

03

film authorship: the director as auteur

In this chapter you will learn:

- an historical account of *how* and *why* some film directors are raised to the level of artists or 'authors' (*auteurs*)
- the criteria critics use to raise a director to the status of an *auteur*, such as the stylistic and thematic consistency across their films
- how Jean-Luc Godard developed the concept of film director as *auteur* in his film criticism and early film making, and then later rejected it when he became a committed political film maker
- an examination of the stylistic and thematic consistencies in the films of two well-known *auteurs*: Alfred Hitchcock and Wim Wenders

The director is both the least necessary and most important component of film-making. He is the most modern and most decadent of all artists in his relative passivity toward everything that passes before him. He would not be worth bothering with if he were not capable now and then of sublimity of expression almost miraculously extracted from his money-oriented environment.

Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p. 37

One aim of Chapter 1 was to introduce the ideas of *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-shot*. These ideas are important for this chapter, so I shall briefly summarize them here:

- *Mise-en-scène* as it is used in this book refers to filmed events, what appears in front of the camera – set design, lighting, and character movement.
- *Mise-en-shot* designates the way the filmed events, the *mise-en-scène*, are translated into film images.

Most critics do not distinguish *mise-en-scène* from *mise-en-shot*, but are content to absorb *mise-en-shot* into *mise-en-scène*. However, this distinction is crucial when discussing the director as *auteur*, as this chapter will attempt to show.

Chapter 2 outlined the key structures of narrative and narration. It concentrated on the narrative's cause-effect logic and the difference between restricted narration (narration tied to one character only) and omniscient narration (narration that jumps from character to character, or which shows the spectator information that no character knows about).

In this chapter we shall see how individual directors use *mise-en-scène*, *mise-en-shot*, and strategies of narrative and narration. In particular, we shall look at the rise of the critical approach to film known as the *auteur* policy (or *la politique des auteurs*, to use its original French name). The aim of the *auteur* policy is to assign to certain directors the title of artists, rather than thinking of them as mere technicians. *Auteur* critics study the style and themes (or subject matter) of a director's films and assign to them the title of art if they show a consistency of style and theme.

Directors whose films show a consistency of style and theme are called *auteurs*. By contrast, directors who show no consistency of style and theme in their work are called *metteurs-en-scène*, and are relegated to the status of mere technicians rather than

artists. According to *auteur* critics, the difference between an *auteur* and a *metteur-en-scène* is that, whereas an *auteur* can transform a mediocre script into a great film, a *metteur-en-scène* can only make a mediocre film out of a mediocre script. *Auteur* critics made the evaluative distinction between an *auteur* and a *metteur-en-scène* because an *auteur* is able to maintain a consistency of style and theme by working against the constraints of the Hollywood mode of production. In other words, an *auteur* is able to transcend the restrictions imposed upon him or her by the Hollywood studio system.

But more central than the distinction between an *auteur* and a *metteur-en-scène* is the question: Is it legitimate to concentrate on the director as the primary creator of a film? *Auteur* critics acknowledge that the cinema is, of course, a collective activity involving many people at various stages of pre-production, production and post-production. Nevertheless, the *auteur* critics argue, it is the director who makes the choices concerning framing, camera position, the duration of the shot, and so on – those aspects of *mise-en-shot* that determine the way everything is visualized on screen. And it is precisely *mise-en-shot* that *auteur* critics focus on, because this is what makes film unique, what distinguishes film from other arts.

The first half of this chapter will look at the origin of the *auteur* policy, which initially concentrated exclusively on the stylistic consistencies of a director's work. Other *auteur* critics expanded the scope of the *auteur* policy by looking at an equally important consistency – the thematic consistency in a director's work, the uniformity and coherence of subject matter across a director's films. The *auteurist's* emphasis on the consistency of style and theme is expressed in the statement that *auteurs* are always attempting to make the same film. The second half of this chapter will consider the dominant styles and themes in the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Wim Wenders.

François Truffaut and *Cahiers du Cinéma*

The *auteur* policy emerges from the film criticism of the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s. This policy was put into practice by a number of critics who became well-known film makers of the French New Wave of the 1960s, including Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol. The manifesto of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics is Truffaut's 1954 essay 'A Certain Tendency of the

French Cinema' whereas the manifesto of the New Wave film makers is Jean-Luc Godard's 1960 film *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*). I shall look at each in turn.

In 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', Truffaut criticizes the dominant tendency in French cinema during the 1940s and 1950s – which he calls the tradition of quality. This cinema is a contrived and wooden cinema that projects a bourgeois image of good taste and high culture. In Ginette Vincendeau's definition, the tradition of quality

... refers to a loose industry category, actively promoted (by financial aid and prizes) to project a 'quality' image of French film: expertly crafted pictures with high production values and often derived from literary sources. Psychological and/or costume dramas such as Jean Delannoy's La Symphonie pastorale (1946), Claude Autant-Lara's Douce (1943), René Clément's Jeux interdits/Forbidden Games (1952), Max Ophüls' La Ronde (1950), Jacques Audry's Minne, L'ingénue Libertine/Minne (1950), Jean Renoir's French Cancan (1955), René Clair's Les Grandes manœuvres (1955), all projected an image of Frenchness tied to good taste and high culture.

Ginette Vincendeau, in *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, pp. 426–27

These values were achieved by the following means:

- high production values
- reliance on stars
- genre conventions
- privileging the script.

For Truffaut, the tradition of quality offers little more than the practice of filming scripts, of mechanically transferring scripts to the screen. As Truffaut emphasizes, the success or failure of these films depends entirely on the quality of their scripts. Truffaut's attack is focused primarily on two script writers – Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. Truffaut writes:

Aurenche and Bost are essentially literary men and I reproach them here for being contemptuous of the cinema by under estimating it.

'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', p. 229

These literary men write script writers' films, in which the film is seen to be completed when the script has been written. Incidentally, the French director Bertrand Tavernier returned to the tradition of quality film making in the 1970s. He opposes himself to the New Wave, which was clearly signified when he asked Aurenche and Bost to script his first film *The Watchmaker of Saint Paul* (1974).

The privileging of the script in the tradition of quality deflected attention away from both the film making process and the director. The *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics and the New Wave film makers defined themselves against literature, against the literary script, and against the tradition of quality, and instead promoted 'the cinema' as such. Whereas the tradition of quality advocated a conservative style of film making, in which the best technique is one that is not seen, the style of the French New Wave films is similar to the decorative arts, where style draws attention to itself. In the tradition of quality, film style is a means to an end, a means of conveying story content to the spectator. But in the New Wave films, style becomes independent of the story. New Wave films dazzle the spectator with style rather than story content. The *auteur* policy therefore embodies Marshall McLuhan's idea that 'the medium is the message'.

The critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* respected the work of Hollywood film makers, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Orson Welles, Fritz Lang, John Ford, Douglas Sirk; Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray, all of whom worked against the scripts imposed upon them by the studios. In the following extract, Jacques Rivette attempts to explain why Fritz Lang is an *auteur*, while Vincente Minnelli is only a *metteur-en-scène*:

When you talk about Minnelli the first thing you do is talk about the screenplay, because he always subordinates his talent to something else. Whereas when you talk about Fritz Lang, the first thing is to talk about Fritz Lang, then about the screenplay.

Jacques Rivette, quoted in Jim Hillier, ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: the 1960s*, p. 3

An *auteur* in the Hollywood studio system is a director who transcends the script by imposing on it his or her own style and vision. An *auteur* film involves subjective and personalized film making, rather than the mechanical transposition of a script on to film. The script is the mere pretext for the activity of film

making, and an *auteur* film is about the film-making practices involved in filming a script, rather than being about the script itself. But how does a Hollywood director impose his own vision on a studio film? Primarily through his manipulation of *mise-en-scène* – or, more accurately, *mise-en-shot* (as I pointed out in Chapter 1 and at the beginning of this chapter, most critics do not distinguish *mise-en-scène* from *mise-en-shot*). In the following quotation, we see John Caughie linking the *auteur* policy to what he calls *mise-en-scène* (although it is evident from the quotation that he means *mise-en-shot*):

It is with the mise-en-scène that the auteur transforms the material which has been given to him; so it is in the mise-en-scène – in the disposition of the scene, in the camera movement, in the camera placement, in the movement from shot to shot – that the auteur writes his individuality into the film.

John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship*, pp. 12–13

Victor Perkins (a member of the *Movie* group – see the next section) has also outlined the director's role in detail (*Film as Film*, 1972, Chapter 5). He writes that:

The director's most significant area of control is over what happens within the image. His control over the action, in detail, organization and emphasis, enables him to produce a personal treatment of the script situation. On occasion the treatment can be so personal as to constitute a reversal of attitudes contained in the script.

(*Film as Film*, p. 74)

Perkins adds that the director does not need to subvert the script to make a personal statement: instead, he or she can intensify part of the script's possibilities, to create meaning:

The director has to start from what is known or necessary or likely or, at the very least, possible. From this base he can go on to organize the relationship between action, image and décor, to create meaning through pattern.

(*Film as Film*, p. 94)

The creation of 'meaning through pattern' is another way of saying 'significant form' (a term we discussed in this book's Introduction).

Finally, Perkins also emphasizes that it is the director's control of the action and the actors' gestures that partly defines personal style: 'the director defines his effects *within* the action' (*Film as Film*, p. 95), which can be effective and distinctive as long as the director does not impose meaning on or reach beyond the limits of the action.

In summary, *mise-en-shot* names those techniques through which everything is expressed on screen. An *auteur* works out his or her own vision by establishing a consistent style of *mise-en-shot*, a style that usually works in opposition to the demands of the script.

For the French New Wave film makers, the script merely served as the pretext to the activity of filming. Indeed, for *auteur* critics, there was no point in talking about the film script at all, for an *auteur* film is one that does not represent a pre-existing story, but is one that represents the often spontaneous events that took place in front of the camera.

The French New Wave can be seen as a film-making practice that rejects classical Hollywood cinema's dominance by producers (in which the producer acts as the central manager controlling the work of the technicians), in favour of a more 'archaic' mode of production that favours the director. Consequently, the New Wave directors strongly supported the idea of filming unimportant stories, which then allows the director great freedom to impose his own aesthetic vision on the material. This is one reason Truffaut chose to film Henri Pierre Roche's novel *Jules and Jim* in 1961.

Movie magazine

Before moving on to the New Wave film makers I shall mention, in passing, how the *auteur* policy was taken up in Britain and North America. The *auteur* policy was adopted by the British film critics Ian Cameron, Mark Shivas, Paul Mayersberg and Victor Perkins in the magazine *Movie*, first published in May 1962. Like the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the *Movie* critics sought *auteurs* within the Hollywood studio system. Similarly, *Movie* critics also defined the *auteur* in terms of self-expression, as manifest in the stylistic and thematic consistency across a director's work. However, *Movie* was more flexible than *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The *Cahiers* critics were notoriously well known for preferring the worst films of an *auteur* to the best

films of a *metteur-en-scène*. For example, *Cahiers* critics regarded Nicholas Ray to be the ultimate *auteur*. For this reason, in 1961 they hailed *Party Girl* to be a masterpiece, Ray's best film to date (above his other films such as *They Live by Night* and *Rebel Without a Cause*). However, *Party Girl* is generally considered a routine and hack piece of work – even Ray himself called it 'a bread-and-butter job'.

In contrast to the judgements of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Movie* critics were more moderate. They recognized that even *auteurs* can make bad films and that the *metteur-en-scène* can, occasionally at least, make a good film. The prime example of the latter is Michael Curtiz, who is regarded by *auteur* critics to have directed only one film of lasting value in the history of the cinema – *Casablanca* (1943).

For such an avowedly evaluative mode of criticism as the *auteur* policy, it is inevitable that the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie* would differ about the directors they identified as *auteurs*. For example, whereas *Cahiers* classified Minnelli as a *metteur-en-scène* (as we saw above in the quotation from Jacques Rivette), *Movie* defined him as an undisputed *auteur* and discussed him in three issues of *Movie*, including the first issue which consisted of an interview with Minnelli together with an article called 'Minnelli's Method' by Mark Shivas. In this article, Shivas argues that the consistency of Minnelli's film style is sufficient to define him as an *auteur*, since Minnelli's style transcends the film script – a defining characteristic of an *auteur*. Shivas argues for the superiority of style over script in relation to two of Minnelli's films, *The Reluctant Debutante* and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*:

Minnelli's way with William Douglas Home's rather dreary play [The Reluctant Debutante] is to emphasise the falseness and untrammelled idiocy of the Season by insisting that the adults behave like children and the children like adults, reinforcing the less than witty lines primarily in its visual treatment. . . . As a result of Minnelli's visual style, a mediocre story becomes as sophisticated as The Philadelphia Story is verbally witty.

With The Four Horsemen, Minnelli was once more landed with a turkey, an old one, too, of which only a primitive like King Vidor (Duel in the Sun) could have made a meal. . . . The Four Horsemen is not, except

from the point of view of decoration, roses all the way, but at its best it transcends its story by the brilliance of its mise-en-scène.

Mark Shivas, 'Minnelli's Method', *Movie*, 1, 1962, p. 18

For Shivas, Minnelli is an *auteur* because his films go beyond the mediocre scripts handed to him by the studio. A *metteur-en-scène*, by contrast, would have simply made two mediocre films from these mediocre scripts.

Andrew Sarris

During the early 1960s, Andrew Sarris introduced the *auteur* policy into North American film criticism via his essay 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962' in the journal *Film Culture* (No. 27, Winter 1962–63). Sarris translated the term *la politique des auteurs* into the term *auteur* theory, giving it the prestige that goes with the word 'theory'. Furthermore, he argued that the *auteur* theory is primarily a history of American cinema, since it develops a historical awareness of what individual directors have achieved in the past. This is in contrast to Hollywood practice where, according to studio executives, a director is only as good as the last film he or she made. Finally, an auteurist history of the cinema needed to be evaluative, according to Sarris, if it was not to become a hobby like stamp collecting or trainspotting. The criteria for evaluation were the same for Sarris as for other *auteur* critics – consistency in style and theme across a director's films. Sarris published an evaluative history of American *auteurs* in 1968 in the form of his comprehensive book *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929–1968*, which became the bible of *auteur* critics.

A bout de souffle/Breathless

So far we have surveyed the work of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics and New Wave film makers in an attempt to explain the motivations for their privileging of the director as *auteur*. We then saw how the idea of the director as *auteur* entered British and North American film criticism. We shall now turn to Godard's film *A bout de souffle/Breathless* to look at the aesthetics of the French New Wave at work.

The French New Wave is one of the major movements of European Art Cinema. Ginette Vincendeau (in the *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, p. xiv) defines European Art Cinema as sharing the following aesthetic features:

- a slower editing and narrative pace than Hollywood cinema
- a strong 'authorial voice'
- an investment in realism and ambiguity
- the desire to provoke thought and sometimes shock
- a taste for unhappy endings.

In *A bout de souffle* (1960), we see Godard creating most of these aesthetic features by using the following production techniques, all of which were innovative when Godard made the film:

- location shooting (rather than the studio, as in the tradition of quality)
- a hand-held camera (made possible by the invention of lightweight cameras)
- natural lighting (rather than artificial studio lighting)
- casual acting
- subversion of the rules of classical editing.

All these techniques, none of which are to be found in the tradition of quality, turn the films into spontaneous and improvised performances, rather than being the mere representation of the script, which exists before the film-making process begins.

A bout de souffle begins with Michel Poiccard (played by Jean-Paul Belmondo) stealing a car to drive to Paris. However, two policemen on motorcycles chase him. He turns off the road, but is followed by one of the policemen. Michel shoots the policeman and runs off. What makes this part of the film unusual and innovative is the way it is filmed.

I shall describe the shots beginning with Michel being chased by the police to the moment when Michel shoots one of the policemen. I shall then begin to discuss the production techniques used in this sequence of shots:

Shot number

- 1 The camera is inside Michel's car. He overtakes a lorry and is spotted by two policemen.
- 2 The camera, outside the car, shows Michel overtaking the lorry. The car is shown travelling from screen right to screen left.

- 3 The camera, inside the car, quickly pans from the wind-screen of the car to the back window, where the police can be seen chasing Michel.
- 4 Cut to a slightly different shot of the police chasing Michel. The camera then pans to inside the car (that is, it reverses the pan of shot 3).
- 5 The camera, outside the car, shows it moving from screen left to screen right.
- 6 Shot of the policemen on their motorcycles. They are shown travelling from screen right to screen left.
- 7 Michel pulls off the road. He looks off screen left, and sees . . .
- 8 One of the police motorcycles racing by.
- 9 Michel opens the bonnet of the car to try to get it started again. He looks off screen left and sees . . .
- 10 The second police motorcycle racing by.
- 11 Cut back to Michel attempting to repair the jump lead that will start the car again. Michel looks up and sees . . .
- 12 The second motorcyclist heading towards him.
- 13 Shot of Michel reaching into the car.
- 14 Close-up of Michel's head in profile, facing screen right. He says 'Stop, or I'll kill you'.
- 15 Close-up of Michel's hand holding a gun.
- 16 Close-up of the gun as Michel gets ready to fire.
- 17 The cut to shot 17 occurs as the sound of the gun going off is heard. Shot 17 consists of the policeman falling down.
- 18 In this shot, Michel is shown running across open fields.

This description cannot capture the frenetic nature of this series of shots. The first 17 shots last just 44 seconds, which makes on average a change of shot every 2.6 seconds. (The final shot lasts 14 seconds.) All the innovative production techniques mentioned above are apparent in this series of shots. The scene is shot on location, on the highway. The rest of the film is also shot on location, particularly on the streets of Paris. The camera is very mobile and shaky. The pans in shots 3 and 4 are very quick, creating blurred images. The lighting is natural. In shot 7, the sun shines directly into the lens, creating a bloomer. Belmondo is renowned (and often imitated) for his casual acting style in this film. He seems to improvise most of the time. Finally, this series of shots subverts the rules of continuity editing. The cut from shot 3 to shot 4 is less than 30 degrees and, therefore, creates a jump cut. In shot 5, Michel's car is travelling from screen left to screen right. But in shot 6, the police are shown travelling in the opposite direction, from screen right to screen left. The

cameraman has crossed the road after filming the car to film the motorcycles. Such a change of direction creates a confusion of screen space. Similarly, when Michel stops the car, he looks screen left at the police passing by. But after he has picked up the gun, he looks screen right at the policeman, rather than screen left, as we would expect. Finally, the cut from 15 to 16, the shot of Michel's hand to the shot of the gun, creates another jump, because there is very little difference between the two shots.

The use of a shaky, hand-held camera, together with the use of location shooting and natural lighting, jump cuts and discontinuous editing, do not aim to show the action clearly; instead, it offers a fragmentary and partial vision of the scene. These 'imperfect' techniques represent the *auteur's* presence and serve as clear marks of the way he or she writes his or her individual vision into the film.

The effect these production techniques create is one of spontaneity and improvisation. However, what interests me in the use of these techniques is that they give the film a documentary feel. The blurred pans, the shaky camera movements and abrupt editing testify to the difficulty the cameraman has filming in the conditions he found himself in, and to his physical interaction with the event.

It is important to point out that the stylistic choices made by the French New Wave directors were not simply determined by aesthetic considerations, but also by economics. The French New Wave is a low-budget film-making practice. Filming on location with natural lighting decreases production costs, just as the emphasis on spontaneity defrays pre-production costs such as script writing. Nevertheless, far from being despondent by the lack of money, the French New Wave directors identified low production costs with artistic freedom. They saw an inverse relationship between the size of the budget and artistic freedom: the higher the budget, the lower the artistic freedom. They even saw economic failure at the box office as a sign of artistic independence.

These economic considerations also fed into the judgements the New Wave directors made when they were *auteur* critics. When assessing the films of American directors, *auteur* critics defined an *auteur* as a director who transcended the high production values of the Hollywood studios. In other words, an *auteur* managed to stamp his or her personality on a high-budget film, whereas a *metteur-en-scène* was swamped by high production values and became an anonymous technician.

Consequently, a Hollywood *auteur* film is one that contains a tension between the demands of the studio system and the director's self-expressiveness. As John Caughie explains.

... the struggle between the desire for self-expression and the constraints of the industry could produce a tension in the films of the commercial cinema . . . , encouraging the auteurist critics to valorize Hollywood cinema above all else, finding there a treasure-trove of buried personalities, and, in the process, scandalizing established criticism. Uniqueness of personality, brash individuality, persistence of obsession and originality were given an evaluative power above that of stylistic smoothness or social seriousness.

The business of the critic was to discover the director within the given framework, to find the traces of the submerged personality, to find the ways in which the auteur had transformed the material so that the explicit subject matter was no longer what the film was really about . . .

John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship*, pp. 11–12

As a final point, we need to consider the implicit criticism of the *auteur* policy that Caughie refers to the first quotation above, when he writes that 'Uniqueness of personality, brash individuality, persistence of obsession and originality were given an evaluative power above that of stylistic smoothness or *social seriousness*' (emphasis added). Both the *auteur* critics and the New Wave directors have been criticized for their lack of social commitment. However, the *auteur* policy offers a defence against standardized film-making practices in favour of an alternative – a more expressive and personalized – cinema. The New Wave, while concerned primarily with the personal lives of the young French middle class, put into practice this alternative style of film making.

From the mid-1960s onwards, Godard's film making became politicized, both in terms of his innovative and disturbing style, and in terms of theme and content. His style became political by jolting spectators out of their comfortable and leisurely consumption of film, by continually distracting them, making them notice the style, thereby distancing them from the film's content. In other words, the disturbing style makes spectators aware of the film-making process, rather than trying to conceal

it. He also changed the content of his films, by including political subject matter (the activities of a Marxist group of students in *La chinoise*, a strike in *Tout va bien*). Another way of saying this is that Godard made films about politics *and* also made films politically. These films include *La chinoise*, *Le weekend*, *Le gai savoir*, made between 1967–68, and films made under the banner of the Dziga Vertov Group (basically Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin) between 1969–1972 – including *Pravda*, *Vent d'est*, and *Tout va bien*.

In 1973, the Dziga Vertov group was dissolved and Godard teamed up with Anne-Marie Mieville and made a series of video projects for television. Godard rethought his political position and this led him to pursue new themes in his work, including family and personal relationships, reflecting the emergence of the women's movement in France.

In the early 1980s Godard returned to making less marginal films, including *Passion* in 1982. However, this commercial period came to an abrupt end in 1987 when he made a film version of *King Lear*, with Norman Mailer and his daughter. However, both walked off the set before the film was completed, so Godard started again.

A number of film critics (David Bordwell among them) point out that the spectator cannot read off character relations or thematic significance from Godard's political films, and the films do not seem to have any overall coherence. Each scene seems to go off on a tangent. Part of Godard's move towards becoming a political film maker was to downplay the Romantic idea of the film director as an *auteur*, making films with stylistic and thematic unity. This is why he made his most radical political films under the impersonal banner of the Dziga Vertov Group, rather than his own name.

Summary of the *auteur* policy

- The aim of the *auteur* policy is to distinguish between directors as artists (*auteurs*) and directors as mere technicians (*metteurs-en-scène*).
- An *auteur* is a director who manifests a consistency of style and theme across his or her films.
- The director is privileged by *auteur* critics because he or she is the one who visualizes the script on screen.

- The *auteur* policy was formulated by François Truffaut in his essay 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', in which he attacks the French 'tradition of quality' school of film making, particularly for its over reliance on scripts.
- *Auteur* critics privilege the work of Hollywood directors (including Hitchcock, Hawks, Welles, Lang, Ford, Sirk, Fuller and Ray) whose visual style transcends the scripts imposed on them by the studios.
- Many of the *auteur* critics associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s (Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette) started to make their own *auteur* films in the 1960s; they abandoned the script in favour of improvisation and spontaneity.
- The *auteur* policy was developed in Britain in the magazine *Movie* and in North America by Andrew Sarris.

Style and themes in Alfred Hitchcock's films

Alfred Hitchcock is an undisputed *auteur* for all the *auteur* critics mentioned above – *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the *Movie* critics and Andrew Sarris. I shall briefly review the ways in which these three schools of *auteur* criticism discussed Hitchcock before listing the stylistic and thematic elements that unify his films. *Cahiers* published a special issue on Hitchcock in 1954 (no. 39), which comprises two interviews with Hitchcock, one by André Bazin, the other by Claude Chabrol. In 1957, the *Cahiers* critics Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol published the first book-length study of Hitchcock, simply entitled *Hitchcock* and translated into English as *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* (New York: Ungar, 1979). Rohmer and Chabrol develop a thematic and stylistic analysis of Hitchcock's films. They identified the following themes:

- the influence of Catholicism
- the theme of shared guilt
- homophobia and misogyny

In terms of form and style, they noted at the end of the book that:

Hitchcock is one of the greatest inventors of form in the entire history of cinema. Perhaps only Murnau and Eisenstein can sustain comparison with him when it comes to form. Our effort will not have been in vain if we have been able to demonstrate how an entire

moral universe has been elaborated on the basis of this form and by its very rigor. In Hitchcock's work, form does not embellish content, it creates it.

Rohmer and Chabrol, *Hitchcock: the First Forty-Four Films*, p. 152

Rohmer and Chabrol's book was followed by a book by another *Cahiers* critic, Jean Douchet, whose *Alfred Hitchcock* was published in 1967. Douchet identifies three worlds operating in Hitchcock's films:

- the world of the mundane (of everyday events)
- the world of subjective desire
- the intellectual world.

For example, *Psycho* (1960) begins with the mundane. The camera pans across the skyline of Phoenix, Arizona and we are supplied with mundane information: the name of the city, the date and the time. We see and hear about the mundane lives of Sam and Marion and see the mundane office job that Marion has. The film then moves on to the world of subjective desire – in this instance, Marion's, as she steals the \$40,000 to fulfil her love with Sam. But after Marion is murdered, the film moves into the intellectual world as several characters try to work out what happened to her.

Douchet was one of the first critics to draw the (by now familiar) analogy between Jeff (James Stewart) in *Rear Window* (1954) and the film spectator. Jeff is a photographer who is confined to a wheelchair after breaking a leg. He spends his days spying on his neighbours across the courtyard. For Douchet, Jeff replicates the film spectator – the spectator confined to a chair observing a spectacle at a distance. In *Rear Window* the windows of the apartments across the courtyard replicate the cinema screen.

The most famous book on Hitchcock was published in 1967 – François Truffaut's *Hitchcock*, which was based on more than 50 hours of interviews in which Truffaut and Hitchcock talk about Hitchcock's films in chronological order, covering such issues as the inception of each film, the preparation of screenplays, directorial problems and Hitchcock's evaluation of each film.

The *Movie* critics also interviewed Hitchcock and wrote several essays on mechanisms of suspense in his films. Robin Wood, who wrote regularly for *Movie*, published a book on Hitchcock,