What is an auteur? Who popularized the idea?

An auteur is the lone voice of the film.  The director who has absolute control over the overall vision, the tone, voice, and imagery of the film with a very specific point of view or narrative within the film which everything is based off in it.  Francois Truffaut initially introduced this idea.

What effect did the lack of formal education have on Truffaut's career?

I would say that made him more available to opportunities as they came up. He started as a hated film critic because of his ripping of films before he decided to move into directing. This probably got him plugged into the industry so he spent most of his time making those lasting connections. People may have been eager to please him at that point as well because of his reputation as a critic.

Being a good director requires what?

It requires a lot of hard work, a clear vision for the film, the ability to understand everyone’s job on the set and the goals of the project as a whole. It requires good communication skills with artists, many of which have their own way of doing things, so it also requires the ability to control with and without controlling them depending on their response to the director’s actions in a given situation. I think a good director knows when to control directly and indirectly to accommodate certain artists’ wants or needs in relation to the project.

Compare and contrast the way Sam Raimi made Evil Dead and the way Tarantino made Reservoir Dogs.

They both started with no experience at all in the movie industry. They found a way to get their films financed and made them happen in their own vision. I believe Tarantino sold his to a studio, who took a chance on it since it was of little risk, while Raimi did more of an independent film approach by getting the money from a dentist’s union to fund his picture.