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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku
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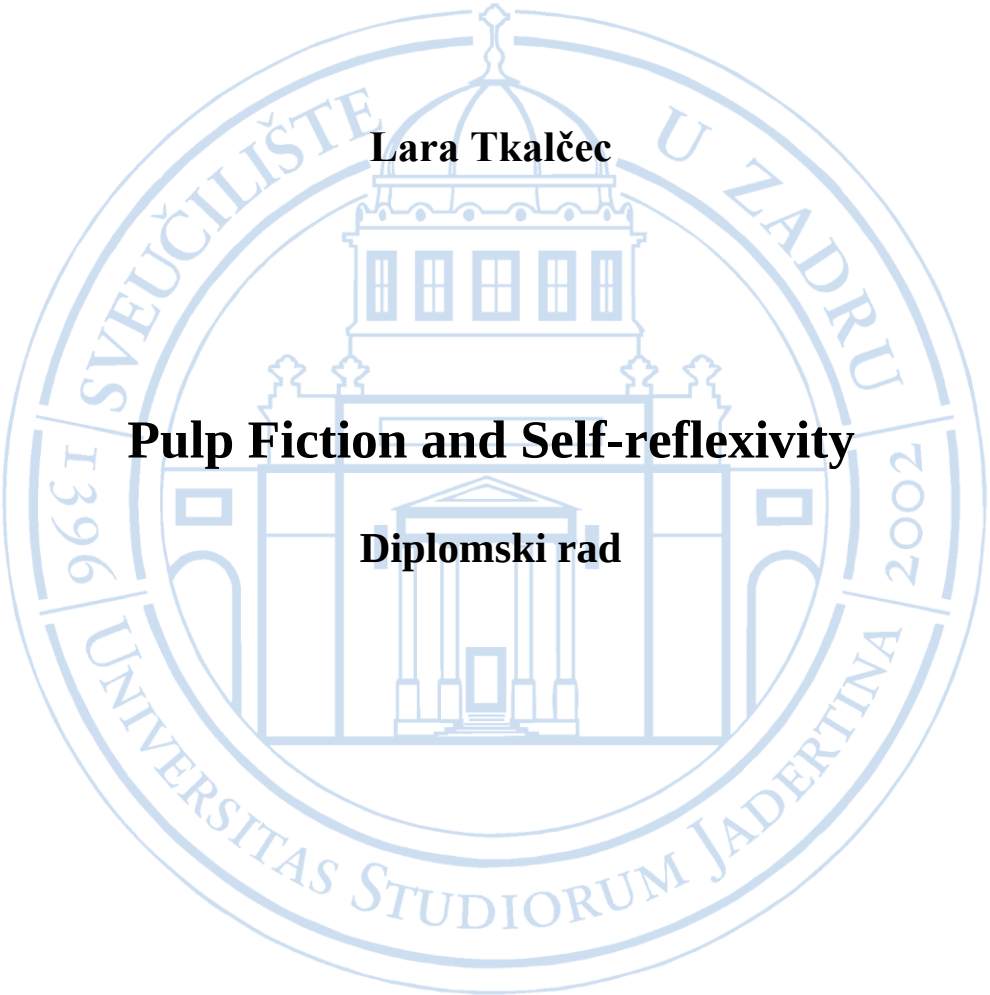

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Zadar, 2019.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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1. Introduction

American gangster films played an important role during the twentieth century; they represented anxiety and hostility of industrialised society and put focus on the tension that stems from the opposition between an individual and society. After its inception in the silent era, the genre was transformed with each passing decade. In 1990s, gangster films regained popularity and, at the same time, began to lose their definition; in accordance with the postmodernist context, filmmakers of the period blurred the boundaries of the genre by utilizing conventions from other genres.

One postmodernist film that diffused the iconography of the gangster film genre to such a great extent is *Pulp Fiction* (1994). *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is a crime/gangster film directed and written by Quentin Tarantino. After the movie was released, it soon became the largest grossing film of its era and it granted Q. Tarantino the reputation of an important and skillful writer/director. Unlike the typical gangster films that examine the 'gangster' as a symbol of moral corruption in society, Tarantino's 'gangster' serves as a symbol and a part of popular culture, which is evident in the movie's self-reflexivity and subjectivity.

Pulp Fiction (1994) is the second film by Quentin Tarantino and, at the same time, it is the one that brought him fame as well as an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay (Page 10). In fact, Edwin Page best illustrated film's significance in his book *Quintessential Tarantino*:

> "*Pulp Fiction* cemented and substantially increased his [Tarantino's] reputation, and was the largest grossing independent movie of its time. It also had a major effect on Miramax, [...] *Pulp Fiction* effectively turned Miramax 'from an art-house haven into a major studio'. In fact, Tarantino's impact on the studio has been so important that studio chief Harvey Weinstein has likened it to Mickey Mouse's on Disney'." (10)

As Michael Green put it, "For many in Generation X, there is the time before *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and there is the time after *Pulp Fiction*. " He describes Generation X as the first ever generation of self-awareness, postmodernity, and obsession with the popular culture, all of which is captured in *Pulp Fiction*. According to Green: "*Pulp Fiction* didn't define us [Generation X] so much as it *revealed* us, by dramatizing our sensibilities to the world.[…] Some of us walked out of the theatre thinking there might be hope for the world's outcasts and misfits after all."

Pulp Fiction is considered by many to be not simply a film, but a phenomenon – a phenomenon that resonated with many; it impacted the work of various directors that came after and became a cultural symbol of its era. Therefore, one might question what exactly did contribute to the film's colossal cultural impact. Dana Polan claims that

> "[…] the significance and value of *Pulp Fiction* are generally to be found not in any message the film imparts nor in any political position it explicitly adheres to but in its reaching beyond meaning and moralism to offer up a sheer cinematic spectacle […]. Those who dislike it dislike it for the very same reason, seeing the deliberate cool superficiality of *Pulp Fiction* as a symptom of the empty post-modernity of our age." (Polan 7)

So it appears that the audiences were (and still are) strangely attracted to the film's lack of any kind of explicit message, its sole purpose being entertainment, with its fascinating characters and fast-paced dialogue. On the other hand, the film was deemed trivial and superficial for the same reasons by many others. The film's polarizing effect could have contributed to its fame as well.

This paper will take a closer look into *Pulp Fiction*, not to try and decipher its hidden message, or to criticize lack of any message, but to analyse it from a postmodernist perspective. In other words, *Pulp Fiction* will be viewed as a postmodern cinematic experience. This means that the film is highly self-reflexive, or self-aware and, in this paper, it will be analysed and explained in detail what exactly this means, how it is achieved and what

it means for the crime genre in particular, as well as cinema in general. First, a brief overview of postmodernism in cinema will be presented and then, film's self-reflexivity will be examined in three crucial aspects of the film: its characters, the setting within which these characters are situated and the narrative of the film.

2. Postmodern Cinema

Before we take a deeper look into the film itself, it is necessary to define the concept of postmodernism and to explain how it affected cinema in general so that we can fully grasp the postmodern elements in *Pulp Fiction*. According to John McAteer, postmodernism is quite a complex concept containing in itself various "contradictory phenomena and ideologies" (2). He maintains that, at least from the viewpoint of art theory, postmodernism is about negating and renouncing some of the elements of modernity (2):

> "Postmodernist art, [...] is art that rejects modern appeals to "the true nature" of art. For postmodernism, art is a "social construction," so there are as many kinds of art as there are societies, and none should be seen as better or more "pure" than any other. [...]. Moreover, postmodernism rejects the existence of an autonomous self and the ability of the artist to impose absolute meaning. Postmodernism aims to deconstruct itself, revealing itself to be just another construction. [...] It reveals artistic representation *as* representation and revels in the artifice of artistic representation. It is about the content of artistic cliché, not the medium." (3)

Therefore, postmodernism rejects any sort of elitism – there is no 'good' or 'bad' art.

Moreover, postmodernist art tends to be aware of itself, i.e. it is self-reflexive, which is especially evident in Tarantino's films. The complexity of the postmodernist movement was also illustrated by Peter Greenaway:

> "[…] postmodernism has alternatively been linked, on the one hand, to neoconservative politics and, on the other hand, to a politics of resistance. In its "resistant" manifestation, postmodernism concerns itself with a critical deconstruction of ideologies, while the "reactionary" brand of postmodernism tends toward the use of pseudo-historical forms to reaffirm conservative values." (13)

These polarizing beliefs of postmodernism, which are a result of general confusion among the people of the era, impacted the culture, and, according to Keith Booker, blurred the lines

between reality and art (16). This in turn led to the mixing of ‘high’ art and ‘low’ art in cinema as well as the other arts.

Besides the blending of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, postmodern films display numerous other distinct elements, many of which are present in the work of Quentin Tarantino as well. Postmodern films tend to put focus on subjectivity; “which concerns the act of seeing itself rather than what is seen“ (Page 15). This can also be related to another important postmodern element, which is “blurring of morality” (Page 15). Films of this era tend to avoid displaying traditionally ‘good’ and ‘evil’ characters and rather focus on depicting them as emotionally complex human beings. Blurring of genre boundaries is not uncommon as well; postmodern films can include elements of different genres in order to challenge viewers’ preconceived notions about film art. What postmodern films sometimes avoid or – better yet – reject, are “[…] grand narratives, which are built on the idea that there are truths that unify the whole of humanity“ (Page 15). Instead of these, postmodernism is more concerned with ‘mini-narratives’, that are focused on “[…] localised events and individual perspectives, and are often open-ended“ (Page 15).

All of these characteristics contribute to the self-reflexivity, i.e. self-awareness of a film, which is, as it was already mentioned, quite crucial for the postmodern movement. The goal of a postmodern film is not to 'sell' a particular story to the audience, or to make the audience believe it is real, but to expose this story for what it is – an artificial narrative. Postmodern films are focused on deconstructing themselves and they are an experience, rather than a story.

3. The Characters

Pulp Fiction offers a plethora of fascinating characters and memorable dialogues among these characters, which is supported by the fact that some of the lines from the film are still quoted by many fans today (such as Jules' and Vincent's dialogue about Royale with cheese among many others). In his article, Michael Green describes the characters of *Pulp Fiction* as "subversive, retro-cool, foul-mouthed, quasi-philosophical, directionless or relentlessly self-conscious, nonchalant and *never* sentimental", which is what was so appealing to the audiences of the era – these characters were, in a way, relatable to them. In fact, one thing that is captivating about these characters is that they seem oddly realistic and common, despite the fact that they find themselves in uncommon situations or occupations, doing uncommon things. "The individuals here are as foul-mouthed and crude as they are conversant about television, movies, and fast food, thus speaking a curious mix of pop culture-infused tough-guy banter." Therefore, the characters of *Pulp Fiction* embody the postmodern mixture of realistic and excessive, popular culture and 'high' art and, to go even further, they seem to be aware of it.

At the beginning of the film, the audience is introduced to two characters, Vincent Vega (John Travolta) and Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson); they look like stereotypical gangsters, with their black suits and sinister faces, as seen before in various other gangster films, including even Tarantino's own *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). "Tarantino and co-writer Roger Avery lampoon crime movies by creating characters whose identities as gangsters are derived largely from movies and television *they* had watched", as Green notes in his article. Based on their appearance, the audience makes assumptions about how these characters are going to behave and what their role is in the film's narrative. As Tarantino himself said in the Cannes interview in 1994: "The starting point is, you get these genre characters in these genre situations that you've seen before in other movies, but then all of a sudden out of nowhere

they're plunged into real-life rules" (qtd. in Peary 85). However, Tarantino then uses the rest of the film to completely break expectations and to, in a way, urge the audience to deconstruct their preconceived notions about how they think these characters should behave:

> "I also like developing my personal mythology by having the first scene in a coffee shop and the second with Jules and Vincent in black suits, like the gangsters in *Reservoir Dogs*. It's like wearing armor, when you see them for the first time. They really look sinister and mean, like really bad guys, like the ones in *Dogs*. Then I spend the rest of the film deconstructing these characters. When you follow them through the rest of their morning, you see their clothes are dirty, bloody, and wrinkled. These tough guys end up looking a little stupid with their t-shirts and their sloppy dressing. They literally decompose right before your eyes." (qtd. in Peary 81)

Another example of a stereotypical character in the film is Marsellus Wallace; a character the audience does not see as often, but hears about him even before they see him.

When Marsellus finally appears, the audience has already constructed some assumptions about him and Tarantino reinforces these assumption even further:

> "The way in which Marsellus sits in the darkened club and has meetings with people makes us think of Don Corleone in *The Godfather*. There is a definite feeling of a man of power seated behind his desk, confidently in charge as he conducts his dodgy dealings. […] it seems clear that the desired effect in both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* is to create a mental link with the stereotypical, Italian gangsters depicted in Coppola's film. This link then causes audience members to recognise even more clearly how different Tarantino's characters are from those usually seen in this genre." (Page 105)

Here, Tarantino uses the character's surroundings as well as appearance to construct a stereotypical character, only to deconstruct his identity. Tarantino manages to achieve this through various different tools, such as characters' clothing, actions and dialogues.

To continue, one of the things Tarantino utilizes to deconstruct these characters is their clothes, most notably the black suits worn by Vincent and Jules, which are sort of a gangster

'trademark' as well as the first thing the audience notices about the characters when they are introduced to the plot. Therefore, the audience bases plenty of their assumptions about the characters precisely on those black suits. Nevertheless, these suits, during the course of the film, become "dirty, bloody, and wrinkled", distorted in one word, and so does the audience's perception of the characters wearing these clothes. This goes even further later on in the film, when Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin and the two gangsters are forced to change their clothes into bermuda shorts and college T-shirts. Therefore, "by removing the 'uniforms' of the gangsters and replacing them with everyday clothes that verge on the geeky" (Page 116), Tarantino deconstructs their identities even further.

Interestingly enough, Polan notes that "[…] the shirt given to Vincent is from the University of California at Santa Cruz and sports that university's mascot, the Banana Slug: where other universities opt for respectable mascots […] the banana slug connotes a rebellious slothfulness, non-athleticism, an unkempt lack of professionalism." (42), which seems to be in complete contrast with Vincent's and Jules's slick and professional appearance at the beginning of the film. Still, Polan would argue against this statement: "But if sleek professionalism and messy amateurism seem at first to be in opposition, there's also a strong sense in which they blur and intermingle [...]. What is cool and what isn't are relative values and each can flip-flop into the other" (43). That the term 'cool' is quite relative in Tarantino's world is supported by Steven Hunter's review of Tarantino's *Jackie Brown,* in which he lists different sorts of cool ('urban street cool', 'beautiful-women-who-are-also-wise-cool', 'wasted-junkie-white-trash-cool', etc.) that appear in that film, but can be found in *Pulp Fiction* as well. Having this in mind, I would argue that *Pulp Fiction,* does not only deconstruct these seemingly stereotypical characters, but our preconceived notions about what 'cool' means as well.

Moreover, Polan discusses a piece of dialogue that was not included into the final cut of the film, but still illustrates the film's self-reflexivity:

> "When Vincent and Jules trade their suits for the geeky clothes that Jimmie fits them out with, the latter describes them as looking 'like a couple of dorks', only to be reminded that they are wearing *his* clothes. […] the script version has Jimmie defend himself by a reference to the ways the clothes make the man – 'I guess you just gotta know how to wear them […]'" (44).

Here, it almost seems like the characters themselves are aware that they are only characters playing a role in a film; each of them has their own role, a costume connected to that role as well as 'rules of conduct' for that role, however, they break those rules as if to remind the audience that what is in front of them is only fiction, and that in real life nobody has only one role, nor only one costume.

Besides the characters' costumes, deconstruction manifests through characters' words and actions as well. "Come on, let's get into character" is what Jules says to Vincent before they enter the apartment of the man they had been hired to confront. As Tarantino himself says, "[…] They're a cross between criminals and actors and children playing roles." (qtd. in Peary 86), confirming that performativity plays an important role in *Pulp Fiction.* Just before getting into character this pair of gangsters discusses the meaning of foot massages, a dialogue one would not expect to occur in this context. To quote Page:

> "This is not how you expect such characters to speak. From viewing other films in the gangster/crime genre you'd expect Vince and Jules to talk about the job at hand or to remain ominously silent. In fact, you'd expect their car journey and walk to the block of flats to take place under grey and dreary skies, possibly even in the rain. However, Tarantino takes usual expectations and turns them on their heads, creating a pair of paid killers who talk like normal people and do their business even on bright, sunny days. This not only creates an interesting and fresh view of such characters, it creates more realistic characterisation and breathes new

> life into a genre which had become stuck in a rut of stereotypical portrayals and two-dimensional tough guys." (101)

This is what Tarantino is talking about when he mentions putting characters into real-life situations, which is what makes them appealing. Peary notes that "John Travolta's character in *Pulp Fiction* is not only likeable but very charming [...]" (95), despite the fact that he is a gangster, and the audience witnesses him murdering people. "He is what he is, he is shown plying his trade, but then you get to know him above and beyond that" (Peary 95). In fact, the audience even witnesses Vincent going to the bathroom. "Even the addition of the book that Vince is reading adds a greater sense of realism and humanity to his character" (Page 111), and this small detail manages to defy stereotypical gangster behaviour we have already seen in many gangster films. To go even further, Page interestingly notices that "'lots of things happen in this movie while people are on the john', usually Vince. Mia goes into the bathroom at Jack Rabbit Slim's, and then Vince is seen going three times: on arrival back at Mia's house, at Butch's apartment, and in the final diner scene" (119). He then adds: "As well as using the bathroom, we are also shown people eating, taking showers, brushing their teeth, talking idly, returning from buying food and drink; things that we all do in our daily lives and all things that most films choose to ignore." (120)

Although this may seem absurd and quite irrelevant to the plot of the film at first, it is worth mentioning it. Most of the time, we do not watch films to see real life; and films usually tend to offer a romanticized versions of everyday lives and therefore omit some mundane activities. However, in *Pulp Fiction*, this mixture of realistic, or mundane, and excessive seems to be quite appealing to the audience. Not only this, but it, in a way, breaks the barrier between the characters in the film and the audience. By inserting elements people do not usually see in films, but do encounter in real life on a regular basis, Tarantino reminds the

audience that what they are watching is a film – fiction, and it creates an interesting contrast between the artificial and somewhat excessive and the mundane and realistic.

Here, it is important to call attention to one of the most memorable scenes from the film, where Vincent and Jules discuss the name of the 'Quarter-Pounders' in French. Page compares this scene with "[…] the conversation between Jim and Huckleberry Finn about why the French don't speak English'" (99), and notes that this "creates a juxtaposition between the classic literature and the Macdonald's fast-food culture, one that is postmodern in its mix of high and low art" (99), which is not uncommon for Tarantino and his work. Still, it is important to note that, besides adding the sense of postmodern self-reflexivity and contributing to the mixture of realistic and excessive, these dialogues do have a functional purpose within the film's narrative:

> "[…] the dialogue between Jules and Vincent before they "get into character" also provides information about the characters (Vincent has just gotten back from Europe, the two men enjoy recreational drugs) and sets the stage for the next story (the foot massage) by establishing how high the stakes are (Antoine was murdered for it)" (Roche 245)

Therefore, Tarantino manages to include these dialogues that are potentially crucial for the film's narrative and then to disguise them as regular, everyday conversations of little or no importance.

It seems that, in *Pulp Fiction*, every character is 'constructed' with great care and in great detail:

> "Through the interactions of Vince and Mia, […], it is clear that 'all the bit players come out of the shadows in *Pulp Fiction*.' Mia is a 'gangster's moll', and in most films would be a two dimensional, bit-part character, as would Vince, the tough guy 'knee-breaker'. However, in *Pulp Fiction* they step out from the shadows and Tarantino shines a bright, three-dimensional light on them with great style." (Page 106)

leading us to conclude that Tarantino puts equal effort in constructing his characters as well as deconstructing them. Another example of this is the character of Marcellus Wallace. As it was mentioned earlier, Tarantino constructed this character through the words of other characters. The audience learns that he is merciless and powerful and this is supported by his appearance as well as his surroundings when they do finally encounter this character, who seems like Tarantino's own interpretation own Don Corleone. However, Marsellus later on in the film decides to spare Butch Coolidge's life, which contradicts his reputation of a stereotypical merciless criminal.

> "He could have easily killed Butch […] Instead he forgives Butch to a degree, allowing him to live and simply telling him to leave the city and never return. This, too, is a break from generic expectations. Due to the crime boss status of Marcellus, the earlier link with Don Corleone, […] the audience may be surprised by him allowing Butch to leave unharmed. Here Tarantino has again toyed with genre stereotypes and shown the audience a character who breaks from these." (Page 112)

Besides these events that are crucial for the plot, Tarantino gave a lot of attention to details as well, in his endeavours to deconstruct the characters of *Pulp Fiction*, and a band-aid on the back of the head of a cruel and intimidating Marcellus Wallace is a proof of that.

Taking all that was previously mentioned into consideration, it is evident that a reference (more specifically genre references) plays an important role in this film. It is precisely this referencing that shows Tarantino's love for the film industry and popular culture. It also puts emphasis on its artificial nature and therefore contributes to the film's self-reflexivity. Besides genre references, which are 'broader', *Pulp Fiction* is full of 'narrower' references to other films as well. For instance, Polan notices that "[…] Mia's hairstyle is like that of Anna Karina in several Godard films – such as *Bande à part*, in which the characters do a vibrant dance like that in Jack Rabbit Slim's (Tarantino's production company is named A Band Apart)" (21). Another example she discusses is Butch Coolidge

not ‘going down for the count’, a storyline which appeared in many films before *Pulp Fiction*, such as film noirs *Body and Soul*, or *The Set Up* (21-22). Regarding the “vibrant dance” Polan mentions, Tarantino also said that he based some of Mia Wallace’s moves on the dance in the animated film *Aristocats* (Polan 19-20).

While all of these references are rather direct, there are some that may not be noticeable at first glance, but still contribute to the general mood of the film: “[…] the script for *Pulp Fiction* frequently sets up an action or a scene in term of some popular culture work of film genre it wants to gain the feel of: thus, for instance, we’re told on the first page that Honey Bunny and Pumpkin’s dialogue is to be said in a ‘rapid pace *His Girl Friday* style’, (Polan 22). Additionally, Green notices that Samuel L. Jackson’s character “[…] with his giant hand cannon, his dripping jerry curl wig, his existential philosophizing and black suit with skinny tie, […] was a hybrid of Blaxploitation hero and Godard anti-hero”, which is plausible, taking into consideration “that Blaxploitation and Godard were two of Tarantino’s greatest influences”.

There are even some references to horror films that can be found in *Pulp Fiction*: “[…] when Lance has to explain to Vincent how to stab Mia with a needle to save her from a heroin overdose, he ‘demonstrates a stabbing notion’, which looks like the “The Shape” killing its victims in *Halloween*’” (Polan 22-23). To go even further, some people have compared this scene with scenes that are quite common in vampire films, i.e. stabbing vampires in the heart with a stake (Polan 23). Polan here offers an interesting interpretation: “[…] this sets up an allusion within an allusion: the stabbing brings Mia back to life, rather than turning her into a victim, but she springs up with the zombie-like pallor of her skin and the hollow of her eyes rendering her like one of those creatures that refuse to die in so many zombie-monster films of the 80s.” (23)

And while not all of these references were confirmed by Tarantino himself, many of them were and therefore it becomes evident that *Pulp Fiction* could be viewed as a kind of a collage of various film and film genre references that can be interpreted and analysed endlessly, which this auteur ultimately may had had in mind while making *Pulp Fiction*. In fact, Polan confirms this by saying: "This poring over little bits of the film can certainly seem to come from the obsessions that fans bring to the film, but it is also necessary to realize the structure and style of *Pulp Fiction* enable such fetishism […]" (17)

Interestingly enough, actors themselves serve as a reference in this film because they "establish intertextual relationship with films and TV shows of the past." (Roche 405) What is more, "Tarantino has often explained how he has specific actors in mind when writing a script, including actors as they appeared in older movies" (Roche 405). Probably the most notable example of this is John Travolta's role in the film, who was cast on the basis of his previous roles in films that made him known as a "teenpic star in *Carrie* (1976), *Saturday Night Fever*, and *Grease* (1978)" (Roche 406). In fact, the scene where Vincent and Mia compete in swing contest was quite probably a reference to Travolta's role in *Saturday Night Fever*. What is more,

> "Vincent's trajectory in *Pulp Fiction* can even be interepreted as Travolta revisiting the evolution of his star image: from cool guy in a teen flick taking a chick out on a date to drug addict with career issues, dramatized as questions of loyalty to Marsellus (and gangsterism) or to Mia (and teen romance). On a metafictional level at least, the death of Vincent Vega ends up being as rejuvenating for Travolta as Jules's epiphany, for it signals the rebirth of the actor's career, which Pulp Fiction effectively r elaunched. Travolta went on to star in such popular films as *Get Shorty* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 19 95) and *Broken Arrow* (John Woo, 1996)". (Roche 409)

Moreover, Tarantino himself is known for cameo appearances in his films, *Pulp Fiction* being one of them. As Jimmie Dimmick in *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino strips away his

characters, Vincent and Jules, of their previously mentioned black suits, as he is, simultaneously, stripping away their previously constructed identities. Therefore, his role in the film may be interpreted as a metaphor for his role as a film director. However, Tarantino is not the only one who appears in his films more than once. Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman and many more, are known for their roles in multiple Tarantino films, which adds to the films' self-reflexivity:

> "If the presence of a character in several films can reinforce the fantasy model that underlies metafiction, especially when the films in question seem to exist in distinct realities [...], casting the same actors reminds the audience of the character's fictionality by drawing attention to the fact that s/he is just a part. It is also an invitation to compare the roles and connect the films." (Roche 414)

Indeed, Tarantino's style is so distinct that a viewer might obtain a sense that all of his films' narratives are situated within the same universe. Consequently, this may highlight even further the fact that what the audience sees is simply a film; a film with actors who had appeared in other films before, and who will appear in other films in the future. Uma Thurman cannot be both Mia Wallace and Beatrix Kiddo at the same time in real life, therefore, the latter two indeed must be fictional characters, and Tarantino does not want the audience to forget that.

"Uma Thurman says that Tarantino is 'someone who's completely, subjectively living through his characters with you'. This is the key to his success; he loves his characters and builds them with care, consideration, and a great deal of realism" (Page 108). Indeed, Tarantino tends to submerge his characters into real-life situations, which makes them seem more realistic. However, this is probably not done so that audiences can relate to these characters (which is the case in most films nowadays); it is done so that audiences are reminded that they are watching a film, and then to remind them again that what they are seeing is not how it is usually done in the film industry. Moreover, "Tarantino's interest in

film history encompasses the history of stars, actors, and less visible members of the crew such as stunt people. His films deliberately resort to typecasting in order to engage with the stars' images and the very notion of typecasting" (Roche 417). *Pulp Fiction* purposely presents us with stereotypical, generic characters as well as actors about whom the audience has already formed a certain opinion based on the roles they have played in the past, so that we become aware of the fact that everything that is occurring on the screen before us is neatly constructed and artificial. Characters of *Pulp Fiction*, no matter how well-constructed, are in the film only to be deconstructed and to serve Tarantino in breaking the illusion.

4. The Setting

As it was previously discussed, *Pulp Fiction* introduced the masses to some quite fascinating and memorable characters. It would be natural to assume that the setting within which these characters exist will be as equally compelling. However, as Gallafent remarks,

> "Tarantino's presentation of the urban landscape might not be […] a particularly interesting aspect of his work. He is not interested in an area's famous landmarks, or in presenting a panoramic view of a city. In terms of settings he rarely draws attention to the spectacular […], and often seems more interested in presenting generic rather than highly individual settings." (75)

In other words, when it comes to *Pulp Fiction*, characters are mostly situated within 'regular' or 'homely' settings; most of the time they are seen in cars, apartments, restaurants, etc., all of which are fairly common. Even when the setting is not familiar, Gallafent notices, the characters are "treating an unfamiliar setting as if it does not much surprise them. (Vincent's reaction to Jack Rabbit Slim's in *Pulp Fiction* would be an example of the latter)" (75). Indeed, Tarantino's characters in this film seem quite nonchalant wherever they go, suggesting that the setting does not play an important role in their lives, and therefore in the film's narrative. According to Gallafent, *Pulp Fiction* is "[…] is full of the homely. We are presented early on with a marginal or failed attempt at it, the apartment in which Brett and his friends are staying. Later we are taken into places that are unmistakably homes, the houses inhabited by Lance (Eric Stoltz) and Jody (Rosanna Arquette), Marcellus and Mia Wallace […]" (80). In short, this film's story lines mostly take places in generic spaces, which do not offer much, in terms of the narrative.

Nevertheless, the setting offers plenty of insight from a postmodern perspective. Namely, Tarantino utilizes these settings to play with the audiences' perception of how a particular should setting be used, i.e. what should and what should not be happening in a

particular space, quite similarly to how he plays with audience's expectations of how a particular should character behave. Therefore, "Tarantino's interest in how these settings weigh on his characters' and his audience's attention, and what actions they enable and what is prohibited in them, is nonetheless an important part of the films" (Gallafent 75). As it was previously mentioned, a good deal of generic, homely spaces are showcased in *Pulp Fiction*; these are the spaces the audience generally equates with safety, familiarity and content. It is precisely this association with comfort and happiness what Tarantino relies on to then completely break the audiences' expectations and deconstruct that very same association. To elaborate, Tarantino takes these familiar spaces and, sometimes in a matter of seconds, transforms them into a crime scene. Therefore, "[t]here is deep uneasiness here, a question of helplessness, and of the potential denial of significance of place, a feeling that we should not die in the same place as we have casual conversations" (Gallafent 76). By showing the audience that anything could happen anywhere, their expectations and demands connected to particular places are brought into question.

The first instance of this can be seen already at the beginning of the film:

> "The film's first instance of violence occurs outside the domestic world altogether, […] the robbery in the Hawthorne Grill, suggests that even a relatively benign public place may become one of terror. Tarantino annotates this setting in two ways. He photographs it so as to stress the horizontal lines in his widescreen frame (venetian blinds, seating, even Honey Bunny conforming to the shape by a pose in which she leans happily along the table at one point) with the result that the space appears attractive and harmonious. But he also takes a moment to suggest unsatisfactory social relations, showing us that Honey Bunny is too pressingly grateful, and Pumpkin too rude." (Gallafent 81)

This is even, in a way, confirmed by the characters in this particular scene; Pumpkin and Honey Bunny are talking about risk factor when it comes to robbing banks or liquor stores when Pumpkin suggests robbing the diner in which they were sitting, claiming that no

one would anticipate such a thing happening in that sort of place. Indeed, probably nobody would expect from overly grateful and polite Honey Bunny to take out a gun and to start yelling about murdering everyone, especially in such a restaurant.

The second instance of violence in the film breaks the expectations in terms of space in which it occurs as well, but in a different, or even an opposite way. This time, the violence occurs in an actual domestic space; an apartment where Brett and his companions, who are just about to be visited by Jules and Vincent, reside:

> "What we see of the bare room suggests a failure of the personal or domestic to make an impression, which becomes an appropriate background to barbaric behaviour. We see in Jules a ferocity that takes the form of breaking the conventions appropriate to a proper domestic scene – demanding a bite of the burger and helping himself to Brett's drink." (Gallafent 81)

The unkempt apartment where the three live does seem like a space where violence or some criminal behaviour might occur, and of course, it does. However, not in a way one might expect. Jules and Vincent, although they are sent there to commit a murder, display the type of behaviour that is nearly 'homely'. Upon entering the room, Jules even says to one of the men to "Keep chillin'!" on the couch and then starts a conversation about the food the three men were eating. The untidy room, the worried faces of the three men and then the casual conversation are a strange combination that creates a sense of uneasiness in a viewer. Interestingly enough, both scenes are somewhat connected to food. While in the first one, the plot is literally set in a restaurant, in the other one, the action is occurring during breakfast, and the emphasis of the characters' conversation is precisely on food. Moreover, having the context of Vincent and Jules being there in mind, that conversation seems quite displaced. Tarantino himself addressed his fascination with restaurants as settings for his films:

> "I thought the idea of a robbery in a restaurant would be funny; it was also the ideal place to wrap up the story, with other characters in the film ending up there. There are restaurant scenes in all of my scenarios. I often go to restaurants and just like to sit there and talk with

> friends. My characters talk a lot, and you open up in this kind of conversation. I like these kinds of scenes. […] I think every viewer can identify with this kind of scene." (qtd. in Peary, 80)

And this is exactly why violence in that sort of spaces creates uneasiness. Restaurants, as well as homes, are places where people can "open up", relax and eat. The last thing anyone would expect is for something horrific to happen there.

Another common and familiar space that plays an important role in *Pulp Fiction* is a car. Tarantino depicts characters having regular conversations in cars, which is quite relatable to the audience. On the other hand, death is associated with cars as well. However, these deaths are always abrupt, distressing and never actually vehicle-related (result of an car accident for instance). What is more, "[s]omething that perhaps makes it attractive to Tarantino is that it is not possible to photograph the inside of a car, or really to see it, as a whole. It is an entirely familiar kind of space, a tight interior of a special kind of awkwardness, where seated figures cannot all look directly at each other easily or for long" (Gallafent 76). Therefore, although this is a familiar space to us, it can never be depicted as we see it in real life, which in turn makes it, in a way, unfamiliar. Besides, because of its design, it restricts regular conversation. As a result, audiences' minds begin to associate this familiar space with danger and miscommunication.

Here, another point that has been addressed in the previous chapter should be briefly discussed. It has already been mentioned that Tarantino uses familiar spaces and then arranges for violent and frightening things to happen in those spaces in order to make them seem less familiar. He also relies on viewer's familiarity with particular spaces in another way. More specifically, he depicts spaces that the audience usually does not see in films, such as, for instance, bathrooms.

> "Usually movie characters are not shown using the bathroom, partly because it is not essential for the plot or narrative. However, in *Pulp Fiction* Tarantino has woven this universal

> necessity of relief into the fabric of the film, and it brings with it an additional reflection of everyday life that Hollywood usually avoids." (Page 119)

This kind of space is usually avoided in most films, however, Tarantino makes it crucial for the narrative of *Pulp Fiction.* To make this even more obvious, Tarantino puts the same character in the same space multiple times (Vincent finds himself in bathrooms of a diner Honey Bunny and Pumpkin decide to rob, Mia's apartment as well as Butch's apartment). By doing this, Tarantino highlights that even the most mundane and regular spaces might have an important role in the narrative.

Now, one on the most postmodern sequences in *Pulp Fiction* has to do precisely with setting, in fact, Booker calls this sequence "[…] the epitome of popular postmodern cinema [...]" (74). The sequence revolves around Mia Wallace and Vincent Vega going to Jack Rabbit Slim's, a restaurant which is at the same time a tribute to the 1950s. This is filmed in a long take in which the camera shows, as Vincent himself says "a wax museum with a pulse":

> "[…] the ambient music is all from the 1950s, [...] The walls are decorated with posters for 1950s films, and the booths are made to resemble classic cars of the decade. The host is an Ed Sullivan imitator, the waiters are dressed to look like such fifties icons as Buddy Holly and Marilyn Monroe, and the items on the menu are named after various figures from 1950s pop culture" (Booker 74)

In other words, this setting is full of references, and referencing, as it was discussed in the previous chapter, is not uncommon in Tarantino's films.

> "All the staff are dressed as film or rock 'n' roll stars of the past. This blurs the boundaries of the real and unreal. The waiter is played by Steve Buscemi, who played Mr Pink in *Reservoir Dogs […]*. There is also a reconstruction of the iconographic Marilyn Monroe pose over an air vent, but this is not Monroe and the reference isn't even to the real person, but to a fictional film role that she played." (Page 106)

In fact, there are so many references that even Vincent struggles to recognize them all, just like the audience may struggle during the entire film. To quote Polan: “Getting the reference allows entry into a private club […]” (18) and Jack Matthews says about the referencing that “for viewers who went in expecting a conventional movie, it must have been like walking into a club where everyone knew the password and secret handshake but them.” Another interesting instance of reference in the film is Tarantino's rejection and even contradicting to product placement. Brands that are Tarantino’s own invention (Red Apple cigarettes, Big Kahuna burgers, Jack Rabbit Slim’s, etc.), most of which first appeared in *Reservoir Dogs,* are now again referenced in *Pulp Fiction,* quite openly and noticeably. Tarantino utilizes space in the film to advertise these products, making the audience remember they have already seen these products before, in another film and thus creating a sense of existence of another universe, Taratino’s universe, in which all of his films’ narratives coexist.

In *Pulp Fiction*, an emphasis on artificiality and theatricality is present in all aspects of the film, including the setting. Space in Pulp Fiction serves as a stage on which the characters play their role. “Even small indoor spaces can be endowed with theatrical potential. In *Pulp Fiction*, Bret’s apartment is the stage on which Jules performs his role as sinister hitman, concluding with his famous Ezekiel 25:17 monologue and the final execution “(Roche 398). In fact, Roche offers a quite detailed analysis of the theatricality of spaces in Tarantino’s films, including Brett’s and Jimmie’s apartments in *Pulp Fiction,* alongside various similar spaces in many other Tarantino films.. According to him, all of the spaces in these scenes have three things in common: “[…] they have doors, offer enough room for movement, and are divided into several sections“ (Roche 398). Naturally, this could be said about almost any space in general, however, the theatricality of these spaces lies in how these common features are exploited, according to Roche (398):

> "Most of them [scenes] start with doors opening and doorways being traversed ([...] Jules and Vincent step inside Brett's and Wolf Jimmie's; [...]) Characters pace, stride, strut or dance across and about these rooms (Jules at Brett's, Wolf at Jimmie's, [...]). The rooms are divided into distinct quadrants: in Brett's apartment, Vincent takes a position in the kitchen area, while Brett and Jules occupy the center, Marvin stays next to the front door, and one of Brett's friends rests in a bed against the wall [...]Spatial theatricality can also be reinforced by various props that call to mind elements from the theater: stages […] curtains, blinds (the yellow ones in Brett's apartment), or […] as well as tools that are usually concealed backstage or in the rafters, such as the ladders, beams, and chains hanging from the ceiling" (400)

It is important to note how Tarantino handles this space as well; the (very) long shots contribute to the theatricality because they make the audience aware of the space in which the action occurs and in turn create sense of observing the actors on stage in a theatre. Moreover, "frontality, […] can also construe a sense of theatricality. In Tarantino's films, this is especially the case in moments where the characters' positions are fixed. This is the case in the kitchen and backyard scenes at Jimmie Dimmick's in *Pulp Fiction*, which present Jules and Vincent on one side and Jimmie and Wolf on the other" (Roche 403). Another tool Tarantino uses to connote theatricality of spaces within the film is frame-within-the-frame composition, i.e. making a smaller frame within the preexisting frame with various elements available in scene. These are usually mundane objects, such as walls, windows, doors, mirrors, etc. For instance, in *Pulp Fiction* this is visible in the scene where Vincent and Jules prepare to enter Brett's apartment (just before Jules says they should "Get into character.") and are framed by a door frame. Therefore, the audience is in a way equated to a cameraman that is filming characters-actors preparing for a scene – a scene in which their role is that of a merciless gangster.

All of these tools illuminate the artificiality of the scene. Camera work ("lengthy, very long and long shots, frontality, and/or deep focus" (Roche 405)), various pro-filmic elements (everything placed in front of the camera to create a scene, particularly in this case objects that remind the audience of theatre, such as ladders, curtains, etc.), and dramatic use of the space (achieved through actors' movement and use of the space) are not "not merely aesthetic and reflexive" (Roche 405), but have a higher purpose: they serve to draw the audience's eye to the performativity of actors' actions and to the, in lack of a better term, artificiality of these actions. In other words, this is done to create "[…] a frame for the films' metafictional discourses on movie stars, actors, and acting" (Roche 432). This is even further reinforced "by [actors'] performances that verge on pantomime and that contrast with more naturalistic acting" (Roche 432) and by "exploration of the actors' careers and star images, focus on types of roles, individual actors, and groups of actors" (Roche 432). All in all, this "[…] specific treatment of space and performance in film […]" (Roche 432), is called "cinematic theatricality" (Roche 432) and it is quite common in Tarantino's films.

This cinematic theatricality emphasizes artificiality of the film and puts audience's attention to the film's self-reflexivity. Polan argues that people find comfort in artificial spaces, which could be one of the explanations for why the film was so well received (72). Interestingly enough, she equates spaces in *Pulp Fiction* with Disneyland, and other similar theme parks:

> "[…] theme parks and planned communities pull away from ordinary experience, creating […] an alternative universe (which is sometimes a cleaned up, sugar powdered version of the universe we live in). Similarly in a film like Pulp Fiction, […] there is an emphasis on special ways of life and of special sites where those lives can be played out. Pulp Fiction frequently projects a worlds apart – nightclubs and post-modern restaurants, homes of rich gangsters, weird chambers of redneck torture – peopled by special figures […] who have created their

> own rules and rituals (just as the visitor to a theme park is supposed to leave certain worldly thoughts and pressured behind)." (72)

What is more, in this universe, characters appear to have built their own spaces – spaces that reflect their identity. One instance of this would be Lance's popular-culture-filled house. There is no doubt that artificial spaces and "cartoon-like built environments" (Polan 73) have a significant role in this film, and Tarantino does not want the audience to forget that. Even if it seems that the characters have constructed their own spaces within the movie, this does not negate the fact that these spaces were in reality built by the film-makers. This is especially brought to the viewers' attention in a couple of scenes, such as the one in which Esmarelda drives Butch after his fight. "The scene is filmed with a deliberately fake-looking rear projection that renders the journey unreal, ethereal even" (Polan 73). Another, similar instance of this is "[…] after Vincent shoots up heroin at the beginning of his strange night out with Mia, his drive to her house is presented with rear projection and turns the journey into an ethereal voyage into another dimension." (Polan 73)

Certainly it seems that Tarantino has managed to create his own universe where different (or rather no) rules apply. As Gallafent puts it, it is "a world that purchases its idea of itself as ordinary at the price of a refusal to face the violence around it – although perhaps Tarantino would argue that this is exactly what the ordinary world actually does" (80). To put it differently, *Pulp Fiction* presents the audiences with ordinary, homely spaces, only to shock them by having violence take place in those, usually safe spaces. But it does not stop there: our expectations are once again broken when the characters treat these violent occurrences as if they are common and to be expected to happen anytime and anywhere in this collage of references that is the world of *Pulp Fiction*.

5. The Narrative

Pulp Fiction's narrative is achronological and presents the audience with three different stories, separated into chapters. The stories revolve mostly around gangsters Vincent Vega and Jules Winnfield as well as Butch Coolidge, a prizefighter. Although the audience does not immediately realize that the story they are watching is not linear, the film's title does provide us with some insight into the film's structure:

> "[a pulp fiction novel] is a novel you could buy for a dime, that you read in the bus while you go to work. At work, you would put it in your back pocket, you'd sit on it all day long, and you'd continue reading it on the bus on the way home, and when you finished it you gave it to a friend or you'd throw it in the garbage." (qtd. In Polan 24)

This is Tarantino's definition of a pulp fiction novel he provided in an interview with Jean-Pierre Deloux. The definition itself reveals plenty about the film's structure, which is "fragmentary and interrupted" (Polan 24). Much like a pulp fiction novel, the consumption of which is casual and often disrupted, the narrative of Tarantino's film is full of tone shifts and discontinuance.

In fact, *Pulp Fiction* is not about a story (or stories, in this case), it is about the way these stories are told. If one takes a closer look, they will notice that there is almost nothing innovative in the story of *Pulp Fiction* itself:

> "For all its interrupted storylines […], *Pulp Fiction* is self-consciously conventional in content, […] The boxer whose honor won't permit him to throw the fight, the gangster's moll with a wandering eye, the camaraderie of professional killers - these are all subjects so hoary as to be clichés. In using them as a starting point, *Pulp Fiction* rejuvenates the fundamentals of American moviemaking, the kiss-kiss bang-bang first principles […], by pumping the old storylines up with an intricate web of quotations from the communal media world of

> television, movies, and, in perhaps Tarantino's most significant addition, the universal experience of being a consumer." (Dowell and Fried 4)

In other words, *Pulp Fiction* presents different stories divided into three chapters: all of the stories revolve around the world of crime and gangsters and these are the stories that were seen in many films before. The fact that this is not coincidental is even further supported by the way Tarantino constructs these stories and their characters: they are a collage of cinematic tropes and clichés that are begging the audience to notice their presence. Once the audience start to perceive the film's narrative as something they are used to seeing, they get 'comfortable' in a sense that they feel like they can already predict what is going to happen in the film. However, this is what Tarantino wants and this is where he takes the film's narrative to a different level. This was even confirmed by Tarantino in the interview that was first published in *Sight and Sound* in 1994:

> "What I wanted to do with the three stories was start with the oldest chestnuts in the world. You've seen them a zillion times. You don't need to be caught up with the story because you already know it. The guy takes out the mob guy's wife—"but don't touch her." And what happens if they touch? You've seen that triangle a zillion times. Or the boxer who's supposed to throw the fight and doesn't—you've seen that a zillion times too. […]" (Peary 72)

Here, Tarantino in a way explains the origin of the film: we are presented with narratives that may be considered a cliché, but then, Tarantino expands these narratives: "So let's extend that whole little opening, let's hang out with them [the characters] for the rest of their day, and the shenanigans that follow" (Peary 72). In essence, where other directors would cut the scene, Tarantino decides to continue filming and therefore, the story Tarantino is ultimately telling is not the one about the characters and what happens to them, but about the genre: the audience is presented with standard story elements of the genre, but then the film starts "breaking itself down, commenting on itself, exposing the illusions of fiction" (Peary 95). In other words, Tarantino plays with narrative in various different ways, thus constantly reminding the

audience that what they are seeing is not real. As a result, the audiences are urged to rethink what they know about the crime film genre, i.e. about the stereotypical characters and narratives belonging to the genre as well as the film composition in general: ”Tarantino’s semi-mischievous reclassification of the crime movie as art film, [...] is accomplished partly through the introduction of improbably elaborate narrative architecture that obliges the viewer to contemplate the usually invisible mechanisms of narrative selection“ (Peary 94). In other words, *Pulp Fiction*'s unconventional structure forces audience to notice this nonlinear storytelling and compare it to what they are used to seeing in other films.

In his playing with the film’s narrative, Tarantino employs literary devices, which is evident in how he segments the film’s plot into chapters and relies on nonlinearity to tell the story. According to Tarantino himself, he, when it comes to writing, relies on the identical rule as do many novelists: “You can tell it any way you want.” (Peary 96) and he claims that “*Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* would be dramatically less interesting if told in a completely linear fashion” (Peary 96). The use of chapters in this film has many functions; “[…] structural, narrative, and metafictional: they delineate the narrative structure, identify the setting and/or characters, announce the action, and point to intertexts“(Roche 231). However, all of these chapter functions have one purpose in common, and that is to make the film more understandable: “Viewers are made aware of the structure, specific plot points, intertexts, and even of the way the film proposes to subvert or on the contrary abide by generic conventions. This knowingness is characteristic of metafiction” (Roche 237). That is, these chapters are tools that once again remind the audience that what they are watching is fictional: real life is linear and does not have chapters.

As Roche puts it: “Displaying the structure of a film calls attention to its constructedness and is thus an overt means of laying bare the artifice” (235). In other words, by pointing out the way the film is constructed (through the use of chapters, nonlinearity,

etc.), Tarantino emphasises the film's artificiality. Here, it would also be important to note that applying both literary and cinematic tools could be viewed as mixing 'high' and 'low' art, which is yet another postmodern characteristic visible in this film.

Nonlinearity is a common postmodern element and *Pulp Fiction* is not the first movie to utilize it (Green lists *Clerks* (1994), *Kids* (1995), *Slacker* (1991), *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) and *The Doom Generation* (1995) as examples of films of the era with nonlinear narratives). However, according to Page, "it [the film] came out at a time when cinema had become increasingly formulaic and tedious on the whole. This trend was exploded very effectively by Tarantino and his co-writer, Roger Avary, and with a great deal of style." (120) The technique does create interesting effects. As Thompson and Bordwell claim, "sometimes a fairly simple reordering of scenes can create complicated effects." (81) Indeed, *Pulp Fiction* begins with Honey Bunny and Pumpkin negotiating whether to rob a diner they are in and, although this is the first scene in the film, it is, in actuality, set later on in the plot (at the very end, in fact). The audience does not know that until the very end, when their robbery interrupts the dialogue Vincent and Jules, which are the characters that are more essential for the plot, are having in that same diner. Therefore, by simply taking that part of the final scene and placing it at the beginning of the film, Tarantino creates the sense of circularity and completely surprises the audience.

Another example of this would be Vincent Vega's appearance in the scenes subsequent to the one in which he was murdered. By rearranging the scenes in this manner, Tarantino creates a certain effect. "By coming at the film's conclusion, these portions receive an emphasis they wouldn't have if they had remained in their chronological story order." (Bordwell and Thopmson 81) This is probably a part of the reason why the film was such a success. Even Roche claims that "*Pulp Fiction* was the film that really triggered a trend of more adventurous storytelling in American cinema of the late 1990s."(211)

What is more, Polan argues this film is appealing to the audience because it is like a puzzle they have to solve (26): beside many popular culture references that call for deciphering, the achronological nature of the film's structure presents, in a way, a puzzle itself. In fact, the film's nonlinearity in itself might be another reference to popular culture. To quote Dowell and Fried, "The structure of *Pulp Fiction* is not so new as it looks. It should be familiar to any television watcher, for it is our psychological accommodations to TV's dramatic shape that Tarantino exploits for his narrative surprises" (5). Therefore, not only does Tarantino refer to literary devices through the structure of *Pulp Fiction*, but he also imitates structures with which the audience is familiar from watching television. For instance, Tarantino's film is full of interruptions and pauses, much like commercials interrupt television programmes:

> "In *Pulp Fiction* Tarantino starts episodes and lets them come to what feel like commercial breaks. The setup scene of Honey Bunny and Pumpkin in the coffee shop planning their robbery is exactly like the tease that opens most television shows before the first commercial; audiences don't expect it in a movie and so don't frame it as such, but, after surfing in and out of other episodes, Tarantino eventually returns to it." (Dowell and Fried 5)

Interestingly enough, Polan equates narratives of *Pulp Fiction* with TV sitcoms:

> "[…] the segment entitled 'The Bonnie Situation' – in which the hitmen are reduced to virtual adolescence (even in their manner of dress) as they try to clean up a mess (in this case, a body and a bloodied car) before Bonnie comes home – has the structure of those sorts of sitcoms in which kids get into some mess while the parents are away and then spend the whole segment trying to make things right before time runs out […]" (25).

All of these references to television as well as adopting some formats of entertainment commonly seen on television should not come as a surprise considering the fact that Tarantino is known for being quite a fanatic when it comes to pop culture and television. (Polan describes him as "[…] someone who lives only inside the world of cinema, television and

popular music (78)). Moreover, Dowell and Fried also maintain that this usage of television structures in the film emulates real-life experiences of the era, i.e. the people's struggle to assemble many pieces of information they are bombarded with on a daily basis (5). However, the information is not only provided by television: with the appearance of the Internet, the masses became even more saturated with various data coming from both television and computer screens. Polan claims that some connection might be found between the rising momentum of the cyber literacy and the narrative structure of *Pulp Fiction*: "If you understand mouse-click and web-links and hypertext, you are in the same structural mindset as Pulp Fiction, with its disjunctions, its loops of narrative, its dramatic shifts in tone and image" (37). Therefore, it could be argued that *Pulp Fiction* was not based on nonlinearity and the breaking down of the narrative only because it is a part of Tarantino's distinct style, but also because it represented the collective mindset of the era.

Nonlinearity in this film is accompanied with shifts in tone. There are many instances when the narrative takes the audience in directions they would never suspect. For example, the scenes where Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin in a moving car, or where Mia overdoses on heroin after her and Vincent's evening out, are not what the audience would expect. As film critic Roger Ebert says:

> "The Method of the movie is to involve its characters in sticky situations and then let them escape into stickier ones, which is how the boxer and the mob boss end up together as the captives of weird leather freaks in the basement of a gun shop. Most of the action in the movie comes under the heading of crisis control." (43)

This is yet another way of breaking audiences' expectations and therefore it helps emphasize the film's artificiality. The constant shift in tone contributes to the parodic quality of particular scenes. A good example is the already mentioned scene with Butch and Marsellus in the gun shop, or more specifically, the scene where Butch tries to choose a weapon which

he will use to kill his captors and save Marsellus Wallace. His decision to save Marsellus is quite surprising in and of itself, but then, as Polan puts it, "[…] we watch as he escalates from one implement of destruction to another, going […] from the genre of horror (a chainsaw a la *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*) to that of the Japanese yakuza film (a samurai sword a la Paul Schrader's script for *The Yakuza*)" (29). This is also another way to utilize genre references; by placing a simple object into the frame and by character's utilization of that object, the audience might instantly be reminded of another film, or another genre. By combining various genre references, Tarantino manages to create a sort of collage full of shifts in the quality of the narrative. Tarantino himself claims he enjoys creating confusion by changing the narrative's tone:

> "The stories in the movie remind me of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. You're following these two guys, […] then suddenly they turn corner and BOOM! They're in the middle of a civil war! They're in another movie! How […] did they get in there? They don't know and you're just as confused as they are." (qtd. in Polan 29)

Time plays an important role in *Pulp Fiction*: there are constant references to time, such as Butch's golden watch being a focal point of one whole segment of the movie, or simple details such as Esmarelda's taxi meter running thus indicating time, and the phrase 'What time is it?' is repeated quite often. These time references are instances of the film's self-reflexivity and serve to even further emphasize nonlinearity and to play with it. The best example of this is when The Wolf says: "It's thirty minutes away, I'll be there in ten.', an impossible statement which further illuminates how much linearity is disregarded in this film. Another way Tarantino plays with nonlinearity in this fashion are the many appearances of the black screen, which indicate the passing of time. However, the black screens never indicate how much time has exactly passed, they only serve as "[…] effective markers which

add to the theme of time running like a vein of gold […] through the movie's narrative" (Page 112)

However, some argue that the role of nonlinearity in *Pulp Fiction* is not only to accentuate the artificiality of the film: it also plays a major role in interpreting the story. Here is Janet Maslin's interpretation of the film's structure from *The New York Times*:

> "The unusual chronology of Quentin Tarantino's film accentuates the way his characters' decisions can change their destinies, even as their futures are seen falling into place. Circular in structure, the movie closes with the image of a man who is fated to die…because he has not understood how to save his own life. […] A vision like this elevates *Pulp Fiction* well above its own ebullient sense of fun, even establishing it as the anti-Gump [a reference to *Forrest Gump*, the film that received the major Oscars in the race with *Pulp Fiction*]." (Maslin 13)

This sort of an analysis suggests that *Pulp Fiction* is not simply 'a movie about movies' after all, i.e. it is not made only to serve as a constant reminder that what we are watching is not real, a reminder made of overused characters, storylines and settings that, although it is fun to watch, it has no deeper value or message. Roche offers a similar interpretation:

> "The structure of *Pulp* Fiction is by no means a gimmick and is highly relevant thematically,as it orders the way we are made to view each character's arc. Indeed, the movie is about people who are subjected to the power of one man, Marsellus Wallace, and who either remain subjected (Mia and Vincent) or find a way out (Butch and Jules). The stories have been ordered in such a fashion as to celebrate the possibility of escape and redemption, and thus to undermine Marsellus's authority." (257)

Polan, on the other hand argues that, by looking for this so-called deeper meaning, we neglect everything else the film has to offer: "The translation of the whole texture and textuality of an artwork into a verbal message means that tone, feel, the sensuousness of form […] all have to be left behind. […] Such transformation of the filmic work into a parable […] misses so much of what is going on in the experience of the film" (Polan 82). Moreover, she

goes on to say that there is even no need for such interpretation because Jules himself offers his own interpretation when the bullets miss him, an event he perceives to be a message from God, urging him to change his ways (82). The legitimacy of the message carried out in that particular scene, however, is brought into question by the way it was treated: although this is quite an important and serious moment in Jules' life, it is contrasted with popular culture references (Jules comparing himself to a character from a television show *Kung Fu*) as well as Jules' 'cool' personality we have been witnessing so far. And, although the theme of redemption evidently permeates the film, Tarantino is interested mostly in one thing and that is, according to Roche, "how to best tell a story" (260). All in all, it is up to the viewers to decide whether they will try to interpret *Pulp Fiction*, or they will, as Polan puts it, try "seeing it as experience, as game, as visuality, as cinema." (83)

6. Conclusion

To summarize, *Pulp Fiction* indeed displays postmodern self-reflexivity in all of the aspects that were analysed previously. The characters are embodiments of stereotypes from the world of crime film genre, constructed through their clothes as well as the way they speak and behave. Once the audience starts to perceive them as stereotypical characters, Tarantino begins to use these same tools to completely deconstruct the characters and break the audiences' expectations: the characters shed the uniforms that match their roles and start talking about hamburgers, foot massages as well as about "getting into character". Actors themselves, who are playing these characters serve as references to their own past acting experiences, making this film not only about genre, but about cinema in general.

When it comes to the setting in which these characters are situated, it is, again, quite familiar to the viewer. These are common and homely spaces, such as cars, apartments, restaurants, etc. –spaces that are usually associated in the audiences' minds with safety and comfort. Here Tarantino again takes advantage of those preconceived notions and surprises us by turning these homely spaces into crime scenes. Tarantino employs theatricality while creating a film, which serves even further to emphasise artificiality, i.e. self-reflexivity. The settings of *Pulp Fiction* can be compared to the stage of a theatre where the characters fulfil their role. For instance, once Vincent and Jules "get into character", they enter Brett's apartment where they play the role of hitmen.

Camera work, everything that is placed in front of the camera to create a scene as well as the dramatic use of space contribute to theatricality, which in turn points the audiences' attention to the artificiality of what is in front of them. And what is in front of them are three stories which are intertwined, nonlinear and, at the first glance, just like the characters, quite stereotypical. But since this is a film about genre, about how stories are told, Tarantino breaks

our expectations when it comes to the narrative as well. He takes these clichéd narratives and expands them, taking them somewhere the audience would not expect by showing us parts of the plot which are usually not included in the films of the same genre (such as, for instance, going to the bathroom, cleaning a car after a murder has been committed in it, etc.) . Literary devices, such as nonlinearity and chapter titles that are used to segment the film, play an important role in Tarantino's play with the narrative as well. There are many pauses and shifts in tones that might remind the audience of the television programmes and commercial breaks, which are a part of their everyday lives. All of these genre and popular culture references, as well as the achronological narrative might seem like a puzzle the audience has to solve. And while some are able to solve it, others are not, which creates a divide between the viewers, i.e. that is why there are so many people who both praise and criticize the film.

Taking all that has been mentioned in this paper into consideration, it becomes apparent that *Pulp Fiction* represents a separate world where a different set of rules (or the lack thereof) is applied. The film seems to be an imaginary universe constructed solely for the purpose of displaying its artificiality. As it was mentioned earlier, Polan compares watching *Pulp Fiction* to visiting Disneyland: she maintains that both represent imaginary worlds in which an individual follows a certain path in which he or she encounters different attractions (Polan 76). What is meant by 'attraction' when it comes to *Pulp Fiction* are many parts of the film that seem to be "[…] stand-alone bits of virtuosity either in the craft of the dialogue, the weirdness of the action […], or the show-off quality of the cinematic style." (Polan 76) that stand out from the rest of the plot (such as the scene in the redneck pawnshop). And much like a theme-park ride, there are many shifts in tone and direction in *Pulp Fiction.* And, just like it was pointed out in the previous chapter, "[…] on this narrative ride, the primary goal for the spectator is not to look for meanings […], but to have an experience, to luxuriate in sensations" (Polan 77).

Indeed, one of the components of postmodernist movement is focusing on the way people are experiencing what is in front of them, rather than focusing what it exactly is they are experiencing. Some might think this is pointless. For instance, Shattuck in his article for the *Los Angeles Times* said: "*Pulp Fiction* does not satirize our media culture. It succumbs willingly to that culture, celebrates it, exploits it and successfully spreads its meaningless violence and jokeyness across all human lives shown." (3) For Shattuck, the lack of a deeper meaning is an issue. Still, there is no denying that the film had a major impact in the world of cinema: it is appreciated by many people (many of which appreciate it especially because of that lack of meaning) and it influenced many directors to come.

The film redefined the gangster/crime film genre and started a new trend of 'cool', eloquent gangsters who go through the world being nonchalant towards the chaos that surrounds them (examples of this include Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000) or *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998)). Pulp *Fiction* is a beautiful collage of fascinating characters, brilliant dialogues, popular culture references and unusual storylines – it is an experience, rather than a story of redemption told in an unusual way. Its meaninglessness has divided and confused audiences for the quarter of a century. I say successfully because I believe this was Tarantino's intention. Just like Honey Bunny, who demands to know what is in the briefcase in the final scene –"What is it? What is it? Goddam what is it?" – the audience is left with many questions after the film is over, most of which remain unanswered. It is up to an individual to either try and work out the deeper meaning, or to simply enjoy the roller-coaster ride that is *Pulp Fiction*.

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8. *Pulp Fiction* and Self-reflexivity: summary and keywords

Pulp Fiction (1994) is a crime/gangster film directed and written by Quentin Tarantino. Unlike the typical gangster films that examine the 'gangster' as a symbol of moral corruption in the society, Tarantino's 'gangster' serves as a symbol and a part of popular culture, which is evident in the movie's self-reflexivity and subjectivity. Self-reflexivity refers to the film being aware of itself and it is one of the most common postmodern characteristics. This paper focuses on the concept of self-reflexivity in *Pulp Fiction* and analyses it in three major aspects of the film: its characters, the setting and the narrative.

Keywords: self-reflexivity, postmodernism, nonlinearity, metafiction, crime film

9. *Pakleni šund* i samorefleksivnost: sažetak i ključne riječi

Pakleni šund (1994) je kriminalistički film Quentina Tarantina. Za razliku od tipičnog filma ovoga žanra koji se bazira na liku gangstera kao simbolu moralne korupcije u društvu, Tarantinov je gangster simbol popularne culture što se očituje kroz subjektivnost i samorefleksivnost ovoga filma. Samorefleksivnost se odnosi na samosvijest filma te je to jedna od čestih karakteristika postmodernizma. Ovaj rad fokusira se upravo na koncept samorefleksivnosti u filmu *Pakleni šund* te ga analizira unutar tri aspekta filma: likova, okruženja unutar kojeg postoje i djeluju ti likovi, te narativa.

Ključne riječi: samorefleksivnost, postmodernizam, nelinearnost, metafikcija, kriminalistički film