

# TARANTINO

*An auteur of modern cinema*



Master's thesis by

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September 12, 2016



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## Introduction

Everyone has a favorite film, a favorite genre, or even a favorite director. Directors consistently pull an audience in with their versions of love stories or action films, as have they done for many years. However, every once in a while, a director appears and pushes the limits of the audience and break down the boundaries of traditional cinema. One of these directors is Quentin Tarantino. Tarantino made his entrance in the film industry with the film *Reservoir Dogs* in 1992, which became a huge success at the independent film scene as well as with its audience. In 1994, Tarantino released *Pulp Fiction*, which cemented Tarantino's status as a director to watch out for in the future as the film won an Oscar for best screenplay and was nominated in six other categories. Tarantino has since become a name in the film industry that most people know to some extent due to his very recognizable and distinct craftsmanship. Despite having directed only eight films over the span of 24 years, being *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill* (2003 & 2004), *Death Proof* (2007), *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012), and finally *The Hateful Eight* (2015), Tarantino has managed to create a recognizable expression within his films. It is an expression so distinct that his films become recognizable as his work at first glance to anyone who has seen a Tarantino film before. Tarantino's films are often a bloody and brutal affair, a mixture of an original story and a large amount of pop cultural and intertextual references which on numerous occasions have sparked debate about the values Tarantino actually contribute to the film industry. However, when one delves beneath the hardcore, R-rated surface of Tarantino's films it becomes apparent that the director has a gift for telling stories with important thematic meaning. Since Tarantino appears to be exhibiting such an individual and distinct style, it would be relevant to analyze his works with focus on auteur theory, as this theory focuses especially on the director as the ultimate creative source of a film. This inherent identity within the films is subject for further analysis as it is interesting to investigate the *Tarantino-style* and what cinematic elements make his films special. To do so, this project works around the following thesis:

Is Quentin Tarantino an example of an auteur of modern cinema? Does Tarantino show a consistent way of making his films in terms of visual style and narratology? Does Tarantino communicate a specific message in his films, and is this message consistent throughout his works? Based on *Politique des Auteurs*, can Tarantino be considered as a true auteur?



In order to examine Quentin Tarantino as a possible auteur, this project will draw on the relevant theory concerning the *auteur*, presented by François Truffaut, André Bazin, and Andrew Sarris. Furthermore, the forthcoming analysis will be performed over Bordwell & Thompson's neo-formalistic methodology, assessing the areas of stylistics and narratology as the most relevant aspects in Tarantino's films which can contribute to the conclusion of him being considered an auteur. Also, as part of the analysis, a case study of Tarantino's latest film, *The Hateful Eight* from 2015, will be performed in order to emphasize if and how Tarantino still maintains these analyzed traits throughout his career as a director to this day. The results from the analysis will be approached in relation to the presented theory to discuss Tarantino's position as an auteur of modern cinema and how this status is achieved. The conclusion of this project will attempt to determine whether or not Quentin Tarantino can be considered an auteur of modern cinema and emphasize the decisive elements for this conclusion.

## Theory

### Auteur Theory

To eventually conclude whether or not Quentin Tarantino can be seen as one of our time's great auteurs through the writing, directing, and staging of his eight feature films, the following chapters will contain an outline of the historical and theoretical framework of the *auteur* principle. This theoretical framework will contain the ideas of film critics François Truffaut, André Bazin, and Andrew Sarris. The *auteur*-label in itself translates directly to author, but the value of the label came to mean so much more as the discussion became one of who, between the studio, screenwriter, and director, could lay claim to being the artistic creator of a film in the making.

In the time during the Second World War, and in the time after, sound cinema grew into being commonplace in the film industry. As such, the idea grew amongst those working with, and interested in, film that the years to come would mark the era of cinema where the script writers would be recognized as the artistic force behind their films (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, p. 381).

Some critics, however, opposed this new notion of the importance of the scriptwriter, and instead argued that proper film could only be created at the hands of an engaged director. In France, many critics championed this view and in 1948 film critic Alexander Astruc published an essay on the subject, in which he foretold that the film media would soon be an outlet for artistic expression to the director much like the canvas has been to the painter, and pages to a writer. Astruc firmly believed that cinema could achieve this level of abstract thought and creation on the same level as the written language and as such labeled this new tendency "la Camera-Style" or "The Camera-Pen" aptly published as "N'assaince d'une nouvelle avant-garde: La Caméra-Style", or "The Birth of a new avant-garde: The Camera-Pen" in the French magazine *L'écran Français* (Astruc, 1970, pp. 149-151).

Astruc was not the only French cinephile who believed change was coming to the French film industry and many of these likeminded critics, such as François Truffaut, André Bazin, and Eric Rohmer, were affiliated with the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Especially Truffaut managed to upset the order of things with his essay "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema" (1952) in which he openly attacked the traditional ways of the French film industry and especially its screenwriters, who, according to Truffaut, created nothing original but instead relied on adapting literary works to the big screen. Truffaut's essay also included his original idea of the director as *auteur*, a director who would write his own scripts and stage them for the camera

according to his own vision, and as such his essay sparked the beginning of the ideas of *auteur* theory (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, p 382).

### Truffaut

One of the earliest corner stones of what would later come to be known as the *auteur* theory was laid by then film critic, and later director, François Truffaut, through his essay "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema". It was published in the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1952 for which Truffaut was a film critic and writer at the time.

Truffaut's essay is a collection of comments on, and critique of, the state of French cinema at the time, as well as a collection of ideas of what the makers of film art should ideally aspire to. One of Truffaut's major points of criticism is aimed at what is called the "tradition of quality" which was "a cycle of literate films that were considered among the [French] nation's best cinema" (Grant, 2008, p. 2). Truffaut's criticism of this tradition was how it was rooted in a systematic production which often included adaptations of literary works, making cinema the skill of adapting literature rather than film making in its own right. According to Truffaut, this tradition was problematic because screenwriters were men of literature and as such these writers, who adapted literature into cinema, were under the impression that certain scenes were un-filmable. Truffaut strictly disagreed and argued that instead of omitting certain scenes equivalence could be invented in the form of "scenes as the novel's author would have written them for cinema" (Truffaut, 2008, p. 11).

Truffaut states that he only believes in true equivalence between the source literature and the adaptation when said adaptation was created by a man of cinema, as opposed to a man of literature. According to Truffaut, screenwriters would often seek to convey their own political statements, polluting the equivalence of the adaptation to screen with little regard to how it would play out in front of the camera (Truffaut, 2008, p.15). The problem of writers writing literature for cinema springs from a certain disregard for the craft of film at the time. On this matter, Truffaut cites film director Jean Delannoy when implying how writers felt like they needed to lower themselves to be understood by the lowliest of audiences when they decided to write screenplays rather than literature, which is why these writers were so careful to keep themselves within the confines of the tradition of quality that had already proved successful (Truffaut, 2008, p.15).

Truffaut admired directors such as Jean Renoir and Robert Bresson who write their own stories, scripts, and character dialogue for the films they direct. This is, according to Truffaut, the traits of true men of the cinema, *auteurs*, who take full responsibility for telling stories through

mise en scène rather than literature (Truffaut, 2008, pp. 15-16). Furthermore, after proclaiming these *auteurs* the true men of cinema, Truffaut states how he does not “believe in the peaceful coexistence of the “Tradition of Quality” and an “*auteur's* cinema”” (Truffaut, 2008, p. 16).

In his presentation of the *Auteur's Cinema*, it becomes apparent how Truffaut supports the same core ideals as Astruc. Astruc described how the camera could be used as a pen to communicate an idea or thematic problem through cinematography and mise-en-scène, whereas Truffaut believed a true man of cinema should aspire to take responsibility for most aspects of the creative process, such as script writing, staging, and directing. Both men agree that should this new standard gain a foothold the craft of film making would attract some serious artists who could manage to create serious art using the film medium (Astruc, 1970, p. 151).

Truffaut criticizes the long standing tradition of quality which had existed in the production of French cinema as he believes screenwriters focused too much on conveying their own values through the value system of literature in general. By writing original scripts for cinema themselves, the director becomes more than just the man staging and organizing the screenwriter's scripts, a so called *matteurs-en-scène*, he becomes the true artistic force behind the film: A true *auteur*.

## **Bazin**

André Bazin was one of the founding editors of the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* and as such very familiar with the views and statements made by Truffaut on the recently created ideal of *politique des auteur*. Even though Truffaut used *Cahiers* as an outlet for his ideas of the *auteur* and many of his fellow writers and critics on the magazine shared his view, or at least his fascination, his editor and mentor, André Bazin, did not fully agree on Truffaut's idea of the *auteur*. Bazin's own thoughts and opinions on the *auteur* could subsequently be found in his article “De la Politique des Auteurs” published for the first time in *Cahiers* in 1957.

In the opening lines of his article Bazin accounts for a tendency in the articles of *Cahiers* which grew in the two years following Truffaut's essay from 1954. Bazin describes how *Cahiers* had arguably begun a praising campaign for the benefit of all the films made by directors whom the magazine and its writers deemed worthy of carrying the *auteur* label. Bazin states that even though many of the critics and writers within the *Cahiers* might disagree and share different opinions on different directors and their films, the writer who was most enthusiastic and liked a film or director the most, always got to write the article on the subject. As such, the writers of *Cahiers* could be viewed as almost crusading a film or championing a director to the point where said

director would come to appear as an “infallible directors who could never make a bad film” (Bazin, 2008, p. 20).

Almost apologetic to the readers of *Cahiers*, Bazin explains the dynamic in opinions within his circle of critics and how he generally supports the newly formed *politique des auteurs* but often disagrees with his fellow writers on their passions for specific films and directors. Where Bazin distances himself the most from the likes of Truffaut and Rohmer is in his understanding of the relationship between a film and its creator. Bazin is adamant in his belief of how the work or creation transcends the creator, which, in the world of *auteur* cinema, means that the film transcends the director (Bazin, 2008, p. 20). This belief is directly opposed by the ideals of his fellow *Cahiers* critic Truffaut, whom by Bazin is often stated to quote Jean Giraudoux by saying “there are no works, there are only *auteurs*”, and Eric Rohmer, who has been quoted with the assertion “in art it is the *auteurs*, and not the works, that remain” (Bazin, 2008, p. 20). In a rebuttal, Bazin argues that such ideas are fallacies because it would mean a director could never create a bad film as soon as at least one of his works earned him the title of *auteur* within the circle of critics: “As soon as you state that the filmmaker and his film are one, there can be no minor films, as the worst of them will always be in the image of their creator” (Bazin, 2008, p. 20). To illustrate this fallacy Bazin refers to the relation between French philosopher Voltaire and his works of creation. Bazin agrees that the name Voltaire is associated with a certain style and wit which makes Voltaire recognizable and that said style may be more influential than certain works in his bibliography. But besides Voltaire's genius creations, such as his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, was also his “abundant and atrocious writings for the theatre” (Bazin, 2008, p. 21). As such, an artist is not infallible simply from creating one masterpiece and the artist's creations must be independently evaluated.

Bazin's argument of assigning value to a work with lesser regard for its creator's persona stems from the mentality and value system from Voltaire's time, the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Bazin, this was a time in history where artists and philosophers would take no credit for their works and would even at times denounce them if they fell short of their intended qualities. It was not until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that author rights became a legal matter and in turn gave credibility to the name of the author, artist, or creator (Bazin, 2008, p. 22). Despite all this Bazin also agrees that the individual creative process is important, but clearly argues that film as an art, because of its status as an industry, cannot attain the same level of artistic individualization as other art forms such as painting. But this blend of artistry and industry is also one of the reasons for Bazin's praise of, especially, the American cinema of the time, which, through its productions

manages to “show American society just as it wanted to see itself” (Bazin, 2008, p.22). Hence, Bazin agrees that the individualization of cinema, and art in general, is a good thing, yet also that the artist as a person will always be a product of the world around him. Bazin states it clearly in the following:

“The evolution of Western art towards greater personalization should definitely be considered as a step forward, as a refinement of culture, but only as long as this individualization remains only a final perfection and does not claim to *define* culture. At this point, we should remember that irrefutable commonplace we learnt in school: The individual transcends society, but society is also and above all *within* him”  
(Bazin, 2008, p. 22)

With this statement Bazin moves on to discuss the idea of the artistic genius, which he believes exists in cinema, although in a different form than most other arts. As stated in the quote above, Bazin believes the individual, and therefore each and every filmmaker, to be a product of society and the idea of the genius as being free and independent is therefore flawed. Genius is, according to Bazin, a certain combination of “unquestionable personal talent, a gift from the fairies, and a moment in history” (Bazin, 2008, p. 22). The filmmaking genius does not necessarily have to define filmmaking in all its aspects, but instead understand the enterprise that filmmaking is, its technological possibilities, limitations and the society which it seeks to represent and reflect. Due to this extensive process that is filmmaking, achieving a stroke of genius in the art of cinema is, according to Bazin, much more improbable than in literature or painting. The genius is to Bazin, not only the artists who are ahead of their time, but also the artists who define their own time in history. To do so, these geniuses do by no means have to be infallible. Again Bazin mentions Voltaire who, through his philosophical work, defined the 18<sup>th</sup> century even though he fared far worse in other undertakings, such as writing plays. Using that as a baseline for the argument, Bazin declares that genius artists will most certainly at times create works that are below their standards. And since that is the case, so too is the opposite: “There is no reason why there should not exist – and sometimes there do – flashes in the pan in the work of otherwise mediocre filmmakers” (Bazin, 2008, p. 23).

So if the *auteur* is not an infallible genius who has to make but one brilliant film, then what is it to be *auteur*? According to Bazin, the *auteur* is a director who reflects on his own identity and values: “To a certain extent atleast the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario he always tells the same story, [...] has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgement on the

action and on the characters” (Bazin, 2008, p.25). An *auteur* has a unique fingerprint which he leaves on all his creations, and it is this fingerprint that the supporters of *politique des auteurs* hold in such high regard that it sometimes, according to Bazin, clouds the objective judgement on each individual film created by said *auteur*. As an example, Bazin compares the films *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *Confidential Report* (1955) from the critically acclaimed director Orson Welles. *Citizen Kane* is, according to Bazin, the superior film of the two and defined a whole new era in cinema. To this day *Citizen Kane* is still ranked 67 on the Internet Movie Database's list of top 250 best films of all time, based on a rating system used by the site's visitors (IMDb – Citizen Kane). *Citizen Kane* was, according to Bazin, a product of combined efforts between Welles himself, the RKO studio and their technology and technicians, as well as cinematographer Gregg Toland. *Confidential Report* on the other hand was all Welles himself. As such, there were those amongst the practitioners of *politique des auteurs* who would argue fiercely that *Confidential Report* is the superior film, since it much clearer shows the unique fingerprint of Orson Welles (Bazin, 2008, pp. 24-25). Therefore, it could at times be argued that the supporters of *politique des auteurs* would “prefer small ‘B’ films, where the banality of the scenario leaves more room for the personal contribution of the author” (Bazin, 2008, p.25), which leads Bazin to the conclusion that “All [the supporters of *politique des auteurs*] want to retain in the equation *auteur* plus *subject* = *work* is the *auteur*, while the subject is reduced to zero” (Bazin, 2008, p. 25).

Bazin's main concern with the *politique des auteurs* as criticism is, therefore, that a film is automatically good if it has been made by a director who has beforehand been declared a true *auteur*. It falls within what he calls ‘criticism by beauty’ in which the critic simply declares that a work of art is good based on its creator rather than trust his own critical intelligence (Bazin, 2008, p. 26). Bazin finds it problematic that this kind of automatized thinking took over and that, even after practicing *politique des auteurs* for almost four years, the critics of *Cahiers* had yet to compile a manifesto of exact guide lines for *politique des auteurs*. As such, Bazin feared that *politique des auteurs* would instead turn into an “aesthetic personality cult” (Bazin, 2008, p. 26).

To summarize, Bazin agrees with his fellow writers and supporters of *politique des auteurs* in the idea that further individualism in the craft of filmmaking will inevitably lead to greater artistic aspiration. What he does not agree on is the *auteur* automatically being more important than the work he has created. Furthermore, Bazin dislikes the idea of the infallible director, who, after being appointed *auteur*, can never create a bad film and on the other hand he fears that brilliant films made by mediocre directors, who has not achieved *auteur* status, might be wrongfully judged as

inferior. The *auteur* and work of art exists in a symbiotic relationship for one could not be without the other and Bazin's essay fittingly ends with the following lines: "One [does not] have to deny the role of the auteur, but simply give him back the preposition without which the noun *auteur* remains but a halting concept. *Auteur*, yes, but what *of*?" (Bazin, 2008, p. 28).

## Sarris

In 1962, five years after the publication of Bazin's "De la Politique des Auteurs" and almost eight years after Truffaut's "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema", American film critic and writer Andrew Sarris, who was the first *auteurist* in America, published an essay which contained a comprehensible framework for the *auteur* theory. The essay was called "Notes on Auteur Theory in 1962" and was originally published in the magazine *Film Culture*.

Sarris opens his essay with a rather sarcastic paragraph in which he appears to be siding with those critics who are opposing the *politique des auteurs* and he does so by comparing the two directors, John Ford and Henry King, one of whom is an acclaimed auteur: "The *auteur* theory is unyielding. If, by definition, Ford is invariably superior to King, any evidence to the contrary is merely an optical illusion. [...] Let us abandon the absurdities of the *auteur* theory so that we may return to the chaos of common sense" (Sarris, 2008, p. 36). Yet, through his words it is quickly established that he seeks to defend the *politique*, but in order to do so it must be established in more concrete detail what the *politique des auteurs* actually is. As such, Sarris takes on the role of establishing a formal set of criteria much like Bazin sought for the *politique* supporters of the *Cahiers* to do years earlier.

Sarris is no stranger to Bazin and proclaims him the greatest film critic who ever lived (Sarris, 2008, p. 37). Sarris admires Bazin for his love of film which is so profound that Bazin strived to see at least some quality in every film and would often argue against his much more cynical colleagues, whom Bazin felt passed inaccurate judgements for the sake of "dramatic paradoxes" (Sarris, 2008, p. 37). Regardless of his admiration for Bazin, Sarris states that Bazin was wrong. Whereas Bazin argued that one could not determine the quality of a director's future films based on his previous works, Sarris argues that in previous years many of the proclaimed *auteurs* had done well in their career, whereas those who had been harshly critiqued by the *Cahiers* had turned out to deserve that critique as well. As such, Sarris argues that, even with their dramatic harshness, many of the supporters of the *politique des auteurs* "managed to see the future more clearly on an *auteur* level than did Bazin" (Sarris, 2008, p. 38). A reasonable claim, yet arguably beyond the point Bazin tried to make in his article. Bazin feared the glorification of a director based



on only one work of brilliance, and likewise feared the exclusion of a potential *auteur* based on one single failure. Sarris claims to disagree with Bazin, yet goes on to argue that *auteurism* can only be granted a director who manages to consistently be brilliant over the course of many works and not just one. Likewise, he states that a bad director consistently has to fail in his work to be bad: “what is a bad director if not a director who has made many bad films” (Sarris, 2008, p. 42).

Unlike the *Cahiers* supporters of *politique des auteurs*, Sarris comes up with a set of comprehensible rules, or guidelines, for what made a director eligible for the *auteur* title and thus creating *auteur* theory. The corpus of the *auteur* theory, as coined by Sarris, is made up from three criteria of value which every *auteur* should express in their works:

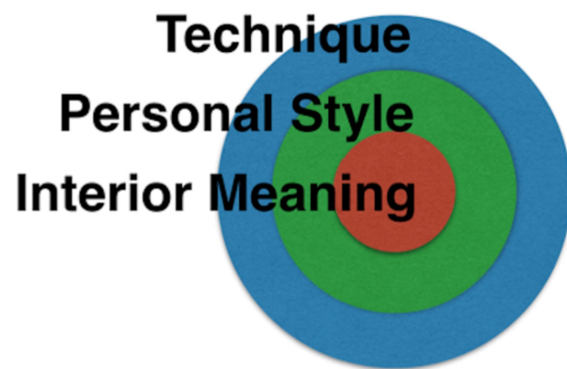
The first criterion is technical competence, as the director has to at least display some level of flair for the cinema, as Sarris states. As cinema is a huge industry with many specialist workers attached in various production departments, any film could probably make it through production with a subpar director and still come out, more or less, looking like the studio's intended product. Nevertheless, a director with no technical skill might have a job directing films, but he will never rise to be a truly great director (Sarris, 2008, p. 43).

The second criterion is personal style. Much in accordance with Bazin, Sarris states that an *auteur* must, through a number of his films, exhibit some personal stylistic traits that are unique to his way of film making. This, the second criterion, can be seen almost as an extension of the first, as it will often be through his technical competence, such as cinematography and mise-en-scène an *auteur* leaves his personal fingerprint. Furthermore, and also in accordance with Bazin, this fingerprint can be the story's approach which, no matter the film's scenario, will resonate throughout all of the *auteur's* films (Sarris, 2008, p. 43).

The third criterion, or the ultimate criterion as Sarris calls it, is interior meaning. This criterion is hard to define in clear terms, yet strangely critical to the whole definition of the *auteur*. Sarris states that “interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material. [...] It is not quite the version of the world a director projects nor quite his attitude toward life” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). For something that makes up a criterion for a theoretical framework, this definition is rather vague. Sarris himself admits that interior meaning is hard to define and that it can occur as no more than a brief moment of breaking the pace of the film, where the director reveals his identity. As such, it can be argued once again that, just like criterion two built upon criterion one, this ultimate criterion builds upon the second one. To explain, Sarris states that “it is imbedded in the stuff of cinema and cannot be rendered in in noncinematic terms” (Sarris,

2008, p. 43). Arguably, any traits, messages, quirks or ideologies a director possesses must be translated to the screen using the production tools of cinema. For said director to establish said identity he must fulfill criterion one, knowing the craft, in order to fulfill criterion two, carefully choose which of these tools best suits the story he is telling based on his vision for the film. If said vision transcends mere choices of cinematic technique, and instead becomes an extension of the director's persona, then he has fulfilled the ultimate criterion and thus becomes an *auteur*.

Sarris, unlike any other *auteur* critic, manages to create a system of analysis and a set of definable traits of *auteurism* in film. According to Sarris himself, this system could be visualized by three concentric circles, showing the layers of *auteurism* with 'interior meaning' at the heart of it all and states that the corresponding titles for directors are "a technician, a stylist, and an *auteur*" (Sarris, 2008, p. 43).



### **Early *auteur* theory in conclusion**

Concluding the various arguments of these three critics, it is interesting to determine which ideas and definitions of *auteurship* are shared amongst them and which are not. The actual *auteur* theory created by Sarris is not to be disregarded, but seen as an extension, or product, of the *auteur* discussion. Truffaut argues that an *auteur* is the controlling and creative force in the production of film and that *auteurs* should strive to write or otherwise create their own stories, which the visionary *auteur* brings to life on camera through *mise en scène*. Bazin argues that the *auteur* should exhibit a certain and unique identifiable style across his films, if possible. However, a director can achieve *auteur* status even though this is not the case for all his films, as each film carries value in its own right. Therefore, an *auteur* is not infallible, as well as the subpar director may in a turn of events achieve a stroke of brilliance. This can be the result of cinema being an industrial undertaking and much less personal in the creative process than other liberal arts. One of Bazin's main points is that the *auteur* is only a genius on the level the industry and society permits, as society is reflected within each and every individual. Lastly, Sarris supports Truffaut on the basis that his early judgments appeared to reveal timeless directors who did keep creating quality films

over the course of time. Yet, he also states that the true *auteur* must be established based on a greater corpus of creations than just one.

Across the three of these critics, the main points of being an *auteur* come down to these points:

- A director who writes his own material
- A director who possesses the technological skills of the filmmaking trade
- A director who displays a unique style in his films
- A director who, regardless of scenario, tells the same story

Arguably, Sarris' *auteur* theory is an extension of these criteria, each step building towards the next. Truffaut's statement of the *auteur* as the man of cinema, who writes and stages his own scripts through mise en scène, is the link between the first and second criteria, stating an *auteur* should possess some cine-technical prowess and a unique style of his own. Furthermore, Bazin's idea that the *auteur* is an artist although he is a product of society can be argued to establish a link from the second to the third criterion of Sarris' theory, which is interior meaning. Interior meaning, as Sarris states, is found in the underlying meaning and the director's approach to the material. With starting point in Sarris' statement that this third criterion "is not quite how the director projects the world and also not quite his attitude towards life", it can be argued that there must exist some tension within the director which comes to show. Even though the director seeks to showcase a specific scenario, it subconsciously clashes with his identity, which in turn finds its way into his work.

## Methodology

### Approaching the *auteur* concept

Evidently, *auteur* theory took its beginnings in the 1950's and early 60's nearly 60 years ago. According to Bordwell & Thompson *auteur* theory of the 50's and 60's shaped the understanding of cinema into what it is today. Academic studies embraced *auteur* theory as a critical approach and to this day many moviegoers, critics, fans, and ordinary people alike, uses some degree of *auteurism* as a criterion of taste. And this criterion is not reserved for art-film directors alone, but extends to Hollywood's more commercial directors as well. In short, *auteur* theory has introduced the director as the man behind the film to the world (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, p. 383).

The value of the *auteur* label is also still discussed among critics and film scholars with various opinions on the matters and different approaches to the analytical process. As *auteur* theory is mainly concerned with applying the director as the creative force behind any film, one such analytical process is the question of "why?". Why the finished product of a film ends up looking, sounding and feeling like it does, and whether or not it is the results of the efforts of the director. As such, the analytical process becomes a matter of *agents* and *agency*. In the chapter "Agency in Film, Filmmaking, and Reception" from the book *Visual Authorship – Creativity and Intentionality in Media* from 2004, Torben Grodal, based on David Bordwell's earlier definitions, defines agents as conscious beings with desires and intentions. Agency is thus the understanding and acceptance of the fact that everyone and everything one comes across acts purposefully to some extent. In filmmaking, this leads to several levels of perceived agency: The filmmaker is an agent, his characters may appear to be agents, and even the film companies can be perceived as agencies with intentions and beliefs (Grodal, 2004, p.15). In her chapter "Authorship Approaches" from the textbook volume *Authorship and Film* (2003), Janet Staiger states that "authorship will be the term used to cover the research question of causality for the film" (Staiger, 2003, p. 28). To the causality question, or agency question, Staiger reviews already existing approaches, which, according to Staiger, are faulty and "dodges" the actual questions of agency (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 38). In the chapter "The Makers of Movies: Authors, Subjects, Personalities, Agents?", also from *Visual Authorship – Creativity and Intentionality in Media*, Casper Thybjerg explores Janet Staiger's thoughts on causality and discusses these approaches through the inputs of various scholars. The first faulty approach, or dodge, mentioned by Staiger, is claiming that the *auteur* does not exist and is merely a reading strategy. But claiming such a thing completely "evades the question of whom or what made the film" (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 38). The second dodge is to regard the *auteur* as "a site of

discourses”, making the *auteur* no more than a conduit for history and conveys a message that is beyond his control. If that is the case, the *auteur* would have no cause and no agency, and the unique traits found in the film would not be fingerprint of the *auteur*, even though it might seem like it. Without agency, the *auteur* would exist only in the critical reading of his works (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 38). Aside from these two dodges, Staiger outlines the four general approaches to authorship, which all accounts for various degrees of agency, or intentionality.

The first approach sees the filmmaker as a conscious agent. He is aware of his intentions and manages to express them in his work, making him the true origin. The second approach sees the filmmaker as a limited agent constrained by his personality. As he cannot separate his vision from his subconscious, his self-will unintentionally flow into the film. In the third approach the filmmaker is limited, not by himself, but by his role or place within a larger organization, such as a studio or the film industry as a whole. The fourth and final approach reduces the filmmaker to nothing more than a name and stripped of all intentionality and is therefore no longer an agent.

According to Staiger, these approaches all have their shortcomings. The first approach bears the implications that the author is basically omniscient in the creation process and able to carry every aspect of their creative vision into the finished text (Staiger, 2003, p. 30). According to Thybjerg, many critics takes this approach, even though said critics are aware that most films are not, and cannot, be created by the hand of one man alone, as the approach nimbly allows for the disregard of the empirical process that the analysis of actual production details would become:

“The assumption that the director is (directly or indirectly) responsible for the interesting and worthwhile bits of a movie appears realistic and sensible. It also saves time and allows the critic to concentrate on the films rather than dig through dusty and often uninformative production records” (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 41).

One could, however, take this empirical approach, which would fall within the third of Staiger's mentioned approaches. Within this approach, filmmaking is considered a collaborative process and critical scholars, such as Robert Carringer and Berys Gaut, have advocated such approaches where the *auteur* is a commune made up from the director as well as everyone attached in some way to the production process. Carringer, however, still insists that the director is the primary *auteur*, to which Gaut disagrees (Thybjerg, 2004, pp. 43-44). Staiger opposes this idea of collective creativity as she finds it problematic to view a collective production crew as having

creative agency while laboring under the supervision of a production corporation (Staiger, 2003, p. 42). Staiger herself practices the approach she calls 'Authorship as technique for the self', where in the identity of the *auteur* is a focal point for the political and cultural surrounding, which will inevitably be projected onto the work of the *auteur*. Staiger is more accommodating towards the second approach, where the result of the work can be read as more of an unconscious effect instead of actual intention. This notion shines even more through in the fourth approach, in which the author is reduced to no more than a signature with no practical influence on the production process. Staiger states that such claims are to some extent agreeable because it bases intentionality on social formations instead of individual agents (Staiger, 2003, p. 44, Thybjerg, 2004, p. 43). Thybjerg finds both of these approaches lacking as the critics practicing them often "pay relatively little attention to the practicalities of filmmaking" (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 41). Should one choose to approach a film from this viewpoint and accept it as a product of social formations, and not the director as an artist, it "still begs the question of how this particular subjectivity is able to mold a movie in its own image" (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 43).

Thybjerg instead advocates the rational agent approach, also advocated by David Bordwell, in which the author is regarded as a highly intentional agent. Bordwell regards stylistic analysis of a film to be superior, as the author-as-origin approach leads to thematic interpretations for which there is no concrete argument: "The emphasis on stylistics then leads logically to the rational-agent model, because a stylistic choice is much more evidently the result of real-world decision-making than a thematic point" (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 51). In the argument of Bordwell, a film becomes the product, or artefact, of skilled artisans, who use their film-technical abilities to tell stories through *mise-en-scène* and can therefore be analyzed as such (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 53).

"His inferences are above all guided by the assumption that filmmakers are real, thinking people and that they are concerned above all with the practical problems of putting together a movie in such a way that it works [...]. He does not deny that the filmmaker may express the inner aspects of their psyche or that they may reflect or be symptomatic of the wider cultural forces. The understanding of films as artefacts produced by a network of causes and channeled through real people working within the social and practical context of film production provides [...] a flexible and sensible approach to answering the question of how and why films get made the way they are" (Thybjerg, 2004, p. 62).

As such, Thyberg agrees with Bordwell and they do not deny that the subconscious of the *auteur* and the cultural and political surroundings can influence the *auteur* but instead choose to focus on the more concrete approachable stylistic elements, approaching the *auteur* as a rational and intentional agent in the creative process.

### **Problematics of *auteur* theory and actual approach**

The discussion conducted by Casper Thybjerg shows that there are various ways to approach *auteur* analysis and that all these approaches have their shortcomings. Even though Staiger outlines four approaches of intentionality, and Bordwell his own, the borders between these approaches are arguably not so clearly cut, as the discussions also showed. Should one choose to approach authorship purely stylistically as Bordwell suggests, then the director would perhaps be reduced to the role of 'stylist', as seen in Sarris' concentric circles, as interior meaning, the true *auteur* criterion, is arguably a matter of thematic interpretation. Bazin argues that every director is a product of society, which seems to fit well in Staiger's more politically oriented approach, but this almost completely neglects the actual and practical process that is filmmaking, by stating that the subconscious mind will dominate the conscious one.

Furthermore, an *auteur* is not static or bound within a certain moment in time. Filmmakers evolve and make different films throughout different periods in time. Therefore, it should be assumed that, even when approaching the works of only one *auteur*, the production process, intentionality, creative, and practical freedom behind said works differ. Yet, in order for a director to achieve the status of *auteur* he must exhibit some level of consistency, as stated by the early critics, and it can be counterproductive in the critical approach to differentiate the director's films too much from each other when looking for recurring traits. In short, one must assume some level of consistency between the works of the *auteur* even though many of the parameters of the analysis are obviously inconsistent.

The ultimate approach would be one which combined the efforts of all of the above approaches and analyzed every aspect of the *auteur*'s life and the production process in minute detail. Such an undertaking would be impossibly huge. First, production records should contain every small detail of every cast member, crew member, and other personnel's routines and roles and not least their interactions with, and instructions from, the director. Second, the finished film should be analyzed shot by shot, approaching it both as an individual work, but also in the context of the director's entire corpus of works. Third, every detail of the director's life should be known in order to be certain what traits to ascribe to his personality. If the level of production details and analysis

alone seemed incomprehensible, surely knowing a person in such detail all the way down to his deepest subconscious levels is downright impossible. Therefore, no matter what, a critical analysis of the *auteur*, and his relation to his works, will always rely on a certain amount of assumption.

This project aims to determine Quentin Tarantino's status as a modern *auteur*. When assessing Tarantino and his collected works, the analysis of these are based on Bordwell & Thompson's neo-formalistic system in regards to film style and narrative form, found in *Film Art – An Introduction* from 2013. These specific areas for analysis are consciously picked, since these portray the most approachable and tangible areas of filmmaking and thus providing basis for an empirical analysis. When doing such an analysis, one needs to accept and expect that Tarantino, to some extent as an agent, has control of every single process in regards to his films. If not hands on, then he has hand-picked people for the respective tasks, such as editing or casting, and these people are then able to produce exactly, or close to, the vision Tarantino has for his film. Therefore, this project works under the assumption that all actions and decisions in regards to his films reflect back onto Tarantino and not his crew. The results of the analysis will be compared to the theory presented above regarding auteur theory, and this comparison will then lead to the conclusion of Tarantino's possible status as an auteur in modern cinema.



## Analysis

### Stylistics in Tarantino's works

#### Mise-en-scène

For the purpose of establishing Quentin Tarantino as an auteur of modern cinema, one needs to look into his ways of creating his works, and distinguish his significant style in his films, and how recurring elements across his films are visible. Analytically, one examines the films technique, mise-en-scène, which is the most noticeable for the audience. Mise-en-scène is the term for every element present in front of the camera, meaning that it is everything that can be seen in the frame by the audience. These elements are the setting, costumes, makeup, lighting, the actors and how they act and move. Most directors have their own style, or at least particular areas within the mise-en-scène they rely on (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 112). This is also the case for Tarantino, and the following will examine what Tarantino places in front of the camera, and why, hence, analyzing his style in the production of his films.

#### *Setting:*

In *Reservoir Dogs*, setting plays a minor, and yet important, role. The film has quite few locations and settings, which then allows the film to maintain a focus on the characters and the dialogue between these. The rendezvous spot in the film, the warehouse, appears primarily as what Bordwell & Thompson call a container for the drama between the characters to unfold (2013, p. 115). Still, the choice of using the warehouse as the constructed setting supplies the film with authenticity, since that exact location, being basically empty and unused, seems to be a location which would be used for a heist like the one in *Reservoir Dogs*, giving the scene and setting a realistic aspect. Tarantino makes use of the audience's conception of how shady businesses and crime realistically works, and the realistic aspect is persistent in several locations across all of Tarantino's films, which the following will establish as to how.

Having already said that the setting of the warehouse in *Reservoir Dogs* is minimal in its construction, it still contributes to the understanding of the film with its authenticity. As mentioned, this location appears as an appropriate spot for the criminal activities in question, which then contributes to understanding of *Reservoir Dogs* working with dodgy character types and crime. The setting fits in to the underground feeling of crime, which recurs in Tarantino's later films. Especially Tarantino's first three films, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Jackie Brown*, work with crime and shady businesses in a realistic world and in realistic settings. Looking at the screenshot

below, it becomes clear how the actors are central to the scene and the setting itself is a container for them to carry out the acting.



Screenshot 1: *Reservoir Dogs* - (00:17:09)

The screenshot gives an example of how this rather empty warehouse functions as the setting, or container, for the criminals to act in. In this realistic setting where the criminals are out of sight, the drama can unfold. In these said container settings, the acting and characters become primary for the drama on screen to unfold, which is the case for the scenes in the warehouse in *Reservoir Dogs*. As an audience, we already associate settings like this warehouse as a location for shady businesses to occur, which *Reservoir Dogs* takes advantage of by using one of these exact locations. The following will look at more examples of these settings, and the function of using the respective settings.



Screenshot 2: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:22:46)

Stylistically, Tarantino often makes use of a strip club or a bar as a setting. He fills these settings with a distinct red light, also to accommodate the feeling of realism in the film. This use of light will be emphasized in the later analysis of the light use, but the use of this setting also supports the aforementioned factor of using settings fit for shady businesses and crime. In this case, the audience encounters Butch (Bruce Willis) meeting with gangster boss Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) in a strip club, as indicated by the dancing pole over Butch's right shoulder. Now, the meeting takes place in the middle of the day – not the usual time to attend a strip club, which you normally would do at night. Furthermore, the strip club is empty and the shady business between Butch and Mr. Wallace is not overheard by anyone. In this way, the audience's conception of the strip club at daytime being house of shady matters is confirmed, as the warehouse example from *Reservoir Dogs* did.



Screenshot 3: Jackie Brown – (00:23:04)

*Jackie Brown* shows another example of crime happening under cover, several times, but the screenshot above exemplifies how Ordell Robbie (Samuel L. Jackson) can liquidate a man without anyone being suspicious. First of all, Ordell has parked in an oil drilling ground, where fences cover him from being seen. Secondly, Ordell executes the guy at night, where most people sleep. And third, he hides the body in the trunk of the car. The setting itself does not appear specifically as a spot for crime to unfold, but the darkness and fences decreases the visibility for outsiders, which favors Ordell. He can basically drive into the drilling grounds, shoot the man, and the drive away, without anyone noticing him having even been there, as he does in this scene. Again, this is an example of a realistic setting for crime to happen, emphasized by the fences hiding the area, the darkness also covering the persons and actions in question, and the open space of the drilling grounds, meaning that no one will be around and able to spot this execution.

With the abovementioned settings as examples, Tarantino attempts to establish an underground environment for his cast to act out their characters' criminal backgrounds, by accommodating the audience's general conception of how this type of crime is organized and executed.

Where the first three examples have dealt with Tarantino's first three films, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Jackie Brown*, the rest of his filmography works with different genres, and therefore, also different settings. The first three films are set in what would be present time, at the time of the production, while the following films, belonging to different genres, are set in a different time and space. Assessing the films chronologically, films number four and five, *Kill Bill vol. 1* and *vol. 2*, are in terms of structure constructed as one entire film split into two separate parts. Also, a thing, which is rather specific to *Kill Bill*, is the fact that the film is designed to look like a movie-in-the-movie, as the following two screenshots emphasize.



Screenshot 4: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:00:18)



Screenshot 5: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:00:34)



Screenshot 4 shows the fictive production company of the film, Shaw Scope, along with some Japanese writing on top, to suggest that the film is presented or produced in Japan. Also, screenshot 5 suggests that the film is running in a movie theater at the moment by presenting the text “OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION”, which would be a typical presentation in an older movie theater. The Kill Bill films are not the only ones being set in a fictional world by being a film within a film. *Death Proof* is set in the same universe as the Kill Bill films, and it also has the same “OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION”-opening sequence as mentioned above. *Death Proof* and the Kill Bill films also share something else, namely the location within the film, which is a location Tarantino consistently uses throughout his films, both in his regular feature films but also the abovementioned films determined to be movies-in-a-movie. The location in question is the state of Texas. The exact locations in *Death Proof* and the Kill Bill films is specifically close, which is proven by involving some of the same characters in all films, namely Sheriff Earl McGraw (Michael Parks) and his son, James McGraw (James Parks), as the screenshots below show.



Screenshot 6: *Death Proof* – (00:52:09)



Screenshot 7: *Kill Bill* vol. 1 – (00:19:24)

Earlier, it was mentioned that *Kill Bill* vol. 1 and vol. 2 is supposed to look like a Japanese production, which was exemplified by screenshot 4. The element of the Japanese production and Japan in general is present in several settings throughout both volumes of *Kill Bill*, and the following will examine some of the settings in respectively *Kill Bill* vol. 1 and vol. 2 to underline the Japanese traits. In terms of genre elements, the Japanese aspect will also be emphasized later in the genre analysis part of this project. The following will explore the use of setting in the *Kill Bill* films.



Screenshot 8: *Kill Bill* vol. 1 – (00:07:29)

In screenshot 8 we see the main character, The Bride (Uma Thurman), engaging one of her enemies on her kill list, Vernita Green (Vivica A. Fox), in her house. This early setting in the film suggests, as Tarantino's first three films, a story taking place at a similar time as the production. Technically,

this would be possible if it was not for the fact that we are dealing with a film within the film. The setting is a regular house, looking like any other household in the United States, with a television, plants, and kids' toys on the front lawn, and both actors are dressed casually. The genre is established with the acting as the actions taking place provide an indication to the audience of which environment they are about to engage. The fighting, the combat stances and the use of knives are the genre markers of a martial arts film, as the genre analysis will conclude, and the use of props, in this case knives, is arguably also genre specific. This setting and situation creates what Bordwell & Thompson define as narrative expectations (2013, p. 115), since the audience will come to expect more martial arts related content in the film. In this setting, Tarantino accomplishes the atmosphere of a martial arts film, despite working with a setting in a realistic, American home. The living room of the house becomes the arena for the two female fighters, which contrasts, and even breaks, the expected setting of family and peace normally found inside the walls of the household and introducing martial arts instead.

In terms of location related to the setting, 45 minutes into *Kill Bill vol. 1* The Bride visits Okinawa, Japan, and therefore makes the location, setting, and plot more symbiotic. The martial arts films, of course, originate from Asia, and the location is appropriate to the story's themes and genre elements - and what more stereotypical Japanese location than a tiny sushi restaurant? The Bride meets one of Japan's most renowned sword-makers, Hatori Hanzo, in his sushi restaurant in Okinawa, where he makes a living after having retired from producing samurai swords. See screenshot 9 below.



Screenshot 9: *Kill Bill* vol. 1 – (00:45:52)



Tarantino uses a few props to emphasize the setting's location as a sushi restaurant in Japan by placing knives on the back wall and also a large picture with Japanese signs written. The props are essential elements when underlining the atmosphere of, in this case, a different culture and location than what has been seen earlier in the film. By bringing in these specific cultural objects, the audience can easier identify where the setting and location is. In the screenshot below the audience sees O-ren Ishii (Lucy Liu) and her gang sitting on the floor by low tables, eating and drinking. The low tables and the actors sitting on the floor are indicators of the location, but it is Tarantino's use of props that underline the setting, along with the actors' costumes.



Screenshot 10: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (01:09:21)

Tarantino attempts to recreate the surroundings and the atmosphere of a Japanese restaurant and the respective traditions connected with these. He does so by using props such as the paper fan, the sake cup, the wooden post in the middle of the room, the decorations in the background, and the special windows – all presupposition triggers of what Japanese culture involves. This structuring of the setting is called a *stylized setting*, since the décor of the scene is stylized to achieve a particular atmosphere – in this case, Japanese style. The stylized setting helps create authenticity in the constructed surroundings by trying to replicate certain details from the environment the director wishes to portray (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 116).

The stylized settings are recurring throughout Tarantino's work, especially in the works from *Kill Bill vol. 1* and later. As earlier mentioned, the first three films are set in more realistic settings and locations, but the later films show several examples of how the settings are stylized to uphold a specific atmosphere in the frame. *Inglorious Basterds* is situated during World War II, primarily in Nazi-occupied France, which requires some specific settings to capture the



essence of this particular time and location. As indicated in the earlier passages, it requires more than just the setting to accomplish this. Costumes, makeup, acting, and lighting, along with setting, are all factors contributing to the successful construction of the *mise-en-scène*. The focus here will be the setting and the other elements will be analyzed later in the project.



Screenshot 11: *Inglorious Basterds* – (01:55:34)

In this first screenshot example from *Inglorious Basterds*, the setting is a movie theater in Paris, France. The scene is the premiere of a Nazi-propagandist film, where all important Nazi leaders and soldiers are invited – including Hitler. The movie theater has, without doubt, been decorated for the occasion with the characteristic Nazi swastika flags in red and the Nazi eagle as well. The red color is distinct and the dominating element in this particular setting. Arguably, this is done to exaggerate the looming and imposing presence of the Nazis. These are symbols the audience most likely are familiar through common knowledge about World War II and how the Nazis presented themselves at that time. Therefore, it is another example of a stylized setting, as experienced with the examples from *Kill Bill*. The explicit use of these symbols has the effect of authenticity, since these symbols are how most of the audience will recognize Nazism. The use of these well-known symbols also serves as indicators of the historic time in which the film takes place. The film's opening scene states a specific year, but many amongst the audience would be able to distinguish the period of time being World War II just by seeing plot elements such as the uniforms of the German soldiers and the swastikas.

Arguably, *Django Unchained* shares traits with the western genre. It naturally includes some genre specific elements in terms of setting, as experienced with the former works as well. Such genre markers include horses, stagecoaches, revolvers, cowboy hats, muddy streets, and

saloons. The first few scenes already accommodate many of these markers, quickly confirming the genre. In a western like *Django Unchained*, the setting is much related to genre, since the genre requires specific locations and settings. In the screenshot below, we encounter Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz) and Django (Jamie Foxx). Many of the genre markers are visible in the screenshot below, such as the horses, the wagon, the cowboy hats, and the city surroundings such as the muddy streets.



Screenshot 12: *Django Unchained* – (00:12:58)

Again, the audience's thoughts and general conception of the locations and settings are important, since the film presents a specific geographical location, namely Daughtrey, Texas. The audience may know that many western films take place in Texas. Therefore, very early in the film, a genre-typical setting and location is established.



Screenshot 13: *Django Unchained* – (00:14:37)

Earlier, another genre specific element was mentioned, namely the saloon. After Django and Dr. Schultz arrive in Daughtrey, they visit the town's saloon, as the screenshot above illustrates. The saloon itself as a setting is also associated with specific props and elements required to be present, such as the swinging door, the bar, and, also present in the screenshot, the bull horns. Tarantino has created an authentic setting for his western to unfold authenticating the locations with classic western props like horses, cowboys, and the saloon. Looking through Tarantino's films, a pattern is emerging in terms of setting and locations. When Tarantino creates his settings, he always attempts to create authentic settings that the audience can easily identify and recognize, depending on the film and the time it seeks to portray. His first three films, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Jackie Brown*, focused on realistic settings that people would recognize, where his later films attempted to create an authentic feeling regarding the settings and locations by implementing genre specific props and elements, which the audience would recognize from crime films – in *Kill Bill vol. 1* and *vol. 2* it was the Japanese styled elements, in *Inglorious Basterds* it was World War II elements, and in *Django Unchained* it was western genre elements. All are elements implemented to achieve authenticity within the films' settings and locations. Evidently, Tarantino has an ability to construct his scenes in a way that, as earlier described, basically every location functions as a container in which the actors can carry out the acting. This can be both in minimalistic settings, as exemplified in *Reservoir Dogs*, but also much large settings, as those used in Tarantino's later films. The films all have in common that the actors become the primary force driving the plot and story forward, and the settings, therefore, function as containers which emphasize the impact and authenticity of the acting. This is an evident trait found throughout Tarantino's works, and, therefore, appears as a stylistic trait of Tarantino's construction of settings within his films.

### ***Costume and makeup:***

The following will focus on to the second part of Bordwell & Thompson's important elements of mise-en-scene, costume and makeup, and how this category stylistically is represented and visible in Tarantino's works. The main point concluded from Tarantino's setting and location was the creation of authenticity across all Tarantino's films. Therefore, it is interesting to examine how the choices of costumes and makeup add to this notion of authenticity.



Screenshot 14: *Reservoir Dogs* – (00:37:43)

Being constructed with only few locations and settings, *Reservoir Dogs* continues its minimalist style, utilizing only few, and simple, costumes. The heist members in *Reservoir Dogs* are wearing a plain black suit with a white shirt and a skinny black tie, as seen above in screenshot 14, which supplies the characters with a hidden identity to go along with their assigned codenames, such as Mr. White. Using these costumes contributes to blurring the characters' identities. The combination of the simple suits and the color names hides the true identity of the characters. *Reservoir Dogs* is set in a realistic setting which also requires the characters to be dressed realistically, and the plain black suit is something that probably hangs in most men's closets, and therefore a trivial set of clothing – corresponding with the fact, that Tarantino wants the characters to be character-less in appearance and only be defined by the acting. Arguably, dressing his heist members in what appears to be a regular set also displays an authentic touch to the universe.

The plain black suit worn by criminals is also found in Tarantino's second film, *Pulp Fiction*, where the criminal enforcer duo Vincent and Jules are wearing the same outfit as the heist members in *Reservoir Dogs*, as seen in screenshot 15 below. This can be an indication of two things: First, that Tarantino wishes to portray his criminals the same way he did in *Reservoir Dogs* with the plain black suit, removing special characteristics in the appearance of his characters, and second, that the two films are set in the same universe, and since Tarantino works intensively with intertextuality throughout his works, this is plausible.





**Screenshot 15: Pulp Fiction – (01:53:32)**

Tarantino creates a humoristic contrast in terms of outfits for the abovementioned characters, Vincent and Jules. After an incident with an unfortunate headshot, the suits are covered in blood. The two seek help from Tarantino's own character in the film, Jimmy, and he supplies them with special attires, as the screenshot below proves.



**Screenshot 16: Pulp Fiction – (02:12:26)**

From looking classy and more formally dressed in the black suits, the two criminals now look more like a couple of tourists. The following scenes show that the costume may have been drastically changed, but the personality and cunning remains when Jules fends off a robbery at a restaurant. Normally, when characters change costumes, there would be some sort of change in personality as well. However, this example shows the opposite. Performing this costume change on these two characters is an example of a stylistic trait, namely that Tarantino is able to make his characters

wear anything and still make their acting and personality the main focus of the characters, exemplified both here in *Pulp Fiction*, but also in *Reservoir Dogs* with the black suits. This last example also displays how humor and violence walks hand in hand in Tarantino's films, which will be examined later in the project.



Screenshot 17: *Pulp Fiction* – (01:01:15)

In the screenshot above, we see Mia and Vincent driving home from Vincent's drug dealer after Mia's overdose incident. Notable in this screenshot is how Mia's makeup makes her look lifeless and exhausted. In comparison to Vincent's Caucasian skin tone, Mia's face is white as a piece of paper and her eyes are shady and dark, and on top of that, her hair is messy. There is an intention to display the physical aftermath of Mia's overdose and this is done with makeup by giving her a pale face, dark eyes, and messing up her hair. We come across a similar example in *Reservoir Dogs*, where the victim's makeup, in this case Mr. Orange's, makes him lifeless and in pain, which is visible in screenshot 18 below. On top of looking pale and lifeless, Mr. Orange is also sweating, being an indicator of him being in serious pain after being shot, as Mia also did after being injected with adrenalin. See screenshot 19.



Screenshot 18: *Reservoir Dogs* – (01:01:47)



Screenshot 19: *Pulp Fiction* – (01:01:00)

With these examples in mind, Tarantino arguably has a stylistic trait of how he portrays his characters when they are physically under pressure and put in a situation they cannot control.

Tarantino's third film, *Jackie Brown*, has its limitations in terms of a special use of costumes and makeup. Since the film is based on a novel and not written by Tarantino, it is restricted to the novel's depictions of the characters involved. On the other hand, Tarantino still had to portray the novel's characters in the film in order to capture the essence of the novel and its characters, while still maintaining his own film style. One example is the main character, Jackie Brown (Pam Grier), an airline stewardess. Screenshot 20 below shows how her costume is a stereotypical example of a stewardesses' uniform with a matching suit, a shirt and a scarf or tie, along with the wings and the nametag pins. This example is almost the direct opposite of what we have experienced in



Tarantino's earlier films, with the criminals wearing suits to cover their identities, where stewardess suit does the opposite and tell more about the character's background, and even her name.

Therefore, you can argue that Tarantino works with stereotypes in *Jackie Brown*. Another example of a stereotypical costume in *Jackie Brown* is Max Cherry's (Robert Forster). Max Cherry works with bail bonds, which to the ear sounds monotonous and uninteresting. With a profession like this, the stereotypical costume would resemble the same adjectives at the profession did, and, arguably, the costume does. See screenshot 21 below. Max Cherry wears a simple polo shirt, plain pants with a belt, high above the waist, and a watch, which is a simple, functional, but also plain outfit. In this sense, the stereotypical professions are supported with stereotypical attires.



Screenshot 20: Jackie Brown – (00:27:47)

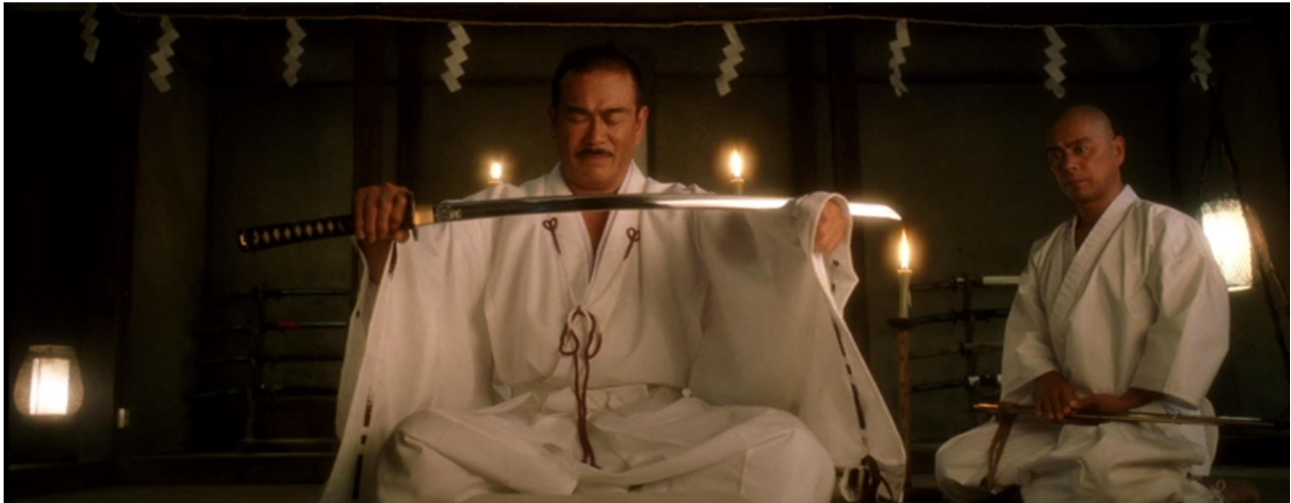




**Screenshot 21: Jackie Brown – (02:25:36)**

When examining the choice of costumes and makeup in the *Kill Bill* films it becomes apparent that, similar to how the settings depict genre specific locations, the same applies for the department of costumes and makeup. Also, similar to the examples from *Jackie Brown*, the costumes are associated with stereotypes of the respective character or culture in question. The paragraph working with setting above made statements that specific elements were expected in the locations and settings when portraying a location in Japan and the same applies for the costumes. Since the *Kill Bill* films make use of various geographic locations, the costumes vary from location to location.

The primary location in *Kill Bill vol. 1* is in Japan, which is portrayed visually in the setting, but also in the choice of costumes, maintaining the stereotypical conception of Japanese culture. This is exemplified by using the classical Japanese kimono, a Japanese robe, and the gi, the martial arts uniform. Using these costumes contributes to the creation of authenticity in the mise-en-scène, as described under setting. Both costumes can be seen in the screenshots below: in the first example used for a ceremonial purpose after forging The Bride's samurai sword, and in the second example worn by O-ren Ishii (Lucy Lui).



**Screenshot 22: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:57:11)**



Screenshot 23: *Kill Bill* vol. 1 – (01:07:48)

In both screenshot examples, the costumes are white, arguably for two different reasons. In screenshot 22, the costumes are worn for a ceremonial and spiritual purpose and the white color can be a symbol of this spirituality in question. In screenshot 23, O-ren Ishii leads her gang into a restaurant, and the gang is all dressed in black and, therefore, the white color makes her stand out and confirms her position as gang leader by creating contrast to her gang's black uniforms.

The same elements of authenticity apply for the following example, which is early in *Kill Bill* vol. 1, where the setting is still in the United States, more specifically in Texas. In screenshot 24, Sheriff Earl McGraw and his son James McGraw are seen both equipped with a cowboy hat and a sheriff star. Sheriffs and cowboys are characters associated with Texas, mainly from the western genre, which supplies another example of using stereotypes in order to create authenticity for the actors. A similar example was found in the setting of *Django Unchained*, which takes place in the same geographic area, only at a different time, and proves that cowboys were commonplace in Texas. Even the profession of being a sheriff is associated with being a cowboy at the aforementioned time, which supports Tarantino's attempt to create authenticity with his characters and costumes. As stated, the two McGraw characters recur in *Death Proof* and the *Kill Bill* films and, therefore, this attempt to create authenticity of the characters is arguably consistent across Tarantino's films.



Screenshot 24: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:17:34)

The following analyzes specific examples of how the western atmosphere is captured in relation to the characters' costumes. One of the more essential props in *Django Unchained* is the cowboy hat. The hat itself is an indication of what type of character one encounters, which naturally would be a cowboy. Therefore, the cowboy hat is an almost indispensable part of the male character's costume in the western genre. Tarantino consistently deals with stereotypes and the audience's stereotype of the cowboy involves a horse, a revolver, and the cowboy hat, as is the example with Django in *Django Unchained*.



Screenshot 25: Django Unchained – (00:50:58)

Django is an example of confirming the stereotype costume of a cowboy, but the second person in the screenshot above, Dr. King Schultz, is an exception. Historically, contrary to the public belief, the bowler hat was the choice of hat for most cowboys, among them Billy the Kid and Butch Cassidy, and not the hat most people refer to as the cowboy hat, the Stetson (Roberts, 2010). In



*Django Unchained*, Dr. King Schultz is a bounty hunter in disguise as a dentist, wearing a more formal costume for a man of his profession in a western and he wears a bowler hat. In this way, Tarantino makes use of both the stereotypical attire for a cowboy, but also the historically correct attire. Arguably, this contributes to the creation of authenticity, both in terms of the stereotypical element but also the historical.

Historical stereotypes are also essential when examining *Inglorious Basterds* and its use of costumes and makeup. *Inglorious Basterds* is a World War II film, a rather peculiar one in the genre, and it naturally involves soldiers and uniforms. Uniforms in general are very stereotypical and they contribute to the film's establishment of time and space. The audience is likely already familiar with World War II films and may recognize the specific uniforms rather easily, since they are stereotypical and recur across most World War II films. Therefore, being restricted by the genre, Tarantino uses traditional soldier uniforms used during the given time period of the 1940s. The example in screenshot 26 below shows the American soldiers in the traditional green army uniform, and Lt. Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) in his superior uniform and his army cap.



Screenshot 26: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:21:31)

In screenshot 27 below, three of Raine's soldiers are in disguise as German soldiers wearing SS-soldiers' uniforms. These specific uniforms are easy to distinguish from the traditional German soldier's uniform because of the two lightning s's on the collar of the jacket, and as described earlier, these recur across most World War II films and the audience can distinguish the type of soldier encountered from the uniform.



Screenshot 27: *Inglourious Basterds* – (01:14:08)

The fact that Tarantino uses exact replicas of the World War II uniforms is a contributing factor to creating authenticity within in his films, which has been a key factor for all his works. Many elements in Tarantino's films are often full of blood, violence, and profanities, and the use of authentic costumes, and also settings, helps level out these opposing factors and still keep a sense of reality in the films.

### ***Lighting:***

As mentioned earlier, Tarantino's first films are set in a somewhat realistic world. When talking about lighting, certain lighting options can contribute to creating realism in the frame. Since Tarantino's first films are especially realistic, it is interesting to examine how the lighting contributes to the creation of realism in these films. Therefore, the first part of the analysis of lighting will focus on how Tarantino tries to create realism in the frame through the use of lighting.

Beginning chronologically, the first film examined will be *Reservoir Dogs*. An element that can contribute to creating realism in the frame is natural light, or what appears to be natural light. The following example in screenshot 28 shows how the natural light emphasizes the blood on the rear seats in the car, creating contrast in the red and white colors, also in contrast to the black suit.

Furthermore, the light coming in from the rear window of the car functions to light up Mr. Orange's face (Tim Roth) to emphasize his facial expressions, hence, showing the pain he is in. Also, the way Mr. Orange's face is lit up from the rear window allows the audience to see him sweating, which only contributes to the understanding of the situation Mr. Orange is in, being shot and in pain.



Screenshot 28: Reservoir Dogs – (00:10:11)

*Reservoir Dogs* shows more examples of how light can be used to emphasize the character's physical state and emotions. The following example in screenshot 29 again shows Mr. Orange, now lying on the floor of the warehouse in Mr. White's arms after being shot (Harvey Keitel). In this example, the top light lights up Mr. Orange's forehead, while Mr. White covers the rest of his face, hence, creating shade over Mr. Orange's eyes. The light on Mr. Orange's forehead shows a similar example as before, where the light shows him sweat and also how pale he is – probably due to his loss of blood. The paleness along with the shade over his eyes, making his face almost lifeless, are contributing factors to emphasize Mr. Orange's physical state at this point.



Screenshot 29: Reservoir Dogs – (00:13:50)

In the examples above, it is seen how the natural light and the top lighting can contribute to the realism. Bordwell & Thompson state: "Top lighting for realism. Since actors' eyes are crucial to



their performance, most filmmakers light scenes to make their eyes visible” (2013, p. 127).

Evidently, Tarantino makes use of a traditional technique to help him achieve realism in the frame, namely top lighting. In the example above, the top lighting resembles the light from a normal lamp hanging from the ceiling and *Reservoir Dogs* shows many examples of using this technique throughout the film. Screenshot 30 below shows one example, where Mr. Pink's (Steve Buscemi) hair and shoulders are lit up by the top light, which, again, comes from a lamp in the ceiling.



Screenshot 30: *Reservoir Dogs* – (01:20:55)

In screenshot 31, we encounter another example where the top light is used to contribute to the creation of realism in the shot. As with the example above, we see Uma Thurman's hair lit up by the top lighting coming from lamps that would be in the restaurant. The top light also creates some shades on her face, for instance, under her eyes and nose. When seeing Thurman's character, Mia Wallace, we see her distinct black hair and red lipstick which help mystifying her character, but the screenshot below helps to remove this mystification, since the top light makes her black hair look almost dark brown and the lipstick looks less distinct and lighter. In this scene, Travolta's character, Vincent Vega, gets to know Mia and finds out she is not as intimidating as first thought. Therefore, the use of light is to emphasize the action in the scene.



Screenshot 31: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:38:09)

*Pulp Fiction* also shows an example of top lighting functioning to light up a character's face to express his emotions, as we encountered earlier in screenshots 28 and 29. In the example below, Mr. Wallace and Butch are held captive in the basement of a pawn shop. As in the examples with Mr. Orange from *Reservoir Dogs*, the top light shows sweat on the characters' forehead emphasizing their physical state of exhaustion. It shows that Tarantino focuses on showing the physical state of the characters when they are faced with a threatening situation, and the top light emphasizes the features Tarantino wants to be visible.



Screenshot 32: *Pulp Fiction* – (01:39:34)

In the examples above, it is seen how the top light was able to emphasize the characters' faces and feelings. In screenshot 33, the top light functions to cover the characters' faces in shadow, making



them more mysterious. The top light in the example below is an outside house lamp in the ceiling. According to Bordwell & Thompson, this type of top lighting functions as: “harsh single-source lighting from above [which] often renders the eyes as dark patches, making the characters more sinister and inscrutable” (2013, p. 127). Arguably, this quote fits the emphasized example from *Jackie Brown* and the lighting helps to set the tone in the narrative, since the two characters are engaged in some sort of shady business, and suitably, the characters' faces are almost invisible due to the shadows covering them, as the quote also points out.



Screenshot 33: *Jackie Brown* – (02:14:11)

The abovementioned examples have shown how Tarantino creates realism in the frame and mystery around his characters by using the top light, but there is also a more symbolic example with the use of top lighting. In the screenshot below, Mia is in the ladies' room doing cocaine, while the other women are in there to do their makeup or hair. The symbolism is found in the contrast of the women's faces where Mia's face is covered in shadow while the other women's faces are fully lit up. This can be symbolic for the actions taking place in the ladies' room: the illegal action of doing cocaine is emphasized by the shadows on Mia's face, and in opposition the lady-like action of fixing their makeup and hair is emphasized by light, thereby creating contrasts in both light and actions in the frame.



Screenshot 34: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:43:07)

The examples above is evidence that Tarantino often makes use of top lighting to highlight specific elements concerning his characters, whether it is to emphasize something in their faces or, the opposite, cover their faces in shadow and create a sort of mystification around the characters, or third, to create a symbolic contrast in the frame. Hence, the use of top lighting, which Bordwell & Thompson say to create realism in the frame, supports the narrative of Tarantino's films, and sometimes even contributes to the understanding of the scenes by creating a specific atmosphere in the frame which suits the narrative.

The following examines a type of lighting that characterizes Tarantino's first films and is recurring throughout these, putting a stylistic fingerprint in each of these films. The type of light is the red light in a bar or strip club, as exemplified in screenshot 35. Tarantino often makes use of this type of location, and along with this, he always covers this location in distinct red neon light.

The first example, in screenshot 35, is from *Reservoir Dogs* where Mr. Orange is being hired to join the heist group, and this recruitment meeting takes place in a bar covered in the distinct red light. The red light is not covering the room entirely, hence, it is low-key lighting, which creates stronger contrasts and sharper shadows, and Mr. Orange's face shows these shadows. Low-key lighting is also often applied to somber, threatening, and mysterious scenes (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 129). And arguably, this scene is somewhat mysterious and somber due to the reason these people being gathered in the club.



Screenshot 35: *Reservoir Dogs* – (01:10:12)

The second example is from *Pulp Fiction* and was earlier analyzed in relation to setting. In the setting of the strip club, Butch is meeting with Mr. Wallace over a potentially fixed boxing match. Similar to the example before, there is a meeting taking place about something sinister and criminal. Therefore, Tarantino makes use of a similar location for a similar meeting and uses the same type of lighting, namely these distinct red neon lights.



Screenshot 36: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:22:46)

Also in Tarantino's third film, *Jackie Brown*, the red neon lights are recurring. In screenshot 37, Jackie meets with Max Cherry after being released from jail and Jackie reveals to Max the potential deal of her helping the police to catch Ordell (Samuel L. Jackson). This example is not the only one in *Jackie Brown*, as Tarantino makes use of this location and type of lighting several times throughout the film.



Screenshot 37: Jackie Brown – (00:45:24)

Examining Tarantino's first three films, set in a realistic world, a pattern is visible when it comes to the use of the bar or strip club. When Tarantino places his characters in these settings their business in these bars or clubs is related to crime, and is somewhat secret. The distinct red neon light is always present in these situations and can therefore be seen as a marker of Tarantino's implementation of underground crime in his first films.

The next element of lighting is somewhat peculiar and not often seen in films, and therefore, Tarantino stands out for his use of this particular technique. The technique in question is the use of backlighting, or more specifically, edge- or rim lighting. Edge- or rim lighting has the function of making the actor's body stand out from the background and create a silhouette of the actor (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 127). In the following examples, the use of this technique will be emphasized in order to show how Tarantino uses this particular technique to highlight specific elements in the frame, and thereby draws attention to these.

The first example, in screenshot 38, is from *Kill Bill vol. 1* where The Bride fights all of The Crazy 88s clan. She stands triumphantly on the railings and watches the dead bodies on the restaurant floor, and backlighting creates a silhouette around her head and shoulders and also around the sword in her hand. The way the sharp backlighting creates these silhouettes intercepts the attention of the audience and it almost makes The Bride appear as a divine figure, as an angel-like character. The low angle of the camera also contributes to this appearance, but the key is that



the backlighting creates focus on The Bride's head and the sword, arguably the parts of her body she used the most in the fight against The Crazy 88s.



Screenshot 38: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (01:29:09)

Another example of using backlighting is found in *Inglorious Basterds*, where Hans Landa, finally, catches Lt. Raine. As with the example from *Kill Bill vol. 1*, the backlighting accomplishes to draw attention to the parts caught by the light, in this case Landa's hands and face, but also the cowl on Lt. Raine's head, since the backlighting create a contour around it. Therefore, the light captures the interplay between the two characters, and especially the movement of Landa's hands and the mimic of his face. The use of the backlighting allows us to see the satisfaction in Landa's face from capturing Lt. Raine.



Screenshot 39: Inglorious Basterds – (02:02:33)

The screenshot below proves as another example of how Tarantino makes advantage of using the backlighting to make the frame more dynamic, similar to the examples above from *Kill Bill vol. 1* and *Inglorious Basterds*. The backlighting, in this case edge lighting, creates a contour around Django. A silhouette that directs the audience's attention to him and his movements, as the backlighting did in the examples above. Therefore, there is a pattern in how Tarantino chooses to use the backlighting, in order to place the focus in the frame. The backlighting, and how it creates a silhouette or contour around the characters, makes the movements in the frame more explicit and demands the attention from the audience, since the lighting creates focus on the particular character framed by the backlighting.



Screenshot 40: Django Unchained – (02:40:09)

The backlighting can also be used to emphasize an element that normally would blend in with the background and, therefore, makes this particular element stand out in the frame. An example of the backlighting used like this can be found in *Death Proof*, as the screenshot below illustrates. Stuntman Mike's (Kurt Russell) car, realistically, would be almost invisible in the darkness with the headlights turned off, but the backlighting emphasizes the car from the almost entirely black frame and emphasizes action or movement in frame. Without the backlighting, the car would appear to stand still or at least be difficult to see moving or to see at all.



Screenshot 41: Death Proof – (00:50:48)

The analysis has shown how Tarantino uses specific lighting options to accommodate his settings and characters in their respective films. Some distinct stylistic trademarks were visible, for instance the use of the red neon light in bars and strip clubs and, conclusively, how Tarantino uses backlighting to emphasize the focus on his characters and their movements in the frame and thereby force the audience to direct their attention towards these characters. Also, in the examples above it was exemplified how Tarantino used backlighting to emphasize an action in a relatively dark frame and, thus creates a dynamic frame with movement using the tool of backlighting.

### ***Staging: Movement and Performance:***

In the first elements of mise-en-scène, it was found that Tarantino has a strong tendency of creating authenticity within his films, whether it is his settings, characters, and often also the lighting. Therefore, it is interesting to examine if the same applies for how he instructs his actors to act and move in his films, and see if the same authenticity is visible. Earlier, it was established how Tarantino's first films, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Jackie Brown*, take place in a realistic world and that they were also constructed realistically. Arguably, the same applies for *Inglorious Basterds* and *Django Unchained*, but these are set in a historic time period and, therefore, history and genre markers are relevant. The notion of realism in Tarantino's films is relevant in relation to how he chooses to direct the actors and make them act and move in his films. One thing Tarantino has always been associated with is originality, especially concerning his characters, and how they are constructed for the purpose of the respective film. When talking about a character's acting and movement in a film, a performance is characterized as individualized and/or stylized. An individualized performance is, as the name indicates, when the actor makes his or her character

unique depending on which actor is in the role. On the other hand, a stylized performance is more associated with characters that are difficult to precisely say how would have behaved, for example a witch from a fantasy novel. No one can say how a witch would behave and act, apart from what we think they do based on fairytales and stories. Therefore, a performance from an actor playing, for instance, a witch has to draw on background knowledge of this type of character, and what this particular character is associated with (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 137). Bordwell & Thompson also emphasize the example of Marlon Brando's Don Vito Corleone from *The Godfather* (1972), which functions the same way as the witch-example above, since very few have experience with mafia bosses and this character type is equivalently hard to generalize. In relation to a realistic film with a realistic character, the performance cannot seem too exaggerated nor can it be too underplayed, hence the actor has to find a balance for his or her character. On this notion, the following will emphasize how Tarantino's characters appear in relation to the abovementioned elements concerned with the characters across both the realistic films and the other genres in question.

Having mentioned *The Godfather* above, the first of Tarantino's films take place in a similar environment with organized, underground crime. In both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* we encounter crime on various levels, which has an effect on how the characters are portrayed. *Reservoir Dogs* is a clear example of how a gang is instructed to rob a jewelry store by a superior man, similar to the *The Godfather*-example. In the paragraph concerned with setting, it was argued that due to the lack of many different settings in *Reservoir Dogs*, the few settings present function as containers for the actors to carry out their acting, which in relation to this paragraph of movement and performance corresponds with the claims that the characters are the primary plot elements. Therefore, the actors have the opportunity to perform an individualized performance of their respective characters. Still, as with the *The Godfather*-example, this crime business is somewhat unknown to the common audience, hence the acting performances must rely on the same principles as in *The Godfather* and to some extent the performance must still be stylized. Both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* include characters associated with underground crime, which is a social environment the common audience has no experience with apart from what they have seen in films. Therefore, the acting has to fit inside the framework of how the audience superficially perceives underground crime and the atmosphere associated with it. This includes using stereotypes such as the godfather-looking boss, exemplified in these two films by respectively Joe Cabot in *Reservoir Dogs* (Lawrence Tierney) and Marcellus Wallace in *Pulp Fiction* (Ving Rhames). These two



characters appear in different ways as stylized mafia boss characters, acted in relation to the stereotypes associated with this character type. Depending on the film and its content, the actors have the ability to individualize their characters to fit the relevant themes of the film, for instance Ving Rhames and his character Mr. Wallace has a particular bad language and a stereotypical cultural attitude, as if he grew up in the ghetto. The same goes for Lawrence Tierney's character, Joe Cabot, which shares several stereotypical traits with the mafia boss experienced in *The Godfather*, both in physical traits as well as in attitude. This way, it is experienced how the two characters are both stylized by being stereotypical mafia bosses but also individualized by the actors, giving them specific attitudes.



Screenshot 42: *Reservoir Dogs* – (00:27:23)



Screenshot 43: *Pulp Fiction* – (01:35:19)

Apart from the bosses, the two films also share similar traits when it comes to the gang members. Earlier in the costume and makeup paragraph, it was pointed out how the gangs' respective members wear the same outfits across the two films, but does this also apply to the acting and how the characters behave? One trait they share is that they do the jobs given to them, no questions asked, which applies for the gang members in both films. There seems to be some difference in terms of gang size and hierarchy. In *Reservoir Dogs*, the gang consists of six men, whereas the only gang members in *Pulp Fiction* we see are John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson's characters, Vincent and Jules. Therefore, the same hierarchical system in the gang is not present in *Pulp Fiction* as it is in *Reservoir Dogs*, since they are only a duo. Still, the characters share some traits in terms of how the characters behave. In both films, the characters are rather cold-blooded and only focus on getting the job done even if it costs lives. Of course, since different people are encountered, different behavior is to be expected. Jules from *Pulp Fiction*, for instance, is fast talking and threatening, whereas his partner, Vincent, appears to be calmer and less intimidating. One might argue that Jules is the leader of the two. The same difference appears between the characters in *Reservoir Dogs*, as this group clearly has a leader in Mr. White. He makes the decisions and the rest of the gang answers to him. Similar to Vincent, both Mr. Orange and Mr. Pink are subordinates and they do basically what they are told to, whereas a character like Mr. Blonde seems more

independent and uncontrollable. Therefore, one could argue that the characters not only share the outfits across the two films, but also some character traits from the acting, but at the same time they are very different, since they occupy different roles in different scenarios.



Screenshot 44: *Reservoir Dogs* – (00:36:02)

Screenshot 45: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:11:47)

Some of the most memorable acting in Tarantino's films is found in *Inglorious Basterds* and *Django Unchained*, primarily from Christoph Waltz playing the German Colonel, Hans Landa, and the bounty hunter, Dr. King Schultz – both parts that earned Waltz an Academy Award. Both characters show examples of unusual traits from the particular character, which will be explored further. Hans Landa from *Inglorious Basterds* is a rather complex character compared to what the audience is used to when encountering a German soldier in a film. The audience is used to the German soldier being the enemy, which is also the case in *Inglorious Basterds* and Hans Landa is in no way an exception. However, normally the German soldiers are portrayed as mere tools of Hitler, since most well-known World War II films are produced in the United States. In *Inglorious Basterds*, the audience experiences a German soldier with intelligence and cunning which is evident throughout the film. Landa is an eloquent speaker and is fluent in several languages, among them German, English, French and Italian. Along with his verbal skills, he uses his cunning to outsmart his enemies and eventually kill them, which has made him in charge of hunting down Jew refugees in France. His sly appearance and sophisticated way of behavior is visible throughout the film as he searches for the Jewish girl, Shosanna, and Lt. Raine and his soldiers. This sophisticated behavior transfers across to Waltz' role in *Django Unchained*, Dr. King Schultz. This time, he is not the antagonist but the protagonist's aide, helping Django. Nonetheless, some of the character traits are similar to what we experienced with Landa from *Inglorious Basterds*. For instance, one thing that recurs is his ability to speak several languages, as he speaks German, English and French in the film. Also, he is as eloquent a speaker as in *Inglorious Basterds*, as he successfully talks Django and himself out of several dangerous occasions. His cunning and sly personality fits along with the fact that he acts as a dentist despite being a bounty hunter, which is a profession that is not associated with being an eloquent speaker, fluent in many languages, and being a gentleman.

Therefore, Dr. King Schultz is a character that, initially, confirms the stereotypical western gentleman, hence, only to break these stereotypes down by being a bounty hunter.



Screenshot 46: *Inglorious Basterds* – (02:05:02)



Screenshot 47: *Django Unchained* – (00:04:52)

Having engaged some of Tarantino's memorable characters from their respective films, a couple of stylistic traits appear concerning these. Tarantino's films make use of multiple genres, involving different characters, which provide different performances for the film in question, but nonetheless, there is a tendency in the characters to be their own opposition. For instance, as argued above, Dr. King Schultz from *Django Unchained*, who is a bounty hunter under cover as a dentist, but he has polite manners and acts as a gentleman, which is normally not associated with the bounty hunter profession. Another example worth mentioning is Lt. Aldo Raine from *Inglorious Basterds*, the leader of group of soldiers being deployed behind enemy lines in France. He is of high rank in the military, but his ways of working as a soldier and his behavior seems both immature and foolish for a man of his ranks. For instance, he claims to speak Italian, but practically only knows a couple of words, and his stubbornness puts the mission at risk. There are more examples similar to these, where the characters show opposing traits, which contributes to the audience finding them more interesting.

### ***Additional traits: special effects***

One of the elements Tarantino is most known for in the world of cinema is the explicit use of blood and violence in his films. Since these elements are visible in the frame, they sub-categorically belong to the mise-en-scène, and therefore, these special effects will be analyzed stylistically. Another type of special effect found in some of Tarantino's films is the use of non-diegetic visible writings or figures in the frame, incorporated in the film. These described special effects are, technically, a joint area concerning mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing. Since the relevant elements are visible in the frame, the analysis will be performed under the mise-en-scène section, since it already works with stylistic traits in the frame in Tarantino's films, and therefore, this following paragraph will do as well.

Initially, this part of the analysis will examine Tarantino's use of blood and violence in his films. This is an area that has been questioned by many critics, and Tarantino has been forced to discuss his choice of explicit use of blood and violence throughout his career. This section will establish this use of blood and violence and prove its stylistic value in Tarantino's films by analyzing multiple examples from all the Tarantino-films, and thereby, concluding this explicit use of blood and violence as a stylistic trait.



Screenshot 48: Reservoir Dogs – (00:56:14)

Chronologically, the following exemplifies Tarantino's use of blood, beginning with examples from *Reservoir Dogs*. In this first example from *Reservoir Dogs*, blood is basically the primary element in this particular frame. Since it is a close-up, the main focus instantly becomes the blood, the man's eyes, and the tape covering his mouth. His face and the duct tape are in neutral colors, which make the red blood more eye-catching and the focus of the frame, adding to the dramatic effect. Knowing Tarantino and his films, one might argue that these bloody shots tend to blend in with the rest of the shots, since they are recurring and shots you expect to see when watching a Tarantino film. The example above in screenshot 48 is from *Reservoir Dogs*, and this film provides multiple shots where blood is used prominently, as does the film's successor *Pulp Fiction*. The examples below are only a few of the shots found in *Pulp Fiction* containing blood and many more could have been included.





Screenshot 49: Pulp Fiction – (02:08:36)

Similar to the chosen example from *Reservoir Dogs*, this screenshot shows how the predominant color in the frame is the red from the blood covering the inside of the car. The only elements in focus in the frame are the actors and the distinct red blood, which is emphasized by the light coming through the rear window of the car. This way of giving backlight to the blood has the same effect as the example from *Reservoir Dogs*, namely to draw attention and make it appear eye-catching, since it is a clear contrast to the other colors in the frame, which are mostly greyscale.



Screenshot 50: Pulp Fiction – (01:35:33)

The screenshot above works to confirm that Tarantino-films are not holding back when it comes to the explicit use of blood, as the examined examples have shown. To some extent, this defines Tarantino and his films to its audience, since shots like the example above are explicitly brutal, thus adding to the expectancies of what is experienced when watching a Tarantino film. One film stands

out from the normally bloody pattern experienced in Tarantino's works. Where the films emphasized earlier contained multiple scenes with lots of blood, *Jackie Brown* only has a single shot containing blood, and only very little, as seen in the screenshot below.



Screenshot 51: *Jackie Brown* – (02:05:12)

Whether this example is the only one in *Jackie Brown* is due to this particular film belonging to a different universe or because it is an adaptation is unclear, but nevertheless, one of these factors is decisive, since only one scene including blood is atypical for Tarantino, and therefore, the fact that *Jackie Brown* is an adaptation and belongs to a different universe must have worked as a restraining factor for Tarantino.

Arguably, Tarantino's audience and fans are accustomed to the vast use of blood and violence. However, examples exist in Tarantino's films which show how the use of blood is so excessive that it becomes comedic. The following will analyze the unusual use of blood across Tarantino's works to prove that blood is not employed solely for brutish and violent effect, as the previous examples have shown.





Screenshot 52: *Kill Bill* vol. 1 – (01:14:32)

The first example is from *Kill Bill* vol. 1, where The Bride has cut Sofie Fatale's arm off, resulting in a vigorous spray of blood that even hits the camera lens. Other than hitting the camera lens, the blood spray contributes with an overdramatic feel to the shot, which supports the notion of *the Kill Bill*-films belonging to the movie-in-movie universe, where the boundaries are not as strict as a realistic film. Therefore, this type of blood spray contributes to the understanding of the film's universe and how to interpret it.



Screenshot 53: *Django Unchained* – (00:12:36)

Similar to the example from *Kill Bill* vol. 1, this example from *Django Unchained* shows the use of blood spray, which in this case is forced from the blast of a shotgun. Naturally, the excessiveness causes the blood to function as a dramatic effect, but in this case, where the example from *Kill Bill* vol. 1 supported its genre and universe, the example from *Django Unchained* supports the brutal

nature and mentality associated with the time, place, and genre shown. Still, this example is also an exaggeration and creates an overdramatic effect, similar to the prior example.



Screenshot 54: *Death Proof* – (00:51:15)

Tarantino's explicit use of blood at times becomes directly macabre and the next couple of examples will give examples of this exact notion. The first example of a macabre shot is from *Death Proof* and seen in the screenshot above, where the girl in the passenger seat has her leg ripped off in a car crash, with glass splinters and blood all over. In this particular scene, Tarantino deliberately shows what happens to all four girls in the car, as Kurt Russell's car hits them head on. As such, the audience experiences the scene a total of four times, where each repetition focuses on a specific death of one of the girls in the car. In all four depictions, the tone is similar to this example, where nothing is too explicit, brutal, or macabre for Tarantino.



Screenshot 55: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:26:21)



The example above proves to be similarly macabre and explicit as the other bloody examples, only in a different fashion. Where the earlier examples were filled with blood, this particular example appears particularly graphic but does not involve as much blood spraying. Nonetheless, what lacks in blood, the explicitness and macabre image makes up for. Lt. Raine's group employs the mode of operation of scalping the German soldiers they kill, and the example above shows exactly how they do – and as usual, Tarantino holds nothing back when creating these frames containing obscure and macabre elements, as all the above mentioned examples have established. There is a distinct stylistic trait throughout Tarantino's films in the use of explicit, bloody and often macabre depictions of the respective scenes and situations. This also means that Tarantino's core audience will be used to these depictions, and the audience unfamiliar with Tarantino's style will most likely feel offended by Tarantino's explicit use of blood and macabre images.

Tarantino's way of including explicit elements containing blood and other macabre elements proved a stylistic trait, and almost sarcastic in certain examples, as seen in *Kill Bill*. Similarly to this, Tarantino often includes violence with the same goal of creating explicit and sarcastic scenes. These sarcastic scenes are structured by creating a comic contrast to the scene or by creating elements like the excessive blood spatter, that are so obviously unrealistic that they create a clear opposition to the realism Tarantino otherwise seeks to establish. The following will analyze Tarantino's way of establishing violence in his films.



Screenshot 56: Death Proof – (01:49:29)

Tarantino has an ability to turn what appears to be raw or violent situations into humoristic and sarcastic scenes that an audience normally would not laugh at but is forced to by the distinctive

atmosphere created in his films. For instance, in the first example from *Death Proof*, Tarantino has chosen to basically change the stereotypical gender roles by making the girls powerful and dangerous, whereas Stuntman Mike is vulnerable and unable to defend himself. Such a violent scene would normally not involve humor, but the scene's ending shows the girls celebrating how they have successfully beaten Stuntman Mike to the ground, by throwing their hands in the air, which appears sarcastic in relation to what has happened in the scene.



Screenshot 57: *Inglourious Basterds* – (00:37:38)

As argued, Tarantino has a special habit of using unusual and sometimes macabre traits for his films and characters, as was emphasized with how the soldiers in *Inglourious Basterds* scalped their enemies. Another similar example can be found in *Inglourious Basterds*, as they also leave a mark on the enemies they do not kill, namely a swastika cut onto their heads with a knife – a thing an audience normally would not find amusing. However, the acting and the framing creates the special atmosphere in *Inglourious Basterds* allowing this element to appear humoristic and sarcastic, as well as the scalping does. Arguably, these specific traits are contributing factors to how Tarantino manages to create this distinctive atmosphere of humor and violence in his films.



Screenshot 58: *Inglourious Basterds* – (01:38:04)

Among Tarantino's films, especially *Inglourious Basterds* involves a lot creative sarcasm, as it mixes humor and violence extensively. The example above confirms this film's atmosphere and spirit by showing how Lt. Raine casually sticks his finger in a bullet hole in von Hammersmark's leg, of course causing much pain. This action appears humoristic to the audience due to the film's special, and almost absurd, atmosphere. Most of the characters are in some way humoristic themselves. Both the character, their actions and the special traits they inhabit are contributing factors to creating the special atmosphere that fills *Inglourious Basterds*, and manages to make otherwise bloody and macabre things humoristic and thereby create conflicting emotions within the audience.

Without doubt, Tarantino has an ability to deal with violence, blood, and macabre images like nobody else, as he manages to familiarize his audience to the recurring explicit images throughout his films. Tarantino grounds his explicit scenes in a certain realism and makes them appear as being normal, thus creating a unique atmosphere in his film in which the humoristic and violent are often mixed resulting in an almost surreal outcome. The screenshots analyzed above stand as examples of Tarantino's stylistic trait of familiarizing his audience with blood and violence, and how humor and sarcasm function as a catalyst in creating the wanted expression and atmosphere of the respective film.

#### ***Additional traits: Non-diegetic text and sound***

Another visible element that can be found in Tarantino's films is the use of non-diegetic text in the respective frames. Throughout his films, the audience experiences several different variations of text implementations, which supplies different information depending on the situation. The following will emphasize and analyze Tarantino's use of non-diegetic texts throughout his films,

analyze its function, and determine whether this use of text is a trait seen throughout Tarantino's films.

**pulp** /'pʌlp/ *n.* **1.** A soft, moist, shapeless mass of matter.  
**2.** A magazine or book containing lurid subject matter and being characteristically printed on rough, unfinished paper.

American Heritage Dictionary  
New College Edition

Screenshot 59: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:00:15)

The first example is from the very beginning of *Pulp Fiction*, where the dictionary definition of the word 'pulp' is explained. The exact thought behind using this definition in the film remains unknown, but one might argue that the film is a mixture of both definitions – a shapeless mass of matter and also a story containing lurid subject matter on rough unfinished paper. Actually, the two definitions are somewhat oppositions, since lurid synonymously means sharp, thereby being the opposition to the first definition, a soft and moist matter. Nonetheless, this is the only occasion where Tarantino's uses a word description from a dictionary, but certainly not the only occasion using white text on a black background, as the following examples will prove.

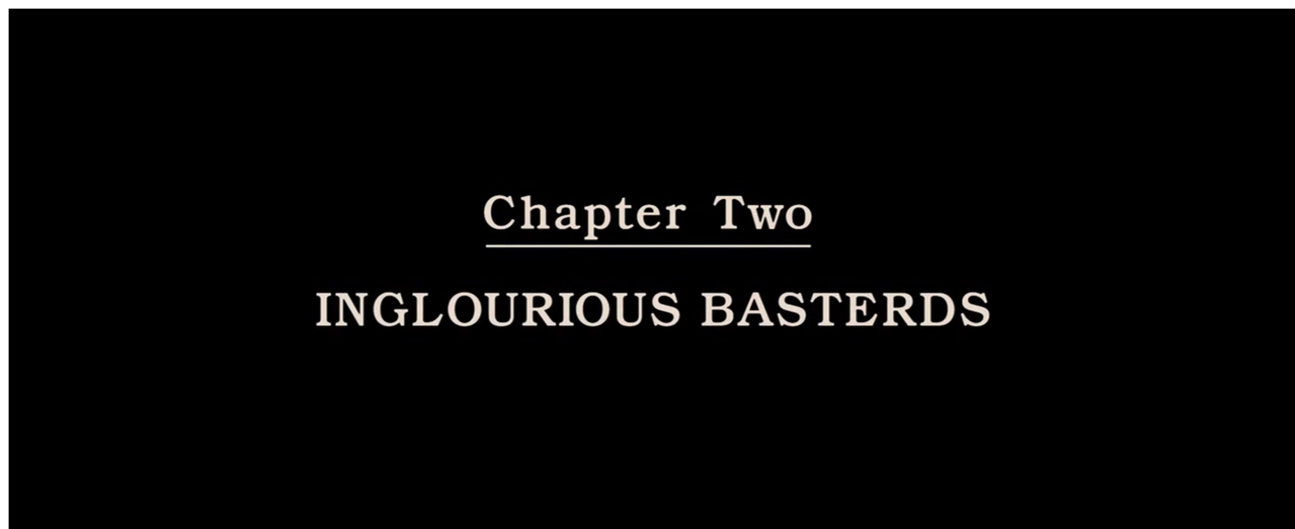
## Chapter Four

# The MAN From OKINAWA

Screenshot 60: *Kill Bill* vol. 1 – (00:45:19)



As in the example just given, the example above from *Kill Bill vol. 1* also shows white text on a black background. In this example, the text resembles the description of a chapter found in a book. The *Kill Bill*-films are known to be a movie-in-a-movie, and can therefore be compared to a book, since both appear as fiction. Apart from telling that the film is metafiction, the non-diegetic text naturally also functions to indicate the following scenes' themes and locations, exemplified above with the location Okinawa, and therefore this frame does not only have a stylistic function but also a narrative one.



Screenshot 61: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:21:25)

Similar to the example from *Kill Bill vol. 1*, this example from *Inglorious Basterds* shows non-diegetic text informing of the coming chapter in the film. Where *Kill Bill vol. 1* was metafiction, *Inglorious Basterds* belongs to the realistic universe of Tarantino's films, and therefore he transcends the fictional element of chapter from a book to his realistic universe. The style of the chapter indication is similar to the prior example with white text on a black background, and apart from the font, the style of writing is also alike, since the nouns and names are capitalized in both examples.



Screenshot 62: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:22:04)

Other than indicating chapters, Tarantino also makes use of text in the frame to describe the character present, as emphasized above. In the *Kill Bill*-films, The Bride has her kill list, and once the audience encounters one of these characters from the list an accompanying text appears to describe this character. The text tells the person's name, that he or she was member of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, and the person's codename. Arguably, this way of using text in the frame has no more function than to present information to the audience. This information could have been delivered differently, but Tarantino stays true to his own style and the non-diegetic text becomes a visible trait of his.



Screenshot 63: Inglorious Basterds – (00:28:18)

As the examples have proved, Tarantino also makes use of the non-diegetic text in his films in his real universe. Again, it is used to present one of the relevant characters, whose story or persona

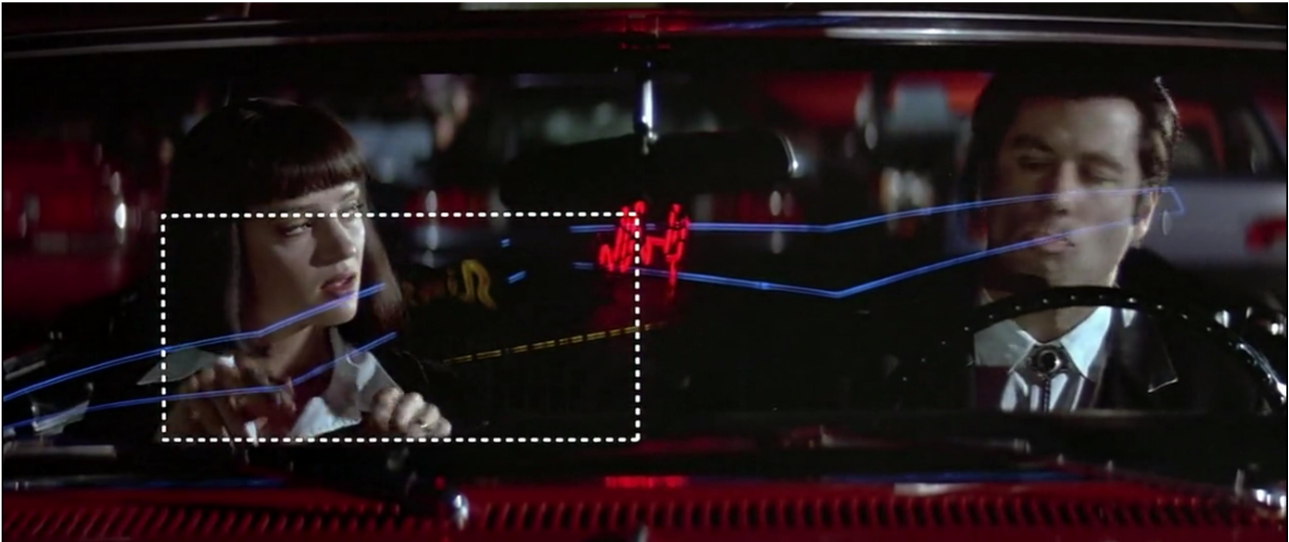
needs clarification, since he or she is somewhat unknown to the audience. In this example, the character Hugo Stiglitz is presented with a bright black and yellow name tag accompanied by the sound of a rock guitar, in order to create dramatic effect and make this character appear raw. Unlike the example from *Kill Bill vol. 1*, the only information the text supplies is the character's name, with the following scenes presenting the character and who he is, and this following scene are similarly raw, hence establishing the character as a hardcore Nazi killer.



Screenshot 64: Django Unchained – (00:58:18)

As text in films often does, the previous examples supplied information about the elements in question, whether it was a chapter description or a character description. In this example, the text gives a geographic location. In *Django Unchained*, many of the western-style towns look alike and one can be difficult to distinguish from the other. Therefore, Tarantino uses large text pieces to present the geographic locations in question, in order to help the audience follow the narrative and the characters' position within the narrative. An audience of the western genre is used to small lettering in the bottom of the frame presenting the concrete location, but instead Tarantino uses the entire screen to clarify the geographic location. Furthermore, the text follows the motion of the people in the background.





Screenshot 65: Pulp Fiction – (00:34:29)

One rather unique example of non-diegetic writing, in this case not text, can be found in *Pulp Fiction*, when Mrs. Wallace draws a square with her hands and a dotted line square appears on the screen. Not only is the square visible to the audience, but as Mrs. Wallace speaks the sentence “Don’t be a square” the word square is left out and replaced by her action when drawing this square on the screen. Using a figure is unique in Tarantino’s films, but as the text examples, the figure also represents the non-diegetic element in the frame, and therefore confirms the trait of Tarantino implementing non-diegetic writing in his films.

### *Summary of mise-en-scène*

In Tarantino’s mise-en-scène there are distinct patterns that can classify Tarantino as the creative origin of his films, since certain stylistic elements in his approach are recognizable across his collective works. First, Tarantino is not afraid of breaking conventions of cinema. Therefore, one rule when watching Tarantino’s films is to expect the unexpected, at least when it comes to stylistic elements. Tarantino has his own unique style and often uses different techniques in order to achieve a desired effect. Across the examples of non-diegetic texts and sounds the ‘Don’t be a square’-example from *Pulp Fiction* is a unique example, appearing in only one film. One of Tarantino’s main goals stylistically is to create authenticity through characters and settings the audience can relate to, even when the themes and plots are rough and violent. Tarantino attempts to create settings and surroundings as realistic as possible, but with the focus on making the settings containers for his actors to carry out the acting and emphasize this acting in the film. Nonetheless, the settings and surroundings play significant roles in all Tarantino films and nothing is coincidental in regards to settings, nor with costumes, lighting, or makeup. Conclusively, the most style defining

trait in Tarantino's films is his recurring use of excessive amounts of blood and violence and explicit shots in general. The audience is forced to encounter explicit shots with blood and/or violence being the primary element in the scene, as the characters in the films find themselves shot, killed, or victims of car crashes. Therefore, Tarantino has a distinct style and distinct visual traits in his ways of making his films.

### **Cinematography**

The following analysis of the stylistics of Tarantino and his films is concerned with cinematography, which deals more with the technicalities and camera settings, or what is behind the camera, rather than what is in front. Therefore, the following will explore elements like the photographic quality, camera- and lens choices, and perspectives. and thereby discover any given stylistic traits in his choices of cinematography.

The first cinematographic area to be covered is perspective, since there are some unique examples to be found in Tarantino's films that, potentially, can be seen as a stylistic trait of his. Tarantino makes use of a special piece of equipment, namely a split-focal diopter, or split-focus lens. This device allows the camera to maintain focus in two areas in the frame at once, whereas normal lenses only allow focus in one area, whether it is a long-angle lens or a wide-angle lens. The split-focal diopter creates two areas of focus, creating almost a blurred line down the center of the frame in order to capture more than one area in focus. The split-focal diopter creates a unique depth in the shot, as it has a deep focus. The screenshot below gives an indication of how the split-focal diopter works.



Screenshot 66: Reservoir Dogs – (01:02:25)



Obviously, the shot is staged to accommodate pictures in motion and when frozen, as in the screenshot, it looks almost like a mistake. Nonetheless, the split-focus lens allows both characters to be captured despite being located far from each other, both from left to right but also in terms of depth. There is a clear cut in the focus, as the man in the front's head is in focus in order to emphasize the sweat running down his neck, and also, Mr. Orange is in focus in the back, to indicate communication between the two. Therefore, there is a clear blurred line down the center of the frame which almost splits the frame in two, and thereby allows the split focus onto two elements or characters at once. This technique is not often seen used by any other directors, making it unique to Tarantino's style of cinematography. Arguably, the use of split focus is a trait in Tarantino's style, since multiple examples are found throughout his films, as the following examples show.



Screenshot 67: *Pulp Fiction* – (01:35:54)

The second example of using the split-focus diopter is found in *Pulp Fiction* where Butch is being chased by Mr. Wallace. Butch's face is in focus, as is the street and buildings on the left side. The blurred center line of the split-focus diopter cuts exactly on the corner of the building thus better concealing its use. The split focus allows the audience to simultaneously see Butch's facial expressions and the blood on his face, as well as Mr. Wallace coming from behind.



Screenshot 68: Jackie Brown – (00:35:01)

The next example is from *Jackie Brown*, where Jackie's is getting her sentence in court. Jackie is in one of the areas of focus and the judge is in the other. Again, this allows the audience to see two relevant areas in the same frame at once, in this case the primary action carried out by the judge, and Jackie's reaction to this. Therefore, the split-focal diopter is used to create relations between to interacting agents in the shot.



Screenshot 69: Death Proof – (01:22:10)

Yet another example of the split focus is found in *Death Proof*, and similar to the previous examples, the split-focal diopter is used to create two areas of focus – one in the front and one in the

background. Though, this particular example shows the difficulty of using the split-focal diopter, since it obscures the image as the girl on the right's shoulder is distorted by the lens.

Arguably, it is a conscious choice to implement the use of the split-focal diopter to create a certain depth in some of the relevant frames, and Tarantino makes use of this particular technique from his early films and throughout. The unique lens has the ability to create two areas of focus, and Tarantino uses this to maintain focus both in the foreground and the background, hence allowing the camera to compliment the dialogue of interacting characters without cutting or shifting focus.

### ***Camera angles***

Another essential area of cinematography is the positioning of the camera and creating unique camera angles. The regular audience of cinema is familiar with the concepts of high- and low-angle camera, but probably not as a stylistic tool and trait. Therefore, the following examines how Tarantino makes use of a usually generic tool in a director's toolbox, and somehow makes the use of this particular technique unique to his style. The technique and angle in question is the low-angle shot, which means the camera is located below the persons and elements in the frame, filming up towards the sky.



Screenshot 70: *Reservoir Dogs* – (00:37:43)

The low-angle shot is not unique to Tarantino's style, but he has redefined the low-angle shot and uses this technique to make the camera take the place of a victim in his films. This means that the camera, and therefore also the audience, takes the position of a character in the film and creates a point-of-view shot where the actors in the shot look directly into the camera, and often this point-of-view takes place from the trunk of a car. The example above from *Reservoir Dogs* shows this trunk



shot and how three of heist members look down upon the camera, which takes the place of the police officer taken hostage by Mr. Blonde and lying in the trunk of the car. This camera angle and using victim's point-of-view can be found in more of Tarantino's films, which the following examples show.



Screenshot 71: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (01:40:21)

The second example, from *Kill Bill vol. 1*, is almost identical to the first, as we see The Bride looking down in the trunk of the car on her victim, Sofie Fatale. Despite the fact that she is wearing a helmet with a tinted visor, the angle of her face and body towards the camera indicates that she is looking directly at the camera, similarly to the example from *Reservoir Dogs*. Therefore, Tarantino again creates the aforementioned point-of-view trunk shot and the camera takes the place of the victim.



Screenshot 72: Jackie Brown – (00:19:25)

Another trunk shot can be found in *Jackie Brown*, as Ordell forces Beaumont (Chris Tucker) down in the trunk of the car. There is no victim in the car yet, but arguably, Beaumont will eventually lie in the trunk and thus the victim in the trunk is virtually present. The construction of the trunk shot is therefore the same, despite there is no person in the trunk at the time being.



Screenshot 73: *Death Proof* – (01:19:53)

Now, having established the term *trunk shot*, the example from *Death Proof* shares a similar construction apart from the camera's position in the car. Instead of being located in the trunk the camera's position is under the hood of the car and thus functions as the point of view of engine of the car. There is no victim in this scene, but the cinematographic construction is the same, as the actors look directly into the camera, which is positioned below them and filming from a low-angle perspective.



Screenshot 74: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:37:46)



Having presented examples where the trunk of a car is central, another type of the point-of-view low-angle shot can be found in *Inglorious Basterds*. However, there is no car, and therefore no trunk, yet, it is related to the trunk shots, since the camera takes the place of the victim in a low-angle shot, and similar to the examples above, the actors also stare directly into the camera or into the eyes of the victim. Despite the fact that the victim is not laying in the trunk of a car the construction of the shot is identical.

Throughout his films, Tarantino makes use of the low-angle shot where the camera is supposed to take the position of a victim. In numerous examples, this victim is located in the trunk of a car and the camera looks up at the actors in frame, whom is responsible for the victim being in the trunk. In the last example, from *Inglorious Basterds*, the audience experienced a similar construction of the shot, where the camera, and therefore the victim, would look up at the actors in the frame from a low-angle shot, but would not be located in the trunk of a car, but on the ground. The effect is produced despite not being in the car, as the victim would still look up at his or her capturers from a low-angle and create a point-of-view shot with the actors looking directly into the camera.

### ***Framing:***

Especially one element in relation to framing is relevant to examine in Tarantino's films, namely how he makes use of naturally existing frames, like doorways, in the shots to frame the scenes. Therefore, the following explores relevant scenes and how Tarantino has made use of these naturally existing frames in his efforts of framing. This specific type of framing is a merge of mise-en-scène and cinematography, since the natural elements in the scenes, being the framing elements, are visual in the shot, and therefore in front of the camera. Meanwhile, the area of framing is a cinematographic tool related to camera angle and distance in the shot. Arguably, this special application of framing can be placed both under the categories of mise-en-scène and cinematography since they are equally influential.



Screenshot 75: *Reservoir Dogs* – (00:18:12)

The first example is from *Reservoir Dogs* and one of the many scenes from the warehouse. Mr. White and Mr. Pink are having a conversation in one of the adjacent rooms in the warehouse. The audience's focus is to be put on Mr. White, and the framing help to do so, since Tarantino uses the hallway and especially the door frames to frame the character. The shot appears almost tunnel-like and the audience stands in the opposite end than the character in the frame. This cinematographic construction appears in several scenes throughout *Reservoir Dogs*, as Tarantino successfully redirects the audience's attention with the natural frames used, in this case the door frames.



Screenshot 76: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:12:50)

Screenshot 77: *Pulp Fiction* – (01:20:38)

Next are two examples from *Pulp Fiction* where Tarantino also makes use of the door frames to frame the characters and the action within this constructed frame. The first example is almost identical to the example from *Reservoir Dogs*, as the hallway and door frames create a corridor and puts the audience's focus at the end of the hallway, where the two characters are located. These long hallways and the door frames also help to create depth in the shot, as they are only in the shot to create this tunnel vision and redirect the focus to the back of the frame. The second example from *Pulp Fiction* has the same function, only on a smaller scale. The frame is closer to the camera and

so are the actors. Instead of a hallway as the other two examples, the contrast is a flat wall and a door opening, wherein the acting takes place. Nonetheless, the door frames are still the natural frames contributing to emphasizing the area of focus. And as in *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* delivers plenty examples of the natural frames throughout the film.



Screenshot 78: Jackie Brown – (01:48:38)

Earlier, it was argued that this special type of framing is an element of both mise-en-scène and cinematography. This screenshot from *Jackie Brown* shows an example of this, since this natural frame deals with light and contrast, which is an element of mise-en-scène. The audience experiences a static camera filming towards a door opening and the action takes place inside the door frames. The only action taking place is inside the door frames, and this is the only area not lit up. Normally, the area of focus is lit up, but the construction with the door frames leads the attention to the person in the door rather than the enlightened areas surrounding the scene. Therefore, lighting and contrasts is an important element when analyzing the natural framing of the scenes, and the following examples share this construction.



Screenshot 79: *Kill Bill* vol. 2 – (00:06:05)

As the example before was concerned with light and creating contrast, and the area of focus was located in the dark area of the frame, the following examples exaggerate the exact opposite, and uses the light and contrast to draw attention towards the enlightened area in the frame. Where the example from *Jackie Brown* showed the area of focus in the darker area, the example from *Kill Bill* vol. 2 shows the exact opposite, as The Bride walks through the archway and out into the light. The archway creates the natural frame in the shot, as well as the contrast between light and dark. Being a scene shot all in black-and-white emphasizes the contrast in lighting and thus the natural frame of the archway. This forces the focus to the center of the frame and onto the character within this frame.



Screenshot 80: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:20:43)

The example from *Inglorious Basterds* is almost identical to the one from *Kill Bill vol. 2*, as the small door creates a frame in the shot and allows light into the shot, from the door and small window. The two examples have the exact same function of creating contrasts and draw the attention of the audience to the desired area, and in this example the latter is particularly important. Most of the shot is completely dark and only the doorway and the window show visible contents. Therefore, the area of focus is decreased to only the lit areas, and this is required for the audience to take notice of the girl running away into the background, since she would almost disappear in a shot without the given contrast in lighting. Therefore, the use of the natural frame in shape of the doorway has the advantage of emphasizing smaller elements, since the shot is basically narrowed down to what appears only inside the natural frame.



Screenshot 81: Django Unchained – (01:40:37)

Conclusively, the last example from *Django Unchained* supports the trait of having the natural frame in the center of the shot. This stands in opposition to the current standard of framing stating never to place important elements in the center of the shot. The natural frames are all placed in the center, hence, the areas of focus and the important elements are always in the very center of both the frame and the shot itself. Therefore, it leaves no doubt that the use of the natural frames, often times in the shape of doorways, is a distinct trait in Tarantino's way of constructing shots, as multiple examples of this are present throughout his films.

### ***Technical preferences:***

Quentin Tarantino directed his first feature film in 1992 with *Reservoir Dogs*, and has since that day sworn to record these on original, analog film reels. Therefore, all his films are recorded and



distributed as analog on 35 mm film, and his latest film *The Hateful Eight* on 70 mm film.

Arguably, Tarantino is rather old-fashioned when it comes to films, and he confirmed this when asked how he watches films himself: "I have a bunch of DVDs and a bunch of videos, and I still tape films off of television on video so I can keep my collection going" (Shepherd, 2015).

Arguably, Tarantino is one of the few film directors who trust the traditional equipment and reel types, instead of following the technological progress of digitalization. Therefore, Tarantino is a man against the digitalization of cinema and argues that the atmosphere and feeling associated with film and cinema will disappear with the implementation of digital technology, such as digital cameras for filming. Hence, he persists to use the original, analog film reels and only records his films on 35 mm or 70 mm reels.

## Sound

The aspect of sound plays a pivotal role in the process of filmmaking, yet it is an area the audience often seems to forget to direct its attention towards, since it is not visible and as tangible as visual images. Nevertheless, the sound in Tarantino's films is as unique as any of the previously analyzed stylistic areas. In terms of sound, many sound effects are related to what appears visually in the shot, which can be both *mise-en-scène* and cinematography, since it is the interplay between the visual and the audible that creates unison. The special sound is often related to something shown on camera, whether it is a particular action performed by an actor or a certain camera movement accompanied by a special sound effect. Therefore, the following examines Tarantino's films in relation to the aspect of sound, and more precisely if there are any remarkable trademarks in the use of sound, such as specific recurring sounds accompanied by certain visual elements.

The first trait in sound to be analyzed is the sound effect accompanying the cinematographic, high-speed zoom. There can be found examples of both fast zoom-ins and zoom-outs accompanied by the sound effect, which comes in form of a swooshing sound that resembles going through wind at high speeds.



Screenshot 82: Kill Bill vol. 1 (01:21:43)



Screenshot 83: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (01:21:43~)

An example of the fast zoom and the swooshing sound is seen in *Kill Bill vol. 1*, as a Crazy 88 gang member comes running into the restaurant. The particular scene is packed with action, as The Bride fights the entire gang, and the pace of cutting is high. Therefore, the tempo of the zoom needs to be equal to the cuts, and the swooshing sound is a contributing factor to emphasize the tempo and dynamics in the scene. According to Bordwell & Thompson, this creates a vivid sound perspective, which means that the closer the camera is to the source, the louder the swooshing sound (2013, p. 278).

Also, what this combination of sound and cinematography does is emphasizing the object or person being approached by the camera. The object or person was either positioned in a close-up from the beginning of the shot or the zoom-in brought the camera closer to the given object or person, hence, creating a close-up. Combined with the aforementioned high tempo in both cuts and zoom, the close-ups emphasize urgency in the area of interest and have the ability to make an item or person intimidating or vital to the scene and shot.

Throughout his works, it becomes clear how much attention Tarantino pays to detail, also when it comes to sound. One will be able to hear many different sounds that add to the understanding of the shot, both diegetic and non-diegetic. Tarantino has another characteristic habit in terms of sound, which is to use non-diegetic sounds in places where they do not belong. An example of this is a fight scene in *Kill Bill vol. 1*. As The Bride falls through a table, the fall is emphasized by the sound of falling bowling pins. Another example is found in *Reservoir Dogs*, when Mr. Orange pays a visit to the restroom packed with police officers. After washing his hands, he turns to use the dryer but instead of the normal blowing sound from a dryer the sound of a jet engine drowns out any other sound.



Screenshot 84: Reservoir Dogs – (01:13:27)

The examples above are influential uses of non-diegetic sound, and the audience is forced to take notice of these peculiar sound choices, since it breaks the conventions of non-diegetic sound usage. Nonetheless, these sound choices contribute to the understanding of the scene and add something extra, whether it is for dramatic effect or as a humoristic addition. These couple of examples display what Bordwell & Thompson describe as follows: "A play with the conventions can be used to puzzle or surprise the audience, to create humor or ambiguity, or to suggest thematic implications." (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 284) Arguably, the bowling pin sound effect from *Kill Bill vol. 1* is added to give the fighting a humoristic touch, whereas the jet engine from *Reservoir Dogs* adds to notion of Mr. Orange's mental state while being watched by the police officers in the restroom. The detail of sound is what appears most remarkable in terms of Tarantino's films, as he manages to manipulate multiple scenes with non-diegetic sounds, that either contributes to creating dramatic effect in the scene or somehow becomes a humoristic addition. Therefore, the central part, as mentioned earlier, is that these sound bites break the conventions of sound, which the audience has to take notion of, and thus creates a very different cinematic experience.

## Editing

The area of editing deals with the relations between shot A and shot B. These relations can be graphic, rhythmic, spatial, and temporal relations, and each relation has its various options to create a coherent scene. The aspect of editing is, therefore, associated with cuts and how to put together the relevant shots in order to create consistent and coherent scenes for a film. Based on this, the following will analyze Tarantino's work with editing and explore if, and how, he manages to achieve smooth continuity between shots, and thus creates an overall balance (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 221).

*Pulp Fiction* gives an example of how a normally discontinuous scene can be balanced and more predictable due to cutting the correct way, as Vincent and Jules are having a conversation across the table where they eat. The screenshots below show how, despite the two characters being located in opposite side of the frame in each shot, the cutting creates an overall balance, and, therefore, creates a structure of a simple conversation with a predictable left-right trajectory, which the audience can easily follow. A single shot with a similar construction, with the character in one side, would appear odd, but the cutting between the two different shots, and the two different characters, creates cohesion and the illusion of a conversation across the table.



Screenshot 85: *Pulp Fiction* – (02:15:13)

Screenshot 86: *Pulp Fiction* – (02:15:14)

One area of editing that Tarantino has a clear focus on is temporal relations, which is the editing technique to control time in one's film. Usually, the narrative in a film happens chronologically, but some directors make use of a different formula to manipulate the story time. The entire notion of the narrative element will be emphasized in the later paragraph concerned with narratology, but nevertheless, there is a present editing aspect worth analyzing, which the following will perform.

A particular area, which Tarantino makes use of, is repetition of story actions through editing, which means that the same scene is played more than once, often from different angles or points-of-view. Normally, we are accustomed to scenes only being shown once, but Tarantino shows how a scene can be repeated for a particular purpose. The technique of repeating story actions seems rare, thus, this is possibly why it appears as a powerful editing resource (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 231). This area is not to be confused with flashbacks and flash-forwards, since these skip back or forth in story time to an episode not seen before, and the repeating of story actions through editing does, as the name indicates, repeat a scene or action from the film that has already been seen before. The following screenshots from *Death Proof* display how the scene is shown multiple times, from different angles, to emphasize exactly what happens to each of characters involved, one person at a time.



Screenshot 87: *Death Proof* – (00:51:06)

Screenshot 88: *Death Proof* – (00:51:10)



Screenshot 89: Death Proof – (00:51:15)



Screenshot 90: Death Proof – (00:51:22)

The four screenshots display how each of the characters in the car are killed in the crash, all in their own shots with focus only on the respective character. Therefore, in terms of editing, the scene is repeated four times in order to portray each character's position in this car crash, which is a seldom seen construction of a car crash scene.

There is another type of example where the editing is central, as the scene appears more than once in a film. An example of this is found in *Pulp Fiction*, when Vincent and Jules liquidate a young man in a hotel room.



Screenshot 91: Pulp Fiction – (00:20:53)



Screenshot 92: Pulp Fiction – (01:52:39)

We encounter a rare phenomenon in these highlighted scenes in the screenshots, as the exact same shots have been used. As the time indicates, there is more than 90 minutes of film between the two scenes, which in itself is rare, but the choice to use the exact same shots is somewhat unique and not an action often seen in films. In terms of storytelling, the repetition of a scene brings the audience back in time to its first occurrence to pick up the story where it left of. In *Pulp Fiction*, it is especially important to guide the audience's attention, exactly because the film is so fragmented in its temporal order.

As an editing tool, the choice of using the same scene twice is not something that stylistically defines Tarantino as a director or *auteur*, but it is a useful tool in navigating the narrative of *Pulp Fiction*. Showing the same scene twice is not the only trait Tarantino employs to upset the temporal order, and as the structuring of plot and story elements fall under the category of narratology, these elements will be analyzed in detail in the following chapters.

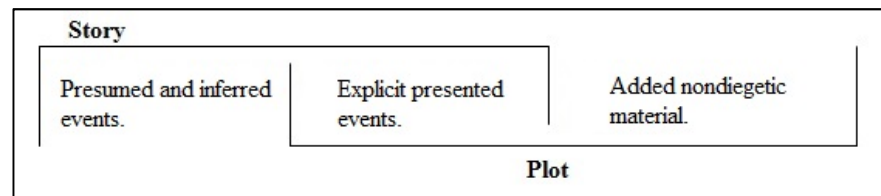


## Narratology in Tarantino's works

One of the ways this project seeks to explore Tarantino's status as *auteur* is through a closer look on how his stories are put together. As such, this chapter seeks to analyze the narratological aspects of plot & story, time & space, and cause & effect. Like with the stylistic analysis of mise-en-scène, the theoretical basis for this approach is found in the neo-formalistic system created by Bordwell & Thompson.

When analyzing the narrative aspect of a film, it generally means analyzing how a story is told. As the early practitioners of *politique des auteurs* discussed, the way a story comes to life at the hands of a director is of critical importance to said director's status as *auteur*. The technical practicalities of staging and camerawork are, however, only one part of the entire process, and many steps must be taking even before

that. The script is the basis for the film, and as such the narrative of the film exists already in the narrative of the script.



Stories and storytelling are important parts of every person's life. They surround everyone to an extent that we are probably not always aware of, but still help us make sense of the impressions and information which are presented on a daily basis. The *narrative form* is the way stories are constructed. Bordwell & Thompson describe a narrative as being "a chain of events linked by cause and effect and occurring in time and space" (2013, p. 73). All these elements, especially causality and time, are important in the storytelling process, as those are the elements that help our understanding of what is going on in the story. As such, the audience of the narrative relies on a certain amount of anticipation when decoding the narrative, and said anticipation can come either from narrative elements within the film or from already existing stories or films which the audience may be familiar with and use in the decoding process (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp. 72-73).

The audience and their understanding of the narrative form is crucial in the storytelling process. Often times, telling a story relies heavily upon the assumptions of how the audience will interpret what they see and hear on screen. Therefore, distinctions are often made between *plot* and *story*. *Plot* refers to everything explicitly audible or visible, including all the events directly depicted. Furthermore, all non-diegetic material, the material which does not exist in

the world of the film, is plot elements. Like plot, *story* also includes what is explicitly presented, but extends to every action that is not explicitly shown, but instead inferred by the audience themselves. One might state that plot elements aid the audience's ability to infer the story and thus the combination of plot and story forms a narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, pp. 81-82).

The narrative of *Reservoir Dogs* includes clear examples of the distinction between plot and story. When watching the film the audience is explicitly shown the planning phase and aftermath of a jewel heist.

In certain scenes of the film, the heist is being planned and the characters are presented. In other scenes, Mr. Orange has been shot and Mr. Pink states he is in possession of the jewels. Hence, even though it is not explicitly shown, the



Screenshot 95: Reservoir Dogs – (01:20:18)

audience deducts that part of the story must have included the heist itself and that the heist went horribly wrong. Another interesting plot element is the suitcase, which Jules and Vincent are tasked with



Screenshot 94: Reservoir Dogs – (00:16:46)

picking up and bringing to Marcellus Wallace in *Pulp Fiction*. The contents of the suitcase are never revealed to the audience but its importance is clearly stated. Jules and Vincent are willing to kill and die for it as seen when Jules states: “I’ve been through too much shit over this case this morning to just hand it over to your dumb ass” (*Pulp Fiction* - 02.24.28). And when the case is opened, away from the camera, a golden light shines at Pumpkin’s face while he states: “Is that what I think it is? [...] It’s beautiful”. The plot explicitly hints that the contents must be incredibly valuable, but the contents itself are not shown and it is up to the imagination of the audience to infer what said contents are and thus create the story.



Screenshot 93: Pulp Fiction – (02:22:05)

Plot and story affects all three of the narrative elements which are *causality*, *time*, and *space*. The most common agents of cause and effect within a narrative are the characters who trigger events and react to them unfolding. The causes created by characters are often a result of said characters' motivation or traits, which can be said to constitute a particular character's identity as the audience perceives him. Furthermore, causes can stem from other sources than characters, such as natural disasters, wars, outbreaks of disease, or alien invasions (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp. 77-78).



Screenshot 96: Pulp Fiction – (02:21:58)

*Reservoir Dogs* is ultimately a character and dialogue driven narrative as most of the plot consists of characters talking to each other with very few action or traveling sequences. As such it is filled with character related causes and effects. Mr. Orange is an undercover cop and is motivated to infiltrate the criminal world and stop the crime. To succeed in this infiltration, he makes up a cover story about how well he handled being a marijuana pusher and through this story earns the respect of the criminal Mr. White. Mr. Orange has revealed the heist plans to his law enforcement colleagues causing them to intervene during the crime, which gets Mr. Orange shot and leaves Mr. White to care for him. As the newest member of the criminal circle, many of the other gang members accuse Mr. Orange of the setup, but Mr. White defends him and turns on his fellow criminals. After a massive shootout, Mr. Orange reveals his identity to Mr. White as the police shows up, causing Mr. White to kill Mr. Orange out of a feeling of betrayal before being shot by the officers himself. Mr. Orange's motivations and traits get him undercover, earn him the respect of Mr. White, but also get him and everyone else killed. Interestingly enough, Mr. Orange's last words to Mr. White are "I'm sorry. I'm sorry" (*Reservoir Dogs*, 01:35:00), indicating to the audience that Orange is morally conflicted, as he respects Mr. White but has to betray him out of a sense of duty. This is an example of a three-dimensional or round character, who displays more than just a few traits. The connection and relationship between traits, and how the character's actions unfold as a result of these, is what helps establish a believable and relatable character (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp. 77-78).

The gravity of causes and their effects can be underlined by how time unfolds in the narrative. In real life time is a constant, chronological flow, but that flow can be manipulated on

screen through various techniques. These techniques are often created stylistically or in editing. One well known temporal manipulation is the flashback which depicts something from the story's past in the present plot. Flashbacks often help to emphasize causality by showing the cause of something from the past to justify the effect in the present (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 80). In *Django Unchained*, Dr. King Schultz hires Django to identify three men who previously worked as foremen at the plantation where Django was a slave. When Django spots the men, flashbacks occur of the foremen whipping Django's wife whilst Django begs them to stop. The audience now better understands Django's burning hatred for the men and his willingness to assist Schultz. To better distinguish between past and present parts of the story, the flashbacks have a different, bluer tinted color grading compared to the more natural color grading representing the present, as can be seen in the screenshots below. Furthermore, the cutting transition between the shots of the present and the flashback is accompanied by a blowing, non-diegetic sound which cues the audience in to the ongoing transition.



Screenshot 97: Django Unchained – (00:33:00)



Screenshot 98: Django Unchained – (00:32:52)

Another plot and story element is that of space: the location where the story unfolds. Like other plot and story elements, space can be divided into plot space, or screen space, which is what explicitly shown, and story space, which is inferred



Screenshot 99: Kill Bill vol. 2 – (00:57:57)

by the audience. For instance, in *Kill Bill vol. 2* Beatrix Kiddo is captured, sedated, put in a wooden casket, and buried alive. On screen, the audience is explicitly shown Beatrix being trapped inside the casket. Her panic reaction and the previous shots of Budd burying a casket cause the audience to infer that Beatrix is inside the box and, furthermore, buried under six feet of dirt, even though that probably never occurred during the production of the film and is never explicitly shown. As space is



very much intertwined with the concepts of cinematography and mise-en-scène, it has already been discussed in the appropriate chapters analyzing stylistics.

As it can be deduced from the above, a narrative is a collection of plot elements which form a pattern from which the audience can interpret the story. Many narratives revolve around a conflict and characters that are central to this conflict. As such, a narrative's pattern often consists of the way things appear to be in the reality of the story's beginning, only to undergo a certain change as a result of cause and effects, so that the story's reality at the end is different from that of the beginning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp. 85-86). The opening of a film is often crucial as it is the important first impression left on the audience and serves as a focal point for the pace, atmosphere, theme, and other plot and storytelling elements. As such, a filmmaker may choose from a variety of options when choosing what opening style suits the story told the best. An opening can be *panoramic* establishing the landscapes and slowly moving closer to the origin point of the story. The narrative can also begin *in medias res* where the audience is thrown into what would appear to be the middle of the story without any other presenting elements. Whether or not the openings are panoramic or start in medias res, crucial information will often be presented to the audience as clues to decode the pattern of the narrative. The characters are often presented as well as their relationship with each other and their place in the world (Haastrup, 2009, p. 239).

As the opening is often very telling of the story and how its told in a film, an analysis of crucial parts in the openings of Tarantino's films will be conducted to establish the existence of storytelling traits commonly used in his films, and perhaps more importantly, uncommonly used in general. One of the key elements in analyzing Tarantino's narratives is looking at the dialogue he writes for his characters, as that is one of the director's core strengths and of great importance to him. On the notable dialogue-heavy introduction to *Reservoir Dogs* Tarantino stated: "I didn't want to describe the characters [...] I wanted the characters' personalities to be expressed through the dialogue" (Ciment & Niogret, 1998A, p. 15). It should be noted that the following excerpts of dialogue differentiates between using character names and actor names. Actor names are deliberately used in dialogue situations where characters have not yet been introduced by name. This is due to Tarantino being fully aware of when to present his characters' identities and when to leave them anonymous to the audience.

### **Opening in *Reservoir Dogs***

*"Let me tell you what 'Like a Virgin' is about. It's all about a girl who digs a guy with a big dick. The entire song – it's a metaphor for big dicks" – Mr. Brown*

That is the opening line from Tarantino's first film. It is delivered through the title credits without showing the face of Tarantino who is delivering it. As soon as the line is delivered, the film cuts to the



Screenshot 100: Reservoir Dogs – (00:00:28)

first frame of the film: an over shoulder shot revealing Michael Madsen and Eddie Bunker listening to Tarantino's character before Michael Madsen's character rebukes "no it ain't. It's about a girl who is very vulnerable". The discussion of Madonna's hit song goes on while the camera pans around revealing a total of eight men sitting around the table in a diner, six of whom are wearing a black suit and a skinny black tie. While five of the suit clad men are discussing music, another of the men can be heard mumbling "Toby... who the fuck is toby". The voice is revealed to come from Lawrence Tierney's character who is rummaging through a notebook. After hearing Tierney mumble through the notebook and Tarantino going on about Madonna, Harvey Keitel's character is fed up and takes the notebook from Tierney:

Keitel: "Give me that fucking thing"

Tierney: "What the hell do you think you are you doing? Give me my book back."

Keitel: "I'm sick of fucking hearing it, Joe. I'll give it back to you when we leave."

Tierney: "What do you mean when we leave? Give me it back now!"

Keitel: "For the past fifteen minutes now, you've been droning on about names! Toby... Toby? Toby? Toby Wong. Toby Wong? Toby Wong. Toby Chung? Fucking Charlie Chan! I've got Madonna's big dick coming out of my left ear, and Toby-the-jap-I-don't-know-what coming out of my right."

Tierney: "Give me that book."

Keitel: "Are you gonna put it away?"

Tierney: "I'm gonna do whatever the fuck I want with it!"

Keitel: "Well, then I'm afraid I'm gonna have to keep it."

Madsen: "Hey, Joe. Want me to shoot this guy?"

Keitel: "Shit! You shoot me in a dream you better wake up and apologize."

[Laughter from the rest] (Reservoir Dogs – 00:02:27)

The interesting thing about this opening scene is that there is almost no information given. The only two characters who are given names are Lawrence Tierney as Joe and later in the scene Steve Buscemi as Mr. Pink. Furthermore, the men talk about songs and what they heard on the radio, while Joe is going through an old notebook, which turns out to have no impact on the story further on. So, the opening reveals nothing as to what is going on, the purpose of the meeting, and why they are dressed as they are. Yet something very crucial is revealed. Through the interaction between the men, it becomes clear that Joe is an authority figure. He pays for the men's expenses at the diner and Michael Madsen appears to look to Joe for instructions when asking, albeit jokingly, if he should shoot Keitel. Even though it comes off as a harmless comment, Madsen's joke is a setup to his character later being revealed as coldblooded hitman loyal to Joe. Keitel's character also induces a feeling of authority as he dares to confront the established leader, Joe, and take his notebook. He also delivers a snappy rebuke at Madsen's threat making the other characters laugh, establishing him as a figure the others look up to. The film arguably starts *in medias res* but it is unclear where in the narrative. It is established that the men know each other, but nothing of their purpose is known and there is not a single clue given as to what the film is about other than the foreshadowing of a possible lethal conflict between Keitel and Madsen. As such, the opening of *Reservoir Dogs* is unusual as there is very little *exposition* happening, exposition being the term for situations in which helpful plot elements and story information is given to the audience (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 85). Even though the actions of the story are not that well established, something else is. Tarantino presents his characters as people. They are not heroes caught up in some existential or globally important discussion, rather they are just people, and as Tarantino is not afraid of including profanities and swear words the conversation is lowered to a level of gritty realism and the diner, in which it takes place, enhances the authenticity even more. The opening appears to be Tarantino stating that the film is about these characters more than what they are doing and what is going on around them. This is emphasized by the casting credits and title screen, which follows the diner scene. In these credits, the cast is seen leaving the diner, each one getting a close up with the actor's name in writing concluded by the final sequence "are – Reservoir Dogs". As such, without establishing what the story is about, Tarantino presents the actors and characters in it,

which underlines, more than anything else, that this film is about these people.

The title sequence is followed by another sequence *in medias res*. While the credits are rolling on screen, a man is heard screaming “Oh god, I’m gonna die!” while a second man exclaims “just hold on, buddy boy!”. The screen cuts to Tim Roth writhing in pain in a pool of blood in the back of a moving car driven by Keitel. This sequence leaves the audience with many unanswered questions as to what was the cause of this predicament and one question in particular turns out to be the revolving point of the rest of the film: What were the characters doing before this point in the story time and how did it go so wrong that one of them got shot? Keitel takes Roth to a warehouse and gradually the other characters start showing up and piece by piece the plot reveals what has happened. By choosing this type of opening, Tarantino presents the audience with an effect but leaves the cause to be discovered through the dialogue and interactions between the characters, again emphasizing the importance of the character driven plot.

### Opening in *Pulp Fiction*

The opening of *Pulp Fiction* shares many traits with that of *Reservoir Dogs*. After the dictionary definition of the word “pulp”, the scene opens to a shot of Amanda Plummer and Tim Roth sitting in a diner booth. The audience is thrown directly into their conversation with



Screenshot 101: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:00:30)

Roth’s opening line being “Forget it, it’s too risky. I’m through doing that shit”. As the conversation progresses, it is revealed that the two people are robbers, who normally rob liqueur stores, but are now contemplating the dangers:

Roth: [...] “The point of the story is, they robbed a bank with a telephone.”

Plummer: “You wanna rob banks?”

Roth: “I’m not saying that I wanna rob banks, I’m just illustrating that if we did it would be easier than what we’ve been doing.”

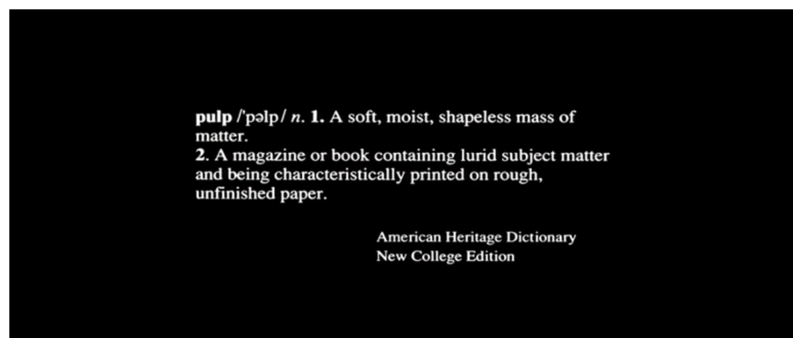
Plummer: “And no more liqueur stores?”



Roth: "What have we been talking about? Yeah! No more liqueur stores. Besides it ain't the gig it used to be, too many foreigners who own liqueur stores: Vietnamese, Koreans, they don't even speak fucking English, you tell them 'Empty out the register' they don't know what the fuck you' talking about and make it too personal. If we keep on, one of these gook fuckers is gonna make us kill him.

Plummer: [Almost playfully] "I'm not gonna kill anybody." (PF 00:02:20).

Considering the parallels between the openings of *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*, the characters are personalized and humanized through their dialogue with each other, whilst the realism is achieved through the location. However, in *Reservoir Dogs* the subject of conversation is something as normal as lyrics and pop icons and the dynamics between the characters and their characteristics are established through their language use, which is everything but formal. The same informality and flow is used between the characters in *Pulp Fiction*, but instead of lyrics the subject of conversation is robberies and killings. Yet, the line delivery and dynamic between the actors makes it appear as normal and daily life for these people, and as such the audience accepts the reality of the film because of it. This reality of the film is perhaps further accepted because of the film's title and the dictionary definition of 'Pulp' which appears in the very beginning: "Pulp: A magazine or book containing lurid subject matter". Screenshot 102: *Pulp Fiction* – (00:00:19)



Arguably, Tarantino emphasizes the violent themes of the film, yet manages to make it appear natural within the reality of the film.

Opening scenes often serves the purpose of presenting the main characters and as such one would expect the characters Honey Bunny and Pumpkin to be the main characters of the film, simply because they are the first to appear on screen and have a conversation about who they are and what they do. But Pumpkin and Honey Bunny are not the main characters and are not seen again until the very end of film's runtime, where they encounter the films actual main characters, Jules and Vincent. It is revealed that the opening and closing scenes are continuous and that the film has had a fragmented temporal order. Therefore, the opening, and the rest of the film as will be

discussed further on, serves as an intricate setup for the film's conclusion in which Jules decides to change his life.

After the diner scene and the opening credits, two of the actual main characters, played by John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson are presented. Their presentation appears almost as a tribute to *Reservoir Dogs* as the two can be seen wearing the same black and white suits and engaged in the same type of dialogue which serves no other function in the narrative other than establishing the two as being ordinary:

Travolta: "But you know what the funniest thing about Europe is?"

Jackson: "What?"

Travolta: "It's the little differences. I mean they got the same shit over there that they got here, but it's just that there is a little difference."

Jackson: "Example"

Travolta: "Alright, well you can walk into a movie theater in Amsterdam and buy a beer. And I don't mean just an old paper cup, I'm talking about a glass of beer. And in Paris you can buy a beer at McDonald's. Ey, you know what they call a Quarter Pounder with cheese in Paris?"

Jackson: "They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with cheese?"

Travolta: "No man, they got the metric system, they don't know what the fuck a Quarter Pounder is."

Jackson: "Then what do they call it?"

Travolta: "They call it a *Royale* with cheese!"

Jackson: "A *Royale* with cheese?!"

Travolta: "That's right."

Jackson: "What do they call a Big Mac?"

Travolta: "Big Mac's a Big Mac but they call it *le* Big Mac."

Jackson: "*Le* Big 'e Mac 'e [Laughs] What do they call a Whopper?"

Travolta: "I don't know I didn't go into Burger King." (Pulp Fiction – 00:07:32)

Jackson and Travolta's characters are introduced as ordinary people having a conversation about ordinary things, but as with *Reservoir Dogs*, they too are soon to be revealed as affiliates of the criminal environment, working as Hitmen for a crime boss. This shift from ordinary to extraordinary is gradually phased into the conversation. When the two arrive at their destination, the conversation switches from discussing burgers in Europe to the upcoming job. Accompanied by Tarantino's trademark trunk shot,

Jackson states: "We should have shotguns for this kind of deal". The ordinary conversation continues until the time comes for Vincent and Jules to do their job: Securing a suitcase from the 'business associates' of their boss at



Screenshot 103: Pulp Fiction – (00:08:48)

gunpoint. Concluding this opening,

Jules executes one of the men by citing Tarantino's own interpretation of the bible verse Ezekiel 25:17:

"The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who in the name of charity and good will shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who would attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee." (Pulp Fiction – 00:20:07)

Aside from introducing Pumpkin and Honey Bunny in the opening, Tarantino has familiarized his audience with two other on the one side seemingly normal people: Vincent, the laid back stoner and burger connoisseur, and Jules the articulate and religious believer, whose profession as lethal enforcers makes them far from normal.

### **Openings of *Kill Bill* vol. 1 & 2**

*Kill Bill* vol. 1 opens with the statement "Revenge is a dish best served cold" - Old Klingon Proverb' before jumping into a flashback which functions as a prologue for the plot of the film. This flashback is shot in black and white, setting it apart from the rest of the film. The scene frames a

close up of a beaten and bloody Uma Thurman lying on the floor in her wedding gown, breathing frantically. Footsteps are heard approaching and heavy boots are shown walking the floors before stopping over Thurman. No other face is shown, but David Carradine's voice is heard delivering the film's opening monologue:

“Do you find me sadistic? You know, I bet I could fry an egg on your head right now, if I wanted to. You know, Kiddo, I'd like to believe that you're aware enough even now to know that there's nothing sadistic in my actions. Well, maybe towards those other jokers, but not you. No Kiddo, at this moment, this is me at my most masochistic” (Kill Bill vol. 1 – 00:01:22).

These lines are delivered while the character is seen wiping Thurman's, or Kiddo's, face with a handkerchief with the name Bill embroidered into it, leading the audience to believe that this man must be Bill.



Screenshot 104: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:01:33)

After wiping Thurman's face, Bill is heard cocking a gun, Kiddo's eyes widen with fear and she exclaims “Bill. It's your baby” before being shot and the screen cuts to black for the opening credits and the title screen “Kill Bill vol. 1”.

The opening exposition in *Kill Bill vol. 1* differs from those of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* as the characters are presented as functions in the plot, whereas the previously discussed openings focus on presenting characters as ordinary people who happen to be involved in the narrative. Through the opening exposition in *Kill Bill vol. 1*, Tarantino manages to convey a large amount of story elements through relatively few plot elements. The opening statement is about

revenge, and seeing a pregnant bride beaten and attempted executed by a man named Bill certainly explains why someone would seek revenge against Bill and thus explains the title: Kill Bill. As there are only two shots in the opening, and both of them are close-ups, it's hard to deduct where it takes place in reference to time and space. However, starting in medias res, and seeing how the two characters know each other intimately enough for the bride to be pregnant, while Bill at the same time hears about this pregnancy for the first time, it is understood that they presumably had a close relationship before having a falling out, leading up to this tragic point in their story.

*Kill Bill vol. 2* begins in much the same manner, and it becomes obvious that the two installations were meant to be released as one film. In order for the audience to catch up with the happenings of the narrative in the former film, Tarantino has opted for repeating most of the opening scene with Uma Thurman lying on the floor. The scene is, however, cutting out early so that the credits appear with David Carradine's dialogue continuing on the audio track. After repeating the shooting of Kiddo, the screen cuts to black and Thurman's voice is starting a monologue. She is then seen behind the wheel of a car, delivering her monologue directly to the camera and creating the appearance of addressing the audience directly, establishing the character as the film's narrator. Interestingly, Kiddo was already functioning as what Bordwell & Thompson call a *character narrator*: a character who also serves the purpose of delivering story relevant plot information to the audience (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 93). In the first installment of *Kill Bill*, Thurman's voice is narrating through an inner monologue or voice over, but the opening scene of *vol. 2* is the first and only occurrence of the character narrator delivering an outer monologue whilst acknowledging the camera. Having a character acknowledging the camera, and thus the process of filmmaking, is arguably a breach of immersion, and the breach of said immersion could arguably be a way for Tarantino to further establish *Kill Bill* as a film-within-a-film.

After the summarizing opening of *vol. 2*, the film begins with the sixth chapter of the overall narrative. This chapter serves as an expansion on the brief opening scene in *vol. 1* as it shows the events leading up to Kiddo being shot while wearing her wedding dress. Furthermore, it explains Kiddo's hatred for the people on her death list and why Bill would want her dead. The scene is shot in black and white which, furthermore, establishes the link to the opening of the previous films as well as its status as a flashback. In the process of telling the story, Tarantino created a *setup* and an effect with the opening of the first film but withheld the *payoff* and the cause until the opening of the second film. It becomes obvious to the audience that the temporal orders of the openings of the *Kill Bill* films are not chronological. This trait is not restricted to the openings



but occurs throughout the entirety of the films, as well as being evident in the previous films, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*.

### **The Non-Linear Narratives of Tarantino's Early Films**

When looking at narrative tendencies amongst Tarantino's films, a recurring use of fragmented temporal order can be found. This sort of fragmentation can be used to set up surprises, as critical information of the story is shifted around in the temporal order of the plot, so that it has a bigger impact on the audience (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp. 79-80). One way to upset temporal order is to simply add flashbacks to the narrative in places where it makes sense, such as characters facing actions which require background information in order for the audience to grasp the full extent of the situation, as seen in *Kill Bill*. Tarantino uses flashbacks, evidently in both *Kill Bill* and *Django Unchained*, but besides the obvious, stylistically different flashbacks, Tarantino rearranges the entire temporal order within the narrative of *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Kill Bill vol. 1 & 2*, by breaking up the chronological timeline of the plot and piecing it together in a different order. As the analysis below will show, the result of this fragmentation is an increased dramatic payoff in the relationship between cause and effect as it lets Tarantino pace and properly setup the climaxes of his narratives.

Tarantino had an obvious plan for the structuring of *Reservoir Dogs*. Tarantino explored the possibility of creating a non-linear film without using flashbacks but instead using chapters. This structure was meant to resemble the structure of a novel and pay homage to one of Tarantino's idols, Sergio Leone, who, with his film *Once Upon A Time in America*, uses this structure and, according to Tarantino, puts "answers first, questions later" (Nevers, 1998, p. 7). That is perhaps an inappropriate way of putting it into words as the opening of *Reservoir Dogs* certainly gives way to a wide array of questions: Why is Tim Roth's character bleeding in the back of a car? What went wrong? And, who are these characters and what did they try to accomplish? What Tarantino seems to mean is that effect comes before cause. These questions become the product of the effect to which the cause is not known, and as such the narrative progresses so that it unveils said causes and thus provides answers. To further heighten the suspense of the narrative and the impact these answers has on the audience, Tarantino uses a non-linear temporal order. An example of this is how the characters are not probably introduced in the plot before they do something which affects the main story. When Mr. White and Mr. Pink discuss how they were set up, Mr. Pink suggests that their boss, Joe, set them up on purpose. As seen in the dialogue, Mr. White is adamant that this is not the case:

Mr. Pink: "So who's the rat this time? Mr. Blue? Mr. Brown? Joe? You know, listen, I mean Joe set this whole thing up maybe he set it up to set it up."

Mr. White: "I don't buy it. Me and Joe go back a long time. I can tell you definitely Joe didn't know a fucking thing about this bullshit."

Mr. Pink: "Hey, look. I've known Joe since I was a kid. Okay? Me saying that he definitely had nothing to do with it is ridiculous. I can say I definitely didn't do it because I know what I did or I didn't do. But I cannot definitely say that about anybody else cause I don't definitely know. For all I know you're the rat."

Mr. White: "For all I know you're the fucking rat."

Mr. Pink: "All right now you're using your fucking head. For all we know he [Mr. Orange] is the rat."

Mr. White: "Hey, that kid in there is dying from a fucking bullet I saw him take. So don't you be calling him a rat."

Mr. Pink: "Look, I'm right. Somebody is a fucking rat." (Reservoir Dogs – 00:25:30)

It is clear to the audience that Mr. White trusts Joe but up to this point there have been few indications within the plot to directly show the exact relationship between the two. After the dialogue between Mr. White and Mr. Pink in the warehouse, the setting shifts and the narrative now unfolds in Joe's house in which both Joe and Mr. White are located. The scene obviously takes places before the unfortunate events in the warehouse but there are no stylistic elements which suggest that it as flashback. Instead, only the dialogue reveals that the temporal order is upset, as the two men are planning the upcoming heist. Instead of a flashback, the scene becomes Mr. White's chapter in the story and provides integral information to his actions in the unfolding warehouse situation. The two men are seen in a casual situation drinking whiskey together while Joe tells Mr. White about the heist he is planning.

At one point Mr. White asks:

"What's the cut, Papa?" to which

Joe replies: "Juicy Junior".

Weighing the plot information given, the audience can deduct that



Screenshot 105: Reservoir Dogs – (00:28:20)

the two men are too close in age to actually be father and son. Instead, it can be ascertained that the familiar titles with which the two address each other is a token of mutual respect. This provides an explanation as to why Mr. White would defend Joe's honor in an argument with Mr. Pink.

According to Bordwell & Thompson, one of the key elements to a plot's progression is the *change in knowledge* within the characters, which often leads to a turning point in the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 85). By presenting crucial information in a twisted temporal order like Tarantino does, he ensures that the audience experiences the same change in available information as the characters on the screen, which results in a much deeper level of relation with said characters. One plot element which makes particularly good use of this composition is the reveal of Mr. Orange being the undercover cop, and therefore the rat. In many of the previous scenes, Mr. White can be seen caring for Mr. Orange after he got shot and defending him from Mr. Pink's accusations of him being the rat. When Mr. Orange reveals his identity, the narrative shifts to Mr. Orange's chapter in the story, showing the process he went through to establish his cover and how he bonded particularly well with Mr. White. Therefore, the reveal comes as a big of a shock to the audience as it does to Mr. White, and the audience is able to better experience the betrayal Mr. White must be feeling.

With his second film, *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino expands on the novel traits within his films, which becomes even more fragmented in its temporal order and introduces the idea of having three intertwining stories within the same narrative. According to Tarantino, the narrative of *Pulp Fiction* is made up from the three storylines surrounding the hitmen Vincent and Jules' efforts to secure the briefcase, Vincent's endeavors with Mia Wallace, and lastly, the boxer Butch's double-crossing of Marcellus Wallace. Interestingly, the characters are not confined to their own segment of the narrative. The three stories take place in the same diegetic world and as such the characters are free to enter and exit the different storylines. According to Tarantino, he had originally decided he wanted to make an "anthology"-film in three separate segments. Tarantino abandoned the idea of segment separation as what he truly wanted to make was "a novel on screen, with characters who enter and exit, who have their own story but who can appear anywhere" (Ciment & Niogret, 1998B, p. 81). As such, Tarantino has written *Pulp Fiction* in such a way that a character, who may be the protagonist in one of the storylines, becomes a minor character in another. The different sets of characters are driven by different motivations which create different plot patterns. The storylines of Vincent and Butch are very much what Bordwell & Thompson call *goal-oriented* plots "in which a character takes steps to achieve a desired object or state of affairs" (2013, p. 85). The stories of

Vincent and Butch also share a parallel trait as they both start out with an original goal which later changes due to a dramatic impact on the plot. Vincent is originally tasked with entertaining Mia Wallace, but when she accidentally overdoses on heroin Vincent's main objective becomes to save her life. Butch, the boxer, originally plans to double-cross Marcellus by not throwing his upcoming match as agreed, but instead flee the city with his wager winnings. This plot is also upset when Butch's girlfriend Fabienne, whom he tasked with packing their belongings, forgets Butch's departed father's watch - Butch's only prized possession. In accordance with the storytelling of his previous film, *Reservoir Dogs*, Tarantino emphasizes the importance the watch holds to Butch, and why he acts like he does when Fabienne forgets it, by cutting in a chapter of how Butch as a young boy is given the watch by Captain Koons after Butch's father has died in Vietnam. Butch and Vincent cross paths in the narrative two times and as such becomes a minor character in the other's story. The most notable example of this is the scene in which Butch shoots Vincent. Tarantino states the reason for his choices in storytelling as:

“I like that each character of *Pulp Fiction* could carry a film as the main hero. If I'd made a film, for example about Butch and Fabienne, and only about them, the character played by John Travolta probably wouldn't have had a name. He'd been called “Bad Guy no. 1.” But as *Pulp Fiction* is conceived, he is Vincent Vega. We know his personality, we have an idea of his way of life, he's not simply a minor character. So then when they shoot him, the spectator feels something.” (Ciment & Niogret, 1998B, p. 81)

As such, the payoff of Vincent's death has a much larger impact exactly because establishing the character as one of the film's leads was a much deeper and elaborate setup.

Unlike Butch and Vincent, Jules' plot-pattern is primarily driven by a change in knowledge. In the opening, Jules had been established as loyal and very religious henchman of Marcellus, who delivers an intimidating bible verse before killing his targets. When he and Vincent survive being shot at six times at point blank range, Jules interprets it as a miracle and a sign of god. This prompts him to reflect on his life and his deeds and he ultimately decides to quit the life of being an enforcer. This decision is delivered through an elaborately structured setup which makes use of Tarantino's affinity for the non-linear timeline. The very first characters presented in *Pulp Fiction* are Pumpkin and Honey Bunny who rob a diner at the beginning of the film. Even though they are the first characters introduced, they are not seen again until the very end of the film. It turns

out that Jules and Vincent happen to be in the same diner. Given the plot elements of clothing, the suitcase, and Vincent being alive, it is established that the scene occurs right after Jules and Vincent visit Jimmy and right before they hand over the suitcase to Marcellus, which has already occurred in the film. Pumpkin and Honey Bunny's roles in the film thus become to provide a basis for the redemption of Jules who, through a conversation with Pumpkin at gunpoint, reflects on the meaning of the bible verse he used to cite when killing people:

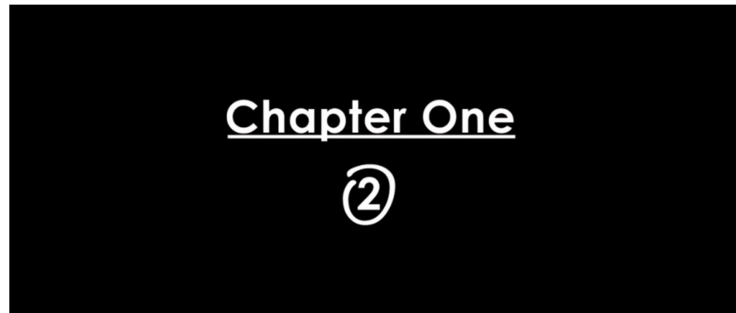
“Now, I’ve been saying that shit for years. And if you ever heard it, that meant your ass. You’d be dead right now. I never gave much thought to what it meant. I just thought it was a cold-blooded thing to say to a motherfucker before I popped a cap in his ass. But I saw some shit this morning, made me think twice. See, now I’m thinking: maybe it means you’re the evil man. And I’m the righteous man. And Mr. 9mm here, he’s the shepherd protecting my righteous ass in the valley of darkness. Or it could mean you’re the righteous man and I’m the shepherd and it’s the world that’s evil and selfish. And I’d like that. But that shit ain’t the truth. The truth is you’re the weak. And I’m the tyranny of evil men. But I’m tryin’, Ringo. I’m tryin’ real hard to be the shepherd.” (Pulp Fiction – 02:27:27)

As this scene appears at the very end of the film, it provides a closing comment, not only to Jules’ story arc, but to the film as a whole. Even though the scene takes place before Marcellus tries to hunt Butch down, the spectator has already seen this part in the film, and any other part. As such, the audience better understands the life Jules wishes to leave behind. The audience has seen the ‘tyranny of evil men’ and how living that life can lead to death, as is proven when Vincent gets shot. By manipulating the temporal order, Tarantino provides a comprehensible insight into Jules’ self- reflection, which becomes the closing statement of the entire film.

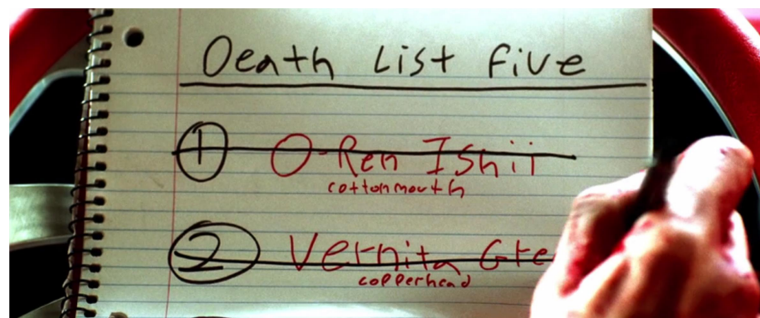
With the *Kill Bill* narrative, Tarantino evolves the trend of segmenting his films into chapters, as the two films are clearly edited and cut into a total of ten chapters which are all numbered and given a sub-headline in the film. Tarantino is clearly taking an idea he likes, in this case the use of chapters, which he tried to implement already in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, and constantly evolves it. As with his previous films, the manipulation of the temporal order is also apparent in *Kill Bill*. As already discussed, the film’s prologue is a flashback, but the subsequent first chapter is simply named “2”. This indicates that something of importance has already occurred in the story. When watching the film, the audience will discover that the narrative is structured



around the “Death List Five”, a list made by Beatrix containing the names of the five people who wronged her and thus needs to die. This list is an important plot element in terms of navigating the temporal order of the films. It becomes clear that Beatrix seeks out the people on the list in numerical order: O-ren Ishii, Vernita Green, Budd, Elle Driver, and Bill. An indication of this is the aforementioned first chapter named “2” in which Beatrix confronts Vernita Green. After confronting and killing Green, Beatrix crosses out



Screenshot 106: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:05:10)



Screenshot 107: Kill Bill vol. 1 – (00:15:48)

Green's name on the list and it is revealed that O-ren Ishii is already crossed out, indicating that Beatrix has already killed her, even though it has not appeared in the film. The fight with O-ren serves as the climactic battle at the very end of the film in which Beatrix disposes of both O-ren as well as her entire gang of blade-wielding thugs.

It is interesting to note how the use of the fragmented temporal order in the *Kill Bill* films differs from how the temporal order was utilized in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*. In the earlier two films, Tarantino manipulated the temporal order as a means to maintain mysticism and reveal crucial plot points at the right time. In *Kill Bill*, many crucial plot elements are revealed before they truly have an effect on the film. An example already mentioned is that O-ren's name is already crossed out on the death list before the audience gets to see the confrontation. As a result, the audience never doubts that Beatrix will be victorious. Another example is in the opening of the second volume, in which Beatrix is having a presenting monologue addressing the camera and the audience. In one of her lines she states:

“I’ve killed a hell of a lot of people to get to this point. But I have only one more. The last one. The one I’m driving to right now. The only one left. And when I arrive at my destination, I am gonna kill Bill” (Kill Bill vol. 2 – 00:01:23).

When the first film ended, Beatrix had conquered two of the names from her list. Opening the second film with this monologue reveals to the audience that she will be victorious when confronting the third and fourth. The only thing that is never revealed at any point leading up to the conclusion of the narrative is whether or not Beatrix will be able to exact her revenge on Bill. Bill's name is in the title of the film as well as the very last name on the list, so that may be the point of this narrative structure, to emphasize that the only name that truly matters to Beatrix is Bill's. But there is another reason for Tarantino to put such emphasis on the name of Bill and so little on the rest. When carefully examining the plot-pattern surrounding Beatrix' and Bill's relationship, it becomes clear that the story of Beatrix is propelled by a change in knowledge. It is revealed that Beatrix trained with Pai Mei to become an effective assassin and work for Bill and his Viper Squad. Beatrix and Bill are apparently close enough to conceive a child, and when Beatrix learns that she is to become a mother she decides to leave the squad and try to find a more normal life. Angered by this, Bill decides to punish Beatrix, shooting and leaving her for dead. Beatrix does not die, but she does lose her baby. Having now lost the prospect of becoming a mother, Beatrix shifts back into her role as an assassin, now with a goal-oriented story of revenge. She kills O-ren Ishii and Vernita Green, but at Green's house Beatrix faces Green's daughter whose mother she has killed, bringing back some of her motherly instincts which prompted her to leave the assassin way in the first place. She is not completely transitioning back to the role of mother, but refrains from killing as she tracks down the remainder of the people on her list. This becomes evident when Beatrix faces off against Elle Driver whom she blinds and leaves even though she has every opportunity to kill her. Budd was killed by Elle earlier, sparing Beatrix the trouble of doing it. With the first four names out of the way, Beatrix seeks out Bill. Upon finding him, it is revealed that Beatrix' daughter never died and that Bill has been raising her. It could be argued that Beatrix transitions fully back into her role of mother at this point which would mean that she should not kill Bill. When carefully analyzing the plot elements Tarantino implements in the film, it could be argued that Beatrix actually spares Bill's life, despite her long quest for vengeance, and the fact that it would appear to the audience that she actually does kill Bill.

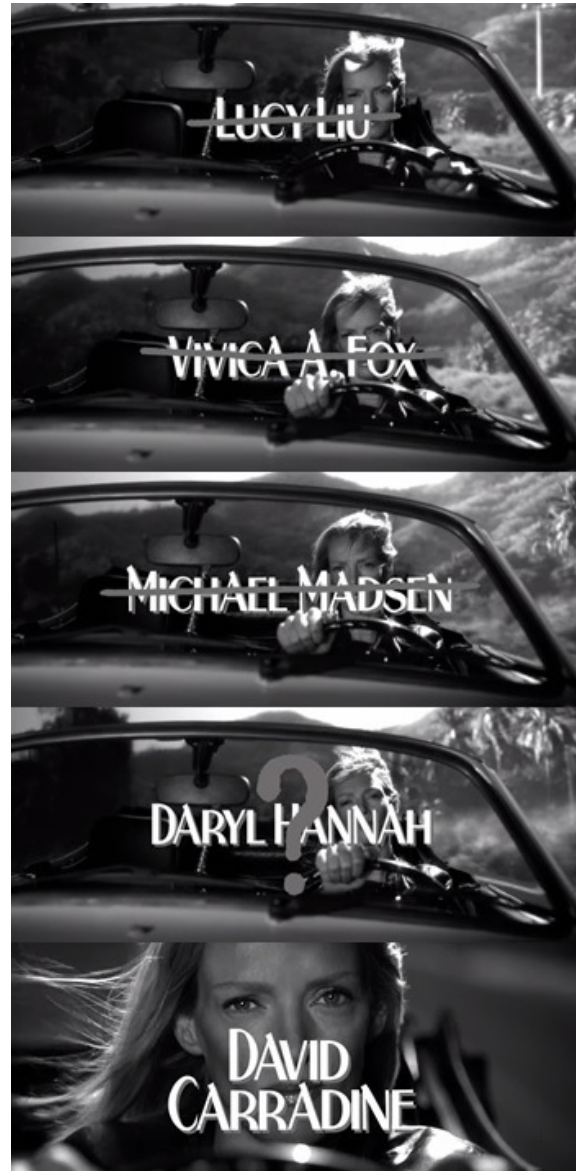
In a previous chapter, Beatrix and Bill are seen discussing her soon to be mentor Pai Mei. Bill tells legendary stories about Pai Mei, particularly one in which Pai Mei killed a man in a confrontation using a move called "Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique" - a move where Pai Mei hit the man with five punches, leaving the man to take five steps before his heart failed. In their final confrontation, Beatrix apparently uses the very same move to kill Bill. She hits him, he

gets up and walks, before falling lifeless to the ground. But when carefully looking at the scene, minor details become apparent. When Beatrix hits Bill, there appears to be six punches

accompanied by six distinct sound effect overlays.

Surprised Bill asks: "Huh, Pai Mei taught you the Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique?" to which Beatrix answers "Of course he did" but she does so shaking her head. When Bill rises and takes his last five steps, he actually appears to be taking six steps before falling, as if acknowledging being hit six times. One of the biggest plot points to Bill being alive is perhaps found in the non-diegetic credits appearing at the end of the film. The names of the actors who played O-ren Ishii, Vernita Green, and Budd are all crossed out in accordance with their characters' status as deceased. The name Daryl Hannah, who played Elle, is only marked with a question mark, in accordance with how Beatrix did not kill her but simply left her to her unknown fate after blinding her. The only name left on the death list is that of David Carradine, who played Bill, and his name remains unmarked in the credits, perhaps indicating to the audience that Beatrix might have let him live, despite that she initially appears to have killed him. The case of Bill's survival is not clear cut and perhaps that is how Tarantino wants it.

The entire narrative of *Kill Bill* serves as a setup to Beatrix' confrontation with Bill, and therefore such a twist would promote the idea of Beatrix being a mother first and foremost, and the values of compassion that instills in her, rather than her being an assassin killing Bill for the sake of revenge. As such, reading into the narrative like this, the climax almost becomes a letdown. Tarantino has manipulated the temporal order to show just how little importance all the villains, except Bill, held in the story, only to perhaps spare Bill in the final confrontation.



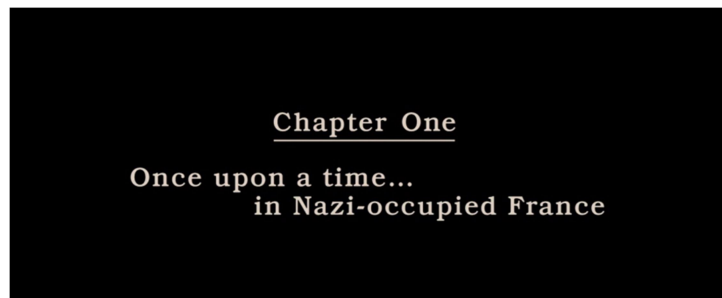
### Opening in *Inglorious Basterds*

Unlike the three films mentioned above, *Inglorious Basterds* begins in the more presenting panoramic format. The opening credits and title, accompanied by music, conclude with the introduction card: "Chapter one:

Once upon a time... in Nazi-occupied France", which instantly makes the

audience draw parallels to the opening lines of a classic fairytale. Notably, Tarantino continues using chapters just like it was the case in one of his previous films, *Kill Bill*. The film's establishing shot is that of an idyllic, almost pastoral setting with a small cabin on top of green hills with grazing livestock. The idyllic scene is interrupted with the arrival of Nazi soldiers whose uniforms, motorcycles, and cars create a clear-cut contrast to the natural, almost tranquil, environment of the pastoral setting. The first characters introduced are the LaPadites who live on the small farm, but much like *Pulp Fiction*, the first characters introduced are merely supporting characters who are helpful in the process of establishing one of the film's main characters, in this case the villain, SS Colonel Hans Landa, played by Christoph Waltz. By analyzing Tarantino's previous films, it can be deemed one of Tarantino's trademarks that much of a character's presentation is done through said character's dialogue. The effect of the dialogue is enhanced through cinematography and sound editing, but is first and foremost achieved in Tarantino's writing and the respective actor's delivery. Tarantino has been quoted stating that the character Hans Landa is the best he has written so far, and that one of the reasons for the character's quality on screen can be attributed to the actor Christoph Waltz, who, according to Tarantino, was the only one at the casting who could play the character the way Tarantino envisioned it (Grater, 2016). It is clear that the character is an impactful presence on screen, which arguably lies in the well-spoken, intelligent, and yet sinister traits Landa displays:

Col. Hans Landa: "Now, if one were to determine what attribute the German people share with a beast, it would be the cunning and the predatory instinct of a hawk. But if one were to determine what attributes the Jews share with a beast, it would be that of the rat. [...] If a rat were to walk in here right now, as I'm talking, would you greet it with a saucer of your delicious milk?"



Screenshot 108: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:02:00)

Perrier LaPadite: "Probably not."

Col. Hans Landa: "I didn't think so. You don't like them. You don't really know why you don't like them, all you know is you find them repulsive. Consequently, a German soldier conducts a search of a house suspected of hiding Jews. Where does the hawk look? He looks in the barn, he looks in the attic, he looks in the cellar, he looks everywhere *he* would hide. But there's so many places it would never occur to a hawk to hide. However, the reason the Führer has brought me off my Alps in Austria and placed me in French cow country today is because it does occur to *me*. Because I'm aware what tremendous feats human beings are capable of once they abandon dignity. May I smoke my pipe as well?"

Perrier LaPadite: "Please Herr Colonel. Make yourself at home."

Col. Hans Landa: "Now. My Job [puffs] dictates [puffs] that I must have my men enter your home [puffs] and conduct a thorough search before I can officially cross your family's name of my list. And if there are any irregularities to be found, and rest assured there will be - That is unless you have something to tell me that will make the conducting of a search unnecessary. I might add that, also, that any information that makes the performance of my duty easier will not be met with punishment. Actually quite the contrary, it will be met with reward. And that reward will be your family will cease to be harassed in any way by the German military during the rest of our occupation of your country."

[long pause] "You are sheltering enemies of the state, are you not?"

Perrier LaPadite: "Yes."

Col. Hans Landa: [Pause] "You are sheltering them underneath your floorboards, aren't you"

Perrier LaPadite: [now crying] "Yes." (Inglorious Basterds - 00:13:45)

The construction of this dialogue perfectly conveys the sinister nature of the character Hans Landa. His intellect and cunning becomes apparent as it becomes obvious to the audience that Landa suspected La Padite of sheltering the Jewish family from the very beginning, and merely manipulated the conversation so that La Padite's emotions would give him away. Furthermore, the audience learns that Landa actually takes pride in his job and position which, given what is



commonly known about the horrendous acts the Jewish people suffered through, makes this villain all the more terrifying. Having a character justify, and even relish in, the atrocities committed in the Second World War clearly emphasizes the sinister nature of said character.

*Inglorious Basterds* is a film that balances the boundaries between fact and fiction, which becomes apparent already in the first chapter's title card. The sentence "once upon a time" clearly alludes to the fictive narrative of a fairytale while "In Nazi-occupied France" is a reference to one of the darkest periods in modern history. From the opening on onwards, it becomes the audience's task to navigate between fact and fiction and thus arguably places *Inglorious Basterds* within the genre of *historical fiction*. The Second World War, and especially the names of the Nazi party's leadership, roots the narrative in history as the story progresses. Much like Tarantino's early films, *Inglorious Basterds* consists of two intertwining stories revolving around fictional characters: That of Jewish refugee Shosanna Dreyfus, who is one of the Jews hiding from Hans Landa under Perrier LaPadite's floors in the opening of the film, and that of Lieutenant Aldo Raine's Basterds, a Jewish-American black-ops unit conducting guerrilla warfare against the Nazis in France. It is interesting to note that these two stories seem to present the horrors of war committed from both factions of the War. In the very opening, Shosanna is betrayed and sees her entire family killed at the hands of the Nazi Colonel Hans Landa. However, the allies are also depicted as equally cruel and brutal, as the very purpose of the Basterds is to spread as much fear and terror throughout the ranks of the Nazi troops as possible:

Aldo Raine: "Our battle plan will be that of an Apache resistance. We will be cruel to the Germans. And through our cruelty they will know who we are. And they will find the evidence of our cruelty in the disemboweled, dismembered, and disfigured bodies of their brothers we leave behind us. And the Germans won't be able to help themselves, but imagine the cruelty their brothers endured at our hands, and our boot heel, and the edge of our knives. And the Germans will be sickened by us, And the Germans will talk about us, and the Germans will fear us. And when the Germans closes their eyes at night, and they are tortured by their subconscious for the evil they have done, it will be with thoughts of us that they are tortured with. Sound good?!"

Basterds: "Yes Sir!" (*Inglorious Basterds* - 00:21:52)

The Basterds are one of the fictional elements of the narrative, but Tarantino clearly states that violence and atrocities were not limited to any one faction of the war. However, it also appears to be

a statement of how the violent acts committed by the Allied forces were a necessary evil to overcome the Nazi forces. The high ranking SS officer within the Nazi ranks, and another fictional character, Hans Landa becomes the embodiment of Nazi Germany and thus the main antagonist in both the story of Shosanna and the Basterds.

### **Opening in *Django Unchained***

The opening of *Django Unchained* follows the same panoramic opening also used in *Inglorious Basterds*. The film opens to a shot of a barren and rock-filled landscape as the casting credits appear accompanied by the theme song “Django”, which was originally written and performed by Luis Bacalov and Robert Rocky respectively for the original, Italian western film “Django” from 1966 (IMDb - Django). Soon after, the camera pans and Jamie Foxx’ character is revealed walking through the landscape chained on his feet and being part of a larger column of black people, all chained and with scars on their backs. As the opening progresses, it is revealed that the men are herded through the landscape by two white men on horses, and as the progressing shots are getting gradually dimmer lit, the

audience experiences a feeling of time passing as the men walk through various locations, all equally barren. The credits conclude with the theme song just as it appears to be nightfall and the film takes its proper beginning with the presenting



Screenshot 109: Django Unchained – (00:03:43)

text: “1858 – Two years before the Civil War. Somewhere in Texas”. As with *Inglorious Basterds*, this indicates that *Django Unchained* falls within the genre of historical fiction, and, time and place within the narrative becomes important plot elements as its premises require that the audience to some extent has an already existing knowledge of this era in American history. One other trait *Django Unchained* shares with its predecessor is that the first character to get extensive screen time and dialogue is played by Christoph Waltz, and that his character, Dr. King Schultz, again is very articulate and well-spoken despite being a foreigner to the country in which the story takes place. In this case, a German dentist gone bounty hunter who displays little sympathy for the business of slave trading:

Dicky Speck: "Who is that stumbling around in the dark!? State your business or prepare to get winged."

Dr. King Schultz: "Calm yourselves, gentlemen. I mean you no harm. I'm simply a fellow weary traveler. Good, cold evening gentlemen. I'm looking for a pair of slave traders that go by the name of Speck Brothers, might that be you?"

Ace Speck: "Who wants to know?"

Dr. Schultz: "Well, I do. I'm Dr. King Schultz and this is my horse Fritz." [Fritz bows]

Dicky: "What kinda' Doctor?"

Dr. Schultz: "Dentist. Now are you the Speck Brothers and did you purchase those men at the Greenville slave auction?"

Ace: "So what?"

Dr. Schultz: "So wha..? I simply wish to parlay with you."

Ace: "Speak English."

Dr. Schultz: [Chuckles] "I'm sorry. Please forgive me, it is a second language. Now amongst your inventory, I've been led to believe is a specimen I'm keen to acquire. [Addresses the slaves] Hello you poor devils! Is there one amongst you who is formerly a resident of the Carrucan Plantation?"

[Pause]

Django: "I'm from the Carrucan Plantation"

Dr. Schultz: "Who said that? [Looking through the slaves] What is your name?"

Django: "Django."

Dr. Schultz: "Then you are exactly the one I'm looking for."

[...]

Ace: "Hey! Stop talking to him like that!"

Dr. Schultz: "Like what?"

Ace: "Like *that!*" (Django Unchained - 00:03:41)

The exposition in *Django Unchained* is far more presenting than those in Tarantino's earliest films which mostly began in medias res. In *Django Unchained*, the main characters are almost instantly identifiable and presented by name, as is their situation. Through the dialogue, Dr. Schultz reveals his need for Django and, thus, sets up the story of the two of them. Although the dialogue sets up the story of Django and Dr. Schultz, it does not directly address Django's situation as a slave. Tarantino relies to some extent on the historical setting and time in which the narrative takes place and the audience's knowledge hereof. Tarantino expects the audience to know that slavery was common in Texas two years prior to the civil war and as such Django's situation is easily acceptable within the narrative, as is the way the Specks treat the black slaves. The character Dr. King Schultz is a more curious matter. He has the appearance of a prosperous white man with very proficient linguistic skills. The way he calls the slaves "poor devils", as well as the fact that he acknowledges them at all, indicates that he is not a native of the southern American territories. Through several other plot elements, such as his name, the fact that he states English is a second language, and that he does not approve of slavery, might indicate to the audience that Dr. Schultz is originally from one of the German speaking countries in Europe. Today, it has been long since America abolished slavery, yet it remains an integral part of American history. The fact that the world was once a place in which slavery could exist unchallenged might seem absurd in the modern world and the character Dr. King Schultz arguably serves as a mediator who expresses his concerns and disbeliefs of the world around him, much like any person of today's modern societies would.

### **The Historical Fiction Narratives of Tarantino's Later Films**

One of the key differences between Tarantino's earlier and later films is the shift in historic time. His early films have no direct indication of historic time and are thus contemporary to the time in which they were released. Tarantino's later films, however, take place in very important historical eras. And even though all his films exhibit humorous elements, his latter films, and *Inglorious Basterds* in particular, are almost parodies which unfold in very realistic surroundings.

Throughout *Inglorious Basterds*, various elements are overly stylized, such as the violence, in accordance with how Tarantino makes movies. But something that is uncommon to Tarantino is how overly parodic some of the characters are, as Tarantino is often regarded as a front figure when it comes to putting realistic, round, and relatable characters on screen. Especially the military personnel showed seem to be the product of caricatures and stereotyping. One of the film's

main characters, Lt. Aldo Raine played by Brad Pitt, is from Tennessee and speaks with a very heavy southern accent: “You probably heard we ain’t in the prisoner-takin’ bu’iness. We in the killin’ Nazi bu’iness. And cousin, bu’iness is a-boomin’” (IB 00:29:13). Also the British soldiers are shown as caricatures speaking with an overly posh accent, which is hard to replicate in writing:

Lt. Archie Hicox: “Lieutenant Archie Hicox reporting, sir!”

Gen. Ed Fenech: “General Ed Fenech. At ease, Hicox. Drink?”

Hicox: “If you offered me a Scotch and plain water, I could drink Scotch and plain water.”

Fenech: “Attaboy, Lieutenant. Make it yourself like a good chap, will you? The bar is in the Globe.”

Hicox: “Something for yourself, Sir?”

Fenech: “Whiskey, straight. No junk in it.” (*Inglorious Basterds* - 01:01:57)

In opposition to the soldier story of Lt. Aldo Raine and his Basterds is the story of the hunted Jew, Shosanna Dreyfus, and contrary to Aldo’s storyline, Shosanna’s takes a very serious and urgent approach to the subject matter of the hardships of the Jews during World War II. In the film’s opening, Shosanna escapes her first encounter with Col. Hans Landa and takes on the identity of Emmanuelle Mimieux. Later in the temporal duration of the film, Shosanna ends up in a private conversation with Landa. Through a brief flashback, it is revealed to the audience that Shosanna definitely recognizes Landa, but it remains unclear whether or not he recognizes her. Shosanna is visually uncomfortable and as the audience has been shown what cruelties Landa was capable of in the film’s opening, as well as possessing a general understanding of what happened to Jewish people during the war, the tension rises as the audience understands Shosanna’s fear of exposure. As such, *Inglorious Basterds* becomes a narrative that, through its double story structure, balances and instills vastly contrasting emotions. The genre of historical fiction is brought out in force as one of the inherent stories shows the hard conditions and the fear with which Jews had to live during this time, while the other story, with its overly stylized and parodic characters, provides a humorous relief from the tension created in the opposing story. The fictional element is truly emphasized in the film’s conclusion, when both the Basterds and Shosanna manage to brutally kill off Hitler as well



as the top of the Nazi party's establishment.



Screenshot 110: *Inglorious Basterds* – (02:25:26)

*Django Unchained* also belongs within the genre of historical fiction but it is not quite as parodic in its fictional elements as its predecessor, but it does exhibit some of same humorous elements in the story telling. One such element is the relationship between the films supporting character, Dr. King Schultz, and the films antagonist, Calvin Candie. The two possess radical different values with Candie inhabiting the conservative values of the southern states and Dr. Schultz the progressive thinking of the Northern states and Europe. To further express the rivalry between the two, Tarantino made Dr. Schultz a dentist by profession, which is a remarkable choice in its own right within the genre of western, but Tarantino also named Schultz' enemy Candie and made said enemy reside on a plantation called Candieland.

Instead of employing parody to emphasize the fictional elements in *Django Unchained*, Tarantino instead structures the story much like a fairytale, a myth, or a fantasy story. As already established, Tarantino implemented fairytale elements in the opening of *Inglorious Basterds* by using the phrase “once upon a time...”, but with *Django Unchained*, Tarantino takes the fairytale element even further. The story is driven by a goal oriented plot as Django seeks to rescue his wife, Broomhilda, from slavery. As Dr. Schultz informs Django, and thus the audience, Broomhilda is named after the character Brünnhilde who appears in Germanic mythology.

Dr. Schultz: “Brünnhilde was a princess. She was a daughter of Wotan: God of all gods. Anyway, her father is really mad at her. [...] She disobeys him in some way, so he puts her on top of the mountain [...] and he puts a fire-breathing dragon there to guard the mountain. And he

surrounds her in a circle of hellfire. And there Brünnhilde shall remain. Unless, a hero arises, brave enough to save her.”

Django: “Does a fella’ arise?”

Dr. Schultz: “Yes Django, as a matter of fact he does. A fellow named Siegfried.”

Django: “Does Siegfried save her?”

Dr. Schultz: “Quite spectacularly so.” (Django Unchained – 00:47:02)

Besides drawing a parallel to the story of Siegfried and Brünnhilde, and informing the audience of such a parallel, it becomes apparent that Tarantino has actually structured the narrative of *Django Unchained* to resemble, to some degree, the structure of a fairytale. Mythologist Joseph Campbell argued that all heroic tales and myths followed the same archetypal structure, which he called the *monomyth* (Stableford, 2005, p. 60). The monomyth breaks down the hero’s journey into a total of seventeen *stages*, within three *acts* named *departure*, *initiation*, and *return*. The seventeen stages contain specific plot elements and while most tales inhabit most, if not all, of these elements, some tales leave certain stages out, while other rearranges the stages to some extent (“Science Fiction Writers Workshop,” n.d.). *Django Unchained* does not fully follow the monomyth but enough stages remain for them to be recognizable as a parallel to the archetypal structure. Django is the hero who leaves his known life as a slave behind to go on a quest. The *call to adventure* is issued by Dr. Schultz who enlists the help of Django in return for teaching him how to become a bounty hunter. Dr. Schultz becomes the older mentor who equips Django with the skills and tools he needs to save his wife and thus completing his quest. A core element of the *hero’s journey* is the protagonist crossing the threshold into a world or life unknown to him. Django first experiences the bounty hunter’s life in Daughtrey, Texas, where Dr. Schultz shoots the town’s sheriff who is actually an outlaw. Afterwards, Django and Dr. Schultz enter into an agreement and Django begins his life as a bounty hunter. The next step on the Hero’s Journey is *The Belly of the Whale*. It is the final separation from the hero’s former self, which is symbolized by Django picking his own outfit,

which is much different from anything he has worn before.



Screenshot 111: *Django Unchained* – (00:35:58)

In *Django Unchained*, this step takes place when Django kills his first bounties and his former tormentors, the Brittle Brothers. Often times, the hero meets a goddess through whom the hero experiences love. Broomhilda is literally a parallel character to the valkyrie Brünnhilde and serves the same purpose of empowering Django for his quest through their mutual love. The hero often undertakes a series of trials before he can complete his original quest, and so does Django as he works as a bounty hunter alongside Dr. Schultz. The plot shows him training his marksmanship, his reading and writing, as well as working several bounties. At long last, the hero sets out for his end goal, in Django's case saving Broomhilda from Calvin Candie in Candieland, which is the film's parallel to the mountain and the fire breathing dragon from the tale of Brünnhilde and Siegfried. As with *Inglorious Basterds*, there is a more grim and serious side to the narrative of *Django Unchained* as well. Like its predecessor thematically dealt with the holocaust, so does *Django Unchained* deal with slavery in America before the civil war, and it does so in graphic detail. Stylistically, Tarantino has always expressed a fondness for explicit carnage, whether it be through a shoot-out, sword fight, or a simple accident. But whereas a lot of the violence found in Tarantino's films is often accompanied by plot elements that induce conflicting emotions, such as a witty one-liner, an upbeat song, or a comedic acting performance, some of the violent scenes in *Django Unchained* provide no such relief. Furthermore, having the story rooted in the realistic setting of the civil war further emphasizes the hardship showed in the film as it ensures the audience that what they are experiencing, despite of how terrible it is, might actually not be so far from the

truth of what actually happened. Structuring the narrative this way is a conscious choice made by Tarantino as he states in an interview:

“It was very interesting in *Django*. There's a couple of sequences in particular that are very, very hard to watch for people. In particular the mandingo fight to the death, that the two slaves are forced to do, and then there is a scene where a runaway slave is attacked by dogs. And the more we kept cutting the movie the more those two scenes got closer and closer to each other, alright, so it was like, really, like traumatizing the audience. And now, if I'm doing a movie about slavery I don't mind traumatizing the audience, you should be somewhat traumatized in watching a film about slavery. You need to know what America was like that time, you need to know what slavery means per se to some people.”

(Keeper of the FLAME, 2016)

Arguably, Tarantino can afford to implement realistic scenes which induce such a heavy felt negative emotional response exactly because some of the fictional scenes are so obviously fictional, as a result of the monomythic structure it relies on. The structure in itself becomes a plot element which the audience recognizes and in all iterations of the monomyth the hero prevails. The audience may fear for Django and they may be traumatized by what he is going through, but through the structure the audience is always reassured that the hero will overcome and complete his quest.

## **Case study – *The Hateful Eight***

Tarantino's latest addition to his collection of works is *The Hateful Eight* from 2015. Similar to *Django Unchained*, *The Hateful Eight* is a film belonging to both the western and the historic fiction genre, and the plot takes place in a cabin in Wyoming, United States, where a bounty hunter, John Ruth (Kurt Russell), and his prisoner, Daisy Domergue (Jennifer Jason Leigh), seek shelter from a blizzard. The cabin is already occupied by four other individuals and it becomes evident that someone in the lodge has killed the owners. Inevitably, a confrontation between the inhabitants in the lodge occurs as they strive to find the culprit. *The Hateful Eight* is Tarantino's eighth feature film and was released for cinema in late 2015. The film will be subject for analysis in relation to all aforementioned formalistic elements and areas, as Tarantino's former films have been. Conclusively, this case study will determine *The Hateful Eight*'s position as a Tarantino film, and how it shares similar traits and characteristics with his seven earlier films.

## **Stylistics in *The Hateful Eight***

### **Mise-en-scène**

#### ***Setting***

One of the primary claims in the earlier analysis of setting in Tarantino's works is that basically every setting throughout the films functions as a container for the actors to carry out the acting. Tarantino's way of filmmaking emphasizes the characters, and thus the acting, making the setting a secondary priority, as the acting and the interplay between the actors is what drives the narrative. This is also relevant when analyzing *The Hateful Eight*, as it presents multiple scenes where the acting and said interplay between the actors are the key elements to the scenes, and therefore, the settings is constructing as a container for the acting to take place. The following emphasizes examples of these said settings, or containers.





Screenshot 112: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:13:16)

In one of the early scenes where Major Marquis Warren (Samuel L. Jackson) has been picked up by the bounty hunter, John Ruth (Kurt Russell), the setting is the inside of a stagecoach, where a conversation between the two characters is taking place. The scene itself is close to ten minutes long, and a similar scene follows after another person is picked up on the way. The small stagecoach, therefore, has the aforementioned function of a container, since the actors are put in this box and the plot and acting takes place inside this stagecoach. Therefore, the acting and the interplay between these particular characters become primary, and the setting is only the place for the characters to unfold.

In relation to setting, *The Hateful Eight* shares a similar construction as Tarantino's first film, *Reservoir Dogs*, as the film only consists of rather few settings. The primary location and setting in *The Hateful Eight*, Minnie's Haberdashery, is much related to the warehouse in *Reservoir Dogs*, which is the primary location and setting of said film. Therefore, also similar to each other, the minimalistic setting has the ability to bring forth the acting and functions almost as a theater stage, where the audience would sit right in front of the acting taking place, and where setting and props are down prioritized in favor of creating a container for the acting to take place within



Screenshot 113: *The Hateful Eight* – (01:05:38)

The screenshot above displays the depth of the setting and how this setting allows actors both in the front- and background to act together, without cuts. The film's location of Minnie's Haberdashery is basically the only location and setting in the film from minute 35 to the end of the film, at 2 hours and 43 minutes. Thus, the audience is not given any new impressions from the outside for more than two hours of film time. Only the actors can change the story and atmosphere surrounding the scene and setting, since the location remains the same for such a long time span, which Tarantino also showed in *Reservoir Dogs*, only in shorter duration. Furthermore, due to its relation to the western genre, *The Hateful Eight* manages to achieve authenticity in the setting by creating a classic western haberdashery with lots of wooden furniture and items like antlers hanging on the walls, which is similar to the examples emphasized in the earlier analysis of setting from *Django Unchained*, which proved to make use of some of the same elements and objects to create the proper atmosphere of a western film.

Based on these observations, *The Hateful Eight* attaches itself to Tarantino's earlier films in terms of setting, since the traits found in these proved evident in both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Django Unchained*. Especially the areas concerned with the western genre, and also the aspect of making the setting a container for the acting to unfold, has proven to be recurring elements up until Tarantino's latest film. The acting and the interplay between the characters become primary, and the settings basically contribute to the atmosphere of the film, also confirming the genre by implementing genre stereotypical props.

### ***Costume and makeup***

As already mentioned before, *The Hateful Eight* belongs to the western genre, as well as *Django Unchained* does. Therefore, the most visual similarities in Tarantino's works are found in these two

particular films, especially in regards to costume and makeup. The earlier analysis emphasized the notion of authenticity and how to create authenticity in the scenes, and costume and makeup in particular can contribute to the atmosphere of a film belonging to a specific genre. In regards to this, *The Hateful Eight* takes advantage of dressing the characters as stereotypical as possible, in order to make them appear as cowboys, just as in *Django Unchained*.

The screenshots below exemplify some of the characters' costumes, all wearing some form of cowboy hat, as would be expected from characters acting in a western genre film, as well as traditional western outfits from the given time period. These costumes, and the hats in particular, contribute to the achievement of authenticity, and the audience can relate to these traditional and stereotypical costumes, as they would expect classic western outfits when watching a western. Therefore, Tarantino makes a typical stylistic choice, as he has done with all his historic films, like *Inglorious Basterds* and *Django Unchained*, to stylize his characters in a historic stereotypical fashion, in order for the audience to recognize the characters in a film as belonging to the western genre. This is done to capture the atmosphere of the western genre and *The Hateful Eight* succeeds to achieve this stereotype in relation to costumes.



Screenshot 114: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:55:36)



Screenshot 115: *The Hateful Eight* – (01:36:20)

### ***Lighting***

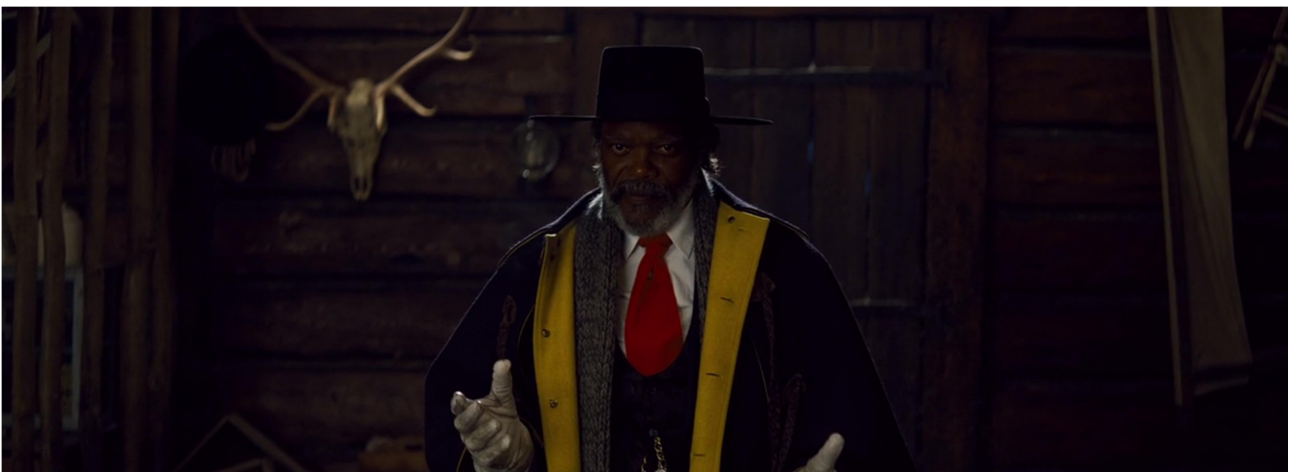
Previously, it was explored how Tarantino's films made use of top lighting to achieve realism in the shots. Tarantino frequently makes use of top lighting to emphasize certain features in his characters' faces, such as emotions and feelings. In *The Hateful Eight*, however, the top lighting not only functions to establish realism but also adds certain mystery to the characters. This happens due to the characters' hats as they create shadow over the characters' faces and blocks the top lighting from highlighting their faces. The screenshot below shows how the brim on Major Warren's hat is completely lit up and blocks the top lighting from hitting his face. His facial features are still visible, although not emphasized by lighting, which contributes to the mystery surrounding the character in *The Hateful Eight*.



Screenshot 116: The Hateful Eight – (00:57:29)

The top lighting also resembles a natural daylight source, which emphasizes the realistic setting. At the same time, the lack of visible facial expressions, as a result of the contrasting light and darkness, establishes mystery within the film.

Having already mentioned how the setting appears almost as a theater stage, the following examples show how the lighting can be used to create more depth in the shot, making the characters stand out from the background, which would not be the case without lighting as the both the characters' costumes and the setting are of darker nuances.



Screenshot 117: The Hateful Eight – (01:31:39)

The example shown, with Major Warren in the center of the shot, is simple and does not consist of many elements – merely a door, a set of antlers, and the character are the visible elements in the shot. Major Warren's costume is almost black, apart from the yellow collar and the red tie, and would, therefore, blend in with the background, which is very dark brown. Therefore, the backlighting, which is only just visible on Major Warren's shoulders, his hair, and his hat, helps to



create the needed depth in the shot for the character to stand out from the background instead of blending in with it. A similar example is seen below, where Sheriff Chris Mannix (Walton Goggins) stands in the front, and Major Warren sits by the table in the back. As in the example before, the setting is almost two-dimensional, but the lighting creates depth and distance between the characters and the background. And to create this distance and depth in the shot, the character in the front, Sheriff Mannix, is highlighted primarily with backlighting as his coat, collar, and hat stand almost in silhouette.



Screenshot 118: *The Hateful Eight* – (01:49:55)

Evidently, Tarantino has shown a pattern of using top lighting to achieve realism in the shots in his earlier films, which is also the case in *The Hateful Eight*, as the analyzed examples proved. Also, Tarantino has sought to create depth and distance in his setting of Minnie's Haberdashery, which is a closed space of monochromatic brown colors and nuances, which the characters would normally blend in with. Tarantino uses backlighting to make his characters stand out from the background, and furthermore, to create more depth and distance between the characters and the background but also between the characters, as the last example showed.

### ***Staging: Movement and Performance***

Without doubt, *The Hateful Eight* contains obscure characters and notable acting, since the film relies heavily on detailed dialogue between the characters. As the characters within the narrative are so different from one another, the interactions between them become heavily loaded with tension. The characters range from the hillbilly sheriff, the ruthless bounty hunter, the English gentleman, and the outrageous criminal woman, and all contribute in their own, almost stereotypical, way to the acting and the understanding of the film's themes. In some of Tarantino's earlier films, he made



some of his main characters their own contrasts, as was exemplified with Hans Landa from *Inglorious Basterds* and Dr. Schultz from *Django Unchained*. Both characters had inherent, conflicting traits. This appears relevant for the characters in *The Hateful Eight* as well, only in different perspective. Whereas the characters from the earlier films, like Hans Landa and Dr. Schultz, showed two opposing sides within the characters, the characters in *The Hateful Eight* act as oppositions to each other. The film deals with only few characters, all located at the same place, Minnie's Haberdashery, and therefore, they all represent different character types like the few mentioned before. Arguably, Tarantino has opted for an ensemble where each character embodies a distinct personality and set of values, as this helps convey the heavily used theme of racially induced hatred. Employing an ensemble cast further creates the need for easily identifiable characters, as the audience needs to familiarize themselves with the virtues and values of each character. The narrative makes use of elements from the mystery genre, and having many round characters that are in clear contrast to one another emphasizes the mystery of who are actually the good and the bad guys of the story.

#### *Additional traits: special effects*

The audience of Tarantino's films is accustomed to explicitly bloody scenes with much violence, and nothing has changed in *The Hateful Eight* as all of the characters in the film somehow die. The audience encounters countless scenes with excessive use of blood. An example is the screenshot below. John Ruth has been drinking poisoned coffee and suddenly begins vomiting blood explosively. The shot and image leaves nothing to imagination and is presented almost as a fire spewing dragon, as blood sprays all over the dining table.



Screenshot 119: The Hateful Eight – (01:43:45)

Arguably, Tarantino even takes his level of blood, violence, and explicitness in the film to an even higher level than before, as the audience is forced to witness, for instance, John Ruth vomiting blood or, as seen below, Daisy Domergue being covered in her brother's blood as he is shot in the head before her very eyes. One could find several examples showing a similar amount of blood, such as heads being shot to a pulp or in gun duels, and the violence and explicitness is, therefore, a distinct trait in Tarantino's way of making films. He is, by far, one of directors using the most explicit shots in his films and a Tarantino film would, arguably, at this point appear odd if it did not implement these explicit shots.



Screenshot 120: The Hateful Eight – (02:23:19)

As argued, based on the used examples, nothing has changed in regards to the visual impression gained from *The Hateful Eight*, since Tarantino carries on the already established Tarantino style of using excessive amounts of blood, violence, and particular explicit shots. This type of experience is associated with Tarantino and his films, thus nothing less is expected from *The Hateful Eight*, and arguably, *The Hateful Eight* marks a new peak in Tarantino's use of blood and violence, as all his characters in the film are killed at some point in the film, predominantly in a violent manner.

#### ***Additional traits: Non-diegetic text and sound***

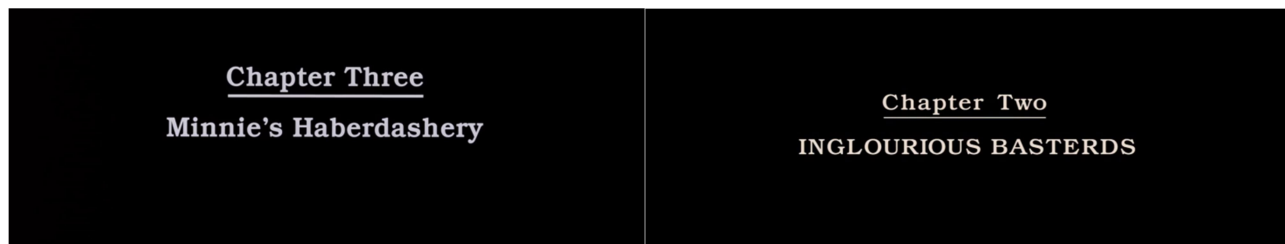
As earlier established, Tarantino writes all his material such as script and screenplay. The writing aspect of his films was relevant in the earlier analysis, since he presents some of his films resemble novels, both in structure and style. This proved relevant because of the shots with a title screen, or a chapter screen, naming the following passage of the film. Tarantino's use of these chapter screens were similar in construction across the films, and the following example prove that he has maintained this construction in *The Hateful Eight* as well, thereby maintaining the same trait of the chapter screens.

# Chapter One

## Last Stage to Red Rock

Screenshot 121: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:04:39)

The first chapter screen, saying ‘Chapter One’, proves already after five minutes of *The Hateful Eight* that Tarantino has chosen to carry on his trait of presenting his film with resemblance to a novel by implementing these chapter screens. Furthermore, the construction, the font and the color, are almost identical to some of the chapter screens from Tarantino’s earlier films, as the screenshot examples below show.



Screenshot 122: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:35:07)

Screenshot 123: *Inglorious Basterds* – (00:21:25)

The font is not identical, but very similar, and the chapter name is capitalized in *Inglorious Basterds*. Other than that, the two chapter screens appear almost identical with the white text on a black background and the underlining of the chapter number in the first line. Arguably, Tarantino has deliberately chosen to present *The Hateful Eight* in similar fashion to some of his earlier films, namely by presenting the film with resemblance to a book by using the chapter screens. Therefore, another recurring visual trait is encountered in *The Hateful Eight*.

### ***Concluding mise-en-scène:***

The analysis of the stylistic traits in *The Hateful Eight* proves that Tarantino remains faithful to his already established style from his earlier films, as many of the traits found in the earlier films were recurring in *The Hateful Eight*. The experienced recurring traits were the technique of the settings functioning as containers for the acting to take place within, which Tarantino exerts throughout his

films, as the dialogue and interplay between the actors become primary for presenting the story. Other than that, the traits of using both top lighting for achieving realism in the shots and using backlighting for creating depth and distance in the shots are recurring, as these traits were found throughout Tarantino's earlier films, and prove still to be relevant in *The Hateful Eight*. As with his other films, the costumes contribute to achieving authenticity in the shots and in the universe of the film. Conclusively, what in the earlier analysis proved to be a main element of Tarantino's unique style continues to be so, namely the explicitness in the shots involving blood and violence.

Tarantino is known as a provocateur since he strives to use much violence, much blood and as explicit shots as possible. *The Hateful Eight* follows the exact same line, and might even appear as the most explicit Tarantino film to date. Therefore, in terms of visual stylistic traits, *The Hateful Eight* is an archetypical Tarantino film, and consists to some degree of all the elements one would associate Tarantino and his films with.

### Cinematography

The analysis of Tarantino's earlier works established the use of the split-focal diopter as a distinct trait of Tarantino's. As it has been described before, the split-focal diopter allows the shot to have two separate areas in focus, which technically allows both a character in the front and the background to be in focus at the same time. Now, saying that the use of the split-focal diopter shots is a trait in Tarantino's films needs elaboration. The amount of split-focal diopter shots in each film is low, but the technique appears in every Tarantino film. Typically, one film has one or two shots where the split-focal diopter is visibly used, and this pattern is repeated throughout his works. This is also the case in *The Hateful Eight*, as the film includes some scenes where the split-focal diopter is used.



Screenshot 124: The Hateful Eight – (01:43:38)

The first example from *The Hateful Eight* shows both Sheriff Mannix in the front, pouring himself a cup of coffee, while, John Ruth and Daisy Domergue sit by the dining table in the background of the shot. The split-focal diopter allows all characters to be in focus. Immediately after this shot, John Ruth starts vomiting blood due to the poisoned coffee. Employing the split-focal diopter helps create the interplay between Sheriff Mannix and John Ruth, and the fact that he has been poisoned by the very coffee Sheriff Mannix is about to drink himself. Focus in a frame defines where the important actions occurs within the setting, and having two points of focus creates the possibility of showing two equally important actions simultaneously.



Screenshot 125: *The Hateful Eight* – (01:49:14)

Another example is found a few minutes later, as Major Warren questions his suspects about poisoning the coffee while Sheriff Mannix guards the suspects. In the shot, the focus is on both Major Warren in the background as he interrogates his suspects and on Sheriff Mannix's gun which is pointed towards the suspects. Technically, the function of the split-focal diopter in this example is similar to the prior, since the cinematography corresponds to what happens in the shot. In this case, Major Warren directs his attention to the suspects of poisoning the coffee and so does Mannix's gun.

These two examples emphasize that Tarantino has a definite trait of using the cinematographic technique of the split-focal diopter in order to create two areas of focus in one shot. The use of the equipment allows the two areas in focus to interplay with each other, as the two examples proved, since the elements in focus typically are related to the important actions of the shot. As argued earlier, the split-focal diopter shots are not used in large numbers, but only occur in a few scenes, as have they done throughout Tarantino's works. Therefore, the use of this technique, and amount of shots using this technique, is a distinct cinematographic trait.



***Camera angles – the ‘trunk shot’:***

The first example is found when Major Warren kills Bob, the Mexican, who is lying on the floor. Similar to the examples from Tarantino's earlier films, the camera creates eye contact with the character standing up, which in this case is Major Warren, and the camera takes the position of the victim in the scene, Bob. The only difference is, of course, that the edge of the car trunk is missing, but otherwise, the cinematographic construction is the same.



Screenshot 126: The Hateful Eight – (01:57:18)

The second example found is closer to the original trunk shots from the earlier films, which involved the trunk of a car. The victim, or the camera, is located inside a container resembling the trunk of a car, in this case a wooden shed. The reason this screenshot resembles the earlier examples so much is that the wooden shed creates a frame around the superior character, Joe Gage, much like the confines of the trunk of a car would frame the superior character in Tarantino's earlier films.



Screenshot 127: The Hateful Eight – (02:13:12)

The framing, normally associated with the trunk of the car, is a contributing factor in the construction of this trunk shot, since, despite being in a wooden shed, the victim's position is basically identical to the examples with victims being in car trunks where Tarantino films from a low-angle perspective, and catches eye contact with the superior character staring down at his victim. Arguably, this is a distinct trait in Tarantino's cinematographic choices and can be found throughout his films.

### ***Framing:***

In terms of cinematography, one of the more distinct traits established in the earlier analysis was Tarantino's use of natural frames in his shots, more specifically door frames. Having argued that *The Hateful Eight* makes use of very few settings would normally restrict the use of these mentioned door frames, but Tarantino manages to implement the natural framing door frames in some shots anyway. The following screenshots show how Tarantino manages to create these natural frames in the shots, despite having restricted himself to only a few settings and, therefore also, few door frames. It is interesting to note that Tarantino circumvents the limit of having only one door in the location of Minnie's Haberdashery by using that one door extensively as a frame throughout the film. When the stagecoach arrives at Minnie's, the characters enter through the door in pairs, utilizing it as a frame a total of three times.



Screenshot 128: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:52:28)

This setting is virtually seen multiple times throughout Tarantino's works, since this framing appears in all of his films. The construction is that the door frame in the shot creates a limited area in which the acting takes place, and thereby the audience's attention is directed towards what happens within said door frame. What Tarantino has been forced to do, due to the restricted amount

of settings, is to move the camera outside and capture the action through a door frame into Minnie's Haberdashery, since the inside basically allows no visible door frames apart from the one above.



Screenshot 129: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:58:51)

Despite working with few locations, Tarantino has created a shot including a natural frame in the stables outside Minnie's Haberdashery, which is similar to one of the examples analyzed earlier. The example is from *Kill Bill vol. 2*, where Tarantino creates contrasts between the inside and outside of frame. The example from *The Hateful Eight* is slightly different. In the shot from *Kill Bill vol. 2*, the character, The Bride, is standing outside, whereas the characters in the example here are standing inside. As a result, the characters are covered in darkness, since the only light in the shot comes through the door frame, thus making the characters silhouettes. Framing the scene like this obscures the physical traits of the characters and emphasizes the mystery established in the film.

Arguably, *The Hateful Eight* proves that Tarantino strives to use natural frames, such as the aforementioned door frames, throughout his films. The restricted amount of settings in *The Hateful Eight* sets some boundaries to how many door frames can be found, but the few actually found are heavily utilized. Therefore, there is a trait in Tarantino's style when it comes to using natural frames for a greater purpose in his films, which is also evident in *The Hateful Eight*.

### ***Conclusion to cinematography***

The cinematographic traits found in Tarantino's earlier films once again proved to be recurring in *The Hateful Eight*. First, the split-focal diopter is used to create two areas of focus in one shot. Tarantino has made multiple shots using this technique in his previous works and does so again in *The Hateful Eight*. Second, the trunk shot is utilized, in which the camera takes the position of a victim in a low-angle perspective, creating eye contact with the superior character standing in front of the camera. And third, Tarantino strives to use natural frames in his shots for a greater effect,

such as creating contrasts of light to emphasize the atmosphere of the setting and the film in general. All techniques were used multiple times in *The Hateful Eight* and can, therefore, be determined as recurring traits in Tarantino's cinematography.

## Sound

As in all of his prior films, Tarantino pays significant attention towards sound. Some of these sounds are difficult to describe and categorize, but most of these sounds are tweaked or emphasized to create the desired effect. Some sounds are predominantly used in scenes to create dramatic effects, such as the scene with the exploding jar of jelly beans in Minnie's Haberdashery. The sound of the glass breaking and the jelly beans flying everywhere is exaggerated in volume, which supports the dramatic scene of the gang killing everyone inside Minnie's Haberdashery, as well as the enhanced sound of gun fire establishes the drama and action taking place. The screenshot below illustrates exactly how the splinters of glass and jelly beans almost explode, as the bullet blasts through the jar.



Screenshot 130: *The Hateful Eight* – (02:09:57)

The screenshot above is a single example of a general tendency in *The Hateful Eight*, as much as in Tarantino's earlier films, where certain sounds are enhanced to make them more distinct in the scenes. Earlier, the analysis explored the creation of dramatic effect, which is exactly what enhancing loud sounds like gunfire and explosions does. On the other hand, the lower and less prominent sounds are not necessarily enhanced to create a dramatic effect, but rather to emphasize the attention small details are given, so that the audience takes notice of these particular details. The following example proves how the minor sounds prove relevant when enhanced.



Screenshot 131: *The Hateful Eight* – (00:46:04)

The screenshot shows Sheriff Mannix hammering in metal poles outside in the blizzard. Naturally, in a blizzard the snow and wind are the dominant factors of sound, and other sounds need to be enhanced for the audience to take notice of these. Therefore, the clinging sound of the hammer striking the metal poles is enhanced to stand out from the more dominant sounds of the weather.

In the earlier analysis of Tarantino's works, the analyzed examples showed Tarantino's recurring use of dramatic, high-speed zooms accompanied by a non-diegetic swooshing sound, which therefore was established as a stylistic trait. However, in *The Hateful Eight*, none of said zooms and swooshes are found, which in relation to Tarantino's combined works weakens the status of being a stylistic trait. Nevertheless, Tarantino's attention to detail is confirmed by the choices of sound in *The Hateful Eight*, emphasized by the aforementioned enhanced sounds which accompany visual elements. Despite breaking with one of the more obvious stylistic traits from his earlier films, Tarantino manages to implement his attention to detail in sound in *The Hateful Eight* as well as he does throughout his earlier works.

## Editing

In the earlier analysis of editing, the first area explored was how Tarantino created balance between his shots, for instance in conversation scenes, by cutting and editing with a left-right trajectory. In *The Hateful Eight*, Tarantino redesigns his traditional left-right trajectory by implementing an additional axis, allowing more characters to participate in the conversation, but maintaining a similar cutting construction. The following screenshots emphasize this redesigned construction of cutting trajectory.





Screenshot 132: The Hateful Eight – (00:29:28)



Screenshot 133: The Hateful Eight – (00:29:46)



Screenshot 134: The Hateful Eight – (00:29:49)



Screenshot 135: The Hateful Eight – (00:31:32)

In this particular scene, the acting takes place inside a stagecoach where four characters, Major Warren, Sheriff Mannix, John Ruth, and Daisy Domergue are placed. In a traditional left-right trajectory scene involving a conversation, the cuts are made between only two characters in accordance to their line of sight, as exemplified by Major Warren above, as he addresses Sheriff Mannix. The addition to the traditional construction happens when Tarantino chooses to implement the other characters in the stagecoach into the conversation, making the line of sight central to the cutting. These shots and cuts are made to achieve continuity and establish which of the characters are addressing each other and the audience understands the interactions in the scene due to the cuts in line of sight. This construction also allows Tarantino to break the normally obligatory 180 degree system of spatial continuity, where the camera is only allowed to move on one side of the axis of the shot and never the other. However, the cuts in line of sight allow the camera to cross the 180 degree axis, in order to capture the face of all four characters inside the stagecoach. Therefore, the cuts to the line of sight of the characters justify the breaking of the normally essential rule of the 180 degree axis.

*The Hateful Eight* is, like Tarantino's other films, constructed with a non-linear narrative, and therefore shifts back and forth in time. The following will analyze relevant examples in Tarantino's editing of *The Hateful Eight* which leads to said non-linear narrative.

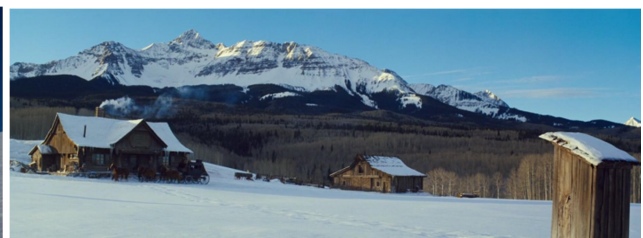


Screenshot 136: The Hateful Eight – (00:35:55)

In the screenshot above, John Ruth, Major Warren, Sheriff Mannix, and Daisy Domergue arrive at the haberdashery, seeking shelter for the blizzard. The following ninety minutes of the film's duration are mostly chronological with only a few flashbacks. When the coffee is poisoned, the audience experiences the classic Tarantino construction of breaking the regular narrative as the narrative includes a chapter which takes places before the film's opening in temporal order. This is revealed with the first screenshot below, which emphasizes a previous time with the text in the bottom left corner and the sudden change in weather.



Screenshot 137: The Hateful Eight – (02:00:02)



Screenshot 138: The Hateful Eight – (02:01:52)

The second screenshot above shows the Domergue gang arriving at Minnie's Haberdashery, and the following scenes show how they take control of the haberdashery and murdering everyone inside. From the point on, the narrative progresses in time to the point where John Ruth and his travelling companions arrive at the haberdashery – which later leads to the confrontation between said companions and the gang waiting in disguise inside. Upsetting the temporal order is a trademark of Tarantino's, as it becomes evident when analyzing the editing above. Besides emphasizing temporality in editing, Tarantino utilizes it even more so as a plot element in his narratives. As such, temporal order will be further elaborated on in the following analysis of narratology.

## **Narratology in *The Hateful Eight***

### **Opening in *The Hateful Eight***

Tarantino's eight film, *The Hateful Eight*, opens with a series of landscape shots panning over snow covered mountains and valleys engulfed in snowy weather. The pictures are accompanied by the diegetic sound of a howling wind and the non-diegetic, looming score created by legendary western composer Ennio Morricone. The screen cuts to black and two title cards appear to present the film: "The 8<sup>th</sup> film by Quentin Tarantino" followed by "The Hateful Eight". The shot following is a close up of a wooden, snow-covered crucifix. Focusing on said crucifix, the camera slowly moves away, revealing more and more of the snowy landscape surrounding it, while the non-diegetic cast and crew credits appear. A stage coach appears in the distance and gradually moves closer until it passes right by the camera and the shot cuts to black and the text "Chapter one – Last Stage to Redrock" appears.

The cast and credit sequence does not reveal much in terms of plot elements which could propel the storyline. However, the extensive use of landscape and weather shots indicates that these elements are crucial within the narrative. Furthermore, with the opening dialogue in *Reservoir Dogs*, Tarantino showed that he was capable of foreshadowing events which were set to occur much later. The crucifix must hold some importance to the plot in order for it to be featured so prominently in the opening sequence. Arguably, the crucifix symbolizes sin, pain, and suffering, which are later revealed to be important themes in the narrative.

In true Tarantino style, the narrative of *The Hateful Eight* is separated into chapters and besides the chapters it shares a number of similarities with Tarantino's previous films, especially its two most recent predecessors, *Inglorious Basterds* and *Django Unchained*. The opening is panoramic, presenting the setting and the characters, and through those two things the historical time in which the narrative takes place is revealed.

Warren: "Name is Major Marquis Warren, former U.S. cavalry, currently a servant of the court. Trying to bring a couple of no-goods into market. Got the paperwork on 'em in my pocket."

Driver: "You takin' 'em into Redrock?"

Warren: "Figure thats where you're headed, right?"

Driver: "I am. That damned, blasted blizzard has been on our ass for the last three hours. There ain't no way we are gonna make it all the way to Redrock before it catches us."

Warren: "So you hightailin' it half way to Minnie's Haberdashery?"

Driver: "You know I am."

Warren: "May I come aboard"

Driver: "Well, Smoke, If it up to me, yes. But it ain't up to me."

Warren: "Who's it up to?"

Driver: "Fella in the wagon. [...] You gonna have to talk to him"

Warren: "Well, that's what I'll do."

Passenger: "Hold it, black fella. 'Fore you approach, you take them two guns of yours and you lay 'em on that rock over yonder. [...] Now come forward. Thats far enough. Well, I'll be dogged. You a black fella I know, Colonel somethin'-or-other Warren, right? "

Warren: "Major Marquis Warren. I know you too. We, uh, shared a steak dinner once upon a time in Chattanooga. You John Ruth The Hangman."

Ruth: "That'd be me. [...] You still in business?"

Warren: "You know I am."

Ruth: [Points at female passenger] "You don't know nothing 'bout this filly here?"

Warren: "Nope."

Ruth: "Don't even know her name?"

Warren: "Nope."

Ruth: "Major Marquis Warren this here's Daisy Domergue. Domergue, to you this is Major Warren."

Domergue: "Howdy, nigger."

Ruth: "She's a pepper, ain't she? Now, girl, don't you know the darkies don't like being called niggers no more? They find it offensive."

Domergue: "I been called worse."

Ruth: "Now that I can believe. You never heard of her, huh?"

Warren: "Should I?"

Ruth: "Well she ain't no John Wilkes Booth, but maybe you might heard tell about the price on her head. [...] 10.000 dollars." (The Hateful Eight – 00:05:20)

The historical time is not directly stated but within the dialogue are numerous indications that the narrative is set somewhere in the years after the civil war came to an end. Major Warren is an African American who served in the cavalry, and African American's serving in the military was uncommon up until the emancipation proclamation in 1863. Furthermore, John Ruth mentions that the word "nigger" has become an offensive slur to African Americans, but has no problem saying the slur himself. In a more modern context, the slur bears such offensive connotations that many people, especially those of non-African American heritage, completely refuses to say it. Having Ruth say it on screen with such ease indicates that it is a transitional period in which racial identities were shifting and not completely established. Lastly, Ruth states that Domergue is no Wilkes Booth. John Wilkes Booth was the man who got infamous for assassinating President Abraham Lincoln, who led the North American Union against the confederate South in the civil war, emancipated the slaves, and was killed for these actions as the war was coming to its end. By featuring such information rich dialogue, Tarantino establishes his characters and their motivations, which propels the main plot of John Ruth and his goal to collect the bounty on Daisy Domergue, but also the historic time and setting of his narrative. Tarantino also indicates the themes around which the story revolves. Showing the crucifix in the beginning already indicated thematic elements but the exposition given through the characters' dialogue allows the audience to understand how and why themes as sin, pain, and suffering may play a role in the narrative. Like Tarantino's previous films, *The Hateful Eight* is an example of historical fiction, and like its predecessors, Tarantino again relies to some extent on the audience's understanding of said historical era. The opening of the film very much implies to its audience that it will revolve around the racial identity,



which was literally the cause of the civil war, and given that the surrounding setting is as cold as the air between Major Warren and Daisy Domergue, and the fact that only three major characters have been revealed, the title piques the audience's interest into who the remaining hateful five may be.

### **Narrative structure in *The Hateful Eight***

With *The Hateful Eight*, Tarantino implements many storytelling elements from his previous films. The film can be seen as a symbolic sequel to *Django Unchained* as the two were released in succession and deals with a historical narrative of life in America before and after the civil war. Besides its place in historic time and place, *The Hateful Eight* does not share many exclusive traits with its predecessor. As with every other Tarantino film, the most recent one appears to be a display of every skill, technique and trait he has accumulated and learned up until this point in time. Initially, the opening presents the film as belonging to the genre of historic fiction, like its two predecessors. As the stagecoach arrives at Minnie's Haberdashery, however, it becomes apparent to the audience that the story becomes that of a mystery, which in terms of narrative structure creates a parallel between *The Hateful Eight* and Tarantino's very first film, *Reservoir Dogs*.

The parallel to *Reservoir Dogs* is created already through mise-en-scène, as the largest part of the film unfolds on one location only. In *The Hateful Eight* that location is Minnie's Haberdashery and it is very much parallel to the warehouse setting of *Reservoir Dogs*. In both cases, the characters are confined within the location with external forces keeping them in place. In *Reservoir Dogs* that force is a previous agreement of a rendezvous point, as well as the fear of getting caught by the law enforcement, and in *The Hateful Eight* the force is a raging blizzard.

Already with the novel-like structure of *Reservoir Dogs*, Tarantino displayed great affinity for manipulating what Bordwell & Thompson call *range* and *depth of story information*. These two terms describe how much more or less the audience knows about the story of the film compared to the characters, and how deeply into the mind of a character the audience is allowed to see (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp 88-91). *The Hateful Eight* is a classic example of a mystery film exactly because it makes use of what Bordwell & Thompson calls *restricted narration*, as the audience's knowledge is restricted to that of the characters. To further establish the mysticism, Tarantino makes use of *objective* narration in which the plot "confine[s] us fully to what the characters say and do" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 90) instead of relying on subjective techniques such as inner monologues and point-of-view shots. Simply put, the audience is restricted to the role of observer. As with *Reservoir Dogs*, the mystery is sparked when the characters that are trapped together become suspicious of the intentions of one another. At the time the stagecoach gets

to Minnie's, the audience has already been introduced to Major Warren, John Ruth, Daisy Domergue, Chris Mannix, and O.B, the driver. The mystery arises when several new characters, with unknown motivations, are introduced and the already established characters are confined with these within the location of Minnie's. An example of this is when the audience is first introduced to the character named Bob; a Mexican apparently employed by Minnie to take care of the Haberdashery in her absence.

Warren: "Minnie and Sweet Dave in there?"

Bob: "Minnie and Sweet Dave went to visit her mother on the North side of the mountain."

Warren: "What?"

Bob: "Yep."

Warren: "Minnie ain't here?"

Bob: "Yes, they are visiting her mother."

Warren: "Her mother?"

Bob: "Yes."

[...]

Warren: "And she left *you* in charge?"

Bob: "si:"

Warren: [Laughs] "That sure don't sound like Minnie:"

Bob: "Are you calling me a liar?"

Warren: "Well not yet I ain't. [...] She still stinking up the place with Old Quail pipe tobacco?"

Bob: "hah. Minnie doesn't smoke a pipe. She rolls her own. Red Apple Tobacco. But, mi negro amigo, I think you already know this.

Warren: "Yeah, I do señor Bob. Just seeing if you do." (The Hateful Eight – 00:56:59)

The audience has never encountered neither Minnie nor Bob before, and as such has no basis for deciding whether or not Bob is speaking the truth. However, as Major Warren apparently knows more about Minnie than the audience, and the fact that he is so inquisitive is an indicator to the restricted and observing audience that something might be out of order, thus sparking the mystery. Tarantino further emphasizes the mystery through the character John Ruth, who appears to be extremely suspicious of his new companions in the haberdashery.

Ruth: "One of them fellas is *not* what he says he is."

O.B.: "What is he?"

Ruth: "In cahoots with this one. That's what he is. One of them, maybe even two of them, is here to see Domergue goes free. To accomplish that goal they'll kill everybody in here. They got 'em a couple of days, so all they got to do is sit tight and wait for a window of opportunity. And that's when they strike. Huh, bitch?"

Domergue: "If you say so, John."

Warren: "Are you sure you ain't just being paranoid? Now, what you [Domergue] got to say about all of this?"

Domergue: "What do I got to say? About John Ruth's ravings? He's absolutely right. Me and one of them fellas is in cahoots." (The Hateful Eight – 01:08:46)

Again, as the audience is restricted to the viewpoint of the objective observer. There are no explanations as to why John Ruth would harbor these suspicions other than him being paranoid and afraid of losing his bounty, as Major Warren points out. At this point in the narrative, none of the guests in the haberdashery has performed any actions that could be interpreted as openly sinister. In line with the genre of mystery, there is, however, a slight oddness to all of them. The Confederate General, Sanford Smithers, never leaves his chair, the British hangman, Oswaldo Mobray, is rather curious about the number of travelers guarding Domergue, and brutish looking cowboy, Joe Gage, is writing his autobiography and on his way to visit his mother for Christmas. The only reason any of these appear out of place to the audience is because the main characters, Ruth and Warren, believe so.

To validate the mystery, Tarantino employs a narrative technique he has rarely used before which is that of implementing a *narrator*. According to Bordwell & Thompson, a narrator is

“some specific agent who purports to be telling the story” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 93). A narrator can be a character within the story, as it was the case with Beatrix in the opening sequence of *Kill Bill vol. 2*, but the narrator can also be an external, non-diegetic voice, sometimes referred to as the *Voice of God*. The latter is the narrator type utilized in *The Hateful Eight*, and, appropriately enough, the voice of god belongs to Quentin Tarantino himself (IMDb - *The Hateful Eight*). Within the narrative of *The Hateful Eight*, the function of the narrator becomes to validate the mystery and broaden the audience's range of information.

Narrator: “Let's go back a bit. 15 minutes ago Major Warren shot General Smithers in front of everybody. But about forty seconds before that, something equally as important happened, but not everybody saw it. While Major Warren was captivating the crowd with tales of black dicks in white mouths, somebody... poisoned the coffee. And the only one to see him do it, was Domergue. That's why this chapter is called 'Domergue's got a Secret'” (*The Hateful Eight* - 01:36:34).

With the revelation of the coffee being poisoned, the mystery turns into suspense as the audience now has more information than the characters. The suspense and mystery enhance each other as it remains unknown who poisoned the coffee and why. When the suspense is at its highest and people start dying, Tarantino, true to his style, reveals the plot through a chapter which appears out of the temporal order of the rest of the narrative. The chapter explains the disappearance of Minnie and Sweet Dave, who is in cahoots with Domergue, and who poisoned the coffee.

As the ensemble of characters is trapped by the blizzard and before a villain has been revealed, the aforementioned thematic elements of sin, pain, and suffering becomes the revolving point of the story. Much like its predecessor *Django Unchained*, *The Hateful Eight* is touching upon the hardship of the African American people, here represented by Major Warren, in the time before and immediately after the civil war. John Ruth represents a more progressive way of thinking as he on many occasions in the film, in his own way, expresses sympathy for the former slaves, and appears to be idolizing the late President Lincoln. Sanford Smithers, and to some extent Chris Mannix, represent the more conservative confederate way of thinking, expressing no agreement with the emancipation and methodically hunting down and killing emancipated black people. Yet, they believe themselves to be justified as they fought for dignity in defeat, which was hard to obtain under an unconditional surrender. Unlike *Django Unchained*'s African American protagonist, who arguably embodies the heroic traits of being lawfully good, Major Warren embodies no such traits.

It is revealed that he killed Confederate and Union soldiers alike in a fire, so that he alone could escape confinement, and when confronted about it shows no remorse towards his actions. At some point, Warren states that he joined the army specifically to kill Southern crackers. As such, having been in a situation of being discriminated against has not put Major Warren in a position above discriminating against others. Arguably, Warren's hate for the Confederacy is understandable, yet he also displays traits of discriminating against others, in particularly Bob the Mexican.

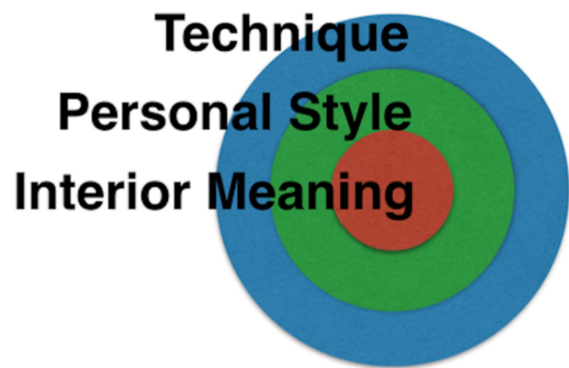
Warren: "see, if you'd have been here two and a half years ago, you'd know 'bout that sign used to hang up over the bar. [...] You wanna know what that sign said Señor Bob? 'No dogs or Mexicans allowed.' Now, Minnie hung that sign up the day she opened this haberdashery. And it hung over that bar every day till she took it down a little over two years ago. You know why she took it down? She started lettin' in dogs." (The Hateful Eight - 01:55:15)

In the middle of the mysterious story, the themes of sin and suffering unfold. Most of the characters presented are round and driven by their own personal motivations. Arguably, none of them are inherently good or evil as they all fought for their own beliefs in the war and ended up as broken and hateful men when it was over. In the confines of Minnie's Haberdashery, old grudges are renewed and as the English character Oswaldo Mobray says: "I know Americans aren't apt to let a little thing like unconditional surrender get in the way of a good war" (The Hateful Eight - 01.06.38).



## Discussion

The point of this discussion is to evaluate whether or not Tarantino fits within the boundaries of the auteur, set by the early practitioners of *politique des auteurs*. The following discussion will be provided on the basis of Andrew Sarris' model of authorship, which has been presented in the theoretical chapters of this project. The model is utilized since it is the only existing comprehensible guide to what it means to be an auteur.



Initially, for a director to be considered as an auteur, he or she must be skilled in the craft of filmmaking, or possess definite technical competences in the arts of filmmaking. As presented by Sarris, the director needs an extensive knowledge in filmmaking, involving all aspects including directing, lighting, costumes, and camera techniques. Therefore, it is important to take notice of Tarantino's position in relation to this aspect, namely, whether his level of expertise supports the first claim of the auteur model.

In Tarantino's own words, he is a film fanatic and has strived to learn as much as possible about film and filmmaking. In *Quentin Tarantino Interviews* from 1998, Tarantino expresses that he always wanted to make films, and therefore, he has learned as much he could to become the best film-maker possible (Peary, 1998, p. 7). The already executed analysis of stylistics in Tarantino's works stands as evidence of his technical capabilities. And arguably, the matter of Tarantino possessing massive knowledge on the area of film and filmmaking is undiscussable, which his efforts in film have proved for almost 25 years. His knowledge of filmmaking comes to show throughout his works, where the technical know-how and stylistics are apparent, which, therefore, passes the first criterion of value, which is technique.

The second element of Andrew Sarris' auteur model is personal style. The following will, therefore, strive to discuss what defines Tarantino's personal style, in order for him to be considered as an auteur. Furthermore, the following discussion will assess what the distinction of originality is, and how pop cultural references and intertextuality can be considered as auteur confirming elements, despite not being truly original content invented by the director in question. When assessing Tarantino films, it is apparent that these are filled with intertextual references of

different kind. In the early theories of the auteur, this type of filmmaking would appear as opposing the theory, since the element of originality would be diminished. However, the theory of the auteur as well as the film industry have developed with time and, therefore, Tarantino's trademark use of pop cultural references and intertextuality can now be considered as part of his personal style in his films, which allows the notion of Tarantino being a modern day auteur. On this notion, Roland Barthes argues: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. [...] the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original" (Barthes, p. 99, 2008). Barthes argues that any original idea has already been attempted and it is, therefore, the author's role to interpret the already existing ideas to create new material. In analyzing the works of Tarantino, it becomes apparent that his use of intertextual references is excessive, and as such appears to support the idea of Barthes that all originality is gone. However, after having built himself a distinct name in the industry, a certain degree of expectation has developed within the audience. The Tarantino audience has after almost 25 years of experience, and eight films, been accustomed to the excessive use of pop cultural references and intertextuality that along with the use of excessive, explicit violence, chaptered storytelling, and unfiltered dialogue has become the Tarantino fingerprint. Arguably, this stands in opposition to Roland Barthes' idea, since Tarantino's way of creating originality is by taking advantage of pop cultural references and intertextuality in a recognizable way, thus, making the unoriginal original in Tarantino's style.

One of the objectives of this project was to analyze Tarantino works in regards to formal style to discover stylistic traits which would support his establishment as an auteur. Some of these traits have become trademark fingerprints of Tarantino's, and the audience will recognize the use of these particular techniques and recognize the films as Tarantino's work. One of these elements is his construction of settings, where he manages to create a setting which functions as a container for the acting to take place within, and therefore, emphasizing the acting and dialogue as his primary plot elements. Examples are the warehouse from *Reservoir Dogs* and the haberdashery in *The Hateful Eight*, which are both small spaces where the acting and dialogue are the dominant elements making the physical setting less significant. The earlier analysis also uncovered how Tarantino always strives to create authenticity in his films, especially through elements such as props, costume, and setting. Perhaps Tarantino's most recognizable stylistic trait is the explicitness and violence. A Tarantino film without extreme violence and harsh dialogue would simply not be a Tarantino film. Furthermore, looking into details such as the camera work, Tarantino displays a pattern of using especially one type of shot, namely the low-angle perspective trunk shot where the

camera takes the point of view of the victim in the scene. Along with the use of the split-focal diopter, which creates two areas of focus in the same frame, Tarantino maintains his strategy of cinematography throughout his works, which therefore becomes a recognizable stylistic trait.

One of the things that has become a staple in Tarantino's narratives are his novel-like structure, where time does not necessarily progress linearly and in which a character can enter without much introduction, and said character's motivations and traits will be revealed through his or her dialogue. Furthermore, Tarantino is a director who constantly evolves his approach to filmmaking. Initially, he had the idea of structuring his first two films like novels, utilizing chapters instead of flashbacks. The idea evolved with *Kill Bill* in which the narrative is literally segmented into numbered chapters, which in the spirit of its predecessors does not necessarily occur in linear temporal order. Tarantino held on to the numbered chapters in *Inglorious Basterds*, yet the historical fiction narrative set in the second world war did not share the previous films temporal distortion, at least not to the same extent. *Django Unchained* continued the trend of Tarantino's interpretation of a historical narrative, this time set during the slavery before the emancipation in America. Despite abandoning the use of distinct chapters, Tarantino instead draws a parallel to the monomythic structure of a fairytale, going so far as to drawing a direct parallel to the Nibelungelied about Siegfried and Brünnhilde, which the supporting character, Dr. King Schultz, tells the protagonist Django in the film. Lastly, *The Hateful Eight* appears to be a culmination of all the storytelling tools Tarantino has accumulated and employed previously.

Arguably, Tarantino employs more than a few stylistic and narratological elements across all of his films and the accumulation of these traits make up for Tarantino's personal style. As such, there can be no doubt that Tarantino fulfills the second criterion of value in Sarris' model of authorship.

At the center of Sarris' auteur model is interior meaning, which, according to Sarris, is particularly important when defining the auteur. The first two areas of the model are tangible and can be more or less precisely defined, whereas interior meaning is an abstract concept which requires some degree of assumption and interpretation. Sarris defines the area of interior meaning as: "interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material. [...] It is not quite the version of the world a director projects nor quite his attitude toward life" (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). As such one can only assume that interior meaning is found in the relationship between the director's values and the way he addresses and presents the important themes of his works. The discussion of interior meaning in Tarantino's films should ultimately lead to the conclusion of

whether or not he can be considered an auteur. When watching the collective directorial works of Tarantino it becomes evident that he inhabits a fondness of dealing with characters who fall within the category of being minorities in society to some extent: Jules and Django are black, The Inglorious Basterds are Jews, Beatrix Kiddo and the ensemble of heroines from *Death Proof* are women, and Jackie Brown is both black and female. As already discussed, one of Tarantino's core strengths is his abilities to write these characters in such a realistic way that the audience relates to them extremely well when they appear on screen, even though some of the plot elements are often absurd and explicitly stylized. By choosing minorities as protagonists, Tarantino has stated that he hopes to give the respective minority communities a relatable hero to look up to, as well as open up for a much needed dialogue surrounding especially the past of the black community in America:

“I wanted to give black males, and in particular young black males, and I'm kinda talking about kids that aren't even born yet, a black cowboy hero. [...] I have always hoped *Django Unchained* might be a rite of passage that black fathers watch with their black sons when they get old enough.” (Keeper of the FLAME, 2016).

What makes a Tarantino film so distinct is that these socio-economical themes, which are often times very relevant in the contemporary time where the films are released, are presented in a film of very explicit language and graphic violence. This violence is often times the first thing that enters peoples' heads when they hear the name Tarantino and is also one of the plot elements which has caused the most controversy around the director throughout his career. When asked about the reason and necessity of violence within his films, Tarantino remains adamant, and has been so ever since his directorial debut, that said violence is simply a means to making “good cinema” (Channel 4 News, 2013) and that people are very much capable of separating what they see in a fiction film from real life. In the heated discussion surrounding Tarantino's films, it is often times forgotten that his films are also very humorous and that the humoristic elements are often as overly stylized as the violent elements. Examples of this are Mia and Vincent dancing twist in *Pulp Fiction*, the caricature accents of the American and British officers in *Inglorious Basterds*, and Fritz, the horse of Dr. King Schultz in *Django*



Screenshot 139: Reservoir Dogs – (00:56:26)

*Unchained*, which bows at the mention of its name. The humor and violence stand in clear contrast to one another when it comes to the emotions they evoke. However, in Tarantino's films they often occur within the same scene, or even shot, which makes up for a very absurd scenario. Examples are the torture scene in *Reservoir Dogs* in which Mr. Blonde cuts off the ear of a police officer while doing a very ungraceful dance to the song *Stuck in the Middle With You*, or the scene in *Pulp Fiction* where Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin, who sits in the back of the car, in the head, transforming the interior of the car to a bloody mess. Other examples from the later films are the proud mannerism with which Lt. Aldo carves swastikas into the foreheads of surviving Nazi soldiers in *Inglorious Basterds*, or the pompous costume in which Django is dressed when he unloads his gun into Little Raj Brittle in *Django Unchained*. As such, the absurdities in Tarantino's film exist as a product of the interconnected elements of humor and violence which creates an ever changing, dynamic range of emotional responses within the audience. Now, any film works in a similar pattern, where certain scenes are to provoke a certain reaction from its audience, but given the fact that Tarantino works with humor and violence in such extreme measures, the respective emotions the scenes provoke are equally enhanced, which would explain the harsh reactions and debate around especially the violent parts in Tarantino's films. Therefore, the extreme humor and violence functions as a catalyst for provoking certain emotions within the audience, which helps to convey the important themes Tarantino implements in his films, and sparking the discussion of Tarantino's desired discourse. All things combined, it becomes a matter of subjective taste, as to what is acceptable to put on screen and what not. Since Tarantino states that he makes whatever he thinks is good cinema, arguably, his own threshold is almost non-existing based on the fact that he relishes in the explicit violence found in his films. However, Tarantino's films being loved by some and dreaded by others must be an indication that he walks a fine line of what is tolerable in mainstream cinema. As stated, this is predominantly a subjective matter, but the amount of debate and critique Tarantino has gotten throughout the years is evidence that Tarantino is indeed a controversial director and that he constantly works to push the limits and stir his audience's emotions with his films. According to Michael Rennett, the approach which Tarantino chooses when it comes to the stylistics of his films, labels him as an "outlaw" in the circles of cinema. This outlaw persona is fueled by the controversy Tarantino's film creates and the controversy itself is a product of the audience for whom Tarantino creates his film and said films visual expression:

"Part of this outlaw image is based on the artistic standards of the independent movie industry to which Tarantino and his peers belong. If these scenes were to appear in B- and



C-level exploitation movies, then the violence would be an accepted part of the feature. However, within both the mainstream and independent art film circuits, this on-screen material becomes controversial.” (Rennett, 2012, p. 399)

Arguably, Tarantino approaches themes in his films which are culturally and historically relevant, and many people globally are able to relate to, allowing him to follow the mainstream. He does, however, shroud his mainstream themes in explicit stylistics confusing the boundaries, level, and category to which said films belong, and thus creating the controversial image.

In all probability, this is the closest one can get to deduct whether or not Tarantino exhibits interior meaning in his films. Arguably, he often time employs the timeless theme of minorities overcoming oppression, and he communicates this theme through his distinct style. However, that does not mean Tarantino hopes to incite the same violent mannerism in real world minorities. Tarantino urges everyone to overcome their own obstacles and showing it in extremes on screen simply emphasizes the message when it carries over into the real world.

The analysis showed Tarantino's fondness of utilizing characters with a minority status, whether it is Jews, African Americans, or women. This fulfills the idea of Bazin who argued that an auteur always tells the same story regardless of the scenario. Since Tarantino's narratives often deals with overcoming and prevailing despite the minority status, Tarantino's films typically present a hero or front figure of the given minority. Tarantino himself argues that despite some of his films being set in the past, the thematic substance of his films are highly relevant for debate in today's society, and argues the following when asked about how *The Hateful Eight* addresses the contemporary race issues in America: “Not only do I think it relates to it, I think, as far as I know, it might be the only movie coming out this year that actually directly addresses it” (Keeper of the FLAME, 2016). Arguably, Tarantino manages to find a theme which is highly relevant in contemporary society, and on the same time manages to create a film in which said theme becomes equally relevant. This corresponds with Bazin's notion that both the auteur and his film are products of his time and reflections of society. Tarantino stands as an even clearer example of this as he not only reflects the themes and problematics of society but also consciously implements these in his films, by using and implementing pop cultural references in his works. Furthermore, he demonstrates an awareness of the film industry, the film medium, and what tools these offer for him to take advantage of. Tarantino embraces the broad spectrum of genres and styles and implements these both as an ode to the medium that he loves, as well as a means of conveying his own themes

and messages. Originally, Truffaut argued that an auteur is a director who, among other things, writes his own scripts. Placing Tarantino within this classification can be problematic because he writes his own screenplays but, as just stated, writes said scripts by implementing large amounts of pop cultural references and intertextual material from other films. Truffaut states that the true auteur must write his own original scripts, but given Barthes' argument that the author and originality are dead, this arguably proves to be problematic. Arguably, Tarantino embodies all aforementioned points: he writes his own scripts and makes his own films, and he fills these with intertextual pop cultural references which arguably are product of how he perceives the world. Some of the referential elements may prove to be unoriginal, but through a combination of Tarantino's stylistics, his chosen themes, and original stories he manages to create truly original films.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to analyze Quentin Tarantino as a director in relation to the auteur theory, and later conclude his status as an auteur of modern cinema. In order to do so, the relevant theories of authorship have been examined including contributions from critics François Truffaut, André Bazin, and Andrew Sarris. Based on Bordwell & Thompson's neo-formalistic system of film style and narratology, the project has analyzed distinct traits in Tarantino's stylistics and narratology. The final part of the analysis involves a case study of Tarantino's latest film, *The Hateful Eight*, which functions to show how Tarantino has maintained and evolved his distinct style throughout his works. The result of this analysis leads to the discussion of Tarantino's status as an auteur of modern cinema and how his works have cemented his status as an auteur.

In the first part of the analysis, the focus was on stylistics in Tarantino's films which was analyzed utilizing Bordwell & Thompson's neo-formalistic approach. The analysis established how Tarantino employs the trait of stylizing the settings in his films to function as containers in which the actors and the acting unfold. Several examples throughout his works showed evidence of this technique and, arguably, Tarantino has a unique way of engaging such settings and constructing them to make the acting primary and the setting secondary. In relation to this, Tarantino's efforts in direction and drawing the best performances out of his actors were evident as well. He manages to create iconic characters that the audience remembers for their actions within the film and not for the actor playing the character. Iconic characters such as Jules from *Pulp Fiction* or Dr. King Schultz from *Django Unchained* both stand as clear examples. Assessing the more technical aspects of cinematography, Tarantino has made a habit of certain techniques such as implementing the trunk shot, framing the superior character from the eyes of the victim, and the split-focal diopter which allows two separate areas of focus in the same frame. However, the most distinguishable trait found in Tarantino's works is the visual and verbal explicitness combined with humor. Especially his combination of blood, violence, and humor creates the foundation for what a Tarantino film looks like, since these elements in collaboration create the expression of a Tarantino film, which has come to be well-known in the industry.

Tarantino also proved a certain uniqueness in the narratology of his films. Tarantino often manipulates the range of information available to both the characters within the narrative, as well as the audience without, introducing or withholding story elements to achieve a desired effect. One of Tarantino's most prominent tools for manipulating the flow of information is his use of the non-linear narrative which, to some degree, is employed across all of his films. These temporal

tools specifically function to emphasize cause and effect throughout his works. Tarantino seeks to replicate the novel's narrative structure on films and often implements more than one storyline in his narratives. His narratives often reflect his love of telling stories as Tarantino will often incorporate narratological elements from wide variety of genres and narrative structures such as parody, fairytales, and fantasy. Therefore, Tarantino shows a wide repertoire of skills and tools when putting together his narratives. Finally, related to the area of acting in stylistics, the characters and their motivations are often the main element driving the plot forward. The characters' traits are mainly revealed through dialogue, thus, emphasizing the importance of the actors and the acting.

With all abovementioned factors in consideration, this project has discussed Tarantino's possible status as an auteur of modern cinema. With the analyzed elements in mind, Tarantino has been assessed in relation to the presented theory of the *auteur* from Truffaut, Bazin, and Sarris, which presented a number of criteria the director should exhibit in order to be considered an auteur. The criteria upon which all three critics could agree is that an auteur is:

- A director who writes his own material
- A director who possesses the technological skills of the filmmaking trade
- A director who displays a unique style in his films
- A director who, regardless of scenario, tells the same story

Tarantino does write all of his own screenplays, thus fulfilling the first criterion. However, these scripts often include many intertextual references and pop cultural references. As such, the actual originality of his works can be questioned. Throughout his works, Tarantino has made use of pop cultural references, but also various narrative structures. Arguably, a director can only implement so many elements to the extend Tarantino does by being a skilled craftsman within the art of filmmaking. Throughout his works, it becomes apparent that many of the stylistic and narratological elements are recurring and especially utilized by Tarantino. As such, Tarantino displays his personal and unique style within his films. In the construction of his narratives, Tarantino exhibits a consistent vision for his stories. One part of this vision is the construction of the absurd which is created through the evident contrasts of humor and violence. These contrasting elements create equally contrasting emotions within the audience that help convey the other element of Tarantino's vision, which is the consistent theme of minorities overcoming overwhelming opposition.

This project sought to determine whether or not Tarantino could be classified as an auteur by establishing four criteria with roots in the original *politique des auteurs*. The performed analysis arguably shows that Tarantino accomplishes all required criteria of becoming an auteur,

however, the criterion of originality is obscured by Tarantino's extensive use of intertextual elements. However, part of Tarantino's recognizable style is how he makes the unoriginal elements work in unison with his original ideas. *Politique des auteurs* took its beginning in a vastly different period of cinematic history, and arguably much has changed since. The film industry has developed significantly and the auteur principle should be allowed to develop alongside it. Is Tarantino a modern auteur? Yes, with emphasis on *modern*.



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## Resume

Dette speciale har til formål at undersøge, hvorvidt den amerikanske filmskaber, Quentin Tarantino, kan anses for at være auteur i samtidens filmindustri. Auteurbegrebet opstod blandt franske filmkritikere i slutningen af 40'erne, som et opgør med den traditionelle Franske filmindustri. Fortalerne for auteurbegrebet lagde især vægt på, at filmens instruktør skulle varetage en større rolle i den kreative skabelsesproces, en rolle, der tidligere, tillagdes manuskriptforfatteren. I spidsen for bevægelsen stod filmkritikere som Francois Truffaut, André Bazin, og Andrew Sarris. Eftersom disse kritikere opstillede en række kriterier for, hvad det vil sige at være auteur, vil disses overvejelser og ideer udgøre den bærende teori, der ligger til grund for udarbejdelsen af analysen. Auteurbegrebets kriterier omfatter elementer som en instruktørs tekniske færdigheder, dennes personlige præg på sine film, samt hvorvidt filmen udtrykker en såkaldt indre mening. Specialet vil primært analysere disse elementer i Tarantinos otte instruerede værker, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill* (2003 & 2004), *Death Proof* (2007), *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012), og slutteligt *The Hateful Eight* (2015). For at udføre denne analyse vil specialet som værktøj gøre brug af Bordwell & Thompsons neoformalistiske metode. Analysen undersøger primært, hvordan Tarantino gør brug af stilistiske elementer, som mise-en-scène, cinematografi, lyd og redigering, samt narratologiske elementer, som kausalitet, tid og rum. Den udførte analyse påviser at Tarantino filmteknisk er en ekstremt dygtig og velovervejet instruktør. Desuden kan analysen påvise, at visse filmiske elementer er særligt prominente i Tarantinos værker, og er at finde i samtlige af hans film. Eksempler på sådanne elementer er den udprægede brug af dialog, det temporalt fragmenterede narrativ, samt brugen af overdreven vold og humor, i kontrast med hinanden. Gennem disse elementer skaber Tarantino sit eget filmiske udtryk. Analysen påviste også, at Tarantino ofte udarbejder sine film med omdrejningspunkt i en samfundsrelevant diskurs. Derfor kan der argumenteres for, at Tarantinos filmtekniske udtryk fungerer som kommunikationsmedie for den problematik han ønsker at belyse til diskussion. Afslutningsvis diskuterer specialet, hvorvidt Tarantino kan klassificeres som auteur, hvilket han, med forbehold, kan konkluderes som værende.