

1 · Introduction

the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successfully a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of *caméra-stylo*.

Alexandre Astruc (1948)¹

The *politique des auteurs* has had its day: it was only a stage on the way to a new criticism.

Fereydoun Hoveyda (1961)²

As a term, Astruc's *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen) failed to take root, but the association of the film artist with the 'serious' writer, and the insistence on film as individual self-expression, had a considerable polemical importance, forming the basis of the *cinéma d'auteurs* constructed in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s. Traditionally, the reference to the *auteur* in French film criticism had identified either the author who wrote the script, or, in the more general sense of the term, the artist who created the film. In the work of *Cahiers* the latter sense came to replace the former, and the *auteur* was the artist whose personality was 'written' in the film.

Within its distinguishable currents – *Cahiers* in France, *Movie* in Britain, Andrew Sarris in America – *auteurism* shares certain basic assumptions: notably, that a film, though produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director ('meaningful coherence is more likely when the director dominates the proceedings': Sarris³); that in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist (an *auteur*) a film is more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films. Most *auteurist* critics made a distinction between the *auteur* and the (mere) *metteur en scène*: the one consistently expressing his own unique obsessions, the other a competent, even highly competent, film-maker,

but lacking the consistency which betrayed the profound involvement of a personality. The distinction opened out energetic controversies along the borderline between the two: over Minnelli, for example, or Huston. Each of the currents had its own set of values and its own areas of privilege, and within the currents there were differences; but each seemed to assume that, if film were to be considered an art, as it quite generally was, then what they were urging inevitably followed: film is an art, and art is the expression of the emotions, experience and 'world-view' of an individual artist.

The business of introducing this section on *auteurism* is made considerably easier by the presence of Edward Buscombe's article, 'Ideas of Authorship'. Simply to repeat the points of Buscombe's critique would be redundant, and it seems more useful here to fill out something of the place of *auteurism* within the history of film criticism and theory, giving an indication of the history into which *auteurism* intervened, and the history which it initiated: the history, that is, of the before and after which is implied by the two quotations which head this introduction, and which finds a starting point in the extract from Abrams which follows.

Ironically, the intervention of *auteurism*, its critical revolution, was simply the installation in the cinema of the figure who had dominated the other arts for over a century: the romantic artist, individual and self-expressive. Established film criticism had long ago accepted that film was an art (it was the necessary justification for its own discourse), but it had meant it at the most general level, at which art has something to do with truth and beauty. Film theory had concerned itself almost exclusively with the relation between the representation and the real thing, and had not developed an aesthetic to explain the place of the artist in film art. Since the cinema which was predominantly valorized was the less apparently industrial cinema of Europe and Asia, the problem of the apparent contradiction between a commercial industry and an art was not fully confronted, and where it arose (as in the films of Ford, Welles or Griffith) it tended to be dealt with either in terms of overriding genius, or by a compromise position in which, by a combination of exceptional circumstances (a good subject, a good script, a good cast, an artist and freedom), a work of art which was personal might be produced despite the constraints of the industry. Established criticism valued as artists a small number of directors, predominantly European, who produced work which had a certain highly variable quality of 'greatness' (which was typically either a moral quality or a social penetration) and a certain 'seriousness' (which involved the apparent commitment of the artist to his theme). Art was simply a value term, and the theoretical questions which it begged went largely unanswered. *Auteur* criticism, on the other hand, proposed as artists a much larger number of directors whose work, viewed over a number of films, displayed a consistency of underlying theme and style which was surprising in the industrial and com-

mercial system in which they worked, and which therefore, it seemed, could be ascribed to the force of the director's personality and unique obsessions expressing themselves through the film despite the constraints. In fact, the struggle between the desire for self-expression and the constraints of the industry could produce a tension in the films of the commercial cinema which was lacking in the 'art' cinema, encouraging the *auteurist* critics to valorize Hollywood cinema above all else, finding there a treasure-trove of buried personalities, and, in the process, scandalizing established criticism. Uniqueness of personality, brash individuality, persistence of obsession and originality were given an evaluative power above that of stylistic smoothness or social seriousness.

Put thus, the critical shift which *auteurism* effected within the history of film criticism can be seen as a step backwards to a romantic conception of the artist as it is described by Abrams: a regressive step precisely at the moment at which romanticism was becoming less secure in other branches of criticism, and in a medium in which an aesthetic of individual self-expression seemed least appropriate. This regression can be explained partly by the lack of definition which had been given to the notion of film art in traditional criticism, a lack of definition which allowed *auteurism* to pour cinema into the mould which was already provided by the romantic aesthetic. The relation between *auteurism* and romanticism also helps to explain the process by which, after the initial scandal, *auteurism* was easily assimilated into the dominant aesthetic mode.

But if this succeeds in explaining away Astruc's 'new age of cinema' as nothing more than the old age of romanticism, it fails to explain the relation of *auteurism* to the 'new criticism' which Hoveyda invokes. If we describe *auteurism* as nothing more than an escape into the romantic aesthetic of bourgeois criticism, away from the actual conditions of production, we pose it as simply a dead end of history, albeit one which is still with us. My argument would be that *auteurism* did in fact produce a radical dislocation in the development of film theory, which has exposed it progressively to the pressures of alternative aesthetics and 'new criticisms'. This dislocation cannot be attributed easily to a single cause, but can be associated with a number of impulses, shifts of emphasis and contradictions which were central to *auteur* criticism.

In the first place, the shift which *auteurism* effected was a shift in the way in which films were conceived and grasped within film criticism. The personality of the director, and the consistency within his films, were not, like the explicit subject matter which tended to preoccupy established criticism, simply there as a 'given'. They had to be sought out, discovered, by a process of analysis and attention to a number of films. The recognition that the director was not always able to choose the best subject matter for his own self-expression was the concession which *auteurism* made to the conditions of production. Subject matter, the story, what the film was explicitly about, could in most instances be posed as a frame-

work given to the director by the studio, and not necessarily of his choosing. The business of the critic was to discover the director within the given framework, to find the traces of the submerged personality, to find the ways in which the *auteur* had transformed the material so that the explicit subject matter was no longer what the film was really about – ‘The story of *The Criminal* centres on a race-track robbery, but this is certainly not the subject of the film.’⁴ Film criticism became a process of discovery, a process which, while it remained firmly within the hermeneutics of romantic criticism, forced a more precise attention to what was actually happening within the film than had been customary for a traditional criticism which tended to be satisfied with the surfaces of popular films, assuming that the conditions of their production prevented them from having depths. More than this, *auteurism* forced an attention to what was actually happening in a lot of films. New *auteurs* were discovered like new stars in the sky; and Andrew Sarris, in particular, insisted on a rigorous and comprehensive knowledge not only of each putative *auteur's* output, but also of as much of the total output of all cinema, and particularly of the undiscovered Hollywood, as it was physically possible to see. This attention to individual films, to groups of films, and to the whole of cinema was, of course, necessary, beneficial and, in the context of the history of film theory, progressive.

In one form, the attention involved simply a discovery of recurrent underlying themes, giving to the critic the role of interpreter, separating the true from the apparent, finding the depth below the surface, easing the object into consumption. While the awareness of recurrent themes is clearly useful, there is a continual danger in predominantly thematic approaches that they will lend themselves to a critical reductiveness: a ‘eureka syndrome’ in which the aim is to ‘crack the code’, to liberate the theme and the values from the film which contains (and conceals) them. Because of the fundamental and perpetual difficulty of quotation in film criticism (of quotation from a visual discourse in a verbal discourse) thematic analysis (which verbal discourse copes with by repressing the visual) tended more and more to establish itself in many of the currents of *auteurism*, emerging clearly in ‘*auteur-structuralism*’.

Elsewhere, however, *auteur* critics avoid reductiveness by a close attention to *mise en scène*, and much of the best *auteurist* criticism (Barry Boys on Minnelli,⁵ Hoveyda or V. F. Perkins on Ray⁶) focuses on *mise en scène* as the stylistic ‘signature’ of the director, complicating a simple elaboration of themes with a constant return to the way in which they appear on the screen. The logic of this attention is clear within the *auteurist* project – given the conditions of production in which subject matter and script are likely to be in the control of the studio, style at least has the possibility of being under the control of the director, and it is there that his personality may be the most legible. *Mise en scène* has a transformative effect. It is with the *mise en scène* that the *auteur*

transforms the material which has been given to him; so it is in the *mise en scène* – in the disposition of the scene, in the camera movement, in the camera placement, in the movement from shot to shot – that the *auteur* writes his individuality into the film.

While the motivation for this attention to *mise en scène* may be within the project of discovering and celebrating *auteurs*, it also raises questions of the effectivity of the visual discourse. In *auteurist* criticism *mise en scène* begins to be conceived as an effectivity, producing meanings and relating spectators to meanings, rather than as a transparency, allowing them to be seen. Luc Moullet’s notorious ‘Morality is a question of tracking shots’⁷ appears less scandalous than it did to the critics of *Sight & Sound*⁸ if it is construed to indicate an awareness of the relationship between strategies of *mise en scène* and the production of ideologies. More than that, the attention to *mise en scène* gives criticism a way of accounting for the text as pleasurable, pointing to its fascination as well as to its meaning. An almost hedonistic pleasure in visual delights is a feature of much of the writing in *Cahiers* in the mid-1950s (Hoveyda on Ray: ‘if one insists on thinking that *Party Girl* is rubbish, then I proclaim: “Long live this rubbish which so pleases my eyes, fascinates my heart, and gives me a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven.”’⁹), and it frequently lapses into mere formalism; but when one places *Cahiers’* development alongside that of the more soberly traditional journals, it is hard not to sympathize with Bazin when he says, ‘at least in *Cahiers* we prefer this prejudice to its opposite’.¹⁰ In many respects, the attention to *mise en scène*, even to the extent of a certain historically necessary formalism, is probably the most important positive contribution of *auteurism* to the development of a precise and detailed film criticism, engaging with the specific mechanisms of visual discourse, freeing it from literary models, and from the liberal commitments which were prepared to validate films on the basis of their themes alone.

If this is the positive contribution of *auteurism* to film criticism, the eventual theoretical dislocation which it produced is more accurately attributed to the contradictions which it exposed within the aesthetics of film. *Auteurism* was not itself a theory: *Cahiers* proposed it as a policy; Sarris was prepared to admit it was more of an attitude than a theory; and *Movie* refused theoretical elaboration. But by adopting a fairly consistent romantic position in relation to creativity, it exposed film aesthetics to the contradictions of those romantic principles of individual creativity which formed the basis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism, when applied to an expressive form which was collective, commercial, industrial and popular. The contradictions of a resolutely romantic aesthetic in relation to cinema came to be generally recognized, and two modes of coping with them were developed. On the one hand, a certain inappropriateness was recognized, and the rules were relaxed to allow creativity – even creative dominance – to enter at other levels (a Paddy

Chayefsky film, a James Cagney film). This approach characterized the later work of the writers associated with *Movie*. On the same level, the critical approach could be given a greater adequacy and flexibility by introducing principles of genre and industry, situating the *auteur*, or author, as one level among several which produced meaning in the text. Such a 'liberal *auteurism*' is indeed more adequate to the conditions of cinema, and escapes much of the inappropriateness of earlier *auteurism*, but in so far as it tends to seek for alternative unifying and ordering principles, personnel or relationships, it is still closely tied to the romantic aesthetic, and causes little disruption in theory.

On the other hand, and more radically, the attempt to confront the contradictions of *auteurism* within cinema aligned an important section of theoretical work on film with a more thoroughgoing critique of the romantic conception of authorship which depended on the notion of a unified and free creative subject. It is the course of this project which the later sections of the Reader attempt to chart. The decisive intervention is perhaps that of the editors of *Cahiers*, whose work on the Ford film, *Young Mr Lincoln*, constructs the text as a play of tensions, silences and repressions, in which the author is a problematic 'inscription' rather than an intentional source of meaning, a personality or a principle of unity. No straight line can be drawn between this work, or between the work on the author as fiction and function which dominates Part Three of the Reader, and the more intuitional, impressionistic work of early *auteurism*; but it is clear that the *Cahiers* editors' text did not emerge from nowhere. The work of Comolli and Narboni on Ford in this section of the Reader seems to indicate a pull between the recognition of the *auteur* as system of consistencies and the film as site of repressions and contradictions; and Sarris, in posing 'interior meaning' as a tension between the director's personality and his material, already hints at unconscious meanings and at the authors constructed *a posteriori*, whose names Peter Wollen will later put into inverted commas. *Auteurism* was at its most productive in its contradictions, and the systematic and rigorous attempt to confront them marks a shift out of *auteurism* as a critical policy towards work on a theory of authorship.

It would be absurd to suggest that the subsequent history of film theory followed necessarily from the radical intuitions of *auteurism*. What I am suggesting is that the foundations of a number of developments in authorship theory were already present – untheorized – in the work of those *auteur* critics who were more concerned with the productivity of *mise en scène* than with the simple identification of the *auteur's* thematic preoccupations; that the present concern with film as language or film as discourse marks a return to a more rigorous concern with the rhetorical figurations of *mise en scène*, a return which has frequently lacked the ability to account also for film as pleasure; and that other developments in film theory have followed (particularly in *Cahiers*) from the need

to rationalize the massive contradictions of an untheorized and assumed romantic *auteurism*. The tendency to reject *auteurism* because it is 'hopelessly contradictory' loses sight of the extent to which subsequent authorship theories, and subsequent theories of the production of ideologies in films, were at least inflected, if not initiated, by these contradictions. Equally, the tendency to reject *auteurism* because it is 'hopelessly romantic' lends itself to an over-reaction in which the author appears as 'nothing but' an effect of the text, failing to elaborate what the effect does. The attempt to move beyond *auteurism* has to recognize the place which *auteurism* occupies, and the influence which it brings to bear. It has to recognize also the fascination of the figure of the *auteur*, and the way he is used in the cinephile's pleasure.

A final point has to be added to free *auteurism* from the historical confinement which the association of the term with a particular period of *Cahiers* implies. *Auteurism* is a critical approach which existed before Truffaut announced '*la politique des auteurs*' in 1954, and persists after the *Young Mr Lincoln* text of 1970. Lindsay Anderson, in the late 1940s in *Sequence*, was already writing about John Ford in a way which anticipated the best of *auteurism*, even to the point of distinguishing (in a *Sight & Sound* review) between Ford's *Wagonmaster* and Wise's *Two Flags West* as 'the difference between the expressive, poet's eye, and the elegant, superficial skill of the *décorateur*'.¹¹ And Robin Wood in 1975:¹²

Hawks obviously isn't the sole creator of *To Have and Have Not*, but I still value it primarily as a Hawks movie: his unifying and organizing presence seems crucial to its success.

Auteurism now, even more than in the polemical situation of the 1950s and early 1960s, is a critical, rather than a theoretical, practice, fully accommodated within established aesthetics, less concerned, in its security, to defend itself or rationalize itself. Within film criticism, in fact, from being a dislocation, it has become the tradition, producing evaluations and interpretations which are frequently impressively and seductively perceptive, but which very seldom throw into question, in any rigorous way, the premises on which the cinema depends. The attention necessary to contemporary *auteurism* is not as a theory, but as a critical position within discourses about cinema, a position which is supported institutionally and ideologically by the 'received' cultural aesthetic: a position, that is, which defines the space in which other discourses about cinema take place.

Notes

1 Alexandre Astruc, 'The birth of a new avant-garde: *la caméra-stylo*', in Peter

16 *Auteurism*

- Graham, ed., *The New Wave*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1968, pp. 17–23; first published in *Ecran français*, no. 144, 1948.
- 2 Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'Autocritique', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 126, December 1961, p. 45.
 - 3 Andrew Sarris, 'Toward a theory of film history', in *The American Cinema*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1968, p. 30.
 - 4 Letter from Ian Cameron, Mark Shivas and V. F. Perkins, editors of *Oxford Opinion*, in *Sight & Sound*, vol. 30, no. 2, Spring 1961, p. 100. The editors were responding to Penelope Houston's criticism of their position in her article 'The critical question', *Sight & Sound*, vol. 29, no. 4, Autumn 1960, pp. 160–5.
 - 5 Barry Boys, 'The Courtship of Eddie's Father', *Movie*, no. 10, June 1963, pp. 29–32.
 - 6 Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'La réponse de Nicholas Ray', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 107, May 1960, pp. 13–23; see extract below. V. F. Perkins, 'The cinema of Nicholas Ray', *Movie*, no. 9, May 1963, pp. 4–10; in *Movie Reader*, I. Cameron, ed., London, November Books, 1972; in Nichols.
 - 7 Luc Moullet, 'Sam Fuller: sur les brisées de Marlowé', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 93, March 1959, pp. 11–19; see extract below.
 - 8 See Richard Roud, 'The French line', *Sight & Sound*, vol. 29, no. 4, Autumn 1960, pp. 166–71. Roud's article was a companion piece to Penelope Houston, 'The critical question' in the same volume.
 - 9 Hoveyda, 'La réponse de Nicholas Ray'.
 - 10 André Bazin, 'Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien?', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 44, February 1955, pp. 17–18; see extract below.
 - 11 Lindsay Anderson, 'Wagonmaster and Two Flags West', *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 8, December 1950, p. 334.
 - 12 Robin Wood *et al.*, 'The return of *Movie*' (an editorial discussion), *Movie*, no. 20, Spring 1975, p. 17; see extract below.

3 · Edward Buscombe: 'Ideas of authorship'

Screen, vol. 14, no. 3, Autumn, 1973

Written after the development (and into the decline) of 'auteur-structuralism' in Britain, Edward Buscombe's article links the critique of early *auteurism* with that of the structuralist extension. In Stephen Heath's 'Comment' the critique is extended to any theory of authorship which depends on the assumption of a unified subject.

The article is a revision of a paper, 'The Idea of Authorship', given at a seminar organized by the British Film Institute and the Society for Education in Film and Television.

The *auteur* theory was never, in itself, a theory of the cinema, though its originators did not claim that it was. The writers of *Cahiers du Cinéma* always spoke of 'la politique des auteurs'. The translation of this into 'the *auteur* theory' appears to be the responsibility of Andrew Sarris. In an essay entitled 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962' he remarked, 'Henceforth, I will abbreviate "la politique des auteurs" as the *auteur* theory to avoid confusion.'¹ Confusion was exactly what followed when the newly christened 'theory' was regarded by many of its supporters and opponents alike as a total explanation of the cinema.

Not only was the original *politique* of *Cahiers* somewhat less than a theory; it was itself only loosely based upon a theoretical approach to the cinema which was never to be made fully explicit. The *politique*, as the choice of term indicates, was polemical in intent and was meant to define an attitude to the cinema and a course of action. In the pursuit of this course *Cahiers* did inevitably reveal some of the theory on which the *politique* was based; but usually this appeared incidentally, and at times incoherently.

One thing is clear, however. From the beginning *Cahiers*, and its predecessor *La Revue du Cinéma*, were committed to the line that the cinema was an art of personal expression. (In the second issue of *La Revue* an article appeared entitled: 'La création doit être l'ouvrage d'un seul'). At that period (the late 1940s) it was inevitable that part of the project of a new film magazine would

be to raise the cultural status of the cinema. The way to do this, it seemed, was to advance the claim of the cinema to be an art form like painting or poetry, offering the individual the freedom of personal expression. The main difference at that time between *Cahiers* and other film magazines was that *Cahiers* did not feel that opportunities of this kind were to be found exclusively in the European 'art' cinema. Right from the very earliest issues there are discussions of Hollywood directors such as Welles, Ford and Lang. *Cahiers* was concerned to raise not only the status of the cinema in general, but of American cinema in particular, by elevating its directors to the ranks of the artists.

The *politique* in the sense of a line that will be rigorously pursued and provocatively expressed, really dates from an article in issue no. 31 by François Truffaut entitled 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'. Truffaut attacks what he calls the tradition of quality in the French cinema, by which he means the films of directors such as Delannoy, Allégret and Autant-Lara, and especially the adaptations by Aurenche and Bost of well-known novels. They are attacked for being literary, not truly cinematic, and are also found guilty of 'psychological realism'. Truffaut defines a true film *auteur* as one who brings something genuinely personal to his subject instead of merely producing a tasteful, accurate but lifeless rendering of the original material. Examples of true *auteurs* are Bresson and Renoir. Instead of merely transferring someone else's work faithfully and self-effacingly, the *auteur* transforms the material into an expression of his own personality.

So successful was Truffaut's call to arms, and so many were the *auteurs* subsequently discovered, that in all the later articles in *Cahiers* in which the '*politique*' was explicitly discussed, a great deal of space had to be devoted to dissociating the journal from the excesses committed in its name. (See, for example, issues nos 63, 70, 126, 172). Truffaut had referred only to French directors, but *Cahiers* began to give more and more space to the American cinema. In its special issue nos 150-1 on the American cinema no fewer than 120 *cinéastes* (i.e. *auteurs*) were identified.

Yet even by this late date (1964) the questions of what an *auteur* is and why the cinema should be discussed largely in terms of individual artists are ones that are only answered by implication. Clear articulations of a theory behind the practice are rare and sketchy. But a review by André Bazin of *The Red Badge of Courage* (no. 27, pp. 49f.) gives a clue. Bazin distinguishes between Hitchcock, a true *auteur*, and Huston, who is only a *metteur en scène*, who has 'no truly personal style'. Huston merely adapts,

though often very skilfully, the material given him, instead of transforming it into something genuinely his own. A similar point is made by Jacques Rivette in a later issue (no. 126), in the course of a discussion on criticism. Rivette declares that Minnelli is not a true *auteur*, merely a talented director at the mercy of his script. With a bad script he makes a bad and uninteresting film. Fritz Lang, on the other hand, can somehow transform even indifferent material into something personal to him (and this, Rivette assumes, makes it interesting).

Such discussions, however, do not advance much beyond Truffaut's original position, though they serve to confirm *Cahiers'* stance on the issue of personal expression. Some attempt to modify this was made by Eric Rohmer. Rejecting the lunatic fringe who took the issue of personality to extremes, Rohmer writes, 'Le film est pour lui [the *auteur*] une architecture dont les pierres ne sont pas — ne doivent pas être — filles de sa propre chair.'² The comparison with architecture, another industrial art, would seem to lead in a different direction from comparisons with literature, the best known of which is, of course, Alexandre Astruc's article 'The Birth of a New Avant Garde: *La Caméra-Stylo*'.³ But it was Astruc's article which was to prove more influential over the critics of *Cahiers*. The more romantic conception of the director as the 'only begetter' of a film was the one that dominated the journal.

One expression of this which seems particularly indebted to Romantic artistic theory is that of Rivette in issue no. 126: 'Un cinéaste, qui a fait dans le passé de très grands films, peut faire des erreurs, mais les erreurs qu'il fera ont toutes chances, a priori,* d'être plus passionnantes que les réussites d'un confectionneur.'⁴ What seems to lie behind such a statement is the notion of the 'divine spark' which separates off the artist from ordinary mortals, which divides the genius from the journeyman. All the articles by Truffaut, Bazin and Rivette from which I have quoted share this belief in the absolute distinction between *auteur* and *metteur en scène*, between *cinéaste* and 'confectionneur', and characterise it in terms of the difference between the *auteur's* ability to make a film truly his own, i.e. a kind of original, and the *metteur en scène's* inability to disguise the fact that the origin of his film lies somewhere else.

When this is compared with a statement from early Romantic

* It's hard to see how this can be so *a priori* in any case; only according to the balance of probabilities.

literary theory, it is easy enough to see the derivation of this distinction.

An Original may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made; Imitations are often a sort of *manufacture*, wrought up by those *mechanics*, *art* and *labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own.⁵

It's not surprising, therefore, to find that *auteur* critics draw others of their assumptions from Romantic theorists. For example, Coleridge makes a distinction between two kinds of literature which makes use of the metaphor of organic unity contained in the above passage: 'The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher are mere aggregations without unity; in the Shakespearean drama there is a vitality which grows and evolves itself from within — a keynote which guides and controls the harmonies throughout.'⁶ This notion of the unity produced by the personality of the *auteur* is central to the *Cahiers'* position; but it is made even more explicit by their American apologist, Andrew Sarris: 'The *auteur* critic is obsessed with the wholeness of art and the artist. He looks at a film, as a whole, a director as a whole. The parts, however entertaining individually, must cohere meaningfully.'⁷ The work of a *metteur en scène* will never be more than the sum of its parts, and probably less. The *auteur's* personality, on the other hand, endows his work with organic unity. The belief that all directors must be either *auteurs* or *metteurs en scène* led inevitably to a kind of apartheid, according to which, as Rivette says, the failures of the *auteurs* will be more interesting than the successes of the rest. Another formulation of what is essentially the same distinction occurs in *Cahiers* no. 172:

l'être doué du moindre talent esthétique, si sa personnalité 'éclate' dans l'oeuvre, l'emportera sur le technicien le plus avisé. Nous découvrons qu'il n'y pas de règles. L'intuition, la sensibilité, triomphent de toutes théories.⁸

Whether this zeal to divide directors into the company of the elect on the right and a company of the damned on the left owes anything to the Catholic influence in *Cahiers* is hard to say at this distance; but what can be identified, yet again, is the presence of Romantic artistic theory in the opposition of intuition and rules, sensibility and theory.

This tendency in *Cahiers* to make a totem of the personality of the *auteur* went to such extremes that every now and again the editors felt the need to redress the balance. André Bazin, writing in issue no. 70, introduces a different perspective:

The evolution of Western art towards greater personalisation should definitely be considered as a step forward, but only so long as this individualisation remains only a final perfection and does not claim to *define* culture. At this point, we should remember that irrefutable commonplace we learnt at school: the individual transcends society, but society is also and above all *within* him. So there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determines it.⁹

Bazin, as Rohmer had done before, takes up the analogy of architecture:

If you will excuse yet another commonplace, the cinema is an art which is both popular and industrial. These conditions, which are necessary to its existence, in no way constitute a collection of hindrances – no more than in architecture – they rather represent a group of positive and negative circumstances which have to be reckoned with.¹⁰

To be fair, *Cahiers* never entirely forgot these commonplaces, and quite frequently ran articles on the organisation of the film industry, on film genres (such as Bazin's own 'The Evolution of the Western' in December 1955) and on the technology of the cinema. The development of '*la politique des auteurs*' into a cult of personality gathers strength with the emergence of Andrew Sarris, for it is Sarris who pushes to extremes arguments which in *Cahiers* were often only implicit.

Sarris, for example, rejects Bazin's attempt to combine the *auteur* approach with an acknowledgement of the forces conditioning the individual artist. Arguing strongly against any kind of historical determinism, Sarris states:

Even if the artist does not spring from the idealised head of Zeus, free of the embryonic stains of history, history itself is profoundly affected by his arrival. If we cannot imagine Griffith's *October* or Eisenstein's *Birth of a Nation* because we find it difficult to transpose one artist's unifying conceptions of Lee and Lincoln to the other's dialectical conceptions of Lenin and Kerensky, we are nevertheless compelled to recognise other differences in the personalities of these two pioneers beyond their respective cultural complexes. It is with these latter differences that the *auteur* theory is most deeply concerned. If directors and other artists cannot be wrenched

from their historical environments, aesthetics is reduced to a subordinate branch of ethnography.¹¹

(Pauline Kael is for once correct to write of this: 'And when is Sarris going to discover that aesthetics is indeed a branch of ethnography; what does he think it is – a sphere of its own, separate from the study of man and his environment?'¹² But her own confusion re-emerges later in the same essay when she remarks, 'Criticism is an art, not a science...'¹³ Is ethnography, then, not a science?)

If Sarris is not saying that genius is independent of time and place, then he comes dangerously close to it. The critic's task as he sees it is to scan the cinema for signs of 'personality', and having found them to mine the film so as to bring as much as possible of it to the surface. It is not his job to explain how it got there. He is canny enough to remain aware that his position is partly determined by the need to maintain a polemic, both against those who are contemptuous of the American cinema and against the crudities of 'mass media critics'. ('*Auteur* criticism is a reaction against sociological criticism that enthroned the *what* against the *how*.'¹⁴) But this awareness does not save him from being driven further and further into an untenable position. That position is reached, I think, when he writes in his essay of 1962: 'The second premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style which serve as his signature.'¹⁵ Here, surely, is a fatal flaw in Sarris's argument, and the sleight of hand he uses to cover it cannot disguise its vulnerability. He is attempting to make the *auteur* theory perform two functions at the same time. On the one hand, it is a method of classification. Sarris talks elsewhere about the value of the theory as a way of ordering film history, or a tool for producing a map of the cinema, and no one could deny that in this sense the theory has, whatever its faults, been extremely productive, as a map should be, in opening up unexplored territory. But at the same time Sarris also requires the theory to act as a means of measuring value. Films, he is saying, become valuable in so far as they reveal directorial personality. He therefore does precisely what Bazin said should not be done: he uses individuality as a test of cultural value. It's worth noting that Sarris is not consistent in practising what he preaches, for several directors whose work undoubtedly exhibits a high degree of personality do not rank very far up the league tables of *The American Cinema*. Kazan, Wilder, Dassin, even Brian

Forbes, all produce films easily recognisable as 'theirs' which are not rated by Sarris.

As one means, among others, of classifying films, the *auteur* theory has proved its usefulness. But to assert that personality is the criterion of value seems altogether more open to question. The assumption that individuality and originality are valuable in themselves is, as Bazin points out in 'La Politique des Auteurs', derived from Romantic artistic theory. Sarris goes further; 'the *auteur* theory values the personality of the director precisely because of the barriers to its expression.'¹⁶ In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams describes the way in which aesthetic theory came in the Romantic period to see the artist as essentially opposed to society, achieving personal expression in the face of a hostile environment and valuing it all the more for this.¹⁷ Sarris is directly in this tradition.

Sarris, like *Cahiers* before him, then uses this criterion of value as a means of raising the status of American cinema. He admits that in Hollywood there are pressures which might work against individual expression. But so there are elsewhere:

All directors, and not just in Hollywood, are imprisoned by the conditions of their craft and their culture. The reason foreign directors are almost invariably given more credit for creativity is that the local critic is never aware of all the influences operating in a foreign environment. The late Robert Warshaw treated Carl Dreyer as a solitary artist and Leo McCarey as a social agent, but we know now that there were cultural influences in Denmark operating on Dreyer. *Day of Wrath* is superior by any standard to *My Son John*, but Dreyer is not that much freer an artist than McCarey. Dreyer's chains are merely less visible from our vantage point across the Atlantic.¹⁸

Taken at face value this is unexceptionable; of course no director has total freedom, and there is no reason *a priori* why American cinema should not be as good as any other. And in fact, says Sarris, it is better:

After years of tortured reevaluation, I am now prepared to stake my critical reputation, such as it is, on the proposition that Alfred Hitchcock is artistically superior to Robert Bresson by every criterion of excellence, and further that, film for film, the American cinema has been consistently superior to that of the rest of the world from 1915 through 1962. Consequently, I now regard the *auteur* theory primarily as a critical device for recording the history of the American cinema, the only cinema

in the world worth exploring in depth beneath the frosting of a few great directors on top.¹⁹

Again, this in itself is fair enough; the problem is that, having obtained our easy assent to the proposition that all film-makers are subject to conditions, he appears, by a sleight of hand, to proceed on the assumption that therefore conditions are unimportant. America can produce film artists in just the same way as Europe, but more of them, and of a higher standard. Film history is for Sarris the history of *auteurs*. The acknowledgement of 'conditions' turns out to be mere lip service. And it is not, I think, difficult to see why: if personality is the criterion of value, and can be achieved in the face of 'conditions', then it is not the critic's job to be much concerned with them.

One obvious objection to employing individuality as a test of value is that a director could well be highly individual, but a bad director. In the first edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* Peter Wollen does not seem wholly to avoid this trap. In the chapter on the *auteur* theory he writes:

My own view is that Ford's work is much richer* than that of Hawks and that this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted *auteur*. Moreover, the *auteur* theory enables us to reveal a whole complex of meaning in films such as *Donovan's Reef*, which a recent filmography sums up as just 'a couple of Navy men who have retired to a South Sea island now spend most of their time raising hell.'²⁰

There is no doubt that films such as *Donovan's Reef*, *Wings of Eagles* and especially *The Sun Shines Bright* (almost indecipherable to those unacquainted with Ford's work) do reveal a great deal of meaning when seen in the context of Ford's work as a whole. But does this make them 'good' films as well as interesting ones? The question is worth asking, because it seems to be just this smuggling in of one thing under the guise of another that is most responsible for the reputation in some quarters of the *auteur* theory as merely the secret password of an exclusive and fanatical sect.

Possibly people such as Pauline Kael, who are roused to fury by Sarris's version of the *auteur* theory, should simply be left to stew in their own juice. And perhaps those who won't accept that *Wings of Eagles* is a good film have a very narrow concept of what is

* Possibly by 'richer' Wollen does not imply 'has greater aesthetic value'; but if that is the case his terminology is a little confusing.

good and are unreasonable in demanding that all films should have formal perfection, should be 'intelligent', 'adult', etc. But the *auteur* theory becomes more tenable if in fact it is not required to carry in its baggage the burden of being an evaluative criterion. And Wollen, in the third edition of his book, dumps it along with much else.*

At this point, it is necessary to say something about the *auteur* theory since this has often been seen as a way of introducing the idea of the creative personality into the Hollywood cinema. Indeed, it is true that many protagonists of the *auteur* theory do argue this way. However, I do not hold this view and I think it is important to detach the *auteur* theory from any suspicion that it simply represents a 'cult of personality' or apotheosis of the director. To my mind the *auteur* theory actually represents a radical break with the idea of an 'art' cinema, not the transplant of traditional ideas about art into Hollywood. The 'art' cinema is rooted in the idea of creativity and the film as the expression of an individual vision. What the *auteur* theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final 'coherent' version. Like a dream, the film the spectator sees is, so to speak, the 'film façade', the end product of 'secondary revision', which hides and masks the process which remains latent in the film's 'unconscious'; by a process of comparison with other films, it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or world-view, but a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which *auteur* analysis disengages from the film.

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the rôle of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual concerned. . . . It is wrong, in the name of a denial of the traditional idea of creative subjectivity, to deny any status to individuals at all. But Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from 'Fuller' or

* The virtual obsession with aesthetic – even moral – evaluation which has characterised so much British criticism undoubtedly gave the *auteur* theory much of its appeal. (It's hard to ascribe moral value to, say, the studio system.)

'Hawks' or 'Hitchcock', the structures named after them, and should not be methodologically confused.²¹

Wollen does not claim that this is a total theory of the cinema: *Auteur* theory cannot simply be applied indiscriminately. Nor does an *auteur* analysis exhaust what can be said about any single film. It does no more than provide one way of decoding a film, by specifying what its mechanics are at one level. There are other kinds of code that could be proposed, and whether they are of any value or not will have to be settled by reference to the text, to the films in question.²²

There is much in this position that is attractive. It satisfies our sense that on the one hand the American cinema is the richest field for study, and on the other hand that the more one knows about its habitual methods of working the less it becomes possible to conceive of Hollywood as populated by autonomous geniuses. And certainly *a priori* evidence suggests that the themes of transferred guilt in Hitchcock; of home, and the desert/garden antithesis in Ford, for example, are almost entirely unconscious, making it inappropriate to speak, as so much *auteur* criticism does, about a director's world-view (and especially about the moral worth of that world-view). And the avoidance of the problem of evaluation is surely justified until we have an adequate description of what we should evaluate.

Structural analysis of *auteurs* has produced important results, not least in Wollen's own book. Yet there are surely problems in using techniques which were developed for the analysis of forms of communications which are entirely unconscious such as dreams, myths and language itself. For what is the exact relation between the structure called 'Hitchcock' and the film director called Hitchcock, who actually makes decisions about the story, the acting, the sets, the camera placing? It is possible to reveal structures in Hitchcock's work which are by no means entirely unconscious, such as the use of certain camera angles to involve and implicate the audience in the action. Hitchcock remarks about *The Wrong Man*:

The whole approach is subjective. For instance, they've slipped on a pair of handcuffs to link him to another prisoner. During the journey between the station house and the prison, there are different men guarding him, but since he's ashamed, he keeps his head down, staring at his shoes, so we never show the guards.²³

This kind of thing occurs in almost all Hitchcock's films, and so could be said to identify him as an *auteur* in the traditional sense. But it also connects to his obsessional and no doubt largely un-

conscious (till he read about it) concern with guilt and voyeurism, which have been revealed in structural analysis.

Earlier versions of the *auteur* theory made the assumption that because there was meaning in a work someone must have deliberately put it there, and that someone must be the *auteur*. Wollen rightly resists that. But this doesn't mean that one can only talk about unconscious structures (admittedly Wollen does say it is wrong to deny any status to individuals at all, but is there not something a little disingenuous in this concession?). The conscious will and talent of the artist (for want of a better word) may still be allowed some part, surely. But of course, that conscious will and talent are also in turn the product of those forces that act upon the artist, and it is here that traditional *auteur* theory most seriously breaks down. As Sam Rohdie says:

Auteurs are out of time. The theory which makes them sacred makes no inroad on vulgar history, has no concepts for the social or the collective, or the national.

The primary act of *auteur* criticism is one of dissociation – the *auteur* out of time and history and society is also freed from any productive process, be it in Los Angeles or Paris.²⁴

The test of a theory is whether it produces new knowledge. The *auteur* theory produced much, but of a very partial kind, and much it left totally unknown. What is needed now is a theory of the cinema that locates directors in a total situation, rather than one which assumes that their development has only an internal dynamic. This means that we should jettison such loaded terms as 'organic', which inevitably suggest that a director's work derives its impetus from within. All such terms reveal often unformulated and always unwarranted assumptions about the cinema; a film is not a living creature, but a product brought into existence by the operation of a complex of forces upon a body of matter. Unfortunately, criticism which deals with only one aspect of the artistic object is easier to practice than that which seeks to encompass the totality. Three approaches seem possible, and each of them must inevitably squeeze out the *auteur* from his position of prominence, and transform the notion of him which remains. First, there is the examination of the effects of the cinema on society (research into the sociology of mass media, and so on). Second is the effect of society on the cinema; in other words, the operation of ideology, economics, technology, etc. Lastly, and this is in a sense only a sub-section of the preceding category, the effects of films on other films; this would especially involve questions of genre, which only means that some films have a *very* close relation to other films. But

all films are affected by the previous history of the cinema. This is only one more thing that traditional *auteur* theory could not cope with. It identified the code of the *auteur*; but was silent on those codes intrinsic to the cinema, as well as to those originating outside it.

Notes

- 1 *Film Culture*, no. 27 (Winter 1962–3); reprinted in *Perspectives on the Study of Film*, ed. John Stuart Katz, Boston, Little, Brown, 1971 (p. 129). Sarris later conceded, 'Ultimately, the *auteur* theory is not so much a theory as an attitude, a table of values that converts film history into directorial biography.' *The American Cinema*, New York, Dutton, 1968, p. 30.
- 2 'For the *auteur*, the film is a piece of architecture whose bricks are not – must not be – the children of his own body.' *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 63, October 1956, p. 55.
- 3 Alexandre Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: "La Caméra-Stylo."' reprinted in *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham, London, Secker & Warburg, 1968.
- 4 'A *cinéaste* who has made great films in the past may make mistakes, but his mistakes will have every chance of being, *a priori*, more impressive than the successes of a "manufacturer."' *Cahiers*, no. 126, p. 17. The same idea is to be found in Sarris, in *The American Cinema*, p. 17: 'the worst film of a great director may be more interesting than the best film of a fair to middling director.'
- 5 Quoted in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961, p. 54.
- 6 S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures and notes on Shakespeare and other English poets* (1818), London, Dent, 1951.
- 7 Sarris, *American Cinema*, p. 30.
- 8 *Cahiers*, no. 172, November 1965, p. 3: 'a man endowed with the least aesthetic talent, if his personality "shines out" in the work, will be more successful than the cleverest technician. We discover that there are no rules. Intuition and sensibility triumph over all theories.'
- 9 André Bazin, 'La Politique des Auteurs', trans. in *The New Wave*, p. 142.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Sarris, in Katz, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–3.
- 12 Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares: Joys and Sarris', in Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
- 13 *ibid.*, p. 142.
- 14 Sarris, *American Cinema*, p. 36.
- 15 Sarris, in Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
- 16 Sarris, *American Cinema*, p. 31.
- 17 See Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–64 and *passim*.
- 18 Sarris, *American Cinema*, p. 36.

34 *Auteurism*

- 19 Sarris in Katz, op. cit. p. 134.
20 Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 3rd edn, London, Secker & Warburg, 1972, p. 102.
21 *ibid.*, pp. 167–8.
22 *ibid.*, p. 168.
23 François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, London, Panther edn 1969, p. 296.
24 Sam Rohdie, 'Education and Criticism', *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 10.

B The theory in practice

4 · *Cahiers du Cinéma*

Cahiers du Cinéma: revue mensuelle du cinéma et du télécinéma began publication in April 1951 under the editorship of Lo Duca and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, joined in the second issue by André Bazin. François Truffaut's polemical article, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français', which threw down the gauntlet of '*la politique des auteurs*', appeared in issue no. 31 in January 1954. Truffaut's article was essentially a fierce attack on the '*Tradition de la Qualité*' which was currently dominant in French cinema, a tradition which gave the central creative role to the writers – notably Aurenche and Bost – whose work was mainly adaptation of 'quality' novels, leaving to the director the secondary role of implementing their scenarios. In opposition to this, Truffaut proposed the *cinéma d'auteurs*, in which the creative role was given to the director as *auteur*, whose commitment to the film was something more than an implementation of someone else's creation. The appeal was for more than a shift in creative responsibility; in asking that cinema be given over to the true *hommes de cinéma*, Truffaut was rejecting a novelistic, psychologically realistic cinema (however socially conscious it might be) and appealing for a cinema that was truly cinematic. The directors he pointed to as exemplary *auteurs* for the French cinema were Renoir, Bresson, Cocteau, Becker, Gance, Ophuls, Tati and Leenhardt.

In his history of *Cahiers* in issue no. 100, Doniol-Valcroze identifies Truffaut's article (published with some hesitation by himself and Bazin) as a turning point, the 'real point of departure' – 'From then on there was one doctrine, the *Politique des auteurs*, even if it did lack flexibility. . . .' At the same time, while Truffaut's article may have initiated *auteurism* as a critical policy for the magazine, it did not invent the idea of *auteurism*. This idea seems rather to have been foundational for *Cahiers*, informing a number of the earliest articles, most notably Rohmer's 1952 essay,

'Renoir Américain'. Historically and internationally, an idea of *auteurism* seems also to have informed the project of the earlier *Revue du Cinéma* which provided *Cahiers* with much of its inspiration and some of its personnel, and which, in its first editorial in 1946, identified itself as 'the home of inventors and poets' (vol. 1, no. 1, p. 5), and in Britain much of the writing of Lindsay Anderson and his colleagues in *Sequence* was informed by Anderson's belief (expressed in 1950) that the director was 'the man most in a position to guide and regulate the expressive resources of the cinema' ('The director's cinema?' *Sequence* no. 12, p. 37). Anderson sees in Wyler (pp. 11, 37),

a perfect example of the director . . . who seeks with honesty, artistry and technical skill of the very highest order to make his films a true and perhaps enriched realisation of their authors' intentions.

What Wyler does not attempt to do – the declaration is his own – is to use the cinema to express his own feelings or his own ideas; and as a result there is about them a certain impersonality which marks them as the work of a brilliant craftsman rather than a serious artist. The anticipation of *Cahiers'* distinction of *auteur* and *metteur en scène* indicates that, while *Cahiers* carried the implications of *auteurism* to conclusions which were resisted elsewhere, it did not invent *auteurism* in a vacuum.

The role of the *Cahiers* critics as the directors of the New Wave cinema in France in the late 1950s achieved for *Cahiers* the same sort of cultural currency as the 'Angry Young Men' in Britain. Internationally, the mid-1950s saw the emergence of an oppositional culture which took various forms, but which invariably involved a generational clash, a rebellion against old values and a disappointment with the sterile conventionality of the post-war society from which so much had been hoped. *Cahiers* participated in this in contradictory ways. Much of its writing was conservative, if not reactionary, in its implications at least. (Truffaut's rejection of 'psychological realism' echoes with the scandalized prudishness which greeted the 'smut' of Zola's naturalism: 'In one single reel of the film, towards the end, you can hear in less than ten minutes such words as: "tart", "whore", "bitch", and "bullshit". Is that realism?' – François Truffaut, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'). But its 'tone' was rebellious, albeit in a way which had very little to do with a conscious politics. This lack of politics irritated 'committed', socially conscious criticism, while the extension of 'art' to popular and commercial cinema (and to its lowest echelons) constituted an erosion of the traditional field of art which was equally disturbing to 'bourgeois' criticism. In fact, *Cahiers* critics seemed to delight in the polemical situation in which they found themselves, scandalizing both the bourgeoisie and the committed.

But this has a serious side, the most fundamental point of which is the refusal to valorize films on the basis of their subject matter, preferring instead to discover the audacities of the *mise en scène*, and the marks

of the *auteur's* unique personality. Again the search was for the purely filmic, but it led *auteurism* into a formalism which not only brought down the scorn of its detractors but also worried its elder statesman, Bazin, whose reservations on the question of subject matter appear over and over again in his writing. In an important article written in 1974 ('La Politique des auteurs', *Jump Cut*, nos 1 and 2) John Hess identifies the *politique* as (no. 1, p. 19),

a justification, couched in aesthetic terms, of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in the years after the war.

There is no doubt that *auteurism* as practised in the *politique* was formalist, or that *Cahiers* swung between a-politicism, political confusion and downright political reaction. At the same time, its rivals in the field, *Positif*, say, or *Sight & Sound*, expose the opposite danger of a contentism in which a film is valued on the basis of the correctness or relevance of its sentiments. Fereydoun Hoveyda, in his 'Autocritique', in *Cahiers'* December 1961 special issue on criticism accepts the condemnation of formalism, but adds (p. 45):

But they forget that, far from overvaluing form, [formalism] mistakes it by separating it from meaning. This formalism meets up with the cinema of 'subject-matter' which ignores form. It can't be enough to judge Stanley Kramer or Autant-Lara on their intentions alone, however worthy they may be. It's not enough to protest against atomic suicide or war: it's also necessary to produce a work of art capable of shifting the spectator and of making him ask himself questions.

John Hess attributes something of *Cahiers'* cultural conservatism to its association with Personalism, a movement of Catholic intellectuals, including Bazin and Leenhardt, initiated in the 1930s around the magazine *Esprit*. But Personalism itself is something of a mish-mash: a quasi-philosophical attempt to align anti-capitalism with a belief in the importance of spiritual development, appropriating terms from socialism and early existentialism; and it's a mish-mash which tended to characterize *Cahiers'* intellectual background in the 1950s, a variable confusion of religious moralism, existential anxiety, absurdist nihilism, Angry Young Man polemics and beatnik rejection of convention. Alongside this should be placed the fascination which American culture had traditionally exerted on French intellectual life, a fascination which had been intensified by the cultural deprivation of the Occupation. The toughness and brashness associated with American culture was a quality to be valued, and in *Cahiers* it appears supported by such terms of approval as spontaneity, originality, roughness, primitiveness, violence and virility.

It is this diversity of stimuli, rather than a singular philosophical source, which seems to account for the confusion of positions in early *Cahiers*.

At the same time, a certain ideological profile can be discerned in the confusion, a certain privileging of those films which focused the themes of solitude, aimlessness, introspection, aggression and failure, leaving little room for the political concerns of *Positif*, or for the liberal social values of *Sight & Sound*.

Cahiers' function in the history of film criticism appears as a shaking loose of established modes. Not necessarily progressive in itself, *Cahiers* seemed to enable progress. In so far as there was a 'critical revolution' it was a revolution within bourgeois film criticism, which made other critical revolutions possible and necessary.

In the selection of extracts, which concentrate on the period 1951-61, I have tried to preserve something of the confusion of voices. It is tempting to present the principles of the *politique* as a set of rules: the late work of an *auteur* is necessarily more interesting than the earlier work, the worst work of an *auteur* is necessarily worth more than the best work of a *metteur en scène*, etc.; but such a schematization, though it has a substantial foundation, avoids the seductiveness of *Cahiers'* *auteurist* practice, with its celebration of *mise en scène* and its ability to account for pleasure and excitement: it misses the variety and dissensions in the writing, and, most seriously, it situates the *politique* as an aberration outside any tradition of criticism, rather than as an attempt to bring the principles of romantic criticism to bear on cinema, as they had been brought to bear on the other arts.

Extract from Pierre Kast, 'Des confitures pour un gendarme'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 2, May 1951

The film *auteur* who thinks that, in the current system of production it is possible to *express himself* is not only massively deluding himself but is also, however pure his intentions may be, defending and protecting the mystifications which the cinema generously distributes to its spectators.

Extract from Eric Rohmer (Maurice Schérer), 'Renoir Américain'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 8, January 1952

The history of art, as far as I know, contains no example of an authentic genius who has experienced, at the end of his career, a period of real decline. Rather history encourages us to discover, under the apparent awkwardness or poverty of these films [Renoir's American films], the traces of that willingness to lay oneself bare which characterizes the 'late period' of a Titian, a Rembrandt, a

Beethoven or, nearer home, of a Bonnard, a Matisse or a Stravinsky. Having once cited those great names, I would wish then to propose a form of criticism which would not concern itself with 'beauties' or 'faults', but which would uncover the rationale underlying a development whose thread has eluded us, and would discover, under its 'pseudo-faults', the true brilliance which a cursory glance had only been able to tarnish. Such a proposal involves a certain overturning of commonly accepted values, and I believe that our time is more ready than any other to recognize that it is the property of all masterpieces to suggest a new definition of the beautiful.

Extract from François Truffaut, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 31, January 1954
(the article appears in full in Nichols, see bibliography)

'But why', they will say to me, 'why couldn't we have the same admiration for all those film-makers who do their best to work within this Tradition and within the Quality which you deride so flippantly? Why not admire Yves Allégret as much as Becker, Jean Dellanoy as much as Bresson, Claude Autant-Lara as much as Renoir?' ('Taste is made up of a thousand distastes' - Paul Valéry.)

Well, I can't believe in the peaceful co-existence of the *Tradition de la Qualité* and a *cinéma d'auteurs*.

Basically, Yves Allégret and Dellanoy are only *caricatures* of Clouzot, and of Bresson.

It isn't the desire to create a scandal that leads me to deprecate a cinema so praised elsewhere. I remain convinced that the exaggeratedly long life of *psychological realism* is the cause of the public's incomprehension when faced with works as new in their conception as *Le Carrosse d'or* [Renoir], *Casque d'or* [Becker], not to mention *Les Dames du bois de Boulogne* [Bresson], and *Orphée* [Cocteau].

Long live audacity, certainly, but it's still necessary to discover it where it really is. In terms of this year, 1953, if I had to draw up a balance sheet of the audacities of the French cinema, there wouldn't be a place on it for the vomiting in *Les Orgueilleux* [Allégret], nor for Claude Laydu's refusal to be sprinkled with holy water in *Le Bon Dieu sans confession* [Autant-Lara], nor for the homosexual relations of the characters in *Le Salaire de la peur* [Clouzot], but instead it would have the gait of *Hulot* [Tati], the

maid's soliloquies in *La Rue de l'estrapade* [Becker] the *mise en scène* of *Le Carrosse d'or*, the direction of the actors in *Madame de . . .* [Ophuls], and also Abel Gance's experiments in Polyvision. You will have understood that these are the audacities of *hommes de cinéma*, and no longer of scenarists, *metteurs en scène*, or *littérateurs*.

Extract from Eric Rohmer, 'A qui la faute?'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 39, October 1954
(the article introduces a special issue on Hitchcock)

Is it our fault, can those of us who like Hitchcock and think him the equal of the greatest creators in the history of the cinema be blamed, if, simply because he can perform with greater assurance on that difficult instrument called the motion picture camera, one is supposed to consider him as a mere virtuoso, as a man with a clever but superficial touch? Is it our fault if it isn't possible to speak of profundity without using profound terms, or if the whole essence of profundity consists of not revealing itself on the surface? . . .

It is well known that the *Cahiers* team is divided on the Hitchcock case, as it is on many others. Since Jacques Doniol-Valcroze has given an advantage to the defence by entrusting the presentation of this issue to one of the most fervent Hitchcockians, I will gladly return the compliment by not launching from the outset into a sectarian apologetic. I willingly concede to Hitchcock's critics that our author is indeed a formalist. Even so, we still need to determine whether this appellation is as pejorative as they like to think it is. What, for example, is a formalist painting: a painting without soul, purely decorative, in which the play of lines and colours seems to have been imposed by a preconceived design on the part of the artist rather than born directly from a perception of things? Does it mean, on the contrary, that the painter can express nothing except through the intermediary of spatial relations? I see nothing in that undertaking which is incompatible with the very essence of his art, and it is clearly a difficult task, one which only the very greatest have been able to accomplish, while the more superficial artists, on the other hand, express their emotion in ways which have nothing to do with plasticity. In this sense, the film director could never be too formalist.

Extract from Jacques Rivette, 'Notes sur une révolution'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 54, Christmas 1955: special issue on American cinema

After the existential *coup de force* of Griffith, the first age of the American cinema was that of the actor; then came that of the producers. If we declare that this is at last the age of the *auteurs*, I know quite well that I will provoke sceptical smiles. I won't put up wise theories against them, but four names. They are those of film-makers, Nicholas Ray, Richard Brooks, Anthony Mann, Robert Aldrich, whom criticism had scarcely accounted for, when it didn't purely and simply ignore them. Why four names? I would have liked to have added others (those for example of Edgar Ulmer, Joseph Losey, Richard Fleischer, Samuel Fuller, and still others who are only promises, Josh Logan, Gerd Oswald, Dan Taradash), but these four are *for the moment* incontestably at the front of the queue.

It's always ridiculous to wish to unite arbitrarily under a single label creators with different affinities. At least you can't deny them this trait in common: youth (the kiss of death for a director), because they possess its virtues.

Violence is their prime virtue; not that easy brutality which constituted the success of a Dmytryk or a Benedek, but a virile anger, which comes from the heart, and lies less in the scenario or the choice of events, than in the tone of the narrative and the very technique of the *mise en scène*. Violence is never an end, but the most effective means of approach, and these fist fights, these weapons, these dynamite explosions have no other purpose than to make the accumulated debris of habit jump, to drill an opening: in short, to open the shortest routes. And the frequent resort to a technique which is discontinuous, halting, which refuses the conventions of cutting and continuity, is a form of that 'superior madness' which Cocteau speaks about, born out of the need for an immediate expression which accounts for and shares in the primary emotion of the *auteur*.

Violence is still a weapon, a double-edged weapon: physically touching an insensible public with something new, imposing oneself as an individual, if not a rebel, unsubdued. Above everything, it's a question for them all of refusing, more or less freely, the dictates of the producers, and of trying to make a personal work – and these are all *liberal* film-makers, some of them openly men of the left. The throwing out of the traditional rhetoric of the scenario and of the *mise en scène*, of this limp and anonymous

dough imposed by the *executives* since the beginnings of the talkies as a symbol of submission, has primarily the value of a manifesto. In short, violence is the external sign of rupture.

Extract from Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'La réponse de Nicholas Ray'
Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 107, May 1960

The subject of *Party Girl* is idiotic. So what? If the substratum of the cinematic opus was made up simply of the convolutions of the plots which are unravelled on the screen, then we should just annex the Seventh Art to literature, be content with illustrating novels and short stories (that, moreover, is exactly what happens in a great many films which we do not admire), and hand over *Cahiers* to literary critics. I am not attempting to reopen here an old debate which is both pointless and without interest. But, with the regularity of a clock, some critics keep harping back to how necessary it is not to neglect the importance of the screenplay, of the acting, of the production system. While they are about it, why not take into account as well the influence of celestial bodies?

Of course cinema is at the same time a technique, an industry and an art, and like all art, it borrows from other arts. But to my knowledge, the diversity of production systems and of types of subject has not stopped masterpieces reaching us from every latitude. This digression doesn't really take me away from the point I am making. Precisely because *Party Girl* comes just at the right moment to remind us that what constitutes the essence of cinema is nothing other than *mise en scène*. It is through this that everything on the screen is expressed, transforming, as if by magic, a screenplay written by someone else and imposed on the director into something which is truly the film of an *auteur*...

I said at the beginning of this article that Nicholas Ray's new film is in its way a continuation of the interview which *Cahiers* published in 1958. *Party Girl* does indeed reply, in colours on celluloid, to the *big* question: the ultimate meaning of an already extensive body of work. Should we be looking for this meaning in Ray's thematics? I have already talked about the subjects he uses. Solitude, violence, moral crises, love, struggle against oneself, self-analysis, the common features of the characters and their preoccupations in the different films, in a word, the constants of this universe, present nothing which is original, and belong to an arsenal shared by all the film-makers whom we admire. Where then can we locate the deep meaning of his work? *Party Girl* shows

us in the clearest possible way: we must look for it purely and simply in the *mise en scène*: not in the apparent answer that Ray gives to the mystery of the world and of people, but in the way in which he interrogates this world and imitates life. It is not by examining immediate significance that we can come into contact with the best films, but by looking at the personal style of each author. It is obvious why I think that *Party Girl* is Ray's most interesting film to date.

Extract from Luc Moullet, 'Sam Fuller: sur les brisées de Marlowe'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 93, March 1959

Young American film directors have nothing at all to say, and Sam Fuller even less than the others. There is something he wants to do, and he does it naturally and effortlessly. That is not a slight compliment: we have a strong aversion to would-be philosophers who get into making films in spite of what film is, and who just repeat in cinema the discoveries of the other arts, people who want to express interesting subjects with a certain artistic style. If you have something to say, say it, write it, preach it if you like, but don't come bothering us with it...

Could Fuller really be the fascist, the right-wing extremist who was denounced not so long ago in the communist press? I don't think so. He has too much the gift of ambiguity to be able to align himself exclusively with one party. Fascism is the subject of his film, but Fuller doesn't set himself up as a judge. It is purely an inward fascism he is concerned with rather than with any political consequences. That is why Meeker's and Steiger's roles [*Run of the Arrow*] are more powerfully drawn than Michael Pate's in *Something of Value* [Richard Brooks]: Brooks is far too prudent to feel directly involved, whereas Fuller is in his element: he speaks from experience. And on fascism, only the point of view of someone who has been tempted is of any interest.

It is a fascism of actions rather than of intentions. For Fuller does not seem to have a good head for politics. If he claims to be of the extreme right, is that not to disguise, by a more conventional appearance, a moral and aesthetic attitude which belongs to a marginal and little respected domain?

Is Fuller anti-communist? Not exactly. Because he confuses, partly no doubt for commercial reasons, communism and gangsterism, communism and Nazism. He invents the representative of Moscow,

about whom he knows nothing, on the basis of what he does know, through his own experience, about Nazis and gangsters. We must not forget that he only talks about what he knows. When he depicts the enemy (and in *The Steel Helmet*, *Fixed Bayonets* and *Hell and High Water*, he usually tries just to avoid doing so), it is a very abstract conventional enemy. Only the dialogue dots the i's, and it is really unfortunate that *Pickup on South Street* and *China Gate* should remain *verboten* to us for such unjustified reasons.

Morality is a question of tracking shots. These few characteristic features derive nothing from the way they are expressed nor from the quality of that expression, which may often undercut them. It would be just as ridiculous to take such a rich film [as *Run of the Arrow*] simply as a pro-Indian declaration as it would be to take Delmer Daves for a courageous anti-racist director because there is a clause in each of his contracts which stipulates that there will be love affairs between people of different races. The unsuspecting public is taken in and he always ends up on the right side of the fence.

Extract from André Bazin, 'Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien?'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 44; February 1955

I for my part, in common with many others, deplore the ideological sterility of Hollywood, its growing timidity when it comes to dealing with 'big subjects' with any freedom, and this is why *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* makes me long for *Scarface* or *Only Angels Have Wings*. But I am grateful to the admirers of *The Big Sky* and of *Monkey Business* for discovering with passionate perception that, in spite of the explicit stupidity of the screen-writers, the formal intelligence of Hawks's *mise en scène* conceals an actual intelligence. And if they are wrong not to see, or to wish to ignore, the stupidity, at least in *Cahiers* we prefer this prejudice to its opposite.

Extract from André Bazin, 'La politique des auteurs'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 70, April 1957

(translated in Peter Graham, *The New Wave*, and in forthcoming translations from *Cahiers*)

(This short extract simply attempts to focus Bazin's position on the issue of subject matter; it does not do justice to the breadth of Bazin's critique,

which is available elsewhere in English, and is taken up in Edward Buscombe's article.)

To its supporters *Confidential Report* is a more important film than *Citizen Kane* because they justifiably see more of Orson Welles in it. In other words, all they want to retain in the equation *auteur plus subject = work* is the *auteur*, while the subject is reduced to zero. Some of them will pretend to grant me that, all things being equal as far as the *auteur* is concerned, a good subject is naturally better than a bad one, but the more outspoken and foolhardy among them will admit that it very much looks as if they prefer small 'B' films, where the banality of the scenario leaves more room for the personal contribution of the author.

Of course I will be challenged on the very concept of *auteur*. I admit that the equation I just used was artificial, just as much so in fact as the distinction one learnt at school between form and content. To benefit from the *politique des auteurs* one first has to be worthy of it, and as it happens this school of criticism claims to distinguish between true *auteurs* and directors, even talented ones: Nicholas Ray is an *auteur*, Huston is supposed to be only a *metteur en scène*; Bresson and Rossellini are *auteurs*, Clément is only a great *metteur en scène*, and so on. This conception of the *auteur* is not compatible with the *auteur/subject* matter distinction, because it is of greater importance to find out if a director is worthy of entering the select group of *auteurs* than it is to judge how well he has used his material. To a certain extent at least, the *auteur* is always his own subject matter; whatever the scenario, he always tells the same story, or, in case the word 'story' is confusing, let's say he has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters. Jacques Rivette has said that an *auteur* is someone who speaks in the first person. It's a good definition; let's adopt it.

The *politique des auteurs* consists, in short, of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then of assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next. It is recognized that there do exist certain important films of quality that escape this test, but these will systematically be considered inferior to those in which the personal stamp of the *auteur*, however run-of-the mill the scenario, can be perceived even minutely. . . .

The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e. not only the talent of this or that

film-maker, but the genius of the system, the richness of its ever-vigorous tradition, and its fertility when it comes into contact with new elements – as has been proved, if proof there need be, in such films as *An American in Paris*, *The Seven Year Itch* and *Bus Stop*. True, Logan is lucky enough to be considered an *auteur*, or at least a budding *auteur*. But then when *Picnic* or *Bus Stop* get good reviews the praise does not go to what seems to me to be the essential point, i.e. the social truth, which of course is not offered as a goal that suffices in itself but is integrated into a style of cinematic narration just as pre-war America was integrated into American comedy.

To conclude: the *politique des auteurs* seems to me to hold and defend an essential critical truth that the cinema needs more than the other arts, precisely because an act of true artistic creation is more uncertain and vulnerable in the cinema than elsewhere. But its exclusive practice leads to another danger: the negation of the film to the benefit of praise of its *auteur*. I have tried to show why mediocre *auteurs* can, by accident, make admirable films, and how, conversely, a genius can fall victim to an equally accidental sterility. I feel that this useful and fruitful approach, quite apart from its polemical value, should be complemented by other approaches to the cinematic phenomenon which will restore to a film its quality as a work of art. This does not mean that one has to deny the role of the *auteur*, but simply give him back the presupposition without which the noun *auteur* remains but a halting concept. *Auteur*, yes, but what of?

Extract from Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'Autocritique'

Cahiers du Cinéma, no. 126, December 1961; special issue on criticism

This leads me to clarify my ideas on the function of criticism. In many respects, it resembles that of the psychoanalyst. Must it not, in effect, re-establish across the film the discourse of the *auteur* (subject) in its continuity, bring to light the unconscious which supports it, and explain its particular 'joints'? The unconscious, as Lacan would say, is indeed marked by a gap; it constitutes in some way the censored sequence. But, as in psychoanalysis, the truth can reveal itself: it is written somewhere other than in the 'apparent' chain of the images: in that which we call the 'technique' of the *auteur*, in the choice of actors, in the decor and the relationship of the actors and objects with this decor, in the gestures, in the

dialogue, etc. A film is, in some ways, a rebus, a crossword puzzle. Better still: it is a language which inaugurates a discussion, which doesn't end with the viewing of the film, but incites a genuine research.

The influence of the *politique des auteurs* was felt most in Britain in the pages of *Movie*, which was first published in 1962 under the editorship of Ian Cameron, Mark Shivas, Paul Mayersberg and Victor Perkins. *Movie* appeared, at first regularly and then intermittently, until 1972, disappeared, and then reappeared with issue no. 20 in 1975. Its origins lay in the film criticism written by Cameron, Shivas and Perkins in the university magazine, *Oxford Opinion*: 'In *Oxford Opinion* we tried to write criticism that was actually about films' (letter in response to editorial criticisms, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 4, Summer 1961, p. 64).

As a 'position', and much of its importance is in the position which has been constructed for it and by it, *Movie* can be related to three currents in film criticism and in cultural criticism at large.

1 *Cahiers* While *Movie* was careful to keep a critical distance from the 'extremities' of the *politique*, and engaged less in polemical and partisan excesses, it shared with *Cahiers* the general principle that the director was central to the work (with admitted exceptions) and that the work expressed his personality; it shared the close attention to the film's *mise en scène*; and it displayed a similar (though never exclusive) commitment to the American popular cinema and its undiscovered *auteurs*. Looking at the two magazines together, what is most immediately striking is the difference in their mode of writing, from the excited, frequently over-heated subjectivism which typifies *Cahiers*, to the more controlled, academic writing of *Movie*, which seems to speak 'common sense'. The distinction, and a certain difference in privileged values, can obviously be attributed to distinct cultural situations.

2 *British film criticism* However much more 'respectable' than *Cahiers* *Movie* seems now, it did not protect it from the suspicion and hostility of the established film criticism in which it intervened. In the late 1940s the film magazine *Sequence*, edited by Lindsay Anderson and also coming out of Oxford, had already anticipated many of the principles which *Movie* was to build on; but by 1962 the vigour of *Sequence* had disappeared (the magazine had ceased publication in 1950), and the energy of the debate about 'commitment' which had been released with the publication, in *Sight & Sound*, of Lindsay Anderson's 1956 article, 'Stand Up! Stand Up!' (a plea for a cinema and a criticism which made clear its social and political commitment) had been for the most part absorbed in the vague

and self-effacing moral, social and cultural liberalism of *Sight & Sound* – the perpetual background to British film criticism. Criticism tended to be neither very committed nor particularly rigorous. Within that context, in the 1960s, *Movie's* attention to 'style', to the way the film was constructed, to the movement of the *mise en scène*, its focus on 'how a film should be made, rather than on why' (V. F. Perkins, 'British Cinema', *Movie Reader*, p. 10), constituted and produced a radical shift in British film criticism. That the extent of the shift tends to be ignored is a mark of the extent to which *Movie's* practice and principles have, in their turn, been absorbed into the main stream. In the 1970s 'the *Movie* position' was constructed as one of cultural and critical conservatism by those writers, notably in *Screen*, who were attempting to develop a more theoretically founded account of cinema.

3 *Leavis* The particular critical tradition in which *Movie* placed itself (or found itself) is both important and difficult to define. Sam Rohdie, writing in 1972 when he was editor of *Screen* (Review, 'Movie Reader and Film as Film', *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 4, p. 138):

If *Movie* inscribed the Hollywood film into discourse about cinema in Britain, and if, in doing so, it called attention to the structure of the text, *Movie* nevertheless carried out that inscription within, rather than opposed to, a critical tradition already familiar and easily relatable to the work of F. R. Leavis.

In general terms, 'the Leavis position' is identified by its close reading of the text (the literary magazine which Leavis edited in the 1930s was aptly named *Scrutiny*); by a refusal of theory; by a realist aesthetic which favours texts in which the personality and values of the author emerge from an implicit relationship between text and author (the author concealed in the story), rather than being uttered as an explicit discourse; by a view of the text as a coherence, a harmony, a 'living organism'; by a view of culture and tradition, where it has not been debased by mass industrial society, as potentially enriching; and by a system of humanistic values which resists a classifying name, but which can be suggested by a list of privileged critical terms: integrity, wholeness, experience, life, intensity, organic, ethical, truth, moral, honesty, personal, individual, vision, profound. The description is selective, but it throws into relief certain points of intersection with the *Movie* project: an intersection which the *Movie* critics, and particularly Robin Wood, would probably describe in a much more complex way, but would not absolutely reject. In many ways, it is more useful to relate *Movie's* critical approach to this tradition within academic literary studies than to the influence of *Cahiers*. Which is not to say *Movie* was academic or literary in its approach to cinema; far from it, its criticism was highly specific, deriving from Leavis the detailed attention to 'what is actually there' ('The function of criticism', in *The Common Pursuit*). Perhaps the most important, and ultimately the

most limiting, point of contact with Leavis was the refusal of theory, which seemed to allow the *Movie* critics to make their judgments from a position which was never itself called into question, a position which seemed to depend on an appeal to an undefined 'common-sense'. This refusal of theory not only provoked the challenges of the alternative position represented by *Screen*, but, more importantly for the history of *Movie*, may also account for a certain lack of development in the *Movie* position: a lack of development, that is to say, relative to the shifting conjuncture of film and cultural criticism.

Movie's writing is less various than that of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, tending, within the fluctuations of taste and preference, towards a homogeneity. Ian Cameron's essay, which is included here in full, represents almost the only sustained reflection on the magazine's critical practice, and while it does not give a full impression of the best of *Movie's* critical writing (Barry Boys on *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* in *Movie* no. 10; say, or V. F. Perkins on Nicholas Ray in *Movie* no. 9 – reprinted in Nichols; see bibliography) it does offer a clear statement of the early *Movie* position. It is accompanied here by an extract from an editorial discussion, which was published in the first issue produced when the magazine reappeared in 1975 (*Movie* no. 20) and which offers a more recent view of *Movie's* reflections on authorship.

Ian Cameron, 'Films, directors and critics'

Movie, no. 2, September 1962

Why does the camera go up now?
Because he's watching the sky.

This question and answer, printed in an interview with Vincente Minnelli from the first *Movie*, have excited more comment than anything else in the magazine. Derek Hill in *The Financial Times* found them so absurd that he used them to dismiss the whole of *Movie* as an expensive joke. I suspect that there were a number of causes behind Mr. Hill's mirth: the idea of asking such questions on minute detail to a director would have seemed pointless to him, particularly when the answer was so simple that he probably took it at once to explode the grandiose theories which the foolish young critics were doubtless hatching about the director's intentions and to stamp him as ambitionless or simple.

Had we found Minnelli's answers stupid, we would obviously not have printed them in *Movie*. And if they were in flat contra-

diction to our theories about his work, we would certainly have hesitated to use them without comment. Where we differ from Mr. Hill, then, is in our attitude to directors. Apparently our assumptions are still sufficiently strange to need explanation. In aiming to fill that need here, I do not want to say anything particularly new or to provide a defence of our views. Our only defence is that our approach seems to work when actually applied to films. Before starting to recapitulate our assumptions, though, I would like to say a little more about the Minnelli business.

In *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, the shot in question occurs just after the death of Lee J. Cobb. Shattered by the discovery that one of his grandsons is a Nazi, he has rushed out into the garden, haunted by the destructive vision of the Four Horsemen. As he collapses to the ground and dies of a heart attack, another grandson (Glenn Ford) rushes out to him, kneels down on the ground and cradles the body in his arms. As he looks up at the sky, sobbing, and sees the vision of the horsemen, the camera cranes up and moves in. Our question and its answer may look a little less rudimentary if one bothers to think of other reasons why the camera might have craned up. Thus: (1) Emotional: the camera moves up to leave him cowering before the vision. (2) Symbolic: the camera looks down on him in judgment because he feels himself (or the director feels him) responsible in some way for the old man's death. (3) As a way of linking the shot to its successor, which shows the Horsemen in the sky. (4) As orchestration, taking up the bravura of the camera movements which have preceded it. That Minnelli cranes up simply because of the movement of his actor is indicative of his whole method (and confirms what was said elsewhere in the magazine). The camera moves so that we can see Ford's face as clearly as possible. The reason is neither inevitable nor foolish.

The motive for interviewing directors at all is to see how far their ideas of their aims square with the critics' rationalisations from the films. When the director disagrees with the critics this does not mean that the critics are wrong, for, after all, the value of a film depends on the film itself, and not on the director's intentions, which may not be apparent from the finished work.

For talking about one small section of a film in great detail, whether in an interview or in an article, we have been accused of fascination with technical *trouvailles* at the expense of meaning. The alternative which we find elsewhere is a *gestalt* approach which tries to present an overall picture of the film without going into

'unnecessary' detail, and usually results in giving almost no impression of what the film was actually like for the spectator.

The film critic's raw materials – apart from his own intelligence – are his observations in the cinema: what he sees, hears and feels. By building up our theses about films from these observations, we are going through the same processes as the audience although, of course, our reactions are conscious whereas those induced in the cinema, particularly at the first viewing of a film, tend to be reached unconsciously. We believe that our method is likely to produce criticism which is closer, not just to objective description of the film itself but to the spectator's experience of the film.

The assumption which underlies all the writing in *Movie* is that the director is the author of a film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality it may have. There are quite large exceptions, with which I shall deal later. On the whole we accept this cinema of directors, although without going to the farthest-out extremes of *la politique des auteurs* which makes it difficult to think of a bad director making a good film and almost impossible to think of a good director making a bad one. One's aesthetic must be sufficiently flexible to cope with the fact that Joseph Pevney, having made dozens of stinkers, can suddenly come up with an admirable western in *The Plunderers*, or that Minnelli, after years of doing wonders often with unpromising material, could produce anything as flat-footed as *The Bells Are Ringing*.

Everyone accepts the cinema of directors for France, Italy, Japan, India, Argentina, Sweden and Poland – everywhere, in fact, that the Art is easily identifiable. Critics will talk happily about a Bergman film, or a Mizoguchi film, or even a Carol Reed film. It is only over American movies that the trouble starts, and reviews are likely to end with a desultory 'George Cukor directed efficiently.' The reasons are easy enough to find. Hollywood pictures are not so much custom-built as manufactured. The responsibility for them is shared, and the final quality is no more the fault of the director than of such parties as the producer, the set designer, the cameraman or the hairdresser. Only by a happy accident can anything good escape from this industrial complex. The good American film comes to be regarded as the cinematic equivalent of a mutant.

Now there are qualities superimposed on most big studio films (these days there are very few of them indeed) that depend not on the director but on the studio: the look of colour films is particularly prone to this sort of control. An extreme example is Fox films in the late forties and early fifties which are almost immediately identifiable by their photography and music, particularly if these

are by the leading exponents – photographers Joseph la Shelle and Joe MacDonald and composers Leigh Harline and David Raksin. However, these qualities are rather peripheral, and one common accusation of this sort, that Gregg Toland effectively directed the films he photographed so remarkably, has been disposed of by Andrew Sarris in *Film Culture*: 'Subtract Gregg Toland from Welles and you still have a mountain; subtract Toland from Wyler and you have a molehill.'

The closer one looks at Hollywood films, the less they seem to be accidents. There is a correlation between the quality of the films and the names of their directors. When one notices that such masterpieces as *Scarface*, *Bringing Up Baby* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* were all directed by the same man, one begins to wonder whether the merits of these otherwise dissimilar films might not be explained by this man's talent. On a slightly closer look, one finds that he was also responsible for such generally admired movies as *Twentieth Century*, *Sergeant York*, *Red River* and *Monkey Business*, not to mention *Rio Bravo*, a film which gained little attention on its release and is now accepted as a masterpiece, even by *Sight and Sound*, which greeted its appearance with a singular lack of enthusiasm.

Hawks is just beginning to be accepted in Britain and the US. Raoul Walsh, on the other hand, is virtually unknown. Yet if one looks at Walsh's films (or some of them – he has made 200 since he started directing in 1913), one can identify the same talent and highly sympathetic personality behind a British cheapie of 1937, *Jump for Glory*, a 1945 racecourse movie, *Salty O'Rourke*, and more recent works like *Blackbeard the Pirate* (1952), *The Lawless Breed* (1952), *Battle Cry* (1955), *Esther and the King* (1960) and *Marines Let's Go* (1961). The similarity of these movies made in three different countries over a period of 25 years by a director whose name does not spell prestige, who will thus not have an exceptional degree of freedom, should leave no doubt that, provided he has any talent, it is the director, rather than anyone else, who determines what finally appears on the screen.

Part of the neglect of American directors comes from the simple fact that it is easier to accept foreign films as Art: a status word to indicate that the film is worth the critic's serious attention. In foreign language movies, one of the biggest obstacles has been limited: the dialogue. Even if they are bad, subtitles provide a shock-absorber between the dialogue and the audience. Everyone knows that laughable subtitles do not necessarily indicate defects in the original language. But two lines of ill-written dialogue in an

American picture will put the critics on their guard. Almost invariably it is duff dialogue that alienates them, not unconvincing motivation, or false movements of actors or pointless camerawork. A recent victim is *The Four Horsemen*, which did have rather more than a couple of bad lines.

When a *Sight and Sound* critic does manage to work up some enthusiasm for an American film, it is usually self-limiting: 'very good . . . of its kind.' So we are treated to dimly remembered sections of John Russell Taylor's childhood erotic fantasies about Maria Montez and Veronica Lake as a picture of the Forties. Reviews of American films tend to link them together in remarkably ill-assorted pairs. One would be amazed at the current review of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and *Guns in the Afternoon* (both 'so consciously old-fashioned and nostalgic that, appearing in 1962, they seem almost esoteric') if one had not already been treated to such unlikely joint reviews as *Exodus* plus *The Guns of Navarone* and *Psycho* plus *The Apartment*. If the writers of these pieces were literary critics, which, barring a certain illiteracy, they very nearly are, one imagines that they would happily review *Tender Is the Night*, *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Manhattan Transfer* together entirely in terms of American *mal-de-siècle* in the twenties. Any other qualities would be written off in a well-chosen sentence: 'Mr. Dos Passos's narrative technique of intertwining a number of almost unconnected stories does not make for easy comprehension.' *Sight and Sound* has just produced the most accurate piece of unconscious self-criticism in its most recent and most desperate attempt to be hip: a column in which the glad hand of John Russell Taylor is hidden behind the name of Arkadin. 'Why,' he opens brightly, 'don't we take horror films more seriously? Well, not seriously seriously . . .'

The worst sufferer from restricted admiration has been Hitchcock. *Psycho* was passed over as one big laugh. As a joke it could not possibly be anything else. *Psycho*'s joke-content is very large, but that doesn't mean it is only joke. Example: the scene of Janet Leigh and Anthony Perkins getting acquainted is both an ingeniously extended *double entendre* on stuffing birds and a very real and touching picture of two people, isolated from others by their actions, voluntary or otherwise, trying to talk to each other.

The great weakness of *la politique des auteurs* is its rigidity: its adherents tend to be, as they say, totally committed to a cinema of directors. There are, however, quite a few films whose authors are not their directors. The various film versions of Paddy Chayefsky's works are all primarily Chayefsky movies rather than Delbert

Mann, or John Cromwell or even Richard Brooks movies. Given a weak director the effective author of a film can be its photographer (Lucien Ballard, *Al Capone*), composer (Jerome Moross, *The Big Country*), producer (Arthur Freed, *Light in the Piazza*) or star (John Wayne, *The Comancheros*). None of those films was more than moderately good. Occasionally, though, something really remarkable can come from an efficient director with magnificent collaborators. Such a film was Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*, which contained Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains, Sidney Greenstreet, Conrad Veidt, Peter Lorre and Marcel Dalio, and was somehow missed from John Russell Taylor's knee-high panorama of the forties. More recently we have had *The Sins of Rachel Cade*, which, although directed by the excellent Gordon Douglas, was above all an Angie Dickinson movie, being entirely shaped by her personality and deriving all its power, which was considerable, from her performance.

Many films have also an iconographical interest, which is something quite apart from any aesthetic merits they may have. This interest comes from their relationship either to conditions external to their making (things as diverse as the discovery of the H bomb or current trends in automobile design, which influenced the design of the submarine in *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*) or to other films. Joseph Newman's *Spin of a Coin* (*The George Raft Story*) is fascinating because of its similarity to other period gangster movies: the sequences are built in the same way towards a climax of slaughter — only in this case the burst of gunfire is replaced by equally staccato laughter, for instance, as Al Capone (played by Neville Brand, who was Capone in Karlson's *The Scarface Mob*) tells George (Ray Danton, whose performance is an extension of his previous *Legs Diamond* in Boetticher's film) how much he liked his performance as Capone in *Scarface*, the climactic scene of which has been reconstructed for us. This sort of kick is also available even more lavishly in Vincente Minnelli's amazing new *Two Weeks In Another Town*, where faded movie star Kirk Douglas sits in a viewing theatre watching a film he has previously made with the director for whom he is now working in the dubbing room. The film is *The Bad and the Beautiful*, which Minnelli made ten years ago with Douglas, as well as the same writer, producer and composer (Charles Schnee, John Houseman and David Raksin). In another Joseph Newman movie, *The Big Bankroll* (*Arnold Rothstein, King of the Roaring Twenties*), it is assumed that the audience has seen the earlier movies which found it necessary to explain how boot-legging and protection worked. *The Big Bankroll* (in

spite of 26 missing minutes in the British version one of the very best of its kind) builds on the knowledge it assumes to tell the story of Arnold Rothstein, who turned the mechanics of corruption to his own ends.

A few films are interesting for a related reason: the picture of their audience which they provide. The best example is Delmer Daves, who makes movies for stenographers and provides them with just what they wish to see. His pictures may be trivial, dishonest, immoral – Daves' movies have every fault in the book except bad production values – but they do provide a picture of the girl Daves is aiming his films at (very successfully, it seems). However irritating one may find Suzanne Pleshette in *Lovers Must Learn* (*Rome Adventure*), one has to admit that her performance is brilliantly pitched at just the right level of gush.

While one can appreciate films for their iconographical significance or as a critique of their audience, any merit they may have still comes from the director, much more than from any other source. Although finally our belief in the cinema of directors can only be justified through continuous application of our ideas in *Movie*, I want to conclude this article with an extended example of the part played by the director, based on three films, two of them well-liked, more or less, British offerings, J. Lee Thompson's *The Guns of Navarone* and David Lean's *Bridge on the River Kwai*, the third a much less respected American film, Don Siegel's *Hell Is for Heroes*.

All three contain the simple moral that war is futile and degrading; all three use one of the basic war film stories: the strategic action of considerable importance which devolves on a very few men. *Navarone* sets out with the obvious intention of telling a rattling good yarn about the way our chaps heroically battled against almost impossible obstacles to knock out the Jerry guns. Even this it almost fails to do by disastrously overplaying its suspense potential in a lengthy sequence of spurious thrills as the team crawl up a crumbling cardboard cliff so early in the movie that everyone will need to survive to justify their billing on the credits. However, its worst sin is stopping off at least twice in the course of the narrative for dialogue meditations on the nastiness of war, which the audience is meant to accept and which would in themselves be perfectly sympathetic, if slightly superfluous, in a film that refused to present war as enjoyable. But here their effect is completely vitiated by the rest of the action, and in context they seem almost hypocritical. I have a feeling that the failure is not inherent in the script but comes from the lack of any firm control

in the direction. Even the one moment which could hardly help having some force, the shooting of Gia Scala as a collaborator, in the film has none. Here admittedly the script does side-step by letting Irene Papas, who is Greek and only a secondary character, forestall Peck and Niven in shooting her, when they are both more directly affected by the responsibility for her death. But even allowing for this, the lack of conviction is total.

Hell Is for Heroes is based on a story by Robert Pirosh which could easily have been turned into the sort of plug for the gallantry of the American fighting man which William Wellman made 13 years ago from a Pirosh story in *Battleground* (recently re-released with Anthony Mann's remarkable ex-3D western *The Naked Spur*). I am not concerned here with the central theme in the film which is embodied in the Steve McQueen character, the psychopath who makes an ideal soldier but goes to pieces outside the field of combat. Two sequences are particularly relevant to my purpose here as they could easily have degenerated to the same level as *Kwai* and *Navarone*. In the first, three soldiers set out at night on a manoeuvre to trick the enemy into thinking that they are sending out large patrols and therefore have the front well-manned. The idea is to take empty ammunition tins out into no-man's land, fill them with stones and rattle them by remote control from their position by means of lengths of telephone wire. The noise of these would be picked up by the enemy's ground microphones and all hell would be let loose to greet the ghost patrol. Siegel does not tell us what they are doing until their mission is almost completed. We take the episode seriously, which is right because it is serious and no less dangerous than a real patrol. If he had shown us beforehand exactly what they were doing, the episode would have been invested for us in the safety of our cinema seats with a feeling of fun, of fooling the enemy. Never once in the film do we get this feeling.

The last sequence for once does sum up the whole film by its picture of the contribution an individual can make to the action. In serious trouble after leading an abortive attack on the crucial pillbox, which has resulted in the death of his two companions, McQueen takes it upon himself to put the pillbox out of action. He manages by a suicidal charge to get close enough to lob a satchel charge into the mouth of the box. Inevitably he is shot. Seeing the charge thrown out of the pillbox, he staggers forward, grabs it and rolls into the mouth of the box with it as it explodes. A flame-thrower is played on the mouth of the pillbox to make sure it is out of action. The last shot of the film is a longshot of a

general advance beginning along the section of the front around the pillbox. The advance is obviously going to be very costly. The camera zooms into the mouth of the pillbox and the end title is superimposed. The zoom in from the general view to the detail emphasises the smallness of the gain from McQueen's death. One pillbox has been put out of action, and as the advance continues that pillbox ceases to have any significance. It is left behind a dead, almost abstract object. Unlike *Navarone*, there is no conflict between the intended content and the form which expresses it.

Contrast with the last shot of *Hell Is for Heroes* the end of *Bridge on the River Kwai*. James Donald stands surveying the wreckage after the destruction of the bridge. 'Madness, madness,' he says, and the camera soars back away from him in a mood of triumph which is taken up by the martial music on the soundtrack. In the contradiction between the sentiments expressed by the dialogue and the meaning contained in the treatment, critics have noticed only the former. *Bridge on the River Kwai's* anti-war content is widely accepted to be impeccable. But *Hell Is for Heroes*, where the ideas are expressed by the whole form of the film, can pass nearly unnoticed and even be described as equivocal in its attitude to war. The lack of perception which results in this sort of fuzzy thinking is the best argument for a detailed criticism.

Extract from Ian Cameron, Jim Hillier, V. F. Perkins, Michael Walker and Robin Wood, 'The return of *Movie*: a discussion'
Movie, no. 20, Spring 1975

JH What, then, does the word *auteur* imply?

MW I suppose it's insight into the creator: the sense of being able to identify certain elements in a film as personal to the director, scriptwriter or whoever.

RW It takes one back to the films with one more tool for understanding their qualities.

JH But are we talking about Cukor as a man or some critical abstraction called Cukor?

VFP It would be very dangerous to take your 'man behind the camera' line literally, because it is Cukor the artist rather than Cukor the man – an interaction in which Cukor the man is only one part and which inevitably accommodates, and is allowed to accommodate, only some aspects of the man Cukor.

JH So is the *auteur* a critical construct?

VFP Yes, as long as you're not implying by that a degree of unreality. It doesn't make it a 'fabrication'.

JH Isn't the distinction important? With Hawks, for example, there's often a very strong impulse to appeal to the actuality of the man, a confused attempt to merge that with Hawks as an *auteur*. Maybe it's more appropriate with Hawks.

VFP Do you feel that you know about the actuality of the man? I think that we should stick to helpfulness rather than appropriateness, because one cannot know about that. I find Hawks as a personality a baffling commodity to speculate upon – the great friend of a rather difficult novelist, the man who turned out *Rio Bravo*, the fashion plate melodramatist described by Ben Hecht, etc. It's not a simple case. And always there are the evasions and the image-mongering of the director, the whole projection business. In this sense, Preminger is an even more difficult case: is there a real Otto Preminger?

IAC It's worth emphasising that the view which got summarised as the *auteur* theory was a much more extreme and rudimentary one than any of us ever *felt* we represented.

MW There was a search for *auteurs* – not necessarily directors. Ian's piece in *Movie* 2 spoke of a number of movies in terms of the *dominant personalities* in each – *The Sins of Rachel Cade* as an Angie Dickinson movie or *The Big Country* as a Jerome Moross movie. You could say that *Movie* was inhibited by looking only for the dominant personality behind a particular film, where there were obviously lots of things coming into play which were never properly disentangled.

IAC We had to wade in somewhere, and we chose to limit ourselves, possibly to make the task simpler.

JH It was also largely a historical thing: finding yourself in a situation in which the American cinema is not valued and having to find a strategy. The strategy was to talk about Hawks, Preminger, etc., as artists like Bunuel and Resnais.

VFP What's interesting is how far in the current, much less polemical situation on that front one would choose to operate in the same way. To a large degree, I would, getting rid if possible of the aberrations and occasional stupidities.

JH One of the requirements is to be conscious of the problems of writing about film in a certain way. This has to be tentative – an understanding of some of the limitations without being at all sure how to overcome them, but the awareness is vital.

RW It seems clearer now that the great Hollywood films are the products of multiple determinants rather than of a single person-

ality. At the same time, it is also true that we value these films still for the role played in them by that personality while acknowledging the other factors.

JH For, or because of?

RW Both. That *To Have and Have Not* is so much finer and more successful than *Sergeant York* can't simply be attributed to Hawks as director, though it's closely bound up with the question of the appropriateness of material to a given artist. Factors of genre, casting, script and subject-matter all enter in. The question of collaboration is part of it: Hawks/Furthman/Bogart versus Hawks/Huston/Cooper. Hawks obviously isn't the sole creator of *To Have and Have Not*, but I still value it primarily as a Hawks movie: his unifying and organizing presence seems crucial to its success.

The business of introducing a variant of the *politique des auteurs* into American film criticism is largely associated with an individual critic, Andrew Sarris, rather than a magazine. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sarris contributed regularly to *Film Culture*, the magazine, edited by Jonas Mekas, of the East Coast avant-garde film-makers; a magazine in which increasingly Sarris's articles (and those, notably, of Peter Bogdanovich) on the popular commercial cinema seemed compatible with the rest of the contents only in their insistence that even that kind of cinema was an art form. The wider dissemination of the debate around *auteurism* in America was helped by the West Coast magazine, *Film Quarterly*, whose initial contribution was the dramatization of the hostilities between Pauline Kael and almost anyone who mentioned *auteurism* in English.* Kael's principal target was Sarris, but salvos were fired at *Movie*, and at the relatively innocent *Film Quarterly* itself. Subsequently, *Film Quarterly* featured a series of articles which developed debate of *auteurism* and 'auteur-structuralism' at a more theoretical level.

Although Sarris's writing operates at a much more journalistic level than that of, say, *Movie*, his contribution to the development of a theory of authorship was probably more significant. In the first place, he seemed to recognize the industrial structure of the cinema as something more than an 'interference' on the *auteur's* freedom of creativity; he saw it rather as something which produced a 'tension' between the *auteur* and his material, a tension which structured the 'interior meaning' of the film. Following from this, there is a sense in which, while the personality of the director remains crucial for Sarris, the notion of directorial intention is called into question. His comments on Preminger below suggest a 'personality', which is no longer simply expressions from intentions, but is constructed out of the tensions and gaps in the text. This opens the way (in a sense, whether Sarris likes it or not) for the 'auteur-structuralist' shift from John Ford and Sam Fuller to 'John Ford' and 'Sam Fuller'.

Sarris's critical practice seems principally motivated by the desire to

* e.g., 'Circles and squares', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, Spring 1963, pp. 12-26 (extracted in Mast and Cohen); Andrew Sarris, 'The *auteur* theory and the perils of Pauline', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, Summer 1963, pp. 26-32; editors of *Movie*, 'Movie vs Kael' and reply by Kael, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 1, Fall 1963, pp. 57-64.

construct a history of the American cinema on an evaluative basis, placing directors within a hierarchical system – the ‘Pantheon’ system being his most immediately identifiable, most regressive, and possibly (though never explicitly) most applied contribution to film criticism. In the end, perhaps, his most decisive intervention has been the naturalization of ‘*politique*’ as ‘theory’. It’s worth noting that Luc Moullet, in his article on Fuller written in *Cahiers* in 1959, had already referred to ‘Truffaut’s celebrated *auteur* theory’ (*Cahiers*, no. 93, p. 15), whereas Sarris claims that his first use of the term was in 1962. This suggests that the boundaries between policy and theory were less clearly defined in *Cahiers’* *auteurist* practice than has sometimes been assumed, and modifies the enormity of Sarris’s apparent mis-translation. What Sarris did, though, at least for Anglo-American criticism, was to establish *auteurism* in critical discourse (and in general, non-specialized discourse about cinema) with the clothing, if not the substance, of a theory. The currency of the notion of an *auteur* theory preceded its theoretical formulation. Sarris, in a sense, begged the question of theory.

Extract from Andrew Sarris, ‘Notes on the *auteur* theory in 1962’

Film Culture, no. 27, Winter 1962–3
(reprinted in Mast and Cohen; see bibliography)

(Henceforth, I will abbreviate *la politique des auteurs* as the *auteur* theory to avoid confusion.) . . .

What is the auteur theory?

As far as I know, there is no definition of the *auteur* theory in the English language, that is, by any American or British critic. Truffaut has recently gone to great pains to emphasize that the *auteur* theory was merely a polemical weapon for a given time and a given place, and I am willing to take him at his word. But, lest I be accused of misappropriating a theory no one wants anymore, I will give the *Cahiers* critics full credit for the original formulation of an idea that reshaped my thinking on the cinema. First of all, how does the *auteur* theory differ from a straightforward theory of directors. Ian Cameron’s article, ‘Films, Directors, and Critics,’ in *Movie* of September, 1962, makes an interesting comment on this issue: ‘The assumption that underlies all the writing in *Movie* is that the director is the author of a film, the person who gives it

any distinctive quality. There are quite large exceptions, with which I shall deal later.’ So far, so good, at least for the *auteur* theory, which even allows for exceptions. However, Cameron continues: ‘On the whole, we accept the cinema of directors, although without going to the farthest-out extremes of *la politique des auteurs*, which makes it difficult to think of a bad director making a good film and almost impossible to think of a good director making a bad one.’ We are back to Bazin again [see extract above], although Cameron naturally uses different examples. That three otherwise divergent critics like Bazin, Roud [*Sight and Sound*, vol. 29, no. 4], and Cameron make essentially the same point about the *auteur* theory suggests a common fear of its abuses. I believe there is a misunderstanding here about what the *auteur* theory actually claims, particularly since the theory itself is so vague at the present time.

First of all, the *auteur* theory, at least as I understand it and now intend to express it, claims neither the gift of prophecy nor the option of extracinematic perception. Directors, even *auteurs*, do not always run true to form, and the critic can never assume that a bad director will always make a bad film. No, not always, but almost always, and that is the point. What is a bad director, but a director who has made many bad films? What is the problem then? Simply this: the badness of a director is not necessarily considered the badness of a film. If Joseph Pevney directed Garbo, Cherkassov, Olivier, Belmondo, and Harriet Andersson in *The Cherry Orchard*, the resulting spectacle might not be entirely devoid of merit with so many subsidiary *auteurs* to cover up for Joe. In fact, with this cast and this literary property, a Lumet might be safer than a Welles. The realities of casting apply to directors as well as to actors, but the *auteur* theory would demand the gamble with Welles, if he were willing.

Marlon Brando has shown us that a film can be made without a director. Indeed, *One-Eyed Jacks* is more entertaining than many films with directors. A director-conscious critic would find it difficult to say anything good or bad about direction that is nonexistent. One can talk here about photography, editing, acting, but not direction. The film even has personality, but, like *The Longest Day* and *Mutiny on the Bounty*, it is a cipher directorially. Obviously, the *auteur* theory cannot possibly cover every vagrant charm of the cinema. Nevertheless, the first premise of the *auteur* theory is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value. A badly directed or an undirected film has no importance in a critical scale of values, but one can make interesting conversation

about the subject, the script, the acting, the color, the photography, the editing, the music, the costumes, the decor, and so forth. That is the nature of the medium. You always get more for your money than mere art. Now, by the *auteur* theory, if a director has no technical competence, no elementary flair for the cinema, he is automatically cast out from the pantheon of directors. A great director has to be at least a good director. This is true in any art. What constitutes directorial talent is more difficult to define abstractly. There is less disagreement, however, on this first level of the *auteur* theory than there will be later.

The second premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature. The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels. This is an area where American directors are generally superior to foreign directors. Because so much of the American cinema is commissioned, a director is forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of material rather than through the literary content of the material. A Cukor, who works with all sorts of projects, has a more developed abstract style than a Bergman, who is free to develop his own scripts. Not that Bergman lacks personality, but his work has declined with the depletion of his ideas largely because his technique never equalled his sensibility. Joseph L. Mankiewicz and Billy Wilder are other examples of writer-directors without adequate technical mastery. By contrast, Douglas Sirk and Otto Preminger have moved up the scale because their miscellaneous projects reveal a stylistic consistency.

The third and ultimate premise of the *auteur* theory is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material. This conception of interior meaning comes close to what Astruc defines as *mise en scène*, but not quite. It is not quite the vision of the world a director projects nor quite his attitude toward life. It is ambiguous, in any literary sense, because part of it is imbedded in the stuff of the cinema and cannot be rendered in noncinematic terms. Truffaut has called it the temperature of the director on the set, and that is a close approximation of its professional aspect. Dare I come out and say what I think it to be is an *élan* of the soul?

Lest I seem unduly mystical, let me hasten to add that all I mean by 'soul' is that intangible difference between one personality and another, all other things being equal. Sometimes, this difference is

expressed by no more than a beat's hesitation in the rhythm of a film. In one sequence of *La Règle du Jeu*, Renoir gallops up the stairs, turns to his right with a lurching movement, stops in hop-like uncertainty when his name is called by a coquettish maid, and, then, with marvelous postreflex continuity, resumes his bearishly shambling journey to the heroine's boudoir. If I could describe the musical grace note of that momentary suspension, and I can't, I might be able to provide a more precise definition of the *auteur* theory. As it is, all I can do is point at the specific beauties of interior meaning on the screen and, later, catalogue the moments of recognition.

Extract from Andrew Sarris, 'Toward a theory of film history'

The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-68, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1968. (first published as 'The American cinema', *Film Culture*, no. 28, Spring 1963; reprinted in Nichols)

Ultimately, the *auteur* theory is not so much a theory as an attitude, a table of values that converts film history into directorial autobiography. The *auteur* critic is obsessed with the wholeness of art and the artist. He looks at a film as a whole, a director as a whole. The parts, however entertaining individually, must cohere meaningfully. This meaningful coherence is more likely when the director dominates the proceedings with skill and purpose. . . .

Even the vaunted vulgarity of the movie moguls worked in favour of the director at the expense of the writer. A producer was more likely to tamper with a story line than with a visual style. Producers, like most people, understood plots in literary rather than cinematic terms. The so-called 'big' pictures were particularly vulnerable to front-office interference, and that is why the relatively conventional genres offer such a high percentage of sleepers. The culturally ambitious producer usually disdained genre films, and the fancy dude writers from the East were seldom wasted on such enterprises. The *auteur* theory values the personality of a director precisely because of the barriers to its expression. It is as if a few brave spirits had managed to overcome the gravitational pull of the mass of movies. The fascination of Hollywood movies lies in their performance under pressure. Actually, no artist is ever completely free, and art does not necessarily thrive as it becomes less constrained. Freedom is desirable for its own sake, but it is hardly an aesthetic prescription. . . .

To look at a film as the expression of a director's vision is not

mise en scène

to credit the director with total creativity. All directors, and not just in Hollywood, are imprisoned by the conditions of their craft and their culture. The reason foreign directors are almost invariably given more credit for creativity is that the local critic is never aware of all the influences operating in a foreign environment. The late Robert Warshaw treated Carl Dreyer as a solitary artist and Leo McCarey as a social agent, but we know now that there were cultural influences in Denmark on Dreyer. *Day of Wrath* is superior by any standard to *My Son John*, but Dreyer is not that much freer an artist than McCarey. Dreyer's chains are merely less visible from our vantage point across the Atlantic.

The art of the cinema is the art of an attitude, the style of a gesture. It is not so much *what* as *how*. The *what* is some aspect of reality rendered mechanically by the camera. The *how* is what the French critics designate somewhat mystically as *mise en scène*. Auteur criticism is a reaction against sociological criticism that enthroned the *what* against the *how*. However, it would be equally fallacious to enthrone the *how* against the *what*. The whole point of a meaningful style is that it unifies the *what* and the *how* into a personal statement. Even the pacing of a movie can be emotionally expressive when it is understood as a figure of style. . . . Of course, the best directors are usually fortunate enough to exercise control over their films so that there need be no glaring disparity between *what* and *how*. It is only on the intermediate and lower levels of film-making that we find talent wasted on inappropriate projects.

Extract from Andrew Sarris, 'Preminger's two periods'

Film Comment, vol. 3, no. 3, Summer 1965

What's art to Preminger or Preminger to art? Preminger's champions on *Movie* and *Cahiers du Cinéma* would retort that Preminger's art is of the highest order. I find myself in a dangerous middle position that I would like to explain in some detail. To do so, I must begin with a very personal definition of *mise en scène*.

For me, *mise en scène* is not merely the gap between what we see and feel on the screen and what we can express in words, but it is also the gap between the intention of the director and his effect upon the spectator. Serious film criticism of Hollywood movies is always impaled upon the point that Hollywood directors are not profoundly articulate about their alleged art. How can one possibly compare John Ford to Michelangelo Antonioni, for ex-

ample? Antonioni talks like an intellectual, albeit a middle-brow intellectual, while Ford talks like an old prospector cut off from civilization. American critics travel abroad bemoaning the fact that American directors are unable to conduct festival seminars on the Pressing Problems of Our Time. Certainly any three Polish directors you might pick up in the street would undoubtedly outpontificate and outparadox the legions of Hollywood directors from time immemorial.

In this respect, Preminger is not a 'good' interview. He will freely concede that more is read into his films by some critics than he consciously put there. He neither abuses his detractors nor embraces his defenders. He seems to enjoy the effect he creates with his outrageous personality, a personality that serves also as a mask. To read all sorts of poignant profundities in Preminger's inscrutable urbanity would seem to be the last word in idiocy, and yet there are moments in his films when the evidence on the screen is inconsistent with one's deepest instincts about the director as a man. It is during these moments that one feels the magical powers of *mise en scène* to get more out of a picture than is put in by a director.

Mise-en-scène
J

17 · Peter Wollen: 'The auteur theory'
(extract)

From *Signs and Meaning in The Cinema*, Secker & Warburg, London,
1967 and 1972 pp. 93-105, 112-115 (72 EDITIONS)

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The importance of the book from which this extract is drawn has been recognized both in America by Charles Eckert – '*Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* must be, after *Film Form* and *What is Cinema?*, the most widely read work on film theory among present-day film students' (see p. 154 below) – and in Britain by Robin Wood – 'Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* is probably the most influential book on film in English of the past decade' ('Hawks de-Wollenized', in *Personal Views*, p. 193). The central importance of its chapter on the *auteur* theory is apparent in the number of times it is included in general anthologies. Wollen's reformulation of *auteurism* provided a focus not only for the development of a more systematic, 'scientific' or materialist critical practice, but was also influential, as Wood testifies (p. 193), within the more pragmatic criticism practised by *Movie*.

I have attempted to highlight the unmarked shift in Wollen's position, noted by Henderson and in my introduction to this section, by placing together an extract from the 1969 chapter and an extract from the 1972 postscript.

1969

Something further needs to be said about the theoretical basis of the kind of schematic exposition of Hawks's work which I have outlined. The 'structural approach' which underlies it, the definition of a core of repeated motifs, has evident affinities with methods which have been developed for the study of folklore and mythology. In the work of Olrik and others, it was noted that in different folk-tales the same motifs reappeared time and time again. It became possible to build up a lexicon of these motifs. Eventually Propp showed how a whole cycle of Russian fairy-tales could be analysed into variations of a very limited set of basic motifs, (or moves, as he called them). Underlying the different, individual tales was an archi-tale, of which they were all variants. One important point needs to be made about this type of structural analysis. There

"functions"

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is a danger, as Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, that by simply noting and mapping resemblances, all the texts which are studied (whether Russian fairy-tales or American movies) will be reduced to one, abstract and impoverished. There must be a moment of synthesis as well as a moment of analysis: otherwise, the method is formalist, rather than truly structuralist. Structuralist criticism cannot rest at the perception of resemblances or repetitions (redundancies, in fact), but must also comprehend a system of differences and oppositions. In this way, texts can be studied not only in their universality (what they all have in common) but also in their singularity (what differentiates them from each other). This means of course that the test of a structural analysis lies not in the orthodox canon of a director's work, where resemblances are clustered, but in films which at first sight may seem eccentricities.

In the films of Howard Hawks a systematic series of oppositions can be seen very near the surface, in the contrast between the adventure dramas and the crazy comedies. If we take the adventure dramas alone it would seem that Hawks's work is flaccid, lacking in dynamism; it is only when we consider the crazy comedies that it becomes rich, begins to ferment: alongside every dramatic hero we are aware of a phantom, stripped of mastery, humiliated, inverted. With other directors, the system of oppositions is much more complex: instead of there being two broad strata of films there are a whole series of shifting variations. In these cases, we need to analyse the roles of the protagonists themselves, rather than simply the worlds in which they operate. The protagonists of fairy-tales or myths, as Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, can be dissolved into bundles of differential elements, pairs of opposites. Thus the difference between the prince and the goose-girl can be reduced to two antinomic pairs: one natural, male versus female, and the other cultural, high versus low. We can proceed with the same kind of operation in the study of films, though, as we shall see, we shall find them more complex than fairy-tales.

It is instructive, for example, to consider three films of John Ford and compare their heroes: Wyatt Earp in *My Darling Clementine*, Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* and Tom Doniphon in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. They all act within the recognizable Ford world, governed by a set of oppositions, but their *loci* within that world are very different. The relevant pairs of opposites overlap; different pairs are foregrounded in different movies. The most relevant are garden versus wilderness, plough-share versus sabre, settler versus nomad, European versus Indian, civilised versus savage, book versus gun, married versus unmarried, East versus West.

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These antinomies can often be broken down further. The East, for instance, can be defined either as Boston or Washington and, in *The Last Hurrah*, Boston itself is broken down into the antipodes of Irish immigrants versus Plymouth Club, themselves bundles of such differential elements as Celtic versus Anglo-Saxon, poor versus rich, Catholic versus Protestant, Democrat versus Republican, and so on. At first sight, it might seem that the oppositions listed above overlap to the extent that they become practically synonymous, but this is by no means the case. As we shall see, part of the development of Ford's career has been the shift from an identity between civilised versus savage and European versus Indian to their separation and final reversal, so that in *Cheyenne Autumn* it is the Europeans who are savage, the victims who are heroes.

The master antinomy in Ford's films is that between the wilderness and the garden. As Henry Nash Smith has demonstrated, in his magisterial book *Virgin Land*, the contrast between the image of America as a desert and as a garden is one which has dominated American thought and literature, recurring in countless novels, tracts, political speeches and magazine stories. In Ford's films it is crystallised in a number of striking images. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, for instance, contains the image of the cactus rose, which encapsulates the antinomy between desert and garden which pervades the whole film. Compare with this the famous scene in *My Darling Clementine*, after Wyatt Earp has gone to the barber (who civilises the unkempt), where the scent of honeysuckle is twice remarked upon: an artificial perfume, cultural rather than natural. This moment marks the turning-point in Wyatt Earp's transition from wandering cowboy, nomadic, savage, bent on personal revenge, unmarried, to married man, settled, civilised, the sheriff who administers the law.

Earp, in *My Darling Clementine*, is structurally the most simple of the three protagonists I have mentioned: his progress is an uncomplicated passage from nature to culture, from the wilderness left in the past to the garden anticipated in the future. Ethan Edwards, in *The Searchers*, is more complex. He must be defined not in terms of past versus future or wilderness versus garden compounded in himself, but in relation to two other protagonists: Scar, the Indian chief, and the family of homesteaders. Ethan Edwards, unlike Earp, remains a nomad throughout the film. At the start, he rides in from the desert to enter the log-house; at the end, with perfect symmetry, he leaves the house again to return to the desert, to vagrancy. In many respects, he is similar to Scar; he is a wanderer, a savage, outside the law: he scalps his enemy. But,

like the homesteaders, of course, he is a European, the mortal foe of the Indian. Thus Edwards is ambiguous; the antinomies invade the personality of the protagonist himself. The oppositions tear Edwards in two; he is a tragic hero. His companion, Martin Pawley, however, is able to resolve the duality; for him, the period of nomadism is only an episode, which has meaning as the restitution of the family, a necessary link between his old home and his new home.

Ethan Edwards's wandering is, like that of many other Ford protagonists, a quest, a search. A number of Ford films are built round the theme of the quest for the Promised Land, an American re-enactment of the Biblical exodus, the journey through the desert to the land of milk and honey, the New Jerusalem. This theme is built on the combination of the two pairs: wilderness versus garden and nomad versus settler; the first pair precedes the second in time. Thus, in *Wagonmaster*, the Mormons cross the desert in search of their future home; in *How Green Was My Valley* and *The Informer*, the protagonists want to cross the Atlantic to a future home in the United States. But, during Ford's career, the situation of home is reversed in time. In *Cheyenne Autumn* the Indians journey in search of the home they once had in the past; in *The Quiet Man*, the American Sean Thornton returns to his ancestral home in Ireland. Ethan Edwards's journey is a kind of parody of this theme: his object is not constructive, to found a home, but destructive, to find and scalp Scar. Nevertheless, the weight of the film remains orientated to the future: Scar has burned down the home of the settlers; but it is replaced and we are confident that the homesteader's wife, Mrs Jorgensen, is right when she says: 'Some day this country's going to be a fine place to live.' The wilderness will, in the end, be turned into a garden.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance has many similarities with *The Searchers*. We may note three: the wilderness becomes a garden — this is made quite explicit, for Senator Stoddart has wrung from Washington the funds necessary to build a dam which will irrigate the desert and bring real roses, not cactus roses; Tom Doniphon shoots Liberty Valance as Ethan Edwards scalped Scar; a log-home is burned to the ground. But the differences are equally clear: the log-home is burned after the death of Liberty Valance; it is destroyed by Doniphon himself; it is his own home. The burning marks the realisation that he will never enter the Promised Land, that to him it means nothing; that he has doomed himself to be a creature of the past, insignificant in the world of the future. By shooting Liberty Valance he has destroyed the only world in

which he himself can exist, the world of the gun rather than the book; it is as though Ethan Edwards had perceived that by scalping Scar, he was in reality committing suicide. It might be mentioned too that, in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, the woman who loves Doniphon marries Senator Stoddart. Doniphon when he destroys his log-house (his last words before doing so are 'Home, sweet home!') also destroys the possibility of marriage.

The themes of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* can be expressed in another way. Ransom Stoddart represents rational-legal authority, Tom Doniphon represents charismatic authority. Doniphon abandons his charisma and cedes it, under what amount to false pretences, to Stoddart. In this way charismatic and rational-legal authority are combined in the person of Stoddart and stability thus assured. In *The Searchers* this transfer does not take place; the two kinds of authority remain separated. In *My Darling Clementine* they are combined naturally in Wyatt Earp, without any transfer being necessary. In many of Ford's late films – *The Quiet Man*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, *Donovan's Reef* – the accent is placed on traditional authority. The island of Ailakaowa, in *Donovan's Reef*, a kind of Valhalla for the homeless heroes of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, is actually a monarchy, though complete with the Boston girl, wooden church and saloon made familiar by *My Darling Clementine*. In fact, the character of Chihuahua, Doc Holliday's girl in *My Darling Clementine*, is split into two: Miss Lafleur and Lelani, the native princess. One represents the saloon entertainer, the other the non-American in opposition to the respectable Bostonians, Amelia Sarah Dedham and Clementine Carter. In a broad sense, this is a part of a general movement which can be detected in Ford's work to equate the Irish, Indians and Polynesians as traditional communities, set in the past, counterposed to the march forward to the American future, as it has turned out in reality, but assimilating the values of the American future as it was once dreamed.

It would be possible, I have no doubt, to elaborate on Ford's career, as defined by pairs of contrasts and similarities, in very great detail, though – as always with film criticism – the impossibility of quotation is a severe handicap. My own view is that Ford's work is much richer than that of Hawks and that this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted *auteur*. Moreover, the *auteur* theory enables us to reveal a whole complex of meaning in films such as *Donovan's Reef*, which a recent filmography sums up as

just 'a couple of Navy men who have retired to a South Sea island now spend most of their time raising hell'. Similarly, it throws a completely new light on a film like *Wings of Eagles*, which revolves, like *The Searchers*, round the vagrancy versus home antinomy, with the difference that when the hero does come home, after flying round the world, he trips over a child's toy, falls down the stairs and is completely paralysed so that he cannot move at all, not even his toes. This is the macabre *reductio ad absurdum* of the settled.

Perhaps it would be true to say that it is the lesser *auteurs* who can be defined, as Nowell-Smith put it, by a core of basic motifs which remain constant, without variation. The great directors must be defined in terms of shifting relations, in their singularity as well as their uniformity. Renoir once remarked that a director spends his whole life making one film; this film, which it is the task of the critic to construct, consists not only of the typical features of its variants, which are merely its redundancies, but of the principle of variation which governs it, that is its esoteric structure, which can only manifest itself or 'seep to the surface', in Lévi-Strauss's phrase, 'through the repetition process'. Thus Renoir's 'film' is in reality a 'kind of permutation group, the two variants placed at the far ends being in a symmetrical, though inverted, relationship to each other'. In practice, we will not find perfect symmetry, though as we have seen, in the case of Ford, some antinomies are completely reversed. Instead, there will be a kind of torsion within the permutation group, within the matrix, a kind of exploration of certain possibilities, in which some antinomies are foregrounded, discarded or even inverted, whereas others remain stable and constant. The important thing to stress, however, is that it is only the analysis of the whole *corpus* which permits the moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the individual film.

Of course, the director does not have full control over his work; this explains why the *auteur* theory involves a kind of decipherment, decryptment. A great many features of films analysed have to be dismissed as indecipherable because of 'noise' from the producer, the cameraman or even the actors. This concept of 'noise' needs further elaboration. It is often said that a film is the result of a multiplicity of factors, the sum total of a number of different contributions. The contribution of the director – the 'directorial factor', as it were – is only one of these, though perhaps the one which carries the most weight. I do not need to emphasise that this view is quite the contrary of the *auteur* theory and has nothing in common with it at all. What the *auteur* theory does is to take a

group of films – the work of one director – and analyse their structure. Everything irrelevant to this, everything non-pertinent, is considered logically secondary, contingent, to be discarded. Of course, it is possible to approach films by studying some other feature; by an effort of critical asceticism we could see films, as Von Sternberg sometimes urged, as abstract light-show or as histrionic feasts. Sometimes these separate texts – those of the cameraman or the actors – may force themselves into prominence so that the film becomes an indecipherable palimpsest. This does not mean, of course, that it ceases to exist or to sway us or please us or intrigue us; it simply means that it is inaccessible to criticism. We can merely record our momentary and subjective impressions.

Myths, as Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, exist independently of style, the syntax of the sentence or musical sound, euphony or cacophony. The myth functions 'on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically in "taking off" from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling'. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true of the *auteur* film. 'When a mythical schema is transmitted from one population to another, and there exist differences of language, social organization or way of life which make the myth difficult to communicate, it begins to become impoverished and confused.' The same kind of impoverishment and confusion takes place in the film studio, where difficulties of communication abound. But none the less the film can usually be discerned, even if it was a quickie made in a fortnight without the actors or the crews that the director might have liked, with an intrusive producer and even, perhaps, a censor's scissors cutting away vital sequences. It is as though a film is a musical composition rather than a musical performance, although, whereas a musical composition exists *a priori* (like a scenario), an *auteur* film is constructed *a posteriori*. Imagine the situation if the critic had to construct a musical composition from a number of fragmentary, distorted versions of it, all with improvised passages or passages missing. *pp. 105-112*

What the *auteur* theory demonstrates is that the director is not simply in command of a performance of a pre-existing text; he is not, or need not be, only a *metteur en scène*. Don Siegel was recently asked on television what he took from Hemingway's short story for his film, *The Killers*; Siegel replied that 'the only thing taken from it was the catalyst that a man has been killed by somebody and he did not try to run away'. The word Siegel chose – 'catalyst' – could not be bettered. Incidents and episodes in the original screenplay or novel can act as catalysts; they are the agents which are introduced into the mind (conscious or unconscious) of

the *auteur* and react there with the motifs and themes characteristic of his work. The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which fuse with his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work. Thus the manifest process of performance, the treatment of a subject, conceals the latent production of a quite new text, the production of the director as an *auteur*.

Of course, it is possible to value performances as such, to agree with André Bazin that Olivier's *Henry V* was a great film, a great rendering, transposition into the cinema, of Shakespeare's original play. The great *metteurs en scène* should not be discounted simply because they are not *auteurs*: Vincente Minnelli, perhaps, or Stanley Donen. And, further than that, the same kind of process can take place that occurred in painting: the director can deliberately concentrate entirely on the stylistic and expressive dimensions of the cinema. He can say, as Josef Von Sternberg did about *Morocco*, that he purposely chose a fatuous story so that people would not be distracted from the play of light and shade in the photography. Some of Busby Berkeley's extraordinary sequences are equally detached from any kind of dependence on the screenplay: indeed, more often than not, some other director was entrusted with the job of putting the actors through the plot and dialogue. Moreover, there is no doubt that the greatest films will be not simply *auteur* films but marvellous expressively and stylistically as well: *Lola Montès*, *Shinheike Monogatari*, *La Règle du Jeu*, *La Signora di Tutti*, *Sansho Dayu*, *Le Carrosse d'Or*.

The *auteur* theory leaves us, as every theory does, with possibilities and questions. We need to develop much further a theory of performance, of the stylistic, of graded rather than coded modes of communication. We need to investigate and define, to construct critically the work of enormous numbers of directors who up to now have only been incompletely comprehended. We need to begin the task of comparing author with author. There are any number of specific problems which stand out: Donen's relationship to Kelly and Arthur Freed, Boetticher's films outside the Ranown cycle, Welles's relationship to Toland (and – perhaps more important – Wyler's), Sirk's films outside the Ross Hunter cycle, the exact identity of Walsh or Wellman, the decipherment of Anthony Mann. Moreover there is no reason why the *auteur* theory should not be applied to the English cinema, which is still utterly amorphous, unclassified, unperceived. We need not two or three books on Hitchcock and Ford, but many, many more. We need comparisons with authors in the other arts: Ford with Fenimore Cooper, for

self-discipline

with the necessary changes having been made

example, or Hawks with Faulkner. The task which the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* embarked on is still far from completed.

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At this point, it is necessary to say something about the *auteur* theory since this has often been seen as a way of introducing the idea of the creative personality into the Hollywood cinema. Indeed, it is true that many protagonists of the *auteur* theory do argue in this way. However, I do not hold this view and I think it is important to detach the *auteur* theory from any suspicion that it simply represents a 'cult of personality' or apotheosis of the director. To my mind, the *auteur* theory actually represents a radical break with the idea of an 'art' cinema, not the transplant of traditional ideas about 'art' into Hollywood. The 'art' cinema is rooted in the idea of creativity and the film as the expression of an individual vision. What the *auteur* theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final 'coherent' version. Like a dream, the film the spectator sees is, so to speak, the 'film façade', the end-product of 'secondary revision', which hides and masks the process which remains latent in the film 'unconscious'. Sometimes this 'façade' is so worked over, so smoothed out, or else so clotted with disparate elements, that it is impossible to see beyond it, or rather to see anything in it except the characters, the dialogue, the plot, and so on. But in other cases, by a process of comparison with other films, it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or world-view, but a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which *auteur* analysis disengages from the film.

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved. The film is not a communication, but an artefact which is unconsciously structured in a certain way. *Auteur* analysis does not consist of re-tracing a film to its origins, to its creative source. It consists of tracing a structure (not a message) within the work, which can then *post factum* be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds. It is wrong, in the name of a denial

of the traditional idea of creative subjectivity, to deny any status to individuals at all. But Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from 'Fuller' or 'Hawks' or 'Hitchcock', the structures named after them, and should not be methodologically confused. There can be no doubt that the presence of a structure in the text can often be connected with the presence of a director on the set, but the situation in the cinema, where the director's primary task is often one of co-ordination and rationalisation, is very different from that in the other arts, where there is a much more direct relationship between artist and work. It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of a film *auteur* as an unconscious catalyst.

However, the structures discerned in the text are often attacked in another way. Robin Wood, for example, has argued that the '*auteur*' film is something like a Platonic Idea. It posits a 'real' film, of which the actual film is only a flawed transcript, while the archi-film itself exists only in the mind of the critic. This attack rests on a misunderstanding. The main point about the Platonic Idea is that it pre-dates the empirical reality, as an archetype. But the '*auteur*' film (or structure) is not an archi-film at all in this sense. It is an explanatory device which specifies partially how any individual film works. Some films it can say nothing or next-to-nothing about at all. *Auteur* theory cannot simply be applied indiscriminately. Nor does an *auteur* analysis exhaust what can be said about any single film. It does no more than provide one way of decoding a film, by specifying what its mechanics are at one level. There are other kinds of code which could be proposed, and whether they are of any value or not will have to be settled by reference to the text, to the films in question.

Underlying the anti-Platonic argument, however, there is often a hostility towards any kind of explanation which involves a degree of distancing from the 'lived experience' of watching the film itself. Yet clearly any kind of serious critical work – I would say scientific, though I know this drives some people into transports of rage – must involve a distance, a gap between the film and the criticism, the text and the meta-text. It is as though meteorologists were reproached for getting away from the 'lived experience' of walking in the rain or sun-bathing. Once again, we are back with the myth of transparency, the idea that the mark of a good film is that it conveys a rich meaning, an important truth, in a way which can be grasped immediately. If this is the case, then clearly all the critic has to do is to describe the experience of watching the film, reception of a signal, in such a way as to clear up any little confusions

or enigmas which still remain. The most that the critic can do is to put the spectator on the right wavelength so that he can see for himself as clearly as the critic, who is already tuned in.

The *auteur* theory, as I conceive it, insists that the spectator has to work at reading the text. With some films this work is wasted, unproductive. But with others it is not. In these cases, in a certain sense, the film changes, it becomes another film – as far as experience of it is concerned. It is no longer possible to look at it 'with the same eyes'. There is no integral, genuine experience which the critic enjoys and which he tries to guide others towards. Above all, the critic's experience is not essentially grounded in or guaranteed by the essence of the film itself. The critic is not at the heart of the matter. The critic is someone who persists in learning to see the film differently and is able to specify the mechanisms which make this possible. This is not a question of 'reading in' or projecting the critic's own concerns in to the film; any reading of a film has to be justified by an explanation of how the film itself works to make this reading possible. Nor is it the single reading, the one which gives us the true meaning of the film; it is simply a reading which produces more meaning.

Again, it is necessary to insist that since there is no true, essential meaning there can therefore be no exhaustive criticism, which settles the interpretation of a film once and for all. Moreover, since the meaning is not contained integrally in any film, any decoding may not apply over the whole area of it. Traditional criticism is always seeking for the comprehensive code which will give the complete interpretation, covering every detail. This is a wild goose chase, in the cinema, above all, which is a collective form. Both Classical and Romantic aesthetics hold to the belief that every detail should have a meaning – Classical aesthetics because of its belief in a common, universal code; Romantic aesthetics because of its belief in an organic unity in which every detail reflects the essence of the whole. The *auteur* theory argues that any single decoding has to compete, certainly in the cinema, with noise from signals coded differently. Beyond that, it is an illusion to think of any work as complete in itself, an isolated unity whose intercourse with other films, other texts, is carefully controlled to avoid contamination. Different codes may run across the frontiers of texts at liberty, meet and conflict within them. This is how language itself is structured, and the failure of linguistics, for instance, to deal with the problem of semantics, is exemplified in the idea that to the unitary code of grammar (the syntactic component of language) there must correspond a unitary semantic code, which

would give a correct semantic interpretation of any sentence. Thus the idea of 'grammaticality' is wrongly extended to include a quite false notion of 'semanticity'. In fact, no headway can be made in semantics until this myth is dispelled.

The *auteur* theory has important implications for the problem of evaluation. Orthodox aesthetics sees the problem in predictable terms. The 'good' work is one which has both a rich meaning and a correspondingly complex form, wedded together in a unity (Romantic) or isomorphic with each other (Classical). Thus the critic, to demonstrate the value of a work, must be able to identify the 'content', establish its truth, profundity, and so forth, and then demonstrate how it is expressed with minimum loss or leakage in the signals of the text itself, which are patterned in a way which gives coherence to the work as a whole. 'Truth' of content is not envisaged as being like scientific truth, but more like 'human' truth, a distillation of the world of human experience, particularly inter-personal experience. The world itself is an untidy place, full of loose ends, but the artefact can tie all these loose ends together and thus convey to us a meaningful truth, an insight, which enables us to go back to the real world with a re-ordered and re-cycled experience which will enable us to cope better, live more fully and so on. In this way art is given a humanistic function, which guarantees its value.

All this is overthrown when we begin to see loose ends in works of art, to refuse to acknowledge organic unity or integral content. Moreover, we have to revise our whole idea of criteria, of judgement. The notion behind criteria is that they are timeless and universal. They are then applied to a particular work and it is judged accordingly. This rigid view is varied to the extent that different criteria may apply to different kinds of works or that slightly different criteria may reflect different points of view or kinds of experience, though all are rooted in a common humanity. But almost all current theories of evaluation depend on identifying the work first and then confronting it with criteria. The work is then criticised for falling short on one score or another. It is blemished in some way. Evidently, if we reject the idea of an exhaustive interpretation, we have to reject this kind of evaluation. Instead, we should concentrate on the *productivity* of the work. This is what the 'modern movement' is about. The text, in Octavio Paz's words, is something like a machine for producing meaning. Moreover, its meaning is not neutral, something to be simply absorbed by the consumer.

The meaning of texts can be destructive – of the codes used in