

Discourses of Cinematic Culture and the Hollywood Director: The Development of Christopher Nolan's Auteur Persona

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the concept of the auteur functions in contemporary Hollywood film industry and popular culture through a consideration of extra-textual components of cinematic discourse. By analysing a director's films along with the industrial and cultural factors surrounding those films, a method for understanding contemporary auteurism in Hollywood is presented.

Case study Christopher Nolan has earned a reputation as a director who produces films which are critical and popular successes and also reveal stylistic and thematic consistency across genre and industrial contexts. Building on ideas from Michel Foucault and Timothy Corrigan, this thesis adapts the ideas of the author function and the commercial auteur to examine how Nolan's auteur persona is developed and used by industry and audiences in understanding his films.

Drawing on a hybrid theoretical framework incorporating auteur, star, and reception studies as well as post-structuralist theories on authorship, this thesis analyses how Nolan's auteur persona is constructed across a range of texts, but especially through DVD extras (official discourse), professional reviews (critical discourse), and responses from the general public (audience discourse). The analysis exposes the mechanisms within the discursive surround which create a distinct auteur persona that helps differentiate Nolan and his films in the marketplace.

The research demonstrates that the auteur is an enduring and dynamic concept that is prevalent through all aspects of film culture including in the films, but also from production to critical reviews to audience discussion. Furthermore, due to technological changes, audience discourse plays an increasingly active role in shaping the auteur persona, often adapting the auteur concept to negotiate meanings for films. Ultimately the auteur persona acts as a way to understand not only how the auteur concept functions in cinema to organise economic, artistic, and cultural conditions, but also how film knowledge is developed intertextually in contemporary culture by varied audiences.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis is about authorship in cinema. However, the notion of authorship has always been a contentious concept in film. One of the most cultivated ideas about authorship in this realm is the notion of the auteur, or that the director is the author of a film and the primary meaning and creativity of a film comes from the director. A primary tenet of auteurism, though, is that not every director can be an auteur. Auteur indicates a certain level of quality that separates artists from functionaries. Despite this initial designation, the term auteur has increasingly been used to describe any director, especially in Hollywood where distinctiveness is a marketable feature. Studying what function the auteur concept plays in contemporary Hollywood is important because of the consistent return in all levels of film discourse – popular, critical, academic, industrial – to the idea that the director is the author of a film.

If directors are immediately declared an auteur, it is necessary to question if the auteur concept has use or value in contemporary society. Through its extensive use in multiple contexts, the term seems to hold little meaning in and of itself at times. While thinking about these issues of being an auteur and what that means in cinematic culture, I attended an opening night screening of *The Prestige* (2006) directed by Christopher Nolan. After the film, the group of people who accompanied me remarked that they

should have known there would be a surprise ending because Nolan's other films all had twists in the narrative. Different viewers commented on how the film was similar to *Memento* (2000) and how the cast worked well together, just like in *Batman Begins* (2005). The one thing that continued to occur in the conversation was an understanding that Nolan was the unifying force behind these films and that the film should be compared to his earlier films, despite his name never being mentioned. In listening to this discussion, it became clear that the auteur concept is still continually used and is active not just in critical or scholarly writings, but is also present in audience discourse about films, as suggested above. Upon reading reviews of *The Prestige*, a similar style of discussion could be seen in both the critical and audience evaluations of the film. The idea then arose that perhaps the sign of being an auteur in contemporary Hollywood was creating an auteur portfolio of specific themes and styles within the films, but also using the surrounding discourse and extra-textual materials to create an auteur persona. Christopher Nolan's films, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, are subtly similar, creating a filmic world that relies on themes of identity, duality, and vengeance as well as containing intricate narrative structures and a focus on characters over action. Furthermore, the discourse surrounding his films continues these themes in interviews, audience reaction, critical reaction, and the DVD extras that accompany the home release of the films. The one factor that connects these items is Nolan.

In examining the role of the auteur in contemporary Hollywood, one function which became apparent was that of a unifying force behind each individual film as well as connecting a seemingly disparate set of films and other texts into a particular filmography. Discussing the role of the author in literature, Foucault suggests that a contemporary author cannot be thought of simply as a person who writes a book. Instead, he claims the author must be thought of as fulfilling the author function, which entails a wider understanding of the concept of author:

The individual who sets out to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is prowling, takes upon himself the function of the author: what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace

remarks – this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn. (Foucault, 1981: 59)

In these and related remarks, Foucault posits that the author exists fully in a cultural surround and must be considered as more than just a writer. The author in this sense is each interview given, each letter written, each draft abandoned, and each genre within which he or she works. Furthermore, the author is also defined by how the audience perceives him or her, including both the work as well as what they know about the author and the context of the writing. Transposed onto the idea of the contemporary auteur, as suggested in the previous paragraph, the author function allows for a wider conception of what the auteur is and how the concept is used in cinematic culture. It is not only the films, but how the films are made, how they are exhibited, and how they are received that help define the auteur. Equally, the auteur is used to help unify and make sense of the multiple texts surrounding films.

Consideration of the auteur as a function for unifying and locating meaning in a varied set of texts makes it necessary to think of the auteur as a specific identity that is constructed for this purpose rather than as an actual person; they are instead an auteur persona. Brookey and Westerfelhaus argue “from the postmodern perspective, the auteur persona is not so much the natural product of an oeuvre as it is the construction of a marketable identity” (2005: 112). To be an auteur in contemporary Hollywood is to have a distinct persona that can be identified to help create meaning in the texts, as discussed above, as well as to separate the auteur from other directors, creating a type of brand (Grainge, 2008: 45-46). Similarly, in discussing the idea of a commercial auteur, Timothy Corrigan suggests “there is a business and politics of agency that permits auteurism to remain a useful tactic in engaging commercial or semi-commercial patterns of identification” (1991: 118). Thinking of the director as an auteur persona can help to understand how the auteur continues to function in Hollywood in terms of creativity, industry, and culture.

Certain film directors have always developed personas around themselves and their films or been celebrated as artists in publicity as well as by critics and audiences, for example D.W. Griffith (Schickel, 1984) and Frank Capra (Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., 1975). The idea of the auteur persona explored here stems from this history of celebration

and focus. Barbara Klinger (1994) shows one example of directorial promotion and publicity in her study of Douglas Sirk's films. Klinger demonstrates that Sirk actively played a role in shaping how his films were understood. By participating in interviews, Klinger claims, he helped suggest a language for critics and scholars to use when discussing his films, also shaping the language for discussing melodramas generally (1994: 7-10). Similarly, Christopher Nolan, as an example of a contemporary auteur, participates in constructing his auteur persona through interviews and commentary, which helps set an auteur frame for understanding his films in all levels of cinematic discourse, as will be analyzed throughout this thesis. More generally, Klinger notes

the contextual factors that accompany the presentation of a film, including such materials as film reviews and industry promotions as well as specific historical conditions, serve as signs of the vital semiotic and cultural space that superintend the viewing experience. Further, these factors are not just "out there", external to the text and viewer; they actively intersect the text/viewer relation, producing interpretive frames that influence the public consumption of cultural artifacts. (1994: xvi)

Klinger analyzes how in the 1950s and the 1980s "the institutional, cultural, and historical conditions" (1994: xv) surrounding Sirk's films changed the interpretation and understanding of those films. This thesis incorporates the cultural surround as Klinger does, but focuses on the figure of the *director*, rather than his *films*. Furthermore, it examines how the cultural conditions around the time of production formed one distinct, though adaptable, identity for Nolan, rather than how that identity changed in different eras.

It is posited here that with the rise in the immediacy and reach of the cultural surround in cinematic discourse, due to factors such as the Internet and new home viewing technology, it is essential to consider the role of context in developing an auteur persona and the auteur frame used to orient understanding of Nolan's films. Therefore, this thesis, unlike Klinger, studies the auteur within the cultural surround, not the cultural surround through the auteur. The director as auteur is still an oft-used concept at all levels of cinematic discourse, as will be explored throughout this thesis, and by looking at the

cultural surround, the permeation and use of that concept in contemporary cinematic discourse can be better understood.

Although an auteurist study, the research also helps illuminate the cinematic culture that has developed around auteurism in aesthetic, industrial, and social conditions. Klinger suggests that “by placing a film within multifarious intertextual and historical frames – the elements that define its situation in a complex discursive and social milieu – the film’s variable, even contradictory, ideological meanings come into focus” (1997: 110). Extending this idea to a focus on directors, by studying Nolan within an intertextual frame, his function as both an individual artist and a manufactured commodity – promoting his films and his persona – can be understood more clearly. Analyzing the methods used to create Nolan’s auteur persona at the initial release of his films reveals the continued influence of auteur focus in all aspects of cinematic discourse and adds a contemporary example of intertextual film research to the growing literature on the relationship between auteurs and extra-textual materials.

Klinger cautions that when undertaking film history, context must be known to understand the reception of a film because meanings change depending on the socio-historical or industrial conditions. Within the context of this research it is also necessary to remember the mutability of the cinematic surround; the surround will be different in the future. Therefore, as noted above, the research records a specific moment in history. By looking at film history through an auteurist perspective there will always be gaps or omissions, and the account will most likely tend to over-glorify the role of the director. However, gaps can occur when using a variety of filters. This thesis does not claim to offer a totalized view of contemporary Hollywood culture, but instead preserves the moment of Nolan’s creation of his auteur persona and in so doing demonstrates that through incorporation of the discursive surround, contemporary film research can capture the instance of initial reception and its aftermath. Furthermore, by incorporating traditionally historical methods of film research, this thesis continues the development of contemporary auteur studies, discussed above and further in the thesis, away from a primarily textually-based approach, demonstrating the importance of cinematic discourse in understanding films and film directors.

This thesis re-theorizes the contemporary auteur, examining how the auteur concept functions in the Hollywood film industry and popular culture through a consideration of extra-textual components of cinematic discourse such as DVD extras, reviews of films, and audience reaction. By analysing a director's films along with the industrial and cultural factors surrounding those films, a method for understanding contemporary auteurism in Hollywood is presented and the mechanisms of how the multiple levels of discourse work and proliferate is exposed in relation to Christopher Nolan to better understand the role and function of the auteur concept in contemporary cinematic culture.

1.1 – The Aim of Investigating the Auteur Persona

This research investigates how an auteur persona is developed and used by studios, critics, and audiences in making meaning in film. With the continued prevalence of the auteur concept in all areas of film culture, it is important to understand how the auteur concept is situated in the industrial, cultural, and social context of Hollywood because of the influence the concept has in each of these areas. To achieve an examination that encompasses the scope of the discursive surround as well as the depth required for full understanding of the auteur, this thesis will analyse Christopher Nolan's auteur persona by incorporating multiple levels of cinematic discourse along with his films. This analysis will determine how he has created an auteur persona which is critically, artistically, and financially successful. Within the research aim of establishing how an auteur persona is established and used in Hollywood, there are several secondary questions to consider:

- How does official discourse, especially in terms of new home viewing technology, establish the auteur persona as an extension of the filmic experience?
- How does critical discourse, as a specialized section of the audience, help create specific expectations around an auteur persona, thereby linking film enjoyment and understanding to knowledge of the director?
- To what extent does the knowledge of an auteur persona, based on films, official discourse, and critical discourse, influence an audience member's

understanding or enjoyment of a film, and how does this influence the development of Nolan's auteur persona?

The research shows how the auteur persona straddles the multiple levels of discourse creating an auteur framework which helps provide meaning in the director's films. Furthermore, the thesis highlights the increased participation of audiences in creating the auteur persona, which is due in large part to the rise of the Internet and the importance of the home viewing market. Furthermore, the analysis of audience understanding of Nolan's auteur persona demonstrates the extent to which the critical and academic focus on auteurism has been adopted in audience discourse, even as it has faded in these original discourses in some regards.

Along with an investigation of the mechanics behind the discursive surround, the research examines how Christopher Nolan has established an auteur persona through these discourses. This auteur persona incorporates the Romantic notion of the traditional auteur – a director who puts his or her personal vision in each film – and the commercial auteur – a director who uses the extra-textual materials to develop a personality apart from his or her films – into a revitalized auteur concept utilizing emerging technologies and interactive opportunities with the audience. As will be shown throughout this thesis, the auteur persona consists of three primary functions which involve both filmic and extra-textual factors: firstly, it enhances the filmic experience; secondly, it uses the director's name as a referent for a particular quality to organize a set of films, a style, or an experience; and finally, it creates a distinct niche within filmic culture for the director. An auteur persona must incorporate these three factors to become fully developed and sustained, and each level of discourse is required to accomplish this.

1.2 – Why Study Christopher Nolan

This research primarily questions how the increased presence of official and critical discourse and the increased access to this material for audience members contributes to constructing a lasting auteur persona. Because of this cultural moment, where blockbuster films appear to dominate Hollywood landscape while also becoming more artistically acceptable, it is important to choose a contemporary director who is actively involved in Hollywood production as a case study. There have been several generations of film

directors who continue to work in Hollywood today, from the New Hollywood of the 1970s (Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas) to the independent auteurs of the 1980s (Joel and Ethan Coen, Steven Soderbergh, Spike Lee) to the festival, low-budget directors of the 1990s (Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez, Peter Jackson). Many of the directors of these generations could be seen to have an auteur persona and have contributed to how one can theorize the auteur persona today, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. However, because of the focus on technology and the blockbuster, it is important to study a director who has developed his or her auteur persona concurrently with the growth of these factors, so a director who has been working primarily only in this century. Furthermore, to limit the scope of the research, there needs to be a singular focus on one director to be able to fully understand the multiple levels of construction and reception.

Christopher Nolan was chosen as the case study for aesthetic, economic, and cultural reasons as a rising, though respected, director to illustrate the auteur persona process in Hollywood. Since his debut in 1998, Nolan has directed six films, ranging from a low-budget festival film to one of the biggest Hollywood blockbusters of all time. During the past twelve years, Nolan has earned a reputation as a director who can produce films which are critically and popularly well-received and, even more important in terms of Hollywood, earn large profits: *Following* (1998); *Memento* (2000); *Insomnia* (2002); *Batman Begins* (2005); *The Prestige* (2006); *The Dark Knight* (2008). Furthermore, Nolan continues to be active in Hollywood as can be seen by the upcoming release of *Inception* in July 2010 and the 2012 releases of the third Batman film and the rebooted Superman franchise, for which he is acting as a producer and mentor (Boucher, 2010a, n.p.). To compare this with his contemporary generation of directors, for example, Bryan Singer¹ has proceeded on a similar route to Nolan, moving from independent films to superhero franchises. However, Singer's films have not been as consistently released, nor quite as critically or financially successful as Nolan's films. Another comparison can be found with two directors frequently mentioned in relation to Nolan, Darren

¹ *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Apt Pupil* (1998), *X-Men* (2000), *X-Men 2* (2003), *Superman Returns* (2006), *Valkyrie* (2008)

Aronofsky² and M. Night Shyamalan³ as all three directors have distinctive visual styles and tend to challenge the audience to question the construction of reality and the meaning of truth. Aronofsky and Shyamalan both, though, have not received the critical nor commercial reception with their most recent films as they achieved with their first features, and so may not be as successful examples to determine how a lasting auteur persona is constructed. Further directors such as J.J. Abrams⁴ or Joss Whedon⁵, while celebrated as upcoming directors, are better known at the moment as television auteurs. As can be seen, these and other directors can be analysed to determine how an auteur persona is constructed, maintained, and received, and study of them could benefit from the methods used and results found in this research. However, Nolan's work provides a secure base for analysis due to its continued quality, which helps to create a temporally stable auteur persona.

Apart from the critical praise, high box-office returns, and consistency of his work, Nolan is also a useful case study because of his position within Hollywood. Firstly, Nolan has positioned himself as an outsider to the Hollywood system, immediately distinguishing himself from his contemporaries. He accomplished this outsider status initially through emphasizing his British origins, although he is also an American citizen, and through his early independent films. Rather than attend film school or work on music videos as many current film directors have done, Nolan read English Literature at University College London before filming *Following* while making corporate training videos (Sloan, 2003). Furthermore, when filming, Nolan has incorporated global filming schedules and an international roster of actors. For example, for his re-imagining of the American icon in *Batman Begins*, Nolan chose a Welsh actor for the title role (Christian Bale), an iconic English actor for Alfred (Michael Caine), an English actor for Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman), and a Japanese actor (Ken Watanabe), two Irish actors (Cillian Murphy and Liam Neeson), an English actor (Tom Wilkinson), and a Dutch actor (Rutger Hauer) to play Batman/Bruce Wayne's enemies. He also chose to take Batman out of Gotham and into the real world, filming scenes in Chicago as well as in Iceland and

² *Pi* (1998), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), *The Fountain* (2006), *The Wrestler* (2008)

³ *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Unbreakable* (2000), *Signs* (2002), *The Village* (2004), *Lady in the Water* (2006), *The Happening* (2008)

⁴ *Mission Impossible III* (2006), *Star Trek* (2009)

⁵ *Serenity* (2005)

England. Nolan's continued inclusion of non-American actors, even if well-known in the United States, and locations is an example of the increasingly global nature of Hollywood, and it is important for a case study to encompass the new directions of Hollywood to gain a better understanding of the contemporary factors involved in the artistry and audience reach. The focus on the British and American involvement, however, is also beneficial for this research as it is being conducted at an English university by an American researcher and encompasses both English and American materials and audience members. Nolan exemplifies the new methods and inclusiveness of the big-budget blockbuster film through his outsider status, but with access to the Hollywood system. His detachment from the fan-boy status enjoyed by other directors also helps set him apart from fellow directors because he builds his auteur persona partially on being somewhat distant from the audience, maintaining a level of authority.

Secondly, Nolan is a useful case study to examine the auteur in Hollywood because of his attention to the details of the medium of film, including new cinematic technologies. *The Dark Knight* was the first narrative fictional film to be shot in the IMAX format, rather than just screened in IMAX, providing an advance in the technical quality of the film. Along with the push into improved technical fields in theatrical release, Nolan also attempted to help further the growth of new home format Blu-ray by appearing with *The Dark Knight* as the first director to offer live commentary through the BD-Live feature, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three. This engagement with new media also shows Nolan's awareness of new patterns of consumption for audiences, acknowledging the enhanced power of the extra-textual features in the home market. However, while championing new forms of exhibition in the theatrical and home markets, Nolan also frequently eschews reliance on computer generated image (CGI) technology. Although some of his films, such as *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, involve some form of CGI, Nolan has said in interviews many times that he attempts to create as many effects as possible in camera instead of in post-production. Commentator Geoff Boucher suggests that in his films "Nolan put a premium on achieving the unreal on camera as opposed to in computer, which runs counter to Hollywood's obsession with the pixel possibilities of green screen and 3-D" (2010b: n.p.). In this way he is both choosing to support specific new technologies, but also attempting to further traditional

methods of filmmaking, as well. His involvement in cinematic technologies illustrates Nolan's dedication to film, further supported by his insistence on directing all parts of his film, rather than have a second unit director as with most Hollywood films. Therefore, Nolan can be seen as not only a director and writer of his films, but also as a complete filmmaker – one who is involved in all aspects of the film – which helps give credence to the idea of Nolan as a blockbuster auteur.

Nolan's trajectory from British independent to Hollywood blockbuster films has been accompanied by relatively consistent critical praise, reflecting an increase in creative power and freedom as well as a consistent artistic sensibility. Nolan's first feature, which he both wrote and directed, was *Following*, a low-budget, neo noir film featuring intersecting lives. Shot at weekends for over a year, the £3,000 film unfolds in a non-linear fashion, jumping in time at crucial moments to unfold more of the "truth" of the story. Nolan has noted that he wanted to explore the notion that "character is ultimately defined by action" and that he "decided to structure [his] story in such a way as to emphasize the audience's incomplete understanding of each new scene as it is first presented" (Maslin, 1999). This desire to challenge the audience to question how they view and understand characters and narrative became a dominant stylistic theme through the rest of Nolan's films and also signalled his interest in exploring the limits of film structure and technique. Nolan's first wide-release was *Memento*, which also showed at independent showcase Sundance Film Festival (2001) and was nominated for two Academy Awards.⁶ The film uses a dual narrative, including one that runs backwards, to tell the story of an amnesiac (Guy Pearce) who is trying to find his wife's killer and the man responsible for his own mental state. Further exploring themes of guilt and trauma, *Insomnia*, based on the 1997 Norwegian film of the same name directed by Erik Skjoldbjærg, centres on a police officer's (Al Pacino) moral mission – to catch and incarcerate murderers – but he is impeded by his own guilt and insomnia. Produced by Warner Brothers, *Insomnia* was Nolan's first studio film and the only film he did not write or co-write. Its success led to Nolan being entrusted with one of Warner Brothers prized franchises, Batman.

⁶ In 2002, Christopher Nolan and Jonathan Nolan were nominated for Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen and Dody Dorn was nominated for Best Editing.

Nolan approached the Batman franchise through continuing to explore themes of identity and guilt by incorporating them into Batman's origin story. By focusing on how Bruce Wayne became Batman, Nolan effectively disconnected his film from the earlier film versions (director Tim Burton's *Batman* [1989] and *Batman Returns* [1992]; director Joel Schumacher's *Batman Forever* [1995] and *Batman and Robin* [1997]). *Batman Begins* signalled Nolan's move from smaller films to blockbuster status, yet he also retained a sense of character and development within the film that had not frequently been seen in Hollywood blockbusters. Nolan's next project, *The Prestige*, was a smaller period film centred on two magicians (Hugh Jackman and Christian Bale), but which investigated the nature of film and performance. *The Prestige*, like earlier Nolan films, is presented in a non-linear form and is rife with themes of multiple identities, revenge, and guilt. The film oscillates in time, revealing pieces of each magician's life and motivations in fragments. Although the film, like the Christopher Priest novel (1995) on which it is based, digresses into a more fantastical than earthbound story, Nolan's themes remain a driving force in keeping the audience (dis)believing and questioning reality. Nolan's most recent and most successful film to date is *The Dark Knight*, the sequel to *Batman Begins*. The film shifts away from the origin story presented in the earlier film to a further development of Bruce Wayne/Batman's character by pitting him against two men, District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart) and the Joker (Heath Ledger). Although the film was ambitious and technically driven, *The Dark Knight* received a large amount of critical and popular attention due partially to the premature death of star Heath Ledger, who died seven months before the film premiered. The film broke many box office records and, in an indication of its wide-spread appeal, immediately became the number one film on popular media website Internet Movie Database.⁷ The success of *The Dark Knight* allowed Nolan freedom to choose his own project next, rather than direct a project he felt obligated to film. This led to *Inception*, an original project set primarily within the world of dreams, starring an international cast featuring Leonardo DiCaprio, Marion Cotillard, and Ellen Page. Overall, Nolan's films, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, remain thematically and stylistically similar while also showing growth in

⁷ The rapid rise of the film was especially intriguing because IMDb's voting system is designed to avoid 'ballot stuffing', so independently many regular voters needed to all vote the film into the top spot by rating it highly. However, as of February 2010, the film is number ten on the list.

terms of his style and the industrial context. Coupled with his position within the Hollywood system, Nolan proves an excellent example to examine the mechanics of developing a distinct auteur persona.

1.3 – The Multiple Levels of Cinematic Discourse

As this thesis argues, the auteur persona is not formed in isolation, but rather through knowledge accumulated from multiple sources. Therefore, as is argued throughout the thesis, in a contemporary auteurist study, it is crucial to consider the auteur persona within the films and the surrounding cultural context. As Thomas Austin notes “this pluralist mode of investigation contrasts with more rigidly compartmentalised methods in orthodox film studies, which have often approached cinema as a set of discrete and implicitly autonomous mechanisms of production, textual organisation and (more recently) consumption” (2002: 1-2). By expanding on traditional approaches to film studies through consideration of the multiple factors that influence film production and reception, a clearer and more practical understanding of Christopher Nolan as the contemporary Hollywood auteur can be established. Although all levels of discourse can influence and cross over to the others, there can be some distinction between the different types of discourse surrounding a film. The myriad forms of discourse that surround films can be organized into three basic categories: official, critical, and audience. Although each level intersects with the others, most forms of discourse can be placed into one of the categories. Discourse, in this thesis, means a way to organize modes of discussion about film. Michel Foucault suggests

it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (1990: 100)

Developing from Foucault’s propositions, discourse in this thesis brings together disparate elements of cinematic culture and shows how they are related to each other, and

how that discourse develops a specific auteur persona. However, as suggested above, discourse is a fluid entity and is also always involved in issues of power. In certain situations, levels of discourse can have more power than others. It is asserted in this thesis that power in cinematic discourse is negotiated in multiple ways, though each level draws upon knowledge of the film. Official discourse refers to materials produced by the studios, marketing agencies, and those involved with the film, including Nolan. Critical discourse is comprised of professional reviews of the films as well as reports on the people involved with the films and other aspects of film culture such as box office analysis and opinion. Audience discourse consists of how lay people discuss and evaluate film, for example in Internet posts or discussions with fellow audience members. The auteur persona does not originate only from one level of discourse, but instead is developed through each level as well as in the films (Figure 1.1).

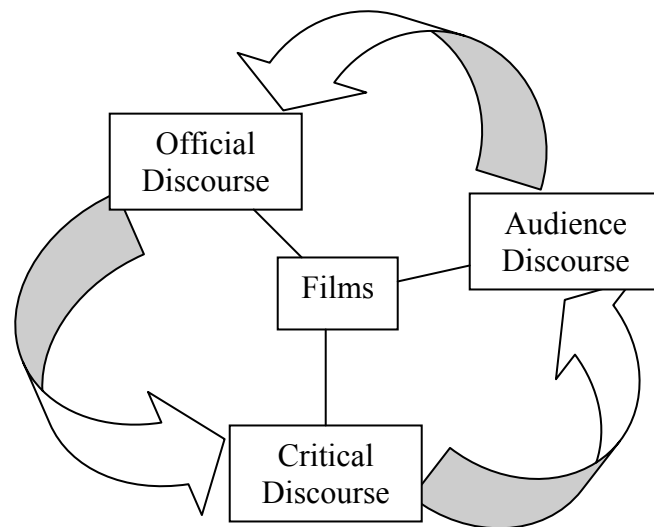


Figure 1.1 – The Levels of Cinematic Discourse

While multiple texts form the discourse levels, each with a somewhat different specific purpose, generally the discourses are a reflection of how a segment of cinematic culture understands and uses films. Furthermore, each level of discourse emanates initially from the films produced. Without a film to promote, discuss, or view, there would be no discourse; however, the discourses all have different relationships to the film. Firstly, official discourse is the most closely related to the film, produced by the

studio or the filmmakers to be seen as an “official” text to accompany the film. For example, posters and trailers promoting a film are included in official discourse as are the materials on the website and those which are packaged with the DVD or Blu-ray release. Their proximity to the source film gives them a level of authenticity that needs to be interrogated to determine how they may enhance or detract from the filmic experience and the auteur persona.

Secondly, critical discourse refers to the reviews written about the film by professional film critics. The critical discourse appears at one remove from official discourse, but is closely related to official discourse in several ways because it often comes from a position of assumed knowledge and power, much as the official discourse does. As Foucault suggests “the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between ‘partners,’ individual or collective; it is a way in which some act on others” (2000: 340), which in this case can position critical discourse as having power on both official discourse and audience discourse. Critics can use or repeat official discourse, but likewise they can also counteract the messages being transmitted by official discourse to create new meanings for audience members. However, an audience member would have to interact with critical discourse to allow critics to influence them. So neither official nor critical discourse can be seen to have complete power over audience discourse, but the imbalance in power in the discourses must be remembered.

Thirdly, audience discourse is how audience members discuss films and filmmakers along with the texts that they produce about these films. However, while audience discourse has always existed, in the past decade with the rise of the Internet and the home market, audience discourse has become a more vocal presence in cinematic culture. For example, audience members can now post reviews of films on-line, challenging or supplementing critical discourse, or use film footage to create their own trailers or commentaries for films, challenging official discourse. To an extent, official and critical discourse can encourage this interaction, for example, by creating websites where audience members can use official materials to create their own advertising. It is in examining these three levels of discourse along with the films that one can see the development and establishment of Christopher Nolan’s auteur persona and understand how the auteur concept functions in Hollywood cinematic culture.

1.4 – Structure of the Thesis

Following this chapter, **Chapter Two** presents the primary literature informing this research. In particular, the next chapter will position previous directorial and auteurist studies in relation to other aspects of film studies, such as star and audience studies, to demonstrate how an examination of contemporary Hollywood directors needs to incorporate multiple methods of analysis, rather than relying solely on textual analysis of films or only one form of discourse. It is then shown how these auteur studies influenced American film production from the 1960s to 2010, particularly in regards to the Hollywood blockbuster and the independent film sectors. However, to further explain the theoretical implications of moving auteur studies outside of the textual realm, post-structuralist and postmodern theories on author and identity will be outlined in relation to film studies, building especially on Roland Barthes' (1977c) call to place the source of meaning with the reader and Michel Foucault's (1981; 1991) conception of the author function, introduced briefly in this introduction. An intertextual framework that guides this research is outlined, primarily incorporating previous studies on stars (Dyer, 1998) and the director's reputation (Kapsis, 1992). Finally, the literature, including the framework, will be placed into a wider context through a brief examination of the relationship between genre studies and auteur studies, a relationship that will be explored throughout the thesis.

After establishing the theories and framework informing the research in the second chapter, **Chapter Three** utilizes the intertextual framework by investigating the initial production of Christopher Nolan's auteur persona through his films and the extra-textual material produced by Nolan and the studio. This chapter begins with an analysis to show how the issues of identity and authorship are explored and developed through Nolan's films. The investigation of identity development provides a basis to explore how the auteur persona is formed outside of the text, especially in regards to the relatively new technology in home viewing – DVDs and Blu-rays. The spatial and temporal proximity of the extra-textual features to the film in these formats allows for the development of an unparalleled relationship between auteur and audience, which will be the primary focus of this section. Exploring how Nolan's auteur persona is formed in conjunction with the

films will illustrate the ability for the auteur persona to exist as part of the film and simultaneously as a separate commercial entity (Corrigan, 1991).

Chapter Four investigates how the auteur persona established within official discourse is then developed and negotiated by critical discourse. Professional film reviewers are a specific type of audience who, as discussed earlier, retain a sort of power over the general audience by being positioned as an authority (Baumann, 2007). A selection of reviews for each of Nolan's films is analysed to determine how the auteur persona is presented in critical discourse. It is shown that the critical discourse perpetuates Nolan's auteur persona as seen in the official discourse, while it develops further dimensions such as name and filmography recognition, which are then incorporated into audience discourse and future official discourse. Furthermore, the analysis also highlights the methods that critics use to help frame a viewer's expectations of the film through auteurist and genre specific language.

After establishing Nolan's auteur persona in official and critical discourse in the previous two chapters, **Chapter Five** shows how audience members respond to Nolan's films and, in particular, how they understand and use his auteur persona when participating in cinema culture. This chapter focuses on Nolan's most recent film, *The Dark Knight*, allowing for an in-depth examination of the multiple factors that can influence how an audience member understands a film. It is established that despite the presence of diverse factors, Nolan's auteur persona plays a significant role in audience knowledge of film, providing some of the first evidence of the relationship between audience and auteur, reinforcing the relationship proposed in Chapter Three. This research shows that a majority of audience members use Christopher Nolan's auteur persona to help set expectations of his films as well as other films within similar genres or industrial conditions. Furthermore, while the audience discourse is increasingly active and visible due to increased technology, the discourse relies on auteur language that has been seen in critical, scholarly, and official discourse in the past, showing the infiltration of the auteur concept into all levels of film culture. The chapter commences by analyzing the results of an on-line audience survey in terms of the viewers' engagement with Nolan and directors generally, official discourse, critical discourse, and genre. Following this, there is a review of the new technologies available to audience members, which

contribute to the rise in audience discourse in cinema culture. A selection of self-generated reviews about *The Dark Knight* posted to audience discourse websites is examined, developing from the results of the audience survey to show how Nolan's auteur persona is used by these audience members to set expectations for the film and the official discourse surrounding the film.

The concluding chapter, **Chapter Six**, illustrates how the analyses presented of the multiple discourses work together to form an auteur persona which contributes to the success of both Nolan's future films as well as his career and reputation. Christopher Nolan's auteur persona is one of an intellectual director who is interested in exploring narrative structure and genre conventions as well as furthering the audience's film experience. At each level of discourse the core features of his auteur persona are maintained, although each form of discourse develops the persona in slightly different ways, which helps create longevity for Nolan's persona and his films. The auteur persona is developed in each level of discourse, as well as in the films, so anyone will experience a similar version of Nolan's auteur persona irrespective of the discourse with which they engage. However, each level of discourse influences the other levels, so to understand fully a director's auteur persona, it is essential to examine how the mechanisms of each level work. This thesis shows the continued prominence of the auteur concept at each level of discourse; therefore, the chapter will emphasize the need for auteur studies to develop beyond textual analysis or singular discourse approaches to gain an accurate understanding of the role of the Hollywood director in cinematic culture.

Chapter Two

Examining Directors Outside of the Text

As discussed in the previous chapter, the auteur concept, though sometimes questioned in terms of its validity, is one that has had longevity in film studies and broader film culture due to its myriad definitions and frequent use. Despite the rise of other, potentially contradictory, methods of enquiry such as reception studies, feminist film studies, and star studies, the auteur concept continues to manifest in filmic discourse through avenues such as scholarly collections of studies on directors, both generally (for example, Gerstner and Staiger, eds., 2003; Wexman, ed., 2003; Grant, ed., 2008) and about specific directors (for example, Friedman, 2006; Naremore, 2007; Mayer, 2009). Furthermore, the word auteur and auteur language – using terms traditionally associated with auteur writings, discussed below, such as associating the director with the artistry and power behind a film – are used frequently in scholarly, critical, and audience discourse. Finally, the auteur concept is further apparent through sustained specific knowledge of directors and auteur language in audience discourse, as is demonstrated in everyday conversations as well as through formalized reviews. Consequently, auteur language is one of the more frequently used languages in the multiple levels of filmic discourse along with genre

language and discussions of stars. However, the main question which arises from this landscape of auteurism, and the impetus at the heart of this research, is how the auteur concept manifests, transmits, and alters through the levels of filmic discourse. Further and more importantly, is the question of what function the auteur concept currently plays in terms of contemporary theory, production, criticism, and reception. To properly examine these questions, this chapter will discuss the origins of the auteur concept including how the French *la politique des auteurs* was adapted by theorists before being widely adopted by Hollywood directors in the 1960s to claim power over their films. Following this, the chapter outlines methods of intertextual research, including the growth of intertextual studies through the 1970s and 1980s, specifically in regards to its applications for auteur studies. Finally, the chapter proposes the framework used in the following research, which relies on previous director and auteur studies, star studies, reception studies, and genre studies. This framework provides the foundation for examining Christopher Nolan's role as contemporary auteur constructed through an auteur persona reinforced through multiple filmic discourses.

2.1 – The Origins and Early Development of the Auteur Concept

The development of what is now known as auteur theory is commonly credited to the French film critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* who first popularized the idea of the auteur in the early 1950s (Astruc, 1968; Truffaut, 1976; Hillier, 1985, 1986). Drawing from “Jean Epstein’s 1921 coinage of the designation *auteur* to refer to a film director” (Wexman, 2003: 2), these critics did not initially propose a theory, but rather a “*politique*” which used the notion of an auteur as a way to critically analyze the popular medium of film. The auteur, although never having a complete and codified definition, was a director, often working within the restrictive Hollywood system, who rose above the subject matter or conditions of production to create a work of art, thereby imprinting his, or rarely her, viewpoint and style in the film. The auteur-director was supposedly a rare director and was differentiated from a *metteur-en-scène*, or a more formulaic and technical director. The auteur was a director “consistently expressing his own unique obsessions, the other [was] a competent, even highly competent, filmmaker, but lacking the consistency which betrayed the profound involvement of a personality” (Caughie,

1981: 10). Therefore, the traditional notion of an auteur is a director who consistently displays an artistic signature in the films he or she directs, making the director the primary source for artistry and unity in not just an individual film, but in a set of films.⁸

One *Cahiers* critic explained the concept in a 1960 article:

The originality of an auteur lies not in the subject matter he chooses but in the technique he employs, in *mise-en-scène*, through which everything is expressed on the screen [...] what counts in a film is the striving towards order, harmony, composition; the placing of the actors and objects, the movements within the frame, the capture of a movement or a look; in short, the intellectual operation which has set to work an initial emotion and a general idea. (Hoveyda, 1986: 142)

Thus, although auteur criticism eventually began to consider thematic unity as one signal of auteurism, the artistic components within the film – those things directly under a director’s control – were the locations for discovering the auteur. In the beginning the auteur was almost a Romantic, solitary, and often apolitical figure who fought against the system of production to create a personal art that could become apparent through intensely analysing each of the director’s films for consistencies and repetitions.

The initial idea of the auteur spread outside of France to British and American film circles as more critics began to think analytically about film as art.⁹ It was in these countries, and especially with American film critic Andrew Sarris (1981) and his 1962 article in *Film Culture*, “Notes on the Auteur Theory”, that the term auteur theory was popularized and the original auteur concept developed by the French critics was transformed.¹⁰ In his book *The American Cinema* (1968), Sarris attempted to clarify and define his auteur theory and also classified levels of directors from the most distinguished, or Pantheon, directors to the ones who were overrated to the ones who were interesting, but did not produce a consistent level of quality. Sarris’ classification led to a so-called “aesthetic cults of personality” rising around certain directors, where

⁸ See Jim Hillier (1985; 1986) for further information on the early growth of auteur ideology.

⁹ During this period film was beginning to be established as an academic discipline, so many critics were also theorists. Later in this chapter, and for the rest of this thesis, the term critics generally refers to film writers who review films for a wider audience, while the term scholars refers to film writers who examine films for an academic audience. However, it should be noted that even in contemporary filmic culture these two types of writers can often overlap.

¹⁰ See Caughie (1981) for a thorough overview of the transformation and adoption of auteur ideology, especially in Britain and the United States.

every aspect of their lives were seen as relevant to the meaning of the film and “minor directors were acclaimed before they had, in any real sense, been identified and defined” (Wollen, 1998: 53). Although Hollywood directors had previously been singled out for praise, as discussed in the previous chapter, the legacy of this cult of personality can be seen with many directors today, for example Quentin Tarantino or Martin Scorsese, in the somewhat fanatical followings they have. Despite slipping into a classification of sorts on some fronts, the popularity of the auteur concept began to flourish within film criticism and film reception, as Barbara Klinger (1994) demonstrates in her study on the re-evaluation of Douglas Sirk’s films. However, while the auteur writings could possibly fall into a narrow view of film analysis and understanding, the writings also illustrated for one of the first times how film could be considered art, not merely entertainment, helping to conflate the ideas of auteur and art in film.

One of the breakthroughs of auteur criticism was that it helped open the field of writing about film to serious critical appraisals, starting to blend the divisions between high art and mass culture. However, auteur criticism did not form in isolation, but partially because of socio-historical and technological changes. The critics who initially articulated the auteur concept in post-World War II France did so because they were able to view in a relatively short period of time many French and American films, providing them with a strong sense of the links between sets of films. Furthermore, technological changes with cameras and other equipment allowed for new aesthetic possibilities in cinema, including lighter cameras enabling outside, natural shooting. These conditions, among others, contributed to a new way of thinking about directors and cinema, as happened again with New Hollywood directors, discussed later in this chapter, as well as current thinking on auteurs. As Marjut Salokannel argues “we must remember that cinema involves the intersection of three concurrent forms of social practice: the artistic, the economic, and the technological. The structure of each of these is determined by a specific set of historical and social conventions, with their own inherent power-relations” (2003: 152). Film theories and methods do not occur out of isolation or because of a solitary influence, but rather through a complex negotiation of factors that inevitably derives from different levels of discourse being influenced by others. The rise of the contemporary auteur in this research could only happen at a specific time of technical

innovation and cultural change resulting in new modes of production and methods of consumption.

Although auteur criticism helped stimulate an age of film criticism, it also had detractors, many of whom argued that the auteur critics looked at too narrow a selection of factors in analysing and appraising value in a film. For instance, within the film industry, writers, among others, decried the auteur ideology. Phillip Dunne, scriptwriter of *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) remarked

the auteur theory led to such nonsense. The entire premise was based on ignorance, lack of information. If [director] John Ford was the supreme creator of *How Green Was My Valley*, then who was [producer] Darryl Zanuck, me, Richard Llewellyn who wrote the novel, or William Wyler, the director who prepared the script for production with me? (qtd. in Staiger, 1995: 2)

Claims for authorship could be made for film composers (Sergi, 2003) as well as writers, stars, and producers. In the realm of critical discourse, American critic Pauline Kael argued “traditionally, in any art, the personalities of all those involved in a production have been a factor in judgment, but that the *distinguishability* of personality should itself be a criterion of value completely confuses *normal* judgment. The smell of a skunk is more distinguishable than the perfume of a rose; does that make it better?” (1994: 297, emphasis in original). Several critics adopted anti-auteur positions. For example, Arthur Knight of the *Saturday Review* commented in 1964 on what he saw as the passing storm of auteurism, while Dwight MacDonald resigned from *Film Comment* because “he refused to be associated with a magazine that included” Sarris as a writer, objecting to his auteurist views (Grant, 2008: 2). Most of these critics were dismayed at the seemingly narrow and superficial scope used in auteur criticism.

In response to criticisms and because theories and categories naturally evolve or else fade away, auteur writings incorporated wider theories and ways of thinking, such as structuralism with its natural affinity to the auteur concept and also post-structuralism. British critic Peter Wollen describes this transformation, claiming

there must be a moment of synthesis as well as a moment of analysis: otherwise the method is Formalist, rather than truly Structuralist. Structuralist criticism cannot rest at the perception of resemblances or repetitions (redundancies, in

fact), but must also comprehend a system of differences and oppositions. In this way, texts can be studied not only in their universality (what they all have in common) but also in their singularity (what differentiates them from each other). (1998: 60)

Wollen suggests that the critic must take into account a wider set of factors than a singularity of artistic vision for the auteur and not simply group a set of films together as an example of that singularity. Wollen's suggestion for analysis, then, begins to combine a socio-historical understanding to the idea of the auteur, and in the case of the early auteur-structuralists, especially pulling from common myths, following the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others (Eckert, 2008: 108). While auteur ideology, as it was now becoming, and criticism continued to evolve among film scholars, and become popular in audience discourse through its inclusion in film reviews by popular critics (Baumann, 2007: 127), in the late 1960s and 1970s the notion of authorship and the role of the author in contemporary society was being discussed outside of the theoretical realm. The auteur concept had spread in America beyond critical circles to contexts of production. No longer were only critics bestowing the auteur label onto individual directors, but some directors were now assuming the title of auteur for themselves.

2.2 – The Auteur in Hollywood

Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s underwent a shift in terms of power, production, and reception which resulted in the proliferation of the auteur concept throughout the industry. Understanding the socio-cultural history of this period is essential in understanding the conceptual and practical changes that occurred to create the contemporary position of Hollywood directors and the role of the auteur. As was discussed earlier, directors in Hollywood had often been touted as artists to help sell a film. Directors such as Frank Capra (Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., 1975), Douglas Sirk (Klinger, 1994), and Alfred Hitchcock (Kapsis, 1992), among others, were promoted alongside their films as proof of certain traits or a level of quality. However, after the dissolution of the studio system¹¹ there was a fundamental shift in production and artistic

¹¹ See Tino Balio, ed. (1985) and Douglas Gomery (2005) for a review of the traditional studio system, including its demise.

styles in Hollywood, with the combination of this promotion history and the influx of auteurism, which facilitated a visible rise in the prestige and power of directors in Hollywood. The 1960s were a chaotic time in American cinema, full of box office disappointment and creative stagnation, which led to openings for new methods of filmmaking influenced, conversely, by a corporate culture and widening sensibilities and artistic influences, especially from Europe. With the change in film production and exhibition, “by the end of the 1960s the continuing decline in motion-picture revenues left the studios weak and vulnerable to outside financial manipulation. [...] In the age of conglomerates they became attractive targets for acquisition, and a number of movie companies were absorbed by mammoth corporations” (Sklar, 1994: 289). However, this financial uncertainty and absorption by corporate parents, as well as the cultural shifts occurring in the United States at the time, allowed mainstream Hollywood production to devise new methods to regain the cinema audience. One of these cultural shifts within the Hollywood system, based on changing mores in wider culture, was the dissolution of the Production Code and the formation of a ratings system that allowed for a wide range of material to appear on screen that had previously been banned.¹² While this opened the door for new artistic freedoms in film, “first and foremost the new ratings system was a business proposition. The studios needed to update their product lines and the new code was a means toward that end” (Lewis, 1998a: 90). Because, as Justin Wyatt notes, “aesthetic ‘products’ are presented to suit the conditions of the overall market, and as the marketplace shifts across time, so does the product” (1998a: 64), Hollywood noticed that younger directors were attracting a sizable audience for a small production budget, and so studios granted these directors a high amount of freedom to make films. This seemingly newfound power of directors, which set in motion the current position of directorial power in Hollywood, became known as New Hollywood. As discussed previously, directors in the past had been in the spotlight or had power over their films, but New Hollywood made directorial power more visible and celebrated than in the past, shaping recent cinematic culture.

¹² For further exploration, see Couvares, ed. (2006) for early Hollywood censorship, Biskind (1998) for a discussion of how directors responded to the lack of production code and Lewis (2000) and portions of Gomery (2005) for a history of the changing means of censorship and ratings in Hollywood.

The directors of New Hollywood were influenced by television and art house theatres where they could watch older Hollywood fare and European films that would previously have been unavailable. Many also came from the recently established film schools such as New York University, University of California-Los Angeles, and University of Southern California where they learned about classical films and the newly popularized auteur theory. There was a drastic shift of power in Hollywood with directors such as Arthur Penn, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Peter Bogdanovich, and Robert Altman creating individual styles in small films. This generation of directors schooled, officially and personally, on cinema “attempted to create the American auteur cinema based in large part on the European model” (Biskind, 1998: 13). They produced films with raw, emotional storytelling and personal vision that “play[ed] on emotion and personal response” (Pye and Myles, 1979: 5) rather than the big budget and somewhat sanitized studio films of the previous decade. For example, Peter Bogdanovich with *The Last Picture Show* (1971), George Lucas with *American Graffiti* (1973), and Martin Scorsese with *Mean Streets* (1973) all directed semi-autobiographical films produced on small budgets, therefore, with little studio involvement in the production, which nonetheless became commercially and critically successful on their own merits, and also through the promotion of the directors behind the films.

The New Hollywood era introduced the high period of the Hollywood auteur, but it also ushered in the era of the blockbuster.¹³ While there had been successful and well-promoted films in the studio era, the shift into blockbuster film production and marketing signalled a new phase of multi-media collaboration and cross-over in production and reception of films. These directors made innovative films on a small budget, but the films had, on the whole, turned in a sizable profit, and “for the filmmakers who had emerged as auteurs in the crisis years, a complicating factor was that their innovative, revisionist works of the late 1960s had also been popular, box office leaders” (Sklar, 1994: 325).

¹³ The term blockbuster was “originally coined to describe a large-scale bomb in World War II, [and it] was taken up and used by Hollywood from the early 1950s on to refer on the one hand to large-scale productions and on the other hand to large-scale box office hits” (Neale, 2003: 47). In contemporary use, blockbuster generally refers to a film with a high production budget and a wide distribution and marketing pattern. Normally a blockbuster will be a high-concept film (Wyatt, 1994) full of stars and special effects. See Stringer (2003), particularly the introduction, for a more in-depth discussion of the definition of the contemporary blockbuster.

The suggestion that this era was a golden age for artistic freedom for directors' films is not entirely true, for the film industry remained just that, still an industry which was primarily interested in securing a profit, and "between 1967 and 1977, nearly one-third of the 220 leading money-makers were either sequels themselves or films that prompted sequels" (Ray, 1985: 262) rather than all being fresh, innovative fare. Those films that seemed to bear the mantle of auteur productions may have done so for more pragmatic reasons than just creativity. Jon Lewis claims that the rise of the "director's cinema" was merely a financial risk program, and had little if anything to do with celebrating artistry. He argues

after the release of *The Godfather* (1972), the studios' embrace of the auteur theory...seemed to signal a shift in power away from studio producers and executives. But the shift was both brief and superficial. [...] By allowing the *auteurs* to take more responsibility for *their* movies, studio executives were able to shift the blame for box office failure away from themselves. As a result, at the start of the 1980s, when auteur films began to lose money, the studio executives were in a position to blame not only individual directors but also the very system the studios had formerly exploited." (Lewis, 1995: 2, emphasis in original)

Francis Ford Coppola, one of the early adopters of the director's movement, spent most of his career attempting to control the terms of his film productions, including in his attempt to remove the traditional studio power from his movies forming his own studio, Zoetrope.¹⁴ As will be discussed below, this turn to commercial and power concerns provided the groundwork for future auteur theorization (for example, Corrigan, 1991). The auteur in Hollywood has always been a commercial one, with artistic goals and financial concerns ever present together. The rise of the blockbuster era was not the death of New Hollywood, but rather a shifting of artistic concerns to align with commercial demands, which is still seen in contemporary cinema with auteur blockbusters (Flanagan, 2004).

¹⁴ Zoetrope Studios did not last long, but was an example of Coppola's keen understanding of where power lay in Hollywood. See Biskind (1998) and Lewis (1995) for accounts of Coppola's rise and fall and rise again.

2.2.1 – The Rise of the Contemporary Blockbuster Film

In 1975 Steven Spielberg's film *Jaws* was released and the age of the blockbuster film fully commenced. Several other films from New Hollywood directors had been very successful, for example Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* and *Godfather II* (1974) and William Friedken's *The Exorcist* (1973), but with *Jaws*' non-stop publicity, commercial tie-ins and vast box office, as well as the even bigger revenues and publicity from George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) two years later, the studios fully realized the amount of money able to be made, and "this 'blockbuster syndrome' caused a trend toward the production of fewer and fewer films, with an attendant increase in advertising and marketing budgets to insure a film's success" (Cook, 1998:14). So while a large number of more experimental, "artistic" films were produced during the 1970s, there were also the seeds for the big-budget "event" films. Event films that "target the mass audience, making lack of knowledge of their existence virtually impossible" (Stringer, 2003: 1) took after the model of *Jaws* and featured a wide-release along with a mass amount of publicity leading up to that release. Although not technically a genre, the rising production and popularity of the blockbuster film soon helped create a sub-genre category of film that has impacted on the production and reception of all Hollywood films.

While the rise in big-budget films seems to have, on the surface, deflated the newfound Hollywood auteur projects, in many ways the blockbuster films helped certain directors gain more power and artistic freedoms. Although many of the high profile projects of this era, such as *Jaws* and *The Exorcist*, emanated from producers or studio heads, others came from directors, such as Lucas' *Star Wars* and Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) (see Pye & Myles, 1979; Elsaesser, 2004). Spielberg and Lucas had shifted the focus of their filmmaking by moving away from a European film sensibility to one that attempted more to reference American cinema's past while updating the special effects quotient. Thomas Schatz notes that in the mid-1970s, "while Coppola was in the Philippines filming *Apocalypse Now* [1979] [...] his protégés Lucas and Spielberg were busy refining the New Hollywood's Bruce¹⁵ [special effects, sensationalism] aesthetic (via *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*), while replacing the director-as-author with a director-as-superstar ethos" (1993: 20). The innovation

¹⁵ Bruce was the name given to the mechanical shark used in *Jaws*.

practiced by auteur Hollywood directors of the 1970s, bringing a more personal, grittier edge to commercially successful films, led in some ways to the standardization of that innovation and a closing off of some artistic freedoms that more directors had been previously granted (Sklar, 1994: 327), but it also allowed for new ways of innovation, including the growth of American independent film.

In consequence of this new relationship of innovation combined with profit making, a new category of film arose, the auteur blockbuster. Michael Allen suggests this new form “seemed to imply a direct clash of systems. Auteurist films are, almost by definition, small, intimate, personal; the blockbuster, again by definition, is large, usually epic, and involves large production crews” (2003: 95). However, this clash, rather than destroy the auteurist film, helped create a new type of blockbuster and also helped to change the notion that an auteur could only make “small” films. To make a personal statement or an impact on a film, then, directors must carefully choose the projects they work on, finding one that can be both financially successful and also allow for their own imprint. The more successful a director is at balancing the artistic and commercial sides of film, the more freedom he or she will have to do a more personal project.¹⁶

The blockbuster film itself is not necessarily without artistic merit, and several have had lasting cultural cachet as well as helping to redefine power in Hollywood. Warren Buckland argues “that an auteur in contemporary Hollywood is a director who gains control over all the stages of filmmaking: not just film production, but also distribution and exhibition” (2003: 84), suggesting that both small and big budget films could be considered auteur vehicles depending on the level of power the director had over the project and the ensuing media outlets. Buckland proposes that power within the Hollywood industry is an indicator of being an external auteur because the director is able to control aspects outside of the film. According to this theory, one must be both an internal auteur, controlling the aspects within each film, and an external auteur, having power in key decisions in the distribution, marketing, and exhibition of the film, to be a contemporary auteur. Although not at the same level of power as Buckland’s subject Spielberg, Christopher Nolan has become an external as well as internal auteur as seen

¹⁶ Steven Soderbergh’s work as a director is an example of this, with both mainstream blockbuster and personal, artistic films alternating in his filmography (Scott, 2009).

through his roles as director, producer, and writer of most of his films as well as the freedom to move between genres, adaptations, and original works. The presence of power as a marker of a contemporary Hollywood auteur is important to recognize, but it is not the only factor which makes a blockbuster auteur. As will be discussed in the next section, contemporary auteurism is also marked by a consistency within the filmography of the director and also in the cultural surround of the films. The power Nolan has achieved allows him to form a particular auteur persona through the multiple filmic discourses, which is essential, it is argued in this thesis, in being a contemporary auteur. The auteur concept influenced directors in Hollywood, but also created a new form of American cinema which operated, for the most part, independently of Hollywood.

2.2.2 – American Independent Cinema

In the gap between the rise of the blockbuster film in the 1980s and the smaller, personal film of the New Hollywood directors of the 1970s, the “independent” American film emerged. These were films developed and financed outside of the studio system and usually had small budgets, personal themes, contained unknown actors, and centred on dialogue. As Jim Hillier notes, “historically ‘independent’ has always implied work different from the dominant or mainstream, whether this relationship is defined primarily in economic terms (production and distribution) or in aesthetic or stylistic terms” (2001: *ix*). The exact definition of independent cinema is difficult to codify, however, as styles, modes of production, or profits could sometimes be indistinguishable and independent studios, such as Miramax and New Line, became part of Hollywood studios (Wyatt, 1998b). A tension between art and commerce inherent in nearly all cinematic endeavours was present in independent cinema, and so “‘Independent’, then has to be understood as a relational term – independent in relation to the dominant system – rather than taken as indicating a practice that is totally free-standing and autonomous” (Kleinhaus, 1998: 308). However, the term independent typically connotes a small, personal film rather than just one financed outside of the main studio system, similar in many ways to the original Hollywood auteur definition of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷

¹⁷ See Pierson (1997), Hillier (2001), King (2004), and Tzioumakis (2009) for more detailed discussion of American independent cinema.

With the rise in the late 1980s and 1990s of a new generation of independent cinema, there was a revival of the “importance” of the director as artist and author. This generation came after the New Wave influenced directors of the 1960s and 1970s, incorporating their methods, but also reacting against the blockbuster mentality they started. Although the birth of American independent cinema is often dated to John Cassavetes’ directorial work, such as *Shadows* (1959) and *Faces* (1968), or Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), the American independent movement came into being fully in the 1980s. However, initially the American independent movement is generally dated to the emergence of Jim Jarmusch and the rise of the independent festival circuit in the early 1980s (Hillier, 2001: xv). Jarmusch’s second feature *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) won prizes at numerous festivals including a major festival, the Cannes Film Festival, and independent ones, the Sundance Film Festival. The small film was relatively successful commercially as well, partially due to the distributor Samuel Goldwyn’s advertising campaign.¹⁸ Pierson notes, “Jarmusch was of course a complete unknown yet the ad campaign said, ‘A New American film by Jim Jarmusch’” (1997: 27). Although emphasizing the director, *Stranger Than Paradise* was marketed not just as a director’s film, but also as symbolic of the type of independent and artistic fare that would become traditional of films shown on the independent cinema circuit, paving the way for the emergence of a new almost genre – the independent film. Film festivals, and particularly the Sundance Film Festival, played a significant role in bringing independent film to a wider audience and also of raising the profit level expectations for independents. In 1989 Steven Soderbergh’s first film *sex, lies, and videotape* debuted at Sundance, causing instant excitement in the artistic, popular, and financial arenas. There was a bidding war among the small distributors at the festival and Soderbergh became an in demand personality (Pierson, 1997: 127), highlighting the attachment of the director and his or her personality to the success of an independent film. Furthermore, the bidding war and subsequent success outside of the festival circuit of *sex, lies and videotape* showed the continued relationship between artistry and commerce, even in sectors where it was not expected to be.¹⁹

¹⁸ It earned \$2.4 million at the U.S. box office (Box Office Mojo)

¹⁹ The film earned over \$24 million in its domestic release (Box Office Mojo).

Although the American independent cinema movement remained relatively strong, the nature of the period changed, as some of the films on the festival circuit seemed to be slightly co-opted by mainstream Hollywood in that they appeared to be designed specifically to cross-over into the larger market (Merritt, 2000). The success of this route led to directors attempting to acquire an “independent” label as a stepping-stone for mainstream success, much as some of the New Hollywood directors used film school. Christopher Nolan, though starting his career in London with *Following*, quickly moved to Los Angeles for his second feature *Memento* and became part of the independent community, incorporating signifiers of the scene, such as creativity and intelligence, into his auteur persona. The growth and establishment of this almost-genre, along with theoretical developments on the role of the author in general, led to new considerations of authorship in film.

2.3 – New Theoretical Developments in Auteur Studies

While the New Hollywood directors of the 1970s embraced the role of auteur, leading to a new generation of independent directors as well as a change in the business of Hollywood, film scholars and critics continued to raise the question of what being an auteur entailed. The study of directors in contemporary film discourse, although still often centred on identifying the style and themes which run throughout a director’s films, has also expanded to incorporate aspects from other film theories as well as an examination of the discursive surround (Klinger, 1997: 109) of the films and auteurism. Instead of being restricted to close textual readings, the extra-textual features in which the director participates, or is expected to participate in, should be included in the consideration of films. In considering the director as a cultural entity, multiple perspectives must be utilized and, as Janet Staiger suggests

some headway has occurred in the past ten years through applying the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and others to authorship as a mode of self-fashioning. By conceptualizing authoring as a technique of the self, as a citational practice, an individual person “authors” by duplicating recipes and exercises of authorship within a cultural and institutional context that understands such acts as agency and repetition of such acts as signs of individuality. (Staiger, 2004: 1)

By blending *structural* theories, the idea that a central figure can provide meaning for a set of texts; *post-structural* theories, the idea that this meaning can change depending on the cultural, economic, and social factors inherent in the production and reception of the texts; and *postmodern* theories, that meaning is almost never absolute, but multi-faceted and knowingly referential to other texts, into the study of the director, it is possible to propose new ways in which the auteur functions in film theory as well as other discourse.

As was discussed previously, the concept of the auteur at its most basic level is essentially a structural way of considering film. Auteursm provides a system for organising and understanding a sometimes disparate group of films; however, “the structure of authorship is not itself a theory, only a topic or theme. It can involve a great variety of political positions and theoretical assumptions” (Naremore, 1999: 9). Auteur writings could be used by each writer to present different concerns and viewpoints in relation to film, whether political or apolitical, within a specific framework of the director as auteur. As Barbara Klinger cautions to remember context, noting “films themselves do not determine their own ideological pedigree; rather, they serve as sites of confluence for diverse cultural concerns during particular eras and through time” (1994: 159). This mutable quality of auteursm led to uses in post-structural thinking, where the auteur could become a symbolic author capable of inserting meaning and artistry into a text, but often looked at in a strictly abstract rather than practical way. This idea, while incorporating some level of political and social consideration for the conditions of reception, often ignored the fact that the director is actually a person who exists not just inside the art he or she creates but also as an individual outside of the film who influences the text at the stage of production. Although initially it could be viewed that “thematic and auteur criticism are general forms of criticism in a dual sense – they can be applied to any film or group of films, and they aim to generalize [...] they feel the film’s ultimate meaning has been identified, and that no further analysis is required” (Elsaesser and Buckland, 2002: 19), adapting auteur criticism to forms of post-structural thinking allows for a deeper analysis of specific films from a textual and extra-textual vantage. This means, as stated above, that the structural basis of auteursm, grouping a specific director’s work together to find his or her imprint on them, remains but it is now expanded to considerations of the director as influenced by the conditions surrounding

production as well as the ultimate reception of a film. This has connections to postmodern thinking of the auteur, as one always created by the text and reception, but it must be remembered that the director does exist as an individual within the system, not just a construct of the system. To bridge the gulf between the individual and the construct, this research claims that there is the creation of an auteur persona. Discussing the auteur concept as an auteur persona helps acknowledge the actual individual, but also the broader implications, theorizations, and room for collaboration which occurs in filmmaking. To fully understand the auteur persona as discussed in this thesis, it is essential to explore the broader theorizations of the author that occurred outside of film studies.

Much of the post-structuralist, and structuralist, discussions of the director's function in the meaning-making process can be traced back to the theorizations in the 1960s and 1970s of Roland Barthes (1977c) and Michel Foucault (1981; 1991) about the author in the modern world. Writing in 1968, in "The Death of the Author," Barthes claims, not so much that the author has died a literal death, but that he has ceased to exist as more than a function of the text:

The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. [...] In complete contrast, the modern sriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*. (1977c: 145, emphasis in original)

With this way of thinking, the Author as an entity has been removed and replaced by the modern sriptor, one who does not exist outside of the work created, and is *created* by the text, though, as suggested above, this *pure* abstract can be an unhelpful strategy in understanding how the director functions in film. In studying filmic culture, the text – the film – is the primary source of meaning, that from which all other texts emerge. The complexity, subtlety, or ultimate meaning of a text is determined by the reader, not the author, for "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes, 1977c: 148). This did not mean that Barthes was claiming that there was no author, but that the

audience, and the socio-cultural conditions, must be considered in the meaning-making process, and, further, that the author must be actively considered, not simply accepted as a fact. It is essential, as Barthes claims, to understand the reception of the work in placing meaning to a text; however, it is also still necessary to consider the production of the text – in the case of this research, the auteur persona – to help gauge meaning. Therefore, both reception and production should be viewed to understand fully a specific socio-historical understanding of a film, which is reflected in later discussions of encoding/decoding considerations (Hall, 1980a).

Foucault, like Barthes, asks how the author relates to his or her work, but also questions how the reader or critic positions the author in the work, returning some consideration to production of the text. Writing in 1969, Foucault claims

it is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships. (1991: 103)

While Barthes calls for a new term and idea for the evolution of the Author, Foucault claims that the Author does not necessarily matter. It is not that the Author is dead or has become incorporated within the work, but that the Author never existed in any meaningful way in the first place. Foucault and Barthes both attempted to place attention on the text itself and its function and reception in culture. However, as this research suggests, the author can be discussed as a product of both the text and the culture surrounding it. This, ultimately, can give a more in-depth understanding of the film director and the text and how both function in relation to each other and in broader culture.

To combat the gulf between the text and the Author, as discussed in the previous chapter, Foucault refers to the “author function.” Although there is no *actual* author, the *idea* of an author remains useful in understanding texts, and “the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications” (1991: 111). Translated to film, the author function can become an important concept in an integrated study of the primary and secondary texts, and can be related to Timothy Corrigan's (1991)

commercial auteur, examined in more detail below, who is a director who uses extra-textual materials to create further meaning in the film as well as place him or herself as the privileged meaning-maker. Foucault expands on the notion of the author function, suggesting it is “characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourse within a society” (1991: 108). Therefore, the author function incorporates the secondary texts and offers a way of understanding the importance of surrounding discourse on the film and society’s relation to the material. The author function can be used as a concept to highlight the importance of the text and reception in determining meaning, but still place some power in the director as a primary creator of the text(s).

Foucault, writing on his earlier comments regarding the death of the author, clarifies his remarks, claiming that the author ultimately matters, and “it would of course, be absurd to deny the existence of the individual who writes or invents” (1981: 59). Furthermore, Foucault explains the author’s position in post-structuralist literature:

The author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry the authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth. The author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real. (1981: 58)

The author, in this case, needs to exist to help provide meaning to the texts, and is not inherently a text him or herself. Instead, the author, or auteur, is one way of helping to unify the multiple influences of the intertext to create a meaningful text. Therefore, the auteur does exist as an actual being, but can also be considered as having an auteur persona that acts, much like a star persona, as a public figure only loosely related to the *actual* author, allowing for a unifying presence through the texts.

The auteur persona is both within the film and other texts as well as outside these texts as a unifying presence. As discussed previously, Buckland (2003) suggests that there are external and internal auteur factors that need to work together to form a unified persona to be effective and attain longevity. By expanding the auteur persona from artistic presence within the film to a tool for creating meaning in the various extra-textual

materials surrounding the film, the auteur persona helps create a framework of meaning that transcends genres and industrial conditions. Furthermore, this framing of auteur allows for consideration of the problem of collaboration in film, an oft stated objection to auteur writings since film is a fundamentally collaborative process. If the auteur is a created function, then he or she is simultaneously both more than and less than an actual man or woman – all the collaborators on a film can, perhaps, be combined into the *idea* of the auteur, although this collaborative force is still organized into one individual. Therefore, if one considers Christopher Nolan as an auteur, it is not necessarily just Nolan himself who contributes to that, but also his collaborators in front of and behind the camera. Nolan chooses the people and elements that help form his auteur persona. For example, beginning with *Memento*, Nolan has worked with cinematographer Wally Pfister and Emma Thomas, Nolan’s wife, has produced each of Nolan’s films. Although Pfister’s or Thomas’ work are integral and praised individually, their work is also part of the Nolan auteur persona. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Nolan’s collaborators are always situated within the frame of Nolan as primary creator – the auteur. This collaborative auteur concept derives much from postmodern theory which, at its most basic, can be described as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, 2004a: 123), meaning that postmodern thought interrogates concepts and history rather than simply accepting the world as it is presented. An auteur persona, with its myriad influences and components, can be seen as postmodern because its identity, though stable in terms of some elements, can be seen as fluid and changing over time and in differing situations.

To briefly expand upon postmodern thought as used in this research, it can be seen as rejecting unifying theories of meaning and an immovable history, instead focusing on the myriad meanings inherent in art, especially by focusing on interpretation of signs and images in a pluralistic fashion, and so is strongly related to semiotics and post-structuralism. In this sense postmodern thinking is not a break from post-structuralism, or even from modernism, but rather an attempt to bring historical, economic, and social concerns – often questioning time and space – to discussions of culture. So this means there is not “a total break or rupture between modernism and postmodernism, but rather that modernism, avantgarde, and mass culture have entered

into a new set of mutual relations and discursive configurations which we call ‘postmodern’” (Huyssen, 1986: x). The postmodern enquiry can be seen to continue from earlier theorizations, but adds a complicating force that takes into account how these multiple theorizations, and multiple texts, can inform and change each other as well as the greater historical moment. Andreas Huyssen (1986) also suggests, among other things, that postmodernism significantly reduces, if not eliminates, the gulf between high culture, a large concern at the height of modernism, and mass culture. Postmodernism instead can propose a way to understand how blockbuster films can start to be seen as art, rather than just entertainment or as a representative of Adorno’s (2001) culture industry. Fredric Jameson suggests that “postmodernism looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds [...] for shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and the way they change” (1991: ix, emphasis in original). From Jameson’s statement it should be noted both the importance of the notion of breaks, seeing how ideas and texts flow into others and break apart, and the central placement of ideas of representation.

How texts are represented, both at the production and reception phases, as well as how individuals represent themselves, is something to be considered in a postmodern investigation of the auteur. As David Harvey proposes, “the idea that all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have the voice accepted as authentic and legitimate is essential to the pluralistic stance of postmodernism” (1990: 48). In claiming an authentic voice one also is claiming an identity and that the individual matters, in both reception and production, highlighting the relationship between the audience and the director. The contemporary auteur creates a distinct persona within the films and the extra-textual materials, but the audience also helps create the auteur persona. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, identity is not a fixed nor purely internal concept. As Lyotard suggests “a *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at ‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits” (2004b: 132, emphasis in original). The identities of audience members and the auteur persona are constructed from their relations to other people, institutions, and culture. Therefore, as this thesis argues, the auteur persona can be seen as originating from the “authentic” person (Christopher

Nolan) but also from the audience, since Nolan is part of the audience. Brian McHale notes, “what is strange and disorienting about the postmodernist author is that even when s/he appears to know that s/he is only a function s/he chooses to behave, if only sporadically, like a subject, a presence” (1987: 201). The auteur chooses to portray him or herself through the text, but also through the multiple extra-textual avenues associated with film in contemporary cinematic culture, influenced by the multiple levels of discourse. It is the power of the choice to create an auteur persona, and consistently maintain it throughout multiple texts, that marks an essential factor of a contemporary auteur, as opposed to simply a director.

Although auteur ideology has its roots in structural and modern theories, it can be evolved and applied to contemporary film studies using post-structural and postmodern ideas. Moving thinking about the auteur into postmodern concerns allows for both the abstraction of an author, but the acknowledgement that a physical individual exists who is also influenced by social and cultural factors. Culture, and in this case film specifically, needs to be considered through its conditions of production as well as its place in a shifting historical landscape, not just assumed to have a stable or rigid meaning. As Colin McCabe suggests, “post-modernism [sic] is not fundamentally a question of subject-matter or themes, but of the full entry of art into the world of commodity production” (1992: *xii*). Therefore, to properly determine the development and function of the auteur in contemporary society, a hybrid conceptual framework needs to be developed that incorporates the multiple influences, both artistic and commercial, on auteur construction by first examining the foundations of intertextual research.

2.3.1 – The Intertextual and the Auteur

Blending post-structural and postmodern theories and considerations of authors with auteur writings, more film theorists addressed how one can use the idea of the auteur in contemporary film (see Corrigan, 1991; Jameson, 1992a and 1992b). These theorists incorporated an intertextual approach to their writings on films, and specifically on directors, to gain a broader understanding of the role of a contemporary auteur. John Frow cautions, “the concept of intertextuality requires that we understand the concept of a text not as a self-contained structure, but as differential and historical. Texts are shaped

not by an imminent time but by the play of divergent temporalities” (1990: 45). Intertextuality, similar to postmodernism, is concerned with the context of a text and the multiple influences which create meaning in the text, both at the site of production and in the process of reading; however, intertextuality, rather than look for breaks, examines how the texts are integrated. The increasing diversity of texts surrounding film makes intertextuality an ideal method to analyze cinema in this instance, as will be discussed below. Furthermore, looking at how multiple influences create, alter, or define the contemporary auteur creates a robust method to understand the function and purpose of the auteur in culture.

Intertextuality as a method allows for an investigation of how multiple texts combine to create new meanings. Derived from semiotic and post-structuralist theories, intertextuality “designates a multi-dimensional relation through which a particular text is intelligible in terms of the other texts that it cites, reiterates, revises, and transforms” (Goodwin, 1994: 9). As a theory and form of cultural criticism, intertextuality in its current form can be regarded similarly to post-structuralism, because “as a self-reflexive discourse, which constantly divides itself against itself and transgresses its own systems, post-structuralist criticism avoids being fixed, avoids becoming an established method” (Young, 1981: 7). Due to this inherent mutability in using both post-structural and intertextual avenues of enquiry, it is important to establish what intertextuality means for this research. The first challenge in defining an intertextual study is to define the text or intertext. A film is produced in a specific context and then usually seen or read by a wide variety of people, leading to multiple interpretations and understandings. However, this text can also be seen as an intertext, a text that has influences and imitations from previous texts as well as society. In fact, “the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole” (Still and Worton, 1990: 1), but must always already be influenced by other factors both in its creation and its reading or reception, akin to the use of pastiche²⁰ in postmodern texts. Moreover, as Roland Barthes suggests, “any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more

²⁰ Pastiche is, briefly, the practice of knowingly copying or imitating previous works for an artistic or political purpose. It is not a new concept, but it has become more frequently used in contemporary film, making pastiche a hallmark of a so-called postmodern film. See Richard Dyer (2007) for a thorough examination of the concept.

or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture” (1981: 39). The (inter)text can be a discrete object such as a film, but in the case of this research, the (inter)text can also be something larger which takes into consideration historical concerns.

The text can also include those items outside of the original boundaries of the film, such as the interviews or promotional materials used to support a film’s release. These texts can both form their own intertext, a combination of all texts which are related to a specific film, but also are factors influencing the reception of the original text. In this sense “the identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation. The intertext is not a real and causative source but a theoretical construct formed by and serving the purposes of a reading” (Frow, 1990: 46). As theorist Frow proposes, the intertext exists in the theorist’s mind, rather than as a physical entity and can, therefore, change depending on who is reading or viewing the text, meaning that *reception* of the intertext is part of the intertext’s being. The intertext can shift depending on both conditions of production and reception. For this research the intertext is the text of the films along with those cultural and social factors that have influenced its production and its reception, including related texts. This means that “even when written (fixed), it [the text] does not stop working, maintaining a process of production” (Barthes, 1981: 37). Although the intertext is defined in this research based on specific texts which were chosen to analyze the auteur, when looked at from another perspective by a different researcher, this intertext could portray something slightly different. This is similar to how each audience member may view a film differently based on the knowledge he or she brings to the viewing, which can change over time.

Intertextuality, the method used to examine intertexts, was a concept first suggested by theorist Julia Kristeva which specifically indicated a text not just influenced and acted upon by texts, but rather a text that had multiple systems of meaning acting upon it simultaneously so that these multiple systems must be examined before the text could be understood (Kristeva, 1980). Her ideas, and especially her term intertextuality, were soon adopted and transformed by other post-structuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes. As noted above, Barthes considered all texts as intertexts, since there can never be a text isolated from influence during the production or reception phases. It is the act of understanding these influences that form a method of intertextuality. As Barthes notes,

“just as Einsteinian science demands that *the relativity of the frames of reference* be included in the object studied, so the combined action of Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism demands, in literature, the relativization of the relations of writer, reader and observer (critic)” (1977a: 156, emphasis in original). Intertextuality, while seemingly fluid, can actually be considered as an almost scientific approach to understanding texts due to its preoccupation with fully discovering the systemic and individual influences on a text. As intertextuality does not have a strict nor stable definition, as shown above in the multiple understandings of the term, defined for this research, intertextuality is the examination of how multiple influences – official, critical, and audience – combine to give meaning to a text and also to the auteur.²¹ The auteur is partially embedded in the text and the understanding of the text, and for this research the method of intertextuality centres on the auteur as a unifying focal point for the study of the film and surrounding texts. In other words, the contemporary Hollywood auteur will be explored using a method of intertextuality to discover the multiple methods and systems, or discourses, used to construct an auteur persona, which include social, aesthetic, technological, and historical factors.

2.3.2 – Contemporary Auteur Studies

The notion of the auteur, the singular force behind a film, has been contested and debated in the past, as shown above, and also among more contemporary film theorists. Any theory that assigns credit to one person in film can seem reductive given the inherently collaborative nature of narrative fiction filmmaking.²² Throughout the history of film production the role of the director has been a fluid one, with the exact function and definition changing depending on the socio-cultural, financial, and artistic needs at the time of production, though through most of cinema’s history the concept of a “director” of some type has been present (Musser, 1990: 6). Since the first segregation of duties at the beginning of the studio era that defined the contemporary director role (Staiger, 1985:

²¹ From this point forward, the text will be understood to also be an intertext as defined above.

²² Narrative fiction filmmaking refers to commercial productions produced for wide-consumption. More independent or avant-garde productions, such as Maya Deren’s films, can more arguably be considered as solely one-woman productions so there are different considerations of authorship which cannot be addressed here due to the scope of the thesis.

113), there has been a continued debate on who is ultimately responsible for the film, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. While the debate on who is an auteur, and what that means, continues in contemporary film culture, the director is still most often addressed as the auteur in discourse.

One of the most influential studies on the auteur outside of the text in the past two decades came from Timothy Corrigan's *A Cinema Without Walls* (1991), where he suggests the idea of a commercial, not just artistic, auteur. Framed in a discussion of post-Vietnam War American films, Corrigan proposes that the auteur, rather than being considered a Romantic, solo, artistic individual who fought against production constraints, could instead be viewed as "a *commercial* strategy for organizing audience reception" (1991: 103, emphasis in original). For Corrigan the auteur was not something present only in the films, but also outside of the film in the discursive surround and, moreover, had been commodified to the point where he or she was not truly present within the text, but instead interacted more directly with the audience outside of the text. Several directors have always had a certain level of involvement in the extra-textual features of their films, such as Frank Capra (Buscombe, 1981) or Alfred Hitchcock (Truffaut, 1986); however, Corrigan's suggestion of the commercial auteur moved beyond a separate discussion of promotion and films to a fusing of the two, to the radical point where, perhaps, the films were not always the central text in the construction of an auteur. Instead, Corrigan saw the auteur as being constructed outside of the text and perpetuated primarily through interviews. For example, Corrigan singled out director Francis Ford Coppola "as the *auteur*-creator victimized by the forces of [industrial, goliathan] productions" (1991: 109, emphasis in original) who had to maintain this carefully constructed auteur identity to sell his films, rather than being an auteur through his art. Corrigan suggests Coppola is successful as a commercial auteur where his auteur status remains independent of the quality of his work, but instead is dependent on the self-promotion of his image. This example appears apt, as in a somewhat recent interview with Coppola about his 2007 movie *Youth Without Youth*, a film critic wrote

throughout our conversation he took evident delight in presenting himself – one of the old lions of the New Hollywood; an Oscar and Palme d'Or winner; a man whose professional life has been a 40-year epic of triumph and catastrophe;

Francis Ford Coppola, for goodness sake! – as a young upstart with a gleam in his eye and a camera on his shoulder. (Scott, 2007a: n.p.)

The Coppola whom Corrigan uncovered in interviews in 1991, that of maverick child fighting within the industrial complex of Hollywood, remained the same Coppola presented in interviews in 2007, even though sixteen years and a few ill-received or not as artistic films (*Jack*, 1996; *John Grisham's The Rainmaker*, 1997) separated the two profiles.²³ However, despite the slowing of artistic output from the director, his constructed image remains present due to his continued stable portrayal of a specific persona, demonstrating the essence of the contemporary commercial auteur.

Corrigan claimed the extra-textual materials such as interviews given by the director need to be analyzed in relation to the meaning of the film as audiences now, more than previously, are exposed to and influenced by these outside but related texts, sometimes even to a greater extent than in viewing the film itself. As Helen Stoddart cautions though, “while Corrigan is right to signal the influence of such commercial strategies, the danger is that they may be overemphasized as determinants of the way the texts are read rather than as one of many influential factors in the production of meaning” (1995: 53). Therefore, it must always be remembered that although it is perhaps essential to examine the extra-textual materials surrounding a film to discover its reception or meaning, the film, and conditions of production, remain of vital importance. The interviews and commercial marketing opportunities around the film can be influential and have an impact on reception of film and the filmmaker, but these materials always initially emanate from the film text. Ultimately, it can be claimed that this new type of auteur incorporates the discourses produced with and surrounding the film, which include interviews, as mentioned above, but also advertising for films and – in contemporary filmic discourse – the promotional materials that accompany DVD releases and which populate websites. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Barbara Klinger (1994; 1997) cautions that the researcher must consider multiple levels of discourse to accurately

²³ The titles of two of Coppola's films, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and *John Grisham's The Rainmaker* further complicate Coppola's standing as an auteur in these films, as the names of the source novels' authors are clearly present in the official titles. As Thomas Austin notes, “the title presented *Bram Stoker's Dracula* as a faithful adaptation of the novel” (2002: 119) which means a less authorial position for the director, as it is not completely the director's film, then. However, as Austin explains, the marketing of the film attempted to capitalize on both Stoker's authorship *and* Coppola's authorship by highlighting them both in different outlets.

gauge the impact of reception in different historical and social contexts. She notes that “while a text’s formal features may set into motion certain procedures of decipherment for the spectator, these features alone cannot explain the range of meanings a text can have in different contexts of reception” (Klinger, 1994: 34). Although Klinger is discussing wider socio-historical factors, it is argued here that the director, in some cases, can both be acted upon by contextual factors and be a contextual factor influencing reception. Corrigan’s commercial auteur is a useful way of incorporating the extra-textual materials, as well as the audience reception of these materials and the film, into an understanding of the auteur, but must be tempered and balanced by examining other discourses such as production influences as well as the films.

Following from and expanding on Corrigan’s theories, several film scholars began to form hybrid cultural studies to examine the role of the director, rooted in film, that borrows aspects of reception studies along with the image making of Corrigan’s commercial auteur. For example, Martin Flanagan (2004) examines how critical perception of director Ang Lee, along with the rise of blockbuster auteurs in 2003, led to specific critical and financial expectations for *Hulk* (2003) based on Lee’s auteur persona. Flanagan suggests that the studios, rather than taking a *risk* on “auteur” directors, *chose* to entrust their big budget, blockbuster films to these directors based on calculated risk and a profit motive. Having an auteur, rather than an unknown director, was seen as part of a strategy to differentiate these films from other blockbusters. Successful examples include Sam Raimi directing the *Spider-Man* (2002, 2004, 2007) films, Alfonso Cuarón directing *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), and Christopher Nolan revising the Batman franchise. Producing an auteur blockbuster could offer both prestige and financial rewards based on successful critical and box office response. Devin Orgeron (2007) focuses on a different facet of the filmic discourse by showing how director Wes Anderson purposely created an auteur persona through not just the films and interviews, but especially through his films’ DVD extra-textual materials. Flanagan’s and Orgeron’s work will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, but it is important to note how they both incorporate social and economic factors in their assessment of auteurism, rather than relying on a textual analysis of the films.

A third scholar who incorporates extra-textual factors in the consideration of the auteur is Yannis Tzioumakis (2006) who suggests the term “industrial” auteur to recognize the industrial context in which auteurs are currently placed in Hollywood. In an article analysing the trailers for several David Mamet films, Tzioumakis suggests that the industrial auteur is a director who contributes to the promotion and publicity of his or her films while also building a reputation as an artist. Tzioumakis’ idea of the industrial auteur presupposes that the director is *already* considered an artist before the promotion and publicity of the film. This, therefore, assumes that the industrial auteur cannot exist without previous work to qualify him or her for this category, whether it be in some other role within film (such as art director, cinematographer, or screenwriter) or in another creative industry (such as the theatre, literature, or fine art). In the case of Mamet, he had worked to great acclaim as a writer for the theatre before venturing into directing films. It was on this theatrically based reputation, one of skill and controversy, that the publicity for Mamet’s films was based. The industrial auteur reputation criterion can be adapted, however, to use specific conventions of the industry or genre to build a reputation for a novice director. For example, the festival circuit is established as almost a type of genre or qualification, as suggested by Peter Wollen (Altman, 1999: 91) and earlier in this chapter, to a point where a first-time, independent filmmaker with no prior industrial experience can still be promoted using the techniques suggested by Tzioumakis. However, once a novice director is then established past the independent or first-time status, he or she can then be situated in terms of their own work rather than in relation strictly to others’ work or in terms of genre, although they are often still positioned within or in opposition to a specific genre. By considering Corrigan’s commercial auteur alongside Tzioumakis’ industrial auteur and Flanagan’s blockbuster auteur, it can be seen how a director initially constructs a specific identity through official discourse and then that identity can be expanded upon and emphasized by critical and audience interpretations of the persona. An example of this can be seen in Thomas Austin’s (2002: 122-127) examination of Coppola and *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992) where the film was marketed partially based on Coppola’s status as auteur, since “the presence of Coppola as star-director added to the list of attractions” (Austin, 2002: 122) in advertising for people

to see the film. Therefore, Coppola's self-branding was utilized by Columbia Tri-Star, the studio marketing the film, and propagated by this official discourse.

Although the industrial auteur is primarily based on an origination point in official discourse, it is also predicated on the idea that audiences will understand the industrial references. The idea of the industrial auteur leads to a method of study that takes "into consideration the increasingly complicated relation between audiences and film-related forms of media (magazines, interviews, on-location reports, reviews, and the making-of featurette)" (Tzioumakis, 2006: 60). In this case the industrial auteur works within the cinematic industry in multiple ways to procure a reputation for not just his or her work, but also for him or herself, which is then incorporated with and compared to the films he or she produces (Flanagan, 2004). In discussing or promoting his or her film, an industrial auteur would link the themes and artistry of the film with a persona, connecting, in a sense, the actual author with the abstract author function. Furthermore, "it seems that for a filmmaker to be advertised as an auteur, the filmmaker in question needs to be associated clearly with a specific institutional apparatus. It is this association – for film distributors at least – that allows the filmmaker to achieve recognition with an increasingly media-savvy film audience" (Tzioumakis, 2006: 72). This means that the director and other elements such as studios and critics construct a lasting persona linked to specific industry traditions or categories such as genre, technology, or personal traits, including recurring themes and traditional auteur stylistic traits within films. Christopher Nolan has worked as both a commercial and industrial auteur, as well as a blockbuster auteur, and constructed a specific persona by appropriating the thriller and noir genres onto new forms (independent, revenge, comic book, and period-fantasy films), forging a reputation for placing independent film sensibilities in mainstream Hollywood films as well as intelligence and creativity. Both the commercial auteur and the industrial auteur concepts can be incorporated into the author function, constructing an auteur persona which allows for a method of studying the multiple factors involved in constructing the auteur, both inside and outside of the text.

2.3.3 – The Rise of the Auteur-Star

With the growth of the director's cinema of New Hollywood and the independent film sector discussed earlier came a growth in the position of directors within that area. Directors more often than in early Hollywood became important, though at times reluctant, factors in the promotion and identity of their films. The auteur was becoming an integral component in the cultural promotion of his or her film and could be seen as a cultural agent within the film world. Although the auteur is still predicated on the film, "there are many kinds of auteurs in contemporary film culture. And there are many strategies through which a movie maker can employ the agency of auteurism and by which audiences can use it as a way of understanding films" (Corrigan, 1998: 58). One of the ways of being an auteur is to become a celebrity – an auteur star. While this can be compatible with forming an auteur persona, there are two primary considerations with the auteur star: possible fissures in the filmic world and factors of temporality. Creating a successful auteur persona requires complementing the film world's themes and ideas and also developing a persona that will be accessible beyond the contemporary moment.

It is now more than just a transcendence of conditions that creates an auteur, but a synthesis of multiple texts to create a unified and lasting body of work – both on the screen and off. Dudley Andrew (1993), reflecting on the resurgence of auteur studies in the early 1990s, questioned the function of the new breed of auteur-celebrity by focusing on Spike Lee. Andrew asks, if viewers could once be lost in the world created by a director through his or her films, is there a way to be immersed in a filmic world when the viewer is surrounded by the trappings of the auteur-star: "should we speak of Spike Lee's 'world', when his is designed to fold itself inside our world? Appearing on talk shows and Nike shoe ads, Lee is familiar in our living rooms, just as pizza and Public Enemy fit comfortably within his films" (1993: 81). Andrew suggests that this type of move toward a postmodern auteur, one who is apart, within, and absent from the films could lead to a breaking of traditional film viewing and understanding, as the viewer's world could now be conflated with the film world. For example, the viewer could not only see the film, but buy the products featured in the film and around the film, play the video game, and experience the behind-the-scenes information presented on the DVD, as well as on the website. However, it is useful to recall Foucault's question if "everything

[the author] wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work” (1991: 103). In this case the director, to create a lasting and complementary auteur persona, must limit and monitor the texts he or she creates to avoid the fissures or discrepancies suggested by Andrew. The auteur persona thus, at its essence, is always centred on and promoting the film, not the person behind the persona.

This research suggests that the careful balancing of the auteur-star culture with a specific and relatively stable persona will help emphasize the continuity and artistry of the films, creating an auteur persona, rather than distract from the film or create irreparable fissures. Andrew notes, summarizing Gilles Deleuze, that “the auteur marks the presence of temporality and creativity in the text, including the creativity of emergent thought contributed by the spectator” (1993: 83), suggesting that the auteur is still present within the text as a mark of quality and creation, but the viewer also has a role to play in composing a type of intertext of the film, bringing their own understanding to the film and the notion of director. Christopher Nolan creates a consistent persona that reflects the auteur-star trappings of self-promotion to some extent with interviews and DVD materials, but creates a solid film world separate from any direct mixing, or folding in, of the viewer’s world. His persona, instead, gently guides readings of the film by emphasising themes, such as the double and identity, rather than things such as product placements.²⁴

2.4 – Framework for the Research: Forming an Intertextual Method

Taking into consideration the evolution of auteur thinking as well as the growth of intertextual research, it is important to develop a multi-layered and robust approach to researching and understanding the complexities of the contemporary Hollywood auteur. As suggested above, a singular or textually isolated approach to the study of Christopher Nolan or directors generally will not result in satisfactory or valid conclusions as there would always be a segment missing from the work. Instead, this research will use a hybrid conceptual framework that incorporates a brief textual analysis of the films with considerations of how the filmic world created is then perpetuated and influenced by the

²⁴ Although product tie-ins are ubiquitous with a franchise like Batman, Nolan’s films do not actively feature such products, and they appear almost in a separate sphere. For example, on release of the film *The Dark Knight*, there was no new video game, something considered odd and remarked upon in both gaming and film circles (Lang, 2009), although a related video game was released in late 2009.

official, critical, and audience discourses to create the role of the auteur in Hollywood. This framework will draw from auteur writings, discussed above, as well as genre studies, and reception studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary Hollywood auteur. By utilizing an intertextual and theoretically hybrid approach, the research provides not only insights into the function of the Hollywood director – in this case Christopher Nolan – in cinematic culture, but also an example for how to conduct future research on the auteur persona.

As has been discussed previously, intertextuality is a somewhat fluid notion, so boundaries and a distinct framework are needed to guide the research to determine which texts should be examined. Although influenced by several previous studies, the framework for this research is initially formulated from Richard Dyer's 1979 (printed in an extended and revised version in 1998) analysis of film stars and Robert E. Kapsis' 1992 examination of Alfred Hitchcock's reputation. Both of these studies incorporate an intertextual approach to explore their subject matter. More specifically, this research borrows from each work the idea of identifying multiple categories which influence the understanding of the subject. Dyer discussed four categories used to create a film star: promotion, publicity, films, and criticism and commentaries. Effectively Dyer's study showed that stars are created from the films they appear in, how they and the studio present their images (promotion, publicity), and how others discuss their images (criticism and commentaries). However, these categories, while useful in their scope and range, must be adapted for studying directors for, as Dyer has noted in his study, the star consists as an image seen on screen (or print) while a director is not normally physically *seen* in a film, but rather is present in a more abstract form. Rarely is the director the main star of the film, and when he or she is, such as Barbara Streisand in *The Prince of Tides* (1991) or Clint Eastwood in *Gran Torino* (2008), they are seen separately as star and director, even when praised in both roles, or their director status is more associated with their role as star (for example, see Mainar's [2007] examination of Eastwood).²⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to form categories which pertain specifically to directorial studies.

²⁵ Similarly, when actors then turn to directing instead of acting, such as Ron Howard, they tend to be looked at separately in regards to each role.

In research on the development of Alfred Hitchcock's reputation, Kapsis (1992) adapted Dyer's categories with consideration of the "art world" framework proposed by Howard Becker (1982). Becker, in a manner similar to an intertextual approach, claimed that all artists work in a form of collaboration with their influences as well as with the perceived anticipation of the audience response, both critical and popular. This suggests that artists work not just to produce art irrespective of the world around them, but to produce art for a certain response, whether that be to cater to existing tastes or to challenge audiences to appreciate a new direction in art (Kapsis, 1992: 5). The film art world is a prime example of art which takes into consideration reception and conditions, with the high financial expectations and genre constraints inherent in commercial filmmaking. Becker purposely "overemphasized the collective character of making and consuming art, to see what could be seen from that vantage point" (1982: 351) and downplayed the role of the individual artist except for an investigation into the formation of reputation. Becker suggested, as is claimed in this thesis regarding auteur personas, reputations are a continual process formed by the collective about an individual entity (person, genre, institution). Further, Becker states that the individual reputation is essentially not important, but works to help the art world as a whole and does not necessarily reflect the value of individual works of art. Although the current research emphasizes that the individual director is essential, Becker's discussion on individual reputation working from and towards the collective helps situate the importance of creating auteur persona in contemporary film. It can help raise or maintain the reputation of a genre, of a studio, of crew and cast members, and of the actual director. Ultimately this helps to distinguish the art world of Hollywood to the public, rather than *just* an entertainment world, which then feeds into and sustains the reputation of the films.²⁶

Building from Dyer's categories and Becker's art world and reputations, among other theorists, Kapsis developed three factors based on Hitchcock's career which he claim need to be present for a director to be considered an artist or auteur in a lasting manner. Kapsis' (1992: 11-12) three factors were "public reputation", or how the biographical facts known about a director can affect understanding of his or her films;

²⁶ The amount of time and money studios contribute to Academy Awards and other award campaigns can be seen as an example of studios wanting to attain a certain level of prestige.

“conventions of critical discourse about genre”, or how critical and scholarly writings frame discussions about a certain genre which can then influence how a film situated within that genre is seen; and, finally, “critical discourse on the cinema”, or the contemporary state of thinking in critical and scholarly writings on the cinematic forms of the past. While Dyer’s (1998) categories focus specifically on the texts produced around a star, Kapsis’ factors centre on the meanings created about a director on different levels of discourse, but both theorists take into account the discursive surround of film to better understand their subject. Kapsis’ factors add a more specific collective dimension to Dyer’s four categories in that Kapsis incorporates changing ideas about film culture with Dyer’s “criticism and commentaries” on an individual star. Hence, Kapsis claims that Hitchcock could not have become the respected auteur known today except for the shift in critical thinking in the 1960s about both the acceptability of the thriller genre and the growing respect for directors developed from the auteur theory. Shyon Baumann (2007), also building on Becker’s art world concept, corroborates Kapsis’ claim, exploring how shifts in critical perception can influence both the reception (critical and audience) of films and how studios produce and market films. Similarly, it is claimed in this research that part of Christopher Nolan’s persona is born out of the formation of the blockbuster auteur and growth in acceptability of mainstream films as art, as well as changes in filmic presentation and production, for example special effects and IMAX technology. It is partially because of a shift in critical thinking and an industrial shift similar to that at the time of New Hollywood, discussed previously, that allows Nolan to claim status as a contemporary auteur.

While useful as a framework because of the acknowledgement and incorporation of critical and scholarly reception at different historical modes, the framework must be altered since Kapsis’ (1992) work gives little voice to how audiences view the director or help create the reputation. Although there is some consideration of the audience, Kapsis relies on the “reflection perspective” that suggests “by choosing the films it attends, the audience reveals its preferences to the Hollywood studios which, in turn, produce films reflecting audience desires” (1992: 245), a somewhat simplistic method of thinking about the audience. However, he tempers this by acknowledging that in this perspective “the audience’s influence has less impact or authority since it is filtered through conflicting

perceptions of the audience's future tastes" (Kapsis, 1992: 245), as well as business and financial considerations. This view of audiences worryingly places them as a mass, rather than as individual viewers, and as mostly passive subjects rather than participants. As is discussed in this thesis, audience members have distinct identities that can interact with and add to the auteur persona in several respects, especially with outlets such as the Internet. Although Kapsis' research effectively illuminates a way to study the texts surrounding the director, its focus on the official and critical discourse surrounding Hitchcock does not fully permit it to consider audience opinions in the process of perception and meaning-making. However, as has been discussed above and will be discussed further below, it is essential to consider how the audience, constituted by individual viewers, understands and uses the director and concept of auteur in film reception. It is not enough simply to assume what the audience thinks, especially in the contemporary filmic environment that becomes more interactive by the day.

Considering the framework and criteria of Dyer's (1998) and Kapsis' (1992) work, as well as advancements in audience research discussed below, this research has formulated the factors and categories into three different levels of discourse. Discourse means not just an utterance or discrete piece of language, but a set of texts which are bound together because of like purpose or origin. It must be noted that discourse, as Foucault cautioned, is always already engulfed in issues of power, and to even define something as discourse is to assign power to it and the one who produced it as "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (Foucault, 1981: 52). Discourse, therefore, can be a powerful tool in regards to information, including in how it is defined. These considerations are present throughout this research, and accurate and fair decisions on choosing and analysing forms of filmic discourse were attempted by representing diverse forms of discourse, but ones that are frequently used, as will be discussed in each section as appropriate. Furthermore, by including multiple levels of discourse, rather than just one narrow selection, a more complete and vigorous vision of filmic culture surrounding the director is achieved.

As stated in the introduction and earlier in this chapter, the levels of discourse are labelled as official, critical, and audience, which all centre on films (see Figure 1.1). Each discourse is not discrete or closed off, but is somewhat fluid and interacts with each other at various points. It is this interaction and influence the levels of discourse have on each other that is one of the primary concerns of this research, because it is in the cross-fertilization of texts (the intertext) and discourses that the contemporary auteur can be seen. However, as with discussing intertextuality, limits and a definition need to be set to give direction to the research. The first discourse discussed, official, is comprised of what Dyer referred to as the promotion and publicity and is roughly comparable to Kapsis' professional reputation category. This consists of the promotional materials produced by the studio to advertise a film's release such as posters and trailers (Tzioumakis, 2006), as well as publicity such as interviews with Nolan (Corrigan, 1991). However, official discourse also includes the promotion of the film upon release in the home market, specifically with the DVD extras (Skopal, 2007). The DVD extras, more so than other aspects of official discourse, allow for the audience to become somewhat active participants in the production and meaning-making process. Not only can the viewer play, pause, rewind, or advance the film at his or her will, he or she can also learn about the filmmaking process through behind-the-scenes documentaries and deleted scenes or gain insight into the creators' minds through interviews and commentary. Although these types of extras have always been around in some form in other media, it is the proximity to the original text – the film – which gives DVD extras added power, immediacy, and authenticity (Parker and Parker, 2004: 20). Because of the intimate relation between DVD extras and the film, the analysis of official discourse focuses on these extras.

The second level of discourse, critical, encompasses professional film reviews. As Baumann (2007) suggests in his book on film reviews, professional art reviews are a form of disseminating opinion and taste, so understanding what ideas are being stated in these reviews helps to understand how standards are set and appropriated to a larger audience. Although “appropriated” can have certain negative connotations, it is used here to describe the process of audiences, either critical or popular, taking aspects of the auteur persona and developing those aspects as part of their own discourse. As suggested by Dyer's (1998) category of criticism and commentary and Kapsis' (1992) focus on the

critical surround of Hitchcock's work, this level of discourse evaluates and assigns labels of quality to films and the producers of films. Conventions about what is acceptable, appropriate, or appreciated in film are partially set by what critics write, and as "conventions place strong constraints on the artist" (Becker, 1982: 32), it is important to understand which conventions are active around the production and reception of Nolan's films. In his study on how cultural value is determined, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) suggested, among other things, that art work has meaning and value, cultural capital, because of the cultural knowledge of those viewing it. As Thomas Austin explains, Bourdieu

argues that "cultural capital", or the symbolic resources and knowledges needed for cultural consumption, is both unequally distributed (via education and social environment) and value-laden, so that certain forms of consumption are legitimated and others derided. A hierarchy of cultural codes and practices is produced with those of dominant groups uppermost, and then naturalised through the arbitration of good or bad 'taste'. (2002: 20)

The critical discourse for this research, discussed further in Chapter Four, analyzes printed reviews in newspapers and magazines. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, a high proportion of viewers still appear to trust and read this type of review over those on television, Internet-only, or radio, making a selection of newspaper and magazine reviews an appropriate sample. Examining how the auteur persona is constructed within critical discourse will highlight the culture of auteurism that permeates film reviews, specifically noting how that culture develops and is designed to influence other forms of film discourse.

The third level of discourse concerns audience reception, understanding, and engagement with the director. As suggested previously, investigating audience discourse is essential in gauging how a film or the director is actually received. It is not enough to assume things about the audience based on official or critical examination. Audience discourse can consist of any interaction viewers have with film, from personal understanding whilst viewing the film to formal written reviews years after the fact. As Janet Staiger notes, "although intellectual focus on the reader has a history as long as that on the author, several scholarly pursuits have been foregrounded recently under the tags

of reader-response criticism, reception aesthetics, and reception theory” (1992: 7). Staiger locates her audience research in a historical context, highlighting socio-cultural factors in investigating audience response, considering multiple influences and factors, including auteurism, in discussing viewers’ reactions to films. Ultimately Staiger claims that “a reading act’s origin and end is the reader” (1992: 23) despite these other influences, though her main concern rests in how meaning, or signification, is made by viewers. What is most important in considering Staiger’s substantial investigation into viewers is that she defines this research as reception studies, which “has as its object researching the history of the interactions between real readers and texts, actual spectators and films” (1992: 8) so is not a theory in itself, but employs philosophy and theory in its exploration. Similarly, the discussion of audience discourse in this research relies primarily on actual audience response, rather than imagining how an audience will respond. While many scholars have conducted audience research, Staiger (1992), Klinger (1997), Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998), and Thomas Austin (2002) all provide extensive and thorough discussions of how film research into audiences has evolved over the past three decades. One point that runs throughout their discussions, as well as others on reception studies, is the importance of context.²⁷ Incorporating audience discussion of directors into wider discussions of film production and criticism illustrates the ways that each level of discourse influences each other, and how all filmic discourse originates from, and returns to, the films.

Ultimately, classifying forms of discourse into three categories allows for a relatively robust, comprehensive, and thorough examination of how an auteur persona is established and maintained via multiple sources. However, even though the levels of discourse used in this research have been defined, it is still necessary to outline the method for analyzing these texts. The analysis will draw from multiple methodologies, similar to the structure of the research, though the primary influence will be from textual analysis and previous audience studies. In researching British cinema and audiences through a contextual framework, Sarah Street suggested seven methodological concerns to bear in mind for choosing and analysing extra-textual materials: type, authorship,

²⁷ The exact methods of audience research influencing this study will be discussed further below and in Chapter Five.

agency, context, impact, archival scheme, and interpretive significance (2000: 6-9). Following this range of criteria allows for a detailed investigation into multiple documents or texts. Although each criterion is considered throughout the analysis, special attention has been paid to the following: authorship, who or what generated the text; agency, why does the text exist and to what purpose; and impact, how the text influences other levels of discourse. While keeping these concerns in mind, it is also essential to note that much of this analysis derives from social and multimedia semiotics, those branches of semiotics which address the wider cultural significance of signs and multiple systems of sign relations. However, while the ideas of semiotic theorists such as Roland Barthes inform the analysis, this research does not claim to be a work of semiotic analysis. Instead, it more broadly enquires into cultural systems through multiple forms of language. Therefore, the work also does not use Content Discourse Analysis, or other set methodological analysis from linguistics, but rather the analysis of the texts is inspired by the idea that “content analysis is a means of trying to learn something about people by examining what they write, produce on television, or make movies about” (Berger, 1998: 23). In this case the “people” who are being examined are the author, Christopher Nolan, and the audience, including critics, watching his films, and also the cultural systems in place that interact with each other to create cinematic culture.

One of the most prevalent methods in the past thirty years used to analyze audience response to film and television is the encoding/decoding model. As Jackie Stacey explains, the main instigator of this method “Stuart Hall (1980[a]) argued that meanings do not reside in texts, but rather in the negotiation between reader and text which may produce one of three possible decodings: dominant, negotiated or oppositional” (1994: 36-37). Hall’s theories introduced the audience’s responses into the ultimate meaning of the text, in his case a television program. While it had been proposed previously that visual images have multiple meanings within them, for example Barthes’ analysis of “linguistic message, the denoted image, and the connoted image” (1977b: 37) in an advertisement for pasta, Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding suggested that ideology, or an intended meaning, was set (encoded) in the text at the point of production due primarily to the corporate nature of television. However, his view expanded from and built on earlier theorists’ work on the subject, such as Barthes (1977b) subject, Lévi-

Strauss' (1978) myths, and Louis Althusser's (2001) writings on ideology and interpellation. The subject, for Hall, "is not the unitary individual but a set of contradictory 'positions'" (1980b: 158) which could interact with the ideology presented and choose to accept or reject that ideology. Each text being "read" has a specific message and "before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded" (Hall, 1980a: 130). The text, therefore, despite having a message encoded within it during production, cannot have meaning without an audience to place meaning in it. However, encoding/decoding went beyond simply placing meaning with the audience to contemplating what audiences then do with this meaning, as well as understand how any meaning was placed in the text originally.

There are several weaknesses, though, in relying strictly on the encoding/decoding method in understanding texts. While the encoding/decoding method "sought to penetrate the way media texts are structured, and to explore the implications of those structuring for audience 'decodings'" (Barker and Brooks, 1998: 91), it also restricted the ways that the audience could respond into only three categories, stated above, despite the seeming broad nature of those categories.²⁸ Furthermore, as David Morley notes in his encoding/decoding based study on television audiences, both the encoding and decoding portions are inherently problematic in studying and defining as "the message in social communication is always complex in structure and form" (1980: 10). It is almost impossible to decipher only one specific meaning that was placed in a film text due to the complicated and collaborative nature of the effort. For this research, the plurality of the text studied makes a singular preferred meaning encoded in the text a particularly fraught concept. However, the basic idea proposed by Hall, that there can be some sort of preferred or consistent meaning attempted through these texts and the audience can then interpret, or decode, the meanings though the information – social, political, cultural – at hand, is useful in synthesising the multiple levels of discourse being examined in this research. Thus, the research will utilize a version of encoding/decoding analysis to determine how an auteur persona is constructed in various

²⁸ See Barker and Brooks (1998) for an in-depth critique of the encoding/decoding method, especially pages 91-97.

discourses and then understood through these discourses. Ultimately this shows that the auteur persona is dependent on the interaction of all discourses, and does not emanate from only one discourse.

2.5 – Genre Studies, Auteurism, and Audience

As genre has been mentioned several times in this chapter, and one of the primary ways in which audiences interpret film texts is through their knowledge of genres, it is important to examine what is meant by the term. As discussed previously, directors often create an auteur persona in relation to their work within – or outside of – genre conventions. Along with auteur ideology, genre theory is currently one of the most utilized concepts in writing and thinking about film in scholarly, critical, practical, and popular discourse. Genre can have a multitude of meanings and applications though the basic uses for genre can be seen as a general classification for describing movies. More specifically, one can limit genre to specific “genre movies”, a certain segment of films that “are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations. They also *encourage expectations and experiences* similar to those of similar films we have already seen” (Grant, 1995: xv, my emphasis). A genre movie is one that employs basic codes and themes that are familiar through their repeated use in various media. What is especially important to note from Barry Keith Grant’s basic definition above is the idea that genres are dynamic in the way they interact with the audience. The concept of genre means little without an audience knowing the codes and standards expected. Because of the fundamental ideas behind genre being a set of codes which provide some sense of similarity and familiarity in viewing, many genre discussions are centred on Hollywood films, especially those stemming from the studio era. Before discussing the audience and genre, as well as how genre and auteur ideology work in a complementary fashion, it would be helpful to understand some of the main ideas and theories behind genre.

Genre in film was initially formulated from an established history of literary genre theory, which was not a concrete and homogeneous theory, but rather one that, while consisting of certain stable elements, could be open to multiple classifications without completely clear boundaries or standards over time (see Altman, 1999 and Buscombe,

1995 for more discussion of literary precedents). Film genres, arising from this shifting landscape, appeared initially in some books regarding films in the 1940s and 1950s, but were an issue for debate from the 1960s and 1970s in U.K. and U.S. critical discussion with reviews and official discourse classifying films into certain categories (Neale, 2000). Genre theory attempted to codify the structure, style, and themes that appeared in a certain set of films, though the rules for specific genres altered through time. Because, historically, genres were meant to be stable with fixed borders, not all categories, such as colour versus black and white or release platform, are genres as they “are thought to reside in a particular topic and structure or in a corpus of films that share a specific topic and structure” (Altman, 1999: 23). Thomas Schatz suggests that ultimately genre is categorized by narrative and “can be examined in terms of its fundamental structural components: plot, character, setting, thematics, style, and so on” (1981: 16) presenting a seemingly stable, unalterable definition of genres. However, Schatz modifies this stance later in his discussion, claiming

the sustained success of any genre depends on at least two factors: the thematic appeal and significance of the conflicts it repeatedly addresses and its flexibility in adjusting to the audience’s and filmmakers’ changing attitudes toward these conflicts. [...] Each genre has a static nucleus that manifests its thematic oppositions or recurring cultural conflicts. And each genre has, through the years, dynamically evolved as shown by the ways its individual films manipulate these oppositions. (1981: 31)

Schatz’s definition of genre calls for a structuralist understanding of genres as generally fixed entities. Although allowing for changing standards in genre, this view remains firmly stable at its core. This structuralism can be helpful in thinking about the expectations the viewer may have for a film, as well as genre mixing, but fails to fully contemplate the rapid and discursive changes that can occur to genre, something addressed more fully by post-structuralist scholars, discussed in more detail below. Furthermore, Schatz, while addressing the importance of audience in creating genre, gives too much credence to the audience as a homogeneous unit and too little consideration of multiple understandings of an audience – both demographically and historically. Instead, it is important to acknowledge that the fluctuation in genre

definitions allows for individuals to form slightly different expectations influenced by cultural factors.

To combat the shifting and manifold meanings inherent in the term genre, it is necessary to embrace a comprehensive and flexible definition of film genre. In his extensive discussion, Rick Altman (1999) provides such a definition by suggesting a framework consisting of four fundamental categories which can form genre. As he notes genre, it would appear, is not your average descriptive term, but a complex concept with multiple meanings, which we might identify as follows:

- genre as *blueprint*, as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry production;
- genre as *structure*, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded;
- genre as *label*, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors;
- genre as *contract*, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience. (Altman, 1999: 14, emphasis in original)

Altman suggests that these categories can be used together, but do not all need to be present simultaneously in discussing genre. Furthermore, these categories allow for a negotiation of genre meaning between different historical periods, different groups (industry, audience), and through different exhibition spaces (cinema, DVD). These negotiations occur often without acknowledgement that they exist, for example in terms of audience expectations, but can be propagated through official and critical discourse, especially in the case of the latter discourse. While official discourse, such as publicity, rarely invokes genre terms directly, often using multiple genre signifiers if they are used at all (Altman, 1998: 6), it is primarily critical discourse that establishes genre and the terms used to describe them (Neale, 2000; Baumann, 2007). Genre is a process, rather than a completely stable entity, brought about through critical descriptions, audience understandings, and industry acceptance, so that ultimately it could be helpful to “consider genre not as a quality of texts, but as a by-product of discursive activity” (Altman, 1999: 120). Because of this divergent construction of genre, it is important to consider how it is used through the various levels of filmic discourse, a concern

addressed throughout the current research. Furthermore, the shifting definitions and uses of genre relate to the ways auteur persona is used in film going.

This research will consider the formation of genre as part of the current system of understanding directors in Hollywood film in terms of official, critical, and audience expectations and construction of auteur persona. While genre has been discussed in terms of directors before (for example, Hitchcock and thrillers), the link between genre conventions and perception of auteurs is often a neglected or under-stated one. Collections such as David Desser's (1983) *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa* and Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein's (2001) edited collection on John Ford's westerns are two examples of work linking genre and auteur. However, these and similar works mostly rely on textual readings of the films to determine the links between the auteur and genre.²⁹ While this research will examine Nolan's films as one aspect of his auteur persona, it will also examine how ideas about genre are incorporated throughout the discourses, becoming central to Nolan's auteur persona. Genre acts as a central function through the three primary levels of discourse as an established – but conversely, ever shifting – concept to ground identity, establish quality, and frame pleasure, among other functions. The auteur persona in many ways builds from the codes of genre, and in the case of Christopher Nolan, the tweaking of genres is central to his status as auteur.

2.6 – Conclusion

This research examines the function and reception of the contemporary auteur in Hollywood. Based on a hybrid conceptual framework, the research incorporates theories of intertextuality to examine the films, official discourse, critical discourse, and audience discourse. The contemporary auteur is constructed from historical, industrial, and social factors; therefore, one must look beyond the traditional definition of an auteur as a director who “transforms the material into an expression of his own personality” (Buscombe, 1981: 23) to one who controls the means of production along with being concerned with the reception of the films and of his or her own reputation. Taking cultural, financial, and technological factors in to consideration when discussing the

²⁹ An exception to this can be found in the Studlar and Bernstein (2001) collection where there is an essay on John Ford's self-identification with, or distancing from, the western genre by Charles J. Maland.

auteur means looking at the multiple texts which transform the original film at different levels, calling on post-structuralist, semiotic, and reception studies traditions to determine the impact and resonance of this filmic intertext. It is proposed here that a director must create a distinct persona both within and outside of the text to become a contemporary auteur.

The past decade has shown a shift in the consideration of blockbuster films in scholarly and critical discourses (see Lewis, 1998; Neale and Smith, eds. 1998; Stringer, ed., 2003). It is at a time of shifting aesthetic concerns and technological innovation, when big-budget action films can be considered worthy of artistic study, that Nolan's films are placed. Given his biographical history, as an independent director with an outside (non-American) status, as well as the changing industrial and critical fields in Hollywood, Nolan can be viewed as an example of a new type of auteur, one who crosses genre boundaries and encourages a dynamic relationship with the audience, for instance in the DVD commentaries, while still acting as privileged meaning-maker in his films. Although the reception and use of this persona among critics and audiences will determine what effect it has on the reception of his films, it is first essential to determine how an auteur persona is constructed. Based on the criteria gathered from Dyer's (1998) and Kapisis' (1992) studies, as well as considerations of the film art world (Becker, 1982) and the contested state of authorship in film, the next chapter will examine the official discourse used to develop an auteur persona. The examination begins with a brief analysis of Nolan's six films to demonstrate how he addresses issues of authorship and identity within the films. After establishing an overview of these issues in his films, the official discourse surrounding the films is analyzed. Specifically, the DVD materials, which are the closest thematically and textually to the films, are analyzed to illustrate how Nolan establishes himself as an auteur within the context of the film's production. It is shown how Nolan completes the business of being a commercial (Corrigan, 1991) and industrial (Tzioumakis, 2006) auteur through expanding on his internal, film-based auteur persona. The persona is then tracked through the critical and audience discourse to see how it is positioned, used, and understood, ultimately showing how the construction of a specific persona through each level of discourse can create a relatively lasting reputation as an auteur for contemporary directors.

Chapter Three

Constructing an Auteur Persona Through Films and Official Discourse

The auteur persona, though developed through multiple outlets, is often initiated through the auteur's films and the surrounding official discourse. As discussed in the previous chapters, the auteur persona is always situated within specific industrial and cultural conditions. For Hollywood directors, especially, these conditions are closely tied with changing technologies of production and consumption including digital cameras, IMAX or 3-D formats, and new home viewing technologies such as DVD, Blu-ray and the Internet. Furthermore, the extra-textual materials available through the new technologies have changed the access that the audience can have to information about films and their creators. Therefore, it is necessary to examine both the films and the extra-textual materials surrounding the films to determine how – and why – the auteur persona is developed. As critic Elvis Mitchell notes “for the movie industry, the DVD has become so important that the tail now appears to be wagging the dog. The studios – and the rest of us – have realized that nothing they put on screen will ever go away again” (2003: 1). The ephemeral media surrounding film, such as interviews, making of documentaries

(MODs), posters, and trailers, will remain packaged along with the film rather than existing only at the film's release or fleetingly after.³⁰

This chapter principally analyzes the official discourse surrounding a film – the texts produced by the studio, related parties, or Christopher Nolan to promote and publicise his films. These texts are labelled as official because they are produced by the studio and feature Nolan speaking directly about the films and the filmmaking process. The official discourse has two primary intentions: raise audience awareness of the film and create an extension of the film experience (Skopal, 2007). These intentions are not always separate, for example film posters are used to advertise a film to an audience, but can also be an extension of the main themes or motifs of the film. Furthermore, “the DVD is perhaps the ultimate example of media-industry synergy, in which the promotion of a media product is collapsed into the product itself” (Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2002: 23). The intimate nature of the extra-textual features and the film make them revealing texts to identify qualities and experiences of the films connected to Nolan's auteur persona.

As mentioned in the Introduction, there are three primary factors involved within the development of the auteur persona: the films, the name, and the niche. Each of these factors, which will be expanded upon later in this chapter, need to be present to maintain a distinct auteur persona. The auteur persona provides an extension of the film experience for the viewer while also fulfilling the author function by creating a unifying entity – the auteur's name – to organize and make sense of the multiple texts (Foucault, 1991). As has been discussed previously, the author function acts as a unifying point for creating meaning in a set of texts. However, it is also essential to create a distinct niche within film that distinguishes the auteur from other directors, for example Quentin Tarantino's stylized violence and popular culture references or James Cameron's work in new technologies and expanding budgets. The idea of the niche is developed from the concept of the auteur signature, though the niche resides not only in the films, but also in the materials surrounding the films – in the auteur persona. The viewer knows James Cameron uses new technology not only by watching *Avatar* (2009) and his other films,

³⁰ Although stable for now, eventually new technologies and ways of accessing extra-textual materials will most likely usurp the Internet and current home viewing technology. However, as discussed in the Introduction, this thesis is capturing the initial instance of reception.

but also because Cameron discusses it in interviews and articles written about the film dissecting the production. Similarly, Nolan's films engage with narrative and genre form, which audiences know from watching the films, but also because Nolan discusses his intentions in interviews.

This chapter examines how Nolan's auteur persona is initially established through his films and the official discourse surrounding the films, specifically in regards to home viewing technology. Firstly, Nolan's films are analyzed to demonstrate how Nolan creates a unified set of texts thematically and in terms of narrative, focusing on the theme of identity construction. Secondly, the extra-textual materials presented on DVDs in the official discourse are examined to show that these texts build from the films to create an auteur persona for Nolan which complements the issues of identity and artistic concerns, such as narrative time and space, while also placing Nolan as the primary meaning-maker. However, while confirming Nolan's primacy, the official discourse also creates a relationship between the auteur persona and the audience which allows for negotiated readings (Hall, 1980a) of the films, although always within a specific framework set by Nolan. While the relationship between audience and auteur is heightened with the presence of the DVD extras, the auteur framework retains ultimate power in presenting meanings. However, since it is a framework, there is also room for audience members to create individual meanings and become invested in Nolan and the auteur concept.

3.1 - Foundations of the Auteur Persona Within Films

Christopher Nolan's films, despite their seemingly disparate natures, remain in many ways thematically and stylistically similar. This similarity can be credited to the role of Nolan during their production. As discussed in the previous chapter, Michel Foucault (1981: 58) suggested the author, or in this case auteur, provides a unifying force behind his or her texts which helps to clarify and expose meanings for the audience. Thus, while the ultimate meaning of a text is determined by the viewer, the framework of comprehension is presented by the auteur. It is achieving this unifying force that partially determines who is an auteur instead of simply a director. Furthermore, a Hollywood auteur is someone who creates both a sense of unity within his or her films and a complementary auteur persona surrounding those films. This unity could be seen as a

type of power through discourse, as the auteur would influence the majority of signs and references associated with his or her work. As was highlighted earlier, Foucault suggested “the author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real” (1981: 58). Nolan’s auteur persona can be seen as providing the author function which allows the viewer to create meaning from a set of disparate texts. However, while Nolan’s auteur persona is the nodal point for these texts, the place where a system of signs and references is devised, he does not create these references in a vacuum, but within specific social contexts. Although this research claims that the current Hollywood auteur is one who is established through the various levels of discourse, he or she always begins as an auteur with the quality of the films produced.³¹ However, because the primary goal of this research is to examine how the auteur persona is constructed and perpetuated within greater filmic discourse, a complete analysis of the films is beyond the scope of the thesis. The following section instead restricts focus to the theme of identity construction and use of narrative, which are primary features of all of Nolan’s films, to determine how Nolan addresses ideas of authorship and identity. Although *mise-en-scene* is normally analyzed in auteurist studies, due to space limitations and because the discourses examined further in this research focus on Nolan’s films’ themes rather than style, themes will be the central preoccupation of the following analysis. Furthermore, the theme of identity, besides being prominent in all of Nolan’s films, is also appropriate as a link from the construction of characters’ identities within the films to the construction of Nolan’s auteur persona within and outside of the films. It is through the quality and content of his films that Nolan’s auteur persona of being an intelligent, innovative, independent, and creative director emerges.

Nolan’s films are filled with ambiguity and unease, which are partially transmitted through journeys of identity construction and through the films’ endings. It is often unclear who the “good guy” may be, and there are not any firm resolutions. By never allowing the audience to sympathise fully with the main protagonist, despite visual signals that the audience should sympathise with him, there are no clear allegiances. Furthermore, the endings of the films are left in an uneasy truce between characters and

³¹ The notion of cult auteurs, such as Ed Wood or John Waters, who may arguably have variable quality is beyond the scope of this thesis.

meanings, with the audience being offered only a partial resolution. The ambiguity frames possible resolutions, but forces the audience to examine their own understandings, which also highlights the multiple ways identity is understood for each viewer, thus opening the way for audience participation with auteur discourse, which will be discussed further in this and subsequent chapters.

Identity is a frequently discussed but amorphous concept both in society and in film. Identity is not a rigid concept, as most often a person does not have a fixed identity, but one that changes and shifts throughout time and space. However,

no one has only one identity, in the sense that everyone must, consciously or not, identify with more than one group, one identity. This is about more than combining multiple identities in an ‘additive’ way. [...] Different forms of identity, then, should be seen as interactive and mutually constitutive rather than ‘additive.’ They should also be seen as dynamic. (Lawler, 2008: 3)

Thus, identity is a multi-layered and changeable concept. In one case, a person may be a citizen of a country, a daughter, a friend, a mother, a student, a carer, and an athlete at different (or the same) times and in different social situations. Similarly, the characters in Nolan’s films can be seen through different versions of their identity. For example Bruce Wayne is seen as a son by his parents and Alfred, a friend to Rachel, a playboy to Gotham society, a hero to those he saves, and an enemy to those he fights. Additionally, most of the characters are actively seeking to confirm the multiple parts of that identity. The characters in Nolan’s films struggle both to define and evolve their identities, so it is not only identity that is explored, but the importance of developing that identity which marks the characters in Nolan’s films. Furthermore, this process is mirrored within and outside of the films in the development of an auteur persona. The auteur persona is a stable but changeable one, which requires a specific set of criteria to make it distinct, but needs the ability to evolve in response to changing industrial, cultural, and social conditions. Like the identities of the characters analyzed below, the auteur persona is always situated socially and is influenced, as discussed throughout this thesis, by official, critical, and audience discourses.

While issues of identity are not unique in cinema, Nolan’s films nonetheless offer a picture of how identity can be worked through in film. There are many ways to examine

identity construction, for instance through the psychoanalytic methods of Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung and theorizations of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, among others, or through specific questions of gender (see Butler, 1990) or race and history (see Fanon, 1970). However, to remain consistent with the rest of the theorizations in this research, identity in Nolan's films will be viewed in regards to the social and performative acts used to form identity in contemporary culture (for example, Goffman, 1971; Doniger, 2005). To look at identity in terms of performance and presentation in the social also allows for consideration of how postmodern thought has influenced identity, for "if the *modern* 'problem of identity' was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* 'poi' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open" (Bauman, 1996: 18, emphasis in original). The characters in these films are both modern and postmodern in the sense that while they strive to develop an identity, they can never create a stable or fully integrated persona. Adopting multiple performances which then obscure what is the real or authentic identity, if one even exists, however, reflects a postmodern sensibility on identity, as "from the postmodern perspective, as the pace, extension and complexity of modern societies accelerate, identity becomes more and more unstable, more and more fragile" (Kellner, 1992:143). In Nolan's films, and in the construction of the auteur persona within and outside of the films, there is constantly a breaking apart of stable identities despite an attempt to reconstruct some semblance of continuity and wholeness. This thematic opposition is reflected in the *mise-en-scène* and narrative structures of the films as well as the discursive surround with the multitude of related but separate texts available. This section will examine each of Nolan's six films in relation to how Nolan portrays identity construction, especially relating to fragmentary and performative identity, demonstrating a part of Nolan's "auteur signature" within the films. This auteur signature, as mentioned above, consists partially of a commitment to use narrative and visual techniques to put the viewer in the mind of the character, while still remaining somewhat ambiguous, participating in construction of the identities.

3.1.1 – Reality and Superheroes: *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*

One of the most visible places identity is worked through in popular culture is that of the superhero. There are several reasons why identity is so central in this subset of films,

books, television series, and so on, including the frequent use of a specific alter ego (Clark Kent/Superman, Peter Parker/Spider-Man). These superhero stories, even the lesser-known ones, are often known to some degree by viewers, much like genre knowledge. Jim Collins (1991: 165) calls this knowledge the “hyperconsciousness of popular narrative” and suggests that, although it existed in the past, its presence rose in the 1980s with the increasing popularity of superhero films. Referencing Umberto Eco’s (1983) “the already said”, which suggests that everything is ultimately a reference to a previous utterance, Collins claims

texts like Tim Burton’s *Batman* (1989), Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), and Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* (1986) reconfigure that “already said” by moving across genres, mixing different forms of discourse as well as different media [...]. This reconfiguration involves the inversion of specific generic conventions, but more importantly, it depends upon the amalgamation of disparate narrative and visual codes. (1991: 165)

The position of the Batman legend as a hyperconscious narrative, or part of a well-known fiction network (Craft, 2004), must be considered when re-working a part of that narrative, although at the same time there is room to incorporate new aspects to the legend, as Nolan did with *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. Although this hyperconsciousness of the narrative existed, Nolan and co-writer David S. Goyer were able to adapt a franchise film into something novel. In the two Batman films, Nolan focused on the creation of Batman, and more importantly Bruce Wayne, both internally and socially, therefore, adding to and engaging with previous versions of Batman. By focusing on character development, especially in *Batman Begins*, as well as character motivations and identity, Nolan incorporated elements of film noir, such as a mysterious protagonist, and independent cinema, for example the use of “authentic” (non-CGI) methods and focus on character, to the established Batman narrative.

Similar to other superhero films, the Batman legend’s most obvious interaction with identity is in the issue of dual personas. In *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* the double identities portrayed by the characters – such as Bruce Wayne, Henri Ducard, and Jonathan Crane – do not merely act as devices to hide the character’s alter ego, but also function as the key factor in the motivations of several of the characters. The dual

personas also fuel a high level of duplicity within the films, especially in *Batman Begins*; however, this duplicity is incorporated as part of the identity construction of the characters in all of Nolan's films. For example, in *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) meets Henri Ducard (Liam Neeson) who teaches him how to fight evil, both physically and mentally. However, Ducard reveals himself later as the true Ra's Al Ghul, the head of the League of Shadows, who are intent on destroying Bruce's Gotham. Likewise, in *Memento*, discussed more below, Leonard (Guy Pearce) realises that beliefs he has held as true – that he is seeking vengeance for his wife's death – have been challenged by Teddy's (Joe Pantoliano) double personas, so he plots how to kill Teddy and keep his beliefs intact. In these somewhat extreme examples, double identities which are purposely hidden from the protagonist amount to duplicity, which then forces the protagonist into action to retain, or construct, a certain identity. The characters' duplicity encourage the audience to actively engage in the film to discern the characters' true identities and motivations.

As the auteur persona is constructed through multiple levels of filmic discourse, the characters within Nolan's films also must negotiate their identities through multiple ways of being, helping to present a more realistic and character-driven version of Batman than in past film adaptations. Stuart Hall notes, "identities are never unified and, in late modern [or postmodern] times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions" (1996: 4). In *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* Bruce Wayne struggles internally, and then externally, to attempt to determine what he believes to be his authentic identity. To achieve this, however, Bruce must perform an alternate persona. In the 1950s sociologist Erving Goffman (1971) suggested that in social interactions individuals *perform* roles in society, rather than simply being these roles. However, as Steph Lawler suggests, Goffman "is arguing for something much more profound than the ideas that we play roles: he is arguing that roles, or performances, far from making the 'true person' (as is commonly assumed) are *what makes us persons*" (2008: 106, emphasis in original). Thus the performance that Bruce Wayne plays in being Batman helps make him into a more complete person, rather than being a distinct persona that is only enacted to disguise the true self, as each person performs at least one aspect of their

identity. Therefore, Batman is another facet of Bruce's identity, helping make him into the person he is, rather than a completely separate identity. This also suggests that multiple narratives guide each person's identity, although they are intricately related. The playboy and Batman both exist because Bruce Wayne can fund them, and because each narrative provides a crucial part of his overall identity. In deciding to become Batman, Bruce comments that "people need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy. I can't do that as Bruce Wayne – as a man. As flesh and blood I can be ignored. I can be destroyed. But as a symbol, as a symbol I could be incorruptible. I can be everlasting."³² Bruce realises that he needs to *perform* an identity beyond his own to become what he needs to be, which ultimately evolves into a new form of the Bruce Wayne identity.

The construction of the character is further emphasised through the narrative structure leading to the decision to perform Batman. Nolan inserts frequent flashbacks throughout the early part of the story so that Bruce's past and present are woven together without clear delineation between the two. For example, the film begins with young Bruce (Gus Lewis) playing in the garden with young Rachael (Emma Lockhart) before Bruce falls down a well. The film then shifts without obvious transition to an older Bruce in a Chinese prison camp meeting Ducard and the League of Shadows before returning again to the incident in the garden with young Bruce. There is little indication apart from the age of the actors that one scene is occurring in the past and one in the present. Since neither scene fits the traditional notion of the Batman narrative presented in earlier films, the hyperconsciousness of popular narrative (Collins, 1991), along with possible knowledge of Nolan's previous films' narrative structures, might lead to the audience assuming that the entire sequence is a form of flashback. It is only with Bruce's speech, quoted above, that it becomes clear how the past has informed the present, leading to the formation of Batman. The jumping of narrative time reflects ideas of postmodern identity formation, as it can be considered that postmodern identity can lead to the "*fragmentation* of time into *episodes*, each one cut from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self contained. Time is no longer a river, but a collection of ponds and pools" (Bauman, 1996: 25, emphasis in original). In real life identity can feel, not like a linear path, but like specific events in time that combine to inform the identity one

³² All film dialogue transcribed by author from the DVD versions of each film.

performs. The presentation of the early construction of the Batman persona mirrors the fragmentation of identity through time and space, but also offers an example of how these multiple parts can result in a more cohesive identity. The narrative structure helps to stress the fragmented nature of identity, but also because it coheres as a singular narrative under Nolan's authority, the structure shows that these fragments develop into a more or less stable identity.

As Bruce builds the character of Batman through a trial and error process with Alfred and Lucius (Morgan Freeman), he also establishes a third persona, that of "Bruce Wayne" the playboy. Alfred reminds Bruce that although he has now dedicated himself to a life of crime fighting, he must still appear to be the millionaire-playboy to the world. If Bruce simply disappeared into Wayne Manor, his home, as Alfred explains, "strange injuries, a non-existent social life. These things beg the question as to what exactly Bruce Wayne does with his time and his money" and so Bruce has to explain himself in regards to the social standards set for him. In essence, not only is Bruce pretending to be Batman, but also pretending to be himself. Wendy Doniger suggests that the theme of impersonating yourself "tells us that many people must put on masks to discover who they are under the covert masks they usually wear, so that the overt mask reveals rather than conceals the truth, reveals the self beneath the self" (2005: 3). Bruce is not simply himself or Batman, but something in between. He invents "Bruce" so that Batman may be hidden; however, in the end it is unclear which character is the authentic identity.

In Nolan's *Batman*, Bruce is moving further from an internal identity to one that is more socially defined. Rachel (Katie Holmes) admonishes "Bruce" for acting the playboy; "it's not who you are underneath; it's what you do that defines you." It is the identity that is on display for the world, interacting with others, that ultimately, for Nolan's characters, defines who they are as "identity needs to be understood not as belonging 'within' the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social relations" (Lawler, 2008: 8). Similarly, an auteur persona must be developed through the social filmic discourse, not just internally through the films. The identities formed, though, by both the characters and Nolan, are never fully stable or declared authentic, but always left with some unease. Douglas Kellner notes "one is never certain that one has made the right choice, that one has chosen one's 'true' identity, or even

constituted an identity at all. The modern self is aware of the constructed nature of identity and that one can always change and modify one's identity at will" (1992: 142).

Kellner, following the general argument by Huyssen (1986), argues that identity is always in flux due to changing context and influences. Following this, the personas created by Batman or Nolan are always able to be changed given certain conditions or moments of history.

Emphasising the changeable and uncertain nature of identity presented in the film, *Batman Begins* refuses to have a concrete ending, with a coda that leaves questions rather than resolving them. Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman) informs Batman that things will only get worse with inmates from Arkham Asylum, including the Scarecrow, escaped and a new villain appearing, one who leaves joker cards at his crimes. Although this could be seen by some as simply an opening for the inevitable sequel, it can also be read as a refusal of a resolution. Bruce/Batman seems to have become comfortable with his internal struggle of dual (triple) personas, but he ignores the larger picture presented to him. He has not fought and won; he has changed the nature of the fight, which has now become more difficult. Placing this as the last scene of the film, rather than the light-hearted dénouement in the ruins of Wayne Manor with Alfred and Rachel, Nolan has chosen to challenge the audience's ideas of good versus evil by suggesting that Batman's war against crime is unfinished.

The refusal to create a concrete, or traditionally uplifting, ending to his films marks a stylistic signature in Nolan's films which is mirrored in Nolan's portrayal of identity. While Nolan is not the only director to create ambiguous endings, the consistency with which he refuses to provide answers in or about his films is significant. To some extent, as with *Batman Begins*, Nolan's films continue to challenge the audience after the initial viewing by allowing several interpretations available at the conclusion. Although in the power relations enacted in watching a film the author, as discussed in the previous chapter, holds the majority of the power due to forming the symbols communicated, the viewer also holds power over how he or she interprets and understands those symbols. By intentionally constructing ambiguous endings Nolan further shifts the power to the individual viewer, as seen in Chapter Five, although always retaining some power through the structure of the film and the symbols therein. He

creates a distinct auteur persona in this way by creating a frame for interpretation rather than distinct meanings. As Foucault notes “every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit a point of reversal” (2000: 346). Ultimately, there is always a form of struggle to have power over the communication and understanding in a film, but Nolan actively encourages the audience, on some level, to participate in the struggle for power over the meaning of ideas in his films. While other directors might also participate in this struggle by encouraging the audience to make multiple meanings, Nolan’s consistent engagement with the theme of identity in his films, and the extension of that into his auteur persona, provides a distinctive aspect of Nolan’s auteur persona, which is also discussed in critical and audience discourse.



Figure 3.1 – *The Dark Knight* Poster

While *Batman Begins* focuses on the internal development of Bruce/Batman/“Bruce” and the influence of the social on that development, there are also external individuals who act as opposites to Bruce and help define his performance of identity, for example Henri Ducard/Ra’s Al Ghul and Jonathan Crane/Scarecrow (Cillian Murphy). However, outside individuals, acting as a sort of double, play a larger role in shaping Batman’s identity in *The Dark Knight*, primarily in regards to the characters the Joker and Harvey Dent. The three men form a triangle of specific ideals, forming doubles of each other as well as each performing dual personas (see Figure 3.1). The Joker is introduced with no back-story, except the one he tells about his facial scars, which he alters for each telling. The lack of a specific origin for the Joker contrasts markedly with

Bruce/Batman, since *Batman Begins*, which is referenced in *The Dark Knight*, focuses on the details of Batman's origin. This situation positions the men as opposites; Batman has a distinct beginning and alternate persona while the Joker is undefined, preaching chaos as a unifying theory. Both men create a narrative around themselves, and "through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life. In order to live well, with unity and purpose, we compose a heroic narrative of the self that illustrates essential truths about ourselves" (McAdams, 1993: 11). The stories told – one of unity and one of chaos – define how the other characters and the audience view the men. District Attorney Harvey Dent is also situated as an opposite to Batman, but with similar ideals rather than contrasting ones. Both Dent and Batman work to rid Gotham of criminals, but the former works within the legal system while the latter evades the legal system, even when enlisting help from Gordon. Bruce sees an escape from Batman and "Bruce" through the ideals espoused by Dent. Apart from the narrative parallels and contrasts of the characters, there are specific visual aspects linking the men. All three characters are portrayed early in the film in action, with Batman fighting criminals in the car park, Dent attacking a would-be assassin in the court room, and the Joker performing a magic trick for Gotham's underworld bosses. Each character is developed in relation to each other rather than individually, resulting in the construction of what a hero actually is, a theme throughout the film. Nolan leaves the idea of the hero undefined, which allows the audience to interpret the meaning in the film in several ways, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five. However, as in his other films, the framework for meaning is always firmly established by Nolan.

The Dark Knight creates an ambiance of unease throughout the film by constantly shifting identities and allegiances. There is no clear good guy or bad guy, with the Joker standing up to the crime lords, Dent dissolving into Two-Face, and Bruce retreating into Batman. In the final scenes of the film, the Joker and Batman ultimately refuse to kill each other, while Dent attempts to shoot a boy. To protect the ideals he shared with Dent, Batman adopts the role of anti-hero, rejecting traditional notions of good or bad, explaining to Gordon, "sometimes truth isn't good enough. Sometimes people deserve more. Sometimes people deserve to have their faith rewarded." The creation of an anti-hero, or at least a non-heroic protagonist, to help preserve a semblance of morals and

ideals occurs throughout Nolan's films, but most prominently in the traditional superhero role of Batman. Although some members of the audience would recognise the work of Frank Miller's Batman graphic novels influencing this focus on Batman as an anti-hero, it also continues the idea of the postmodern identity. As Lyotard suggests "the narrative function is losing its functions, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal" (2004b: 124). It is no longer possible, in the world created by Nolan, to have traditional heroes or villains. However, as with his other films, in the end this in itself may be a performance, as there are still certain morals and guidelines. The final scenes of the film indicate an end to a world of heroes, and Gordon notes Batman is "not a hero. He's a silent protector, a watchful guardian, a dark knight." As in the end of *Batman Begins*, Nolan positions the resolution as incomplete, full of explosions and confusion, rather than the "good guys" beating the "bad guys", as it is unclear who falls in to which category. Many of the characters in these films, especially with Bruce, must pretend to be a specific role – the anti-hero, the clown, the saviour – to ultimately reveal who they really are – the hero, the criminal, the fallen idealist.

3.1.2 – Facing Yourself: *Insomnia* and *The Prestige*

Christopher Nolan's two other traditional studio films were made on either side of *Batman Begins* and also focused on characters constructing their identities through performance. Nolan reveals this performance, as in *The Dark Knight*, by presenting aspects of each character's performative identity through a mirroring of multiple characters, resulting in the formation of doubles. The mirroring heightens the sense of unease within the films, as neither the characters nor the viewers can be sure of the authentic identity of the characters contributing to the ability to create multiple meanings of the films. Although most evident in *The Prestige*, doubling is a main narrative and stylistic feature in *Insomnia* as well. While ostensibly a thriller, *Insomnia* ultimately can be read as a character study in which the main protagonist, Will Dormer (Al Pacino), is shown as questioning his own motivations and ethics as much as he questions the murder suspects. As in *The Dark Knight*, the other main characters can be seen to reflect different aspects of Will's character, making him – and the audience – question who Will really is. These characters help the audience understand Will and the mental journey he takes

during the film by contrasting or emphasising Will's differing personas and his descent in to near madness. While the main double in the film could be viewed as murderer Walt Finch (Robin Williams), Will's partner Hap (Martin Donovan) and rookie cop Ellie Burr (Hilary Swank) also mirror aspects of Will's identity, either those that currently exist, those he might one day obtain, or those he has lost. Nolan often attempts to place the viewer in the character's viewpoint, for instance in *Batman Begins* when characters experience the nerve toxin, but also by using the narrative to create a sense of the character's mind-set. For example, the structure of *The Prestige* and *Memento*, as will be discussed below, help place the viewer in a situation where limited information is available, mirroring the characters' situations, thereby asking the audience to identify with the main characters, but also removing a clear meaning through the ambiguities of the narrative and through character development.

The film is set against a background of moral uncertainty, with Hap and Will sent to Alaska to help with a murder enquiry while under investigation by Internal Affairs over possible misconduct in a case in Los Angeles. When Hap admits that, upon his return to Los Angeles, he is going to cooperate fully with the investigation, Will reminds him that if Will's reputation is officially questioned or thrown into doubt, good, correct convictions may be overturned, implying that Will is guilty of misconduct in at least one case. He admonishes Hap that it is not about "us, but all the people who depend on us," which implies that he still considers himself as doing the "good" thing. As Erving Goffman suggests about performing identity, "at one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (1971: 15). Will has become convinced that he is the upstanding and respected cop, despite private knowledge suggesting otherwise, and he continues publically to perform the role of moral and crusading police officer. The struggle to know his true identity is intensified by his supposedly accidental shooting of Hap. Hap's death provides a moral conundrum for Will. With Hap gone, he stands a better chance of escaping the internal affairs investigation. However, killing is wrong, and Will is supposed to uphold the law. Will must ask if he is a murderer, or if he is still the moral man he thinks he is.

The audience is positioned to identify with Will's struggles by joining him in questioning his motives and actions as he begins to hallucinate, seeing Hap in unlikely places, and having trouble sleeping. Will's growing insomnia indicates his unease and uncertainty about who he is, although he attempts still to perform the role of sanity. The insomnia is most vividly shown through flashes of light – blinding white light – which tend to obscure the truth from Will rather than elucidate it. Nolan used light in *Batman Begins* to indicate a constant dawn and in *The Dark Knight* to reflect a frequent darkness of night; he here uses it to gesture towards the emptiness consuming Will. While he mentally retreats into darkness – shooting his partner and lying about it and being under investigation for his past cases – Will is conversely constantly surrounded by light. The light, though seen around Will, seems to be radiating from within him rather than outside of himself. For example, near the end of the film when the case appears to be solved, the murdered girl's boyfriend has been implicated in the crime and so Walt will keep Will's secret, Will attempts to sleep once more. However, he cannot escape the light and so attempts to create a stronger window covering. The hotel clerk (Maura Tierney) comes to check on him due to the noise, and when Will tells her it is too bright, she turns on the light to show him that his perception is wrong; it is dark. The audience has believed through the lighting of the scenes that Will's experience of brightness is accurate, but instead it is suggested that it may reside in Will's mind. The idea of brightness and disrupted perception was first indicated earlier in the film when Ellie, knowing Will is having trouble sleeping, repeats his own wisdom back to him that “a good cop can't sleep because a piece of the puzzle is missing. A bad cop can't sleep because his conscience won't let him.” Will, perhaps, is in control of his sleep, but will not permit himself to rest because he strives to be good but knows he has done bad things. The visuals help place the audience in Will's mind, but ultimately his judgement is called into question, leaving the audience unsure of what to believe.

A sense of unease and ambiguity is heightened through the film in a variety of ways including distorted images and inserts of spreading blood which are left unexplained for most of the film. Primarily, though, the climax of the film represents a power struggle among Will's identities that leaves the audience unsure who triumphed. At the end there is a form of resolution as Will shoots and kills Walt, saving Ellie in the

process. After Will helps to save her from Walt, Ellie attempts to throw the 9mm shell proving Will killed Hap in the sea, telling the dying Will that even if he is unsure, she knows he did not mean to kill Hap. Will stops her from throwing it in the water, telling her “don’t lose your way” before he dies. The sudden reversal of Will from killing Walt to saving Ellie could intimate that he is not ultimately a moral officer, but is still concerned with his reputation through Ellie’s memory of him. The characters can choose who they want, or do not want, to be. As with both Batman films, Nolan allows for multiple readings, ending the film with a wide shot of the Alaskan wilderness which is a stark contrast from the claustrophobic final scenes which preceded it. This contrast further suggests that there is not necessarily a concrete good or bad within the film, but something in between. While Walt chose to embrace a dark side with the murder, Will was torn between the two, not sure if he meant to kill Hap or not, though choosing not to tell the truth about it. Ellie, meanwhile, is poised to decide who she will be. She can continue to be a moral and honest police officer, exposing the truth about Hap’s killing, or she can choose to remain silent and preserve, or even save, Will’s professional reputation. It is unclear what she will do, and the final scenes of an open landscape emphasise the multiple possibilities available.

The ambiguity and identity construction in *The Prestige* are portrayed primarily through doubling and duplicity. The two protagonists of the film, Robert Angier (Hugh Jackman) and Alfred Borden (Christian Bale), act as doubles of each other, but ultimately have their own physical doubles as well. Borden and Angier are the opposite of each other in that they thrive off of their professional and personal rivalry and in many ways seem to be incomplete without the pull of the other. However, there also exists a physical doubling: Borden is revealed to be identical twins while Angier first finds a man to play his double and ultimately finds a way to re-create himself through electricity, creating multiple copies. Nolan hides the physical doubles, revealing both the twinning and the electric copies at the end of the film, but at the same time uses the film’s structure to direct the audience towards this conclusion. The narrative, set as a magic trick, specifically tells the audience the coming structure. In the first scenes of the film, the structure is laid out through the solitary character of Cutter (Michael Caine) who explains

every magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called the pledge. The magician shows you something ordinary. A deck of cards, a bird, or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it. To see that it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But, of course, it probably isn't. The second act is called the turn. The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now, you're looking for the secret, but you won't find it. Because, of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn't clap yet, because making something disappear isn't enough. You have to bring it back. That's why every magic trick has a third part, the hardest part, the part we call the prestige.

This speech is intercut with scenes from the primary "crime" of the film, Borden's murder of Angier, and it turns out to be the final scene of the film, although that is not revealed until the temporal end of the movie. Fragments of this speech, as well as derivatives from it, are repeated throughout the film to alert the audience to pay attention while at the same time attempting to deceive the audience through the narrative structure. The repeated speech also suggests an interplay between author and audience, with Nolan, through the characters, speaking to the audience about the structure of the film.

The narrative further displays the doubling and deceit of the characters in the device of the exchange of diaries, which also demonstrates how each character constructs his identity apart from and in relation to the other. Each protagonist's thoughts and actions are portrayed through the reading of the diary, although, the opposite character reads the diary to the audience, so, for example, Borden reads Angier's diary and the audience hears Angier's voice through Borden's eyes. Thus, while each character is ostensibly self-reporting his identity, it is always presented in relation to his opposite through the content and the form of telling. In telling their identity and thoughts through a story, Angier and Borden form a narrative of identity, similar to the multiple narratives and identity presented in *The Dark Knight*. However, this narrative identity, as in general culture, "is only completed (if it ever is!) in the interaction between teller and audience. But the initial narrative is *itself* both an interpretation and the creative assemblage of disparate elements" (Lawler, 2008: 16). As in the power relations discussed previously about communication, an identity narrative is never fully complete unless there is both

someone to tell it and someone to understand it. While the power may reside more forcefully on the side of the teller, identity must be negotiated with the social because humans do not live in isolation from others. In the case of Angier and Borden, they define themselves through how they are seen by others. For example, the audience only knows Angier through his diary, as it is read by Borden. Therefore, the identity of each is told through a disparate and confused narrative, cobbled together from multiple elements. Apart from the overlapping diary structure, comprised mainly of flashbacks, at other times the narrative will switch to the “present” where Cutter is telling the court or magistrate about the two men. This alternating point of view helps further conflate the characters and their stories. The interlinked narration creates a sense of unease, emphasising the character over an objective reality, thus implying that the version of reality with which the audience is presented is only through one character’s perspective.

As in Nolan’s other films, there is no definite answer provided to the mysteries posed in the film, though, as in *Insomnia*, there is a more distinct ending than in other Nolan films. Although *The Prestige* was different in several distinct ways from the novel in both narrative structure and characters, among other aspects, it still remained relatively faithful to the doubling idea presented in the source including the final secrets; Borden was two men and Angier was many. The final scenes have Angier and Borden explaining their secrets to each other – and the audience – continuing their narratives, though there is still some confusion on what is appearing on screen. As Wendy Doniger comments on self-impersonation of identity, “the final indignity comes when the imitation eclipses the original, so that the original is regarded as an imitation of the imitation” (2005: 15). Angier and Borden double and replicate themselves to such an extent in the film that neither they nor the audience know who is the authentic or real person, and instead will always be both a unified, modern and multiple, postmodern identity. This contradictory notion, as has been suggested earlier with Kellner (1992) and Huyssen (1986), can be accomplished as

a self-pluralistic perspective moves on from modernism’s unified self, but it does not go so far as to kill off that subjectivity entirely. Rather, it postulates an individual who encounters his or her world from a plurality of positions, through a plurality of voices, in relation to a plurality of self concepts, yet who still retains a

meaningful coherence, both at the level of the constituent pluralities and at the level of the total system. (Cooper and Rowan, 1999: 2)

The characters in both *Insomnia* and *The Prestige* continually strive for a unified understanding of identity, but are consistently forced or choose to create alternate personas. They fluctuate between conventional and radical roles and solitary and social influences, ultimately performing many parts of identity. The fluctuating nature of identity in these films demonstrates awareness by Nolan that identity is an active process, which requires participation from multiple sources.

3.1.3 – Remembering the Beginning: *Following* and *Memento*

Nolan's earliest films centre on concepts of identity construction, exploring through narrative and style the essence of how an individual creates, or fails to create, an identity, establishing Nolan's interest in investigating the formation of identity and notions of agency and authority, both in terms of the individual characters and for Nolan's place as author. As Steph Lawler notes, "the very construction of an identity is configured over time and through narrative" (2008: 17) especially in the narrative that one tells to others as well as one's self, discussed previously. Both the writer (Jeremy Theobald) in *Following* and Leonard in *Memento* are confused about who they are, and they each attempt to construct an identity through repeatedly providing the narrative for others. Through his position as writer and director – the auteur – Nolan reflects his characters' narration by providing the stories and identities for those in the film. He primarily uses an unconventional narrative structure to interrogate identity construction, creating a situation which asks the audience to actively participate in forming meaning by watching carefully to make sense of the time and status of each character.

Following introduces Nolan's interest in creating a sense of unease for the characters and the audience. None of the protagonists, including the narrator, are clear about what is occurring in the film. The young writer, herein known as Bill, tells a police officer (John Nolan) "the following, it's my explanation. Well, more of an account of what happened," positioning the film from the beginning as one version of a story, not the truth. As in films noir from the past such as *The Big Sleep* (1946) or *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), the central character is shrouded in mystery from the start of the film

despite often acting as narrator, almost asking the viewer to seek an actual truth outside of the specific story being told. By structuring the film partially to recall these older films, Nolan placed *Following*, and later *Memento*, within a particular genre framework, engendering specific expectations for the audience. These characters, though being presented as straight-forward and simply surrounded by untrustworthy characters, can often be seen to be hiding something. This incredulity towards the narrative is heightened by the frequent cuts to different points in the chronology of the story. As the audience sees Bill's version of events, near the end of the film they are also allowed to see character interactions that happen outside of Bill's presence, further calling his narrative into question. The breaking of the narrative, and with it a sense of linear time, creates a tension and suspense in the film, not just about the events of the film, but how the truth of any situation or identity is established. The disruption of traditional notions of time and truth is significant, because as David Harvey notes, "how we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world" (1990: 205). Offering unorthodox methods to view time could change how the audience considers their own relationship with time. As in the opening parts of *Batman Begins* and the diary structure of *The Prestige*, Nolan challenges how time is related to the construction of self. David Denby proposes that the contemporary trend in Hollywood to construct non-linear narratives could be a new way for directors to interact with their audiences, and "some of the directors may just be playing with us or, perhaps, acting out their boredom with that Hollywood script-conference menace the conventional 'story arc.' But others may be trying to jolt us into a new understanding of art, or even a new understanding of life" (2007: n.p.). Denby's assertion is that Hollywood directors, unlike avant-garde directors such as Godard, are making these films to challenge a mainstream rather than art house audience, and this attempt should be seen as art rather than a gimmick. Time, in the case of Nolan's films, is compounded with identity construction, and Nolan attempts to use narrative structure to emphasise the interrelatedness of identity and time, challenging the audience to engage with the film and the themes on a wider scale.

Bill constructs several personalities to present to other characters as well as the audience, and it is unclear who is the authentic Bill. The fluidity of identity is

exacerbated by the fact that no one's identity is confirmed, including Bill's. The main female (Lucy Russell) is never named, but simply known as "the woman" or "the blonde". Cobb (Alex Haw) self-reports his name, as well, and knowingly gives false information about himself to both Bill and the Blonde. Each character in the film appears to resist revealing too much information about him or herself, instead relying on constructed images. The characters are carefully playing their roles, often unbeknownst to the others. Bill believes the role he is playing, a suave burglar defending a righteous woman, until it is made apparent to him by the Blonde and the policeman that he remains simply a writer. Despite his realisation, Bill has become so enmeshed in his role that he can no longer return to the writer role and is instead being charged for murder and theft. *Following* establishes Nolan's fascination with an unreliable central character and interest in using narrative and simple camera techniques to heighten the unease and ambiguity of the film. In the final scene, Cobb appears in a crowded West End street, standing still among the sea of people. This mirrors the first scene of the film, where Bill stood against the crowd. However, while Bill came out of the crowd, Cobb slowly disappears in the drift as the police officer tells Bill that no record of Cobb exists. These concluding visuals emphasise the precarious position of Bill's narrative, as well as the undependable nature of Bill and his narrative.

Following's fractured narrative and characters represent a relatively postmodern conception of identity, similar to the Batman films. Kellner suggests "modern identities – however multiple and subject to change – appeared to be more stable, whereas there currently seems to be more acceptance of change, fragmentation, and theatrical play with identity than was the case in the earlier, heavier, and more serious epoch of modernity" (1992: 174). Bill has repeated his identity narrative in so many ways to so many people that he no longer has a stable identity to rely on, similar in effect to the Joker's multiple origin stories. Furthermore, others, especially Cobb, have usurped Bill's identity, with his help, and transformed it beyond a simple narrative. No matter what Bill tells the police about his "version of events", the tangible evidence of identity – fingerprints, dead bodies, the murder weapon – indicate Bill as being something else. His identity from here on remains uncertain because of the conflicting narratives offered, forcing the audience to make a determination of truthfulness within the structure presented.

Memento presented a sequel of sorts to *Following* in terms of the central ideas and narrative conceits of ambiguity and unreliability of the notion of truth, which were explored in the earlier film. Leonard, the central protagonist, cannot recall the immediate past and so is always in the present. He constantly repeats the narrative of the injury that resulted in his short-term memory loss, which comprises the primary component of his current identity, to the other characters in the film. Because Leonard cannot remember his immediate past, the memories of his historical identity drive his present construction of identity. The tension between having a fixed knowledge of self, Leonard believes he is a righteous avenger, and the constant introduction of contradictory information helps to highlight the conflict between a modern, internal identity and a postmodern, social identity. This tension is further heightened by Leonard's internal identity being often mediated through different forms, such as photographs and his tattoos. The narrative structure of the film emphasizes Leonard's inability to remember, as well as his need to tell his narrative, by moving between a backwards and forwards storyline, intercutting at key points in the plot. Throughout the film Leonard seems to be the victim of circumstance, trying desperately to keep control of his life by leaving himself notes, tattoos, and pictures, creating narratives of self. As the film progresses, however, it appears that Leonard's system is leading him astray and that those around him, especially Teddy and Natalie (Carrie-Ann Moss), are manipulating Leonard for their own gains. These three characters attempt to construct a narrative that allows them the most gain. While Teddy and Natalie appear to have the power in writing the narrative, it is ultimately Leonard, in setting his "detective case" in trying to find his wife's murderer and his constant repetition of the Sammy Jankis story, that drives the narrative. By positioning Leonard as an unreliable character in the film, Nolan has again forced the audience to question the validity of the information they have been given. However, because they can still trust in Nolan's authorship, due to the quality of the narrative structure and content, Nolan's place as an auteur is more secured. Nolan helps place the ambiguous or unclear notions of the text in to a sense of reality (Foucault, 1981: 57-59), providing grounding for the audience's understandings of the film and Leonard's character.

In the end of the film, which is the story's beginning, it is left ambiguous whether Leonard is truly in control of his identity construction or is once again being manipulated by outside forces, an ambiguity emphasised further by the DVD extras, discussed below. As will be seen in the discussion of the official discourse, Nolan seizes upon the final scenes while recording his commentary to stress his control over the narrative structure, but simultaneously questions the nature of authorship by providing multiple commentary endings. In this way the official discourse develops concepts and themes from the films to enhance Nolan's auteur persona. As in Nolan's other films, such as the focus on Batman at the end of *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, *Memento* closes with a close-up on the protagonist, placing Leonard as the centre of the narrative. Leonard has just declared that he chooses to believe that he is still searching for his wife's killer, claiming, in close-up as he is driving away from Teddy

I have to believe in a world outside my own mind. I have to believe my actions still have meaning. Even if I can't remember them I have to believe that when my eyes are closed the world's still here. Do I believe the world's still here?

At this point there is a cut from Leonard closing his eyes to a black and white image of his wife, caressing a new tattoo on his chest reading "I've done it." Reverting to an extreme close-up of Leonard's closed eyes, the image is saturated with light. He continues his monologue:

Is it still out there? [His eyes open.] Yeah. We all need mirrors to remind us of who we are. I'm no different. [Pulls up in front of a tattoo parlour] ...now where was I? [Close-up on Leonard's face, smiling.]

Leonard actively rejects the evidence around him, despite saying that he is still part of the world, leaving the audience to decide if Leonard or Teddy is correct, or if neither is telling the truth. By placing the camera firmly on Leonard's eyes throughout the monologue, Nolan implies that Leonard's truth is only in his mind, not in the larger world, leaving precise meanings open for interpretation. However, each person is acted upon by a multitude of factors. Although Leonard is convinced, on some level, that his authentic identity is formed by a fundamental factor from within and can be controlled by him, Nolan has suggested that the truth, and identity, is far more complicated and unsure. Although identity is a frequent theme within film, it is the consistency with which

Nolan's films centre on the confusion of identity as a central theme that marks it as a significant point to consider. Furthermore, the contrast between the identity crisis of the characters in Nolan's films and the relative stability of Nolan's auteur persona provide a helpful avenue to explore how Nolan develops the films' themes to conflate them with his auteur persona, thereby creating a unified filmic world.

Within Nolan's films lies a concern with the formation and mutability of identity. As has been suggested above and will be explored in more detail below, as a contemporary auteur Nolan knowingly creates a persona within his films and the rest of the official discourse. This persona is further transmitted and developed through critical and audience discourses, helping to create both unity for his films and increase Nolan's power within the industry artistically and financially. Therefore, to be an auteur – which means creating an auteur persona – in contemporary Hollywood, it is necessary to incorporate the persona established through the films and expand upon it to establish an auteur persona through the various discourse levels. As Timothy Corrigan (1991) suggests, it is not just in the quality of his or her work, but also in the discursive surround of that work where the contemporary auteur resides. The stability of Nolan's persona in the official discourse reinforces his films and demonstrates the plurality of the contemporary Hollywood auteur.

3.2 – Creation of the Auteur Persona in Contemporary Hollywood

An essential component of a contemporary Hollywood auteur is the presence of an auteur persona which exists outside of the film texts. Related to the star persona proposed by Richard Dyer (1998) in relation to actors, the concept of the auteur persona emanates from the director's films, but is then further constructed by the official discourse surrounding the film – normally interviews, profiles, and commentary – and then confirmed and altered by critical and audience discourse. As Thomas Austin notes in regards to the development of a star system, or in this case auteur system, it is “best thought of as a shared, but never fully equal, venture involving film-makers, marketers, reviewers and commentators, fans, and stars themselves, as active players within such economic and discursive machinery” (2003b: 25). The auteur system is the combination of multiple factors, as suggested above, which work together to transmit a specific,

though not static, perception of an auteur. The construction of an auteur persona within Hollywood, and to some extent in other film areas, resides not only in the films or the individual, but also in the entire collaborative and economic systems of production in place surrounding Hollywood film. It is only through these multiple levels of discourse and multiple systems of meaning, the intertextuality, that an auteur persona can be developed and sustained. However, as discussed in the previous chapters and in the introduction to this chapter, it must be remembered that “the concept of the extratextual authorial agency is fundamentally different from the textual ones advanced in earlier phases of auteur criticism” (Tzioumakis, 2006: 60). Consequently, although the auteur persona begins with the influence of the film text, in its contemporary version, it is only fully constructed with extra-textual materials, including the publicity, promotion, and various DVD features. Despite moving to a wider consideration of the idea of textual, that an auteur persona encompasses more than just the films, Corrigan cautions that “from its inception, auteurism has been bound up with changes in industrial desires, technological opportunities, and marketing strategies” (1998: 40). In contemporary Hollywood, a director is an auteur partially *because* of his or her position within a system, not apart from the system. With the rise of multiple forms of communication and address – Internet, DVD, television, newspapers – as well as new modes of film production and reception – new technologies in film, new sites of viewing, media integration – the consideration of what constitutes part of an auteur persona must shift.

This auteur persona, like almost all forms of identity as discussed in the previous section, is constantly changing and can appear in slightly different forms depending on how the viewer receives the information or engages with the discourses. Since identity, and the auteur persona, is “constituted within, not outside of representation” (Hall, 1996: 4), it is important to determine how Nolan is represented through the multiple layers of discourse. As Dyer notes about the star image, “stars are involved in making themselves into commodities; they are both labour and the thing that labour produces” (2004: 5). Although stars and auteurs are different in their construction and reception, both can be involved in creating and being a commodity. Nolan is implicitly involved in the construction of his auteur persona, which is used to help further economic, as well as aesthetic, goals. Furthermore, as Barbara Klinger notes, an auteur cannot form solely

through the discursive surround, but must actively participate in the creation of an auteur persona (1994: 7). Through an increase in creative freedom and salary, Nolan personally and professionally profits from his auteur persona, but the constructed auteur persona also reinforces the themes and messages of the films and creates a marketing tool for the promotion of the film. In the past two decades there have been an increasing number of outlets to create the auteur persona, most specifically through the Internet and the almost ubiquity of the home market, especially DVD and Blu-ray.³³

The auteur persona is a construct that may contain biographical elements, but remains a construct. The author function, discussed previously, helps bridge the gap between the constructed persona and the actual person by seizing on the idea of the name.

Foucault suggests

it would seem that the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterising, its mode of being. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. (1991: 107)

The auteur remains a name which helps categorise and unify a set of texts, but ultimately is not the authentic person, despite sharing similar attributes. The division of authentic person and auteur persona is important to remember, especially in regards to interviews and commentary that can appear personal and authentic, and which may be to some extent. However, as was suggested earlier, the auteur persona ultimately works within specific economic and production systems and must be considered in view of this, as well as being an expression of art.

In the previous section it was shown that Nolan's films, among other features, have innovative narrative structures that present characters struggling with postmodern identity construction. Nolan helps to continue the experience and themes of the films through careful construction of an auteur persona, while also developing this persona to position himself as the author/auteur/artist, and by extension position his films as more

³³ Although DVDs and Blu-ray discs are different technology, unless specifically stated otherwise the term DVD will refer to both formats in the rest of the thesis, as in most cases they both offer a similar home experience with nearly identical extra features.

than just entertainment, and perhaps worthy of artistic consideration. To this extent, Nolan enhances the experience of the films through a complementary auteur persona, which not only creates continuity with the filmic world, but expands on it by presenting insights into the film and strengthening the themes and ideas introduced in the films. For example, as will be discussed later in this section, the structure and content on the *Memento* DVD continues the puzzle of the film while providing some insight into the issues raised within it. Furthermore, publicity materials such as official film stills position Nolan in relation to the themes of the film while stressing his role as meaning-maker. This placement can be seen in a still from *The Dark Knight* (Figure 3.2), where Nolan is situated next to the bat signal in a contemplative pose, as well as in a still from *The Prestige* (Figure 3.3) where Nolan is seen directing Hugh Jackman and appears to be natural on the Victorian-era set.



Figure 3.2 – *The Dark Knight* Publicity Still



Figure 3.3 – *The Prestige* Publicity Still

To understand the auteur persona, the following section will examine Nolan's involvement with the extra-textual features of the DVD, focusing on the commentaries and the making-of-documentaries (MODs). The ability to create a specific and well-known auteur persona has been precipitated by changes in viewing habits, particularly in regards to new technology. Nolan engages the audience, highlights distinct qualities, such as narrative and character development, and exhibits authority. As was mentioned previously, the rise of the home viewing market, and particularly the technology associated with DVDs and Blu-rays, has created a new set of lasting discursive texts, which often interact with the original film text due to their immediate proximity and positioning. The discussion of official discourse will centre on new technologies because of their proximity to the film as well as the unique relationship the complete text – the film and the extras in one disc – has in terms of relationship with the audience. The

audience member can now own this hybrid text, which allows the viewer to create their own meanings by interacting with the text how and when they choose to do so, although always within a specific framework. The origins of Nolan's auteur persona are a complex combination of artistry – technically and narratively – creativity, independence, and outsider qualities. However, the official discourse, along with the films, is only one origin of the auteur persona. To become something of duration and truly be an auteur persona (Andrew, 1993: 83), it must then be accepted or negotiated by the audience, both critical and popular. Ultimately the analysis of how the auteur persona develops within the official discourse will show how Nolan and the studios producing his films create a stable and differentiated persona which helps promote Nolan, his films, and the idea of auteurism.

3.3 – The Development of the Auteur Persona Through DVDs

The materials that come as extra on DVDs allow for an increasingly active way for the director to communicate directly with the audience and, in some instances, for the audience to feel as though they are a stakeholder in the film and more directly included in the process of meaning making. The DVD format, debuting in the United States in March 1997, almost immediately became a sensation in the home video market because “with its superior audio and video quality and capacity to store a wide array of supplementary materials – from documentaries, to audio commentaries, to deleted scenes, to trailers – the DVD is a cineaste's home video dream come true” (Kendrick, 2005: 58). The general adoption of the DVD format allows for every viewer, from cinephile to casual, to have access to both the film and the production details, creating a new generation of knowing film-goers, similar to the explosion of art cinemas in urban centres in the 1960s and 1970s. As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, and has been suggested by a variety of researchers and commentators (Arthur, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Brookey, 2007), a majority of those watching DVDs are engaging not only with film, but the extras also included on the DVD.³⁴ The limited survey conducted for this research indicates that approximately 67% (120/170) of the respondents watched DVD extras. Due to the high

³⁴ As of 2007 approximately 87% of households with a television in the United States had a DVD player according to Nielsen Media Research, which is up from approximately 43% in 2003 (MPAA, 2007: 17).

number of audience members engaging with DVD extras, and their potential impact in understanding a film, it is important to consider how these extras help to form a specific auteur persona around Christopher Nolan.

As suggested earlier, one of the primary ways in which DVD technology has changed the formation of the auteur persona is through the increased access the audience is now able to have. In exploring how DVDs are marketed to an audience, Pavel Skopel's research revealed that rather than being advertised as simply owning a copy of the film "what is offered is rather a kind of experience and knowledge" (2007: 190) of how and why the film works, from production to meaning. By placing the emphasis of the DVD on including the viewer in the filmmaking process, DVDs offer even the casual viewer an agency in that process. Furthermore, the emphasis on production places the crew, and especially the director, as the centre of importance. For example, typical supplementary materials include commentaries, MODs, deleted/alternate scenes, and blooper reels. Almost all of these feature the production process: the commentaries mostly feature directors, writers, and producers (Doherty, 2001); the MODs normally highlight technical aspects of production (Arthur, 2004); the extra scenes expose some of the decisions made by the director, editor, and producers to include or exclude scenes; and the bloopers show mistakes or jokes made during the production. Although actors figure in all these features, especially the latter category, the emphasis is not on stars, but crew, leading to a renewed emphasis on the director. This is further highlighted by the popularity of the audio commentary, which will be discussed below. The viewer can interpret materials in multiple ways, as discussed in Chapter Two, and will most likely not watch all of the supplementary materials;³⁵ however, this research, expanding from Corrigan's (1991) assertion that the auteur is present outside of the films, argues that one of the factors that makes Nolan, and other contemporary Hollywood directors, an auteur is that there is a consistent message and auteur persona produced through all of the extras included on his films. Thus, no matter which extra features are engaged in, a viewer can still acquire a consistent idea of Nolan's auteur persona. Because of the current ubiquity of new technology, this research shows that it is essential to develop a consistent and distinct auteur persona in the official discourse to be an auteur in Hollywood. Without this kind

³⁵ See Chapter Five for further discussion of which supplementary features are watched.

of engagement that enhances audience experience, a Hollywood director cannot fully be considered an auteur.

The DVD extras, particularly the director's commentary, are integral in contemporary Hollywood to establishing a director as an auteur, especially with inexperienced or younger directors. As discussed in the previous chapter, the auteur within Hollywood has been used since at least the 1960s as a marketing tool by the studios and as Thomas Austin (2002) and Martin Flanagan (2004) suggest in their studies, the auteur continues to be an increasingly important factor in selling genre or action films. The DVD extra features are positioned in a way to encourage auteurism on an unprecedented level. Although extra features are normally watched after the first viewing of a film and thus "retrogressively reframe the viewer's experience and memory" (Skopal, 2007: 191), they can emphasize and frame understandings of future viewings as under the mantle of an auteur. In discussing the attempted creation of an auteur persona for two rookie directors, Sam Mendes (*American Beauty*, 1999) and McG (*Charlie's Angels*, 2000), Brookey and Westerfelhaus note that

these first time directors, albeit of very different films, are constructed as creatively powerful artistic personalities, and thus they are invested with the authoritative personae of auteurs. If the film industry needs to turn out auteurs quickly, then there is little time for a body of work to emerge. DVD extra features, however, allow for the immediate construction of an auteur, with the persona emerging from the features included on the DVD version of a film. In this way, DVDs commercially benefit from, and facilitate, the commercial construct of auteur personae. (2005: 115)

Because of the amount of extras that can be included on a DVD and the proximity of those extras to the film viewing experience, they are an ideal breeding ground for the auteur persona in its construction, dissemination, and continued emphasis. As was argued in Chapter Two in relation to Yannis Tzioumakis' (2006) concept of the industrial auteur, within the Hollywood system it is becoming more common to instantly anoint novice directors as auteurs by adapting specific conventions of the industry, genre or, as Brookey and Westerfelhaus (2005) suggest, testimonials from established industry fixtures such as actors, other directors, or critics. However, as this thesis argues, the

auteur persona has to also be developed over time and through other levels of discourse to be formed completely. Thus, while Sam Mendes might be confirmed as an auteur, McG may not be due to varied critical and audience response.

As has been suggested previously, the director becomes an auteur through a variety of filmic and extra-textual factors, but the presentation of the director on the DVD extras can play a large role in establishing an auteur persona both in the initial establishment of the persona and in its continuation. Devin Orgeron suggests that the director can become more of an auteur or artist by embracing the opportunity to supplement the meanings in their texts by achieving “a degree of continuity” (2007: 43) in the themes and messages of the films and the extra-textual material. In his discussion of extras in relation to director Wes Anderson, Orgeron notes that “Anderson, like many contemporary directors who help to produce the extrafilmic materials on their own DVDs, projects a carefully authored public image of himself as author” (2007: 43) and that this created persona complements the characters and themes within his films. Orgeron continues his argument by explaining how Anderson’s DVD image is constructed alongside, and within, the filmic world he creates. The ability of directors to create this image in such close proximity has been “largely responsible for the inauguration of a new age of the cinematic author” primarily because audiences “have unparalleled faith in the *authority* of their directors” (Orgeron, 2007: 58, emphasis in original) on DVD extras. While Orgeron suggests that the information presented on DVD extras focuses a renewed attention on the director’s authority, he does not ask to what extent the audience understands or accepts this authority. As will be seen in Chapter Five, the audience surveyed for this research shows that audience members, among other reasons, watch MODs and commentaries because of a desire to learn more about the intentions and techniques used in producing a film, suggesting that they place authority in the director and crew. The authority of the director is encoded in the text through his or her placement, references to the director, and through a consistency in message. As Stuart Hall suggests, “texts do not express a meaning (which resides elsewhere) or ‘reflect reality’: they produce a representation of ‘the real’ which the viewer is positioned to take as a mirror reflection of the real world” (1980a: 159). Through the extra-textual features of the DVD, the director is presented as the authority, which is presumed to be a

reflection of the actual production. Even though the official discourse is comprised of diverse texts, they work together to convey a specific vision of the auteur, among other things.

Nolan has participated in the DVD materials including commentary and interviews on all of the DVDs. Although promotional materials, including posters, publicity photographs, and trailers are featured on the DVDs, these will not be considered in detail due to space limitations and because their initial presence was prior to the original theatrical release.³⁶ Furthermore, although a part of the auteur persona development, they are more focused on selling the overall film rather than the auteur persona. In the commentaries and interviews on the DVDs, Nolan creates an image of technical mastery with an emphasis on narrative, themes, collaboration, and intellectual enquiry. He successfully navigates continuity from text to surrounding discourse through use of the DVD technology and the information he provides in relation to production and meaning. Nolan also creates continuity by the level at which he chooses to participate, for example not providing definitive answers to ambiguous elements or questions raised within the films' narratives. Furthermore, he refrains from discussing subjects unrelated to the production process, such as gossip from the set or publicity tour, instead focusing on technical details about each film's production. While creating this continuity, Nolan attempts to conflate the role of director and spectator in terms of meaning-maker, inviting the spectator, as discussed below, to take an active role in the reception of the film by refusing to give concrete, singular meanings to the films.

3.4 – Creating a Hybrid Text: Director's Commentary

One of the most powerful tools in new filmic technology and media in the creation of an auteur persona is the audio commentary due to its fusion with the primary text. When a director or other member of the production supplies stories or insights to a scene as that scene is playing, it provides a seemingly authentic experience that endows what is being said with a greater gravitas than if it was said in an interview or MOD, which is one remove from the viewing of the film. The commentary track provides “an unusual

³⁶ For a full list of DVD and Blu-ray extras included with Nolan's films see Appendix E.

immediacy. It becomes another text, intimately related to the film, complicating the experience of the film, but nevertheless not quite the film” (Parker and Parker, 2004: 13). This hybrid text, both of and apart from the film, allows for a new relationship between director and audience. As Thomas Doherty notes, although directors have always discussed their craft, “the length and specificity of the analysis via DVD, and the imaginary friendship nurtured in the vicarious dialog between pantheon artist and mortal fan, is of a whole new order of intimacy” (2001: 78). Doherty focuses on the idea that a viewer may commune with one of the Pantheon directors, invoking Andrew Sarris’ (1968) term; however, another way to consider this idea is that having a commentary track, in part, tries to bestow legitimacy and “greatness” on a particular director. If an audience member chooses to listen to and watch the film with commentary, he or she is bestowing legitimacy on that person’s authoritative, and usually authorial, position. Furthermore, intimacy between the director and the viewer as discussed by Doherty and others comes partially because in other forms the director is always at one remove from the audience – through an interviewer, for example – but with the commentary there is a sense of immediacy as well as intimacy that lends itself to both a privileging of the audience, by addressing them directly, as well as a recrudescence of the director as auteur, by setting the director’s commentary as important or worthy of being listened to and understood.

The contact that directors have with audience members through DVD features illustrates a contemporary use of the author function, particularly in how the auteur persona helps to create a frame of meaning for the audience. This interaction with audiences, though, also recalls Barthes’ (1977c) discussion, explored in Chapter Two, that the death of the author had resulted in a resurgence of individual audience member understandings. However, as Judith Mayne suggests, “the displacement of the author as the privileged source of a text’s meaning was accompanied, in Barthes’ terms, by the emergence of the reader, not as a new source of unity but as a dismantling of the very notion of unity (1993: 35-36). The commentary, though, places the director firmly back as a point of unity and meaning-maker within the texts. While the director provides greater unity in these texts, the commentary only exists because someone may listen to it – there is no purpose behind it without some form of expected audience – and so there is

always an intended viewer. Parker and Parker show that although directors specifically consider an audience's reaction closely in both filming and reflection on the filming, "intention in these tracks is not used in the abstract and broadly thematic sense in which it is invoked in other forms, such as interviews, *manifesti*, or more general statements by directors" (2004: 20). This is because the immediacy of the commentary to the film focuses the intention on specific technical and local details, as well as occasional theoretical or critical comments.

Knowing the auteur's intention helps the viewer feel a part of the film experience, but it both closes, through stating intention, and opens, by providing a possible alternate view, the system of meaning within the film. Janet Staiger, referencing Louis Althusser, Terry Eagleton, and Stuart Hall, suggests that viewers are never completely free as "to think any reader or group of readers can do anything – accept, negotiate, resist – is to lose the very real power of the contributions of cultural and structural Marxism to understand *constructed* economic, political, social, and psychological identities" (1992: 13, emphasis in original). While this may be true to an extent, that historically and culturally derived identities limit or contain what can be understood, this research proposes that there is a space available for a combination of authorial and audience understanding of the texts. Although the authorial framework guides possible audience response, that response is never fully predetermined. Developing from Hall's (1980a) and Morley's (1980) encoding/decoding model, the authorial framework provides a basis for audience understandings within the film, which is influenced by the surrounding auteur persona as well as the other socio-historical forces influencing understanding. The authorial framework is not an ideology, but instead a way to help construct a guide for multiple readings of the film. Based on the popularity of the DVD and Blu-ray formats, the extras play a part in forming the space for understanding.³⁷

As has been stated previously, the placement of DVD extras within the same package as the film creates a new type of relationship between author and audience. In a similar vein to Staiger's ideas on "interpretive frames" (1992: 21) as historically constructed, Brookey and Westerfelhaus claim that the "close proximity, temporally and spatially"

³⁷ As mentioned previously, the survey conducted for this research project showed that 67% of the respondents watched DVD extras, primarily the commentaries, making-of-features, extra scenes, and blooper reels.

(2002: 24) of the supplementary or extra materials to the film text directs the audience to the dominant, or preferred, reading of a film, as stated by the studio and director. This denies the viewer any opportunity to hold a different view of the film, and the DVD extras can even “correct” supposed mis-readings of the film. In their analysis of the *Fight Club* (1999, David Fincher) DVD, Brookey and Westerfelhaus suggest “the DVD-extra text operates as a complex rhetorical object. [...It] gives the signifying force of intertextual relationships an intratextual advantage. It can evoke the ideological residue of the ‘auteur’, and do so in a way that directs the viewers’ experiences of the film” (2002: 25). While Brookey and Westerfelhaus argue that the immediacy of the extras, especially in the director’s commentary, leaves no space for a discursive reading, this thesis suggests that a director can choose to open the meaning-making process by using the extra features as a continuation of the themes and motifs of the film. A commentary that does not suggest specific thematic meanings or grand theories for the film *encourages* discursive readings rather than limiting the audience’s understanding. By constructing an auteur persona which comments on, but does not necessarily provide answers for, an ambiguous and searching film the director is paradoxically able to retain the authority of the auteur by providing a grammar to understand the film, but also allow for the audience to use that grammar to discover their own meanings. While this trait is not restricted only to Nolan’s auteur persona, Nolan is a prime example of a director who is consistent in his framing of the film to enhance and leave open a film’s meaning. As will be shown below, his success in reinforcing an authorial identity while also acknowledging the cooperative and complex nature of filmmaking as well as the fluidity of identity and meaning in his films, demonstrates that Nolan’s auteur persona is partially constructed through an encouragement of audience interaction with the films.

By allowing for discursive readings through a focus on the production aspects of his films, Nolan partially constructs an auteur persona which emphasizes the primary themes and qualities of his films. In this way, “the DVD provides a platform for an auteur to discuss explicitly the artistic choices made, articulate the defining features of his/her distinctive style, and in this way assert his/her creative persona” (Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2005: 115). Nolan provided director’s commentary on *Following*, *Memento*, and *Insomnia* as well as providing a live and interactive commentary to

100,000 Blu-ray users of *The Dark Knight* (Moran, 2008). His is the only track on *Following* and *Memento*, but commentary on selected scenes from various crew members and actor Hilary Swank is offered along with Nolan's on *Insomnia*. Each person, however, records a solitary rather than joint commentary. As Brookey and Westerfelhaus (2005: 118) argue in their examination of Pixar as corporate auteur, the commentary for *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) included four people (Peter Doctor, Lee Unkrich, John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton), a mixture of directors and producers, which highlighted a collaborative method of authorship, including frequent use of "we" instead of "I" in describing the production process. Despite frequent acknowledgement of individuals' work in each film, the solitary nature of the commentaries on Nolan's early films helps reinforce a singular author.

As well as emphasizing Nolan as auteur, the commentary tracks also indicate a specific type of audience. In all three of his commentaries Nolan begins by stating that he is using the commentary to help the audience, or future filmmakers, understand the process of filmmaking. The focus on helping the audience to understand the filmmaking process is in keeping with the first extras included for home video. The DVD format, as has been noted by several scholars (Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2005; Kendrick, 2005), followed on from Laser Discs, which catered for a film elite who could afford to buy the high-priced format. Companies like Criterion specialised in creating extras to accompany the film, first on Laser Disc and now on DVD, which would enhance the understanding and knowledge of the movie (Schauer, 2005). Nolan continues this tradition as on a surface level all three commentaries explain the process of filmmaking on an increasingly larger scale including technical details about cameras, lights, and practicalities of filming on set versus on location. Each film's track also includes anecdotes about filming as well as thoughts on intention. However, unlike some commentaries which question the purpose of the track or ask who is listening to it, for example Steven Soderbergh wondering in the middle of the *Out of Sight* commentary who would possibly want to listen to it (see Parker and Parker, 2004: 15), Nolan always assumes an audience, framing his commentary as a discussion about the filmmaking process. Doherty cautions, "being a one-sided relationship, the DVD monologue will inevitably frustrate the listener-spectator bursting to ask an impolite question" (2001: 79). Nolan, though, frames his comments in

a way that appears to reach out to the audience in a personal way by speaking in direct address, bringing them into filmmaking and meaning-making process by attempting to answer some of the unasked questions about production techniques and reasons behind choices made in the film. To a limited extent, Nolan also addressed this problem by being the first director to utilize the BD Live feature of Blu-ray players which allowed viewers to ask questions, though through an intermediary. In most DVDs, “the viewer is situated in the position of a community member, he or she is addressed as one of the participants in a collective screening” (Skopal, 2007: 191), and while Nolan seems aware of this collective nature, he tends to address the viewer as an individual rather than part of a group. Partially this is a result of the solitary nature of the track, where he is not paired with a co-writer or actor from the film, which is a situation which would encourage a greater sense of a community. However, as suggested earlier, Nolan’s commentaries, while static and solitary in many ways, demonstrate how a contemporary, commercial auteur can have a dynamic relationship with the audience while still adopting the role of privileged meaning-maker. The dynamic element comes partially because of the intimate address and nature of the commentary, since there can be a *seemingly* more personal interaction between director and viewer than in the past. Furthermore, the change in style throughout the three primary commentaries (*Following*, *Memento*, and *Insomnia*) demonstrates Nolan’s development into an auteur through the continued construction of an auteur persona, moving from a slightly repetitive commentary to a more crafted narrative that conveys authority.

The commentary for *Following* centres on technical details of the filmmaking process, but also raises issues regarding narrative and form leading to meaning. Furthermore, it introduces concepts and motifs which appear throughout the rest of his films. The commentary begins with a disclaimer on the screen stating “Director and Writer Christopher Nolan recorded this commentary to talk in detail about how FOLLOWING was made with almost no budget. Geared for the low budget filmmaker, this commentary focuses on how FOLLOWING was written, shot and directed” (*Following* Region 1 DVD, Columbia Tri-Star). This disclaimer limits the *intended* viewership, stating that it is only for aspiring filmmakers, but as Janet Staiger (1992: 24-26) notes, an intended or ideal viewer is rarely found, and anyone, even an academic, can

listen to the commentary. These unintended viewers, though, will be aware that they are not the ones being spoken to, but this may help form discursive understandings of the film because it appears that the unintended viewer has been able to overhear a private conversation. However, the disclaimer also attempts to place Nolan as an aspiring filmmaker himself, despite the fact that he is authoritatively speaking as director and writer (and cinematographer, editor, and producer, though these roles are not mentioned in the disclaimer) identifying him partially within audience discourse, as well, within which Nolan is always already situated. Despite the intended practical audience, the commentary also works in a critical fashion. Nolan spends much of the commentary discussing the script and how necessity in production led to stylistic changes, blending his roles of writer and director. To this end, Nolan states that he wrote the script in a “modular headline” fashion to allow for quick changes and improvisation, highlighting his artistry and his authority by being able to adapt at a moment’s notice. He continues discussing the narrative structure, explaining that he created “parallel narrative timelines” to “expand the story in 3-D” with a limited budget. This situates Nolan as writer (or producer or editor) more than director, while also incorporating the recurring theme of time and linearity that is present within the film. However, while Nolan retains a focus on the importance of script and story, he also discusses further production aspects, for instance, giving tips to avoid shooting permits while still creating a sense of place in the film.

Interwoven within the technical commentary about script and production, ideas about the larger theoretical issues of the film are continually offered, suggesting Nolan’s position as meaning-maker. For instance, when discussing the first face-to-face meeting between Bill and Cobb in the café, Nolan describes the logistics of shooting in the location – how the large windows provide sufficient natural light to shoot, how they had to re-purpose an existing location to appear as a lunch-time café, which crew members are extras in the scene – but also suggests that Cobb is not telling the truth and ultimately “whether it [Cobb’s story] is authentic is irrelevant by the end of the film.” This casual questioning of the authenticity of the characters reinforces themes in the film that no one is to be trusted and challenges the audience to constantly pay attention to the slightest details to discover a version of truth while alerting them to the intended ambiguous nature

of the ending. Nolan again brings in possible points of meaning and emphasizes the importance of detail throughout the production description, noting during a discussion of filming limitations, for example, that a certain aspect “is deliberate, but it wasn’t a choice.” As Parker and Parker note, “by its very nature, the DVD commentary track enforces a heightened attention to intricacies of intention as it plays out over the course of the film” (2004: 20). Nolan’s comments about the careful logistics involved in shooting the film suggest that the viewer should pay attention to places where there may have been deliberate, but not chosen, aspects. Nolan helps the audience with this by offering further instances, for example that his parents’ house was burgled in the middle of shooting so the re-shoots that were planned had to be cancelled, leaving some small factors more ambiguous than intended. These kinds of personal or critical insights, enmeshed in technical discussion, imply that each aspect of the film is crafted to try to draw the audience into an intellectual, as well as visual, puzzle.

Nolan, though, problematizes his suggestions that each detail offers a clue to meaning by remarking that a particular shot is “evocative, but pretty meaningless.” By first implying his authority by giving technical details and specific insights into the film, Nolan then forces the attentive viewer to question if particular shots and factors in the film truly are deliberate to the overall structure and meaning or if there is little resonance. This, though, actually emphasizes the unreliability of the narrator (Nolan and Bill) of the film. Nolan’s focus on details on both a production and critical level engages the audience in the structure and content of the film. By giving this detailed overview Nolan acts as the voice of authority on the film; however, his questioning of the authenticity of his characters raises concerns that Nolan himself is not authentic and should not fully be believed. Further, Nolan often repeats stories or facts, in a way that sounds as though he forgot he had just mentioned it or that an editor decided to simply repeat the sequence, undermining Nolan’s supposed attention to detail and authoritative position.

The questioning of Nolan’s authority and authenticity opens the possibility for the viewer to form a discursive meaning, one that is separate from, though still possibly based on, the dominant, so-called authoritative views set forth by Nolan. This is furthered, as mentioned above, by framing the commentary in terms of production only, despite the presence of critical commentary, which can be seen as a negation of the

critical aspects presented by Nolan. However, Nolan also notes that he intends for people to watch the film a second time, so that each scene has a new meaning when seen during a second viewing. The commentary adds to this new insight because, as mentioned above, “DVD extras are mostly supposed to be watched after the first watching of the movies, so they retrogressively reframe the viewer’s experience and memory, or they construct a new experiential horizon” (Skopal, 2007: 191). Nolan uses the structure of the film as well as the DVD extras to reframe the viewer’s experience. Despite being recorded shortly after DVDs became standard, Nolan displays an awareness of film structure that is particularly suited to the format. Finally, by creating an open meaning-making process through the authoritative commentary, Nolan can be seen to be performing the function of the auteur (Corrigan, 1991: 136) through his participation in the promotion of his films and the partial commodification of his authorship. However, he is also creating a dynamic relationship with the spectator, at least those who seek out the relationship by listening to the commentary, by addressing them as equals and refusing to give a singular meaning to his choices, thereby retaining some of his authorship credentials. As suggested in the beginning of this section, this role suggests that Nolan is actively performing the author function (Foucault, 1991) by creating a role for the spectator to have agency in the meaning-making of the film while also providing a frame within which this meaning-making can occur.

The director’s commentary for *Memento* (Region 1 Limited Edition DVD, Columbia Tri-Star) continues the technical production focus of *Following*, but performs in a slightly more analytical fashion, demonstrating an evolution in Nolan’s auteur persona seen through the increased confidence of the commentary. Reflecting the increased budget, release, and critical response to *Memento*, the DVD commentary is more polished and professional. As with *Following*, Nolan overtly emphasizes his role as writer rather than that of director, such as discussing the story reason behind choices, but the underlying message of the commentary is that Nolan is the authority on the film. The focus on Nolan as writer in these two commentaries helps to emphasize the narrative structure of the films, their most distinguishing and accomplished feature. The authority, as discussed previously, is achieved by Nolan being the only person to give a commentary and also by the technical expertise and attention to detail Nolan displays. Furthermore, Nolan

contributes to the continuity of the primary text into this secondary text in what he chooses to address and in the form of the commentary itself.

The *Memento* track begins with a garbled, backwards voice, eventually turning into Nolan introducing himself. This backwards sound, played over the backwards action occurring in the film, is the first indication that Nolan will attempt to thwart giving a dominant and clear meaning. After the switch to forward sound Nolan discusses how the first scene was filmed – the film was run backwards through the camera though all sound was recorded normally – highlighting how he used the backwards technique to immediately draw the audience into the structure of the film, but kept the sound unaltered to create a “conventional physicality” that the audience could relate to. Throughout the commentary he highlights these ways that he “plays fair” with the audience, clearly setting out the rules and “grammar” of the film so that the audience will be able to navigate the larger mysteries rather than getting lost along the way. In providing the grammar for the audience, both within the film and in the commentary, Nolan is able to appear as though he is giving concrete answers to the film; however, it also then partially obscures the fact that while details to understanding the structure are explained, the larger mysteries are not. This provides a further case of Nolan entering a dynamic relationship with the audience, helping them to understand the film but still leaving the opportunity available for the audience to create their own meanings based on his authorial structure.

In *Memento*, to a greater extent than in *Following*, Nolan demonstrates a fascination with space and time, describing in detail how space is used to create different moods in the film, such as a long-distance, high camera angle in the initial black and white scenes to create a sense of objectivity and surveillance while using mostly close-ups or over-the-shoulder shots in the colour sequences to place the viewer in Leonard’s mind. He also demonstrates an awareness of time with the consideration of costumes. Leonard’s suit becomes cleaner as the film continues, and facial wounds change severity, using Natalie’s injury to indicate “when” in the film the viewer is situated, a technique also used in *Following*. Primarily, though, Nolan’s focus on time is combined with both the narrative structure and the editing used to achieve this, conflating his roles as writer and director. In discussing the grammar used in the editing of the film, for example always using the same shot at the start and end of the colour scenes, Nolan shows an acute awareness of,

and respect for, the audience by providing touchstones for the audience to orient themselves. As in *Following*, Nolan attempts to incorporate primary themes from the films with discussion of the technical details, especially in regards to ideas of the struggle with identity in his narrators.

Continuing the theme of authenticity and untrustworthy narrators from *Following* and *Memento*, the DVD extras and the commentary are designed in a puzzle. The DVD package takes the form of Leonard Shelby's mental health case file, further calling into question Leonard's reliability. To find the DVD extras, including the commentary, the viewer must complete aptitude tests, answering a series of questions before the extra-feature is played.³⁸ The hidden nature of the extra features implies a reluctance to give definitive meaning to the film, while also suggesting that there *is* a definitive explanation for those who choose to engage with the text and the extras, that Leonard was a patient in a mental hospital who made up most of his story. Once the commentary is reached, as discussed above, Nolan provides a basically standard commentary in terms of giving insight into intention, production, and stories from the set. However, although the film has only one ending, Nolan gives four different conclusions to his commentary, problematizing the authority of his position as meaning-maker. As Douglas Kellner suggests, "postmodern theorists claim that subjects have imploded into masses, that a fragmented, disjointed, and discontinuous mode of experience is a fundamental characteristic of postmodern culture, of both its subjective experiences and texts" (1992: 144). The commentary as a form provides both a definitive method of experiencing a text, but also a breaking apart of experience because it changes the nature of how a viewer experiences the film.

Nolan's multiple commentary endings further this disjointed experience of narrative by disallowing any concrete understandings. One commentary ending will be randomly selected for the viewer unless they know how to play the puzzle at the exact right time, switching to a commentary of their choice. For the first ending, Nolan's voice runs backwards for the remainder of the film. This garbling of the sound thwarts any meaning that could be given, but complements the start of the commentary, which is also

³⁸ There are several fan websites that list how to navigate through the DVD extras. Two that provide explicit information about the menu and commentaries are by Douglas Bailey (2002) and Johannes Duncker (n.d).

backwards, and highlights the issues of time and perception. In the second ending Nolan gives a basic description of the events on screen without offering much more than trivia (the license plate in the scene was his childhood postcode) and basic observation (Jimmy is being dragged down the stairs). While this does not directly challenge a fixed meaning, it still leaves ambiguity to a set meaning, implying that Nolan may not actually have a particular insight to how the film ends. In the third ending Nolan explains that Teddy is lying, and has always lied, and the audience will not believe what Teddy says because they have not believed Teddy throughout the film. This ending is troublesome because it gives a definitive answer to the film, and it also specifically tells the viewer what he or she should think and believe about the film. Additionally, this explanation appears to differ from what both the film and commentary have been suggesting. In the fourth ending Nolan reverses his statements and says that Teddy is telling the truth in the final moments, despite having lied at earlier points, and the audience should not believe Leonard. This ending, like the third ending, provides a more clearly defined meaning, but still allows the viewer to decide how much to believe Leonard or Teddy. While these last two endings seem to give definitive meanings, if viewed in the context of the other endings, as well as the nature of the commentary and DVD, allow for a questioning of Nolan's authority and provide, and almost encourage, discursive readings of the film. The commentary emphasizes the themes and narrative structure of the film, which itself encourages discursive readings.³⁹ If Nolan had provided a clear way to access the DVD materials, or if he had given specific answers to questions raised in the film, it would have broken the consistency of the film's themes and his auteur persona. Specifically, concrete or easy answers would have provided only one way to read the film, thereby creating a specific meaning rather than an authorial framework, closing the auteur-audience relationship. The puzzle of the film and the puzzle of the commentary complement and reinforce each other to allow and encourage further alternate readings by audience members. This implies an intelligence and the crafty or tricky nature of Nolan's auteur persona.

³⁹ For example, commentator Andy Klein (2001) wrote a lengthy article of possible meanings based on audience on-line discussions.

The commentary for *Insomnia* (Region 1 Wide Screen DVD, Warner Brothers) continues to develop ideas from the earlier DVDs' commentaries thwarting expectations of definitive meanings by being presented in shooting order rather than how the scenes appear in the film, a tactic not normally used in DVD commentary.⁴⁰ Showing consistency with the ostensibly production based commentaries of *Following* and *Memento*, Nolan frames his commentary as providing "an idea of the experience we go through in actually shooting the film." In choosing this frame, Nolan forces the viewer to experience the film in an alternate way and thereby think about the film in an unorthodox fashion. By removing the traditional notion of filmic time, Nolan encourages the viewer to form alternate readings, but at the same time his own power as meaning-maker is solidified as he is still in control of the framing of the film.

Despite his claim to focus only on the experience of shooting the film, Nolan's commentary, like his two earlier ones, integrates critical commentary on the motifs and narrative reasons for scenes. There is an underlying emphasis again on time and space, especially in relation to the ways it can be distorted. A prime example of Nolan's interest in the clashing of time and space is in a discussion of the scene where Will races to find the murder weapon hidden by Walter before the police arrive, which is intercut with Walter's interrogation at the police station. Will's search for the gun was shot on the second and third days of shooting while the parallel action at the station was not filmed until days twenty-four and twenty-five. Nolan notes on the commentary that this is one of his favourite scenes, remarking that despite possible production and continuity struggles, "I actually like to cross-cut. I like the different textures, different locations, sometimes even different times being collided together in a scene." Nolan's interest in playing with time and space, which in *Following* and *Memento* was displayed through his role as writer in discussions of the narrative structure, is now brought forward through a directorial frame. While compared to his earlier films *Insomnia* appears to be a somewhat more straightforward film in content and narrative structure, Nolan complicates the meaning and structure of time by presenting the commentary in an unexpected way and within the commentary indirectly asking the viewer to question how time and space are

⁴⁰ As of the writing of this thesis, the *Insomnia* DVD commentary appears to be the only commentary presented in this way.

perceived. Nolan's implication with these comments within the structure of shooting order is that the viewer should pay attention to the details present to look for discrepancies in the way time and space are structured, but further that the viewer should trust that Nolan has both the artistry and intelligence to make two scenes shot almost a month apart into a meaningful single sequence. While, as discussed previously, the commentary usually places authority and trust with the director, Nolan's explicit dual message calls attention to his skills as a storyteller and director. This misdirection further emphasizes the dichotomy of Nolan's auteur persona; he is both encouraging the viewer to pay close attention to discover individual meaning within the film while also retaining the privileged position of auteur and authority.

Issues of time and space are highlighted and enforced through the commentary, but their position as grounded in technical details of the production simultaneously seems to negate theoretical factors of the film and reinforce that production and theme can be intertwined and dependent on each other. In the same scene discussed above, Nolan comments on the challenges of lighting Al Pacino, giving the specifications needed to light properly, but then noting that "light is such a part of the film ... light [acts] as fear of exposure for this character" further conflating production and theme. Nolan directs a viewer to be aware of the use of light in the film because how it is used will indicate the character's state of mind, but at the same time partially brushes this thematic insight away by placing it within a technical discussion of how to light a scene. In his discussion on authors and writers, Barthes notes that "the author performs a function, the writer an activity. Not that the author is pure essence: he acts, but his action is immanent in its object, it is performed paradoxically on its own instrument: language" (1972: 144). This, translated to the idea of the auteur as has been done throughout this research, can be applied in regards to this piece of commentary. Nolan, as auteur, uses filmic language to perform the function of being an auteur, both by situating the film out of chronological order and by using the language of production – as director and as a writer – to demonstrate and explain his labour. It is still left to the viewer to apply this authorial explanation to the film, though if the viewer is aware of Nolan's earlier films, as he or she is likely to be, the thematic comments couched in production terms will be more easily understood because of familiarity with Nolan's work with time and space

conventions. As with *Memento*'s commentary, the structure of the track, as well as the content, stresses a production based understanding, allowing viewers to construct their own meanings, while still retaining a privileged position of meaning for the director, thus partially constructing Nolan's auteur persona as one of technical competency enmeshed with artistic consideration.

Nolan's authority is further stressed by its placement next to the other features on the DVD including brief commentary from others involved in the film. While Nolan's was the only alternate audio track on *Following* and *Memento*, the *Insomnia* DVD contains thoughts on selected scenes from actor Hilary Swank, production designer Nathan Crowley, editor Dody Dorn, cinematographer Wally Pfister, and screenwriter Hillary Seitz. Unlike other DVDs which will often offer group commentary when more than one person is participating (see, for example, *The Usual Suspects* [1995] with director Bryan Singer and writer Christopher McQuarrie in joint commentary or *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* [2005] in which writer and director George Lucas, Producer Rick McCallum, Animation Director Rob Coleman, and Visual Effects Supervisors John Knoll and Roger Guyett all contribute to one track), each person offers a singular commentary on selected scenes. The solitary nature of these commentaries separates the skills of each person and allows for them to reflect on their exact roles in the film, in part calling attention to the stratified production structure of Hollywood film. While the presence of multiple commentaries could be seen on the surface as removing some authority from Nolan by offering alternate narratives, ultimately each person, while discussing his or her particular sequence, refers back to Nolan as the main decision-maker. Furthermore, often stories are repeated versions of stories or facts discussed in Nolan's commentary, which recalls the repetition of stories and facts in the films *Following* and *Memento*, as well as the threading of a singular back story throughout *Insomnia*. The continual references to Nolan imply an authority in Nolan's commentary (and Nolan himself), especially as his track, while disjointed from the linear order of the narrative, spans the entire film while the rest of the tracks only cover a few scenes, which together calculate to approximately half the film. The director's commentary is presented as the definitive, authoritative version of production, however, the acknowledgement that

there are many people involved in the creation of a film helps to make Nolan appear as one of the crew, though the one with the vision.

As mentioned previously, while the director's commentaries featured prominently on Nolan's first three films, his most recent three, *Batman Begins*, *The Prestige*, and *The Dark Knight*, do not feature a traditional commentary in any of the home formats. It is unclear exactly why they lack this feature, but based on the hypothesis set out at the start of this chapter, it could be that Nolan refused to give a concrete meaning to these films, and given their increased audience size, any recorded singular commentary would create too firm a meaning. However, Nolan provided a live and interactive commentary of *The Dark Knight* for select Blu-ray owners. This event occurred on 18 December 2009, nine days after the film was released on DVD and Blu-ray, and used the new BD Live technology, which allows a text-based and interactive commentary where viewers could send in questions.⁴¹ The first 100,000 people to register their copy of the disc online with Warner Brothers received a special invitation to "attend" the event (Moran, 2008). Thus, the commentary was marketed as a special event for those who were early adopters of the new technology of Blu-ray.

From reports of the event (Chen, 2008; White, 2008) Nolan's commentary focused on similar aspects to his previous ones including technical details of production and anecdotes from filming, such as discussing reasons why IMAX cameras were used (clarity of picture) but not for the whole film (the noise of the cameras and the expense).⁴² Based on these reports, it appears that the commentary shifted throughout the film from technical to anecdotal features, such as how the final chase sequences were filmed and how Heath Ledger contributed to the development of the makeup and characteristics of the Joker. While ultimately the commentary's content seems to have been similar to Nolan's earlier commentaries, focusing on production aspects and avoiding any concrete answers to the meaning of the film, the interactive nature of the commentary allowed the viewer to have a greater agency in the production of meaning in the film, though the immediacy of the commentary was tempered by the text based nature

⁴¹ Although the live chat was only for the first 100,000 who registered, current Blu-ray users can still access the chat through the special feature according to the official *The Dark Knight* website (Warner Brothers, 2008).

⁴² All questions and answers are based on participant Brian White's (2008) transcript of the commentary.

of the system (Figures 3.4 and 3.5, GlumPhoenix, 2008). However, while giving the viewer more interaction with the meaning-making process, it also helped to confirm viewers' belief in Nolan's authority by making the viewer further invested in Nolan's opinions. In describing the commentary, fan White (2008) notes "Chris' favorite Joker line was when the Joker says Hi to Harvey Two-Face while he was dressed as a nurse at hospital (this is mine too!)", showing an excitement that his opinion is validated by being shared with Nolan's opinion. This is an example of the "imaginary friendship" described by Doherty (2001: 78) between fan and auteur. In creating a situation where the fan is incorporated within the official discourse of a DVD commentary, rather than perhaps a question and answer session after a screening, Nolan has furthered his position as a contemporary auteur who uses technology to reach out to the audience.

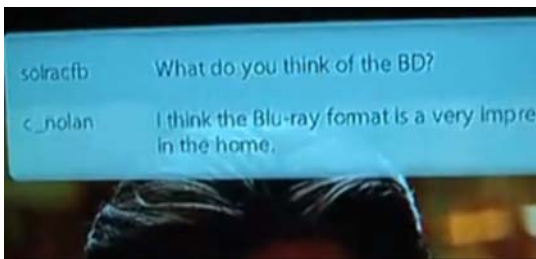


Figure 3.4 – Close-up of BD Live Text Box



Figure 3.5 – Watching BD Live Commentary

The BD Live technology helped Nolan perform the business of being an auteur to a greater extent than a traditional commentary due to its increased level of immediacy, but also because of his position as being the first director to use the technology. In publicising the event, stressing the exclusivity and innovation of it, Warner Brothers were marketing several products: the Blu-ray disc of *The Dark Knight*, the new Blu-ray technology, and Christopher Nolan as auteur. As Thomas Austin notes, "films succeed commercially primarily because they are pleasurable and meaningful for viewers. Accordingly, industrial strategies aim to engineer a range of possible pleasures and meanings and advertise their presence to different audience fractions" (2002: 3). Warner Brothers created a strategy for selling the Blu-ray disc that not only relied on the popularity of the film generally, but that also reached out to a specific technologically oriented sector of the audience using auteur interaction as an incentive to adopt a new form of technology. This strategy proved successful as *The Dark Knight* was the top-

selling Blu-ray until May 2010 (Boucher, 2010b). Nolan's auteur persona was partially centred on creativity and technology, from his focus of the use of limited technology and budget in *Following* to the first use of IMAX technology for a fictional narrative film in *The Dark Knight*, and so he could be sold as an appropriate director to showcase and sell Blu-ray technology. Nolan, in part, is being sold as a commodity. Like a film star, Nolan's auteur persona is formed through production and also through consumption (Dyer, 1998:17), meaning that while his auteur persona is produced by the studios and himself, it is only meaningful if the audience – the consumers – believe in Nolan as an auteur. Having a structured absence, no traditional commentary on the DVD or Blu-ray, only helped to heighten Nolan's BD Live talk as a desired commodity (MacDonald, 2008; Chen, 2008). Because of his well-publicised interest in new technological methods, as will be discussed below, Nolan could be marketed with the Blu-ray technology helping further to construct and uphold his auteur persona.

The commentaries on Christopher Nolan's DVDs help to construct a specific auteur persona that complements and enhances the experience of the films. The solitary nature of the commentaries places Nolan as the primary meaning-maker because he is presented as the authoritative voice for understanding the film. However, through the structure of the commentary and his refusal to provide a concrete overall meaning to his films, Nolan negotiates and encourages a space for the audience to perform discursive readings. Ultimately Nolan uses the "transformative nature of this change in format" (Parker and Parker, 2004: 14) in the interaction and immediacy it gives for a director to cement his role as auteur in a way to confirm a knowledgeable, creative, technologically minded and authoritative auteur persona. This persona is further emphasized through the other extra features on the DVDs of his films, primarily MODs. Ultimately these hybrid texts help advance the idea of Nolan, and other Hollywood auteurs who utilize the commentary function, to be active in the author function, where Nolan is known not only for the films he creates, but all texts he produces. Nolan's participation in creating commentaries, as well as participating in other extras, illustrates an awareness of his position outside of the film and suggests that he actively participates in creating a specific auteur persona. Furthermore, the content and context of his commentaries demonstrates a

conscious development of a relationship with the audience that continues through the other levels of discourse.

3.5 – Looking Behind the Scenes: Further DVD Extras with Nolan

While the director's commentary provides a privileged place in DVD materials in making meaning in the film due to the immediacy of the text (Parker and Parker, 2004), the other materials packaged with the DVD can also contribute to the creation of an auteur persona through their depiction and reference to the director. These extra features often consist of behind-the-scenes or MODs involving interviews with people involved in the production, deleted or alternate scenes, outtakes, and promotional materials for the film including trailers, publicity stills, and artwork such as posters.⁴³ On the BD Live commentary for *The Dark Knight*, Nolan stated that he “was very involved in the Blu-ray disc creation” (White, 2008). From this and other comments (O’Hara, 2005), for example on the *Memento* commentary about the film’s DVD and website production, it can be inferred that Nolan is active both in the production of the DVDs and in providing material for the DVD package. The following section will discuss how the extra features included on the DVD, particularly the MODs, further foreground Nolan as primary meaning-maker whilst helping to construct his auteur persona by stressing his creativity, intelligence, and dedication and refusing to provide definitive meanings to the questions raised throughout the films. At the same time the extras continue to expand upon the themes of the film, creating a level of continuity from the filmic experience to the extras. As discussed earlier, continuity between auteur persona and the filmic world is crucial in maintaining an auteur persona as each text should create a unified filmic reality. Timothy Corrigan cautions that the auteur-star can create “fissures and discrepancies that consciously employ the public image of the auteur in order to confront and fragment [the film’s] expressive coherency” (1998: 51). The auteur persona, in contrast to the possible disruption of the auteur-star, builds upon the themes of the film, creating a sense of unity rather than disruption.

⁴³ See Appendix E for a full list of the special features on Region 1 and Region 2 DVDs and Blu-rays of Nolan’s films.

One of the most included and influential extras on DVD are the MODs due to their history and in-depth style. While the MOD has existed in some form since the advent of cinema (Arthur, 2004: 39), it “has enjoyed a new life on DVD, becoming a standard feature particularly of the range of supplementary materials included within so-called special edition discs” (Hight, 2005: 4). However, as Paul Arthur notes, the MOD has traditionally been seen as existing “solely at the behest of a ‘parent’ or source film, a splinter of after-the-fact publicity with nothing more at stake than the boosting of residual profits [...] devoid of independent artistic virtues” (2004: 39). In an age of increasing production of MODs and their inclusion not just as publicity separate from the film, but actually packaged with the film itself, MODs take a more significant role in meaning-making, both working within and outside of the film. The DVD extras, including MODs, can be either produced specifically for the DVD or repurposed from publicity created prior to the film’s release. As Pavel Skopal notes in his study on the economics of DVD extras, there must be a careful balance in choosing which material to use keeping in mind the need “to differentiate the DVD format from other distribution channels through exclusive materials on the one hand and to repurpose the same material for as many media channels as possible on the other hand” (2007: 187). Ultimately, Skopal suggests the need to create a desirable product for the viewer will outweigh artistic concerns, though DVD production companies, such as Criterion, attempt to create meaningful extras that will complement the film experience and in that way differentiate their product to the consumer (Schauer, 2005: 33-34). This need to create a market also leads to the creation of multiple editions of DVD release, for example simultaneously releasing a single-disc edition with limited extra features and limited or special editions with multiple extra features to attract both the audience interested only in the film itself and the more invested cinephile audience. Nolan’s films have used a variety of these tactics, for example releasing multiple editions of *Memento* in different regions and at different times, but producing only a singular edition of *Insomnia*. As will be seen in the analysis of self-generated reviews in Chapter Five, audience members have come to expect a certain level of MODs in terms of quality and quantity. Nolan’s DVDs use a combination of repurposed material and original features, though there is a tendency to include more original than repurposed material.

Overall DVD extras attempt to provide an extension of the film going experience “as the filmmakers are overwhelmed by the incomparable memories of the filmmaking process, the viewers are invited to let the memories of the incomparable filmic experience come back” (Skopal, 2007: 190). By listening to the production team and actors share their experiences and memories, the extras are helping to frame new memories for the viewer which incorporate his or her memories of the original viewing of the film as well as the appropriated memories of the filmmakers. As Arthur notes, though, “among intrinsic principles [for the MODs and extras] is the validation of directorial artistry, counterbalanced by the airing of less ballyhooed collective contributions” (2004: 40). However, not all MODs create a specific emphasis on the director’s artistry. For example on the MODs for the film *In Bruges* (2008, Universal Studios), first time feature director Martin McDonagh is interviewed about his thoughts on the production and is praised by the cast members, but ultimately the artistic vision is credited to the city of Bruges rather than one particular person. This highlights the themes and experience of the film, while not necessarily contributing a specific artistry or persona to the director. Therefore, it is important to note that while extras *can* be used to validate the director’s artistry, this is not always done as not every director has an auteur persona. In the case of Nolan, as has been seen, he is attempting to construct and maintain an auteur persona and the content of the DVD extras helps bolster this persona.

The supplementary materials contained on the DVD release for *Following* are limited, reflecting its limited production and minimal theatrical release, though the resulting prominence of the director’s commentary highlights Nolan’s centrality to the film.⁴⁴ The DVD contains trailers for the film and for *Memento* and a director’s commentary, discussed above. Further, it has a function to allow the viewer to watch the film in chronological order and also contains the shooting script for the film in an interactive feature in which the viewer can switch between script and film. According to the DVD this “provides an interesting view of how a film changes from script to screen.” The inclusion of the script, as well as the alternate narrative structure, continues the themes of the director’s commentary that attempts to instruct perspective filmmakers.

⁴⁴ It has been widely reported that an alternate DVD version will be created by Criterion in the next few years which will most likely contain a greater variety of features.

The inclusion of the material somewhat negates Nolan's authority, by changing the intention he set out in the commentary and the film itself, and allows for audiences to experience the film on terms that they choose. However, as Brookey and Westerfelhaus caution, "these choices ... have been carefully selected by those involved in making and marketing the product, and may include material that points to a preferred interpretation of the film" (2002: 25). Therefore, while DVD choices can herald a new level of interactivity and process of meaning making, it is imperative to remember that ultimately the choices are part of an official discourse, one that is in the business of making money as well as entertainment, and is complicit in the production of an auteur persona as a marketing tool.⁴⁵ Despite these cautions, the DVD extras can still provide a way for viewers to assert discursive meanings while simultaneously emphasizing the director as the primary authority.

The supplementary materials included on the Limited Edition *Memento* DVD illustrate the dichotomy between the director's authoritative meaning and a viewer's ability to create alternative meanings.⁴⁶ As mentioned previously, this version of the DVD is designed to look like Leonard Shelby's patient record from a mental health hospital. The discs both contain puzzles you must solve to access the features, though the first disc is relatively straightforward in that you just have to choose from a list of words to access the film (watch), alternate languages (listen), subtitles (read), chapter selection (chapter), and the director's commentary (comments). The second disc, however, involves visual and logic puzzles that you must solve to access the extras. Some of them are easier to solve than others, but things like a re-ordering of the film in chronological order are quite deeply hidden. This puzzle design presumably can make the viewer invested in the film and take a greater interest in what is offered, though it also limits the access that a viewer can have to the extras. In part, this appears to be an attempt to retain control of the authorial function by limiting the information a viewer can discover and by making him or her "earn" the right to more information. Arthur suggests that in

⁴⁵ The near ubiquity of fans creating their own products on the Internet, such as re-edited trailers (hundreds are present on YouTube and other web sharing sites) or fake commentary (see, "Alternative Scenes" with commentary by MagicHugs) has further subverted an official discourse, as has the BD Live commentary function discussed in the previous section. Audience participation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

⁴⁶ Although the Region 1 DVD was reviewed, many of these features can also be found on the Region 2 Special Edition.

producing MODs, “a recurring tactic is to seize on an integral trope for the filmmaking process that mirrors the typology of the original narrative” (2004: 41). As seen with both *Following* and *Memento*, and will be seen again in *Batman Begins*, Nolan applies aspects of the film’s structure to the entire DVD, from menu to commentary to MOD. Although seemingly a bit cruel, this structure creates continuity with the film, which also gives the viewer limited access to information. Furthermore, Nolan has said in interviews, as one of the extras is the ability to restructure the film in chronological order which he did not want to include on the disc, he wanted to make it difficult to find (O’Hara, 2005). This exhibits that although at this stage in his career Nolan was able to hold some control over his artistic output, the studio still had final power over what should be given to the audience. Nevertheless, Nolan’s control, artistry, and creativity are featured heavily in the DVD extras.

The extras for *Memento* are a mix of repurposed features rather than original features. The extras include a short documentary for the Sundance Channel’s “Anatomy of a Scene” programme, the shooting script for the film, the original short story by Jonathan Nolan, and promotional artwork including posters and film stills. Nolan, apart from the commentary, contributes to the “Anatomy of a Scene” by giving an interview. The programme, which focuses on the first scene of the film, begins with a clip of Nolan discussing how he originally devised the story. He portrays himself as more of a writer than a director, reflecting his commentary, revealing that after his brother shared the short story with him, he “spent months just banging my head against a wall just trying to come up with a notion; how do you give the audience the experience of not being able to remember things.” As in the commentary, Nolan shows an awareness of the audience in how he writes and films, trying to involve the audience in the mystery of the film. The programme also features interviews with other key members of the crew such as the cinematographer Wally Pfister, the editor Dody Dorn, and a producer Jennifer Todd. However, while each person explains their role in the scene, Nolan is constantly referred to and his intentions are reinforced. Furthermore, the programme often cuts back to Nolan, almost as a framing device, giving his role the privileged position. Although this was not an MOD made specifically for the film, the choice to include it as an extra presents a condition of supporting the idea of auteur and Nolan’s authority as well as

stressing the independent nature of the film and Nolan. Because it was produced by the Sundance Channel, an independent cable channel in the United States associated with the Sundance Film Festival, the documentary both presumes and encourages an idea of independence, without ever specifically stating the idea, through the connotation of Sundance with independent film. Although the DVD extras strongly present Nolan as *the* authorial figure of the film, and thus in the position of meaning-maker and auteur, the puzzle structure of the presentation and the fact that the primary mysteries and questions are only hinted at but never answered, again allows the viewer to hold a form of agency in determining meaning of the film.

As with the previous two films, the central DVD extras for *Insomnia* are the commentary tracks on the disc, though the DVD also features four original MODs which heavily feature Nolan and a deleted scene with commentary by Nolan. The *Insomnia* DVD is formatted in a straightforward manner, unlike the *Memento* DVD. There are production stills, the trailer, and the four MODs – about the production, the cinematography and production design, insomnia, and an interview between Nolan and Pacino. In each of these features Nolan is praised as being the creative force behind the film. The various production members commend his leadership and vision, and in the documentary on insomnia he is interviewed as an expert on the condition. Although conforming to the stereotypical praise expected on DVD extras, it also serves to reinforce Nolan as auteur by repeatedly returning to his vision and skill on this film and within the wider filmic culture. For example, in the “unscripted conversation. On a Saturday afternoon” with Pacino, Nolan compliments Pacino, who then compliments Nolan. They both ask about each other’s work process and say how wonderful it was to work with each other. Furthermore, at one point Pacino shares a story about Francis Ford Coppola crying over a last minute set-up, subtly and favourably comparing Nolan to Coppola. In the production MOD a similar type of comparison is made when Nolan speaks of his desire to make this “Hitchcockian” film which is immediately followed by producer Steven Soderbergh declaring Nolan the right director to successfully portray difficult concepts like fatigue. This series of comments explicitly links Nolan’s ability and Hitchcock’s style as complementary, implying that Nolan is worthy of being considered a quality director. However, later in the MOD, Nolan both continues this association and

tries simultaneously to distance himself from a position as ultimate meaning-maker by suggesting

it's not enough to construct the simple scenario and then resolve it. It's, in some ways, it's as valid or more valid to raise difficult questions and acknowledge that they're not easy to answer and that you can't as a filmmaker just wrap things up neatly and say, 'well that's the solution to these things.' The type of stories I'm interested in telling, they do have, I think, a slightly messy approach to them in a way. An unsettled approach, perhaps.

As was suggested in previous sections of this chapter, Nolan confirms that he does not see a concrete ending for his films, but intentionally leaves a sense of ambiguity. Nolan attempts to narratively match the themes running through the films – loss, a lack of stable identity – by not providing easy answers within the films or through the extra features.

The most revealing extra on the disc is the deleted scene because of what it suggests about Nolan's role on this film. During the BD Live commentary Nolan noted that he “believes that the theatrical cut of the movie should always be the authoritative version” (White, 2008). Therefore, out of his six films, this is the only extra scene presented on any of the DVDs.⁴⁷ There is an option to watch the scene on its own or to watch it with commentary from Nolan. The scene would have appeared near the end of the film and is a conversation between Will and the hotel clerk where he discusses a childhood incident, and it is very similar to a scene in the 1997 version of the film. Nolan explains that in terms of exposition and character development, it was a helpful scene but it broke the flow of the story and took too much time away from the primary narrative. Nolan then is appraising it both as a director and writer, though he only acted as director on this film. The fact that the scene was not included in the finished product could indicate that Nolan had final say over the film, if not the final script. However, it could also show that Nolan was not able to keep the scene off of the DVD extras to help retain a sense of unity. As James Naremore proposed, one of the many reasons that Stanley Kubrick is considered an auteur is because “he left no ‘director's cuts’ or alternate versions to signify a conflict between the artist and the man within” (2007: 245). This

⁴⁷ Part of an additional angle of a scene is presented within an MOD on *The Dark Knight* DVD, but it is not advertised nor listed as such.

augments his auteur persona of a relative recluse working independently outside of the Hollywood (or even U.K.) system. Similarly, Nolan attempts to be seen as an independent and in control director, so it is unusual to see a deleted scene, but the commentary helps temper the loss of authority in his early Hollywood career.

The *Batman Begins* DVD contains several short MODs which primarily focus on the technical details of creating the film and reviving the Batman franchise, but also reinforce Nolan's position as primary creative force. The extras retain thematic unity through focus on the film's place within the Batman fiction network (Craft, 2007), with the menu in the style of an interactive comic-book with the different MODs and information hidden in the pages. Nolan is presented as integral to the creative and technical re-launch, and the MODs situate the viewer within Nolan's Batman world. For example, in the MOD discussing filming the Nepal scenes (filmed in Iceland), cinematographer Wally Pfister describes Nolan pushing him to film in as much detail and as realistically as possible, including sledding down a steep slope with the camera after the actors to obtain an action shot. However, Pfister references how Nolan's encouragement spurred him to do better work and Nolan was next to him the whole time, helping with logistics and guidance. Furthermore, the emphasis on Nolan insisting on realistic backgrounds, sets, and emotions is stressed throughout the extras. For example, in the MOD that discusses the lack of digital effects in the film, the production designer Nathan Crowley notes "Chris could spot the digital Batman" versus an actor, emphasizing Nolan's attention to all details of the film as well as his insistence in having the film as realistic as possible by limiting CGI.

Although Nolan is positioned as primary meaning-maker and authority in the extras, he is also portrayed as someone appreciative of collaboration and interested in working outside typical Hollywood methods, for instance by not relying on CGI and refusing a second unit director. By rejecting techniques Nolan dismisses as not authentic, he creates an atmosphere of artistic invention. In one interview on the MOD David S. Goyer, the co-writer, remarks that he wrote the first draft of the script on his own, but Nolan provided many ideas during the initial story drafting and helped re-write the second draft of the script, mainly in a small café in Los Angeles, showing Nolan's personal style and attention to details. Furthermore, in interviews with several of the

producers, they revealed that during pre-production executives met at Nolan's house to read through drafts of the script, and all primary actors were cast prior to having the script finalized so that they could be involved in the collaboration. However, while collaboration is stressed throughout the MODs, ultimately everyone involved in the process claims to have consulted Nolan for inspiration and leadership, positioning Nolan as the primary meaning-maker. Nolan is, therefore, portrayed as an auteur, but one who works outside of the traditional Hollywood system, being active through all aspects of the production and so retaining some of his independent film roots by ignoring aspects of the traditional hierarchy which can exist on a Hollywood film set. This also points to Nolan acting as an external auteur (Buckland, 2003), retaining power over all aspects of his film. It evolves Nolan's auteur persona by retaining traditionally independent qualities while firmly placing Nolan within the Hollywood sphere, something only hinted at in the *Insomnia* extras.

The extras on Nolan's most recent films continue the emphasis of Nolan as auteur and meaning-maker, but there are fewer extras and they tend to be less in-depth. Although it is unclear why *The Prestige* and *The Dark Knight* have fewer supplementary features since, as has been suggested previously, extras help DVD sales (Skopal, 2007), it could be that Nolan has a continued reluctance to speak for the film, and so does not want to highlight any particular meanings through the extras. However, it could also be that during the DVD production of *The Prestige* Nolan was already deep in the production process for *The Dark Knight*, so was not as involved in the extras, and that after the success of *The Dark Knight*, Nolan did not want to add to the hype around his own film. Although these are simply speculations, based on Nolan's behaviour in regards to his previous DVDs as well as the lack of interviews and material outside of *The Dark Knight* DVD, they are reasonable assumptions to make. Nevertheless, there are several features on each of the DVDs which add to the continuity of Nolan's auteur persona.

The Prestige contains one MOD split into five sections which firmly places Nolan as the meaning-maker of the film by featuring his thoughts on different aspects of production. Entitled "The Director's Notebook: The Cinematic Sleight of Hand of Christopher Nolan", the MOD primarily focuses on the relationship between film and magic as well as setting out the grammar of the film for the audience. For example, Nolan

explains the narrative structure in several ways, telling the viewer that “reading another character’s diary allows for two perspectives at the same time”. Each of the five sections of the MOD begin and end with Nolan as a “talking head”, speaking directly to the camera. There are several interviews with cast and crew who explain their part in the production. For instance, costume designer Joan Bergin explains how people wore clothes in the Victorian era and how that was replicated for the film. However, in each case they refer to Nolan’s vision and desire for realistic depictions. The format of the MODs and the content, referring to Nolan for all choices, emphasize Nolan’s place as auteur, but the focus of technical details allows for the main mysteries to remain dormant and unexplained. For example, Nolan notes

I like films that spin off in all sorts of different directions in your head once you’ve seen the films. So I would hope you would walk away having been hopefully very entertained by this story, but there would also be all kinds of resonances, I don’t know, interesting thoughts, banging around the brain.

As in earlier films, Nolan voices his intention of ambiguity in the end of the film, though he explains the structure to the audience so they can focus on the themes of the film rather than worry about how it is being told, even though ultimately the how is tied up in the themes. The DVD also contains a slideshow of production stills and artistic renderings of scenes, partly to show how an idea becomes reality on the screen, but also to highlight the artistic achievement of the film.⁴⁸ While scant in length, the DVD extras for *The Prestige* reinforce the thematic and visual motifs of the film which serve to reinforce Nolan’s auteur persona.

Despite being the highest grossing film of the year, *The Dark Knight* DVD contains few supplementary features. As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, some audience members felt disappointed with the lack of extras, and some individual viewers as well as film websites listed the features they would expect to see in the next release of the DVD, which shows an expectation of a re-release despite no official announcements (Pirrello, 2009). As it stands, however, the DVD is designed in a similar manner to *The Prestige* DVD and contains one MOD broken into smaller parts that focus on filming in

⁴⁸ The film was nominated primarily for visual awards, for example, the two Academy Award nominations for the film were for cinematography and art direction.

IMAX, developing music for the Joker, filming with limited CGI, and the changes in the batsuit and his new devices. There are also episodes of the fictional show “Gotham Tonight”, some of which featured in the film, as well as the IMAX scenes in full screen. Again, similar to *The Prestige*, there is an art gallery showing stills and artwork from the film. Although Nolan features in different amounts in each of the MOD sections, he is referred to throughout by his collaborators and also is the first voice heard on each section with the title “co-writer/producer/director” written under his name in each case. This designation stresses Nolan as an overall filmmaker rather than simply a writer or director, something he has attempted to highlight since *Following*. For example, executive producer Kevin De La Roy, speaking about the success of the film, explains “it all stems back to Chris. He saw a different vision and a different level of everything. He sees it and then he briefs us and then we become part of that vision and we execute that vision. So to raise the bar it’s quite simply the director, Chris Nolan.” Despite the focus on technical details in the film, this demonstrates Nolan’s perceived authority and creativity. Furthermore, it also unites the disparate elements within the film production into a signifying force – Nolan as the author function. Within these MODs Nolan’s auteur persona is used to create a sense of stability and authorship.

Although Nolan is constantly praised, there is still a sense of remove in *The Dark Knight* extras through their production focus. Unlike most MODs, there are very few talking heads in *The Dark Knight* features. Almost all interviews, including each time Nolan speaks, are voiceovers with moving or still images of the production process.⁴⁹ By centring the MODs on the process, not on the people, they portray a greater sense of collaboration, again perhaps opening space for the viewer to decipher the meaning of the film for him or herself. The lack of traditional interviews also creates a structured absence by divorcing image and sound. This structured absence is most likely formed to limit the unplanned absence of Heath Ledger. Ledger’s death is dutifully not mentioned on any of the extra features, but the removed nature of the MODs’ structure, perhaps, lessens this fact since Ledger is still seen in the images, just not heard in the voices. As was noted briefly earlier, within the feature “In Camera – *The Dark Knight*” which discussed how special effects were created, there is a brief deleted scene of the Joker

⁴⁹ Composer Hans Zimmer is the only person who is presented in a more traditional interview format.

leaving the hospital after he has detonated the bomb. In the voiceover, Nolan explains that although it is an impressive acting job by Ledger, he felt it was better to leave the Joker's escape a mystery. However, the inclusion of an extra scene buried within another MOD is one small acknowledgement of Ledger's absence. Ultimately, as with *Batman Begins*, the supplementary features on *The Dark Knight* uphold Nolan's auteur persona by their focus on the technical details of the film, while still emphasizing Nolan as the primary, unifying creative force. The extras stress Nolan as a visionary and independent filmmaker through his use of old and new techniques as well as his ability to collaborate with a large group of people to create an entertaining piece of cinema, and Nolan is placed in the appropriate industrial context through each progressive set of extras.

3.6 – Conclusion

While the film is the central point for creation of the auteur persona, the extra-textual materials surrounding the film help to form a certain perception of the director while also providing the director with a privileged role in the meaning-making process. However, the official discourse can also provide a discursive process, encouraging the audience to play a more participatory role in meaning-making. The increased availability and longevity of the official discourse, as well as its proximity to the film due to new technology, creates a resurgence of the auteur in production and popular culture. Nolan has used the official discourse to emphasize themes and qualities from his films, such as exploring the formation of identity and the relative nature of time, and has incorporated these and other elements into an auteur persona that promotes both him and his films. Furthermore, this promotion within the official discourse has helped position Nolan inside a film niche of an independent Hollywood director and has generated the idea of Nolan as a complete filmmaker, stressing his role as director, writer, and producer. However, he has also cultivated both a distance from the audience, through a lack of features on his later films, and a rapport with the audience through positioning himself as a knowledgeable creator, offering insights to those who choose to engage with the special features. Through the consistency and quality of his films as well as the continued development of a complementary persona outside of the films, Nolan is situated not as *just* a director, but as an auteur.

This official discourse, though, is only powerful or meaningful if it is appropriated by the recipients. In conducting intertextual research into films, official discourse must be analyzed in relation to reception, also examining critical and audience discourses. The official sources encode the materials with certain meanings and use technology to reach out to and incorporate the viewers, but it relies on the viewer to decode the meanings within the framework established. The next chapter will analyze selected critical reviews of Nolan's films to determine how the messages presented in the various forms of official discourse are then appropriated, reinforced, or negated by the media. Following this analysis, responses by audience members in the form of self-generated reviews and a targeted survey will be analyzed to determine if the perceptions generated from the official and critical discourse are reflected in the discourse of the audience and how these levels further develop the auteur persona.

Chapter Four

Development and Dissemination of the Auteur Persona Through Critical Discourse

In the previous chapter, official discourse was examined to determine the ways the auteur persona is constructed and used to enhance the themes and experience of the film and to distinguish Christopher Nolan from other contemporary Hollywood directors. The films create the base of the auteur persona while the official discourse places Nolan as the authority in those films. Through the films and the DVD extra-textual features Nolan instigated an auteur persona that is defined by intelligent films, attention to narrative and character development, and displays an attempt to form a relationship with the audience by asserting authority while simultaneously encouraging audiences to engage with the films and meaning-making. However, as has been suggested previously, each level of discourse intersects with and influences the other levels to varying extents. The critical discourse helps to develop each of the three factors of the auteur persona – through enhancing the film’s themes in regards to Nolan, using Nolan’s name as a unifying referent, and creating a niche for Nolan in terms of films and genre – but especially creates a strong connection between Nolan’s name and identification with the films. Furthermore, the use of Nolan’s name in the critical discourse also creates a sense of

authority for Nolan as well as transmitting auteur language and priorities to the general public. Critical discourse is essential in the development of the auteur persona by establishing the recognition of “Christopher Nolan” as a single referent for the qualities, themes, and ideas present in Nolan’s films and auteur persona. Furthermore, the critical discourse responds to official discourse and real or perceived audience discourse to create a form of dialogue among the discourses.

It has been suggested that the auteur name is used as a referent in unifying the texts and the meanings in the texts. As Foucault claims, an author’s name is not used equally in all forms of discourse, as “the author function does not affect all discourses in a universal and constant way” (1991: 109). In particular, critical discourse uses the auteur’s name in a much more visible and relatable way than the official or audience discourse. The establishment of the name as referent occurs primarily in the critical discourse, as it helps this discourse assign meaning to the films and it also creates a culture of auteurism. In discussing the formation and importance of commentary discourse around the primary text, Foucault suggests “the commentary’s only role, whatever the techniques used, is to say at last what was silently articulated ‘beyond’, in the text. By a paradox which it always displaces but never escapes, the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said” (1981: 57-58). Although the commentary and the text are separate, they can both work to reinforce meanings or create knowledge. However, the paradox, noted above, in terms of this research is that the critical reviews more specifically voice the auteur ideology, that perhaps is only underscored in the films, by giving prominence to the auteur’s name and his or her qualities. The critical surround becomes its own discourse that is reliant upon the original film, but separate in its function and design, which adds to understanding of the source.

Critical discourse can work in a prefigurative (Barker, 2005) or retrogressive (Skopal, 2007) fashion, where viewers can choose to engage with critical discourse either prior to or after seeing a film, or both, though due to the structure of the review system, the former is most likely. However, it must be remembered that ultimately critics are an audience, though a specific type of audience, and so reviews should be considered as a

type of audience reaction, albeit one that engages heavily in official discourse. Martin Barker notes in his discussion of ancillary materials

the address to reviews is certainly valuable, especially in as much as it challenges the unstated assumption in much film analysis that the presumed audience is some kind of end-point, experiencing films as things-in-themselves, and on the brunt end of their assembled symbolic force. Seeing reviews rather as indicators of reception processes at the very least reminds us that film viewing often takes place for quite specific purposes – and to be a writer of reviews is to be one particular *kind* of audience. (2005: n.p., emphasis in original)

Barker continues by cautioning, though, that it is important not to look *only* at reviews for audience reaction to determine how a film is understood, appropriated, and negotiated by an audience. This research addresses Barker's concerns by examining the ways ideas are transmitted and appropriated from production, through critics, and finally to audiences. Although this is rarely a straight or unidirectional line because each level of discourse interacts with others in a variety of ways, it provides an overview of how a contemporary auteur is created in Hollywood by uncovering some of the ways Nolan's auteur persona identity is distinctly reinforced and evolved through each level.

This chapter will examine the role of critical discourse in constructing the auteur concept by analysing how critical reviews help enhance and disseminate a specific auteur persona for Christopher Nolan. Critical discourse in this research refers to professional film reviewers, some of whom write for film specific publications (for example, *Sight and Sound*) and some of whom write for more popular publications (for example, *USA Today*). Therefore, the scope of the term critical discourse in this instance does not refer to academics or theorists, though they help inform the examination of the critical reviews. Barbara Klinger notes that film criticism is “a specific means of appropriating and explicating texts subject to conditions within the academy” (1994: 31), meaning that criticism is influenced by academic debates as well as other cultural factors. The context of criticism – critics in the U.S. and U.K. in the 2000s – must be remembered. Therefore, before exploring how critical reviews enhance Nolan's auteur persona, a brief discussion of contemporary critical discourse in the United States and United Kingdom will allow for a broader understanding of how critical reviews function in society. Following this,

the specific methodology used for examining Nolan's reviews will be outlined before chronologically examining the critical reaction to Nolan's films. Within the analysis of the critical reaction several factors will be focused on including overall critical reaction, how critics establish "Christopher Nolan" through use of his name and creating association among his films, and the specific qualities attributed to Nolan directly or through implication. The chapter demonstrates how critical discourse develops specific name and thematic recognition in Nolan's auteur persona which is not as present in official discourse, but reflects aspects of discussion in audience discourse, revealing the intertextual nature of cinematic culture. Furthermore, the critical discourse constructs a language for discussing films which situates Nolan as an auteur within specific cultural and industrial contexts. Therefore, the development of Nolan's auteur persona in critical discourse helps create a lasting auteur persona which could not be achieved through official discourse alone and which directly relates to how a wider cinematic audience understands Nolan as auteur.

4.1 – The Role of Critical Discourse in the Auteur Concept

Although critical discourse is a specific type of audience discourse, critics ultimately can shape and alter the understanding of film for a wider audience as well as feed back into official discourse. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, critics were influential in developing and popularizing the auteur concept, from the writings of the French *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Postif* critics to the British cine-structuralists at *Movie* to American Andrew Sarris in *Village Voice*. These and other critics helped, and continue to help, shape how the audience perceived certain directors and filmic style generally. As Richard Dyer notes in regards to stars

critics and commentators are often taken to express rather than to construct the response to a star, and indeed on occasion they may well be expressing a widely held, pre-existing sentiment or view about a star. More frequently, however, they contribute to the shaping of 'public opinion' about a star (and the relationship of what the media call 'public opinion' to the opinion of the public must always remain problematic). (1998: 63)

Thus, while it can appear that critics simply reflect current tastes and interests in film, they often shape and guide how the audience appropriates and understands individual films as well as wider concepts in cinema. As Shyon Baumann suggests, developing upon Howard Becker's (1982) concept of the art world, "only by examining artistic production and reception as social processes can we understand the socially constricted nature of cultural hierarchy and of artistic status" (2007: 14). In this Baumann notes that how the audience evaluates and enjoys different films is not a solitary pursuit that is inherent in each audience member, but grounded in a socially constructed concept of what is valuable and what is not.

Critics can influence cinematic thinking through their near ubiquity in contemporary Western culture. With the advent of the Internet, critical reviews are easier and faster to find, especially with such sites as Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Indiewire, and Movie Review Query Engine, which all collect, organize, and summarize professional reviews while also posting audience reviews.⁵⁰ Although film critics are being made redundant at an increasing rate, and the "death" of the professional critic has been increasingly discussed (see James, 2008 [*Sight and Sound*], Thompson, 2008 [*Variety*]), film criticism still appears to play an important role in influencing audience perception of film through – and because of – this new technology. For example, in the survey conducted for this research, approximately 64% (133/208) of the respondents, when asked if they had a preferred source for obtaining film information, explicitly noted a professional source (newspaper, film review television show, or magazine). Furthermore, as critic A.O. Scott notes "the circumstances in which the art of criticism is practiced are always changing, but the state of the art is remarkably constant. Which is to say that, from a certain angle, the future of criticism is always bleak and the present always a riot of ill-informed opinion and boisterous disputation" (2010: n.p.). While criticism may not be at the height of popularity it reached in the 1960s when debates on auteurism appeared in popular publications, based on the number of critical websites and the survey responses noted above, it still appears to be quite influential in audience understandings of films.

⁵⁰ These websites will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter in regards to audience reviews.

Critical discourse is essential in creating the auteur persona in terms of developing a referent which unifies the dispersive set of texts, but it also develops the persona by providing a language of genre and auteur as well as value in regards to certain films. By exploring Nolan in relation to established genres and contexts, the critical discourse illustrates ways for the audience discourse and official discourse to discuss Nolan. Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998: 97), in their research into audience reactions of *Judge Dredd* (1995, Danny Cannon), discovered evidence of this when their respondents categorized the film by merit such as “Bog standard Hollywood Action epic” or “trash movies” or “worthy movies”. Although Barker and Brooks’ discussion highlights the audience’s knowledge of genres, it also indicates a level (or lack) of quality expected of a film *before* viewing. While this expectation could have come from other audience members, it also is a socially learned knowledge about what to expect from a particular type of film, which is reinforced by critical reviews and writings. However, the value of a certain cultural object or type can change over time. Remarking on Becker’s (1982) concept of an art world, Kapsis notes “one of Becker’s important insights is that the consensus about the appropriate standards by which works, genres, and artists are judged important is inherently fragile, since no art world can insulate itself entirely from the impulses for change” (1992: 5). Kapsis claims throughout his study of Hitchcock that a change in critical reception in terms of the development of the auteur concept and acceptance of the thriller/horror genre allowed Hitchcock to be considered an artist. Without critical (auteur) champions such as François Truffaut (1986) and Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol (1979), Hitchcock’s artistic reputation would not have become as widespread as quickly as it did. Similarly, contemporary critics can be seen to place greater artistic value on blockbuster films than was afforded in the past, including regular discussions of budgets and earnings alongside critical discussion showing the increasing incorporation of industrial concerns in artistic appraisal in contemporary popular criticism. This change can then influence how audience members evaluate films, so, for example instead of automatically being considered “bog standard” fare, *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* may be considered worthy of deeper artistic or intellectual worth.

In considering the shift in critical understanding from Hollywood blockbusters as just entertainment to something of artistic or cultural value, there still remains a sense of

differentiation within the group so that there are now “quality” blockbusters and regular blockbusters (Buckland, 1998). Often this critical (and audience) differentiation is attributed to the director, though actors and scriptwriters can also help mark the value in these films. As Martin Flanagan notes, in the past decade there has been “the increasing tendency for studios to entrust ‘event’ movies and economically crucial ‘tentpole’ releases to filmmakers whose backgrounds and aesthetic roots lie outside of the mainstream” (2004: 19-20), leading to a directorial category of blockbuster auteur. The promotion of auteur-centric language in a review helps differentiate the different types of blockbusters and maintains the auteur persona as a type of author function by using the director as “the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design)” (Foucault, 1991: 111). Critical discourse, more than other forms of discourse, uses the auteur as a unifying force to make meaning in films. Although it is unclear why auteur ideology is used frequently in critical discourse, it could be because of the need to locate an author in works of art (Baumann, 2007), or that it is a reflection on auteur language in audience discourse, or simply that it is a useful critical tool to discuss films. Furthermore, despite the director being a nearly ubiquitous feature in film reviews as will be discussed below, the critical discourse develops distinct auteur personas for some directors and in specific industrial contexts, thereby also acting an indicator of culture or taste.

The function of critical discourse in developing the auteur persona as an author function to help understand the films sets it apart from official discourse in several distinct ways. As Richard Dyer further notes in relation to the development of the star persona:

Critics and commentators do not operate in the same space as those who construct the image in promotion and films. This gap between on the one hand promotional and filmic construction of the star image (which is further complicated by the highly ambivalent way publicity relates to promotion and films) and on the other the role of criticism and commentary in that construction is a real one, and accounts for both the complexity, contradictoriness and ‘polysemy’ of the star

image and also for the capacity of critical opinion to contribute to shifts in careers. (1998: 63)

While official discourse might attempt to establish a director as an auteur through interviews and DVD materials, for example, if the critical discourse does not support and develop this idea, most likely the auteur persona will not persist, as can be seen in previous examples such as McG. In Nolan's case, though, the critical discourse supports and expands his auteur persona, bestowing authority on Nolan as the primary meaning-maker for the films, as do the interviews and extra-textual materials present in official discourse. However, the critical discourse also differs from the official discourse in its attention on genre and thematic development of the films and the persona.

As was suggested in the previous chapters, the reviews develop the auteur persona in three distinct ways. Firstly, the reviews, on the whole, reinforce the themes and qualities from the films and explicitly associate these with Nolan, for example linking characteristics of intelligence and creativity within the film to characteristics of Nolan. Secondly, through their use of his name and mention or discussion of his previous films, the critical reviews can imply to readers that knowledge of Nolan and his previous films is important information to know when understanding a film. Most importantly, the emphasis on the name of the director places a distinctly auteurist perspective on the films by classifying them as Nolan's films, also highlighting Nolan in his author function as primary meaning-maker. Finally, critics place Nolan and his films within a certain genre which helps stress how Nolan as a filmmaker can be understood. This also relates to the changing status of different genres in critical circles. For instance, relating the film noir genre to Nolan and his films within the context of an action film helps shift the perception of action films generally, as well as Nolan's auteur persona. The following discussion of the critical commentary surrounding Nolan's films will examine how these three factors have appeared and evolved throughout his career. Ultimately the critical discourse helps to further construct an auteurist framework in which to understand films, and in particular continues the development of Nolan's auteur persona as one which is intelligent, creative, interested in the cinematic form, and refuses to reveal simple or singular meanings in his films. However, before embarking on this examination, it is important to outline the methods and reasoning behind this portion of the research.

4.2 – Method of Analysis and Selection of Sources

Critical reviews can be analyzed through a variety of lenses depending on the needs and context of the research. As was discussed in Chapter Two, the following analysis will be based on the textual analysis consistent with the previous chapter; however, cultural studies theories, such as encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980a; Morley, 1980), inform the discussion to ensure robust and meaningful analysis. As Hall notes, “there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code” (1980a: 131), which in the case of critical reviews means the establishment of a specific way of writing about film. While this can be seen to borrow from official discourse, helping transmit messages to viewers, it also reflects audience discourse by being a specific audience, and also by anticipating concerns or questions the audience may have in viewing the film. In examining the three factors mentioned above – characteristics, name and film history, and genre – a type of code will be uncovered. This is not necessarily as strict a code as is traditionally associated with the encoding/decoding model because there are many sources of production in critical reviews. However, the critical discourse is a part of an art world, and so tends to reflect similar values and understandings, even if individual opinion varies.

To accomplish an analysis that is both wide in scope yet examines the discourse in sufficient depth, the critical discourse is reviewed through a hybrid method. A sample of print reviews from the United States and the United Kingdom are considered for each film to examine the general critical view of Nolan’s film, how reviews place Nolan in relation to genre and the larger cinematic world, and how reviews relate specific characteristics to Nolan and his films. This analysis is informed by the previous discussion of Nolan’s auteur persona in the DVD extras to determine similarities and additions to the auteur persona within critical reviews, but also with a view to the audience discourse because, although audiences are discussed further in this thesis, it exists simultaneously with the critical discourse. Furthermore, to determine how the author function of “Christopher Nolan” is created within the reviews, the analysis looks at how frequently Nolan’s name is used and where in the review it appears. Part of the contemporary Hollywood auteur persona must be based in a popular (audience)

recognition of the director by name or by filmography as well as the primary traits and styles associated with that director, and critical reviews are one of the primary ways in which this knowledge is popularized.

As was suggested previously, traditional reviews are still an important source of information for the public, and so a higher and more prominent use of Nolan's name helps recognition of Nolan as an auteur in the public sphere. In his examination of the evolution of film reviews, Shyon Baumann (2007: 127) found that by the 1980s it was standard practice to include the director's name in reviews. Baumann suggests that the inclusion of the director's name was an important marker of films being accepted as art rather than just entertainment because "serious art forms require recognition of the artists by name" (2007: 124). Although Baumann found evidence to support this claim within the reviews he found, the initial impetus for looking at the director's name stemmed from Bourdieu's (1984) ideas on cultural capital. Bourdieu noted that "knowledge of directors is much more closely linked to cultural capital than is mere cinema-going" (1984: 27) and one of the ways this is emphasized and learned is through critical reinforcement. The inclusion of the director's name, as well as comparisons to other directors and films, becomes part of the cultural code. However, as Baumann found, mentioning a director's name is practically ubiquitous in critical reviews, so it is important to examine *how* the name is used in terms of the context, frequency, and placement within the review. Furthermore, how the reviews refer to Nolan's films and which films they choose to refer to helps shape what the general audience knows of Nolan. A greater emphasis on Nolan as primary meaning-maker and the decision to highlight certain films stresses specific qualities and knowledge. This method provides an overview of how Nolan's auteur persona is developed and sustained through the successive films.

A selection of reviews from newspapers and journals was chosen from the United States and the United Kingdom providing a comprehensive range of sources in terms of geography, cultural and political standing, and level of readership. Reviews from both countries were used for several reasons including the director's connection to both countries, the fact that the reviews in these countries are primarily written in English, and the situation of both the researcher, in the United Kingdom, and of the primary subject material (the films), produced in the United States, except for *Following*, which was

produced in the United Kingdom, though, many Hollywood films – including Nolan’s – are global in their production, distribution, and reception. However, the scope of sources had to be narrowed, and limiting to two countries was one way this was done. The scope was also narrowed to newspaper and magazines that have both print and electronic versions.⁵¹ A limited scope provides a manageable number of sources, but also retains the focus on traditional news sources, which are still one of the primary sources consulted for reviews according to the research survey and the many critical websites discussed previously. Furthermore, these reviews will most likely become the archival material that is accessed later due to the nature of archiving newspaper and magazine items, and so will most likely be the most historically resilient.

The sources have been chosen with regard to their geographical and social breadth as well as their cultural influence. The American sources were chosen based partially on the method used by professional culture rating website Metacritic. The selection process includes: “identify publications that (1) were well-regarded in the industry and were known for quality reviews; (2) actually seemed to produce quality reviews (or, if not, were so influential in the industry that they had to be included); and (3) had a good quantity of reviews” (Metacritic editors, n.d.). A similar method was applied for choosing newspapers and journals from the United Kingdom in regards to quality of reviews, taking into account the newspapers with high circulation and also different political leanings. The issue of political viewpoint was not a consideration for the American reviews because the difference in journalistic structures does not normally make this an issue for American newspapers, especially in regards to art reviews. However, unlike the United Kingdom, there are no truly national papers in the United States, apart from perhaps *USA Today* or a few “local” papers such as the *New York Times* or *Los Angeles Times*. Therefore, a selection of regional newspapers was selected for the American publications while only national newspapers were chosen for the United Kingdom newspapers. The publications were further categorized by country and by type – industry/targeted, regional, and national – to allow insight into possible differences in how auteur concepts are used in different contexts. Given the concerns of quality,

⁵¹ After sources were chosen both the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* switched to an on-line only format because of monetary shortcomings. They were kept in the analysis since they still exist in some form and had print versions when the reviews were initially published.

accessibility, and coverage and the need to have a manageable number of sources, 24 sources were chosen with eight from the U.K. and sixteen from the U.S. (Table 4.1).

| Type | Name | Country | Frequency |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Industry/Targeted | <i>Empire</i> | UK | Weekly |
| Industry/Targeted | <i>Entertainment Weekly</i> | USA | Weekly |
| Industry/Targeted | <i>Rolling Stone</i> | USA | Bi-Monthly |
| Industry/Targeted | <i>Sight and Sound</i> | UK | Monthly |
| Industry/Targeted | <i>Time Out</i> | UK | Weekly |
| Industry/Targeted | <i>Variety</i> | USA | Daily |
| Regional | <i>Austin Chronicle</i> | USA | Weekly |
| Regional | <i>Boston Globe</i> | USA | Daily |
| Regional | <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i> | USA | Daily |
| Regional | <i>Los Angeles Times</i> | USA | Daily |
| Regional | <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> | USA | Daily |
| Regional | <i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i> | USA | Daily |
| Regional | <i>Village Voice</i> | USA | Weekly |
| Regional | <i>Washington Post</i> | USA | Daily |
| National | <i>Christian Science Monitor</i> | USA | Weekly |
| National | <i>Daily Mail</i> | UK | Daily |
| National | <i>Guardian</i> | UK | Daily |
| National | <i>Independent</i> | UK | Daily |
| National | <i>New York Times</i> | USA | Daily |
| National | <i>Telegraph</i> | UK | Daily |
| National | <i>The New Yorker</i> | USA | Weekly |
| National | <i>Times</i> | UK | Daily |
| National | <i>Time</i> | USA | Weekly |
| National | <i>USA Today</i> | USA | Daily |

Table 4.1 – Publications used by type

Not every publication had all six reviews available despite almost every effort made to access them through critic websites (for example, Metacritic, Movie Review Query, Rotten Tomatoes), Google searches, searches on the publication’s website, subscriptions to access articles, and visiting the British Film Institute archives in London. Because of the scope of this project and the limited funds, research trips to individual newspapers or other archives were not possible. Furthermore, only reviews longer than 200 words were included in the analysis, which eliminated some of the reviews, especially for *Following*. A minimum word count was imposed to ensure that each review was more than a capsule and thus had a critical element. Ultimately, twelve reviews were used for *Following*, twenty-one for *Memento*, twenty-three for *Insomnia*,

twenty-three for *Batman Begins*, twenty-two for *The Prestige*, and twenty-four for *The Dark Knight*.⁵²

Each review was examined to determine how it referred to Nolan by noting when his name was first mentioned within the text, how many times his name was used, and adjectives or phrases used to describe him or his work on the film. These were then put into appropriate categories. For example, descriptions of Nolan coming from outside the American or Hollywood system were noted in one category, as these mentions place Nolan as “other” to the traditional system or method. Further, any frequent directorial comparisons made regarding Nolan were noted, as well as film comparisons. Finally, mention by name of other crew members were recorded, since mentioning other specific filmmakers responsible for the finished film could be seen as an emphasis that the film is a collaboration rather than the responsibility of one person. Actors were not specifically noted in the analysis unless it seemed relevant as, much like a synopsis of the film’s plot, discussion of actors is present in almost all film reviews and actors are not the focus of this research. If Nolan is the only crew, or one of the only crew, consistently referred to by name, this strongly indicates that he is considered the primary meaning-maker and artistic force behind the film.

As discussed earlier, the goal of the analysis was to determine how critical discourse develops Nolan’s auteur persona as well as points where the discourses interact. Based on this, the analysis focused on analysing three concepts: identification of the film’s qualities with Nolan, for example, independent, creative, intelligent; defining Nolan in terms of genre; and how Nolan’s name and filmography were used or framed within the review. As is argued throughout this thesis, the development of the auteur persona is an amalgamation of traditional auteur focus of the director as an artist who infuses his or her vision into the film, the unifying force of the author function, and an extension of the commercial auteur. The critical discourse helps coordinate these three factors to develop the auteur persona as a way to understand meanings in individual films as well as a specific set of films. As Foucault suggests in regards to the author function, “the author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing – all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence. The

⁵² For a complete list of which publications had reviews for each film, see Appendix A and bibliography.

author also serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts” (1991: 111). Critical discourse, along with official and audience discourses, establishes Nolan as the centre of meaning within his texts and uses Nolan’s auteur persona to help create meaning around the similarities and differences within his films. Within critical discourse Nolan’s independent status is stressed, through choices within the films and his outsider status, as well as his creativity and intellectual nature. These features and qualities are used to differentiate Nolan from other contemporary Hollywood directors, increasing the validity and dissemination of a distinct auteur persona.

4.2.1 – *Following*

The critical reviews for *Following* continue the construction of an auteur persona for Nolan based on the personal narrative from official discourse, the themes and techniques used within the film, and the genre and category in which the film is placed. Although these three categories of critical discourse are present throughout the other films’ reviews as well, those also rely on reputation, while *Following*, and to an extent *Memento*, form the initial basis for the auteur persona in critical discourse. In the twelve reviews examined 83% (10/12) of the reviews are primarily positive, though the negative review in the *Daily Mail* claims “the 28 year-old Nolan, now making a properly budgeted movie in Hollywood, can do better than *Following*, and probably will” (Tookey, 1999), so ultimately presenting Nolan positively while giving the film a negative review. The twelve reviews stress Nolan’s involvement with the film, highlighting him as the *filmmaker*, with a focus on his multiple contributions to the film, rather than only his role as a director, discussed below, as well as mentioning Nolan’s personal narrative in relation to the quality of the film and positioning the film within specific genre terms (film noir or crime) and industry terms (independent).

Most of the critics describe Nolan not just in terms of the film, but also in relation to the personal narrative Nolan created outside of and around the film, linking the film’s traits and Nolan’s history. This personal narrative consists of, among other things, the £3,000 budget, shooting on Saturdays with an amateur cast, and using his parents’ and friends’ flats as locations. For example, the *Time Out* review states “genuinely different and intriguing, Christopher Nolan’s first feature may have been made on a shoestring, but

it's without a doubt one of the most thought-provoking, original, and promising British debuts in recent years" (Andrew, 1999). The incorporation of Nolan's narrative from official discourse is found explicitly in seven out of the twelve reviews, although a further two reviews mention the limited budget in passing. The *New York Times* and *Independent* reviews quote Nolan directly, mirroring the official discourse presentation of Nolan as a young and resourceful director, developing and legitimizing this as part of his auteur persona. For example, the official press book describes the film as a "Hitchcockian thriller" that "is a clever piece of directing with an ingenious plot" (Alliance Atlantis, n.d.: 2). Several of the reviews echo the press book's description, as well as the future DVD materials, by portraying Nolan and his film as intellectual, challenging, and talented: "impressive first-time director" (Maslin, 1999); "Nolan has a fine visual sense and knows how to propel a story" (Nechak, 2000); "evidence of a far-seeing creative imagination. Nolan is a compelling new talent" (LaSalle, 1999). In describing the elements of the film, these reviewers conflate appreciation of the film with elements of Nolan, linking the two together for the reader and reinforcing the centrality of the director. Although Nolan may not be called an auteur in the reviews on the basis of one film, by linking elements of the film to Nolan, the foundations of an auteur persona are laid.

Furthermore, the reviews highlight Nolan's multi-faceted and multi-talented nature, with most reviews commenting, along with the personal narrative, that he played a larger role than the director of the film, with nine of the twelve reviews specifically mentioning his multiple roles. The three reviews which do not list his multiple roles also do not specifically label him as director, but simply attribute the film to Nolan, for example, it is a "very clever film by Brit Christopher Nolan" (Savlov, 2000), thereby suggesting that Nolan is responsible for the overall quality of the film through his attention to detail, setting aspects which will become part of his auteur persona. Several reviews also remarked beyond Nolan as the writer or director, commenting on his "agile hand-held camerawork" (Maslin, 1999) and that he "shows a natural talent for a fluent handheld aesthetic" (Thompson, 1999) with the *Los Angeles Times*' critic reminding the reader twice that Nolan was the writer-director-cinematographer (Thomas, 1999). The emphasis on Nolan as more than *just* a director both enforces and expands the auteur

idea. The fact that Nolan is the director bestows authorship of the film on him in these reviews, but highlighting that he also acted as writer, cinematographer, and editor implies that he is in full ownership of the film and an artist – an auteur rather than a *metteur-en-scène*. The association at this early stage of Nolan with these multiple functions, especially with writing and editing, establishes an auteur persona of film artistry that continues through following reviews as well as reappearing in future official discourse, for example in the DVD extras discussed previously which frame technical discussions through Nolan as creator.

Further to the placement of Nolan as a multi-faceted filmmaker, the reviews also place Nolan within a specific genre and industrial category of crime caper and independent cinema. Eight of the reviews specifically call it a film noir, though often with a prefix which distinguishes the film from other film noir such as “London noir” (Darke, 1999) or “neo noir” (Thomas, 1999). This identification with the crime or thriller genre of film with the expression noir places Nolan in a specific genre with expectations about him and his films. However, he is also placed specifically within the independent movement of cinema, in either a British or American context depending on the location of the reviewer. Eleven of the twelve reviews mention that Nolan is British or that the film is set in London, setting Nolan apart from other independent directors of the time. As the mostly positive *Variety* review proposes, “a fairly clever neo-noir exercise, Christopher Nolan’s debut feature is both distinguished – as a Brit production – and compromised by its very Amerindie feel” (Harvey, 1998). Harvey suggests that in many ways *Following* fulfills the well-known trappings of American independent cinema – unknown actors, black and white cinematography, crime theme, fractured narrative – but what makes it and Nolan stand apart is the British sensibility inherent in the film. Harvey suggests here and later in the review that if Nolan freed himself from the “fest and calling-card fare” (1998) which he views the film as being, Nolan could produce a more original and entertaining film.

The blending of the genre and industrial traditions is not universally hailed, with the negative *Village Voice* review decrying that “moan as we might about ex-film students cranking out résumé movies whose only interface is with other movies, the Quentin [Tarantino] Virus continues to spread. It’s too bad we cannot somehow mandate

that young directors need to spend serious time with real criminals before being allowed to make a postnoir crime indie” (Atkinson, 1999). Although negative, this review continues in some respects to develop Nolan’s auteur persona by associating him with the independent and crime traditions in film. It also incorrectly places him as a former film student, associating him further with the American independent movement. Each of the reviews discuss Nolan in terms of genre and industrial context, which allows for the reader to begin to develop an understanding of Nolan as a filmmaker. By associating him with already established film language, the reviews provide a foundation for later discussing Nolan in more specific auteur terms, if he should earn it.

Apart from associating specific qualities or talents to the auteur persona, as was mentioned previously, one way critical discourse helps build an auteur is by creating associations between a director’s other films and his name. Since this was Nolan’s first film, there could not be any film history established, but his name was used multiple times to suggest authority and authorship. Prominent use of a director’s name in the review, through placement and number of mentions, can help develop an auteur persona by implying that the director’s name is worth remembering and that he or she has authority over the film. In the case of *Following*, Nolan’s name is mentioned in six of the twelve reviews in the first sentences. As this was his first film, Nolan had not yet earned a specific reputation, but the mention of his name in the initial portion of half the reviews lends Nolan the privilege of authorship. All of the reviews, as expected, mentioned Nolan at least once, with an average use of his name of just over four times (4.25; 51/12). The frequent use of Nolan’s name throughout the reviews, despite the fact that he was a first time director, reflects that the reviews generally assign full credit for the film on Nolan’s abilities, even if it is a negative reflection, as in the *Village Voice* review. However, this was also in keeping with traditional discussion of independent directors, as discussed in Chapter Two in regards to Jim Jarmusch (Pierson, 1997: 27), further associating Nolan within the independent film sector.

Ultimately, the reviews for *Following* use official discourse to discuss Nolan and the film, but expand upon the official discourse to further incorporate themes and technical details from the film into Nolan’s auteur persona. Furthermore, despite the lack of history, the critical discourse also places Nolan within a specific industrial and genre

history while at the same time providing him with distinct qualities, such as intelligence in regards to film form, creativity and British-ness, which distinguish him from other filmmakers. These aspects begin to establish an auteur persona for Nolan which continues and develops in critical discourse through his subsequent films. Mirroring statements by the majority of critics (75%; 9/12), as the review in the *Independent* notes, “judging from his debut, Chris Nolan’s career is going to be one to, ahem, follow” (Darke, 1999: 14), placing Nolan as director for the reader to pay attention to as a talented filmmaker. Although the critical discourse formed an initial association between Nolan and a specific genre and industry, as well as specific qualities such as attention to detail and being British, an auteur persona is rarely based on only one film. Instead an auteur persona must be consistently developed through a director’s career. The critical discourse plays a role in the evolution of the auteur persona by connecting new developments of his or her films with the director’s history. Therefore, while the foundation for Nolan’s auteur persona was introduced in the critical discourse and official discourse surrounding *Following*, it did not develop into an auteur persona until his next films.

4.2.2 – *Memento*

Critical reviews for *Memento* further develop the auteur persona of a creative, film-intelligent, and independent filmmaker laid out in the reviews for *Following*. However, due to the wider release and perceived quality of *Memento*, Nolan’s auteur persona was amplified and transposed onto a different cultural sphere, treating him as a more established director rather than one with something to prove. Furthermore, the reviews specifically position Nolan within the genre traditions of noir and thriller while also tying his qualities as a filmmaker to the themes – revenge, identity, justice – and narrative techniques present in *Memento*. The links highlighted in the reviews between both his previous film and the themes within his current film confirm a specific auteur persona for Nolan which separates him from other directors.

Memento reviews are positive overall, with only four of the twenty-one reviews examined giving a somewhat positive rather than fully positive review to the film.⁵³ This quality is explicitly attributed to Nolan's work on the film, for example, with the *Empire* review crediting the film's "stroke of genius" (Errigo, 2000) to Nolan as the writer and director of the film. The *Los Angeles Times* calls *Memento* "writer-director Christopher Nolan's exceptional new film" (Turan, 2001) while the *Independent* states "Nolan retains unwavering control of his material, and the results are that rare thing – an intellectual roller coaster" (Billson, 2000). Though not unique to name the director as the author or creator of a film, the repeated close link between Nolan and the techniques and themes of the film demonstrate a high level of respect for his role in all aspects of the film which separates him. For example, the *Guardian* review asks "how is Christopher Nolan going to construct a thriller without the continuous thread of time and memory to slot its constituent scenes together? That he is able to do so, daringly abolishing normal narrative rules, is proof of a precocious imagination and technical facility" (Bradshaw, 2000). The reviews call attention to Nolan's distinct film features and explicitly link creativeness and a high competence in film tropes to Nolan, positioning him as a complete filmmaker, rather than an aspiring one as in the *Following* reviews.

This critical praise for Nolan as intellectual and creative is reflected in the future official discourse of the DVD materials discussed in the previous chapter, but also in the official discourse available to the critics in the form of the press book. On the first page of the book, the film is described as "Christopher Nolan's explosive new thriller [...] *Memento* skewers comforting notions of identity and traditional narrative in a terrifying, compelling and astonishing display of filmmaking" (I Remember Productions, 2000). Although it is not possible to know how many critics read the press book prior to writing reviews, the similarities of message in several respects reflects the interaction and occasional reflection of official and critical discourse. However, as Flanagan (2004: 25-26) and Barker (2005: n.p.) note, despite similarities that often arise between official and critical discourse, as stated previously, the two discourses serve complementary though different purposes. While official discourse attempts to attract an audience, critical

⁵³ The somewhat positive reviews were in the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, the *Austin Chronicle* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. However, these reviews still recommended the film and had positive things to say about parts of the film and about Nolan.

discourse, at its best, attempts to inform an audience about aspects of the film (James, 2008: 16-18). For example, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* review began by stating that Nolan's film was "something new and original – perhaps even great – to come out of that vast wasteland known as the New American Cinema" (Arnold, 2001) which, while mirroring some of the official discourse message, also instructs the audience that the film is independent from Hollywood, but within a familiar tradition of New American Cinema. Further in the press book, producer Jennifer Todd is quoted as saying Nolan is "the kind of director who's dedicated to the story, the characters, the artistic process – he has a vision and wants to bring that to reality" (I Remember Productions, 2000). In a similar vein, the *New York Times* claims that "Mr. Nolan demonstrates a supercharged cinematic intelligence" (Scott, 2001) while the *San Francisco Chronicle* suggests that "he has a strong command of the medium" (Guthmann, 2001) and *Entertainment Weekly* summarizes that "Nolan is a moody craftsman of dazzling vision and skill" (Gleiberman, 2001). These reviews, as well as others, imply that Nolan is more than just a director, but the author of the film. The review in *Time Out* states explicitly "in the end this is Nolan's film. And he delivers, with a vengeance" (Andrew, 2000: 79). By attributing the quality of the film to Nolan above others involved in the production, the critical reviews associate him with the artwork, which in turn helps form the auteur persona within and outside of the film.

As with *Following*, Nolan's auteur persona is further developed through the discussion by mentioning his personal narrative. For example, in the *Guardian* review the first paragraph traces Nolan's career discussing both *Following* and *Memento*, ending the praise for Nolan by noting "the regret is that, while the melancholy search for a British movie renaissance continues, the most natural young movie talent this country has produced in ages evidently finds American to be his natural cinematic language" (Bradshaw, 2000). In this example the British Bradshaw places Nolan within a personal history, a history of British cinema, and an American industrial context. By placing Nolan in these varied environments Bradshaw establishes for the reader how he or she should understand the rest of the review, the film, and Nolan's career. In total, almost half of the reviews (48%; 10/21) specifically mention Nolan as British, placing him outside of the Hollywood tradition, or in the case of the British publications, claiming

him as one of their own.⁵⁴ This British-ness comprises part of Nolan's auteur persona placing him both as distinct from his own generation working in Hollywood, but also as similar to other British/American directors such as Ridley Scott and American/British directors such as Stanley Kubrick, two directors who are cited by Nolan in interviews as influences (Sloan, 2003: n.p.). Associating Nolan with his British background helps develop his auteur persona, especially in regards to his relationship with the American production context.

Another factor arising in critical discourse that differentiates Nolan as an auteur is the suggestion that rather than just making a film, he is also exploring the process of filmmaking and film viewing. Six of the twenty-one reviews (29%) explicitly, and more reviews implicitly, call attention not just to Nolan's use of cinematic conventions, but that he has turned them inward to explore and expand upon the cinematic form itself.⁵⁵ The *Austin Chronicle* review, for instance, suggests that *Memento* "foregrounds all the implicit questions that surround the art of filmmaking" (Baumgarten, 2001) while the *Christian Science Monitor* claims "*Memento* is one of the few recent films to recognize how closely a movie can resemble a memory bank" (Sterritt, 2001). The narrative and genre disruption in the film are the most commented upon aspects of how Nolan frames questions of cinema. The *New York Times* calls attention to "the disorienting pleasure of its unusual narrative technique" (Scott, 2001) and the *San Francisco Chronicle* claims that "it's hard to follow – intentionally so. Like *The Sixth Sense* [1999], which also played with notions of time and perception, it's designed to challenge and confound us" (Guthmann, 2001). These critics praise the complexity of the narrative because it forces the viewer to think about the construction of the film rather than just the content and this is linked to Nolan through stressing his authority over the film. Linking the film's overt themes to a more discursive investigation of cinematic form informs the reader that Nolan is someone who is more than just a director, but a filmmaker building a distinct career.

⁵⁴ Over two-thirds (71%; 5/7) of the British publications mentioned Nolan's nationality while only a third (36%; 5/14) of American publications did so. As has been noted before, though, Nolan is both British and American and grew up in both countries. However, he is often claimed as British within all three forms of discourse.

⁵⁵ The six publications are *New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *USA Today*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Austin Chronicle*, and *Entertainment Weekly*.

While it is common to refer to a director's earlier works in a discussion of the current film, the positioning of this earlier work can present different meanings. In the case of *Memento*, 62% (13/21) of the reviews refer to *Following*, and more tellingly, they incorporate the themes of *Following* into a discussion of *Memento*. For example, the *Variety* review notes near the beginning that "British-born scripter-helmer Christopher Nolan avoids the sophomore slump with flying colors while deepening some of the themes so craftily explored in his debut effort, *Following*" (Nesselson, 2000) while the *Village Voice* comments

adding several extra dimensions and considerable confidence to the 29-year-old Nolan's tricky first feature, *Following* (1999), *Memento* may be a stunt, but it's a remarkably philosophical one. The movie is a tour de force of frustration, a perverse tribute to the tyranny of cinema's inexorable one-way flow, and in effect, an ad for a home DVD player. It's also an epistemological thriller that's almost serious in posing the question: How is it that we know ourselves? (Hoberman, 2001).

By linking the films together, not just by their connection with Nolan but their underlying thematic (mutability of identity) and technical (non-traditional narrative structure) similarities, these reviews imply that Nolan is developing new ways of using cinema to explore issues of identity and truth. While the reviews for *Following*, on some levels, seemed to regard the narrative disruption as a trick to get noticed, the reviews for *Memento* develop Nolan's auteur persona by heralding the narrative as a revised way to experience the cinema. They also imply the relationship between audience and auteur, discussing the ways Nolan seems to reach out to the audience, trusting them to follow the film and asking them to create their own understanding of the film within the structure provided.

While genre language is as ubiquitous of a critical tool as naming the director, for *Memento*, as with *Following*, the film is placed in terms of how it simultaneously adheres to genre conventions and subverts them. For example, *Entertainment Weekly* suggests *Memento* "may be the ultimate existential thriller, [it] has a spooky repetitive urgency that takes on the clarity of a dream" (Gleiberman, 2001), categorizing it as a thriller, but suggesting also that it rises above the genre. Furthermore, this description qualifies the

type of thriller as existential, adding further differentiation from what the viewer might think of as a typical thriller, specifically that it is intellectual rather than just visceral. Over three-quarters of the reviews (76%; 16/21) positioned *Memento* as a thriller while just under half of the reviews (48%; 10/21) placed it as a film noir.⁵⁶ As with *Following*, though, the reviews did not let the films rest within “typical” genre descriptions, but emphasize that *Memento* attempted to rearrange and call attention to genre conventions. The *Village Voice*, differentiating it from the high number of films attempting to be a neo-noir, claims “video stores are filled with examples of retro-noir and neo-noir, but Christopher Nolan’s audacious timebender is something else. Call it meta-noir” (Hoberman, 2001). *Sight and Sound*, constructing their review of *Memento* around its placement in this genre, credit Nolan with the innovations in the film, noting the film is “the work of a film-maker clearly capable of breathing new life into stock noir devices” (Darke, 2000). The connection of Nolan as someone who works within, but tests the boundaries of, genres contributes to his auteur persona as a director knowledgeable about, and with a desire to innovate, the medium of film. By highlighting how Nolan’s cinematic grammar operates, the critical discourse complements the official discourse and the film by helping the viewer navigate the messages and techniques of the film, foreshadowing audience discussions about how to understand the film. This is reflective of the official discourse available to the critics apart from the film. In the press book, Jonathan Nolan notes that

the crime thriller genre has become a sort of ninety-minute call-and-response session with the audience; they know all the tropes and tricks backwards and forwards. [... Christopher has] created a thoroughly enjoyable thriller; and at the same time, he’s made a film that forces us to ask why we enjoy crime thrillers in the first place” (I Remember Productions, 2000: 2-3).

Recalling Hall’s (1980a) encoding/decoding model, the critical discourse here helps the viewer to understand the encoding process as well as how it should be decoded. However, while this implies a specific reading of the film, it also gives agency to the viewer by offering genre tools he or she can use to create negotiated meanings from the film by stating that the film does not adhere to any specific genre.

⁵⁶ Some reviews called it both.

As with *Following*, the reviews use Nolan's name to help highlight his authority within meaning-making. Nolan's name appears in the first two sentences of the review in approximately 62% (13/21) of the cases studied, further emphasizing that reviewers consider Nolan the primary force behind the film. He is mentioned on average approximately three times (2.95) in each review, with Jonathan Nolan, who wrote the story for the film, mentioned in only 38% (8/21) of the reviews. When Jonathan is mentioned, it is always as Nolan's brother, placing him almost as a continuation of Nolan, rather than as an independent member of the team. Jonathan becomes part of Christopher's vision, rather than a separate entity. This is present starting with this film, but is seen again in their future collaborations where the two are sometimes referred to as "the Nolans" instead of individually, further incorporating Jonathan's contributions as an extension of Nolan's auteur persona. Although other crew members are mentioned in some reviews, no one is mentioned as close to as many times as Christopher Nolan. This continued placement of Nolan as the main touchstone for the film further repeats the message of the official discourse in which all of the crew refer to Nolan as the person making all decisions and being the main focus of production. As the *Guardian* claims, "Memento is a film high on thrills and high on IQ – an impressive new step in the career of this heavyweight director" (Bradshaw, 2000). The reviews of *Memento* clearly position Nolan as a talented independent filmmaker who creates intellectual films which address themes at the centre of filmmaking and identity. However, as discussed previously, the auteur persona must continually be developed to sustain, and so implicit in these reviews is also a looking forward to Nolan's next film.

4.2.3 – *Insomnia*

Despite the move from an independent to a studio production, the *Insomnia* reviews contribute to his auteur persona by continuing to associate him with intelligence and having a keen sense of the cinematic form, but also credit him with successfully negotiating his independent sensibility to a summer Hollywood film. For example, *Entertainment Weekly* praised "the directorial confidence of Christopher Nolan. Neither repeating nor losing touch with the keen trickiness of *Memento* or his feature debut, *Following*, he uses his first big Hollywood picture – a good, basic cop flick – to

demonstrate that he's the real deal. This is a filmmaker in full control of mood, tone, and pacing" (Schwarzbaum, 2002). Nolan is still given independent stature, by virtue of his independent features being incorporated with the description of *Insomnia*, and suggesting that he belongs making films in Hollywood by claiming he is "the real deal," and not *just* a small-picture director. The opinion that a Hollywood film was a positive step for Nolan is frequently expressed, with comments such as he "smoothly vaults into the studio leagues" (Lim, 2002) and that he has "a gift of creating intelligent, engrossing popular entertainment" (Turan, 2002). Supporting Martin Flanagan's 2004 argument that the first years of the 2000s saw the development of auteur blockbusters, the *Austin Chronicle* claims that *Insomnia* "sure makes a strong case for the value of smart, daring filmmakers in Hollywood" (Baumgarten, 2002). Nolan's auteur persona is developed within this discourse by being positioned not just as an intelligent filmmaker, but one who can effectively balance entertainment and artistic concerns within the relative restrictions of a studio financed film with well-known actors.

The reviews for *Insomnia* were mainly positive, reaching the same critical approval as for *Memento*, with 91% (21/23) of the critical reviews praising the film. As with his previous films, though, even the two negative reviews still favourably praise Nolan's skill. For example, the *Washington Post* review notes that "both in his first film, the little-seen *Following*, and in his breakout hit *Memento*, Nolan showed an edgy creativity and willingness to bend the rules" (Hunter, 2002) and the *New Yorker* review comments

the director, Christopher Nolan, showed his hand to dazzling effect in *Memento*, and his sense of location, of places beaten up by a wrecking crew of desperate or disappointed humans, has not deserted him. The trouble is that his skills are now applied to a tale that can scarcely bear the pressure of his sophistication. (Lane, 2002)

Within these reviews Nolan is positioned as a skillful director working with material that does not fully suit his talents. While this was the minority opinion, these two examples show that even at an early stage in his career, Nolan's auteur persona is already so well-established that reviewers can call upon his "known" skill and quality to demonstrate to readers he is better than a the film that the reviewer did not like. As Yannis Tzioumakis

(2006) suggests with his review of David Mamet as an “industrial” auteur, these and other reviewers are assuming prior knowledge of the reader along with a general understanding that Nolan is positioned as an artistic filmmaker to further place Nolan as auteur despite a seeming misstep in film choice. This tactic further implies a sort of collusion with the reader, rather than any sort of didactic tone. The critic is a segment of the audience, and so the critic positions him or herself as a knowing member of the audience, assuming a similar level of knowledge from the reader.

The reviews, apart from identifying specific qualities with Nolan’s auteur persona, also use his previous films to emphasize his skills which helps to foster a film association. The reviews connect Nolan’s auteur persona to the themes and techniques in the films. Every review refers to *Memento* at least once, while 35% (8/23) of the reviews also reference *Following*. This mention was almost always used to incorporate praise for Nolan such as “Nolan matches his *Memento* achievement with another triumph of style and substance” (Travers, 2002); “Nolan, who made the ingenious backward-tracking thriller *Memento*” (Quinn, 2002) and that the film is “very recognizably the work of the sharp, probing intelligence that gave us *Following* and *Memento*” (Andrew, 2002). While describing the films, these quotes are also explicitly tying Nolan to both the films and the properties within those films. These then translate, mostly, to praise for the current film. Further, these reviews, as with the reviews of *Memento*, incorporate many of the main themes of the film, often in reference to Nolan himself. For example, the *New York Times* review begins “the intensely sharp-witted remake of the noir thriller *Insomnia* – a cat-and-mouse game in which the mouse feels its pursuer’s breath on its fur and the cat is burdened with shame – matches the director Christopher Nolan’s particular interests” (Mitchell, 2002). *USA Today* continues this idea, claiming *Insomnia* is “a perfect fit between filmmaker (*Memento*’s Christopher Nolan) and material (Norway’s same-name psycho-chiller from 1997)” (Clark, 2002), and the *Boston Globe* states “Nolan, who’s British, has an unrelenting obsession with desperate men debilitated by the psychosomatic” (Morris, 2002). There is a connection clearly made between the director’s personality, which incorporates his nationality, and his choice in film themes, with *USA Today* implying that Nolan is more of a force on the film than the director of the original film by only mentioning the origin country for the 1997 film.

Praise of Nolan's skills is also tied to the genre within which he is working, similarly to the discourse around *Memento* and *Following*, which helps create a sustained and distinct quality of Nolan's auteur persona. Over three-quarters of the reviews (78%; 18/23) refer to the film as a thriller and over half of the reviews (57%; 13/23)⁵⁷ describe the film as a noir, or as in Nolan's previous films, some version of a noir or thriller which both reiterates and complicates the traditions and motifs of the genre. For example, the *USA Today* review claims the inversion of darkness and light, among other genre tweaks, "solidifies *Insomnia* as the exact opposite of film noir" (Clark, 2002) while the *San Francisco Chronicle* further comments on this, noting "the director shows how film bright can be as dramatic, oppressive and revealing as film noir" (LaSalle, 2002). As with *Memento*, critics also coined new phrases for the film with the *Guardian* calling it a "blanc-noir" (Bradshaw, 2002) and the *Independent* choosing to describe it as a "back-to-front noir" (Quinn, 2002) due to its use of light where dark is normally standard, but also recalling the narrative structure of Nolan's earlier films. By stating how the film fits within genre conventions and then plays with them, the reviewers are confirming genre tropes and then positioning Nolan as "an intelligent-director who can raise the stakes in a mainstream genre" (Norman, 2002). The *Boston Globe* argues "in Christopher Nolan's *Insomnia*, Pacino is in rare form, and so is the psychological-thriller genre. (It's a psychological thriller with actual thrills and actual psychology)" (Morris, 2002). The ability to blend industrial contexts (Hollywood and independent) and stretch genre tropes forms a distinct part of Nolan's auteur persona, one that is voiced most prominently in critical discourse, but which appears within audience discourse, as well.

Nolan was continually positioned as the central creative force through the use of his name as well as through the adjectives used about him. Despite transferring from a film where he ostensibly had more artistic freedom (as an independent film and in the dual roles of writer and director) to one where he had less (as a studio picture and solely director), Nolan's name was still mentioned in the first two sentences in 57% of the reviews (13/23), as opposed to the 62% (13/21) for *Memento*. The similarity in prominence could be seen as a continued amount of critical praise for his artistic abilities.

⁵⁷ As before, the total count is over 100% because several of the reviews refer to the film as both a thriller and a noir, for instance the *New York Times* calls it a "noir thriller" (Mitchell, 2002).

Furthermore, Nolan was explicitly referred to an average of four times (4.13), once more than for *Memento*. This is surprising given that Nolan was the writer and director of *Memento* while acting only as the director on *Insomnia*, although official discourse emphasized that he worked closely on re-writes of the script. The writer, Hillary Seitz, is mentioned in only 61% of reviews (14/23), suggesting that Nolan is still the primary filmmaker despite not scripting the film.

Along with the artistic credence placed on Nolan in the reviews, they also look forward to his next film, claiming that “*Insomnia* bodes well for Nolan’s future.... This is one director who’s not asleep at the wheel” (Baumgarten, 2002), again tying Nolan to the themes of his film (insomnia). Further reviews suggest that Nolan’s “detailed, ornate style and thematic preoccupations are a cry for auteur status” (Morris, 2002) and “credibility is something that Christopher Nolan ... has in spades” (Sandhu, 2002) positioning Nolan as among the best directors working, rather than just a functionary, whose future films are worthy of study by association with the director, rather than simply on their own merits. Furthermore, in claiming that Nolan’s films are crying for auteur status, Morris suggests that Nolan is aware of the discourse surrounding his films and is actively seeking to become an auteur. The implied statement in these reviews, though, is that Nolan needs to move beyond working on a re-make in just a directorial role, with *Sight and Sound* noting that “Nolan’s real promise is as a writer-director, rather than a director for hire. And in that case, getting a solid mainstream success like this under his belt is a shrewd move, buying him the freedom to do his own thing in the future” (Wrathall, 2002: 64). With *Insomnia* Nolan managed in critical discourse to maintain the identity of a creative and intelligent filmmaker – more than just a director, despite only acting as director – and also establish that he could bring this creativity in genres (remake, cop-buddy) that may not usually have this level of intelligence. The critical discourse positions Nolan as an auteur by linking him to the thematic and industrial contexts within which he works, but by also differentiating him from those contexts by referencing his independent film past and stressing the play with genre tropes. The continued emphasis in the *Insomnia* critical discourse on similar qualities as in the reviews of *Following* and *Memento* shows that a stable set of conditions have been formed for Nolan’s auteur persona including an attention to the film form and genre

traditions. However, these stable qualities are transposed, mainly, to praise for Nolan as a Hollywood director, something not present in earlier discourse. Nolan's stable auteur persona functions to pacify discrepancies among the industries and the individual films, and the critical discourse begins to establish Nolan as part of a new type of Hollywood directors – the blockbuster auteur.

4.2.4 – *Batman Begins*

The critical discourse surrounding Nolan's *Batman* film was generally, though not universally, positive, though as with the previous mixed criticism, Nolan himself was usually praised. Despite this film appearing to be strictly within the traditional Hollywood blockbuster model, the reviews continued to develop the independent, intellectual, and creative reputation of Nolan established in the reviews of his previous films, but confirmed the status of Nolan as a blockbuster auteur. This was further integrated with genre expectations and the industrial context, as well as in relation to his previous films. For example, the *Rolling Stone* review states that the audience should “credit Nolan for trying to do the impossible in a summer epic: take us somewhere we haven't been before” (Travers, 2005), incorporating Nolan's control over the film and his ability – and desire – to rework genre and industry convention. Nolan could be seen, according to these reviews, to reform the traditional Hollywood blockbuster into something more creative and intelligent working in a specific historical time which accepts this type of shift.

All of the reviews position the film within the *Batman* fiction network, claiming it as a new beginning to the *Batman* franchise after the critical and commercial disappointment of *Batman and Robin*, with many of the reviews comparing it more favourably to Tim Burton's *Batman*. Many reviews commented that Nolan's *Batman* is more grounded than Burton's gothic-fantasy through shooting in real locations, and more importantly, through its focus on character development instead of action which was often associated with Nolan's previous work on independent films. The reality of the film was stressed in some way in 78% (18/23) of the reviews. As the *New York Times* review notes, “what Mr. Nolan gets, and gets better than any other previous director, is that without Bruce Wayne, *Batman* is just a rich wacko with illusions of grandeur and a

terrific pair of support hose” (Dargis, 2005). This focus on character development instead of action in *Batman Begins* was routinely highlighted, with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* calling the film “more of a character than a caricature piece” (Arnold, 2005), unlike previous Batman films. The actors, particularly Christian Bale as Batman, were often cited as influential factors in keeping the interest on character development over action. As Thomas Austin notes “the familiar role will carry particular expectations, at least for many members of the prospective audience. Casting Batman is thus a hazardous undertaking” (2003a: 137). However, the critical discourse generally looked favourably on the casting of mainly independent British actor Bale in the role, as out of the reviews which specifically commented on his performance, only one thought Bale was not a good fit (91%; 20/21).

Furthermore, the casting decision was linked complimentarily to Nolan’s broader artistic vision. For example, the *Boston Globe* review notes “Bale and Nolan tip their hats to Burton once or twice, but mostly they reclaim the character and make Bruce Wayne the author of his own fortunes” (Burr, 2005), pitting them as a team, though with Nolan as primary force. Similarly, the *Rolling Stone* review proposes that in the film “the buildup is steadily engrossing. That’s because Nolan keeps the emphasis on character, not gadgets. Gotham looks lived in, not art-directed. And Bale, calling on our movie memories of him as a wounded child (*Empire of the Sun* [1987, Steven Spielberg]) and an adult menace (*American Psycho* [2000, Mary Harron]), creates a vulnerable hero of flesh, blood and haunted fire” (Travers, 2005). Bale’s performance, linked with his star persona and audience knowledge of him from earlier films, is integrated in Nolan’s realistic depiction of the film world. The explicit connection in many of the reviews between the success of Bale’s performance and Nolan’s vision develops Nolan’s auteur persona by continuing to position Nolan as the primary artistic force in the film. While Nolan’s work with actors was praised by critics in relation to *Memento*, especially Guy Pearce, and *Insomnia*, especially Al Pacino, in this case Nolan’s choice of actor to match his themes and work to further his own persona is more explicitly noted. Furthermore, the connection between actor and director becomes incorporated as part of Nolan’s persona – he is an actors’ director.

The critical discourse generally connected Nolan's auteur persona of intelligence, independence, and creativity with the themes and technology of the film. However, these traits are not only attributed to him because of *Batman Begins*, but also frequently because of the reputation or auteur persona constructed from Nolan's previous films. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* review states

Nolan was a shrewd choice to revive a franchise that has gone eight years without a film. One of the qualities shared by his exceptional but otherwise diverse trio of previous films (*Following*, *Memento*, *Insomnia*) is how skillfully they are put together on a craft level. This *Batman* is a carefully thought out and consummately well-made piece of work, a serious comic-book adaptation that is driven by story, psychology and reality, not special effects. (Turan, 2005)

In this example Turan specifically recalls the industrial context and Nolan's filmic history and connects them to specific qualities and interests which are part of Nolan's auteur persona: artistic and technical quality, interest in delving below the surface, and an effort to be "truthful" with the audience by limiting CGI. Statements such as this imply to the reader that these are aspects of Nolan's auteur persona, signaling that both *Batman Begins* and Nolan as a filmmaker are to be taken seriously within Hollywood and art contexts. Further example of the implicit qualities of Nolan's auteur persona in a review can be seen in the *Christian Science Monitor* review which claims *Batman Begins* is "a prequel with as much energy as the Caped Crusader himself, which isn't surprising from director Christopher Nolan, of *Memento* fame" (Sterritt, 2005) and the *Washington Post*, which claims *Batman Begins* has "a thoughtful, methodically structured narrative that works on you for days afterward. That's to be expected from Nolan, whose looking-backward movie *Memento* has become the toast of a generation [...] Nolan's street cred is massive. And it will continue, thanks to this film" (Thomson, 2005). Thompson uses the independent and intellectual "credentials" Nolan has earned with his earlier films, specifically *Memento*, to understand his shaping of *Batman Begins*, as some critics did with *Insomnia* (Sandhu, 2002). Nolan's independent stature is enhanced by the quality of *Batman Begins* combined with the memory of *Memento*, rather than negated by the Hollywood status of the film. As the *Los Angeles Times* review concludes, "bringing an auteur sensibility to blockbuster material may sound next door to impossible, but *Batman*

Begins shows it can be done” (Turan, 2005). Nolan’s independent status is used to qualify him as an auteur blockbuster, helping to define what an auteur blockbuster should be.

The connection between Nolan’s previous, especially independent, films was essential in the reviews for making the claim Nolan was producing an artistic blockbuster. While 91% (21/23)⁵⁸ of the reviews refer to at least one film Nolan had previously directed, the critical reviews most often mention *Memento* with each of the reviews citing it at least once. Although this is somewhat surprising considering Nolan’s most recent film was *Insomnia*, which was only referenced in just over half (52%; 11/21) of those reviews mentioning previous films, *Memento* helps make the link between art or creativity and the blockbuster context.⁵⁹ The privileging of *Memento* over *Insomnia* in the reviews, despite *Batman Begins* and *Insomnia* both being studio films with wide releases and recognisable actors, subtly shifts the reader’s understanding of Nolan’s auteur persona as one that remains independent despite working in Hollywood. *Memento* is thus set as Nolan’s signature film, which most readily identifies him and encompasses his distinct qualities – for example, cinematic intelligence, attention to detail, interest in narrative. For example, the *Time Out* review specifically tells the reader the consistent themes that run through Nolan’s films:

Christopher Nolan’s films (*Following*, *Memento*, *Insomnia*) are about the dependence of identity on narrative: we know who we are only because of the stories we make of our own lives. With *Batman Begins*, Nolan successfully applies this mode to a character who is essentially a self-crafted living legend – and, in the process, reinvigorates a franchise that had been lost in self-pastiche. (Walters, 2005)

Nolan is thus portrayed as an intelligent director who is still independent, but almost happened to stumble upon Batman on his way to his next film and is reforming the genre as he happens to be there. Further reviews support this opinion, also noting Nolan’s fidelity to themes, for example the *Empire* review claiming “the Nolan who made *Memento* and *Insomnia* is at home with extreme psychological states – this might complete a Three Colours Of Neurosis trilogy by following memory loss and

⁵⁸ The *New York Times* and *Austin Chronicle* did not mention any of Nolan’s previous films.

⁵⁹ *Following* was mentioned in 29% (6/21) of the reviews.

sleeplessness with phobia” (Newman, 2005). Newman creates specific links between Nolan’s last three films, and connects these to Nolan’s auteur persona. He suggests that despite seeming differences in his earlier films, Nolan is consciously attempting to build a coherent portfolio of films, one that reflects a specific auteur persona and obliquely references Polish art-house director Krzysztof Kieslowski further linking Nolan to art-house and international film. The review in *Entertainment Weekly* similarly assigns specific qualities to Nolan’s auteur persona while referencing his earlier work:

Batman Begins, directed by indie-oriented storyteller Christopher Nolan (*Memento*), is a triumph — a confidently original, engrossing interpretation, with a seriously thought-through (but never self-serious) aesthetic point of view that announces, from the get-go, someone who knows what he’s doing is running the show, and he’s modestly unafraid to do something new (Schwarzbaum, 2005).

The critical discourse incorporates the qualities of independence, creativity, and narrative strength present in *Batman Begins* and in Nolan’s previous films with a discussion of the industrial constraints present within the blockbuster genre of film. The auteur persona continues to be constructed around these factors, including the narrative structure, partially through recollection of Nolan’s previous films. Sometimes this comparison is not always favourable, for example, the *USA Today* review claims “no fan of cult director Christopher Nolan is going to regard this respectable effort as anything but a comedown from 2001’s *Memento*” (Clark, 2005). Though negative, this still situates Nolan as an independent director.⁶⁰

The focus on Nolan’s independent films is further coupled with a call by some critics to return to the novelty and independent qualities of his original, non-adapted, films, which, though at times negative, enforce Nolan’s talent. Along with the mostly positive *USA Today* review that calls for Nolan to return to original material, the *Telegraph*, in a negative review, notes “the job of restoring Batman’s tarnished reputation has fallen to Christopher Nolan, Anglo-American director of high-class, noir-tinged dramas such as *Following* and *Memento*. [...] Why Nolan, a cerebral and gifted director of twisty, left-field action thrillers, felt the urge to apply his artful energies to such

⁶⁰ Although “cult” and “independent” have different meanings, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine them. As a mass-audience publication, most readers of *USA Today* would most likely understand similar traits in both terms.

backwards-looking fare is a mystery” (Sandhu, 2005).⁶¹ Sandhu’s negative review, like negative reviews for Nolan’s previous films, compliments Nolan’s skills, but dislikes his material. More positive reviews also comment that Nolan is underused with the material. For example, the *Independent* proposes that

Nolan has worked hard to bring the franchise back from the abyss of self-parody. All the same, I do wonder if the talent behind *Following* and *Memento* isn’t being squandered on the formulaic thrills of an unworthy genre. [...] Hiring Nolan to direct a blockbuster feels a little like hiring Raymond Chandler to compose a Hallmark card. You know it will be competently done, but you also know that opportunities are being missed. (Quinn, 2005)

Despite the reviews which comment that Nolan should return to more original fare, the overall critical impression was that “it was a fairly gutsy bet on Warner’s part to entrust the job to Nolan, a crafty young director whose *Memento* and *Insomnia* evinced storytelling smarts, visual flair and good instincts with actors” (McCarthy, 2005). As has been mentioned in previous quotes as well as in this one, Nolan reworked the action-adventure, comic-book genre to create a more real-world crime thriller. With his previous work in noir and thriller, Nolan was seen as changing what comic-book films should be. The *New York Times* review comments “what makes this *Batman* so enjoyable is how Mr. Nolan balances the story’s dark elements with its light, and arranges the familiar genre elements in new, unforeseen ways” (Dargis, 2005). An important part of Nolan’s auteur persona is the way that he alters genres and transforms them in slight ways which have a large impact. In this way he is interacting with the audience, asking them to form new ways of thinking about traditional modes of film genre. Rick Altman (1999: 62-68) cautions though, genres are always a process and can never be solidified or completely stable. However, despite the shifting nature of genre definitions, there are generally some conditions within them that remain stable in specific historical periods. Nolan, in each of his films, attempts to evolve genre into a new stage. In the case of *Batman Begins*, he presents a detailed origin story where Batman, the central character, remains Bruce Wayne for the majority of the film. This shifting of what an audience expects challenges

⁶¹ This reviewer earlier claimed Nolan had credibility with *Memento*, but appears to be unhappy with his move to Hollywood blockbusters.

the individual viewer to reinterpret what he or she thinks of a specific genre. This shift is reinforced by the critical discourse and can be seen as accepted when reflected in future genre films. For example, while *Batman Begins* borrows from the origin-centered films *X-Men* (2000) and *Spider-Man* (2002), three years later in *Iron Man* (2008, Jon Favreau), the complete superhero is not seen until halfway through the film. Instead, the film is focused on how Tony Stark physically and emotionally made the decision to become Iron Man.

The critical discourse surrounding *Batman Begins* developed the existing discourse from Nolan's previous films, both official and critical, especially in confirming Nolan's authority over the film. Nolan was positioned as the primary meaning-maker as both director and co-writer, with approximately five (5.30) mentions of his name per review. The frequency of his name being used suggests a high level of authorship being attributed to Nolan, as his name is mentioned more times than in the reviews for *Memento* and *Insomnia*, which are smaller, and arguably more personal, films. However, Nolan was mentioned in the first two sentences in only 35% (8/23) of the reviews. The position of the film within the Batman franchise, instead, was the focus of most of the reviews and led the articles. However, the content of the reviews maintains the notion that Nolan was considered the primary creative force in the film, and suggests that the notion of an auteur blockbuster can now be accepted. Martin Flanagan suggests that perhaps in 2003 auteur blockbusters could not succeed critically or financially because, among other things, "bottom-line financial realities of popular cinema ensure that auteurs 'embedded' into the fabric of blockbuster discourse and publicity do not have it all their own way" (2004: 31-32), and must instead submit artistic freedom to audience expectations and financial concerns. However, Nolan's reception with *Batman Begins* by the critics and the audience indicate that auteur blockbusters could exist in 2005. As the *Chicago Sun-Times* review explains

Christopher Nolan, still only 35, whose *Memento* (2000) took Sundance by storm and was followed by *Insomnia* (2002), a police procedural with Al Pacino. What Warner Bros. saw in those pictures that inspired them to think of Nolan is hard to say, but the studio guessed correctly, and after an eight-year hiatus, the Batman franchise has finally found its way. I said this is the Batman movie I've been

waiting for; more correctly, this is the movie I did not realize I was waiting for, because I didn't realize that more emphasis on story and character and less emphasis on high-tech action was just what was needed. The movie works dramatically in addition to being an entertainment. (Ebert, 2005)

Ebert's review, along with several others, indicates that after years of build-up with well-received action and comic-based films, the time is right to create an auteur blockbuster category. However, some reviews, as mentioned above, voice remaining hesitation. For example, despite overall positive reviews, the *Boston Globe* suggests in the end "Nolan is forced to knuckle under to the demands of plot" (Burr, 2005) while *Time* notes "Nolan, who directed the tricky, widely admired *Memento*, must oblige the conventions of the big-budget action movie" (Shickel, 2005). A negative review in *The New Yorker* claims the film faltered in several aspects, and "the real failing is Nolan's. [...]. In *Memento*, Nolan and his editor, Dody Dorn, created a new syntax for movies. It's depressing to see Nolan now relying on the same fakery as everyone else" (Denby, 2005). These comments, though, still point towards a growing acceptance of the blockbuster as capable of being artistic, even if perhaps Nolan may not fully be achieving the task. Furthermore, the comments imply an expectation of greater artistry and quality from Nolan, still indicating that Nolan is capable of creating good films, showing the strength of his auteur persona after only four films.

Summing up the general critical attitude for the film, *Sight and Sound's* review asks "will Nolan's distinctive identity, the very thing that won him studio attention, be subsumed to the requirements of furnishing Warner Bros their tent-pole movie this summer? In fact, in a film that frets over issues of identity [...], Nolan's stamp is detectable throughout" (Lawrensen 2005). Nolan's auteur persona, relatively well-developed through *Following*, *Memento*, and *Insomnia*, is maintained and enhanced through his blockbuster debut, remaining an intellectual and creative filmmaker who can bridge industrial conflicts and invigorate established genres. The initial critical discourse outlined expectations for Nolan's auteur persona – an interest in narrative and the film form, an attempt to engage the audience, a creative approach – within the independent film context. The *Batman Begins* discourse judged Nolan upon these earlier features, emphasizing how the features remain constant, but in a different industrial context. The

discourse also added expectations such as ability to bring out excellence in his actors. The critical discourse, more than the official discourse, relies on the history of Nolan's filmography to help define his auteur persona. Writing about genre, Rick Altman suggests "critics ... often take it upon themselves to locate a film in a more extended past" (1999: 124). In the case of the auteur persona, the critics comment on the film in question, but use Nolan's history and the cultural context of the film to connect ideas and form unity among Nolan's work, helping to solidify his auteur persona.

4.2.5 – *The Prestige*

The critical discourse for *The Prestige* further developed Nolan's auteur persona as a creative and intellectual filmmaker through an even closer association between his personality and the themes of the film as well as continued emphasis on his interest in shifting genre tropes. Nolan chose a subject remarkably far from the action and mythos of Batman, avoiding being typed as *just* a director of action films. However, despite the surface differences between *Batman Begins* and *The Prestige*, the critical discourse often focuses on the thematic and stylistic similarities between the two films, as well as Nolan's previous films. By creating an obvious connection among the films' themes and narrative structures, the critical discourse encourages the fundamental aspects of Nolan's auteur persona. Examining the similarities among the films, as well as how ideas have developed through the films, helps guide but not dictate audience understanding of how a Nolan film should be understood, thus, working in a similar way as the official discourse in organising audience understandings. Fundamental in connecting the films is the idea of Nolan as the organizing factor in understanding the consistencies and development of the films. Nolan's auteur persona works as an author function by helping to provide meaning to the texts. As Foucault suggests, the author "is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses" (1981: 58) the texts under his or her name. However, as has been seen in the previous analysis, critical discourse is both asking Nolan to account for his work and helping him account for discrepancies by explaining and justifying the unity of the disparate texts.

In the reviews, which were predominately positive or mostly positive (77%; 17/22), the *consistency* in Nolan's thematic preoccupations and stylistic features is

frequently stressed. Reviews of *The Prestige* often mention how Nolan used a period setting to recreate the themes and twists present in his earlier films. *Time Out* begins the review specifically calling attention to the consistency of themes in his films, noting

with *Following*, *Memento*, *Insomnia* and the uncommonly smart blockbuster *Batman Begins*, Christopher Nolan has established himself as a filmmaker fascinated by the fluid, tricky contingencies of memory, identity, narrative and time: the way we depend on the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, and the little slips and dodges, ignorant or willed, that allow us to keep those stories straight – at least for a while. (Walters, 2006)

The explicit mention of the films' similarities, attributing them to Nolan's influence, imply to the reader that he or she should be aware of these and that they have some importance of understanding or enjoying *The Prestige*. This implication appears in some form in each of the reviews, suggesting, as the *Times* review does, "two themes seem to have preoccupied the British director Christopher Nolan in his brief but stellar career so far: guilt and revenge. [...In *The Prestige*] Nolan continues to mine his favourite themes, adding deadly obsession and a showman's flourish into the mix" (Ide, 2006). Reviews such as these show not just a return to themes, but a further exploration of these ideas, highlighting how Nolan is expected to grow as an artist from one film to the next. Other reviews also link these themes together, as well as pulling in stylistic features, as in *The New York Times* review:

Mr. Nolan's sympathies appear to lie mainly with Borden, but as a director, he has sensibilities more in line with Angier's. Much as he respects the rigor of close-hand trickery based on tried-and-true techniques, this filmmaker, whose other movies include *Insomnia* and *Batman Begins*, can hardly resist flights of theatrical and cinematic bravura. (Scott, 2006)

The inclusion of a comparison between the characters and the director not only connects previous films with the current one, but also identifies Nolan with the characters in the films, remarking how he is similar to both of them. It was suggested in the analysis of the films in the previous chapter that Nolan's characters provide a type of mirror to his auteur persona, creating a strong link between his auteur persona and his films, and thereby fulfilling the author function by providing meaning to his collected works. In

emphasising Nolan's connection on a personal, not just artistic or technical, level, the critical discourse further validates Nolan as auteur.

As with the reviews of *Memento*, the critical discourse frequently mentions that Nolan is interested in investigating the process of filmmaking along with the subject. In particular, the structure of the film is highlighted as an important stylistic feature that runs through Nolan's films. In explaining the narrative modelled on the parts of a magic act (the pledge, the turn, and the prestige) *Time's* review suggests that "this narrative structure analogizes rather neatly to the customary three-act movie plot and it is both clever and apt of Nolan (he of the backwardly told *Memento*) to underscore this point" (Schickel, 2006). Furthermore, connecting the magicians in the film with the filmmakers was not isolated to this review, but was a common factor of discussion, especially in relation to the structure.⁶² The structure of the film, as mentioned in the quotation above, is told to the audience at the beginning of the film, and then again referred to throughout the film, so that "the film is at once honest (it warns you that you're about to be had) and outrageously dishonest (you're had, but not the way you expected)" (Romney, 2006). The honest dishonesty of the structure, a point of contention among some critics ("with a sinking heart, I realized that *The Prestige* had jumped the rails, and that rules we thought were in place no longer applied" [Ebert, 2007]), was very often compared to *Memento*. For example, *USA Today*, a mass-market newspaper, in praising the twisted narrative structure recommended to "think of this as *Memento* for mass audiences" (Puig, 2006). This comment both creates a strong connection – and shared heritage – of the two films, but also alerts the audience that *The Prestige*, in the fashion of *Batman Begins*, can be accessed by an audience who may not enjoy "independent" film. The *Boston Globe* indicates that "it's very much the work of the man who gave us 2000's *Memento*" (Burr, 2006) implying that, despite the well-known actors, period setting, and adaptation from a popular novel *The Prestige* is very much of an independent nature, and fully a film from Nolan. In the critical discourse, Nolan's authorship has eclipsed any other claim. However, this is partially due to the function of the auteur persona, which has been consistently developed to encompass the qualities and styles the reviews are highlighting.

⁶² Three reviews (in *Time*, *Independent*, and *Sight and Sound*) also recall the films of Georges Méliès when describing *The Prestige*, emphasizing the historical link between film and magic.

The auteur persona also encompasses the crew and actors Nolan chooses to work with such as actors Christian Bale and Michael Caine, cinematographer Wally Pfister, composer David Julyan and editor Lee Smith. Therefore, the placing of authorship solely on Nolan is an example of Nolan acting as a unifying organizing figure to make meaning in this film as well as his other films, but also is a result of the multiple levels of discourse transmitting similar specific qualities of Nolan's auteur persona.

The connection between the narrative structure of *The Prestige* and *Memento* is furthered by the frequent mention of the latter, creating stronger emphasis of narrative structure in Nolan's auteur persona. Despite having been released six years prior, 77% (17/22) of the reviews specifically mention *Memento*, especially in terms of the two films' similarities. In comparison, only half (50%; 11/22) of the reviews mention *Batman Begins*, Nolan's most recent and most widely seen film.⁶³ Nolan's other two films were mentioned infrequently with *Insomnia* only present in 32% (7/22) of the reviews and *Following* mentioned twice (9%; 2/22). The frequent reliance on references to *Memento*, above mention of the other films, both helps locate the type of film for the audience – it is most closely related to the ideas and style of *Memento* – and to help place *The Prestige* as an independent film, despite evidence to the contrary, discussed above. In this case, the perceived independence comes not from the film's financing (studio), cast (established actors), or setting (Victorian London), but from the structure and supposed intelligence and creativity in the film, provided by Nolan as the auteur director. Through the discussion of the film, and its comparison to *Memento*, reviews imply that an intelligent film is something that is considered apart from typical Hollywood fare, an idea running throughout the reviews for all of Nolan's film. This intelligence can have two sides, of course, with *The Prestige* called “a very clever film – damnably clever, you might say” (Romney, 2006), giving both positive and negative elements to the film's twisted nature. The reflective and looping aspects of the films are conflated with Nolan himself, indicating a stable persona, but one that is constantly creating complicated narratives.

While Nolan's disruption of genre was a frequently commented aspect in reviews of his previous films, in critical discourse around *The Prestige*, genre is not as much of an issue as in previous films. However, when genre was discussed, it is often in relation to

⁶³ *Batman Begins* earned \$372 million worldwide while *Memento* earned \$25 million.

the genres in which Nolan had previously worked, calling the film a thriller, period piece, or commenting that the film is a magic trick. Often, more than one genre is used, for example *Entertainment Weekly* calls it “an aggressively devious sleight-of-hand thriller” (Gleiberman, 2006) highlighting the magic and the thriller aspects, while the *Los Angeles Times* conflates structure and genre to declare that “it becomes something of a magic trick in and of itself” (Turan, 2006). There was not a firm consensus within the critical discourse on exactly within which genre *The Prestige* fit. Furthermore, at the end of a relatively positive review, *Time Out* declares that the film is “explicitly modelled on the pattern of a magic trick, it’s also bound to the rules of the mystery thriller genre; yet the one relies on lingering uncertainty, the other on full disclosure” (Walters, 2006), suggesting that the melding of genres in *The Prestige* may not be as successful as in Nolan’s previous films. However, the inability to completely identify *The Prestige* in one – or two – genre categories led to a tendency for reviewers to define the film in terms of *Memento* instead, as discussed in the previous paragraph, implying that while Nolan cannot be defined by genre, his films retain a consistent stylistic and technical unity. As the *Empire* review states, “it’s no surprise that the man who brought us a modern noir about a man with short-term memory loss through a brain-straining reverse-chronological structure should present a Victorian murder-mystery tale of such beautiful convolutions that the dizzying struggle to follow it provides half the entertainment” (Jolin, 2006). This inability to easily place *The Prestige* in a specific category continues to underscore Nolan’s auteur persona; he is an intelligent director who is interested in creating films which both challenge and entertain the audience. As the *Empire* review concludes, “it’s a small film that feels big, a period drama that looks modern, defying comparison to anything but Nolan himself” (Jolin, 2006), highlighting Nolan’s ambition, genre-cross, and linking him specifically to the creative and structurally intelligent film. Nolan’s auteur persona in these reviews is more than *just* a blockbuster auteur. With *The Prestige* he is showing that he can produce a smaller, period film with a similar level of intelligence and creativity.

As with previous films, Nolan was by far the most mentioned crew member in the reviews, with his name mentioned in the first two sentences 64% (14/22) of the time, more than for any of his earlier films. This frequency of using Nolan’s name in the early

part of the review is most likely for two primary reasons, that *The Prestige* is a return to a smaller film compared to *Batman Begins* and also that Nolan now has a higher economic and artistic cachet after helming a successful action film. However, Nolan's name was used less frequently overall, being mentioned approximately 3.59 times in each review. Nolan's collaborators were mentioned more frequently than in previous reviews, with 59% (13/22) of the reviews noting the source material, Christopher Priest's novel, and 50% (11/22) mentioning that Nolan co-wrote the script with Jonathan Nolan. In each instance, as with *Memento*, Jonathan was referred to as Nolan's brother, connecting his work and identity with Christopher's, firmly retaining authorship for Christopher.

Although the reviews for *The Prestige* are mixed, as with previous films even negative reviews reinforce positive aspects of Nolan as a director. This reinforcement further develops a specific identity for Nolan by claiming that he should have made a clearer and smarter film, one that does not rely on gimmicks and has stronger character development. The negativity mostly focused on the sometimes confusing narrative structure, with some reviewers (Harvey, 2006; LaSalle, 2006) commenting that while Nolan attempted to infuse the film with some of the same elements located in his previous films, he failed and "the vital elements of wit, of insolence, of light-footedness and light-headedness that make magic so compelling – and incidentally, also made Christopher Nolan's first two films so compelling – are all neglected in favour of a desperately humourless and unsmilingly acted contest" (Bradshaw, 2006).⁶⁴ This implies that there are specific expectations of a Christopher Nolan film, such as a well-devised narrative, intelligent questions posed, and a focus on character development, even if it is in a different genre than he has worked before. Even many of the more positive reviews suggested that *The Prestige* was not as successful – as entertainment or art – as Nolan's earlier films, and as *Sight and Sound* notes, "if he is evolving as a stylist, it is in small but telling increments" (Fuller, 2006). However, these reviews imply that Nolan needs to move on, or back, to a film more in keeping with his abilities to create characters and humor in his films. The reviews are invested in Nolan's career, expecting him to deliver both a consistent slate of films artistically and entertainment-wise, but at the same time to

⁶⁴ This review, while critiquing *The Prestige*, also critiques *Insomnia* and *Batman Begins* by stating that Nolan's "first two films" were compelling, omitting the most recent two.

also grow as an artist and filmmaker. The critical discourse surrounding *The Prestige* retains the independent qualities established in Nolan's early films – intelligence, character development, genre mixing – and more closely associates these features with Nolan and the themes of his films. Furthermore, the critical discourse has positioned him as an authority, not just in his films but in the industrial context of Hollywood. Nolan is presented as a director with power over what projects he works on, who he works with, and how his projects evolve.

4.2.6 – *The Dark Knight*

Despite the intense interest and collusion of factors that surrounded the release of *The Dark Knight*, Nolan's auteur persona was further evolved in the critical discourse to reflect a new level of power and control for Nolan both artistically and within the Hollywood industry. The reviews of *The Dark Knight* are primarily positive (88%; 21/24) with several especially enthusiastic reviews claiming the film as an instant classic. The most significant factor in the critical discourse surrounding the film is how the “hype” (Austin, 2002) in the official discourse and media prior to the film's release. However, within this hype, Nolan is positioned as continuing to grow artistically and has proved himself a worthy Hollywood director by keeping his qualities – cinematic intelligence, creativity, focus on characters – in such a large production. Apart from the merits of the film itself, much of the adulation arises from the heightened publicity surrounding the film due to the death of lead actor Heath Ledger. The official publicity surrounding the film focused mostly on Ledger's character of the Joker, with a significant viral campaign including materials seemingly coming directly from the Joker (see Figure 4.1 for an official poster with which the Joker has “interfered”).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Viral marketing included fake Gotham-based websites which all had “interference” from the Joker, making all of the viral marketing ultimately about the Joker and the darker side of heroism, one of the main themes of the film. Furthermore, several of the posters for this film were released in two versions – a standard version and one that had graffiti from the Joker.



Figure 4.1 – A Joker-ized Poster

As stated in the Introduction, as a sequel to a popular film and as part of an enduring superhero legend there would have been immense publicity for the film in any case, but when coupled with curiosity brought about by Ledger’s death, the film was set to be a major popular culture event upon its release. The reviews of the film duly mirror the public interest, with the *Times* stating in the second paragraph that “The genius of *The Dark Knight* is that Christopher Nolan, the film’s director, producer and co-writer (with brother Jonathan) has not only produced a stunning, amazing comic-book movie, but also one with an intellectual heart and a tough, unresolved message at its end” (Teeman, 2008). The film is strongly praised and the credit for the film’s success is very clearly tied to the director, who in this case is also listed in his other roles, emphasizing Nolan’s authorship and authority in the film. Nolan’s auteur persona as an intelligent, character-minded blockbuster auteur is fully established in the critical discourse around *The Dark Knight* through the overall attention the film received, the credit bestowed on him in relation to the film, the discussion of his play with genre and expectation, and through use of his name. Ultimately this highlights how Nolan’s auteur persona has remained stable in the portrayal of his specific qualities, but has evolved in relation to the cultural surround, placing him as a powerful, artistic Hollywood director.

While Ledger’s performance dominated much of the review space and focus, several of the reviews continue to place Nolan’s work and vision as the central defining factor in the quality of the film, confirming Nolan as a director and writer who melds the intelligence and moral questioning of art cinema with the blockbuster format. The verdict in *Empire*’s review notes “Ledger’s performance is monumental, but *The Dark Knight*

lives up to it. Nolan cements his position as Hollywood's premier purveyor of blockbuster smarts" (Dinning, 2008). Ledger's performance is singled out, but ultimately the review identifies Nolan's ability to mix intelligence and entertainment as the factor that produced a quality film. Ledger was the centre of conversation in terms of the actors, mentioned an average of four times (96/24), while Bale was only mentioned on average just under two times (1.9; 46/24). In reviews for *Batman Begins*, Bale was mentioned just under three times (2.7; 63/23), demonstrating Ledger's prominence in *The Dark Knight*. However, the mentions of Bale almost universally single out how well his performance works with and complements Ledger's performance, thus, while the Joker is the primary focus of the critical reviews, he is placed within context of the film as a whole. Within this discussion, Nolan is still firmly placed as the authority, being mentioned more than anyone (4.5; 108/24).⁶⁶ Nolan, as with previous films, is positioned as the head of a collective, but almost always as the primary force in the film.

A primary feature of the discourse is Nolan's cinematic intelligence, with the effect that Nolan is praised for not just creating an intelligent or complex movie, but for doing so when it was not needed as it was *only* a blockbuster film. For example, in the *Village Voice*, the review notes that Nolan "has one of the great procedural minds among contemporary filmmakers" and claims that "in making the transition from low-budget independent films to studio tentpole projects, Nolan (who co-authored *The Dark Knight* with his brother, Jonathan), has sacrificed none of his abiding obsessions" (Foundas, 2008). In reviews for earlier films and for the current film it is implied that despite working on a mainstream Hollywood film, Nolan himself remains independent, creative, and intelligent, with the *Independent* review noting that "Nolan, whose key film is the fractured amnesiac thriller *Memento*, touches on areas of psychological dread and doubt that hardly seem containable within a blockbuster. Yet, also to his credit, he never forgets that a blockbuster is what he has been hired to deliver" and after describing the multiple chases and psychological dilemmas of the film, concludes "You will exit the cinema with an enhanced respect for Nolan's intelligence, for Wally Pfister's pin-sharp cinematography, and, sadly, for an acting talent tragically curtailed." (Quinn, 2008).

⁶⁶ On occasion a reviewer used the term "Nolans", referring to both Christopher and Jonathan Nolan. These mentions were counted in the average. However, if a reviewer only mentioned Jonathan, this was not counted.

Recalling the audience expectations Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998: 75) found, this reviewer is establishing a specific expectation from summer blockbusters, implying that art and weighty subjects are not normally present. The admiration for Nolan's ability to infuse a serious meditation into a summer blockbuster is tied to his previous films to some extent.

Nolan's previous films, which were established in critical discourse as intellectual or creative, are used to support the claim that Nolan has been able to achieve this fusion. However, the films do not feature as prominently as in previous reviews. While *Batman Begins* is mentioned by every review, unsurprisingly given *The Dark Knight* was its sequel, Nolan's previous films are not frequently mentioned. *Insomnia* and *Following* are listed in only two reviews each (8%) while *The Prestige* is only referenced in approximately 21% (5/24) of reviews. Apart for *Batman Begins*, *Memento* is referred to the most, but only by 29% (7/24) of the publications. The frequent exclusion of Nolan's previous films is not surprising, though, because of the intense interest in the film itself. The "story" of the film's release remained firmly on Ledger and on the evolution of the blockbuster form. Therefore, when Nolan's films are mentioned, it is to bolster the claim that Nolan has elevated the blockbuster form. For example, *Rolling Stone* suggests that "it's enough to marvel at the way Nolan — a world-class filmmaker, be it *Memento*, *Insomnia* or *The Prestige* — brings pop escapism whisper-close to enduring art" (Travers, 2008). It is Nolan who creates this art – and does so consistently through his films according to this review. Furthermore, in his review, Travers stops short of calling a comic-book film art, but implies that Nolan has elevated and possibly transformed a genre, a similar claim to those made in reviews for several of Nolan's previous films.

Several reviews of *The Dark Knight* echo the claim that Nolan had created a new or altered form of art out of the summer blockbuster. For example, *Sight and Sound's* review shows explicit themes and connections between Nolan's films, explaining that "Nolan uses a blockbuster budget to explore the kind of characters he has been drawn to in his smaller works" (Newman, 2008) making direct parallels between characteristics of Batman, the Joker, and Harvey Dent and protagonists in Nolan's earlier films. As will be seen in the following chapter, audience members also commented on these genre parallels, showing the connection between the official discourse (posters), the reviews,

and audience discussion. The focus on consistent themes and concern with artistry, when written about, is almost always incorporated with mention of Nolan and his own trajectory as an artist. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, after explaining how the film qualifies as a traditional action film with action sequences, suggests “*The Dark Knight* is also a tighter, smarter, more focused film than *Batman Begins*, and Nolan has become a more effective storyteller. [...] With *The Dark Knight*, the cinematic superhero spectacle comes closest to becoming modern myth, a pulp tragedy with costumed players and elevated stakes and terrible sacrifices” (Axmaker, 2008). Axmaker not only praises Nolan’s use of genre, but also uses the term “storyteller” to describe Nolan, praising him as more than a director. As in the official discourse, Nolan is singled out not for only one role, but for his ability to successfully manage authorship on multiple levels. The *Chicago Sun-Times* review also reflects the idea that Nolan has been able to create a new category, emphasizing his authorship of the film:

Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* is a haunted film that leaps beyond its origins and becomes an engrossing tragedy. It creates characters we come to care about. That’s because of the performances, because of the direction, because of the writing, and because of the superlative technical quality of the entire production. This film, and to a lesser degree *Iron Man*, redefine the possibilities of the “comic-book movie.” ...The screenplay by Christopher Nolan and his brother Jonathan (who first worked together on *Memento*) has more depth and poetry than we might have expected. (Ebert, 2008)

In his praise for *The Dark Knight*, Ebert mentions *Iron Man*, suggesting that while Nolan’s film may have been quite good, the blockbuster and comic-book formats had already been undergoing alteration in the past few years. As has been suggested previously, one reason for the success of Nolan and his created persona can be traced to the economic and cultural forces within which he is working. At the time of *The Dark Knight*’s release, blockbuster films, especially comic-book derived action films, were no longer considered solely as entertainment, but in some instances were also considered as serious or artistic films (see, for example, Neale and Smith, 1998; King, 2000), and Nolan’s foray into the field helped develop both his auteur persona and the blockbuster generally.

The change in expectations of comic-book films comes partially from their longevity. As the *Entertainment Weekly* review comments “our comic-book-movie culture is 30 years old (it kicked off in 1978, with the Christopher Reeve *Superman*)” (Gleiberman, 2008), giving a certain maturity to those comic-book derived films released in the 2000s. This newfound gravitas further emanated from the growing respectability of the source material, as starting in the 1980s “the American comics business had begun to *reinvent itself* with a gradual proliferation of *comicbook specialty stores* and the more *varied* and *plentiful supply* of comics” (McCloud, 2000: 9, emphasis in original) which included titles with darker and more political themes, such as revenge, power, and government control, than in the past such as Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*.⁶⁷ Scholarly works that focused on comic-books began to be produced in larger numbers, with several specifically focusing on Batman including, but not limited to, *The Many Lives of the Batman* (Pearson and Uricchio, 1991), *Batman Unmasked* (Brooker, 2000), and *Batman and Philosophy* (White and Arp, 2008), a collection of essays published to coincide with the release of the film *The Dark Knight*. The rise in academic tomes on comic-books and the films based on them, often released for general audiences as well, gives evidence that a culture of acceptance of this genre of film as art, or at least as a genre worthy of some level of serious critique and thought. Thus, Nolan’s auteur persona is connected to a specific cultural moment where there has been a shift in values. Furthermore, this connection shows, as Kapsis (1992: 70) suggests in relation to Hitchcock, a lasting reputation is formed through changing cultural values rather than only through artistic merit.

From this cultural surround, it can be seen that in the past decade the superhero, comic-book film has matured and become accepted as possibly more than just entertainment. It is at a time when the perception of the superhero genre shifts, that Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* was released. The reviews, as mentioned above, hesitatingly reflect the idea that an action film about a superhero can be more than just a summer blockbuster. The review in *Variety* reflects the expanded criteria for the genre, noting that Nolan has produced an “enthraling second instalment of his bold, bracing and altogether

⁶⁷ British comic-books also had a revitalisation in the 1980s with *2000AD* and *Watchmen* coming from British artists.

heroic reinvention of the iconic franchise. An ambitious, full-bodied crime epic of gratifying scope and moral complexity, this is seriously brainy pop entertainment that satisfies every expectation raised by its hit predecessor and then some” (Chang, 2008). In *USA Today*, which has a more general and wide-reaching readership than the entertainment industry-centric *Variety*, the review qualified its praise by acknowledging that a comic-book film is not traditionally expected to be more than just mindless entertainment:

Accolades must also go to director and co-screenwriter Christopher Nolan. *The Dark Knight* is a more thrilling, intelligent, morally complex and masterfully crafted film than any summer blockbuster in recent years. It’s probably the best superhero movie to date. Despite its comic-book origins and fantasy setting, the story poses timely and compelling ethical dilemmas, demonstrating that popcorn thrillers need not be mindless nor disposable. (Puig, 2008)

This and other reviews claim that *The Dark Knight* is not a typical genre film, but at the same time do not deny that it remains within the comic-book film tradition. It is a claim that Nolan has, as in his previous films, “successfully reworked genre staples” (Dargis, 2008) to make the film something which stands apart from other genre films. However, it is also clear that the reviews credit Nolan with this achievement above others active in the film, though Ledger and Bale receive frequent acclaim. By crediting Nolan with a successful artistic blockbuster the reviews evoke Nolan’s past – the independent and art film background – and link him to a Hollywood future, thus further developing his auteur persona by connecting him to wider cultural shifts, and placing him in some ways as a harbinger of these shifts.

In claiming that *The Dark Knight* furthered the seriousness of blockbusters, the reviews not only compared it with other comic-book films, but also traditional crime films. The most oft cited comparison to the film, and Nolan, was Michael Mann’s crime thriller *Heat* (1995), with 29% (7/24) of the reviews comparing them. The comparison of *The Dark Knight* with a dark, character-driven thriller also recalls Nolan’s earlier work, especially *Insomnia* which featured *Heat* star Al Pacino in a similar role. The comparison could also be seen as a call to move forward, as *The Guardian* review suggests

I can't help thinking [the Batman franchise] may be a bit of a career blind-alley for the talented director who gave us brilliant and disquieting movies like *Following* (1998) and *Memento* (2000), whose inventions still linger in the mind. *The Dark Knight's* massive box-office success has surely given Nolan the means to write his own cheque, and in addition something sweeter still – clout. I hope that he will use it to cultivate movies that are smaller and more manoeuvrable than that great armoured Batmobile. (Bradshaw, 2008)

In this comment, Bradshaw is continuing to discuss his disappointment in the lack of signature Nolan applied to *Batman Begins* and complete dislike of *The Prestige*, calling for Nolan to return to smaller films. However, the majority of the reviews agreed with *The Los Angeles Times* which began with a similar discussion on the purpose behind Nolan's return to the Batman mythology:

Adventurous, eclectic director Christopher Nolan could have gone anywhere and done anything with his next film. So why did he elect to return to the mythical city of Gotham, to the confines of a superhero movie and the narrow world of a caped crusader imprisoned by the secret of who he really is? [...] To see it is to understand that Nolan and his co-writer brother Jonathan saw a chance to go deeper into familiar characters and mythology, a chance to meditate on darker-than-usual themes that have implications for the way we live now. A chance to disturb us in the ways these kinds of movies rarely do. (Turan, 2008)

Both reviews praise Nolan's talents, but view him as achieving his potential in different ways. While *The Guardian* does not see *The Dark Knight* as much more than a large, loud action film, *The Los Angeles Times* sees the film as serious and worthy of thought and contemplation. Most likely this can be attributed, besides the differing tastes of the two reviewers, as a difference in the perception of Hollywood comic-book based films between the U.K. and the U.S., especially Los Angeles. Of the eight British publications reviewed, seven of the reviews are extremely or mostly positive of the film. However, including *The Guardian*, six of the reviews claim Nolan should return to smaller films, qualify praise with the reminder that it is only a blockbuster, or express admiration at the attempt to add serious considerations to an action film. The high percentage of British reviews which limit the expectations of what a comic-book film should be implies that,

perhaps, the perception of the genre may be more limited or specific in U.K. publications. This difference in perception between the United States and the United Kingdom is bolstered by the fact that none of the U.S. reviews, thirteen of which are positive with three negative, claim Nolan should change to different, more intimate genres. Despite these initial indications of difference, though, more research would need to be conducted to determine if the bias exists.

The critical discourse about *The Dark Knight* indicates that a distinct auteur persona has been established for Christopher Nolan which is present despite high profile components such as an established legacy (Batman) and social factors (Heath Ledger's death). While mentioning several of the aspects that are present in the DVD extras of official discourse, namely that Nolan is an intelligent and creative filmmaker who has authority in the film, the critical discourse also highlights other aspects which create the auteur persona, specifically the use of Nolan's name as a unifying tool and creating a sense of importance around links within Nolan's filmography. The critical discourse, more so than official discourse, creates awareness of film and genre history in understanding Nolan's films. It is not just that he is the author of the texts, it is that the authorship is always already situated in particular knowledge of cinematic culture, as discussed earlier in relation to Dyer's (1998: 63) discussion of stars. Critical discourse helps place Nolan in that culture. As will be seen in the following chapter, audience members also always situate Nolan within a specific cultural context. Furthermore, the quality stressed in the critical discourse of using knowledge of Nolan's previous work as a partial basis for understanding the current film is evident within audience discourse. This auteur persona, first identified in Nolan's early films, is brought to the forefront with *The Dark Knight* reviews because the auteur is contrasted with the scale of the production, highlighting Nolan's role in creating art, not just managing the production. Within the critical discourse surrounding his films Nolan's auteur persona is established as one which is both a director and writer who is interested in exploring narrative and genre conventions. Furthermore, Nolan's interest in the technology inherent in filmmaking and his overall authorship of the films is stressed in similar ways as in the official discourse. Specifically, Nolan is presented as a blockbuster auteur who retains focus on character and idea development. Furthermore, the critical discourse transmits

the stability of these foci while also identifying the ways this shows Nolan's power. The critical discourse highlights the ways he is an internal auteur, managing the themes and motifs within the film, but also an external auteur, managing cultural and industrial factors outside of the text. This power was not evident in the reviews of his earlier films, but by the reviews of *The Dark Knight*, Nolan is situated as a blockbuster auteur who brings intelligence and creativity to Hollywood films.

4.4 – Conclusion

Christopher Nolan is directing films at a moment of change in perception of blockbuster films. Through his films and the official discourse surrounding the films, Nolan has created an intellectual and creative persona, one in which he plays with genre conventions to create challenging and innovative films. Critical discourse plays a crucial part in helping Nolan act as the author function, creating a focal point for understanding his films. Foucault suggests that the author function is “characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society” (1991: 108), and as has been shown here, critical discourse relies heavily on the auteur persona to describe and understand films as well as contextualize the auteur persona in ways such as industrial standards, genre, and film history. Conversely, the auteur persona could not be fully developed without critical discourse. The critical discourse confirms and evolves this auteur persona through frequent use of Nolan's name, using language that positions Nolan as primary meaning-maker, and furthering the characteristics presented in the official discourse and films such as cinematic intelligence and the interest in adapting genre conventions.

Nolan has been a part of the revived reputation of blockbuster films and the emerging acceptance of auteur blockbusters. It is not that auteur directors have never been associated with blockbuster films – New Hollywood directors such as Coppola, Spielberg, and Lucas launched the age of blockbusters and before them directors like Howard Hawks and John Ford produced critically and popularly successful films – but it is only in the past decade that there has been serious critical discussion acknowledging this. London *Times* critic Tom Shone, in his study of blockbuster films, notes “having been commandeered by first the producers in the late eighties, and then the executives in

the early nineties, the blockbuster has now been returned to the directors, with whom it first started, as it had to, if it was to be restored to some of its old lustre, and regain a little muscle tone” (2004: 311). The critical discourse has positioned Nolan as a writer-director who is worth paying attention to as an auteur who creates creative and intellectual films. Critical discourse helps to differentiate and define the auteur persona, influencing how the director is understood in official and audience discourse as well as historically. However, it must be remembered that “what appears to be definite at one moment will be subject to penetrating alterations with the ascendancy of new cultural eras” (Klinger, 1997: 112). The analysis in this chapter shows in this era a continued relevance of auteur categorization, and that the cultural surround, not only the films or official discourse, establish artistry. Furthermore, the consistent messages about a director show the continued need for film criticism. *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott claims “criticism matters to the people who care about it. It’s not that everybody out there in the world needs to hear what we have to say, but some people want to. And there is still, I think, an appetite” (Itzkoff, 2010). In its interaction with the other two levels of discourse, critical discourse continues to provide relevance and use for the auteur concept in Hollywood film.

While the official or critical discourse presents specific characteristics of a director and suggests how an audience should view or understand a film, the audience can ultimately choose how they interpret the film or understand a particular director’s impact on a film. As Stuart Hall suggests, the viewer “is not the unitary individual but a set of contradictory ‘positions’, fixed by those processes in a certain relation to knowledge and language” (1980b: 158), so each individual interprets information and derives meaning based on a variety of historical and personal factors. Therefore, it is important to look at the audience not as a unified group, but as individuals who view films in a variety of ways, though always within the structure set by the film itself and influenced by social context – official and critical discourses. This will indicate how influential or effective official and critical discourses are in developing and maintaining a director’s auteur persona as well as highlight audience concerns which filter into official and critical discourse. To determine how audiences discuss and use directors, and specifically Christopher Nolan, in understanding film, the following chapter briefly

discusses current thinking in audience studies before examining the results of an audience survey and a selection of self-generated reviews. Analyzing audience responses returns again to the idea of intertextuality, since “a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilization of the packaged material ... by all the texts which the reader brings to it” (Still and Worton, 1990: 1-2). Critical discourse incorporates multiple cultural, industrial, and social factors in its understanding of the films and Nolan. Similarly, audience members’ reception of films is always already informed by the multiple discourses, and audiences develop understanding based on this cultural knowledge.

Chapter Five

Appropriation and Understanding of the Auteur in Audience Discourse

The films, official discourse, and critical discourse attempt to inform and influence, in some way, what the viewer thinks, feels, or absorbs from the experience of a film. The film itself is constructed to portray some sort of meaning or feeling, while the official discourse and critical discourse can attempt to mould that meaning or feeling into specific avenues of thinking using, among other things, the auteur persona. However, as was discussed in Chapter Two and throughout the thesis, it is the individual audience member who decides what is absorbed, interpreted, or understood from a film experience. Barthes proposes removing all notions of locating central meaning in a text because “a text is a mode of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader” (1977c: 148). The films and surrounding discourse examined thus far have all been geared towards the reader, offering methods for the viewer to ultimately make meaning. However, as Dyer cautions “audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions that work for

them” (2004: 4). Increasingly these surrounding texts, especially DVD extra-textual features as discussed in Chapter Three, continue to exhibit an auteur framework within which the viewer can make meanings, both limiting possible meanings and simultaneously allowing space for the viewer to create individual understandings within the framework.

This thesis argues that the auteur persona, created within and outside of the films, provides a framework for understanding films. For example, in discussing *The Dark Knight*, some audience members were surprised that a director who constructed himself as an independent, which often means liberal, filmmaker would seemingly support widespread surveillance (Staiger, 2009), while other audience members, also knowing the reputation of the director, interpreted the surveillance issues in the film as critique of those same policies (Mendelson, 2008). As this example demonstrates, interpretation of a film can be different for each viewer, but is always within a specific frame, in this case with the view that Nolan is an independent director, which is part of his auteur persona. Nolan’s auteur persona includes an intelligence linked to respect for the audience and the level of narrative and thematic intelligence in his films, a creative approach to narrative and theme, and an interest in tweaking genre convention. All or part of these factors can be used by viewers to help make meaning, but the meaning ultimately lies with the individual viewer. Because the auteur persona exists in all levels of discourse, not just in the films or official discourse, it is essential to analyze how audience members understand Nolan’s auteur persona and use that knowledge to help interpret the films. The following analysis highlights ways that official and critical discourses influence the audience, but will necessarily, then, also indicate places throughout the discussion where the audience discourse influences the other discourses.

In the past three decades the importance of reception studies has been increasingly noted. As has been discussed previously, theoretical models such as Stuart Hall’s (1980a) and David Morley’s (1980) methods of encoding/decoding have been proposed to better understand how audiences understand media. Joke Hermes (1995) suggests that audience research is shifting towards what can be called a postmodern approach because it moves away from all encompassing and unifying theories of what an audience should understand from media texts. However, she cautions “while a radical postmodern view

would dictate that all meaning is locally produced, independent of the text or grand theory, popular culture research usually recognizes some relation to the media text. It steers a middle course between text-based and text independent interpretations of how media use is meaningful” (Hermes, 1995: 13). Hermes’ insights reflect the position taken in this research. By showing how an auteur persona is developed through the films and official discourse and also appropriated and expanded upon in critical discourse, this research frames audience understandings within an already established structure of possible meanings. In utilizing this framing method, the research follows the structure of intertextuality described in Chapter Two, that all texts interact with and impact upon each other, because “Kristevan intertextuality suggests, in line with Marxist sociology, that meaning is not *given* nor produced by a transcendental ego. Indeed the transcendental ego is itself an effect *produced* in a social context” (Still and Worton, 1990: 17, emphasis in original). In the cinematic context, this means that, while the films, official discourse, and critical discourse help to develop the auteur persona, audiences also have a role in determining meaning in a film, as well as determining the auteur persona of Christopher Nolan. The audience, more than in previous eras, has a voice in shaping how the auteur persona is understood and how they choose to use that persona in understanding the films, as will be seen in the discussion of audience reviews. Furthermore, this relationship echoes the suggestion made throughout this thesis that Nolan is always already part of audience discourse.

Through incorporation of a variety of positions and theories such as intertextuality, encoding/decoding, and genre, the evidence below is considered from multiple angles in order to present as complete an understanding as possible of how audiences and directors interact. Specifically, the analysis unveils the expectations and understandings that audiences bring with them in viewing a film based on knowledge of the director. Approaching audiences as individuals within a complex social context hopefully avoids some of the pitfalls of relying strictly on one “theory” of audiences, since, as Barker and Brooks note “what can be learnt from the best of recent researches, is learnt at the points where their evidence outruns and ignores the supposed theoretical basis” (1998: 13). The approach will also try to go some way in considering how the viewers are “socially situated” (Jancovich, et al., 2003: 6) by taking the cultural context

of the viewer into account as much as possible throughout the analysis. The analysis shows that audiences, to varying extents, understand auteur personas through the films, official discourse, and critical discourse, which shows that directors, while maybe not always the primary reason for a viewer to see a film, are influential factors in audience enjoyment of and understanding of film. Furthermore, audience discussions about Christopher Nolan mirror factors from other discourses, indicating that the multiple levels of discourse influence each other to create an auteur persona which organizes interpretations of film. Ultimately, a director such as Christopher Nolan, who has developed a distinct auteur persona through the three levels of discourse – and not *just* in his or her films – will be able to have a reputation which maintains temporal credibility, leading to a greater level of independence and respect in filmmaking. The culturally formulated auteur persona, a contemporary form of the author function (Foucault, 1981; 1991), is what now distinguishes a Hollywood director as an auteur.

Two methods were utilized to examine how audiences use and understand the concept of the director in watching films (a survey and self-generated reviews) to gain as robust a view of audience discourse as possible. It was important to use at least two different methods to gather audience research since, as has been seen in critical – and especially official – discourse, there are multiple areas of discussion as, “what we think of as single entities (the studio, the spectator) actually comprise multiple discursive sites” (Altman, 1999: 121). Furthermore, as Janet Staiger (1992: 12) discusses, audiences do not “read” films in a coherent manner, but rather understand films in multiple ways and through a variety of positions. As discussed above, audience members are influenced through a set of texts and social factors which create a specific frame of reference for each viewer. The auteur framework suggested in this thesis is one of the frames viewers use to “read” or understand a film. Therefore, it is essential to use multiple sources of audience discussion to gather a full picture of audiences, rather than only one sample of viewers. Thus, the research is interested not in what an individual viewer thinks, but how “Christopher Nolan”, and by extension directors generally, is used by an audience in appreciating and understanding films. As Stuart Hall discusses in regards to cultural identity:

I agree with Foucault that what we require here is ‘not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice’ [2002: xv]. However, I believe that what this decentring requires – as the evolution of Foucault’s work clearly shows – is not an abandonment or abolition of ‘the subject’ but a reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm. (1996: 2)

While Hall is calling for a new way of understanding identification and the subject, his use of Foucault highlights an important aspect in examining audience discourse. Although the current research into audience discourse is focused on general shifts and patterns, there is always an individual, a subject, with agency and voice within the cultural system. With new technologies involved in audience feedback, most significantly the Internet, as well as older feedback systems, such as buying a ticket to a film to show interest, the audience is both made up of subjects and also encompasses a tradition of thinking about and participating in cinematic culture to varying degrees. It is this wider discursive practice that is discussed here, but the position of subjects within that always informs the analysis and discussion.

The first method used to understand audience response consisted of an Internet survey through Zoomerang, and the second method consisted of self-generated reviews gathered from popular Internet sites Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and Amazon. Although relying on two Internet based sources could skew results in favour of a younger, more computer literate audience, the Internet is now used by a wide range of people so it was the most effective method of finding opinions and responses, as the goal was to reach a diverse group of potential audience members, not just those who would be most likely to watch Christopher Nolan films. Furthermore, due to the temporal, physical, and financial constraints on the research, Internet sources were the most comprehensive and in depth methods to gain audience perspective. Ultimately, the sources included a range of audience members, as will be discussed later in this chapter and can be seen in Appendix C, with ages ranging from teenager to pensioner and film watching habits from no films a month to those who claim to watch over sixty films a month. The range and diversity of the audience discourse, though narrow in some respects, permits an exploration into how and the extent to which the official and critical discourses are

utilized and appropriated in audience discourse as well as locate places where audience discourse feeds back to official and critical discourses. More importantly, the analysis reveals how audiences use knowledge of Nolan's auteur persona indirectly and directly to understand, interpret, and experience his films.

Because of the timing of the research (early 2009), both sections of audience discourse focus on *The Dark Knight*. This is due to the film being the most recently released from Christopher Nolan as well as his most popular, at least in terms of box office, to date. Centring the analysis around a particular film is beneficial as it allows for a distinct focus for the analysis as well as providing a more natural discussion about film, instead of one that is obviously targeted at knowledge of directors. This technique is similar to Thomas Austin's (2002) research on genre where he focuses on a particular film, such as *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, to learn more about the constituent parts which create genre knowledge in audience members. Austin notes, "during its marketing and reception, a film is framed by a constellation of institutions, texts and practices" (2002: 3). This thesis has already investigated the official and critical discourses that affect the film, but because of the multiple influences in terms of audience discourse it is important not just to look at what audiences are saying, but how these other levels of discourses inform their understanding of film. This analysis highlights spaces where audience discourse informs the other levels of cinematic discourse to develop the auteur persona, as well as how other organizing factors, such as genre, interact with and help develop Nolan's auteur persona, which ultimately help guide how viewers understand films and film culture.

5.1 – The Audience Survey: Methods, Considerations, and Results

An on-line survey was chosen as the most effective and efficient way to gauge audience awareness of Christopher Nolan, as well as understand the level of engagement generally with directors, film, and critical discourse. An Internet survey was able to reach a large and varied amount of people in a relatively short time period, more so than conducting interviews or focus groups in the area where the researcher was located, North East England. Professional survey company Zoomerang was used to build the survey because of the tools available, such as professional formatting, skip logic, and reporting functions.

The survey was launched at the official end of *The Dark Knight's* theatrical run (Gray, 2009) and approximately two months after the DVD and Blu-ray release of the film. Additionally, it was active during the weeks before and after the Academy Awards, the end of awards season, where *The Dark Knight* was nominated for eight awards and won two (Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role and Best Achievement in Sound Editing). The timing of the survey, therefore, capitalized on the highest amount of publicity so that the widest number of people would have seen the film or have heard something about it. The survey consisted of four sections: questions about *The Dark Knight*, questions about the director of *The Dark Knight*, questions about directors and film-going habits, and questions about the respondent.⁶⁸ The survey was designed to obtain general thoughts on film from the respondent before then guiding him or her to more focused questions on what the respondent knows about directors in the hope that the answers regarding directors would be somewhat spontaneous. The survey provided information regarding how audience members claim to use directors in viewing films, how often official and critical discourses are consulted and in what ways, and how these factors, along with genre, are used in conjunction to make meaning in films and film culture. Ultimately, the survey showed that the auteur persona, as a combination of these multiple factors, can strongly guide interpretation and understanding of films.

5.1.1 – Respondent Selection and Initial Results

A survey link was sent to a group of people who were asked to complete the survey and send it on to others. This use of the snowball effect would hopefully allow for a wide range of respondents across demographics, thereby providing a wide representation of the potential audience (Hermes, 1995: 181; Barker and Brooks, 1998: 20). One of the drawbacks to this method of survey distribution, however, was the probable high proportion of respondents who were particularly interested in film, as this demographic was the most likely to take time to answer a survey about film. However, this bias could occur in any form of direct audience research, as those people more interested in a subject would be more likely to participate in the research. Furthermore, the survey e-mail did

⁶⁸ See Appendix B for complete survey information and questions.

not mention that the research was specifically on directors, as some people may feel that if they did not know about directors, they should not take the survey (see Hermes, 1995 for a detailed consideration of these issues as well as Ruddock, 2001: 135). A test survey was sent which elicited twenty-six completed responses. After analysing the results, one question was added, regarding how often and why DVD extras were viewed, and two questions were altered to become clearer in their phrasing. The final survey had a total of 182 complete responses. For transparency and feedback, the respondents were offered a place to enter their e-mail address so that they could receive the survey results.

There were 208 total responses, primarily from those in the United States and United Kingdom and from respondents aged in the 25 to 59 year range.⁶⁹ Out of the respondents, 66% (137/208) had seen *The Dark Knight* while 34% (71/208) had not seen the film. The number of people who viewed the film was expected to be around this amount due to the popularity of the film critically and in regards to the box office.⁷⁰ The fact that the percentage of respondents who saw the film was not higher suggests that the survey reached more than simply film fanatics, who would most likely see the “biggest” film of the year, and instead reached a wider public.

Although the results of the survey, discussed below, reached a relatively wide demographic of people, it must always be considered that this is still a small segment of the population. Therefore, all conclusions reached here are in some ways speculative and wholly based on this select segment of the public. Although some generalisations will be made below about the “audience”, it is always in reference to the specific data gathered in the survey and, therefore, only a hypothesis about a larger audience. Despite these cautions, the survey gives insight into Christopher Nolan’s auteur persona, but also a more general understanding of an audience’s engagement with Hollywood directors and how this influences their film-going experience. Ultimately, the answers can be examined together to show that audience members differentiate Nolan through his auteur persona – derived and built through films, official discourse, and critical discourse – which influences how they understand his films. Knowledge of a “Christopher Nolan” persona,

⁶⁹ See Appendix C for full demographic results.

⁷⁰ *The Dark Knight* broke the opening day record, opening weekend record, and fastest film to pass \$500 million. Although some of those records have since been broken by other films, as of this writing, *The Dark Knight* still holds the opening day record and has the third biggest (domestic) gross of all time, showing one indicator of its impact among audiences.

then, leads to how audiences understand a “Nolan” film based on the previous films he has done and personal appearances (such as on DVD extras). Furthermore, the links between Nolan and genre can affect how audiences see a particular genre of film, as well. Therefore, a well-developed and defined auteur persona helps expand the film’s experience for the audience member and also helps create a lasting persona for Nolan.

5.1.2 – Engagement with Directors

One of the primary findings from the survey is the extent to which the audience knows directors and uses that knowledge in understanding a film. It has been suggested that when people see genre films, which *The Dark Knight* could certainly be, the director has very little, if any, importance. Edward Buscombe, in his 1970 discussion of the western genre, declared that “for [the audience] it is not a new Hawks or Ford or Peckinpah; it is a new western” (1995: 20). Although dismissing the importance of director in favour of genre for the audience, Buscombe continues with an auteurist conceit by stating that the quality of the film, however, can still be dependent largely on the director, as the mix of genre conventions and an artistic directorial style “emphasizes the relation between the artist and the material, on the one hand, and the material and the audience on the other. The artist brings to the genre his or her own concerns, techniques, and capacities – in the widest sense, a style – but receives from the genre a formal pattern that directs and disciplines the work” (1995: 20-21). Buscombe highlights that there has often been some relationship between auteur and genre, and later, indirectly reminds the reader of the relationship that exists between auteur and audience, often incorporating genre expectations. The survey demonstrates the increasing strength of these relationships and their influence on each other.

Overall the survey respondents showed a relatively high engagement with film directors and knowledge of Christopher Nolan’s films. Although knowledge of Nolan was highest among those who had seen *The Dark Knight*, with 46% (63/137) being able to name him as director, approximately 17% (12/71) of those who had not seen the film could still name him, meaning that over a third of the respondents could name Nolan (36%; 75/208) without prompting. This indicates that Nolan has successfully created a memorable or distinct persona that would stand out enough to have the audience

members pay attention (to the film, official discourse, or critical discourse) to remember Nolan, especially considering that the marketing and publicity for *The Dark Knight* focused primarily on the actors with Nolan only appearing in specialized publicity appearances. It could also indicate more generally that the audience has a high level of specific knowledge of directors. As will be discussed more below and has been mentioned in previous chapters, knowledge of a director's name can be seen as an indicator of critical, popular, and financial success. If a movie is memorable and distinct, the viewer is more likely to remember it. Similarly, if a director has developed an auteur persona connected to a set of films, he or she is more likely to be remembered and used in decisions to see and understand those films.

Knowledge of Nolan's involvement with *The Dark Knight* was seen through name recognition, but also through knowledge of his previous films. The majority of respondents who knew Nolan chose at least one of four previous Nolan films when presented with a list of ten possible films (97%; 73/75). Just over half (55%; 114/208) of all survey respondents knew at least one of his previous films and over a third (36%74/208) of all respondents knew multiple Nolan films, suggesting that there is a relatively deep knowledge of his films.⁷¹ Furthermore, if all completely blank responses are removed, as some people may have simply skipped this question, the percentage of those who correctly identify at least one Nolan film rises to 96% (114/119) indicating a high knowledge of Nolan's filmography (see Figure 5.1). Additionally, the response rate of 57% (119/208) to this question indicates that over half of the respondents had enough confidence in their knowledge of Nolan, or the director of *The Dark Knight*, to attempt an answer to this question.

⁷¹ Although people could have marked at least one film correctly due to chance, all but one response appeared to take the task seriously, as there were only a few films chosen. Respondent #118, Female, US, answered yes to every film. While this could be because she thought each film was directed by Christopher Nolan, it also could show that she wanted to make sure she got the answer correct, so guessed that they were all directed by him.

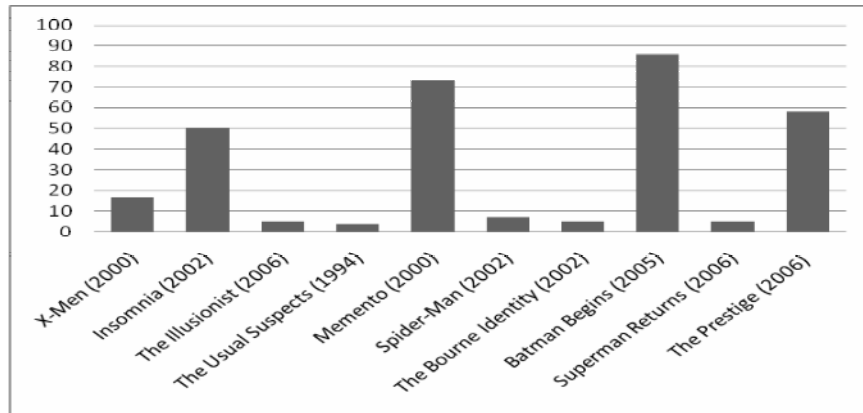


Figure 5.1 – Films directed by the same person as *The Dark Knight*

The knowledge of Nolan’s previous films reveals a specific type of film understanding, that of Nolan’s filmography. Even when audience members do not know the name of a certain director, they will most likely have knowledge of how films are related to each other through the director, reinforced through official and critical discourse. Figure 5.1 illustrates that despite being quite different films in genre and subject matter, respondents generally could identify those films that were specifically Nolan rather than a similar director or generally in the genre within Nolan works. The response to *The Illusionist* (2006) as opposed to *The Prestige* (2006) demonstrates this, as despite their similarities to each other and their difference from *The Dark Knight*, only five respondents thought Nolan had directed *The Illusionist* while fifty-eight people thought he directed *The Prestige*. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this specific historical director knowledge is also related to critical discourse, as critical reviews, unlike official discourse, “often take it upon themselves to locate a film in a more extended past” (Altman, 1999: 124). Although Altman discusses this in terms of genre formation, as has been argued previously, critics also do this with a director’s filmography, emphasizing which films should be recalled by mentioning them most often. Critics most often referred to *Memento* when discussing Nolan, with approximately 69% (63/92) of reviews post-*Memento* in this study mentioning it and of those who answered the question, 61% (73/119) of respondents chose *Memento*. However, because of the subject matter of *The Dark Knight*, and because all reviews mentioned *Batman Begins*, it is not surprising that most respondents knew he had directed the most recent Batman film (72%; 86/119). However, the official discourse supports the knowledge of

filmography to some extent as well. For example many posters and trailers list the film as “From the Director of...” which has become a common practice, and in many ways is also a reflection of critical discourse influencing official discourse.

Knowledge of Nolan was high, but the survey also revealed how that knowledge influences audience members’ decisions to see a film. For those who saw *The Dark Knight*, 18% (24/137) claimed to have seen it based partially on the director’s previous work.⁷² Three respondents chose this as the *only* reason for seeing the film. Although a small number over all, this shows that almost one-fifth of the audience is highly influenced in their film-going by the director, and in this case, Nolan specifically. As previously discussed, it often has been assumed (for example, Buscombe, 1995) that the genre of the film and the actors starring in it are normally the fundamental reasons why people choose films. However, in the survey responses, only 23% (31/137) of the audience chose “I liked the actors in the film” as a reason why they saw *The Dark Knight*, which is not a significantly higher percentage than those who chose the film because of Nolan, although combining all “actor” categories together, 56% (76/137) of the audience saw the film due in part to the actors.⁷³ A further 72% (98/137) claimed to see the film in part because of genre or topic, discussed further in Section 5.1.5. However, this is in addition to several aspects and demonstrates the multiple factors involved in audience decisions. Only one person (1%; 1/71), in choosing why they did not see the film, claimed it was in part because they did not like the director’s previous work, indicating that there was generally a high regard for the director. Additionally, even this person’s dislike of Nolan indicates he has formed an auteur persona which influences movie-going. Out of those who saw the film due in part to Nolan’s previous work, all of them claimed to be frequently or sometimes influenced by the director in choosing a film to view and 88% (21/24) could name Nolan as the director. Further, 42% (10/24) of these respondents correctly chose all of Nolan’s previous films with only two (8%) choosing one incorrect film; however, all twenty-four correctly chose at least one of Nolan’s previous films. This high level of knowledge among the respondents who watched the

⁷² The respondents were asked to choose their top three primary reasons for seeing *The Dark Knight*, so percentages equal over 100%. See Appendix B, Question 2, for full choices.

⁷³ Three additional people wrote in specific actors and forty-two respondents chose “Heath Ledger’s Performance” as a reason for seeing the film. However, this may not be an entirely accurate representation due to the intense interest in Ledger and his untimely death shortly after filming finished.

film partially based on director indicates a deep engagement with filmic discourse and an awareness of factors outside of those presented directly on-screen, as these respondents knew a substantial amount about Nolan's filmography. Thus, on some level the official and critical discourse which promotes a specific version of Nolan's auteur persona is effective in creating a persona that is intimately linked to his films, and becomes more so through the audience's confirmation of this connection. Furthermore, it could indicate that while Nolan has developed an auteur signature *within* the films that connects them, the presence of an *external* auteur persona strengthens this connection. At the very least, awareness of Nolan appears relatively deep for a majority of the audience through knowledge of his name and his directorial history.

Most respondents also had a high level of engagement with directors generally, even when not aware of Nolan specifically. When asked if a particular director's involvement influenced their decision to see a film, the majority of the respondents (79%; 164/207) claimed that directors sometimes or frequently influence their viewing choice.⁷⁴ While genre and star may still play a larger role in film viewing decisions than the director, these responses indicate that a specific director has a significant bearing on viewers' film choices. As mentioned previously, in his research on the marketing of *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Thomas Austin demonstrates how the studio publicity used director Francis Ford Coppola's stature and persona as an auteur filmmaker to help attract an "art film" crowd to see the film, noting that "the presence of Coppola as star-director added to the list of attractions" (2002: 122). He further examines the role Oliver Stone played in the marketing of controversial film *Natural Born Killers* (1993), suggesting that "the film's maverick status was enhanced by the reputation of its director, Oliver Stone, who has a public image as a rebel, a successful but controversial Hollywood auteur" (Austin, 2002: 153). Both tactics clearly demonstrate, and rely upon, the importance of the director's persona being known to at least a certain group of potential audience members. This illustrates part of the cycle involved in forming an auteur persona, where official discourse presents an auteur persona that they believe will resonate with audiences, and in turn continues to be used if audiences respond positively to that

⁷⁴ This question was changed from the test survey from "Often" to "Frequently" on the main survey.

persona, which is, as always, linked to the films as well as appearing in extra-textual materials.

Austin's insights and the survey results show that audience members have an understanding of auteur personas and use that information to set expectations. However, Geoff King claims "the names of a few directors, such as Spielberg or Tarantino, might be recognized as selling points for a majority of filmgoers. Many other names, however, are likely to be picked up only by the smaller but generally higher spending constituency of enthusiasts" (2002: 113). King overstates the case somewhat, as demonstrated by the survey results, since a great number of respondents claimed to be influenced by a director in seeing a film; however, it is important to verify this in some way. When asked if there are "any directors whose work you particularly enjoy", 129 respondents listed specific favourite directors, with many responses listing several names and writing that they had many more, as well. Household names Scorsese and Spielberg received the most mentions of a favourite director, though, on average, each respondent listed four directors (3.74; 482/129) with nearly one hundred individual directors listed. Even eleven respondents who claimed to never be influenced by a director listed at least one favourite, suggesting that perhaps they are not consciously influenced by a director, but in the end the director remains a significant factor in film viewing. The breadth of directorial influence indicates that name recognition is growing, but, as seen in Chapter Four, this is due to a large extent because of critical discourse rather than "Hollywood" official discourse. As King rightly acknowledges later, in official discourse the "'from the makers of' strategy is used quite frequently, as an attempt to build the expectations of one film upon the success of a predecessor" (2002: 114) and that a move to a "film by" status is an achievement for a Hollywood director, showing that an auteur persona has been developed and fed back into marketing strategies. The survey results demonstrate that critical, official, and audience discourses influence each other to reinforce the auteur persona, in this case by all reinforcing the importance of using the director as an organizing factor and to set expectations of enjoyment.

From the survey results, it can be deduced that constructing and maintaining a specific directorial identity offers a distinct advantage in creating artistic and financial opportunities. As one respondent noted after listing her favourite directors, "[I] usually go

to see a movie, and go to a movie because it was done by a certain director” (#32, Female, Czech Republic). It appears that the audience generally values and pays attention to directors, supporting Timothy Corrigan’s (1991: 103) suggestion that a contemporary director needs to perform as a commercial auteur along with his or her films. Not only does a director need to produce quality films to be a contemporary auteur, but he or she must also construct a persona in the official and critical discourse that links to that filmic identity thereby creating something that audiences will remember – and pay to experience.

5.1.3 – Engagement with Official Discourse

The advancement in technology for the dissemination and consumption of official discourse – such as DVD extras and promotional materials – allows for new discursive spaces of immersion and interaction between director and audience. The studio and Christopher Nolan have developed a persona for Nolan as innovative, cinematically intelligent, and independent, which is deeply connected to his films. However, Nolan’s persona can be understood best by the audience if they choose to interact with discourse, so it is important to see how and why people interact with these extras. The survey, supported by the self-generated reviews discussed below, suggests that members of the audience have strong engagement with the various levels of official discourse. In total, 68% (123/180⁷⁵) of the respondents claimed to watch DVD extras sometimes. Many of the respondents indicated that they only watch the extras if they are particularly interested in the film, while several indicated that they watched extras simply because they were there. One respondent stated “I don’t like taking a dvd back to th[e] shop if I haven’t at least had a look at the extras” (#6, Male, UK). The sentiment of watching the extras to get full worth out of the film can indicate a desire to become more immersed in the world of the film, although it can also indicate the pervasiveness of the extras in that they are there simply as filler. However, the high number of people who specifically commented on wanting to understand more about a particular film, for example, “if I like the movie, I want to know everything about it and how it was made” (#43, Male, USA) suggests that

⁷⁵ This question was only asked on the final survey.

the extras act as an extension of the film experience, as suggested in Chapter Three, rather than a discrete text outside of the film (Hight, 2005; Skopal, 2007). The extras can act as a deeper immersion in the film world or the filmmaking process, allowing the viewer to be more invested in those who made the film, including the director.

The desire to understand the technical and intellectual processes that contribute to filmmaking was a frequently stated reason for watching DVD extras, with a high proportion of the responses claiming they wanted to know the choices made in the film or the effort that went into producing it. This indicates that the director, who is normally positioned as primary meaning maker in the extra features, is a factor in audience knowledge and understanding of the film. The most watched category of extra was the deleted scenes with fifty-three respondents specifically mentioning their enjoyment of it, “bonus footage feels like I am getting an extra secret of the movie” (#38, Female, USA), or that it gives them an insight into the filmmaking process as they “can give extra insight into story” (#95, Female, UK), “to be entertained and also to understand why they were omitted” (#46, Male, USA) or as one respondent stated, “I like deleted scenes – gives me an idea of what the director was thinking” (#74, Male, USA). The comment about the director provides an insight into how the audience member understands the film, as this respondent assigns major film decisions – in this case whether to include a certain scene – with the director. Further, the audience member is interested specifically in what the director is thinking. This desire to understand the director can be viewed as a sign that a director has built a distinct persona. If the film seemed unremarkable, or the filmmaking itself did not intrigue the viewer, the viewer would most likely not want to experience the thinking behind the film. When the director is someone that appears to be intelligent or creative, as Nolan has established himself, then the viewer may have a greater desire to listen to the commentary or be more inclined to purchase or rent the DVD, however, further research would need to be done to confirm this hypothesis. The second most watched feature, MODs with fifty respondents mentioning them, also reflects the audience’s interest in understanding the process of filming and the intention behind decisions. One respondent explained that he watched “behind the scenes [documentaries] mainly to give a fuller understanding of the film” (#160, Male, UK), further indicating the enmeshed experience of films and extras as well as the viewer’s interest in fully

experiencing the movie, which again could be linked to interest in the director's intention.

While bloopers or outtakes ranked as the third most watched extra, with thirty-two respondents mentioning them, director's commentary or interviews with actors and directors were the next most popular features, with twenty-eight people specifically writing that they enjoyed the commentary and sixteen stating that they enjoyed interviews. Interviews, of course, are also a part of MODs, but in this instance respondents specifically mentioned interviews. As with the previously discussed extras, viewers responded that they watched or listened to these features to get a greater insight into the film and the filmmaking process, especially in regards to the director:

“Director[‘]s commentary, because it[‘]s a great insight into the story being told in the film” (#5, Female, UK)

“Whichever features there are, especially director's commentary – to understand more about the process of film making” (#97, Male, UK)

“Commentaries and featurettes. I watch to learn more about process of creating the film and gain insight on how a particular director goes about bring his/her vision of a film to the screen. (That line sounded cheesy, but it's true)” (#144, Male, USA)

The viewers, in this case, firmly place the role of the director as important in a film, similarly to the way the official and critical discourse have placed it. Additionally, the respondents are interested in understanding how the director left his or her imprint on the film, a distinctly auteurist frame of thinking. The desire to understand intention and meaning in a film was a frequently stated objective for watching the DVD materials. Although the director's intention or thinking about a film was not a ubiquitous comment, seventeen (14%; 17/123) respondents specifically stated that they wished to gain an insight into the director's thoughts. Although this is a small number, it must be considered along with the high proportion (45%; 55/123) of the comments which reported the respondent watches the extras to gain a better understanding of the filmmaking or story process. In most cases, as has been suggested in this thesis, this is often the director. If the responses from those who did not leave a reason are removed from the equation, almost three-quarters of the respondents (72%; 55/76) watch DVD

extras to gain a better understanding of the filmmaking process. The other reason for watching the extras tended to be for enjoyment, though this was not an as frequently stated reason (16%; 20/123).⁷⁶

The number of people who watch extras to gain an understanding of the director's intention, even if doing so indirectly, could help develop the function of the auteur persona in contemporary Hollywood by expanding the requirements of what texts an auteur must produce. With the increasing presence of extra-textual features as standard on DVDs, as will be discussed further in the following section, audiences are demanding that the auteur produces not just the film, but supporting texts. These can then be integrated into an auteur persona although, as discussed in Chapter Three, they are not always. As has been argued in this research, the auteur persona is an amalgamation of several concepts, most prominently, the author function. Foucault cautioned, though, in his discussion of discourse, that the function of an author was to help limit what could be considered an author's discourse. However, as discussed in the Introduction, he also opened the definition so that "what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks" (1981: 59) can contribute to what is an author. In this way, the DVD extras, along with interviews in the press, the films, and personal appearances, can be considered in understanding the auteur persona. More than including Nolan's appearance on the DVD extras as part of his auteur persona, as was discussed in Chapter Three, Nolan purposely omits outtakes or alternate scenes, thereby creating only one authorized version of each film, similar to Naremore's discussion of Stanley Kubrick's legacy (2007: 245). The structured absence of alternate versions helps create Nolan's status as the primary meaning-maker and with the other "commonplace remarks" said in the DVD extras, Nolan's authority is stressed as part of his auteur persona.

Those respondents who watched extras were more likely to know the director of *The Dark Knight*, with 82% (51/62⁷⁷) of those who knew Christopher Nolan reporting that they watched DVD extras. Of those who chose to see *The Dark Knight* due to the

⁷⁶ It could be inferred, though, that most people watching the extras were doing so out of some form of enjoyment. Usually it was a stated reason for watching bloopers. Some people gave multiple reasons for watching the extras, so motivations may total over 100%.

⁷⁷ Since the question about DVD extras was not asked on the test survey, the test survey results have been removed for following calculations as needed to maintain validity.

director, 82% (18/22) watched DVD extras, though only 44% (8/18) of those who watch the extras specifically mention viewing them for information about or from the director. Thus, it appears that people who are influenced by a director are prone to watching DVD extras or vice versa. The expectations of certain audience members to have specific criteria for DVD extras, as will be seen further in the next section of this chapter in relation to *The Dark Knight* DVD, indicates that official discourse and audience discourse are highly related because they rely on mutual understandings and uses. The extras would not exist if those producing them thought they were not of some value (financial or other) to the audience, showing one way the audience influences official discourse and the development of the auteur persona, as it exists partially through these extras. Furthermore, as proposed in Chapter Three (see Doherty, 2001; Arthur, 2004), the DVDs offer new ways of forming a relationship between the viewer and the auteur, and Nolan's involvement in crafting a specific auteur persona through the DVD extras of his films can be seen as a reaction to the audience desire to connect with the director, but also fuelling further audience interaction with the DVD extras.

It was suggested in Chapter Three that the growth of DVD extras as part of official discourse is crucial in constructing an auteur persona for Nolan because it allows for an intimate and cinematically integrated experience. Nolan's persona was emphasized as crafty, creative, and as someone who challenges the audience's assumptions by altering narrative and genre conventions, while the structure and content of the extras all established him as the primary meaning maker. However, it was further suggested that this authority to establish meaning was negotiated by Nolan to allow for a space for the viewer to create his or her own meaning, for example by refusing to give definitive reasons behind the meaning of endings in his films. The high level of respondents who claim to watch the DVD extras suggests that Nolan's auteur persona would be appropriated by those watching the extras, as described above, and that it is an effective way to build a reputation as an auteur. This research suggests that DVD extras are used by a majority of the audience to discover the inner workings of the film and expand the film experience. Therefore, by creating a consistent and thematically integrated use of the extras, Nolan's auteur persona positions him favourably to create a lasting reputation as a distinct and artistic filmmaker, rather than a Hollywood functionary.

5.1.4 – Engagement with Critical Discourse

While engagement with official discourse seems to correlate with a high level of knowledge of director it is equally important to consider what role critical discourse plays in influencing an audience member's understanding or knowledge of director, especially considering that critical discourse develops different aspects of the auteur persona. The survey attempted to determine the extent to which audience members interact with critical discourse and the type of media they use to access critical discourse, as well as how this overall engagement corresponds with knowledge of the director. As seen with official discourse, overall, a high level of engagement with critical discourse showed a high level of directorial knowledge. Additionally, most survey respondents interacted with critical discourse, suggesting that critics continue to influence film-going and understanding of both individual films and cinematic culture.

As seen in Table 5.1, below, critical discourse was accessed across various media and most respondents accessed multiple forms of critical discourse in varying amounts. Overall respondents regularly (daily, 1-2 times per week, or 1-2 times per month) accessed television (83%; 163/196) and the Internet (83%; 166/199) the most to engage with critical discourse. Newspapers (67%; 132/197) and radio (56%; 107/192) were the next most consulted media. While these numbers could be misleading due to new technologies, as someone who reads an on-line version of a newspaper could choose Internet rather than newspaper, most likely they would still choose the newspaper option as well, making the results valid. Furthermore, since the survey was conducted through the Internet, it is possible that this selection of respondents is more likely to access the Internet than a different, off-line, selection of respondents, but this is a consideration with any form of survey, and so should not influence the results significantly. Therefore, the results show that critical discourse is frequently engaged with across various forms of media, as shown in Figure 5.2 below.

| Source/Frequency | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Yearly | Never | Total Responses |
|------------------|-------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-----------------|
| Film Magazines | 1.6% | 6.1% | 15.5% | 22.1% | 54.7% | 181 |
| Newspapers | 7.6% | 25.9% | 33.5% | 19.3% | 13.7% | 197 |
| Radio | 3.6% | 20.3% | 31.8% | 20.3% | 24.0% | 192 |
| Television | 13.3% | 34.2% | 35.7% | 8.7% | 8.1% | 196 |
| Internet | 21.6% | 35.2% | 26.6% | 11.1% | 5.5% | 199 |
| Friends | 9.3% | 44.1% | 40.7% | 5.4% | 0.5% | 204 |

Table 5.1 – Percentage of respondents who receive information from different sources

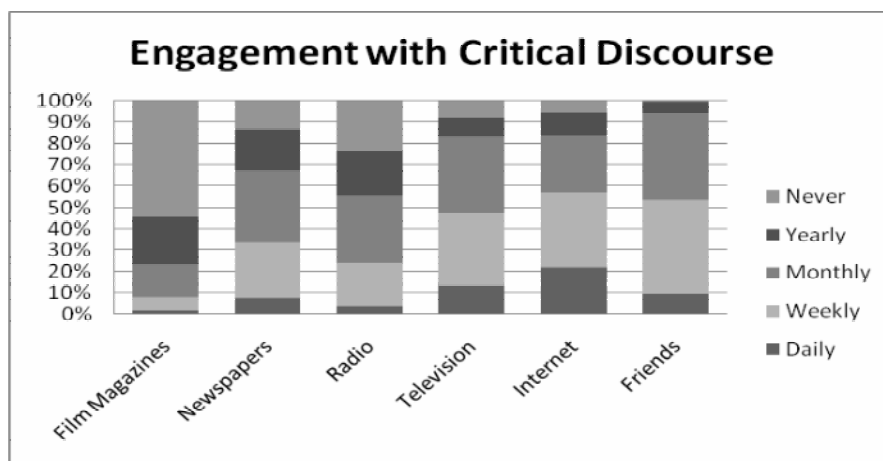


Figure 5.2 – Percentage of respondents who receive information from different sources

While the category of friends is the most consulted source for film information (94%; 192/204), it is not the most frequently consulted source, but seemingly used in conjunction with other sources of information. Those who consult a source frequently (daily or 1-2 times per week) do so on the Internet more than consulting a friend, with approximately 57% (113/199) using the Internet compared with 53% (109/204) who frequently speak with friends. These close results suggest that while audience discourse is useful for *general* film information, perhaps *specific* film knowledge is sought through professional critical discourse, on newspaper or critical websites, or official discourse on sites such as IMDb.com or studio websites. Bourdieu suggests

in identifying what is worthy of being seen and the right way to see it, they are aided by their whole social group (which guides and reminds them with its ‘Have you seen...?’ and ‘You must see...’) and by the whole corporation of critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worth of the name. (1984: 28)

Thereby both a personal (friends) and professional (critics) opinion is used for choosing films to see and what to think of those films, but each are influenced by the other, and some are even becoming somewhat combined, as seen in the self-generated audience reviews discussed below. Furthermore, when consulting friends, they may be accessing second-hand critical and official discourse. The influence of critical discourse in obtaining film information is supported by the comments responding to favourite program or source for film information. As seen in Table 5.2, below, there is a varied and deep nature of the general engagement with critical discourse as well as suggest the continued dominance of traditional critical discourse, the newspaper or magazine film review, despite frequent discussions with friends.

| Favourite Source | No. of Respondents |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Newspaper (print or on-line) | 95 |
| Magazine (print or on-line) | 55 |
| On-line only source | 37 |
| Television program or channel | 27 |
| Radio program or channel | 14 |
| Friend | 1 |

Most respondents listed more than one preferred source.

Table 5.2 – Favourite source for information on film

To most efficiently and effectively analyse this data, the responses were reviewed and each respondent categorized into a user type. The categorization was initially based upon Barker and Brooks’ (1998) suggestion of audience members having either “high investment” or “low investment” in a film. They explain that the term investment is used to

refer to all those aspects of audiences’ relations to film that relate to how and why a film matters to them. Low investors are characterised by lack and absence. [...] High investment in film associates with raised levels of preparation and planning for response and use, with claims of rights and ownership over the experience, with developed forms of language for discussion and elaborated criteria of judgement. (Barker and Brooks, 1998: 236)

Thus to have an investment in a film is to participate in the discursive surround and from the varied sources create an understanding or expectation of how to understand the film. For example, someone with a low investment may have no knowledge of a film before viewing it, while someone with a high investment may have read critical reviews, seen the promotional materials from official discourse, or have a strong knowledge of the background of the production or of the fiction network (Craft, 2004). As Steph Lawler suggests in forming an identity “we are putting various facets of narrative traditions together to produce our ‘own’ story and hence our ‘own’ narrative” (2008: 21). Similarly, in choosing what level of investment to have with a film, and therefore at what level to engage with the official and critical discourses, each audience member constructs a relationship with the film that can be both stable in elements, but can be fluid in how the elements are used at a given point. An audience member’s relationship with critical discourse shows, in part, their investment with film and cinematic culture. As suggested above, there are multiple forms of critical discourse and, according to the survey respondents, most often several sources are conducted to gain an understanding of film. To determine if a higher level of investment in critical discourse leads to an overall higher knowledge of Nolan, and thus his auteur persona, it was necessary to gauge the level of investment each respondent had with critical discourse.

Critical investment – or engagement – was categorized in two ways, frequency and depth. Depending on how often respondents reported consulting critical discourse, respondents were categorized as frequent, occasional, or infrequent users. A frequent user was someone who consulted any of the first five sources daily or more than one of these sources one to two times per week, because this meant that they engaged with critical discourse on films at least several times a week. The category of friends was not explicitly considered in this calculation as it is not critical discourse as defined in this research, but is more a part of audience discourse, although both forms of discourse influence each other, as was previously mentioned. An occasional user was someone who indicated that they consulted a single source one to two times a week or several sources one to two times a month. Those users who mostly consulted sources one to two times per year or never were considered infrequent users of critical discourse. This calculation reveals how often a respondent views critical discourse, but not in what detail. To gain

this information the described favoured program for film information was analysed to determine if a respondent was a deep or shallow user of critical discourse. Respondents who chose film specific programs or publications, or chose several specific ones, such as magazines *Entertainment Weekly* and *Sight and Sound*, were labelled as deep users of critical discourse while respondents who listed general publications or sources such as *People* magazine or their local newspaper, or claimed to have no favourite source, were labelled as shallow users. Those who left no comments were not assigned a category. The categorization of how respondents use critical discourse allows for a broad understanding of sources of critical discourse, but also allows for comparisons of how critical discourse use is associated with official discourse engagement and knowledge of directors.

The majority of respondents were frequent users of media to gain information about film, though generally in a superficial manner. Over half of respondents were frequent users of critical discourse with 60% (125/207) obtaining information about film daily or more than once a week, usually from multiple sources. Furthermore, 29% (59/207) of respondents were occasional users of critical discourse, meaning that they obtained film information from the media at least several times a month. Although, as stated previously, this survey is most likely biased towards those who do have an interest in film, the fact that 89% (184/207) of the audience regularly engage with critical discourse suggests that critics can have a high level of influence on how the audience understands film. Therefore, the frequent use of a director's name in a film review, as well as praise for a director as an artist, would most likely translate into high knowledge of film directors among audience members. Consequently, the heavy use of auteur and genre language in critical reviews, as shown in the previous chapter, should translate to a high level of knowledge of directors and genre in the audience members who more actively engage with critical discourse. However, it is also important to consider the depth with which people engage with the media, not just the amount of time spent with it. Of those who left comments about their preferred source for film information, 45% (81/179) engage on a certain level of depth with filmic critical discourse while over half (55%; 98/179) engage on a more superficial or surface level with the discourse. This shows a wide range of interaction with critical discourse, both in terms of frequency and

depth, but overall the results imply that most audience members have some familiarity with critical discourse and, therefore, are exposed to auteur and genre language.

As was expected, the higher investment a respondent had with critical discourse – either in frequency or depth – the more likely he or she was to know Christopher Nolan and more generally be interested in or know directors. Although the survey did not allow for follow-up questions which could determine the correlation between an appropriation of Nolan’s specific auteur persona qualities for those with high critical investment, the strong relationship between high critical engagement and high appreciation of directors or knowledge of Nolan suggests that critical discourse plays an important role in establishing the role and persona of a director. Almost half of those who frequently consulted critical discourse named Nolan as the director of *The Dark Knight* (46%; 57/125). This is a far higher percentage than for those who only consulted critical discourse occasionally (24%; 14/59) or infrequently (13%; 3/23). Those who had a deep engagement with critical discourse knew Nolan at approximately the same level of those with frequent engagement with 49% (40/81) being able to name him, compared with 25% of respondents with shallow interaction who could name him. For those who had both a frequent and deep engagement with the critical discourse, the number only rises slightly with 52% (34/65) knowing Nolan. The general correlation between critical discourse and film director knowledge is further suggested by only a slight rise in those who knew Nolan among people who were frequent engagers in critical discourse *and* had seen the film (58%; 48/83) from all respondents who were classified as frequent. It was expected that far more people who saw the film and also engaged heavily with critical discourse would know Nolan. However, as stated previously, these results indicate that any higher form of engagement with critical discourse, whether frequent or deep, results in higher awareness of film directors provided the critical discourse is positioning him or her as an auteur, as with Nolan.

Higher engagement with critical discourse correlating with higher knowledge of Nolan further suggests that although the films are always central, Nolan’s auteur persona is constructed effectively in official and critical discourse and, as seen in the audience reviews and survey results, in audience discourse. Taking into account some of the comments in this section of the survey, it could be surmised that many people would be

more likely to read about *The Dark Knight* or retain information about it if they had an interest in viewing the film. Furthermore, the audience's investment, like their investment in film itself, is varied and consists of multiple factors. Stuart Hall, in discussing his encoding/decoding model, suggests "unless they are wildly aberrant, encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate" (1980a: 135). While critical discourse may encode a variety of positions due to its plurality of origin, as was shown in Chapter Four, generally critical discourse transmits a certain auteur persona for Nolan. Given the high engagement with critical discourse shown through this survey, it can be hypothesised that Nolan's auteur persona is appropriated by the audience through both official and critical discourse. In this way Nolan participates as the author function, becoming a category that can be used not just to categorize and classify a group of films, but also to help create expectations prior to seeing a "Christopher Nolan Film" ("prefigurative capacity" [Barker, 2005: n.p.]) and create meanings during viewing and in subsequent viewings or reflections ("reframe the experiential horizon" [Skopal, 2007:191]). Thereby, Nolan's auteur persona creates a reputation for Nolan outside of the film, but also in how his films are understood.

The comments from the survey demonstrate the expectations held in audience discourse in terms of Nolan's auteur persona, which reflects the expectations shown in the critical discourse. For example, one respondent contemplating the film said he liked the film overall and within the Batman fiction network, but "when compared though with Nolan's *Batman Begins* I feel that *Dark Knight* fell short" (#2, Male, UK). This viewer judged the film against a set of criteria that included Nolan's previous work. In total twelve respondents specifically gauged the film against *Batman Begins*, with comments such as "not as good as *Batman Begins*" (#185, Male, UK) and "I really liked the movie at the time, but looking back now I think *Batman Begins* was more memorable" (#42, Female, USA). This shows that, as in critical discourse, the audience members associate previous knowledge of Nolan's films and persona with enjoyment and appreciation of the current film. Although this could also be seen as simply comparing the film to the most recent Batman film, it underscores an understanding that similar films should be compared to each other, a trait shared with critical discourse. An example of this can be seen more clearly in one respondent who specifically notes some of the qualities

associated with Nolan's auteur persona: "the first one (*Batman Begins*) was a terrific film, full of everything *The Dark Knight* lacked; character development, good story, well written screenplay" (69, Female, USA). As in the critical discourse discussed in Chapter Four, because Nolan did not provide the level of quality that was expected of him, the viewer did not enjoy the film. Further showing the link between critical discourse and audience discourse, one respondent commented, "I thought it was the best of the Batman films to date. I loved it for the most part but agree that it's [sic] second half bogs down with the Two-Face character arc" (#10, Male, USA). Presumably the agreement the viewer refers to is with the critical discourse where many critics mentioned the Two-Face arc as feeling rushed. These viewers, as well as others, use Nolan's auteur persona, which is partially formulated through his other films, to create expectations for his future films. When the films do not meet these auteur expectations, the viewers do not enjoy the film as much as they may have done without auteur expectations. However, it can also help the viewer better understand a way to interpret the film, one that is influenced by critical discourse, as seen here and in Chapter Four.

5.1.5 – Engagement with Genre

In Chapters Two and Four it was suggested that genre can be a major factor in expectations of film-going and in framing discussions about film (Schatz, 1981; Altman, 1999; Neale, 2000). As was discussed above, auteur knowledge can operate in a similar fashion, both in the expectations and in framing understanding. For example, an audience member may have similar expectations for the 2006 films *The Prestige* and *The Illusionist* based on genre and topic, they are both films about magicians in the Victorian era, but may have different expectations based on the respective directors Christopher Nolan and Neil Burger, as Nolan had an established film record and persona while Burger did not.⁷⁸ Audiences are aware of genres and the standards expected within a particular genre, and genre knowledge and auteur knowledge can both affect the

⁷⁸ As with previous discussion of genre and auteur, the actors in the film could also be used to set expectations, with *The Prestige*'s cast of big-budget, high-profile actors (Hugh Jackman, Christian Bale, Michael Caine) and *The Illusionist*'s more character-driven actors (Edward Norton and Paul Giamatti), however, in this case both casts are relatively well-known for a diverse body of work. Furthermore, the question of stars and actors, though relevant, is beyond the scope of this research project.

audience's experience of the film – with different types of knowledge expectations influencing how each audience member understands and enjoys the film. This is because “genres do not consist solely of films. They consist also of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process” (Neale, 2000: 27). While each audience member may have an understanding of genre, and perhaps what a “Christopher Nolan” film is, this is a slightly different understanding of each person, and can change over time. Furthermore, genre indicators are established to some extent by official and critical discourse to “indicate the kind of viewing activity that will be demanded” and “they mark out awareness of the possible value of a film; but this is a value placed by ‘others’” (Barker and Brooks, 1998: 75). However, while not the same, genre and auteur persona, especially in Nolan's case, can be intertwined. Nolan's auteur persona is intricately linked to the genres within which he works, and so audience members' expectations of genre are linked in some cases to their expectation of Nolan's auteur persona.

To determine how genre and auteur expectation might influence enjoyment or knowledge, those respondents who saw *The Dark Knight* were asked why they saw the film and what they thought of it. The survey showed that a majority of the respondents had some form of expectation with 72% (98/137) of the respondents claiming to have seen the film based on previous knowledge and enjoyment in the genre or fiction network.⁷⁹ More specifically, 46% (63/137) of respondents claimed to have seen the film due to enjoyment of *Batman Begins*, 41% (56/137) saw *The Dark Knight* because of the Batman character, and 23% (32/137) saw the film because they “like comic book/action films”.⁸⁰ Although the number of respondents who specifically mention an established genre is low, those familiar with the fiction network is quite high. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the fiction network is the presence across various properties or mediums of one singular entity. For example, the character of Batman exists in comic books, television, film, action figures, and soundtrack albums. In essence the fiction network is “the large-scale conglomeration of other texts” (Craft, 2004: 12) into a new narrative or

⁷⁹ See Appendix B for the full list of choices.

⁸⁰ Answers equal over 100% due to multiple choices allowed.

entity. It combines popular knowledge of a certain property and assumes that knowledge in building the property, similar to Jim Collins' "hyperconsciousness of popular narrative" (1991: 165) discussed in Chapter Two. Expanding on Collins' concept that there is always already a history involved in many aspects of popular culture, Craft explains "the fiction network builds on reiterations, on the productive recombination of consistent cardinal functions with narrative innovations" (2004: 110), so it has both consistency and room for innovation. In the incorporation of multiple texts and ideas into a complete though ever changing entity, a director, especially one with a distinct auteur persona, can also be part of the system making up this entity. For example, the *Alien* set of films, with directors Ridley Scott (*Alien*, 1979), James Cameron (*Aliens*, 1986), David Fincher (*Alien³*, 1992), and Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997), provide an example of a specific fiction network that has been influenced by certain film directors who conversely were able to incorporate the affiliation with the network into their own reputation and persona. Similarly, as has been shown throughout the previous chapters, Nolan's already established auteur persona helped bring a renewed sense of creative, independent, and intellectual expectations to the Batman franchise after Joel Schumacher's two Batman films, but the franchise also helped add Hollywood credibility to Nolan's auteur persona.

Fiction networks, while not genre, can still organise texts into certain categories and perform as genre including being internalized by audiences over time. However, as Jason Todd Craft (2004) suggests in his discussion of the networks, unlike traditional genre, fiction networks are ultimately controlled and managed by a corporate entity. The fiction networks engender a standard and set of conditions that must remain stable throughout the various representations of that character or characters because they are proprietary and lasting, despite any new introduction of details. Therefore, members of the audience will have certain expectations of the film based on their own knowledge and experience with the Batman network, but will also expect Nolan's interpretation of the network based on knowledge of his auteur persona. For example, in viewing Tim Burton's *Batman*, the audience's "expectations involve the reiteration of and, at the same time, the making new of a narrative for which, through present or past engagement with the network, most viewers understand as either immediately relevant or nostalgic" (Craft,

2004: 79). As has been suggested previously, through his films, the various forms of official discourse and critical discourse, Christopher Nolan has constructed a persona as an independent outsider producing intelligent films, and this persona is partially built through his use of genre tropes in non-traditional or new ways. In putting his signature onto a familiar fiction network, Nolan becomes incorporated within that network. Therefore, expectations of *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* are formed based on a variety of factors including an audience's knowledge of genre, knowledge of the stars, knowledge of fiction network, and knowledge of director. These factors are not discrete entities, of course, but impact on each other. In the multiple permeations of previous knowledge, each audience member would have a specific set of expectations when viewing a film, especially one such as *The Dark Knight* which is part of a fiction network (Batman), part of a genre (action-adventure), part of a specific commercial strategy (summer Hollywood blockbuster), part of a popular culture moment (Heath Ledger's sudden death), and part of a current series (Christopher Nolan's *Batman* with Christian Bale), among other categories of expectations.

As has been argued in this research, it is not only the genre in which Nolan works that has formed an integral part of his auteur persona, but what he has accomplished within those genres, exploring the parameters of convention (the white noir of *Insomnia*) and how it can reflect the filmmaking and viewing experience (the narrative reflections of *Memento* and *The Prestige*). With *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, Nolan moved toward a more realistic depiction of Batman with little supernatural or fantasy influence, in many ways returning to the 1930s' roots of the character. Nolan appropriated genre expectations of noir and crime films with a superhero film, also altering the summer blockbuster model, as discussed in Chapter Four. Comics commentator Robert Brian Taylor suggests, in his discussion of the film branch of the Batman fiction network that

Nolan properly reins in the outlandish elements to a point where Batman's universe is only one or two steps removed from our own. There are no supermen from other planets who can save our world here, only a human being with enough determination and loose screws to roam the city dressed like a bat for our protection. [...] It's a lesson that all caretakers of the Batman mythos would do well to follow. (2008: 11)

Although not directly identifying Nolan's auteur persona within this quote, Taylor's essay attributes a realistic and grounded narrative and style to Nolan, crediting him for making *Batman Begins* both his own film as well as a perfect fit for the Batman fiction network. Nolan's auteur persona helps to supply the two Batman films with a specific set of expectations while the inclusion of the Batman network into Nolan's auteur persona positions him as someone who can not only command a large-budget, high concept film, but also bring a sense of intelligence and creativity to that genre.

The survey comments regarding *The Dark Knight* reflect varied expectations, but primarily the expectations, as discussed above, incorporated knowledge of the fiction network, the genre, and, specifically, *Batman Begins*. Because Nolan's auteur persona is integrated at several points with each of these factors, recognition of them can also help develop the auteur persona. Those respondents who saw *The Dark Knight* were asked their primary reasons for seeing the film and then what they thought of the film. Although the question was basically unstructured, the previous categories of reasons for seeing the film and the framing of the question, asking for thoughts rather than if they enjoyed the film, were designed to help gear the reader to a more critical answer. There was a risk that respondents would write very little or simply state if they liked the film or not, which did happen in some cases. However, a more directed question, especially one specifically about the director, may have intimidated some respondents or skewered the answers toward what the respondent thought the researcher wanted to hear.

The response rate for the comment question was quite high, similar to previous responses, with 96% (131/137) of the respondents writing at least some comments. On average each comment was twenty words long, with the shortest comments being one word ("amazing", "amazing!", "fabulous", "fun", "great", "impressive", "intense", and "mediocre") and the longest comment being 398 words long. As predicted, many of the comments focused on how the respondent enjoyed the film. However, the majority of the comments expanded upon why the respondent enjoyed or disliked the film, with only sixteen responses (12%; 16/131) simply stating enjoyment levels. The amount and quality of the comments, therefore, allows for some discussion of how the audience positioned the film and set expectations. While, as stated above, almost three-quarters of the respondents stated they wanted to see the film because of its placement in genre or the

fiction network, only thirty-six respondents (28%; 36/131) explicitly mention genre or fiction networks in their comments. This discrepancy, though, is most likely due to two primary factors. The first factor relates to the general wording of the question and the inability for follow-up questions. The second, more intriguing, factor relates to the personal nature of genre understanding among audience members. Although, as discussed previously, genres must have more or less universally understood standards and features to be a genre (Altman, 1999:14), each audience member will come to the genre – or fiction network – with his or her internalized notion of that understanding.

The interpretation of genre convention for this film could also be seen in some respects to relate to understanding of Nolan's auteur persona, since tweaking of traditional genre is frequently incorporated into the persona. While some responses rely on traditional, although savvy, genre understandings, "It was an intelligent approach to a genre that is otherwise consider[ed] something for the young male demographic" (#144, Male, USA), there were also non-traditional views of where the film fit with genre: "I thought that it was an interesting take on the 'triangle' theme involving Batman, the Joker and Harvey Dent. I enjoyed the interplay of those three and it reminded me most of Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* [1962]" (#195, Male, USA). Neither of these comments directly states a specific genre, but both imply categories: the Hollywood action-adventure or comic book genre in the first comment and a romantic or buddy picture, based in the French New Wave in the second. These two comments illustrate the individual nature of viewing film for each audience member, but also, in a more subtle way, show the ways the genre is viewed in relation to Nolan. Both of these respondents named Nolan in the survey and both brought out issues of intelligence or film knowledge into their discussion of the film. Although this could more readily reveal information about the state of mind of the two respondents, it could also indicate how Nolan's auteur persona guides understanding of films. Nolan is known for approaching genres in intelligent and new fashion as well as borrowing from older film traditions, which is reflected in both of these readers' comments. As was suggested in relation to Buscombe (1995) at the beginning of this chapter, these readers are showing a relationship between auteur and genre as well as genre and audience. Expectations based on Nolan's auteur persona seem to be tied, in the two comments above, to expectations of genre for *The Dark Knight*.

Out of the comments that explicitly mention genre, half of them praise *The Dark Knight* for being better than expected from the genre. This is noticeable especially since at least half a dozen films of the same genre had been released during the same summer *The Dark Knight* was released.⁸¹ For example, one respondent stated “it was the most faithful-to-the-source material Batman film ever made, and likely the best comic-book inspired film ever made. Even beyond comic-book based [films], it had an excellent story as well as incredible action” (#17, Female, UK). This comment specifically states that the film has risen above the quality of all other comic book films, implying that the viewer already enjoyed this genre of film, but has now found that *The Dark Knight* improved on some elements the previous genre films had been missing – story. Narrative is a trait closely associated with Nolan’s auteur persona in official and critical discourse, and more subtly in the audience discourse, further reflecting the intersection and influence of the discourses. As shown in Chapter Four, the critical discourse almost always placed Nolan within specific genres, but more importantly, many said how he altered those genres. This is reflected in comments placing the genre above or different to what is expected, as in the examples above. The tendency to compare films of a similar genre confirms a connection between critical and audience discourse, showing not necessarily a linear relationship, but one where critics and audiences both build expectations based on the auteur persona and genre, which are reinforced by the critical discourse.

The similarity of comments with critical discourse suggests that the audience credits, or in some cases blames, Nolan for the placement of the film in genre and the network, similar to the treatment of Nolan in critical discourse. This conclusion is reinforced by the number of people who were aware that Nolan was the director, as well as the six comments that specifically discuss Nolan, three of which use his name and three of which mention the director generally. One comment specifically cites Nolan’s influence in relation to the Batman legacy, as well as other action films, stating “I really like Tim Burton’s version of Gotham, whereas Nolan’s was more like a non-comic book action film set in an ordinary city. As my friend pointed out, ‘it might as well have been

⁸¹ These include other superhero films *Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk* (Louis Leterrier), *Hancock* (Peter Berg), and *Hellboy II* (Guillermo del Toro), as well as action/franchise films *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Steven Spielberg) and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Rob Cohen).

[D]ie [H]ard [1982, John McTiernan]” (#103, Female, UK). This viewer’s displeasure with the film – she found it dull and boring – stems from Nolan straying away from traditional genre forms. However, the same reasoning can be seen from those who liked the film, with another respondent claiming the film was “awesome – I do like Christopher Nolan's previous films, as well as being a fan of Christian Bale/Heath/Aaron Eckhart and Michael Caine. Plus, I am an action/comics nerd, so this and *Batman Begins* is like the stars aligning” (#116, Female, UK). Both of these comments specifically place Nolan’s work as an important part in their enjoyment of the film and also equate him with his work in this genre or fiction network. Moreover, although few people mentioned Nolan in their comments, there were multiple comparisons between *The Dark Knight* and *Batman Begins*, more so than for other texts in the Batman fiction network, which implies an implicit connection between the genre and Nolan, suggesting that many respondents associated a certain representation of Batman with Nolan and used this as a criterion for judging the film. Although time is always a necessary factor to determine the validity of an auteur persona (Andrew, 1993: 83), these responses indicate that Nolan’s auteur persona is not only associated with a specific genre, but with a template of how to refresh and make new an older conception of what the genre is. In this way, Nolan provides “the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications” (Foucault, 1991: 111). Nolan’s auteur persona, which is connected to genre, offers a structure to organize in viewers’ minds a specific set of expectations and qualities which group together his films.

5.1.6 – Concluding Survey Remarks

The survey results show that the audience generally knows Christopher Nolan and uses that knowledge in choosing films and, more importantly, in choosing how to understand those films. Although some of the aspects of Nolan’s persona appear in a subtle fashion, when taken as a whole the survey demonstrates that the director is a significant factor in audience members’ understanding of films and film culture. Furthermore, the ways in which people responded to the survey indicate that, as proposed in this thesis, audience discourse is highly linked to both official and critical discourse. The other two discourses help establish the auteur framework by directing the audience to certain factors within the

film, such as genre or narrative structures. For example, it has been proposed that Nolan's auteur persona has been linked to unusual narrative frameworks and an attention to characters and reality throughout the official and critical discourse. These qualities often appeared through the comments on the survey. For example, one respondent commented that *The Dark Knight* "was excellent. Instead of presenting a very black-and-white depiction of 'good' and 'bad' – which Batman and other comic/movies have historically done – this version really made you THINK" (#3, Male, USA). This comment emphasizes the intelligence and its elevated place within the genre. Survey comments frequently noted the conceptual depth and non-traditional focus on character and idea development, which has been highlighted by both other discourses. For instance:

"I thought that it was an exceptionally well made film; it had something to 'say' about the world today as well as functioning as entertainment." (#7, Female, UK)

"I thought it was a great movie and very different from any movies that I have recently seen. Meaning it was a very captivating film." (#31, Female, USA)

"Loved it. I thought it was an intelligent exploration of the idea of justice." (#74, Male, USA)

"Visually impressive and well written." (#97, Male, UK)

"Visually stunning, complex plot and interesting ideas, such as 'escalation', which find echoes in current concerns over, for example, the war on terror." (#186, Female, UK)

However, while official and critical discourse have filtered through to the audience discourse, as has been stressed before, this is not a linear path. Audience discourse can influence aspects of official and critical discourses. There are multiple ways that audience discourse influences the other levels, including buying a ticket to or copy of the film to show interest or through market research. However, they can also now have a more dynamic role in the other levels of discourse, and in developing the auteur persona, through the rise of audience discourse on the Internet. To understand more fully how the auteur persona is developed and used in audience discourse, it is necessary to examine audience discussions on the Internet.

5.2 – Self-Generated Reviews

The rise of audience discourse websites has grown exponentially as the Internet becomes nearly ubiquitous in the promotion of Hollywood films and culture. These websites give the user a place of discussion for cultural objects such as film. Audience reviewers do not completely usurp the role of the professional critic, despite claims to the contrary as discussed in Chapter Four, but the way in which people use the critical reviews is shifting along with how audiences interact with critical and official discourses. Although websites often incorporate critical and official discourses within them, they are designed to allow for quick access of information and a level of interactivity for the audience. This inclusion of critical discourse in the same space as audience discourse, as well as the clear separation of the two types of discourse, helps establish a perceived need for professional critical opinions while encouraging audience discourse to develop. However, these sites frequently maintain a strict hierarchy of knowledge, allowing the user to quickly access what is the most important or valued knowledge. For example, on Metacritic, a website dedicated to compiling critical reviews for media, there is always a large ranking at the top of the page which is compiled from critical reviews, along with a smaller ranking below it compiled from audience rankings (Figure 5.3).⁸² Further down the page, below elements of official discourse, the editors clearly mark “What the Critics Said” with a summary of critical comments including a ranking (Figure 5.4), and, further down the page, “What Our Users Said” also containing comments and rankings (Figure 5.5). These are kept apart and a clear hierarchy exists in the placement of the rankings and comments, despite the increased ability for audience members to now have a voice similar to and alongside critical discourse. Furthermore, official discourse is somewhat given priority over the critical discourse, and certainly over audience discourse, with official trailer and studio information presented before the critical reviews (Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4).

⁸² All Metacritic screenshots were accessed on 11 August 2009 at [http://www.metacritic.com/film/titles/dark knight?q=the%20dark%20knight](http://www.metacritic.com/film/titles/dark%20knight?q=the%20dark%20knight).



Figure 5.3 – Metacritic – Top



Figure 5.4 – Metacritic – Middle

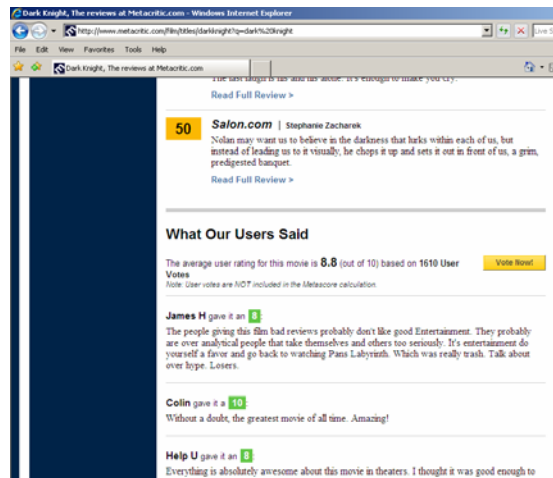


Figure 5.5 – Metacritic – Bottom

Rotten Tomatoes, another popular critical compilation site, also follows a similar format by separating critical and audience reviews on to different tabs or screens (Figure 5.6).⁸³ Traditional critical sources, like the *New York Times*' website, continue the hierarchy of knowledge as they clearly place their reviewer's article at the top and place readers' comments further down the page (Figure 5.7).⁸⁴ All of these websites, and similar sites on the Internet, are structured to allow comments and reviews from the audience, but have a primary focus of the critical or official discourse. Therefore, while

⁸³ Screenshot accessed on 11 August at http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_dark_knight/?name_order=asc.

⁸⁴ Screenshot accessed on 11 August at <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/357349/The-Dark-Knight/overview?scp=1-spot&sq=the%20dark%20knight&st=cse>.

the audience, or at least a certain segment, can now have more of a voice in setting opinions on films, this voice is not necessarily considered on the same level as professional critics or of the official studio information.



Figure 5.6 – Rotten Tomatoes

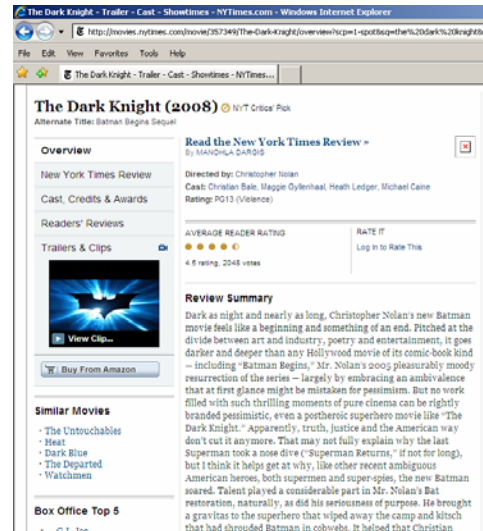


Figure 5.7 – New York Times

This hierarchy of knowledge, that some knowledge is situated in a way to imply it has more value, mirrors the functioning of DVDs in official discourse, where the audience member is able to navigate and use the materials as they wish, but it is always within a firm set of limitations and structure. This pattern is repeated throughout the Internet on professional websites, though on personal webpages the page's owner is usually the only reviewer, whether they are a professional critic or not. However, these blogs or personal sites are often harder to find, and thus most likely not viewed as often or by as many people. The framing of knowledge and placement of limits on communication can be seen as a source of power within the discourse. As Foucault suggested in 1982, "relationships of communication imply goal-directed activities (even if only the correct putting into operation of directed elements of meaning) and, by modifying the field of information between partners, produce effects of power. Power relations are exercised, to an exceedingly important extent, through the production and exchange of signs" (2000: 338). Despite the interaction in types of communication among the discourses, there always exists a power relationship. In the way these and similar websites are structured, the power always appears with the official and critical discourse, as well as with the director. Martin Barker notes "talk around films is very

importantly a way of generating expectations of pleasures – or of course, in the other direction, fears of disappointment, or even of discomfort and dislike” (2005: n.p.) and these websites offer a structured organization of this talk. Therefore, while the audience now can communicate their pleasure, dismay, and general opinions on films with a large number of people, their discourse is almost always situated in a way that retains power with the official or critical discourse, and at the same time situates what is normally an unstructured sharing of opinions firmly as a discourse.

Paradoxically, by organizing audience discourse and giving it a large-scale platform, audience discourse has more power than at any point in the past to influence all levels of discourse, although most power normally remains with critical and official discourse. As discussed in Chapter Three, DVD commentaries and documentaries tend to reinforce a dominant reading of the film in question, often emphasizing the role of the director. Although, as has been suggested, Christopher Nolan actively tries to leave open a space for the audience to create alternative meanings, which gives the audience some power over interpretation of films and the surrounding discourse, the structure of the DVD privileges an understanding within the auteur framework and thus the importance of the director. Similarly, the critical review websites, though designed for use specifically by audience members, enforce the dominance of the critical and official discourse while, at the same time, incorporating audience discourse into the official and critical spheres. In the placement of the information from various discourses, the websites perpetuate and reinforce a hierarchy of knowledge and a privileging of the director’s position as meaning-maker, creating a general filmic culture where an auteur persona can be developed and valued in meaning-making. However, the rise of a more organised and permanent way for audience discourse to develop can be seen as a significant move forward in the power of the audience and in the role audience discourse has on film and director understanding. Foucault (1981) comments that while some discourse may be given a privileged or official status, ordinary discussion can become as important as official texts and discourse. He suggests “this differentiation is certainly neither stable, nor constant, nor absolute. There is not, on the one side, the category of fundamental or creative discourses which repeat, gloss, and comment. Plenty of major texts become blurred and disappear, sometimes commentaries move into the primary positions”

(Foucault, 1981: 57). Although power is usually situated with the official or critical discourse, in the organization of audience discourse, it moves closer to gaining importance in shifting opinion on films and on a director's reputation. Because of this, it is important to understand how the audience approaches, discusses, and understands Christopher Nolan to gain a complete picture of the role of the auteur persona in cinematic culture.

5.2.1 – Method for choosing self-generated reviews

Self-generated audience reviews reveal the extent to which audiences use Nolan in understanding his films, as well as the relationship between audiences and official discourse and the growing presence – and power – of audience discourse in shaping the understanding of the auteur persona. These reviews were written by audience members who felt strongly enough about their opinions to share them on websites. By publishing their reviews on various websites, these audience members have entered into a form of dialogue within audience discourse that allows for a dynamic that, as mentioned above, can replicate, or attempt to replicate, the function of the critical sphere. However, if it is thought that critical discourse should elucidate for the audience the finer points of a film, subtle meanings or artistic flourishes which they might otherwise miss, audience reviews rarely do this. There are, of course, several personal websites of film enthusiasts who can match the quality of professional critics; however, the majority of comments and reviews on the main cinema-focused websites reside in a “should you see it” framework, thereby functioning as a type of friend rather than an expert. Although functioning more in a friend capacity, self-generated reviews mirror some aspects of the critical reviews, including a focus on similar films and highlighting standout aspects of the film in question. Overall, though, these audience reviews remain firmly in the realm of audience discourse, modelled more from daily conversations than critical discourse, although influenced by the other discourses.

The self-generated reviews were chosen from two widely-read websites for film which prominently feature audience reviews, Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and Amazon. As discussed previously, reviews were chosen only for *The Dark Knight* due to its temporal proximity to the research period and the growth of Internet audience

discourse, as well as its placement in contemporary popular culture. Twenty reviews were chosen for study, ten from IMDb, five from the American version of Amazon, and five from the British version of Amazon.⁸⁵ IMDb was chosen because it is one of the most popular places on the Internet to obtain information on films, as can be seen through its place as one of the first links appearing when searching for a film through an Internet search engine. Amazon was chosen because of its popularity for those buying a film after its initial theatrical release. Furthermore, both IMDb and Amazon contained substantial reviews, rather than simply comments, and provided some statistics for the reviews such as date of publication and location of reviewer, though the latter was self-reported. Other websites previously discussed, such as Metacritic, do not have this type of statistical information and contain reviews that are usually less substantial and more similar to comments stating whether the poster enjoyed the film or a dialogue between posters with comments geared toward other audience members. For example, James H on Metacritic, who awarded *The Dark Knight* an ‘8’ rating, wrote

the people giving this film bad reviews probably don't like good Entertainment. They probably are over analytical people that take themselves and others too seriously. It's entertainment do yourself a favo[u]r and go back to watching *Pans Labyrinth*. Which was really trash. Talk about over hype. Losers.

Although there is certainly material here for research about these new forms of audience discourse, especially in his apparent reaction to the “intelligence” of the film highlighted in other critical and audience reviews, a dialogue between those posting comments does not immediately assist in investigating how users are relating the director to film. Therefore, the longer, less conversational reviews and comments from IMDb and Amazon were used.

Both IMDb and Amazon, as with other Internet sites, prioritize the official information of the film above any comments. However, unlike some other audience discourse websites, IMDb and Amazon tend to feature audience comments more prominently than critics’ reviews. One reason for this is most likely because these websites are not linked with any specific critical discourse source, but instead are

⁸⁵ Although IMDb has different versions of its website for the United States and the United Kingdom, the reviews of films remain the same for both versions.

specifically designed for the audience. Therefore, the reviews featured on the website are from audience members, except for a short review on Amazon from the in-house critic. Both websites allow the user to filter the order of which reviews they see first, for example viewing in order of “most helpful” or “best” written or “hated it,” with the highest rated reviews showing first automatically. The “best” reviews from IMDb and the “highest rated” reviews from Amazon were chosen for analysis because they would be the most widely read reviews on the website. As of 8 July 2009, IMDb had 3,137 reviews for *The Dark Knight*, Amazon.com had 1,150 reviews, and Amazon.co.uk had 239 reviews for *The Dark Knight* two-disc edition.⁸⁶ Although the reviews are a small sample of the total reviews written about the film on each of these websites, not even considering the reviews on other websites, this limited sample is required due to the scope of the project and the focused nature of doctoral research. However, these reviews will give a solid indication of the discursive practice occurring about Nolan within *The Dark Knight* audience discourse.⁸⁷

Overall, the reviews on IMDb and Amazon resemble professional critical reviews, but aim to more specifically engage in dialogue with fellow audience members, as initially discussed above. Furthermore, the reviews function as a guide to fellow audience members of what is important, including stressing Nolan as the primary meaning-maker. As expected from the analysis in the previous chapters, critical discourse is appropriated by those reviewing the films, as is official discourse. The official discourse, though, similar to the critical discourse, is used in a sort of attempted dialogue with other audience members and expectations of specific needs from official discourse are voiced, such as which features comprise a quality experience in regards to DVD extras, suggesting an awareness of official discourse. This also feeds into the theory of genre creation as an on-going cycle among official and audience discourses where, “like two serpents biting each other’s tails, industry and audience are seen as locked in a symbiotic relationship leaving no room for a third party” (Altman, 1999: 16). As Altman illustrates,

⁸⁶ Amazon.com lists the same reviews for each home version of *The Dark Knight*. Amazon.co.uk, though, has different reviews for each version of *The Dark Knight*. The reviews analysed were from the two-disc DVD release because it is the most popular version as indicated by Amazon’s sale charts. There was no single-disc version, unlike the United States. Furthermore, one review from the US site was an exact replica of an IMDb review, so the sixth highest review was used instead.

⁸⁷ A full list of reviews used can be found in Appendix D.

and as is discussed below, this relationship in codifying genre conventions has basis in reality – where the audience helps to confirm and, sometimes, redefine genre meanings – but is ultimately too simplistic and narrow. However, the audience members’ views on the films and genre, now more than in the past, can influence the marketing and production of films, although critical discourse, as suggested in this research, also has a powerful influence in the formation of film discourse. Similarly, the audience’s understanding of directors, and relationship with what they perceive the director to be, can possibly influence when and what kind of work a director receives. This understanding, as proposed in previous chapters, is initially formulated as an auteur persona in official and critical discourse before it is then appropriated by audience discourse, but can then feed back into the development of the auteur persona.

5.2.2 – Self-generated reviews analysis

The self-generated reviews remain an essential audience discourse, meaning that specific codes and conventions are used in audience discourse which are separate from, though related to, conventions of official and critical discourses. One of the primary differences between critical reviews and audience reviews was, predictably, the level of critique, with audience reviews presenting a personal, sometimes emotional, engagement with the film that is generally absent, or at least more restrained, in critical discourse. However, there was still a relatively high level of attempt at critique in some of the reviews with analysis of specific filmic elements and comparisons between films and filmmakers. A further difference was the amount that the director was mentioned, although there were significant differences in the engagement with the director depending on which website the review was posted and the country the reviewer was from. Overall the self-generated reviews showed a high level of film engagement among audiences with a high interest in the actors in the film followed by the director, and finally the visual aspects of the film.

One of the most obvious differences in the reviews from each website can be attributed to the different purposes of the websites. While IMDb is designed specifically to provide information about the film, Amazon exists to sell the film, specifically in its home market format – DVD, Blu-ray, or digital copies. Therefore, three of the Amazon reviews focus almost exclusively on the quality of the DVD or Blu-ray technology and,

especially, the extra features. As discussed in the official discourse chapter, *The Dark Knight* offers few extra features, and those that it offers tend to be slightly impersonal and brief, especially compared with features on Nolan's previous DVD releases. With the rise of DVDs, the audience now expects more access to behind-the-scenes information, crew commentary, or other insights into the filmmaking process. As was previously discussed in the survey results, the audience's desire for behind-the-scenes information indicates the continued relevance of the director in helping make meaning in the film. Although not always stated directly in these reviews, the wish to have greater access to those responsible for the film, Christopher Nolan in this case, shows that audience members use the auteur persona developed in the extras to help their understanding of the film. For example, a reviewer on Amazon.com started his review with the following:

There is nothing more to be said about this movie – probably the best superhero film ever made, with a mesmerizing performance by Heath Ledger as the embodiment of chaotic evil – this is a 5-star DVD if ever there was one. But there is a LOT to be said about this awful, feature-free, completely inadequate 2-disc set. (R20, 2008)

The reviewer then detailed the features that were included with the DVD and why there should be more. He concluded his review by noting “this is clearly a holiday season rip-off, a quick-and-dirty scheme to rake in a few extra bucks from unsuspecting clods like me who expected WB [Warner Bros.] to release a package worthy of this great movie. Instead, what we have is an insult to the fans and the filmmakers” (R20, 2008). This reviewer has a set of expectations from the official discourse and has knowledge of the marketing tactics (“holiday season rip-off”) that are inherent in the production of home market versions of the films. Furthermore, the reviewer also specifically disassociates the disappointment in the DVD with the quality of those who made the film, claiming both audience and filmmaker are victims together, implying a relationship between audience and creator. The production of multiple versions of a home video release has been growing in recent years as “the DVD market gives an extraordinary opportunity for the differentiation of the product – a Hollywood movie. It was the economic logic of differentiation that motivated the fast establishment of the multi-edition practice” (Skopal, 2007: 186). This differentiation can then be applied to the construction of the

auteur persona, as having an extended special features disc with commentaries or behind-the-scenes features can help establish that the film, and the director behind the film, are worthy of being studied and considered art and artist, as implied in the quote above. The reviewer wants a better set of extras both for his or her own enjoyment, but also as a sign of respect for the filmmakers, implying a relationship between audience and filmmakers.

Although some of these discussions are aimed at fellow audience members attempting to replicate a form of discussion and a warning to others thinking of purchasing the film rather than a critique of the film itself, the implied meanings behind the discussion show an awareness of the auteur in meaning-making. This discussion, containing knowledge normally present in official and critical discourse, could indicate a new form of audience discourse, where the audience becomes more savvy and industry centred in their discussion, but still shows a reliance on traditional auteur concepts by looking for meaning from the filmmakers. Currently, the audience reviews continue to remain similar to critical discourse with a focus on the film's quality, specifically in terms of acting, directing, and the script. The move towards this type of all knowing portion of the audience, seen in even higher numbers in individual blogs, can account for the focus not being as much about Nolan as was seen in the critical discourse. It also mirrors the lack of mention of Nolan in the promotional materials within official discourse, such as posters and trailers, which are the most widely seen part of official discourse, indicating the influence of both official and critical discourse on the audience discussions.

Those reviews that focused on a critique of the film often replicated reviews from critical discourse in their discussion of the movie's merits and drawbacks, as well as in the general structure of the review. Although only 65% (13/20)⁸⁸ of the reviews specifically mention Christopher Nolan, which is far fewer than the 100% of reviews which mentioned him in the critical discourse sample, and only 20% (4/20) mention him in the first two sentences, the persona and identity constructed around Nolan in critical and official discourse is present through most of the reviews in relation to the main

⁸⁸ 90% (9/10) IMDb reviews mentioned Nolan, while only 20% (2/10) of Amazon reviews mentioned him. This discrepancy can most likely be attributed to the different functions of the websites.

elements of independence, intelligence, and genre shifting.⁸⁹ In one review from IMDb, an audience member begins the review writing “Christopher Nolan has a vision. And whether you agree with it or not, he undeniably completes it in *The Dark Knight* – a vicious, engrossing, overwhelming, intelligent event-film that re-defines ‘comic-book-flicks’” (R8, 2008). This opening incorporates several elements previously discussed, including assigning artistic merit to the director, assigning a specific genre (“comic-book-flicks”), specifying the industrial context (“event-film”) and incorporating elements of Nolan’s persona, tied up with the film (“intelligent” and “re-defines” genre). Several reviews mirrored this level of analysis with another IMDb review noting:

For a comic book film adaptation, this film is not at all fantasy-like. It is quite realistic in a way and this is what gives the film more credibility. Also, the fact that the script is realistic is unbelievable, as you expect a superhero film when you walk in the cinema, and walk out realizing you have just seen an epic crime saga. Yes, CRIME SAGA. [...] But of course, none of this is possible without the genius that is the other Nolan, director Christopher. As per *Memento*, he knows how to direct a film. The dramatic scenes are engaging and the action sequences are crisp, thrilling, and will blow you out of your seat. Nolan's direction is tense, whip-smart, kinetic and smart. (R1, 2008)

In this almost passionate address to the reader, the reviewer again mentions genre, especially in terms of the shift in genre expectations, and assigns the bulk of the credit to Nolan, having already mentioned Jonathan Nolan’s work on the script. Furthermore, in describing Nolan’s direction, the reviewer stresses intelligence calling the direction both “whip-smart” and “smart.” This implies that intelligence is seen as part of Nolan’s auteur persona, but also that intelligence is not normally a feature of this genre, and so Nolan has altered the perception of the genre. This supports the survey comments, discussed earlier, that there is an intelligence and depth in *The Dark Knight* that is not normally present in summer blockbusters. Furthermore, this again indicates a point where the three

⁸⁹ Although all of the reviews used in this analysis were positive, there were several negative reviews on each website as well. However, proportionately there were few negative reviews compared with positive ones. For example, on Amazon.com, 76% of the reviews awarded four or five stars to the film while 16% of the reviews awarded the film only one or two stars. Amazon.co.uk displayed similar figures with 75% of reviews listed as four or five stars and only 14% listed as one or two stars. Furthermore, many of the negative reviews tended to be quite short and were not voted among the most helpful, which is why there are none in the sample.

discourses all mention an aspect of Nolan's auteur persona – intelligence in altering genres – but develop the aspect in slightly different ways. An Amazon.co.uk reviewer further emphasizes Nolan's role in raising the film above normal genre expectations noting “co-writer/director Christopher Nolan brings a[n] epic to the screen of proportions which no other comic book movie can match. This is dark and gritty it[‘]s not an average superhero movie and bares [sic] little resemblance to its genre” (R12, 2008), comparing the film instead to contemporary gangster films *Heat* and *The Departed* (2006, Martin Scorsese). This comparison mirrors those made in the critical discourse, where several critics (29%; 7/24) cited *Heat* as a similar film to *The Dark Knight*, as did interviews Christopher Nolan had previously given, suggesting an appropriation of critical and official discourse into audience discourse. The majority of the reviews, especially those which do not focus on the content of the DVD, seem as though they are trying to convince the reader to see the film despite, rather than because of, its genre.

“This is a superhero movie that isn't cartoonish or childish; it's complex and intense and thoroughly enjoyable.” (R14, 2009)

“Thanks Christopher Nolan. Simply, thank you for a film that's a lot more than the typical film based on comic books.” (R3, 2009)

“Nolan has made his ‘I will always be remembered’ movie, this is the crown jewel in his portfolio. Perfect directing, perfect story, perfect balance between action and drama, everything is perfect. Even if you hate Batman, you will love this film. If you don't, then something beez wrongz with youz [sic]!” (R5, 2009)

These comments, and the many similar comments in the twenty reviews examined, specifically address the audience members, or Nolan himself, claiming that no matter what genre they typically enjoy, they will like *The Dark Knight*. Unlike the more dispassionate reviews from critical discourse, these reviews instruct the reader how they *must* enjoy the film. For example, one person ends the review claiming “this isn't an action movie. It's a film that explores literary themes of the hero and villain, as well as order and anarchy. Yes, listen to the dialog because it's all in there” (R2, 2009). The direct address to the reader (“yes, listen to the dialog”) implies an expected disbelief on the part of the reader that the film has merit beyond *just* an action film and it is up to the reviewer to convince him or her that it can be a good film. This attitude is a shift from the

critical discourse discussed in the previous chapter. With the critical discourse the reviews are informing and, hopefully, educating the reader about the film. In its attempt to mimic professional reviews audience discourse instead sometimes gives a more simplistic and definitive stance on how a movie should be understood.

The audience self-generated reviews in this sample demonstrate an active engagement with critical and official discourse, although they are still audience discourse in their style of address and focus of discussion. While discussion about the director is not as frequent as in critical discourse, there is a strong sense of auteur language and ideology in the reviews' placement of Nolan as the artist responsible for the film's success.⁹⁰ Without any specific prompting, the reviewers in this sample discuss director, actors, and plot in a manner similar to critical discourse. Several of the reviews also display a strong engagement with official discourse, including specific needs that they feel are, in some cases, not being fully met. However, the reviews also demonstrate the power that can be seen in audience discourse. These reviews are available on highly visited websites and read by other audience members, presumably influencing opinions. Ultimately the reviews, like the survey results, suggest that the audience is knowledgeable about Nolan's auteur persona and his previous films, and they use this information to understand the film. Furthermore, the reviews indicate the interconnected nature of all levels of discourse and how audiences have made the auteur persona into their own, fostering the relationship between auteur and audience that is hinted at in the other discourses.

5.3 – The Audience and the Director

The survey results and the self-generated reviews suggest that audience members are frequently aware of directors both in explicit terms, naming particular directors, and historical ways, knowing previous films by directors, which are influenced by official and critical discourse. It is difficult to tell from the survey answers if those who are more involved with official and critical discourse are more likely to know or understand a *specific* auteur persona for Nolan due to the lack of directed questions. However, if there

⁹⁰ Equally, a brief examination of some of the more negative reviews shows that those reviewers still generally credit Nolan with the artistic and intellectual decisions; they just see it as a negative.

had been a chance for further or more targeted questions, it would have been useful to ask specifically if respondents had a particular image of Nolan to see how that description would have matched their description of *The Dark Knight*, and also how it relates to what is presented in official and critical discourse. Nevertheless, the discussions in both sets of data surrounding *The Dark Knight* demonstrate that audience members generally have an awareness of directors, and more specifically many can link Nolan not only to his most recent film, but also his previous films, indicating that he has established himself as a distinct and memorable director.

Even if audience members do not explicitly use Christopher Nolan's name in their decisions to see or not to see his films, they implicitly use directorial knowledge to set expectations and alter or engender perceptions of those films. The widespread basic knowledge of directorial styles and conceits enmeshed in culture is derived from the original auteur writings in considering some directors more worthy of being called artists or authors of a film. However, this knowledge has been adapted and appropriated and the creation of distinct auteur personas – often linked with or in opposition to genre – continue the business of being an auteur (Corrigan, 1991) and help frame audience viewing. Christopher Nolan's persona is recognized because of its consistency within the films he produces and in the persona set in official and critical discourse, allowing him more power in the projects he chooses. Nolan is acting as a commercial auteur and upholding the author function by using official discourse to construct a consistent auteur persona to both prefigure and retrogressively frame the meanings which audience members can take from his films. As has been suggested, there has been little research or theorizing done in regards to how audience members actually understand or use directorial knowledge in understanding cinema. The analysis conducted in this chapter, including the exploration of links between official, critical, and audience discourse in confirming a specific auteur persona, shows that directorial knowledge influences, to varying extents, how people choose films and how they understand those films. Audiences often recognize an individual intelligence at work behind the films; they perceive its existence even if they cannot name it as Nolan's. This helps frame how audiences understand his films, but also how they use and understand the cultural surround of his films.

Although audience discourse has always influenced other film discourses to varying extents, due to increased technology, audience members have a greater voice in creating meaning in the other levels of discourse. The organization and wide dissemination of audience reviews and opinions creates a level of discourse that, at times, can rival critical and official discourses. As has been mentioned previously, critical discourse has responded to this by adding audience reviews to their websites while official discourse has relied on direct marketing or providing art and posters on the official studio websites to be used by the audience to incorporate the characters with the audience member's identity.⁹¹ Foucault suggests that "not all regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions" (1981: 62). The audience discourse is the most open of the levels of cinematic discourse, but with the growing presence of the audience in the past decade, official and critical discourse can be seen to become more open through allowing, and even encouraging, audience participation. This suggests a shift in power relations between the discourses over the past decade, as suggested earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, the development of audience discourse emphasizes the interconnected nature of cinematic culture, with the auteur persona straddling all levels of cinema discourse to act as an organizing force for understanding and enjoying films.

⁹¹ For example, upon visiting the official *The Dark Knight* website, a user can get the "Ultimate Fan Kit" by choosing allegiance to one of the three main characters and then display that by adding materials to their own websites or profiles (Warner Brothers, 2008).

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This thesis began with the claim that the Hollywood director who constructs an auteur persona can help shape how films are understood and discussed. However, the auteur persona which helps the director act as a unifying and meaning-making source is not a simple nor natural idea, but instead is a construct that must be developed through an intricate web of texts and multiple levels of discourse. Furthermore, there is an increasing importance of technology in developing and maintaining the auteur persona, including the elevated influence audience discourse has on the auteur persona due to new technologies. With the increased use of auteur language and concept at all levels of discourse, the auteur persona is a way to understand differentiation between directors in Hollywood. This differentiation through auteur persona can be used as a type of commodity in industrial and cultural factors of Hollywood film at the stages of production, exhibition, and reception, but can also remain a marker of quality and distinctiveness. The concept of the auteur persona analyzed here builds on earlier ideas about the auteur, but develops the earlier ideas by providing a way to examine in both theoretical and practical terms what the place and function of the auteur is in contemporary Hollywood culture. Earlier studies have looked primarily at only one aspect of film culture, or have focused more on the films and culture rather than the

director, but this thesis has shown the importance of considering the multiple factors that add to understandings of the auteur, since each level of discourse contributes to the development of different facets.

The auteur persona is at once stable and shifting, but is always a form of identity that is adopted to help distinguish and arrange films and directors. The auteur persona provides a framework for a set of texts that helps organize their meaning over time, creating a relatively unified collection. Conceptualizing the auteur persona as a form of identity helps to stress the intertextual nature of the persona. Stuart Hall suggests “actual identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (1996: 4). The auteur persona, as a type of identity, is a combination of internal and external factors that shape it. It is never a finished product, but one that is changing based on those influences. Nolan, as other directors have done before, takes concepts from auteurism and incorporates those into his auteur persona, but his persona is constantly evolving because of the new texts created around and by him as well as changing cultural conditions, and so may shift even after Nolan’s retirement. Nolan’s auteur persona is defined in the films and surrounding discourse through cinematic intelligence related to narrative and visuals and a paradoxical independent Hollywood sensibility, magnified by a distancing of his persona from fan culture. Encapsulated by his signature films *Memento* and *The Dark Knight*, Nolan is known for producing films that challenge audience assumptions on what a particular genre or storytelling frame should be, but ultimately encouraging the audience to become invested in his films – and auteur persona – by offering tropes that help the audience explore and understand his films.

By presenting new ways to view films as well as providing a guide to navigate those new ways, Nolan’s auteur persona allows him to specify a frame of meaning for his films and the surrounding text. In constructing ambiguity and openness in these texts, Nolan’s auteur persona also leaves space for multiple meanings to be made. Nolan uses discourse – the films and the surrounding materials – to retain authority over his texts, especially when acting as both director and writer, and also to incorporate audiences by

leaving areas of ambiguity. As Foucault suggests “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (1990: 101). Therefore, some forms of discourse will always have power over others, but it is not an absolute or final power. All forms of discourse involve some level of power, thus the audience has a role to play in developing Nolan’s auteur persona due to the structure of audience discourse, but also because of Nolan’s use of other levels of discourse to reach out to audience members. Nolan is both an audience member and a member of production. He is influenced by other directors and in turn influences others. The framing of his DVD commentaries emphasizes his awareness of the intertextual nature of film meaning-making, and he presents his commentary how he would like to be addressed as an audience member, both taking the position of authority and allowing the audience to have agency in understanding the film.

It has been shown that there are three factors involved in constructing a lasting auteur persona. Firstly, the auteur persona needs to enhance the filmic experience. Nolan’s auteur persona has been tied to the themes of his films, for example, issues of identity and authorship. More than thematic consistency, though, Nolan has also created distinct stylistic features. Within his films, Nolan’s style is present in intricate or non-linear narrative structures with central framing of the characters to place the viewer in a particular character’s mind. Furthermore, Nolan has continued these thematic and stylistic concerns outside of the films by maintaining a consistent level of mystery in his interviews, as seen on the DVDs, that retains the ambiguity in the films, and he does not introduce outside factors which would puncture his film world. Thus, he frames possible meanings for his films which exist throughout his filmography and in the extra-textual elements creating his authority over these texts. Secondly, the auteur persona uses the director’s name as a referent for a particular quality to organize a set of films, a style, or an experience. As seen in the critical discourse, Nolan’s name is used heavily to help organise his films into a coherent group. As Foucault (1991: 105) has cautioned, though, the name can never be purely a referent; it means more than just a name. Instead, “Christopher Nolan” denotes a specific experience and expectation for a film that will most likely include a focus on characters, a propensity for twists, and an untypical narrative structure. Knowing Nolan’s auteur persona, then, can provide the viewer with a

set of expectations for his films, again framing the viewing experience and helping audiences understand the films. Thirdly, the auteur persona must have a distinct niche within filmic culture that differentiates the auteur and his or her films from other films and directors working in the industry. Nolan has created a niche by re-purposing genre conventions to novel effect, especially in terms of thrillers and blockbuster films. Although not the only director to play with genre tropes, Nolan's use of technology and focus on character help distinguish a Christopher Nolan film from other blockbusters. For example, Nolan's IMAX filming, mixed with a concern for reality seen by avoiding 3-D, and the presence of well-defined characters and questions of identity construction, partially define his auteur signature within the films. The consistency of this signature influences how he and his films are discussed in the cinematic discourses. For example, the official and critical discourses stress Nolan's dual role as a writer and director, emphasizing his authority in the style and structure of his films.

There is a continued resilience of the auteur concept in cinematic culture, and understanding the mechanics of the auteur persona helps to determine the use value of the auteur in production and reception of film. A substantial part of this resilience derives from the adoption of auteur concepts into all levels of film discourse, but also because of the permanence of what used to be primarily ephemeral texts such as publicity materials, critics' reviews, and audience reactions. The commentary in the surrounding discourse is necessary to evaluate because it complements the auteur structure created by Nolan within his films. In discussing the function of discourse, Foucault suggests "the commentary-principle limits the chance-element in discourse by the play of an identity which would take the form of repetition and sameness. The author-principle limits the same element of chance by the play of an identity which has the form of individuality and the self" (1981: 59). Commentary – the official, critical, and audience discourse – repeats and transforms knowledge to create a specific auteur persona while Nolan's presence creates a differentiated identity for the persona. All factors must be present and work together to construct the auteur persona. The interplay of these factors demonstrates that when researching Hollywood directors, it is not enough to analyze only one aspect of film culture. This thesis argues that the contemporary Hollywood auteur can only exist if developed at all levels of cinematic culture since each level of discourse contributes

different aspects to the auteur persona; however, these levels of discourse are still emerging in many ways, especially in terms of the rapidly changing place of technology in all levels of discourse. Therefore, this research is a first step at providing a framework to help research and explain the function of the auteur in cinematic culture. No level of discourse is discrete, and similarly, the films are never independent of context, and thus this research illustrates how each level of discourse can be examined to provide a more complete understanding of how the auteur concept is used in contemporary Hollywood film culture. Christopher Nolan has created a distinct auteur persona that reaches beyond the films and permeates all levels of discourse, representing the essence of the modern-day Hollywood auteur.

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Christopher Nolan Filmography with Primary Cast and Crew

*Has contributed to more than one film with Christopher Nolan

***Following* (1998)**

Produced by Next Wave Films and Syncopy

Distributed by Zeitgeist Films (USA) and Momentum Pictures (UK)

Primary Crew:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Director | Christopher Nolan |
| Screenplay | Christopher Nolan |
| Director of Photography | Christopher Nolan |
| Editors | Gareth Heal and Christopher Nolan |
| Production Designer | Tristan Martin |
| Music | David Julyan* |
| Executive Producer | Peter Broderick |
| Producers | Christopher Nolan Emma Thomas* Jeremy Theobald* |

Primary Cast:

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| The Young Man (Bill) | Jeremy Theobald* |
| Cobb | Alex Haw |
| The Blonde | Lucy Russell* |
| The Cop | John Nolan* |

***Memento* (2000)**

Produced by Newmarket Capital Group, Team Todd, I Remember Productions, and Summit Entertainment

Distributed by Newmarket Films (USA) and Pathé Distribution (UK)

Primary Crew:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Director | Christopher Nolan |
| Screenplay | Christopher Nolan |
| Based on a short story by | Jonathan Nolan* |
| Director of Photography | Wally Pfister* |
| Editor | Dody Dorn* |
| Production Designer | Patti Podesta |
| Music | David Julyan* |
| Executive Producers | Chris J. Ball* Aaron Ryder* William Tyrer* |
| Producers | Jennifer Todd Suzanne Todd Elaine Dysinger Emma Thomas* |

Primary Cast:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Leonard Shelby | Guy Pearce |
| Natalie | Carrie-Ann Moss |
| Teddy | Joe Pantoliano |
| Sammy Jankis | Stephen Tobolowsky |
| Mrs Jankis | Harriet Sansom Harris |

Insomnia (2002)

Produced by Alcon Entertainment, Witt/Thomas Productions, Section Eight, Insomnia Productions, and Summit Entertainment

Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures (USA) and Buena Vista International (UK)

Primary Crew:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Director | Christopher Nolan |
| Screenplay | Hillary Seitz |
| Based on Screenplay by | Nikolaj Frobenius and Erik Skjoldbjærg |
| Director of Photography | Wally Pfister* |
| Editor | Dody Dorn* |
| Production Designer | Nathan Crowley* |
| Music | David Julyan* |
| Executive Producers | George Clooney Steven Soderbergh Tony Thomas Kim Roth |
| Producers | Charles J.D. Schlissel* Paul Junger Witt Edward L. McDonnell Broderick Johnson Andrew A. Kosove Emma Thomas* |

Primary Cast:

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Will Dormer | Al Pacino |
| Walter Finch | Robin Williams |
| Ellie Burr | Hilary Swank |
| Hap Eckhart | Martin Donovan |
| Chief Nyback | Paul Dooley |
| Fred Duggar | Nicky Katt* |
| Rachel Clement | Maura Tierney |

Batman Begins (2005)

Produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, Syncopy, DC Comics, and Legendary Pictures

Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures (USA) and Warner Bros . (UK)

Primary Crew:

| | |
|------------|---------------------------------------|
| Director | Christopher Nolan |
| Screenplay | Christopher Nolan and David S. Goyer* |
| Story | David S. Goyer* |

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Based upon Batman | |
| Characters Created by | Bob Kane |
| And Published by | DC Comics |
| Director of Photography | Wally Pfister* |
| Editor | Lee Smith* |
| Production Designer | Nathan Crowley* |
| Music | Hans Zimmer* and James Newton Howard* |
| Executive Producers | Benjamin Melniker* |
| | Michael E. Uslan* |
| Producers | Emma Thomas* |
| | Charles Roven* |
| | Larry Franco |

Primary Cast:

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Bruce Wayne/Batman | Christian Bale* |
| Alfred | Michael Caine* |
| Lucius Fox | Morgan Freeman* |
| Henri Ducard | Liam Neeson |
| Rachel Dawes | Katie Holmes |
| Jim Gordon | Gary Oldman* |
| Dr Jonathan Crane | Cillian Murphy* |
| Carmine Falcone | Tom Wilkinson |
| Rutger Hauer | Rutger Hauer |
| Ra's Al Ghul | Ken Watanabe* |

The Prestige (2006)

Produced by Touchstone Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, Newmarket Productions, and Syncopy
 Distributed Warner Bros. Pictures (USA and UK)

Primary Crew:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Director | Christopher Nolan |
| Screenplay | Jonathan Nolan* and Christopher Nolan |
| Based on the Novel by | Christopher Priest |
| Director of Photography | Wally Pfister* |
| Editor | Lee Smith* |
| Production Designer | Nathan Crowley* |
| Music | David Julyan* |
| Executive Producers | Charles J.D. Schlissel* |
| | Chris J. Ball* |
| | William Tyrer* |
| | Valerie Dean |
| Producers | Aaron Ryder* |
| | Emma Thomas* |
| | Christopher Nolan |

Primary Cast:

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Robert Angier | Hugh Jackman |
| Alfred Borden | Christian Bale* |
| Cutter | Michael Caine* |
| Oliva Wenscombe | Scarlett Johansson |
| Sarah Borden | Rebecca Hall |
| Nikola Tesla | David Bowie |
| Alley | Andy Serkis |
| Julia McCullough | Piper Perabo |

The Dark Knight (2008)

Produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, Legendary Pictures, DC Films, and Syncopy
Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures (USA and UK)

Primary Crew:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Director | Christopher Nolan |
| Screenplay | Jonathan Nolan* and Christopher Nolan |
| Story | Christopher Nolan and David S. Goyer* |
| Based upon Batman | |
| Characters Created by | Bob Kane |
| And Published by | DC Comics |
| Director of Photography | Wally Pfister* |
| Editor | Lee Smith* |
| Production Designer | Nathan Crowley* |
| Music | Hans Zimmer* and James Newton Howard* |
| Executive Producers | Benjamin Melniker* |
| | Michael E. Uslan* |
| | Kevin De La Roy |
| | Thomas Tull |
| Producers | Charles Roven* |
| | Emma Thomas* |
| | Christopher Nolan |

Primary Cast:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Bruce Wayne/Batman | Christian Bale* |
| The Joker | Heath Ledger |
| Harvey Dent | Aaron Eckhart |
| Alfred | Michael Caine* |
| Lucius Fox | Morgan Freeman* |
| Rachel Dawes | Maggie Gyllenhaal |
| Jim Gordon | Gary Oldman* |

Appendices

Appendix A: Critical Review Table

| # | Newspaper/Journal | <i>Dark Knight</i> | <i>Prestige</i> | <i>Batman Begins</i> | <i>Insomnia</i> | <i>Memento</i> | <i>Following</i> |
|----|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 | <i>Austin Chronicle</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 2 | <i>Boston Globe</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X | X |
| 3 | <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |
| 4 | <i>Christian Science Monitor</i> | Yes | TS | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |
| 5 | <i>Daily Mail</i> | Yes | Yes | X | Yes | X | Yes |
| 6 | <i>Empire</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 7 | <i>Entertainment Weekly</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |
| 8 | <i>Guardian</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | TS |
| 9 | <i>Independent</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 10 | <i>Los Angeles Times</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 11 | <i>New York Times</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 12 | <i>Rolling Stone</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |
| 13 | <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 14 | <i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 15 | <i>Sight and Sound</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 16 | <i>Telegraph</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |
| 17 | <i>The New Yorker</i> | Yes | TS | Yes | Yes | Yes | TS |
| 18 | <i>Time</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | TS | X |
| 19 | <i>Time Out</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 20 | <i>Times</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | X | Yes | TS |
| 21 | <i>USA Today</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |
| 22 | <i>Variety</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 23 | <i>Village Voice</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 24 | <i>Washington Post</i> | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | X |

X = Review unavailable

TS = Review under 200 words

Appendix B: Survey Information

B.1 – Pilot e-mail

(Sent 7 February 2009 to 20 individuals in the US and UK.)

Please find below a link to a test survey about films. This survey will eventually be widely distributed, but now I am checking to make sure that the questions make sense and are useful. The results will add to my PhD research on Hollywood films. I would be grateful if you could please take some time to complete the survey by next Monday, February 23rd. I am interested in all opinions, from avid film-goers to those who have not seen a film in a long time. If you find anything on the survey confusing or odd, or if it takes you longer to complete than the estimate, please let me know.

After this initial test is completed I will be sending out a new link and will ask you to send it to anyone you know, but for now please do not send on the link.

Link: <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB228TQGQNBZC>

B.2 – Survey e-mail body

Please find below a link to a short survey about films. Your answers and opinions will add to on-going PhD research about Hollywood films. I am interested in all opinions, from avid film-goers to those who have not seen a film in a long time. I would be grateful if you could please take some time to complete the survey and pass the link on to anyone and everyone you think may be interested. The survey will remain open until the 14th of April 2009.

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB228VA6ELNLS>

B.3 – Survey Welcome Greeting

Thank you for completing this survey. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to finish. The survey will ask questions about the film *The Dark Knight* (2008) as well as more general questions about film and your film going habits. All responses will be kept confidential and will be used strictly for my PhD research. If you would like to receive the results of the survey, please include your e-mail address at the end of the survey in the box provided. If you have any questions about this survey, please e-mail me at erin.hill-parks@ncl.ac.uk.

B.4 – Survey

1. Have you seen *The Dark Knight*?
Yes/No
2. If yes, what were the primary reasons you decided to see *The Dark Knight*? (Please choose up to three options.)

I like Batman
I enjoyed *Batman Begins* (2005)
Heath Ledger's performance
I like the director's previous work
I like the actors in the film
I was curious because of the media hype surrounding the film
I like comic book/action films
Other (Comment)

3. If yes What did you think of *The Dark Knight*?
Open Comment Box

4. If yes, in what format did you see the film? (Please check all that apply.)
Cinema
IMAX
DVD
Blu-Ray
On-line

2. If no, what were the primary reasons you decided not to see the film? Please choose up to three options.)

I dislike Batman
I did not enjoy *Batman Begins* (2005)
Heath Ledger's performance
I don't like the director's previous work
I don't like the actors in the film
Because of the media reports surrounding the film
I dislike comic book/action films
Other (Comment)

5/3. Do you know who directed *The Dark Knight*? If so, please write below.
Open Comment Box

6/4. Do you know other films that were directed by the same director as *The Dark Knight*?

X-Men (2000)
Insomnia (2002)
The Illusionist (2006)
The Usual Suspects (1994)
Memento (2000)
Spider-man (2002)
The Bourne Identity (2002)
Batman Begins (2005)
Superman Returns (2006)
The Prestige (2006)

- 7/5. Of those films below that you have seen, have you enjoyed them? Ranking 1-5
Same list
- 8/6. Does a particular director's involvement influence your decision to see a film?
Never influences my decision to see a film; Often/Sometimes influences my decision to see a film; Frequently influences my decision to see a film.
- 9/7. Are there any directors whose work you particularly enjoy?
Open response
- 10/8. Approximately how often per month do you watch films in the following formats?
Cinema; VHS/DVD/Blu-Ray; on-demand/Internet; free on TV
- 11/9. From which of the following places do you obtain information about films?
Never, 1-2 times per year, per month, per week, every day
- Film magazines
 - Newspapers
 - Radio
 - Television shows
 - Internet (IMDb.com, Rotten Tomatoes.com, etc.)
 - Friends
 - Other (comments)
- 12/10. Please list your preferred program, newspaper, or magazine for film information.
- 13/11. Have you ever written a film review on a website?
Yes/No
If so, on which site?
- 14/12. Please select your age range <13, 13-17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-69, >69
- 15/13. Please select your gender Male/Female
- 16/14. Please fill in the following information for statistical purposes
- Occupation Comment Line
 - Country of residence Comment Line
- 17/15. If you would like to receive the results of this survey, please enter your e-mail address. (Your address will only be used send you the results and will then be deleted.)

B.5 – Survey Thank You Page

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information you have provided will contribute to research on directors in Hollywood, focusing on the director Christopher Nolan. If you have any questions on this survey, please e-mail me at erin.hill-parks@ncl.ac.uk.

Appendix C: Survey Demographic Results

Total Respondents: 208

| | | | | |
|------------|---------------------|-----|-----------------|---------------------|
| Gender: | Female | 146 | (71%) | |
| | Male | 61 | (29%) | (One no response) |
| Location: | United States | 125 | (61%) | |
| | United Kingdom | 73 | (36%) | |
| | Czech Republic | 1 | | |
| | China | 1 | | |
| | Norway | 1 | (3% all others) | |
| | South Africa | 1 | | |
| | St. Kitts and Nevis | 1 | | |
| | U.S. Virgin Islands | 1 | | (Four no responses) |
| Age Range: | 13 to 17 | 8 | (4%) | |
| | 18 to 24 | 18 | (9%) | |
| | 25 to 34 | 99 | (48%) | |
| | 35 to 49 | 50 | (24%) | |
| | 50 to 69 | 28 | (14%) | |
| | Over 69 | 3 | (1%) | (One no response) |

Film Going:

Have you seen *The Dark Knight*?

| | | |
|-----|-----|-------|
| Yes | 137 | (66%) |
| No | 71 | (34%) |

- 76% (104/137) saw *The Dark Knight* in its theatrical distribution, either at a traditional cinema or in an IMAX theatre
- 19% (26/137) saw *The Dark Knight* more than once

Approximately how often per month do you watch films in the following formats?

| | | |
|----------------------|------|-----------|
| Cinema | 1.54 | |
| VHS, DVD or Blu-ray | 4.95 | |
| Free on television | 3.08 | |
| Internet or OnDemand | 0.92 | (Average) |

Director Knowledge: Does a particular director's involvement influence your decision to see a film?

| | | | |
|------------|-----|-------|-------------------|
| Never | 43 | (20%) | |
| Sometimes | 122 | (59%) | |
| Frequently | 42 | (20%) | (One no response) |

Appendix D: Self-Generated Audience Reviews

| RR | User Name | Date | User Name | Location | Title | Source |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------|--|---------------|
| 1 | del91 | 05-Jul-08 | | Unknown | "The best film of 2008 so far. A masterpiece." | A |
| 2 | straightblast | 09-Jul-08 | | USA | "Film surpasses the hype" | A |
| 3 | Chilenazo | 12-Jul-08 | | Chile | "The Dark Masterpiece" | A |
| 4 | johnnymacbest | 07-Jul-08 | | USA | "Supasses "Begins" in every aspect!!" | A |
| 5 | manuel_de_dios | 07-Jul-08 | | Netherlands | "Best movie of 2008 hands down!" | A |
| 6 | AK0707 | 07-Jul-08 | | Unknown | "So much more than a Batman movie" | A |
| 7 | ThatLankariKid | 16-Jul-08 | | Australia | "Certainty Dark - Worth the Wait" | A |
| 8 | Topher-Liam Froehlich | 19-Jul-08 | | USA | "And Here... We... GO!!!" | A |
| 9 | LennyRenquist | 16-Jul-08 | | Unknown | "Best. Comic. Movie. EVER." | A |
| 10 | zxic3wd | 16-Jul-08 | | USA | "The sequel we deserved to the Batman we wanted" | A |
| 11 | Peter WarrenRothwell "PeterR" | 03-Mar-09 | | UK | "Disturbingly Dark" | B |
| 12 | R.Fisher "entertainment lover" | 24-Jul-08 | | UK | "so much more than a superhero movie" | B |
| 13 | Lark | 03-Jan-09 | | Ireland | "The Joker Steals The Show" | B |
| 14 | Kona | 24-Apr-09 | | Unknown | "Thrilling" | B |
| 15 | P. Clement | 13-Mar-09 | | UK | "best yet" | B |
| 16 | Victor Belagosi "Victor Belagosi" | 08-Dec-08 | | USA | "Great Film - Buy te Single Disc Version!" | C |
| 18 | Woopak "The Thrill" | 20-Jul-08 | | Unknown | "The DARK KNIGHT Returns for Gotham City's Soul...." | C |
| 18 | Marmez1@aol.com "Marmez1@aol.com" | 22-Jul-08 | | USA | "Batman channels Plato's Republic" | C |
| 20 | Leif Fellague "oraclelf" | 28-Dec-08 | | USA | "DO NOT BUY 2-DISC 'SPECIAL' EDITION - MAJOR RIPOFF" | C |
| 21 | Will Clark "Liam Blackchurch" | 12-Dec-08 | | USA | "Really, Really DISAPPOINTING !!" | C |

Source References

- A** Accessed at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468568/usercomments> (8 July 2009)
- B** Accessed at http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/B001CEE1W6/ref=cm_cr_pr_helpful?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=0 (13 July 2009)
- C** Accessed at http://www.amazon.com/Dark-Knight-Two-Disc-Special-Digital/dp/B001GZ6QDS/ref=cm_cr_dp_orig_subj (13 July 2009)

Appendix E: Extra-textual Features on Home Releases of Christopher Nolan's Films

***Following* (1998)**

Region 1 DVD released 2001 by Columbia Tri-Star Home Entertainment (One Disc)

- Director's Commentary
- Second Angle Showing Director's Shooting Script
- Restructure the Story Chronologically
- Theatrical Trailers for *Following* and *Memento*
- Cast & Crew Biographies

Region 2 DVD released 2003 by Momentum Pictures (One Disc)

- Same Special Features as Region 1

***Memento* (2000)**

Region 1 DVD released 2001 by Columbia Tri-Star Home Entertainment (One Disc)

- Interview with Christopher Nolan by Independent Film Channel
- Art Gallery

Region 1 Limited Edition DVD released 2002 by Columbia Tri-Star Home Entertainment (Two Discs)

- Director's Commentary
- Interactive Challenge/Puzzle Menu
- Director's Shooting Script with Annotations
- Original Short Story
- Anatomy of a Scene (Documentary by the Sundance Channel)
- Ability to Restructure the Story Chronologically (Hidden Feature)
- Art Gallery
- Trailers
- Production Journal
- Sundance Film Festival Award Ceremony

Region 1 Blu-ray released 2006 by Sony Pictures (One Disc)

- Director's Commentary
- Anatomy of a Scene (Documentary by the Sundance Channel)

Region 2 DVD Released 2002 by Pathé Distribution (One Disc)

- Interactive Challenge/Puzzle Menu
- Interview with Christopher Nolan by Independent Film Channel
- Art Gallery
- Director's Shooting Script with Annotations
- Original Short Story
- Art Gallery
- Trailers
- *The Beginning of the End* (Hidden Feature to restructure the film chronologically)

Region 2 Special Edition DVD Released 2004 by Pathe Distribution (Three Discs)

- Interactive Challenge/Puzzle Menu
- Interview with Christopher Nolan by Independent Film Channel
- Interview with Guy Pearce
- Anatomy of a Scene (Documentary by the Sundance Channel)
- Art Gallery
- Director's Shooting Script with Annotations
- Original Short Story Read by Jonathan Nolan
- Art Gallery
- Trailers
- Leonard's Journal
- *The Beginning of the End* (Hidden Feature to restructure the film chronologically)

Region 2 Blu-ray Released October 2010 by 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment

- Special features not announced at time of writing

***Insomnia* (2002)**

Region 1 DVD Released 2002 by Warner Home Video (One Disc – Both Full and Wide Screen Versions)

- Commentary by Director Christopher Nolan (in Order of Shooting Sequence)
- Selected Scene Commentary by Hilary Swank, Production Designer Nathan Crowley, Cinematographer Wally Pfister, and Screenwriter Hillary Seitz
- Additional Scene with Director's Commentary
- *Day for Night*: Making of Documentary
- *180°*: A Conversation with Christopher Nolan and Al Pacino
- *In the Fog*: Cinematography and Production Design
- *Eyes Wide Open*: The Insomniac's World
- Stills and Art Gallery
- Theatrical Trailer
- Cast and Crew Filmography Highlights

Region 1 Blu-ray Released 2010 by Warner Home Video (One Disc)

- Same Special Features as DVD

Region 2 DVD Released 2003 by Buena Vista Home Entertainment (One Disc)

- Same Special Features as Region 1 DVD

***Batman Begins* (2005)**

Region 1 DVD Released 2005 by Warner Home Video (One Disc – Both Full and Wide Screen Versions)

- *Batman Begins* Mobile Game Demo

Region 1 Deluxe Edition and Limited Edition DVDs Released 2005 by Warner Home Video (Two Discs)

- MTV's *Tankman Begins: A Batman Begins Spoof*
- Theatrical Trailer
- *Inner Demons Comic*: Interactive Comic Book
- *Batman – The Journey Begins*: Development of the film and Batman's casting
- *Shaping Mind and Body*: Christian Bale's transformation into Batman
- *Batman – The Tumbler*: Reinvention of the Batmobile
- *Gotham City Rises*: Creating Gotham City, the Batcave, and Wayne Manor
- *Saving Gotham City*: Focus on the special effects
- *Genesis of the Bat*: A look at how different versions of Batman influenced the film
- *Confidential Files*: Fact cards about different characters and aspects of the film

Region 1 Blu-ray Released 2008 by Warner Home Video (One Disc)

- Same Special Features as Special Edition DVD, plus
- In-Movie Experience: Crew reveal movie's backstory as film plays
- *The Dark Knight* IMAX Prologue

Region 2 DVD Released 2005 by Warner Home Video (One Disc)

- Same Special Features as Region 1 DVD

Region Two DVD Released 2005 by Warner Home Video (Two Discs)

- Same Special Features as Region 1 Special Edition DVD

Region Two Blu-ray Released 2008 by Warner Home Video (One Disc)

- Same Special Features as Region 1 Blu-ray

***The Prestige* (2006)**

Region 1 DVD Released 2007 by Touchstone Home Entertainment

- *The Director's Notebook: The Cinematic Sleight of Hand of Christopher Nolan*
 - *Conjuring the Past*
 - *The Visual Maze*
 - *Metaphors of Deception*
 - *Tesla: The Man Who Invented the Twentieth Century*
 - *Resonances*
- *The Art of The Prestige* – Gallery of Art and Film Stills

Region 1 Blu-ray Released 2007 by Buena Vista Home Entertainment/Touchstone

- Same Special Features as DVD, plus
- *Becoming Fallon* (Hidden Feature)

Region 2 DVD Released 2007 by Warner Home Video

- Same Special Features as Region 1 DVD

Region 2 DVD Released 2007 by Warner Home Video

- Same Special Features as Region 1 Blu-ray

The Dark Knight (2008)

Region 1 DVD Released 2008 by Warner Home Entertainment (One Disc)

- No Special Features

Region 1 Special Edition DVD Released 2008 by Warner Home Entertainment (Two Discs)

- *Gotham Uncovered: Creation of a Scene*: Short making of documentaries featuring different aspects of the production
- *The Dark Knight* IMAX Sequences: The six IMAX sequences in full screen
- *Gotham Tonight*: Six episodes of “Gotham Cable’s Premier News Program”
- Art Galleries: Joker Cards, Concept Art, Poster Art, Production Stills
- Theatrical and Television Trailers

Region 1 Blu-ray Released 2008 by Warner Home Entertainment (Two Discs)

- Same Features as DVD, plus
- BD-Live interactive features
- Batman Tech: The incredible gadgets and tools
- Batman Unmasked: The Psychology of The Dark Knight

Region 2 Special Edition DVD Released 2008 by Warner Home Video (Two Discs)

- Same Special Features as Region 1 DVD

Region 2 Blu-ray DVD Released 2008 by Warner Home Video (Two Discs)

- Same Special Features as Region 1 Blu-ray