

Auteur Theory

In 1975 *Jaws* was released in cinemas globally, and has gone on to become one of the highest grossing films of all time (<http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm>). In this early work, Spielberg hadn't yet become a household name and the genre of this work was fairly specific, making use of suspense and action to create an effective picture. Stephen Rowley writes in his article, "Genre, Auteurs and Spielberg", that if he had continued to work in the environment in which he created *Jaws* that his future works would have continued in the same manner:

"...see Spielberg's emerging reputation based purely upon his skill at orchestrating two elements: suspense and action. The proficiency with which he did so suggested that this was a field in which he would continue to work..." (1)

However in the immediate years after the success of *Jaws* his style changed quite specifically, with films such as "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977) "E.T: The Extra Terrestrial" (1982) fitting into the science fiction genre, lacking the suspense and action elements on which he had built his reputation as a director. In relation to the auteur theory it can be argued that this is evidence of Spielberg demonstrating his own influence, and that this sudden change in approach can be attributed to his new found status, and Rowley also writes that his contrasting works are a display of power.

However, leading auteur theorist Andrew Sarris is of the opinion that in order to be the true author of a film a "signature" style must be defined across a catalogue of work. This is the second of three premises of the auteur theory:

"The second premise of the auteur theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain current characteristics of style, which serve as his signature."

For example all films by Steven Spielberg must contain certain elements which are instantly recognisable by audiences who can immediately distinguish these as his own. Therefore, it is possible that although the genre of his films are arguably diverse, Spielberg may have applied his signature in terms of film content.

Matt Peaches writes in his essay, "The Spielberg Face, A Legacy", that Spielberg's signature are pivotal moments across his works which involve the facial expressions of leading actors when truly astonishing or dumbfounding moments occur:

"When a character looks up and catches something unexpected, that's the face. When a character watches something otherworldly take place in front of their eyes, that's the face. When a character stares outward,

mouth slightly agape and has a revelation that will change them forever, that's the face." (3)

This can be seen in early Spielberg works such as *Jaws* (1975) when Martin Brody sees the shark for the first time (4):



Similarly in *Jurassic Park* (1993) when Alan and Ellie have their first encounter with dinosaurs (4):



The camera holds still on their facial expression, capturing the emotions of the characters involved, demonstrating through this method the immense significance of the incident in hand.

References

- (1) Rowley, S. (1998). *Genre, Auteurism, and Spielberg*. Available: <http://home.mira.net/~satadaca/genre2.htm>. Last accessed 7th March 2012

- (2) Sarris, A. (1962). Notes on the Auteur Theory 1962. *Film Culture*. 27 (7), p562.
- (3) Peaches, M. (2011). *The Spielberg Face: A Legacy*. Available: <http://www.ugo.com/movies/the-spielberg-face-a-legacy>. Last accessed 7th March 2012.
- (4) Peaches, M. (2011). *The Spielberg Face: A Legacy* . (Online Image) Available at: <http://www.ugo.com/movies/the-spielberg-face-a-legacy>. Last accessed 7th March 2012.