

The American Cinema: Directors And Directions 1929-1968

By Andrew Sarris

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The auteur theory, of which film criticAndrew Sarris was the leading American proponent, holds that artistry in cinema can be largely attributed to film directors, who, while often working against the strictures of studios, producers, and scriptwriters, manage to infuse each film in their oeuvre with their personal style. Sarris's *The American Cinema*, the bible of auteur studies, is a history of American film in the form of a lively guide to the work of two hundred film directors, from Griffith, Chaplin, and von Sternberg to Mike Nichols, Stanley Kubrick, and Jerry Lewis. In addition, the book includes a chronology of the most important American films, an alphabetical list of over 6000 films with their directors and years of release, and the seminal essays "Toward a Theory of Film History" and "The Auteur Theory Revisited." Over twenty-five years after its initial publication, *The American Cinema* remains perhaps the most influential book ever written on the subject.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Since its publication in 1968, *The American Cinema* has been the manifesto of the auteur theory. Written by Andrew Sarris, the theory's chief advocate, the book traces the history of movies by examining the careers of more than 200 film directors. Covering everyone from D.W. Griffith to Francis Coppola, Orson Welles to Roman Polanski, Sarris argues that directorial greatness is marked by a personal style and consistency of excellence that can be traced throughout a career. Sarris's commentary is sometimes worshipful, sometimes acrid, but almost always quotable. Alfred Hitchcock is "the supreme technician of the American cinema." John Huston coasted "on his reputation as a wronged individualist with an alibi for every bad movie." Stanley Kubrick holds "a naive faith in the power of images to transcend fuzzy feelings and vague ideas." Michelangelo Antonioni makes films so pessimistic and alienating that Sarris dubs him "Antoniennui."

You may not agree with all of Sarris's assessments, but this book provides the best possible opportunity to consider auteurism, an approach to cinema that, in an age that reveres Scorsese, Spielberg, and Tarantino, seems more relevant than ever. The book closes with an essay called "The Auteur Theory Revised," Sarris's attempt at a definitive theoretical statement. *--Raphael Shargel*

From Library Journal
This 1968 volume is probably the bible of the auteur theory of filmmaking, i.e., that the director's vision is what shapes film history. Though LJ's reviewer found some of Sarris's conclusions "furiously debatable," this nonetheless is an "invaluable reference book and a major contribution to film literature" (LJ 12/15/68).
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Review

***The Week*, Kenneth Turan's "The Book List," 7/4/14**
"There is no overestimating the impact critic Andrew Sarris had on serious filmgoers…This book is an essential work of film criticism."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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