

Auteur Theory

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The worth of this theory has been questioned by some critics. But, it is particularly useful as a starting point for the interpretation of some films.

Auteur Theory suggests that a director can use the commercial apparatus of film-making in the same way that a writer uses a pen or a painter uses paint and a paintbrush. It is a medium for the personal artistic expression of the director.

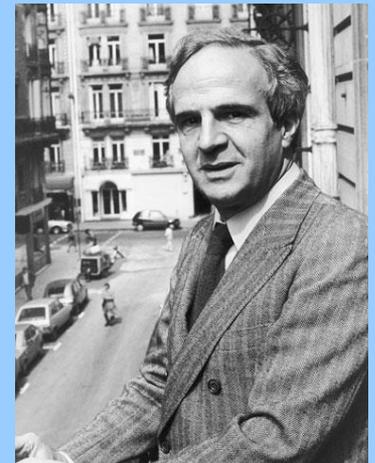
Do you agree?

Auteur Theory

In 1954, François Truffaut wrote an essay entitled *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema*. In this work he claimed that film is a great medium for expressing the personal ideas of the director.

He suggested that this meant that the director should therefore be regarded as an *auteur*. In fact, Truffaut once provocatively said that: "There are no good and bad movies, only good and bad directors"

François Truffaut



Auteur Theory suggests that the best films will bear their maker's 'signature'. Which may manifest itself as the stamp of his or her individual personality or perhaps even focus on recurring themes within the body of work.

Truffaut and the members of the *Cahiers* recognized that moviemaking was an industrial process. However, they proposed an ideal to strive for: the director should imprint his or her vision on the work (conversely, the role of the screenwriter was minimized in their eyes).

While recognizing that not all directors reached this ideal, they valued the work of those who neared it.

The film theorotician, André Bazin, explained that: *auteur* theory was a way of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next.

Bazin promoted the idea that films should reflect a director's personal vision and who also championed such filmmakers as Alfred Hitchcock

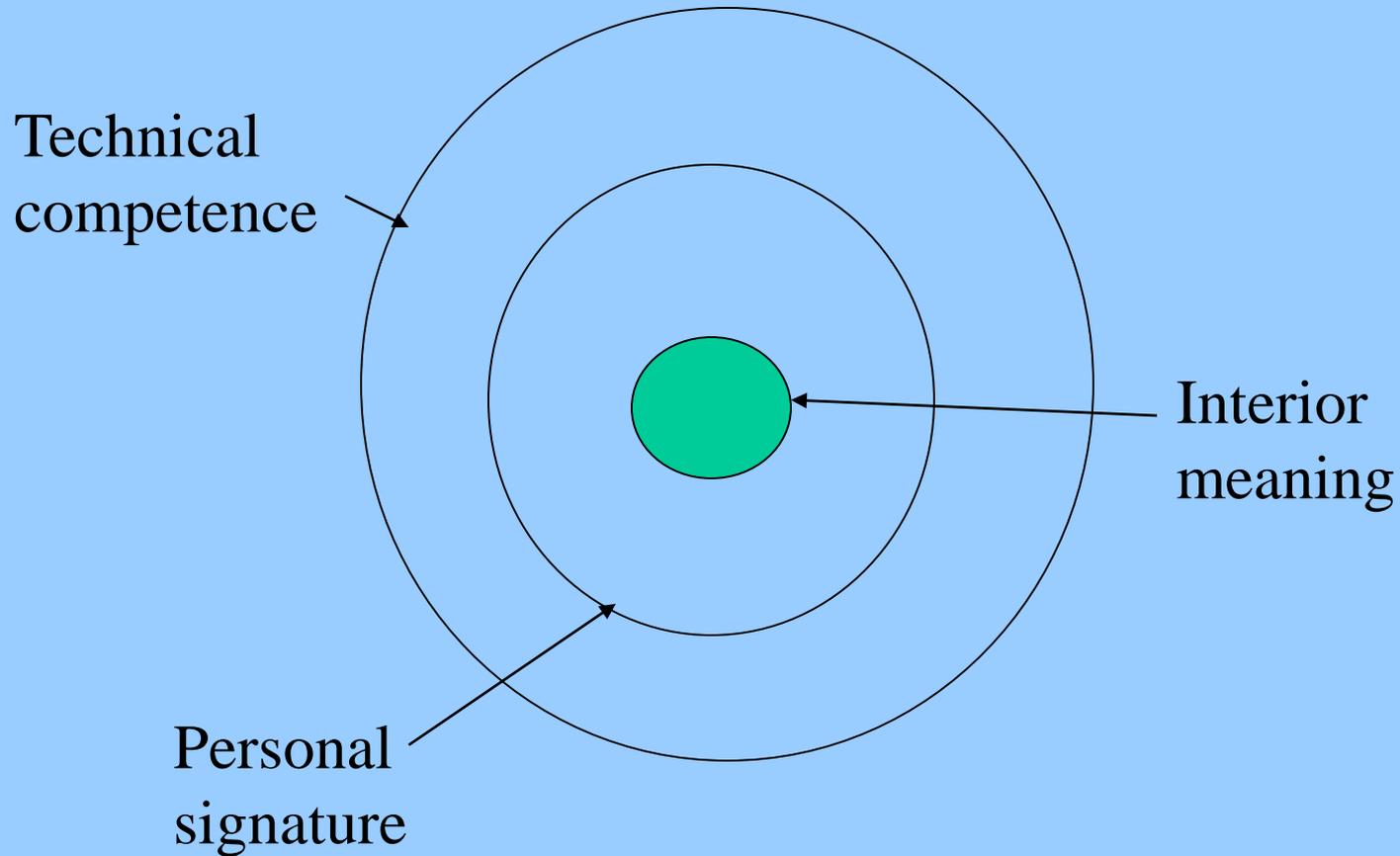


André Bazin

However, Bazin remained wary of the theory's
excesses

He also objected that other factors, such as
**social context are passed over in auteur
theory** and thought it overlooked a film in
favour of its creator.

Andrew Sarris' three 'competences'



How do our three directors fare here?

Let's try
out auteur
theory on
Hitchcock



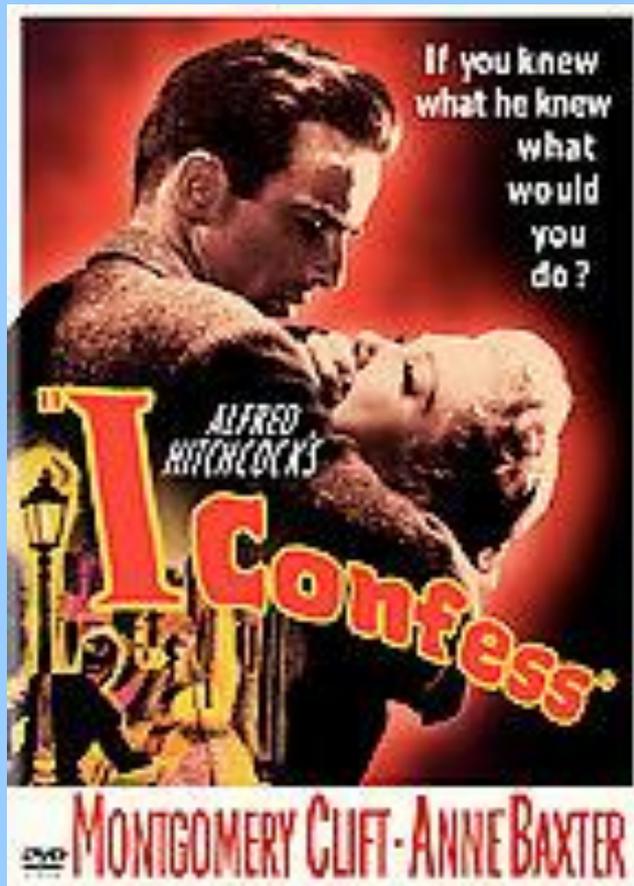


Key themes in his
films?

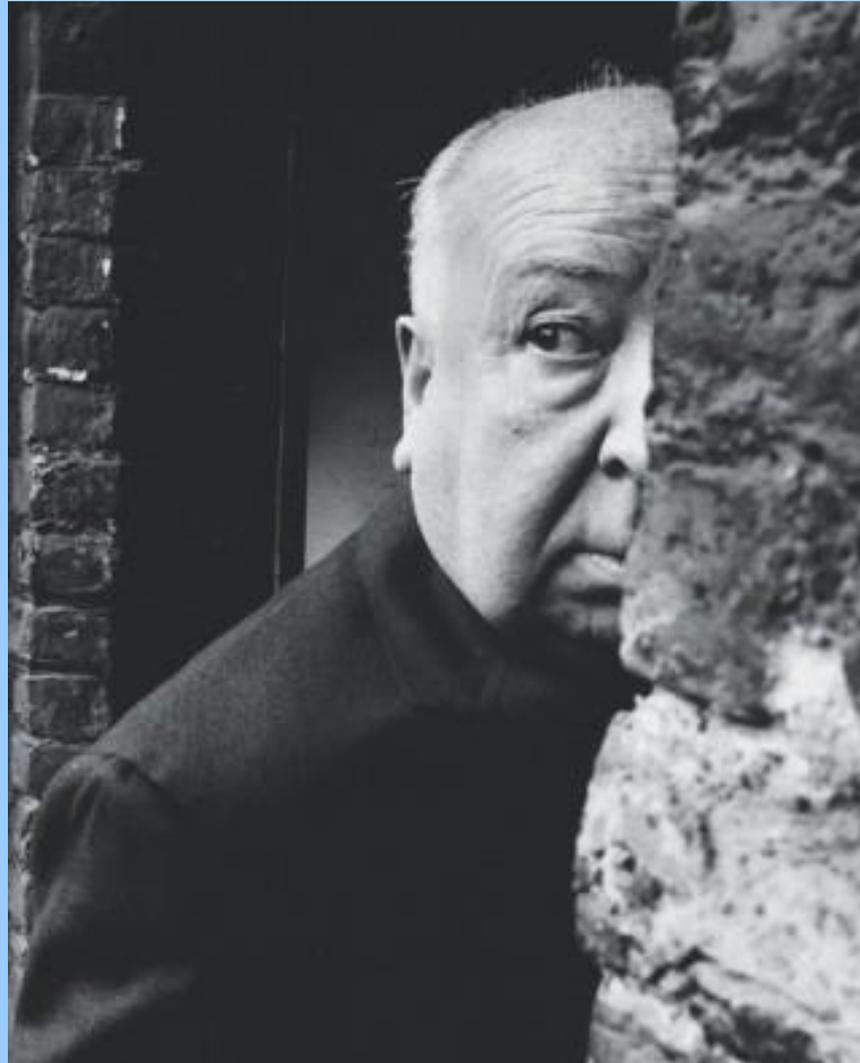
Key Hitchcock themes:



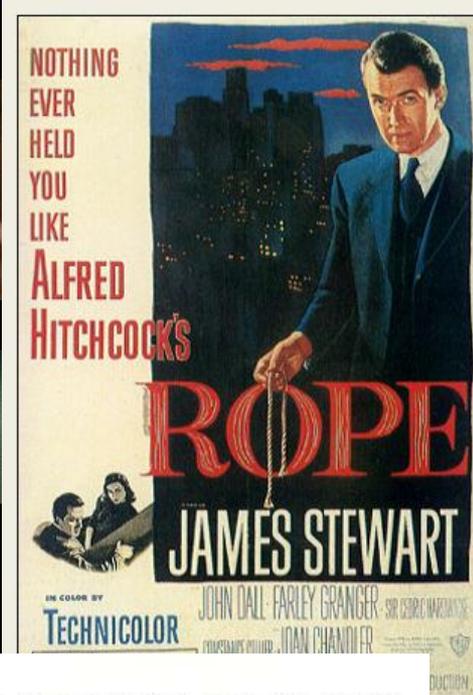
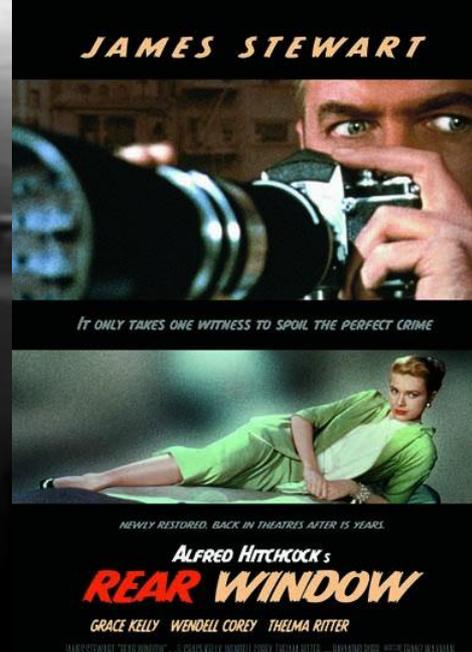
Catholic guilt



Voyeurism







SAME ACTORS

Or...

Tippi Hedren – The Birds



Priscilla Lane - Saboteur



Tippi Hedren - Marnie



Grace Kelly – Rear Window



Janet Leigh - Psycho



Doris Day – The Man Who Knew Too Much



Grace Kelly – To Catch A Thief



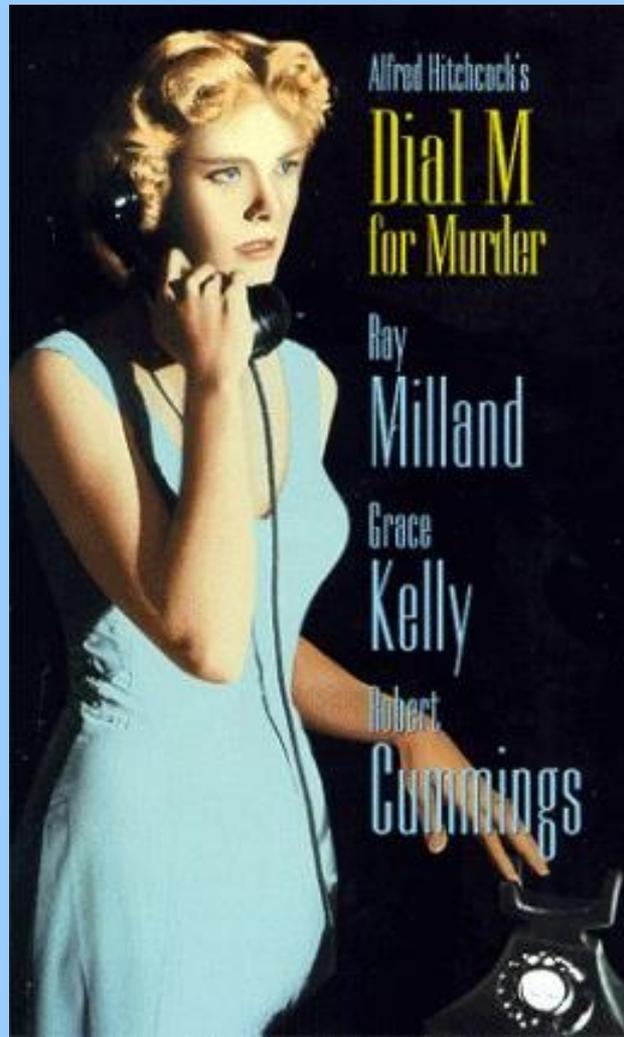
Aenny Ondra - Blackmail



Kim Novak - Vertigo



Grace Kelly – Dial M For Murder



Eva Marie Saint

- North By North West



Karen Black – Family Plot



ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

"dial **M** for Murder"

IF A WOMAN ANSWERS... HANG ON FOR DEAR LIFE!



Uses the same themes:

Suspense, guilt, murder

WARNER BROS.

WARNER COLOR





Vertigo



Saboteur



Psycho



Foreign Correspondant



Young And Innocent



Strangers
On A
Train

Rear Window



Rear Window



North By North West

Typical Hitchcock Ingredients



Man in unexpected trouble



Blonde love interest

Horizontal travel

Danger is vertical



Absent or dead figure haunts the living

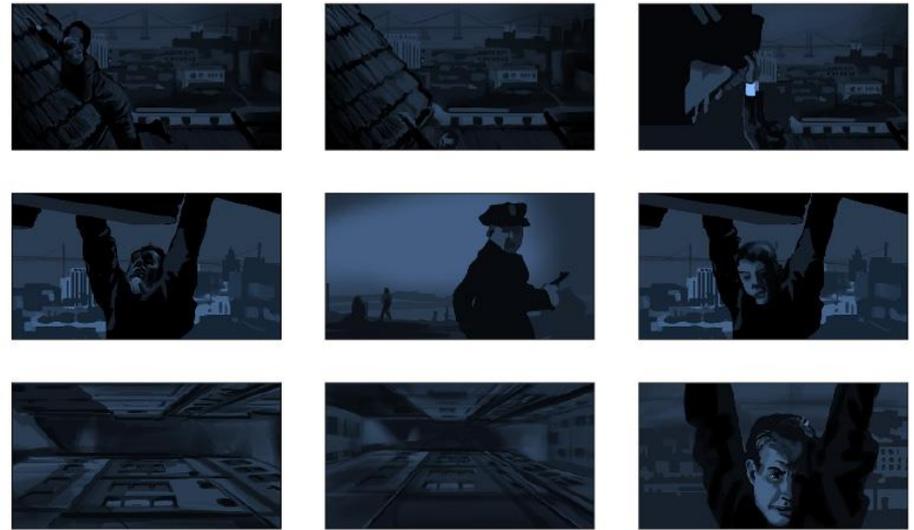


Domineering mother character

Authority is unhelpful or not to be trusted



Elaborate set in Rear Window



Meticulous pre-planning

Inventive use of sound



Technical competence

The MacGuffin



All the aforementioned themes etc Truffaut would point to grand body of work, recognisable style etc.

BAZIN – would agree :
Hitchcock is in charge. He would also probably look at his body of work as reflective of the period of maturing cinema, mid-twentieth century political attitudes, the influence of psychoanalysis, etc.

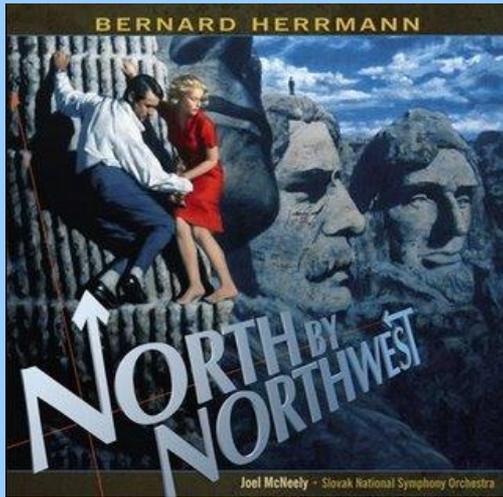


As we have seen, Hitchcock controls a lot of things in his film, and has a lot of creative control, hiring fresh screenwriters until they achieved his cinematic vision, instructing his camera operators in fine detail etc.



In terms of Sarris, Hitchcock hits all three 'circles'

Contributors to North by Northwest:



Music by Bernard Herrman



Roger Thornhill played by Cary Grant



Artwork by Saul Bass

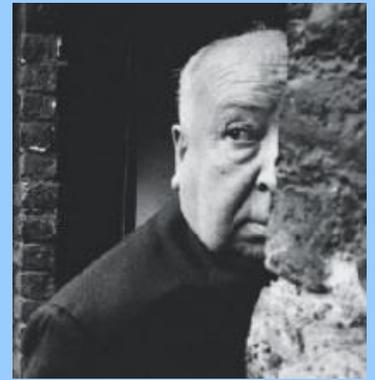


Cinematography by Robert Burks

Roland Barthes would say that it doesn't matter what Hitchcock intended; true 'meaning' comes from what you, the spectator 'decodes'.



Your task:



- Select three of the characteristics of Hitchcock films from the following list.
- Research online or in books how each characteristic is found and what purpose it may serve in Hitchcock's films.
- Write 500 words on how each characteristic can be identified as significant in *Vertigo*.
- Extracts from the film can be found on the website.

- The doubling of characters
- Relationships between male and female characters
- Dreams and reality
- Authority
- Mothers
- Use of soundtrack
- Cinematography
- Narrative structure
- Perspective
- Insanity
- The eye
- Female clothes
- Falling
- Portraits (painting and photographs)
- Guilt
- Appearance and reality
- Staircases

