

PULP FICTION
(1994)

COMPONENT 2
SECTION D: FILM MOVEMENTS
(EXPERIMENTAL FILM: 1960-2000)



“FIVE LONG YEARS HE WORE THIS WATCH UP HIS ASS THEN, WHEN HE DIED OF DYSENTERY, HE GAVE ME THE WATCH....AND NOW LITTLE MAN, I GIVE THE WATCH TO YOU”



AREAS FOR STUDY

- ◆ FILM FORM
- ◆ MEANING AND RESPONSE
- ◆ **NARRATIVE – specialist study**
- ◆ **AUTEUR – specialist study**

Film Form means.....

We must analyse the first 5-10 minutes plus other clips to understand **narrative and auteur theory** (but also linked to genre, representation and postmodernism)

- ◆ **Cinematography**
- ◆ **Mise-en-scene**
- ◆ **Editing**
- ◆ **Sound**
- ◆ **Performance**

Key areas

- ◆ Representation issues
- ◆ Postmodern identity
- ◆ **Narrative experimentation as specialist area
(linking with the postmodern and genre)**
- ◆ **Auteur as specialist area (see Tarantino clips)**

Working towards one 30 minute, 20 mark question like..... (remember you get a choice of two)

- ◆ Explore how far your chosen film is experimental in challenging conventional approaches to narrative
- ◆ To what extent are approaches to narrative experimentation both exciting and difficult for the spectator?
- ◆ Evaluate the auteur critical approach in relation to how it contributes to the study of your chosen film

What do you think about the following comments?

1. “I could see how it makes loads of intertextual references, but I fail to see how it is postmodern”.
2. “Tarantino is a bit like Orson Welles who first directed Citizen Kane, but then lived his life in reverse”.
3. “OK, so it’s got a non-linear narrative – apart from that it’s a mainstream film”.
4. “Man With a Movie Camera and Citizen Kane were experimental films – Pulp Fiction was great fun but not avant-garde”.

INITIAL CONTEXT

- ◆ 2nd directed Tarantino film (first Reservoir Dogs, 1992)
- ◆ Tarantino is a self confessed cinephile - encyclopedic knowledge of film (worked in a video shop in his youth)
- ◆ Films known for aestheticisation of violence, extended dialogue, intertextual references to popular/film culture
- ◆ First major Miramax project – then a leading independent distributor. Low production values - \$8m but first indie to gross over \$200m.

CASTING CONTEXT CRUCIAL – UMA
THURMAN AND JOHN TRAVOLTA:
IRONIC REFERENCE TO SATURDAY
NIGHT FEVER



SAMUEL L. JACKSON ESTABLISHED BY 1994
BUT NOT 'A' LIST – TWO GANGSTERS
PLAYING WITH BUDDY 'COP' TEMPLATE.
TRAVOLTA'S WEIGHT REFERENCED



HARVEY KEITEL HAD ONLY AGREED TO
BE IN RESERVOIR DOGS BECAUSE HE
LIKED THE SCRIPT, THEN HE LIKED
TARANTINO



BRUCE WILLIS WAS WELL KNOWN
BUT HIS CAREER WAS ON THE SLIDE



POINT – INDIE STAR MARKETING BUT PULP FICTION MADE/REMADE CAREERS



PULP FICTION FILM FORM AND NARRATIVE 1

- ◆ Non linear but fundamentally tells a story from start to finish (despite ending at the beginning – coffee shop)
- ◆ Episodic using 5 book chapters
- ◆ Dateline unclear – narrative takes place over four days
- ◆ Two scenes from a different POV
- ◆ Multi stranded based on character

PULP FICTION FILM FORM AND NARRATIVE 2

- ◆ Circular narrative arguably revolves around the fate of Jules and Vincent
- ◆ Jules finds spiritual humanity (survives), Vincent does not (is shot by Butch – Willis)
- ◆ Fits Todorovian four act structure but challenges traditional Hollywood 3 act structure
- ◆ Atypical protagonists and antagonists – representation of the maverick anti hero

HONEY BUNNY AND THE COFFEE SHOP



FILM LANGUAGE USED BY TARANTINO 1

- ◆ Colour palette - use of red/black, yellow connoting filth in Lance's apartment but also the ironic white interior of Mia's house
- ◆ Non-diegetic soundtrack (synergy) links narrative e.g. "being good isn't always easy" (son of a preacher man)
- ◆ Editing – use of long takes to build tension e.g. adrenalin shot

MIA OVERDOSE



FILM LANGUAGE USED BY TARANTINO 2

- ◆ Use of CU but importantly ECU e.g. red mark on Mia's chest/CU long take of Jules sucking Sprite through a straw
- ◆ POV - iconic shot of the back of Marcellus' head talking to Butch (plaster creating narrative enigma)
- ◆ Subversion of the stereotypical connotation of low angle e.g. Honey Bunny/Pumpkin on table

SUBVERTED LOW ANGLE



TRADITIONAL LOW ANGLE (POWER
ETC.) - SURREAL LONG TAKE IN LIFT
DISCUSSING FOOT MASSAGES



FILM LANGUAGE USED BY TARANTINO 3

- ◆ Significant use of the two shot e.g. Jules and Vincent establishing character relationships
- ◆ Wide angle, shot on 35mm
- ◆ Use of zoom and deep focus e.g. diner scene
- ◆ Cross cutting between diegetic and non diegetic (same piece of music e.g. Mia and Vincent's night out)

“OH, I’M SORRY – DID I BREAK
YOUR CONCENTRATION?”



POSTMODERNISM BOX TICKING 1

- ✔ YES – STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE
- ✔ YES – SIGNIFICANT SELF REFERENTIAL
FILM LITERATE INTERTEXTUALITY
- ✔ YES – BRICOLAGE/GENERIC PASTICHE
- ✔ YES – COPIES OF COPIES E.G. JACK RABBIT
SLIMS' CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL
ECLECTICISM – BUDDY WAITER AND
MARILYN MONROE DRESS BLOWING

'BUDDY' AT JACK RABBIT SLIMS



POSTMODERNISM BOX TICKING 2

- ◆ ARGUMENT – USING LYOTARD, A LACK OF META NARRATIVE FRAMES THE FILM AS POSTMODERN....
- ◆ DO YOU THINK THERE IS A ‘BIG’ STORY? ARE THERE ANY MESSAGES, VALUES AND THEMES ENCODED?
- ◆ BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF HIGH AND LOW CULTURE

POSTMODERNISM BOX TICKING 3

- ◆ BAUDRILLARD AND HYPER REALITY E.G. McDONALDS' NAME FOR GLOBAL BURGERS
- ◆ AUDIENCE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING THROUGH SITUATED CULTURE AND INTERTEXTUALITY
- ◆ NEW STATESMAN, 2014 – “PULP FICTION IS ABOUT NOTHING, SAYS NOTHING AND MAKES YOU FEEL NOTHING”

TARANTINO THE AUTEUR



AUTEUR FEATURES 1

- ◆ CLASSIC CAMEOS IN EVERY FILM – HITCHCOCK
- ◆ OBSESSION WITH EXPRESSIONISTIC REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE (TO THE POINT THAT HE HAS BEEN ASKED TO DIRECT TV EPISODES OF CSI AND ER USING HIS OWN RECOGNISABLE STYLE)
- ◆ REFUSES TO SHOOT ON DIGITAL – ALL FILMS ARE EITHER 35MM OR 16MM

AUTEUR FEATURES 2

- ◆ ALL FILMS MAKE LITERATE INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCES
- ◆ LIKE SCORCESE (DE NIRO) AND BURTON (DEPP) TARANTINO HAS REGULAR COLLABORATORS – THURMAN, ROTH, KEITEL, THE WEINSTEINS (DISTRIBUTION)....
- ◆ PERSONAL CONTROL OVER USE OF MUSIC

AUTEUR FEATURES 3

- ◆ LONG INTENSE DIALOGUE
- ◆ BLACK HUMOUR - VIOLENCE
- ◆ REVENGE NARRATIVES – KILL BILL, INGLORIOUS BASTARDS, DJANGO.....
- ◆ RECURRING SHOTS E.G. POV FROM TRUNK
- ◆ MORAL AMBIGUITY – CINEMA FOR CINEMA'S SAKE: DISCUSS

“PIGS ARE FILTHY ANIMALS, I DON’T EAT FILTHY ANIMALS”.

