The Auteur Perspective of David Fincher

by
Garrett Kitamura

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

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in partial fulfillment of
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degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in English
(Honors Scholar)

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Garrett Kitamura for the degree of <u>Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in English</u> and <u>Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Education</u> presented on May 16, 2017. Title: <u>The Auteur Perspective of David Fincher</u>.

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Jon Lewis

Director David Fincher's films contain many distinct elements that set his work apart, but one of the most instantly recognizable elements is his visual style – specifically, his camerawork. The level of control and purposefulness that Fincher exhibits in his films qualify Fincher as the auteur, or "author," of his films. This thesis will closely examine four of Fincher's films that are indicative of his style in a given point in his career.

The films that will be explored are *Fight Club* (1999), *Zodiac* (2007), *The Social Network* (2010), and *Gone Girl* (2014). Using the variation of auteur theory as laid out by American film theorist Andrew Sarris, this thesis will explore the signature elements of Fincher's camera positioning, camera motion, and camera angling in order to qualify Fincher as an auteur. These elements will be analyzed in how they literally appear and in the narrative function they serve.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Garrett Kitamura, Author

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Acknowledgements

Coming to Oregon State University, I never would have imagined that I would be writing this thesis. All of this research and analysis represents a culmination of a genuine love for film that I have gained over the course of my four years as an undergraduate, and I see this thesis as a perfect way for me to conclude my formal scholarly work in film studies.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Jon Lewis for serving as my mentor for this thesis. Early on, he directed me toward a wide array of film texts which later served as my bedrock when I took to the task of making an auteur analysis of David Fincher. Professor Lewis gave me the freedom to find my own approach but was always sure to give me a gentle push in the right direction whenever I found myself moving off course or when I was unsure of the next step to take.

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David Fincher and my now incessant prodding of any film that fails to measure up to the "Fincher standard."

Introduction

Acclaimed director David Fincher's career has spanned over thirty years. As of 2017, his body of work has included ten films, more than fifty music videos, two television adaptations and numerous advertisements. Because of Fincher's sense of perfectionism and his pragmatic ability to judge when and how to approach projects, he is one of the most sought-after directors in modern Hollywood. Likewise, his purposeful and consistent camera positioning, angling, and movement serve as central tools in driving the story and underlying themes of his works.

All of Fincher's works exhibit a distinct set of camera techniques. His unique camerawork has often been attributed to his collaborations with cinematographer Jeff Cronenweth. However, this visual style has been present in all of Fincher's works since the release of his first music video, "Bop 'Til You Drop" by Rick Springfield in 1984. Fincher did not begin collaborating with Cronenweth until Fincher's fourth film, *Fight Club,* in 1999. Since *Fight Club*, Cronenweth has only collaborated with Fincher on Fincher's three most recent releases, starting in 2010 with *The Social Network*, followed by *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), and *Gone Girl* (2014). Fincher carries his distinct look into all of his works, regardless of who is serving as his director of photography.

On the whole, Fincher's camerawork can best be summarized as a sleek and deliberate presentation that passively attempts to guide the viewer's eye toward the key objects onscreen. This goal of subtle visual gravitation stems from Fincher's

determination to limit how often he forces the viewer into a certain perspective. In

interviews, he has openly discusses his feelings on camerawork:

> I'm interested in just presenting something and letting people decide for
> themselves what they want to look at . . . . I look for patterns in coverage, and for
> ways to place the camera to see what you need to see, from as far away as
> possible. I try to remain semi-detached; I want to present material without
> becoming too involved . . . My [visual] approach comes from a more voyeuristic
> place.[1]

This is an example of how Fincher's personality – wanting to guide, not force the

audience – shows up in his films.

Hand in hand with his purposeful camerawork, Fincher also places a high value

on staging, saying it is "the most important thing directors do, and a not a lot of people

realize that."[2] Fincher's dual desires for distance and control are then made even more

unique by his self-proclaimed belief in creating films that, rather than promote a sense of

escapism, remind viewers that "everything is *not* okay" [emphasis added].[3] In total, all of

these elements result in a smooth, purposeful style of filming that avoids the use of

frivolous close-ups, while creating a sense of discomfort through neo-noir framing and

angling techniques. In short, these are how Fincher achieves his oxymoronic look of tight

detachment.

With the aid of interviews, director commentary, and close viewings, this thesis

will scrutinize Fincher's camerawork through the lens of the auteur theory. This thesis

explores Fincher's origins in filmmaking before jumping forward to an analysis of his

1999 cult classic *Fight Club* and concluding with his most recent feature-length film,

Gone Girl. His favored methods of filming will be highlighted and evaluated in order to

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[1] Lawrence F. Knapp, "Introduction," in *David Fincher Interviews*, edited by Laurence F. Knapp, ix-xxii (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), xi.
[2] FincherFanatic.com, "You Better Be Fucking Serious: David Fincher on Directing," 211.
[3] Knapp, "Introduction," xii.

verify Fincher's status as an auteur. Likewise, the variations and evolutions in his techniques will be scrutinized.

Thesis

David Fincher is an auteur whose signature can be found in the evolution of his camera positioning, camera angling, and camera movement.

Fincher and the Auteur Theory

In the past, Fincher has addressed the assertions made by some critics that he is an auteur. In a 2012 interview he said he was "fundamentally against [the] notion" of auteurism, believing it to be a theory that was only applicable in the era it was created in: the 1950s and '60s. He added, "[Y]our point of view is all you got . . . you cannot do anything other than what you do."[4] These comments seem to convey that Fincher dismisses auteur theory on the grounds that it is irrelevant or that it is as an outdated model that compartmentalizes and reduces directors to a checklist of elements. While there is a relatively consistent set of traits that mark Fincher's work, he is anything but formulaic. Like a true auteur, his artistic agency is embedded in nearly every piece of his work, but with the flexibility and technical skill to adapt and adjust to unique demands of each story.

Although it is dismissed by some, auteur theory is not a relic of the past, nor is it a means by which to pigeonhole directors. Andrew Sarris, who popularized auteur theory in the United States in the late 1960s, noted that auteur theory "claims neither the gift of

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[4] FincherFanatic.com, "You Better Be Fucking Serious: David Fincher on Directing," in *David Fincher Interviews*, edited by Laurence F. Knapp, 204-213 (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press 2014), 210.

prophecy nor the gift of extracinematic perception."[5] Rather, he observed, it is "a table of values that converts film history into directorial autobiography."[6]

Like the lens of a microscope, the auteur theory offers a sharp and focused means for analyzing a specific set of elements in a collection of films, with each element relating back to the artistic agency of the director. When applied to the right director, the auteur theory can be the most insightful, shrewd, and appropriate lens for examination. Auteur theory is an evidence-based assessment of a director's creative choices, and any attempt to simply quantify elements of a director's films without investigating their underlying purposes is indicative of a "lazy auteur critic."[7] However, it also recognizes the human element underscoring the creation of films. Fincher rejects auteurism, but his consent is irrelevant. Auteur theory is a method of retroactive evaluation for the film critics, not a set of guidelines for the film creators.

Sarris listed three qualifiers for determining auteurism: (1) a director's films must demonstrate the director's technical competence; (2) a set of recurring characteristics of style must be present; (3) and the films must possess an interior meaning that is "extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material."[8] This thesis will examine how all three of these auteur qualities are present in Fincher's camerawork.

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[5] Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (1968, reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 26.
[6] Ibid., 30.
[7] Ibid., 32.
[8] Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Seventh Edition, edited by Leo Baudy and Marshall Cohen, 451-455 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 452-3.

Scope

As a comprehensive analysis of Fincher's filmography would be exhaustive, this thesis is limited to a close examination of four of David Fincher's feature-length films, each representing a different era of his career: *Fight Club* (1999), *Zodiac* (2007), *The Social Network* (2010), and *Gone Girl* (2014). The explication of these films will focus on the elements of camerawork and how they contribute to the advancement of the films' respective stories and themes.

Fight Club, indicative of Fincher's 1990s work, will be analyzed with reference to his other '90s films: *Alien 3*, *Seven*, and *The Game*. The 2007 film *Zodiac* saw Fincher return to feature filmmaking after a brief hiatus that began in 2002. *Zodiac* will serve as the archetype for his 2000s decade work, which also includes *Panic Room* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. *The Social Network* demonstrates Fincher's works of the 2010s, which also includes *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Finally, *Gone Girl*, Fincher's most recent film, will serve as a measure of the how aspects of Fincher's style have evolved or remained the same over the course of his career.

When analyzing Fincher's films, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) is a proverbial elephant in the room for both Fincher fans and detractors. For some, *Benjamin Button* stands out as a problematic film due to its sentimental tone. Both film critics and fans indignantly assert that the film was Fincher's attempt to create an "Oscar-bait" blockbuster that would garner mainstream awards. They further argue that this resulted in a finished product that ran contrary to his usual thematic style. It is even rumored by some that Fincher only took on the project in the wake of his father's death.

Whether *Benjamin Button* is an auteur film is a question for another time. Regardless of its departure from Fincher's usual styling, it is still largely emblematic of Fincher's methods. As Sarris noted: "Directors, even auteurs, do not always run true to form . . ."[9] Not every film made by an auteur director is an auteur film. Because it is an outlier to Fincher's general body of work, the analysis of *Benjamin Button* will be fairly limited. However, this limited analysis of the film should not be misunderstood as an omission meant to bolster the argument for or against Fincher's auteur status. Consistent with Sarris' observations regarding auteur directors, this exception is irrelevant to the way Fincher's overall filmography serves as a testament to his auteur status.

Biography: From Birth to *Alien 3*

David Andrew Leo Fincher was born August 28, 1962, to Howard and Claire Fincher. Fincher spent his early childhood in San Anselmo, California, where his father worked as a bureau chief for *Life Magazine* and his mother worked as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation specialist. "When I was a kid, I would spend hours in my bedroom drawing. I could never get my fucking hands to do it the way I had it in my head," Fincher recalled in a 1999 interview. "I used to always go, 'Someday you'll have the skill to draw exactly what you see in your head and then you'd be able to show it to somebody, and if they like it, then you will have been able to transfer this thing [in your head] through this apparatus to this, and then you'll truly know your worth.'"[10] Even at such a young age, Fincher was driven by the desire to convey a precise and exact image of his visions to others.

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[9] Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Seventh Edition, edited by Leo Baudy and Marshall Cohen, 451-455 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 453.

[10] Gavin Smith, "Inside Out," in *David Fincher Interviews*, edited by Laurence F. Knapp, 48-60 (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 60.

Some of Fincher's earliest encounters with the film industry occurred while growing up in California. He lived only a few doors down from director George Lucas, who was just beginning his rise to fame with the release of *American Graffiti*. Fincher said that seeing Lucas as a neighbor "demystified" the idea of being a film director and made him feel as though it was within his reach.[11] Fincher was also heavily influenced by George Roy Hill's behind-the-scenes documentary of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Fincher saw the documentary around the age of seven and was fascinated by the amount of hidden behind-the-camera work that went into creating a film.[12]

Several years later, Fincher and his parents moved to Ashland, Oregon, where he remained until he graduated from high school. In Ashland, Fincher continued to explore his passion for film in both his free time and through a variety of odd jobs, including working as a theater projectionist, being an on-site cameraman for the local NBC affiliate, and serving as a lighting coordinator for the high school's drama department.[13] Following high school, Fincher moved back to California to pursue a filmmaking career, rather than attend film school.

In California, Fincher was offered a job at Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) to work as an assistant cameraman and matte photographer for the stop-motion animated scenes in *Return of the Jedi*. At ILM, Fincher gained additional knowledge of cinematography and the film industry. In a 2006 interview, Fincher credited his time in the ILM animation department as having helped him develop his sense of attention to detail, saying:

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[11] James Swallow, *Dark Eye: The Films of David Fincher* (London: Reynolds and Hearn, Ltd, 2003), 13.

[12] Salisbury, "David Fincher British Film Institute Interview," 147.

[13] Swallow, *Dark Eye*, 14.

 . . . animation is its own kind of weird subset of filmmaking because the intention has to be so specific. . . . [Y]our thing is about "What am I trying to solve in these fourteen frames," or "these sixty-four frames." You're not thinking in terms of, "Well let's just see what happens . . ."[14]

Fincher's time at ILM gave him the technical background that allowed him to meticulously control the camerawork of his future works, a skill that adds to his qualifications as an auteur under Sarris' definitional condition of technical competency.

After his stint at Industrial Light and Magic, Fincher moved into full-time directing, taking contracts to film music videos for various record labels. At a time when the popularity of music videos was skyrocketing, Fincher was given the opportunity to work with a variety of artists, including Madonna, Paula Abdul, Aerosmith, and Rick Springfield. With the freedom to create more avant-garde products, Fincher began to experiment and found his preferred filming style. Many of his earliest stylistic tendencies, such as steady camera, noir-esque framing, and low camera angles first appeared in his music videos. When asked if he treated his time making music videos as his *de facto* film schooling, Fincher admitted:

Yeah. I hate to say this because I took millions of dollars from people to do these things . . . I just thought it was so cool that you could try out this stuff and . . . [if the final product was bad] they'd blame it on Michael Jackson.[15]

A few years into making music videos, Fincher went on to become one of the founders of Propaganda Films, a production company that specialized in music videos. These formative years as a director allowed Fincher to develop his visual auteur signatures.

In 1990, Fincher was given the opportunity to direct his first feature-length film: the now-infamous third film in the *Alien* franchise. His experiences during the production

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[14] Stephen Littger, "David Fincher Interview," in *David Fincher Interviews*, edited by Laurence F. Knapp, 86-103(Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 90.
[15] Salisbury, "David Fincher British Film Institute Interview," 148.

of *Alien 3* arguably shaped him more than any of his prior or future experiences in the film industry. By the time Fincher joined the *Alien 3* project, the previous director had been fired, the screenplay had gone through multiple rewrites, and the film's release date had been pushed back. Fincher, only twenty-seven years old, began filming without a completed script and while unused sets from prior screenplay drafts were still being torn down.

Throughout the filming of *Alien 3*, Fincher clashed with studio executives over deadlines, budgets, and creative differences. The stereotypical conflict between director artistry and studio financing became jarringly personal for Fincher, who at one point was told by an unnamed executive that the studio "could have somebody piss against the wall for two hours and call it *Alien 3* and it would still do [$30 million] worth of business."[16] Fincher called the experience a "baptism by fire."[17]

In the end, *Alien 3* received near-universal recognition for being subpar – a scathing judgment shared even by Fincher himself.[18] He walked away from the film with the resolve that he would never allow himself to work on a project that he did not have complete creative control over. From this disastrous experience, Fincher learned: "If you're not prepared to say 'Forget it, let's not do it,' you have no power over the situation. Unless you're prepared not to make it, you're never going to get to make a movie your way."[19] Fincher carried this lesson with him throughout the rest of his career, and his sense of control has manifested itself in each of his subsequent projects.

[16] Mark Burman, "Interview / A real horror show: The filming of Alien 3 was a nightmare for its director David Fincher. Mark Burman reports," *Independent*, 20 August 1992. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/interview-a-real-horror-show-the-filming-of-alien-3-was-a-nightmare-for-its-director-david-fincher-1541578.html.
[17] Salisbury, "David Fincher British Film Institute Interview," 149.
[18] Swallow, *Dark Eye*, 37-45.
[19] Ibid., 55.

The Films

Fight Club (1999)

Arguably one of his most notorious films, *Fight Club* is indicative of the filming techniques that Fincher used in his '90s works. The film begins with a digitally-created opening credits sequence that rushes through the fear-center of the human brain – a prudent choice for a film that deals with a damaged, unreliable narrator with a split personality. From here, we see the camera pull back, revealing the whole brain before exiting the sweat glands of the protagonist (whose actual name is never mentioned in the film). The camera then dollys up the gun barrel being held in the protagonist's mouth by the character Tyler Durden. In describing the opening sequence, Fincher said it came from his belief that "the first rule of cinema is that a movie has to teach an audience how to watch it."[20] This extreme close-up is unnerving and unusual, and it immediately sets the stage for the chaotic and fast-paced tone of the rest of the film. This method of presenting opening titles is indicative of a technique Fincher utilized in his early works.

In *Alien 3*, credits are displayed against the backdrop of stars in outer space while extreme close-ups of warning sirens, blood-soaked sheets, and vital signs periodically flash across the screen – each image hinting at the titular monster's presence aboard the Ellen Ripley's space ship. Likewise, the opening titles of *Seven* (1995) are presented amidst a backdrop of extreme close-ups consisting of gritty images of the diaries and desk items owned by the film's serial-killer antagonist. *The Game* (1997) is unique in that it displays only the film title and had no opening credits, but even this film begins with a large set of computer-generated puzzle pieces engulfing the screen before flying toward

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[20] Andrew Pulver, "Fight the Good Fight," in *David Fincher Interviews*, edited by Laurence F. Knapp, 65-69 (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press 2014), 68.

the audience. Fincher's later films move away from this use of close-up title sequences,

reflecting an evolution in how he displays his voyeuristic tendencies. All of these

aforementioned films are clear demonstrations of Sarris' auteur notion of a final product

that reflects the tension between the director's personality and his films. Fincher, in his

attempt to suit his style to a given film, allows the camerawork in his opening credit

sequences to vary for the sake of establishing tone.

In contrast to *Fight Club*'s title sequences, extreme close-ups are used much less

frequently and for a much shorter duration throughout the rest of the film. Extreme close-

ups are used to create a sense of environment – such as the doughnuts, disposable coffee

cups, and name badges that are indicative of support group meetings or the bubbling

chemicals in the narrator's dilapidated home. Extreme close-ups are also used to show

actions – generally hand motions –that Fincher deems critical for the audience to see. On

the whole, extreme close-ups in Fincher films are meant to show hard-to-see but can't-be-

missed details.

Instances of action-oriented extreme close-ups in *Fight Club* include a thumb

cocking the hammer of a revolver, a pair of hands examining the empty chambers of the

same revolver, and a scene in which Tyler Durden restrains the narrator's hand while

dousing it with flaked lye. Extreme close-ups are used in a similar fashion in Fincher's

other 1990s films: a businessman's napkin wiping an ink stain from his shirt pocket (*The

Game*), a prisoner's fist frantically slamming a door-lock button (*Alien 3*), and a

detective's knife cutting open a mysterious box (*Seven*).

In *Fight Club*, we can also see how Fincher uses facial close-ups to stylize

dialogue and progress the plot. These shots are withheld and their presence acts to

punctuate the delivery of a line central to a given conversation – like the darkly humorous scene in which a cancer patient admits to no longer fearing death, but then directly states that she just wants "to get laid for the last time."[21]

Close-ups of a non-speaking face are also used to show characters processing information and revelations. These types of scenes are often followed by a refrain to a medium-length ensemble shot or to a previously-withheld establishing shot, creating a sort-of visual exhale as the tension of a scene is resolved. I will refer to these withheld establishing shots as decompressions. An example of this close-up followed by decompression occurs during one of *Fight Club*'s lesser-known scenes: When the narrator's boss discovers a list of fight club rules left on the office photocopier, the narrator obliquely threatens his employer before snatching the paper out of his boss' hand. In this scene, the camera is tightly held in close-up and tilted slightly upward during the tense exchange. When the narrator grabs the paper, the scene jolts into a previously-unseen medium-length shot. This same dynamic can be seen in Fincher's other films of this era, like the at-home dinner scene in *Seven* (1995) or in the arguments between Ripley and the prisoners in *Alien 3* (1992).

The facial close-ups and their subsequent decompressions are a cornerstone to all of Fincher's films. The withheld establishing shots, in particular, are reminiscent of the noir method of creating claustrophobia by preventing viewers from being spatially oriented.[22] Many shots place characters in alleyways, windows, and doorframes. To

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[21] David Fincher, *Fight Club*, 1999 (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment), 2009. Blu Ray.
[22] L.S. Peterson and J.A. Place, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir," in *Movies and Methods, Vol. I*, edited by Bill Nichols, 325-338 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 336.

enhance the claustrophobia, noir films also often present characters in frames, a technique Fincher also employs.[23]

The claustrophobic feel of *Fight Club* is emphasized by Fincher's near-ubiquitous use of subtly low-angled shots. These shots reveal the ceilings of the narrator's office and home, which serve make us feel as if we are being boxed in. They also create an added sense of realism, contrasting with the level shots that we are used to seeing in sitcoms or low-budget films; in these programs, actors often perform on a minimally-constructed soundstage with no ceiling, presenting audiences with a very limited and plain set of camera angles. Low-angle shots add an illusion of three dimensions to Fincher's films, particularly when presented in a theater setting. Audience members are forced to tilt their heads slightly upward in order to view a screen that is bearing down on them, creating a sense of realistic perspective.

Each of these camera elements is accentuated by Fincher's use of stable-image techniques which produce smooth panning and tracking shots. As a display of Fincher's sense of directness and control, *Fight Club*, like all of his films, minimally employs any form of shaky or handheld camera effects. Fincher explained the omnipotent camera movement in *Fight Club* as an attempt to portray the narrating character's thought process, particularly during intricate voiceover sequences. Fincher wanted to "leap out-of-body, moving the camera in a very free way to visualize [the narrator's] all-over-the-place thoughts as he tries to work things out for himself."[24] Yet, even when portraying the stream of consciousness of a mentally unstable protagonist, nearly all the camera motions are done smoothly and without a cutaway.

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[23] Ibid., 335.
[24] Swallow, *Dark Eye*, 130.

A distinct visual effect that is one of Fincher's signature techniques, the shaky cam makes an appearance approximately two times in any of Fincher's films. Like all of his camera techniques, the shaky cam is thoughtfully added to serve a narrative or thematic purpose. *Seven* – with its chase scene – has the highest instances of shaky cam scenes, but they are still so infrequent that their occurrences can be counted by hand.

In *Fight Club*, the lone shaky camera scene occurs immediately following a montage of vandalous acts committed by Tyler Durden's followers. Tyler, who is filmed at a long shot while giving a monologue disavowing material wealth, looks around his basement as the camera begins moving toward him. Once the camera reaches the space of a facial close-up, Tyler looks directly into the camera and the scene begins to shake, giving the illusion that the film reel itself is coming undone. The scene is indicative of Fincher's reluctance to include more than a few scenes in which the frame becomes unstable. This filming style is used sparingly and, in this case, its purpose is to further hint at Tyler Durden's chaotic and fictitious nature.

As his career progressed, Fincher's camerawork became more detached from characters and narrators, and his use of extreme close-ups likewise became more infrequent. These signature camera elements continued to be carried forward into his other works, along with his other signature visual techniques. The camera work found in *Fight Club* – the shaky cam, brief close-up shots, and distinct opening titles – are examples of recurring characteristics of his auteur style that would continue to manifest throughout the rest of his career.

Zodiac (2007)

After the release of *Panic* Room (2002), Fincher took a five-year hiatus from creating feature films before releasing *Zodiac* in 2007. Fincher's sixth feature film, *Zodiac* shows reenactments of slayings attributed to the infamous Bay Area murderer of the 1960s and '70s who was known as the Zodiac Killer. Fincher only reenacted attacks where victims survived and gave eyewitness testimony, as noted in the ominous opening title card: "What follows is based on actual case files." With a limited set of facts surrounding one of the most famous unidentified serial killers in the United States, Fincher's image of tight neo-noir that simultaneously remains at a distance is a perfect fit. The camerawork creates an air of ambiguity through its distanced and blocked perspective. Fincher's filming style also serves to accurately portray the investigations, revelations, and descent into obsession that engrosses the film's protagonist, Robert Graysmith.

Zodiac opens with an establishing shot that pans across the skyline of Vallejo on the Fourth of July, 1969. The skyline scene then cuts to a panning shot of various homes in a Vallejo neighborhood. The neighborhood scene is shot through the window of a car, giving the viewer a sense of being a bystander to the neighborhood's happenings. In commentary, Fincher described how his desire to capture the neighborhood shot was hindered by the persistent shaking that occurred when the camera was placed inside the moving car. A determined master of control, Fincher had his crew lay down forty feet of dolly track in order to allow the camera to follow alongside the car and shoot through its window. This eliminated any camera shake in the tracking shot. Justifying his need for maintaining a smooth pan, Fincher said, "It just needed to be this sort of detached,

indifferent view of the roads and houses, and the people with their barbeques."[25] Fincher wanted to depict the tone of the period as well as the sense of "normalcy" in Vallejo prior to the Zodiac killing that would occur later that night.[26]

The first shots in *Zodiac* are characteristic of Fincher's filming style in the first decade of the 2000s as he became further removed from a sense of intimacy in favor of detached observation. *Zodiac*'s opening sequence, like his prior feature-length works, is meant to establish tone and school audience members on how to view the film. Although *Zodiac*'s first scene lacks credits, its status as a tone-setting scene allows it to be directly contrasted to the intimate opening credits of Fincher's 1990s films. This variation in Fincher's opening credits exemplified how auteurism does not demand that each element be stylistically consistent from film to film. (But for the more nitpicky critics, it is worth noting that this marriage of opening titles and detached establishing shots is present in *Panic Room*, which shows 3D credits against a backdrop of skyscrapers.) While the element of Fincher's openings saw an evolution in his 2000s films, the rest of Fincher's camera style remained true to the form established in his prior works.

Although more detached, the camera movement in *Zodiac* remains omnipotent in its positioning and navigation. Fincher's utilization of obscure overhead shots and obstructed panning shots is a perfect match for a film that intends to maintain an air of mystery surrounding certain details of the Zodiac killings. In the opening murder scene, the camera pans across the front of the victims' car, blocking our view of the Zodiac's vehicle. The camera then jumps to the interior of the car, matching the victims' views of the murderous intruder.

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[25] David Fincher, *Zodiac*, 2007 (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2009), Blu Ray.
[26] Ibid.

When the slaying begins, the camera sits at a comfortable distance from the front of the victims' car, interfering with our ability to identify the killer. This is ironic given that the camera has thus far shown its fluidity and ability to move anywhere, yet it restricts us to a position that makes our view as obscured as that of the victims. This omnipotent yet distant camera positioning and movement is equally effective in a later scene involving a bird's-eye-view filming of the Zodiac's cab driver killing. In *Panic Room*, the omnipotent camera is more brash in its detached movement, passing through floors and walls in a manner very similar to the rapid narrative sequences in *Fight Club* (e.g., when the narrator in *Fight Club* described how a gas leak destroyed his apartment).

Borrowing elements from mystery and police-procedural genres, many of the facial close-ups in *Zodiac* are built around revelations and discoveries. This dynamic is abundantly displayed in the scene where three detectives interviewed a prime suspect, Arthur Lee Allen. Over the course of their back-and-forth exchange, Allen makes numerous suspicious statements that include having bloody knives in his car, expressing his hope that police will no longer be called "pigs" (an oft-used term in Zodiac letters), and his outright denial that he was the Zodiac ("But if I was, I certainly wouldn't tell you."). In this meeting, the police officers pose sharp interrogative questions about Allen's possible motivations and his cover stories. Over the course of this exchange, numerous facial close-ups are used, but a decompression shot is withheld until the end of the interview, allowing a series of building tensions to fill the scene. This scene demonstrates a style of presenting conversation that can be found in all of Fincher's films. It also gives us an example of Fincher's flexibility by showing his willingness to

film in a manner that is appropriate for the given circumstance. In this instance, continued tension and multiple revelations called for withholding the decompression shot.

The interrogation scene with Allen also contains instances of Fincher's extreme close-up technique, another repeating element of Fincher's work that lends itself to classifying him as an auteur. Examining Allen's Zodiac-brand watch, the detectives pass the watch to each another; numerous extreme close-ups show hands titling the watch and fingers stroking across the front of it. Through these extreme close-ups, we clearly see the small Zodiac-brand logo on the watch. Throughout *Zodiac*, extreme close-ups are frequently used to show written letters, pieces of evidence, and – in one instance – a pistol clip being ejected in order to show that it is fully loaded. *Panic Room*, with its heist and break-in story elements, also has extreme close-ups relating to methodical action, such as drilling an underground safe. Even Fincher's outlier film, *Benjamin Button*, displays extreme close-ups of mundane tasks, like hands tying shoelaces or playing a piano. Each of these films demonstrate a continued effort by Fincher to use brief extreme close-ups in order to emphasize important objects, hand gestures, or items that typify a given environment.

Fincher's other signature directorial choices are also present in the *Zodiac* interrogation sequence. Like most scenes in the film, the camera is titled slightly upward so that the ceiling is visible, giving a sense that the metal pipes and fluorescent lights are bearing down on the characters. This tightness is intensified by the framing shots that accompany Allen's entrance and exit. As Allen enters the factory breakroom to speak with the officers, the camera pans across the breakroom window from Allan's point of view. The window is covered by metal diamond-holed expansion guards; behind the

metal guards sit the three police officers, staring back at Allen (i.e., the film viewer). Not framing so much as entrapping, the image of the police officers caged in the breakroom serves to perpetuate the overall tone of the film by adding to the uneasy and tight nature of the interrogation that follows. This same shot occurs at the end of the interrogation, bookending the sequence and serving as the overall decompression shot. As one of Fincher's two cop films, *Zodiac* beautifully showcases Fincher's noir tendencies.

Zodiac's police procedural theme is also enhanced by the one-off use of shaky cam. It appears when two detectives, called to investigate an early-morning cabbie homicide, exit their cars. The camera trails them, peeking over their shoulders and flanking them like a paparazzo. As in most of Fincher's films – with the exception being *Seven* – the utilization of shaky cam is restricted to a single sequence. Unlike most of his other films, however, the shaky cam persists throughout the majority of this scene. Describing the scene as "static," Fincher justified his decision to extend the use of the shaky cam, noting "it's the only time in the movie where we're at a crime scene with somebody who's trying to glean what's happening."[27] In yet another example of Fincher's auteur styling, the presence of shaky cam in *Zodiac* is purposeful and done with technical precision. It portrays the mindset of two police officers who have been awakened before sunrise to investigate a bizarre murder. The shaky cam brings us into the hazy minds of the tired police officers as they approached the scene.

In a somewhat ironic fashion, this uncharacteristically prolonged use of shaky cam lends itself as evidence of Fincher's auteur status: although the degree of shaky cam in the crime scene investigation represents a slight deviation from his usual form, it demonstrates Sarris' notion that an auteur creates interior meaning from the tension

[27] Ibid.

between the director's personality and the given material. In spite of Fincher's decision to limit prolonged shaky cam shots in most of his films, he pragmatically assessed the tone of the investigation scene and allowed that tone to influence his style. What results is a more prolonged use of shaky cam, albeit a use that is confined to a single sequence.

After *Zodiac*, Fincher's works continued to move in a more white collar direction thematically. Rather than producing nitty gritty films with subversive themes, Fincher's works of the 2010s have embodied a more composed and subtle representation of human depravity. With this thematic movement, Fincher's visual style continued to remain consistent for the most part, with subtle modifications made to accommodate a new array of storytelling spaces.

<div align="center">

The Social Network (2010)

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The Social Network can arguably be called Fincher's first white collar film – or second, depending on how one categorizes *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008). In *The Social Network*, characters do not find themselves evading physical perils or traversing dilapidated spaces; rather, the film presents polished, young adults moving from the Ivy League to the business world, while wallowing in the sins of greed, betrayal, and youthful arrogance. *The Social Network*, as Fincher's first film of the 2010s, embodies how his signature camera styles adjust to navigate a more subtle and bourgeois world where decadence lies just beneath the surface.

In Fincher's previous films, even interior scenes, like the broken down home in *Fight Club* or the newspaper offices in *Zodiac*, have an open sense about them due to their high ceilings and large floor spaces. Unlike previous films, however, *The Social Network* is set primarily in small interior spaces that create a greater degree of intimacy;

this is reflected in the camerawork. Shots are much tighter with more prolonged close-ups and fewer decompression shots that are, in turn, less pronounced. After *The Social Network,* Fincher would return to more familiar territory in the film that followed: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011). With a plot focusing on a missing person's case and an unknown serial killer, many of Fincher's older auteur elements like extreme close-up openings and more distinct decompression shots reemerged in *Dragon Tattoo*.

The screenplay of *The Social Network* was written by Aaron Sorkin, whose scripts are famous for their quick, witty, and often poignant dialogues. True to form, Fincher uses the opening scene to establish the tone and pacing of this dialogue-driven film. *The Social Network* opens in a college pub, throwing us into the middle of a conversation between the protagonist Mark Zuckerberg and his girlfriend, Erica Albright. Commenting on the opening, Fincher said:

> When I read the script, this first scene was not only a great foundation for the character Mark Zuckerberg . . . but also sort of set up the move and how the movie should be taken: that it was going to be about semi-important things, and self-effacing, and that it was going to be about this kind of pace. I like the first scene of the movie to inform the audience as to how much they have to pay attention, and this was definitely one of them.[28]

Fincher's use of opening sequences to set the tone of *The Social Network* demonstrates his continued auteur style of exposing his audience to an archetypal scene intended to condition them to process the rest of the film. From a visual standpoint, the opening exemplifies the more compressed version of Fincher's filming style: here, close-ups are much more intimate and decompression shots are still relatively tight.

In the bar scene, Zuckerberg and his girlfriend fly through a multitude of topics and details in a roughly five-minute span. Using three sets of punctuated facial close-ups,

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[28] David Fincher, *The Social Network*, 2010 (Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 2011), Blu Ray.

Fincher's camerawork helps to filter out irrelevant details and accentuates the important aspects of Zukerberg's conversation with his girlfriend. The three close-ups occur . . .

. . . when Zuckerberg states his goal of gaining admittance to a Harvard Final Club.

. . . when Erica asks which Final Club is easiest to join, with the close-up shots going back to Zuckerberg's face as he takes offense to the implication that he is unlikely to be accepted into a Final Club. The scene then remains in close-up to draw attention to a brief mention of Zuckerberg's friend Eduardo Savarin – who plays a crucial role throughout film.

. . . and when Erica, having just dumped Zuckerberg, says that no girl will ever like him because he is "an asshole."

After the third close-up, the scene then decompresses to a previously unseen medium shot of Zuckerberg sitting at the table, looking up at Erica as she walks away. This entire sequence demonstrates Fincher's flexibility in taking a crowded scene and applying his signature method of filming to fit the flow of a conversation.

Fincher's use of close-ups to single out important points in rapid-fire dialogue is also present early on in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, when the protagonist, Lisbeth Slander, is pressed by her employer to disclose everything she knows about the disgraced reporter Mikael Blomkvist. Set in an office, this sequence between Lisbeth and her interrogators is comparatively less tight than the interior sequences of *The Social Network*. The *Dragon Tattoo* scene features Fincher's return to a more backed-off style of filming discourse. This return to older preferences is also present in *Dragon Tattoo*'s

opening credits, which include extreme close-ups in a manner similar to Fincher's '90s films.

With *The Social Network*, Fincher continued with his now-established form of presenting detached opening title sequences to create an atmosphere and set the tone for the entire movie. As the character Mark Zuckerberg exits the pub and begins the walk to his Harvard dormitory, an omnipotent camera tracks his motions from a high vantage point overlooking the street outside the pub. From a detached distance, the camera follows Zuckerberg through campus, panning up and down to show the university's architecture, as well as scanning the quad to show students moving about. In combination, these elements bring us into the environment of Harvard in the fall of 2003. The scene that follows shows a drunk and dejected Zuckerberg creating the controversial female-ranking website FaceMash.com. Occurring roughly within the first fifteen minutes of the film, the FaceMash sequence provides us with an abundance of examples of Fincher's signature camera styles.

Like the opening credits, the sequences of Zuckerberg developing and distributing FaceMash further demonstrates Fincher's use of smooth and detached omnipotent camerawork. These sequences also present examples of his use of extreme close-ups and noir framing. As Zuckerberg is creating the website, the film cuts to a party occurring at the Phoenix Club, one of the Final Clubs he hopes to join. "We are making a point here because it's an omniscient point of view," Fincher explained. "It's a party that has to be subjectively channeled through the people who are *not* invited" [emphasis added] with the uninvited being the envious Zuckerberg.[29] Through these "subjective shots," Fincher shows viewers what was occurring at the party while Zuckerberg sits in his dorm:

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[29] Ibid.

detached panning shots are used to show the party at the Phoenix Club, with extreme close-ups showing students ingesting recreational drugs.

Fincher also uses extreme close-ups and detached panning shots to illustrate the rapid spread of Zuckerburg's website. The camera pans across exteriors before resting on open windows, where students can be seen on their computers. Reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, we are given a voyeuristic look in on people who are compartmentalized and framed in their windows like portraits.

The purpose of this sequence is to inform the audience about "what the characters are up to" while not "boring them [the audience] with a tutorial on how to hack."[30] To accomplish this, Fincher's camera motions are aided by punctuated extreme close-ups of rapid keyboard typing and mouse clicks. These close-ups shots reveal what the characters are doing, but do not demand that we understand the technical intricacies underlying the actions.

The FaceMash sequence is also indicative of another element of *The Social Network* that signals a minor deviation in Fincher's style: there is a decreased presence of low-angled shots and a higher frequency of high-angled shots. Again, this break from tradition shows Fincher's style adjusting to a dialogue-driven film with more intimate interior settings. The angles of the shots help to convey the dynamics of power and submission in conversation, with close-ups continuing to play a key role in showing characters deliver and process information.

When FaceMash's heavy traffic causes the Harvard network to crash, Zuckerberg experiences a sudden shift in emotion, from smug pride to worrisome reflection. The camera angling highlights this emotional swing. "You cut to Jesse [who plays

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[30] Ibid.

Zuckerberg] and he has this sort of impish look on his face like 'So what? Isn't that the whole point is to be a little naughty?' [sic] And then you see it sink in for a second," Fincher said, describing the scene's emotional turn. Fincher uses a close-up, low-angle shot to show Zuckerberg's realization that his website is responsible for the network crash. The camerawork makes Zuckerberg appear dominant and accentuates his confidence. Yet in the same cut, upon realizing there would be backlash for his misbehavior, his face droops into a troubled expression. As this occurs, the camera slowly begins to lift upward, bearing down at the now submissive Zuckerberg while still framing him in close-up.

In addition to these sequences, one of Fincher's well-known but lightly-used techniques is withheld until the final act of *The Social Network*: the shaky cam. It makes an appearance during the "millionth member" party hosted by Sean Parker, a Facebook co-founder and notorious party boy. Realizing the music downstairs has stopped, the visibly intoxicated Parker opens his upstairs bedroom door and sees police officers coming toward the stairs. "This is the one handheld shot in the whole movie because it follows the perspective of somebody who's maybe – *maybe* – inebriated," Fincher explained in a tongue-in-cheek tone. "And it felt that the idea of walking out in that slightly tipsy state might best be described by humans sloppily shouldering cameras."[31]

Fincher's first two films of the 2010s could be mischaracterized as having presented a schizoid history of Fincher's camerawork. *The Social Network* appears to step away from the more noir-like elements of Fincher's style, while *Dragon Tattoo* appears to be a regression toward Fincher's older styling. Both of these would be incorrect assessments. All of Fincher's signature camera styles are present in these films,

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[31] Ibid.

but the degree and frequency of their application has been masterfully revamped to suit the stories. Using technical competence developed over several decades of work, Fincher embeds his filming style into two films that explore widely different themes. The minor variations of his style in these films are indications of the interior meaning manifesting between Fincher's style and subjects of his films.

<div align="center">Gone Girl (2014)</div>

As Fincher's most recent film, *Gone Girl* stands as the sole model of his current auteur style in feature filmmaking as of 2017. Moving away from the tame interior settings of *The Social Network* while demonstrating greater polish than *Fight Club*, *Gone Girl* stands dead center in the thematic repertoire of Fincher's filmography.

Revolving around protagonist Nick Dunne and the mysterious disappearance of his wife, Amy, *Gone Girl* contains dialogue-driven scenes, but the film also shocks us with graphic acts of slaughter and self-mutilation. Set in an upper-middle class neighborhood in suburban Missouri, *Gone Girl*'s subversive elements remain just beneath the surface, occasionally boiling over when tensions reached a peak. Consequently, Fincher's camerawork develops these themes in a way that represents a culmination of his auteur stylings.

The opening minutes of *Gone Girl* display a balance of Fincher's two styles of opening a film: close-ups and indifferent distance. The film opens with an image of the central character – the gone girl, Amy Dunne. The first scene is a close-up shot, showing the top of her head as she lies on her husband's chest before looking up at the camera. The scene then fades to black and begins to roll the opening credits which are displayed against images of the film's setting, the fictional city of North Carthage. These shots

display a range of scenes of the city – a glimpse of the old-time downtown, the city's

abandoned mall, and newly-developed suburbs on the edge of wilderness – each hinting

at how far the city has sunk in the aftermath of the Great Recession.

Like Fincher's other films, the omnipotent opening gives viewers a foretaste of

Gone Girl's tone and pace; it is a film that deals with deeply personal concerns and

exposes them in a cold, calculating manner. If *Gone Girl* were to be Fincher's final

feature-length film, one could easily point to this opening as the pinnacle of his auteur

camerawork. It features a fusion of his title sequence styles in order to create an opening

that conveyed the film's competing elements of intimacy and distance.

Gone Girl once again shows Fincher returning to a method of camera positioning

that favors noir techniques. Interior shots, such as Nick's home or the police station, are

filmed at a low angle that creates a sense that ceilings are closing in on characters.

Likewise, the element of entrapping frames is present – predominantly in scenes that take

place in the police station. Nick Dunne, in his evolution from person of interest to prime

suspect, is twice shown framed within the window and doorframes of a police

interrogation room: once during his initial interrogation and once during a decompression

shot following the declaration of his arrest.

In this range of interior spaces, the camera freely pans through walls and past

furniture while tracking the movements of investigators who are navigating homes and

offices searching for evidence. Fincher focuses our attention on these pieces of evidence

by using action-oriented extreme close-ups, such as zeroing in on a gloved hand marking

a bloodstain with a sticky note. Other extreme close-ups include a thumb and forefinger

moving a board game piece, a hand drifting slowly across an empty "book ideas" bin in

Nick's office, and a variety of colored pens writing damning (albeit, mostly fictitious) accounts of a fractured marriage. This technique shows a skillful paring of Fincher's two favorite subjects for extreme close-ups: hands in action and inanimate objects signaling a given environment.

In *Gone Girl*, Fincher also continues a technique overtly utilized in *The Social Network*: the depiction of power dynamics through high- and low-angled shots. Although commonly used in mainstream cinema, this technique is generally absent from Fincher's early films, having been overshadowed by his near-ubiquitous use of low-angled shots. *Gone Girl*, however, makes use of high-angle shots in a number of scenes, such as the flashback sequence showing Nick and Amy's courtship. The scene – which begins with two strangers feeling each other out through sharp-witted conversation – ends with Nick proclaiming himself to be "the guy who's here to save you from all this awesomeness."[32] In this moment, the camera pivots from a level shot of Nick and Amy to an over-the-shoulder shot that rests above Nick and points downward toward the now-smitten Amy. Like the other variances in Fincher's camera style, this application of high-angle shots demonstrates Sarris' notion of a manifestation of interior meaning. The tension between Fincher's style of filming and the film's subject results in a final product that favors a greater use of high-angle shots.

Beyond the use of high-angle shots, Fincher's use of camerawork to accentuate conversation dynamics remains largely consistent in *Gone Girl* as compared to his other works. Camerawork in dialogue-driven sequences persists in displaying Fincher's pattern of closing in on characters' faces to emphasize weighty discourse. Once again, this

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[32] David Fincher, *Gone Girl*, 2014 (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment), Blu Ray.

dynamic sees a fusion of Fincher's older and newer styles: although *Gone Girl* shows a reemergence of some of Fincher's noir motifs, it departs from the element of withholding establishing shots.

In *Gone Girl*, fear and tension developed in familiar settings. Tension is not built on the mystery of unknown locations, but rather emerges from the mysteries that permeate characters' familiar and safe spaces. The factor of familiar spaces shows in Fincher's decompression shots, which are slightly more subdued in that they are not filmed from profoundly new angles. In fact, at times Fincher demonstrates a willingness to return to a previously used ensemble shot for his decompressions, such as when Nick and his lawyer Tanner Bolt argue over how to proceed with a television interview in light of the publicized disclosure of Nick's affair.

In the exchange between Nick and Tanner, an ensemble shot shows Tanner as he approaches Nick and Margo, Nick's sister. As Tanner attempts to convince Nick to pull out of the interview, Nick resists, and the camera shots begin to close in on both characters. The argument culminates with Nick firmly stating, "I can handle it."[33] This response shows Nick's face at a closer range than any other shot in the exchange. From there, the camera cuts back to Tanner at a medium-close shot of Tanner as he concedes. With the conflict resolved, the camera then pulls back to the conversation's opening ensemble shot.

Finally, *Gone Girl* contains the essential element included in other Fincher films: the one-off camera shake. This technique is applied to a single take that occurs during the candlelight vigil held for Amy. After being told publically that his missing wife was six-weeks pregnant, Nick attempts to make a quick exit from the vigil, dodging attendees and

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[33] Ibid.

news reporters. As he makes a run for a police car, the camera that follows him shakes as if it is being held by a member of an onsite news crew.

Whether *Gone Girl* stands to be Fincher's magnum opus is a subjective debate that will require more time to pass before it can be definitively argued. However, as the tenth and most recent of his films, *Gone Girl* serves as a culmination of Fincher's auteur style. The film stands as a good unit for measuring how certain elements of Fincher's camera style have remained consistent and how others have ebbed, flowed, and fused over the course of his career.

Conclusion

Fincher has vehemently expressed his belief that surviving and maintaining originality in the film industry requires a director to have grit and guts. As he once stated:

> I always wanted to give a lecture at film schools. You go in and you see all these fresh faces, and you say: "You! Stand up, tell me your story. Tell me what your film is going to be about." And they start, and you go: "Shut up and sit the fuck down!" And if they do, you go: "You're not ready." Because the film business is filled with Shut-up and sit-the-fuck-down. You got to be able to tell your story in spite of sit-down and shut-the-fuck-up. If you are going to let something like that derail you, what hope do you have against transportation department? What hope do you have against fucking development executives?[34]

Through this philosophy, Fincher has been able to consistently produce films that reflect his vision. From his experience with *Alien 3* and other films, he has developed the determination to never again be trapped by external forces that conflict with his vision. This vision manifests itself through cool, composed shots that work to appear natural despite being underpinned by Fincher's tight creative grip. Consequently, he his body of work represents some of the best auteur work in modern Hollywood.

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[34] FincherFanatic.com, "You Better Be Fucking Serious: David Fincher on Directing," 211.

Fincher's experiences working behind the camera in high school and later for Industrial Light and Magic gave him the auteur-level technical knowledge to translate his mental images into reality, and his experiences working as a subordinate for major film executives strengthened Fincher's resolve never to compromise his vision. Both his experience and resolve have allowed him to employ camera techniques that reflect his preferences and are examples of his authorship in his films – a key element in establishing a director as an auteur.

An analysis of Fincher's filmography revealed the following sets of recurring qualities that characterize Fincher's visual auteur signature:

Camera Movement
The smooth camera pan and other camera motions convey a sense of control and purposefulness. Omnipotent camera movement allows the camera to seamlessly move between spaces and position itself at angles beyond ordinary reach. The rare use of the handheld camera technique occurs roughly once per film and often conveys disorientation.

Camera Positioning
Opening credits help to set the pace and tone of the film. Early films favored extreme close-ups, while later films contained detached opening credits showing the surrounding environment. It is common to see characters framed in windows or open doors. One of Fincher's two distinct noir-inspired camera techniques, the use of frames conveys the notion that characters are trapped. Brief extreme close-up shots are used in order to show hand actions or inanimate objects indicative of a given environment. Establishing shots are often withheld in order to create a sense of tension. These shots are used to convey a release of built up tension, usually after an argument or revelation. Commonly used in noir films, this withholding creates a sense of uncertainty because the audience is inhibited from fully exploring a space. Close-up shots of faces are used to show characters processing and delivering information.

Camera Angle
There is a near-ubiquitous use of low-angled shots, with a greater use of downward angles occurring later in Fincher's career. The noir-esque visual presence of enclosed spaces, such ceilings, creates a sense of claustrophobia and further enhances the sense of entrapment created by the use of frames.

Fight Club, *Zodiac*, *The Social Network*, and *Gone Girl* each contain these visual styles either in pure form or in variance for the purpose of fitting with a film's themes or settings. As the author of the film, Fincher possessed full creative control over how the story would unfold for the audience. These works are representative of how his unique ability to choose– or, at the very least, approve the choice – to implement or modify these visual techniques in order to realize his vision for the story. Consistent with Sarris' definition of auteur styling, variance or adherence to his style demonstrated the auteur condition that Fincher's personality mesh with his films to produce "interior meaning."

Whether he accepts or rejects the auteur label, Fincher's genius is his ability to draw the viewer subtly into the film. His distinct and unique vantage point becomes embedded in each film through his masterful use of the camera to provide the viewer with the opportunity to see the story through his eyes, and his controlling vision presents a faux-objective reality that is built on careful calculation. This is what makes Fincher an auteur.

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