

Definition

It is the French *masculine* word for 'author'.

It implies that there is a singular artist responsible for the piece of art.

This idea assumes that an 'auteur' has personal artistic control over the product, and that if you watch their body of work, you will be able to identify patterns, repetitions or motifs - an **auteur signature**.

Origins:

- *Cahiers du Cinema* magazine began to celebrate particular directors and hail them as 'auteur' directors in the 1950s. These directors demonstrated particular artistic skill whilst working within the studio system, notably Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles.
- *Camera stylo* - the camera is to the film director what the pen is to an author.
- Personal expression is key to being given the title of auteur.
- More concerned with the aesthetics and themes than structure & content.
- Lesser than the auteur is the 'metteur-en-scene' - a very good director and technician, but lacking in personal style.

Motif/signatures:

Can you identify repeated features in your focus film AND in other films made by the same 'auteur'?

How do you identify that the film 'belongs' to an auteur?

What is their artistic 'voice'?

Does your 'auteur' achieve all three of these? Does it matter? Does your auteur make films that are all the same? Are there any examples of your auteur moving outside of their usual style? Can you assign these motifs to the director or another member of the crew, star or studio? What does your director think about the label of 'auteur'?

**Visual Motifs
= Elements of form**

- Directors such as Wes Anderson have a clear visual style that identifies their work.
- What is your director's style and what scene shows this most clearly?
- Consider the role of cinematographer, composer and art director and their level of influence.

Thematic Motifs

- Interior meaning and message.
- A director may return to particular themes, ideologies and messages in their films.

Structural Motifs

- **Genre:** The style of a director from the early days of cinema may have become so synonymous with a genre that their style is now considered a code and convention of the genre. A director may have made innovations in a particular genre, for example Ridley Scott with his films *Blade Runner* and *Alien*.
- **Narrative:** Some directors have a narrative structure that they prefer, or a motif may be that they 'play' with narrative structures and POV's in their films. For example, Hitchcock's 'MacGuffin' or Nolan's use of narrative time and space.
- This is where you need to consider the role of editor and writer.

Pro Auteur:

- Sarris = A director must have a high level of technical competence, personal style and interior meaning to be considered an auteur.

Anti Auteur:

- Kael = Auteur theory 'glorifies trash' from directors making the same thing over and over. We should watch a film on its own merit, not because a particular person made it. 'A film is a film.'
- Film is a collaborative process; auteur theory minimises the creative role of the crew.
- Other artists may be called an auteur - the star, composer, cinematographer or studio.

The Experimental Auteur:

1. If a director's style is to make intertextual references throughout the film, is that being an original or just copying?
2. What is the director's personal vision? Is it similar to their other work?
3. Are the experiments the result of technological advances? Can the director take 'credit' for that?
4. What has inspired the director? Theatre? Art? Film?
5. What is the effect on the audience?
6. Is the director challenging mainstream ideas about what film is?