

Auteur Film: Case Studies of Three Auteurs

(FILM 285/485, HART 283/481)

Instructor: Cesare Wright

Location: MED 103

Time: 1:00PM - 4:00PM W

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Description:

The course will explore the tradition of auteur filmmaking, with an emphasis on how this particular artistic mode situates the filmmaker, the work, and the audience. The *auteur* filmmaker exhibits an unparalleled degree of control over the creative process, such that the body of work is uniquely identifiable to the auteur through notable conventions of aesthetics, style, theme, content, atmosphere, etc. In this course, we will consider the auteur tradition through case studies of three directors: Werner Herzog, Dario Argento, and Rob Zombie. These filmmakers are distinct, in that they work both within and outside of the bounds of the Hollywood system, and thereby raise a counter-point to the argument that a true auteur can no longer exist within the collaborative, heterarchical, and institutionally homogenized contemporary Hollywood system.

As a musician and animator, Rob Zombie brings a unique sensibility to the post-modern horror film genre. Dario Argento's revolutionary soundscapes and innovative cinematography create a uniquely powerful and metaphoric cinematic experience that transcends the Italian "giallo" tradition. Prolific filmmaker Werner Herzog compares the power of cinema to poetry, explaining: "When you read a great poem, you instantly would know in your heart, in your guts, that there is a deep inherent truth, an ecstatic truth... It has to do with our collective desires, our collective dreams..." Taking Herzog's concept of "ecstatic truth" as a central conceit, we will consider a variety of films by Herzog, Argento, and Zombie.

Course Requirements:	% of Course Grade
Participation -	10%
Final Paper -	40%
Auteur presentation -	15%
Reflection Journal -	20%
Discussion Leading -	15%

Assignments:

Expanding or Contesting the Auteur presentation: (15%) Students will write a 2-3pg synopsis and critical analysis of a contemporary example of auteur expression, and will give a 5min presentation on the work. This may be focused on a particular film, work, or auteur, or on an emergent mode (i.e. a specific New Media form). Student must discuss auteur themes of style, control, content, and persistence, in relation to the work/mode/auteur. Why does this example qualify as auteur expression? What are the artistic, social, institutional implications? What is the scope of influence? Alternatively, if you reject auteur theory, you may present a counter argument to the auteur status of a particular artist or work, and explain why this does not qualify as auteur expression.

Physical copy must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day of the scheduled presentation.

Final Paper: (40%)

Students will write a 10-14pg (15-20pg for 400lvl) paper critically considering the works of a specific artist or filmmaker, in relation to the auteur tradition. Students will turn in a 1pg project proposal and present their proposed topic in class (2-3min). Professor consultation on projects is available on an as-needed basis, in order to revise or refine paper topic. Upon approval of topic, students will develop and submit an outline for the final paper.

The auteur and films discussed may be from the course or external sources selected by students. The paper should apply the framework and theories discussed in class and addressed in course readings. It is also acceptable to argue against auteur theory, by framing a counter-argument that critically addresses/deconstructs auteur qualifications (control, style, content, etc.). Questions to consider: Why does the artist qualify as an auteur (or not). How does the body of work of the artist support your contention? What are the artistic, stylistic, political, and/or institutional implications of the artist's work? If you believe the artist to be an "auteur", how does this impact the reception of the work? If not, how does the myth of the "auteur" function in relation to this artist?

A Final Paper guide sheet will be posted with more detailed information about the requirements of the assignment, and we will discuss this in class.

Advanced requirements: 400lvl students must write a 15-20pg paper, and must include a minimum of 3 external references (texts not included as primary or advanced readings for the course).

Physical copy must be turned in by 5pm on April 25th.

Reading and Film discussion leading: (15%)

Students will sign up to lead a 10min class discussion of 1 reading and film. This discussion should not be a summary of the reading or a synopsis of the film; rather, the discussion should highlight the main themes of the reading(s) and connect these to the film. No more than 2 students may sign up for any one class period. If 2 students sign up for the same day, they may elect to split the discussion, such that one student discusses the reading(s) and the other connects the readings to the film from the previous week.

Advanced requirement: 400lvl students must discuss one of the advanced readings.

Reflection Journal: (20%)

Over the course of the semester, students will write 5 critical reflections, which will address the themes from a particular week. These reflections may include personal commentary – ‘What the film/readings/discussion meant to you’ – but the discussion must also be grounded in the readings and course materials (including relevant citations). The 1st journal (Is the auteur a myth?) is required for everyone. Students may select the week and theme of the others.

Journal entries must be posted online by the next class period after the topic date. For instance, if you are writing a reflection of the content from Week 4, it must be posted by the class period of Week 5.

Participation: (10%)

Participation is important in this course. Cinema is an inherently social experience. By contributing actively to classroom discussions, students will provide new insights and encourage other students (and myself) to challenge pre-existing understandings and beliefs. It is also important to maintain a respectful and supportive environment, while promoting a healthy critical discourse. Please DO NOT feel constrained to a rote regurgitation of readings. The class discussions offer an opportunity for you to share your unique understandings, beliefs, and ideas... *particularly* if you feel that these conflict with or are underrepresented by the course materials.

Readings:

All course readings are to be completed BY the indicated class date, such that they may be discussed in class on that date. All students are encouraged to read the advanced texts, but only 400lvl student are required to do so.

Advanced readings: 400lvl students must read the designated advanced readings, in addition to the primary text.

Required texts (available at Rice Bookstore) –

Caughie, J. (1981). *Theories of Authorship*

Prager, B. (2007). *The Cinema of Werner Herzog – Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*

Screenings:

Incident at Loch Ness (2004, Dir. Penn)

Fitzcarraldo (1982, Dir. Herzog)

Burden of Dreams (1982, Dir. Blanks)

House of 1000 Corpses (2003, Dir. Zombie)

Tenebre (1982, Dir. Argento)

Suspiria (1977, Dir. Argento)

The Great Ecstasy of Woodcutter Steiner (1974, Dir. Herzog)

Lessons of Darkness (1992, Dir. Herzog)

Grizzly Man (2005, Dir. Herzog)

Halloween (2007, Dir. Zombie)

Deep Red (1975, Dir. Argento)

Little Dieter Needs to Fly (1998, Dir. Herzog)

Devil's Rejects (2005, Dir. Zombie)

Aguirre: The Wrath of God (1972, Dir. Herzog)

Kumare (2011, Dir. Gandhi)

Week 1 - Jan 11

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>INTRO TO THE AUTEUR</p> <p>“Film is an entirely constructed experience.” (Tom Holman, THX, 5.1, Lucas Labs)</p> <p>What is an auteur?</p> <p>De-mythologizing the auteur... Can the auteur exist?</p>		<p><i>Incident at Loch Ness</i> (2004, Dir. Penn)</p>	

Week 2 - Jan 18

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>Control as the domain of the auteur.</p> <p>Introduction to Herzog’s “ecstatic truth”</p>	<p>Introduction (Ch. 1) and Ch. 2-3, pp. 9-33 – <i>Theories of Authorship</i>, Caughie (2008)</p> <p>Introduction (vii-xii) – Cronin (2002). <i>Herzog on Herzog</i>. ONLINE</p> <p>Ch. 3. (pp. 65-70 only) – Cronin. ONLINE</p> <p>Ch. 5. (pp. 135-150 only) – Cronin. ONLINE</p> <p>Conclusion: “Cinematic Poesis” - pp. 198-202, <i>The Cinema of Werner Herzog</i>, Prager (2007)</p>	<p>Fitzcarraldo (1982, Dir. Herzog)</p> <p>Dethcarraldo (11min)</p> <p>Boondocks (12min)</p>	<p>MANDATORY JOURNAL: Is the “auteur” a myth?</p>

Week 3 - Jan 25

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>The auteur and the cinematic process.</p> <p>Framing the cinematic experience and the author as a frame or “parergon” to the work.</p> <p>The myth of Herzog</p>	<p>Introduction pp. 1-19 –Prager.</p> <p>Ch. 23 pp. 208-213 – Caughie, (Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”)</p> <p>Ch. 4 pp. 35-47 – Caughie</p> <p>Advanced – Introduction pp. 1-10 – <i>Rhetoric of the Frame</i>, Duro (1996)</p>	<p><i>Burden of Dreams</i> (1982, Dir. Blanks)</p>	

Week 4 - Feb 1

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>SPACE FOR THE AUTEUR</p> <p>The auteur in the institutional Hollywood world of blockbuster films.</p> <p>Space for the auteur... Indy productions and subsidiaries.</p> <p>Vivification, Magnitude, and the representation of the body.</p> <p>The price of auteurism. Censorship in <i>Tenebre</i> and <i>House of 1000 Corpses</i>.</p> <p>Post-modernism and resistance.</p>	<p>Post-modernism "Grindhouse: An Experiment in the Death of Cinema" Benson-Allott, C. ONLINE</p> <p>Ch. 6, pp. 61-66, Caughie.</p> <p>"Guilty Pleasures", Rob Zombie, ONLINE</p> <p>Advanced Reading: Ch. pp. 229-266, Bill Nichols</p>	<p><i>House of 1000 Corpses</i> (2003, Dir. Zombie)</p> <p>Rob Zombie – Beavis and Butthead animation.</p> <p>Out of Class Screening – <i>Tenebre</i> (1982, Dir. Argento)</p>	<p>Group 1 - Auteur presentations</p>

Week 5 - Feb 8

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>SPACE FOR THE AUTEUR CONT.</p> <p>Cult film and alt media modes.</p> <p>The New Media auteur.</p>	<p>"Menopausal Monsters and Sexual Transgression in Argento's Art Horror", De Ville, D. (<i>In Cinema Inferno: Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins</i>. Weiner, R. & Cline, G. (2010).) ONLINE</p> <p>"The Indulgence of Critique: Relocating the Sadistic Voyeur in Dario Argento's <i>Opera</i>". Cooper, A. ONLINE</p> <p>"The elegant brutality of Dario Argento". McDonagh, M (1993), ONLINE</p> <p>Watch online episode(s) of <i>The Guild</i> (www.watchtheguild.com)</p> <p>Guardian article on <i>The Guild</i>. ONLINE</p>	<p><i>Suspiria</i> (1977, Dir. Argento)</p> <p><i>The Guild</i> (Dir. Day)</p> <p>Youtube, Vimeo, Kickstarter, and social media</p>	<p>Group 2 - Auteur presentations.</p>

Week 6 - Feb 15

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>Origins of the auteur and</p>	<p>Minnesota Declaration, Herzog</p>	<p><i>The Great Ecstasy of</i></p>	<p>Group 3 - Auteur</p>

<p>the development of style.</p> <p>Introduction to phenomenology and the reflexive engagement of the audience.</p> <p>Identity crisis and embodiment of the filmic character.</p>	<p>1999 (ONLINE)</p> <p>“The four theses about being and the basic problems of phenomenology”. pp. 15-19, Heidegger (1982) ONLINE</p> <p>Ch. 1, pp. 20-48, Prager</p>	<p><i>Woodcutter Steiner</i> (1974, Dir. Herzog)</p>	<p>presentations.</p>
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Week 7 - Feb 22

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>Growth of the auteur and the persistence of themes.</p> <p>Introduction to the sublime and relationship to Herzog’s “ecstatic truth”</p> <p>Fiction of the author/author of the fiction</p>	<p>Ch. 22, pp. 199-206, Caughie</p> <p>Ch. 6, pp. 171-197, Prager</p> <p>“The Sublime in the 1670’s: Something Indefinable – A Je Ne Se Quoi?”, (In <i>Sublime Pousin</i>, Marin, L. (1999). pp. 209-223. Stanford. ONLINE</p> <p>Advanced reading: “Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime.” Guerlac, S. <i>New Literary History</i>, Vol. 16, No.2, The Sublime and the Beautiful: Reconsiderations. (Winter, 1985), pp. 275-289.</p>	<p><i>Lessons of Darkness</i> (1992, Dir. Herzog)</p>	<p>Group 4 - Auteur presentations.</p>

Week 8 – March 7

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>Transcendence of the auteur</p> <p>Homage, pastiche, reinvention, and reinterpretation of works.</p>	<p>Ch. 3, pp. 82-119, Prager</p> <p>Ch. 9, pp. 79-82, Caughie</p>	<p><i>Grizzly Man</i> (2005, Dir. Herzog)</p>	<p>Final project proposals due for EVERYONE. In class discussion of Group 1 topics.</p>

Week 9 - March 14

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>The Auteur and extension of Self in the text</p> <p>Auteur theory vs. auteur structuralism.</p> <p>Rob Zombie and post-</p>	<p>"Manifesto: Re Self in Film Peter Whitehead (ONLINE)</p> <p>Ch. 14, pp. 123-130, Caughie</p>	<p><i>Halloween</i> (2007, Dir Zombie)</p>	<p>In class discussion of Group 2 topics.</p>

modernism; socio-psychological realism			
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Week 10 - March 21

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>The artistic and socio-cultural framing of the auteur in the text.</p> <p>Phenomenology, reflexivity, and the authorship of the audience.</p> <p>Horror and emotion, vivification cont..</p> <p>The sublime and the dialectics of decay in Dario Argento, the “giallo”, and Italian neo-realism</p>	<p>Ch. 26, pp. 225-231, Caughie</p> <p>Ch. 28, pp. 242-250, Caughie</p> <p>Ch.1, (START at pg. 24). pp. 24-58, Carrol</p> <p>Advanced Reading: The Dialectics of Decay: Rereading the Kantian Subject Karen Lang <i>The Art Bulletin</i>, Vol. 79, No. 3. (Sep., 1997), pp. 413-439. ONLINE</p>	<p><i>Deep Red</i> (1975, Dir. Argento)</p> <p>Ask about moving class to alternate time for Society and Media Conference</p>	<p>In class discussion of Group 3 topics.</p>

Week 11 - March 28

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>The text as an extension of the auteur.</p> <p>Herzog, Dieter, and the shadow of WWII</p>	<p>Ch. 5, pp. 142-170, Prager</p> <p>Ch. 32, pp. 282-291, Caughie</p>	<p><i>Little Dieter Needs to Fly</i> (1998, Dir. Herzog)</p>	

SPRING BREAK! - (Feb 25 - March 4)

Week 12 - April 4

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>Auteur expression as journey.</p>	<p>“The Return to the Origin: Heidegger's Journey to Greece”, Duro, P. <i>Art Journal</i>; Fall 2007; 66, 3; Research Library pg. 8 (ONLINE)</p>	<p><i>Devil's Rejects</i> (2005, Dir. Zombie)</p>	

Week 13 - April 11

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>The filmic world as auteur metaphor.</p> <p>Herzog's "Ecstatic Truth" and identity crisis in Aguirre.</p> <p>Deconstructing the myth of Herzog.</p>	<p>"On the Sublime and the Absolute", Herzog's Milan address. ONLINE</p>	<p><i>Aguirre: The Wrath of God</i> (1972, Dir. Herzog)</p>	<p>Final paper outline due.</p>

Week 15 - April 18

Themes	Focus Text	Screening	Assignments
<p>Auteur themes beyond the auteur.</p> <p>Vikram Gandhi and "Ecstatic Truth" in Kumare</p>		<p><i>Kumare</i> (2011, Dir. Gandhi)</p>	<p>FINAL PAPERS DUE APRIL 18th</p>

Course Policies:

Attendance: Attend class. Attendance is mandatory. Class absences will count against your participation grade. If you must miss a class, please contact me by phone or email before the absence and it will not count against you. Remember you are responsible for the material in the classes you miss.

Late Assignments: Will not be accepted. Documented emergencies will be considered on a per case basis.

Academic Honesty Policy: Do not cheat. Plagiarism involves using another person's writing and/or research without proper citation. University policy forbids and punishes plagiarism severely.

Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All such discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to also contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Incompletes: A grade of "I" (for "Incomplete") will be given only in cases of documented emergency late in the semester. An Incomplete Grade Contract must be completed.

Screenings: The screenings are an essential part of the course. As such you are required to watch ALL of the films. If you are unable to attend a particular screening, you may request a reserve copy of the film, but you must watch it by the next class meeting.

Internet/Email: If you need to reach me, the best way to do so is via email. Please put ARTS/FILM 280 in the subject line of your message. Papers and assignments will *not* be relayed through email. They must be received and handed back in class. The Internet may be used for research, but it cannot be the sole source of material in any paper.