MASTER'S THESIS

BLACK STETSONS, REVENGE OF THE EPICS, AND BLOODY POETIC JUSTICE:

A STUDY OF QUENTIN TARANTINO'S EXPLOITATION OF AESTHETICIZED VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Quentin Tarantino is a filmmaker who is renowned for his exaggerated and extreme depictions of violence, causing delight and abhorrence alike. One might speculate why Tarantino portrays violence in the way that he does, and if the violence serves a larger purpose. Thus, this study intends to examine the various ways in which Quentin Tarantino exploits violence in his films for providing symbolic meaning and as a storytelling device, as well as its effect on the spectator, in order to determine if the combination of violence, plot and story imparts an underlying message. The examination will be based on three exemplary Tarantino films: *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), *The Hateful Eight* (2015), and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019).

The study employs a selection of primary theories and underlying concepts in order to explicate the ways in which Tarantino uses violence in his works. Murray Smith's cognitive media theory on character engagement in film and Margrethe Bruun Vaage's more emotionally founded theory on the antihero are used to analyze the character structures of the films and their relationship to violence. A combination of three theoretical perspectives on fictional and aesthetic violence from Henry Bacon, Margrethe Bruun Vaage and Joseph H. Kupfer respectively is employed as a tool for analyzing the aesthetics and morality of the violence depicted in the films. Furthermore, Cynthia A. Freeland's account of the sublime in cinema and Patrick McKee's theory on the sublime and violence are employed, as they allow the spectator to engage in moral considerations of violence, reaching beyond the scope of moral evaluation of characters. The three underlying concepts of parody, pastiche, and intertextuality will be considered throughout the analyses.

The analyses show that violence is inevitable in all three filmic universes. In *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, the culture of violence is established through '70s Kung Fu aesthetics, professional assassins, and a revenge theme. In *The Hateful Eight*, the culture of violence is imparted by genre codes of the western and the murder mystery set in an atmosphere of post Civil War animosity, and in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, the mix of late '60s fact and fiction referencing the Manson Family murders and Old Hollywood western filmmaking with stuntmen and cowboys comprise the culture of violence.

The composition of the violence that is depicted is different in every film. In *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, the aesthetics of the graphic martial arts violence is mostly surrealistic and hyper-violent, establishing a rhythm in the structure of the film. In *The Hateful Eight*, hyper-violence is used to increase the pace and intensity of the film, and in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*,

the violence is aestheticized by means of effects and sound, and it stands out as more impactful because the film does not center around violence to the same extent that the two others do.

In all three films, the violence also has a narrative function. In *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, the spectator is sympathetically allied with the protagonist by means of violence in a context of revenge. In *The Hateful Eight,* the violence provides a sympathetic and moral compass with which to navigate the hatefulness of the characters, and in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* the spectator's sympathetic allegiances with the two main characters Rick and Cliff are cemented by their use of violence.

The films can all be argued to contain sublime elements in a violent context. *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* incites moral evaluation through aesthetic violence depicted in martial arts combat, calling into question the American readiness for violence. *The Hateful Eight* highlights America's racial issues through an aesthetically appealing inversion of power between a black man and a white man. Finally, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is arguably sublime in its entirety, as the overall magnificence of the film gives rise to moral considerations in regard to the rewriting of a historical tragedy.

Tarantino's auteurist filmmaking is extremely visually and aesthetically appealing, and his works can therefore be enjoyed while the spectator engages in fictional relief. However, this study finds that his use of sublime elements appeals for the spectator to engage in moral consideration in a broader perspective. The study concludes that in his works, Tarantino attempts to right the wrongs of American evils with cinematic and aestheticized violence.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2019, Quentin Tarantino's 9th film, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, was released. The film was extremely well received among film critics, given four out of four stars on the esteemed film review site RogerEbert.com (Tallerico), full marks from the Chicago Sun-Times (Roeper) and a grandiose review from The Wrap, stating it is a "grand playground for the director to further fetishize old pop culture, [...] and to bring a wide-eyed glee and a robust sense of perversity to the whole craft of moviemaking" (Pond).

However, the film's reception among some Tarantino fans was lukewarm, as can be observed from the audience reviews on the American film and TV review-aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes. On the one hand, the film scores top marks and is praised for its performances and "basically flawless" cinematography (Vincent A), and on the other hand it is given low scores and critiqued for being "a snooze fest wrapped as a love story to glory days" (Tarek A), and for lacking action and violence in comparison to most of Tarantino's other films.

This divide in audience reviews attests to the fact that Tarantino fans have come to expect certain very specific elements and features from Tarantino's style, but most importantly: extremely skillful filmmaking and plenty of action in the form of violence. Tarantino is renowned for his exaggerated and extreme depictions of violence, as demonstrated by films such as *Kill Bill*, in which the violence stands out as particularly inflated in terms of volume and special effects. He also has a well-known talent for constructing extremely complex and interesting characters, which often do not conform to any standards of what can be categorized as reasonable or normal human conduct. Such characters are present in *The Hateful Eight*, a film in which violence is also a very prominent theme. One thing is certain about Tarantino's films: they are guaranteed to elicit strong spectator reactions.

Tarantino's filmmaking style begs the question of why he portrays violence to the extent that he does. Is it merely an expression of a personal preference for or fascination with violence, or is there a deeper meaning? The spectator is left wondering whether the violent nature of Tarantino's films reflect an underlying opinion which transcends the borders of the filmic universe. These considerations have formed the basis of the following thesis statement:

This study intends to examine the various ways in which Quentin Tarantino exploits violence in his films for providing symbolic meaning and as a storytelling device, as well as its effect on the spectator, in order to determine if the combination of violence, plot and story imparts an underlying message. The following examination will be based on three exemplary

Tarantino films: *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), *The Hateful Eight* (2015), and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019).

In order to explicate the above thesis statement, this study will employ the following method. Firstly, a selection of five primary theories will be presented. Murray Smith's theory on character engagement in film has been chosen, as it provides the tools with which to analyze the sympathy structures of the characters in the three films, rendering possible an analysis of the characters' relationship to violence and how this is perceived and morally evaluated by the spectator. Aiding in this purpose, an array of Margrethe Bruun Vaage's terms related to the concept of the antihero have been selected, as they provide a perspective on character engagement which is more emotionally founded than Smith's.

The third chapter of primary theory combines three theoretical perspectives on film violence in order to provide analytical tools for examining the violence depicted in the films. The appeal of fictional violence as well as the morality and motivations of violence are elucidated by means of Henry Bacon's account of the subjects, supplemented by Margrethe Bruun Vaage's theory on moral disgust and rape. Supplying analytical terms for describing the aesthetics of the violence in the films, Joseph H. Kupfer's concept of aesthetic violence is presented.

The final two chapters of primary theory provide an overview of two connected theories: the sublime in cinema, and violence and the sublime. The first is introduced through the work of Cynthia A. Freeland, connecting the sublime and cinema, while the latter is based on the work of Patrick McKee, establishing the relation between violence and the sublime. These theories have been chosen because they allow the spectator to engage in moral considerations of violence which reach beyond the scope of moral evaluation of characters.

In addition to the primary theories, the three underlying concepts of parody, pastiche, and intertextuality are clarified, as these terms will be employed throughout the analyses in order to examine Tarantino's use of the concepts.

Each film will be examined individually, focusing on three overall analytical topics: the culture of violence represented in the film, the composition of the violence depicted in it, and the sympathy structures of the characters. Following the individual analyses are three examinations of the sublime in each of the films with regards to violence.

Finally, a discussion of Tarantino's auteurist traits and cultural criticism will be conducted, firstly presenting a brief account of auteurism based on Emma Hamilton and Alistair Rolls' introduction to the term and its use in modern cinema. Secondly, Tarantino's traits of auteurism will be pointed out based on the findings of the analyses, while drawing on examples from his other works. Lastly, the discussion will attempt to unfold its previous findings in order

to reveal whether there is an underlying criticism infused in the violence in Tarantino's filmmaking, exemplified by the analyses conducted in this study.

THEORY

Primary Theory

Character Engagement in Film

When watching a film, most of us cannot help but respond emotionally to the fictional characters we see on the screen; we may gasp, cry, or laugh along with them. This is one of the factors which makes narrative film enjoyable to us, and the response of the spectator to fictional characters in film is what Murray Smith sets out to examine in his work *Engaging Characters – Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*. The concept of emotional response is known in everyday language as 'identification', which Smith defines as such: "We watch a film, and find ourselves becoming attached to a particular character or characters on the basis of values or qualities roughly congruent with those we possess, or those we wish to possess, and experience vicariously the emotional experiences of the character: we identify with the character" (Smith 2). Smith terms this definition the 'folk model' of spectatorial response to character, as it is easily understandable but lacks systematicity (2-3).

The model relies on two basic concepts: namely 'character' and 'spectator', and according to Smith it only offers a very simple, crude model of response, which allows either the option of identifying or not identifying with the character. He thus deems it severely lacking, and instead proposes a much more comprehensive system for this purpose, the 'structure of sympathy', which will be presented in detail later. Smith argues that characters are "central to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of narrative texts. Character structures are perhaps the major way by which narrative texts solicit our assent for particular values, practices, and ideologies" (4).

Therefore, the blanket terms of 'identification' or 'point of view' do not even begin to capture the complexity of spectatorial response to characters in film. Furthermore, the system Smith proposes is not founded in psychoanalysis, as the term 'identification' is often designated, but rather analytic philosophy and cognitive anthropology (5). In order to truly grasp the concept of emotional response to fictional characters in film, it is important to come to a common understanding of the most basic and important aspects of the system: character and spectator.

Character

While some narrative theorists have argued that the concept of 'character' as referring to a fictional counterpart of a human agent is not of much relevance to narrative, Smith argues otherwise. He finds that the terms 'character' and 'agency' are necessary for our understanding of and engagement with films, as a notion of 'personhood' is required to facilitate these (17). Rather than being a closed structure created solely by its accumulated features presented throughout the film, a character is also constructed through the assumptions and expectations the spectator brings to it (19). When it comes to a character's physical appearance, the spectator also has some subconscious expectations. Unless otherwise cued, we expect every character to have one specific and physically unique human body, and even when a character is instantiated by a non-human agent such as an animal or inanimate object, we still to some extent expect it to behave like a human, with human agency and according to human norms (19-20).

Seeing as characters are analogues of human agents and hence are considered renditions of plausible and possible persons, it is important to establish what we understand by the terms 'person' and 'human agent'. Smith proposes a list of capacities which he calls the 'person schema':

1. a discrete human body, individuated and continuous through time and space;
2. perceptual activity, including self-awareness;
3. intentional states, such as beliefs and desires;
4. emotions;
5. the ability to use and understand a natural language;
6. the capacity for self-impelled actions and self-interpretation;
7. the potential for traits, or persisting attributes. (Smith 21)

This list pertains to our expectations of human agents and by extension to characters: "In constructing characters, we begin with this basic schema and revise it on the basis of the particular data in a particular text. This information is itself likely to elicit culturally specific imagery concerning particular social roles, stereotypes, and so forth. But the framework provided by the person schema undergirds the process as a whole" (21-22). All human agents regardless of cultural affiliation share these capacities, which is evident from our ability to interact across radically different cultures (22).

The first item on the list of the person schema is that of an individuated and continuous body. We expect a person to have one body because this is how humans are constructed – at this point in time at least. That is not to say that one fictional character cannot be played by more than one actor, but it is uncommon and is often interpreted symbolically as reflecting a special meaning (26). As much as a character's body is of importance, its proper name is salient as well, as it gathers the traits of the specific character; it individuates the character, and performs "a typifying function, since proper names bear connotations of, among other things, nationality, gender, region, and class" (30).

While the name of a character is of greater importance in linguistic narratives than in than cinematic ones, many films do include peripheral characters that play an important role for the plot, but are only ever mentioned in dialogue and not actually shown on screen, like when a character only appears in the form of a voiceover (30). Just like in linguistic narratives, when a character is merely described and not physically shown, we still assume that it has a body, and so "[t]he person schema, as an instrument of the imagination, takes us beyond what is stated or implied by the story just as surely in literary narrative as it does in the movies" (31). However, while Smith does not deny that language can play a role in character recognition, he "ascribe[s] primacy to the iconic representation of the body, voice, and face as together they form the bedrock of recognition in most films, as their real presence does in life" (114).

Spectator

The term 'spectator' refers to a person watching and producing an emotional response to a fictional character in film. Spectating is a psychological activity which involves "acts of mental assent or dissent" (41) of the characters portrayed on the screen, ultimately resulting in the formation of allegiances. Smith argues that the concept of imagination within cognitive psychology is key in "examining the relationship between self and others" (47). The central concept in this regard is the cognitive 'schema', which is what we use to organize, categorize and process all the sensory information we receive at all times into patterns; data which we receive from signs and social events. These patterns constitute the basis for how we act and form expectations of the result of our own as well as others' actions, and they are learned through culture-specific socialization, which means that the ritual with which we greet people, for instance, will vary across cultures (47-48).

With regards to fictional narratives such as film, we use cognitive schemata in the form of 'cultural models', which are "prototypical scenarios which generate 'simplified worlds' of

types and events" (48), and they provide us with the ability to recognize agents and events from just a few important details. Thus, we can rather quickly identify the likely traits and personalities of characters without having to "draw an inductive picture, from the ground up, of every new agent (real or fictional) that we encounter" (ibid). While the film may prove us right regarding our assumptions and categorization, some films also set up the spectator to make certain assumptions about characters which turn out to be untrue, e.g. mistaking a villainous character for a good guy.

While the creation of the schemata is for the most part automatized, we are able to consciously reflect on them once they have been developed, and the hierarchies and slots within the schemata are subject to change when new information is obtained. This ability to adapt existing conceptual framework through experience – including experience of fictional representation – is what makes the human cognition imaginative (52). The relationship between texts (including film) and our understanding of the world is two-sided; we watch and understand mimesis and representation of the real world, using our schemata of and experience with the real world, and in turn, mimesis and fictional representation "transform the way we understand and experience the world" (54).

The final important aspect of spectatorial response to fictional characters is emotion. Smith argues that there are two forms of emotional response, "one to actual events, and one to fictional events" (57). The difference between the two is that our response to an actual situation can only be elicited by events that are believed to exist or have existed, while the response to a fictional text only requires that we "imaginatively propose to ourselves that the object exists" (ibid). Rather than thinking of these two types of response as contingent on specific and different conditions, Smith suggests that we can think of them as two categories defined by prototypes, as the prototype functions as a norm against which other category members are measured (ibid). In this case, the two categories 'fictional representation' and 'historical' or 'documentary representation' can be seen as two overlapping categories of representation with fuzzy boundaries rather than clear limits.

Smith points to Patricia Greenspan's theory that emotion and rationality are not opposing concepts which must be kept separate. Rather, emotion is "a necessary 'motivational supplement' to logic. In other words, emotions function partly as focusing and guidance systems" (62). This theory is relevant to Smith's model of character engagement, and especially his notion of allegiance, which is the level of engagement at which sympathetic or antipathetic char-

acter response lies, because the emotional response is based on a logical identificatory evaluation – "emotion [is] an integral aspect of human perception and cognition, not something opposed to them" (65).

The Structure of Sympathy

The structure of sympathy is, as previously mentioned, Smith's comprehensive system of emotional response to fictional characters, and it consists of three basic levels of engagement: recognition, alignment, and allegiance. Smith describes the structure of sympathy as such:

> In this system, spectators construct characters (a process I refer to as *recognition*). Spectators are also provided with visual and aural information more or less congruent with that available to characters, and so are placed in a certain structure of *alignment* with characters. In addition, spectators evaluate characters on the basis of the values they embody, and hence form more-or-less sympathetic or more-or-less antipathetic *allegiances* with them. (Smith 75, emphasis original)

These levels of engagement are elicited through the narration of the text, which also means that some forms of narration, e.g. suppressive narration, can challenge the processes of the structure of sympathy. However, while the classical functioning of the processes may be disrupted, they are not eliminated, so long as the form is narrative, and the construction of character is relevant (76).

None of the three levels of engagement require of the spectator that she replicates the traits of a character or experiences the same emotions as the character does. The term 'sympathy' within the structure of sympathy is "distinguished from empathy precisely in virtue of its acentrality" (85). Rather than centrally experiencing and feeling exactly what the character is going through, or behaving like the character does, the spectator's response is acentral in the sense that she understands the traits and mental states of the character, and that she evaluates and responds emotionally to these in the context of the narrative situation; her response is sympathetic rather than empathic (ibid).

Supplementing the three levels of engagement are the notions of affective mimicry and emotional simulation – concepts which account for 'empathic' phenomena (73). Emotional simulation is the voluntary act of simulating the emotions we observe in other human agents,

be they real or fictional. It can be used as a means of trying to predict the behavior of others, projecting oneself into the situation, and hypothesizing the emotions they may experience (97). Thus, while the structure of sympathy elicits a sympathetic rather than empathic spectator response, one of the mechanisms we use to gather information about the traits and states of the characters is, however, a form of empathy through central imagining (98).

Affective mimicry, on the other hand, is an involuntary reaction to a human agent's emotional state. When a character is, for example, visibly upset, startled, or angry, the spectator may produce a reflexive simulation of the character's emotion (99). Mimicking someone's emotional state or facial expression can cause the subjective experience of the mimic's emotion to be intensified; "it functions almost as a 'sixth sense', a physiological mechanism by which we constantly probe the meaning of our environment" (100). Affective mimicry is a very important tool in films that deny the spectator a narrative context or any social cues other than those of facial expression and bodily posture (101).

What complicates this empathic response, however, is the fact that the spectator can mimic the emotional state of not only the hero of a film, but also the villain, for instance in a moment of terror before he faces his inevitable downfall. Therefore, affective mimicry has the power to disrupt the moral structure of a film, dividing spectator reactions (106). The two empathic responses described above "function to 'attune' the spectator to the emotional tenor of the narrative" (103), thus supporting the structure of sympathy. One thing that is important to note is that all three levels of engagement are dynamic phenomena, developing throughout and across the text. In the following, each of the levels will be presented in greater detail.

RECOGNITION

The level of recognition pertains to the spectator's construction of character, and it is based on the exterior traits of the character, that is, its physical appearance and voice, "an individuated and continuous human agent" (82). Unless explicitly contradicted in the text, we expect this fictional human agent to be a mimetic reference to human agents as we see them in the real world, including their ability to continuously change and develop, e.g. through aging or injury. Smith argues that "[j]ust as persons in the real world may be complex or entertain conflicting beliefs, so may characters; but as with persons, such internal contradictions are perceived against the ground of (at least) bodily discreteness and continuity" (ibid).

The previously mentioned person schema "must underlie any response to a narrative agent as a person-like, human figure" (110), as this provides the foundation for recognition.

Recognition is constituted by individuation and re-identification, the latter being dependent on the first. In order for a character to become individuated and re-identified, some prior operations must be performed, such as being able to "distinguish humans from other objects and agents" (111), e.g. unindividuated characters, or characters who blur the line between human and non-human. Unindividuated characters, such as extras, may be characters we only see for short amounts of time, or who move around in large crowds of undistinguishable people. They are also known as stick figures: "A stick figure has a body, a face, can speak a natural language, and so forth; but it does not possess—for the spectator—a particular, recognizable body, face, or idiolect, which would serve to distinguish it from other human agents" (ibid).

The physical traits of a person are just as important for the person schema as psychological traits, and there are two reasons for this. Firstly, both types of traits are not merely fixed, they are subject to change; the body may change due to plastic surgery or age, for example. Secondly, "bodily attributes can and often do imply psychological traits: shifty eyes, an honest face" (113). The bodily and psychological traits are thus difficult to disentangle. Continuity, then, is what establishes the re-identification of a character, which happens through similarity and causality – when a character develops over time with regards to both psychological and bodily traits.

We can accept the use of two or more actors representing the same character at different stages in the character's life, so long as they represent distinctly different parts of said life, and there is a degree of similarity between them. If there is little similarity, we expect there to be a logical reason for this, like plastic surgery (115). Furthermore, even in a case where no physical traits are present, such as when a character is instantiated only through voiceover or the mention of a proper name, the person schema is still evoked, and there is an assumption that the voice or name has a body (116). Indeed, language can also be a telling factor when assigning certain traits to characters, like the use of pronouns or titular names, such as 'father' (118).

Smith does not agree with the typical division of characters as either 'flat' or 'round', as he finds that this categorization is too superficial, and that it collapses a variety of dimensions into a simple opposition. Instead, he suggests that "we may discriminate degrees of complexity, fixity, stereotypicality, plausibility, artificiality, attachment, and subjective transparency among [the characters]" (116). Characters can be more or less complex and fixed, and the traits they embody may, to a greater or lesser extent, conform with or depart from certain cultural stereotypes, or traditional stereotypes in fiction, which in turn impacts the spectator's perception of them as plausible. The nature of a character may be more or less artificial, the film may attach

the spectator to a character to varying degrees, and the transparency of the character's traits and opinions also varies.

These dimensions are all equally important for the construction of character (116-117). However, character attributes can only be considered actual traits if they are persistent and continuous: "we can only know which attributes are enduring when a character is re-identified on the basis of an attribute we have seen before. The very act of re-identification on the basis of an attribute turns it into a trait. This is the operation which constitutes the shift from simply individuating a character to apprehending the continuity of a character" (120). Once a character has been introduced and its initial behavior and attributes are made available, it is placed within an appropriate cognitive schema, enabling the spectator to "produce hypothetically fuller versions of the character than the text, taken as an object, actually puts before [her]" (120-121).

Another contributing factor in establishing character recognition is the opening of a film, as "[o]penings have a special function in our experience of a narrative, because we base our viewing strategies and expectations on the information we receive at the beginning of a text, a phenomenon known as the 'primacy effect'" (118). The appearance of star personae is also a contributing factor; it provides an elemental form of identification when we recognize a star at the beginning of a film, which elicits pleasurable anticipation, as star personae are often associated with well-developed types of character models (119).

ALIGNMENT

The term alignment covers the process of the spectator being given access to the character's actions, knowledge, and feelings. Similar to Gérard Genette's literary notion of 'focalization', alignment is obtained through "the 'lens' of a particular character" (83). While all characters, individuated or not, have the potential for a complex and fully developed inner life, the narration is more interested in characters who are indeed individuated (150). The information the spectator receives is thus usually restricted to one or few people with whom the spectator is aligned, and there are two interlocking ways through which this happens: 'spatio-temporal attachment' and 'subjective access'.

The function of spatio-temporal attachment is to restrict the narration to one character's actions, or to focus on the spatio-temporal paths of two or more characters while moving freely among them. Subjective access, then, concerns the degree of access the spectator is given to each character's subjectivity, which can vary amongst the characters in a narrative, and

"[t]ogether these two functions control the apportioning of knowledge among characters and the spectator; the systemic regulation of narrative knowledge results in a *structure of alignment*" (83, emphasis original). The distinction between the two functions can be defined in terms of their relation to the notions of agent and subject; attachment is what "renders characters as agents" (143), while subjective access "represents characters as entities that desire, believe, feel, think, and so forth" (ibid).

It is important to note that alignment cannot take place until the level of recognition has been employed; "[r]ecognition is a prerequisite for alignment" (144), meaning a character must be individuated in order for the spectator's narrative experience to be filtered through said character's lens. Furthermore, the level of alignment should not be confused with that of allegiance, as they are very distinct in spite of their interacting qualities. And finally, the 'filtering' effect, where the spectator is aligned exclusively with the protagonist, must not be confused with the more general concept of alignment, as there is a "broad range of alignment structures generated by the various articulations of attachment and subjective access" (ibid). The purest pattern of alignment, in which the spectator is attached to one character with complete subjective transparency, is quite rare – there is often a discrepancy between the knowledge of the spectator and the character (145).

Expanding upon the function of spatio-temporal attachment, there are several techniques which can be employed in order to establish a pattern of attachment to multiple characters, e.g. by simply cutting from one spatio-temporal location to another or using non-character voice-over narration or intertitles (147). Although less common, there are also cinematographic techniques which can be used to show several characters at once, for instance by "attaching us to one character on the soundtrack, and one on the image track" (ibid), or through the use of split-screen devices. When it comes to exclusive attachment, one of the most common patterns is that of the eyeline match shot.

With regards to subjective access, the degree of access can change over the course of a film, and it can also shift into taking on the nature of "a kind of multiple or intersubjective access" (150) through which the spectator is aligned with the shared mental state of several characters simultaneously. False subjectivity as well as opaque subjectivity also lie within the spectrum of subjective access, the first referring to a character's psyche being inaccurately constructed, and the latter to the performance not allowing the spectator to really gain any subjective access (151). Two important factors in conveying a character's inner state are those of actor performance and music; facial expressions and body language alert the spectator to the character's emotional state, which diegetic music is often used to emphasize. Furthermore, the score

of a film often interlocks with dramatic structures, such as shocks or abrupt changes, functioning as yet another tool for gaining subjective access (151-152).

There is an infinite amount of possible combinations when it comes to the degree of subjective access and the pattern of attachment, but certain combinations, also known as structures of alignment, are commonly used in certain genres. The detective narration, for instance, has quite a distinct structure of alignment through which the narration is restricted to the detective protagonist, and the spectator and detective are equally unaware of key events (153). With melodramatic narration, on the other hand, the attachment is multiple, and the spectator is usually higher in the hierarchy of knowledge than any of the characters. While these two structures of alignment can be considered to constitute "the limits within which classical films operate" (153), Smith argues that "[i]n general, narrative films are constantly modulating the range and depth of the narration's knowledge" (154).

One way to align the spectator with the character perceptually is through optical point-of-view (henceforth POV) shots. This narrative tool is not necessary for engagement on any of the three levels, and it can simply be used to serve the function of concealing the identity of the character whose point of view is shown, among other narrative devices (83). However, in relation to alignment, POV does have its place, as it allows the spectator to be in unusually close proximity to the character: "[c]lose perceptual alignment makes us an 'accomplice' and not merely a 'witness' of a character's actions" (156).

While some theorists agree that POV shots are representative of the entire mind of the character, Smith argues that they do not always provide access to a character's subjectivity by default. He suggests that rather than thinking in terms of POV shots, we should think of them as POV structures, and consider them "in the context of the larger narrational structures of the film as a whole" (157). POV structures do allow the spectator to see what the character is paying attention to, from which it is in some cases possible to infer the character's thoughts, but "the mind is not always consumed by what the eyes see, and what the eyes see does not itself tell us what the mind thinks" (ibid).

ALLEGIANCE

The concept of allegiance concerns the spectator's moral evaluation of characters based on a variety of factors, such as attitudes related to nation, gender, class and ethnicity. Not every character in a given film lends itself to allegiance forming, as it "depends upon the spectator having what she takes to be reliable access to the character's state of mind, on understanding

the context of the character's actions, and having morally evaluated the character on the basis of this knowledge" (84). This moral evaluation can, for instance, take on the form of spectatorial anger or outrage sparked by a character's action, thus causing the spectator to categorize the action as undesirable, and "being affected—affectively aroused—by this categorization" (ibid). This is how the spectator's moral structures are developed, and within this structure, the spectator organizes and ranks the characters by moral preference.

"The phenomenon of allegiance is distinct from those of recognition and alignment in that it is an emotional as well as a cognitive response" (187). This means that in order to become allied with a character, the spectator must first perform a moral evaluation of the character, resulting in the character's traits being deemed morally desirable, or at least preferable over other characters. Based on this evaluation, the spectator's attitude towards the character manifests itself as either sympathy or antipathy, eliciting emotional responses to the character's situation.

The moral dimensions of the construction of character are what the spectator bases her own moral evaluation on, and therefore these are crucial for the level of allegiance. Character action is one of the most important mechanisms when it comes to moral orientation, as the way major characters treat minor characters, for example, is very telling of their morals. Positive evaluations are obviously more likely to be elicited when characters exhibit positive behavioral traits, like kindness and generosity. Similarly, a character's behavior towards pets is something most people feel very strongly about, and the nature of this will also affect the spectator's moral evaluation (190). Iconography is another element which factors in the moral system of a film. The physical features of a character can in some cases reveal something about their moral status; typical heroes and villains, for example, are often distinct from each other with regards to body type and facial features (192-193). And finally, music is also an important moral determinant.

Apart from these cinematographic devices, linguistic techniques are also employed in film in order to help establish a moral system, such as sociolects, morally loaded epithets, and proper names with symbolic meanings (193). Furthermore, we cannot disregard the influence of star personae when it comes to morality either, as Smith argues that "we should acknowledge that the process by which we evaluate characters and respond to them emotionally is often framed or informed by our evaluation of the star personae of the stars who perform these characters" (ibid).

Each film has a 'system of values' – Smith dubs this the text's 'co-text', and it is within the moral limits of this co-text that the spectator condones or condemns the actions and behavior of the character. Relative desirability is a key concept here, as a character may be acting in a

way that is repugnant and completely unacceptable according to our external standard of morality, while the same behavior is considered preferable within the co-text of the film; a lesser evil, so to speak (194-195). The co-text of many contemporary works is "'invisible' in so far as it conforms to the values of the social world in which we actually live" (195), but there are also plenty of films which have a co-text that clashes with the predominant standard of morality. However, the assignation of morality to a character's appearance and actions has a pitfall, as every person's moral system may differ from the next, which can give rise to different interpretations. We must thus rely on the fact that the majority of spectators share schemata, allowing a normative reading to form the descriptive standard (196-197).

One of the classic moral structures used in film is the Manichaean structure, which "articulates an unqualified opposition of good and evil values [… and it] is often identified with the melodrama" (197), but this has since been expanded to include a range of other genres, such as westerns, horror movies, thrillers, etc. (206). Characteristic of this moral structure is the embodiment of 'evil', antagonistic traits in one or more physically discrete agents, or villains, whose intentions are to thwart the goals of the 'positive hero' (203); "the Manichaean structure is founded upon characters defined by either wholly negative or wholly positive attributes, eliciting an uncomplicated sympathy or unqualified aversion" (209).

It is important to note, however, that far from all Hollywood films are organized around this moral structure which revolves around a dichotomy between good and evil. A moral structure which is increasingly more common in Hollywood film is one Smith terms the 'graduated moral structure', which "is characterized by a spectrum of moral gradations rather than a binary opposition of values" (207). In this moral structure, the characters cannot be categorized solely as good or evil, but instead they embody traits from both poles. This moral structure contrasts the Manichaean structure by combining culturally positive and culturally negative traits into physically distinct agents, making them more 'believable' as representations of human agents (209).

Together, the Manichaean and the graduated moral structure comprise the 'classical moral system'. They require – the Manichaean structure is in fact contingent on – moral resolution and a moral centre; "[m]oral resolution entails that the text makes the moral status of the characters clear (if not in the course of the narrative, then at its end, as in the mystery film). A moral centre entails a locus of positive moral value" (213). These principles in combination with the two moral structures make up the boundaries surrounding the value systems of typical Hollywood films (214). Some modes of filmmaking, however, challenge these classical moral

systems by undermining their requirements; they "refuse moral resolution" (214) by making the characters' moral state unclear.

The moral structure of a film is complemented narrationally by moral orientation as described earlier. However, in some cases the moral orientation can challenge the reliability of the narration by "stretching the classical conventions to or even beyond breaking-point" (216). While the moral structure may be the same in different film genres, the moral orientation can differ; the mystery film typically has a dynamic pattern of moral orientation, where the spectator's construction of moral structure is undermined at the very end, whereas the classical stage melodrama has a much more stable pattern of moral orientation (ibid).

Another factor which influences the moral orientation of a film is a lack of narrational depth. When a character is represented with subjective opacity, it hinders the spectator's access to the character's inner state and psyche, making it all the more challenging to interpret their moral valence. Furthermore, when events within the narrative suddenly overturn the assumptions and evaluations the spectator has relied upon up until this point, it forces her to reread events and interpret gaps in the narrative, muddling the spectator's moral evaluation thus far (221-222).

Smith thus draws the conclusion that "alignment alone does not result in allegiance. […] it is not the mere fact of being aligned with a character that makes us sympathetic to them, so much as what is revealed to us through that alignment. […] what counts is what is revealed by the alignment, not the mere fact of it" (222-223). Our moral evaluation of a character's actions and behavior determines what we perceive to be her subjectivity, and conversely, our perception of the character's subjectivity affects our moral evaluation of her.

The Antihero

In her work *The Antihero in American Television*, Margrethe Bruun Vaage delves into the concept of the antihero and the question of what makes the spectator like and sympathize with characters who are morally bad and display repulsive behavior, when we, according to Murray Smith, sympathize with those we deem to be morally good. Vaage's theoretical framework is based on cognitive film theory and media psychology, and she disputes the dominant idea in film theory that moral evaluation is based on deliberate, reflective thinking; Vaage instead argues that the spectator's moral evaluation of characters is primarily reliant on moral emotions (Vaage 1).

Vaage thus presents a division of moral judgment as being either intuitive or rational, intuitive referring to a pre-reflective judgment based on a gut reaction, and rational covering deliberate and reflective reasoning (2-3). This dual-process model of moral judgment is proposed as a means of explaining how the spectator engages with the antihero. In traditional cognitive film theory, as represented by Murray Smith's structure of sympathy, "the spectator's engagement with the characters on-screen is grounded in an assessment of the moral structure of the film" (4). However, Vaage points out a few flaws in Smith's level of allegiance, the first one being that while Smith emphasizes the importance of moral evaluation, he fails to explain what moral evaluation actually entails.

Vaage points to the fact that Smith denies a systematic relation between alignment and allegiance, as the spectator is not always encouraged to form a sympathetic allegiance with the character she is aligned with, suggesting that moral evaluation is "an independent, perhaps even rational deliberation" (6). Vaage's counterargument is that the character with whom the spectator is aligned influences her moral evaluation of the story and its characters. There are examples of antiheroes whom the spectator is not encouraged to like or sympathize with, but this is typically not the case with the more recent television series antiheroes, and, by extension, film antiheroes.

Furthermore, Vaage questions Smith's argument that iconography, music, and star personae influence the spectator's moral evaluation of a character, because this would suggest that moral evaluation is indeed not a rational evaluation, as these factors are non-moral. These aspects render Smith's concept of moral evaluation unclear: "It seems to be assumed that it is a deliberate evaluation of some kind, as it does not follow automatically from being aligned with a character; nonetheless, it is also influenced by non-moral factors, and our values when engaging with fiction are admittedly to some degree different from our real-life values" (ibid).

In spite of these theoretical inconsistencies, Smith has since the publication of *Engaging Characters* (1995) defended his claim that moral evaluation is pivotal for the process of allegiance, and he maintains that forming a sympathetic allegiance with a morally bad character is quite a rare occurrence. While this may be a more clear-cut case with the Manichaean moral structure, where the spectator typically likes the hero and dislikes the villain, the story of the antihero is often much more "morally murky", as Vaage terms it (9). Smith's concept of moral evaluation is based on moral reasoning, but Vaage argues that with the antihero, moral evaluation is much more dependent on moral emotions; it rests upon an intuitive rather than rational moral judgment, which is formed quickly and automatically (7, 13).

Vaage essentially subscribes to a view of allegiance forming which is not hinged on morality to the same capacity Smith's is. The basic idea is that when the spectator sees the character as morally good, her evaluation is influenced by non-moral factors; "[l]ow-level, automatic responses, such as empathic responses, and relatively simple feelings of liking and sympathy in a Plantingian sense, greatly influence even our long-term sympathetic allegiances. This is the correct causal relation between these types of spectator responses" (11). According to Vaage, any sympathetic or antipathetic allegiance with a character usually rests on moral intuitions and emotions, rather than rational deliberation (15). In the following, Vaage's key terms in relation to the antihero will be elucidated, as they are the narrative strategies used to facilitate sympathy with the antihero.

Fictional Relief and Reality Checks

One of the reasons why Vaage argues that we tend to base moral evaluation more so on intuition rather than reasoning is because reasoning is cognitively demanding, and we are cognitive misers (22). Most of us watch television and films because we wish to relax and be entertained, so it is highly unlikely that we would want to engage in a strenuous activity like consciously monitoring our own moral responses while doing so. Vaage's claim is that the spectator thus circumvents rational, moral judgment, and she terms this 'fictional relief': "A fictional relief can be defined as the relief from fully considering the moral and political consequences of one's engagement with fiction, from considering whatever relevance the fiction film may have for the real world, and from whatever realistic basis the narrative has" (23).

In order to enjoy antihero narratives and relax at the same time, the spectator must grant herself fictional relief, as it means turning a blind eye to a range of principles which would make the film otherwise morally unacceptable, such as unjustifiable killings, or a lack of regard

for the legal system. However, Vaage does not believe that circumventing rational evaluation is the only thing that makes antihero narratives enjoyable. She suggests that "part of the attraction of these series is that at regular intervals they confront us as spectators" (25).

Vaage terms a confrontation of this sort a 'reality check', because it forces the spectator to consider the consequences of the antihero's actions, had they taken place in the real world. Reality checks leave the spectator in a state of conflict as she has evaded rational moral evaluation thus far, but is now confronted with the uncomfortable reality of the antihero's actions. Intuitively, we enjoy watching antiheroes go about their immoral business when it is still morally preferable to other characters within the fictional world, but rationally, we disagree with what they do – and then we intuitively find it unpleasant to watch "the antihero kill with glee" (26). Reality checks are often unpleasant and serve as a reminder to the spectator that she is rooting for someone who would not be deserving of such support in the real world, and this can cause the spectator to momentarily drift out of sympathy with the character. Hence, the spectator's sympathy has the ability to fluctuate and is not completely unwavering once established. However, "once the narrative moves on, she tends to bounce back into sympathetic allegiance" (58).

Partiality, Familiarity, and Pleas For Excuses

Many antihero narratives employ the moral code of "loyalty with those in one's own group" (39), also known as 'partiality'. While the antihero may appear to be amoral, she does follow a moral code in terms of loyalty toward her own, and in turn, "the spectator tends to become partial to the antihero's perspective through alignment" (ibid). Antihero narratives which employ this moral code rely on it to increase the spectator's fondness for the "morally flawed antihero" over time, but "once she has sided with someone, the spectator is a stubborn sympathizer" (ibid). Dedication and loyalty toward her family is typically one of the driving forces of the antihero, and it is also a very attractive character trait, proven to enhance the spectator's sympathy with her (40). When the antihero is loyal and devoted to her own, it sets her apart as morally preferable over any character who is not, and the spectator is partial to her perspective.

We tend to be biased toward those we love, like family members and friends, typically favoring them over strangers. In the same vein, knowing about a character's background and motivations has a great effect on our moral evaluation of her: "We tend to show favouritism toward the ones we know well and love, and we feel morally warranted in doing so" (41). One of the ways we become familiar with someone is by seeing them often, and this is where the

concept of 'familiarity' comes into play. Being exposed to characters in fictional narratives over longer periods of time makes us feel like we know them intimately, they become familiar to us, and this familiarity then makes us evaluate the character more favorably (42-43, 46). Familiarity with a character also allows the spectator to turn a blind eye to any moral flaws the character might portray: because we like her and know her well, we cut her some slack, like we would a friend (45, 58). The spectator's ability to forgive and forget ultimately comes down to partiality and familiarity, as knowing a character well makes the spectator partial to their view, in a sense considering them one of her own group.

While familiarity plays an important role with regards to sympathetic allegiance, the spectator actually only needs a glimpse of a character in order to form a gut opinion of them. Preceding the rational processing of information which over time turns into familiarity is the concept of 'affective primacy', functioning as an instant flash of affect before we even know the character in question; either we like or dislike said character the instant we see her (43). Due to this, we can typically identify 'bad guys' and 'good guys' rather quickly.

Another narrative device which is used to foster sympathy with the antihero is the presentation of contrast characters. Vaage argues that "what makes the spectator perceive these contrast characters as morally worse is often merely the fact that the spectator is aligned narratively with the antihero. Sometimes these contrast characters are actually morally worse, but often they are only perceived this way" (47). In many cases, the antihero will actually be morally worse, if we reflect deliberately and rationally on the situation, but Vaage's argument is that alignment still causes us to sympathize with the antihero, simply because we know her best and are partial to her perspective.

Finally, an important reason why the spectator sympathizes with the antihero is due to the complexity of her character. She may have a morally bad side, but this is made up for by her "deeply human" and positive sides (ibid). This is known as the narrative making 'pleas for excuses' on behalf of the character, and it is "a prominent way through which alignment systematically influences allegiance" (ibid). For instance, we can excuse or justify a character's morally bad behavior if she does it for her family, or if something terrible or unjust has happened to her, causing her to behave this way. Thus, the concepts of partiality, familiarity and pleas for excuses all work together to create a sympathetic allegiance between the spectator and the morally bad antihero.

Suspense and Empathy

When a character is placed in a stressful situation doing something morally wrong, the spectator is meant to feel suspense for the character (64). Traditionally, suspense is "defined as grounded in moral evaluation" (ibid), but feelings of suspense are not always moral. Vaage therefore argues that various spectator responses must be kept apart in order to clarify how moral evaluation relates to feelings of suspense. Typically, only the notion of sympathy, sometimes also referred to by the vague term identification, has been used to describe the relation between morality and suspense. However, Vaage emphasizes the importance of differentiating between "*sympathizing*, *liking* and forming a fully blown *sympathetic allegiance* with a character" (ibid, emphasis original), and she takes this differentiation one step further by arguing that the terms sympathy and empathy should also be kept apart, contrary to the view of traditional cognitive film theorists like Carl Plantinga (ibid).

Vaage divides empathic responses into two categories: a low-level automatic reflex called 'embodied empathy', and a more cognitively demanding effort termed 'imaginative empathy'. Embodied empathy refers to the automated mechanisms we activate almost unconsciously when watching someone do something, such as involuntarily tensing up and moving our feet as if to brake when a character in a film is about to run their car into something. Imaginative empathy, on the other hand, is a deliberate effort which entails imagining what the character is going through and coming up with alternative actions for the character to take, or even "feeling like coaching [her]" (65). This division of empathy is comprised of a fast and a slow response, just as the dual-process model of morality.

According to Vaage, the notion sympathetic allegiance should not be taken as a "starting point in an analysis of the role played by moral evaluation in feelings of suspense" (ibid). Rather, she argues that a sympathetic allegiance is built up gradually, going from the more low-level, more automatized response of liking to sympathizing, before finally forming a long-term sympathetic allegiance. However, as previously mentioned, our sympathy for a character can fluctuate, and in some cases then, suspense is used as a means of encouraging the spectator to maintain her sympathy for the antihero: "just as you might think you have definitely fallen out of sympathy with the antihero (e.g., after a particularly severe reality check), they (i.e., the creators) pull you back in. And suspense is one very effective way of pulling you back in" (65-66).

Suspense is such an effective tool that it can even cause the spectator to empathize with immoral characters, at least locally in the narrative. In this sense, empathic engagement can be

amoral, as the spectator is able to empathize with a character she does not find morally preferable, like a villain, from watching them suffer. This moral inversion of suspense is effectuated by empathy because "both empathy and morality make use of automatic, low-level responses" (74). While we are able to empathize with someone deliberately in an effort to understand her, more often empathy is an automatic, low-level response, simply mirroring a person's emotions or movements. The corresponding dual-process of morality works similarly: we rely on our low-level, automated intuitive and emotional responses more so than we do the deliberate reflections, and "it is thus likely that empathizing with someone can – and will – influence our moral evaluation of the situation that person finds herself in" (ibid). Feeling with the villain or having 'sympathy for the devil', however, is usually only designed to have local effects in a film. Moral inversion of suspense occurs most easily with the antihero whose view the spectator is partial to and narratively aligned with, and in this case it is used as a narrative strategy to enhance sympathy with the antihero.

Moreover, moral inversion of suspense has another important function: it drives the narrative forward. While watching suspenseful sequences focused on a character who is not morally preferable, the spectator feels suspense on behalf of the character when it seems unlikely that she will succeed in her immoral endeavors. Regardless of her immorality, the spectator wants her to succeed and is rooting for her, as achieving her goal will drive the narrative forward. The spectator has external narrative desires regarding the development of the story, and these may differ from her character desires, depending on the type of narrative. While narrative desires may not be something the spectator is consciously focused on, it might become evident for her if her narrative expectations are not met: "If the tragedy has an artificially induced happy ending, I might dislike the film because it did not give me what I desired" (75). In relation to suspense, narrative desires become evident in that we wish for the story to be engaging, and suspenseful sequences are enjoyable. So much so that "[i]t is often the case that the spectator wishes for unfortunate events to befall even liked characters in fiction because it makes a good story" (76).

Film Violence

The Appeal of Fictional Violence

Most people will agree that violence is not a very pleasant thing to watch. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of violence in cinema, which inevitably reflects a general interest in the topic. So what is it about seeing violent episodes unfold on the screen that appeals to us? In his work *The Fascination of Film Violence*, Henry Bacon points out that humans have historically been fascinated by violence, from crowds watching public executions and practices of torture, to suffering being made a spectacle in art (Bacon 25-27). Philosophers have surmised that we, when we are not in peril ourselves, derive satisfaction from watching others in pain, and modern cultural critics theorize that it can answer to the needs of making oneself more numb, or acknowledging "the existence of the incorrigible" (26). Watching violence has "its morbid, partly sadistic, partly masochistic fascination" (ibid).

Fictional violence in film thus allows us to watch this object of morbid fascination without having to face any of the consequences that it would otherwise entail in the real world, which can cause anxiety. Furthermore, fictional violence provides us with the ability to identify with all parties involved in the violent act, not just the victim, but also the perpetrator and any potential onlookers, and "[t]his game of shifting alignments can be highly satisfying as it creates tantalizing tensions and their exhilarating releases" (25). Bacon also points to the fact that "[r]epresentations offer things in compact, digestible forms" (27), meaning only certain features of the real world are showcased. Even if we do not believe in "pure unselfish love" or "clearly defined good and evil", we find satisfaction in watching representations of these concepts. We like to watch fictional people ignore the "constraints that our society imposes on us" (ibid) because it allows us to forget about these constraints in our own lives momentarily. For instance, we thoroughly enjoy watching someone who has been wronged get their revenge, and we sometimes find ourselves rooting for criminal and immoral characters to succeed in their unlawful endeavors.

However, depending on a range of factors such as general life experience, everyone reacts differently to fictional violence, and some prefer to avoid it entirely. But generally, the uncanny allure of fictional violence tempts many to watch films they find provoking, unpleasant, and even disturbing (29-30). The reasons for watching fictional violence in spite of this are many, some of which include the aforementioned possibility of "detaching oneself from everyday life concerns [… and] satisfying imaginary needs such as romance, excitement, and heroism" (30), but also the possibility of allowing oneself to process certain feelings without the

anxiety of watching the catalyst event happen in the real world (30-33). The appeal of fictional violence is thus rather comprehensive in spite of its brutal nature.

The Morality of and Motivations for Violence

Different types of violence are resorted to in different situations, and some types of violence are viewed as more morally acceptable than others, or at the very least more rationally founded. "Irrespective of the moral considerations involved, violence can be deemed to be rational when it is used as a means for reaching a goal" (22). Violence of this sort is referred to as 'instrumental violence', and it is characterized by being exercised in cases where someone is posing a threat to or is in the way of the agent's interests. In some social contexts, violence can be viewed as acceptable or even desirable.

Most violent characters in action films have rather clear motivation for their violent behavior. But even when this is not the case, so long as this behavior is "not depicted as down-right psychotic, the spectator will probably seek to construct some kind of an explanation in terms of more familiar ways of categorization" (23). An example of this is crude stereotyping, whereby the fears provoked by the violence is projected on otherness. However, when there is no apparent motive or rationality behind a character's violence, and said character is simply disturbed, we have a hard time assigning it to any specific form of otherness, and thus find it harder to cope with. Most of the time the film will provide an explanation for the madness in the end, which comes as a relief to the spectator, but sometimes there is no logic or sense behind it, and this is frightening. Perpetrators of random violence do, however, also have a way of fascinating and drawing the spectator in: "A person who discards all norms and constraints is in a sense authentic" (ibid).

'Expressive violence' is neither fully rational nor irrational, but somewhere in between, and it is "typically motivated by a wrongdoing which in the mind of the perpetrator has grown to the proportions of metaphysical injustice" (24). This type of violence can occur as a form of protest against prevailing societal demands that make the perpetrator feel anxious and power-less. However, taking the law into one's own hands "goes against the fundamental principle according to which punishment for evil acts must be executed solely by prescribed social insti-tutions" (ibid). When we are not allowed or able to act on our impulses, we will often fantasize about doing so, whether that impulse is sexual or violent. Similarly, we can enjoy fiction por-traying these suppressed fantasies, as they are "detached from real life concerns" and reflect "certain socially and even universally shared concerns on a more general level" (24-25).

When it comes to the act of violence itself, some acts are harder for us to watch than others and certainly more difficult to sympathize with. Margrethe Bruun Vaage argues that rape is one of the absolute worst acts of violence for the spectator to watch, as it elicits moral disgust beyond that of gory murder. She suggests that this is the case as

> we find morally disgusting those trespasses where we find that the perpetrator behaves subhumanly, where we perceive the perpetrator's acts to be unnatural and impure in some way, and where the moral trespass has an associative link to some of the things that elicit core disgust. (Vaage 138)

The relation between moral disgust and rape comes down to two things. Firstly, the basic emotion of core disgust can be elicited from such things as bodily fluids, and sex is a "carnal act that saliently involves the transfer of bodily fluids" (137). Secondly, the sexual act is combined with a violation of moral norms in the form of non-consent, taking away the victim's autonomy and thus violating the natural order. In conclusion, the "[m]oral disgust triggered by rape makes the rapist categorically repulsive" (140).

While western legal systems do administer harsher punishment for murder than rape, and while we do generally agree that not many fates are worse than death, rape showcased in cinema typically produces much stronger spectator reactions than murder. One explanation for this asymmetry between fiction and real life could be that rape is more taboo, and more emotionally volatile than murder. However, Vaage also suggests that in fictional contexts, rape is perceived to be a worse moral trespass than murder because we evaluate these trespasses based on intuitions and moral emotions rather than reflection, as we rely on these to a much higher degree in fiction (141). Upon reflection on harm and fairness in the real world, we will most likely come to the conclusion that murder is the ultimate violation of a person's freedom, but in fiction we relieve ourselves of our perceived obligation of morally reflecting on harm and fairness, and instead react intuitively – and moral disgust intuitively evokes stronger reactions (143).

Rape in fiction has narrative functions as well, Vaage argues. On the one hand, it serves to separate the bad guys from the worse, especially in antihero narratives. A character who rapes is not someone we can easily sympathize with; on the contrary, rape is used to mark someone as a contrast character, or simply antagonistic. On the other hand, rape "is used as a justification for vigilante revenge, and to make the spectator applaud this" (127-128). When the

spectator sees a fictional character getting raped, she desires revenge for the character, and any violence exerted on her behalf is justified, as the spectator longs to see the perpetrator punished. In a fictional context, we are willing to turn a blind eye to the feelings of anger evoked by murder, so long as we are aligned with and partial to the perpetrator's perspective. However, "feelings of moral disgust are harder for us as spectators to counteract" (141), and hence we are typically not encouraged to sympathize with rapists – very, very few human traits can mitigate the act of rape.

Aesthetic Violence

Some films are able to "not only emphasize violence but manage to present it in a fashion that celebrates it by making it attractive" (Kupfer 14). While violence is typically condemned in the real world, films are able to portray violence in a way that can make it seem almost positive by 'aestheticizing' it. As a baseline, violence in film is aesthetic in the sense that it is "framed, shot from a particular point of view and camera angle, lighted in a distinctive way, held for a certain period of time, and located within a sequence of other shots or scenes" (ibid). But violence can be aestheticized beyond this basic aestheticization of cinematography as well, as its representation differs depending on the effects the film is trying to achieve. For instance, violence can be represented as realistic, as is often the case in war films or standard fare westerns.

According to Joseph H. Kupfer, cinematic violence can be arranged according to two aesthetic modes: the conceptual and structural meaning of violence, and the formal-composition of scenes. The first mode focuses on the use of violence as adding meaning to and making sense of the story of a film, which can happen in three different ways. The first is when a shot, scene or sequence of violence is used in a 'symbolic-figurative' manner, meaning that it functions symbolically: "When cinematic violence is employed as a symbol, it can embody something that is related to it – directly or apposite" (15). Violence in film can also be used metaphorically, or as a form of metalepsis, metonymy, paradox or oxymoron (16). The second way in which violence can add meaning to a story is when it is used 'structurally', shaping "the incidents of the movie story into an organic whole" (17). The third and final aesthetic use of violence with regards to meaning is that of 'narrative meaning', which "encompasses the film as a whole, but now in terms of thematic content rather than formal unity" (18) as is the case with the structural meaning.

The second aesthetic mode, the formal-composition of scenes, entails the specific composition of the violent movie action. Kupfer also divides this mode into three different categories which will be elaborated in the following. While the first group of aesthetic strategies pertains to the meaning of the story, this one "addresses the way the aesthetic qualities of images are accentuated, usually through technological sleight-of-hand" (19), attending to such qualities as color saturation and the style and form of the characters' movement. The focus of these categories is violence carried out between individuals, not caused by something like natural disasters or explosions, and it is concerned with visually pleasing violence that is mostly removed from realism.

MEGA-VIOLENCE

The notion of mega-violence is the least aesthetic category of the three, as it refers to "great quantities or accumulations of violence" (ibid), and a large amount of blood spill does not in itself equate to visual aesthetics. Kupfer does, however, point out that aesthetic aspects can be found in repetition, and that

> [v]oluminous violence can make an artful impact. Packing enormous carnage densely into a rapid sequence of shots or a short span of scenes can have an exhilarating effect. The cascade of wounding, blood-letting and killing can create the aesthetic forcefulness of the overwhelming, analogous to the way an avalanche of snow or recurring towers of tidal waves appear overpowering. (Kupfer 20)

In order to further enhance its aesthetic effect, this overwhelming amount of violence can be combined with a percussive rhythm, for instance by showing the violence in increasingly bigger waves, or by escalating it throughout the film (ibid). Furthermore, characteristic of this type of violence is that the characters behave relatively realistically.

HYPER-VIOLENCE

Hyper-violence is aesthetic in the sense that it "plays with the sensuous surface of human destruction in visually compelling ways" (21). With hyper-violence, the nature of the characters' behavior is also relatively realistic in the sense that their actions would not be impossible for ordinary people to emulate, but the consequences of the violent actions are far from realistic,

and these are what comprise the aesthetic aspect: “The slow-motion severing of an arm or the spreading of pulsing blood can only be produced by means of camera-work or film-editing. The violence can be considered “hyper” because it is above and beyond the simple excesses of realistic representations (including those found in mega-violence)” (ibid). The images of death and blood spill are intensified and exaggerated beyond realism, e.g. in the form of excessive blood sprays and spatter arranged in a visually pleasing and impressive manner.

SURREALISTIC VIOLENCE

This final form of aesthetic violence is the least realistic of them all – in fact, it is surrealistic, as the actions of the characters “defy the laws of gravity as well as the limits of the human body. Moreover, bloodshed and bodily trauma are elided in favor of graceful movement and creative playfulness” (22). The violence bears much closer resemblance to beautiful aerial dance rather than ugly and brutal fighting, as it is stylized and supernatural. The martial arts film is known to be the paradigm of the aesthetic of surrealistic violence, as the fighters in these films soar, gyrate and somersault in a superhuman display of skills.

An important narrative aspect of surrealistic violence is its lack of injury and gore, and “[a]s a concomitant of the absence of injury and gore, the combatants naturally show little pain while giving and taking an enormous number and variety of blows” (24). Furthermore, the match is almost always even, meaning the fighters are faced with opponents who match their level of skill relatively well, and finally, the protagonist usually acts in self-defense and is rarely the aggressor, justifying her violence (ibid). In summary, “surrealistic movie violence favors the fantastic and lyrical instead of the macabre or chilling” (25).

The Sublime in Cinema

Immanuel Kant is considered the philosophical father of 'the sublime', describing it in the sense of "shape-less mountain masses towering one above the other in wild disorder, with their pyramids of ice, or… the dark tempestuous ocean" (Freeland 65). Following the Kantian notion, scholars describe the sublime not only as a reflective encounter with the grandeur of nature, but also an emotional experience with art.

In her chapter "The Sublime in Cinema" in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, Cynthia A. Freeland makes the first thorough attempt at connecting the Kantian concept with film and cinema (65-66). In this, Freeland examines, discusses and documents the processes, cognition and other elements that combined constitute the term as a cinematic concept within cognitive media theory discourses. Her approach focuses on the aesthetic qualities, contrary to Kant's philosophical context. This study thus opts to primarily adopt Freeland's perspective and approach.

The Four Features of The Sublime

Freeland's processing of the cinematic sublime categorically establishes films within the discourse of works of art. In this regard, she considers the sublime as a description of the spectator's emotional experience with a work of art. She refers to 'the sublime object', which, in regard to cinema, can be an entire film or a scene (66). She presents the sublime as an analytical device consisting of 'four features of the sublime', which describe an emotional experience in four stages: (1) "a characteristic conflict between certain feelings of pain and pleasure" (66); (2) something ""great" and astonishing" (67); (3) something "that evokes ineffable and painful feelings, through which a transformation occurs into pleasure and cognition" (68); (4) something that prompts moral reflection.

THE FIRST

In a more descriptive manner, the sublime object is foremost represented by "a characteristic conflict between certain feelings of pain and pleasure, it evokes what Burke labels "rapturous terror"" (66). The sublime, cinematic or otherwise, is as a concept generally complex, and as such the experience consists of conveying a set of mixed feelings. Therefore, while being associated with emotions such as terror, fear and dread on a negative spectrum, it also pertains to a spectrum of positive emotions, such as exhilaration, excitement, pleasure, and awe. Freeland

stresses that “so long as we are safe, the ineffable, great element before us in the awesome object evokes a certain intellectual pleasure of astonishment or elevation” (ibid), which translates to a reaction based on deliberate reflection.

Kant philosophically describes this reaction as the person’s (spectator’s) “awareness of features of our moral selves” (ibid), whereas Burke associates it with “the power of the artist’s creative mind” (ibid). In any case, they connect the complex and contradictory aspects of the sublime with some kind of awareness and decision. Freeland adopts a perspective that places itself between these starting points, she demonstrates this by referring to the film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). However, as the example is rather dated and to avoid falsely implying that the sublime exclusively refers to antique silent films, this outline will be exemplified by means of a more contemporary example.

Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993), starring Liam Neeson, Ralph Finnes, and Ben Kingsley, represents the fusion between the terrors of humanity at its worst, and the aesthetic brilliance of a cinematic storyteller. The artistic aspect of shooting the film in black-and-white effectively conveys authenticity through the retro aesthetics, which is only supported by, e.g., magnificent lighting and enthralling and stirring shots. One of these is in the scene where Neeson’s character Oskar Schindler thinks it is snowing, only to realize that it is in fact ashes raining from the sky, coming from the mass burning of Jews in the concentration camp. The baffling beauty of the snowlike downpour and the horrific knowledge of what it really is create a contrast that is both horror-striking and very powerful, which offers a “sustained experience of heightened feelings” (Freeland 66), being painful and disturbing while simultaneously creating awed pleasure, both narratively and visually.

Another example is a lengthy scene taking the spectator on a tour through the depiction of a cascade of emotions, which at one point becomes almost intolerable. It showcases immense horror and despair, as Jewish women are forced into a compact space resembling a communal shower, the showerheads in the ceiling explicitly implying gas-chamber in this context. Close-ups emphasize the women’s claustrophobic physical proximity and their facial expressions the increasing paranoia and helplessness. This is amplified by the sound of a deafening choir of moaned anguish, which, combined with the resonating acoustics of the porcelain tiled room, audiovisually conveys unbearable and excruciating anxiety. The scene reaches its crescendo as the faucets are turned on, but the paralyzing anxiety is replaced with diametrically contrasting relief as water washes over the women, instead of gas. The strong emotional power combined with the outstanding technical beauty and exalting cinematography aesthetics, in the scene and

Schindler's List in general, achieves the conveyance of mankind at its worst in a way that is simultaneously emotionally excruciating but absolutely visually pleasing.

THE SECOND

The second feature of the sublime elevates the experience with a great, powerful and astonishing element: something that is essentially overwhelming (66-67). In combination with the cinematographic aesthetics in *Schindler's List,* the climax of the narrative plays into the characteristics of the third feature; as Oskar Schindler, initially recognized as a Nazi sympathizer and collaborationist, turns renegade and exploits the resources available to him, by means of his factory and status, and ventures to liberate as many Jews as possible. One of the most glaring demonstrations of overwhelming features is Schindler's heartfelt sorrow, regretting not being able to save even more people in the end. The film's ending is particularly great, astonishing and powerful as it provides the authentic account of the impact of Schindler's actions on his own life and of the lives of the group referred to in real life as 'Schindler's Jews'. Schindler was divorced and went bankrupt from providing for the Jews during and after their liberation. The end scene shows the descendants of 'Schindler's Jews' paying tribute to the grave where he was buried in Jerusalem by their forefathers. The power elicited by a former Nazi buried in the spiritual Jewish capital is incontrovertibly astonishing and breathtakingly stirring.

THE THIRD

The third feature constitutes "ineffable and painful feelings, through which a transformation occurs into pleasure and cognition" (68), which conveys that something about the sublime object's superior greatness must be painful and thus a struggle for the spectator to take in. This stage in the experience of the sublime causes the mind to fight to move on from the negative and painful spectrum of feelings, by considering the sublime in the aspects of an object and its artistic qualities rather than the emotional aspects, thus creating an emotional distance. Freeland describes the entire process as a "sensory and emotional experience of some sort that is so extreme, unsettling, or intense that it would be disturbing on its own. But in its context, it forces us to shift into another mental mode, cognition, or thought" (ibid). Pain is transformed into pleasure as this experience culminates in the categorization of the sublime object as something superlative, drawing attention to its aesthetic qualities combined with the horrible and painful narrative and its visualization. The shift in the cognitive process encourages the spectator to

consider the sublime object a work of art instead, through appreciation of the ineffable combination of pain and pleasure.

THE FOURTH

The fourth feature describes the culmination of the sublime experience, which according to both Freeland and Kant is the prompting of moral reflection, as Freeland explains:

> Certain aesthetic objects give rise to the central emotional conflicts of the sublime. The ineffably dreadful and painful experience grounds the pleasure of elevation, because it stimulates our human capacities to value powerful artworks. In particular, we are elevated in engaging through the work in reflection that is somehow about the pain or terror it evokes (69).

The complex experience, combining the spectator's conflicting emotions with the appreciation of art, prompts moral evaluation, which ultimately elevates the experience as a whole and a process, as sublime. Freeland describes this in the context of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* in a way that is easily transferable to that of *Schindler's List:* "The representation of so much suffering is indeed painful, but it is justified and made enjoyable within the film's expert construction and through its attitude about such suffering" (ibid). In this way, what elevates the experience with a work of art into something that is categorically sublime is the culmination prompting moral evaluation, connecting the experience of fiction with aspects of reality (69).

Addressing a Crucial Issue

An important observation that should not go unnoticed or unaddressed is that although Freeland and this study both describe the sublime experience by using films that depict extreme emotional and physical suffering as examples, this should not convey a diminishing and simplifying misconception of what elicits pain and terror. As such, extreme violence, cruelty, apathy, sorrow etc. can also generate a painful experience or, by association, negative emotions. In the same vein, terror is an interpretationally ambiguous word connoting emotional concepts such as, fear, immorality, the unethical, injustice, disgust, etc. The fact that interpretation is ambiguous and depends on the individual is supported by Freeland's description of the cinematic

sublime experience: “When we find a film sublime, we both evaluate it as an excellent, superlatively great artwork, and also are elevated by reflection in the moral issues it raises and its perspective on those issues” (83).

Violence and the Sublime

Patrick McKee's article *The Sublime and Depictions of Violence in Some Contemporary Artworks* predominantly engages the context of violence and the sublime in order to discuss two primary aspects. Firstly, the article argues that "the use of extreme violence can be understood as an artistic effort to enhance the viewer's experience of such transcendent values as personal freedom, community, and others" (McKee 19). And secondly, the article discusses the morality issues of using "extremely violent imagery to achieve artistic ends" (ibid) and the complexity of those problems, rooted in "its potential effects on our perceptions of human dignity and gratuitous suffering" (ibid). As a means to reach these ends, the Kantian concept and Freeland's four features are adapted in the article to emphasize the representation of extreme violence in contemporary artworks, such as films. Consequently, this approach presents a modified version of the four features of the sublime, specifically in a context of violence.

Four Characteristics of Representations of Violence

Number One

"Violence can be represented as boundless or formless, without boundaries or limits" (11), whereas the interpretation of the word boundless, as referring to limitless, is purposely ambiguous because: "It is important to note that we can perceive the power of a thing as unlimited in this way in aesthetic awareness, while conceptually recognizing [that] the thing's power has physical limits" (ibid). As such, "[c]haos or disorder can also be experienced as unlimited for aesthetic awareness" (ibid). Violence as formless describes "[v]ivid depiction of violence [that] fosters our perception of it as formless" (ibid), for example the explicit representation of severed limbs or bullet holes etc. Another example of formless violence can be drawn from the film *No Country for Old Men* (2007), which demonstrates that when the source of violence is unknown, the violence becomes uncontainable. The character Hannibal Lecter is another example of formless violence because his "motives [are] opaque, undecipherable" (11). These examples demonstrate violence in terms of "force without restraint". However, boundless violence can also be depicted as "aesthetic image[s] of limitless violence" (ibid), by means of "giving violence an unimaginably vast quantitative scale" (ibid). As an example, this can be represented by a large body count of mutilated victims or, on an even greater scale, by a "world of universal violence, each instance of which is explicitly depicted" (ibid).

NUMBER TWO

The second characteristic derives from the same discourse as Kant's second feature of the sublime, as it constitutes something overwhelming. In violent works of art (i.e. in this context on screen and in film) the elements of violence seek to surpass other, previous and similar types of representations of violence. As such, violence surpasses former representations by increasing its aesthetic or awesome value (awesome refers to brutality). This can be achieved with something that is considered ""cutting edge" or intractably *avant garde*" (ibid, emphasis original).

NUMBER THREE

The article introduces the dimension of morality, which is considered in terms of "the Self, its Freedom, and Humanity as a Community of persons" (9). This concept is an essential aspect of the third characteristic of violence, where, much like the third feature of the cinematic sublime, the experience is elevated by moral awareness. This part of the sublime experience requires that the spectator engages with aesthetic awareness of the world of the sublime object (i.e. poem, work of art, film, etc.) as a representation of a culture of violence, which constitutes its own sense and base for moral dimension. As such, it is possible to suggest that engagement and experience of the sublime, to some extent, requires some level of fictional relief and alignment. Additionally, another aspect of the third characteristic is stated in the article as such: "It should be noted that beauty or being beautiful is not an aspect of the sublime. A thing can clearly be aesthetically experienced as ugly and also as sublime. On the other hand, both beauty and ugliness are sublime when experienced as unimaginably intense and without limit (15)".

NUMBER FOUR

The fourth characteristic depends on the spectator's engagement in terms of emotional response, which categorically renders the distinction between a depiction of violence as merely an expression of emotions, and a depiction of violence that plays into an experience of the sublime. One way to distinguish the sublime is that the depiction of violence is elevated by aesthetic value prompting aesthetic awareness. This specific feature is distinguished by categorical emotional responses (15); determined by feelings that by Kant are labeled as either 'interested' or 'disinterested'. The interested feelings constitute our individual needs and desires, categorized by Kant as 'laconic feelings' (15)

The disinterested feelings, however, are more complex to describe. These are significantly distinguished by what Kant refers to as 'robust feelings'. They are disinterested in the way that they are "independent of all sensible interest" (ibid) and "subserving no natural purposes or goals" (ibid). As such, it is possible to say that they rather serve the purpose of an aesthetic response (16); the sublime is distinguished by disinterested feelings and by association robust feelings in this way, as robust feelings constitute awareness of the ""imperative" aspects of life" (ibid) such as moral awareness, which is a crucial aspect of the fourth feature of violence and the sublime.

The differentiation between laconic and robust feelings provides the ultimate distinction between emotions of worldly interest and the transcendent moral awareness of the sublime. The transcendent state of mind of moral awareness renders it possible for the spectator to appreciate the depiction of violence for its moral dimensions, and how these are translated and employed, and for its aesthetic value. However, as suggested by McKee, a mixed experience of the two might be the predominant norm for the average spectator. The spectator might initially engage a depiction of violence merely seeking cathartic relief from his laconic feelings, but eventually and inadvertently be put in the mind of transcendent values by the violence she witnesses on the screen (ibid).

Clarification of Underlying Concepts

Parody

The study of preceding lexicographical descriptions of parody shows that the traditional approach is based on the focus on one of six parodic features: "(1) its etymology; (2) its comic aspects; (3) the attitude of the parodist to the work parodied; (4) the reader's reaction of it; (5) the text in which parody is not just a specific technique but the 'general' mode of the work itself […]; [and] (6) its relationship to other comic or literary forms" (Rose 6). The word parody originates from the ancient Greek language and its execution in theatrics and literacy. This perspective conveys connotations to imitation, change and transformation, regarding the relationship between an original object and a new object.

Parody is an ambiguous term, conveyed by the meaning of its prefix 'para' describing both "nearness and opposition" (8). The effects of parody demonstrate both mockery, i.e. 'laughing at', and amusement, i.e. 'laughing with', representing a scale of versatile imitation and humor abilities. By association, the spectrum in terms of change ranges from slight to the extent of absurdity. As such, from an etymological perspective, parody is described as a practice of creation, relying on pre-established elements from original works. Today parody extends to any field of creation, and, as such, cinema.

A common misconception merely defines parody as a "device for comic quotation" (20) lacking gravity. Humor is a flexible entity that relies on individual preference and is thus conveyed through the aspects of several subcategories, e.g. slapstick, morbid, dry, self-deprecating, witted, exaggerated and ironic parody, which demonstrates, to an extent, the various capabilities of parody. Ultimately, the ambiguity of parodic effect is emphasized by the second of the two common qualities of parody: the first is its ability to convey comic effect, and the second is its ability to convey a serious message or meaning; notably one does not exclude the other.

One way to convey a comic effect with parody is through simulation. The praxis of simulation establishes specific expectations with the spectator, generated through recognition of elements from the original text. In a cinematic context, that may be expectations for the narrative, such as plot or character development, etc. The comic effect emerges when these expectations are not met by the narrative, due to the implementation of change (30). Irony, when it is used to temporarily conceal the true agenda, is an example of dissimulation. The employment of this narrative strategy might convey a specific attitude or mislead the spectator.

Imitation of style and form is a fundamental necessity in terms of change and transformation, because "the comic in parody will be looked for in the creation of any type of comic incongruity, be it a dissimilarity or an inappropriate similarity between texts" (32). In this way, intertextuality is a central concept regarding the comic aspects of parody. It is in this regard crucial to mention that although the comic effect and ineptness of parody depend on the spectator's recognition of the aspects of imitation as a parodic feature, external knowledge of the original and parodied object is not crucially required, according to the norm. This notion constitutes the foundation of parody and simultaneously establishes imitation as a key concept (33).

In terms of effects, it is possible to argue that parody, to some degree, depends on calculated spectator engagement and emotional response: it is pertinent that the spectator recognizes and follows the signals of parody. In this sense, the various comic aspects in combination with intertextuality can function as manipulative narrative devices and structures: resembling signals of parody guiding the spectator in accordance with the intentions of the parodist. In addition, metafiction, or a narrator, can be used as a means of communication between the parody and the spectator, to navigate the spectator in regard to following the narrative and recognizing the comic effect or the underlying message (43-45).

The signals of parody also render it possible for the spectator to infer the parodist's attitude toward the parodied object (the original object): the attitude of the parodist is categorized by two modes of attitude toward the 'targeted text': (1) mocking, or (2) admiration. The dual meaning of the prefix of the word parody, 'para', i.e., "nearness and opposition", is fundamental to the two modes. Most commonly the parodist is either deemed critical or sympathetic toward their target, which can be either the creator of or the original object. However, parody consists of and presents a dual structure, so the attitude might present itself as complex. The functions of 'mockery' and 'admiration' as styles are versatile and ambiguous; it is possible to use mockery with other intentions than to ridicule. In any case it is possible to use either style to manipulate the narrative structure and expectations in order to ultimately have a calculated effect on some part of the spectator's reaction.

A parody, as the practice of creation and transformation, presents two categorical types in terms of a parodic object: (1) specific parody, and (2) general parody. This assessment functions to define the parodic object in terms of descriptive qualities, which can be generally explained using examples within a cinematic context. Specific parody is used to describe an element: a scene, a character etc. of parody, contrary to general parody which describes an entire film as belonging to the genre of parody, by parody being integrated throughout the style, form and subject matter of the film.

Parody has often been misinterpreted as interchangeable with burlesque, plagiarism, hoax, satire, irony and pastiche. These terms, however, are merely related to parody in the way that they share similar aspects. In the context of this study, the term pastiche differs from the other associated terms, due to its correlation with parody. This relationship is demonstrated as objects of parody can be infused with elements of pastiche and objects of pastiche can be infused with parodic elements (46-53).

Pastiche

Historically, 'pastiche' is the more recent term and it has often been confused with parody, because they are of similar construct, which is based on the act of imitation. However, the expectations are different. First of all, a work of pastiche is not necessarily neither critical nor comic. As a contrast it is believed to be a work of more serious and earnest imitation, bordering on plagiarism. This also marks a contrast between parody and pastiche, as the reconstructed or transformed elements of parody must be obvious and/or recognizable. On the other hand, works of pastiche have been documented to be so close to the original that it is difficult to tell the difference (Rose 72).

Leif Ludwig Albertsen distinguishes between the two terms by reasoning that both form and content should remain unaltered and perceived in a work of pastiche, a feature describing the exact opposite being defining to the concept of parody (73). In regard to the cinematic context relevant to this study, imitating an original film while changing the genre by transforming it to match the aspects of a different genre categorizes the new film as a parody. This also explains how the comically incongruous structure and the comic effect are exclusively features of the parody, and not the pastiche.

However, it is possible to merge the two by adding pastiche elements to a work of parody, and vice versa. A grave difference is how the parody is 'allowed' inversion and transformation bordering on absurdity of the original text, whereas the pastiche does not employ that level of change. This plays into the fact that pastiche has frequently been compared to and accused of plagiarism (74). In contrast to the ridiculing abilities of parody, pastiche connotes a positive aesthetics implying sympathy for the original text, rather than critique that can be associated with parody. In this sense, Albertsen describes pastiche as "a way of reviving things from the past" (75). Cinematic pastiche is recognized by two modes: probably most commonly, pastiche can describe the act of filmmakers paying homage to the distinguished style or form of other filmmakers, or a specific film, such as using elements from other films; an example of which is Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*, which is considered a pastiche of predating American westerns. Pastiche can also be used by filmmakers as a means of attempting to perfect original elements.

Intertextuality

The Textual Concept

The philosophy behind intertextuality dates back to Roland Barthes and his philosophy arguing 'the death of the author', but in praxis the concept is introduced by Julia Kristeva, who is credited as its inventor in formality. Her thoughts on the subject develop from the idea that "a text is constructed out of already existent discourse" (Allen 35). As such, "a text is 'a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text', in which 'several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another'" (35). As it is, culture offers a number of different discourses and several ambiguous interpretations of such, but what they all have in common is their relation to tradition. An example of such relevant discourses could be literary style and form, genre, interpretation, symbolism, or thematic traditions. In this perspective, Kristeva argues that "the text is not an individual, isolated object but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality" (36).

With Kristeva's semiotic approach, the elements of meaning in a text are looked upon through a dual-perspective, where one focuses on what meaning the element generates in the text itself, and the other focuses on what she labels "the historical and social text" (37), which refers to the discoursal traditions and the text as a representation of such. In this way, "[a] text's meaning is understood as its temporary rearrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meanings" (37). Kristeva's definition and description of the concept of intertextuality focus on text as a term in the literary sense. However, postmodern approaches to intertextuality adopt the groundwork laid out by Kristeva, but have made translations of the concept in terms of any interpretation of text as a general term, regarding the production of content rather than the physical form. In this way, intertextuality can be found and the meaning it carries can be analyzed and interpreted in anything from propaganda, to film, to YouTube videos; the term carries ambiguity in more ways than one.

Postmodern Intertextuality

The description above can be exemplified by technological texts such as films, where any example of such, in their own way, consists of the rearrangement and reproduction of elements of an original work; any conceptual element exists within a discourse of tradition that refers to the

broad specter of production; it extends to every aspect of film creation, such as the construction of characters, story and plots to cinematography (Allen 181-182).

In the context of films, postmodernity presents an approach to intertextuality where the concept of film is viewed and considered in terms of the elements of its construction. Kristeva's semiotic approach suggests that any element of construction, in its own right, is defined as intertextual, even referring to the technical production of a text. However, with a postmodern perspective, the assessing approach exclusively considers elements that are sufficiently charged and carry significant meaning. As an example, simply categorizing an antihero as an archetypal character construction is not a sufficiently context-loaded observation, because it does not provide significant knowledge about the character as an entity. However, if the specific construction of said antiheroic character was based on references to an original character, in order to convey a specific atmosphere or meaning of substantial influence on the interpretation, the purposeful utilization of references would distinctively carry intertextual qualities. In this sense, the postmodern approach specifically looks at the original text and the manner in which the element has been adapted and rearranged, to convey a significant meaning or symbolism.

Intertextuality Discourses

In *The Rhetoric of Intertextuality,* Frank J. D'Angelo presents what he labels a nontraditional approach to describing concepts of intertextuality. As such, he introduces other pre-established and well-known genres to the rhetoric of intertextuality; implementing them in the discourse of intertextuality. In this way, adaption, retro, appropriation, simulation, and most importantly, in the context of this study, parody and pastiche, are categorized as different subgenres of intertextuality (D'Angelo 31).

One aspect that is made attainable through the use of these pre-established terms as subcategories of intertextuality, is represented by a dual approach to assessment provided by interpretational qualities. Through assessment of the intertextual object, it is on the one hand possible, to some extent, to make interpretational suggestions of the attitude toward the original text. On the other hand, it is subsequently possible to make interpretational suggestions of the embedded intentions toward the recipient reactions and character engagement, through the assessment of the attitude of the influential aspects and elements. In this sense, intertextuality can have a significant influence on both recognition, alignment and allegiance in the structure of sympathy, through for example parody or pastiche, due to the nature of the implications of,

references to, and adaptations made of, e.g., other characters, archetypes etc. because of the meaning they convey and the interpretation and attitude they suggest (31-47).

Intertextuality in Praxis

In conclusion of this chapter, intertextuality is a narrative device which possesses the ability to be influential to the extent of manipulative; it is a storytelling device that functions as a way of communication between the film and the viewer, through explicit and implicit intertextuality. Intertextuality is made explicit through direct quotes or obvious references and exists as an established "part of the film's aesthetic storytelling" (Haastrup 90). In this line of process, it is made obvious to the spectator, in one way or another, that a reference is being made, which is called 'use recognition' (ibid). Though it also depends on 'text recognition', it is not to the same extent that implicit intertextuality does. Implicit intertextuality exclusively depends on text recognition, and thus the spectator's "cultural frame of reference" (ibid). These references are more subtle, the film or characters do not alert the spectator of their presence. Implicit intertextuality is the more unmanageable and less obvious form, because it is not made clear, and therefore recognition on the part of the viewer is somewhat left to chance; it is entirely dependent upon the viewer's cultural frame of reference and the spectator being "familiar with the source material" (ibid), for the spectator to fully grasp the reference.

One last example of a specific type of intertextuality is what this study labels 'aesthetic intertextuality'. This makes use of cinematographic techniques and elements, such as mise-en-scéne and music, to convey a historical or cultural context, and thus provides a sense of implicit knowledge or atmosphere. As an example, it can establish the setting of the film in a specific time in history, which is demonstrated in the TV-series *Stranger Things* (2016-), with an abundance of 1980's pop-culture and other historically appropriate American references. Another example of aesthetic intertextuality is when one film recreates the technical aesthetic of another film. An example of this is Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1970) which is considered the quintessential spaghetti western in all aspects, such as the construction of stereotypical or archetypical characters, plot lines, or developments, and specific aesthetic techniques or other elements of cinematography. This study adopts a primarily postmodern perception of intertextuality in the analytical approach.

ANALYSIS

Kill Bill[1]

The Culture of Violence: The Ancient Arts of the Samurai and the Aesthetics of 1970s Kung Fu Films

Once Upon a Time in the 1970s: Disco Lights, Funky Fanfares and Bruce Lee

In *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003) the title provides an initial reference to violence. The non-suggestive imperative mood implies a violent context by hinting the premise of the plot: killing Bill. In the same sense, violence serves as a general and dominating theme from the film's paratextual outset and throughout. The paratext contains the referential context of violence provided by intertextual aesthetics and source text references; it presents four individual frames accompanied by music. The first two frames show a transition sequence with text and logo on a multicolored frosted-glass backdrop, accompanied by a groovy and funky trumpet fanfare. The third frame is a swirl of colors still accompanied by the same music and an animated text saying: 'Our Feature Presentation'.





L: (0:00:14), R: (0:00:17)





L: (0:00:28), R: (0:00:46)

[1] Unless otherwise disclosed, all images and timestamps in this chapter are extracted from *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003).

The backdrop colors resemble the reflection of electric lights behind a glass exterior, aesthetically it connotes ‘70s disco, and the music simultaneously resembles the aesthetics of film soundtracks from the same era. The third frame depicts a similar color scheme and consists of a cinema tradition, prominent in the 1970s, used to announce the end of previews and the beginning of the main event. The music and the 1970s mood convey an atmospheric reference to ‘70s Kung Fu films. This sense is emphasized by the presence of the SB crest logo, which trademarks The Shaw Brothers Studio: the primary film production company in Hong Kong from the late 1950s to mid-1980s, which popularized the Kung Fu film genre.

Martial Arts serves as a primary theme, as Kung Fu is one of the primary combat techniques performed in the film, and due to a substantially influential context of genre codes. In one sense, Kung Fu represents archetypal character traits and other classic storytelling traditions. In the same sense, honor, patience, discipline and technical skills are considered positive characteristics. In Western cinema culture, these features were culturized as defining the Kung Fu genre based on the mainstream popularity of Bruce Lee films in the 1970s, through the assessment of persistent characteristics portrayed by Lee’s protagonist characters.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (henceforth *Kill Bill*) is influenced by ‘70s Kung Fu films in several ways. This is seen in the overall appreciation for and imitation of appropriate aesthetics in combat style and technique, and in the film’s construction of characters and story. This is also seen as the film makes a parodic and pastiche tribute with pop-cultural and intertextual references to the genre with numerous intertextual elements from original ‘70s Kung Fu films. As an example, the main character is dressed as a Bruce Lee parody and wears a yellow track suit that pays homage to Lee’s last finished movie, *Game of Death* (1979), where he wore an almost identical outfit. In addition, the group of antagonists in *Kill Bill*, The Deadly Viper Assassination Squad (DVAS), represents a Kung Fu-appreciating subculture of contract killers, who not only take pride in mastering the hand-to-hand combat of Kung Fu, but also make it a point of honor to master the most elegant weapon of military history, the samurai sword aka katana.

In the optics of these aspects, it is possible to argue that the intertextual integration of Kung Fu within the atmosphere initialized in the paratext, initially encourages the spectator to indulge in appreciation for retro aesthetics. The implications of violence in the fourth frame of the paratext; the atmosphere of retro aesthetics, and nostalgia by association, make a subtle encouragement for the spectator to acknowledge, accept and thus indulge the film’s premise of violence.

Organized Crime Cultures: Eclectic Warfare and a Star Trek Reference

The fourth frame introduces the film's main theme as revenge, within a context of intertextual reference. The cited quote "Revenge is a dish best served cold" represents another culture of violence. The cited source 'Old Klingon Proverb' is a *Star Trek* reference to a culture of authoritarian humanoids, called Klingon. Although the source citation also exists as a parody, in a context of made-up quotations with no actual reference to *Star Trek*, but instead as a contextualization of parallels between Human and Klingon culture.

Klingons are characterized by prideful ruthlessness and brutality and a cultural practice of authoritarianism. In this way, violence is ingrained into their culture through values and general race traits. These features are similar to characteristics valued by the DVAS, as the group of assassins, representing a societal subculture, resembles a similar social group dynamic, as they cooperate in a totalitarian social system. In addition, the DVAS represents a culture of violence by association of organized crime referencing both the Japanese Yakuza and the Chinese Mafia. The underground world of crime conveys violence in terms of power struggles, elimination of enemies, rough conducts of business, subordination, respect, honor, lethal retaliation and settlement of debts, loyalty and social hierarchy.

This social order and everyday conduct of violence can be exemplified in the film in two ways. Firstly, the event that pretexts the plot, referred to as 'the Massacre at Two Pines', demonstrates how lethal consequences are justified as a result of insubordination and disloyalty. This also demonstrates a conduct of violence conveyed by ruthlessness and power demonstration. In the context of the plot, these acts of violence are executed as punishment conducted by the DVAS for the protagonist's (henceforth the bride) desertion and by association display of disrespect.

This event consists of the mass murder of the attendants of the bride's wedding rehearsal. In spite of enthusiastic efforts in the brutal physical attack on the pregnant bride, she is left the sole survivor of the massacre. The onslaught acts as the catalyst for the plot, story and theme, which pick up right after the bride wakes up from a four-and-a-half-year coma consequential to the assault. In the wake of realizing that her baby and her surrogate family are dead, she ventures out to take revenge on her assailants. Secondly, the katana combat between the bride and O-Ren Ishii (1:30:22-1:37:30) conveys the role played by violence in the assessment of a character's value and the level of respect she deserves from and instills in other characters. This interpretation is based on part of the dialogue in a sequence where O-Ren makes a verbal assessment of the bride and says:

> Silly Caucasian girl likes to play with samurai swords.
> You may not be able to fight like a samurai.
> But you can at least die like a samurai.
> (1:34:14-1:34:29)

The first sentence suggests O-Ren's crude stereotyping of the bride, and in combination with the second, she implies her own superiority that is partially due to a culturally and biologically inherited claim. The bride's lack of legitimate claim contests the actuality of her abilities and thus capability. In this way, O-Ren's estimation suggests, to some extent, that the bride is incapable because she is also unworthy. O-Ren maintains this assessment in the third sentence by stating the inevitable consequences of her superiority as an undeserved honor, implying that the bride should in some way be honored by dying at O-Ren's sword. This hints at the assessment of honor, prestige and exclusivity as being fundamental aspects in the samurai arts. However, in the optics of O-Ren's arrogance, she is persuaded to make a reassessment of the bride's worth and capability, when the bride finally manages to strike her (1:35:11-1:35:31). This leads to a shift in the power dynamic, when O-Ren says:

> For ridiculing you earlier…
> I apologize.
> (1:35:58-1:36:07)

The reasoning for this apology stands in a sharp contrast to O-Ren's lack of regret and sympathy for the consequences in relation to the bride's pregnancy. This suggests that according to the priorities of her mindset, combat superiority and quality of martial arts skills and weapon wielding are favored and dominating factors in assessing a person's value and in the reasoning for showing them respect. In both examples, violence is not only depicted as a reasonable and justified form of retaliation, but also an inevitable consequence.

Additionally, these examples demonstrate that respect and capability are assessed by skill superiority (in terms of combat techniques, martial arts and weapon wielding); worth and value are determined by eclectic combat capabilities, and ruthlessness and brutality, which are considered positive qualities. The film further emphasizes this as all the main characters demonstrate excellence in numerous types of fighting techniques such as: knife wielding, gunmanship, various types of martial arts and katana wielding. In this way, it is possible to argue that the

narrative implication of violence suggests that capabilities and abilities in relation to the exercise of violence are portrayed as somewhat positive character traits, in the sense that they should be somewhat positively appraised, or at least acknowledged by the spectator.

Revenge on the Rocks and a Side Order of Morality and Motivation

A culture of violence is also represented by the principal motivations for violence. In the context of revenge, violence is a representation of instrumental violence. In this sense, the conduct of violence is executed as a means to an end. The subculture of contract killers implies personal gain, in terms of money and success as a primary motivation for violence. The same goes for the organized crime culture, although its members also execute violence as a means of revenge and power demonstration. In both instances, self-defense, professionalism, and superiority are secondary motivations in support of the categorization. From an overall perspective, these represent rational motivations for violence, in the sense that 'rationality' can be based on individual and thus personal reason and logic, and thus persists as an abstract concept.

However, not all characters share these motives of resort. The personal bodyguard of O-Ren, Gogo Yubari is arguably an agent of random violence. Although her professional position might suggest otherwise, such as loyalty and necessity, the film literally presents her as the exact opposite of rational, as the bride introduces Gogo as such: "The young girl in the schoolgirl uniform is O-Ren's personal bodyguard, 17-year-old Gogo Yubari. Gogo may be young, but what she lacks in age, she makes up for in madness" (0:59:38-0:59:51).



(1:17:21)

She demonstrates this in the following scene (0:59:51-1:00:34), a flashback, where she beguiles a much older and drunk man into declaring that he desires her sexually, just to stab him in the crotch with a miniature katana. The incident unfolds due to incitement and manipulation, revealing her intentional orchestration of a violent fallout. Her inclination for violence and her manic verbal taunt when she says to the man, "How about now, big boy? Do you still wish to penetrate me?... or is it I who has penetrated you?" (1:00:22-1:00:34), translate to psychotic traits. Additionally, Gogo is an intertextual pastiche of the Japanese film *Battle Royale* (2000), in which the actress portraying Gogo, Chiaki Kuriyama, stars as the character Takako Chigusa. The significance of both characters is their parallel participation in an extremely violent fight sequence, their brutal murder, and the killing of a man by a crotch stabbing.

Gogo's psychotic traits challenge the spectator's ability to think of an explanation that allows a familiar categorization, to the extent of rendering it impossible. Without reason and simply disturbed, Gogo's actions are simultaneously difficult to categorize in terms of any specific form of otherness, which might deny the spectator relief in terms of the need for a character to be connected with some sense of logic. As a contrast, it is possible to appreciate Gogo, in terms of fascination of the uncanny, which is particularly emphasized by the contrast she portrays. In this sense, the schoolgirl appearance and delicate voice contradict her brutality and psychotic demeanor. This is also seen (1:17:22-1:20:24) when she fights the bride with a meteor hammer, as the weapon's impact and visual impression impart brutality, as a contrast to the elegance of the bride's katana. As a narrative device, Gogo's irrationality contrasts the bride's obvious motive in a way that might suggest that the bride is rational, which might encourage the spectator to perceive the bride's violence as more justified and possibly even more desirable.

However, as the bride primarily resorts to expressive violence, she does not, in theory, appear exclusively rational; as her revenge is motivated by injustice, the subsequent violence can be categorized as neither ultimately irrational or exclusively rational. While the emotional reasoning for seeking revenge is understandable, the manner in which she achieves justice does not abide by the common laws and regulations of society. Instead she indulges in the violent social structure of the assassin and mafia subculture and takes to a self-administration of justice.

In terms of the spectator's critical judgment, it is possible to suggest that indulging in the fictional depiction of expressive violence can serve as a symbolic outlet for inhibited impulses. In this sense, its function resembles that of escapism, whereby the case of expressive violence relates to suppressed fantasies unconcerned with real life morals and ethics, because fictional relief enables engagement without prejudice. In this way, one could argue that it is possibly easier to relate to expressive violence, due to its relation to emotional reasoning, which

might encourage the spectator to assess categorization through engagement of either empathy or sympathy. As such, the bride is presented as morally preferable, considering her motivation for and the morality of the violence she conducts.

The Composition of Violence: A Homage to Grindhouse Cinema and Samurai Jidaigekis

The overall composition of violence in *Kill Bill* can be categorized as mega-violence because the structure presents a comprehensive abundance of violence, which is orchestrated in a stirring escalation, where the scenes come in a percussive rhythm of waves. The film's accumulation of violence is separated by the division of the plot into chapters, resembling a narrative structure that is often seen in westerns. Following this tradition of storytelling, the film consists of scenes of explicit physical violence intertwined with non-violent scenes that provide relief in the excessive violence-exploiting structure. This structural repetition of violence provides an aesthetic aspect that is more artfully conducted. However, the composition of the individual scenes of violence demonstrates various categories. Four scenes have been chosen because they are particularly epitomic demonstrations of the three categories mega-, hyper- and surrealistic violence.

The first scene (0:05:11-0:16:08) shows the bride's combat with Vernita Green. They battle in hand-to-hand combat and with knives. The technique is touched by Kung Fu aesthetics shown by their stances and hand gestures. While the action is depicted in a fast-paced rhythm, it also conveys graceful movement. Throws and falls of bodies defying gravity and human body limits, with a lack of gory impact, following bodily collision with glass-encapsulated furniture depict creative playfulness. Symbolically it is possible to argue that the bride acts in honorary self-defense; though she is responsible for seeking out the confrontation, Vernita dies consequently to ambushing the bride with a hidden gun.

In the same vein, the second scene (1:17:12-1:20:39) showing the combat with Gogo Yubari, demonstrates an aesthetic composition of violence. The choreography imitates the subtlety, precision and elegance of martial arts films. The fighting is depicted in a suspenseful rhythm moderated by the forceful impact of Gogo's meteor hammer. The slowly building suspense of the tempo emphasizes the intensity of the meteor hammer blows. Gogo's importunate attacks contrast the more graceful aesthetics of the bride's katana technique. Symbolically, this

can convey the sense that it is not an even match and therefore, the bride acts in honorable self-defense.

The relatively realistically conducted death of Gogo is an aesthetic composition of violence that can be categorized as hyper-violence. Cinematography techniques such as framing and slow-motion are used to make an aesthetic spectacle of the meteor hammer. The camera frames it in a big close-up and synchronizes with its movements to centralize the weapon's powerful impact.



(1:20:24)

The scene generally lacks gory details, aside from the shot that shows Gogo's face after she is struck down; it is, in a way, significantly and aesthetically compelling and beautiful. The image is artfully executed, demonstrating technical excellence, which can be seen in the color scheme that creates a contrast between the darkness of her hair, the paleness of her skin and the excessive brightness of the blood running down her face like tears. Framing and exaggerated body realism such as the tears of blood convey sensuous destruction in a visually compelling way. The still resembles a high-definition art photo that conveys the sense of being far enough removed from reality that it can be appreciated for its artistic and aesthetic elements. The colorful contrast connotes intertextual references to the Italian horror film *City of the Living Dead* (1980), directed by Lucio Fulci.



***City of the Living Dead* (0:31:38)**

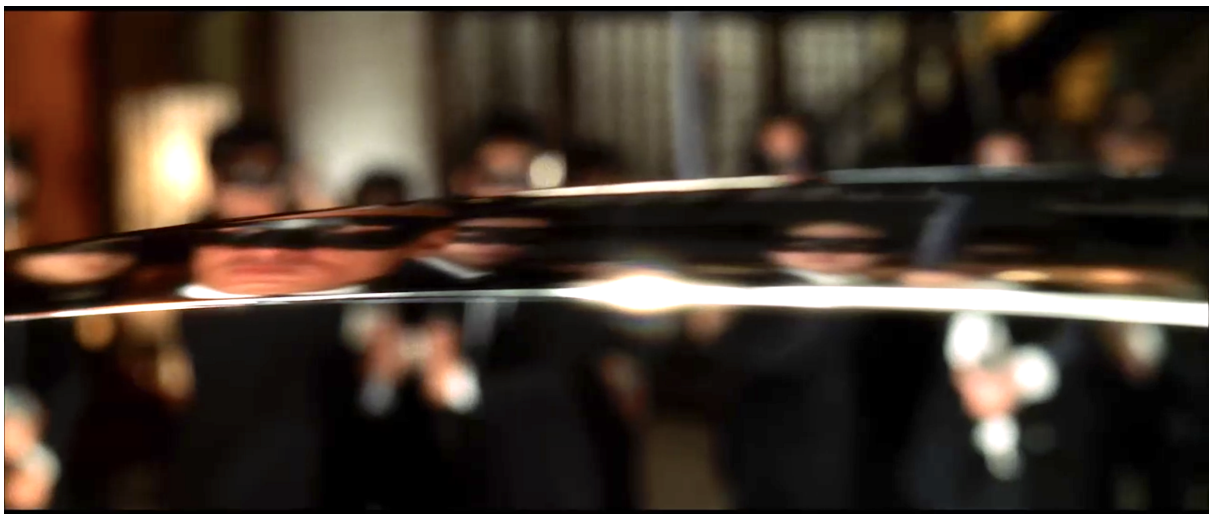
Fulci's films, bearing close resemblance to Tarantino's auteurist reputation, exploit nontraditional plots and character arcs that depend strongly on atmosphere; something Tarantino is also known to excel at. Similar to *Kill Bill*, Fulci films feature excessively gory details that seek to shock and disturb the spectator; famed for unrelentingly creepy and bizarre visualization.

The third scene (1:22:06-1:27:40) shows the battle royal at the teahouse, House of Blue Leaves, featuring the Crazy 88, who parodically wear Kato masks and overact when it comes to death screams, exaggerating the characteristically caricatured kiai sounds from Kung Fu films. The name of the teahouse is also parodic, as it is a reference to a 1971 play of the same name. The composition of the play is profusely chaotic – throughout the elements of and relationship between story, plot, and characters – in the same way that the teahouse carnage generates a chaotic atmosphere with audiovisual tools, such as the arrangement and manipulated effects of image filters, sound, and tempo. The scene depicts an abundance of violence orchestrated in sequences that are classified by distinctive artistic construction. These generate a chaotic atmosphere and a stimulation of the senses that provide a profound and hectic audiovisual experience, representing an accumulation of violence arranged in a percussive rhythm. In a sense, the aesthetics of the repetition categorizes the scene's general composition of violence as mega-violence. However, closer examination of the classified sequences also demonstrates pronounced elements of both hyper- and surrealistic violence.

In succession, the three sequences are referred to as 'the prelude to violence', 'the massacre', which consists of two parts, where the first one is in color and the following one black-and-white, and the last sequence, which is accordingly labeled 'the shadow fighting'. The prelude (1:22:04-1:22:54) is initiated as the Crazy 88, O-Ren's personal army, surrounds the bride in the teahouse. The Crazy 88 stand in a circle facing the bride in the middle; the choreography

of their movements is synchronized with the slowly increasing rhythmic crescendo of the music, in a manner that technically resembles Mickey Mousing. The elegant movements resemble surrealistic violence and represent the honor codex associated with the katana, as they portray the opponents' assessment of each other. Although the Crazy 88 initially are at a numerical advantage, the following massacre establishes it as an even match. It is possible that the numeric disadvantage of the bride encourages the spectator to feel suspense for her, which further encourages the spectator to morally disregard the abundance of violence by engagement through suspense and empathy.

Cinematographic techniques such as a crane shot, or God's eye view shot, showing the encircled bride and a shot of the bride's katana with a mirror effect, are used as narrative devices and impart aesthetic aspects of hyper-violence, while supporting the increasing intensity of the suspenseful situation.



(1:22:38)

The sequence that follows (the massacre, 1:22:55-1:26:53) presents an audiovisual counterpoint to the prelude. The music stops and the action breaks into a chaotic setting of fast movement, aggravated screams, and battle cries with a lack of background music, which creates a juxtaposing atmosphere. This is based on the combination of the chaotic battlefield and diegetic sounds of crossing blades, fighting, consequential damage, and defeated opponents counterpointed by the hollow and monotonous mood generated by the lack of non-diegetic sound like background music. The aesthetics are emphasized by a black-and-white image filter that accentuates an intense atmosphere. This conveys an audiovisual experience that resembles "[t]he cascade of wounding, bloodletting and killing" (Kupfer 20) that creates "the aesthetic

forcefulness of the overwhelming" (ibid), which in a sense is "analogous to the way an avalanche of snow or recurring towers of tidal waves appear overpowering" (ibid). In this way, this sequence can initially be categorized as mega-violence.

However, the sequence also consists of excessive defiance of gravity and human body limits. This is demonstrated when the bride jumps from the ground level to the second floor and later performs an exaggerated somersault; moves that resemble both the technique and quality of special effects associated with martial arts films. The bride conducts a style of fighting superior to human physique as she incorporates cartwheels and breakdancing, in addition to superhumanly running up a staircase railing. The grace and elegance of these moves that almost resemble aerial dancing can be classified as surrealistic violence.



L: (1:23:22), R: (1:24:03)



L: (1:23:25), R: (1:25:23)

Furthermore, the sequence depicts caricatured and graphic geyser-like blood spatter and explicitly visualizes sensuous destruction, which falls under the category of hyper-violence. This is featured as numerous graphic dismemberments, amputations of body parts, including a beheading, and the slow-motion sequence of an axe thrown at the bride, but instead of hitting its initial target, it is caught by the bride who throws it back, splitting the thrower's head in two. Additionally, the bride plucks out the eye of an assailant, cuts a Glasgow smile into another, and cleaves the torso of a third in half.

The scene presents intertextual elements of parodic and pastiche qualities referring to the Japanese jidaigeki film, *Shogun Assassin* (1980); dubbed for an English-speaking market,

the film is edited and compiled from two 1972 films (*Lone Wolf and Cub: Sword of Vengeance* and *Lone Wolf and Cub: Baby Cart at the River Styx*) from a series of films, based on a manga series called *Lone Wolf and Cub*. Both manga and film have achieved cult status. *Kill Bill* depicts violence with a grindhouse aesthetics similar to that of *Shogun Assassin*. Both films depict excessive and graphic dismemberment, characteristically caricatured geyser blood spatter, and great quantities and accumulations of violence; depicted in compositional similar sequences of fighting.



Shogun Assassin **L: (0:04:57), R: (1:17:18)**

More specifically, *Shogun Assassin* also features a sequence that depicts partial and complete cleaving of heads, and the protagonist is likewise attacked and surrounded by multiple opponents at the same time. Furthermore, the films share a revenge theme where vengeance is sought against a former employer, because they have taken out a fatal punishment on the protagonists' families.

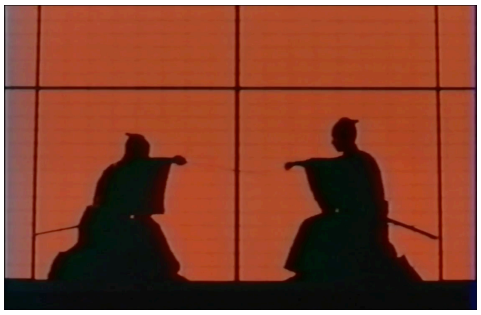
The pastiche elements from *Shogun Assassin* also function as an example of the imitation of grindhouse aesthetics in *Kill Bill.* Grindhouse cinema and aesthetics play into the overall construction of the intertextual atmosphere in *Kill Bill*; it encapsulates low-budget horror, splatter and exploitation films. As a genre, grindhouse had its prime of popularity from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. Exported Kung Fu revenge epics featuring exotic cinema and heaps of violence comprised a popular subgenre, and dubbed martial arts films are subsequently considered a televised grindhouse tradition. In the same vein, wire fu stunts and caricatured special effects represent the aesthetics of the cinema's technological capabilities at the time.

The exploitation films are categorized by exploitation of lurid subject matter and features, such as bloody gore, violence, rebellion, mayhem, misogyny and taboos. These were often depicted in a context where serial killers, rapists, petty crooks, and low-level gangsters were stock standard characters portrayed as protagonists as often as antagonists. The concept of protagonists that are categorically villainous by their profession is demonstrated in both Kill

Bill and Shogun Assassin; the bride and Ogami Ittō are both murderers by definition, by choice a former assassin and the Shogun's former Decapitator.

In the same vein, grindhouse aesthetics transfers these significant features into sensational elements to create spectacle and atmosphere. The aesthetic atmosphere in the massacre sequence in *Kill Bill* is conveyed with lurid bodily destruction, caricatured blood spatter and wire fu fighting that simultaneously resemble a pastiche to *Shogun Assassin.*

Subsequently to the massacre sequence, the teahouse hostess turns off the lights, which marks the transition to the third sequence (1:26:54-1:27:49). This consist of a shadow fight which aesthetically pays pastiche to the opening sequence in *Samurai Fiction* (1998), with a slight difference in the color of the background (in the source text it is red, but in *Kill Bill* it is blue).



Samurai Fiction **L: (0:01:51)**



R: (1:27:40)

The composition of the violence depicted in the *Kill Bill* sequence represents the general complex composition of violence in the film, as it is also difficult to categorize. Initially, the realistic conduct of fighting resembles mega- and hyper-violence, but it does not portray other characteristic features, such as a large amount of bloodshed or exaggerated body realism. However, the simple aesthetic expression conveying intertextual reference represents an artistic choice of editing that resembles hyper-violence. The continuation of katana fighting, and by association the elegant moves, accordingly connote martial arts films. At this point, the fight finally appears to be an even match, due to the considerable reduction in the number of the Crazy 88 assembly; as such, the sequence can be classified as surrealistic violence.

The fourth scene (0:35:58-0:44:08) stands out significantly because it is an anime sequence; it depicts the origin story of O-Ren, making a number of intertextual references to and being a pastiche of yet another Samurai jidaigeki film called *Lady Snowblood* (1973). The Japanese film revolves around the character Yuki, who seeks revenge on her family's murderers.

In this way, O-Ren's motivations for violence resemble Yuki's, because similarly to Yuki, O-Ren's introduction to a culture of violence is preceded by revenge.



Lady Snowblood **(promotional picture)**



(1:32:44)

In the same vein, *Lady Snowblood* includes an anime sequence which revolves around the protagonist's revenge quest, brought on by a family tragedy that caused the deaths of her father, brother and mother. Furthermore, O-Ren's exterior traits bear close resemblance to Yuki (aka Lady Snowblood), which is shown by their feminine attire of a white kimono that contrasts their rough violence. O-Ren is even figuratively put in Yuki's shoes, in a symbolic visualization of the common idiom, showing how they, through the similar processes of their early lives, are able to understand each other's experiences, motivations and challenges. In both films, the image of the foot in the show marks the women walking toward their destiny.

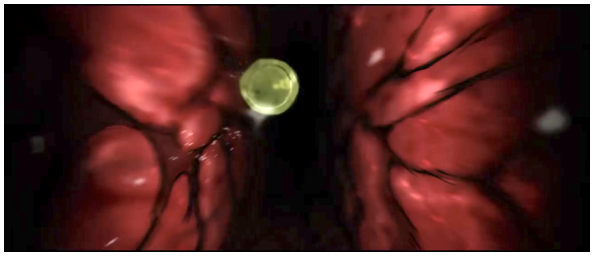



Lady Snowblood **L: (0:03:15)** **R: (1:31:37)**

The spectator's recognition of and alignment with O-Ren's character are complex and challenged. Although she is introduced primarily, by means of her association with the DVAS, as an antagonist, O-Ren's pastiche to *Lady Snowblood* in the aspects of and combination with her origin story generates the sense of a secondary antihero persona; narratively creating certain spectator expectations for her character development.

Beyond the aspects of the pastiche elements to yet another jidaigeki, the intertextual references surrounding O-Ren convey an aesthetic atmosphere regarding the contrasts that constitute her construction as a character. Ominousness by means of the play between light and darkness conveys emphasis on her lethality, by means of how her appearance compliments her personality. In this way, Tarantino creates a final boss in the plot with a sinister potential and O-Ren thus poses a sufficient challenge.

On a different note, the animated sequence in *Kill Bill* allows more blood and violence in regard to the film's R-rating, and in terms of composition, it can primarily be categorized as hyper-violence. The scene depicts relatively realistic conduct of violence depicted as hand-to-hand combat, katana wielding, and shooting of firearms, but it also plays with sensuous demolition in visually compelling ways that focus on the artistically aesthetic features of bodily destruction. This is, as an example, seen in the shot and framing of the sequence showing a bullet travelling through a brain to leave an exit wound resembling a window into the skull in the back of the head. The animation style sufficiently removes the brutality far from reality, resembling somewhat less realism in the form of animation compared to the preceding sequence depicting O-Ren's revenge and her parents' murder.




L: (0:43:30), R: (0:43:38)

In the same vein, the scene also consists of images that demonstrate particularly artistic technique and thus can be appreciated for their resemblance of skillful execution of camerawork and editing. One example is an image that shows a big close-up of the Yakuza boss, Boss Matsumoto's eye, the iris reflects a close-up of a cropped face belonging to a young O-Ren. The aesthetic aspects of the image lie in its artistic and technical construction.



(0:41:09)

Similarly to how the introduction of Gogo conveyed her psychotic traits, this image conveys about O-Ren an atmosphere of intensity, determination, ruthlessness and brutality; a child exploiting the sexuality of a depraved pedophiles as a weakness is grotesque and uncanny. The details are provided by the bride's narration, as she elaborates on how an eleven-year-old O-Ren could get close enough to Matsumoto to kill him and successfully achieve revenge. As O-Ren straddles Matsumoto she tells him to look at her; she demonstrates that for her age she is unsettlingly calculating, apathetic and violent. These qualities are re-identified as persistent character traits in a different scene (1:00:48-1:04:35), in which O-Ren decapitates a Yakuza clan chief for disrespectfully addressing her half breed heritage. Beyond the scope of a severed head, that scene also portrays a parody similar to a classic scenario where business is discussed over spaghetti by the Italian mafia, in that the Yakuza clan heads eat sushi at a long table during the initiation of O-Ren as the Organized Crime Lord of Tokyo.

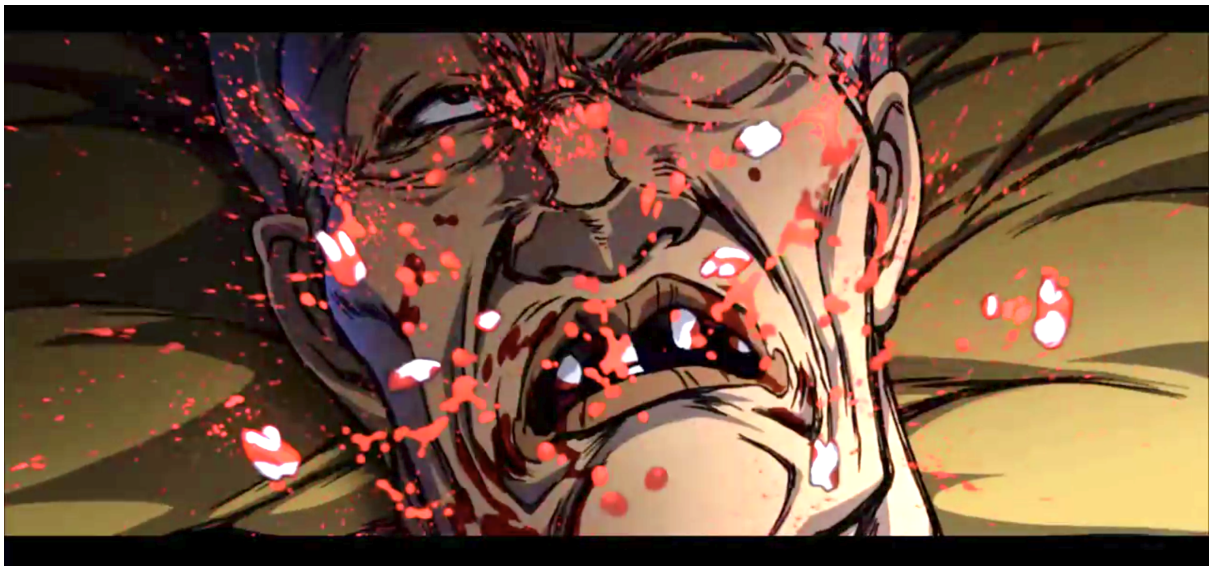
The taunting demonstrated during the sequence is depicted through oddly artistic framing and editing: Matsumoto's eye reflecting O-Ren's face shows that the young O-Ren revels in her revenge. She prolongs the conduct of violence by attempting to force an unnecessary

confession from Matsumoto, even though she herself was a witness and thus is able to sufficiently testify to the fact. In addition, she wants Matsumoto to make the connection and know why and by whom he is murdered, resembling sadistic tendencies. The scene depicts hyper-violence as it makes a pleasing visual of excessive blood sprays, in the same fashion that is carried out throughout the remainder of the film's violence from this point.



L: (0:41:36), R: (0:41:37)

The sequence conveys unconventional grindhouse aesthetics, which is seen, as an example, in the massive blood spatter geyser that shoots out of Matsumoto as O-Ren removes her katana from his chest. The blood spill is particularly graphically caricatured as O-Ren's body leaves an imprint on the footboard of the bed. Additionally, the scene depicts and visually highlights gory details, such as the exaggerated facial distortion and ruination of Matsumoto.



(0:41:19)

The unrealistic eruption of shattered teeth and blood from the face following the penetration of Matsumoto's abdomen with a katana, portrays grotesquely entertaining gore that resembles grindhouse aesthetics.

Conclusively, *Kill Bill* depicts a construction of violence orchestrated in diverse compositions. The aesthetic atmosphere and artistic expression is a testament to appreciation for the 1970's cinema, Kung Fu and Samurai films, and grindhouse cinema aesthetics. This is demonstrated by the fundamental influence of intertextuality that is correlative to any aspect of the film's concept of violence.

Characters and Sympathy Structures: The Battle Royale of Ferocious Femmes and the Subsidiary Male Obstacle

Recognition of the film's central character, the bride, is established in the opening scene (0:00:42-0:02:28). In this regard, the primacy effect is imparted by the significant aesthetics of the scene. The film's prelude begins in the outro of the paratext, where it is initiated as a non-diegetic sound of panting but transitions into diegetic sound with the first official frame of the prelude.



(0:01:01)

This is marked by a close-up sequence, from a high angle of framing that reveals the source of the staccato breathing. The image of a severely beaten and frantic woman lying on a wooden floor while wearing a wedding veil, imparts an uncanny audiovisual expression.

The image demonstrates that the immediate recognition of the bride is undercut and retarded, because her physical traits are disrupted by framing and editing. In other words, the process is initially challenged by a correlatively diffuse and bizarre bodily representation. The portrayal visualizes victimization emphasized by the aesthetics. The close proximity of the

framing conveys a suffocating atmosphere that matches her breathing. The effects of the black-and-white shooting convey the sense of blurred vision that is implied by the blood and sweat that distorts the bride's view.

The unnerving atmosphere proceeds as the scene unfolds with the diegetic sound being joined by approaching boot-steps. A person positions themselves mostly outside the frame, only one boot tip is visible in the bottom right corner of the frame. The atmosphere and the threatening position, as the person is standing over the bride, imply that they are an adversary. The man is simultaneously revealed to be Bill, as he wipes at the bride's mouth with a monogrammed handkerchief. The monologue informs of a preexisting relationship between the bride and Bill and implies an unidentified emotional connection. The terms of which are implied by the bride's retort as she says: "Bill, it's your baby" (0:02:22-0:02:26), causing Bill to shoot her in the head.



***The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1:05:56)**

This shot pastiches the aesthetics of a scene from Sergio Leone's 1966 Italian epic spaghetti western *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, where Eli Wallace points a gun at Clint Eastwood. The intertextual reference implies the bride's protagonist categorization. Their relationship is further implied by the song that follows the prelude as a transition into the plot, which goes:

> I was five and he was six
> We rode on horses made of sticks
> He wore black and I wore white
> He would always win the fight
>
> Bang bang, he shot me down
> Bang bang, I hit the ground

> Bang bang, that awful sound
> Bang bang, my baby shot me down
> Nancy Sinatra - "*Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down*)" (1966)

In the same vein, the line "He wore black and I wore white" makes an intertextual reference to a classic western film narrative device, in which the the protagonist wears a white Stetson and the antagonist wears a black Stetson, symbolically conveying their respective affiliation with good and evil (Kendrick 72).

The action confirms that Bill is the perpetrator of the bride's current state. The primacy effect is based on the implication of the film's title in combination with the context provided by the prelude. In this way, the bride's visual victimization implies that the film's story premise is seeking revenge on Bill as retaliation for what occurs in the prelude. In the same sense, the film's construction of narrative meaning of violence communicates exclusive subjective access to the bride, which is demonstrated in her resemblance of a detective narrator, despite the retrospective style of her storytelling, implying a knowledge of key events that are not shared by the spectator. The subjective access is further established by diegetic music, which emphasizes the bride's emotional state. This is demonstrated in the segregated scenes where the bride encounters Vernita and O-Ren respectively, as an increasingly unpleasant soundtrack alerts the spectator to the subsequent violent confrontation, resembling video game aesthetics that signals a fight with a 'boss' character.

An atmosphere of animosity is conveyed by the combination of music and cinematographic techniques. An optical POV shot shows an extreme close-up of the bride's face, focused on the intensity in her eyes, a shot that predominantly conveys emotions of betrayal and traumatic stress.



L: (1:14:16), R: (1:14:19)

The image transforms into a flashback with cross-cutting. The construction of the sequence is peculiar, as the previous image of the bride's eyes interlace with the scene of the flashback. In

both instances, the flashback references the massacre at Two Pines. The subjective access is further emphasized by the framing of the flashback.

In the case with O-Ren (1:14:11-1:14:24), the flashback initially shows a big close-up, in a somewhat distorted high angle of framing, of the bride laying beaten on the floor, until the image subsequently transitions into a low angle close-up of O-Ren looking down on the bride, implying her role as an assailant. In this way, overlaying present action with past events generates the sense that the earlier animosity and assault still linger in the present, in the relationship between the bride and O-Ren. In the same vein, subjective access also provides narrative meaning that can be interpreted as a plea for excuses. As such, the flashback sequence provides the context of motivation, whereas the explicit victimization of the bride encourages the spectator to sympathize with her and thus, indulge in her violent execution of revenge. Cross-cutting is used in a similar way to encourage sympathy through empathy with her victimization in an earlier scene that precedes the bride's lethal revenge quest. In the scene (0:19:51-0:21:58), Elle Driver, member of the DVAS and participant in the massacre at Two Pines, infiltrates the hospital dressed as a nurse. She is tasked with the mission of liquidating the bride who is lying in a coma.



L: (0:21:23), R: (0:21:33)

The split-screen images respectively show the comatose bride on the left and Elle on the right. The scene is accompanied by contrapuntal music that connotes a sense of carefree joy that juxtaposes the sterile surroundings of the hospital and Elle's ill, prophetic and gloomy demeanor. The bride's peaceful and innocent exterior appearance contrasts Elle's suggestively psychotic satisfaction, which is based on her categorically vicious smile and cruel excitement at the prospects of the brutality and lethal consequences of her conduct. In this way, the cinematographic technique is used as a narrative device that encourages sympathy for the bride. The bride appears vulnerable through the depiction and framing of her comatose form and the subsequent big close-up of her IV-connected arm. This displays an eerie contrast to Elle's hypodermic needle, the red content of which connotes to poison. The scene encourages sympathy

for the bride by symbolically referring to the breach in the Kung Fu and Samurai code of honor, as it is considerably immoral and cowardly to assassinate an incapacitated and defenseless opponent.

Finally, the film's use of diverse shooting and editing techniques creates a sense of psychologically poetic logic toward the bride's revenge quest regarding her motivations and their justification and, in the same vein, creates perceptional alignment with the bride. This is further established and emphasized by the structural meaning of violence, which is demonstrated by correlation between the film's narrative structure and the bride's kill list. The kill list consists of, in chronological order, O-Ren, Vernita, Budd (Bill's brother, encountered in the sequel), Elle Driver, and Bill, all members of the DVAS, and as such former allies and co-workers of the bride and ultimately assailants participating in the massacre at Two Pines.

The order of the kill list is pivotal to the orchestration of events of both story and plot. The chronological progression of the story's events matches the kill list, which generates structural meaning of violence with its resemblance of video game quest narrative structure. In this way, the encounters with each target on the list represent combat with a boss character, the defeat of which resembles the unlocking of the next level. In a narrative sense, the bride must succeed at each challenge in order to advance to the next. The narrative structure of the plot also resembles a video game narrative quest structure. In this case, the structural meaning of violence is symbolic to additional video game aspects that symbolically include rhetorical concepts of loot, gaining experience, and levelling up. Through loot a character can obtain armor, i.e. weapons, which they use to gain access to the next level, and experience helps increase the character's ability and capability. Access to the next level is granted when the character defeats any resemblance of a minor boss character, as experience is achieved through these victories.

The bride initially obtains armor and subsequently gains access to the next level through the initiation of her revenge quest by obtaining a weapon. She seeks out Hattori Hanzō, a master Japanese swordsmith, and persuades him to bestow upon her a samurai sword. Hanzō's deified swords are legendary and symbolize superior power. Hanzō's reputation is also established intertextually as the character is based on a real-life Samurai of the Sengoku era famed for his skills and heroism. The actor of Hanzō, Sonny Chiba, starred as a character called Hattori Hanzō in a Japanese television jidaigeki called *Kage no Gundan* aka. *Shadow Warriors* (1980). The character of Hanzō provides yet another intertextual reference and is a testament to the film's homage to Kung Fu films. In the scene where Hanzō hands over the sword to the bride he says: "If, on your journey, you should encounter God, God will be cut" (0:58:02-0:58:10). The story line pastiches part of the film *Samurai Reincarnation* (1980), where Chiba plays the protagonist

Yagyu Jubei, who receives a sword with divine powers from a sword maker. In both instances, the swords are given by a master, and procuring the weapon represents gaining the ability to win an uneven battle. The three-dimensional intertextuality of Chiba portraying Hanzō symbolizes a stock story line in Kung Fu films in which the essence is that the student becomes the master. This transfers to the bride as she must become the master, by sufficiently increasing her experience, to be capable of defeating the ultimate goal and the final boss that is Bill.

In the same vein, the film's narrative structure implies that the bride needs a Hanzō sword to feel confident that she can defeat O-Ren, which conveys symbolic structural meaning of violence in regard to the non-chronological orchestration of the kill list, seeing as the confrontation with Vernita precedes the encounter with O-Ren. This sense is also conveyed by the non-chronological narrative structure of the plot, because the scene is used as a storytelling device in four ways. Firstly, the composition of violence in the scene is the least gory and bloody construction, which arguably provides the spectator with a less overwhelming or disturbing introduction to the film's violent co-text and premise. However, Vernita's family room, with a view of the front-lawn that overflows with toys, and the residential neighborhood generate a suburban atmosphere. In this atmosphere, the ferocious dispute between the two maternal characters conveys the symbolic resemblance of a stereotypical fierce rivalry between two soccer moms. The combination of the setting, symbolic context and conduct of vehement violence is parodically contrastive, bordering on absurdity.

In addition, the scene employs a similar technical storytelling device by using the same cross-cutting and interlaced images in a flashback sequence, as is used in the previously mentioned scene with O-Ren. Per video game discourse and audiovisual editing, Vernita is recognized as a boss character whose defeat grants access to the next level. Moreover, an interpretation of the emotions conveyed by the bride's eyes and partial facial expression in the big close-up, implies notably more resentment than the similar shot in regard to O-Ren.



L: (0:05:51), R: (0:05:54)

In comparison, the big close-up of the bride interlaced with the shot of O-Ren shows a facial expression and look in her eyes that communicate some extent of fear. This can be interpreted from her dilated eyes and the crease of her brow. Whereas, the shot regarding Vernita shows an intense stare and frowning brows. Conventionally, in the case regarding O-Ren, this connotes shock and vulnerability, and regarding Vernita, predominantly antipathy. This observation correlates to the interpretation of O-Ren's origin story as a symbolic demonstration that the bride possesses some extent of respect for and possibly awe of O-Ren. In light of how O-Ren's background story is told, it conveys the notion that her accomplishments are admirable and that her family tragedy is a redeeming aspect of her integration into such a culture of violence.

However, it is also possible to interpret, based on the chronological order of the story, that the bride's facial expression is more confident when facing Vernita, because she is better equipped with experience in this case, as Vernita is the second target on her list. This interpretation is based on the amount of narrative context and information that is provided about Vernita in comparison to O-Ren. The lack of background knowledge about Vernita makes her seem like less of a threat compared to O-Ren, as O-Ren is the only antagonist who has an entire origin story. The first point of view is, however, supported by the fact that O-Ren exclusively is introduced with an origin story. The narrative offers more substantial insight into the context of her character development, which centers on her motivations for violence, than any other character, even the bride. In this way, the origin story functions as a plea for excuses in terms of familiarity.

According to Kupfer's theory and seeing as the bride is the exclusive narrator of the plot, it is reasonable to assume that the structural meaning of plot and violence reflects the bride's personal account and reasoning. Secondly, the arrangement of the story's events employs a narrative structure in the context of violence that resembles the progression structure of video game quest narratives, in which experience increase is essentially requisite. In this way, the plot structure supports the implication of the narrative meaning of violence that O-Ren is the superior opponent in the film. Thirdly, the scene introduces the bride's essential character traits, when she says to Vernita: "It's mercy, compassion and forgiveness I lack. Not rationality" (00:10:42-00:10:49). The self-proclaimed apathy is countered by two subtle pleas for excuses. Firstly, the bride seconds her claim of rationality by declaring: "I'm not gonna murder you in front of your child, okay?" (0:10:33-0:10:37), which contradicts her apathy to some extent. The second is insinuated by more dialogue:

VERNITA: You have every right to want to get even.

BRIDE: No, no, no, no, no. No. To get even, even Stephen, I would have to kill you, go up to Nikki's room, kill her, then wait for your husband to come home and kill him. That'd be even, Vernita. That'd be about square.
(0:11:02-0:11:27)

This part of their conversation refers to the events and subsequent consequences of the massacre at Two Pines and suggests a preliminary justification of the bride's inevitable actions based on her motivations. In this way, the scene encourages the spectator to feel sympathy for the bride's conduct of revenge, which is facilitated by her assault and tragedy. In the same vein, the red sequence of flashback and interlaced images emphasize the victimization of the bride and the villainization of Vernita. In the same vein, the bride is depicted as less aggressive and is thus suggested to be the lesser evil compared to the portrayal of Vernita as a stereotypical angry black woman. This portrayal consists of parodic elements in the imitation of a stereotypical black woman's sassy attitude and use of profanities.

Vernita's death conveys a symbolic meaning of violence that is correlative to the shared totalitarian mentality of the DVAS and, in combination with her womanhood and maternal status, connotes outdated patriarchal values of women's oppression. In a figurative sense, Vernita is punished for thinking that she could leave the world of violence and discard her assassin nature, in favor of a conventional suburban life. The bride was initially punished in the same way, for deserting the DVAS to become a mother and eventually get married.

The oppression of female agency and the practice of elimination of freedom of choice resemble the values of the 1950's patriarchal American society that used to consider it deviant and abject if a woman would stray from her domestic duties. Although this ultimatum is slightly inverted as motherhood is not symbolized as the ultimate female occupation, it still represents the idea that women should be confined to a solitary identity.

In the same vein, the bride's mutilation of Sofie conveys a symbolic meaning of violence, in a context revolving around motherhood and symbolic castration. By cutting off Sofie's arms, the bride takes away her symbolic and literal ability to 'bear' children. This can be seen as a symbolic retaliation for what Sofie took part in doing to the bride at the massacre of Two

Pines, after which the bride woke up four and a half years later, no longer pregnant and therefore unable to bear her child in two ways.

Firstly, she does not know if the child is alive or dead, and she is physically unable to hold it due to their separation. Secondly, she was unable to carry the baby in pregnancy symbolically, due to her unconscious state. Sofie is literally left unable to carry a baby in her arms and thus unable to take care of a baby, and she is symbolically robbed of something that is essential to womanhood and thus defeminized. Therefore, the violence against both the bride and Sofie, in this sense and context, conveys symbolic meaning of emblematic castration.



(1:15:09)

Sofie's mutilation functions as a test of the spectator's allegiance with the bride, in the sense that it portrays the bride as extraordinarily cruel because Sofie does not possess the means nor the combat skills to defend herself. The action functions as a re-identification of these as the bride's persistent character traits. For moral evaluation to lead to allegiance, it depends on the spectator partaking in fictional relief and subsequently accepting the film's co-text as a premise for this. This allows for the interpretation of the bride's actions as justified, as the magnitude of the injustice done to her and its consequential tragedy prompt a sympathetic perception of her motivations. In short, sympathy depends on the categorization of the bride as the morally preferable character. This view of her is prompted by her elimination of several threats to conventional and moral society, by exterminating a group that is affiliated with violence, crime and murder.

Ultimately, the bride is depicted as a rational character and by association reliable, because she takes responsibility for her actions, contrary to Vernita who has thought she could attain redemption in the suburbs. This is demonstrated by the bride's departing statement to

Vernita's daughter, where she initially apologizes for killing Vernita in front of her and also says: "When you grow up, if you still feel raw about it… I'll be waiting" (0:14:56-0:15:08). Cinematographic techniques and editing are used in the initial confrontation with O-Ren, to convey structural meaning of violence.



(1:13:41)

In a manner similar to the boss-alerting soundtrack that accompanies the flashback sequences, which is used to signify an upcoming combat with a boss character, the split-screen resembles the framing of combat video games that revolve around fights staged in fixed boundaries between two opponents. Moreover, the big close-up of the bride's mouth resembles a tv trope called 'mouthscreen', which is often used in anime and manga. The bride's intonation when saying "You and I have unfinished business!" in Japanese, imitates an anime trope where enemies speak exaggeratedly when confronting and summoning each other for battle, which conveys the sense that they are nemeses.

The narrative meaning of violence is significant to the structural meaning in this sense because it finalizes O-Ren's significance by categorizing her as the ultimate confrontation of the plot. However, O-Ren's character is also significant in a way that contrasts the opposition of her characterization as a generally antagonistic character; another interpretation provides a comparison of the bride and O-Ren as protagonist characters, by means of their individual storylines.

Elaborating on the intertextual references to the jidaigeki *Lady Snowblood*, paralleling O-Ren with the *Lady Snowblood* protagonist Yuki; *Kill Bill* pastiches *Lady Snowblood* even more, by recreating very specific shots that, in terms of alignment, support the characters' protagonist personae and simultaneously make a symbolic comparison between Yuki and the bride.

By means of angle, the cinematographic recreation in *Kill Bill* conveys symbolic and narrative meaning of violence that parallels *Lady Snowblood*. In the same way as O-Ren, the bride pastiches Yuki's motive for revenge, which is demonstrated by the parallel visualization of their victimization; in a POV shot from an extreme low angle that has the targets of revenge looking down on a protagonist subject.

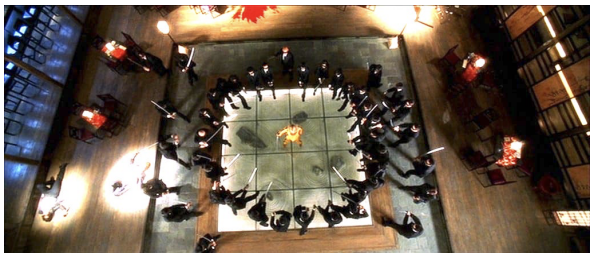




Lady Snowblood **L: (0:18:24)** **R: (0:35:25)**

Another example of this is two paralleling God's eye view shots that have the protagonists surrounded by enemies, which simultaneously make visual pleas for excuses regarding their conduct of violence, conveyed by the symbolic meaning of their centered position in the images. Due to framing and angle, the images resemble the outline shape of an eye, and, as such, the protagonists take up the position of the pupil. Symbolically, this conveys alignment with their POV, which is further supported by the aspects of their outnumbered circumstances. The spectator is encouraged to adopt their perspective, or at least sympathize with it.





Lady Snowblood 2: Love Song of Vengeance **(1974)**
L: (0:12:08) **R: (1:22:30)**

The last scene in *Kill Bill* orchestrates the showdown between the two Yuki imitations. Similarly to the example with O-Ren and the symbolic images of the shoes, the bride enters the scene of the showdown in a way that recreates and resembles the shot of Yuki symbolically walking towards her destiny. Both Yuki and the bride enter snowclad courtyards, symbolizing the crescendo of their revenge quest in the plotline of the separate films.





Lady Snowblood **L: (1:33:42)** **R: (1:30:32)**

The final scene in *Kill Bill* symbolically depicts the showdown between the two Yuki-protagonists, a fight that will end with one's dominion over the spectator's allegiance by means of alignment; symbolically, it is a showdown between two antihero personae, where, for the sake of the narrative, one must defeat the other. With this comparison, both the bride and O-Ren identify with Yuki, by means of symbolism, context and technical alignment. In a symbolic sense, the parallel between O-Ren and the bride, as revenge-seeking antiheroes, makes them competitors for the position of the protagonist in the perception of the spectator; the sympathetic allegiance of the bride and O-Ren compete for the spectator's ultimate allegiance, their weapons being the spectator's subjective access with the bride and the familiarity with O-Ren. However, who prevails is decidedly determined at the end, which is why the spectator might find themselves ambivalent towards O-Ren's death. Of course, outside the context of this interpretation of the narrative and symbolic meaning of violence, based on symbolism and intertextuality, it remains abundantly clear that the bride is the film's protagonist.

Although O-Ren resembles the final boss of the plot, she is not the ultimate target of revenge in the story. This is in fact Bill. Not much is revealed about Bill. In this sense he resembles a phantom menace. The spectator is provided with and insufficient and defective bodily representation of his character. In the same manner, he is equipped with very little dialogue and is only briefly mentioned by other characters, and it is the scarce dialogue and mentioning that render it possible to recognize some characteristics and re-identify these as persistent character traits. However, recognition is obscured by framing and alignment is made impossible, as he only appears in three short scenes, predominantly outside the frame. Therefore, Bill is considered a peripheral character, and the spectator's idea of personhood depends on the basic person schema that relates to constructing characters. The spectator's perception of Bill's character is

based on the two last items on the list: "6. the capacity for self-impelled actions and self-interpretation; [and] 7. the potential for traits, or persisting attributes" (Smith 21). This is demonstrated in a number of ways.

The spectator is given some, although lacking, information in the conversations between other characters. Bill holds mentor status and both O-Ren and Sofie are his former protégées. Vernita reveals that he believed the bride to be irrational and a competent warrior, as she was "one of the best ladies he saw with an edged weapon" (0:12:59-0:13:03). He is a shadow operator and an éminence grise of organized crime. And he is a killer. This is verified in the previously mentioned scene where Hanzō has forged a sword for the bride, because as he puts it: "I've done this because philosophically, I am sympathetic to your aim" (0:57:42-0:57:52), and because he refers to swords as "instruments of death." In the same scene it is revealed that Bill is a former student of Hanzō's (0:54:18-0:54:34), which implies that he is also a master katana wielder. However, more substantial implications of characteristics are provided in the aforementioned three scenes that feature Bill.

The first scene is the prelude, in which a handkerchief makes his presence known. Unexpected action and bizarre monologue instigate recognition of an uncanny character; first Bill wipes the bride's bloody face, demonstrating a caring gesture, but this notion is immediately contrasted by his philosophical self-reflection and the fact that he ultimately shoots the bride in the head the moment she reveals that she is carrying his baby.



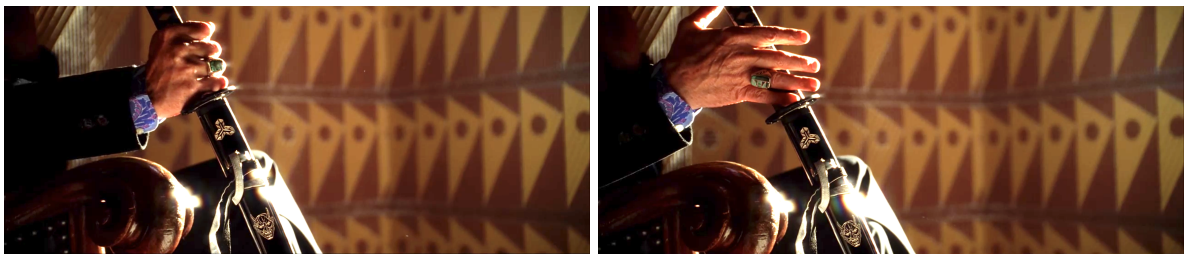
(0:01:31)

In combination with the gory victimization of the bride and Bill's dominating position, presumably towering above her, the monologue sounds almost macabre:

> Do you find me sadistic? You know, I'll bet I could fry an egg on your head right now. If I wanted to. You know, kiddo... I'd like to believe 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.
> (0:01:21-0:02:22)

The reasoning that he is being masochistic rather than sadistic seems a callous interpretation; sounding very similar to the use of manipulation and psychological abuse by physically abusive perpetrators to convince their victim that they deserve what they get, holding the victim accountable for driving the abusive part to their actions. In this way the abusive part liberates themselves from blame and responsibility, saying 'this hurts me more than it hurts you'. Despite his verbal efforts, the appearance of the bride, her vulnerable position and the compromised circumstances in the context of a wedding, as opposed to Bill's actions, imparts a convincing argument that he is in fact sadistic. This is only reinforced by the insinuation of their intimate relation.

The second scene features a phone conversation between Bill and Elle (0:22:36-0:24:47) that occurs when she is at the hospital to assassinate the bride. Bill's spoken words correlative to the symbolic meaning of his accompanying physical gestures provide interpretational suggestions of his manipulative character traits.



L: (0:23:29), R: (0:23:48)

Bill manages the conversation and demonstrates subtle tyranny, by being intimidating while simultaneously sounding whimsical and patient, laying emphasis on his oxymoronic personality traits. This is demonstrated as he alternates between addressing Elle like a child, a petulant teenager, an employee, and a lover. His capricious appeal depicts an eerie dichotomy of flirtatious manipulation and intimidating affection, establishing his patriarchal position of power.

This contrast between softness and aggression is emphasized by the close-up of Bill holding a samurai sword. The way he fiddles with the phallocentric sword is synchronized with and emphasizes his shifting mood. He caresses the hilt when Elle accommodates him, begins to threateningly remove the sword from the sheath when she challenges him, and forcefully replaces it into the sheath when he demands obedience. Bill's mood is more aggressively conveyed by the way he handles the sword than by his vocal pitch, although it is implied by his insisting and exasperated tone of voice.

He uses the same ominous solicitude in the third scene (1:39:27-1:43:18), when he talks to Sofie after she has been mutilated by the bride. He oozes with a combination of affection and intimidation symbolized by his hands as they simultaneously caress and grab Sofie's face. Sofie's response to Bill's soft-spoken declarations of ownership ("My Sofie") demonstrates her subjected devotion, miserably and fearfully apologizing for her betrayal.



1: (1:39:44), 2: (1:39:52), 3: (1:39:59)

He addresses her with soothing praise that resembles the sadness of assessing the damage done to a valued possession, emphasizing her beauty and brilliance while sounding nostalgic, rather than her value as a mere person. This is reinforced as he laments the destruction of his asset, as if she were a broken doll, brushing aside Sofie's own concerns of betrayal, saying: "But still nothing. Except my aching heart over what she's done to my beautiful and brilliant Sofie" (1:39:46-1:39:56). As he speculates on the reason why the bride has spared Sofie's life, rather than providing true comfort or assurance, Bill is characterized as truly self-centered. It appears that Bill's only real concern is: "Is she [the bride] aware her daughter is still alive?" This scene functions as a re-identification of Bill's persistent, despicable character traits. He is portrayed as a self-serving man, without any redeeming qualities. The lack of familiarity, partiality, and pleas for excuses renders sympathetic allegiance with Bill impossible. However, it is possible that the spectator might find herself fascinated by his psychotic traits and the lack of character embodiment, in a manner that serves the narrative by surrounding the final boss with nervous excitement and anticipation.

The Hateful Eight[2]

The Culture of Violence: The Trigger-Happiness of an Atypical Western and a Thriller-esque Murder-Mystery

Whodunit in the Wild West

Right from the beginning of the film, this western comes across as atypical. The film is indeed shot in a widescreen format typical of classical westerns, and it is set in a typical western location in the hills of Wyoming. However, the landscape of the hot, barren plains usually dressed in dust and tumbleweed, which we typically associate with westerns, is covered in snow, and a blizzard is approaching; this is the first sign the spectator receives that something about this western is unusual. The opening sequence of the film bears resemblance to classical western openings, showing extreme long shots of the landscape, although white and clad in snow, while the quality of the picture is slightly shaky and grainy, mimicking that of classical mid 1960s westerns and giving it a retro aesthetic:




L: (0:00:38), R: (0:01:21)





L: (0:01:33), R: (0:01:42)

However, the colors are cold and gloomy rather than warm and inviting, and this sinister and unfriendly background is then juxtaposed with a yellow, cartoonish font presenting the name of the production company.

[2] Unless otherwise disclosed, all images and timestamps in this chapter are extracted from *The Hateful Eight* (2015).

Accompanying the landscape frames is an equally sinister and dramatic music score consisting of lingering tones of string instruments, eventually joined by a beat reminiscent of war drums. When the title of the film appears in bold, yellow, cartoon-like letters with red shading, the character of the music changes, as a melody played by a deep tuba sound gives off an atmosphere of danger and treachery. Both fonts presented on the screen connote western film aesthetics, and the font of the title in particular appears fun and friendly, but it is contrasted heavily by the atmosphere of the music and the preceding images, and not least by the meaning of the title itself.

In spite of the unusual presence of snow in the landscape, the wilderness poses just as much of a threat and danger as it usually does in the western genre – if not more – and this is emphasized by the dramatic score which carries on from the title sequence and intensifies as the stagecoach drives through the snow behind a wooden crucifix. The score is composed by the celebrated composer Ennio Morricone, some of whose most well-known work is created for Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, and it is reminiscent of that which is played when danger approaches in classical westerns such as in John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), paying tribute to the sound of classical westerns and setting the tone for the film and the expectations of the spectator.

The comparison to *The Magnificent Seven* is anything but made arbitrarily, as the title *The Hateful Eight* serves as an obvious intertextual reference to it; it is a western about seven cowboys who are hired to protect a little Mexican village for a very small pay, but end up defending the village almost purely out of the goodness of their hearts, with four of them dying in the process. This reference alerts the familiar spectator to the fact that *The Hateful Eight* is a western, but also that the premises of the film are completely inverted compared to *The Magnificent Seven*: the main characters are not magnificent in the slightest. In this regard, *The Hateful Eight* ironically parodies *The Magnificent Seven*.

When it comes to the film's elements of mise-en-scéne, all the characters are immediately recognizable as inhabitants of the Wild West, dressed in cowboy hats and boots and wearing pistols on their hips. Each of them represents a typical figure within the world of the western, such as bounty hunters, outlaws, and a sheriff, but they are also representative of historically significant events surrounding the American Civil War in the form of soldiers from both the North and the South, and an emancipated slave. Their language, while including unusually high amounts of profanity and crudity, is also fairly consistent with what we might expect from a western with regards to jargon and accent, but precisely because it is so laden with expletives,

it comes across as another parodic take on the Wild West. The stagecoach and Minnie's Haberdashery, which forms the main stage for the majority of the film, are also easily connected with the setting of a western.

The Civil War plays a significant role for the violence in the plot as well, as the characters' discussions in relation to it always end up in some form of brutality – in addition to the fact that war is of course extremely violent in itself. Due to the animosity exhibited by the representatives of the conflicting parties toward one another, one of the characters, Oswaldo Mobray, even suggests that they divide the haberdashery into a northern half and a southern half with the dinner table being neutral ground, so as not to stir up any conflicts unnecessarily, which of course does not end up having the intended effect. Narratively, the Civil War is thus of great importance to the violent acts that are performed in the film, and its representations will be examined further in a later chapter.

With concepts like pistol duels, legal executions, and 'frontier justice', the western is inherently a representation of a culture of violence. The bounty hunters make a living off of violently captivating and sometimes murdering outlaws, and they collect the reward from an armed sheriff, who, if the criminal is delivered alive, sees to it that they are executed; in westerns, a man is only ever truly powerful when holding a gun. This is one thing the film does explicitly manage to establish: the man who holds the weapon is the man who holds the power. However, as Murray Smith points out, westerns are known to employ the Manichaean moral structure, meaning there is typically a representation of good forces, a hero of some description, balancing out the evil forces and restoring justice when it is threatened. What is completely atypical about this western, then, is the fact that none of the main characters are good guys, and the moral structure is thus complex and twisted.

Instead of the notion of good versus evil, there is a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, and all the main characters are villainous in some way. This is emphasized through the darkness inside the haberdashery and the dangerous snowstorm raging outside – there is no silver lining and no one coming to save the day. When the coffee in the haberdashery turns out to be poisoned, the story takes on the characteristics of a murder mystery, which further enhances the atmosphere of distrust that has been established from the beginning. The murder mystery is naturally also inherently a genre that involves violence due to the fact that its plot revolves around resolving a murder case. Tarantino himself narrates the beginning of chapter four and five, marking the beginning of the 'whodunit' part of the plot.



(1:36:58)

In the fourth chapter, the sequence where Warren kills Smithers from the previous chapter is shown once more, but from a different camera angle and with a different focus, which is briefly narrated in a voiceover. This elicits an atmosphere of mystery, as all the characters' as well as the spectator's main objective becomes finding out who poisoned the coffee, creating thriller-esque suspense. However, the sudden implementation of the whodunit into the plot seems like an ironic parody of the murder mystery genre. Warren takes on the role of the detective, presenting his deduction from the facts in a long monologue, but once he reaches his conclusion, rather than arresting or detaining the suspect as a detective typically would, he puts two bullets in señor Bob, one bullet for each of the victims Warren believes he killed (1:54:01-1:57:03). This 'shoot first, ask questions later' attitude is very unlike the detective genre, which is why it appears to be used parodically, but this attitude is logical and salient within the western genre, because it is necessary for one's survival when no one can be trusted.

The atmosphere of distrust appears to even transcend the limits of the film, as the narrating voice suggests that the spectator cannot be trusted to understand what is going on with statements like: "And the only one to see him do it … was Domergue. That's why this chapter is called 'Domergue's Got a Secret'" (1:37:10-1:37:29). The comment regarding the name of the chapter is completely redundant, as the spectator has figured that out herself already, but the film seemingly does not trust her capability.

The unique combination of the western and the murder mystery, which are both genres that draw on elements of violence, envelops the spectator in a universe that is inherently violent, and there is a constant suspense and threat of violence, building up in every scene. As a whole, *The Hateful Eight* is a pastiche of the western genre, as its use of setting, mise-en-scéne, the Ennio Morricone score, and storytelling style with interludes and onscreen chapter titles is a

homage to the classic western genre. However, the film also has parodic elements, e.g. the intertextual reference to *The Magnificent Seven*, which must be interpreted as an ironic parody in terms of plot due to the hatefulness of the characters in *The Hateful Eight*. Moreover, the parodic murder mystery element does not conform to the norms of the genre in so far as the detective figure shoots his suspect without proof. These conditions set up the spectator's expectations of the characters within this violent frame of reference as unsympathetic or even antipathetic, which is bound to complicate the forming of allegiances, as will be explored further in a later chapter.

Greed, Power and Murky Morality

The violence that is performed in *The Hateful Eight* can on most accounts be considered acts of instrumental violence, as it is used as a means to an end, whether that is beating someone into obedience, as John Ruth does to Daisy Domergue, or killing someone because they are a suspected threat, as Marquis Warren does on several occasions. The individual motivations for violence are plentiful, but there is one overarching thing that all the characters have in common in terms of motivation, and that is survival: they are all prepared to fight and kill to save their own lives. While one may not agree with violence, this basic human instinct is something most people can understand and rationalize.

For the two bounty hunters Ruth and Warren, money is an important motivation and a driving force behind their violent behavior, as they make a living from captivating and killing wanted criminals. On several occasions, the price on someone's head is brought up, and the prospect of receiving large sums of money appears to be of interest to everyone, as none of them are seemingly wealthy. When Ruth finds out that Warren has had a bounty of $30,000 on his head, he appears baffled, and for a split-second he looks like he is almost considering capturing him (0:28:58-0:29:44). Also, near the end of the film, the alleged sheriff, Mannix, appears to seriously consider striking a deal with the outlaw gang members as they offer him several thousand dollars' worth of reward money in exchange for killing Warren and cooperating with them instead (2:26:26-2:27:58). In conclusion, due to the power that comes with wealth, money is an important motivation for the violent behavior of the characters.

Violence is also used as a means of gaining control throughout the film, as Ruth for instance does when, as a safety precaution, he takes away the two unfamiliar travelers' guns, which are their most powerful tools for conducting violence (1:12:56-1:15:45). When Joe Gage

refuses to hand over his gun voluntarily, Warren sneaks up behind him and forces him to do so in an act of violence.



(1:13:02)

Due to the suspicion and distrust all the characters feel toward one another, being able to gain some form of control over those who are not to be trusted seems like a vital and rational course of action. When someone is held at gunpoint, or with a knife to their throat, they will comply with almost anything the perpetrator asks of them. Furthermore, Ruth's confiscation of the others' weapons is another testament to his primary goal of taking Daisy to the executioner and claiming his reward; money, and essentially power and greed, are his ultimate motivations.

The concept of morality in *The Hateful Eight* is quite complex and diffuse due to the murky morality of the justice system at the time. As an example, while the death penalty was (and in some countries and states in the US still is) used as a legal punishment, the morality of it is debatable. This discrepancy between justice and morality is presented within the diegesis, suggesting that the hangman and his dispassion are what constitute the difference between frontier justice and actual justice. According to the character posing as the hangman Oswaldo Mobray, "justice delivered without dispassion is always in danger of not being justice" (0:48:29-0:48:52). The spectator is thus presented with a reality check in the form of a discussion of morality, suggesting that to civilized society, murder is morally defensible so long as it is a punishment sanctioned on a criminal and performed by someone who is dispassionate about it.

However, because the spectator is invited to view the film on the premises of it being a western which employs the moral codes of the Wild West, the spectator is not concerned with morality beyond what is presented in the internal moral discussions amongst the characters. For instance, a few of the characters bring up the question of morality with regards to hanging

women, a discussion which is shut down quickly with the argument: "Well, until we invent a trigger a woman can't pull, if you're a hangman, you're going to hang women" (1:18:01-1:18:08). Furthermore, in anticipation of it raising concerns regarding morality and legality, before Warren reveals to Major Smithers how he killed his son, he places a gun next to the old man, well aware that he is going to try to use it, thus giving Warren the chance to kill Smithers in an act of self-defense (1:28:09-1:34:49).

Of course, the morality of Warren even telling Smithers this horrific story is questionable, but it is justified by the fact that Warren, as a representative of black people, has been historically mistreated and oppressed by men like Smithers, and telling him the brutal story of how he raped and murdered his son is therefore an act of revenge. Warren's mental torturing and killing of Smithers is thus an act of expressive violence, because it is a reaction to the injustice he experiences as a black man and emancipated slave. Upon initial emotional intuition, Warren's preposterous behavior toward and consequent killing of an elderly man hiding behind a blanket out of horror seems completely unsympathetic, but once deliberately evaluated, the action is almost justified and rationally defensible.

In conclusion, the question of morality in *The Hateful Eight* hinges upon the spectator's acceptance of buying into the premises of the moral code the film employs, and this is a murky one. While the acts of killing, poisoning, and brutally beating others do not comply with any moral standards of civilized society, the spectator does not tend to engage in deliberate moral reflections unless explicitly invited to do so by the film itself. While their actions may not be moral, each of the characters' motivations for conducting violence can be rationalized, even though they may seem disagreeable upon initial emotional reaction and intuition.

The Composition of Violence: Geysers of Blood and Exploding Heads

Much of the violence that is depicted in *The Hateful Eight* can be categorized aesthetically as hyper-violence due to its highly graphical, exaggerated, and visually pleasing expression. The majority of the film's events take place inside a cottage which is not very visually appealing; it is a rather confined space in dark and brown tones, and the characters are similarly dirty and dressed in mostly dull colors, but these aspects only serve to make the gory, rich splashes of red blood stand out as even more noticeable and aesthetic. The first deaths occur almost two hours into the plot when John Ruth and the stagecoach driver O.B. drink the poisonous coffee,

the consequences of which are forceful cascades of glistening red blood being spewed all over the dinner table, floor, and not least Daisy's grinning face (1:43:42-1:45:26).

While Ruth is straddling over Daisy and punching her because she is amused at the fact that he has been poisoned, she gets a hold of his gun and shoots him in the chest. As with every other gunshot being fired in the film, this results in a geyser of red blood shooting out of Ruth's back, and tufts of fur from his big fur coat are ripped out by the force of the bullet, whirling in the air, with smoke coming out of the bullet's exit wound (1:45:23-1:45:32).



(1:45:31)

While most people have presumably never witnessed someone being shot in the real world, they will most likely recognize the massive spout of blood exiting Ruth's back as unrealistic and exaggerated, and the angle from which the frame is shot amplifies the intensity of it. While the shot is very fast-paced, an aesthetic element can be found in the way the bright red blood stands out against the dreary, brown-hued background, and the pieces of fur that subsequently float into the air.

Similarly, the pistol fight that occurs between Mannix and Mobray results in thick streams of blood flooding out of both of them as they shoot each other, but this sequence is shown in slow motion (1:58:33-1:59:27). This cinematographic device also functions to amplify the effects of the violence, as the glistening drops of blood can be seen flying towards the camera, and the force of Mannix's gunshot causes Mobray to be flung into the wall, blood dripping from his mouth as he lands on the floor.

Another highly exaggerated episode of violence occurs when Warren kills señor Bob by shooting him twice in the chest, of course causing the familiar spouts of blood to flow from his gunshot wounds, and subsequently shoots him in the head, causing it to explode (1:56:59-1:57:18).



(1:57:15)

Like a balloon filled with blood, Bob's head effortlessly pops, causing gore to spurt in every direction and rain down on his corpse. The same thing happens to Daisy's brother Jody, whom Warren shoots in the back of the head, and his blood and brain matter spray out on his sister's face and hair as she screams (2:23:06-2:23:27). This incident is particularly brutal because it interrupts one of the few, rare moments of sincere joy offered by the film, which is Daisy and Jody's reunion, and the despair Daisy exhibits is naturally exacerbated by the fact that her brother's blood has painted her face red. The aesthetics of Daisy's own death is even pointed out diegetically by Warren and Mannix who evaluate her flailing movements while being hung from the ceiling as "a nice dance" and "pretty" (2:39:37-2:39:48).

While these highly gory representations of violence are not exactly pleasant to watch, they can be enjoyed aesthetically because of their exaggerated nature, which allows the spectator to detach the brutal incidents from reality and what she imagines would happen if they were to take place in the real world; they are too graphic and hyperbolic to be viewed as realistic. One could argue that the truly visually pleasing part of the violence shown in this film can be found in watching the hateful, unsympathetic characters perish, as a feeling almost comparable to relief is released from it.

More importantly, though, these hyper-violent scenes create a feeling of suspense within the spectator, and this suspense drives the plot forward. The first two hours of the film are quite slow-paced, but as soon as the first incident of blood spill occurs, the pace picks up, and the violence quickly escalates to the point where two blood-soaked, dying men are helping each other hang a woman with a severed arm cuffed to her wrist. The violence is thus aesthetic on the level of the actions themselves due to their display of striking effects and bright colors, but it is also aesthetic on the structural level, setting the pace of the film.

Characters and Sympathy Structures: The Good, the Bad, and the Worst, but the Good Guys are Dead

The Good: Victims

As the title of the film reveals, it is about eight hateful characters. In fact, the premise of the film is that the 'good guys' have been murdered, and only the hateful ones remain; according to Margrethe Bruun Vaage this relativity is an important factor in the realm of sympathy structures. While very little is known about the good guys, and their introduction appears very late in the plot, they are easily identifiable as truly sympathetic characters, and this makes the unsympathetic characters stand out as such even more. The present chapter seeks to examine the ways in which the good guys are recognizable as such, and what narrative function their limited appearance serves.

Out of the six chapters that the film is divided into, it is not until the fifth that the good guys are properly introduced – they are the usual inhabitants of Minnie's Haberdashery: Minnie Mink herself, Sweet Dave, Six-Horse Judy, Ed, Charly, and Gemma. The one sympathetic character we have known from the beginning is the stagecoach driver O.B., and he has been acknowledged as sympathetic all along, from telling Warren that he would let him ride with the stagecoach if it were up to him (0:05:51-0:05:59), to Ruth proclaiming to him that "I sorta kinda trust you" (1:15:41-1:15:46), which speaks volumes given the distrustfulness that is otherwise prevalent among the hateful eight.

The fifth chapter is a flashback, showing the arrival of the four Jody Domingre gang members and their subsequent murder spree, which is but a link in their plan to free Daisy from Ruth's captivity. Thus, the atmosphere in the beginning of the chapter is as gloomy as usual, signaled by the familiar ominous score, as the four dangerous passengers are taken through the harsh nature and snowy landscape in Judy and Ed's stagecoach. However, once they arrive at Minnie's Haberdashery, the sinister mood completely changes, as the sun starts to shine and the tone of the interactions becomes friendly and light-hearted (2:01:46-2:02:43).

Instead of the usual profanity and condescending epithets which the spectator is well acquainted with by now, Ed and Charly's conversation is characterized by friendliness and terms of endearment such as "my boy" and "friend", and Judy is extremely energetic and joyful, jumping off the stagecoach excitedly to invite the yet to be revealed passengers inside with a big, genuine smile.



(2:02:28)

The only time any of the hateful characters have smiled thus far is when they ridicule or mock each other, and these first few character attributes displayed by Ed, Charly and Judy are therefore already distinctly more sympathetic. To set them apart from the friendliness that otherwise dominates the scene, the sinister and ominous score picks up again as the four passengers leave the stagecoach and enter the haberdashery (2:02:45-2:03:03); as pointed out by Murray Smith, music is an important indicator of moral structures, and the score that accompanies the dangerous and unsympathetic men alerts the spectator to the fact that they are just that.

Inside the haberdashery, the four passengers introduce themselves as Oswaldo Mobray, Joe Gage, Bob, and Jody, and they charm their way around the room, flirting with Minnie, Gemma and Judy, and striking up friendly conversation with Sweet Dave. Suspension builds up as the music signals that trouble is coming, and surely enough, the scene culminates with them killing everyone inside the haberdashery except for General Smithers (2:03:08-2:11:47). The goodness of the characters who are brutally murdered is symbolized by the fact that they sell candy, and as Mobray shoots Gemma, a huge glass jar of jelly beans explodes, aesthetically symbolizing the destruction of sweetness and thus the sympathetic characters (2:09:55-2:09:58).

As Gage goes outside to get rid of the last of the good guys, a melancholic nondiegetic song plays with the lyrics: “Now you’re all alone, feeling that nobody wants you, and you’re looking for someone to hold your hand, someone who will understand. Now you’re by yourself, and you’re feeling the world close in on you, and you’re asking for someone to show they care, someone…” (2:12:00-2:13:19).



(2:13:23)

The song is cut off abruptly by the loud sound of a gunshot as Gage shoots Charly, sparing him no mercy in spite of the pleas of the song and Charly himself. The red blood in the white snow is another example of aesthetic hyper-violence, and it has a symbolic meaning of Gage killing Charly in cold blood.

In terms of recognition, the good guys are definitely individuated characters and not simply stick figures, because they are recognizable and have distinct, individual traits and physical features. What challenges the processes of the structure of sympathy with regards to them, however, is the fact that they are only on screen and alive for roughly ten minutes of the film, with the exception of O.B., who remains the most anonymous of everyone anyhow. Murray Smith argues that the characters we only see for a short amount of time are typically unindividuated characters, but he does not specify what exactly constitutes a short amount of time, and, arguably, ten minutes out of an almost three hour long film is a short amount of time by most standards. By this logic, the spectator should not be able to engage in constructing the good guys as characters.

So, the good guys are only present for a very short while, but they are individuated characters, some of whom have traits that are re-identified during this short time span, and these are seemingly contradicting factors according to Smith's account of the level of recognition. The good guys must, however, be recognized, because recognition is a prerequisite for alignment, and some alignment does take place. That is, the spectator is given brief subjective access to a couple of the good guys, one of them being Judy, as she lies on the floor in a pool of blood, reaching out her hand towards Joe Gage who has shot her.

In the following frame Judy's point of view is shown, looking up at Gage's face from a very low angle and whimpering before she receives the killing blow (2:11:06-2:11:47), and as has been established previously, POV structures can function as a tool of alignment. This is

arguably the case here, because the spectator sees Judy's view of her cold-blooded killer, nonchalantly eating a peppermint stick, and his obvious apathy combined with the POV shot enhances our sympathy for Judy through empathy. Furthermore, the song that plays when Gage kills Charly can be interpreted as a structure of alignment with Charly's character, conveying his feelings of despair as he lies in the shed, hoping to be spared.

When it comes to allegiance, any moral evaluation of the good guys is based solely on their relative goodness compared to the hateful characters. One could thus argue that the narrative function of the good guys is that they serve as reverse contrast characters, under the terms of Margrethe Bruun Vaage, in the sense that they make the hateful eight even less morally preferable than they were to begin with. The 'good guys' are only referred to as such because they are morally preferable to the hateful eight and therefore good in comparison, in spite of any attributes they may embody that would have influenced our view on them negatively under different circumstances, such as Minnie's bossy attitude and racist behavior toward Mexicans. The portrayal of the protagonists is so antipathetic that it creates a strong polarization, making any character that is not one of the hateful eight seem good, or at least morally preferable. In the following, the sympathy structures of the hateful eight will be examined.

The Bad: Racist Bigots, Liars and Bounty Hunters

The very first person whose face we see clearly in the film is Major Marquis Warren in a close-up shot, which is shown immediately after he is seen sitting comfortably and completely unfazed on a pile of dead, frozen men. Therefore, the spectator's first impression of Warren is that he is likely a dangerous and rather unsympathetic man, and, due to the primacy effect, the spectator's viewing strategy is to be wary of the information that the narrative puts forward about him.



(0:05:09)

In terms of recognition, Warren comes across as polite and compliant when he asks for a ride on the stagecoach and subsequently is ordered to drop his pistol, so that the paying stagecoach customer, John Ruth, can assess him and decide whether or not to let him ride along. He even appears gentlemanly, tipping his hat to Daisy when Ruth introduces her (0:06:21-0:08:36). These are attributes that are later re-identified as traits in Warren's interactions with other characters, but the politeness simply turns out to be an act of precaution due to the fact that he is a distrusting black man among white people with pistols.

Warren is the character we follow for the longest time out of all of them; the film starts and ends with him. He is the one the spectator is given the most subjective access to, in virtue of the concept of familiarity regarding the amount of time he is on the screen, and the amount of conversations he has with the others, which allow the spectator access to much of his inner state. Moreover, Warren is, as previously established, the one who takes on a detective role, investigating the mysterious circumstances at Minnie's Haberdashery. He is evidently the only character who has visited the place before and is familiar with Minnie and Sweet Dave, and his insights cause the spectator to trust him to a higher degree than the others.

Due to this structure of alignment, he is the character that comes closest to being the protagonist of the film, but not in the usual sense of the term. The spectator is not encouraged to care much more for Warren than any of the others, or to wish for him to really succeed in his endeavors, and this is due to the unsympathetic way in which he is portrayed, as will be examined in the following. However, there is one overshadowing plea for excuses which calls for sympathy on his behalf, and that is his race.

The events of the film take place in the years following the Civil war, and Warren is a former soldier who has fought on the side of the Union as an emancipated slave. However, his efforts in the war are questioned by Chris Mannix, a Southern man who comes from a family of pro-Confederate guerillas called Mannix's Marauders, which is likely a historical reference to Quantrill's raiders (Rafuse 609). Mannix accuses Warren of joining the war to kill white men in general, and not just "white Southern crackers", as he claims himself. The accusation rests on the story of Warren's escape from a war prisoner camp, which he succeeded in by burning it down, killing mostly Union soldiers in the process, and subsequently being drummed out of the cavalry with a yellow stripe on his back (0:28:57-0:33:01).

From a contemporary perspective and with the knowledge we have today of the absolutely inhumane practice of slavery, it is difficult not to sympathize with Warren in this discus-

sion, and with his desire to avenge his race against the oppressive forces. This becomes increasingly difficult when Mannix goes on to suggest that a black man's life is worthless compared to a white man's: "Major Marquis burned 47 men alive for no more reason than to give a nigger a run for the trees" (0:31:37-0:31:49). Out of the roster of characters that she has been introduced to thus far, the spectator is most likely to foster sympathy for Warren because of the racial injustice and oppression he has experienced.

However, Warren challenges the spectator's sympathy when he tells the story of how he killed the son of the old Confederate officer General Sandy Smithers. Because Smithers' son reveals to Warren that his father is "the Bloody Niggerkiller of Baton Rouge" (1:29:43), Warren tortures and rapes him, forcing him to perform fellatio at gunpoint while naked in the snow (1:28:09-1:34:49). He promises the naked man a blanket in exchange for the sexual deed, but reveals to Smithers: "That blanket was just a heartbreaking liar's promise. Kind of like those uniforms the union issued those colored troops that *you* chose not to acknowledge" (1:33:45-1:33:59). Margrethe Bruun Vaage argues that the act of rape elicits feelings of moral disgust in the spectator, and that it is typically used to mark a character as antagonistic.

However, because all of the hateful eight are indeed hateful and equally unsympathetic, Warren is not portrayed as any more antagonistic than the rest, in spite of the act of rape eliciting moral disgust; the fact that he does it as an act of vengeance in a historically factual context of slavery and oppression based on racism mitigates the spectator response. As previously mentioned, while the spectator's immediate emotional reaction to the incident is to perceive him as repulsive and far worse than any of the others, upon deliberate moral reflection, Warren's actions seem justified in the light of the racial injustice that has dominated his life.

Warren carries around an infamous "Lincoln letter", a letter he claims to have received in a correspondence with the president during the war. It is an important part of the narrative, because it is a symbolic ticket to the white man's respect; it helps ensure Warren's safety.



(0:17:50)

Symbolically, the first time Warren pulls it out of his pocket in the stagecoach, it lights up as if it were some kind of divine artifact, and Ruth is visibly touched when he reads it. When Mannix ridicules and forces Warren to admit that the letter is forged, he reveals that the reason he keeps the letter is because it has a mitigating effect on how he is otherwise treated by white people: "the only time black folks is safe, is when white folks is disarmed" (1:19:57-1:24:07). Warren's reasoning is a parodic inversion of Mannix's formerly presented excuse for burning down his 'fair share of nigger towns' during the war: "When niggers are scared, that's when white folks are safe" (0:34:07-0:34:14).

Directing the attention toward John Ruth, initially he appears to be the stereotype of brute masculinity with an aggressive, explosive, and rude attitude, and his outwards appearance matches his big ego: he has a wild mane, a majestic moustache, and a big fur coat. In spite of these stereotypically masculine characteristics, Ruth is also the most sentimental of the hateful eight, and this is a trait which is re-identified throughout the film. He is moved when he reads the Lincoln letter, and upon realizing that the letter is a lie, he proclaims that Warren has hurt his feelings (1:22:09-1:23:06). Right after threatening to kill her, he wipes food off of Daisy's face in what almost appears to be an affectionate gesture (1:17:00-1:17:12), and moments before Daisy insults him and he smashes the guitar she was playing, he compliments her singing (1:41:01-1:42:17).

These traits of sentimentality do not coincide with the stereotypical image of a masculine ruffian bounty hunter in the Wild West, and they therefore function as an element of parody with a comic effect. It is parodic in the sense that cowboys are notoriously masculine, and Ruth's display of sentimentality is a trait that is traditionally and stereotypically considered to be a feminine characteristic. Paradoxically, though, while Ruth acts kindly and sympathetically toward Daisy in glimpses, he does not shy away from beating her when she disobeys, and he

does not appear to have any particular disposition to women and thus no qualms about taking a woman to hang. He prides himself on being known as "the Hangman", who delivers his captives to the sheriff alive so he can watch them hang. This piece of information about his character becomes important at the end of the film, because it ultimately determines Daisy's fate, and also Warren and Mannix's decision to deliver justice.

The fact that Ruth has this soft side is his plea for excuses. While he may be just as hateful as the rest, he ends up saving Mannix's life by warning him that the coffee is poisoned, just as Mannix is about to take a sip (1:44:35). He has not previously shown any signs of friendliness toward Mannix, on the contrary, he is very hostile toward him due to their political disagreements, so Ruth's fleeting ability to show glimpses of compassion is a redeeming quality, which ultimately sets him apart as slightly less antipathetic.

Similarly, Mannix also has one redeeming quality. The initial impression of him is that he is a sly, boastful, and racist man, who stands in the shadow of his father and brothers' reputation. His view on black people is clearly defined in his conversation with Warren on the stagecoach, and it demonstrates a very antipathetic trait. He claims to be the new sheriff of Red Rock, but this claim is never proven nor disproven, making Mannix the only one of the hateful eight whose potential bluff is not called. Warren and Mannix are established as sworn enemies from the moment they exchange war stories on the stagecoach, and the antagonism between them persists until the moment Warren deduces that Mannix did not poison the coffee (1:47:15). From this point on, they form an unlikely alliance, and this alliance is what redeems Mannix's otherwise unsympathetic traits.

Once the poisoned coffee kills Ruth and O.B., Warren and Mannix team up against the four other guests at the haberdashery. What they do not realize, however, is that a fifth person is hiding in the basement, and he shoots up through the floor, hitting Warren's genitals (1:58:26-1:58:34). Symbolically, this shot can be interpreted as karma and as Warren paying for performing the morally repulsive act of rape. After the incident, the spectator becomes visibly aligned with Warren as he lies on the floor, writhing in agony, as well as when he lies on the bed later, trying to convince Mannix not to take Daisy's deal in exchange for Warren's life. The alignment in these scenes is visual, as Warren's pain is conveyed through a slow-motion effect, symbolizing his delirious state of mind as he is losing blood and simultaneously becoming desperate (2:31:05-2:31-56).

When Mannix's bargain with Daisy is concluded with a "No deal, tramp" (2:32:27), Warren's face is shown in a close-up frame, and his tearful eyes widen, showing an expression of disbelief as a racist white man chooses the side of a black man.



(2:32:36)

This marks the moment Mannix's antipathetic traits are redeemed, as he and Warren are united by the fact that both their deaths are imminent. As a final gesture of respect to Ruth, they decide to restore justice by hanging Daisy, as Ruth would have wanted. The final symbol of Mannix and Warren's alliance is represented by Mannix reading Warren's Lincoln letter, and acknowledging it as convincing, before he crumples it and tosses it away (2:40:41-2:43:25).

While the spectator is aligned with Warren most of the time, she also gains some subjective access to Ruth and Mannix; they are individuated as well as re-identified in virtue of their unsympathetic traits and redeeming qualities. However, *The Hateful Eight* truly challenges Smith's structure of sympathy, as the characters it aligns the spectator with are unsympathetic beyond the extent of Vaage's concept of an antihero, because they have few redeeming qualities and pleas for excuses – they are more so antagonistic and villainous than antiheroic. Warren, Ruth and Mannix do, however, have redeeming qualities, unlike the rest of the hateful eight, which make the moral evaluation of them result in slightly less antipathetic allegiances compared to the rest.

The Worst: Killers of the Good Guys

Daisy Domergue, señor Bob, Joe Gage, Oswaldo Mobray, and Jody Domingre are from a moral perspective the most antipathetic of the hateful eight, as they have the blood of the good guys on their hands. Out of the five, Daisy is the first character to be introduced on account of Ruth, and also the only one of them to whom the spectator is given some subjective access. On the level of recognition, she is easily identifiable as the most physically repulsive, because she is

constantly bruised and beaten, and gets stew, blood vomit, and even her own brother's brain matter shot in her face. Daisy's facial features moreover imply her psychological traits.



(0:10:59)

Her eyes are disturbingly dark, to the point where they almost seem black, which gives off an eerie, demon-like effect, and her hair is wild and untamed, like herself. The dark bruise on her left eye combined with her impudent attitude suggests that she is feisty and prone to getting into trouble. Overall, she looks very unladylike, and her behavior also reflects this characteristic.

Daisy is excessively foul-mouthed, insulting and mocking anyone she gets near, and she spits, snorts, and screams, presenting herself as generally unpleasant and repulsive to watch. While her personal crimes are never revealed, Ruth presents her as "no John Wilkes Booth" with a price of $10,000 dollars on her head, suggesting that she is not quite as bad as the man who assassinated President Lincoln, but bad enough that she has a rather large reward on her head (0:08:45). At the end of the film, she is revealed to be worth the hefty reward due to her involvement in her brother's outlaw gang along with Bob, Gage, and Mobray. The only time the spectator is given a slight amount of subjective access to Daisy's inner state is in the fourth chapter, which is dedicated to her secret: she knows who poisoned the coffee. However, the alignment is limited, as the subjective access to her knowledge of the perpetrator is obscured to the spectator; she sees Daisy watching someone poison the coffee, but it is not revealed who does it (1:36:39-1:37:21).

Daisy is extremely repulsive, antagonistic and unsympathetic, and these attributes are re-identified as traits throughout the narrative, for instance when she spits on Warren's Lincoln letter, shoots Ruth, or tries to negotiate with Mannix immediately after watching her brother's head explode. Naturally, Daisy's only goal is to escape her captivity, but upon moral evaluation

of her psyche, the spectator does not sympathize with her when her goal is not obtained and the rope becomes her final destination, in fact, this is the fate that the spectator comes to expect she will meet.

The spectator's subjective access to Gage, Mobray, and Bob respectively is much more opaque than to the others, fitting into the murder mystery plot perfectly, as they are the perpetrators Warren is trying to sleuth out. Appropriately for the murder mystery genre as well, all three men are disguised, but their disguises are so unconvincing that they have a comic parodic effect: Bob has chosen the least Mexican name possible in spite of his thick Mexican accent, Gage is a tough and brooding man who claims to be a mama's boy, and Mobray is suspiciously cheerful for someone who claims to hang people for a living. The spectator is not aligned with any of these three men, nor with Jody Domingre, who is introduced very late in the narrative, but they are all quickly identified as antagonistic because they have killed the good guys in cold blood.

This division of the hateful eight into bad and worst is contrived in the sense that they are all shady and awfully unsympathetic, but from a general moral perspective, Warren, Ruth and Mannix allegedly have the law on their side, while the Domingre gang members are outlaws. The division is further supported by the fact that the spectator is mainly aligned with Warren, and to a lesser degree Ruth and Mannix, allowing for subjective access to their inner states, and thus revealing a few redeeming qualities about them, which mitigate their judgment and moral evaluation. However, ultimately, all eight characters are hateful in both definitions of the word: they are full of hate as well as deserving of hate. In this context of antipathy, the most salient factor to set apart the hateful eight from the good guys is the violence.

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood[3]

The Culture of Violence: The Irony of the 1960's Hippie-Pacifists, the Manson Family Massacre and the Wild West

The film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019) (henceforth *OUTH*) is set in 1969. The year marks the close of a decade that started as the dawn of a golden age but, eventually, the dream never materialized, as the '60s were significantly shaped by politics and counterculture. Apart from the 1969 'Summer of Love', it was a politically, socially, and culturally turbulent and divisive decade. The political conflicts revolving around the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, anti-war protests, political assassinations, and the emerging 'generation gap' juxtapose the hippie movement's preaching of hedonism through the holy trinity of sex, drugs and rock n' roll, and the glamour of New Hollywood. The disparity is symbolic to the defining aspects of the '60s. The common denominator in this context is change. Whereas the hippie movement intended to change society, the Hollywood Renaissance connotes the transitional cultural values and new film traditions, as the American New Wave of young filmmakers came to prominence. The prosperity of the '60s strongly contrasted the previous decade, which, in regard to Hollywood, was referred to as the horrible decade.

OUTH is an epitomic depiction of the '60s, as the atmosphere of 1969 is conveyed by an infinitude of pop-culture references, alongside references to real locations, people, and events which all quintessentially connote that decade. The intertextuality relating to '60s pop-culture is integrated in a number of ways, most prominently in the references to and use of footage from films and TV-shows, particularly of the WWII, spy, western and spaghetti western genres, in the context of main character Rick Dalton's own acting career. Moreover, the score from several films, most notably westerns and Eurowesterns, is used in various scenes, and theater billboards of numerous other films have been installed at an abundance of locations throughout the film.

Following this outline of the '60s in terms of political, cultural and social aspects, *OUTH* conveys representations of cultures of violence in three prominent ways. The first relates to the political aspect conveyed by America's participation in the Vietnam War (1955-1973). This

[3] Unless otherwise disclosed, all images and timestamps in this chapter are extracted from *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019).

spurred social uproar, which resulted in the establishing of the countercultural hippie movement, which was devoted to the propagation of pacifism and repudiation of the mores of mainstream American values and domesticity. The consequential societal conflict and demarcation represent a context of violence demonstrated by predominant dispute between pacifists and militarists based on their opposing beliefs in regard to warfare.

The counterculture is represented in the film by Pussycat and her posse, who tour the boulevards of Hollywood to and from Spahn Movie Ranch, as hippie affiliation is implied by their appearance and social conduct. The comparison is based on John Anthony Moretta's insight into hippie culture in *The Hippies: A 1960s History* (2017). Certain aspects of the women's appearance such as bare feet, a lack of make-up and bra, and an anomalous and vagrant secondhand style that deviates from prevailing fashion conventions, resemble the reflection of defiance of corporate culture and rejection of consumerism in hippie fashion.



(1:15:38)

The gang's practice of hitchhiking and garbage gleaning is symbolic to the proletarian lifestyle that conveys the rejection of a mainstream, organized social structure. Their hostile attitude toward the police symbolizes the countercultural animosity toward established institutions, which is demonstrated as Pussycat yells: "Fuck you, you fucking pig" at a passing police car (1:22:04-1:22:07). And the line: "He's a flower, man!" (1:50:43-1:50:45) represents idealistic philosophy and resembles the use of idioms commonly associated with hippie culture.

The hippie subculture is further indicated by the group dynamic of the assembly at the Ranch and the individuals' names. This is implied by their collective living and the fact that they refer to each other by unconventional names, such as Gypsy, Squeaky, Snake, and Sun-

dance, reflecting how "[m]any hippies changed their names as a symbolic act of their independence from mainstream society" (Krassner 37). The hippie subculture representation in the film represents a prominent socio-political conflict centered on a context of violence contemporary with 1969.

The second culture of violence represents the notion of violence on TV. This is based on the context of westerns and the stuntman profession, as representing televised traditions of violence. Violence is conveyed in westerns through essential depictions of saloon fights, pistol duels and crossfire. In the same vein, the infliction of wounds and death are considered conventional genre traits. In all instances, the common denominator is the use of guns as the most genre-characteristic weapon of choice.

The stuntman profession conveys a context of violence, because as trained professionals they make a career of temporarily substituting actors when their characters are performing daring acts that endanger their physical health. In this sense, the stuntman, for one, makes the televised stunt violence and physical injury possible: the stuntman represents a conveyor of violence. The concept of films, TV-shows, actors and, by association, stuntmen as agents of televised violence are represented in the film on two occasions. The first is in a sentiment shared by Pussycat: "Actors are phony. They just say lines that other people write and pretend to murder people on their stupid TV shows. Meanwhile, real people are being murdered every day in Vietnam" (1:24:28-1:24:39). The second time it occurs is in a philosophical monologue delivered by another Manson Family member, a character named Sadie:

> I've been expanding on this one idea in my head. Alright, dig it. We all grew up watching TV, you know what I mean? And if you grew up watching TV, that means you grew up watching murder. Every show on TV that wasn't *I Love Lucy* was about murder. So, my idea is... we kill the people who taught us to kill. I mean, where the fuck are we, man? We are in fucking Hollywood, man. The people an entire generation grew up watching kill people live here. And they live in pig-shit fucking luxury. I say fuck them. I say we cut their cocks off and make them eat it. (2:17:27-2:18:06)

Sadie makes the statement in a scene (2:13:08-2:18:14) where she and three other members of the Ranch community drive onto the street of Rick's house, as they have set out to kill the residents of Rick's neighboring house. However, the idling car calls to Rick's attention,

prompting him to approach and berate the quartet into leaving, under threats of calling the police. The character Tex recognizes Rick as the actor performing the role of Jake Cahill, the main character of the fictional TV-show *Bounty Law* that ran from 1959 to 1963, because he used to watch the show when he was younger. The anticlimactic and demeaning encounter with a childhood hero incites Sadie's speech and a correlative change of plans that initiates the film's climax, as the group decides to divert their mission to Rick's household instead. The context of the scene depends on intertextual references to the historical events that occurred on August 13th, 1969 on 10050 Cielo Drive in Benedict Canyon, Los Angeles; these also represent the third culture of violence.

Through subtle references and mention of names, it is revealed to the spectator that the hippie community represents the infamous 1960s cult known as The Manson Family. The first subtle hint is given in the sequence that introduces the gang of hippie girls (0:15:19-0:16:10), as they sing the lyrics to a song written by Manson called, *I'll Never Say Never to Always* (1970):

1. Always is always forever
2. As long as one is one
3. Inside yourself for your father
4. All is none all is none all is one

5. It's time we put our love behind you
6. The illusion has been just a dream
7. The valley of death and I'll find you
8. Now is when on a sunshine beam
9. So bring all the young perfection
10. For there us shall surely be
11. No clothing, tears, or hunger
12. You can see you can see you can be

The lyrics strongly convey a cultist mentality. Lines one through four imply an alternate philosophy to modern and traditional religion, and the fifth line implies the common notion of leaving every aspect of your life behind before joining the cult. Lines six through twelve draw symbolic parallels to a Nirvana that will be revealed once you join the cult, which is also rep-

resentative of the classic “us vs. them” mentality of cults. The involvement of the Manson Family is further insinuated via references to Charles Manson, by the nickname of Charlie, on two occasions throughout the film. The first is when Pussycat brings Cliff to the ranch, and the second is when Tex instructs the quartet on Manson’s orders for their mission, when asked “What did Charlie say?” Tex responds: “He said: "Go to Terry's old house and kill everybody in there." And you heard him yourself. He said, "Make it witchy"” (2:16:12-2:16:22). Beyond the mentioning of Manson, Tex also refers to Terry Melcher, a mid-to-late 1960’s record producer, singer, and songwriter and the former resident of 10050 Cielo Drive. Melcher and Manson were introduced by Beach Boys member Dennis Wilson in 1968 and their association came about because Manson wanted Melcher to record his music, however, Melcher refused (Plasketes 270).

Tex himself is a biographical parody of Manson Family member Tex Watson, who took part in the real-life tragedy of August 13th, 1969, orchestrated by Manson. The violent correlation between Manson and the death of a stuntman (“Board Denies Manson Parole for 7th Time”) is parodically symbolized in the film, as Cliff, a stuntman, unleashes an abundance of violence on the cult quartet, similar in degree to what Manson's disciples did to Tate and her friends in the real world. In this way, the film conveys a sense of poetic justice, as it is a stuntman who exacts retribution on Manson's horrible crimes.

Furthermore, as in the film, the Manson Family inhabited Spahn Movie Ranch and helped run the place as a tourist attraction offering horseback rides, in the wake of its descend from being rented out as a filming site for westerns from the mid ‘50s to mid ‘60s. However, the Manson Family is undoubtedly most notorious for their association with the most renowned tragedy of 1969: the brutal murder of the pregnant actress Sharon Tate and her friends (Atchison & Heide 777-778). On 13 August 1969, Manson Family members Tex Watson, Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel, and Linda Kasabian drove to the Santa Monica Mountains to carry out Manson’s horrendous plan, which was ordered done in the pursuit of the Armageddon event Manson called Helter Skelter: the fundament of Manson’s doctrine. Ultimately, this culminated in the vicious killing of Sharon Tate and her unborn child, Wojciech Frykowski, Jay Sebring, and Abigail Folger. These three cultures of violence intertwine in the film throughout the multiple storylines of the plot and in the interactions between the characters, producing a homage to the 1960s, L.A. and Hollywood.

The Composition of Violence: A Hippie Beating and Cult vs Dog and a Flamethrower

In comparison to *Kill Bill* and *The Hateful Eight*, *OUTH* does not offer nearly as much violence in terms of volume, and the violence the film does portray does not either fall as easily into any of the three categories within the formal-composition mode of aesthetic violence as presented by Joseph H. Kupfer. However, the sequences of violence that are presented in the film are aestheticized in their own right, which will be examined and discussed further in this chapter.

Apart from the short clips of film violence from the TV shows and films that Rick stars in within the diegesis, there are only two scenes in the film depicting violence and bloodshed among the characters within the fictional reality. In virtue of this, they stand out as particularly impactful, especially seeing as the film is otherwise quite slow-paced and does not center around violence to the same degree that *Kill Bill* and *The Hateful Eight* do.

The first aestheticized incident of violence occurs when Cliff is about to leave Spahn's Ranch after having driven the Manson Family member Pussycat there in Rick's car, and finding out that the hippies are staying at the ranch without Spahn knowing the full extent of the situation. When Cliff walks up to the car, he notices that one of the tires has been punctured with a knife, and a hippie is sitting on a fence nearby, laughing manically at his own deed. When Cliff indignantly asks the hippie to replace the flat tire and he refuses, Cliff punches him in the face with such force that his feet leave the ground, and he is thrown backwards onto the dirt (1:49:54-1:51:19).



L: (1:50:27), R: (1:50:33)

The incident is aestheticized by means of medium and regular close-up frames moving in slow-motion, which amplify the effects of the violence; streams of blood flow from his nose and mouth, and the impact of his body hitting the ground becomes far more intense. While one could argue that there is an element of hyper-violence in the way the man is supernaturally

lifted off the ground by the sheer force of the jab, the consequences of the violence is otherwise realistic; there is no presence of unrealistic and visually pleasing showers of blood or the like. However, other elements play into the aestheticization of the incident, such as the timing of the violence to the non-diegetic soundtrack. Cliff's first punch is thrown just as the song comes to its conclusion with the lyrics: "My life is my own, so leave me alone, I don't want to be your fool," and upon his fist hitting the hippie's face, the song trails out in a drum roll, as if saluting Cliff's punch. Furthermore, the song clearly connotes the retro aesthetics of the late 1960s music associated with the rebellious young hippies of the time, and Cliff's beating stopping the music arguably reflects his opinion of them.

The silence that follows once the groovy tune of the song stops playing while Cliff keeps punching the hippie makes the severity of the violence all the more pronounced. While completely unnecessary due to the lack of retaliation on the hippie's part, Cliff punches him in the face a total of three times, and every time he is seen falling to the ground in slow-motion and subsequently getting picked up by the hair. The third punch is seemingly prompted by the angry outcries from a crowd of hippie women watching the episode unfold. Cliff looks over at the women in an eyeline match shot, grabs a hold of the hippie's head once more, politely nods at the women while uttering the word: "Ladies," and beats him a final time.

As previously mentioned, there is a form of poetic justice to the film allowing a stuntman to beat up a hippie at Spahn Movie Ranch, seeing as the film in this way reimagines the historical event of the stuntman Donald Shea being tortured and murdered by Manson Family members at the ranch. The fact that the hippie is referred to as "Clem" by one of the others (1:52:10) supports this argument even more so, as the name of the Manson Family member who killed Donald Shae was Steve 'Clem' Grogan. As will be examined in a later chapter, this also affects the spectator's moral evaluation of Cliff.

The second violent incident in the film is a culmination of extremely brutal violence and another rewriting of historical events. The events unfold as three Manson Family members, Tex, Sadie, and Katie, enter Rick's home with the intent of killing everyone in it, but once they find Cliff tripping on acid, a turn of events occurs, causing the excessively violent deaths of the three cult members (2:22:33-2:29:50). The atmosphere is laden with suspense and an immense threat of violence looms as the intruders point their weapons at Cliff. However, the severity of the situation is juxtaposed with the calm exhibited by Cliff due to his acid trip, which adds a comedic layer to the otherwise extremely violent sequence.

When Tex loads his gun to finally take a shot at Cliff, with a tongue click Cliff commands his loyal companion, the dog Brandy, to pounce on Tex, and shaky close-up shots show

Brandy ferociously attacking the screaming Tex; the exaggerated sound effects from the biting dog almost drown out the screaming, serving as an amplification of the effects of the violence. Sadie then runs toward Cliff with a large knife in hand while screaming, and Cliff quickly responds by tossing a large can of dog food into her face, causing Sadie to fall to the ground in even louder screams.



(2:26:00)

The close-up shot of Sadie's bloody face with a visibly broken nose from the impact of the can is but one of many examples of unpleasant images portraying gruesome and gory details, and just as with the beating of the hippie at the ranch, the consequences of the violence are far from aesthetically pleasing, but other aspects of the violent scenes have aesthetic qualities, such as the rhythm established by the music playing over the events.

Once again the violent episode is accompanied by a soundtrack, and this time it is a diegetic song playing on the radio which Cliff has turned on moments before the cultists enter the house. Throughout much of the scene inside the house, the song, Vanilla Fudge's cover of "Keep Me Hangin' On", is barely audible over the sound of screaming and dog snarling, but once Cliff tumbles across the coffee table with Katie and gets her knife stuck in his hip, the volume of the song increases to the point where it drowns out the screams and other background noises. As Cliff grabs Katie's head and repeatedly slams it into the wall, a sort of rhythm is established, complimenting the increasing intensity of the music, and once Cliff drops the dead Katie on the floor, the song ends.

In the final part of this violent sequence, the now completely traumatized Sadie rams through a window and walks into the pool where Rick is enjoying some music on a pool floatie.

Rick rushes over to his shed and picks up the flamethrower he used in the fictional film *The 14 Fists of McCluskey* in which he burns a group of Nazi officers; operating this flamethrower is the one dangerous stunt he boasts about having performed without a stuntman (0:08:49-0:09:26), and thus he gets to redeem his own diminishing masculinity and self-worth by taking on the real life role of the hero he so often plays on the screen.



L: (2:29:02)



***Inglourious Basterds* R: (2:24:07)**

Rick torches Sadie with the flamethrower, and the inferno he creates bears resemblance to that of the fiery Nazi execution in Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). The reference is likely an allusion to the rewriting of history which takes place in both films; the historical events figuratively go up in flames.

While the violence shown in *OUTH* is not aesthetic according to Kupfer's formal-composition mode of violence, it is aesthetic with regards to its impact on the spectator. Apart from intensifying the effects of the violence through means of slow-motion effects and sound, the violence most saliently becomes impactful in the sense that the spectator gets to watch Cliff brutalize these hippies and cultists whom the world historically has a vendetta against due to their repulsive crimes – not least, as the film itself emphasizes tremendously, the murder of Sharon Tate. Furthermore, the fact that a stuntman is the one to dispatch the culprits and deliver justice is even more satisfying in light of the historical events.

Characters and Sympathy Structures: A Would-Have-Been America's Sweetheart and An Epic Bromance

In *OUTH*, Tarantino creates a sensuous and atmospheric homage to the 1960s within the context of a plot that both pays tribute to "an era of free love, peace and happiness" (Atchison & Heide 772) and brings poetic justice to the tragedy of the decade. Over the course of multiple story-

lines entwining fiction with reality and intertwining fates, Tarantino composes the ultimate fairytale ending of happily ever after. The main events revolve around three protagonists: actor Rick Dalton, stuntman Cliff Booth, and actress Sharon Tate.

The central context based on real events is subtly introduced after the prelude of the film, which is followed by an opening scene with paratextual references to the major actors. The scene introduces two unnamed characters, only their celebrity personae are made obvious by their appearance; as a blond woman and a bob-haired man walk through an airport, they are stopped by the paparazzi, connoting their celebrity status.



(0:04:18)

Their identities are not explicitly revealed, but the particular focus brought on by the specific introduction invokes spectator expectations that they are somehow significant to the plot. Although this context remains opaque for an additional 18 minutes, an allusion is made in a later scene to the more observant spectator in possession of the appropriate knowledge. When Cliff drives Rick home through the hills of Beverly Crest, the camera makes a combined pan and zoom to reveal the street name they drive onto.



(0:17:45)

As mentioned previously, Sharon Tate resided on Cielo Drive in Los Angeles up until the day she was mercilessly murdered. Thus, the well-informed spectator might make the connection, based on the exterior appearance and recognizable traits, that the couple in the airport scene bears strong resemblance to Sharon Tate and her husband, film director Roman Polanski. This is further implied in a later scene where the couple emerges from the house on 10050 Cielo Drive; actress Margot Robbie starring as the blonde in the airport is wearing a replica of the snakeskin jacket that Tate wore to the premiere of *Rosemary's Baby* in 1968, which she attended alongside her husband who directed the film.



(0:27:32)

Rafal Zawierucha, who portrays the man in the airport with the pageboy cut, is wearing an outfit with a ruffled cravat similar to the style Polanski wore at his wedding to Tate in 1968.

Moreover, there is a striking resemblance between their facial features, as they are of a similar build, and both have slightly receding chins and prominently long noses.



Publicly available photos of Sharon Tate and Roman Polanski

The biographical depiction of Tate and Polanski in the film is ultimately confirmed by a star-struck Rick (0:18:58-0:19:42) who sees them from his car as he and Cliff arrive in his driveway, and firmly established a short while later, in a setting that oozes New Hollywood. Following their departure from the house, Sharon and Roman arrive at a party at the Playboy Mansion, which was notorious in the 1970s for its soirees. Despite this discrepancy between time and location, as a narrative device, the setting creates an atmosphere that implicates the prime celebrity circle of the time. This resonates with Tate and Polanski's true-to-reality up-and-coming Hollywood careers and, thus, their representation of New Hollywood.

The setting is further established by numerous appearances of portrayals of A-list celebrities of that period, such as Mama Cass and Michelle Phillips, both members of a folk-rock vocal group called The Mamas & The Papas actively recording between 1965 and 1968.



(0:29:15)

In addition to this, celebrity hair stylist Jay Sebring makes several appearances in the context of his personal association with Tate and the fact that he was also one of the victims of the tragedy. Recognition of these additional star personae is made explicit when their names appear by their characters, resembling the way characters are introduced alongside the name of the actors who perform them in the opening sequence of TV-shows, such as *Bonanza* (1959-73).

Moreover, actor Steve McQueen, performed by Damian Lewis who bears an uncanny resemblance to McQueen, also makes a cameo appearance. As a contrast to the other cameos that merely establish narrative context, McQueen's appearance is significant in virtue of its function as a narrative device that prompts the separation of fact from fiction. In this way, McQueen's character acts as an agent of communication between the film and the spectator, as he informs of the interpersonal relationship between Tate, Polanski, and Sebring. This is necessary in the sense that the spectator, who does not possess any knowledge of the real event, will eventually need an explanation as to why Sebring was present at Tate and Polanski's house on the night of the murders, while the latter was filming a movie abroad.



(0:29:35)

Tate's entrance at the Playboy Mansion (0:29:30-0:29:40) is symbolic to the construction of her character, in terms of her position relative to the camera. As this chapter will attempt to show, the construction of Tate's character is rather one-dimensional. That is, her depiction is rather non-complex, she is portrayed with an unconditionally exuberant attitude and is, as such, reduced to a characterization that is exclusively vivacious, good-natured, and kind-hearted. This is significantly demonstrated by her naivety, which she predominantly displays in her relation to Sebring by being oblivious to his questionable motives, and in two successive scenes. In the first scene she picks up a hitchhiking hippie woman (0:59:47-1:01:09), Tate drops her off, and they do their parting in an uncommonly friendly manner. Tate hugs the hitchhiker while saying: "Good luck on your adventure. Have a good time in Big Sur." This solicitous parting with a stranger makes Tate lovable.

In the second scene she spontaneously goes to a screening of a recent picture she herself stars in (1:04:28-1:09:16). She appears adorable in the lily-white way she discreetly observes the other spectators, reveling in the fact that they find her appearance in it amusing. The way she seems to enjoy the film with empathy, bobbing her head along with the music and fidgeting in her seat in affect, makes her appear with a manner of childlike pride.

In the Playboy Mansion entrance hall scene, Tate displays a somewhat closed-off body language, based on her position in regard to the camera, as her body is slightly turned, and she faces away from the camera. Her physical representation symbolically resembles her character construction. This can be categorized as one-sided, based on the superficial characterization of exclusively sympathetic character traits, which can be compressed to effervescence and joie de vivre. Just like her stance relative to the camera renders her one-sided, the construction of her

character does not allow the spectator to fully comprehend the character as a representation of an actual complex person. In the same vein, despite the degree of subjective access, the lack of depth of character is reflected in the lack of person schema capacities, which can be attributed to her. Though the spectator might easily align in sympathy, the lack of explicit character function to the overall storyline might also create a sort of distance. Denied several capacities of a real character, this one-sidedness arguably reduces Tate to a narrative function, compared to Cliff and Rick.

The dynamic duo is introduced in the prelude of the film (0:00:36-0:02:39), a scene consisting of two sequences. Shot in 4:3 aspect ratio and black-and-white, the scene authentically conveys atmospheric resemblance to 1960s celebrity TV interviews. The first sequence presents a trailer to the show *Bounty Law*, which focuses on the introduction of the main character Jake Cahill. The second sequence is an interview, hosted by a parodic character named Allen Kincaide, who is portrayed as characteristically sassy and yet uncool, being overly enthusiastic and lacking good punchlines. The interview introduces the actor behind Jake Cahill, Rick Dalton, and his stunt double Cliff Booth.

The trailer sequence categorizes Jake as the protagonist and stereotypically good and heroic cowboy by means of his white hat and gun wielding skills, which is reminiscent of a man who shoots faster than his own shadow, with Lucky Luke-resembling qualities. The televised pop-culture atmosphere of the late ‘50s to early ‘60s also connects Rick’s star persona to a specific part of Hollywood history and makes a subtle suggestion that one of the character’s narrative functions is being a representation of Old Hollywood.



(0:02:27)

The recognition of Rick and Cliff's physical traits might be influenced by the star personae of actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt. However, spectators who are familiar with the auteurist style of Tarantino might know not to depend on the primacy effect and expectations based on the actors' former performances, as Tarantino is known for his unique construction of characters. In this way, Rick and Cliff are recognized based on two primary aspects: one is their respective professions, as the stuntman profession is not connected to a particular stereotype to the same extent that a western TV-show typecast actor is. The other is the faint implication of their relationship dynamic, which is seen in the way they look at each other in the image above. This suggests that the pair has a significantly closer relationship than what is initially implied by their professional association.

The dynamics of the duo's relationship is unfolded through spatio-temporal attachment, which also navigates through the multiple storylines consisting of simultaneous action and flashbacks. The spectator is initially aligned with Rick through subjective access gained by means of cinematography. As the pair enter a restaurant, Rick walks through the door first, and in the following close-up a drink is mixed and subsequently placed before Rick; his needs and desires are cinematographically put before Cliff's. The visualization of Rick as the front man symbolically depicts Cliff as a sidekick. As the scene unfolds, the spectator is sympathetically allied with Rick through the depiction of him as an actor struggling to find his place in the new era of Hollywood. When Rick meets with producer Marvin Schwarz (0:04:39-0:13:44), he portrays a contrast to the way he has carried himself in the prelude. He has a slight stutter and appears humbled by the fact that Schwarz has taken an interest in him, making it obvious that he lacks his former confidence.

This is supported by the scene (1:17:42-1:19:12) in Rick's trailer on the set of the TV-show *Lancer*, which is an imitation of the real-life show that ran from 1968 to 1970. Rick berates himself for drinking and subsequently forgetting his lines and embarrassing himself on the set. Haunted by his wounded integrity he says, looking in the mirror: "I practiced them, and now I don't look like I goddamn practiced them! You're sitting there like a fucking baboon! Why?! You're a fucking alcoholic." The self-derogatory discourse in his rant demonstrates that he has a low opinion of himself, and that this only spirals due to his indulgence in a toxic coping mechanism in the form of alcohol. As a result, he simultaneously demands of, vows to and threatens himself to stop drinking by saying: "Let me tell you something. You don't get these lines right, I'm gonna blow your fucking brains out tonight. Alright? Your brains are gonna be splattered all over your goddamn pool. I mean it, motherfucker."



(1:18:56)

As a contrast to the Playboy Mansion entrance hall scene where Sharon faces away from the camera, Rick's reflection in the mirror is looking directly into the camera. The intention is obviously to make it appear as though Rick is talking to himself in the mirror, even though his body is clearly positioned at an angle that does not allow him to see his own reflection. Instead this angle generates a powerful structure of alignment, due to the way his position creates a sense of eye contact between Rick and the spectator. In this way, the spectator is arguably closer to Rick than he is himself in this situation, as she sees what he would have been seeing himself, if he was positioned accordingly.

Rick's shameful and demeaning alcoholic tendencies are partly redeemed when his self-directed scolding reveals that he particularly regrets failing in front of the child actress of the show. The fact that he is not above the judgment of a child and the order of his priorities in that regard encourage a sympathetic perception of Rick, as he attempts to give himself a somewhat motivational speech: "You show that little fucking girl. You're gonna show that goddamn Jim Stacy. You're gonna show them on that goddamn fucking set who the fuck Rick Dalton is, alright?"

Rick's storyline is orchestrated as a fairy tale quest that symbolically resembles the journey of the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Similarly to how the Lion engages in the misconception that he must receive courage, despite the fact that he has been in possession of it all along, Rick's storyline represents a quest to redeem himself and restore his self-worth, something he has to find within himself. Following fairy tale genre codes, Rick is assisted on his quest by a couple of unexpected guides: the first is Marvin Schwarz and the second is Trudi Fraser, the child actress who plays Marabella and is Rick's co-star on *Lancer*.

Schwarz is an agent of moral support in the way he verbally counteracts all of Rick's self-doubt and professional insecurities. As an example, he expresses admiration for how Rick performed his own stunt with the flamethrower in the film *The 14 Fists of McCluskey*, mimicking the manner in which an adult would praise a child. Their interaction also provides context to the underlying issues of Rick's lack of confidence and self-worth. This is demonstrated as Schwarz compliments Rick for his previous films.

Schwarz informs that he and his wife has had a "Rick Dalton double feature" screening the previous night, to which Rick says: "Oh, well, that's both flattering and embarrassing," and "I hope the, uh, Rick Dalton double feature wasn't too painful for you and the… and the missus." Schwarz responds by saying: "Oh, no. 'Painful.' Stop. What are you saying? Mary Alice loves westerns. Our whole courtship we watched westerns." The fact that Schwarz appears some 20 years older than Rick and uses an outdated word such as 'courtship' to describe a time in his life when westerns were popular suggests that the prime of Rick's western career has come to an end; it now represents old and outdated cinematic traditions. This is supported by James Kendrick's account of the development and changing features of the western genre from the era of the 1950s and early 1960s to the new era that began in the late 1960s, including the introduction of moral ambiguity into the genre, and a shift in its use of violence (Kendrick 75-76).

Schwarz does not realize that Rick's subtle self-criticism is not just an attempt at being modest, but rather a reflection of his deep-seated personal insecurities; Rick fears that he does not have a place in New Hollywood. This is demonstrated after the meeting with Schwarz as he says to Cliff: "Well… it's official, old buddy. I'm a has-been." Rick's reaction is prompted by Schwarz's reflection on his career, which he defines as declining based on the fact that Rick's career has been reduced to "guest shots on episodic TV-shows the last couple of years." Schwarz insinuates that Rick is stuck in being typecast as 'the heavy', and that the continuation of playing the ever-losing, black Stetson-wearing bad guy will eventually end his career as a lead actor. Schwarz's reasoning symbolically reflects the Hollywood typecasting tradition: if you are not the hero, you are insignificant. Schwarz insists that going to Italy to star in European films is the next great career move for Rick. However, Rick thinks of this as a desperate attempt to salvage a faltered career and that making this move would ultimately define his career as just that. Whereas Rick just wants to wear any cowboy hat, Schwarz argues that it must be white.

In this way, Rick mirrors the attitude of Charles Bronson who initially implied that spaghetti westerns were beneath him. However, much like Bronson, who changed his mind after seeing Clint Eastwood gain success from starring in the Sergio Leone spaghetti western series

The Dollars Trilogy (1964-1966), Rick also changes his mind and eventually goes to Europe to star in several films of different genres. In a way, based on this career choice, the possibility is suggested that Rick's career might proceed to parallel Eastwood's. This is implied by the scene (2:03:34-2:04:16) in which Rick returns from Europe, as it bears resemblance to the opening scene that established the star personae of Tate and Polanski. In a similar manner, Rick walks through the airport with a new wife on his arm, followed by Cliff taking care of their bags.



(2:03:49)

Rick's redeemed star persona is additionally symbolically implied by the film's ending, as Rick is invited to join Tate and her friends for a drink (2:34:52), symbolizing Old Hollywood being invited to join New Hollywood.

The categorization of Schwarz as an archetypical guide character is based on the way Rick initially dismisses his philosophy and advice, but eventually adopts and accepts them. In this way, it resembles the student-teacher relationship dynamics in *Karate Kid* (1984), between Daniel San and Mister Miyagi, as Daniel initially questions Miyagi's logic and reasoning, but eventually conforms to them. In the same way, Schwarz tries to lead Rick on the right path and paves the way, but eventually Rick makes the choice himself.

Schwarz's 'philosophy' is based on "an old trick pulled by the network", where they would strategically "hire a guy from a canceled show to play the heavy", in order to substantiate the bona fide of an aspiring actor's hero persona. However, according to Schwarz, the strategy has lasting effects on the actor playing the heavy, as he says: "Now, in another couple of years, playing punching bag to every swinging dick new to the network, that's gonna have a psychological effect on how the audience perceives you," (0:12:55-0:13:06) and concludes: "Down

goes you. Down goes your career as a leading man. Or do you go to Rome and star in westerns and win fucking fights?" (0:13:26-0:13:42).

As Schwarz explains his reasoning to Rick, the camera subtly zooms in on Rick as he strokes his brow with a thumb, symbolizing how reality is closing in on him (0:12:33). The combination of the camera movement and Rick's body language as he reacts to what he is hearing and simultaneously tries to digest it, initially creates an atmosphere of slightly increasing anxiety associated with the realization of an unpleasant truth, but it also encourages the spectator's sympathetic alignment with Rick.

The second guide-like character is the child actress whom Rick meets on the set of the TV-show *Lancer*. She inspires Rick with her dedication and determination regarding acting, for example, being a method actor, she instructs Rick to address her by the name of her character, Marabella. They share an inadvertently soul-searching conversation (0:53:11-0:59:44) during an intermission between the shooting of scenes.

She is impressively intelligent for her young age, making mature reflections on responsibility, ideology, and philosophy. This is exemplified by her saying: "I say 'actor,' not 'actress,' because the word 'actress' is nonsensical." She also demonstrates a very progressive investment in her job, and simultaneously and indirectly scolds Rick for appearing to do the opposite by saying: "It's the actor's job to avoid impediments to their performance. It's the actor's job to strive for one hundred percent effectiveness. Naturally, we never succeed, but it's the pursuit… that's meaningful." Rick adopts Marabella's standards into a new perspective on how he assesses his success. He strives to find validation in being the best version of himself that he can be, as an actor, instead of being defined by how he assumes others perceive him. Of course, Rick is not redeemed completely, he is still a privileged, mediocre actor with an inclination for alcohol, but from a professional standpoint, he abandons his personal stigma against New Hollywood and embraces the prospects of his career in a new age. As Marabella says: "[I]f I can be a tiny bit better, I want to be." Marabella oozes with assertiveness which is demonstrated as she retorts to Rick: "I don't like names like 'pumpkin puss', but since you're upset, we'll talk about that some other time."

The scene encourages a sympathetic allegiance with Rick, as he makes an emotional connection with Marabella because she asks him to tell her about the book he is reading. Rick is overcome with emotion as he summarizes the story of a hero character in a midlife crisis and overwhelmed by the realization that he can relate to and identify with the character, as "He's not the best anymore. In fact, far from it. And... he's coming to terms with what it's like to be slightly more... use-... slightly more useless each day."

Rick finally gets the chance to redeem his hero persona as he brings a violent end to the attack of the cultists, by burning Sadie in his pool with the flamethrower. In this way, he is visualized in a manner similar to the nazi-fighting hero he portrays in *The 14 Fists of McCluskey*; providing a trinity of meta intertextuality with the symbolic narrative function of fire, as previously connected to *Inglourious Basterds*.



(0:03:24)

Rick's dynamic contrast is Cliff. As implied by the paratext sequence, where the names of Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio are switched around, stylized as the opening credits of a TV-show (re: *Bonanza*), Rick and Cliff are two sides of the same coin, or person even. Cliff's relationship with Rick can be summed up by the small exchange between Schwarz and himself, where Schwarz says about Cliff: "Well, sounds like a good friend," to which Cliff responds: "I try." A similar exchange occurs between Cliff and Rick at the end of the film, when Cliff lies in an ambulance about to be taken to the hospital, and Rick says: "You're a good friend, Cliff," to which Cliff parrots his previous response: "I try."

However, stuntman Cliff does possess some misleading complexity, which might derail the spectator in her process of becoming sympathetically allied with Cliff. The first indication of Cliff's character complexity comes with the subtle implication of his antihero persona, in the scene where Cliff has driven Rick home after the meeting with Schwarz. In the doorway, the pair further demonstrates the intimacy of their relation as they engage in friendly banter (0:19:53-0:19:59):

CLIFF: Give me my glasses back.
RICK: Oh, come get them, fucker. Come-
RICK: Alright, alright, Audie Murphy, relax.




L: (0:19:50), R: (0:19:53)




L: (0:19:56), R: (0:19:57)

Audie Murphy was a soldier during WWII, who subsequently became an actor to star primarily in westerns. As suggested by his participation in the war, Murphy is capable of the violence that he imitates on film, in real life. As it is hard to imagine something more violent than war, this makes a convincing argument that he is dangerous. In this way, by referring to Cliff by Murphy's name, Rick implies that Cliff too can be dangerous.

Of course, initially, this just appears as playful name calling. However, throughout the narrative, re-identification of this as a persistent character trait is offered on four occasions, two of which have already been discussed in the previous chapter regarding Cliff's beating of the hippie and his annihilation of the cultists. This will be addressed later in this chapter, following the examination of how an obscured sense of alignment is established with a man, through his dog.

The spectator is aligned in a rather unconventional way with Cliff through technical measures, in the scene where he returns home after dropping Rick off (0:22:05-0:25:57). This alignment reveals two important aspects of Cliff's subjectivity, achieved by means of camera movement and framing. Firstly, the spectator is equally aligned with Cliff and his Pitbull Brandy, in terms of the POV, as the scene consists of many close-up shots of Brandy, Cliff's hands, and the decor of their humble trailer home.




L: (0:24:06), R: (0:25:19)




L: (0:24:16), R: (0:24:50)

Cliff's affectionate relationship with the dog increases the spectator's sympathy for him, as Brandy seemingly eats better than Cliff himself. And, in addition, as a contrast to Rick's luxury home, Cliff's proletarian lifestyle encourages sympathy as it makes him easier to relate to.

Cliff's dangerous persona is subtly implied by the gun that rests casually on a table next to his armchair, always within reach. This suggests that the area in which he lives comes with a high risk of potential spontaneous violence, which is not implied in the same sense about Rick's neighborhood. In the same vein, the gun initially implies that Cliff is, to some extent, capable of violence.




L: (0:24:18), R: (0:24:22)

The way the camera follows Cliff's hands conveys alignment, as the spectator is visually aligned with him through POV shots, similar to the instance with Rick and the mirror. The close-ups of Brandy indicate that she is somehow important to the narrative; the reason why is revealed in the end, as Brandy plays an important role in the dispatch of the cultist intruders. This is also conveyed by the symbolic use of the low angle of framing in some of the shots of her, functioning as an aggrandizement of her. This implies that Brandy is, to some extent, also

capable of being dangerous. However, Brandy's potential for violence is softened by the affectionate relationship she shares with Cliff and the fact that she promptly obeys and is very well-behaved.

This also strengthens the sense that the pair is a unit, with whom the spectator is collectively aligned. This is demonstrated significantly by the sequence in the scene where Cliff presents Brandy with a surprise treat. As he gives her the bone, he crouches down with her. In the frame the two are depicted as a comprised entity, which is conveyed by how the shot has been framed, where both are slightly out of frame. Together they take up the center space of the shot, implying that they are a package deal, there is no one without the other.



(0:23:40)

The affectionate relationship Cliff shares with Brandy also has a significant influence on the moral evaluation of Cliff. This is in the sense that, according to Smith, a character's nice behavior toward pets is a positive behavioral trait, which elicits a positive evaluation.

The second aspect of Cliff's subjectivity, which is revealed through alignment, is based on a shot in the beginning of the scene. The action begins outside the frame, indicated by the sounds of Brandy's breathing and Cliff's babbling greeting. The camera then pans to obtain a position with an obscured view of Cliff on the floor, and Brandy happily returning his greeting.



(0:23:18)

The image is obscured by the crossing legs of a folding table. The visual symbolically resembles how the alignment with Cliff is obscured by the slightly more opaque access to his subjectivity in comparison to Rick, who is much more emotionally transparent. This is supported by the previously mentioned close-up shots of Cliff's hands, which do not allow the spectator to read his facial expression, and thus do not give her access to much of his inner state.

This is also demonstrated in the flashback-in-a-flashback scene (0:42:56-0:43:28) which implies that Cliff killed his wife, possibly with a harpoon, on a boat in the middle of the ocean. The scene provides a plea for excuses regarding the insinuated violent actions of Cliff, as the wife is portrayed as obnoxious and loathsome, calling him “the shittiest person” while beratingly ranting at him:

> Natalie, my sister, said, "He's a loser. He's a loser." They all said it, "He's a fucking loser," and I didn't believe them. So I guess I'm the fucking idiot. And now you're not gonna talk to me? What, you don't feel like fighting? Well, I feel like fucking fighting.
> (0:43:09-0:43:22)

Natalie’s psychological violence against Cliff might encourage the spectator to engage in fictional relief and adopt the underlying atmosphere that suggests she deserved it for being a horrible person.

In addition, the scene suggests a very subtle and inverted Hollywood intertextuality, based on the references to a woman named Natalie, dying on a boat out on the ocean. Natalie Wood was a movie star in the 1970s, who disappeared and died under mysterious and uncovered

circumstances, while being on a boat with her husband in 1981, similar to what is implied about Cliff's wife. However, in this sense, the intertextual reference is somewhat inverted regarding Cliff's wife's personality. It is possible to argue that this lax reference to and inversion of a case of violence and crime from real life suggest an attitude toward the overall American culture of violence. The casual regard for violence indicates that this is a representation of real-life society and as such, a critique of the tolerance of and readiness for violence, emphasizing a willingness to resort to it.

Cliff is also seen demonstrating a casual attitude toward violence in the scene (0:44:04-0:48:47) on the set of *The Green Hornet*, where he taunts and instigates a fight with a parodic portrayal of Bruce Lee. The parodic exaggeration of Lee's arrogance, speech and kiai serves as a plea for excuses on behalf of Cliff's antagonizing attitude towards Lee that ultimately prompts the fight between them. It is possible that the portrayal of Lee parodies a famous rumor that while filming the real *The Green Hornet* (1966-67) TV-show, Lee refused to lose to Robin because, film-historically, Bruce Lee loses to no one. As a result, the fight ended up a tie.

In this way, the scene makes use of Schwarz's 'the hero besting the heavy'-philosophy. As Lee represents a pre-established star persona, the fight that ends in a tie due to interruption, although it was leaning towards Cliff's advantage, serves to build up Cliff's bona fide. In the same way, due to Lee's unsympathetic portrayal, Cliff's readiness for violence is depicted in a positive light, similar to the sympathy structures in *Kill Bill*, where beating the deserving reflects a positive character trait. The ultimate result of these two correlating scenes is that the spectator might not know what to make of Cliff; although she is allied with him, it is not necessarily sympathetically, because Cliff is a brute with a casual relationship to violence who possibly killed his wife.

The feeling that Cliff might not be a sympathetic character is initially instigated in the scene (0:17:05-0:17:34) where he drives by Pussycat in Rick's car the first time. In this scene, the soundtrack, Simon and Garfunkel's song "Mrs. Robinson" (1967), to the 1967 film *The Graduate* is playing on the car radio. This conveys the notorious atmosphere from *The Graduate*, implying the potential romance between two people of great age difference, which is taboo by universal consensus. However, Cliff is redeemed in a later scene (1:21:39-1:26:27) in which he gives Pussycat a lift to Spahn Ranch. In the car, Pussycat propositions Cliff who surprisingly declines on the grounds of her young age. This encourages respect for Cliff based on the expectations of an upcoming unpleasant sex scene which does not materialize. Furthermore, Cliff's positive traits are re-identified as the scene unfolds at Spahn Ranch, where he insists on

seeing George Spahn to make sure that an old man is not being taken advantage of by a group of hippies.

In the same vein, Cliff's continuous acts of moral support toward Rick function as redeeming qualities, like when he tells him, "You're Rick fucking Dalton. Don't you forget it," (0:34:38-00:34:41) and genuinely demonstrates care and friendship, e.g. by asking Rick: "So you're feeling better now?" (0:19:50-0:19:51), when he drops him off after the meeting with Schwarz. The terms of their friendship prompt the spectator to acknowledge Cliff's affection, which is reflected by his persistent response, "I try", in regard to being acknowledged as a good friend. Ultimately, this encourages the spectator to become sympathetically allied with Cliff by means of the dynamic duo.

As previously suggested, their relationship is arguably an analogy for another famously heroic duo. In Cliff's fight with Lee in the context of *The Green Hornet* series, Cliff is depicted as a symbolic representation of Robin, which transcends to the dynamics of the relationship between Rick and Cliff, symbolically resembling that of Batman and Robin. In this way, Cliff's hero persona is established by means of Rick. This is further supported by the atmosphere, as the theme song to the 1960s Adam West *Batman* series plays during the credits.

The climax of the film, where Rick torches Sadie in the pool after Cliff has discarded of the other cultists, ultimately depicts Cliff and Rick as a dynamic duo resembling Batman and Robin; Rick as Batman, with the flamethrower representing Batman's inclination for gadgets, and Cliff as the boy wonder unleashing graphic violence. The violence is depicted with a cartoonish aesthetics, as the combination of tempo and timing of Cliff's punches and the throwing of the dog food and its simultaneous impact resembles classic cartoon violence exclamations such as "Ping. Pow. Choom. Zoom" (0:13:20-0:13:24), as previously re-enacted by Schwarz in reference to Batman and Robin. In this way, following a traditional fairy tale narrative concept, it is a couple of unlikely heroes who save the day.

Violence and the Sublime

At this point, Smith's structure of sympathy has proven enlightening, in regard to how the spectator navigates structurally and emotionally throughout the world of fiction, based on their perception of the characters and their relating contexts as presented in the narrative. According to Smith's theory, although the spectator engages through moral evaluation, this feature that connects to aspects of reality does not breach the limit between fiction and reality, because it is exclusively centered on fiction's imitation of reality. As such, moral evaluation occurs as an act of engagement solely focused on the fictional character within the film's co-text, and thus does not reach into any aspect of reality. This allows the spectator to potentially condone actions which would otherwise be considered immoral according to the spectator's external moral standard, without the prospect of having to morally evaluate their own terms of engagement after the experience with fiction has ended. In this way, Smith's theory argues that the spectator briefly abandons her touch with the external standards of morality, within the unjudging safe space of fiction, and that these aspects of fiction do not convey to reality.

However, Vaage to some extent questions Smith's concept of complete immersion into fiction. She argues that the spectator's engagement will eventually be interfered with by what she calls reality checks, which momentarily draw the spectator away from the fictional reality and briefly reestablish the spectator's sense of reality within a moral framework. Although Vaage critically addresses the importance of what she labels fictional relief in regards to Smith's terms of engagement, she simultaneously provides the tools with which the spectator is able to remain engaged with a co-text, as she also argues for the typically unwavering allegiance with characters that draws the spectator back into the fiction's co-text. This manner of engagement with fiction allows the spectator to indulge in escapism and catharsis, liberating her from being held accountable for her moral reasoning during her experience with fiction after it has ended.

These terms of engagement are deeply embedded into the social and cultural history of Western culture, in regard to the way in which spectators watch films and how they relate to and reflect on their experience. However, the issue with Smith's and Vaage's perspectives, with regards to this study, is that the experience does not reach beyond the narrative, in the sense that they imply that as soon as the film ends so does the moral reflection, as if they have no real merit. This aspect of the experience is however, provided by the cognitive media theoretical aspects of what is known within the field of affect theory as the sublime. Whereas Smith's and Vaage's moral evaluation pertains solely to character engagement with the purpose of engaging in either a sympathetic or antipathetic allegiance, the moral evaluation of the sublime transcends

the fictional work, causing the emotional experience of fiction to fuse with reality. The sublime can thus create a lasting psychological effect in the sense that it does not merely prompt the spectator to reflect on the co-text as mere fiction, but also prompts reflections that carry into aspects of real-life moral evaluation.

A Japanese Zen Garden Showdown

In *Kill Bill* the confrontation with the grotesque results of revenge without "mercy, compassion and forgiveness" compels the spectator to morally evaluate characters with extremely lax affiliations with and ruthless inclinations for brutal violence. The oddly serenity-conveying settings of suburbia, a teahouse and a snowclad Japanese Zen garden are inverted by brutal carnage, graphic mutilation and excessive blood spatter. It is thus possible to argue that the scene which depicts the structural climax of the violence is the most sublime due to its well-orchestrated sensuous manipulation, and the aestheticization of physical destruction as correlative to the moral evaluation it spurs. This regards the scene that depicts the bride's last stand and final face-off with O-Ren Ishii (1:30:12-1:38:32).

The scene is set in a harmoniously snowclad Zen garden, conveying complete tranquility in the combination of softly falling snow to the sound of calming repetition from a bamboo water fountain. This is romanticized by the darkness of the evening serving as a contrast to the white cover, enclosing the setting in a peaceful quietude. The atmosphere of the setting creates a strong contrast to the expectations of brutal violence that come with the prospect of the final showdown, correlating to the construction of the increasing suspense.



(1:30:30)

The serenity of the silence is disrupted by the easy eruption of tunes, resembling rhythmic clapping, that increases in intensity as the two women assume their fighting stances, mirroring the accumulative suspense accordingly. The music builds a polyrhythmic syncopation as Spanish guitar tunes accompany the rhythmic clapping, reminiscent of spaghetti westerns and increasing suspense that implicates violence. The destiny foretold by the sound is fulfilled as the fight breaks out on a particularly heavy note from the guitar. The raw violence that takes place against the serene and pure appearance of the surroundings of the snowclad Zen garden plays into the features of the sublime.

The choreography of the katana fight is elegant and prolonged with the impact from the crossing blades, as they are synchronized to compliment the crescendo of the music. The aestheticization is reinforced by means of editing in terms of angling and framing, as the succession of various types of close-up shots provides a less comprehensive view of the scene, which simultaneously intensifies any action, from fighting to whispered exchanges.

The scene displays a sensuously overwhelming mood orchestrated by the rhythm of contrasting loudness being abruptly interrupted by echoing silence. The quiet is aestheticized by the emphasizing of the whistling sounds of blades that cut through the air and the loud, long, ringing clangs of crossing blades. The scene plays into the first features of the sublime as the aesthetics are pleasing, but the sensuous overload and simultaneous suspense can be considered frustrating. Moreover, as the scene creates a sensuous experience by means of the manipulative rhythm and building of suspense, it plays into the second features of the sublime, playing with sensuous stimulation by means of sound and visualization, to overwhelm the spectator's sense datum.

The apex of the fight provides a sublime visualization of aestheticized violence in the film, as a contrast to the decorum with which it is conducted, conveying the ritualistic honor and refinement associated with the culture of the katana. As one woman cuts the other, they let each other recollect themselves and respectively make sure that the other one is ready to proceed before advancing. As the bride slays O-Ren, a fast succession of close-up shots makes the action hard to completely comprehend, although in essence the aspects of a scalping are made clear. The close-up of the crossing katanas, the sound of severing and the image of a flying scalp convey the weapon's boundless power, which is reminiscent of a previous scene where the bride effortlessly cuts a baseball in half with a Hanzō sword (0:50:31-0:55:57). In an unpleasant way, the scalping resembles the severing of the baseball, so although the action happens off-

screen, the spectator has already been provided with similar images that assist her imagination to an uncanny extent.



(1:36:59)

The visual impression of the scalping is reinforced by the prompting of aesthetic awareness. The close-up framing and the slow-motion movement of the scalp, as it flies through the air, emphasize the beauty in cinematographic techniques and the ugliness of the subject matter. The scalp hits the ground with a heavy thud and caricatured resonance, conveying the immense intensity of the sequence. However, it is a following shot that ultimately enforces the third features of the sublime and violence and the sublime, as what begins as a close-up zooms out to reveal O-Ren's scalped head. The image provides contrasting visual impressions that play on the aesthetic aspects of beauty and ugliness that are hard to take in, as lighting and framing simultaneously emphasize the beautiful features of O-Ren's face and the view of the grim details of her scalping.



(1:37:27)

The framing of the image conveys eeriness as O-Ren utters a final coherent statement before she finally dies. This is especially disturbing in the aspects of her removed scalp, which leaves a direct view of her brain and makes the image resemble an uncanny and abominable experiment known to horror fiction and science fiction, such as Frankenstein with bolts and stitches in his head. The clean severing line of her head is ambivalently repulsive and aesthetically pleasing, as it lacks messy, gory details such as blood and teared flesh. In these conflicting impressions the image prompts rapturous terror.

In light of O-Ren's origin story, the scene makes the character engagement with O-Ren further complex as the predominant subjective access centers on her. Close-up shots of her face, eyes, and movements displaying an open body language, predominantly generate subjective access with her, whereas the bride's twisted position conveys a closed off body language that further emphasizes this late and momentary shift in POV. The partially sympathetic alignment with O-Ren and the graphic details surrounding her scalping make it painful to watch her bittersweet demise.



L: (1:33:02), R: (1:34:50)

The death of O-Ren prompts ambivalence because in the context of her origin story it is possible to find pleas for excuses: her upbringing predetermines a life in a culture of violence. Her affiliation with violence in this sense provides a reasonable explanation for her role in the revenge perspective, which is why it leaves a greater impression when she dies, emphasized by the fact that she does so in a dignified way, with honor in the way she fights.

As O-Ren collapses in the snow with a pathetically soft thud, the bride radiates emotional turmoil as she aims to look over her shoulder at O-Ren, lying dead on the ground, but resists with a dissatisfied and almost sorrowful sigh and then moves to walk away. The accompanying tune compliments the scene, with its Japanese cinema aesthetics conveying the psychological mayhem experienced by heroic characters when excessive killings as a matter of course become overwhelming.

O-Ren's death leads to moral evaluation as the revenge theme clashes with the spectator's partial sympathetic alignment with her. As her character is well-established through familiarity by means of the origin story, her death seems somewhat anticlimactic, which might prompt the spectator to consider the depiction of death and violence in this regard, as the fate of O-Ren appears slightly unexpected and undeserved. In this regard, the spectator is encouraged to morally evaluate and question the bride's conduct of revenge and her readiness for violence. However, these considerations are soon disregarded due to a plea for excuses, as the ending reveals that the bride is intentionally made to believe the misconception that her child is dead, and the unconventional depiction of violence regarding O-Ren's death, in comparison to the bride's other opponents, prompts a reality check that leads to further moral evaluation.

While the combat styles of Vernita, Gogo and the Crazy 88 are relentless and lack etiquette, the fight with O-Ren is clearly based on mutual respect, patience and discipline. The unconventional depiction of the consequences of the violence in the scene with O-Ren provides the most convincing contrast. The scene generally lacks the exaggerated gory details, excessive blood spatter and plain brutality of the previous scenes, but most importantly, the culmination of the fight happens outside of the frame. Based on the obscured violence, the unfulfilled spectator expectation stands out as a prominent reality check and ultimately prompts moral evaluation that goes beyond the narrative and its co-text.

The film thus represents a cultural attitude towards violence with its depictions of cultures of violence, out of which the assassins' subculture, the DVAS, is used narratively to demonstrate the concept of revenge and how easily acceptable killing is when motivated by revenge; this represents a cultural acceptance of and readiness for violence. Seeing as a lack of excessive violence is what stands out as unusual and prompts a reality check in this sublime

scene, the moral evaluation which it elicits is aimed at cinema traditions of violence and the excessive representations of violence in American culture. Thus, the overall readiness for violence represents an assumption about American culture that goes beyond cinematic traditions.

Although the composition of violence in the scene is not in itself sublime, the moral evaluation that ensues elevates the spectator's perspective on the issues of aestheticized violence. In this way, the graphic violence is sublime in virtue of the aesthetic properties of simultaneous aestheticization of beauty and ugliness, as well as its moral implications, which force the spectator to confront the moral issues regarding the cinema's representation of a culturally lax affiliation with and readiness for the depiction of violence and brutality.

A Magnificent and Terrifying Snowscape

In *The Hateful Eight*, the spectator is forced to conduct moral evaluations of extremely despicable, unsympathetic, and violent characters in the setting of a dark, brown, and dirty cottage in the middle of nowhere. However, the scene which arguably evokes the strongest spectator reaction and the most antipathy is the one that is also the most sublime, completely standing out from the rest of the film. In a breathtaking scenery of snowy mountains, a horrific event takes place, and this combination of positive and negative associations into one scene will be examined in this chapter as a sublime object.

As mentioned previously, bounty hunter Major Marquis Warren tells the story of how he tortured, raped and murdered the son of "the Bloody Niggerkiller of Baton Rouge". The story is visually accompanied by a flashback, starting with Warren's reminiscing line which fades into a voiceover: "It was cold the day I killed your boy. And I don't mean snowy mountain Wyoming cold, it was colder than that" (1:30:04-1:31:07).



L: (1:30:10), R: (1:30:29)

The flashback shows an extreme long shot of an immense, bare, white landscape set against a clear blue sky, the border between which looks so clean that the setting could easily be mistaken

for a painting. Warren and Smithers' son Chester are barely visible behind the hill and appear as nothing but specks in the vastness of the snowscape imagery. As they trudge through the snow towards the camera, Warren's appropriately dressed silhouette is easily recognizable, but, unexpectedly, Chester is completely naked. Warren's voiceover then proclaims: "And on that cold day, with your boy at the business end of my gun barrel, I made him strip right down to his bare ass. Then I told him to start walking."

The torturous humiliation that is taking place against the awe-inspiring backdrop of an immense, serene and calm snowscape plays right into the features of the sublime. With regards to the first feature, the emotions elicited by the spectator are those of awe and pleasure, while at the same time feeling a sense of fear in taking in the beauty of the images of the wild nature, which is simultaneously magnificent and terrifying in its visual aesthetics and deadly capacity; the naked man being forced to walk through the wilderness at gunpoint adds an additional layer of dread to the sublime object. Furthermore, the looming threat of violence is in accordance with the characteristics of violence and the sublime. While the traditional aspects of physical violence are absent in the scene, it still comes across as extremely violent on account of the impending death of the naked man, and the extremely painful cold he is bound to be experiencing.



(1:30:34)

The flashback continues as the two men walk through even more astonishing mountain sceneries, which simultaneously beckon and deter the spectator. The wilderness is both beautiful and unforgiving, and the presence of splendor and overwhelming power combined into one breathtaking sequence fits into the second feature of the sublime. Suspense is built up through the relatively slow pace of the scene as the assailant and his victim walk through the snow in

several long shots of picturesque surroundings; the spectator knows that she is about to witness the culmination of the journey.

The shift of power between the white man and the black man, which is symbolic to the act of violence that is taking place in the scene, highlights an important moral issue with regards to race and the historical enslavement and mistreatment of black people. The pain and fear experienced by the white man walking naked through the snowy mountains is painful for the spectator to watch, but the historical pain that lies underneath is much graver in scale and far more deeply rooted. The use of the extreme long shots, rendering the two characters miniscule in size, suggests that the racial issue goes far beyond Warren's personal revenge; they are but tiny snowflakes in the vast snowscape that is historical racial discrimination. In order to deflect the pain of the moral question that is raised, the third feature of the sublime causes the magnificence of the landscape to transform the pain into pleasure derived from the aesthetic qualities of the sublime object. The combination of beauty and pain is so ineffable that the object can only be considered a work of art.



(1:30:59)

As the white man collapses from the cold at the final destination, Warren fulfils the promise of brutality that has been implied by the accumulation of suspense throughout the flashback: he rapes Smithers' son (1:32:14-1:33:06). The brutal sexual humiliation in itself is far from sublime, but its juxtaposition with the grandeur of the snowscape creates a sublime experience. Furthermore, the moral evaluation that ensues elevates the spectator's perspective on the issue of racial discrimination by reversing the historical role of the white man being in power and the black man being a victim to this power. The excessively violent and transgressive nature of the act makes it extremely painful to watch, but it is sublime in virtue of its picturesque surroundings as well as its moral implications; it serves poetic justice to the issue of race raised

by the narrative. On a societal scale, the hatefulness of the hateful eight can be interpreted as symbolic of the evil that is inevitably found in humankind, represented in the film by the grim history and consequences of slavery in America.

A Fairy Tale Tribute to Hollywood's Golden Age

While *Kill Bill* and *The Hateful Eight* both have sublime elements in the form of individual scenes that portray aesthetically pleasing imagery evoking moral evaluation, *OUTH* can arguably be considered a sublime object in its entirety. This is due to the aesthetics derived from the technical finesse of the overall filmmaking, which pays tribute to Hollywood and filmmaking in itself, combined with the rewriting of a tragic historical event, which elicits considerations of morality.

Through its use of mise-en-scéne demonstrated in the settings, costumes, and props, *OUTH* manages to establish an authentic late 60's retro aesthetic, which builds up an atmosphere of nostalgia that is prominent throughout the film. One of the scenes which conveys the essence of this atmosphere is when Cliff drives through the streets of Los Angeles at nighttime (0:20:27-0:22:28). The flashing neon lights and signs emanate the sleeplessness and busy life of Hollywood in aesthetically pleasing and bright technicolor, and the focus is clearly centered on cinema, as demonstrated by the film titles on the marquees of the many theaters Cliff passes by, as well as the fact that he lives next to a famous drive-in theater.



L: (0:21:10), R: (0:21:14)

Cliff's drive through town is accompanied by a contemporaneous soundtrack - just as the rest of the film - playing over the car radio, which aids the authenticity of the setting, fully immersing the spectator in the universe of the film while inspiring a sense of nostalgia for the past era. Every little detail of the film is centered around the artistry of filmmaking and thus the industry that is most prominent and celebrated in Hollywood.

The nostalgia is further enhanced by the sporadic use of old film formats, such as the 4:3 black-and-white clips from the fictional show *Bounty Law* in which Rick stars as the lead role, and the use of footage from actual classical films, like *The Great Escape* (1963), which Rick has been masterfully edited into in place of the immensely popular 60's actor Steve McQueen (1:03:12-1:04:28).



(0:10:50)

Even the character of Rick himself is a reference to the types of actors who starred in spaghetti westerns and became popular in the '60s, flaunting a pompadour and overstated masculinity. There is an astonishing element of metafiction to the film, as the narrative presents an actor performing his job of acting within the paragon of filmmaking eras, which also functions on the aesthetic level; *OUTH* is a film paying tribute to film.

With its constant intertextual references to cinema all the way down to the title of the film - an obvious nod to director Sergio Leone, *OUTH* firmly manifests itself as a love letter to filmmaking and to Los Angeles, and it is in this truly breathtaking and authentic portrayal of the Golden Age of Hollywood that sublime magnificence and beauty can be found. Every little part of the film is expertly orchestrated, resulting in an awe-inspiring symphony of intertextual references, outstanding acting performances and cinematographic artistry. However, the other side of the sublime coin is the tragic event known today as the Manson Family murders. While *OUTH* rewrites the devastating death of Sharon Tate and provides her with a happy ending and a presumably full life, the underlying sorrow and pain that is associated with the details of the real tragedy, along with the inevitable end of a celebrated film era, still smoulder beneath the surface of the film.

The bubbly and warm-hearted portrayal of Sharon Tate performed by actress Margot Robbie is, in Robbie's own words, intended to establish the character of Tate as "a bit of a heartbeat throughout the film" (Collis), and as this study has found in the above analysis of *OUTH*, it really does succeed in this.



(1:05:28)

However, the portrayal also serves as a reminder of Tate's death in the real world, which, with regards to the sublime, is the painful and dread-filled counterpart to the positive emotions of awe and delight that the film otherwise inspires. The moral evaluation lies in the rewriting of the historical events where the spectator is presented with a semi-fictional parallel universe in which Sharon is not murdered, and thus is confronted with the reality of what could have been if she were still alive.

Because of the relatively glaring absence of violence in the film, at least compared to the two other films examined in this study, the idea of violence becomes that much more prominent; as Tate's character is established as utterly lovable and effervescent, the spectator finds herself expecting and dreading to become witness to a fictionalized version of the real world tragic events. When these expectations are not met, the spectator finds herself relieved and pleased, knowing that the character she is sympathetically allied with comes out on the other side unscathed.

The film does, however, culminate in an excessively violent scene which constitutes the overwhelming aspect of the sublime, even more so in virtue of the fact that it stands out from the rest of the film because of the violence it portrays. The extremely violent nature of the scene

is accepted and to some extent even welcomed as it serves poetic justice to and exacts retribution on the Manson Family murders. However, upon acknowledging the fictionality of the ending of the film, the spectator engages in moral evaluation, questioning her own willingness to watch and indulge in violence, depending on its function in the narrative, as well as mourning the loss of innocence that did ensue the Manson Family murders in the real world and came to define the year of 1969.

With its retro aesthetics, *OUTH* is in essence a technically and visually beautiful and nostalgia-inspiring story about Los Angeles in the late ‘60s and the friendship between an actor and his stunt double, and Tate’s happy ending serves as a parallel storyline which adds to the overall nostalgia and aesthetics of the film. The splendor of this love letter to filmmaking in combination with the moral implications of rewriting a historical tragedy arguably forms a sublime object. The readiness for violence is once again brought up to moral evaluation, as the spectator’s willingness to indulge in excessive and brutal representations of violence seems justified when said violence is committed in a context of revenge.

DISCUSSION

Tarantino's Auteurist Confrontation with American Evils

The concept of auteurism rose within French cinema discourse sometime after the Second World War, in the French Fourth Republic (1946-1958). Related to the art film movement French New Wave Cinema, which sought to revolutionize the conventionalized ideas of the entertainment industry regarding production and the field of cinematic analysis theories, the term was contextualized as a characterization of "the particular film style of a small group of prominent directors" (Hamilton & Rolls 1); as such, "[i]t emphasized the significance of innovative film techniques to convey the individual personality and values of directors and largely sought to refute bourgeois values; indeed, the elevation of film as art and director as artist can be seen as part of that refutation" (2).

The term as a description of categorical qualities in terms of production, referring to its prominent contemporary definition and usage, supervened the collective cultural identity that formed with the American-assisted liberation of France, in the post-Nazi Occupation age. The cultural and economic impact of the American presence generated a French identity crisis regarding the constitution of Frenchness, "[t]here was, in short, no euphoric post-Liberation embracing of all things American without its various opposites, which is to say, new forms of cultural resistance" (3). The simultaneously growing intransigence and intrigue found an outlet in, i.a., French literary and art culture by means of the translation process in procuring works of American contexts by non-American authors, whereas the noir genre had a significant role in the fusion of Americanness and Frenchness, but on French terms.

The French adaptation of American literary and art cultural traits and traditions led to the American adoption of the French notion of auteur theory into American critical cinema analysis discourse. The modern definition was formed by its descriptive and categorizing qualities (5-6), predominantly discussed and introduced by the film critic Andrew Sarris "as a mode to better understand the Hollywood feature film and as a tool to catalogue cinema over time. Thus, auteur theory became seen 'primarily as a critical device for recording the history of American cinema [...]'" (6). Much like the original French affiliation, in Hollywood the notion

of auteurism permitted "the director [to assume] pre-eminence as an artist whose personality marked a film as distinctive" (7).

The fundamental American conception of auteurism is based on Sarris' liberal interpretation of the French concept, presenting "three central tenets of auteur theory: directors must have technical proficiency; the 'personality of the director [can be perceived] as a criterion of value'; and, an auteur's oeuvre conveys an 'interior meaning [...] an *élan* of the soul'" (7). Although Sarris' theory has been discussed, contested and rendered more complex by other theorists and theoretical analysts, the tenets he presents remain what is considered a "traditional [notion] of auteur theory" (8). For the intended purpose, this study simultaneously adopts the elaboration presented by Linda Hutcheon, as Sarris' tenets play into her theoretical discussion and perspective that intertextuality can be considered an expression of auteurism (9).

This chapter draws on the concept of auteurism provided by Sarris' tenets and Hutcheon's perspective on intertextuality; these are combined in the following discussion with the rhetoric of intertextuality previously established in this study, as it aims to reflect conclusively on the observations of the analyses, in attempt to elucidate a general coherence within Tarantino's unique filmmaking.

Tarantino's eminence in cinematic intertextuality serves as a testimony to categorical auteurism, attesting to Sarris' three tenets and Hutcheon's connection of terms; as show the results of the analyses. Tarantino's films often exhibit a sudden breach of style, unconventional dialogue, and cinematic devices, thus demonstrating technical proficiency. For example, the conventional concept of continuity is circumvented; this can be observed in *Kill Bill* by the color setting of an image changing mid-scene, in *OUTH* when a flashback is inserted into another flashback, in *Death Proof* (2007) when stuntman Mike (portrayed by Kurt Russell) breaks the fourth wall by looking into the camera, and in *The Hateful Eight* as the voiceover of Tarantino himself is not only an element of metafiction, but presents a breach of genre from western to murder mystery.



***Death Proof* (0:44:59)**

The observant spectator might also notice that sometimes the films of Tarantino present dialogue that is not principal to the plot; rather than drive the narrative forward, these types of dialogue suspend and possibly even obstruct its course, by offering independent attraction rather than narrative function. *Kill Bill* demonstrates this in the scene set at the House of Blue Leaves (1:21:33-1:1:21:38), in a sequence before the Crazy 88 arrive to combat, as the bride and O-Ren share a seemingly nonsensical exchange:

O-REN: Silly rabbit.
BRIDE: Trix are for...
O-REN: Kids.

This will only make some amount of sense if the spectator recognizes the intertextual quotation of the 1970s Trix breakfast cereal commercial, from which the dialogue originates. The most glaring example of irrelevant dialogue in *The Hateful Eight* is the completely unnecessary and excessive yelling that occurs every time someone opens the door to the haberdashery (0:37:40-0:38:01).

Tarantino's use of cinematic devices signifies an independent subcategory of intertextuality discourse, which refers to a number of conventional cinematographic techniques that are simultaneously distinctly personalized. These can be divided into five categories: visual elements, dramaturgic tricks, sound, personal affinities, and metafiction. Tarantino's films demonstrate an obvious preference for the trunk shot, crash zoom, extreme long take, and God's eye view. A variation of the extreme low angle resembling the trunk shot is exhibited in several of Tarantino's films, such as *Kill Bill*, *The Hateful Eight*, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction*

(1994) to name a few; it is often used in a violent context. The shot combines aesthetic experience and the atmosphere of a POV shot, where the untraditional angle prompts spectator curiosity for its holder as well as alignment with the character whose point of view is demonstrated in the shot.



Kill Bill: Vol 1 **(1:38:37)**



The Hateful Eight **(2:11:18)**



Reservoir Dogs **(0:37:27)**

Another cinematographic technique appreciated by Tarantino is the crash zoom: a technique where the camera either zooms in or out in a fast pace, making the spectator attentive to the cinematic technique, thus breaking the illusion of fiction and impairing the foundation for continuity editing. As an example, this is used in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, *Kill Bill: Vol. 2*, and *Django*

Unchained (2012), as pastiche of martial arts films and the blaxploitation genre with parodic exaggeration, as it is notoriously associated with these genres and the substandard of b-films. The technique can provide technical alignment. In *Kill Bill*, it is used to convey the bride's inner state on several occasions. One such example is right before the frames interlace present with past, in the confrontation with Vernita.

Technical proficiency is also demonstrated by Tarantino's tendency to create long scenes without cutting. In *Reservoir Dogs*, the camera follows the character Mr. Blonde (portrayed by Michael Madsen) in a long take as he walks out of a building to pick up a can of gasoline from his trunk and then walks back inside (0:57:14-0:58:40). In *Kill Bill*, a long take follows the bride as she stalks Sofie into the bathroom at the House of Blue Leaves (1:10:55-1:12:49), and the intro to *Jackie Brown* (1997) demonstrates a tracking shot (0:00:19-0:01:50) that is somewhat similar to the long take. These types of shots, like the crash zoom, create technical alignment.

Furthermore, Tarantino's films demonstrate a preference for the camera position called God's eye view, presenting a vertically down pointing angle. As an example, this can be seen in *The Hateful Eight, Django Unchained, Inglourious Basterds* (2009)*, Kill Bill: Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2, Death Proof*, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Jackie Brown*. The shot gives the spectator an omniscient perspective; it does not provide an objective view, as it is used as a manipulative narrative device that can create confusion in and add symbolic meaning to a scene.



The Hateful Eight **L: (2:10:06)**



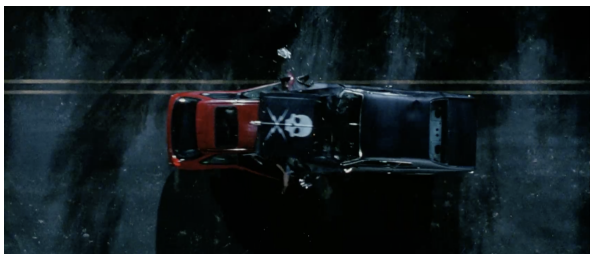
Django Unchained **R: (0:19:21)**



Inglourious Basterds **L: (0:20:02)**



Kill Bill: Vol. 1 **R: (1:33:00)**



Death Proof **L: (0:51:08)**



Jackie Brown **R: (1:39:04)**

Tarantino's use of dramaturgic tricks also demonstrates technical proficiency, with the exploitation of narrative devices such as breaks in the chronological order, flashbacks, puzzle plots, chapter division, and a sudden change in the visual expression, which have been demonstrated and exemplified within the analyses of the three films. As shown in the analyses, sound is yet another feature that demonstrates Tarantino's personal traits. One of the most prominent ways he does this is, as an example, the way he matches contrapuntal background music; contrasting tempo with rhythm or the score from other films or genres, such as spaghetti westerns and '70s fanfare and funk music. Another prominent Tarantino sound trait is the off-screen diegetic sound and the exaggeration of sound effects, such as the singing of samurai swords and the swoosh of movement.

Another demonstration of Tarantino's personal style and form can be categorized as personal affinities. These include, but are not limited to, the re-occurrence of actors such as Kurt Russell, Michael Madsen, Samuel L. Jackson and Uma Thurman, an excessive depiction of feet and death, and an inclination for excessiveness and exaggeration of special effects, exemplified by his fondness for grindhouse cinema.



Kill Bill: Vol. 1 **L: (0:34:21)**



Once Upon a Time in Hollywood **R: (1:24:27)**



Inglourious Basterds **L: (2:00:11)**



Death Proof **R: (0:59:55)**



***Pulp Fiction* L: (0:34:07)**



***Jackie Brown* R: (0:05:53)**

The last feature demonstrating Tarantino's technical proficiency plays into many of the other personalized features, such as the complex plot arrangement and storytelling, and the preferences for certain cinematographic techniques. Metafiction is a consistent storytelling device in Tarantino's films and is iconic to the independent artform that is his filmmaking. Examples of this are the fictional brands Red Apple Cigarette and Big Kahuna Burger, which occur in several films, and the recurrence of the law enforcement family duo consisting of Earl McGraw (Michael Parks) and Son Number One (James Parks) in both *Kill Bill* and *Death Proof*, which symbolically weave the film universes together.

In an interview, Tarantino presents the concept of his cinematic universe and the fictional universes of his films as one complex entity:

> There is actually two separate universes. There is, uhm, there's the realer than real universe, alright, and all the characters inhabit that one. But then there's this movie universe. And so, *From Dusk till Dawn*, *Kill Bill*, they all take place in this special movie universe. So basically, when the characters of *Reservoir Dogs* or *Pulp Fiction*, when they go to the movies, *Kill Bill* is what they go see, *From Dusk till Dawn* is what they go see. (Network 10 Corporate)

This demonstrates the unconventional way Tarantino makes himself, as the author, director, architect and Creator, the centrifugal force of his filmmaking, in every aspect influenced by his own personal preferences; he is ever present, establishing the fact that he represents a concept of filmmaking that is uniquely and iconically Tarantino. This also reflects Tarantino's established cult status.

In the same vein, unconventional to the common conception of adaptation regarding filmmaking and the rhetoric of intertextuality, Tarantino demonstrates autonomy as he takes

the liberty to make demands of and set criteria for his spectators; Tarantino's excessive use of intertextuality for context, aesthetics and atmosphere, sometimes requires that the spectator possesses extraordinary hypotextual knowledge that presupposes comprehension. As an example, this is seen in *OUTH* in the context of the Manson Family and the Tate murders.

Following this line of thought, there are two correlatively important prerequisites for watching a Tarantino film: in order to follow the plot and understand the context, the spectator requires preceding knowledge about Tarantino's filmmaking style and form, and a frame of reference that supplies the ability to acknowledge and recognize the complex subject matter presented by intertextuality. As an example, this is demonstrated in *Death Proof* where recognition of '70s cinema aesthetics and Tarantino's complex storytelling presupposes the comprehension of the film, as it is challenged by disruptive ingenuities.

The beginning of the film visually resembles '70s cinema in every aspect, from cinematographic technique to mise-en-scéne and gritty image quality. Approximately halfway through, the image quality suddenly becomes clear and crisp, changing to more modern standards but in black-and-white, until later when it changes for the last time into color. The flow of the scenes is disrupted on two separate occasions by cutting and editing, resembling a glitch from a scratched filmstrip. The experience is further complicated by the complex plot; the protagonists are not introduced until halfway through, and the first half of the film merely functions as a prelude; the visual disruption occurs seemingly without contextual purpose, merely serving an aesthetic function. In order to navigate around the disruptions of visuals and plot without losing sight of the narrative, the spectator requires recognition of Tarantino's style and form.

In the same vein, metafiction and intertextuality highlight some of the significant signals in Tarantino's films, which guide the spectator in their navigation of the story and plot. Tarantino orchestrates the spectator's experience to an extent, almost completely depending on how familiar they are with his style and form, to align with his own personal vision. This plays into Sarris' third tenet, in the way Tarantino's films demonstrate and implicate his *élan* of the soul, which also implies that his films might carry interior meaning that goes beyond the thematic context; whether that be of atmospheric quality only or of slightly more ideological proportions is, however, rather ambiguous.

An inference of Tarantino's sentiments can be attempted through interpretation, beyond thematic context of the interplay between fiction and reality in the subject matter. As shown in the analysis, *Kill Bill* represents, compared with the other two films elected for the analyses of this study, the predominant depiction of death and aestheticization of violence. The film's pas-

tiche composition of violence pays homage to cinematic violence by glorifying historically significant cinematographic techniques and traditions in terms of genre. However, subsequent to the appreciation of filmic bloodshed, brutality and rampage, certain aspects of the representation and depiction of violence invite the spectator to consider a contrastive and thus more critical perspective.

In this sense, *Kill Bill* as a violence exploitation film, in more ways than one, provides a critical addressing of the historically laissez faire attitude toward readiness for violence in America. In the perspective of filmic traditions, it is possible to argue that *Kill Bill* levels criticism at American society and culture. Following this sense, the thematic context of revenge and, by association, self-defense represents the predominant and constitutionally justified ideological concept of rightly practiced violence. As an example, this is reflected in the American gun policy and the NRA.

In the same vein, the absence of the R-rated counterpart to violence, i.e. sexually oriented nudity, stands out as significantly peculiar; representing an ironic dissonance demonstrated in the uneven representation of the two in *Kill Bill*. Following this perspective, the fact that part of the massacre of the Crazy 88 is shot in black-and-white, in order to accordingly allow larger quantities of and more explicit violence in terms of rating, suggests an almost parodic accommodation to the Motion Picture Association of America film rating system. The amalgamation of sex and violence implies that the two activities are equally offensive, which, given the vastly different nature of them, borders on absurdity. This line of critical interpretation suggests that Tarantino has intentionally infused interior meaning into the thematic context of *Kill Bill*, which, by means of excessive violence exploitation, encourages consideration of moral and philosophical issues regarding the cultural and societal affiliation with violence and its depiction.

In continuation of the above, *The Hateful Eight* raises persistent historical and contemporary issues of racism. The film implies an interior meaning regarding America's cultural inheritance of race discrimination and racism-related violence, as it is metaphorically reflected in the symbolism of the backdrop of the sublime scene; the diminutiveness of man in comparison to the vastness of nature symbolizes how this nefarious ideology reaches beyond the scope of the individual. The unforgiving nature as an entity that persists through time, is a symbolic parallel to the historically predefined and culturally inbuilt American obsession with race. In the light of this, the black man's rape of the white man invertedly symbolizes that inhumanity and abuse have been persistently executed on the black man in and by America for generations on end.

The deliberate and parodic emphasis on everything race and nationality-related in *The Hateful Eight*, such as the Americanized name Bob the Mexican and Mr. Mobray's exaggeratedly posh British accent, represents a symbolic race fixation that suggests a historically American cultural aspect reflecting certain features of American national identity; there is an underlying aversion to categorization, which suppresses individuality, in the constitutional entitlement to freedom that Americans pride themselves on. This line of thought implies the presupposition that American national identity is based on ideas of exceptionality and supremacy. However, the historically cultural aspect of race fixation and discrimination inherently plays into and embraces categorization, and thus not only contradicts, but consequently disables national identity because modern America is founded on immigration. The black man's power assumption over the white man reflects how Tarantino intentionally encourages the spectator to feel moral disgust with the action of the sublime scene as a means to emphasize the moral issues of aestheticizing violence. In this way, *The Hateful Eight*, by highlighting the issues of racial discrimination, represents a social criticism.

This is also the case with the revisionist western film *Django Unchained*; the film unites parodic elements with characteristics of the blaxploitation genre, such as the exaggerated stereotyping, the context of slavery, and the black man getting an upper hand over the white man, in order to convey a race-political sentiment. The film emphasizes the horrific aspects of American history in relation to racism and discrimination. In this way, the post-Civil War context of *The Hateful Eight* and *Django Unchained*, represents a social history of poverty and extreme oppression, which has led to the black American subculture carrying the stigmas of crime and violence. This reflects the role played by social tragedies in the history of a nation that has shown no tolerance for and given no protection to its own people.

Whereas the world and events represented in *Kill Bill* are entirely fictional, *The Hateful Eight* and *Django Unchained* are set in a historical period of time; these stories represent probable scenarios that might have occurred in the real world, referencing real people and historical events. The world in *OUTH* represents a more complex fusion of fiction and reality. While the film builds a context on retro aesthetics by means of intertextuality, Tarantino breaks the nostalgic illusion with a staggering reality check, as he rewrites a piece of history that is crucial to the overall perception of the late '60s.

Just like *The Hateful Eight* highlights a culturally inherited supremacist mindset, i.e. race discrimination and the historical and continuous abuse of the black population; *OUTH* presents a similar visualization of American evils with the representation of cults. The concept of cultism in America is based on a notion of individual supremacy, and similar to supremacy

based on white privilege, supremacy in regard to cultism also fosters violence. The violent Manson cult and general cult-associated violence also demonstrate how American evil originates from the cultivation of radical ideas born from extremist minds. In *OUTH* Tarantino devises a showdown with violent American supremacy. He rehabilitates the historical events by turning the violence back on the Manson cult itself, exacting retribution on the real murderers in his fictional universe.

The above discussion of the auteur traits demonstrated in Tarantino's films leads to an overall interpretation of his cinematic vision: Tarantino retells and interprets the American social history and pop-cultural history on film. His reimagination of the history of America in a context of violence stands out as a particularly critical and thought-provoking processing of cultural topoi. Furthermore, his films can be perceived as metafilms, addressing the general film medium and American film genres, by means of complex intertextuality. In his films, Tarantino explores numerous variations and combinations of film genres, and cultural and historical aspects and contexts, but they also demonstrate that the confrontation with American evils is a general theme. As such, it is reasonable to suggest that Tarantino's filmmaking is not only dedicated to entertainment, but that each film seeks to tell a significant story that conveys a specific message in a certain way; elevating his films to works of art.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine Quentin Tarantino's use of violence in his films through a thorough analysis of three of his films: *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), *The Hateful Eight* (2015), and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). In order to do so, the study has focused on their cultures of violence, the composition of the violence they depict, and the sympathy structures of their characters in relation to violence.

Violence is inevitable in all three filmic universes that the films depict. In *Kill Bill*, the context of '70s Kung Fu films and Japanese jidaigekis, a professional assassination squad with internal rivalry, martial arts, and a Japanese mafia boss establishes a culture of violence which is bound to become extremely violent – a conclusion that is further supported by the overall theme of revenge. In *The Hateful Eight*, the western genre imparts expectations of violence in virtue of its violent genre codes, and the sudden breach of genre from western to murder mystery only adds to the film's culture of violence, as well as the post-Civil War animosity lingering in the atmosphere. Violence is further rendered inevitable by the hatefulness of the characters whom the film portrays, with suspense and threats of violence building up in a pressure cooker situation. *OUTH* is set in the year of 1969, portraying a mix of fact and fiction. The culture of violence in this film is established by the historical events of the time, most saliently the Manson Family murders which ironically took place in the 'Summer of Love', but also such aspects as the stuntman profession and the making of western films.

The composition of violence in *Kill Bill* has elements of all three types of aestheticized violence, most characteristically showing examples of the surrealistic violence of cinematic martial arts and the hyper-violence of grindhouse cinema and jidaigekis. The violence has a structural function as well, as it occurs in percussive waves, establishing an overall rhythm in the film. In *The Hateful Eight*, the composition of violence is characterized by hyper-violent sequences that function structurally by increasing the pace and intensity of the film, which is otherwise slow and highly suspenseful; the suspense is relieved through violence. The pace is similarly slow in *OUTH*, but the violence does not function as a relief of suspense, because the film is not suspenseful. On the contrary, the film is quite uneventful in terms of action, so the violence that does occur becomes all the more impactful. While not easily categorized within Kupfer's terms of aestheticized violence, the violence in this film is still aesthetic in virtue of slow-motion effects and sound.

In all three films, the violence serves a larger purpose than just aesthetics and action: it has a narrative function. In *Kill Bill*, the violence is set in a context of vigilante revenge, which causes the spectator to cheer it on and to become sympathetically allied with the bride. In *The Hateful Eight* the violence is also encouraged by the spectator, because the characters are truly hateful and unsympathetic and thus deserving of the violence being brought upon them, which is reinforced by the spectator's witnessing of the death of the good guys. In *OUTH* the violence also affects the spectator's allegiance with the main characters positively: with Cliff because he exacts retribution on a group of killers toward whom the world feels a lot of animosity, and with Rick in virtue of his final flamethrower stunt, as it redeems his own self-worth, which the spectator can sympathize with.

These three Tarantino films arguably have sublime elements in the context of their depictions of violence. In *Kill Bill*, the scene that depicts the standoff between the bride and O-Ren calls forth the issues of aestheticized violence, such as the American readiness for violence and laissez faire attitude toward cinematic brutality. In *The Hateful Eight*, the sublime can be found in the scene where Warren inverts the power structure between the black man and the white man, symbolically highlighting the grim history of slavery and racism in America. With regards to *OUTH*, the whole film can be viewed as sublime due to its aesthetically impressive cinematic expression and the moral implications of rewriting the horrible tragedy that befell Sharon Tate and her friends.

The fact that Tarantino's films are extremely aesthetically appealing in virtue of his status as an auteur allows the spectator to simply enjoy them for their aesthetic properties and engage in fictional relief, circumventing moral evaluation. However, this study finds that Tarantino's use of sublime elements appeals for the spectator to engage in moral consideration in a broader perspective. In his works, Tarantino attempts to right the wrongs of American evils with cinematic and aestheticized violence.

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