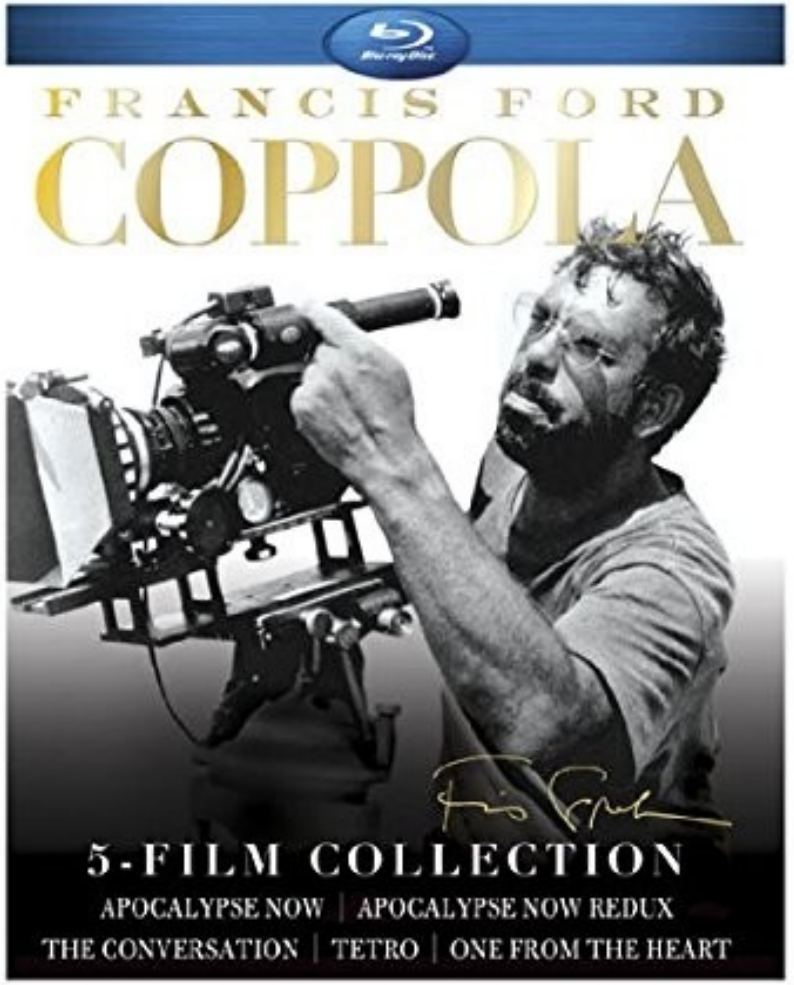
EPISODE 3

The commerce of auteurism

The Auteurist Discourse

- Auteur = director
- Has a large, ideally absolute degree of creative control
- Control is thematic and stylistic
- Endangered by the interference of non-creative agents
- Weakened studio control leads to creative expression and experimentation
- Films created by an auteur are works of art



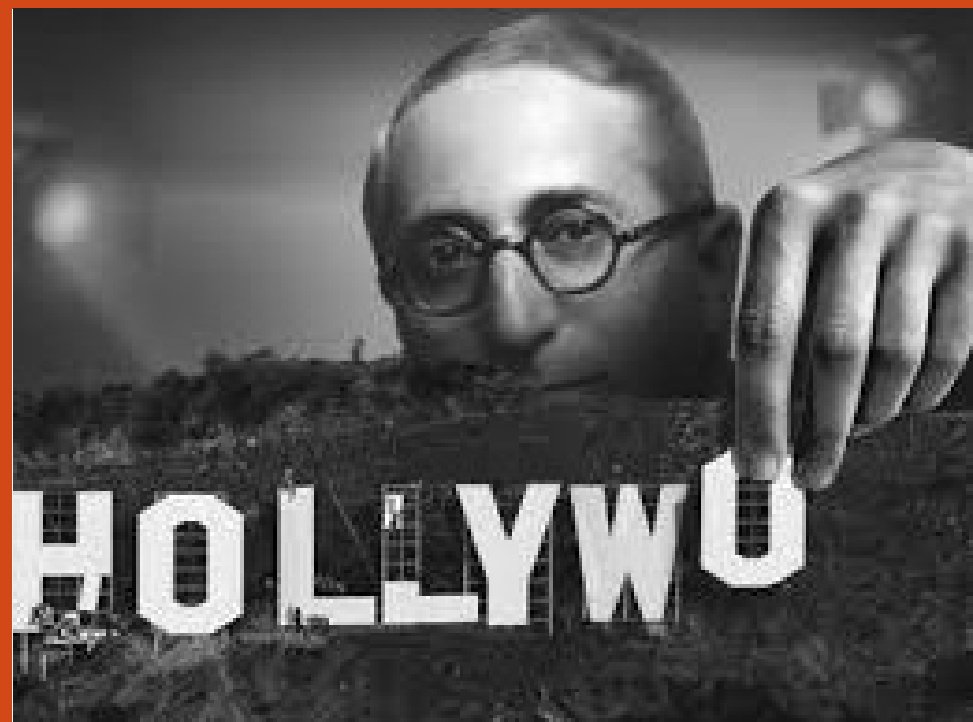
Auteurist metaphors

"Filmmaking is a collaborative art, yet the auteur is forever alone, in solitude [...The director, as captain, sailing the vessel across the sea, forever fixes his gaze on the endless nights."

– Patrick Tam

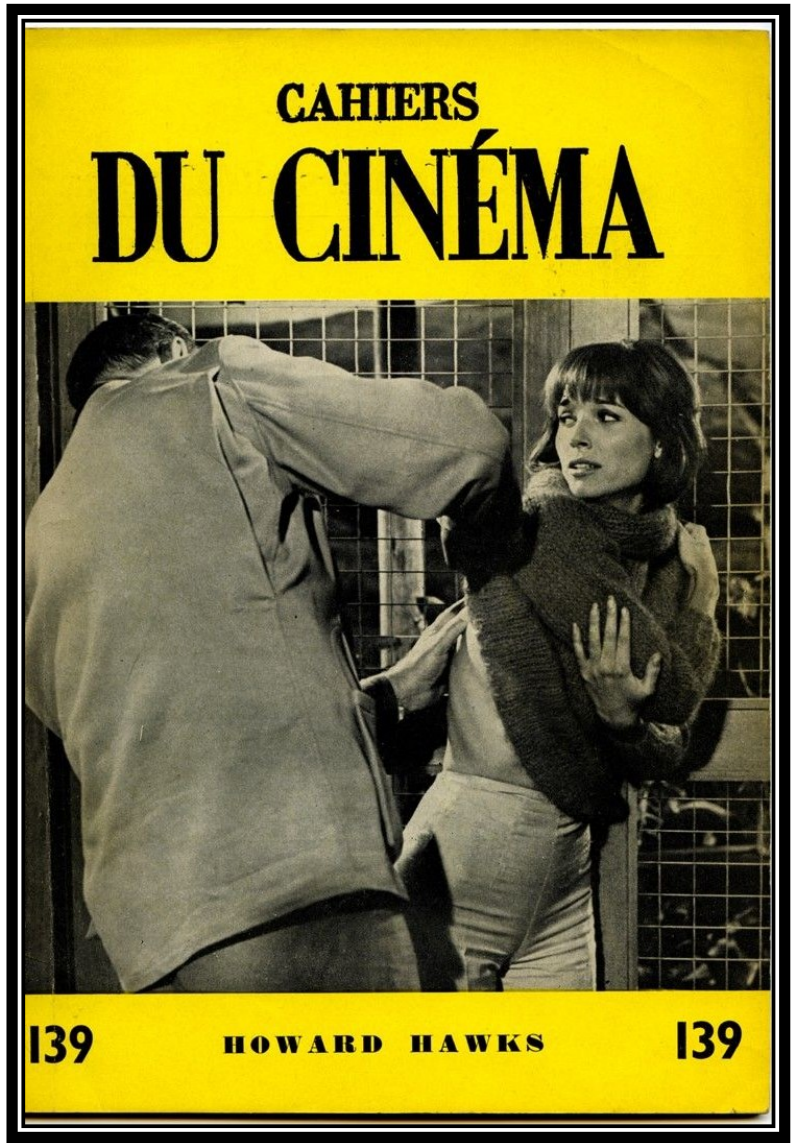
From studio production to package deals

- In classical Hollywood, directors are employed by the studios on contracts: a steady stream of content for studio-owned exhibitors.
- From the 1950s, the studios' role is mainly financers and distributors of smaller number of film "packages" that include script, star, producer, and director.



Work modes and relations in package deals:

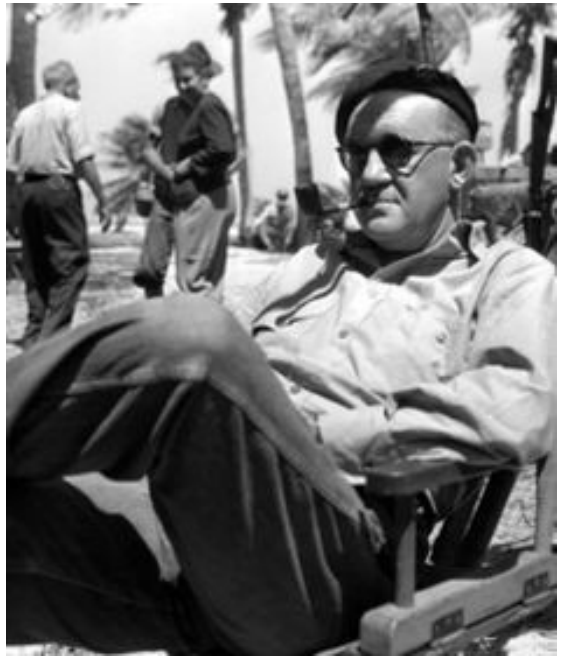
- Directors no longer studio employees: greater independence, but greater insecurity.
- Directors (and other creative workers) must prove themselves to studios over and over with successful films.
- More room for ideas from outside the majors: new executive players bring in new creative players.
- New models of compensation: percentage of box office take, or other rights to content create opportunities for high earnings.
- Importance of bankable talent in the package: directors must sell themselves to studios, studios must sell directors to audiences.

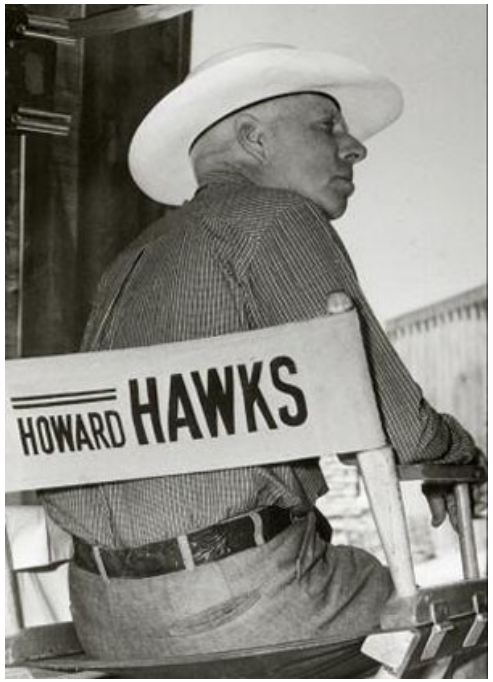


The Emergence of Auteurism

Auteurism as ideology

Auteur theory, emerging in discussions in French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s, is brought to the U.S. mainly through the writings of Andrew Sarris ("Notes on the Auteur Theory", 1962), orienting a generation of film school alumni directors towards the French "Masters".

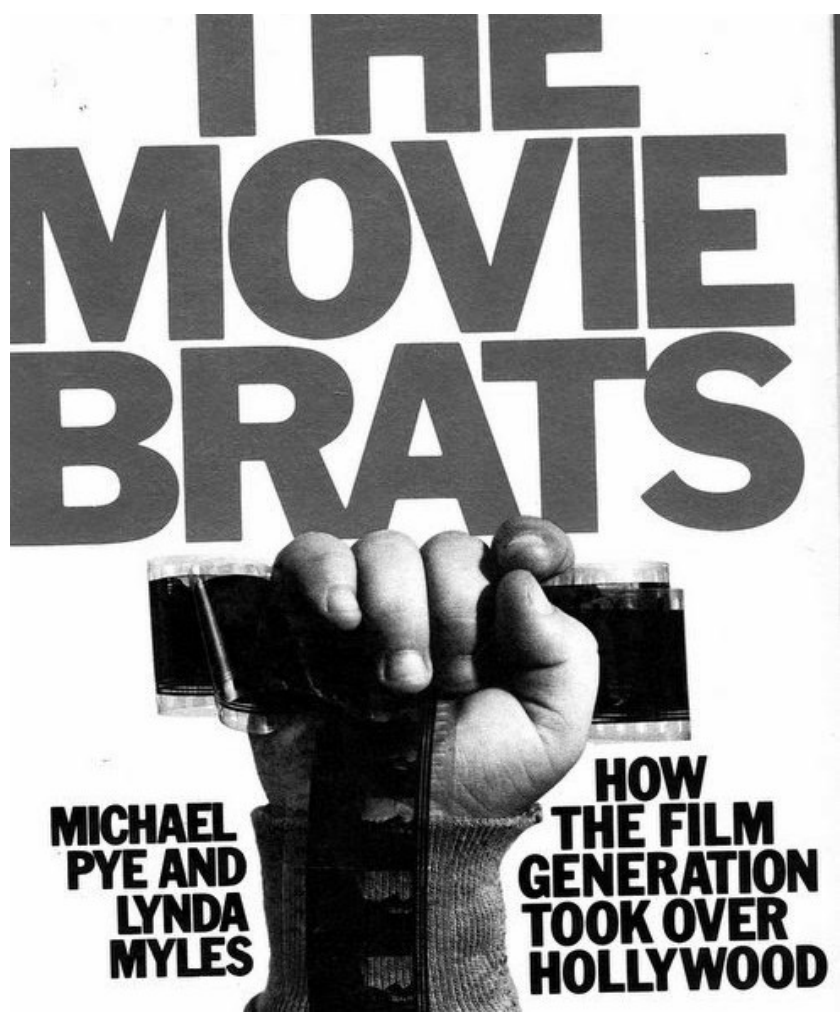




The Emergence of Auteurism

Classical Hollywood auteurs

French auteur theory also "rediscover" auteur directors in studio era Hollywood, just as their films are newly available through art cinemas and television. They are understood as heroic figures who were able to realise personal creative visions despite working within the Hollywood system.



The “Hollywood Renaissance”
(aka the New Hollywood, American New Wave)

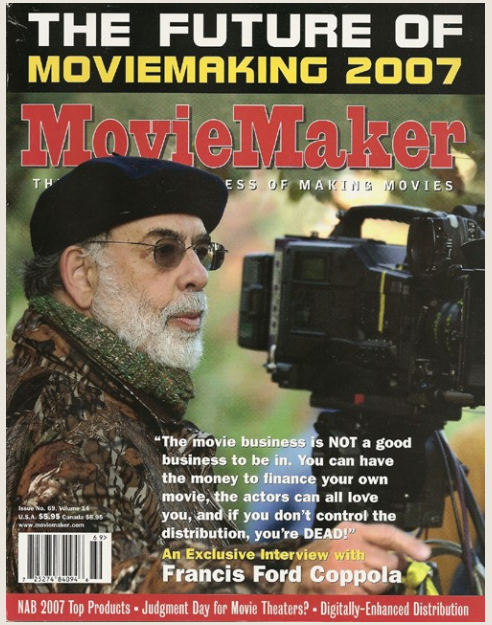
“The Commerce of Auteurism”

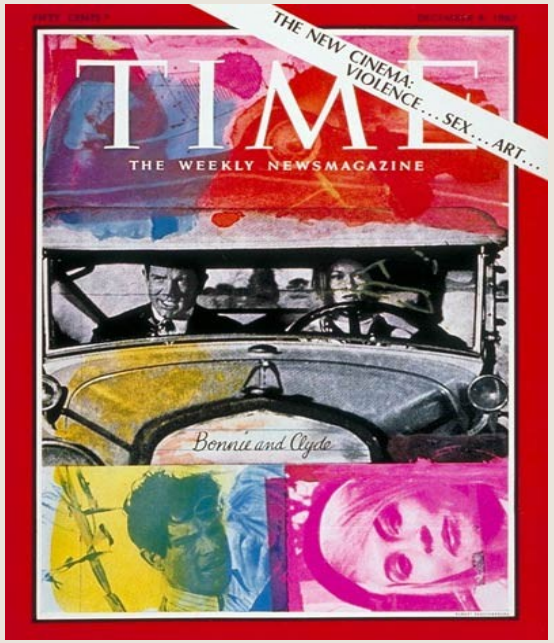
“The name of a director, and varying degrees of auteurist association, can be a considerable asset to the studios. The creation of such an identity is also a benefit to the individual filmmaker. The ultimate achievement for the New Hollywood commercial auteur is to become a distinct brand-identity, marketable on that basis. Stylistic traits and departures from classical conventions are encouraged, up to a point, as a way for the director to leave a distinctive mark or sign of authorship. […] the commerce of auteurism […] phenomenon in which the director rematerialized in the eighties and nineties as an agent of a commercial performance of the business of being an auteur.”

Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema* (I.B.Tauris, 2002) p114-115

Auteurism as performance

The auteur figure is created through conscious evocation of the discourse; through publicity, press materials, interviews.





Auteurism as legitimation

By affirming filmmaking as capable of expressing a personal vision, auteurism provided cinema with cultural legitimacy as a form of art.

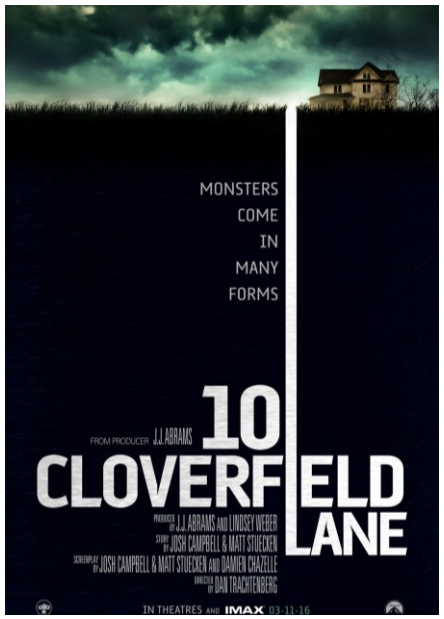
Understanding media promotion: Paratexts

We watch nothing in a vacuum

Additional texts that surround a media product:

- Shape our expectations
- Create our framework for understanding
- Expand the story, the world, and the experience
- Create and add value

SCHWARZENEGGER
In the Year of Darkness, 2029
the rulers of this planet
devised the ultimate plan.
They would reshape the
Future by changing the Past.
The plan required something
that felt no pity. No pain.
No fear.
Something unstoppable. They created
THE TERMINATOR
ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
MICHAEL BIEHN & LINDA HAMILTON
w sensacyjnym filmie amerykańskim
ELEKTRONICZNY MORDERCA
THE TERMINATOR
James Cameron


MONSTERS
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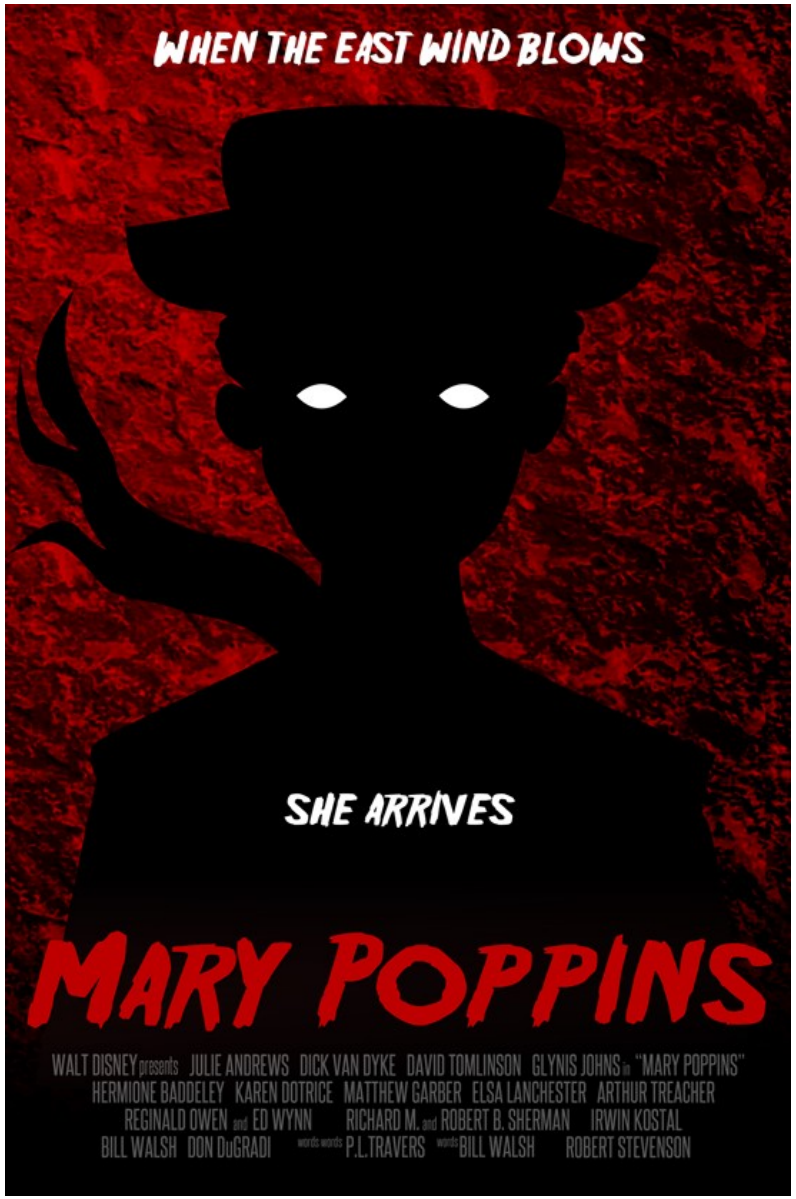
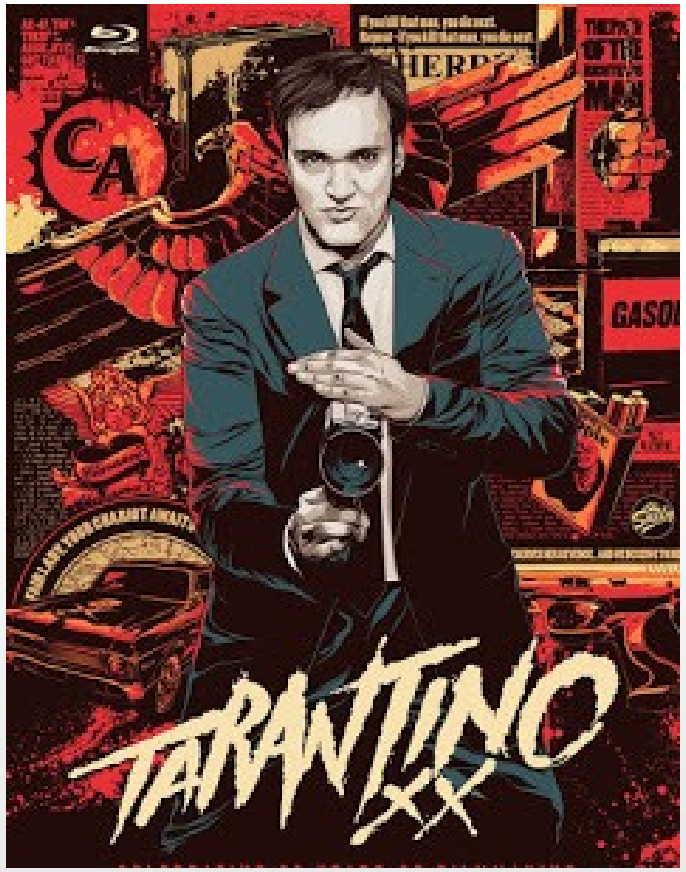

WHEN THE EAST WIND BLOWS
SHE ARRIVES
MARY POPPINS
WALT DISNEY presents JULIE ANDREWS DICK VAN DYKE DAVID TOMLINSON GLYNIS JOHNS in "MARY POPPINS"
HERMIONE BADDELEY KAREN DOTRICE MATTHEW GARBER ELSA LANCHESTER ARTHUR TREACHER
REGINALD OWEN and ED WYNN RICHARD M. and ROBERT B. SHERMAN IRWIN KOSTAL
BILL WALSH DON DaGRADI words and P.L. TRAVERS words BILL WALSH ROBERT STEVENSON


TARANTINO
XX

MONKEYPAW PRODUCTIONS

MUTANT
ENEMY

Exercise: Analysing paratexts

In your groups, select a famous film or film series. Find a special edition DVD or Blu-ray release, and analyse it as a paratext.

- Look at the box and cover design; the back blurb; any inserts or other physical materials included; the special features; try to see if you can find the menu or intro video online and look at their designs.
- What do those elements tell you about the film? How do they frame it? What viewing experience do they invite? How do they add value?