

Alternatives to Auteurs

Graham Petrie

A Canadian scholar of European cinema, Graham Petrie's numerous publications includes one of the first books on Truffaut, *The Cinema of François Truffaut*, published in 1970, and *Hollywood Destinies*, about the careers of several European film directors after coming to Hollywood. In this article, which originally appeared in the Spring, 1973 issue of *Film Quarterly*, Petrie questioned auteurism's neglect of production realities and contexts and began to ask logical questions about the question of control of a film production. Petrie also raises questions about the potential distortions of film history when it is based on a series of auteurs, in opposition to Sarris, who had claimed that auteurism was a way of conceptually organizing the history of cinema. Petrie concludes by offering his own variation of the pantheon, in which only a few filmmakers who had virtually complete control of their films emerge as auteurs, although other categories are more inclusive of those in other roles (actors, producers, cinematographers, scriptwriters) than the pantheon of Sarris and other auteurists.

"No one ever really has final cut, even when you're the producer. Somebody else always owns the picture, and there's always always someone ready to take it away from you and screw it up."

John Huston¹

GEIST: I don't know if you have final cut . . .

SCHAFFNER: I don't. I don't think anybody in the U.S. of A., who makes a film for a major distributor, has final cut.²

The *auteur* theory was essentially an attempt to by-pass the issue of who, ultimately, has control over a film — an issue that Huston and Schaffner disclose with brutal frankness. By distilling something called "personal vision" from a film, and marketing this as the "essence" of its success, it was hoped to evade all the sordid and tedious details of power conflicts and financial inter-

ests that are an integral part of any major movie project. "Personal vision" made it unnecessary to pay much attention to such minor matters as: Who instigated the project, and for what motives? Who actually wrote the script, and how much of it survived? Who cast the film, and for what reasons? Who edited the final product, and under whose directives? All these could gratefully be swept aside, and attention concentrated on what was really of significance: the discovery of recurring themes, characters, and situations in film after film of one's chosen hero.

The contempt for fact displayed by *auteurists* at their peak sometimes achieved breathtaking proportions. Time and again they would confess ingenuously that they hadn't the faintest idea whether Hawks or Ford or Fuller or Aldrich had really *wanted* to make a particular film, had contributed anything to the script

or casting, or had even directed several of the key sequences. All this, they confided was of little importance when set against their own intuition that the film *obviously* bore the director's personal stamp from beginning to end. This habit of arguing from preconceptions has so thoroughly permeated contemporary film criticism that a recent article on "Welles's Use of Sound" can use the railway station scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* as one of its key illustrations without mentioning — or even showing awareness of — the fact that this scene was not directed by Welles himself.³

After this kind of thing it is something of a relief to read Garson Kanin's malicious comments on the Warner Brothers assembly line and to discover that Michael Curtiz (a recent candidate for hagiography) "sometimes started shooting a script without reading it" and that "frequently a director at Warner's wouldn't even see his assembled stuff."⁴ To a hard-core *auteurist*, of course, this would merely provide further confirmation of his belief that a director's personal vision can somehow transcend otherwise insurmountable obstacles, but the recent massive accumulation of evidence of this kind must surely give the rest of us pause.

As books on cameramen and scriptwriters begin to pour off the presses, and interviews with them begin to fill the pages of the magazines,⁵ it becomes evident that some radical rethinking will have to be done, and that most of the lazy and comfortable assumptions that have become habitual even to many who would indignantly deny that they were *auteurists* will have to be abandoned. It is no longer going to be enough to assume that the director's contribution is automatically of major significance; equally, it will be necessary to avoid the dangers of replacing one culture hero by another and launching into "The Cameraman as Superstar" and solemn studies of the personal vision of Sol Polito or James Wong Howe.

There are two directions that this reassessment might fruitfully take. One could be a thorough consideration of the cinema as a cooperative art and of the ways in which it thereby differs from fiction, poetry, painting, and even music and drama. (The two last require collaborators before they can fully exist and they can be performed badly or well, but *King Lear* is still a great play and Beethoven's Ninth a great symphony despite all the inadequate or horrendous incarnations they have achieved: one is dissatisfied with a particular interpretation and not with the orig-

inal work itself. One has only one version of a film to judge, however, and it is *that* which becomes either bad or good.)⁶ And a second might be a serious attempt to analyze the status of the director in Europe (and perhaps America in the silent period and the last five years) as opposed to the "Hollywood of 1927–1967 — the heyday of the big studios and producers.

It is ironic that, at the very moment when *auteur* critics have begun to get over their obsession with themes and are making daring forays into the territory of visual style, the whole question of the responsibility for the way a film "looks" should be thrown into doubt by cameramen who tell us that X "knew nothing about lighting" or Y "left all the lighting to me." But this in turn may produce unexpected benefits, for it forces critics, perhaps for the first time, to ask what it is that constitutes a "visual style." To what extent is it the arrangement of the lights and the choice of lenses, filters, and gauzes (almost invariably the prerogative of the director of photography), and to what extent is it framing and composition, the use of a static or moving camera, the type of location and setting, the establishment of a particular color scheme, the choice of costumes and make-up, and the creation of a basic editing rhythm (all of which *may* be the responsibility of the director)? The complexities of this type of approach are evident when one considers that it is perfectly possible that in a given film the balance of light and shadow, the visual effect of the close-ups, and the movement of the camera may be totally the work of the director of photography; the pattern, order, and type of shot may have been laid down in the script; the costumes and sets may have been chosen by the studio; and the editor and producer may create the final shape of the film between them without even consulting the director. In these circumstances what sense does it make to talk confidently of so-and-so's "visual style" and how can we ever be sure that we are attributing credit where it really belongs? Yet these are questions that have to be answered if we are ever to go beyond the bland assumption that "everything" (or at least "everything that matters") in a film can be credited to its director.

It is also worthy of note that, once the young French critics who had inaugurated and polemicized the *auteur* theory actually came to the stage of making films of their own, their enthusiasm for their earlier ideas began rapidly to fade. Truffaut has recently been

expressing much more interest in the nature of a film's script than its direction, while Rohmer has abandoned the whole process of film criticism completely. It is possible that their own experience of the complexities of getting a film into production has led them to see how over-simplified their previous assumptions had been – at a time when, paradoxically, their own films have given the term “personal cinema” a coherent and justifiable meaning. The theory can then be seen as a kind of wish-fulfillment, a convincing of themselves that it was possible for *them* to make films, their own films and on their own terms; once they had succeeded in doing this, the theory had served its purpose and could be left behind. The staunchest defenders of *auteurism* now are probably to be found in America, where it serves to bolster the self-respect and boost the egos of American directors, as well as providing a convenient way of organizing a film course or getting a book into print. Its connections with the realities of film-making, however, remain as tenuous as they ever were.

The flaw in the *auteur* theory is not so much its assumption that the director's role is of primary importance as its naive and often arrogant corollary that it is *only* the director who matters and that even the most minor work by *auteur* X is automatically more interesting than the best film of non-*auteur* Y. What good does it do Kazan's reputation, for instance, to insist on including in a retrospective of his films the unwatchable *Sea of Grass*, a work that Kazan himself has disowned as a purely commissioned piece, and that the program notes to the showing at the BFI glumly admitted is worthless? And why continue to inflict on Fritz Lang “credit” for *Der Tiger von Eschnapur*/*Das Indische Grabmal* and bewail the “slaughter” performed on them by English and American distributors, when Lang spent most of his time on the set lamenting the depths to which he had sunk in being obliged to make these films, and concerned himself chiefly with adjusting the folds of Valery Inkijonoff's costume and saying that what he *really* wanted to do was to film Camus?⁷ One of the *auteurist's* main defenses is that his methods allow him to rescue neglected films – but there are some films that probably deserve to remain neglected.

By focusing attention so exclusively on a limited number of figures the *auteurist* also runs the opposite risk of overlooking eminently worthwhile films that

cannot conveniently be slotted into any of his favorable categories. Films like *Dark Victory* and *Now, Voyager* are left in limbo because Edmund Goulding and Irving Rapper are not considered worthy of *auteur* status; yet both films are still thoroughly watchable and transcend magnificently the stupidity of their plots. It is not, however, through the “personal vision” or “personal style” of the director that the films achieve this, and it would be impossible to take five minutes at random from either *Dark Victory* or *Now, Voyager* and attribute them with any confidence to either Goulding or Rapper on the basis of visual style or thematic material alone. In most respects the two films are interchangeable: they are the product of a particular *genre* and a particular studio, and in theme, structure, moral tone, sets, costumes, lighting, and camera style they meet the requirements laid down by these rather than expressing anything deeply felt on the part of director or cameraman.

The films, however, are not totally anonymous: they are studio products, put together by craftsmen who were also minor artists, but what gives them their lasting quality is the artistry of Bette Davis, who wielded much more power at Warner's at that time than most directors (and even read her scripts right through before committing herself to filming them). She is not in any sense the “author” or “creator” of these films, she did not write or photograph or direct them, but in a very real sense they were conceived for and around her, and she probably had as decisive an effect on their shaping as any of her collaborators. They are *her* films, and when people go to see them today it is Bette Davis they go to see them for.

The situation becomes more complex if we try to apply a similar approach to a film that is almost universally considered to “belong” to its director: *Ninotchka*. Certainly this film is full of Lubitsch “touches”: it displays the elegance, the wit, the cynicism, the total lack of respect for conventional moral susceptibilities that we associate with his work (and which even pre-*auteurist* critics of the thirties had managed to isolate and identify). In moral tone and social milieu, in characters and situations, it forms part of a world that Lubitsch had been creating as recognizably his own for the previous 15 years. And yet, from today's standpoint, the film belongs as much to Garbo as it does to Lubitsch. It forms an integral stage of her own career – a career that displays a degree of

continuity and artistic coherence comparable to that of most Hollywood directors. It was a film that Garbo wanted, and needed, to make at least as much as Lubitsch did: it gave her a chance to display a neglected facet of her talent and to show her potential as a comedienne. She had more say in the choice of technicians than Lubitsch and insisted, as usual, that William Daniels act as director of photography. The film was made by Garbo's MGM rather than Lubitsch's Paramount, and though the differences between Paramount glamor (in terms of sets, costumes, and lighting) and MGM glamor may be slight, there is no doubt that they exist. And although Lubitsch supervised and contributed to the script, it is certainly possible to see Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's writing as having as much connection with Wilder's later *One, Two, Three* and *Some Like it Hot* as with Lubitsch's earlier films.

An understanding of the basic intersecting forces that went together to make up films like *Ninotchka* and *Now, Voyager* can only help to enrich our appreciation of the films, and is surely preferable to distorting *Ninotchka* by trying to see it as “all” Lubitsch, or neglecting *Now, Voyager* because there is no convenient category in which to slot Irving Rapper. Indeed we might begin to develop a degree of sophistication that allows us to enjoy a film for something more than the “personal vision” of its director – for its photography, its costumes, its music and even (like the humble and much-despised fans of Hollywood's past) for its stars.

There is no need, of course, to neglect or degrade the director and it is worth remembering that many European and even American directors had been identified (and written about) as artists with something personal to convey many decades before the *auteur* theory appeared. A partial list of these figures would include: Eisenstein, Griffith, Hitchcock, Murnau, Pudovkin, Chaplin, Von Stroheim, Ford, Lubitsch, Capra, Mamoulian, and Preston Sturges. The *auteur* theory had the effect of shaking up and often reversing conventional evaluations, and its most lasting contribution has probably been the discovery and rehabilitation of the neglected figures of the formerly despised “action” genres, together with the American films of Lang and Renoir; yet here too it should be pointed out that Manny Farber has been praising the “masculine” values of Walsh, Fuller, and Siegel for many years and for reasons that have little to do with *auteurism*. What we can usefully do now, is to start

sorting out and re-examining some of the *auteurist* preconceptions that have become petrified into meaningless dogma.

Granted that the cinema *can* be a “personal art,” how do we set about defining this? It is certainly possible to identify recurring themes, characters, and situations that reappear throughout the work of many directors, but to rely on these alone, as *auteurists* tend to do, is to court disaster. The continuity may be the result of working within a certain genre, or for a particular studio, or in habitual collaboration with a favorite scriptwriter or actor, just as much as it may spring from a deeply felt need of the director's temperament (and even here the recurrence of a particular theme may indicate a shallow or obsessive vision rather than a fruitful one). To try to isolate a “personal style” based on visual qualities is even more dangerous: there are not more than a handful of American directors to whom one can safely attribute a distinctive visual (or aural, or editing) style that persists no matter with whom they are collaborating or for whom they are making the film. My own list would include Griffith, Welles, Keaton, Chaplin, Von Sternberg (in the films with Dietrich), Ford (in the Westerns at least), Nicholas Ray (for the consistently bizarre quality of his images), and Kubrick.

Even if these difficulties have been overcome, and we have succeeded in agreeing on something – in theme, characters, visual composition, editing, settings, use of music, or what have you – that sets one director apart from his fellows and can reliably be traced as persisting in at least a significant number of his films, there are other problems to be taken into account. Do we insist on pursuing this personal factor into the deepest recesses of the hack and commissioned work that the director may have been forced to churn out, or do we settle on some kind of dividing line that marks off work that is worth considering from that which is not? How do we cope with actors, cameramen, composers, set designers, and scriptwriters who may also have evolved a “personal style” over a series of films (bearing in mind that here too we have difficulties in establishing degrees of freedom and of choice, many cameramen having confessed that they changed their lighting style according to the studio they worked for; while the precarious and often humiliating status of the writer in Hollywood needs little further documentation)?

All these questions lead ultimately back to the issue of control raised in the quotes from Huston and Schaffner. One can take the *auteurist* position that "personality" is some kind of mystic quality that exists in a vacuum, and can be examined in total isolation from such mundane factors as whether the director had anything very much to do with initiating, writing, casting, photographing, scoring, designing, producing, or editing the film for which we are giving him sole credit. It is at least consistent with this standpoint that those few Hollywood figures of the thirties and forties who *did* manage to secure something of this kind of control, being able to choose, write or produce their own projects – men like Stevens, Wyler, Huston, Capra, Sturges, and Mamoulian – have been steadfastly belittled by *auteurists* and insulted for displaying no "personality." Or one can try to work towards a viewpoint based on some kind of knowledge of who actually did what in a particular film, and why; and only then begin to apply criteria of artistic evaluation. As far as the status of the director as an artist is concerned, a useful starting point (though it would have to be used with modesty and flexibility) might be this quotation from Eisenstein:

Unity makes any form of creative cooperation possible – not only between a director and an actor, but between a director and a composer and, particularly between a cameraman and a director. This applies primarily to the cinema, where all these problems acquire particular significance and acuteness. Cooperation exists in every collective where there is unity of style.

When, then, is a "conflict" justified? When can the director behave like a "tyrant"? First, when a member of the collective does not fully perceive the importance of stylistic requirements. Useless to cry dictatorship; it is the director who is responsible for the organic unity of style of the film. That is his function, and in this sense he is a unifier.⁸

It may very well be true, as Andrew Sarris has argued, that English-language critics and audiences have overestimated the freedom of the European director and that he has often had to put up with restrictions at least as confining as those of his American counterpart. The fact remains, however, that Hollywood between the coming of sound and the end of the fifties had no exact equivalent anywhere else in the world. Films were shaped to suit the talents and

the tastes of the producers and the stars, or to fit the requirements of an established film *genre*, or to exploit a mood or a theme that was fashionable (or thought to be fashionable) at that time; they were rarely made because a director desperately wanted to make them. Once filming began, the director had to adapt himself to the whims of his producer, the accepted "look" and moral tone of his studio, the requirements of a script that, in most cases, someone else had written, the limitations imposed by the talents or the screen image of his actors, a tightly organized budget and production schedule, and the knowledge that, once he was finished, the film would be taken away and edited by someone else, often in accordance with imperatives that had nothing whatever to do with what he may have been trying to express. All this is familiar enough, but it bears repeating in the light of some of the more starry-eyed versions of the Hollywood director that we have been given in the past few years. The European director encountered some or all of the same limitations, but rarely in so massive and uncompromising a form, and there has always been a greater opportunity in Europe for the director to *inaugurate* his own film and not merely do the best he can with material allotted to him.

In the groupings which follow, therefore, I have placed together figures from the American, European, and Oriental film-making traditions, *not* on the basis of some elusive and idiosyncratically applied "personality," but according to the degree of creative freedom they can reasonably be assumed to have enjoyed during the most important periods of their careers. A reformulation of this kind might provide a valuable antidote to the almost maniacal "Pantheon-building" that has dominated much of the discussion of film during the last decade (in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie* as much as by Andrew Sarris). My aim is to restore some sense of practicality to an activity that has become increasingly divorced from reality, and my groupings are not intended to imply value judgments as between one category and its fellow. The fact that one man had more creative freedom than another does not automatically make him a better artist (and many film-makers have wasted or abused the freedom granted to them); but a knowledge of the degree and type of freedom enjoyed will allow us to replace fantasy by common sense when talking about their work.

The listings also make no pretense at being exhaustive and are intended simply to suggest the considerations that should be taken into account and to offer a few representative names of each type.

Creators

Those who, in all or most of their completed films, were able to do all or most of the following: write, choose, or collaborate closely on the script; have a decisive voice in the choice of actors and technicians; direct; produce, or work closely with a sympathetic producer; edit or supervise the editing of the version that was released for public viewing.

Strictly speaking, only *Chaplin* truly belongs in this category: he is the only figure in the history of the cinema to have been able to make *all* his feature-length works exactly as he wanted to make them and

to release them without interference or alteration to the finished product.

However, some others come close to this level:

Eisenstein: if we leave aside films like *Que Viva Mexico!* and *Bezhin Meadow*, that were never completed, Eisenstein was given total artistic freedom in the preparing and shooting of all his films. Only *October* was altered after completion, and even *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* was finally released exactly as he had made it.

Griffith: from about 1914 to 1925 had complete artistic and usually financial control of his work, writing his own scripts and editing the films himself. Any assessment of his work, however, should take into account his collaboration with Billy Bitzer, Lillian Gish, and others, and should note the decline of his career after 1925.

Keaton: enjoyed a freedom similar to that of Chaplin between 1920 and 1928. *The Cameraman* and *Spite Marriage* after that period are still recognizably, and



Figure 12.1 Charlie Chaplin (with Paulette Goddard) wrote, produced, directed, scored and starred in *Modern Times* (United Artists, 1936)

beautifully, Keaton, despite the pressures that were to destroy his career soon afterwards.

Von Sternberg: seems to have possessed a good deal of freedom even before the collaboration with Dietrich. For her, he wrote, designed, and often photographed the films, and was left in peace by Paramount to do so, as long as box-office receipts held up.

Lubitsch: was his own producer at Paramount for most of his career in sound films and was able to control scripts and casting to a very large extent.

Capra: enjoyed almost total freedom at Columbia during the thirties, his work being both financially and artistically profitable.

Hitchcock: both in Britain in the thirties and in Hollywood after that obtained a position of respect and authority. Some of his early Hollywood work is largely routine, but over his career as a whole he has generally made only the films he wanted to make, and on his own terms. He is far from being a one-man show, however, and his writers, cameramen (especially Robert Burks), composers (Bernard Herrmann), and actors (James Stewart, Grace Kelly, etc.) deserve a good deal of credit for the success of his films.

Bergman: since 1950 has exerted total control over all his films. But he works with collaborators of genius: Gunnar Fischer, Sven Nykvist, Max von Sydow, Eva Dahlbeck, Bibi Andersson, Liv Ullman, etc.

Fellini: since *The White Sheik* has made films on his own terms, to the extent that his name is now routinely attached to their titles.

Truffaut: all his films have been his own projects, scripted or co-scripted by himself. Only *The Mississippi Mermaid* has suffered from external interference, and there only in the version shown in North America.

Kubrick: the most totally independent of major contemporary American film-makers. But he "voluntarily" cut *2001* and has just done the same on *A Clockwork Orange*. The scale of his projects requires a good deal of assistance on the level of special effects, but, on the other hand, script and photography are often handled by Kubrick himself, uncredited.

Misfits, Rebels, Unfortunates, and Professionals

Those who had this kind of control often enough for it to make sense to talk about *some at least* of their films

as displaying artistic coherence and continuity. At significant stages of their career, however, they did work that was purely routine and to which it is probably unnecessary to devote much attention (whereas with the first group almost every film is one which the director *chose* to make and all should therefore be taken into account when evaluating his achievement). Or, in some cases, several key films have been so mutilated before release that critics spend more time lamenting the "lost" film than studying what remains.

Von Stroheim: the archetypal representative of this group.

Welles: had complete control over *Citizen Kane*. But to what extent in *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Touch of Evil* are we seeing the film that Welles intended us to see?

Ford: the thorough professional, who makes three films he has little interest in, in order to make the fourth that he really cares about. Some 25% of his work, then, was made with a large degree of creative freedom. But which is that 25%? Ford, for one, won't tell us, and his British admirers think that it was *Seven Women*.

Buñuel: since *Viridiana* (1961) has obtained the freedom that he possessed only sporadically in Mexico in the fifties.

Lang: the German films were made by a man with a pretty free hand (though he was heavily indebted to the scripts of Thea von Harbou). The American films were mostly assignments, though he did a good job on many of them.

Renoir: a few beautiful, uniquely personal films, and many that suffered from the demands and compromises effected by studios. *Madame Bovary*, *Toni*, *Elena et les Hommes* and *La Règle du Jeu* (until its restoration in 1965) were among those that suffered from cuts by producers and distributors. Most of the films of the twenties and some in the thirties were done purely on commission.

Losey: his career has been a running battle with producers and distributors. Only the films with Pinter perhaps emerge as "pure."

Pudovkin: had something of the freedom of Eisenstein in the twenties and up to *Deserter* (1933). His work after that serves the Russian state more than himself.

Kurosawa: *The Seven Samurai* and *The Idiot* were butchered by his studio. Others were only lightly massacred. A few have survived intact.

Chabrol: a period of total self-indulgence in the late fifties and early sixties (originally financed from his own funds) was followed by the routine thrillers of the mid-sixties. The films since *Les Biches* have been very much a team effort, with Stéphane Audran, Michel Bouquet, Paul Gégau, and Jean Rabier contributing perhaps as much as Chabrol himself.

Mann: the Westerns of the fifties (and *El Cid*) form a coherent group of films on which Mann suffered little outside interference or pressure and worked with sympathetic producers and scriptwriters.

Scene-Stealers and Harmonizers

This is not limited solely to directors and includes any major collaborator on a film whose influence seems to have been decisive in creating its quality or lasting impact. It could be the star round whom the script was written and for whom the technicians were chosen; the scriptwriter whose work was so powerfully visualized that it needed little alteration in the filming; the director of photography who created images that transcended a banal script and poor acting; a creative or domineering producer in whose hands the director was little more than a puppet; or an erratic or routine director who rose to the challenge of particularly congenial material or circumstances.

This category includes several figures mentioned already as collaborators in the first category. It also overlaps with the second, to the extent that these people rarely had *total* artistic control over their films and that their influence is evident only in a *proportion* of the films on which they worked. There is value, however, in studying aspects of their careers as a whole and in trying to establish patterns of continuity.

Among film stars, for example, *Greta Garbo* and *Bette Davis* were, at the peak of their careers, almost invariably the factor around which discussion of a film would start. Director, cameraman, and supporting actors were chosen to suit *them*, and they possessed powers of veto or noncooperation which ensured that any debate was usually settled to their satisfaction. Each developed a consistent artistic personality on the screen, around which the script, sets, and lighting were shaped: there is a fine line to be drawn between this and mere type-casting, of which *Garbo* was more

nearly the victim than *Davis*. *James Stewart* might come into this category too, so many films of quality – from *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, through *Vertigo* and *The Man from Laramie* to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* – having centered round his varied *personae* as the slow-burning, passive, almost victimized spectator who finally rouses himself to action.

Val Lewton is perhaps the classic example of a producer whose films display a homogeneity of theme and atmosphere, no matter who happened to direct them.

Boris Kaufman, *Gregg Toland*, and *Raoul Coutard* are cameramen whose work is recognizable no matter which director they are filming for. Normally they have worked with men of great distinction, but we will have to learn to talk of the visual style of *Godard* and *Coutard*, of *Vigo* and *Kaufman*, of *Wyler* and *Toland*.

Scriptwriters would include *Dudley Nichols* (taking into account his collaboration with *Ford* in particular), *Jacques Prévert* (who imposes his own patterns on *Renoir* as well as on *Carné*) and *Thea von Harbou* and *Carl Mayer*, whose impact on German Expressionist film is all-pervasive.

There are many directors who were identified with a particular kind of film and could be trusted to carry that through efficiently, but have displayed little noticeable talent outside their chosen area. Some of these would be: *James Whale* (horror films), *Vittorio de Sica* (neo-realism), *Raoul Walsh* (gangster and war), *Michael Curtiz* (melodrama and costume dramas), *Roger Corman* (horror) and *Budd Boetticher* (Western). All these enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom in making films of this type (partly because so many of them were low-budget) and all are quite heavily dependent on the quality of their collaborators.⁹

It would be possible to continue, inventing other categories and drawing more and more refined and tenuous distinctions, but I prefer to stop here. I am concerned simply with suggesting that there are other ways of thinking about the personal factor in film-making than those propagated by *auteurism* and the common assumption that one must start with the director when trying to determine the quality or value of any particular film. In many cases, of course, the director *is* the decisive influence – in one or two or a group of films, or, more rarely, over his entire

career – but this is far from being always, or even normally, the case, at least as far as Hollywood is concerned; and too much injustice and distortion has been performed in recent film criticism for the sake of providing a neat and tidy solution to the extremely complex question of artistic freedom and creativity in

the movies. Good and even great films have been produced in circumstances where directional control has been negligible, or where other contributors have played an equally significant role; a major concern of film criticism should now be to discover how and why this should be so.

Notes

- 1 *New York Times* (Sunday, December 10, 1972).
- 2 *Film Comment*, vol. 8, no. 3 (September–October 1972), p. 36.
- 3 Phyllis Goldfarb. "Orson Welles's Use of Sound," *Take One*, vol. 3, no. 6 (1972), p. 11.
- 4 *Sight and Sound*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Summer 1972), p. 136. Kanin also claims that, to the best of his knowledge, no Hollywood director of this period (the late thirties and early forties) had the right to final cut.
- 5 Spreading, in an interesting reversal of the usual trend, West–East across the Atlantic: see *Cinéma 72*, no. 168 for one of the rare French articles on cinematographers.
- 6 This is true even of a remake, which – unless it was originally

taken from a stage play – is never *exactly* the same material merely performed in a different manner. Which also accounts for the fact that a script that was never made into a film – even one by Eisenstein – has a curiosity rather than an artistic value.

- 7 "Souvenirs de Valery Inkijinoff (II)," *Cinéma 72*, no. 168, pp. 82–3.
- 8 *Notes of a Film Director* (Dover, New York, 1970), p. 113.
- 9 I am not intending to slight these men by calling attention to their limitations. Bergman would probably make a mess of directing a Western. The point is that he has not tried – or been forced – to do so.

Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema

Claire Johnston

Claire Johnston was an important early voice in British feminist film criticism. She is the editor of *Notes on Women's Cinema* (1973) and *The Work of Dorothy Arzner – Towards a Feminist Cinema* (1975) for the British Film Institute. Johnston was one of the first critics to challenge the almost exclusively masculine orientation of orthodox auteurism. In this essay, which originally appeared in *Notes on Women's Cinema*, she rejects "sociological" analysis of film and its false issues of realism for the representation of women, and instead approaches the depictions of women in the male-dominated world of movies as signs of masculinist ideology. From this perspective she reconsiders the by-then standard comparison of Ford and Hawks, as well as opening up auteurism to the consideration of women directors such as Ida Lupino, Dorothy Arzner, and Agnès Varda.

Myths of Women in the Cinema

... there arose, identifiable by standard appearance, behaviour and attributes, the well-remembered types of the Vamp and the Straight Girl (perhaps the most convincing modern equivalents of the medieval personifications of the Vices and Virtues), the Family Man and the Villain, the latter marked by a black moustache and walking stick. Nocturnal scenes were printed on blue or green film. A checkered table-cloth meant, once for all, a 'poor but honest' milieu; a happy marriage, soon to be endangered by the shadows from the past symbolised by the young wife's pouring of the breakfast coffee for her husband; the first kiss was invariably announced by the lady's gently playing with her partner's necktie and was invariably accompanied by her kicking out with her left foot. The conduct of the characters was predetermined accordingly.

(Ervin Panofsky in "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," 1934 and in "Film: An Anthology," D. Talbot, ed., New York, 1959)

Panofsky's detection of the primitive stereotyping which characterised the early cinema could prove useful for discerning the way myths of women have operated in the cinema: why the image of man underwent rapid differentiation, while the primitive stereotyping of women remained with some modifications. Much writing on the stereotyping of women in the cinema takes as its starting point a monolithic view of the media as repressive and manipulative: in this way, Hollywood has been viewed as a dream factory producing an oppressive cultural product. This over-politicised view bears little relation to the ideas on art expressed either by Marx or Lenin, who both pointed to there being no direct connection between the development of art and the material basis of society. The idea of the intentionality of art which this view implies is extremely misleading and retrograde, and short-circuits the possibility of a critique