

ENG 4110: POST-CLASSICAL CINEMA
paper assignment #1

DETAILS:

5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times font. No funny stuff with the margins.
DUE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21

TOPICS:

1. the auteur

In one form or another, the concept of the auteur seems to have entrenched itself in our analytic vocabularies, persisting (in ever-changing form) from one period to the next after its emergence in the 50s (in France) and the 60s (in the US). In order to explore this concept in a more detailed way and to explore its transformation over time, I'll propose a pair of related topics:

1a. Choose one specific auteur and look at the way the critical discourse around that auteur constructs his (or her) authorship. Is this the same notion of authorship that we see in Sarris or is it something different? If it is different, in what ways is it so? Spell out the contours of this new (unspoken) theory of the auteur.

1b. In Sarris's essay, he sees the traces of the auteur primarily in *mise en scène* and he credits the constraints built into the Hollywood system as paradoxically productive of this kind of authorship. However, filmmakers in the period we've been looking at have new kinds of freedom (and arguably equally new kinds of constraints) that seem to demand a rethinking of the source and significance of the notion of the auteur. Choose one specific period and explore the ways in which the auteur needs to be retheorized. It might be especially interesting to consider this in relation to independent film (where directors' names seem to be most frequently invoked), but you might also look at the New Hollywood or the mainstream doc too. (In fact, even answering this in relation to the blockbuster or to digital cinema might be productive.)

With either option 1a or 1b, I'd encourage you to go ahead & read the selections from *Cahiers du Cinéma* that are now online as well as the selections from Sarris that have been belatedly added to the course reserves. These will give you a much broader picture of the way that the auteur was conceived in the period of its emergence.

2. pastiche

Choose one of the 1970s pastiche films and compare it to a more recent pastiche film (90s to present). Has pastiche evolved? Been purified? (Or contaminated?) Has it intensified? Become more diffuse? Work with films that you consider to be emblematic of certain traits of their respective eras in order to develop a diachronic (i.e., "two-time," which is to say "historical") understanding of the notion of pastiche.

3. independent film and the New Hollywood

One version of the history of Hollywood film is a cyclical narrative in which the rise of the independent film represents a return of the spirit of invention of the New Hollywood (with the blockbuster roughly filling the role of those big-budget spectacles that were Hollywood's bread & butter before the late-60s bust). However, the temptation in that narrative to see independent

film as *just* a repetition of the New Hollywood seems wrongheaded to me. In what ways would you contrast these two periods? In your answer, think both about issues of form—i.e., are these films using similar strategies of editing, cinematography, mise en scène, etc.?—as well as larger issues about the historical context in which these films emerge. Here again you might choose two emblematic to you build your essay around.

4. race

In our somewhat simplified historical narrative, we pointed to the explosion of independent cinema in the late 80s/early 90s as the moment when black voices entered the mainstream (or at least something closer to the mainstream) in a meaningful way. In the first of the two Guerrero essays, he points to the ways in which African-Americans are “contained” in blockbusters in the period just preceding the rise of independent film. But the question of race in the films we saw from the 60s and 70s was not raised at all. How does race figure in those films of the New Hollywood that we looked at (or that you looked at on your own)?

You may, in your answer, want to move beyond the simple reduction of race to blackness. That is, Guerrero’s focus is on the question of African-American representation, but you may choose to expand that notion to include any people of color. You may choose to be specific (focusing, say, on Latinos or Chinese-Americans) or you may be expansive (looking at the whole range of minority representation in these films). Whatever approach you choose, be sure to pay close attention to the strategies of representation (i.e., the formal issues of how these people are lit, framed, etc.) and not just how they are positioned in the narratives.

5. independent film and the blockbuster

Most of the narrative we constructed relies on the supersession of one era by another. The post-classical generally supplants the classical, the New Hollywood knocks off the era of the big-budget roadshow musical, the blockbuster replaces the New Hollywood, etc. However, we should know better than to believe in such simple stories. Most obviously, while the independent film does “rise” after the blockbuster has had its (first) decade of dominance, the blockbuster certainly persists into the contemporary moment. Rather than having you think about the grand and somewhat abstract questions about narratives and closure then, I’d like to see you consider the persistence of the blockbuster in the era of independent film. Is the blockbuster fundamentally transformed by the influence (or competition) of the independent film?