The first thing to say about this list is that because of my nature, my favorite 100 movies from 2000 through 2009 are culled from viewing that would under no definition be considered comprehensive.

How little do I see? Of 45 Best Picture nominees so far this decade, I've taken in 31. So I've missed nearly a third, including winners *Gladiator* and *Million Dollar Baby*. (The other nominees I've so far skipped: *At onement*, *The Aviator*, *Chocolat*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Finding Neverland*, *Frost/Nixon*, *Gangs of New York*, *Juno*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *The Reader*, and *Seabiscuit*. For something drawn from broader experience, look at Mike Schulz's list.)

It is certainly possible that some of these movies, if seen, would be on this list. Based on what I know about myself and these movies, though, there's a far greater likelihood that bypassing them was a sound choice. That's a sign of a less-than-fully-open mind, certainly, but it's also a matter of priorities: Do I think this movie would reward my time investment as much as [a different movie, sleeping, Wii, etc.]?

My 100 favorite movies of the decade follow, with links going to essays written for CultureSnob.net. After that are discussions about five filmmakers with multiple movies on this list.

The Top 10

1. *Memento*
2. *Pan's Labyrinth*
3. *Requiem for a Dream*
4. *Oldboy*
5. *The Royal Tenenbaums*
6. *No Country for Old Men*
7. *The Mothman Prophecies*
8. *Mulholland Drive*
9. *Donnie Darko* (original theatrical version)
10. *The Descent* (international version)

The Next 88 (in alphabetical order)

Adventureland
American Splendor
Amores Perros
Ararat
The Aristocrats
The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford
Away from Her
Batman Begins
Birth
Brokeback Mountain
Burn After Reading
Camera (short film; YouTube.com/watch?v=hQlQgzRyBfY)
Capote
Capturing the Friedmans
City of God
Collateral
Confessions of a Dangerous Mind
Dancer in the Dark
The Dark Knight
The Deep End
The Devil's Backbone

District 9
Dogville
Dominion: Prequel to The Exorcist
Eastern Promises
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
Finding Nemo
The Five Obstructions
Game 6
Ghost Town
Ghost World
Ginger Snaps
Grace (2009, directed by Paul Solet)
Happy Endings
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban
Helvetica
A History of Violence
Holes
I Heart Huckabees
In America
Incident at Loch Ness
The Incredibles
Inside Man
Intacto
JCVD
Land of the Dead
Lantana
The Last King of Scotland
Let the Right One in
The Lives of Others
Lost in Translation
Moulin Rouge!
Murderball
The Orphanage
Perfume: The Story of a Murderer
Pieces of April
A Prairie Home Companion
The Prestige
Primer
The Proposition
Rachel Getting Married
Requiem (2006)
Shattered Glass
Spider
Spider Forest
The Squid and the Whale
Stone Reader

Stranger Than Fiction
Talk to Her
Teeth (2007, directed by Mitchell Lichtenstein)
Terminal Bar (short film)
There Will Be Blood
Thirst (2009)
13 Tzameti
The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada
Timecode
Touching the Void
Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story
Trouble Every Day
25th Hour
28 Days Later
Unbreakable
Up
Waking Life
WALL•E
Wolf Creek
The Woodsman
Zodiac (2007, directed by David Fincher)

The Final Two (because they amuse me and aren't showing up on many of these lists)

99. *Tongues and Taxis* (short film; YouTube.com/watch?v=tvJguvgTQfg)
100. *Monkeybone*

Discussions: Five Filmmakers of the Decade

In these sublists, the movies are ranked in rough order of preference -- i.e., the movie listed first is my favorite.

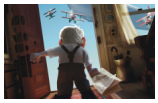
Christopher Nolan

Memento
The Prestige
The Dark Knight
Batman Begins

[redacted]

Pixar

WALL•E
The Incredibles
Up
Finding Nemo



Pixar could be said to have resurrected the idea of movies for the whole family, but I don't think that's true. *The Incredibles* is for middle-aged folks. *Up* is for old people, and those of us afraid of what we might be when we're old. *WALL•E* speaks of loneliness, first love, and the consequences of rampant consumerism.

Kids might like or love any of these movies, but they won't really *get* or feel them. Pixar is making movies that they can grow into and up with, and that the rest of us can love without reservation or shame.

David Cronenberg

Camera
Eastern Promises
Spider
A History of Violence

An odd thing happened with David Cronenberg this decade. He forsook his trademark body/biological horror and began making movies that were, on the surface, conventional.

This wasn't a gradual thing, really. His 1999 film *eXistenZ* had a serious anal fixation and

played like a remake of his own *Videodrome*, and it ended a decade that also included the grotesqueries of *Naked Lunch* and *Crash*. So the feature trio of *Spider*, *A History of Violence*, and *Eastern Promises* looks positively mainstream by comparison.

It's anything but. What Cronenberg seemed to discover this past decade was subtlety -- not the blink-and-you'll-miss-it variety, but a reliance on tone and performance rather than gooey special effects or sexual deviancy. While his movies in the past have been unsettling because of the way they tap into and embody fear and disease, his recent movies have been fundamentally psychological.

Spider is an inside-out adaptation of one of my favorite books, as author and screenwriter Patrick McGrath turned the novel's narrator into a movie character who produces few intelligible words. The gothic portrait of mental illness -- in which Ralph Fiennes as the title character is largely a collection of tics -- mines and cleverly visualizes memory and fantasy, and although its ultimate revelation is no surprise, it also isn't the point. *Spider* feels like an all-access pass to a dark, private place.

The other three movies here are about dual identity, and more specifically about what we actually are even though we imagine ourselves as something else.

A History of Violence is, like its protagonist, bifurcated, and I think it's a little too broad in its small-town clichés to be entirely successful. But it has an exquisite, unresolvable tension that is given voice by one question posed about Viggo Mortensen's seemingly simple diner owner: "How come he's so good at killing people?"

Something about Mortensen obvously inspired Cronenberg, because his next movie -- *Eastern*

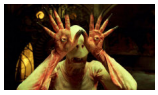
Promises
-- also stars the actor, and has a nearly identical central theme. It has a similarly bizarre architecture, in the sense that the revelation that Mortensen's gangster/driver Nikolai is an undercover cop seems to be a twist for a twist's sake; the movie ends shortly thereafter, and his real identity barely furthers the plot.

Yet the genius of the movie -- why it's so good beyond its tightly circumscribed mob/nurse/baby plot -- is that Cronenberg *doesn't* do anything with the revelation; he lets it work by implication. The final shot, echoing *The Godfather Part II*, shows Nikolai -- finally the "king," in his parlance -- sitting pensively in the restaurant, and we project into a mind that he has declared blank: "I'm just a driver." We consider the tattoos, and the evil that he's done and seen in the name of law enforcement. He has put himself at risk by saving people, but we wonder how much of the good guy has been devoured by the bad one. He remains an enigma, but one senses regret, accentuated by the lovely, mournful eastern-European violin theme.

Best of all from Cronenberg this decade is *Camera*, an ostensibly whimsical six-minute short. It's basically a monologue spurred by those darned kids bringing a movie camera into a house, but the crotchety yet indulgent speaker has existential concerns: aging, death, the way a film gave him a disease in his dream ... . As compact as Croneberg's feature films are, this one packs a ton into a very small space, and it is the most playful he's ever been.

Guillermo del Toro

Pan's Labyrinth
The Devil's Backbone



An apparent believer in Scorsese's "one for me, one for them" philosophy, Guillermo del Toro has made a *Blade* movie and two *Hellboy*s for "them" this decade. And if those mean that he'll continue to make the occasional brilliant personal movie, that's fine by me. The writer/director has grounded these two films -- one a dark fairy tale, the other a ghost story -- in history and a genuine sense of time and place, and as a result the vivid, beautifully executed fantastic elements have even more authority and resonance.

But what really sets del Toro apart is his empathy with children combined with his adult

sophistication; he is in that way the anti-George Lucas.

Lars von Trier

The Five Obstructions
Dancer in the Dark
Dogville

I do not begrudge those who hate the agitating Dane; Lars von Trier makes it easy, as the documentary *The Five Obstructions* shows him to be, bluntly, a cruel asshole. (This is something that can be inferred from *Breaking the Waves*, *D ancer in the Dar* k, and *Dogville* ; seeing the man in action, though, is something else entirely.) Yet there aren't many filmmakers who, in 10 years, could produce three so stylistically disparate movies along with the marriage horror show *Antichrist* (which I have not yet seen). And three so disparate movies that are so distinctly *good* . The Brechtian *Dogville* might be a baffling slog to most viewers -- it was for me for much of its running length -- but its perfectly calibrated conclusion justifies it. *Dancer in the Dark* combines grim, melodramatic tragedy with the widescreen musical, and there's naked authenticity in the central performance by Björk that's positively heartbreaking; she's different from the typical von Trier abused heroine.

The Five Obstructions , meanwhile, is a great introduction to how formal cinematic elements -- editing, for example -- dictate meaning. (In the movie, Von Trier forces his filmmaking idol to re-make a classic short movie five times, each with a different set of rules.) It's also lighter and clearer and more fun than anybody could expect from von Trier.