

## **A Retrospect: The Film Director as Auteur - Artist, Brand name or Engineer?**

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### ***Introduction***

Next to the genre and the stars, it is the director who is the most important indicator for the kind of expectations we bring to a film when we decide to go to the movies. A Woody Allen film, a Paul Verhoeven film or 'Steven Spielberg presents': these are the most reliable signs of recognition of the sort of experience we hope to get from a film. The first and most obvious question that comes to mind is why the director is seen as the most important person in the process of making a film? After all, filmmaking is an industry, it is a collective effort, there is a creative and organisational input from a vast number of people, as one can tell if one stays behind for the five minutes of end-credits. To single out the director already implies a number of assumption and value judgements that we are usually not aware of making.

The first such assumption is that a film is like a book or a work of art, and that it therefore has to have an 'author', an originator. But then, the paradox is even stronger: why is it not the writer of the script or the cameraman who is recognised as the author? The second assumption is that there is a kind of hierarchy in the making of a film, and that a single person must have had the idea of a certain film, and that the significant choices are being made by the man 'behind the camera'. But the director rarely is behind the camera (except on publicity stills) and usually stands or sits next to the camera. It is perhaps prudent to be sceptical about believing in a natural hierarchy concerning the creative process, and giving priority to the director as creator may simply be a prejudice, ignoring the fact that in matters of cinema, the actual power-relations are more complicated, counter-intuitive and probably back to front. The third tacit assumption is that there is someone, a single person, who is 'in control': who not only controls the process of making the work in question, but also controls its meaning (because of what he 'intended to say' with the work). But is a film understandable as product of someone's artistic or creative self-expression? What we know about the logic of the blockbuster, for instance, must again make us sceptical. Nonetheless, it somehow seems absolutely right that in reviews in the newspapers and also in film studies we associate a film with its director. What is not so obvious is why the director is known as the author, and why we often speak of him as the 'auteur', that is, why we use a French term to name the director?

There are at least two historical reasons for this; one is the Paramount Decree of 1948, i.e. the anti-trust decision against the Hollywood studios, breaking up vertical integration, and forcing them to divest themselves of their cinema chains. The other reason is the end of World War II in 1945, and the lifting of the import embargo imposed in 1940 on American films by Germany in the countries it occupied, including France and Paris. What do these two, very different events have to do with us referring to a the film director as an "auteur"?

### ***The Studio-system: Changes in the Production Process***

It was not always the case in the Hollywood film business that directors were even assumed to be the originators of a film. In the glory-days of the studio-system, roughly from 1915-1945, it was well known and accepted, also by journalists, that the person who initiated a film was the producer. He decided what the projects were, he selected the writers, the stars and he also hired, or rather, assigned the director. The director was one of the army of expendable experts that a studio had under contract,

no different from the cameramen, the editors or carpenters: the vast majority of directors were studio-employees, on a fixed salary, ready to take on whatever assignment the boss - Irving Thalberg, Sam Goldwyn, David Selznick, Alexander Korda, Eric Pommer, Michael Balcon, Arthur Freed - gave them. Some were more successful than others - the A-directors like John Ford or Howard Hawks, who could negotiate better terms, higher salaries and more direct co-operation with the screenwriters - but many now 'classic' directors like Michael Curtiz, Fritz Lang, Douglas Sirk or Robert Siodmak had very little say-so on the projects they directed in the 1930s and early 1940s. Even Alfred Hitchcock, when he came to Hollywood, was first under contract to David Selznick and thus under his control.

But the producers were themselves not gods. Until the anti-trust decision, they were as much employees of the studios which were run by the so-called movie moguls - the Harry Cohen, Adolf Zukor, Carl Laemmle, Harry Warner - who were themselves, however, controlled by faceless money-men living not in Los Angeles, but New York or Chicago, and whose main interests were in distribution and exhibition which, as we know determined production. For the studio-system in Hollywood, the anti-trust legislation meant that producers who were previously tied to the big studios could become independent, they could make films and sell them to distributors and exhibitors without going through the studios, which means that they were looking for ways of making cheaper films, B-pictures, which were used in so-called double-bills (i.e. programmes where two films are shown instead of only one), a practice intended to attract more audiences to the movies, especially when these were shown in second-run theatres.

These changes altered the balance of power between producers and directors, with the directors assuming more influence, so much so that many of them became their own producers: Hitchcock emancipated himself from Selznick and became his own producer, Otto Preminger became a producer-director, and a host of other, younger directors, such as Samuel Fuller or Nicholas Ray were able to set themselves up as 'independents'. The decline of the old-style producer was accompanied by the rise of the 'agent' and the deal-maker - men like Lew Wassermann in the 1960s, or Steven Ross in the 1970s.

So this is one historical background to the redefinition of the director as author. The second historical background is located in Europe, and it really starts not in 1945, but in the teens and twenties. In Europe, especially in Germany and France - countries with a differently organised film-industry from that of Hollywood, the director was already acknowledged as the creative source: think of German Expressionism and the names of Robert Wiene, director of *Dr Caligari*, or Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau or G.W. Pabst: they were the names we associate with the classical German cinema, just as in France we think of Abel Gance, Jean Epstein, Renee Clair, Jean Renoir, Marcel Carné as the creative centres of the French film-industry. Thus, in France, the country in Europe where film culture (as opposed to the film *industry*) has been the most developed, and the most consistent, the director had a special legal and creative status ever since the 1910s. But what happened in 1945, with the Liberation, the cinemas in Paris and in the provinces were flooded with American films. French audiences and critics couldn't get enough of Hollywood movies, and of course, Hollywood had plenty of pictures to export, all that backlog from the war years.

When these films came to France, after nearly six years without American films, there was what one might call a 'crisis of classification and attribution' among the critics and the press. The American cinema had changed quite drastically, and critics needed to reorient themselves: they did

not always know how to refer to these films - the genres had changed, colour-film had come in, the studio-look had changed (in the old days Warner Brothers, Paramount, MGM all had a very distinct look), new actors and actresses had come to the fore, like Rita Hayworth and Humphrey Bogart, Gene Tierney and Dana Andrews, and there were a number of exciting new names among the directors, such as Vincente Minnelli and Nicholas Ray, Otto Preminger, Robert Aldrich or Samuel Fuller: names that few had heard of before the war. Critics started to think of ways of making sense of the films, and they came up, *inter alia*, with two new labels, both of which became highly influential: *film noir* (to classify the no-star, low-studio product of the B-feature category, making it thereby into an A-category), and the auteur theory, or, as it was originally known, 'la politique des auteurs'.

### ***The Auteur Theory***

This 'politique des auteurs' was in the first instance a polemical assault on the French film industry by a new generation of critics, most of whom wrote for Cahiers du cinéma, and were inspired by an older critic, André Bazin. The names of the new critics were François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette. Many of these names were first known as critics before they became film directors. This strange fact gives us already one clue to the meaning of the auteur theory, but before saying more about it, here are some of the major theses of the 'politique des auteurs':

- the quality of a film is determined not by its subject matter, but by its style.
- the quality of a film is independent of whether it can be considered high-culture or popular culture, i.e. a Hollywood genre film need not be worse than a French auteur film. Likewise box office is not decisive: not every film reaching a vast audience is thereby "good".
- the 'style' (which decides the value of a film) does not come from the script, the studio, the producer or the actors: it comes from the director.
- the 'style' can be recognised by the 'mise-en-scène', that is by composition of the shots, the editing, the interaction between sound and image, colour and setting, the way the 'inner world' of the protagonists is translated into 'actions', camera movement, the choice of decor and accessories, i.e. the way the entire world of the film corresponds to and expresses the central conflicts and dilemmas of the main character(s).
- among directors, one can distinguish between a *metteur-en-scène* and an auteur. The name *metteur-en-scène* was applied to directors who mastered the placing of camera, the decor, the disposition of the shot, the editing, and the term auteur was applied if on top of this, your themes were also consistent across the different genres. Hitchcock, for instance, is an auteur, but his use of storyboarding might almost be said to embody the ideal of *mise-en-scène*. Another director, Howard Hawks, who was said to have improvised on the set, pursued the same themes in his comedies and his action pictures, namely the comic and tragic sides of masculinity. So, he was an auteur. And the auteur-critics were known as the 'Hitchcock-Hawksians'. An auteur has an 'oeuvre', a body of work which is thematically consistent and stylistically unique, a personal signature. The 'metteur-en-scène' has a consistent *mise-en-scène*, i.e. he knows how to integrate all the formal elements of a film, but he lacks a consistent set of themes, and his *mise-en-scène* is not necessarily unique. If one looks at all the 120 films that Michael Curtiz directed, it will be difficult to identify a consistency of subjects, and now he is mainly known as the director of *Casablanca*, which has become a

classic and a cult film, though not because of the camera work or the editing, but mainly because of the doomed love affair between Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, and because of two immortal lines of dialogue by the screenwriter Howard Koch: "here's looking at you, kid" and "play it again, Sam".

### **The Novelty of the Auteur Theory**

The auteur theory, then, gives the critic a classification system and a hierarchy. This classification system is developed for mainstream films, usually from Hollywood, and that it therefore deliberately overturns the classification of the film-industry (which classifies according to genre and star, the same classification as those used by the ordinary spectator), and it also disregards the hierarchy within the film industry (where as we saw, the real decisions are taken by producers - and their backers - and only when a director also becomes producer can he assume control over the end-product).

Furthermore, it concentrates the evaluation process on those aspects that a director does indeed control: where to put the camera in a shot, when to move it, how to direct the actors and how to edit a film in the editing room. The *politique des auteurs* therefore reinstates the principle of creativity, individuality and 'style' as the highest virtues of film-making. Given that filmmaking is a very industrial, often anonymous process, which is so costly that it must appeal to a very large audience and must make a lot of money for its investors or backers who take large risks, the *politique des auteurs* is not only 'counter-intuitive', but also retrograde, because it appeals to a very old-fashioned, pre-industrial ideal of the creator.

So why was it so successful? Mainly, I think, because it dared to give the products of mass-culture the status, the value and the dignity of 'art': to the opponents (and there were many, not only among the critics, but among directors, too) it may have seemed as if the Cahiers du cinéma critics merely inverted the old value judgement mass culture = bad, elite culture = good, by always giving Hollywood films the benefit of the doubt. But that is not the whole story: the *politique des auteurs* taught a whole generation of film critics and film goers, but - as we shall see, also filmmakers - a completely new way of looking at films, to notice different things and to appreciate a different kind of beauty. And in this respect, the auteur theory was a revelation and a revolution.

For it was also a 'politics' - and a subversive one: it gave priority to the film-director as author (as opposed to the producer or the screenwriter), and it made this 'author' into an 'artist' - the sort of profession hat has one of the highest kinds of prestige in our Western culture, right next to the priest and the philosopher. The novelty of the concept of the auteur: you could be an individual artist within the factory system, the conveyor belt industrial machine of Hollywood. But what sort of artist are we talking about? The Romantic Artist, who throws away the rules, because he only wants to express himself, indeed he has to express himself, or the classical artist, who accepts the traditional forms (of drama, of poetry, of painting or sculpture) but can give new life to the old conventions, the old stereotypes, the traditional subjects and themes? The *Cahiers du cinéma* critics perceived American *auteurs* as classical artists - who worked within institutions, but who knew how to add an extra stylistic layer of expression to their films. To read this additional layer required specialised reading strategies (as developed by art criticism, on which *mise-en-scene* criticism was modelled). By contrast, as (European) filmmakers, which is what these critics were about to become, they perceived themselves as romantic artists - as artists struggling outside the system.

### **Film Noir, Expressionism and the Myth of the Artist as Victim**

This is where the other historical background comes in, namely the phenomenon of 'film noir'. Among the many films that suddenly appeared in France after 1945, there were an unusually large number of crime films and thrillers: very sombre, very pessimistic and cynical films, made in black-and-white, and usually involving a private detective having to solve a murder mystery whose chief suspect, more often than not, was a very beautiful and therefore very dangerous woman: the femme fatale. The titles were also very mysterious: THE BIG SLEEP, LAURA, THE MALTESE FALCON, THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE, FAREWELL MY LOVELY, DOUBLE INDEMNITY, SCARLET STREET, THE BIG HEAT, etc., etc. Where did these films come from, who made them, and how did they fit into the dream factory Hollywood? What did they tell about the United States which had just won the most bloody war in history against the most evil regime of modern times? Why, then, were the films so pessimistic and downbeat, coming from such a victorious and prosperous nation?

As the French were puzzling over these questions - you can tell from all these French words, that they 'discovered' film noir and the femme fatale: Hollywood itself did not know it was making films noirs - for them they were just cheap B-pictures made from hard-boiled novels by Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain and Dashiell Hammett, with a lot of gangster types, sexy women and macho actors like Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, Robert Mitchum and Lee Marvin. Applying the auteur theory, the French were less interested in the scripts, the genre or the actors. They noticed that noticed that an awful lot of these films were directed by German directors who had to flee from Hitler and were exiles in Hollywood: Billy Wilder, Otto Preminger, Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Edgar Ulmer, Curtis Bernhardt. Coming from the German cinema of the 1920s, Expressionism, with all these nightmares of evil geniuses, mad doctors, vampires and malevolent shadows, it is not surprising that these directors made 'dark' films. In other words, these exile auteurs were underdogs, they were persecuted, they were isolated and homeless, living in fear, etc etc - the perfect basis for a myth that makes us think of the 19th myth of the romantic hero: only suffering gives birth to great art. Consumption or syphilis in the Romantic period as the spurs to genius, now it was tortured souls like Dr Caligari and Nosferatu, and political persecution by the Nazis that gave your work a special kind of integrity and authenticity.

On the other hand, there were authors such as John Ford, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, King Vidor, Raoul Walsh. These *auteurs* at the heart of the dream-factory Hollywood refer us less to the romantic artist or the expressionist genius, but first of all, to the classical artist (Hawks worked in the classical genres of Hollywood, Minnelli was a master of the musical and melodrama, Sam Fuller made terrific action pictures and Westerns, and Billy Wilder could make very black comedies apart from very black thrillers (remember SOME LIKE IT HOT and THE APARTMENT, as well as DOUBLE INDEMNITY and SUNSET BOULEVARD: all directed by the same man). These were directors who could create something personal while preserving the classical form, while submitting to constraints or unities, like a poet submits to the constraints of a sonnet, i.e. 14 lines and rhymed in a particular patterns or sequence, or the way Shakespeare stole all the plots for his tragedies from earlier writers or from historians writing about the Roman empire.) The classical artist does not aim at self-expression or originality for the sake of it, but tries to do so within the framework of shared conventions.

### **The auteur-theory reviewed: Europe and its *nouvelles vagues***

But the auteur-theory, as it was developed by the critics *Cahiers du cinéma*, was also a very useful fiction, which turned out to be most handy when these critics began to make their own films and changed from critics to becoming directors. From that moment onwards, the romantic myth of self-expression returns with full force, and the ground was prepared for the idea that almost everyone can make a masterpiece, so long as you have 'style', a personal signature, and can keep control over the mise-en-scene. It became a theory of empowerment for those young filmmakers who only had a hand-held camera, who used their friends as actors and who improvised their scripts on the set, which most of the time was a city location they neither had to build nor pay money for to hire it. With it, the typical qualities of a studio film – a recognisable genre, international stars, and a professionally constructed screenplay – moved to the background. Whether in the long run this was a good decision for the European film industry is a question that still has not been decisively answered.

I hope that it is clear how much of this 'history' is based on different 'mythologies', but also why these mythologies are so powerful and attractive. For it is easy to criticise the 'auteur theory', and it has been many times criticised:

- a. for being egotistical and self-serving
- b. for being elitist and esoteric (you had to be very clever indeed to spot the particular significant traits of the mise-en-scene)
- c. for going against common-sense (even the directors celebrated as auteurs, when they were interviewed about their films often didn't know what these French intellectuals were talking about)
- d. for contrasting sharply with the 'reality' of Hollywood, where the director has - with some exception - had a low status, and where even famous (European) directors were hired because they could deliver a star  
- the star brings the director (Pola Negri brought Lubitsch, Greta Garbo brought Stiller, and Marlene Dietrich made Sternberg famous - and vice versa).
- e. for neglecting the changed realities of Hollywood after the Paramount Decree (the rise of the producer-directors Otto Preminger, Hitchcock, or the new phenomenon of the director-writer-producer, having to do all by himself because he was making films without the benefit of a fixed contract, on poverty row and B-pictures, and on a film-by-film basis (e.g. Edgar Ulmer or Sam Fuller).

But the auteur theory is probably the single most important factor for why you can now get a university degree in film studies! Film finally possessed a set of traditional literary and art-historical criteria of value, of distinction and discrimination. There was now a canon, a tradition of important names and creative personalities, with 'masters' of the art of film, as well as a canon of important films, i.e. masterpieces - sanctioned and legitimated by critical discourse and critical debate

The classical auteur theory originally applied to American directors, ie studio-employees who were making their masterpieces against the grain and against the odds -- that made them culture heroes and father-figures: they had nothing except their genius. They were victims of the system and they triumphed over the system (and that is how some of them were adopted by the new wave directors: Hitchcock, by - Chabrol, Rohmer, Truffaut; Sam Fuller and Minnelli by Godard; Howard Hawks and Fritz Lang by Jacques Rivette; Orson Welles - by all of them...

But in the course of the years, it also started to apply to the classical European 'auteur': Jean

Renoir, celebrated like a great artist (after all, he was the son of the great impressionist painter Auguste Renoir); Roberto Rossellini (stood for the 'good' political part of Italy after the Mussolini dictatorship, he embodied brave, anti-fascist Italy); Ingmar Bergman (self torment and spiritual despair - model of the Nordic sage, of Ibsen and Strindberg: here the auteur inherits the national literature, represents his country, becomes like an icon of high-culture respectability, the links between theatre, cinema and national literature: "from stage to screen...").

Then, in the 1960s, auteurism began to apply to the New Waves, which were at first identified with pamphlets, or manifestos, which claimed a group identity, which wanted to be subversive, rebellious, political. But what the new waves left on the shore, when the waves retreated was usually not groups but individual directors, promoted as auteurs: neo-realism, when it was over as a movement left behind several director-auteurs, such as Antonioni, Fellini, Visconti (it seems strange to think that they ever belonged to neo-realism) ; the New Polish cinema left behind Roman Polanski and Jerzi Skolimowski; the Cinema Novo of Latin America left behind Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra and Raoul Ruiz; the New German Cinema left behind Wim Wenders, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Werner Herzog. Often, they became identified as auteurs thanks to a director-star alliance (Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman, Antonioni and Monica Vitti, Fellini and Giuliana Massina, Godard and Anna Karina, Chabrol and Stephane Audran, Fassbinder and Hanna Schygulla; Herzog and Klaus Kinski).

At other times, directors became recognisable as auteurs because they made a cycle of related films (Eric Rohmer, for instance, Wim Wenders, with his early films all starring Rüdiger Vogler, who embodied the director's alter ego, and then with his Berlin-films *WINGS OF DESIRE* and *FARAWAY SO CLOSE*, or Werner Herzog with his Kinski films, where the actor played three rather similar roles - megalomaniacs like *AGUIRRE*, *FITZCARRALDO* and *COBRA VERDE*). The German directors also 'adopted' father-figures from Hollywood: R.W. Fassbinder took Douglas Sirk and his melodramas as model, Wim Wenders made films with and about Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray, and Werner Herzog chose F.W. Murnau as his 'father' - a German director who had emigrated to Hollywood already in the 1920s, but died there tragically in an accident in 1931.

But, as you can see, the basis for calling someone an auteur in the European filmmaking context is quite different from what it was in Hollywood, for in the 1960s several European countries had only very weak and declining national film industries, or the directors that were called auteurs worked outside the commercial film industries of Italy or France or Germany. Someone like Sergio Leone (who worked within the Italian film industry) is thus neither an auteur, nor a *metteur-en-scene*, but rather a 'cult-director': a label that has arisen in the 1980s, and seems in some sense to have replaced the old auteur theory, for reasons that I shall now briefly outline.

### **The auteur theory reviewed: Hollywood's 'movie brats'**

When we now come to New or Contemporary Hollywood, there are a number of intriguing reversals, which I try to describe in my essay on Coppola's *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*. After the New York film critic Andrew Sarris (writing for *The Village Voice*) had imported the auteur theory and the pantheon of directors, a generation of young Americans learnt from the French critics a completely different way of understanding, valuing and loving their own Hollywood cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. When you see you parents from another persons point of view, from an outsider's perspective you may say: hey, I never noticed this, or well, they can't be that bad after all: if these terribly clever and

sophisticated French intellectuals think so highly of all this Hollywood kitsch, then there must be something to it.

Furthermore, these young Americans grew up at the point when Hollywood was at its lowest in the 1960s, and they went to film academies, except that these film schools in New York, in Los Angeles or San Francisco had begun to teach not only filmmaking but also film history and film theory - what Americans call 'Critical Studies', where - precisely - they learnt about the auteur theory and its revaluation of the American cinema.

Therefore, a generation of filmmakers grew up in the States who began to look not only at old Hollywood filmmaking through the rose-tinted spectacles of the French, but also adopted the self-image of these French critics turned directors. The French critics praising American auteurs in order to become auteurs themselves were in turn the models for young Americans, who adopted John Ford, Orson Welles, Sam Fuller, or the English directors Alfred Hitchcock and Michael Powell as *their* father-figures, *and* tried to emulate or copy Jean Luc Godard or Francois Truffaut: for instance, this was true in the case of Martin Scorsese, Brian de Palma, Paul Schrader, Dennis Hopper, Bob Rafelson.

The American auteurs, whom the French critics had praised in order to make themselves into auteurs, became in turn the models for the young American generation: the director John Ford was adopted by Paul Schrader, Orson Welles was Francis Ford Coppola's model, Sam Fuller became a father-figure for Dennis Hopper, or the English Alfred Hitchcock was being copied by Brian de Palma), and Michael Powell - also English - was even employed by Martin Scorsese as his consultant. At the same time, the young Americans tried to compete with the French nouvelle vague, imitating Jean Luc Godard and François Truffaut.

But it is important also to make distinctions between this new generation of directors who aspired to be 'auteurs'. In the essay "Auteur Cinema and the Film Generation"<sup>1</sup> by David Cook, for instance, the different networks of film school graduates and create milieus are described, who knew whom, who helped whom, who hung out with what crowd. David Cook also makes a basic distinction among the movie brats - between East Coast-directors (the ones I have just named) and West Coast directors (Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, John Milius). But one can also distinguish two generations, or rather the influence of two godfathers for these generations: one is Roger Corman, who was a producer and director of exploitation films, who was himself very influenced by British horror movies from the 1950s, and directed a number of Edgar Allen Poe films ( THE TOMB OF LIGEA, THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH, THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER - all starring Vincent Price), but Corman also made beach movies, biker movies, female prisoners in the jungle movies, etc etc -- and he let of a lot of young film school graduates make some of these exploitation films, or shot their own student films on his back-lot in Venice, California - not very far from USC. Corman, for instance, is portrayed in Wim Wenders' STATE OF THINGS. Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson - the EASY RIDER people - came from Corman, but a lot of others including Martin Scorsese who made a film there, and above all, Francis Ford Coppola.

Before I come to the second godfather, I want to underline one of the great ironies of the auteur theory: it wanted to base itself on formal, aesthetic and objective criteria, but ended up giving a strangely central role of the notion of 'generation' and rebellion, and with it, to the desire for good fathers and bad fathers, for adopted fathers and 'Godfathers'. It not only shows the importance of



networks and peer-groups, of male bonding and tribal loyalties/rivalries in the post-Studio phase of Hollywood, but it also indicates how much the auteur theory in the 1970s began to change from being a critical classification system used mainly in Europe, to becoming a sort of semi-secret recognition sign between a new generation of filmmakers, who emerged after the demise of the studio-system and even after the end of the producer-director system. The auteur-theory comes to stand less and less for particular styles, themes or even mise-en-scene, applied from without (by critics or students), and more for a new kind of self-definition of the American director, which has to do with his (mainly 'his') position within the national and international film-market, including European film festivals, such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin or Rotterdam. One could say that the term 'auteur' in the 1980s makes a fascinating journey from critical category to brand-name and marketing-device, mainly because in the uncertain world of the cinema in the age of television, of blockbusters, mainstream cinema and independents, of art-cinema and new waves, there are very few sign-posts and markers, and in the end, it is the market that demands labels and recognition-signs: whether they like it or not, directors cannot just be directors - they have to advertise themselves, promote themselves, create a brand-identity for themselves: the filmmaker as superstar and the filmmaker as cult director are some of the most familiar results of this process. It makes the term 'author' in one sense almost meaningless, and in another so indispensable that we hardly question its assumptions, such as I laid them out in the opening section. But there is one figure whose career can illustrate this journey better than anyone else, and whose role in the rebirth of Hollywood has so far, I think, been underestimated: Francis Ford Coppola. That is why I call him the second Godfather of the New Hollywood, following in the footsteps of Corman, but also vastly more significant than Corman.

### **Francis Ford Coppola, the Godfather of New Hollywood**

Coppola is in fact a typical example of what happened to the concept of the auteur in the 1980s and 1990s. With Coppola, the concept of the author gets a new meaning, or if you like, several new dimensions which not only all belong together, but -when taken together - produce a distinct mise-en-abyme effect. What are the layers that superimpose themselves in this exemplary auteur of the post-classical period?

- the story of Coppola's own studio Zoetrope
- the successes of Coppola with THE GODFATHER films, APOCALYPSE NOW
- the curious gap between the very traditional story-telling and story-material of Coppola, and his very special avant-garde position, with respect to sound and new film technologies in THE CONVERSATION, APOCALYPSE NOW, ONE FROM THE HEART and BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA.
- the big gambler with the heavy losses

the complicated relationship of Coppola to both the American-Hollywood tradition (DW Griffith,

Orson Welles) and to his own European (i.e. Italian) background, his love of European directors as different as Abel Gance and Hans Jürgen Syberberg, Werner Herzog or Wim Wenders

In short, it is Coppola who can be said to have redefined the auteur concept, and this in several ways: he alternates between more 'commercial' films (RUMBLE FISH, BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA, the John Grisham adaptation) and more 'personal' work, like THE CONVERSATION or the film he is currently making). Also, Coppola has tried to reinvent the studio-system and replace it with electronic cinema (Zoetrope). But even without it, he is in the news, with his big ego, his big projects, his big

disasters (the story of the making of APOCALYPSE NOW proved almost more of an epic spectacular than the film itself). This means that he is a celebrity, i.e. he is 'known for being known', and as such 'bigger than life'. But he also like a brand name of a product, a sort of one man, one name logo: seal of quality, definer of expectations, locus of imaginary/fantasy identification. Yet what is perhaps just as interesting is that he is in some sense the 'failure' where those whom he inspired and supported became the successes. He was the pioneer, he was the Moses who saw the promised land but wasn't allowed to belong to it. Coppola finally, was the prophet of the New Hollywood, but it was those who came after him who fully reaped the benefits of his innovative strategies and experiments.

Coppola also redefines the author-concept, by transforming the connotations of both the heroic outsider and the classical artist; from seeing no contradiction between self-expression and the brand-name seal of quality. He is an over-reacher who is in love with failure, convinced of his artistic creativity, which does not prevent him from wanting access to economic and industrial power. Here, the director-as-auteur becomes a genre in himself, not least because of all the 'stories' into which he transforms his career. Whereas in old Hollywood the marks of authorship resided in the *mise en scene*, Coppola has made sure that in the New Hollywood, *mise en scene* is redefined as technology (sound/image). But Coppola is also the author of the new ethnicity: Martin Scorsese (Italian), Michael Cimino (Russian), Steven Spielberg (Jewish) and Spike Lee (Afro-American).

Coppola is also the author as industrial entrepreneur: in this sense, he was the inspiration for especially George Lucas and Steven Spielberg to rethink the studio system. They helped transform certain artistic, creative and aesthetic skills into a model derived not from the romantic or the modern artist, but rather from the medieval guild (with its masters and apprentices) or the Renaissance workshop (with its highly specialised skills and division of labour), or the Golden Age studio of a Rembrandt or a Rubens, where not everything attributed to Rembrandt was literally painted by him, brush-stroke for brush-stroke -- and still it carried his typical stylistic signature. This, at any rate, is probably how he would like to think of it. But the more appropriate model is perhaps the automobile industry with its practice of outsourcing, or its separate suppliers, or the computer industry, with firms like Apple challenging the old giant IBM (a good analogy to Zoetrope) or Intel, the chip maker and Microsoft, the software maker. The nearest equivalent to Bill Gates (who 'improved on' Apple's Steve Jobs) is in this respect George Lucas, director of AMERICAN GRAFFITI and STAR WARS, but who then decided to stop directing and instead built up a special effects firm, Industrial Light & Magic, as a high-tech unit, supplying the film industry with 'parts' (dinosaurs or spaceships, animatronics or digital effects), but which does not seek the publicity or the limelight of the 'director' or the 'event movie' itself. In this sense, the failed Zoetrope was reborn as a successful Industrial Light & Magic.

But if Lucas is one side of 'the Coppola legacy' then Steven Spielberg is the other. He is undeniably the most successful and best-known director-author of the New Hollywood (Spielberg is the Alfred Hitchcock to Quentin Tarrantino's Samuel Fuller). As we saw, he has his consistent themes and he is a very skilled *metteur en scene*, with his own stylistic signature. But he is a lot more besides: he is the director, where everything connects, because he occupies different spaces, appears in different guises, holds key position in very different branches of the business both material and immaterial, both as an individual person and as a star image. For instance:

- he plays the person, with an autobiography, when he tackles one of his big themes: the race and colour question, the Holocaust, the Second World War -- so he is 'serious' and 'responsible', like an

artist ought to be

- he can claim that he expresses himself in his film -- he shares the sufferings of the Jews and identifies with them, i.e. he has ethnic credibility
- he is extremely skilled at providing mass entertainment for all ages and all classes (he is 'classical' like Shakespeare in his quasi-universal appeal)
- he is one of the leader of a research and development team, which is also a major film studio (DreamWorks, with David Geffen and Jerry Katzenberg)
- he owns major technical patents, such as DTS, Digital Theatre Sound, and in this is comparable to the founder of the US film industry, Thomas Edison, the inventor.
- he is sometimes a producer of other people's films (Poltergeist)
- he is, like all creative Hollywood personnel, incorporated, i.e. a company in his own name, but he also has a production company, Amblin Films, through which is either sponsors or participates financially in other people's projects
- he goes about making his films like an engineer: they are incredibly well-crafted, beautifully and smoothly functioning objects.

A sample scene would be from JURASSIC PARK, when the Tyrannosaurus Rex gets hold of the children in the car. The film creates for its fantastic creatures a number of 'environments'. Spielberg uses special effects not to suggest wondrous worlds, or things that gives wings to your imagination, but to manufacture a set of very precise functional operations and performative effects. He needs to make the dinosaurs 'real' rather than fantastic, and he goes about it with all the deliberation and methodical rigour of an engineer. The film associates them with big trucks or mechanical vehicles: from earth moving vehicles to earth-shaking dinosaurs. But the film also turns them from prehistoric monsters into (zoo or wildlife) animals, by orchestrating their sounds and giving us a sense of the weight of their bodies. Finally, the film –Disney-fashion, gives them cartoon character emotions and motives. Spielberg turns machines as machines to machines as nature (as when the T-Rex feeds on the underbelly of the SUV as if he was lion feasting on a *wilderbeest* on the Serengeti park. He turns them from humans to cartoon figures (as in the fate of the geologist in the same scene).

To summarise: with the argument around the auteur as engineer we have come full circle. At the level of the director as author and as superstar, the name Spielberg is both a guarantee for value and quality (ie a brand name) and a guarantee of authenticity (he has credibility for his personal themes). He even played the game of adopting a father-figure: in CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, he makes François Truffaut, the very 'inventor' of the *politique des auteurs*, play a wise, elderly scientist. But unlike most traditional artist, Spielberg also has power in the system. He is present in so many different 'realities' or 'worlds' of the media, that the different roles he plays mutually legitimate and authenticate each other, even if they seem to contradict one another. Usually, an artist is the opposite from an engineer, an industrial entrepreneur is not trying to express his traumatic ethnic history, a man with a business is not usually a man with a mission). But as with other examples I've given when demonstrating the processes of authentication, and also when examining the concept of the star, what we find is that these contradiction do not cancel each other out, but rather confirm and reinforce each other.

Secondly, and finally, the contemporary auteur is once again at the head of the system and not the outsider struggling against the system. What the original auteur theory championed - the outsider

who fights against the film industry or the insider who has nothing but his stylistic talent to prove his integrity - is today the chairman of the company who runs a supply unit preferably owning all the most valuable patents in a particular industry. The models of authorship (the director as superstar) and prototypical product (the film as event-movie or concept movie) are now derived from industrial research & development, rather than from the traditional arts. This means that the artist is no longer opposed to the businessman, but is a businessman. If you like, the inverse is even truer: today the businessman, the 'engineer' has to be an 'artist', a 'wizard' in order to stay in business. From being a concept of classification, difference and distinction, the author has come to function as the brand-name, the marketing logo and the seal of endorsement on an industrial product. Whether that is a judgement on art and the artist or on us as consumers of culture and entertainment I leave up to others to decide.

1. In: Jon Lewis, ed., *The New American Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 11-37.