



# Understanding Film

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## Major paper of the semester: **Auteur Theory**

The assignment is to write a 4-10 page word-processed paper which explores commonalities of form and content in at least 3 films by the same auteur/director.

“Auteur Theory” (French for author) was introduced by French film theorists from the 1950’s, who began to focus on the director as the principal author and guiding voice behind a film – rather than the star, or the studio, or the collective process of filmmaking. Auteurs often direct independent films, or else they have gained enough stature that they have more than the usual amount of control of what they want their big studio films to be.

To study films by “auteur” means to look at films made by the same directors in order to find common characteristics. These commonalities include both form and content. That is, **form** – including the look of the film, the style of editing, camera work, color, narrative technique, and **content** – including the subject matter, the themes, the human situations the films portray, the psychology of the characters, and the social world created by the film.

Your “auteur” paper will explore 3 or more films by the same director, and involve some research into the critical reception of the individual films as well as of the director in general. Though your paper will certainly discuss the uniqueness of each film, your larger purpose will be to find and discuss the commonalities in both form and content. You might think of your paper as answering this question: What makes us recognize the films of Director X as coming from the same aesthetic and moral sensibility?

I will supply you with lists of auteurs to choose from and some of their key films. If you want to choose off the list, you have to consult first with me.

For this auteur project, I also expect 3 intermediate deadlines to show me you’re making progress:

1. Auteur and films chosen
2. Research about films: including at least 2 external reviews of each film and other information about the director available from [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) and other places on the internet
3. Written notes and quotations taken from these reviews and information sources

## **Selected Directors from Bart and Greg's Wall of Directors**

Woody Allen [Match Point, Annie Hall, Manhattan, Bullet Over Broadway +++]

Robert Altman [Gosford Park, The Player, Short Cuts, Nashville +++]

Wes Anderson [The Life Aquatic, The Royal Tannenbaums, Rushmore, Bottle Rocket]

Charlie Chaplin [Modern Times, City Lights, The Great Dictator, The Gold Rush]

Coen Brothers [O Brother Where Art Thou, Fargo, Blood Simple, The Big Lebowski +]

Francis Ford Coppola [The Godfather Trilogy, Apocalypse Now, The Outsiders +]

David Cronenberg [A History of Violence, EXistenZ, Naked Lunch, Dead Ringers, The Dead Zone]

Cameron Crowe [Say Anything, Jerry McGuire, Vanilla Sky, Almost Famous]

Brian De Palma [Carrie, Dressed to Kill, Scarface, Mission Impossible, Black Dahlia +]

John Ford [The Searchers, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, Fort Apache, My Darling Clementine +++]

Terry Gilliam [Monty Python & the Holy Grail, Brazil, Twelve Monkeys, The Meanings of Life]

Howard Hawkes [The Big Sleep, His Girl Friday, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Red River]

Alfred Hitchcock [Psycho, North by Northwest, Vertigo, Rear Window, Rope +++]

John Hughes [The Breakfast Club, Sixteen Candles, Pretty in Pink, Ferris Bueller +]

John Huston [The Maltese Falcon, African Queen, Key Largo, The Misfits +++]

Stanley Kubrick [Dr. Strangelove, 2001: A Space Odyssey; Clockwork Orange, The Shining, Full Metal Jacket +]

Spike Lee [Do the Right Thing, Malcolm X, Inside Man, 25th Hour, Bamboozled, He Got Game +]

Richard Linklater [Slacker, Dazed and Confused, Before Sunrise, After Sunset, A Scanner Darkly]

David Lynch [Eraserhead, Blue Velvet, Mulholland Drive, The Straight Story +]

Roman Polanski [Replulsion, Rosemary's Baby, Chinatown, Macbeth, The Pianist ++]

Martin Scorsese [Raging Bull, Taxi Driver, Gangs of New York, The Departed, Goodfellas, The Aviator ++]

Kevin Smith [Clerks, Mallrats, Chasing Amy, Dogma]

Steven Soderbergh [Bubble, Traffic, Oceans Eleven, Sex, Lies & Videotape]

Oliver Stone [Platoon, Natural Born Killers, JFK, The Doors, World Trade Center, Any Given Sunday +]

Quentin Tarantino [Pulp Fiction, Kill Bill, Reservoir Dogs, Jackie Brown]

Gus Van Sant [Milk, Paranoid Park, Elephant, Finding Forrester, Good Will Hunting, My Own Private Idaho, Drugstore Cowboy]

Orson Welles [Citizen Kane, Lady From Shanghai, Touch of Evil, Magnificent Ambersons +]

Billy Wilder [Some Like It Hot, The Apartment, The Lost Weekend, Sunset Blvd, Seven Year Itch ++]