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# David Fincher

## INTERVIEWS

Edited by Laurence F. Knapp





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# **David Fincher: Interviews**

Conversations with Filmmakers Series  
Gerald Peary, General Editor



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**David Fincher**

**I N T E R V I E W S**

Edited by Laurence F. Knapp

University Press of Mississippi / Jackson

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Manufactured in the United States of America

First printing 2014  
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fincher, David.

David Fincher: interviews / edited by Laurence F. Knapp.

pages cm — (Conversations with filmmakers series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Includes filmography.

ISBN 978-1-62846-036-0 (hardback) — ISBN 978-1-62846-037-7 (ebook) 1. Fincher,  
David—Interviews. 2. Motion picture producers and directors—United States—In-  
terviews. I. Knapp, Laurence F., 1965– editor of compilation. II. Title.

PN1998.3.F54A3 2014

791.4302'33092—dc23

2014008216

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

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## Introduction

“I don’t enjoy doing interviews, because I don’t like being part of the noise. I just don’t want to be grist for the mill.”<sup>1</sup>

David Fincher hates being defined as an auteur. While many directors such as Tyler Perry, Quentin Tarantino, or Joss Whedon accept their celebrity status as part of their identity, Fincher does not want to be associated with a particular image or theme: “I don’t want to be a Winchell’s Donut. Even if my last name is ‘Winchell.’ I want to be able to make something like *Zodiac*. I mean, shouldn’t your movies, if they are truly personal, change the way you change?”<sup>2</sup> Fincher clings to the old-fashioned belief that his films should do all the communicating: “I don’t in my heart believe that a director should do interviews just to sell the movie. I worry that it demystifies it too much. And, I mean, you can’t fix the movie by explaining to people the context in which you made it. It’s not like they’re going to enjoy it more. If you’ve fucked up they’re still going to ask for their eight bucks back.”<sup>3</sup> As Fincher confesses to Stephan Litterer, “A director is like a quarterback. You get way too much credit when it works and way too much blame when it doesn’t.”<sup>4</sup>

For directors like Spike Lee or Kevin Smith, film is an odyssey of self-discovery and self-promotion. Fincher prefers self-effacement, but his need for absolute control compels him, begrudgingly, to take ownership of his work: “I have many, many friends who are vice-presidents and presidents of production at movie studios, and they never understand this very simple thing: My name’s going to be on it. Your name’s not on it. Your point of view is as valid as any member of the audience. But it’s a different thing when your name’s on it, when you have to wear it for the rest of your life, when it’s on a DVD and it’s hung around your fucking neck. It’s your albatross.”<sup>5</sup> Fincher accepts filmmaking as a Sisyphean task: “That’s the job. That’s what it is. Doing cool stuff like designing shots is 1 percent of your life. The other 99 percent is holding everything together while there’s total fucking chaos, maximizing the amount of hours that you have in order to get stuff, pulling shit out of your ass to

fix things, being able to work on your toes.”<sup>6</sup> He seeks the holy grail of the consummate shot but eventually surrenders to his own truism that “Films are not finished. They’re abandoned.”<sup>7</sup> Fincher’s notorious work ethic and attention to detail—his reputation as a reconstructed Stanley Kubrick demanding an ungodly number of takes—is reflected in this painstaking anecdote from the shooting of *Panic Room*:

I’m a movie director! I have to have meetings with a *lot* of people to convince them to give me even more money, and I have to be responsible for how that money gets spent. It’s my job to prioritize where time is spent because time *is* money. I don’t think I’m a control freak, but I have to be in control. Here’s an example: Today on the schedule it says we have to go down to the kitchen and shoot this scene. And a set of knives that were there in an earlier scene aren’t there anymore, they’ve been stolen. Somebody walked by the set and stole them. I have to be the person who says, “Okay, we’re not doing this right now. Go find some more knives. We’re going upstairs to shoot something else, we’ll come back to this later.” You think that should be an easy decision to make. But it isn’t, because then you have people who go (*urgent whisper*), “You don’t understand, the guy is here with the car and the car’s rented by the day and we’ll have to rent them some other time. Can’t you shoot the scene another way without the knives?” And I have to be the person who either goes, “Okay, we’ll do it another way without the knives,” or who says, “No. Fuck you. Don’t waste any more time talking about this. Get the knives; I wanna shoot the fucking scene with the knives.” I’m not in control of the knives getting stolen, but I’m responsible—I’m responsible for everything. Mainly I’m responsible for the haemorrhaging of money it takes to keep ninety-five people employed for six months to make a movie.<sup>8</sup>

Fincher blanches at being pigeonholed as a taskmaster—“There are a lot of people who will tell you that I like to make things more complicated than they need to be, that I like to make things hard on myself, but those aren’t the people seeing the movie in their head before it’s filmed. They’re just looking at the trucking waybills.”<sup>9</sup>—and a visual stylist—“I don’t like the idea of having a style, it seems scary. It’s so weird—what is it that makes your style? It’s the things that you fuck up as much as the things that you do well, so half your style is stupid mistakes that you consistently make.”<sup>10</sup> He does not rely on intertextual allusions to other directors to define his style. While Fincher admits that *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* inspired him to pursue film as a career, he does

not recognize George Roy Hill's authorship as part of that fascination. Fincher credits George Lucas for providing further inspiration, first as a neighbor ("We lived down the street from George Lucas at the time *American Graffiti* came out. I was ten years old at the time, and I would see him picking up his newspaper when I left for school. That made me think being a director was a viable job."<sup>11</sup>) then as an employer when he joined ILM as a production assistant on *Return of the Jedi*, but he's quick to disavow Lucas's thirty-five-year legacy as his own: "There are plenty of people doing Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. That was George Lucas and Steven Spielberg's trip. I've always been more interested in noir, in seventies movies like *The Parallax View*."<sup>12</sup> Fincher may express an affinity for Alfred Hitchcock or Martin Scorsese, but he does not fawn over them like a J. J. Abrams. When he does reference Kubrick or Spielberg, it's to define and clarify his own balanced approach to narrative range and depth:

I have a philosophy about the two extremes of filmmaking. The first is the "Kubrick way," where you're at the end of an alley in which four guys are kicking the shit out of a wino. Hopefully, the audience members will know that such a scenario is morally wrong, even though it's not presented as if the viewer is the one being beaten up; it's more as if you're witnessing an event. Inversely, there's the "Spielberg way," where you're dropped into the middle of the action and you're going to live the experience vicariously—not only through what's happening, but through the emotional flow of what people are saying. It's a much more involved style. I find myself attracted to both styles at different times, but mostly 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 the material without becoming too involved. I'll say to myself, "Am I getting too involved in the action? Am I presenting this to someone who's uninitiated to these people, and doesn't want to be in the middle of this argument? Maybe we should be doing over-the-shoulders, as if the spectator is experiencing the scene after returning from the water cooler." My [visual] approach comes from a more voyeuristic place.<sup>13</sup>

Although Fincher resists being called a visual stylist, his focus on form and viewer comprehension reveals a director who wants to use the specificity of cinema to engage and manipulate his audience: "I think

the first rule of cinema is that a movie has to teach an audience how to watch it. That's what the first act is, showing the audience the things they have to take seriously, the characterization and technique, laying the groundwork for point of view, and how you will or won't betray it."<sup>14</sup> When Fincher describes his authorship it's usually as a methodology of causality and continuity motivated by a precise application of narrative information and stylistic motifs:

There are two things I'm responsible for. One is whether or not I'm presenting believable behavior, which is totally subjective. The other thing is camera position: from where am I going to see this person? People think of directing as the Big Circus: yes, 90 per cent of directing is getting the money and getting the right equipment and the right people and departments to create the right feeling out of the right context. In film we sculpt time, we sculpt behavior, and we sculpt light. Audiences only get to see what we show them at that moment, I control everything they hear and see. I'm hoping that these elements will translate into feeling. It was Louis B. Mayer who said, "The genius of the movie business is that the only thing the purchaser gets is a memory." That's what directing is.<sup>15</sup>

Fincher may discount his marks of authorship, but his formal discipline and dark worldview link all of his films from *Alien*<sup>3</sup> to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*: "Entertainment has to come hand in hand with a little bit of medicine. Some people go to the movies to be reminded that everything's okay. I don't make those kinds of movies. That, to me, is a lie. Everything's not okay."<sup>16</sup> Fincher, like the artist Banksy, remains ambivalent about his commercial art career and his role as a popular storyteller and image maker. Within Fincher is a drive to antagonize and alienate his audience, as he admits to Mark Salisbury in a well-known quote: "I don't know how much movies should entertain. To me I'm always interested in movies that *scar*."<sup>17</sup> After surviving *Alien*<sup>3</sup> Fincher refused to become a director-for-hire, a *metteur content* to be part of the Hollywood entertainment complex: "A director's job is to feel like everything that they're doing is worth the amount of money, worth the cost of human life and blood, sweat, and tears. I had a meeting once with a famous commercial director who was running off to direct a movie, and he wanted me to join his company. He said, 'I'm going off to do this movie.' I said, 'Well, what is it?' 'Oh it's this cop thing.' I thought to myself, 'Oh my God, I don't ever want to be in a situation where I'm going off to do some 'cop thing.'"<sup>18</sup> From *The Game*, with its metacinematic theme of

exposing the cinematic experience as a Potemkin Village of deceit and illusion to *Zodiac*, a somber dissertation on the vicissitudes of time as it turns truth into hopeless conjecture, Fincher, like his Generation X compatriot P. T. Anderson, operates like Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, ready to make mischief, cueing you to look for that extradiegetic cigarette burn or that instantaneous phallic insert that violates the wobbly trust between filmmaker and spectator.

Fincher, like Tarantino, never attended a high-profile film school like New York University or University of Southern California. He is a throwback to the journeymen of old, developing his craft by learning the trade from the ground up, first working for small production houses and then ILM, before establishing himself as an entrepreneur with his infamous American Cancer Society spot and the creation of Propaganda Films, which led to his attention-getting music videos with Madonna, Aerosmith, and the Rolling Stones. Throughout his salad years, Fincher saw technical expertise as a form of autonomy: "I've always been a fan of people who understand kind of everything; as a director it always seemed to me that you wanted to know so much about everything that was going on so people couldn't bullshit you, so you could go, 'Here's what I want to do,' and there couldn't be some lazy fuck there going, 'You can't do that because you can't hold focus on that.' I wanted to be able to go, 'That's not true, give me a T56 on a 28mm lens and we'll be able to hold plenty into focus.'"<sup>19</sup> Fincher took his father's words to heart—"Learn your craft: it will never stop you from being a genius"<sup>20</sup>—and, like Ridley Scott in the 1970s, became a praiseworthy visual stylist. Ridley established his career with *Alien*. Fincher's career started less auspiciously with the same franchise.

John H. Richardson's "Mother from Another Planet" captures Fincher on the set of *Alien*<sup>3</sup> as a twenty-seven-year-old wunderkind at the helm of the *Titanic*. Fincher lives up to his reputation as the uncompromising perfectionist, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he is in charge of a \$60 million blockbuster in perpetual development hell: "We all sat here and decided to make a china cup, a beautiful, delicate china cup. You can't tell me we should have made a beer mug."<sup>21</sup> Fincher's struggle to make a film out of an unwieldy high-concept franchise set the baseline for his authorial profile for the next twenty years. Fincher became another Orson Welles or Terry Gilliam, the put-upon artist who dared to put aesthetics ahead of prosthetics: "I had a spoiled existence before making that movie. When you direct a video, people give you the money and say, 'Call us when you're done.' Movies aren't like that. I think you're

always in over your head on your first movie, even if it's a very small movie. All you can do is lick your wounds when it's over."<sup>22</sup>

*Alien*<sup>3</sup> did not break Fincher. Much like Clint Eastwood's experience languishing on the set of *Paint Your Wagon*, Fincher realized that he had to have total control over his career to avoid becoming the scapegoat for a film he never fully authored. James Kaminsky's 1993 piece "Mr. Fincher's Neighborhood" offers Fincher only by proxy, superficially pigeonholed as an enfant terrible, but upon further scrutiny a legitimate artist who, according to his associate Mark Plummer, cannot be dismissed as a music video stylist: "It's incorrect to think of him as having one distinct style. David works to arrive at a singular style for each project—often inspired by specific movies or photographs or paintings—and then he'll see it through in every detail. Lots of other commercial and video directors just try to imitate something but miss out on what made it great. David figures it out, then reconceptualizes it."<sup>23</sup>

Fincher himself reemerges three years later in Mark Salisbury's "Seventh Hell" with the unexpected success of *Seven* and his audacious decision to leave Gwyneth Paltrow's head in a box. The tropes that drive every subsequent Fincher interview come together—the perfectionism and his need for control ("Do your best work. Work as hard as you can on every given day and try to live it down."<sup>24</sup>) and the capsule biography that gets referenced and re-referenced like a chain letter (Lucas, ILM, etc.)—but with *Seven*, and Salisbury's piece, Fincher renews his commitment to a darker world view and an aggressive stance toward his audience: "You have a responsibility for the way you make the audience feel, and I want them to feel uncomfortable."<sup>25</sup> Fincher also establishes his working relationship with Brad Pitt, the Cary Grant to Fincher's Hitchcock: "On-screen and off-screen, Brad's the ultimate guy. If I could be anyone, it would be Brad Pitt. Even if I couldn't look like him. Just to be him. He has such a great ease with who he is."<sup>26</sup> Fincher, like Hitchcock and Kubrick, sees actors as one element among many ("Every once in a while there are actors you can defeat. . . . I hate earnestness in performance. Usually by Take 17 the earnestness is gone."<sup>27</sup>), but he is also dependent on a star's physiognomy to bring his images to life: "I believe in casting people whose core—that essential personality you can't beat out of them with a tire iron—has to work for the character."<sup>28</sup>

Ian Blair's "David Fincher Interview," Ryan Gilbey's "Precocious Prankster Who Gets a Thrill from Tripping People Up," and Jean Cooney's "The Head Master" feature a customarily distracted Fincher, shooting and promoting *The Game*, a collaboration with Michael Douglas that



Fincher conceived as a film about the narrative experience itself—the seductive allure of the suspension of disbelief even as the spectator resents being tricked by what he or she knows is artifice and illusion: “Movies usually make a pact with the audience that says: We’re going to play it straight; what we show you is going to add up. But we don’t do that. In that respect, it’s about movies and how movies dole out information.”<sup>29</sup> *The Game*, with Douglas’s association with *Wall Street* and the iconic role of Gordon Gekko, offered an unflattering portrait of Baby Boomer lassitude and selfishness; *Fight Club*, like Lana and Andy Wachowski’s *The Matrix*, announced a Gen-X call to arms, exposing America to the despair behind the slacker pose or the IKEA-boy nesting instinct. Fincher participated in a flurry of interviews for *Fight Club*, frequently appearing alongside his two young collaborators Edward Norton and Brad Pitt, who shared Fincher’s Gen-X mindset and discontent. In a number of group interviews, Fincher would offer one insight: “There were so many things the book’s narrator said where I went, ‘God I’ve thought that and never told anyone.’ For men today, there’s an arid wasteland of information about how to live. Am I supposed to cry? Supposed to fucking break something? Somebody just give me a hint,”<sup>30</sup> only to have Norton chime in: “*Fight Club* has a generational energy to it, a protest energy. So much of what’s been represented about my generation has been done by the baby boomers. They dismiss us: the word *slacker*, the oversimplification of the Gen-X mentality as one of hesitancy or negativity. It isn’t just aimlessness we feel; it’s deep skepticism. It’s not slackerdom; it’s profound cynicism, even despair, even paralysis, in the face of an onslaught of information and technology. . . . More than any film I’ve made, I pulled very directly from my own experience for this. I’m not saying nobody over forty-five is going to understand it. But it won’t surprise me if a great many people go, ‘Huh?’”<sup>31</sup> with Pitt adding: “It’s a pummeling of information. It’s Mr. Fincher’s Opus. It’s provocative, but thank God it’s provocative. People are hungry for films like this, films that make them think.”<sup>32</sup> Fincher, clearly empowered by Pitt’s assertion that he was “piloting the *Enola Gay* on this one”<sup>33</sup> crafted an A-bomb of subjective narration that rattled the audience’s brain as hard as one of Tyler Durden’s punches: “This isn’t the sort of movie you just sit back and watch. This is a movie that’s *downloaded* in front of you. It doesn’t wait for you. If you don’t keep up, you’re lost. It’s like you’ve tripped and sprained your ankle. You have to tell the rest of the audience, ‘Go on. Go ahead without me!’”<sup>34</sup> Gavin Smith’s “Inside Out,” Amy Taubin’s “Twenty-First-Century Boys,” and Andrew Pulver’s “Fight the Good Fight” feature a

garrulous Fincher eager to play pop sociologist and cultural anthropologist, weary of a world dominated by Apple, American Express, and Starbucks. While Tarantino mastered a rococo form of postmodernism that celebrated the triumph of pop culture as America's last coherent frame of reference, Fincher confronted the ontological legacy of postmodernism—the fragmented, alienated consumer/corporate drone lost in time, space, and his own consciousness—to bemoan the dehumanizing condition of late-stage capitalism imposed on any male born after 1962: “There were people at the studio who said, ‘This is evil and nihilistic.’ And I said, ‘No, it’s not.’ Because it’s talking about frustration, about an inability to find an answer. It’s about a guy struggling to make sense of something, as opposed to a guy giving in to the fucked way things are. So there were definitely people who didn’t get it.”<sup>35</sup>

After the Sturm and Drang of *Fight Club*, Fincher decided to make a mere movie with *Panic Room*—at least his idea of a popcorn thriller. In Daniel Robert Epstein’s “Inside *Panic Room*: David Fincher, the Roundtable Interview” and Gilbey’s “Four Walls and a Funeral,” Fincher reverts to his filmmaking-as-masochism mantra, aptly described by Gilbey as “The Pitiful and Miserable Existence of the Modern Filmmaker.” Fincher, like Hitchcock with *Rope* and *Rear Window*, conceived of *Panic Room* as a “composed film” shot entirely on a soundstage, with a rigorous treatment of unrestricted, omniscient camerawork until the final third of the film, when Fincher shifts from Kubrickian omniscience to Spielbergian character involvement. Fincher fell into a storyboard trap, composing the film so much in his head that he lost interest in its actual creation and execution once he lost lead actress Nicole Kidman and retrofitted the character psychology for Jodie Foster: “It just felt wrong, like I didn’t get the most out of the actors, because I was so rigid in my thinking. I was kind of impatiently waiting for everybody to get where I’d already been a year and a half ago.”<sup>36</sup>

*Panic Room* initiated a long hiatus in the 2000s. Stephan Littger’s interview from *The Director’s Cut: Picturing Hollywood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* gives Fincher an opportunity to put his career into perspective in the mid 2000s, especially his genesis from music video tyro into feature filmmaker. Nev Pierce’s “Forget the First Two Rules of *Fight Club*” validates Fincher’s masochistic struggle to give Generation X its cinematic due. Finally, in 2007, Fincher refashioned his author-code with *Zodiac*. Fincher became more reticent, a clue that *Zodiac* came directly from his youth, which he always associated with the Zodiac killings in the late

1960s: “It was a very interesting and weird time to grow up, and incredibly evocative. I have a handful of friends who were from Marin County at the same time, the same age group, and they’re all very kind of sinister, dark, sardonic people. And I wonder if Zodiac had something to do with that.”<sup>37</sup> Fincher always wondered if he could have been one of those traumatized kids on the school bus hijacked by the Scorpio killer in *Dirty Harry*—this was his loss of innocence, a Gen-X epiphany that no one could comprehend or apprehend this serial killer, not Robert Graysmith (Jake Gyllenhaal), David Toschi (Mark Ruffalo), or Paul Avery (Robert Downey, Jr.): “*Zodiac* is a mystery movie with no solution. This may be my particular perversity, but for me, those films are the most interesting. I don’t think we’ll ever know the answers.”<sup>38</sup> Fincher granted only a handful of interviews for *Zodiac*—in Shawn Levy’s “David Fincher of *Zodiac*” and Pierce’s “The Devil Is in the Detail,” he comes across as vulnerable, insecure that his serial killer-cum-newspaper-cum-cop film operated more on the level of Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’avventura* than Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs*:

I wanted the movie to take its toll on the audience, I wanted the audience to feel like they went through it, like they went through the ringer with these guys, and I didn’t know how to do that because these guys didn’t run across rooftops and fall off fire escapes. In their quest to bring the Zodiac to justice they followed the trail of breadcrumbs as far as it would take them, and they kept pushing and kept pushing when there were crackpots coming out of the woodwork. I felt like I didn’t want to make one of those movies where you do montage/montage/montage and you get the idea that they went to the mat with this, that it took its toll—I wanted the audience to feel that. You know, in retrospect you look at it and say maybe audiences who are looking for entertainment on a Friday night don’t want that toll taken on them. I felt like anything less than that would be doing the story and people involved a disservice.<sup>39</sup>

Fincher forces his audience to ponder how time can confound closure—there is no Eastwood dispatching Zodiac with a curt “Do you feel lucky?” only the nagging suspicion that a homely man in a hardware store could be the maniac responsible for Fincher’s penchant for movies that scar.

Out of the malaise and existential sorrow of *Zodiac* emerged a more productive, confident Fincher. In rapid order came *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *The Social Network*, and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

*Zodiac* introduced Fincher to the possibilities of digital filmmaking, which allowed him to bring *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* to life without sacrificing Brad Pitt's star presence:

When you look at a great cinema performance, you're seeing somebody who knows what the camera's doing. They know where they are in the story and they dredge up something incredibly stylized to show what, at that moment, you need to hang on to in order to understand this person. Often it's not the most realistic expression of that moment. That's why we're so fond of our favorite movie stars. They give us just enough to make us see ourselves in their shoes. That's a whole different thing from acting. And it's very odd when you talk about how you interface with a computer to achieve that. But it's the beginning, not the end. Instead of saying, "Oh my god, the machines are taking over," you have to look at Benjamin and say, "Without Brad Pitt, he doesn't exist."<sup>40</sup>

Scott Bowles's "A Curious Case of Friendship: *Benjamin Button* Partners Pitt and Fincher Click On Set" celebrates the ongoing collaboration/bromance between Pitt and Fincher, while Pierce's "In Conversation with David Fincher" and Salisbury's "David Fincher" showcase Fincher's technical proficiency and his congenital need to sabotage that most hallowed of Hollywood conventions, the love story: "In any love story the trick is how you keep them apart. One thing I really enjoyed about the script was that this is not codependent love. They are two fully realized people who choose for better or worse to be together. Nowhere is the choice of wanting to be there for the other person better illustrated than by her caring for him as he dies."<sup>41</sup> Fincher managed to make a romantic epic that, with Tyler Durden-like subterfuge, exposed *Titanic*, *The Notebook*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* as naïve sentimentality: "They aren't committed to one another out of desperation. They're not needy. I'm just tired of the ballad of co-dependency, you know what I mean? I like to see two adults in a movie deciding to live together instead of teenagers caving in."<sup>42</sup>

*Button* led immediately to *The Social Network*, which Fincher nicknamed tellingly as the *Citizen Kane* of John Hughes movies. In Emanuel Levy's "Social Network: Interview with Director David Fincher" and Mark Harris's "The Vulture Transcript: An In-Depth Chat with David Fincher about *The Social Network*," Fincher welcomes comparisons to his Gen-Y counterpart/protagonist Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg): "I know the anger that comes when you just want to be allowed to do the things that

you know you can do.”<sup>43</sup> As with *Fight Club* in 1999, Fincher once again captured the zeitgeist of his time by dramatizing the Web-based psychology of the millennials as they use Facebook to massage their narcissistic “need to be on the cover of one’s own *Rolling Stone*.”<sup>44</sup> Fincher marvels at Zuckerberg’s achievement—“A lot of people have differing ideas about Mark Zuckerberg, But it’s an amazing feat to scale something from a college dorm room to 350 million people. The design of it, the coding, is pretty beyond reproach. In that respect, Facebook is an *amazing* accomplishment”<sup>45</sup>—but he does not overlook Zuckerberg’s—and Gen Y’s—antisocial fixation with online “social” sites. Zuckerberg’s proto-autistic self-absorption, his inability to communicate and empathize with others, brings the film to a beguiling close as he neurotically checks his Facebook account, hoping estranged old flame Erica Albright (Rooney Mara) will validate his life’s work by accepting his friend request—Rosebud as an unrequited mouse click.

Rooney, that waiflike lost object of desire in *The Social Network*, morphs into Lisbeth Salander, a second-wave riot grrrl, in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, which brought Fincher full circle to another franchise only this time on his own terms: “I saw this not as a blockbuster that appeals to everyone. I saw this as an interesting, specific, pervy franchise. The only chance for something like *Dragon Tattoo* to be made in all of its perversions is to do it big. I think *The Godfather* is a pretty good fucking movie. You can start with a supermarket potboiler, but it doesn’t mean you can’t aim high.”<sup>46</sup> Fincher’s return to the serial killer genre allowed him to develop a close working relationship with Rooney and to cultivate a feminist strain in his work that began with Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*. In Brian Raftery’s “Heart of Darkness” and Pierce’s “Chasing the Dragon,” Fincher does not stray from the insidious legacy of rape in Stieg Larsson’s source novel—whether from Salander’s individual perspective or on a wider, more institutional level as the global 1 percent literally prey on themselves and the other 99 percent. Fincher also enjoys subverting Daniel Craig’s James Bond star text with Rooney’s self-reliant Salander: “Craig looks like this tough guy, not realizing that the little creature standing in front of him is a far more dangerous pit bull.”<sup>47</sup> Rooney offers another archetypal portrait of Gen Y—like Zuckerberg, Salander is a computer hacker on the autistic spectrum who craves attention even as she hides behind her precious laptop. While Gen X lashed against the ubiquitous Apple logo in *Fight Club*, Gen Y clings to it as a last refuge in *The Social Network* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

The last piece in the book, Fincher Fanatic’s “You Better Be Fucking

Serious: David Fincher on Directing,” comes from the unofficial Fincher fan website [fincherfanatic.com](http://fincherfanatic.com). The Fincher of 2002 could barely acknowledge the existence of the now-defunct [Davidfincher.net](http://Davidfincher.net) (“I don’t do it [check the site] religiously because it’s too weird. It feels like people know too much about me.”<sup>48</sup>). The Fincher of 2012 grants Fincher Fanatic a remarkable interview, once again denying his status as an auteur even as he explains how an auteur must behave in the twenty-first century: “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 development executives?”<sup>49</sup> Keep telling yourself you are not an auteur Mr. Fincher. If that’s what it takes to allow you to make a film like *Fight Club* or *The Social Network*, so be it.

In accordance with the policy of the University Press of Mississippi, these interviews are reprinted in chronological order in their original form to preserve their historical value. The purpose of any volume in the *Conversations with Filmmakers* series is to give the reader a sense of development as a film director attempts to define his or her work even as some journalists, academics, or bloggers revert to the same vignettes or conflicts. As with any star text, a director must tolerate repeated questions about his or her filmography and extratextual reputation regardless of his or her desire to grow and evolve. All of the pieces selected feature salient writers who want to give Fincher the opportunity to define his work on his terms, especially Nev Pierce, who, since the mid 2000s, has played the role of François Truffaut to Fincher’s Hitchcock.

This book would not be possible without the support of my wife Moyenda and my two sons August and Christopher. Michael Jolls, my editorial assistant (and former student), encouraged me to embark on this book project. No one is as reliable and proficient as Michael. Trisha Collins, the librarian at Oakton Community College, never failed to honor my document requests, no matter how obscure or incomplete. Leila Salisbury, the director of the University Press of Mississippi, and Valerie Jones, my editor, tolerated my numerous inquires and idiosyncrasies with aplomb. Gerald Peary, the series editor and an old friend and mentor, worked his magic when I needed it most. Thanks to all the

contributors for their cooperation, especially Nev Pierce and Mark Salisbury, as well as Fincher Fanatic and his indispensable and definitive website [fincherfanatic.com](http://fincherfanatic.com).

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