La politique des auteurs

• 1950's: debate auteur vs. scenario-led film: Les Cahiers du Cinéma headed by A. Bazin
  – A. Astruc (1948): camera = a pen (*la caméra stylo*) through which director expresses thoughts & sensibility
  – F. Truffaut (1954) directors=∗auteurs* with individual creative style (*metteurs-en-scène*)

• ‘Auteur’ can refer to
  – either a director’s discernible style thru mise-en-scène
  or
  – to film-making practices where the director’s signature is as much on scenario/script-writing as on film product itself
• Theory developed as a reaction to the 'cinéma de papa'

• Despite Hollywood / studio production processes → can be ‘auteur’ (e.g. Hitchcock, Ford)

• Andrew Sarris (USA): 'the auteur theory' --> agency of hierarchy of directors

• Movie (UK): valued cinema 'which had style, imagination, personality and, because of these, meaning'

• Principles of stylistic continuity: director is controlling force in the structure of a film.

• Proponents of 'auteur theory' --> Nouvelle Vague
Sarris: 3 basic attributes:

- technical competence that marks director's ability to understand and practice filmmaking techniques in expressive way

- coherent personal style, set of visual and narrative attributes recognizable in film after film (e.g. Ford's use of Monument Valley; Hitchcock's use of cross-tracking, shot/reverse shot, high angle; Fincher's dark cityscapes)

- a consistent view of the world, interior meaning or vision (a personal narrative unique to the director or major & consistent variation of larger narrative conventions)

Total authors (Godard, Varda, Wenders, Welles, Lynch)
• J. Renoir: a filmmaker needs to learn everything about technique & then forget it + a director really only makes one film in career
  – Ability to think cinematically, to know just right place to put camera, create stillness or motion in frame, understand exactly where an edit should occur = initial marks of auteur
  – Style = technique put to imaginative use

• Peter Wollen (UK): if we take auteur's body of work & strip away narrative variations, we discover a structure of basic thematic & stylistic traits, abstract pattern of ways of seeing & understanding the world cinematically
Evolution of auteurism

• Auteurism evolved over time
• Initially (1950’s): romantic & conservative aesthetic erasing context/ideology/eco structures, etc.
  – Focus on formalistic, stylistic, thematic structures
• 1960’s: Influence of structuralism (e.g. Metz) → *CduC + Movie* revisit ‘auteurism’
  – Potential of structuralism to give scientific legitimacy (objective approach vs. romantic subjectivity)
  – Underlying strategy to establish a total structure (cinema= one outlet for applying structuralist theories)
Criticisms

• Theory overtaking text & occulting other aspects of text (notion of pleasure, audience reception, spectatorship, ideology…)

• Ignores collaborative aspects of filmmaking & privileges director

• Nonetheless a valuable approach → ‘auteur’ as one structure among others producing meaning (e.g. genre, film industry)

• Displacement of ‘auteur’ → not central but ONE among other structures making up film text → yet remains a MAJOR element
Ideology

• After 1968 → CduC introduces ideology in the debate → exploration of Hollywood films that either ‘resist’ or reflect dominant ideology

• Althusser introduces concept of interpellation

• CduC & Screen (UK) address screen-spectator relationship using this analysis

• ISA’s (Ideological State Apparatuses) interpellate individuals as subjects/pre-existing structures (not agents)

• Mirroring process providing the subject with sense of national identity/belonging → meaning is received, not constructed
Post-structuralism

• 1970’s → pluralism of approaches (psychoanalysis, feminism, deconstruction, etc.)
• Mistrust for total theory
• All texts seen to be ‘result of double articulation discourse / non-discourse’ (le dit et le non-dit)
• Post-structuralism looks at all relevant discourses revolving around and within the text (semiotics, psychoanalysis, etc.)