4-3-2010

Honors Senior Project

Matthew T. Dayton
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects

Matthew T. Dayton

Honors Senior Project

3 April 2010

Table of Contents

Blog Entries	Words
14	8,286
Film Responses	Words
5	2,330
Bibliography	Words
10	1,520

12,136 total words

All entries can be found at **http://www.darkesthourfilms.com/** by clicking on 'Senior Thesis' link on the right.

15 January 2010

The Cult of the Auteur- Robert Stam

In "The Cult of the Auteur" Robert Stam recounts the introduction of the auteur theory to the American public by way of Andrew Sarris. Stam discusses not only the critical reactions to such an idea but the requirements of the theory as well. The article almost instantly becomes a thorough introduction to the theory itself for anyone unfamiliar with how engrained it has become in our modern commercial filmmaking industry. As much as I cringe to admit it, this article was one of my first in-depth looks into the idea of the auteur, or at least specifically by that name. Yet for any one at least minimally familiar with the film industry and the placement of film in our society as a whole, the idea of the auteur seems self-evident.

Countless modern films are marketed by listing the director's partial filmography in the trailer. The studios seem to understand, and much marketing research likely supports that audiences who like a film will probably enjoy something similar. At times, it becomes a point of pride to identify whose latest film one will see. And much of the time, expectations about upcoming features will be heavily influenced about what creative minds are involved. Even if, in the case of *Antichrist*, the minds involved have a history of depression preventing work and social obligations from being maintained. This marks our arrival at Lars von Trier, a self-promoting and mentally afflicted Danish filmmaker whose auteurship is far from debated. In this 2009 release, von Trier's connection to the Dogme 95 collective is self-evident as the main characters interact as if in real life, the camera simply documented their escalating struggles. Certain scenes, whether actually adhering to the strict mandates of Dogme 95, appear natural and unadulterated. Further, Trier, whose often describes as visually distinctive, manages to blend the aforementioned realism with the otherworldly and haunting discomfort of an evil forest.

Yet auteurism is more than each film looking the same. Perhaps an auteur-to-the-extreme would find each and every one of his films a carbon copy of its predecessor. Conversely, *Antichrist*'s tone suggests a filmmaker in confusion, perhaps disarray. Be it

the intense violence without need of graphic accompaniment, the brutal and misdirected sexuality, or the eerily unforgettable horror of the woods, the fact the von Trier suffered from depression while making this film only makes sense. Criticized for blatant misogyny, the film explores the gender relations of countless years in modern context with what seem ancient roots. The film, while in fact having Trier's name written in uncomfortable handprint, would have his name all over it regardless. What I find interesting here is how the process of filmmaking, as well as the mental processes surrounding it, influences the final product. Immediately evident is that filmmaking is indeed a process, not a simple and immediate product. And, to hammer it further, such a process needs direction or else it will falter and fade. Thus the auteur, the film's ultimate author, directs this process to his or her preference. *The Wizard of Oz* notably passed creative hands many times before finally residing with Victor Fleming. Von Trier's film, conversely, was scripted and envisioned by the director and nothing about the ultimate mood achieved seems to suggest otherwise.

Auteurism, as I understand it, becomes directly linked to he whom most self-exposes in the final product. Film and filmmaker are inextricably linked by common effort and desire. In the end, much the same as any other desire to create something tangible, film succeeds in immortalizing its creator. At least for the moment.

598

17 January 2010

Film Authorship- Bernard F. Dick from **Anatomy of Film**

It had been the tendency of the *Cahiers du Cinema* writers to rate the directors they admired. Such a policy continued with Andrew Sarris after introducing the auteur theory to America. He argued that such a rating system was but a mere extension from the other arts, where we rate certain artist's works above that of others. Such a practice, for better or worse, has been implemented for many a year and will undoubtedly continue for some time. Yet I wonder, in modern cinema, where do we place those auteurs whose

work is relatively consistent in relation to the director who happens to make a wonderful film? Certainly, as the French filmmakers hailed, a great filmmaker can make a bad film without it damaging his reputation. But it seems more than ever that box office results are the main determinate of who gets money.

Beyond this, though, I question the relevance of any ranking system for today's cinema. First of all, where does one start? If we based rank on how well a film does in the box office or how many Oscars it gets then we negate the very criteria the *Cahiers* writers applaud. If we, then, consider only a director's consistency, then we ignore their popular success, their public approval, their demand as an artist contributing to general society. Yet perhaps this is not of importance. Perhaps, the fact that ranks will always contain discrepancies can dispel our need for rankings entirely. At least official ranking that is.

On the other hand, determining the worth of one film over another is often unchallenging. The question we should ask is whether the presence of the film's author should be considered. Does the fact that it is a Quentin Tarantino film automatically give it more worth than the fact that it is a Zack Snyder film? (Yes, but that is beside the point) No, a film should be based on its individual merit regardless of whose name is stamped onto it. This is, of course, in direct contention with Bazin's formula.

Author + Subject = Work

With this in mind, let me briefly compare the work of two filmmakers I have recently watched selected works from. American film director Frank Capra had a long lasting Hollywood career characterized by feel good and generally patriotic films about human goodness. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* being examples here. Compare these works to Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg whose body horror in *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, and *eXistenz* are a far cry from the light Capra fare. The fact that I have recently viewed a handful of films by these two well-known artists is not the only reason for choosing them. To anyone familiar with these works it becomes obvious how far they are from one another in the filmic kingdom.

The question becomes again, how do we compare these two bodies of work? We could certainly give some points to the longevity of Capra's work, yet Cronenberg has simply not been around as long and may, with time, out-produce Capra in quantity. On the other hand we may credit Cronenberg for his unique visuals and usually wholly original content. Yet Capra's themes seem to run wide and shared in our society. My point being that putting one over the other is simply a matter of personal preference. Much like the *Cahiers* writers, one person's preference does not always coincide with that of their peers.

This still does not answer my original inquiry. Do we rate a director's work as more worthwhile when we can tell whose work it is? And more relevantly, do we need to? Maybe the presence of authorship denotes the individual's continuity and devotion by claiming artistic ownership. It would make sense that we praise those who continue with something to the point that they become proficient. And if this proficiency is measured by their authorial presence, then it only make sense that we admire such a trait. Thus the idea of auteur, regardless of its debated history as a practice or theory, seems not only helpful and fun but important as well.

692

20 January 2010

Please Sign Here- Film Authorship w/ **A Short History of Film**

Writers' names, or at least book titles, are often printed on each page. Painters sign their work. Yet after the opening titles and before the closing credits, the director's name doesn't appear to mark their work. Film demands the dimension of time, unlike painting, so having a signature appear on the bottom corner of every frame would be distracting and unsightly. Yet as we have established, recognizing a director's work is not only possible but occasionally very easy. Where, then, does this come from? How can we recognize immediately that so and so made this film? Is it in the stock characters they bring to every story? Is it in the continued use of special effects, witty dialogue, or

symmetrical composition? Indeed, it is in all of these. The piece as a whole becomes the author's signature and allows its viewers to identify it as such.

As stated, I remember my first foray into the world of David Cronenberg. It was marked by moments of combined shock and amazement. Likewise, I remember my first experience with the savage and upfront (in)humanity of Stanley Kubrick in his 1971 film, *A Clockwork Orange*. It wouldn't be until years later, in the formal structure of film classes, that I would identify the possibility that their work could carry over film to film. I had certainly seen other entries into each of their oeuvres and recognized the repeated elements; I had simply not put a name with it. Now, being conscious of the relevance of the auteur theory and the practice of observing characteristics of film authorship, I am more curious than ever how exactly we come about labeling the auteur. And how thoroughly their style is stamped into each film.

Is it possible, given a certain film or director, to immediately recognize their presence by watching but a fragment of any part of their film? Or do we require at least a scene, an interaction, to grasp its content? Perhaps obviously, story and thematic elements as well as visual style play a large role. If we want dramatic slow-motion and hard-hitting underworld Englishmen then we will likely turn to Guy Ritchie. But what of the case where we get one over the other? What if a director's work clearly exhibits his signature visual style in photography and editing but branches off into entirely new thematic areas? Or the reverse, familiar plot elements and values exhibited in an unfamiliar style? Where would such a piece fit into the oeuvre and how immediately do we see the signature?

Considering a filmmaker's body of work is requisite in discussing their recognizable authorial presence. And sub-standard films can be disregarded. But what of outcasts that don't suffer in quality? What if a director makes a great film that is far removed from their other great films? On the one hand we could give this as validation of their skill, on the other hand we could condemn it for not being their style. More interestingly, could we identify a director whose films bear no resemblance to any other of their films for this reason? Could a director be more original in every piece to the point that their auteuristic film authorship is characterized by diversity and ingenuity?

I seem to have asked more questions than I have answered, yet artistic credit is of utmost importance. We can agree that both form and content is important in recognizing anyone's work. And recognizing work and assigning it a place is standard human practice of categorization and organization. And with this comes evaluation, the ranking of particular works I briefly discussed before. Certainly a film that stands out in an artist's body of work demands attention for its placement and for its displacement. Yet the auteur theory would likely reject such a stray from the norm. It would be forced to abandon the expected signs of authorship and instead observe new ones. Perhaps. 654

28 January 2010

The Active Auteur

It is one thing for a director to be considered auteur, something we have thoroughly discussed here. Yet is another thing for said auteur to be active in the process, to consciously and continuously flesh out their work in the public eye. And while the term *active auteur* is surprisingly new to me the idea seems only too ingrained in the art world. Unlike business or medicine, where creativity and presentation of personal projects are not a regular part of the job, the artist constantly present themselves in their work. However, for every valid interpretation of a piece, for every individual reading and unique viewpoint, there come just as many distorted and unintentional evaluations. This is especially evident in film, where layer upon layer of text can be read to fit the expectations and desires of the audience. Naturally, the audience is composed of hoards of viewpoints, each interpreting and reading the film in a myriad of ways. And while many of these may not be incorrect, the also tend to clutter the filmmakers intentions and can at times dampen the effect. We find this especially evident in cases where the visual content can be challenging and becomes point for discussion thereby ignoring its meaning.

Enter the active auteur, the film author whose participation after the film becomes just as important as his participation in making the film. We have heard countless horror

stories about directors who are forced to alter their films because of studio demands or ratings approval, yet it is few and farther between that we hear about the incorrectly evaluated and mis-criticised works. Obviously, the battle between critic and filmmaker will rage until the end of time, evidence of the personal position of interpretation. However, the active filmmaker encourages the viewers to identify with the reading that was intended in the making of the film. It only comes naturally that one who pours their time and energy into a creative and collaborative work of art would want it to be received correctly. Yet at the same time, art is such a personal exploration for both the maker and the viewer. Certainly no director wants to cheat their audience out of experiencing the film as their own. (Ok, we could find a few) And of course anyone making films does so with the intention that they will be seen, thus finalizing the process.

So then we must ask ourselves, does the given that films are made for an audience negate the desire of the director in helping their reading? In other words, once the film is out, should it be given over entirely to the people it was made for regardless of what afflictions it might garner in the process? Or has the filmmaking process not stopped once the final cut is ready? If this is the case, the creative minds behind the work, who are often willing to engage in talk about its making, must be present and available to present it.

So if we then get more specific, to the auteur whose films bear certain similarities that we have identified and observed, where do we find him and how do we identify him? First, the very notion of the auteur, especially in the self-conscious immersion of the theory today, comes hand in hand with someone who is engaged in their filmmaking practice and would very likely follow through from idea to final evaluation. However, suppose a relatively uninvolved director simply made films, all of the being recognizable in authorship, yet refrained from pulling the oeuvre together as a whole anywhere but the screen. Such a person would either be a recluse or be so incredibly busy that quantity vastly trumped quality. Thus we arrive at a very interesting place in our definition of auteur. For some individuals, this authorship would transcend the screen and arrive in the real world. Of course, this is where it started, the idea of auteur as directorial presence; filmic personality.

661

4 February 2010

David Cronenberg

For a person who wasn't going to school for film, David Cronenberg has carved himself a pretty formidable reputation as both master of horror as well as culturally conscious auteur. From his low budget, Canadian government financed body horror to his recent Hollywood and Oscar nominated family dramas, his career has spanned multiple decades and multiple countries. Yet for all the attention he has received both locally and internationally, his reputation, as a confident and competent director, has not been undermined.

Ernest Mathijs describes Cronenberg as an active auteur, someone whose authorial presence transcends the screen and enters the public sphere to help adapt interpretations and reactions to his films. While many are ready to discount his early efforts to the hoards of b-horror stockpiles, he countered them by claiming artistic merit in his work. And while his string of films through the 80's and 90's certainly deserve such merit uncontested, his early work demanded a bit more defense. In 1981, Cronenberg's film *Scanners* was marketed around a few single seconds of the film. These 47 frames have since entered the cult film kingdom as not only impressive, but immortal. As a character's tense and panicked face contort to supreme fear and submission, his head explodes in a bloody detonation of rabbit livers and dog food. The aftermath, although bloody on-screen, was much more alarming off-screen. Mathijs devotes no less than half a dozen pages to the exploding head, its effects, and its reception. But more importantly, is its connection and importance in the oeuvre of its director.

If the sex parasites and hematophagic armpit plunger weren't enough, *Scanners*' exploding head gave the cautiously minded and socially concerned (read: uptight) something to complain about. The active and attentive Cronenberg defended his film and every film since then that has fared negatively in the public eye for its content; be it sex in *Crash*, masochism in *Videodrome,* or violence in any number of his films. While such

shocking subject matter is often deemed exploitative, its true function is a synthesis of understanding and necessity.

Cronenberg's status as acclaimed Baron of Blood and King of Venereal Horror put him very near, if not atop, the pantheon of cult film directors. So while his visually graphic money shots pertain to the story, they remain important in maintaining the fanship his early films gathered. This is important in recognizing the directorial awareness that has marked his career; a recognition and attention to the audience of his films. Yet this is not limited to the late-night male audience who just want to see exploding heads but expands into the film critic elite who pick apart his films detail by detail and criticize the content. His work has consistently garnered harsh reception by the likes of Robin Wood and others who see his b-grade horror as tastelessly full of sex and violence.

This all said, and again paying attention to his consistent awareness of his films' receptions, Cronenberg's active auteurism seems not only a relevant and advantageous approach but a vastly important one for any artist. As I began discussing earlier, an artist projects his work into view of an audience who will certainly bring different interpretations and run the risk of losing the intended message. This is where the creator can, or should, step in to guide how their work is seen. David Cronenberg has done this since the beginning. 565

6 February 2010

Over Analyzed

I realize that there is a point in analyzing works. I can understand the need to interpret and find reasons for what an artist has done. I can also claim to engage in the process myself. Yet that doesn't deter me from continuously questioning the process. On many occasions I have found myself listening to evaluations and interpretations of films only to think they sounded ludicrous. Then I hear another only to consider it even more

far fetched in comparison to the film than the first one. This is where my leeriness to the practice of figuring out meaning comes from.

I have always been fascinated by the world, particularly for the reason that I can see it. Thus, interesting and strange and beautiful visuals have always been important to me. Further, I can admire a piece of work that is not trying to say anything at all other than being good to look at. This is where I seem to find myself alone. In this business it is all about story. If you have a good story the visuals can be worthless and it doesn't matter. The audience will still get it. But I have often yearned for the opposite. I want something void of meaning, void of story, something I can stare at and be amazed. Obviously, experimental film sweeps in to fulfill this desire immediately, yet even that is riddled with the need for interpretation.

I made a video for class that fit a certain structure and message I was going for. Unsurprisingly, the class found numerous other ways in which to read it. I in no way suggested they were wrong but listened to their ideas instead. However, I did not put them there. They were born from somebody else's mind and exemplify my dissatisfaction with finding a meaning behind everything. Everybody will bring their own idea no matter what is presented. And in a similar vein, one can find whatever they are looking for wherever they look.

Now I am not asking for a schlocky and immature attempt at something so intently driven by entertainment value that it demands the lowest intelligence possible. I simply want the ability to stare at something uninterrupted without having to reason for its inherent magnetism. I guess I just want to see a sunset everywhere.

I suppose it is product of our evolution that we stimulate our intellect to the nth degree. And that is fine. Despite the fact that we are in no danger of extinction, it is indeed good to increase our abilities. Yet at the same time we need to be able to revel in simplicity of liking how something looks. If we really want to get down to it, we are trying to find meaning in the things we create because we are trying to find meaning in the creation of ourselves. And as is obvious, we have yet to satisfactorily find that.
 488

12 February 2010

Let the Film Speak- Stanley Kubrick quote

"I would not think of quarreling with your interpretation nor offering any other, as I have found it is always the best policy to allow the film to speak for itself."

-Stanley Kubrick

The work of Stanley Kubrick is diverse, deep, and highly praised. It is also quite evidently his work; whether it be obsessive use of tracking or the extreme mental states of his characters. The same can be said for the director that has been under much discussion, David Cronenberg. Replace the tracking shots with stationary shots and add lively special effects and gore. However, as has been addressed, Cronenberg is extremely active in the reception and interpretation of his films. This seems like quite and interesting difference than the mindset Kubrick presents in his quote. I am not here to argue the viability of interpreting either of the director's films in any certain way. Rather, I find it curious and perhaps telling, that these two esteemed directors apparently share such different opinions when it comes to the reception of their films.

We could, of course, attribute the difference simply to personality. Kubrick was notoriously hermitic, carving out his own little movie making kingdom and only occasionally and selectively opening up his mind to others. Cronenberg, on the other hand, is open and willing to discuss the nature and state of his filmmaking practice. Regardless of personal style, each director has succeeded in making some (many) of the most important movies to date.

It makes me wonder, then, what this says about each director and their relationship to their craft. Is Cronenberg too heavy-handed in suggesting a certain reading into his films? Is Kubrick too naïve to allow the masses to see what they want to see? Or does the combination of styles produce the fertile critical and theoretical landscape needed to further our understanding of the world of filmmaking? Of course the diversity of readings is what prompts debate and opens up new avenues of thought.   We need conflict in order to progress, to come up with something novel. But, is this better

achieved by an artist sitting back and not giving us any guidance or by taking our hand and leading the way? Or more appropriately, perhaps it is not a question of which is better. (It seems a rare case to find a situation when we are not asked to determine which of two options is better)

Perhaps it is a question of intent. Does Kubrick want us to discover for ourselves despite whether they coincide with his thoughts? Does Cronenberg aim his interpretations so that we both find ways to support and negate and thus inherently foster discussion? It is incontrovertible that both of these director's are intelligent, talented, and conscious of the way their films are received. (And I don't mean to suggest that Kubrick simply washed his hands of the films he made upon their release) Likewise, both have an acute sense of how film works. This being so, each are capable of producing an intended effect, of getting an idea across.

Yet like any work that consumes its creator, filmmakers are indeed caught up in their stories and how they are telling them. They are also incapable of removing themselves from the process that has created the product. Spectators, on the other hand, have much less invested in the film, be it money, sweat, or reputation. Thus we offer a fresh set of eyes to see the work, whether this is superior or not remains debatable. This then opens up discussion for the reading of art by its creator vs its audience, which we will not get into at this time.

578

20 February 2010

From Author to Work – Cinema Genre pg. 104-108

Even before having any familiarity with the authorial presence of a film's maker, and even before any further interest in film aside from watching movies, I was cognizant of the idea of genre. In fact, the concept seems second nature and common sense to anyone who watches movies. It is practically the foremost way in which we organize the countless entries of the cinematic world. Yet aside from seeing a horror film or a kid's

movie, my familiarity with the concept of genres, and their importance, has been limited to identification.

The fact that humans organize the world around them is not lost on the filmic world. The need to categorize is a way of making our sensory stimulations more accessible and bearable. If we had to take each individual aspect separately, without first filtering through familiar settings, our heads would likely explode. Thus the idea of genre comes naturally. Whenever we ask what kind of movie something is, the likely response is one of genre. We could see these as the broadest possible categories, in essence, what kind of film it is. It becomes obvious how important genre recognition can be, and likewise how important familiarity with the genres can be.

As I have discussed a lot recently, the presence of a filmmaking personality can be a large draw for the success of a film. Additionally, the thorough entrenchment of the auteur theory in today's critical world has further validated the filmmaker as artist alongside painters, musicians, and writers whose positions have been secured for ages. Now the concept of genre, a concept that is at times directly linked to the auteur, comes into play. Of course, genre, as a basic categorical tool, comes from any other practice where certain kinds of stories are told based on their content and perhaps delivery.

Thus in moving from an author of a work to the work itself, it would be naïve to completely abandon the creator, just as it is impossible to talk about an artist without talking about the artwork. This person is defined, in part, by what they produce. The relationship between author and work can be varied, as the respective oeuvres of Stanley Kubrick and Danny Boyle attest to, or a director's work may be so consistent in theme and content that one piece blurs into the next.

On the other hand, we can at times ignore the author of a work and talk instead, of the group of works as a whole. Genres are defined by certain characteristics that we can apply film by film. Not that I will be doing this, but the potential is there to evaluate any number of films and their success at representing a particular genre. At the same time, we can cite numerous examples of films that have blurred the line between multiple genres, or simply borrowed components from many and assembled them as desired. The serialization of a film come into play as well when a sequel, while retaining characters or story, etc, is changed from one straight genre to containing aspects of more than one.

It becomes clearer, then, that while at times rigid in content and construction, genres are also malleable and shape shifting. Time changes what we expect, how we see it, and how we evaluate what we see. I am not aiming to trace the path of this or that genre, but simply to explore genre and its place in the modern, and past, cinematic world.

580

1 March 2010

Art on Demand – Purpose of Genre- Moine, Themes of Contemporary Art

Would modern cinema be able to function without the classifications of genre that have been established by a century of filmmaking? Would modern audiences be able to choose a film to see without understanding the categorical organization developed? Would filmmakers even be able to make similar films without an understanding of like-minded films that have come before? Of course, but this doesn't mean genre is irrelevant.

The most blatant purpose of genre is to reproduce a type of film that was successful. Casting aside the art vs. commodity argument for a minute, commercial filmmaking is a business. The American film industry has done a rather amazing job at making it a profitable business at that. Yet their ability to identify the type of films that kept people coming back would not be possible without understanding the idea of genre. On the one hand, the audience likes a certain story and wants to see it again. Thus the proliferation of genre films, be it gangster, western, melodrama, ensures that audiences will find similar films. At the same time, keeping in mind the word 'similar,' the viewers do not (exceptions, of course, exist) want the exact same film a second time around. Thus we get what has come to be called the standardization/differentiation dialectic.

What is interesting is that genre films propagate their own existence. Creating films of similar style/theme is rationalized by their success in the box office. Like stated, the film will then need to differentiate itself from the competition by offering something that audiences have not seen in this particular genre. Naturally, this is not always

achieved and the hoards of entries will fall into obscurity. Thus the downside of consciously creating what is wanted.

Mass production of films diluted the quality of existing films by increasing competition. We could easily blame our culture for insisting one cannot have too much of a good thing and applying the mindset to its arts and creative endeavors. The results can be a commercial compressed and dry film that offers nothing to the viewer but the same old story. It is not my intent to rant about the detrimental effects of commercial filmmaking, I rather like many a film of today. However, the nature of the genre film is both a blessing and a curse, something to look forward to or something to be weary of. It can feel like a prepackaged, assembly line product, yet one that is aimed at pleasing the largest amount of people possible.

Soviet artists Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid hired a professional polling company to find out the average person's aesthetic preferences. The results were used to create paintings, country by country, of the most desired and least desired elements. Of course, the artists did it to comment on the commercial nature art has taken on while at the same time 'selling out' in a way be producing said pieces. The film industry, to a large degree, operates on this very same research. The most successful movies are the one that will get reproduced, serialized, re-released, and most advertised. But does the matter of size, the fact the movies can cost millions and paintings not so much, validate its system? If a painter only painted what people wanted, knowing it would make money, would they be selling out all the time? Would they even be creating art? Would this style of work make the product nothing more than a commodity for mass consumption? If that were the case, a large majority of this country's films would fit the bill. More later. 595

19 March 2010

Liking Genres

There is something inherently comfortable about seeing a straight genre film. The fact that we are more comfortable and accepting of things we are familiar with may have something to do with it. The genre film does not come alone. The package includes the very distinctions that make it a genre film in the first place. Here, we have expectations as to what we see on screen, how the story will play out, possibly lines of dialogue or at least topics and themes that will play out in the narrative. It is true that seeing a genre film, that is the act of watching a film whose content we know before seeing it, tends not to be a challenging experience. I am not referring to the content of the story, not trying to say that a crime drama is going to be a neat and clean and enjoyable experience. Rather, I am referring to the fact that with a film whose genre is clearly defined we do not have to consider where in the cinematic spectrum of films this particular entry falls. We can devote our attention entirely to the story itself without stepping back and asking ourselves what the movie is about.

I am intentionally generalizing. I won't suggest that anything is absolute; especially when it comes to film, whose parts can easily intermingle and transform. Yet when a film comes to us, whose parts are clearly defined and easily identified, the experience of watching it is not threatening. We do not have to guess as to its content or struggle in placing it. The next natural thing to do, then, is question the effects this has on the quality of the film itself. In a world so saturated by film, those that are straight reproductions falter the most. Audiences get bored and we want something new, for the most part. But there is also joy of watching a familiar story unfold, one of the reasons we return to the same movie again and again. Thus the pleasure of the genre film rests on a precarious edge.

I suppose it would be possible to watch the same kinds of movies forever and ever, but I would have to get tiresome. Such a practice, when chosen, would have had to been with maximum enjoyment in mind. And as sequels, remakes, reboots, and genre films themselves prove, people do indeed like familiarity. Thus we are proving the genre film to be a comfortable place from which to watch the world, even if it is an entirely cinematic world. Does this then mean that the straight genre film, one that does not mix numerous genres together, is a close-minded decision on the part of the film viewer? Are

we choosing not to challenge ourselves to different modes of discourse and topics of conversation?

I would like to think not. I will instead assume that the genre film is but one of many entries into any filmgoers participation log. For anyone who watches films with regularity, it is obviously an enjoyable experience. Thus approaching a film with particular and certain expectations in mind is also done with a sense of purpose. With so many films out there to experience, genres may make the selection process a bit more manageable. 546

Test Screening

It is not an uncommon occurrence for films to be screened prior to release. The objective is to gauge an audience's reaction and alter the film so that more people will like it. So what does this mean? It means that the 'art' is being changed so that it is more widely accepted. Now it goes without saying, even though I have said it plenty, that the film industry is undoubtedly (and no one is pretended otherwise) a business. And yes, it makes good business sense to get as large a demographic as possible to make the most money as possible.

On the one hand this is good. It proves the best chances of a particular film being successful and thus the best chances of other films getting made. It ensures the continued success of the industry. Like the Oscar ceremonies (the word *monies* conveniently hidden within), they keep attention and interest in a product that survives on getting attention. Test screenings are a way for a filmmaker to know how the audience feels about the work; how it might be made better (read: more broadly accepted) and what they did not like (read: what will not make the final cut). Thus it provides areas in which the people involved might wish to make changes.

So on the other hand, it means that the production company is simply giving the audience what it wants. From an artistic standpoint, then, this sounds the alarm. Art, in and of itself, should not conform to the desires of those who look at it. If anything, art has always stood to challenge its viewer, to make them see things in a new way, to look

outside the normal parameters in which their gaze is limited. But as we can be assured, the most challenging movies are usually the ones that a.) do well only because of the controversy involved in their reception, or b.) fail to find and audience and fade into filmic obscurity.

So we may wish to find a balance. But we should also take into account the nature of film. Unlike any other art form, film encompasses numerous areas of creativity and is truly the most complicated collaborative art. Cinematographers and actors and production designers and wardrobers and make-up artists all compile their skill and vision into a (hopefully) cohesive and complimentary work. Further, the temporal aspect of film means that small, short lasting aspects represent a smaller percent of the larger whole. Thus a little trim here and a deletion here do not affect the final product as much as it does with other media.

This in mind, the notion of a test screening comes into a bit more acceptable light. All the work that has gone into the film is still there, some obvious, some subtle. The only way to take it all away is to abandon the film entirely. It is now a question of intent. Is a creative choice made because it fits and *bene*fits the piece as a whole or because it makes money. And is the money enough of a benefit to warrant it? And for those not convinced, is it ever warranted to alter a work, an artist's vision, to make it more popular?

Keep in mind that all this refers to film with enough money in the first place to afford test screenings. We are mainly talking big films that already challenge the viewer to lend the term 'art' to their description. This does not mean the topic is irrelevant however. It is simply the context in which the discussion takes place. 599

20 March 2010

Cronenberg and Genre

If one were to examine the most recent films of David Cronenberg, *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Eastern Promises* (2007), it would be easy to prematurely conclude

that he works solely in the family drama. But unless the population of films from which one is observing is 3, then 2 samples doesn't manage a very representative examination.

While the concept of family has indeed pervaded his work form the beginning, it has only been in the most recent millennium that Cronenberg films have narrowed focus and arrived precisely at this category. Early in his career, the director was most fascinated with assaults on the body, and from within the body, found most readily available in the horror genre.   Thus his filmmaking career came to prominence as scientific experimentation goes wrong and the effects cannot but help detriment society. Yet within these relatively straight horror films the family would still play an important role.

As the 80's transitioned in, Cronenberg's film incorporated additional science fiction elements that had been hinted at in the previous decade. The director assaulted his characters by using their own bodies against them. His work continued through the next decade, described more accurately by his adaptations of other's works with his own brand stamped on.

Thus the oeuvre has incorporated numerous genres, at times mixing, at times sampling. Of more interest here, aside from what particular genres the director navigated, is the effect that such navigation has on his career. Long established as one of the foremost cult film directors, in the new millennium, he finally admits to being able to 'sell out.' And Cronenberg is not the only director to have started out in horror, made a name for himself, and moved more mainstream. However, his career can still be defined largely by the horror elements, specifically his commanding hold on body horror.

It would now be relevant to examine how the concept of auteur is related to the idea of genre. As is evident, the range of Cronenbergian films remain distinguishable despite exploration of numerous genres. While other directors have been firmly cemented into a particular genre and identified with such, Cronenberg has managed to stray. It is still most relevant to describe him as a horror director, at least for a little while longer until his body of work more populated with films the reject the horror completely. (If it is possible for him to ever reject it *completely*)

It would also be relevant to include the production sensibility behind sticking to a genre. With success of a particular film it make sense for producers to place the director

at the helm of a film that deals with similar themes since he has proved himself able to tackle them in an understandable and available way. This is not to say that such a pattern can be altered. It can indeed, as the director gains credibility he also gains freedom.

I think it goes without saying that genre is an important component of the filmmaking practice both from an industry standpoint and a personal standpoint. It allows both an audience to demand work and a filmmaker to deliver it.

 525

24 March 2010

Borrowing or Stealing – Conventions of Connection- Braudy

There exists a curious dynamic within the film genres as explicated by the genre films that they bear. Leo Braudy notices the side that seems to assault our notions of what art should be.

> "Genre films offend our most common definition of artistic excellence: the uniqueness of the art object, whose value can in part be defined by its desire to be uncaused and unfamiliar, as much as possible unindebted to any tradition, popular or otherwise."

Genre films, by their very nature, will contain the stereotypes, expectations, and allusions that define their being. Thus the genre film is a part of a whole, a single entity that cannot exist alone without the context of the similar films and themes that surround it. Thus it is necessary for it to be called a genre film for it to exhibit characteristics of such a film.

At the same time, as has been stated before; the film cannot simply replicate down to the detail everything that has already been done. This would, without a doubt, offend much more than our common definition of artistic intelligence. While they may still find something worthy in it, as can be done with *anything*, as a whole it would not be accepted. Thus the genre film must strike the particular balance between new and old. It

must insert enough of the past to be recognizable while introducing enough of the present to be relevant. "Within film the pleasures of originality and the pleasures of familiarity are at least equally important."

We might also wish to look at the timing of any particular film as a part of the genre as a whole. Say film x came out with components a, b, c, d, and e. (a, b, c will be generic conventions) Let's say film y came out with a, b, d, f, g. Film z has c, g, h, and i. If we can allow this simple formula to stand for our films we can see that x and z bear little resemblance to one another. The fact that they came out years apart means that the particular aspects of the genre had changed and the films in between imagined new concepts.

With this vastly simplified example, the malleability of genre becomes evident. Filmmakers have the choice to adhere strictly to the conventions that define the genre or to liberate themselves freely from what has been done. It is inevitable, then, that they would arrive at genre mixing and feel compelled to insert the expectations or themes from a separate and distinct genre. Genre theory as a whole has received criticism because of this point; the boundaries and definitions are foggy at best. Where one ends and another begins is hard to define unless each example were to be a strict and formal representation of the genre.

This would be a rare thing; a film that so exactly captures one and only one genre that the boundaries become obvious and can be traced out on a piece of paper. Evidently, film is not anything near a straight black and white line but rather a multi-colored, multi dimensional web the connects, breaks, jumps, dodges, and disappears where ever it sees fit. The fact that there is so much freedom both technically and narratively makes it such a broad and shape shifting *thing* that trying to pin it down with terms like genre, auteur, etc. is the best we can do.

So when a filmmaker makes a film, particularly a genre film, they hopefully have some understanding of what they are making. As an audience, we then have to decide both what was used and how so. Is the filmmaker simply taking something that already existed and stripping it of a few aspects and claiming it new? Or are they taking something new and inserting things that have already been done? Do these simple abstracts even apply to the nature of film or does the particular film exist somewhere on a

spectrum between the two? And at what point does borrowing become stealing and does inspiration become plagiarism?

 680

27 March 2010

Do Genres Make Us Lazy? – Genre Film: A Classical Experience – Sobchack

It has been well discussed here how the audience to a genre film approaches it with a set of expectations. As Thomas Sobchack explains it, "the plot is fixed, the characters defined, the ending satisfyingly predictable." I have questioned the spectator's reasons for choosing a genre film over another that does not fit a particular model. And while I will certainly not complain about the genre film's status, that does not prevent me from questioning its ethics.

Film is most certainly a form of entertainment. It is also a thought-provoking and socially relevant mode of communication. Thus choosing to watch a genre film can be seen as a choice that one makes with the assumption that it has the highest possibility of yielding a positive result. This is precisely why they are made. So producing a genre film could potentially be seen as a plight of laziness on behalf of the filmmakers. Potentially, not always. That is not my concern at the present time. Rather, I approach the topic from the audience standpoint.

"It is that which we expect in a genre film and that which we get," states Sobchack. So in decidedly picking a genre film we lend no creativity to our conjectures of the final product. Does this mean we are lazy in our decision? My aim here is not the world at large but rather our current American society that is already plagued with clear and unapologetic displays of laziness. It only makes sense, for the modern general public, that such laziness would manifest itself in the forms of media it chooses to ingest.

The claim could be made that it is the industry's fault for continuing to make formulaic pictures. It is strictly a chicken and egg debate at this point. However, it is only going to change when the studios feel that money can be gained by making something original. Here comes the problem. We are not a society that is particularly

fond of immediate change and it is usually much easier to take what is convenient. So it seems that my initial question could be reversed. Does laziness make genres?

Stating it like such makes it sound a little absurd. There are numerous factors not being taken into account and today's society is nowhere near a mirror image of society during the birth of film and film genre. Regardless, the film genre remains an important mode of discourse for affirming our ideological stances and broadcasting them to the masses. Thus we continually demand that which we want to see and that which with we agree. I am not suggesting that genres are the only way in which the ideology is perpetuated, but it is the most cinematically available.

So we can return to the original question, this time ignoring any other factor and focusing entirely on choosing between a genre film and any other film. Sure, there is a degree of laziness in picking something that will do versus something that could be more challenging. Thus the genre film and film genre are more than industrially relevant products but are clearly socially relevant, as reflected in their existence. 525

<center>**Film Responses**</center>

Videodrome (1983)

        Being the first Cronenberg film to put under my belt, this high school discovery unearthed an immediate fascination with the synthetic/organic nature of the director's work. The fact that I was not well versed in the b-horror area, nor had I much exposure to the visceral and graphic assaults on the flesh, certainly contributed to _Videodrome_'s immediate ascension to the heights of my favorite films list. Watching it years later, I found I was able to identify more of the social relevance of the media influence. The psychological and sociological connections would likely elude me until later viewings.

        Watching it now, more than 4 years and 1,100 movies later, I find my self no less engaged and no less fascinated with the 27 year old film. Be it the strange breathing VHS, the seamless excursions into fantasy, or the technical mastery of an electronic world fused with the biological, Cronenberg's story seems a sci-fi nightmare or a unnerving prophecy. Either way, the uncertain discomfort in not knowing the digital world from the real seems even more relevant today than Cronenberg imagines it in the 1980's. The advanced state of computer image making and visual manipulability only blends the line between the virtual and the actual. And with health concerns from cell phones and similar electronic gadgets, the infectious nature of our own creations may not stray that far from the horrific mental machinations found in this film.

        Videodrome also exists on another plain. While my first experiences with it certainly didn't examine the personal and individual characteristics, repeated viewings have made me notice the character and their existence in the story. Each and every one is tied to the TV, be it as slave, as master, or as sidekick. For some the pleasure is financial, for others it is sexual. But Cronenberg's creation doesn't imagine a world where cheap porn and increased viewership demand attention. Rather, this neurotic lifestyle that encompasses everyone onscreen is reflected to everyone looking at the screen. Pleasing our most scopophilic desires we navigate this uncertain and unfamiliar tech/flesh synthesis. The TV has become the retina of the mind's eye. It's only scary how true this is becoming and how connected to, nay dependent on technology we have made ourselves. 374

31 January 2010

Rabid (1977)

Being the earliest entry into the Cronenberg oeuvre I have seen, it also feels the most deliciously classic. The visceral money shots that pre-date his most well known films are right at home and in appropriately raw form. In the wake of a motorcycle crash, a young girl undergoes lifesaving experimental surgery that leaves her hungry for blood, which she sucks from other humans through a blunt proboscis located under her left armpit. Those that she bites turn rabid, foaming from the mouth with bloodshot eyes and a hunger for flesh. The film has the air of a zombie outbreak, although in this case started by innocent porn star Marilyn Chambers in the quaint Quebec countryside.

Rabid is a telling film in the avid work of Cronenberg. The dangers of medical experimentation are explored to extensive degrees and the wider impact clearly warned of. Yet in comparison to heavier films like *Videodrome*, it is relatively easy to sit back and enjoy. Evidence of the young state of his career, this film certainly paves the way, both thematically and visually, for what Cronenberg will be most remembered for. We see it here in the rampant flesh explosions as the rabid citizens are gunned down. We also are treated to the fleshy orifice from which the hematophagic plunger emerges. And while the film may not be the most technically developed of its kind, its inclusion in this particular oeuvre awards it more credibility than the slew of b-grade horror films that surround it.

Yet the place that most solidifies this film into Cronenberg's body of work is in its warning. Similar to a host of his other films, *Rabid* bluntly exercises fear of the scientific experimentation from which the blood-thirsty girl is created and in turn infects a population. It is in the guise of help, to create a morphogenetically neutral piece of flesh that can replicate any other, that the doctor grafts her skin in an attempt to save her life. And while the potential for such a procedure is more than relevant and current, this case is marked by a severe and dramatic failure.

What *Rabid* is, then, is a tentatively shlocky yet important stepping-stone for Cronenberg. One cannot expect to arrive at the top, especially with the content and

themes of films that are to follow. And just as relevant, and hinted above, the film would likely be a formulaic and perhaps forgettable horror entry if the commanding career of the director had not prospered (in a manner of speaking) as it has.   425

2 February 2010

The Brood (1979)

       The Brood is the only film in my recent memory to actually give a physical response to its horrifying content. And while the childlike munchkins that elicited the response have been given ample screen time in numerous horror films sense, Cronenberg's puts them to most effective use here. However, they are accompanied by a rather thorough melodramatic development about family relationships. Although the lengthy expositions may be occasionally out of place for a horror film, they also effectively work to delay the scare and let it brew just a little longer.

       A mother who is undergoing radical and experimental psychotherapy manifests her fear and anger physically; into childlike beings that she births from an external womb and cleans of blood with her mouth. These creatures wreak havoc on her relatives before their source is discovered, causing her ex-husband and daughter the most distress. Admittedly personal, the story is further Cronenbergian in its cultist representation that has found a place in many of his films. And while it contains some classic and disturbing visuals that mark his signature, the film is perhaps the only film that sets out with intention to scare.

       We are not immediately treated to the brood, whose faces are distorted and often hidden in the hoods of their brightly colored snowsuits. Yet their evilly mischievous ways are alerted to from the outset. These children, far from innocent, seem to have an infatuation with beating their victim's head as a kill tactic. Effectiveness is not open to discussion. But the way in which the brood are handled cinematically; carefully obscured, identified by sound, allowed only a quick glimpse, make their first bodily appearance both frightening and disturbing. They have not the soft and clean childhood innocence in their faces nor would their actions conflict such. The success of the film as

actually scary comes from this oddity, from what appears to be a small clan of murderous elves.

        The Brood hit the scene during a horror movie extravaganza and fared well. At the same time, it was criticized for its misogynistic material and the fact that Cronenberg admits its source as his recent divorce. Nonetheless, the movie remains a creepy and mildly disturbing entry into the horror genre and further proof of the director's genre mixing capabilities.   380

22 February 2010

<u>The Fly</u> (1986)

        I would argue that Kurt Neumann's original film is nothing to shake a stick at. And for that matter, neither is the George Langelaan short story that inspired it. However, 28 years after Neumann's film, Cronenberg proves that there was a lot more squirm-inducing fun to be had with the story aside from the warnings of playing with science. The fact that the film would be a commercial success for Cronenberg certainly doesn't hurt its appeal, nor does Jeff Goldblum's eccentric and excited performance.

        While the story may not be his, Cronenberg's name is all over this film, and I don't just mean in the title. The lone mad scientist protagonist resumes his social and biological reign of terror on himself and the minds of those watching him. In this film, his eagerness costs him his life, and for a while, his appearance. Yet before his ear falls off and he starts ripping off his own fingernails, he perceives the newfound physical advantages as therapeutic and cleansing. But if we have seen a Cronenberg film, we know that things won't remain so nice for long. The special creature effects have reached a fantastic complexity and grotesquery in this film. What makes them work so well, aside from fan pleasing vomit drop and gravity prone body parts, is their evolution. Unlike the original fly, Seth Brundle doesn't suddenly appear as half-man and half-fly. His mutations, a cancerous disease, occur in stages that degrade his body almost exponentially.

We know that bodily transformations and assaults are a defining characteristic of Cronenberg films since the beginning, and *The Fly* proves to be the pinnacle of their employment. The fact that it is a fly becomes relevant, not only because it is someone else's source story but because of the aversion to creepy crawlies by the general public. If Brundle had slowly turned into a dog it would be much less shocking but certainly just as strange. Bugs would not, even with the brutal death of the fly, disappear from Cronenberg films. *Naked Lunch* would find a typewriter beetle as a main character and the 2002 film would be called *Spider*. It is hard to see Cronenberg as anything but the mad scientist behind whose experiments are carried out from behind the camera lens. Much has been discussed in terms of his appearance, his 'autobiographical' cameos and characters of curious similarity to the director himself. To me, though, nowhere is this more evident than in *The Fly*. As a child that also collected bugs and creepy crawling things in my childhood, the fusion of man and fly represents much of what I wish I had come up with.

Additionally, there exists a concept in this film that is vastly disturbing, and I don't mean a human insect hybrid. There is a scene where Brundle transports a piece of steak. The steak appears perfectly normal to the eye, but to the tongue it is a different story. In a world where Photoshop has transformed our evaluations of the legitimacy of images, the steak is an early warning of not being able to trust what we see. However, the steak goes beyond mere image and into the physical. It is a three dimensional object created by a computer from the same particles comprising a real steak. Yet, this piece of meat was reinterpreted by the machine, into something inedible. Like a Photoshopped picture you cannot trust, this is a Photoshopped steak you cannot eat. I fear to think that it is only a matter of time before such technology invades our world.

Thus Cronenberg proves himself a forward thinking and innovative director by breathing new and original life into a tried and true story. His signature brand of gore reached mass audiences and grossed them out. At the same time, his scientific and technological warnings, whether heard or ignored, indicate his social awareness.
648

28 February 2010

eXistenZ (1999)

Cronenberg's film feels more relevant now than it must have upon its release more than a decade ago. The film exists in a videogame world where the line between reality and virtual reality is not always distinct. The advancing complexity and quality of today's video games are much closer to making this possible than they were ten years ago and we can only imagine what ten years from now will look like. But unlike many forward looking films, Cronenberg's resists the urge to imagine a world of shiny technology in favor of one more primal. The world in eXistenZ is based in the mind with access granted via bodily penetration, which opens up a world of mutated amphibians, and guns made of bone and teeth.

Having first viewed the film nearly two years ago, my appreciation for it has only grown. The diegetic uncertainty of the characters is projected onto the audience as they try to decipher what is happening and why. Per usual, Cronenberg infuses the virtual world with varying examples of grotesquery. The assembly line of deformed and hybrid amphibians seem to approach normality in a world where genetic manipulation and hazardous chemical spills already transform the creatures. The living game controllers are a bit farther off whereas the bioport from which they receive energy might not be such a stretch. The greatest examination Cronenberg plays with is the concept of the game world and our willingness to partake in it. The eXistenZ players are literally in a state of suspended animation while their minds explore a fictitious yet more stimulating environment. It is a very unexaggerated example of how much time is consumed by mindless entertainment. Further, the film examines the morality found in a virtual world. Avatars come and go at the hands of the protagonists without any thought of the bodies that control them. Cronenberg exaggerates the violence, playing to the tradition of expending a great quantity of ammunition.

eXistenZ could be seen as a game created entirely in the flesh. The means by which it is accessed and played are void of synthetic components and contained in the neural networks of the squirming controller pod. The umbilical cord that plugs into the

spine will bleed when severed and then pod itself can become diseased. Dissection of both pod and gun finds no mechanical parts, only flesh, bone, blood, and living tissues. Is Cronenberg suggesting that one day our entertainment will literally be fused with our bodies?

I don't think so. Rather, he highlights potential physical, social, psychological, and ethical dangers of being consumed by virtual world created solely for entertainment. One of the game testers comments on the dilation of the game whereby the hours spent in a game encompasses more time than the external world. Players could live for hundreds of years inside the game, and if given the opportunity, many probably would. Cronenberg certainly realizes the inherent danger in a society should it be consumed by video gaming zombies. And from this he makes an awesome movie.   505

<u>Narrative</u>

Research for this project could be said to have begun in high school, when I first started exploring the world of film. My main concern with the Honors Project was that it continues this education in a direction that was both interesting and relevant. Applying it to the growing global web only made sense.

All in all, the project totaled to over 12,000 words. The dozen assigned blog posts became fourteen as I found more articles and ideas that sparked my interest. I added a fifth film response above the necessary four and the conclusion of this project means very little in terms of my ongoing writing. I will continue to write and research outside of an assigned project. The inclusion of an annotated bibliography in the project parameters were helpful in requiring me to evaluate the sources and limiting me to reputable material from which to draw. The 1,500 words of annotations are themselves a good reference for me to remind myself which sources I would like to further explore in the coming years.

To say my writing was temporally consistent would be to suggest I new precisely what I would target from the beginning. This is not so. Many of the preliminary sources did not contribute to the final bibliography. Many new articles came my way via Winter Semester courses as well as books acquired between the proposal and starting the project. My regular reading even prompted a quote from which I drew comparisons to Cronenberg and his filmmaking style. Thus the relative freedom with which the project was designed had twofold benefits. First, it allowed me to choose sources that were of superior interest. Second, it only promoted my further exploration of unknown sources with the hope that their content may spark an idea. I did not complete each post on consistent days of the week and my productivity fluctuated. Having not taken spring break into consideration, I found myself a bit behind. However, I was still technically on schedule because the months prior had seen me write a few essays above the assignment.

In tandem with my Film and Video Senior Thesis paper, the Honors Project saw me exploring the film theories of auteur and genre. Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg being the subject of my film thesis, these two theories were perhaps the most relevant. While I had separate reading for film, the articles used for the blog posts overlapped in content. The articles on auteur addressed aspects of Cronenberg's career and the books on the filmmaker mention explicitly his status as film author. Thus the

infusion of auteur specific reading and Cronenberg specific reading supported one another and made for a more solidified understanding of his importance. Likewise, Cronenberg started off in strict horror films, which made my exploration of genre theory not only relevant but also necessary in understanding the filmmaker. The chosen readings and writings became heavily influenced by information surrounding Cronenberg.

I noticed, as I went along, that I would ask almost as many questions as I would answer. When I learn I always find new ways to look at the subject and new questions about it. Thus these writings keep forcing me to try to answer the new uncertainties that arose. One of the most rewarding realizations during this project was when I would encounter relevant ideas in other readings. During assigned reading for a separate film class I was introduced to other artists who challenged the concepts of genre and what defines art. This became a large preoccupation in my writings and thoughts.

Reflecting on the project as a whole, I realized how much it influenced the other writing I was doing. My usual website posts hardly existed without reference to auteur or genre after exploring each theory. Given that the style was more personal and conversational, my class papers needed reworking to appear more polished and professional. And the fact that Cronenberg was one of my favorite filmmakers made exploration of his place in film history only more meaningful. I have come to appreciate his worth more than I did before.

To conclude, this project was not a walk in the park. It was not a simple little blog post every week. It was, as it is intended to be, an augmentation of a large Senior Thesis paper that has required countless hours of reading and film watching and analyzing and writing. But the additional hours devoted to the Honors Project have only strengthened the thesis paper. The freedom in the Honors Project design rounded out the exploration of David Cronenberg more fully and gave me room to explore the context in which his ideas come about. Thus the project succeeded in being the helpful and beneficial augmentation that it was designed to be.

Bibliography

Braudy, Leo. "Genre: The Conventions of Connection." *Film Theory and Criticism*.
      Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. Oxford University Press: New York,
      2009. 535-551. Print.

           Braudy deconstructs the placement of genre in the social context and
           focuses part of the essay on the reaction of genre throughout many art
           forms. Before devoted half of the writing to the specifics of the musical,
           which had little relevance to my discussion, he calls attention to the way in
           which genre violate our expectations of art and originality. Braudy
           examines the expectations of generic conventions and the inability of one
           genre film to be taken separately from the whole in the way in which it
           inevitably interacts with other similar texts. He questions whether genres
           will continue to be relevant down the road while ate the same time
           explicating the importance of the classics in today's cinema. Braudy
           begins to say a lot of interesting things that I had searched for since
           writing about genre, it is unfortunate he devotes so much to the particulars
           in the musical.

Dick, Bernard F. "Film Authorship." <u>Anatomy of Film.</u> New York: St. Martin's Press,
      1978. 129-153.

           Having read this book a year back and citing it in numerous papers since, I
           was familiar with its information. Although a bit dated in areas, the
           chapter on film authorship and the auteur theory is still relevant and
           factual. Dick traces the historical path of the theory from France to the
           United States. He addresses the arguments that took place about the
           validity of the theory. He goes on to explore the types of auteurs,
           independents and studio directors, and continues in defining their
           techniques. Here Dick strays a bit, he attempts to precisely identify the

auteur by naming how they work. He then proceeds to devote the rest of the to Billy Wilder, fully exploring his oeuvre and arguing for him as a great case study. In whole, though, the chapter is ripe with information about authorship and provides and excellent jumping off point for exploring it further.

Dixon, Wheeler Winston and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster. "The Auteur Theory." <u>A Short History of Film.</u> New Jersey: Rutger's University Press, 2008.

>This section explores the auteur theory as it relates to the American directors of which the theory's creators held on high regard. The authors go into details by covering a handful of well-known American directors and their works. Further, they briefly explore the producer and other film crew roles ability to be considered the auteur of a film. What the reading lacks in depth it makes up for by infighting thought about the theory as a whole and how it is identified. The book as whole covers the scope of film history, stopping to explore the important figures of each time period and highlighting the significant social and political climates from which renowned and important films arose. An additional glossary of terms makes this book and excellent reference and has been a resource for numerous class projects and papers.

Kagan, Norman. <u>The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick.</u> New York: Grove Press Ince. 1972.

>My original thoughts for my Film and Video Senior Thesis had me gearing towards the work of Stanley Kubrick. However, his populiary made me desire a director of a bit more obscurity. Regardless, I have still read up on Kubrick quite a bit and this particular book is one of my own. Kagan, unfortunately, devotes a bit too much of his writing to the plot of Kubrick's films rather than his reactions. This means that rather than much information we are simply treated to the same material we could get

from watching the film. The book stops after *A Clockwork Orange*,

leaving a handful of the director's later film out. The most useful aspect,

and the one that fostered the accompanying entry (Let the Film Speak), is

the inclusion of Kubrick quotes at the beginning of every chapter. This is

an excellent way of getting into the director's head and seeing things

through his eyes.

Mathijs, Ernest. <u>The Cinema of David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to
Cultural Hero.</u> London: Wallflower Press,   2008.

        Mathijs's book provides a well rounded yet in-depth exploration of the

entire Cronenberg oeuvre from his first feature up until his most recent

2008 release. Most chapters contain a pair of films, discussed in

chronological order, that provide insight into the state of the director's

career at the time of it's making. The book provides a crucial

social/political context by describing the short and long-term reactions to

the films both domestically and globally. This results in a more thorough

and relevant understanding of the times from which the films originated.

Mathijs also, obviously, explores the story itself, often centering on the

characters interactions and the plot construction as opposed to the

technical feats or experimentations which often are focal points. Further,

and of extreme relevance to the state of my project, numerous occasions

find exposition on Cronenberg's presence as active auteur, available and

visible to the public and actively participating in his films' reception.

Moine, Raphaelle. <u>Cinema Genre</u>. Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA, 2008.

        Translated from French, Raphaelle Moine's book is an all-encompassing

exploration of genre. Traveling much further than the bounds of my

project, his book provides a detailed and thoughout introduction,

explication, and conclusion to the nature of cinema genres. Moine's book

covers not only the thematic structure and framework of genre but explores the social significance as well as historical perspective that frames the importance of genre as both a communal component and narrative aspect. He discusses both the identity of genre as well as genre function in helping define a social identity. The book contained much more than I could even considered covering in six weeks of intermittent writing and more was gained from reading it than is disclosed in this project. Moine's writing demands to be taken seriously not only for its academic discourse but also for the aptitude with which make confusing and complicated concepts available in only a few reads. The book, in total, is a commanding examination of genre and its place and function.

Robertson, Jean and Craig McDaniel. <u>Themse of Contemporary Art: Visual Art after 1980.</u> Oxford University Press: New York, 2010.

I was not well versed in the art world outside of film. This book, required for another class, opened up my view by introducing me to the main themes of art and exposing me to artists working with them through various media. This book became relevant because it addresses the social consciousness with which artists approach their work, obviously something filmmakers do as well. Similar to the concept of film genre, styles of work organize the art world. The authors cite numerous artists from these various styles all working with a theme. The book is an excellent source for invoking discussion on the merits of certain works and whether their function/creation contributes to society, whether in its production or completion. Naturally, such a book lends it support to the filmmaker as artist and the film genre as a way to organize thematic styles within the cinematic sphere.

Sobchack, Thomas. "Genre Film: A Classical Experience." Literature Film Quarterly 3.3
(1975): 196. Communication & Mass Media Complete. EBSCO. Web. 27 Mar.
2010.

Sobchack's essay on film genre places the topic in historical perspective
by crediting the roots to Aristotle and following up with modern
presumptions numerous popular genres. Probably the most succinct
writing for this topic I encountered, his article goes a bit too much into
particulars than was my interest yet the majority of his writing proved
fertile ground for fostering discussion. He goes through a handful of the
more popular genres and identifies the very expectations that contribute to
the definition of genre in the first place. Further, Sobchack addresses the
social placement of the genre in its perpetuation of ideology. Importantly
for my discussion, Sobchack identifies the very nature of the genre film
and its definition. The author also manages to call for more credibility to
the genre film given its historical roots and continued importance both
within the cinematic and social realms. His essay, in wrapping up the
totality of genre itself, proved a fitting final source to my research.

Stam, Robert. "The Americanization of the Auteur Theory." Film Theory: An
Introduction. Ed. Robert Stam. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000. 89-92.

Accompanying "The Cult of the Auteur" as part of our Film Theories
workload, this essay explains the introduction of the auteur theory to the
American masses. Courtesy of Andrew Sarris, the French policy of
director as author of film found its place in America. The French writers
loved American films at the time so it only seems natural the this theory
has gone on to great importance in the film industry. Stam accounts for
the legitimization of film studies by way of the theory as well as its ability
to revive old genres and films. The auteur has had profound effect on our

modern cinema and the way it is marketed. As Stam explains, the personal style of a film was as important as its content. The theory, in essence, hails the film's director as author and credits one's ability to show consistent work throughout their oeuvre.

Stam, Robert. "The Cult of the Auteur." Film Theory: An Introduction. Ed. Robert Stam. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000. 83-88.

Introduced to me in Film Theories class during Fall of 2009 in tandem with "The Americanization of the Auteur Theory." Robert Stam addresses quite thoroughly the basis and origins for the auteur theory from the French film writers/ directors working for a well-known film magazine. He appropriately accounts for the theory by placing it in the social/political atmosphere that propagated the French film critics to come up with it. As an essay, this is a compact introduction to what is one of the more prevalent and encompassing film theories. This piece coincides and accurately describes the theory from origin to implementation by some of the most historically important filmmakers. Stam explains how auteurism would become both tool as well as inspiration for an important French film movement. Finally, he addresses the compassion with which the theory was designed/implemented by filmmakers who were, undoubtedly, film lovers as well.