hack because he had too many movies across too many genres. Allan Dwan still has not received much critical recognition both because too few of his films are in circulation and he made too many without contemporary attention.

The auteurist critics—Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer—wrote mostly about directors, although they also produced some shrewd appreciations of actors. Later writers of the same general school have emphasized the contributions of star personalities like Mae West. However, the stress was on directors, and when Andrew Sarris exported the theory to the United States, screenwriters, producers and others reacted with a good deal of hostility. Writer William Goldman has said that, on first hearing the auteur theory, his first reaction was, "What's the punchline?"

The auteur theory significantly influenced the *nouvelle vague* movement of French cinema in the 1960s.

Strength of such films, according to Auteurist, comes from tension created by Director/Author and limitations of genre. The Dialectic.