

ANDREW SARRIS



Andrew Sarris (October 31, 1928 – June 20, 2012) was an American film critic, a leading proponent of the auteur theory of film criticism.

He is generally credited with popularizing the auteur theory in the United States and coining the term in his 1962 essay, "Notes on the Auteur Theory," which critics writing in *Cahiers du Cinéma* had inspired.

Sarris wrote the highly influential book *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968* (1968), an opinionated assessment of films of the sound era, organized by director.

During this part of his career, he was often seen as a rival to Pauline Kael, who had originally attacked the auteur theory in her essay "Circles and Squares."

In *The American Cinema* (1968), Sarris lists directors in categories:

Pantheon Director: These are the directors who have transcended their technical problems with a personal vision of the world. To speak any of their names is to evoke a self-contained world with its own laws and landscapes. They were also fortunate enough to find the proper conditions and collaborators for the full expression of their talent.

John Ford
Alfred Hitchcock
Ernst Lubitsch
Jean Renoir
Charles Chaplin
Robert Flaherty
D. W. Griffith
Howard Hawks
Buster Keaton
Orson Welles
Fritz Lang
F. W. Murnau
Max Ophüls
Josef von Sternberg

The Far Side of Paradise: These are the directors who fall short of the Pantheon either because of a fragmentation of their personal vision or because of disruptive career problems.

Frank Capra
Blake Edwards
Joseph Losey
Vincente Minnelli
Douglas Sirk.

Expressive Esoterica: These are the unsung directors with difficult styles or unfashionable genres or both. Their deeper virtues are often obscured by irritating idiosyncrasies on the surface, but they are generally redeemed by their seriousness and grace.

Stanley Donen
Joseph H. Lewis
Don Siegel
Frank Tashlin
Budd Boetticher

Fringe Benefits: These directors occupied such a marginal role in the American cinema that it would be unfair to their overall reputations to analyze them in this limited context in any detail.

Claude Chabrol
Sergei Eisenstein
Roberto Rossellini
Michelangelo Antonioni
Roman Polanski.

Less Than Meets the Eye: These are the directors with reputations in excess of inspirations. In retrospect, it always seems that the personal signatures to their films were written with invisible ink.

David Lean
Lewis Milestone
Billy Wilder
John Huston
Rouben Mamoulian.

Lightly Likable: These are talented but uneven directors with the saving grace of unpretentiousness.

John Cromwell
Delmer Daves
Henry Hathaway
Mervyn LeRoy
Andrew L. Stone.

Strained Seriousness: These are talented but uneven directors with the mortal sin of pretentiousness. Their ambitious projects tend to inflate rather than expound.

Jules Dassin
John Frankenheimer
Stanley Kubrick
Sidney Lumet
Robert Rossen.

Oddities, One-Shots, and Newcomers: These are the eccentrics, the exceptions and the expectants, the fallen stars and the shooting stars. They defy more precise classification by their very nature.

John Boorman
John Cassavetes
Francis Ford Coppola
Charles Laughton
Lindsay Anderson.

Subjects for Further Research:

These are the directors whose work must be more fully evaluated before any final determination of the American cinema is possible. There may be other unknown quantities

as well, but this list will serve for the moment as a reminder of the gaps.

Clarence Brown
Tod Browning
Henry King.

Make Way for the Clowns!: These are the most conspicuous of the non-directorial auteurs, and, as such, they cannot be subsumed under any directorial style. They are ultimately the funniest footnotes to the auteur theory.

Jerry Lewis.

Miscellany: No description given. Assumedly, all directors that didn't quite fit into one of the above categories.

John Brahm
William Dieterle
Stuart Heisler
David Miller
Elliott Nugent.