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FICTIONAL DOGS:
The relevance of genre in two Quentin Tarantino Films

by

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I wish to acknowledge my appreciation for the advice,
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PROLOGUE

> They are drug dealers, killers, crimelords, spoilt ladies, prize-boxers, S & M rapists. Everyone of them is on the run, off their heads, or on the wrong side of the law. And yet in a way, they could be us too...
> (Lipman, 1994, p.51)

Amanda Lipman's description of the characters in **Pulp Fiction** (1994) keys into Quentin Tarantino's uncanny ability to access the sensibilities and expectations of his audience. He then twists and subverts them. He manages, by an almost encyclopaedic knowlege of film convention to play against the predictable path that we, his audience are familiar with. We have all encountered the high budget, high profit 'block buster' formula. There's the three act plays like **Forrest Gump**,(1994), **True Lies** (1994) and **The Lion King** (1994) where plots launch from introduction of content characters who then encounter one or more crises . An example of this is Schwarzenegger's character in **True Lies**. He becomes suspicious of his wife having an affair, realises his daughter's delinquency and has a gang of militant extremists threatening the world with a nuclear explosive to contend with. The resolution lies in the re-establishing of the bonded family unit which, it seems, has strength enough to save the world. How lamentable it is that we are frequently lead through predictable films drowning in their own banal moralities.

Tarantino has discussed the relationship between audience and director and the freedom or control directors wish to impose.

> Some people like to show everything. They don't want the audience to have a second guess about anything; it's all there ... Pretty much nine out of ten movies you see let you know in the first ten minutes what kind of movie it is going to be, and I think the audience subconsciously reads this early ten minute message...they're predicting what the movie is going to do...I like to use that information against them. (Tarantino, 1994, p.XIV)

It seems that in **Pulp Fiction** the audience treads a fine line between familiarity and bewilderment. Some of Tarantino's characteristic film making techniques are used to initiate us into the film space (e.g. the lurid subject matter, unrestrained vernacular dialogue and off-beat black comedy). Other devices act contrary to this, serving to jar and unsettle us ,(here it's the pain-filled scenes, disjointed editing or often 'overlong' holding shots, a lack of obvious moral stand points and nasty, casual deaths). But what determines our expectations? Why, for example, have **Pulp Fiction** and **Reservoir Dogs**(1992) been touted as characteristic of a 'Postmodernist' culture? Why are these films deemed representative or reflective of a sense of the contemporary? In this thesis I wish to deal with Tarantino's films' synchronic nature in a way that highlights their absolute dependence on existing established norms of film making. My principle exploration is via concepts of genre as a structuring and thematic influence.

Deviations from and use of genres are more than just sign posts by which Tarantino arrived at **Reservoir Dogs** (1992), **Pulp Fiction**, **True Romance** (1993) and **Natural Born Killers** (1994) (I chose not to investigate the latter two films are they are not pure reflections of Tarantino's directorial intent due to the involvement of Oliver Stone and Tony Scott as directors respectively). The preceeding generic films (e.g. Howard Hawks' **Rio Bravo** (1959) and **The Killers** (1964) by Don Siegel) and their deviant off-spring (such as Scorsese's **Taxi-Driver**(1976), Polanski's **Chinatown** (1974),

Godard's **Bande á Part** (1964) and Melville's **Le Samouraï**(1967)) are the engines underpinning Tarantino's films.

I wish to investigate the structuring influence of genre as an evolving criterion that is, in fact, a reflection of filmic, social and moral positioning. This evolution of film and the genres informing its production echo contemporary society by demarcating the moral and social standpoints of an audience. It also echoes our current interpretations of filmic or social histories. These senses of history and morals are the values by which we inform our own judgements.

GENRE

The concept of genre is based on recognisable stylistic attributes (e.g. the distinctive melodramatic use of shadow in Film Noir) and narrative structure (e.g. the almost inevitable requital doled out to villainous or malcontent characters). Genre is memorialised in the period furnishings, visual icons and style of a film. For genre to operate as an organisational mechanism it must distil traits within similar films to the lowest common denominator. There are certain stylistic and structural characteristics that consistently act as a source for the form the film takes. For example, the recognisable elements that identify a Western as such (from the ranches, to sheriffs and horses) or a gangster film (here it's the dark urban settings, organised crime and be-suited criminals) or a science fiction movie's laser firing, planetary scenery and high technology. These establilshed criteria are also the foundations on which ideas of 'Classical Hollywood' are based. The generalities and familiar categorising of generic imagery are what Robin Wood calls 'the values and assumptions so insistently embodied in and re-inforced by...American capitalist ideology' (Wood, 1986, p.60).

As an ideological construct and due to its restrictive, reductive nature, genre can only exist in its purest elemental form. This, according to Wood is intellectually contemptable in its nature as it resists more comprehensive investigation and correlation of and between films. To engage with any film solely on the basis of one formative element (here it is genre) falls short of the numerous influences that inform production, be they social imperatives (e.g. the financial instability of 'the great depression' in the 30s) or auteur's agenda (e.g. Stanley Kubrick's **Full Metal Jacket** (1987) which "invoked and parodied one detail or another from nearly every American film about the military made in the last two decades preceeding it.") (Gross, 1995, p.8)

One example cited by Wood as being intellectually contemptable (by their use of only the most obvious recognisable generic features) are the Hopalong Cassidy films. Here moral divisions were elementally good guy, bad guy and any social or sexual tensions were avoided or resolved absolutely according to generic expectations. There seems little relevence in such literal or absolute moral stand points. As social indicators 'Our recognition takes place not in relation to individual films, but to a total field which includes a range of contemporary forms'(Tasker, 1993, p.68). So production and reception of signifiers, even within generic forms,are informed and delineated by contemporary media production. This generic essentialism,as outlined by Wood seems not to engage us on our terms.

There is a massive fragmentation within our culture with increasingly multi-textual engagement between empirical and subjective pursuits. An example of this would be the "the erosion of the older distinction of high culture and so-called mass or popular culture ..." or blurring of academic disciplines. "Is the work of Michel Foucault, for example to be called philosphy, history, social theory or political science?" (Jameson, 1983, p.113). Our self-aware, continually qualifying theoretical engagements are perhaps informed by different mind-sets than those that fed critical bunching of particular films into generic baskets. This is not denying the presence of genre in current films. Although both the form and functions of genre are at a different evolutionary stage they can still be identified. According to Tasker

> We can ... find traces of a recognisable form within...narrative pattern, images and characterisations. Nonetheless, for a criticism which seeks to see the cultural or social significance of the development, success and decline of particular genres,it is important to look to contemporary shifts as well as to traces of the past.' (Tasker, 1993, p.70)

Numerous problems arise when attempting to trace the historical development of genre. One may consider the 'intellectually contemptable' (as Wood phrases it) genres to have static positions from which all deviations or sub-divisions can be traced, either chronologically or stylistically. John. G. Cawelti's theories of generic transformations (I will explore these later) relate to pre-established notions of genre and deviations from them. Timothy Corrigan's use of static or adjusted genres(to "recuperate, ritualise and mythologise cultural history which,in turn intensifies a contemporary cultures'relation to social history") (Corrigan, 1995, p.193) would surely only be possible to investigate if generic 'pressure' (influence) was constant and traceable. To weigh down criticism with a static sense of history seems less constructive that to adopt what Frederic Jameson refers to as a 'post-structuralist position'. He considers social history (including generic conventions) as a "construct...a philosophical and cultural mystification." (Jameson, 1983, p.117) This history is subject to nostalgic revision (these concepts are explored in further detail in the **Pulp Fiction** chapter). So not only do genres neutralise history but adopt the same dynamic that historically supports them. Tasker argues that genre is a mobile, fluid category developing and shifting to accommodate the consumption of popular narrative. The production of genre is a play of "familiarity and difference rather than the repeated enactment of any static criteria."(Tasker, 1990, p.54) Continual re-assessment is necessary to judge what can be taken for granted and what is questioned if any criticism of such a fluid category is to be effective.

Tasker includes the terms 'Post-Modernism' and 'Post Modernist Culture', one of whose traits is fragmentation of aesthetic bounderies. Inter-textuality occurs through various media forms due to these disruptions in boundaries. In a time where consumption of popular culture is considered a form of production in itself, we can locate Tarantino as a

consumer/producer of imagery informed by consumption of this popular culture. He constructs his films by the appropriation and re-definition of frequently pre-existing stories, characters and genres.

> Asthetic fragmentation has in turn a central significance for thinking about the function of comtemporary popular genres. Production and criticism depend on bounderies.
> (Tasker, 1990, p.54)

Within this visually literate culture there are no stable view points. Perhaps it is only with the emergence of 'Post-modern' engagement (with its non-categorising, non-oppositional approach) that genres absolute dependency on a contemporary culture becomes visible.It is this culture that defines and interprets genre, assigning contemporary significance to generic codes. Establishing a framework for investigation of contemporary genres is necessary to investigate Tarantino and his films generically. The investigative framework will initially be through Cawelti's theories of genre and social myth. Cawelti's arguments are dependent on senses of traceable (generic) history as he considers the breakdown and evolution of genre through transformations.

Films are fed by "a complex generic tradition *and* by the fears and aspirations of a whole culture" (Wood, 1986, p.66). Robin Wood implies that with their appropriation and re-definition of pre-existing generic imagery, directors like Robert Altman, John Woo, Oliver Stone and Quentin Tarantino either include their own socio-political commentary or allow for a greater potential in the audience readings of their films. Timothy Corrigan suggests that the only way we,as viewers, can participate with visual imagery, would be as "Repo-men, hysterical and paralysed cultists who can at best, re-cycle the images of genre as generic name brands" (Corrigan, 1991, p.159). Yet is this not the relationship fostered within genre films? We are already partially educated to the nature of the characters and possibility of the plot.

These generic name brands are the strongest communicators of particular ideologies, whether they are concepts of morality, justice or the family unit etc. This, by sheer generality fails to consider socially driven agendae and current interpretations brought to a film by its audience. Surely audiences are positioned as producers due to the editorial control they possess over the proliferation of multiple media sources. From satellite channelling and multi-screen cinemas to video technologies, we have the ability to choose, to play and juxtapose what we watch and how we watch it, programming to suit our own tastes and expectations. This creative play of our appropriation and re-definition as audience producers is epitomised by Tarantino. One example of this is the 50s retro-restaurant *"Jack Rabbit Slims"* the 'wax museum with a pulse' in **Pulp Fiction**. *'Slims'* is a treasure trove of appropriated film memorabilia. The walls are decked with mostly Roger Corman film posters, the staff all resemble particular actors, performers or film characters, there is even a Douglas Sirk steak on the menu. It is as if the pastiche of filmic referents are re-defined by becoming signifiers of a dysfunctional reduction of reality to the icons of genre.

Tarantino's awareness of, and engagement with a video culture can be paralleled with the New York film school 'brat pack' in the 70s. These were cine-literate directors (like Scorsese, Coppola, Spielberg and Lucas) who used their filmic knowledge to subvert the internal structures of expectation in the audience. Tarantino's years spent working in a specialist video store (**Video-archives**) in South Bay, California fueled his interest in obscure and classic films. He uses a smash-and-grab technique of exploiting genres and juxtaposing them into pastiche.

In the late-70s Cawelti considered the obsolescence of older genres and the myths they encapsulated. The transformations they had undertaken sounded the death knell for genres as pure establishing forms.

His four modes described classifications of relationships between traditional generic elements and the newer altered contexts. There was, according to Cawelti, a tragic inadequacy of social myths (embodied in genre) when they collided with a universe more complex and more enigmatic. In the example cited by Cawelti, **Chinatown**, Gittes' (a hard-boiled detective) is confronted by a

> Depth of depravity beyond the capacity of the hard-boiled ethos of individualistic justice... it is society and not just a single individual which is corrupt, the official machinery of law enforcement is unable to bring the guilty to justice (Cawelti, 1979, p.562).

I would suggest that not only does this depth of depravity exist but is the environment for Tarantino's shocking and intriguing imagery. It also highlights the inability of any genre (as social myth) to cope with the vast possibilities of individual realities. For example, the spectacular torture scene in **Reservoir Dogs** where Michael Madsen's ('Mr. Blonde') reason for inflicting pain on the police hostage 'Marvin Nash' was his own pleasure:

> ... I'm not gonna bullshit you. I don't really care about what you know or don't know. I'm gonna torture you for a while regardless. Not to get information, but because torturing a cop amuses me. There's nothing you can say, I've heard it all before. ('Mr. Blonde', Tarrantino, 1994, p.61)

And how would a 'Gittes' (Jack Nicholson) style of detective cope with the S & M pawn shop in **Pulp Fiction**? The inadequacy of obsolete social myths and the need to forge relevent myths is the driving force for directors like Tarantino who seek filmic experiences that reflect, parallel and/or parody contemporary society. According to Cawelti

> The present significance of generic transformation as a generic mode reflects the feeling that not only the traditional genres but the cultural myths they once embodied are no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our time. (Cawelti, 1979, p.568)

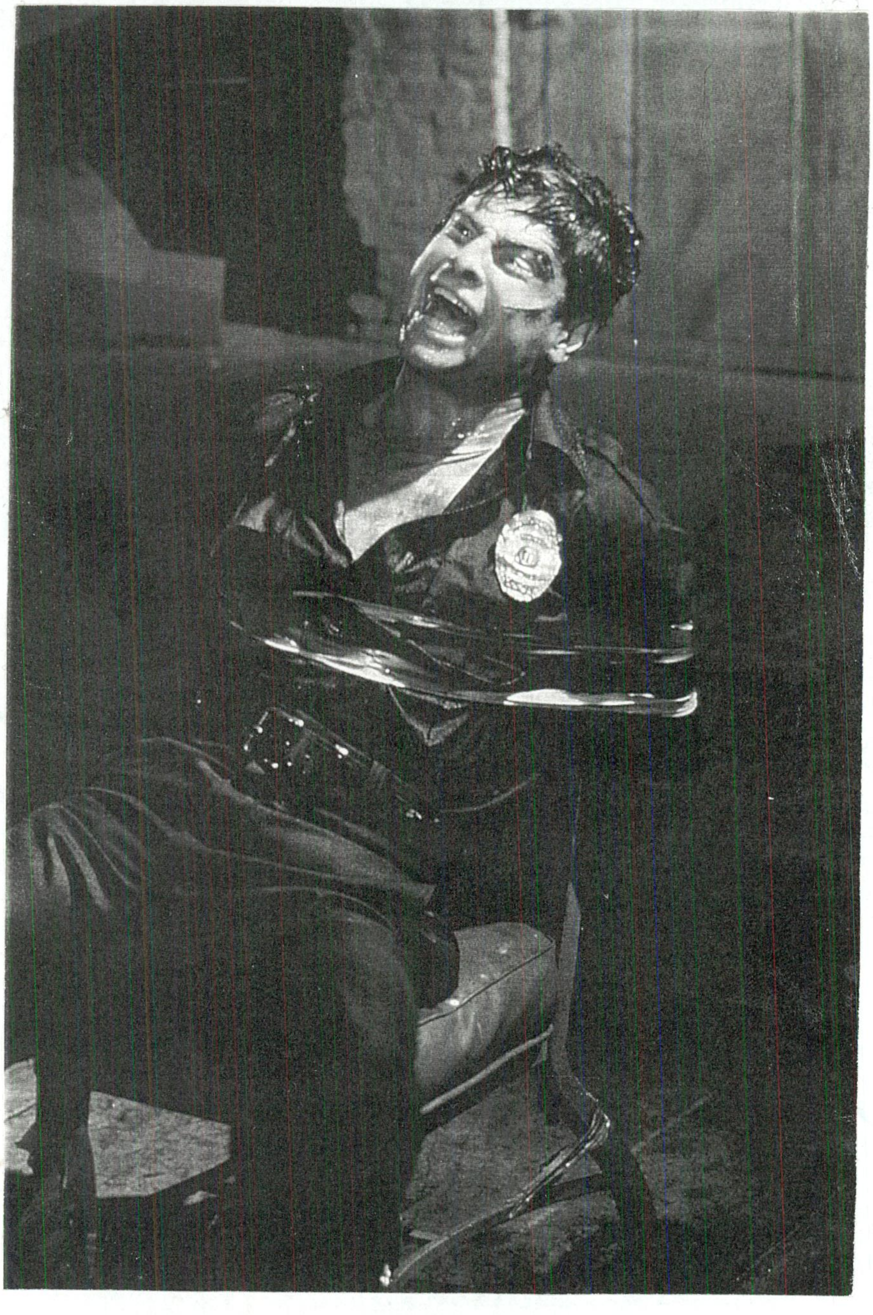

Illustration 1.1. The 'cop torture scene' in Reservoir Dogs.

Cawelti defined myth as "a pattern of narrative known throughout the culture and presented in many different versions by many different tellers".(Cawelti, p.560) One example could be illustrared in the characterisation and form of the noirish, hard-boiled detective. It originated in the pulp fiction magazines like **The Black Mask** and the dime novels of Dashiel Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain. They were source material for films like **Double Indemnity**(1943), **Gun Crazy**(1949), **The Postman Always Rings Twice**(1946), and **The Maltese Falcon**(1941). In turn, these films were deconstructed along generic parameters and re-engineered in the 60s in European art cinema (French and Italian 'New Wave'). Examples of these are Jean-Pierre Melville's **Le Samouraï**(1967) and Jean-Luc Godard's **Bande à Part**(1964). Here the identifying codes of the 'hard-boiled' films were re-contextualised in a French environment. The demythologising of a genre is shown when the genre is high-lighted as a construct of 'destructive and inadequate myths'. This is illustrated by Cawelti's example of Roman Polanski's **Chinatown**(1974). Tarantino also re-adopts film noir and gangster genres to use but he makes it explicit and even trades on his acute awareness of their previous incarnations. **Reservoir Dogs** is similar in character to Stanley Kubrick's **The Killing**(1965). Tarantino takes all the familiars of the gangster genre and returns them to us in a form that can be interpreted as being more about filmic experience than any single genre. He exploits his geekish, cineaste obsession even within the self-aware construction of **Reservoir Dogs**.

One finds a voyeuristic enjoyment, for example, in the sequence Tarantino devised where 'Mr. Orange' (an undercover cop) acts out a fake story about close call he'd had on a drugs run with the police for the benefit of the other gangsters. The sequence follows 'Orange' (Tim Roth) through his rehearsals of the scripted story at various stages in it's development, as he narrates to the group.

Tarantino then shows him within this story, finally Roth addresses the camera with his anecdote inviting us (the audience) into this imaginary space within the film whole. The story serves to engage this film-going audience by giving us implicit knowledge of 'Mr. Orange's' 'real' identity that the other gangsters do not have. But more than this, the nature of viewing and visual engagement is highlighted and addressed. The spot-lighting of the conventions of cinema (in particular genre) causes problems in the operation of those conventions.

> Once generic conventions are foregrounded, the genre can no longer operate successfully as a purveyor of ideology. The conventions become unstable and variable; History increasingly intervenes in the realm of myth and signifiers become signifieds, the referents of films rather than the active agents of cinematic practice, a matter of content rather than vital form. (Kellner and Ryan, 1988, p.78)

If a film exposes generic mechanisms yet continues to use them (as with **Reservoir Dogs**) there is an inevitable battle of style over content. Perhaps this is dependent on whether Tarantino considers filmic referencing and his 'pharmaceutical cocktail of allusions, pop music and visual jolts' (Rafferty, 1992) as a means to a (narrative) end or the end itself. If referencing is the ultimate goal of the film, this may just be a form of blank parody. Here the genre and associated myth are probed and designated as artifice but then engaged in and used as structural imperatives nonetheless. Perhaps the genres are just being burlesqued,to be played as fantastic cinema. But then they are injected with realism to highlight the improbable (if not impossible) situations the characters find themselves in. According to Tarantino, "the idea is to take genre characteres and put them in real life situations and make them live by real life rules" (Tarantino, Nov. 1994, p.19). This can be seen in the editing of **Reservoir Dogs**. Tarantino stops what he refers to as the "movie-clock" and plays the situation (i.e. in the warehouse, following the heist where all the remaining characters attempted to piece together the incidents leading up to the

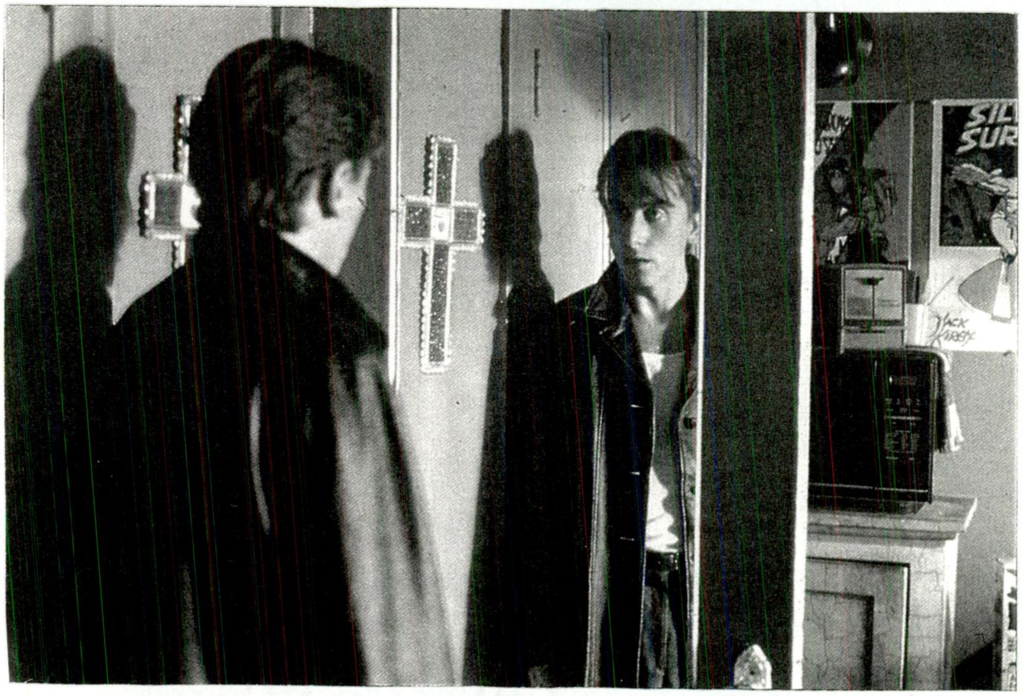

Illustration 1.2, Tim Roth reherses his 'Mr. Orange' character in **Reservoir Dogs** .

bungling of the robbery and subsequent killing of 'Mr. Blue' and 'Mr. Brown') using the "real-time clock". This serves to create tension and a sense of claustrophobia. Tarantino explores the interplay between the characters as they attempt to make sense of the disastrous deviation from a generic heist. Engaging a "movie-clock" form of editing would have probably skipped this and moved elsewhere to propel the generic story. It is as if Tarantino is allowing us to see the frantic personal paddling that keeps the genre 'duck' afloat.

Perhaps then,genre may only operate, invoking expectations by the re-playing of nostalgic, familiar imagery and characters. This (nostalgic invocation) is another of Cawleti's generic transformations. Here, the traditional "generic features of plot, character setting and style are deployed to create the aura of past time" (Cawelti, 1985, p.571). Onto this, Tarantino applies his own interpretation of a contemporary society. *After all*, if nostalgia is to be invoked, a contemporary film

> cannot simply duplicate the past experience...
> or codes ... but must make us aware in some
> fashion of the relationship of past and
> present. (Cawelti, 1979, p.571)

This is achieved by the re-contextualising of the codes, thereby "giving us both a sense of contemporaneity and pastness" (Cawelti, p.572). Through his deployment of popular film icons (e.g. the stars of 50s and 60s Hollywood films and popular culture such as Jayne Mansfield and Buddy Holly in *Jack Rabbit Slims' Diner* in **Pulp Fiction**) Tarantino conjures this generic 'warm reassurance'. This invocation of nostalgic comfort can also be observed in the'bubble-gum'pop music sound tracks, the classic gangster uniforms of Vincent, Jules and Misters 'White to Blue'. Although we key into this iconography, it is in fact a series of generic mis-matches that serve not to pin us to a particular time, place, or even

style but float us through a general feeling of an idealised past. This history is an illusory construct in the mass-produced, low-culture environment in which we live and those we view. It is difficult to ascertain where Tarantino is critically positioned relative to these transformations (from the more traditional, possibly obsolete genres). The sheer intermingling of different transformative gestures within a single film depends on the directorial intent and strategy. Tarantino's treatment of genre does not seem as a deliberate attempt to designate it as just being" the embodiment of an inadequate and destructive myth (s)." (Cawelti, 1979, p.570) His use of formula characters and trappings do not seem to exist purely as a structure from which to deviate. The conflict between realism and generic fantasy is a source of tension and intrigue in both **Pulp Fiction** and **Reservoir Dogs**.

Working within a generic framework allows Tarantino the space to manipulate forms and elements, to breathe vitality into a possibly over-simplified cinematic history. The space that the category 'Post-Modernism' allows is for the re-inventive energy that is derived from the manipulation of predictable genres with such potent (if over-simplistic) codes. This re-inventive energy is achieved by using genre as a source of parody or satire and even as a device for exposing its own coded signifiers.

If, according to Corrigan, ...'the pleasure of reception lies in being able to already know, not read the meaning of the film in a totalising image that preceeds the movie...' (Corrigan, 1994, p.106) films must operate with recognisable ideologies. Yet, as Tarantino illustrates, although he may use recognisable generic elements, it does not follow that the resulting film has to also completely follow the formulae. Depending on context and treatment, the function of genre, whilst testifying to it's own strength does not have to 'inhibit the imagining of radical alternatives' (Wood, 1986 , p.71) in fact, it may even promote them.

RESERVOIR DOGS

Perhaps a testament to the circular nature of media production and reception is a theft and bastardisations of anecdotes and quotes on/by Quentin Tarantino. It seems he has already been eulogised with the filming of four screen plays including Reservoir Dogs and Pulp Fiction. His comment on action and violence in cimema for example, of "seeing a car explode" being "more interesting than seeing it park" can be traced to at least three books and as many magazine articles.

Tarantino's use of pre-existing text or imagery has gained him a notoriety for not only sourcing generic conventions but possibly plagiarising parts of other films. Here I cite the Hong Kong action movie **City of Fire** (1989) by Ringo Lam. Although only a twenty minute segment of the film it is a story of a bungled diamond heist by a gang of code-named robbers that escapes to a warehouse. The reason for the failure of the heist is that one of the them (a psychopath) starts shooting. 'Brother Chow',one of the gang, who is also an undercover cop gets shot and injures an innocent bystander. He is 'minded' by 'Brother Fu'. The boss arrives to accuse 'Chow' of being a cop, he is defended by 'Fu' and a Mexican standoff ensues. Tarantino, of course admits to stealing all his sources as "great artists steal, they don't do homages." (Dawson, 1995, p.91). He finds no difficulty in admitting his sources, no matter how close. Most criticism of Tarantino films has been by reference to preceeding films and genres, (e.g. that Mexican stand off could also have come from **The Wild Bunch**(1969), **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly** (1966) or **Ride the High Country**(1962)). Another possible result of such close affiliations to other sources and scenes by influential directors like Peckinpah, or Scorsese, is the memories of these acting as metonyms. Not only do they invoke" the films which provided inspiration but also the critical praise heaped upon those films" (McKiver, 1994).

But is it possible to locate a particular genre within **Reservoir Dogs**? Does it use those generic conventions, and then why do departures from such specific generic procedures grate and jar us so? Tarantino referred to **Reservoir Dogs** as a "genre based art movie" and it does adhere to numerous generic conventions of a gangster genre. Gangster genre implies action melodrama, although it "shades through areas into other genres notibly crime, noir, social problem, social realism, underworld/lowlife and populist/omnibus". (Durgnat,1990, p.93) **Reservoir Dogs** to date has been critically herded into numerous sub-divisional generic categories, its a "sardonic doodle on B-movie themes" (Rafferty, 1992). Generic similarities have been observed between **Reservoir Dogs** and other gangster films such as **The Asphalt Jungle**(1950), **The Killing**(1965), **Rififi**(1955) and **The Thomas Crown Affair**(1968). These similarities are not only in style but,as Tarantino refers to it, by their "built-in suspense mechanisms" (Dawson, 1995, p.43); where tough guys with guns struggle with the law, with the world and with each other. Though Tarantino has adopted the familiarity of the gangster genre, Durgnat has suggested that

> the Gangster has no structural unity; it's a historical (diachronic) conjunction, normally in mutation...and that its... genre evolution is clarified only by sub-types and mutation points.(Durgnat, 1990, p.94)

Reservoir Dog's, idiosynchronic (idiosyncratic) nature is, by its popularity ..."a sign of entrenched moral ethical confusion of the culture." (Waltz, n.d, p.78) According to Warshow

> The gangster, though there are real gangsters, is also primarily a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster.
> (Warshow, 1962, p.135)

Tarantino's gangsters are imaginary constructs,for example the character of Joe Cabott (Lawrence Tierney),the archetypal head of a caper gang with skilled members is reminiscent of

Marlon Brando in the **The Godfather**(1971). The gangsters are generalised be-suited men vulnerable by blinkered loyalty and restricted imagination. They're gangsters in a style "firmly rooted in a world of seventies cool-guy pop culture that may have never existed except in movies but has resurfaced in the nineties." (Clarkson, 1995, p.XIX) It is this 'cool guy' convention that acts as one cause of the isolation of characters within the generic framework of **Reservoir Dogs**. The isolation is personal. For example, 'Mr. Blonde' (Madsen) has just been released from prison, 'Mr. White' has split up from his former partner' Alabama 'whom he has not seen for a year and a half and Joe Cabott, though married, is isolated by his position as a criminal boss. 'Mr. Orange' is separated by being a police plant within the criminal circle. There is also the professional isolation of the criminals who are under strict instructions not to share personal information as it may jeopardize the heist. According to Shadoian....

> If there is a problem that society is worried about or a fantasy that it is ready to support, odds are, it can be located in the gangster. To take what's within and place it without, is to create a context for observing it with a minimum of clutter, and the gangster, by definition, is without. (Waltz, 1980, p. 79)

Is this isolation, generalised by generic characterisations an illustration of the conflict between professional (multinational, post-consumer) culture and the fragmented clannish societies of post modern culture? It is, of course, the personal relating despite the generic injunction that leads to the destruction of all concerned in **Reservoir Dogs**. Generic considerations inevitably reduce dialogue and characters to stylised mayhem, playground machismo and ultimately to the Mexican stand off. According to Manohola Dargis "a history of American cinema could be traced on the bruised besieged male body from westerns to gangster sagas to male weepies to war films". (Dargis, 1992, p.11). The characters within **Reservoir Dogs** are an amalgam of Melville's trench coated Jef in **Le Samourai** and Travis Bickle in **Taxi Driver** and various points between and before.

Illustration 2.1, The **Reservoir Dogs** in generic uniform.

They are both strengthened and beaten by the weight of generic traditions even before they encounter their own personal rat traps. En route from the failed heist 'Mr. White' attempts to comfort the wounded 'Mr. Orange' with a gentle toned "come on who's a tough guy ?". He endeavours to remind both 'Orange' and the audience of what 'tough guys' should act like and what conventions they should be following. Yet as Terence Rafferty (1992) points out, this instantly throws in self awareness of generic conventions and therefore an element of parody, no matter how dead-pan.

The uniforms of the characters, that of dark suits, white shirts and skinny 60s style ties also dress the individuals with a filmic history where heroes are identified by uniform. This iconography also contextualises them within particular environments or periods. Tarantino's attitude to the suits worn by the gangsters seems to encapsulate his treatment of his sources generally. They act as signifiers of particular convention but are not just a guise under which simplified characters can operate. The destruction of genre, myth and man can be traced in the destruction of this uniform. According to Tarantino his 'suits of armour' are evident also in Jean-Pierre Melville's use of the "snap-brim fedora and Bogart-like trench coat, Leone's dusters and Eastwood's poncho", (Tarantino, 1994, p.17) as too with Harrison Ford's hat and flight jacket in the **Indiana Jones** trilogy. In **Pulp Fiction** the cut and crisp suits of Jules and Vincent set them up as... "real bad asses. But as the movie goes on, their suits get more and more fucked up until their they're stripped off and the two are dressed in the exact antithesis , volley ball wear."(Tarantino, 1994, p.18) The suits miraculously (cinematically) protect them from cinematic violence when Jules and Vincent are surprised by the gun-wielding stray flat mate on their trip to collect their bosses brief case. When they accidentally shoot their passenger in the car following that incident, their suits are ruined while attempting to cope with this unexpected situation. It is as if the uniforms and conventions they encapsulate are unable to sustain the

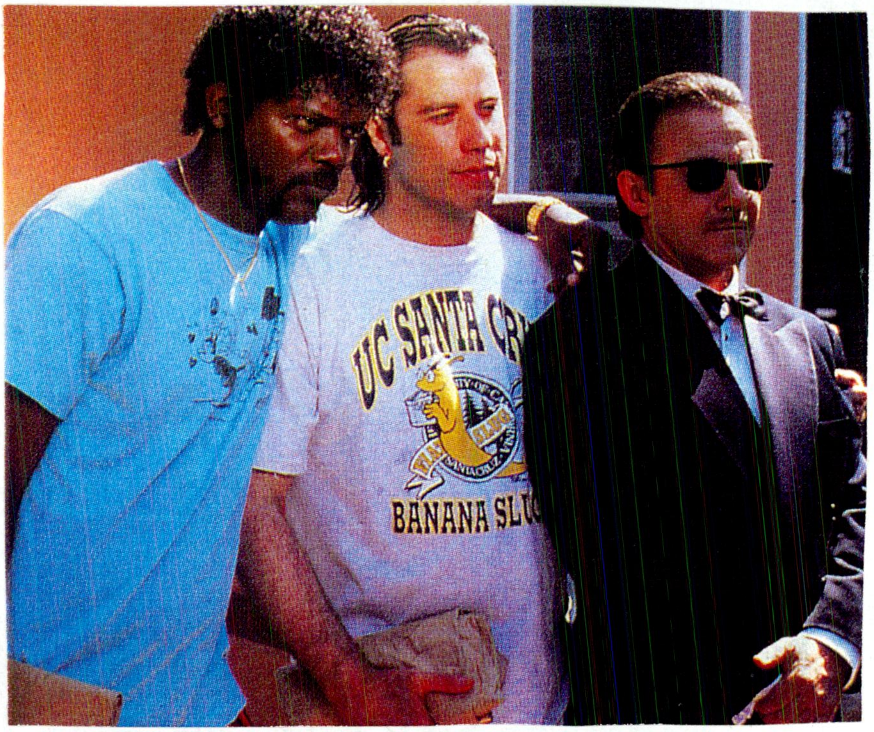
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Illustration 2.2, Jules and Vincent wearing vollyball-gear in **Pulp Fiction**.

characters in contemporary settings and against 'real' incidents that genres are unable to predict.

In **Reservoir Dogs**, this uniform, along with the code names isolate the characters from one and other and propel the underlying tensions within the film. It is the "loyalties, rivalries and enmities...that...develop within the group from the first meeting ...which...finally lead to the destruction of all concerned." (Newman, 1995, p.52). It is the human strength and frailties, despite generic plot and characters that lead to the death of everyone except for 'Mr. Pink'. Is there any significance in the fact that 'Pink' was explicitly gay and therefore exempt from dying 'heroically' (like male gangsters)? He did not enter into this bonding process as the other gangsters, "not acting like a first year fucking theif." He admonishes 'Mr. White' for bonding with the injured 'Mr. Orange' (i.e. sharing his first name with 'Orange' in the car during their escape, an absolute taboo in this film). 'Pink' sees the relationship as personally threatening to himself suggesting that if 'Orange' were brought to hospital as he begged 'White' do and was 'got to' by the police, they could therefore identify 'White' by sight, name and speciality.

> They get to him, they can get you,they get closer to me...I didn't tell him my name. I didn't tell him where I was from, I didn't tell him what I knew better than to tell him. Fuck, fifteen minutes ago, you almost told me your name.
> ('Mr. Pink', Tarantino, 1994, p. 41)

The gangster's inter-relationships and machismo attitudes have opened **'Reservoir Dogs**' to be examined previously in solely monographic modes, such as explorations of Eros versus Thanatos, maleness and violence or some politically correct sociopathy by accusations of supremacism and misogyny. It seems that the icons of masculinity the characaters themselves allude to are generic characatures .'Mr. White' and 'Mr. Blonde' are big Lee Marvin fans.Mr. Orange is pre-occupied by comic book heroes ('The Silver Surfer'). 'Mr. Brown' (Tarantino) positions himself by his 'Madonna' monologue,

with mention of John Holmes (a black porn star) and Charles Bronson in **The Great Escape**(1963) as his representatives of masculinity. In the dialogue between the men, "Tarantino shows their ritualised conversations, play fights and so on, uncensored, rife with racial slurs ('what are we a buncha niggers?') and sexual innuendoes". (Duane, 1993, p.28) According to Duane, there is a "very definite subversive agenda lurking beneath all the tough guy backchat and rapid fire gun play". With the accusations laid against it, according to Tarantino, his aim in **Reservoir Dogs** was "to entertain rather than direct any subliminal messages at his audience." (Clarkson, 1995, p.183) He has (as Jamie Bernard phrased it) finally made a **Boys N'The Hood** for a white audience where the dialogue between the players reflects the type of language actually used in society.

Reservoir Dogs' ambiguous social commentary (e.g. the alleged fascination with the fear of homosexuality that underlies the whole sub-genre of the buddy movie) does actually conclude as an observation, profound in morality and human interaction. For example, 'White' irrationally allies with the dying 'Orange' when he is accused of being the "rat in the pack" in the final scene by Joe Cabot. 'White's' attachments are mistaken, he confuses sentiment with loyalty, jeopardising the trust and friendship he has with Cabot with whom he "goes back a long way". According to Tarantino though,

> I'm not trying to preach any kind of morals or get any kind of message across, but for all the wildness that happens in my movies, I think that they usually lead to a moral conclusion.
> (Fuller, 1994, p.XII)

Surely, this playful nihilism and abdication from any deliberate moral conclusion is utterly dependent on generic expectation, it reflects the current demands placed on social myth. The 'Madonna' speech (and a sexist reading of it), for example, can be defended by explaining that 'Madonna' is, in fact, a model of feminine power. She knowingly exploits her own sexuality for her own gains.

So too Tarantino's abstinence from taking a continual moral stand point emphasises the 'post-modern consumer's ' editorial responsibilities . By using his solid grounding in movie culture he exploits "this generations insatiabile appetite for sex, drugs, rock'n roll and startling violence". (Clarkson, 1995, p.XIX).

The violence in Tarantino's films has been condemned for its extreme nature and for the ease of participation of almost every character to be involved in or complicit with violent acts. For example, as 'White' and 'Pink' discuss their getaways from the crime scene, 'White reveals he has killed two cops; 'Pink' retorts by saying 'what, no real people?'. Similarly, in **Pulp Fiction** when Vincent accidentally shoots and kills Marvin, the following discussion with Jules is less on morality and guilt than about the manner of disposing of the body and cleaning the car interior. Much of the controversy in **Reservoir Dogs** was less concerned with the casual manner in which violent acts took place and more to do with their alleged prolonged and gratuitous nature. But the violence within both films is most effective in its unpredictable, pain filled realism, where violent acts are the beginning of drama rather than just a final enactment of catharsis. Usually, violence is used to progress a story and

> you nearly always know the extent of the violence before it happens. It's robbed of one of its important real-life characteristics - its ability to be surprising and unpredictable.
> (Leith, 1993)

Tim Roth's character ('Mr. Orange') is already shot in the first scene of the film, yet does not die, until the final scene. "He's shot in the belly, he can't walk, he bleeds like a stuck pig, and when he is awake, he screams in pain". ('Mr. White', Tarantino, 1994, p.34) He is aware of his impending death. The filmic theme of male sacrifice and redemption through pain is a familiar issue, yet we rarely have to witness this pain for prolonged periods.

Tarantino's violence is occasionally graphic but principally suggestive. He allows his audience their own imaginative space, then seeks their complicity for the lurid imagery. In that sense, the viewer becomes a co-conspirator to the enactment and suggestions of violence. The absent violence is far more potent than any graphic stylized portrayal. We do not, for example, get to witness the actual removal of Marvin Nash's ear in the torture scene in **Reservoir Dogs**, the alleged shooting spree in the diamond store (both by 'Mr. Blonde') or the boxing match in **Pulp Fiction** in which Bruce Willis (Butch) kills his opponent. Tarantino's violent acts become ambiguous statements but the resulting decelerated anguish and pain describes the reality omitted by stylistic generic gesture. "His violence runs amok, delivered from messy (politically correct) accountability" of generic devices, to a cruel parody of genre which is,in fact,"a vivid visual correlative for the internal agitation of urban America"
(Corliss, 1994, p.67)

Inclusion of generic (predictable) violence (that works as a licence to inflict revenge and end narrative stages) is not restricted to any single genre. As a generic device, it is abundant in many genres. Examples cited by Durgnat are

> the cop film ('**Dirty Harry**'s 'make my day'), comedy(**Throw Moma from the Train**), horror (**American Werewolf in London**). Such films don't just establish, they trace in fascinated detail, mixtures of guilt free callousness with punctilious or sensitive sociability. (Durgnat, 1990, p.94).

Tarantino's depictions of 'guilt free callousness' are more illustrative of the lack of morality or justice in the patterns of life and death. Violent operation on generic levels proves ritualistic, a distant experience skirting around the subject of violence itself.

> **Scarface** and **The Godfather** and **Body Double** display very little understanding of what happens when people start to shoot and torture each other what it looks like, how long it takes, how scary it is. (Leith, 1993)

These violent films (according to Leith) are almost advertisements for violence as they are really about the fun of watching violence. Tarantino's films are less energised by violence than its threat. The threat is the investigation into unpredictable violent acts without the generic expectations. Tarantino's gangsters act like "the disturbingly normal gangster" (the most recent cycle of gangster outlined by Durgnat); for example Scorsese's friendship network in **Mean Streets**(1984) (an "intimiste-populist-realist tale"), where characters indulge in a petty bourgeois manner. (Durgnat, 1990, p.94) Yet, Tarantino's men are still donning the gangster uniform of James Cagney in **Public Enemy**(1931). It is as if the characters are in crisis, caught between their role playing as generic representatives and the 'real' non-generic situations that arise. The actors play gangsters, themselves bit performers in a genre. They are as stunned and disgusted by violence as us when it does not fulfill their generic expectations.

PULP FICTION

> Presented out of chronology, so as to alternate fierce melodrama with behavioural comedy, and vengeance with revelation (Corliss, 1994, p.66),

the story of **Pulp Fiction** is in fact three interconnected narratives with prologue and epilogue that are woven together so that each seems a tangent from the rest. With the disrupting of chronology and causality,

> having moved back and forth in time, and sideways between characters and points of view, there is with the final time shift...the exhilaration of everything clicking together, from the running gag of Vincent always being in the toilet when something mega is going on, to an oddly poignant emotion that comes from our fore-knowledge of what is going to happen next. (Errigo, 1994 p. 11)

The disjointed elements seem to gel into a delicately balanced story with numerous generic plots and characters, that succeed or fail by the flexibility of their generic characterisations. Tarantino's auteurist use of non-linear narrative is not because he is "on this major crusade against linear narrative" (Corliss, 1994, p. 68) but to "use the structures that he sees in novels and apply them to cinema" (Tarantino, 1994, p.XIII). His employment of this chaptering is also evident in **Reservoir Dogs**. He introduces his characters in a series of episodes. Tarantino brings, what Richard Corliss describes as "novelistic devices to the movie mall" (Corliss, 1994, p. 66) His use of film convention and sourcing returns him to the 'Black Mask' style of literature, not only to procure his generic characters but also structure his editing. So although writers such as the likes of Dashiel Hammett inform the generic structures of production, the contemporary renditions of popular myths are presented with the self-aware black humour and parody of writers like Thomas Pynchon.

Pulp Fiction forces its audience to view the whole film as a series of disparate elements inter-relating without any definite time-frame. Each story exists in time relative to the others. **Pulp Fiction** and **Reservoir Dogs** in effect are removed from our own time-frames. This escape from linear narrative is also adrift from the old notion outlined by Tasker that narrative content is somehow simply separable from form. Adopting alternatives to single-line narrative and using easily accessible generic features gives Tarantino's audience "a whole series of extra-textual and intra-textual knowledge and a certain textual reflexivity is in operation." (Tasker, 1993, p.56). In **Pulp Fiction** (although based in the present) ambiguous time-frames and generic synchronic signifiers internalise this world of simplified genre-coded stories. It makes us aware of the pure cinematic fantasy of the 'junk world' where trash is endlessly recycled for consumption.

Not only are the internal structures of **Pulp Fiction** ahistorical (assuming history can be traced by a chronological progression), but the constituent elements (of environments, characterisations and media reference) are also ambiguously multi-referential and attempt to avoid establishing any singular socio-political stand-point. It seems that **Pulp Fiction** wishes to position itself beyond history. This, according to Jameson, is

> an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history ... and we are unable to focus on our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experiences.(Jameson, 1983, p.117)

So, **Pulp Fiction** can only perform itself by being revisionist and emulatory no matter how it uses its self-aware parodying and historical generic referencing. It cultivates senses of nostalgia, attempting to use the idealised generic signifiers as reassuring definites to locate the frantic hyper-bole of contemporary social myths.

This is reminiscent of one of Cawelti's transformative modes of genre, except that the sense of nostalgia is unable to sustain any particular reassurance because we are no longer able to trace history as a single linear truth. A sense of history, like the editorial structure of **Pulp Fiction** can only exist as a multi-lateral non-static criterion. It may only exist by being continually qualified. Nostalgic revision operates by being wholly informed by our current social attitudes to history. These social attitudes are fed by the subjectivity or objectivity of media information and interpretations of history. But how does the use of signifiers of pastness, without contextualising them specifically (as done in the nostalgia film) act as a symbol for our sense of the contemporary in **Pulp Fiction** ?

The sense of nostalgia is abundant in the style and sources of **Pulp Fiction**, their deliberate or accidental irony and parody cannot be ignored. The generic characterisations and plots do not aspire to encapsulate any more ideologies other than being the signifiers of nostalgia. But even in casting, the self-aware production and treatment of genre arises. The cast play warped versions of previous film incarnations of themselves. As observed by Amanda Lipman, Jules and Vincent are 'stray Dogs', Harvey Keitel plays a pure Hollywood version of a situation cleaner, reminiscent of the mute killer in **Nikita**(1990) who cleans up after dead bodies. Bruce Willis is a temperamental, slightly stupid tough guy that nearly made it, reflective of his roles in **The Last Boy Scout** (1991) and the **Die Hard** (1988) films. Honey Bunny and Pumpkin are styled on the **Bonnie and Clyde**(1967) characterisations in **True Romance** and **Natural Born Killers**. These characters are familiar to us, the roles they have played and continue to play are along formulated lines but they are vulnerable by their generic limitations and the history of the roles they have played. What alternative do they have to their fantastic cinematic existence? Uma Thurman is the classic gangsters moll, a femme fatale with a penchant for cocaine and 50s dancing.

Before we meet her, Mrs. Mia Wallace has already been codified by the stories of Jules to Vincent on their first 'hit' of the film. She is, allegedly, the reason for an associate of Marsellus Wallace being thrown from a building into a glasshouse below. She is an overtly sexual 40s femme who, it seems, is untouchable by anybody, other than the crime boss. The tension is evident as the charming Vincent (the same John Trovolta who confidently seduced by dancing in the 70s as Tony Manero) is uneasy as he escorts his "murderous employers insouciant wife on a night out" (Errigo, 1994, p.10)...as instructed. Using decontextualised generic signifiers to create an indeterminate sense of history avoids having to fully engage in any single genre and therefore avoid being forced to adhere to it's convention.

> Nostalgia gives us the image of various generations of the past as fashion-plate images that entertain no determinable ideological relationship to other moments of time...they are simply images. The increasing number of films about the past are no longer historical; they are images, simulacra and pastiches of the past. They are effective as a way of satisfying a craving for historicity using a product that substitutes for and blocks it.
> (Jameson, 1986, p.318)

The raiding of 'noir/gangster sub-genres'as the stylistic blueprint is not unique to **Pulp Fiction**. It has, in turn, fostered films with similar sensibilities, invoking adjusted genres as staging devices that locate a contemporary society in crisis using an over-simplified sense of social history epitomised by treatments of genre. Inexplicable reasoning and irrational motives are explored in the neo-noir of **One False Move**(1993) and **Devil in a Blue Dress**(1995) . These current instances of generic transformation seem far removed from any possible original reflection of history. Once we consume and understand particular codes of interpretation, whether they are generic, gender based, stylistic etc. they are taken for granted and used (often subconsciously) to inform later readings of imagery.

The consigning of synchronic ideologies (or incidents) to history by the consumption of popular media only allow us to reflect on subjective pasts. If it is not possible to categorise **Pulp Fiction** by a reassurring operation (nostalgic invocation), how is spectatorial positioning to be organised ?

Although it is not unproblematic, there is an assumption that auteurist control is used as a structuring priciple, organising expression by control of form and content.

> To view a film as the production of an auteur means to read or respond to it as an expressive organisation that preceeds and forecloses the historical fragmentations and subjective distortions that can take over the reception of even the most classically coded movies.
> (Corrigan, 1991, p.104)

Here I am using Tarantino's individual control expressed in **Pulp Fiction** and **Reservoir Dogs** (by his writing of screenplays, directorial control and production by his company Band Apart) as representative of the materiality and ideologies of social agency.

> Here the auteur can be described, according to the conditions of a cultural and commercial inter-subjectivity, a social inter-action distinct from an intentional causality or textual transcendence.
> (Corrigan, 1991, p.104)

Tarantino's compilation of "cool movie moments"in both films seem representative of a social demand for an ultimately trivial escapism. He talks abouts his own films "with the fetishistic myopia of someone who is their greatest fan, not their director". (Shone, 1994, p.53) Meeting the social demand for lurid music-video-styled infotainment, Rafferty describes Tarantino's use of cool movie moments and generic raiding as a "low aspiration approach to movie-making that may be a generational hazard: he seems to treat everything with an impatient born-too-late shrug. (Rafferty, 1992).

Illustration 3.1, Quentin Tarantino directs Maria De Medieros in **Pulp Fiction**.

Perhaps this 'born-too-late shrug' or unwillingness for us to engage a world so inter-referential is less 'low aspiration' than an attempt to reduce the complexities of contemporary social engagement back to fathomable terms. **Pulp Fiction**'s structure and style (while entertaining all the degradation and complacency of our current society) breaks down into scenes built on moral dilemmas. They are dilemmas fed by circumstance and genre-dictated patterns of behaviour. Vincent has his self-pep-talk in front of the mirror after taking Mia on her date. "...its a moral test of yourself, whether or not you can maintain loyalty, because when people are loyal to each other, that's very meaningful." ('Vincent', Tarantino, 1994, p.69) Butch, after almost killing Marsellus returns to rescue him from the rapists. In turn, the rapists are slashed with a samourai sword and shot. When confronted with violence outside the criminal fraternity (where codes of behaviour are implicit, but observed) Butch employs his callous, opportunist nature to redeem himself with Marsellus and so neatly conclude his episode in the whole story. With the dilemmas reduced to simplified moral divisions within a morally ambiguous film, they act as a microcosm of social moral reaction. The ambiguity arising from Tarantino's non-committal contradictory moral framework "produces and promotes texts that invariably exceed the movie itself" (Corrigan, 1991, p.109). He may actually retain an auteurist label since there is a contemporary subversion of "auteurism as a production strategy to a critical exploitation of auteurism as a category for reception" (Corrigan, 1991, p.111) and Tarantino has visually illustrated himself as a member of the audience as much as a producer.

Each segment ends with moments when one thread of the film meets another. Mrs. Mia Wallace is rescued after her overdose by Vincent and so, in turn, she does not reveal the incidents of the night to her husband. Butch rescues Marsellus and in turn, earns his freedom, and Pumpkin with Honey Bunny are fortunate to meet Jules after he has had his quasi-religious experience.

The extra-textual knowledge the audience holds feeds the possible complexities inherent in the junk-filled, pop-iconed genre-informed plots and style of **Pulp Fiction**. According to Wood,

> It is only through the medium of the individual that ideological tensions come into particular focus, hence become of aesthetic as well as sociological interest.It can perhaps be argued that works are of especial interest when the defined particularities of an auteur interact with specific ideological tensions and when the film is fed from more than one generic source. (Wood, 1986, p.63)

Yet, as a consumer/producer the ambiguous inter-referential style of Tarantino (so dependent on it's popular culture predecessors) hinders any simplistic explicit ideological readings or intent in his films.

Once figured as a character of high-art rather than popular culture practice, referent-juxtaposing (bricolage) seems to have been carried by the fragmentation of boundaries on to popular visual culture. It implies other (accidental) textual or thematic possibilities by the combination of separate constituent elements. Tarantino's parodic toying with genre only gains its significance after it has entered the public domain. In **Pulp Fiction**, the combination of periodised pop-culture icons and genres join together and refer to issues of cultural consumption and previously discussed senses of nostalgia. Our defining of culture by consumption and our 'extra-textual' knowledge of filmic and social history affords pastiche with substance. We in turn, are defined by this visual culture as producers/consumers trading on narratives that do not "represent our historical past so much as they represent our ideas or cultural sterotypes about that past." (Jameson, 1983, p.118)

If we are unable to describe contemporary society without using obsolete terms and ideologies, as suggested by Jameson

the "distinction between narcisstic fantasies and historical reality becomes unmanageable".(Corrigan, 1991, p.141) Corrigan's implied nihilism is pessimistic by it's reflection of an hysterical present. But extratextuality allows for an operation within an idiom that does not restrict criticism by dividing investigation into pasts and present. According to Corrigan

> any crisis now is not between the language of images and the body of cultural history but between multiple conflicting languages that pretend repetitively and desperately to some meaning, yet without anything to refer to. (Corrigan, 1991, p.153)

Tarantino's films seem surely to endorse this point But his movies' accessability are not because referents are absent but because they allow subjective interpretations of them. This is a necessary condition if we are not to disallow every critical engagement because of its generality.

EPILOGUE

Following a general description of genre and some of the difficulties inherent in using it, I determined genre as a "mobile, fluid catagory, developing and shifting to accomodate the consumption of popular narrative." (Tasker, 1993, p.68) I suggested that one result of the use of genre in the films of Quentin Tarantino was to create a generalised sense of nostalgia rather than any specific time or period, by his use of disjointed and disparate generic elements. It also seems that he has abandoned trying to conceal generic conventions, in fact structuring **Pulp Fiction** and **Reservoir Dogs** by a conspicuous signalling and juxtaposing of them. If this (according to Kellner and Ryan) eliminates the ability of genre to operate successfully as a purveyor of ideology what Tarantino has achieved is a subversion of the contexts of genre. He uses the flaws and generalities inherent in genre as the site for drama and tension. The unpredictability of the plot arrives from the clash between how the genre-dictated characters should be acting and how they actually respond to the non-generic situations thrust upon them. Tarantino deploys particular generic signifiers assuming our shared knowledge of the ideologies they allude to and their cinematic history. He also operates with the understanding of

> the potential within genre to manifest itself within contemporary society as a symptomatic look at its cultural history. (Corrigan, 1992, p.31)

Tarantino's use of disjointed generic elements seems to correspond to the fragmentation of society and the ideological redundancy of genre. The only way genre does seem to operate is as the indicator of nostalgia and as a form of overt theatrical display. Tarantino's genre operates as an illustration of dated codes: the debris of history. Yet Tarantino's films imply that this 'debris' is significant in contemporary society.

It acts as a way of contextualising and contrasting with visual popular culture. The significance of 'debris' lies in being descriptive of previous popular social history. It may be compared to contemporary culture consumption and it is interesting that much of the contemporary 'debris' contains outdated cultural imagery. Our engagement with these out-dated culture forms is symtomatic to our time.

"Specific formal devices don't carry an innate or essential meaning." (Tasker, 1993, p.69) Tarantino may have acute knowledge of cinematic devices but he leaves the work of deciphering the combinations of codes and their implications to the audience. Even in juxtaposing various devices then the presence of bricolage is no guarantee of significant content. Perhaps the battle of style over content is won or lost by our own readings of the films and the extratextual and intratextual knowledge we possess:

> As contemporary viewers we can select across an expanded galaxy of images, other roads, other generic rituals, and other subjectivities with which to formulate different *ideologies.* (Corrigan, 1991, p.35)

Tarantino's characters are 'heroes' in quotation marks. They are parodic and ironic versions of the existential heroes (and anti-heroes) that preceded them. They attempt to operate under outdated codes and fail miserably. We observe the intrusion of reality into cinematic space in both treatment and content by the use of realist environments and non-generic incidents. The characters are icons in the purest sense, they are reduced, restricted caricatures: they are representatives of a simplified form of life that is solvable in cinema. (Shrader, 1995) Yet there is an ever-present crisis in Tarantino's style and content as the audience is aware of the artifice in what they view. There is a sophisticated engagement that seeks to eliminate the existential angst (aspired to by previous filmic heroes) in Tarantino's characters.

They trade as blank parodies. This way the audience may incorporate their own value judgements.This, I would suggest reflects an engagement that is particular to contemporary visual culture.

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Taxi-Driver	dir. Martin Scorsese	(1976)
Thomas Crown Affair, The	dir. Norman Jewison	(1968)
Throw Moma from the Train	dir. Danny De Vito	(1981)
True Lies	dir. James Cameron	(1994)
True Romance	dir. Tony Scott	(1993)
Wild Bunch, The	dir. Sam Peckinpah	(1969)