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Marie Philippe

Metafiction in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019)

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Master 2 Recherche Etudes Anglophones

Metafiction in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019)



A dissertation presented by Marie Philippe

Year 2020-2021

Under the supervision of Mehdi Achouche, Senior Lecturer

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ABSTRACT

This paper will endeavor to show the importance of metafiction in Quentin Tarantino's latest film *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019). Since his cinematic authorship lies in the reworking of pre-existing *oeuvres* and genres, the director has often been referred to as a postmodernist. This dissertation will establish links between metafiction and postmodernism as the two share similar characteristics dear to Tarantino. These concepts are useful to investigate the significance of history, film history and genre tropes in the movie. It is important to keep in mind that many genre tropes in the film come from the western pictorial tradition, which will be one of our main tools to analyze the director's style. As the film is one of his last, some of Tarantino's thoughts on the nature and future of cinema arise to offer a unique vision on the industry. These thoughts are helpful to situate *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* within his whole filmography and to deliver a meaningful meta-discourse.

Key Words: Metafiction, Tarantino, Postmodernism, genres, fiction, reality, realism, history, film history, western.

Le but de ce mémoire est de montrer l'importance de la métafiction dans le dernier film de Quentin Tarantino *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. Beaucoup de films du réalisateur exposent une réappropriation d'œuvres cinématographiques du paysage international, ce qui fait de Quentin Tarantino un metteur en scène postmoderne. Dans ce sens, il est possible d'établir des liens entre la métafiction et le postmodernisme car ces concepts partagent des caractéristiques similaires qui semblent chères au réalisateur. Ils sont essentiels pour étudier l'influence de l'Histoire américaine, mais surtout celle du cinéma et de ses genres sur le style de Tarantino. Le genre du western constitue la référence picturale la plus utilisée dans le film, ce qui en fait une solide base d'étude pour traiter de la vision du réalisateur sur ce genre. Puisque *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* est sans doute l'un des derniers films de Quentin Tarantino, un discours sur la nature du cinéma et d'Hollywood y transparait. Il y offre une opinion unique sur l'industrie du cinéma.

Mots clés : Métafiction, Tarantino, Postmodernisme, genres, fiction, réalité, réalisme, histoire, histoire du cinéma, western.

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INTRODUCTION

Like Leone, Tarantino wants to have things both ways: to celebrate the beauty of the icon while undercutting it. As if its redemption lied squarely in its poetic and political power to die and be born anew, a spectral image intimately connected to the past and temporarily projected on a column of smoke for the mere duration of a show.

- David Roche on Quentin Tarantino (292)

Cinematography was, at its very beginning, an art mimicking reality. In its early days, the Lumière brothers created vignettes of the everyday life of factory workers with *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (1895), or a train arriving to the station of La Ciotat with *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896). With the advent of storytelling, films have focused more and more on realism than reality itself. Different types of narration, styles, and genres emerged quickly – most notably the Western genre in the United States, with *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903. Through time, genres themselves have been coined and redefined by the Hollywood industry as they were easy to market to the public. For instance, before being associated with the Western genre, *The Great Train Robbery* was identified with the “then-popular genres of the chase film, the railroad film, and the crime film.” (Grant 6). The latest films by Quentin Tarantino have overtly exposed this desire to rework on past history and genres through a different perspective. Real-life figures and fictional characters are exposed to allohistory, a plot twist on events that have taken place in the past. While *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) reinvents Hitler’s death and the course of the Second World War, his most recent film *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019) casts a new light on the year 1969, the Tate murders and the rise of the New Hollywood era. Tarantino not only shows a transitional period that deeply transformed cinema and its genres, but also explores the way political, social and cultural ideologies were redefined in the late 1960s. This is all rendered through the subjective and stylised lens of the director, giving a one-of-a-kind interpretation of the events. For instance, he uses elements of the Western genre to depict the late 1960s. What was it that triggered Tarantino’s interest for the United States in the late 1960s then? While the director grew up watching films of this era and forged his cinematic knowledge during those years, they also represented a turning point in history and film history.

In terms of history itself, the decade was highly tumultuous. There were great divides between the population and the government on political and social issues. John Fitzgerald Kennedy became president of the United States in 1961 with the idea of implementing an expansionist policy to cement the United States as a world leader, especially in the context of the Cold War. While in the United Kingdom, poet Philip Larkin wittfully claimed that “Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three / (which was rather late for me) / Between the end of the “Chatterley” ban / And the Beatles’ first LP.” (*Annus Mirabilis*), Betty Friedan was releasing her book *The Feminine Mystique*, revealing a widely felt unhappiness within the community of housewives in the United States. In the course of the following year, along with the already famous Civil Rights movement, counterculture movements rose. Ralph W. Larkin defines counterculture as such:

The counterculture emerged in the mid-1960s as a self appellation among young people within the middle-class youth movement as politics merged with cultural issues. The issues of racism, collusion of higher education institutions with the military and corporate worlds in support of the Vietnam War, and *en loco parentis* regulations in colleges and universities fused with struggles over hair length, communal living, musical tastes, drug use, gender roles, and sexuality. (R. W. Larkin 74)

These movements contested the dominant ideologies and blamed governmental implications in several social or military issues. This gave way to a whole population challenging established forms of art, such as cinema. Tarantino explores this evolution within the heart of the cinema industry – Hollywood and more broadly Los Angeles.

Before then, in terms of film history, the studio system imposed a set of cinematic and narrative conventions which limited innovation. In December 1967, the film *Bonnie and Clyde* was released. It was considered a “cultural phenomenon” (Krämer 6) as it showcased violence in a way that had never been seen before in Hollywood. Later in December, *The Graduate* arrived in cinemas and attracted a youthful audience. The film separated itself from the strong moral codes of the time, showing “one-off sexual encounters and occasional (near) nudity” (33). These films mark the turn to a more experimental period in Hollywood – the New Hollywood Era. It is what Quentin Tarantino depicts in the aforementioned film *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, a buddy movie set in 1969 where Rick Dalton – a Hollywood actor desperate to keep his celebrity intact – and his stuntman Cliff Booth evolve through this

transitional period where no one realizes how big these changes are going to be, whether it be within the American population or the film industry. Indeed, one of the central issues in the transition to the New Hollywood Era was the Tate murder and more broadly the Manson Family murders. They were the turning point to a more conscious period of time that changed both Hollywood and the population. Robbie Collin explained that “[Cinemas] lost, before then, the interest of young moviegoers who were mainly interested in music at that point which seemed much more progressive and experimental” (01:10). It is thus no surprise that Quentin Tarantino decided to set his new film *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* in 1969. It represents a fundamental year which cemented this radical change in the state of mind of the American population – most notably initiated by the youth and counterculture movements. With the aimless deaths of the Vietnam War, people became more disillusioned. They also grew weary of current films showcasing strong moral standards and relying heavily on the Bible, or others that kept using the same film genre tropes.

It was the case of the Western genre, which is an important feature in Tarantino’s film. Quentin Tarantino said in an interview that “being the director, the one artist that I think is the most influential to me has got to be Sergio Leone. He is the filmmaker that you can spot the most in my work.” (StudioBinder 09:02). Indeed, Tarantino often worked on the genre, making it the star of the show in *Django Unchained* (2012) or *The Hateful Eight* (2015) for example. This particular love for the Western films of Sergio Leone is palpable in his latest film, and useful to talk about the New Hollywood era. Indeed, not only did it evolve in the same way the Hollywood industry was evolving in the late 1960s, but it is also recognized as the “most American genre”. In her book *The Transatlantic Gaze: Italian Cinema, American Film*, Mary Ann McDonald recalls that “French critic André Bazin [...] views the history of the Western as almost identical to that of cinema itself” (Carolan 61). The Western genre holds a special place in the history of American cinema indeed. It deals with the historical background of the United States in itself, and is characteristically linked with the Frontier myth – “America as a wide-open land of unlimited opportunity for the strong, ambitious, self-reliant individual to thrust his way to the top.” (Slotkin 5) It is no surprise that Kennedy re-used this imagery to gather citizens around a common goal of expansionism and growth with his 1960 New Frontier speech. It is with the advent of spaghetti Westerns and a new kind of American film that the western genre was modernized, most notably with Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* which was released in 1969. For instance, David Kehr summed up the change that underwent the genre when talking about *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). He said, “What’s fascinating to me

about that film is that it has both the cynicism of the Spaghetti Western and the lyricism of the classical Western, able to exist side by side.” (06:30). As *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is set in Los Angeles, Quentin Tarantino tried to show the importance of the Western genre in 1969, whether it be on TV shows or in the cinema. This dissertation will often mention come back to this genre as it is referred to consistently throughout the movie.

Using genre tropes such as Western film ones has led the director to be described as postmodern in his approach to cinema. Upon quoting Frederic Jameson’s idea that postmodern works are not innovations, Joshua Wucher wrote “cinematic authorship needs to be reconceptualized for directors like Tarantino, whose distinctive style of generic reconfiguration leads to creative, intricate films” (1287). Indeed, many of his works using pre-existing cinematic material give a brand-new meaning to old tropes, offering a panorama on aesthetics in film history. As such, Quentin Tarantino does not only quote from former films solely to hint at them. His citational meticulousness helps redefine what fiction means in cinema. Hence, this dissertation will focus on the many metafictional discourses present in the director’s latest film.

Above all, Tarantino’s concern was trying to make sense of a period that brought up enormous changes in the United States on a cultural, social and political level; but also to deliver a unique message on fiction in films, cinema and the intricacies of the industry. From a historical perspective, all the clues are given to us. What is left from this is a very Hitchcockian concept: the creation of suspense, a sense of longing to know how the tale will be told. Thus, how is *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* an efficient and unique meta-discourse on cinema and Hollywood? What does a metafictional analysis tell us about Quentin Tarantino’s cinema?

The first part of this paper will be more theoretical as it will endeavor to explain what metafiction meant throughout the years. This study will gradually focus on metafiction in cinema to deliver a typology and a definition. As metafiction and postmodernism share many common features, it will be interesting to decipher what postmodern and metafictional tropes are in order to use them in our analysis of Tarantino’s latest film. Additionally, this part will provide some background to the director’s style and to *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*.

The second part of the analysis will focus on re-shaping history or film history. This dissertation will investigate the realistic and fictional dimensions in the film and how film or genre tropes help bring a new light on character representation. On a historical standpoint, Tarantino’s concern was trying to make sense of a period that brought up enormous changes in

the United States on a cultural, social and political level. It takes place right before the Woodstock Festival, the most famous event tied to counterculture movements, which happened a week after the Tate murders. Moreover, the final product of his movies is often a clear-cut metafiction, loaded with postmodern politics and aesthetics. Metafictions are reminders that movies are illusions as they dive in the very boundaries of reality and fiction. In *Pulp Fiction*, when Jules tells Vincent “Let’s get into character” (13:22), the attention of the audience is meant to be put on the craft – on the idea that they are characters into characters. This part will investigate the historical and cinematographic elements that shape the fictional landscape of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. As such, setting, genres and character representation are key elements to understand how metafiction works in Quentin Tarantino’s films.

The final part of this study will investigate representations of the industry and the plausible hidden messages behind Tarantino’s style. Since the director has grown in Los Angeles and *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is one of his last films, the final product of this movie delivers a highly personal vision of 1969 Hollywood. He said in a Festival de Cannes interview that “it’s a memory piece, so I’m going back into my six-year-old self to remember what everything was like” (CANAL+ Cinéma 02:25) but this piece also comes as a conceit of the industry he has known over his career. As such, this dissertation will seek to understand the different layers that constitute this meta-discourse. Since Rick and Cliff act as complementary figures and are at the center of the film, duality is a theme which can be analyzed through several angles. Furthermore, his movie displays many references and comments on his previous works. These references can be analyzed with metafictional tools mentioned in the first section. Finally, since the movie lies between memory piece and proof of his love for cinema, it will be interesting to see if *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* represents Quentin Tarantino’s utopia of an industry he loved and loves.

1. METAFICTION, POSTMODERNISM AND QUENTIN TARANTINO'S CINEMA

1.1. What is Metafiction?

a. The History of Metafiction

The use of the prefix *meta* is widespread today, whether it be in everyday life or on social media. NPR Staff asked language columnist for *The Boston Globe* and lexicographer Ben Zimmer why it was such a popular term, something to which he answered with a story.

While the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement was still going on in lower Manhattan, there was something very strange going on – there was a TV show *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, and it set up a replica of that ‘Occupy Wall Street’ encampment in another spot [...] not far from where the actual encampment was. [...] They were going to dramatize the ‘Occupy’ movement for the show. But then the real-life occupiers who were getting kicked out [...] got wind of this and said ‘hey, there’s a mockupation going on’. They showed up and occupied the TV set. On Twitter, they were using hashtags like #OccupyOccupyWallStreet. Eventually, the occupiers got kicked out by real police and the whole thing was over. [...] I was amazed, this was truly a ‘meta’ moment. It seemed to encapsulate how everything in the culture now can become self-referential, self-conscious, self-parodying and create this kind of endless feedback loop. (Ben Zimmer 01:50)

This story was used by NPR to make a point – even humorously, we are faced with meta-narratives all the time. In a 2012 article for *The Boston Globe*, the same writer explains that *meta* is a Greek prefix meaning “above or beyond” (Zimmer). Hence, all things *meta* invite us to study liminality, and what is beyond. Though *meta* is a widely understood term, ‘metafiction’ is still a hazy subject to the ones who discuss it. As a consequence, this subpart will endeavor to understand what metafiction is and how it manifests itself in cinema, in order to propose a definition.

When the term ‘metafiction’ was first used by scholars, it was generally linked with literature, and more specifically the novel. Indeed, Jerome Klinkowitz writes that metafiction derives from “the conventional novel’s self-perceived weakness” (2):

The moment for this insight came in 1960, during the “death of the novel” controversy in which critics were complaining that the novel, an eighteenth-century form, might no longer be adequate to express the transformed nature of reality. The transformations in mind were scientific and philosophical, involving such ideas as relativity in physics, uncertainty in scientific method, and any number of philosophies that challenged the centrality of human intellect in the world’s doings. (Klinkowitz 2)

Ironically enough, this turn led to a focus on fiction rather than on reality itself and encouraged the reader to experience something *beyond* realism. William H. Gass, an American academic and novelist, coined the term in his essay *Philosophy and the Future of Fiction* in the late 1970s stating that metafiction is “works which contain, one way or another, explanations and references to themselves.” (11) He develops his idea with a practical thought on literature: “They are fictions about fiction; not in the obvious sense in which one of the characters is a writer, for that can be taken up in the traditional form. Rather metafiction is fiction in which the content of the work being structured is the structure of traditional fiction.” (11) For Gass, metafiction is works (or novels in this case) that reflect on the fictional tropes they use. He gives the example of American novelist Gertrude Stein, playing with “the phenomenology of the reading process” (13) that is taking into account the moments when the reader is not reading. Gass says, “instead of your having to go back and reread the first line, she gave you the first line again, and then again.” (13) thus playing with the creative process and the structure of fiction.

In her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh further argues that metafiction is “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.” (2) Here, metafiction not only focuses on the creative structure of a fictional piece, but also on its blurry threshold with reality. By definition, reality is the strict opposite of a work of fiction – “a story that is written about imaginary characters and events and not based on real people and facts” (Cambridge Dictionary) – yet the thin line between the two has often been explored in metafictional

literature. From Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820) to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), novels have made of metafiction the main theme in their storyline precisely because they explored the limit between fiction and reality. This very limit has also been studied in their cinematic adaptations by Tim Burton (1999) and Jack Clayton (1961). In *Sleepy Hollow*, Ichabod Crane doubts the existence of a Headless Horseman – an idea that keeps challenging his Cartesian thought-process. In this way, he mirrors the audience's doubts on whether what is told is real or lore – after all, it is specified in the postscript of the book that the storyteller does not “believe one-half of it” himself (Irving). Similarly, *The Innocents*' setting gives rise to *Vertigo*-like scenes where the camera follows the governess in a tilt as she goes up a staircase, which makes the audience wonder if they are seeing straight. This ambiguity also triggers doubts considering how the audience sees the children she takes care of. In both media, the common element is the presence of an unreliable narrator telling us the story from a personal standpoint. Narrators draw attention to themselves and their points of view here. In that way, an objective truth is impossible to reach. As a result, through the study of intertwined reality and fiction, both media produce a meta-discourse on the powers of storytelling.

b. Metafiction in Cinema

What, then, is metafiction in cinema? Of course, studying the relationship between fiction and reality is not the only way metafiction finds itself in films. However, this topic was already present in the beginnings of cinema. For instance, Edwin S. Porter's *Uncle Josh at The Moving Picture Show* (1902) displays a man that believes what is projected on the big screen is real, so much so that he tries to run away from the projection of a train, or to get in a fight with a man onscreen (fig. 1&2).



Figures 1 & 2 Uncle Josh tries to fight with a man and tears up the screen (01:42 & 01:45)

He ends up tearing up the screen, revealing the projectionist. While metafiction onscreen was not discussed at the time, the idea of mixing fiction and reality to create a humorous short film was already explored.

Recent studies have focused on ‘metafilm’ and ‘metacinema’ as equivalents to literary metafiction. In his book *Hollywood à l’écran*, Marc Cerisuelo defines the metafilm as follows:

La détermination est d’abord négative ; le métafilm n’est ni un film en abyme, ni le *backstage film*, ni une simple représentation du monde du cinéma. Le métafilm est une fiction qui prend pour objet le cinéma en représentant les agents de la production (acteurs, cinéastes, scénaristes, producteurs, etc.), procure une connaissance d’ordre documentaire ou vraisemblable, et élabore (cf. le métatexte) un discours critique à propos du cinéma. (Cerisuelo 10)

Here, metafilms are defined as movies about the industry, showcasing a comment or critique on the people and the mechanisms that surround film production. This definition seems a bit specific, especially since cinema can comment on itself without ever showing those who participate in its making. This is what Fátima Chinita does when she sets the framework of both metafilm and metacinema in her article “The Tricks of the Trade (Un)exposed”. According to her, metacinema directs “allegorical depictions, not easy to detect by everyone, since they come in the form of a running metaphor coexisting with a literal narrative meaning” (7). She gives the example of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) which is about voyeurism, and to a certain extent, the way the audience watches a film. The same critique can be applied to Adam McKay’s *The Big Short* (2015) that has virtually nothing to do with cinema. The film showcases references to popular culture and questions spectatorship. For instance, a sequence showcases Margot Robbie playing herself in a bathtub explaining what subprime mortgages are (fig. 3).



Figure 3 Margot Robbie as herself talking finance in a bathtub (14:04)

In the previous sequence, the voiceover of Ryan Gosling's character takes the lead to tell the audience about finance. He says, "Mortgage-backed securities, subprime loans, tranches... It's pretty confusing right? Does it make you feel bored, or stupid? Well, it's supposed to. Wall Street loves confusing terms [...] So, here's Margot Robbie in a bubble bath to explain." (13:36) Stardom appears as a way to captivate the audience in the sequence. Breaking the fourth wall brings a humorous touch to the general atmosphere, but it also comments on the audience's need to be constantly entertained through the use of a cinematic device that is made clear to those watching the film. Alexander Long even describes Robbie's screen appearance as "another Trojan horse filled with important information, drawing the audience in with both her out-of-place appearance and her sex appeal (according to pervasive pop culture standards and practices)" (347). Additionally, breaking the fourth wall is a common practice in the film as many characters do it throughout the movie. This direct communication creates a fake intimacy of sorts that distracts the audience from the initial subject – hence the use of the term 'Trojan horse'. Thus, *The Big Short* engages in a discussion on what it is to be part of the audience.

In order to elaborate a critical discourse on cinema and recreate Chinita's conceit, metafictional works often resort to intertextuality. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this notion as follows: "the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text" (Merriam-Webster). Here, 'text' can mean a literal text, or a film, a play, what a director or film critic said, etc. For example, this device is used in Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1963). From the very beginning of the film, the director manifests the purpose of the film by quoting famous film critic André Bazin: "Cinema [...] substitutes to our gaze a world which is in harmony with our desires"¹ (02:10). This comments on the audience's relationship with film as a piece transcribing our own desires and values when the movie itself is 'only' a mere illusion. Intertextuality also lies in the transposition of Homer's *Odyssey* in the film itself. One of the things that hints at this transposition is producer Jerry Prokosch's theatrical performance in the beginning of the film, resembling that of a stage comedian (fig. 4).

¹ This and all the following translations from French to English are mine.



Figure 4 Jerry's first appearance as a stage comedian (06:46)

He says, “Only yesterday there were kings here, and queens, liars and lovers, all kinds of real human beings [...] Yesterday I sold this land.” (06:49). Indeed, Jerry Prokosch fired people and complains about the empty buildings of Cinecittà. Ironically, he says this line in front of a huge “Teatro n° 6” sign. While using theatricality as a tool, this comments on the relationship between producer and director, showing the god-like power of producers in the filmmaking process.

In the case of Hollywood movies, Christopher Ames goes as far as to underline that there is a bit of the Hollywoodian industry in every Hollywood production. He explains that “Film audiences read the literal plot of a movie simultaneously with that developing metanarrative of Hollywood to which each film contributes a piece. For example, we often refer to characters in a film by the names of the actors, not the characters they portray” (2). Though I would not say this is enough to understand and define metafiction in films, filmmakers sometimes play with the beliefs and myths that have been created around Hollywood. More than a critical discourse on cinema, ‘metacinema’ can challenge the audience’s stated ideals on cinema, especially when it comes to Hollywood as we will see later on with the analysis of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*.

Broader definitions of metafiction in cinema have been made since Cerisuelo coined the term ‘metafilm’. For instance, David Roche defines “as metafictional any work of fiction – or any scene – that, regardless of the medium, engages with its status as a work of fiction by producing a meta-discourse that can be explicit, implicit or, more often, an alliance of both.” (9). He also argues that using the term ‘cinematic metafiction’ instead of ‘metafilm’ or ‘metacinema’ allows the genre to be connected to other types of media (such as literature), to reconnect with the concept of fiction itself, and to insist on the importance of “providing a critique of [fiction’s] own method of construction” (Waugh 2). Indeed, Roche’s idea of ‘meta-

discourse' implies that cinematic metafiction delivers a critical thinking on its own mechanisms. This is where the difference between reflexivity and metafiction lies according to him. In this fashion, Fernando Canet's article on metacinema provides a definition that is closer to reflexivity than cinematic metafiction itself – "Metacinema is the cinematic exercise that allows filmmakers to reflect on their medium of expression through the practice of filmmaking, whereby cinema looks at itself in the mirror in an effort to get to know itself better." (18). Here, metacinema is cinema contemplating and revealing its own mechanisms, but there lacks the notion of critical discourse. This is confirmed later in the article when Canet describes the practices of metacinema through Gerstenkorn's concepts of 'cinematic reflexivity' and 'filmic reflexivity' – that is "whereas the first focuses on the processes and mechanisms of film creation and reception, the second turns its attention towards film history" (18).

Additionally, journalist and film critic Rune Bruun Madsen put forward the importance of spectatorship as well as narrative and communication in his own definition of metafiction:

Metafiction is a narrative *modus operandi* that thematises the construction of a work and the relation between fiction and critique through the concurrent presence of illusory and reflexive elements. Metafiction often necessitates an observant and an active audience perspective. (Bruun Madsen)

To justify the use of 'modus operandi', Bruun Madsen followed the typology of Danish professor of language and literature Anker Gemzøe and added a few theoretical themes to display the mechanics of metafiction. The typology goes as follows: author meta (drawing attention to the director or narrator), addressee meta (communicating directly with the audience), composition meta (putting an emphasis on the way the narrative is built), inter meta (signs of intertextuality), cinematic language meta (displaying particular cinematic techniques noticeable to the audience), genre meta (challenging expectations on film genres), para meta (presence of paratexts). This dissertation has already addressed three of the seven variations of metafiction mentioned above, that is to say author meta, addressee meta, and inter meta. I believe the other notions are just as important and deserve further investigation here.

Composition meta, or a self-referential emphasis on the way the narrative is built in films, comes from a desire to give new forms to storytelling. Film historian David Bordwell extensively discusses the issue of shaping the narrative in relation to art films for instance. He

gives the example of flashforwards (representing a future action onscreen) as an essential tool in challenging the expectations of the audience.

The flashforward is unthinkable in the classical narrative cinema, which seeks to retard the ending and efface the mode of narration. But in the art cinema, the flashforward functions perfectly to stress authorial presence: we must notice how the narrator teases us with knowledge that no character can have. (Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* 155)

One of the films that used flashforward is *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969). The scene is very short as it lasts approximately a second, but it takes its full meaning when associated with the previous shot. In this shot, Wyatt looks at a plaque which is stating “Death only closes a man’s reputation and determines it as good or bad” (01:14:06). Then, the audience is presented with a flashforward showing a burning chopper (fig. 5).



Figure 5 Flashforward of a burning chopper in *Easy Rider* (01:14:10)

As the two protagonists are regularly shown riding their choppers, the audience is given clues as to how the film will end. By announcing this at an early stage, the characters’ deaths suddenly appear as trivial. More than this, it is also a way for director Dennis Hopper to mark a switch from praising to criticizing the counterculture youth of the 1960s. Through this narrative technique, this switch is made clear to the spectator. Breaking the linear composition of the film points out to its artificiality. However, the flashforward is not the only tool leading to self-reflexive compositions. Devices that contribute to the fragmentation of a narrative can indicate a self-reflexive perspective on fiction.

Cinematic language meta devices, rather than dealing with the narrative, form a “stylistic rhetoric” which combines “a multitude of variations and can [...] include out-of-focus framing, the absence of audio, conspicuous uses of non diegetic background music,

unconventional framing or sudden shifts in cinematic style” (Bruun Madsen). As such, the director draws our attention on the artificiality of the scene. In *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), when Elaine understands her mother is the woman Benjamin had been sleeping with, a rack focus shows her out-of-focus face from Benjamin’s point of view for a few seconds (fig. 6).



Figure 6 Elaine understands Benjamin had an affair with her mother (01:10:01)

This implies a sense of disorientation from the protagonist but, as the shot lasts five seconds, it also dramatises the scene. This oddly long out-of-focus take indicates a fashion for romanticizing that the audience notices. In a way, it also reflects our own anxiety when the news is revealed to Elaine. Cinematic language thus transcends the screen to give a sense of emotional verisimilitude.

Challenging genre expectations can serve as a reflexive and critical tool for metafictional films. Bruun Madsen explains “when a film or a TV series draws attention to itself by not meeting the expected genre characteristics of the audience, one can talk about genre meta.” (Bruun Madsen). In his article, he gives the example of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) which displays a duel scene, only for Indiana Jones to break genre expectations and use a gun to put an end to the fight. However, I would argue that metafictional works not only challenge, but also recycle genres to give a new meaning, a new layer to their original tropes. This indicates a reflection on the elements that have been assigned to a particular genre throughout history, thus forming a meta-analysis of genre tropes that belong to the fictional structure of a film. This dissertation will further investigate this matter with the analysis of Quentin Tarantino’s filmmaking.

The last element from Bruun Madsen’s typology that indicates metafiction in cinema is para meta or “the question of how events outside of the work, but with a connection to it, can make us re-evaluate the work and its link and place in the real world.” (Bruun Madsen). Indeed, paratext as defined by Bruun Madsen links the film with the world we live in, thus indicating a

straightforward link between reality and fiction. However, paratext can sometimes be found inside a work in the form of peritext: “titles, subtitles, and title sequences fulfil the characteristics of peritextual elements” (Klecker 404). Peritext and epitext are two forms of different paratexts, an epitext being a paratext outside of the work itself, such as film posters, trailers or advertisement. For instance, extra-diegetic peritext (such as opening credits or titles) is seen as “a disturbance that breaks with the diegetic illusion” by Joachim Paech in his analysis of *Wings of Desire* (1987) (Ibid., 407). He goes as far as to say:

The title credits delay the expectation of the beginning; the end credits point ahead to the painful return to everyday life; the intertitles are meta-discourses, which describe what could have been heard on the very spot but remained filmically mute as long as the film had to do without spoken language. (Paech qtd in Klecker 407)

As such, peritext can be a tool that comments on the film it belongs to. This also works for epitexts, as Lisa Kernan explains that trailers are both meta and paratexts “because of their heavily quotational aspect and the way they rhetorically reconfigure scenes from the film, endowing them with persuasive content” (7). Both devices are part of a sort of meta-communication with the audience and participate in creating or subverting the fictional illusion that is the movie.

c. Towards a Definition

All in all, metafiction in cinema is a hard concept to define. As we have seen, the terms ‘metafilm’, ‘metacinema’ and ‘cinematic metafiction’ all bear the notion of self-reflexivity in cinema – though the first one might be the most specific when the last one gives a broader definition. The challenge also lies in defining the framework of metafiction in cinema. In that case, this dissertation will focus on metafiction applied to cinema as David Roche defined it, as it carries Waugh’s idea of a critical approach that I believe is useful to study Quentin Tarantino’s work. This definition, by linking cinematic metafiction with other media, bears the mark of Waugh’s statement that metafiction points out to its own artificiality. This is beautifully summed up by Nathan Gregory’s thesis on metacinema: “By holding up a mirror to a work, filmmakers call attention to the constructed nature of film, which is, in its own right, an act of truth. By exposing this constructed nature of fiction films, a film can make grander claims than before about truth itself and its relationship to fiction.” (1). As such, the definition of Rune Bruun Madsen is also broad enough and puts forth the importance of audience participation which I believe is crucial in discussing metafiction. My own definition of metafiction thus

derives from both Roche's and Madsen's: Metafiction is a work of fiction that displays awareness of its constructed nature by delivering a meta-discourse often requiring the participation of the audience. It generally uses pre-existing devices in culture (such as works on genre, cinematic language, composition or intertextuality in the case of cinema) to engage in this meta-discourse, but it does not solely rely on them. Meta-discourse is an umbrella term that, in this context, deals with the poetics and politics of fiction itself.

In order to broaden the framework and typology of cinematic metafiction to better understand Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, it is important to study the postmodern movement.

1.2. Postmodernism vs. Metafiction

a. Defining Postmodernism

In 1980, John Barth, a novelist labelled as postmodern, explained that “writing in postmodernist journals [...] consists in disagreeing about what postmodernism is or ought to be, and thus about who should be admitted to the club” (194). Indeed, the term has long been debated amongst academics, and has acquired an ever more political meaning throughout the years. An assistant professor of English has even written in the *Washington Post*, “postmodern theory may be the most loathed concept ever to have emerged from academia” (Hanlon). Why should this dissertation focus on postmodernism then? Even if defining the term seems highly controversial, I would argue that elements from postmodern theory can be applied to metafiction as the two concepts constantly coexist in cinema – something I will further develop in this section.

Postmodernism appears to be the ugly duckling of academia. As mentioned above, the reasons are mainly political. Linda Hutcheon sums them up briefly in the preface of her *Poetics of Postmodernism*. She implies some people see the movement as a “radical revolutionary change or any apocalyptical wailing about the decline of the west under late capitalism” (*Postmodernism* ix). In that sense, postmodernism would translate a sort of disillusionment. This is what Carl Boggs underlines when he writes that “within postmodernism the power of established myths, loyalties, and identities could no longer be assumed” (354). Another reason why the term might be confusing is because it spans a large number of disciplines – Hutcheon

names “architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or historiography.” (Ibid., 3).

By definition, *postmodernism* is a movement that arose after and in reaction to modernism. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines modernism as follows.

Modernism, in the fine arts, [is] a break from the past and the concurrent search for new forms of expression. [...] In an era characterized by industrialization, rapid social change, and advances in science and the social sciences [...], Modernists felt a growing alienation incompatible with Victorian morality, optimism, and convention. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

In reaction to the horrors of the First World War, literature was tainted with disillusionment and fragmentation. Modernism also marked a complete break with history, giving space to a flow of thoughts characterized by the stream of consciousness. Postmodernism stands in contrast with this movement. This is what Hutcheon exemplifies when she talks about Paolo Portoghesi’s “*Strada Novissima*” (1980), showing that postmodernism’s “very newness lay paradoxically in its historical parody” (*Postmodernism* 4). The idea of parody is a concept that is often used, notably by Hutcheon, to describe postmodern theory – something that this dissertation will deal with later on in this section. However, postmodernism does not solely lie in historical parody and self-reflexive works. According to Hutcheon, postmodernism is “a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges” (Ibid., 3). Thus, postmodernism challenges accepted boundaries in the arts, while using the tropes that exist within these boundaries.

b. Postmodern Simulation

Exploring boundaries is something that both metafiction and postmodernism have in common – notably between reality and what is beyond. In postmodern cinema, this sometimes translates in the use of Baudrillard’s “hyperrealism” which is linked to an “idea of simulacrum, which [Baudrillard] defines as something which replaces reality with its representations” (Mambrol). While Baudrillard did not think of himself as a postmodernist – even calling the movement “a world-wide verbal fornication” (*Cool Memories II* 70) – hyperrealism and simulacrum are concepts that have fuelled postmodernist thought and aesthetics. According to Baudrillard, films tend to deal with history as if it were a myth, replacing what happened with man-induced representations. He says, “History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth.

Because of that, it replaces myths onscreen. The illusion would be to rejoice from this “awareness of history on the part of cinema” (Baudrillard *Simulacres et Simulation* 69) In that sense, historical truth and cinema are not compatible. This claim is supported by philosopher Fredric Jameson, who confirmed the postmodern condition lied in:

the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve. (Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’)

Furthermore, Catherine Constable explains that “Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard view postmodern cinema as largely reflective of a nihilistic postmodernity, characterized by the ending of Enlightenment ideals, the rise of capitalism and a return to a violent Hobbesian state of nature” (1). This loss of history coupled with the importance of capitalism in the western world has led to the making of films that reflect on the excesses of both sides. Baudrillard takes the example of *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) in *Simulacra and Simulation*. In 1979 at the Cannes Film Festival, Francis Ford Coppola said:

My film is not a movie. My film is not about Vietnam. It *is* Vietnam. It’s what it was really like – it was crazy. And the way we made it was very much like the way the Americans were in Vietnam. We were in the jungle, there were too many of us, we had access to too much money, too much equipment, and little by little we went insane. (transcript by Rosenbaum 136)

Here, creating the film is mixed with reality itself. The objective truth is transformed into the subjective creation of Francis Ford Coppola. For Baudrillard, the war is turned into a show in *Apocalypse Now*, something that induces more and more production. This is implied in Coppola’s comment on the budget that was dedicated to making the movie. In that sense, the film changed the meaning of the Vietnam war itself, turning it into “the overwhelming sacrificial deployment of a power already filming itself during its unfolding, maybe waiting for nothing but the consecration of a superfilm which completes the mass-spectacle effect of this war” (Baudrillard *Simulacres* 90).

Hyperrealism in *Apocalypse Now* lies, for Baudrillard, in the simulation of a truth which seemingly does not exist. If a film deals with the representation of history, he argues it is

because contemporary history lacks a strong identity with an identifiable frame of references – “The great event of this era, its great trauma, is the decline of strong referentials, the decline of the real and the rational that open onto an age of simulation” (*Simulacres* 70). This is exactly what postmodernists try to play with in cinema. A classic, straightforward example of simulation is probably the Wachowskis’s *The Matrix* (1999). At the very beginning of the film, Neo wakes up and opens a copy of *Simulacra and Simulation* (fig. 7).



Figure 7 Neo opens *Simulacra and Simulation* on the chapter “On Nihilism” (08:40)

The chapter “On Nihilism” appears to be in the middle of the book when in fact it is the last chapter of *Simulacra and Simulation* – starting page 227 on 234 in the version I am using. This scene exemplifies and plays with this “decline of the real and the rational” (Baudrillard *Simulacres* 70). The audience is forced into thinking and tries to decipher what is real and what is not. Later on, the film keeps playing with the duality between reality and simulacrum. For instance, the protagonist’s identity itself is split between Thomas Anderson, the computer programmer in the simulated world, and Neo, ‘The One’, guided by the Oracle to understand what the Matrix is.

c. The Politics of Postmodernism

The close link between metafiction and postmodernism was discussed partially earlier on, but it is important to understand the strong link between both concepts, since postmodern theory can help deciphering the presence of metafictional elements in cinema. Patricia Waugh explains in her book that “metafiction is a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism” (22). In literature, the two concepts are heavily intertwined. So much so that John Barth wrote that postmodernist critics were “also called “metacritics”” (194). Patricia Waugh argues that both metafiction and postmodernism have a critical gaze on their artificiality (22). This is something that can be found in Hutcheon’s definition of postmodernism through, notably, the idea that a postmodernist artwork or current of thought “subverts [...] the very concepts it challenges” (*Postmodernism* 3). A good

illustration might be the aforementioned *The Matrix*. The strong link between Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperrealism and the film has been put forth previously. However, academic William Merrin has been interested with the way this film fits into Baudrillard's theory of cinema. He argues that Baudrillard would oppose the film's aesthetics – "This is *film itself* as a techno-chic object of consumption; as style, statement, and pure sign-object" (2003: 9). Upon commenting on the lack of distinction between reality and fiction in *The Matrix*, Baudrillard himself has argued the film is flawed: "*Matrix* is [...] an extravagant object, both ingenuous and perverse, which has no depth" (qtd. in Grolleau). Yet, exposing these aesthetics sheds light on our own consumer status. Merrin writes in his book *Baudrillard and the Media*, "Our consumption of the films, the merchandise, and the world and myth the Wachowskis sell us, and our collective orgasm over the effects and phones, guns, shades, and leather, represent our integration into the virtuality it promotes." (2005: 131). In short, the film is highly critical of what it showcases. Linda Hutcheon links metafiction and postmodernism as such:

the formal and self-consciousness of metafiction today is paradigmatic of most of the cultural forms of what Jean-François Lyotard calls our "postmodern" world – from television commercials to movies, from comic books to video art. We seem fascinated lately by the ability of our human systems to refer to themselves in an endless mirroring process. (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* xii)

This world *The Matrix* both promotes and subverts belongs to the wider critique of contemporary consumption in postmodern – and metafictional – theory.

These social and political issues in postmodern theory are often discussed in films. Indeed, when it comes to movie themes, Boggs mentions that postmodern cinema often deals with "ambiguity, chaos, and dystopia [...] alienation, conflict, rebellion and mayhem" (353-354). Postmodernism deals with the exploration of "the pulses and rhythms of this society" that is "riven with conflict and turbulence" (Boggs 354), thus indicating a fashion for time bending and disorientation. Among a few films, he gives the examples of *The Godfather* (1972), *Annie Hall* (1977), or *Blade Runner* (1982). The latter is a science fiction, neo-noir film directed by Ridley Scott which deals with the elimination – or rather, the 'retirement', as the opening scene names it – of replicants, slaves created by a corporation to serve humans. Carl Boggs justifies this type of scenario by saying:

As entrenched myths of the American Dream (and the American Century) began to unravel, filmmaking mirrored the changes and turbulence in the extreme, pushed along by the decline of the stuffy and increasingly obsolete studio empires that had governed Hollywood since the turn of the century. (Boggs 353)

Alienation, time bending and disorientation onscreen result from a sort of American disenchantment. These are themes that appear clearly in the plot of *Blade Runner*, but also in its aesthetics. When Deckard, the protagonist charged to kill replicants, visits the Tyrell corporation, the scenery is quite phantasmagorical (fig. 8).

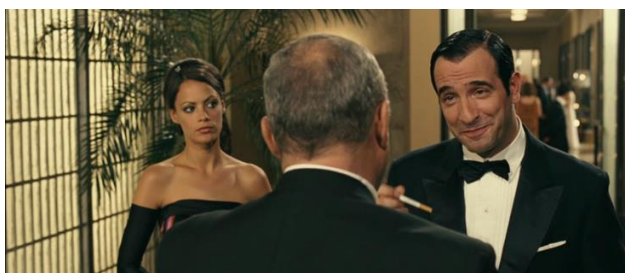


Figure 8 Deckard visits the Tyrell corporation, a place between order and disorder (17:12)

At first glance, the clear sense of authority lies behind the symmetry of the shot. The columns all face each other, and all look the same. However, the light is disrupted by the unsymmetrical buildings in the background. They break the order that was established by the columns in the foreground – this place is not as perfect as it seems to be. Even the yellowish light that starkly contrasts with the bleak depiction of the rest of the city is tainted by a strong *chiaroscuro* typical of Noir films, suggesting a sign of corrupted wealth. Time bending, though not indicated in the narrative process, is indicated by the props and architecture. Greek columns, pyramidal and futuristic buildings, and the hidden Victorian furniture on the side give the audience a feeling of being lost in time. This serves the purpose of postmodern films, showing a critical gaze on the representation of the structures of society. As Giuliana Bruno writes, “the pertinence and uniqueness of architecture to specific places, cultures and times has been lost in postmodernism. The metropolis of *Blade Runner* quotes not only from different spatial structures but from temporal ones as well.” (66). As such, *Blade Runner* explores representations of temporality through several postmodern themes. Bruno considered that *Blade Runner*’s aesthetics are a “pastiche” that “attempts a recollection of the past, of memory, and of history.” (67).

d. The Postmodern Style

Indeed, postmodernism can also be displayed through “irony, pastiche and parody”, which themselves are tools in cinema that allow (at least) reflexivity, or a critique of the mechanics the Industry has created at large (Constable 2). For instance, Hutcheon argues that parody includes irony in its very definition. She asserts postmodern parody is “both a respectful – if problematized – awareness of cultural continuity and a need to adapt to changing formal demands and social conditions through an ironic contesting of the authority of that same continuity” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 107). The early films of Michel Hazanavicius, for instance, can be considered as parodies. Indeed, the director was originally interested by appropriation. His most famous appropriation film is *Le Grand Détournement: La Classe Américaine* (1993), which eventually led him to explore parody without using existing material. He said, “My approach to playing, [...] writing [...] and even filming comes from *La Classe Américaine*” (Konbini 0:01). His film *OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies* (2006) uses conventions of the spy stereotype to mock the genre. Hubert Bonnisseur de La Bath, the protagonist, is based on Jean Bruce’s eponymous character from the 1949 *OSS 117* novels. However, the hero becomes a complete antihero in the film. Hazanavicius made of Bonnisseur de La Bath a 1950/1960s *franchouillard*, an all too confident chauvinistic spy. Hutcheon’s irony in parody lies in the excesses *OSS 117* represents onscreen. As it stands out, one could even say Hubert tries too hard, and this is where the parody finds itself in *OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies*. For instance, a scene in the film shows *OSS 117* meeting people who (he will later know) are his enemies. One of them offers Hubert a cigarette, to which he answers “Thank you! I’m trying to start smoking.” (fig. 9).



Figures 9&10 OSS 117 accepts his first cigarette while Connery uses it as a sign of power (31:06; 55:45)

Meanwhile, Sean Connery’s James Bond in *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962) smokes a cigarette to assert his power over an enemy he just tricked (fig. 10). By admitting he is trying to start smoking, Hazanavicius’s *OSS 117* is emasculating the spy figure, showing weakness where none is usually allowed in the spy film. The cigarette, here, acts as the “awareness of the cultural

continuity” Hutcheon talks about, though this very element is subverted in *OSS 117*. This shows that “parody points out at once to and beyond cinematic textuality to the ideological formation of the subject by our various cultural representations.” (Hutcheon *The Politics of Postmodernism* 109). Parody is thus a useful tool to understand the critical apparatus postmodernists use to challenge the traditions of filmmaking. However, it is not the sole motif there is to identify postmodernity in cinema. It is also important to note that a parody is not always postmodern, for its intent sometimes only resides in a comical effect – which is arguably the case in *Cairo, Nest of Spies*.

According to Jameson, pastiche differs from parody when it is “amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter [...] pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs” (Jameson *Postmodernism*). Pastiche is here presented as an emptied version of parody, incapable of providing a convincing meta-narrative. Despite this critique, Jameson includes pastiche as a sign of postmodernity. Eric Blake defines postmodern art as “pastiche”, “in both senses of the word: referring to already-established works (or at least styles of works – genres, if you will), via intertextuality, homage, and “simulation”, and creating conglomerations of such references not normally held to “go together”” (34). One may note Blake’s definition includes the Baudrillardian notion of simulation mentioned above, linked with the relative importance of realism in postmodern movies. This layer of realism is what Damien Chazelle has tried to put forth in his whimsical *La La Land* (2016). The director uses pastiche as a way to pay tribute to Hollywood musical movies. For example, the *Someone in the Crowd* dance number in *La La Land* refers to the pictorial roots of the musical film *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969). Indeed, both films showcase women in colorful dresses singing in unison (fig. 11&12).



Figures 11&12 Similar costumes in *La La Land* and *Sweet Charity* (12:05; 39:10)

This reference is one of many in the film. Jesús Palacios, a film critic, wrote that “Chazelle mixes the tradition of the Hollywood musical film with postmodern deconstruction [...] he uses the language of the genre to tell something different.” (#0 03:48). Contrary to what Fredric Jameson underlined, pastiche is a means to create something new out of the old. Pastiche can

even “blend high and low culture” (Young 34), which hints at the second part of Blake’s definition – i.e. references that usually do not go together. ‘Raising the lowly’ is a subject that we will come back to later on in this dissertation as Quentin Tarantino often uses this technique in his films.

Postmodernity can also be displayed through form and editing. Bordwell specifies that “by the late 60s, directors were comfortable with a wide range of lens lengths and several were using the two extremes quite boldly” (143). This change in narration and style was the result of the end of the studio era. The studio era was mostly guided by the Hays Code. The Hays Code (or Production Code) was a set of moral guidelines established by William Hays in 1930. These guidelines had to be respected in all American motion pictures. For example, they prevented filmmakers from showcasing adultery, sympathy towards criminals or general brutality. In his thesis on violence in American films, James Kendrick specifies that “when the MPPDA reworked the Production Code in 1934 [...] instances of gruesome violence [...] were no longer acceptable” (34). In terms of narration, Bordwell explains storylines followed “classical continuity” in which there are “principles [...] that assure that the spectator understands how the story moves forward in space and time” (*Hollywood* 119). The camera needed to be at the right place at the right time. In the 1960s, Bordwell claims there was a new type of composition known as a type of postclassical narration, “intensified continuity” along with the loosening of the Hays Code and which is made of “rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements” (Ibid., 121). One of its most famous examples is the use of close-ups or extreme close-ups in the Western genre. Sergio Leone is particularly fond of these shots and uses them several times (fig.13).

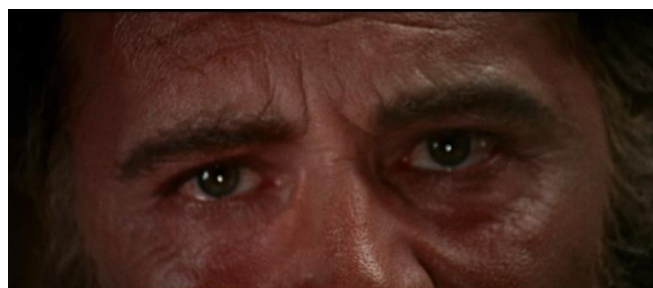


Figure 13 Extreme close-up on Morton’s eyes in Leone’s Once Upon a Time in the West (01:51:51)

Here, this extreme close-up emphasizes emotions and the individual. Very often in postmodern films, subjectivity is put forth as a way to engage with the audience. Jessica Murrell discusses this issue in her thesis on postmodern subjectivity, arguing there is a link between Bordwell’s

postclassical narration and postmodern subjectivity in contemporary cinema. She says, “Given that narrative – in its popular, Hollywood articulation – is a hegemonic cultural form, its capacity to both reflect and construct the subject is considerable” (Murrell 1). In his essay on postmodernism, Brian Patrick Young argues that the elements that shape intensified continuity are “quintessentially postmodern” (8) partly because ‘intensified continuity’ challenges filmmaking traditions. Since standardization was out of the picture, technicality in cinema evolved towards something more radical. This scheme of intensified continuity belongs to postmodernism and metafiction in the way it subverts traditions to go beyond what was then accepted as the norm.

More broadly, postmodernism means experimenting with form. In that way, another element that defines contemporary films according to Bordwell is temporal fragmentation, or non-linear narratives – something that mirrors Bruun Madsen’s composition meta. For example, Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000) has a fragmented narrative structure. It is built around its protagonist’s mental condition – short term memory losses or anterograde amnesia. Indeed, since his wife’s death, Leonard Shelby cannot store new memories and forgets what happened to him every fifteen minutes or so. Christopher Nolan centered the structure around this. He says, “I spent months just banging my head against the wall trying to come up with the notion of ‘how do you give the audience experience of not being able to remember things?’” (Lessons from the Screenplay 02:01). The movie alternates between black and white and colour sequences. The colour scenes are shown backwards and are highly subjective. The black and white scenes are shown chronologically and are a little less subjective than the colour ones. The ending of the film is a mixture of these two types of shots. In an interview on the film’s structure, Nolan explains it was his way to explore “the tension between our subjective view of the world in which we have to experience life, and our faith in an objective reality beyond that” (06:51). Though the director seems to have been heavily inspired by Baudrillard’s concepts, the structure (rather than storyline) serves his postmodern questioning. It works along the line of the general postmodern fashion for disorientation and for “a classicism faced with the postmodern dissolution of its naïve claims regarding the unity of form and content, experience and representation” (Toth 24). Here, the way the narrative is built questions our own understanding of the mind and the world we live in.

All in all, the common feature between the broad aspects of postmodernism is depthlessness. Jessica Murrell writes that “depthlessness pervades all aspects of the postmodern: fragmentation is imbricated with the absence of historical depth; similarly, the

effacement of the referent that gives rise to simulation can be viewed as rendering the signifier as without depth.” (61). The absence of depth is deeply linked with identity and subjectivity as it often reflects on our relationship with the world and the Real – and this is also why it is easy to link it with the ideas of fragmentation or simulation. Murrell illustrates depthlessness with Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* (2000). She argues that protagonist Patrick Bateman has no interiority, and that the very idea of character representation is challenged in the film. For instance, the scene when Bateman applies a facial mask in front of a mirror and reflects on his identity is very telling:

There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours, and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable, I simply am not there. (Harron 06:40)

Here, Bateman overtly explains he is devoid of any personality or subjectivity. Murrell argues that peeling off the mask “conceals nothing and thus, in its removal, reveals nothing more than that which was already visible behind it.” (74) Yet, aesthetics trumps the audience as his reflection is displayed on a mirror through a point-of-view shot, which is often interpreted as a sign of self-reflexivity (fig. 14).



Figure 14 The illusion of a self-reflexive scene in American Psycho (06:53)

Here, Bateman is said to lack a personal identity and shown as having one. Harron offers an ironic character representation and subverts the very meaning of subjectivity in film. Hence, postmodern depthlessness is metafictional when it comes to character representation as it can offer a meta-discourse on character representation and subjectivity in film. All the aforementioned postmodern tropes help significantly in the understanding of cinematic metafiction.

e. Are Metafiction and Postmodernism the Same?

The last big issue this theoretical part needs to investigate is whether metafiction and postmodernism are one and the same. After all, postmodernism has a lot in common with metafiction. As we have seen, it explores the limit between truth (or reality) and fiction (or simulacra), it comments on the traditions of filmmaking (in the case of cinema) and contemporary politics, and both movements have resulted from historical disillusion and/or unhappiness with traditional narrative techniques. Again, the threshold between the two concepts seems blurry. Some academics think metafiction and postmodernism differ in their approach. For instance, critic Sarah Lauzen explains metafiction is a formal term, when postmodernism is a (socio)historical one (Dai and Huang 65). Some others think one belongs to the other. As seen earlier, Patricia Waugh believes metafiction is part of the broader movement of postmodernism, but that “nearly all contemporary experimental writing displays *some* explicitly metafictional strategies” (22). In short, for Waugh, metafiction is a practice that has been around in literature for as long as the novel has existed and is still very present, while postmodernism is a movement that is inscribed in time, starting after the First World War. While those differences are important, I would argue that cinematic metafiction draws attention to the representation of sociohistorical or political issues. By putting forward its constructed nature, cinematic metafiction offers representations and meta-discourses on history or identity politics. Even if the origins of metafiction are not as historically loaded as those of the postmodern movement, it proposes a significant meta-discourse that entails an analysis of history, film history and broader politics.

In that sense, the postmodern strategies mentioned in this subpart also help understand some works in cinema. For instance, Quentin Tarantino’s cinema can be analyzed as such.

1.3. Quentin Tarantino: Some Background on his Directorial Style and his Latest Film

a. Quentin Tarantino and Postmodernism

One may wonder why study Quentin Tarantino’s style through a postmodern or metafictional lens. As it happens, the Oxford English Dictionary created an entry in 2018 for the word “Tarantinoesque” as “Resembling or imitative of the films of Quentin Tarantino;

characteristic or reminiscent of these films. Tarantino's films are typically characterized by graphic and stylized violence, non-linear storylines, cineliterate references, satirical themes, and sharp dialogue" (OED). Nonetheless, this definition does not give complete justice to the works of the director. Tarantino has often argued that his films were made to trigger a reaction in the audience. His cinema is one of emotions, one that invites you to go through a wide range of feelings. In order to do that, the director has said "I want to play you, I want to be the conductor and you're my orchestra and [I decide of] the sounds that I get you to make and the feelings I get you to feel and then I stop you from feeling those feelings. [...] If the director can pull it off, that's a real lucky audience member" (Dan Rather 01:10) While triggering emotions is universally acknowledged to be one of the major effects of cinema on people, manipulating an audience into going through specific emotions at a certain time in the film requires some mastery according to the director. In an interview on violence in his films, Tarantino explains that if the audience comes out of his violent movies smiling, it is because he manages to provoke "contradictory emotions" (01:03) within them. The relationship the director creates with the audience is thus extremely important for the director. This means Tarantino puts himself at the audience's place and traces a route for them in order to subvert the experience they have as cinemagoers. Hence, this manipulation of emotions implies that traditional filmmaking is subverted in order to challenge the spectator's expectations. Under this limelight, it is relevant to study Tarantino's style as a metafictional or postmodern one.

Quentin Tarantino has often been considered a postmodern director. Brian Patrick Young goes as far as to say that "virtually every discussion of postmodern, cutting-edge filmmaking includes an examination of the works of Quentin Tarantino" (31). The most striking postmodern element in Tarantino's cinema is probably the aforementioned idea of pastiche. In an interview, Quentin Tarantino said, "We have a little mantra that me and the crew have been doing a long time where we say: "Okay, we've got it. But we're going to do one more. And why are we gonna do one more?" and then the whole crew screams out "Because we love making movies!" (FilmIsNow 05:53). Even if he never studied cinema at school or at university, the director is known for his love for cinema and cinematic references. He grew up with a fascination for films and developed his encyclopaedical knowledge of cinematic genres and style when he worked in a Manhattan Beach California video rental store called "Video Archives". He explains in another interview, "Our specialty was foreign films, classics, TV shows, you know, this oddball stuff. I had like the shelf and every week I would do a new theme. The films of Michael Parks, the films of Andre DeToth. You know, that store was my

one source of artistic expression” (StudioBinder 01:58). Among some critiques that have been made towards Tarantino was that his experience as a moviegoer transpired heavily into his own work, bordering on plagiarism. However, these critiques never really seemed to bother the director though, as he overtly answered with a metaphor:

I don't consider myself just as a director, but as a movie man who has the whole treasure of the movies to choose from and can take whatever gems I like, twist them around, give them new form, bring things together that have never been matched up before. But that should never become referential to the point of stopping the movement of the film. (Tarantino qtd. in Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret)

This knowledge has often led him to mix Hollywood genres in one single film, to the point where academics have assigned terms such as “genre-blender” to his cinema. Eric Blake explains in his essay “Genre, Justice and Quentin Tarantino” that genre-blending happens when “when a film does not adhere to one specific genre [...] but does not shy away from the concept of genre [...] either – instead taking various genres as if they were ingredients, and then “blending” them into its narrative, creating a curious new whole” (33). Tarantino often refers to diverse film genres in his motion pictures. For example, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), or *Death Proof* (2007) all make different references to exploitation cinema. The first two films are also inspired by the gangster movie. *Kill Bill* (2003) engages with Japanese action classics and Bruce Lee films, as well as Western genre tropes. *Jackie Brown* (1997) draws on Blaxploitation films, even starring one of its main actresses, Pam Grier. Indeed, his works have been filled with an association of high and low forms of art since his career started. This technique of blending different forms of art belongs to the concept of pastiche itself. For instance, *Death Proof* (2007), which is originally a double feature coupled with Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* (2007) titled *Grindhouse*. Grindhouse films designate exploitation films which emerged in the 1950s. Those movies were paired together in theater when they were struggling after the advent of television. A lot of sub-genres emerged from those films such as cannibal or carsploitation films. Editing meant physically cutting the film and sometimes the audience would see scratches onscreen due to manipulating the celluloid (fig. 15).



Figure 15 Scratches onscreen, typical of grindhouse films (06:31)

Death Proof is a product of those niche exploitation films, originally fairly unpopular, along with horror and slasher movies. Additionally, the film also draws from several American classic road movies such as *Vanishing Point* (Richard C. Sarafian, 1971). In that sense, *Death Proof* is a combination of high and low culture. By releasing the film, Tarantino wanted to put in the limelight those small 1970s genres and subgenres that were disappearing. For this reason, he has often been described as a “director as DJ” because of “this cut-and-paste, mix-and-match directorial style [which] is similar to that of a music DJ, who borrows sounds from older songs and combines them to create a new song through a process called “sampling”” (Rennett 392). Tarantino is aware of this influence in his body of work, which makes it his own way to “regenerate cinema and, literally, to save film” (292), as David Roche put it in his work on metafiction in Tarantino’s films. Using references to numerous films does not prevent him from offering a completely unique version of the year 1969. His use of existing cinematic material is never mere borderline plagiarism, but an attempt to cast a new light on events, stories, styles, or genre tropes.

The very definition of ‘Tarantinoesque’ gives us material to study postmodern aesthetics. Indeed, the director is often associated with a renowned postmodern device – narrative fragmentation. The most famous motion picture in his filmography that showcases a fragmented non-linear narrative is *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The basis of Tarantino’s work was to create three crime stories, but to twist these stories to give them something extra special. He thus wrote the stories of Vincent Vega, Butch, and Jules and gave them titles – respectively “Vincent Vega and Marsellus’s Wife”, “The Gold Watch” and “The Bonnie Situation”. However, those events unfold in a non-linear way. “The Gold Watch” story is a flashforward because it is set after the events of “The Bonnie Situation”. Consequently, *Pulp Fiction* plays with people’s expectations. More than this, Brian Patrick Young argues that this jumbling of time is another way for Tarantino to subvert the traditions of filmmaking and that it comes from

a continuous exploration of narrative devices. He says, “non-linear films may also bring to light the artificiality of storytelling and process of narrative creation, but they do so by relying on the audience’s understanding of the way that narrative time works and has worked historically in film” (Young 8). Hence, *Pulp Fiction*’s non-linear narrative corresponds to the concept of composition meta put forward by Rune Bruun Madsen in his typology of cinematic metafiction.

When it comes to metafiction, the title *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* says it all. Not only does it imply that the film is going to play with Hollywood and the Industry in a fictional work, but it also refers to the western *à la* Leone, in the style of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). From the beginning, the audience knows Rick Dalton plays bounty hunter Jake Cahill on TV. Spectators thus understand they are going to be faced with a comment on the industry with tropes that Hollywood uses itself. Moreover, Quentin Tarantino’s film can be considered a metafilm that matches Marc Cerisuelo’s definition – it showcases characters that take part in the landscape of the Hollywoodian industry. Whether they were existing characters or not, most of the main characters participate in the making of movies. A few names that the audience can associate with the industry in the film are Rick Dalton, Cliff Booth, Sharon Tate, Roman Polanski, Bruce Lee or Marvin Schwarz, etc. The director put great care in rendering 1969 as he imagined it. His imagination and style heavily influenced the final material that makes *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* as we know it. His latest film is probably the one that offers the most straight-forward depiction of cinema reflecting on cinema. Indeed, Tarantino exposes in his film a very particular moment in film history that is the rise of the New Hollywood era. A little context is needed in order to fully understand the impact of film history on the film itself.

b. The Background to *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*

As we discussed earlier, Hollywood films before the 1960s were governed by the rules of the Hays Code. Moral values were so important that a lot of narrative and aesthetical devices were prohibited. 1968 marks the end of the Hays Code when these former codes were completely broken. Moral and cinematic codes could thus respectively be contested and revisited, which resulted in a more daring content. Hence, after the end of the studio system and the end of vertical integration (which meant the same company produced, distributed and released films), the population that was attending cinema screenings starkly decreased. The change within the system had brought a new way of perceiving cinema and thus, the Industry had to think of a new way of attracting people.

On December 8, 1967, the new Time Magazine issue featured *Bonnie and Clyde* as cover illustration (fig. 16) by Robert Rauschenberg. Its title was “THE NEW CINEMA: VIOLENCE... SEX... ART...” which straight-forwardly displayed the key elements that made the New Hollywood thought-provoking and experimental. The cover illustration is full of bright colours, depicting an extravagant and refreshing new type of cinema.

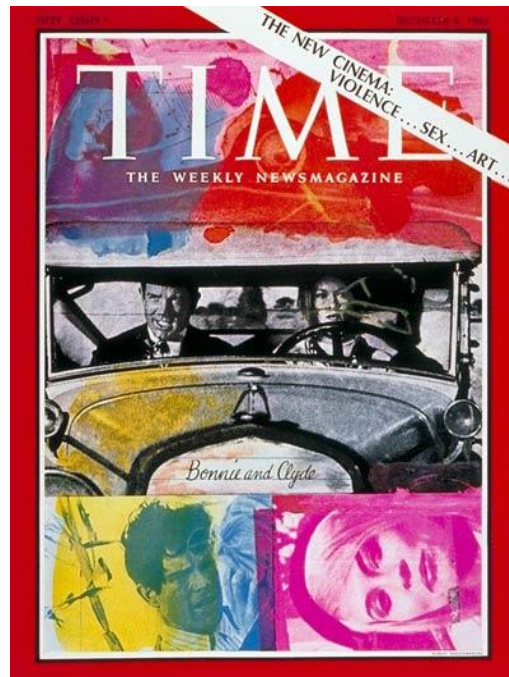


Figure 16 Cover illustration of the August 9, 1969 issue of the Time Magazine

In the article that can be found in this issue, “Hollywood: the Shock of Freedom in Films”, the editorialist specifies that *Bonnie and Clyde* was, “to a growing consensus of audiences and critics, the best movie of the year” (TIME staff 1) as well as “intellectually demanding, emotionally fulfilling” (2). What is it that made such an impression of renewal and success on Time Magazine? 1967 was a turning point in the cinema industry with the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* or *The Graduate*. What made them so famous was their appeal to counterculture movements and more broadly, the youth. In his book on the New Hollywood, Peter Krämer puts forward the prevalence of pop music, soundtracks that appeared on Billboard’s album charts – *The Graduate* was “at the very heart of the youth culture” with its soundtrack by Simon & Garfunkel, ‘Mrs Robinson’, “one of the top-selling singles of the year” (8).

New Hollywood films such as *The Graduate* have heavily inspired Quentin Tarantino throughout his career, before he even wrote a movie set in this era. For instance, the opening

scene of *Jackie Brown* (1997) resembles *The Graduate*'s. Both Jackie and Benjamin are in an airport, waiting on a moving walkway and shown through a tracking shot from right to left (fig. 17&18). The way they are presented to the audience accentuates their passivity and suggests they are at a similar stage in their lives.



Figures 17&18 Similar opening scenes in *The Graduate* and *Jackie Brown* (01:03; 00:58)

However, the characters can be contrasted on other levels. Their mindset is described through different extra-diegetic soundtracks – *Across 110th Street* by Bobby Womack for Jackie Brown and *The Sound of Silence* for Benjamin Braddock. As such, their personalities are also emphasized by a set of colors that are blues for Jackie and a greyish atmosphere for Benjamin. In that way, Jackie is displayed as a bold and brave woman, while Benjamin appears as a character that lacks confidence. Tarantino was already interested in the aesthetics and politics of the New Hollywood era in his previous works and drew from them to create new pieces.

If Tarantino was so appealed by this type of cinema, it is probably because it revolutionized the way people saw film at the time. In general, the content of New Hollywood films was much more daring and exhaustive, showcasing “sympathetic portrayals of criminals”, “scenes of intense and graphic violence” and “casual affairs” (33). More than ‘violence for the sake of violence’, these films explored “social divisions and group conflicts in American society” (36) where women are barely given a place or a voice, and when they do, it is only to be defined through the scope of a relationship which are “characterized by seemingly unresolvable problems” (34). However, the male experience was at the center of New Hollywood films, whether it depicted male bonding or male conflicts. This is illustrated in *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), or *The Sting* (George Roy Hill, 1973), for example. The year 1969 was especially interesting when it comes to this aspect as many films depicted the “odd couple” or the buddy relationship as they “focused on friendships and partnerships between men” (13). *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* by George Roy Hill, also released in 1969, represents the epitome of this new kind of film. In this movie, Paul Newman and Robert

Redford are two outlaws who have to go to Bolivia to find a new career as they are wanted in the United States. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* is the predecessor to many other similar films. In his book, Krämer gives examples such as *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1972), *Papillon* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1973), or *All the President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976). (13). In that sense, Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio mirror Paul Newman and Robert Redford and recreate this fashion for the odd couple in Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. Setting his film in 1969 thus means recreating the essence of a transitional period, a moment when the industry was radically changing.

Additionally, the film is set in Los Angeles, making the geographical Hollywood the center of attention in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, and putting forward the myth of the 'California Dream'. What it meant to be California Dreaming in the 1960s is well exemplified by the 1965 record "California Dreamin'" by The Mamas & The Papas. There, they expressed their longing to return to California while they were in New York. "California Dreamin'" represents an ideal that has been prevailing in the United States and in films for the last two centuries. Historically, California has been the representation of the expansion to the West, the gold rush and the symbol of betterment in one's life. In the 1850s, after James Marshall discovered gold in Coloma, "the golden news spread beyond California to the outside world, it triggered the most astonishing mass movement of peoples since the Crusades" (Brands 28) Benjamin Schwarz states in his article in *The Atlantic* that "From the end of the Second World War to the mid-1960s, California consolidated its position as an economic and technological colossus and emerged as the country's dominant political, social, and cultural trendsetter" (Schwarz) At this time, the Golden State was the mirror of people's desires, a sort of American Dream. While the song showcases a positive image of a "safe and warm" (The Mamas and the Papas) California, it also describes a bitter state of mind, the representation of these changes. With the aimless deaths of the Vietnam War, people became more disillusioned with the American Dream. Indeed, Vibeke Sorensen explains that "Many Americans and even more Vietnamese died in the Vietnam War, and as body bags came home, people all over the country questioned the values they felt led to such senseless loss of life." (Sorensen) According to Steven Flurry, "sun-rushers who poured into the Golden State during the 1960s quickly saw the California dream turn to a nightmare." (Flurry) The theme of California Dreamin' is also something that is found within the Industry. From *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and Norma Desmond's obsessive need to never be forgotten by the public to *La La Land* (2016) and Mia and Sebastian's desire to reach the star status in Los Angeles, making it in California has also

been of huge interest within the cinema industry and films themselves. It is then no surprise that the song ‘California Dreamin’ plays on both an extra-diegetic and diegetic level in the film when Rick and Cliff go home after a long day of work (01:53:09). As Christopher Ames said in his book *Movies about Movies* “‘Dream’ and ‘magic’ are terms that have been associated with the medium from its inception, and Hollywood has been complicit in furthering those associations” (5). Tarantino’s movie hence also deals with the illusion of a dream that kept being questioned with the rise of the New Hollywood.

The director sets his characters in this transitional period, where Californians grew weary and delusional when faced with the shadow of a dream. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is a tribute to this transitional year but also a remembrance of what ended this very moment for many people – the Tate murders at Cielo Drive. Sharon Tate was director Roman Polanski’s wife. On August 9, 1969, the eight-month pregnant Tate and several of her friends were killed by three members of the Manson Family. In his podcast on the film, Robbie Collin claims “the death of Sharon Tate at the hands of the Manson Family – and her friends as well – was the point at which the entire film industry zigzagged off in a completely different direction.” (01:04). This year was crucial and cemented the change Hollywood was experiencing. Joan Didion, a Californian writer and screenwriter, lived on Franklin Avenue in Los Angeles. Her life gravitated around Hollywood and the people who worked there. In her book, *The White Album*, she recalls the night when the murders occurred:

On August 9, 1969, I was sitting in the shallow end of my sister-in-law’s swimming pool in Beverly Hills when she received a telephone call from a friend who had just heard about the murders at Sharon Tate Polanski’s house on Cielo Drive. The phone rang many times during the next hour. These early reports were garbled and contradictory. One caller would say hoods, the next would say chains. There were twenty dead, no, twelve, ten, eighteen. Black masses were imagined, and bad trips blamed. I remember all of the day’s misinformation very clearly, and I also remember this, and wish I did not: *I remember that no one was surprised.* (Didion 42)

For Didion, the lack of surprise was due to a “mystical flirtation with ‘sin’ – this sense that it was possible to go ‘too far’, and that many people were doing it” inherent to 1968 and 1969 (41). Thus, Tarantino leaves the audience with a very culturally and historically loaded era, thus challenging the politics of the late 1960s. Peter Biskind explains in his book *Easy Riders*,

Raging Bulls that there was a general lurid desire to have been part of the whole story, “as if people wanted to have been part of it, slaughtered like animals for some dark purpose of their own [...] as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Butch Cassidy*, and *Easy Rider* had fantasized it, it was much better, more frightening, more compelling: Manson was themselves, a hippie, the essence of the ‘60s” (79). It became a sort of fantasy lurking over perversion for Tate’s relatives and friends to have taken part in all this. They could have been there. This whole mystification, sense of excess, and loss of the California Dream inspired Tarantino to make his own version of the year 1969, placing it in this context of general frenzy. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is built around the end of an era, before it all unofficially changed.

Tarantino’s version of this transitional period, where the California Dream was tainted with fear, is a revision of what really happened, an alternate history. Much to the likes of Tarantino’s previous *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) and *Django Unchained* (2013), the audience’s expectations of historical accuracy are challenged. History is reshaped by the director and turns the film into a “history-as-wish-fulfilment” (Hassenger), which blurs the threshold between reality and the Tarantino Universe. In *Inglourious Basterds*, *Django Unchained* and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, outcomes feel cathartic. Respectively, Hitler’s body is getting riddled by Donowitz’s submachine gun to the point it turns to mush, Django becomes a hero of the West (a bounty hunter) and reverses the roles of slavery, and the Manson Family are killed in extremely violent circumstances – Tex is emasculated by Brandy, Sadie is burnt to death by Rick’s flamethrower and Katie has her head bashed several times on the wall by Cliff. Yet, these uchronias do not exist for the sake of playfulness. For instance, Josh Toth has written upon analysing *Inglourious Basterds* that “if anything, the film simply twists or inverts a seemingly playful revenge fantasy into a fairly overt commentary on America’s treatment of others, and its tendency to ignore the “details” of its past” (9). The stakes are highly political in these films. Toth’s work is heavily influenced by Linda Hutcheon – it is not surprising since she worked on postmodernism and argued that the term is by essence political. She created the concept of postmodern ‘historiographic metafiction’. She defines these metafiction as “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 5). Historiographic metafiction thus rewrite history, much to the likes of Tarantino in *Inglourious Basterds*, *Django Unchained* or *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. They are “self-reflexive” because they explore a link between reality and what is exposed to the characters. For Toth, this is particularly salient in the last (point of view) shot of

Inglourious Basterds. This frame showcases nazi Landa's perspective on lieutenant Raine and soldier Utivich carving a swastika on his forehead (fig. 19).



Figure 19 Point-of-view shot on Raine and Utivich (02:29:28)

This shot places the audience in the uncomfortable shoes of Landa, showcasing from a personal lens the violence we had been advocating from the beginning. At this very moment, Raine claims “I think this just might be my masterpiece” (02:29:30) as if he were looking for a sign of acknowledgment from both Utivich and the audience. It sounds as if Tarantino were making a statement about the film and this alternate history. Additionally, colonel Landa's desire to both complete and end the war appears as an act of perversion which mirrors the film's own – “its own overt and potentially self-satisfying rewriting of history, its apparent willingness to abandon the impossible Real, the past itself, the traumatic complexity of what *really happened*.” (Toth 14). This is well summed-up by Toth when he writes “everything, the film certainly suggests, is a matter of perspective; reality is only ever a fiction.” (14) and this might just as well be a masterpiece of alternate history.

Just as in *Inglourious Basterds* or *Django Unchained*, rewriting history is a fundamental metafictional element in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. History and film history are huge influences on Quentin Tarantino's style.

2. “YOU ARE REAL, RIGHT?” – HISTORY AND FILM HISTORY

2.1. Recollecting Hollywood: Between Fiction, Memory, and Reality

At the very end of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, Cliff witnesses the arrival of three Manson Family members at Rick’s house and asks one of them: “You are real, right?” (02:24:05). The latter answers “I’m as real as a doughnut”, only for the both of them to start laughing frantically. This simple moment is a way for Quentin Tarantino to comically insist on the importance of fiction within the film. As such, it is hard to start analysing the degree to which historical facts co-exist with fictionality in a film that straight-forwardly asserts its own belonging to the fictional world in its very title – *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. However, to set a film in 1969 is to represent certain social, cultural or political tropes, or even people that belonged to this particular moment in time. Quentin Tarantino mingled a fictional storyline with existing figures of the 1960s and characters created from scratch. This section is an analysis of the real-life figures, tropes and ideologies that were inherent to the year 1969 and that participate in the creation of a ‘simulacrum’ of this society.

a. Consumer Society and the Tarantino Universe

The first idea that comes to mind when thinking about the era is the idea of excessive consumption. The film shows or hints at different means of consumption. Consumerism and its excesses in the film are often tied to material goods, but also to art. Consumer culture rose in a post-war desire to reinforce the economy through the sale of disposable goods. Nigel Whiteley starts his essay on this idea.

The 1960s are often thought of as the decade of disposability. Expendability was indeed a central aspect of much of the culture of the 1960s: it was both a physical fact of many products, and a symbol of belief in the modern age. Obsolescence was not only accepted by the fashion-conscious young, often it was positively celebrated. An awareness of the role, meaning and significance of expendability is, therefore, crucial to a full understanding of 1960s' culture. (Whiteley)

This idea of expendability is very well translated in Tarantino’s films. Several ads encouraging the purchase of material goods are made throughout the film, notably through radio or TV ads. These radio ads are so intrinsically linked to the film that Tarantino added them to the album featuring the original motion picture soundtrack. Cliff and Rick often listen to KHJ (which stands for Kindness, Happiness, and Joy), a Los Angeles radio station. Hence, the fourth recording on the album is a Mug Root Beer Advertisement from KHJ. The ads in the film not only promote disposable goods, but also entertainment such as ads for films like *The Possessed* or *Batman*. The most striking ad for a disposable good is the credit scene which promotes Red Apple cigarettes. Rick’s character Jake Cahill boasts about the benefits of Red Apple (fig. 20). Only, when the camera cuts, the viewer finds out Rick cannot stand these cigarettes. In fact, Red Apple is Tarantino’s own fictitious brand of cigarettes. The brand appears several times in the film and is a characteristic element in Tarantino’s motion pictures. Indeed, it appears in several of his films. They are often shown on screen when the characters are smoking, but in *Kill Bill* for instance, the brand is also marketed through ads on panels (fig. 21).



Figures 20&21 Shots promoting the fictitious brand Red Apple (02:39:00/01:06:00)

While this helps build the Tarantino universe, the depiction of Red Apple is most straight forward in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. This type of advertising was so inherent to the 1960s that Tarantino had to make it a big part of his film, even if the brand itself is part of his fictional world. This participates in offering a representation of the era as realistic as possible through the use of fictional elements. Why not real instead of realistic though? Advertisement is something that intrinsically belongs to the world of the simulacrum, the ‘desert of the real’, according to Baudrillard. He describes the publicity market as unimaginative and devoid of any substance. He says, “There is no staging of the commodity anymore, only its obscene and emptied form. And advertising is the illustration of this saturated and emptied form.” (Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* 140). He uses the word “saturated” as overloaded with meaning, that it ultimately loses its substance. In an interview with cinematographer Robert Richardson, Bill Desowitz stresses that “Richardson achieved high color saturation with hints of blue and deeper skin tones, and pushed the grain for a crisp look.” (Desowitz). As such,

Tarantino saturates the film with visual and vocal advertisement which seems to recreate the Los Angeles (and the world) Baudrillard was criticising. On the other hand, by enhancing the colours of skin tones, Richardson additionally conveys a certain warmth that gives a dream-like quality to the shots. Overall, the colour palette effectively translates this “intersection of fiction and reality” (Desowitz). As the late 1960s were an era of excess, saturation is an effective tool to translate this idea.

In merging both the Tarantino universe and real radio ads, Quentin Tarantino acknowledges the postmodern postulate that the world is only made of signifiers, representations of realism. Another hint at this is the three issues of *TV Guide* that are shown respectively in Cliff’s van, at Rick’s place and at Sharon’s home. The first *TV Guide* issue shown onscreen is real. It is an original copy of the February 8-14, 1969 edition of the magazine (fig. 22) with a front illustration of *Mission:Impossible*. However, Rick’s issue is inspired by the August 1971 cover title “How the Stars fight the flab!”. Aesthetically though, the cover illustration aims at showing what Rick’s actor life must have been in the past. The illustration shows Jake Cahill on his horse in the same caricatural style the previous issue displayed (fig. 23).



Figures 22&23 *TV Guide* issues in Cliff’s van and Rick’s house (25:12/26:30)

While this attention to detail is striking, Tarantino manages to mix a realistic present with a fictionally constructed past. This is well summed-up through the real issue that appears at Sharon’s Cielo Drive house on the night of the murders. Voytek Frykowski reads the August 2-8, 1969 *TV Guide* showcasing Andrew Duggan, an actor playing in the real-life version of *Lancer*. His character is not shown onscreen in the fictional *Lancer* sequences, thus the issue blends nicely in the world Tarantino sends its audience in. As such, these issues tell a lot about how consumption in the film is a tool to create an alternate universe to 1969 and justify Rick Dalton’s life in this whole rendition. Tarantino also points at the importance of TV shows, as these issues are present at Rick, Cliff and Tate’s house – ranging through a number of different

social classes and people. This brings us back to our own condition of spectator in a dark room, underlying the hegemony of the media – both TV and cinema.

An element that adds a deeper layer to this postmodern picture of 1969 is the presence of Tarantino's memory of Los Angeles. He explained, "I was between six and seven years old, so the film became a big memory piece." (Entertainment Weekly 01:35). In this fashion, Tarantino interprets history rather than reproducing it completely. There is always an element of his own style in his rendition of Los Angeles mixed with what he remembers of Los Angeles. This is why radio ads are so important. He states, "a big part of my memory of Los Angeles at that time is being in the car with my stepfather [or] with my mum and listening to the radio play all the time and how we listened to the radio back then which is different from the way we listen to the radio now" (Entertainment Weekly 01:47). The overwhelming presence of the radio is thus a memory, a childhood recollection. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* displays a total of ten instances of radio announcements or ads, not counting the diegetic songs heard through the radio (03:20, 05:00, 14:42, 17:10, 17:38, 18:34, 24:47, 37:40, 01:20:25, 01:41:55). Here, rather than a postmodern sense of depthless subjectivity, Tarantino wanted to recreate a contemplative journey. After all, he considers the film as a big "memory piece" and even compared the film to what *Roma* is to Alfonso Cuarón – childhood memories (California Film Institute 16:00). Cliff's light blue Karmann Ghia was the exact same car his stepdad owned for instance. He added, "that camera angle looking up at Brad is pretty much my viewpoint of looking up at him as we would drive around in Los Angeles." (California Film Institute 17:19) He also mentions he added a lot of things he did not remember. However, the film is more infused with pieces of information that kids could navigate through such as KHG radio ads, rather than news about the Vietnam war for example. That is because Quentin Tarantino does not remember that 'adult' Los Angeles. In that sense, Tarantino offers a variety of layers of representations to create his final 1969 Los Angeles. In his description mingle the viewpoint of the child, the member of the Hollywood Industry, and the film lover. Here, this nostalgic aspect transforms this Los Angeles as a myth, an illusion. In a way, this recalls Jameson's "disappearance of sense of history" and how subjective creations are transformed into 'simulacra'.

b. Sharon Tate and the Manson Family: Characters Taken from a Historical Reality

To further this concept of hyperreality, Tarantino has implemented real-life personas to his plot. For instance, the Manson Family and Sharon Tate are the most memorable additions to the film, as they encapsulate an undergoing change in the United States. However, the way Tarantino dealt with their representation is drastically different.

The Manson Family members are represented by well-known facts of their lives. For instance, they did live at the Spahn Movie Ranch, Tex really said “I’m the devil and I’m here to do the devil’s business” (02:25:24) upon committing the Tate murders, and Manson was originally looking for Terry Melcher when he investigated on Cielo Drive. Yet, the Manson Family is a source of mystery for any character in the film. Upon watching the beginning of the film, the Manson Family seem to be solely part of the counterculture movement. Indeed, on several occasions in the film, we are reminded that the Manson Family are just “fucking hippie motherfuckers” (15:10). This is exactly what Rick says right before the Manson Family girls appear onscreen for the first time and he repeats “Bunch of goddamn fucking hippies” (02:14:14) again, before the fight in Rick’s house, when they park their car at Cielo Drive, reducing them to the very same terms throughout the film. Again, at the end of the film, Cliff still believes the three members who came to kill him were not perpetrators but “hippie assholes” (02:41:25). While Tarantino probably did not want to fully associate his depiction of the Manson Family members with real counterculture movements, there are hints that they adopt a similar conduct. For instance, this hippie image that Rick assigns to the Manson Family is represented through Pussycat’s hatred towards the police – we later find out that Pussycat is part of the Manson Family and lives at the Spahn Movie Ranch. She gives a middle finger to a police car right before Cliff picks her up in the middle of an intersection (fig. 24).



Figure 24 Cliff’s car is on the left and is going towards the right side of the frame (01:22:06)

Indeed, a gap between the American younger generation and the police was increasingly foreseeable during the 1960s and reached a climax after the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention. The Democratic party was divided on the issue of the Vietnam War and which policies to adopt while it was now the thirteenth year of fighting. The above-mentioned Youth International party (Yippies) and the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam organised a protest that further increased the ideological divergence between the police and counterculture movements. Frank Kush’s study shown that according to the police,

“the hippies and anti-war activists were likened to godless transients without respect for traditional values” (15), thus ungrateful for the future that has been built for them by previous generations. This image of a rebellious youth is sometimes mirrored through their conduct.

However, if they are showcased as such at first glance, their representation appeals to the audience’s historical knowledge. Of course, they could be hippies, but they are first and foremost cold-hearted murderers. While the name “Manson Family” is never clearly mentioned, the spectator is mediated to understand they are dangerous. As a matter of fact, they are often associated with a paradoxical behavior and excess. For instance, the paradox they incarnate is developed in their speech and the way they deal with capitalism. Tarantino uses the same approach Christopher Gair depicts in his book *The American Counterculture*, that is to say showing “the dependency of the counterculture to rely on the very capitalist structures that it often purported to despise” (2). The danger lies in the paradox counterculture movements embodied – both contesting and accepting capitalism for the sake of entertainment, which they hate for its violence. Right before the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence, Pussycat tells Cliff “Actors are phoney. They just say lines that other people write and pretend to murder people on stupid TV shows. Meanwhile, real people are murdered every day in Vietnam.” (01:24:20), implying that you cannot mess around with death, and that it is exactly what actors do. Violence in TV shows and cinema makes people violent. But the Manson Family spend their days in front of the TV listening to Paul Revere and the Raiders and watching *F.B.I.* or *Bonanza*. They reject something and adhere to it. It is no denying that we never see Pussycat watch a Western film or TV show in the film, but Lynette Fromme and her sidekicks do. During the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence, the camera evolves in several canted shot-reverse shots between Cliff and Lynette, closing up on their faces. One of these final shots breaks the obliquity of the previous shots in an extreme close-up on Lynette’s face while she explains that it is impossible for Cliff to come in as “me and George like to watch TV on Sunday night” (fig. 25), casting a particular importance on the TV watching.



Figure 25 Extreme close-up on Lynette Fromme (or Squeaky) (01:41:17)

Aesthetically speaking, the screen door placed between Cliff and Lynette shows the recurring idea of being trapped, adding a suffocating aspect to an intangible ideology. Later on, Tex and the three girls hold a similar discourse to Pussycat's, which supports the oddity of their behavior and displays the Manson Family as an entity rather than separate individuals.

They are also depicted through representations of excess. Tex and Sadie are easily going to extremes and quickly jumping to conclusions in their discussions, and while Sadie's idea comes from a "trip session", it is never used to justify their behavior. Rick himself is an alcoholic and has a heavy cigarette consumption. Rather than being a justification, it is used as a tool to describe unstable trains of thoughts, devoid of the possibility to rationalize things. Excess here is dealt with in a peculiar fashion, especially regarding violence. Sadie explains it very well when she says she wants to "kill the people who taught us to kill" (02:17:55) – an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. To counter the famous use of violence at the time, peace protests and art projects were made. For example, the building of the 'Tower of Peace' of Los Angeles in 1966 by several united artists acted as a barrier to the violence occurring in Vietnam. It served as political and artistic counterpower – as it was "a symbol of ruptures and tensions within the artistic avant-garde" (Gair 193). Where they differ from the counterculture movements themselves is that they respond to violence with violence. Rather than using pacifism, they are associated with greed and violence. They do not contest against anything at all – neither state inactivity nor establishments of violence. They serve their own personal interests. As such, the Family members are given several layers in the film. From the casual hippie to the crazy lunatic, the audience's perspective on these characters evolves as the plot unfolds. This evolution in audience perception reaches its height when the three Manson Family members are about to go to Rick's house and try to kill everyone (fig. 26). Tex seems to be addressing Linda, who is scared to follow them in this killing spree. He asks her, "Are you calling me a liar?".

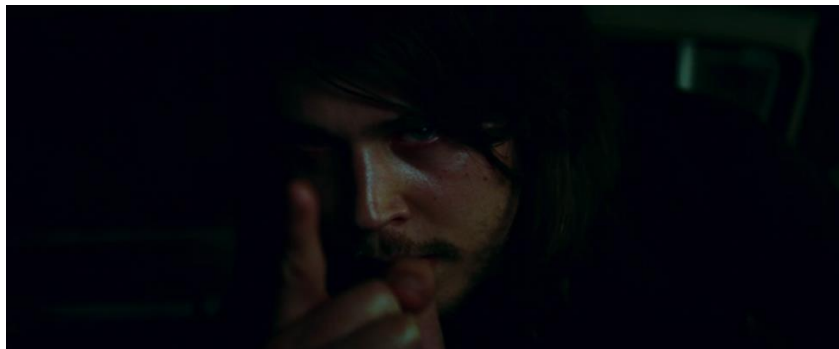


Figure 26 Tex addressing Linda... or the audience (02:16:37)

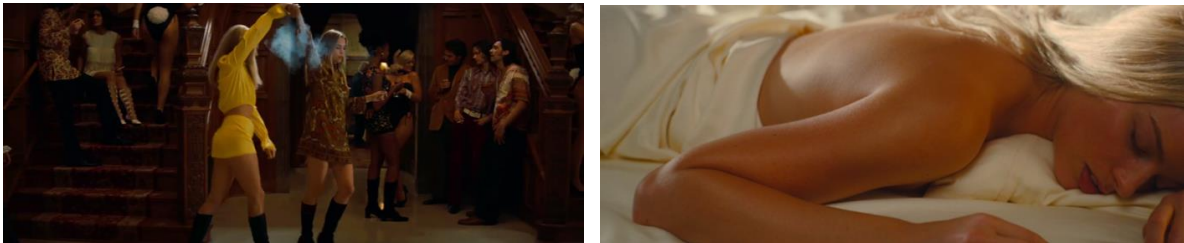
However, the camera seems to be taking Linda's point of view as if Tex were talking to us. From apparently innocent hippies, the Manson Family members now look evil. They involve us in the planning of a murder that we involuntarily agree to watch. By pointing his finger at us, Tex submits us to the Family and reminds us of the passive nature of spectatorship in front of fictional events. All in all, the Manson Family is described with historical signs that links them to both bright and dark sides of counterculture movements such as the hippie culture for the former, and paradox and excess for the latter. These features are gradually pushed to a negative as they change from hippies to evil murderers. As members of the audience, we are tricked into believing they are innocent hippie figures at first. Our expectations are subverted as the plot unfolds. Hence, with hints at historical elements, Tarantino challenges the audience's expectations on character representation.

Contrary to the Manson Girls, Sharon Tate's representation is much lighter, leaner. Her representation helps anchor Tarantino's depiction of the New Hollywood within the period. Carl Boggs mentioned the idea of rewriting myths as an important feature of postmodern cinema (354), and here, Sharon Tate's depiction serves to demythologize her death and contemplate her life. According to Jack Howard, "in the film, her role is to be the angel of Hollywood because we know that her death caused a complete shift in Hollywood" (Howard 23:47). Joan Didion also expands on this idea and says "many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969 [...] and in a sense this is true. The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled." (47). Tate was supposed to be turned "into a new Golden Age screen siren" in the early 1960s (Collin 08:04). Therefore, a whole myth surrounds her death. She represents the innocence of the Golden Age of Hollywood that has been destroyed by the Manson family. Quentin Tarantino chose to make the Sharon Tate murders an important part of the film and even decided to rewrite history by letting Sharon Tate live at the end of the film. This is considered a tribute to who Sharon Tate was, and to the end of an era so dear to the director. However, since she embodies a complex figure, Tarantino chose to give her very little lines, which caused a controversy amongst film critics. Here is how he justifies his depiction of Sharon Tate:

One of the things that's been so incredibly gratifying about this whole experience for these last four weeks is... it's interesting because I tried to not turn Sharon into a Quentin Tarantino character. Rick's a Quentin Tarantino character, Cliff's a Quentin Tarantino character, even McQueen is a bit of a Tarantino character. But I didn't want Sharon to be a character, I wanted her to be the person that she is. Now,

it's only my interpretation of the person from what I've learned about it, and I'm definitely leaning in to the bright and the light stuff, but that really seems to be who she is. If there are other aspects of her out there I didn't find it. (The Director's Cut 31:19)

In his film, Tarantino tried to put himself in Tate's shoes and represent who she was. Her costumes convey this idea of a lively and joyful character. Indeed, when she gets to the Playboy Mansion at the beginning of the film, she is the center of attention. The camera focuses on her as she often is situated in the middle of the shot. She wears a vibrant yellow outfit and is shown dancing and smiling while everyone around her has fairly neutral-toned clothes (fig. 27). The next morning, a rack focus reveals Tate covered in white sheets, sleeping on her bed (fig. 28) – even her snoring sounds endearing. She looks pure and innocent.



Figures 27&28 Sharon Tate is the star of the evening... and an angel in the morning (29:06/33:24)

This also reflects in the way Tarantino deals with morality in the film. Tate is depicted as an angel, which is very unusual in the director's alternate history films. He generally likes to keep a strong moral ambiguity within the plot – the mean guys are often mean, but are the good ones always good? As seen in the first part, the audience is involved in Aldo Raine's joyous scalping and killing in *Inglourious Basterds* until they see violence from Landa's perspective (fig. 19). For some, moral ambiguity in Tarantino movies is so strong that it triggered controversy. Attorney Ari Melber wrote in *The Atlantic* that "While *Django Unchained* presents a morally stark universe, where people do and say evil things with no remorse, it also luxuriates in the license that such evil provides." (Melber). Hence, protagonists in Tarantino's alternate histories are often depicted as having a questionable sense of morality. In that sense, Tate differs from these usual protagonists. History is not inverted as Tate does not kill members of the Manson Family. Moral ambiguity lies between Rick, Cliff and the Manson Family, but Sharon Tate is preserved from all these concerns. These scenes are a tribute to the innocence of the pre-Tate murders period, a nostalgic take on the symbol she embodies. Her presence in the historical framework of the film is more symbolical than interpretative. Here, Tarantino chose to display

her liveliness rather than associating Tate's character with her death, only to keep an era of innocence intact. Contrary to the Manson Family, our expectations on Tate's character remains untouched.

Because she is spared from any moral concern and is a product of sheer nostalgia, Margot Robbie's Sharon Tate gives a dream-like, surreal quality to Tarantino's film. Her character almost appears as a popular fantasy in the way she is depicted and described. When she goes to the Playboy Mansion to have a party with her husband Roman Polanski, she is shot through a slow-motion on her hair waving in the air as she takes off her headscarf (fig. 29).



Figure 29 Slow motion on Tate in the car (28:30)

Moreover, she wears the popular Twiggy make-up look, reinforcing the influence of European trends on the United States. Indeed, Swinging London was trending at the time, whether it be in terms of culture or fashion. Twiggy became a renowned model and icon, popularizing this dark brown line following the crease of the eyelid. Everything about Sharon Tate is what people now call a sort of 'effortless *chic*'. With the use of the slow-motion, the camera creates an aspect of fascination for her. Moreover, the diegetic song *Hush* by Deep Purple plays on the radio, stating "I got a certain little girl she's on my mind/ No doubt about it she looks so fine/ She's the best girl that I ever had/ Sometimes she's gonna make me feel so bad" (Deep Purple 0:55). More than fascination, a projected male gaze plays a big part in the depiction of Tarantino's Tate. Indeed, Laura Mulvey explained that "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (Mulvey 837). After all, the audience gets most of its knowledge of Tate from Steve McQueen as he watches Tate dancing at the Playboy Mansion. He ends up his story by saying he "never stood a chance" (32:12) when it comes to Sharon Tate being his girlfriend. This sentence can be heard again in the film when Rick explains to Jim Stacy he did not get the part in *The Great Escape*. He says, "McQueen did it, and frankly I never had a chance." (01:04:06). This deeply associates

Sharon's representation with the image of a dream, an illusion that is unreachable, unobtainable. Whether it be in the car or at the Playboy Mansion, both the audience and the characters gaze at Tate. Tate's depiction differs from the director's usual protagonist representation as she appears to be mythologized. This fascination is part of Tarantino's nostalgia, which offers a new reflexion on how to look at historical figures.

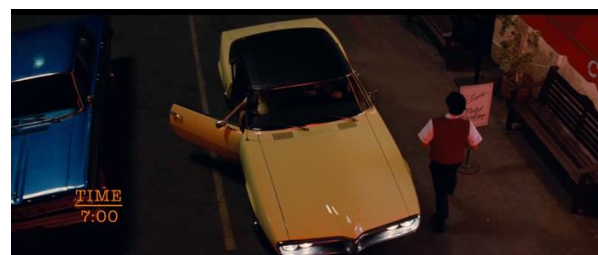
c. Narration and its Effect on Realism

The ambivalence between realism, fiction and memory can be felt in the narrative frame of the film. One of the elements that show this is postmodern fragmentation, or more generally a fashion for time bending. Tarantino explained he was always heavily influenced by novels and the way they sometimes did not rely on chronological time. He said "I read novels, and in a novel, you can start in the middle of a story. They're doing something and it's just moving in the forward momentum of what they're doing that's taking place in the here and now. And now it comes to chapter 3, and chapter 3 happens two years before." (StudioBinder 04:20). At first glance, Quentin Tarantino's movie respects a chronological guideline. The film is separated in three parts, all signified by different days – Sunday, February 8th 1969 (04:56), Sunday, February 9th 1969 (32:39), Friday, August 8th 1969 (01:58:24). However, this separation of narrative sections is different to the classical Hollywood narration, which is unusual to his filmography. Indeed, "with the exception of *Kill Bill* and *Django Unchained*, [...] all the films or stories are organized according to the four-act structure typical of the classical Hollywood narrative" (Roche 159). On December 8, 1967, the TIME Magazine staff published an article on the features of the "New Cinema" or New Hollywood. The editorialists expanded on the idea of chronology.

Whether or not filmmakers want to tell a story, they no longer need adhere to the convention that a movie should have a beginning, middle and end. Chronological sequence is not so much a necessity as a luxury. The slow, logical flashback has given way to the abrupt shift in scene. Time can be jumbled on the screen — its foreground and background as mixed as they are in the human mind. [...] the audience, in effect, is invited to become the scenarist's collaborator, filling in the gaps he left out. The purposeful camera can speed up action or slow it down. (TIME staff 1)

It is true that the film sticks to a chronological timeline to depict the year 1969. However, playing with the idea of time and chronology rose with the New Hollywood Era, and Tarantino

renders this in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. For instance, the third section of narration starts with a black screen indicating an ellipsis of six months (01:58:11), only to bring several flashbacks narrating Rick’s experience as an actor in Europe. In this particular section, Tarantino emphasises heavily on the association of time and reality. He shows “home movie footage: on the set of *Nebraska Jim*” (01:59:38) or “on location: Almeria, Spain – *Red Blood, Red Skin*” (02:01:57) footages to give a sense of immersion to the audience. The voiceover offered by the narrator reinforces this documentary-like aspect, hence a sense of realism. The narrator is in fact Randy, the stunt coordinator played by Kurt Russell which we only see on screen in Cliff’s daydreaming. Randy as figure of narrator disappears completely from the second part of the film, letting the viewer witness a day in the life of Rick and Cliff. In fact, his voiceover usually justifies the use of analepses. In Gérard Genette’s typology, these analepses are mostly homodiegetic and internal – meaning flashbacks that interfere with the main narrative and make connections with the previous storyline. They can be complete and repeating depending on whether they provide new information to the existing plot or not, though the main flashback when Randy recalls Rick’s time in Europe is complete (90-95). This very sequence is a key element to the plot because it partly explains the influence of European cinema on the Hollywoodian industry, and acts as an introspection scene where Randy steps back and takes stock for Rick. However, Randy does not stop talking after the flashback. He explains how the entire evening of August 8, 1969 unfolded, right until Cliff goes out with Randy to smoke his acid cigarette (02:11:31). Within the timespan of a little more than five minutes (between 02:04:49 and 02:11:17), Randy gives the precise time eight times as if he were trying to rebuild the night of the murders as precisely as he could. The director did the very same thing in *Jackie Brown* at the moment of the money transaction (fig. 30&31), only it is now used as a playful means to mingle reality and fiction together. Here, Quentin Tarantino is overwhelming the audience with the presence of time, playfully stressing on its artificiality.



Figures 30&31 Time is given in both *Jackie Brown* and *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (01:43:30/02:06:46)

This documentary-like sequence differs a lot from the February 9, 1969 sequence which mostly puts the audience in the backseat of a car or on set to live a day in the life of Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth. The audience here is completely passive while watching the characters go through the end of an era. Robbie Collin explains:

These people killing time [...] ultimately doesn't matter, that's the core tension there and I'm sure that must've heavily heavily inspired Tarantino when he came to make this as well. There's a lot of driving in this film, people drive to Los Angeles – with purpose or without purpose. Tarantino frequently puts the camera in the back of the car. And there's this sense that you are stuck in the car with no say over the destination. It's taking you somewhere and all you can do is bear with it, look out the window, see what's flying past the window, and enjoy the ride as best you can. (Collin 05:18)

Following several characters as if we were accompanying them makes this second day extremely contemplative. Tarantino is here playing with time as he would play with an accordion – depicting the characters in what would be a typical working day in about an hour and a half onscreen, but then spending less than ten minutes on Rick and Cliff's career in Europe. This shows how important Tarantino's memory of Los Angeles is in the film, and how mediated this representation of Los Angeles is. Most car scenes are infused with this sense of nostalgia, reminiscent of the car rides the director used to go on with his stepdad.

There is a bit of Randy in Quentin Tarantino as well. The fact that Randy suddenly becomes the narrator of the last third of the film is not by chance. When the director had to explain where the idea of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* came from, he explained that over a decade ago, he was working with an “old-timey” actor and his stuntman. There was not anything for the stuntman to do, so the actor came to Quentin. Here is Tarantino's story:

He came to me and goes “Hey, look, Quentin... I got a guy and [...] he's worked with me for the last nine years. I haven't busted your balls about it because there's really nothing for him to do. But there's that thing coming up on Thursday, and he could do that [...]” and I said “Yeah, sure bring him down.” [...] You could tell that there was a time [...] they were probably a perfect double, you could probably shoot close-ups of this guy. This time had passed. (California Film Institute 04:34)

This story is the real-life rendition of Randy chatting with us about Cliff with Rick. This personal experience was transferred into the fictional realm. It then comes as no surprise that Randy is given so much importance later on, as he is quite literally the fictional Quentin Tarantino. As such, there is a heavy importance of underlying both author and addressee meta in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. Randy is often put forth in the film and presents us with the artificiality of a scene by communicating directly with us. For instance, when Rick tells Marvin Schwarz that Cliff gave him a ride because his car is being repaired, Randy reacts by saying “That’s a big fucking lie” (06:01) and cuts the scene short to show a flashback of Rick drunk driving. The figure of Randy as narrator is supposed to render the reality of the life of a fictional character, namely Rick. Randy’s omniscience in the film places us as close as we can get to Rick’s brain. He is also able to manipulate time so that the story unfolds the way he likes it. Directorial commentary serves as a noticeable narrative tool, reminding us that this is all a fiction presented in the style of a documentary. The fact that this is most evidently put forward in the last third of the film is a way for Tarantino to both elongate the tension as the spectator wonders what will happen of Sharon Tate, and to warn us of the inevitably bended reality he is going to showcase.

However, history is also seen through the prism of film history itself here. By re-inventing how the Tate murders unfolded, Tarantino somehow plays with the postmodern condition, where society and the real become “a cinematic, dramaturgical production transformed by representations of the ‘real’ through the images and meanings that flow from cinema and TV” (Denzin qtd in Gazetas 11).

2.2. Film History: Aesthetics Recreating History

a. Rick Dalton: Between Steve McQueen and John Wayne

Film history can also represent this liminality between reality and fiction. Many elements taken from the film can engage on a meta-discourse on the intricacies of belonging to Hollywood. Here, the most straight-forward element that showcases film history is Rick Dalton’s career. Indeed, it is embedded in actual film or TV show history that existed during the late 1960s, rendering a highly intertextual piece. On several occasions, Rick is put in existing material such as *The Great Escape* where he replaces Steve McQueen (01:03:30), or

The F.B.I. in the episode “All the Streets are Silent” showcased in a *mise en abyme*. It is no surprise that Tarantino chose to compare McQueen and Dalton auditioning for the same part in the famous *The Great Escape*. According to him, Steve and Rick have a very similar career, but one of them did not quite work out the way he intended it – Rick’s.

Eventually he landed on NBC on a TV show called *Bounty Law*. On the same year over on CBS, Steve McQueen landed on a very similar show about a bounty hunter called *Wanted Dead or Alive* and for a period of time, they were kind of similar in fame and popularity. Then, both of them proved to be popular enough that during their hiatus they started doing some films, like a feature film. Eventually, during that hiatus time, McQueen did *The Magnificent Seven*. And that was that. He was a movie star. But Rick was still Jake Cahill, the guy from *Bounty Law*. (Vanity Fair 01:44)

Indeed, to build a sense of realism and have his main character fit well within the late 1960s, the director chose to mingle the career and star status of several actors at the time to build Rick’s character. Tarantino explains Rick is also the result of some research on other actors that played in popular TV shows and had a very similar experience, such as “Edd Byrnes, George Maharis who was on the show *Route 66*, Ty Hardin who was on *Bronco*” (01:36). His meticulousness goes further as he wrote several episodes of *Bounty Law* to better anchor Rick within the period. He even plans to direct these episodes as he said in an interview: “I ended up writing five half-hour episodes. So I’ll do them, and I will direct all of them.” (Fleming Jr). This desire of authenticity transpires in the amount of research Quentin Tarantino has done to render a result that mirrored actors of the period. In the same way he inlayed Rick in *The Great Escape*, Tarantino used footage of Sergio Corbucci’s 1967 *Moving Target* to recreate Rick’s fourth film in Europe *Operazione Dyn-O-Mite!*, the “Spaghetti secret agent, James Bond rip-off-type flick” (02:00:30). The focus of this scene is put on Cliff’s stunt, which is clearly indicated onscreen (02:00:54). This film is supposed to have been directed by Antonio Margheriti when in fact, the footage was directed by Sergio Corbucci who himself fictively directed *Nebraska Jim* starring Rick as its main protagonist. This showcases Tarantino’s desire to play with film history itself.

Hence, the first thing that comes to mind when Tarantino describes Rick is how heavily he was built around the works of other actors, particularly actors of Western TV shows or films. For instance, the classic American Western period is embedded in the image of a strong and

independent character. The epitome of this is John Wayne. Along with the importance of the landscape and history in the early days of the Western genre, lied “a discourse of Americanization, which itself began to impart a national identity to the country’s rapidly expanding popular cinema” (Creekmur 396). This sense of Americanization in Western films was also imposed on its main actors, who acted as the involuntary link between reality and fiction. With William S. Hart and later on John Wayne, authenticity in Western motion pictures was rendered through the actor himself. The confusion between the actor and the part he was playing participated in the popularity of the Western film. The Western star “is a hero in two different mythic traditions: the celebrity-generating mythology of Hollywood, and the Boone-Crockett-Cody-Virginian tradition of the Frontier Myth” (242). Wayne’s celebrity kept rising with Ford films such as *Stagecoach* (1939) or later on *The Searchers* (1956), to the point that “Congress authorized a medal honoring him as the embodiment of American military heroism – although he had never served a day in uniform” (Slotkin 243).

It is no surprise that when Cliff and Rick get back from Italy, Cliff’s plane neighbour holds a copy of a Time magazine issue dating from August 8, 1969, announcing the end of the John Wayne era with an already perceptible nostalgia (fig. 32).



Figure 32 Cliff’s neighbour reading the John Wayne issue of Time Magazine (02:01:48)

The article ends on how John Wayne would like to be remembered, which deliberately marks the end of the classic Western period with its main figure disappearing from the map. However, his words are of the utmost importance as it symbolises the image of a Western hero. Wayne says: “I would like to be remembered—well, the Mexicans have a phrase, 'Feo, fuerte y formal.' Which means: he was ugly, was strong and had dignity.” (TIME staff 8). One of the most common traits in the American Western film is the importance of strong, independent masculine characters. Much to the likes of Wayne, Rick Dalton is an actor who is associated with a Western trope that is heroic masculinity at the beginning of *Once Upon a Time... in*

Hollywood. He plays bounty hunter Jake Cahill in *Bounty Law* and represents an ideal of righteousness of which he takes pride in. But since it all stops, he now has to play the ‘bad guy’ in several TV shows. So, producer Marvin Schwarz tells Rick that if he continues playing the villain, he will officially be disconnected from his audience and won’t ever get a chance to be recognized as a Hollywood star. Rick’s public image and celebrity is tied to the characters he portrays, exactly in the same manner Wayne was considered to be the representation of the Western hero himself – the “grandfather image” (1) of the Western film.

Tarantino depicts Rick as a type of actor who rose in the late 1950s or early 1960s, which started on television shows and had trouble pulling off the TV-show-to-movie transition, a kind of actor that did not realize the culture had changed and that “the new leading character is not the he-man macho guys that put pomade in their hair, it’s skinny androgynous shaggy hair-typed guys.” (Vanity Fair) Ultimately though, Rick’s end goal was to be recognized as a mythical figure to the likes of Wayne, a good and honest man both on screen and in real life. Since he is an actor, the significance of Rick’s character needs to be made on two levels – what happens behind the camera, and what happens in front of it. During the filming of *Lancer*, there is a radical change in Rick’s attitude towards the TV show. In the first *Lancer* scene, he seems a bit careless, but once he decides to get involved in the project, he is depicted differently. For instance, Tarantino uses the tracking shot on several occasions in the film to put forward a hero or important character in the story. At the start of the *Lancer* shooting scenes, Jim Stacy is first shown to the audience through a tracking shot, establishing him not only as the hero of the story, but the hero on set (fig. 33). The sequence that follows does not show Rick under the best of light. For instance, he keeps forgetting his lines. During the next shooting scene, Rick’s character Caleb DeCoteau is now depicted through a tracking shot (fig. 34).



Figure 33 The tracking shot following Jim Stacy (01:09:17)



Figure 34 Rick reclaims his rights as hero of the story (01:27:11)

There is a transposition of power here as he is shown to be the important character. It is not surprising to find out later on in the scene that he is going to do a great performance on this day and retrieve the dignity he thought he lost. Thus, there is definitely an element that ties Rick Dalton to John Wayne in the sense that both actors wanted to be a sort of real-life depictions of the characters they embodied. This desire of keeping his dignity by being a strong and powerful man is what Rick tries to put forward both in his life and on set. When he manages to do that, his pride is reflected in the most straight-forward way – he says to himself “Rick fucking Dalton” while raising his gun as a sign of empowerment (01:32:50). It is also interesting to notice there is no focus on Rick’s gun throughout the first *Lancer* shooting scene, while Jim Stacy carries one around and even kills with it. Who is holding the gun becomes an important trope to understand who has power in the sequence. So, when Rick holds his gun in the last *Lancer* sequence, he overtly imposes himself as a Western figure both in *Lancer* and in Tarantino’s film.

As Rick is straight-forwardly depicted as a Western icon, he needs an audience to notice him. Producer Marvin Schwarz plays that role and mirrors what would be our reaction if we watched a Rick Dalton film. As such, Schwarz is the audience himself. Through several cinematic elements, Marvin showcases his enthusiasm for the simple fact of watching films. For instance, he describes his entire routine – lighting a cigar, pouring himself a cognac, etc. Even the process of putting the film into the projector is shown to the audience as he explains he played the “35-millimetre print of *Tanner*” (06:44). The most striking element displaying his interest in Rick’s characters are the sound effects he mimics. When he talks about watching *The Fourteen Fists of McCluskey*, Marvin imitates the sound and way of holding a shotgun while he claims, “I love that stuff you know... the killing” (fig. 35). In that sense, Marvin both mirrors the audience’s feeling upon seeing a film and puts forth the artificiality of the soundscape in movies. It also helps reverse the power structure between him and Rick as he

uses the same means to insist on Rick's loss of influence over the years. Indeed, he fakes punching Rick with "Ping, Pow, Chung... Zoom" (fig. 36) noises right after saying "so Rick, who's gonna kick the shit out of you next week?" (13:18).



Figure 35 Marvin Schwarz mimics holding shotgun (07:33)



Figure 36 Marvin fakes punching Rick (13:22)

Here, the works of Foley artists is made evident to us. By using sound, Schwarz demonstrates the power of the audience – and the industry – on actors and stresses the actor's dependency on these very people. Not only Rick wants to be mythologized, but he has to if he wants to keep his influence. Here, by setting Rick as a Western film actor to the likes of Steve McQueen or John Wayne, Quentin Tarantino delivers a discourse on morality and mythologization in the industry.

b. The Manson Family as Spaghetti Western Antagonists

Marvin Schwarz is not the only character to use violence to make his point. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* constantly deals with violence through disillusion associated with the end of an era. This is materialised by a recurring sense of loss of innocence in the film, typical of the New Hollywood and modernised western films – like the Spaghetti Westerns. One of the first occurrences of the western theme of loss of innocence is the depiction of the Manson

Family. This responds to our prior analysis on historical facts pinpointing at their gradual status of evil characters. At first, the Manson Family girls are siren-like creatures, capable of fooling rancher George Spahn, the owner of the ranch they live in. At first glance, they look candid, young and innocent and the song they sing sounds like a nursery rhyme. In a later scene, when Cliff goes back to Rick’s home, he sees Manson girl Pussycat hitchhiking on the side of the road. Playfully enough, the ad for a fragrance named “Heaven Scent” plays on the radio while Cliff looks at Pussycat. In a close-up on her face, the ad joyfully chants, “a little bit naughty but heavenly”, infantilizing her as she fakes crying (fig. 37).



Figure 37 Pussycat depicted as a childish character (38:15)

However, we quickly understand they are not as innocent as they seem to be. They first look like hazy figures, appearing from afar (fig. 38), much to the likes of the corrupted and evil Frank in *Once Upon a Time in the West* by Sergio Leone (fig. 39). With a rack focus, we finally see them clearly. They are giggling, laughing, and singing “illusion has been just a dream” – the lyrics to Charles Manson’s song “I’ll never say never to always”. This hint foreshadows their impact on Rick and Cliff’s lives, and more broadly on American society. All in all, this behavior would not seem troublesome if it was not associated with danger. The scene where we first see the Manson Family girls is deeply disturbing because while they are depicted as innocent and juvenile, they are also shown through canted angles (fig. 40).



Figure 38&39 A blurred Manson Family (15:32) and the very same shot used for Leone’s Frank (02:02:23)



Figure 40 Canted angles on the Manson Family girls (15:29)

There is no extradiegetic music until we are faced with the group. The slight sound of the breeze and a single high-pitched note signal something is off (15:37). These elements combined show signs of danger. Either these girls are in danger, or they are the dangerous ones.

This dissertation previously investigated the ideology of the Manson Family as paradoxical. This is further developed through Spaghetti Western tropes. For instance, much of the imagery of the paradox they incarnate is linked to violence and its depiction. Their ideology is again very well transcribed in Sadie's speech after herself and a few Manson Family members have just been yelled at by Rick Dalton whilst they were trying to figure their way to Terry's former house – now Sharon Tate's. She mentions she had a sort of epiphany during one of their "trip sessions", and that "every show that wasn't *I Love Lucy* was about murder. So, my idea is... we kill the people who taught us to kill. [...] I say fuck them. I say we cut their cocks off and make them eat it." (02:17:55). Ironically enough, Brandy bites Tex's genitals when Cliff orders her to attack him (fig. 41).



Figure 41 Brandy emasculates Tex (02:26:09)



Figure 42 Tracking shot on Tex while he tries to catch Cliff (01:52:35)

This emasculation serves as a way to deconstruct Tex as the representation of the Western villain we had been given during the Spahn Movie Ranch scene. As we have seen earlier, main characters are often depicted through tracking shots, and it is no exception for Tex (fig. 42). He is shown on a horse in a low-angle shot. He is given power and appears as fearless, while trying to reach Cliff. By losing his masculinity, Tex is deprived of all credibility which prevents him from dying in dignity. This is further developed through his rising use of language and emotions as the film goes on. It is considered a Western genre convention that one of the features associated with masculinity is silence. Men do not speak but act. A study on masculinity in the Western genre reveals that “by remaining “hermetic” and “closed up”, the Western hero maintains the integrity of his boundaries and presents himself to the world as an impenetrable armor.” (Chirica 60). This participates in the building of a huge gap between Cliff and Tex, who appear as fundamental opposites. While Cliff is extremely mysterious, Tex easily gets emotional and unstable towards the end of the film. He seems to eventually always be on the verge of crying (fig. 43), giving him a childlike aspect.



Figure 43 Close-up on an emotional and angry Tex (02:16:55)

Discrediting Tex as a central power figure gives room for Tarantino to be judgemental about their paradoxical behavior, completely embedded in this era of excess. Ultimately, this is why the Manson Family is showcased in a scene of excessive violence. Indeed, David Roche

differentiates restrained and excessive violence in his book on Quentin Tarantino. He says: “generally speaking, the restrained approach recognizes the victim as an imagined human being: the excessive treats bodies as mere cinematic material” (277). While the Western is a genre known to be inherently violent, this is all pushed to an even greater degree as its main purpose is to turn the Manson Family into ridicule, hence Tex’s emasculating scene, Sadie’s burnt corpse in Rick’s pool (fig. 44), and Cliff bashing Katie’s head several times.



Figure 44 Sadie’s burnt corpse in the pool serving as cinematic device (02:29:45)

Violence is thus turned against them, as if Tarantino wanted to represent the paradoxes that fuelled the Manson Family with this very tool. Violence not only is there to represent an era, a genre, or appears for the sake of existing onscreen. It is one of Quentin Tarantino’s crafting tools to shape his idea of the New Hollywood era and power relations.

c. Intertextuality: Similarities with *Easy Rider* and the End of a Dream

Late in the film, the audience is confronted with yet another association of the Manson Family with the New Hollywood era. While Rick makes frozen margaritas at home, he hears a car driving in the lot. As he goes outside, he notices Tex, Sadie and Katie and immediately shouts at them to go away. In a moment of anger, Rick tells Tex, “Hey! Dennis Hopper! Move this fucking piece of shit” (02:15:14). Here, Rick makes a reference to Hopper’s popular *Easy Rider* that was released during the summer of 1969 before the Tate murders occurred. As seen above, this road movie showcases two hippies, Wyatt and Billy, escaping from the norms of a formal American society after selling a considerable amount of drugs in California. *Easy Rider* displays the life and decline of these two misfits, underlying that living in complete freedom outside the dogma has a cost.

As such, Hopper’s film describes the deterioration of the California Dream. Quite literally, this could be seen through the Mamas and the Papas’s career at the time.

The big news in the LA music scene that summer was the triumph at Hollywood Bowl concert and subsequent decline of the Mamas and the Papas who'd inadvertently inspired millions of kids to pilgrimage to LA and San Francisco with their single *California Dreamin'*, and were now beginning to tailspin down the slide of hard drugs and wife swapping. (Longworth 15:00)

The California Dream was not quite the way people perceived it. Drugs were clouding people's perception of life. In that sense, though Rick and Cliff partake in a buddy movie to the likes of Wyatt and Billy, they serve as antagonists to *Easy Rider's* characters. Rick hates hippies and plainly shows it. When he associates Tex with Dennis Hopper, it sounds like yet another comment on his hatred for the hippie movement, but it is not insignificant. When Rick is given a whole new look for his *Lancer* part, he hates it. In these scenes, Rick looks very similar to Dennis Hopper's character in the film, wearing a fringed jacket and long hair (fig. 45&46).



Figure 45 Dennis Hopper's Billy wearing a fringed jacket... (01:19:25)



Figure 46 ... that is very similar to Rick's clothes and style (52:17)

Sam gives Caleb a "hippie look", "nothing anachronistic but where does 1869 and 1969 meet?" (36:08). While Rick executes the demand, he does not adhere to it. This character wears something that is far from who he is.

The ideology Hopper and Manson adopted were very similar. Indeed, in her podcast on the Manson Family and the state of Hollywood, Karina Longworth explains that both Hopper and Manson associated themselves with Jesus and made biblical references (24:26). This is exactly what Tex does when he answers to Cliff his name is “the devil, and I’m here to do the devil’s business” (02:25:23) in Tarantino’s film. Something Cliff completely undermines to the point of mocking him by stating, “Nah, it was dumber than that, something like Rex.” (02:25:28), insisting on his antagonism with these ‘hippie’ figures. Additionally, Longworth develops a parallel between the two.

Maybe it was ironic that the people who made [*Easy Rider*], and the community they were part of and the revolution they represented would eventually become the establishment themselves... or maybe that was the plan all along. The logline of *Easy Rider* was essentially the thesis of the philosophy Charles Manson had spent the last two years teaching to his followers. The endgame of which was nothing short of world-domination. (Longworth 24:30)

In the end of the film, Billy sits by the fire and enjoys his freedom, stating both him and Wyatt can retire to Florida. In a sigh, Wyatt answers, “You know Billy, we blew it.” (01:29:30). After all, one of their friends (impersonated by Jack Nicholson) died earlier on because of their lifestyle. Wyatt knows they will never be at peace. While the movie shares its contemplative dimension with *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* as the audience follows the characters driving around on cars or bikes, Wyatt and Billy are constantly followed by a sense of darkness, a lurking death. By calling Tex “Dennis Hopper”, Rick announces the fate of the three members of the Manson Family – just like Wyatt and Billy, they are going to die. Here, the film overtly seeks revenge for the Tate murders, but also condemns the counterculture and hippie movements at the time for their responsibility in this time of excess. Tarantino also briefly discusses the future of the hippie movement in the very end of the film, forecasting something as bleak as Wyatt had seen coming. Indeed, when Jay Sebring asks Rick if everybody is okay at the gates of Tate and Polanski’s house, Rick answers “Well, the fucking hippies aren’t, that’s for goddamn sure.” (02:33:59). Here, cinematic intertextuality is a way to comment on historical facts and to re-invent them.

d. Cinematic Language: The Prevalence of the Canted Angle

Quentin Tarantino sometimes uses cinematic language as a means to show the liminality between fiction and reality, thus disorientating the audience, but also as a means to make us

understand that this liminality ultimately does not matter. For the sake of example, the focus will be put on the canted angle. The Dutch or canted angle is a recurring shot in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. This type of shot takes its root in 1920s German Expressionism. This art movement is a result of Germany's isolation during the First World War. At the time, all foreign films were banned. There was thus a high demand in films from the population. In terms of camerawork and lighting, destabilising effects are used, such as the Dutch angle or *chiaroscuro*. This later influenced noir films and often finds its way in Quentin Tarantino films. In *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, the canted angle is used in several situations. For instance, when Cliff is daydreaming, he has a fight with Bruce Lee and throws him on Janet's car, the wife of stunt coordinator Randy (fig. 47).



Figure 47 Janet finds out about her broken car (49:27)

When Janet finds out about this, a Dutch angle shot situated over the car gives this feeling of unease – the audience knows Cliff is going to be fired. The same angle is found when there is a supposed flashback of a quarrel between Cliff and his former wife. His wife is shown on a deckchair, arguing about Cliff being “a loser” (43:10). This shot can be interpreted in two different ways – either the scene is a dream, a sign of fiction within the film, or Cliff's wife symbolizes a threat. The only element that could indicate the veracity of the scene is that Cliff seems to have taken his drinking habits from his former wife – both drink Bloody Marys (fig. 48&49).



Figures 48&49 Cliff and his ex-wife drinking Bloody Marys (04:58/43:10)

This very daydreaming scene shows how difficult it is to pinpoint what really happened during Cliff's past or not, and what is hidden or not. The use of the canted angle is also a means to bring tension and suspense to the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence, which this dissertation will investigate in the next subpart. But on several occasions, the Dutch angle seems to be part of a scene solely on the fact that it signifies a fictional moment, a dream-like out-of-time experience. For instance, when Sharon Tate goes to see *The Wrecking Crew* (in which she plays Miss Carlson) at the cinema, she is depicted through a canted close-up (fig. 50). The scene evolves in a series of shot-reverse shots where the cinema attendant is doubtful she played in the film.



Figure 50 Sharon Tate shown in a canted close-up (01:05:31)

Here, the purposeful camera serves as a sort of gateway into the realm of fiction, as if Tarantino would deliberately indicate the following sequence as a tribute to Tate's sweet persona. The same treatment is reserved to Jim Stacy, the actor portraying Johnny Madrid in *Lancer*, when he leaves the set with his motorbike (01:53:23). One might argue that the canted angle is a way to link all cowboy figures together in the film as Cliff and Tex are depicted in the same fashion. Nonetheless, Jim is shot outside of work, while he probably gets ready to go home at the end of the day. This acts as a reminder that this film is still a work of fiction, that Jim Stacy belongs to the same world Cliff, Sharon, and Tex's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* characters live in. While this shot is used to disorientate the audience, it also works as a distorting lens to remind the audience that this is all fiction. This is a new meaning projected on a former existing period that is now over, even if we might wish it was not. It might also suggest the character's alienation to this period, the fact that they are stuck to this very era, unable to grow and evolve outside the fictional realm.

Tarantino's film is a glimpse at a period dear to his heart that he cannot hold back. This also features in his treatment of film genres, and especially in the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence which showcases instances of genre-blending.

2.3. The Spahn Movie Ranch Sequence: Genre Blender

Quentin Tarantino has always liked references. The director named his studio company *A Band Apart* after Jean-Luc Godard's well-known metafiction film *Bande A Part* (1964). If anything, Tarantino has always had a passion for cinematic genres and intertextuality. He considers his purpose in cinema is to "find whatever story or genre I want to deal with and do my own little version of it." (StudioBinder 0:55) Hence, his films are often regarded – by himself and his audience – as genre pieces. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is not an exception to the rule. As this case study will endeavour to show, the cinematic genre features used in the film correspond to Bruun Madsen's genre meta, in the sense that Tarantino constantly challenges the audience's genre expectations. In this section, I argue that Tarantino creates a new whole thanks to genre-blending and genre tropes. For instance, the prevailing genre in the film is unsurprisingly the Western. Quentin Tarantino uses the history of the Western film and its aesthetics to redefine western tropes and set his characters in a transitional period. This section will also focus on elements from another genre, the thriller, that participate in Tarantino's fashion for genre-blending. As the film uses the Western genre throughout its entirety, this study will concentrate on a linear analysis of the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence lasting from 01:32:54 to 01:53:11, which showcases instances of genre-blending as well as setting the film in the Western landscape.

Right before the sequence, Cliff picks up a Manson Family girl called Pussycat on the side of the road to bring her back where she lives – the Spahn Movie Ranch, a former set for Hollywoodian TV shows. The only problem being Cliff has worked there and finds it odd that people have taken over the place with the consent of its owner George Spahn. He decides to investigate on the matter by himself, with the intention of talking to George when he gets there. Historically, Cliff's figure at the Spahn Movie Ranch recalls the death of stuntman Shorty Shea orchestrated by Manson and family members Clem Grogan and Bruce Davis on site. (Longworth 36:57) Shea was working on low-budget B-movies and TV episodes at the ranch, much to the likes of Cliff eight years before he met the Manson girls. The sequence unfolds in a very different way, giving room for the Tarantino universe to expand.

a. When the Spaghetti Western Meets the Thriller

As Cliff gets closer to the ranch, the camera foreshadows he will be trapped in a very inconvenient situation. Indeed, he gets to the highway and his car is shown through some wire

(fig. 51). The wire here acts like prison bars. This imagery can be found within the Western film realm as well. The most striking example within the film is the first shots of Johnny Madrid, Jim Stacy's character. He is shown hidden behind wooden pillars, which indicates he will find himself in a very uncomfortable position later on in the *Lancer* sequence (fig. 52). Here, the feeling of danger is tied to its onscreen representation.



Figure 51 The wire that entraps Cliff (01:24:47)



Figure 52 Jim is shown behind pillars (01:09:36)

When danger is on the table, a hero is needed, and Cliff is the main protagonist of this sequence. A little background on Cliff's character is necessary to understand the Ranch sequence. The sequence resembles a spaghetti Western, inherently tied to the New Hollywood. Since Sergio Leone has been known to be one of Tarantino's influences and that the title *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is a clear reference to Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*, I will use the latter to pinpoint this very resemblance. In a video on the Western film, David Kehr, curator in the department of films at the Museum of Modern Art explains:

Then you have Sergio Leone coming along in the early 60s and realizing that things have changed and that this self-sacrificing altruistic hero is not quite as plausible, quite as relevant. Society is not worth saving. Society is hopelessly corrupt. There's

not much you can do about it. It's bigger than he is. All you can do is to try to take care of your own interests. (Kehr, 05:07-05:34)

The idea of a good or bad moral conduct is transformed into a sort of weariness, a constant moral ambiguity. The most striking element that displays the importance of spaghetti Western and demonstrates the intrinsic change Western was undergoing at the time is Cliff himself. Much to the likes of several spaghetti Western characters such as *The Man with No Name*, Cliff is very mysterious. Here, the audience is barely given information on Cliff's character. Yet, the information we get is enough to build a hazy silhouette out of him. In fact, his main attribute seems to be "carrying [Rick's] load" (02:23), he even lives behind a drive-in cinema, which implies he only lives in its shadow. On the level of his personality, we learn through Rick that "he's a goddamn war hero" (43:32) when he chats with Randy. Randy himself mentions Cliff is suspected of having killed his wife. From there, a supposed flashback shows a fight on a boat between Cliff and his wife where she keeps repeating her sister told her Cliff was "a loser" (43:03). All this discussion on Cliff gets even more blurred by the fact that Cliff imagines this whole sequence while fixing an antenna on Rick's roof. This all turns to nonsense when we realize that within the timespan of a few puffs of cigarette – or what appears like almost ten minutes of daydreaming for us – Cliff has fixed the antenna (50:07). It is thus complicated to interpret the character. A key element is that he is described by two polar opposite moral behaviors, a heartless killer and a war hero. Cliff's moral ambivalence is an important trope throughout the film.

When Cliff sets foot in the ranch, he takes off his glasses to analyze the scenery. This is all filmed in a close-up, one of the most recurring tropes in Western films (fig. 53). There are plenty of these contemplative shots in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, especially in the beginning of the film as it sets the *ambiance* of an entire range of films (fig. 54). Harmonica, the protagonist, is often portrayed through the use of close-ups. Cliff is also depicted through over-the-shoulder shots, which indicate his similitude with a Western hero, gazing at his enemies (fig. 55). Several of these shots appear in Leone's film, most notably seen from Harmonica's side (fig. 56).



Figures 53&55 Close-up on Cliff's face and over-the-shoulder shot



*Figures 54&56 Close-up on Harmonica's face and over-the-shoulder shot in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (12:28/02:23:28)*

As we have seen previously, both Jim Stacy and Rick Dalton were recognized as the hero of the day through tracking shots within the Western TV show they starred in. In a way, this type of shot establishes the setting in which the characters are going to be developed and reach a position of power. This inscribes them within the Western tradition. When Pussycat takes Cliff's hand, she brings him forward to see Gypsy in a tracking shot, establishing these characters within the Western movie realm as well (fig. 57).



Figure 57 Cliff and Pussycat are filmed in a tracking shot

It is also an extreme wide shot, which reduces Cliff to a tiny figure in the landscape. He is vulnerable to whatever might happen to him. Cliff's body language while he is being dragged by Pussycat is also interesting. He seems to try and pull her as if to slow her down. He wants to take a moment before he jumps readily in the middle of the ranch, while she pushes him forward. This is very reminiscent of the rhythm of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, full of

“hypertrophied sequences that simply go on forever and ignore any kind of narrative drive in the way it opens with 20 minutes of people waiting for a train to show up” (Kehr, 06:00-06:19). Here, rather than being devoid of narrative drive, the sequence acts as a sort of parenthesis where Cliff echoes the contemplative yet critical aspect of the spaghetti Western. Just like waiting for a train to stop at the station, Cliff is waiting for the moment he can enter George’s house. The organisation of the ranch itself appears as a hallway, trying to set a sort of goal for the character – that is, reaching George’s house. Even if Tarantino makes Cliff evolve in the scenery through discussion when Leone makes the audience wait in silence, we know a confrontation is the outcome of the sequence. This is rendered playfully by Tarantino in a series of shot-reverse shots, where Cliff is looking at an empty stage. No Manson Family members are still here, but Cliff is already right within his Western character role and shown through close-ups (fig. 53). The diegetic sound of crows cawing and dogs barking foreshadows this very confrontation. Little by little, Cliff loses his identity within the scenery. Even if Pussycat knows his name, the rest of the Manson Family girls do not, which leads them to call him the “old-looking dude in a Hawaiian shirt” (01:35:05). Much to the likes of Harmonica in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, he is defined by the first thing they see from him, which is what he wears. When Cliff gives his name, it is only to get to his main interest – seeing George. This is also true for the Manson Family, who only respond to nicknames like “Squeaky”, “Pussycat”, or “Tex”.

Contrary to Cliff, the Manson Family appear as the clear threat. The young girls from the Manson Family are not innocent anymore. This aspect of demystifying an element in films is tied to the Western genre and its evolution. For example, in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, “Leone reveals the train, the engine that purports to civilize the wild, deserted lands, as a nefarious agent. He represents the railroad as a vehicle for greed and vengeance that brings destruction and degradation [...] to society.” (Carolan 64) While they are human beings, and not objects, they are still a symbol of an entire generation – a representation of the counterculture. Rather than innocent, their presence is suffocating. It is not so much displayed in what they say, but it is in what they do and how they are shown. Several point-of-view shots from Snake or Squeaky’s perception emphasize this suffocating aspect of the scene. They entrap Cliff between two wooden pillars which form a second frame (fig. 58).



Figure 58 Symmetrical shot entrapping Cliff between two wooden pillars

It is a sort of reinterpretation of the famous frame-within-frame composition. David Roche specifies that “the influence of this shot is obviously *The Searchers*” (185), the 1956 John Ford film starring John Wayne. He adds that it is most commonly used to “describe the protagonist’s trajectory” (Roche 187). Most of the time, the protagonist is displayed in the foreground, but here Cliff can be seen in the distance, circled by Tex and the other Manson Family girls. The neat, symmetrical aspect of the position of the pillars adds to the mounting tension.

In the following scene, Western aesthetics show the Manson Family as outdated representations compared to Cliff who is the representation of this fresh New Hollywood character that has already made the transition to a new era. Cliff only uses one means of transport – the car (fig. 59). When horses were the quintessentially Western means of transport, the car appears to be Cliff’s horse, the image of his own type of 1969 masculinity. However, there is a very clear-cut dichotomy between the use of cars and horses as either means of transportation or stagnation in the sequence. One of the most important figures of the Manson Family, Tex, is constantly displayed on a horse throughout the sequence (fig. 60).



Figure 59 One of the many times Cliff is shown driving a car (01:20:38)



Figure 60 Tex is showcased on a horse during the entire Spahn Movie Ranch sequence

The whole ranch scenery has the looks of a car cemetery (fig. 58). One of the Manson Family members explains that the ranch has now turned into a chop shop, hence the imagery. Cliff seems to be surrounded and trapped by the Manson Family who themselves seem to be trapped within this circle of broken cars. While this appears to be a clear threat to Cliff as it is his sole means of transport, he still uses his car to escape the Spahn Movie Ranch later on in the sequence. These rows of broken cars make it seem like the Manson Family have no way to evolve with the technologies of their time, symbol of a certain narrow-mindedness. Most of all, it suggests that the Spahn Movie Ranch acts as a sort of time capsule where the characters are stuck in a classic Western film. The supposed evolution towards something new mentioned earlier lost its meaning when Cliff set foot there.

Right after this shot, the audience can witness the first instance of genre-blending. The reason for this is because a certain sense of dread is slowly installed from then on. The tension increases as the audience wonders if Cliff is going to end up dying, to the likes of Shorty Shea. Upon commenting the Ranch sequence, Tarantino said:

One of the reasons why that scene is effective is... Cliff could die in that sequence. [...] Dramatically, Cliff could die. I don't think you're intellectually thinking that, but your own dramatic inner clock knows that. And it would kind of even make sense in a strange way and you like him enough that it gives you a sense of dread. (California Film Institute 23:50)

Though the presence of the Western genre is overwhelming in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, Quentin Tarantino uses tropes of the thriller genre, and particularly Hitchcock films in order to do that. Konisberg's Complete Film Dictionary describes the thriller as a "film that creates excitement and suspense, especially a mystery or crime film, though the term is also employed on occasion for spy or adventure works" (378). It is no surprise Tarantino refers to

Hitchcock films as the representative for the thriller genre in the sequence as the director is often considered to be one of its creators (King). Alfred Hitchcock is famous for being ‘the Master of Suspense’, a nickname he often commented on. In order to modernize suspense in films, the director believed “that the suspense drama is being smoked out of its old haunts. I think that we must forget about espionage and rediscover more personal sorts of menace.” (Hitchcock 125) Alfred Hitchcock has often explained that suspense was an emotional trigger, “therefore, you can only get the suspense element going by giving the audience information.” (American Film Institute 0:33). Here, this is exactly what Quentin Tarantino does by integrating the Manson Family as a source of menace. The matter is highly personal, as Cliff knows George and the Spahn Movie Ranch well. In the middle of all the aforementioned aesthetical western tropes lies the presence of Hitchcock’s way of building suspense. These tropes all appear once Cliff expresses his desire to see George. A clear tension is built in the way the shots are presented to us, with the Manson girls on one side and Cliff on the other (fig. 61&62).



Figures 61&62 Cliff and the Manson Girls are now clearly separated by the camera

The camera ceases to display both Cliff and the Family together. The house is situated respectively on the right and left side of the frame, implying a certain disagreement between the two separate entities. This tension only increases when Cliff is shown in a shallow focus, blurring what is behind him (fig. 63). However, the background is not blurred enough that we cannot see what it is happening. In a series of shot/reverse shot, the background changes. More and more Manson Family members appear (fig. 64). This shot is built in a very Hitchcockian way, respecting the suspense tool of the “bomb under the table” – the audience is given all the elements to understand what is happening in a scene of tension, creating suspense rather than surprise.



Figures 63&64 More and more Manson Family members appear in the background

It is similar to *The Birds* (1962), when Melanie Daniels finds out a little late that she is surrounded by crows. The bus from which Manson Family members get out of is completely derelict. It mirrors the presentation of the Family we are given in the second half of the film – evil characters. This rising feeling of entrapment Cliff is experiencing associated with the disintegrating innocent image of the Manson Family very well translates the idea of corruption of society David Kehr was talking about.

After discussing with the Manson Family girls, Cliff decides to go and see George anyway. Once again, Cliff seems to be the hero of a thriller. In order to understand this, I will go on with my comparison with Hitchcock’s *The Birds*. In many ways, Cliff finds himself in a similar situation to that of Melanie, notably through the use of sound and silence. When Melanie sits on the bench, she can vaguely hear the kids sing at school. The sound coming from inside the building is weak because it comes from afar (from 01:09:56 to 01:12:19). This weak diegetic sound is exactly what Cliff can hear when he approaches the ranch. Lynette Fromme is listening to Paul Revere and the Raiders inside, and the fact that Cliff can hear this suggests how close he is to entering the ranch. Likewise, Melanie is waiting for the song to end so she can pick up the child. The source of this faint diegetic sound is the goal of the two protagonists, a source which seeks to make the audience feel anxious. In both sequences, this is supported by Melanie and Cliff’s constant eyeing at (respectively) the school and the ranch (fig. 65). After all, the thriller tropes start appearing when Cliff points at the ranch and clearly states what he wants to do (fig. 66).



Figures 65&66 Melanie and Cliff looking at the source of anxiety (01:11:53/01:38:19)

While Cliff contemplates the ranch from a few meters away, Manson girls get out of the ranch. As they pass by, Cliff and the girls stare at each other as if they were going to start a duel. This all seems very odd precisely because Western tropes (duel-like confrontation) and suspense Thriller tropes (diegetic music heard from afar) are blended here.

As Cliff approaches the ranch, Squeaky welcomes him on the porch with only a screen door separating the two of them. As mentioned previously, both Cliff and Lynette are shown through a series of shot / reverse shots. Tex and Snake were also shown through a canted angle (fig. 60 for Tex, 01:37:55 for Snake) prior to that scene. Though the Dutch angle is overwhelmingly present in the film, its use is increasing within the Ranch sequence itself. The pillars that were neatly symmetrical in previous shots are now following the obliquity of the shot (fig. 67).



Figure 67 The pillars are now canted



Figure 68 Mitch's mother in The Birds right before the final bird attack (01:40:24)

This mirrors a feeling of alienation in a place that now appears as foreign to the character. This is exactly what happens for Mitch's mother in *The Birds*, right before another bird attack kicks in at the end of the film (fig. 68). Here, Tarantino plays with the canted angle as the shots gradually become more canted. In the timespan of one minute and thirty seconds (from 01:40:15

to 01:41:45), the director displays ten shot/reverse shots. The first one does not seem canted, the second is slightly canted, but it is only on the third occurrence that the obliquity of the shots drastically increases when Squeaky asks “How do you know George?”. The rest of the shots keep on being extremely canted – except for the aforementioned Squeaky shots at the end of the scene (fig. 25). Here, Quentin Tarantino makes the tension almost unbearable to the audience. The building of this gradual sense of disorientation is purposeful, as it stresses on an underlying violence that would be less apparent without the use of the Dutch angle. This tool, used in thrillers and film noir during the classic Hollywood period, gives a unique feeling to the dialogue between Cliff and Squeaky. This tension keeps rising as Cliff turns around for a final glance at the Manson Family members behind him, only to find all of them are staring at him. A long tracking shot of ten seconds (from 01:42:17 to 01:41:27) showcases many Manson Family members gazing at the ranch. A jump cut occurs in the middle of the tracking shot, possibly to hint at the longevity of the time the members spent looking at Cliff. The take stops on Pussycat’s worried face – she knows something could happen and conveys her fear to the audience.

When Cliff enters the ranch, a few tropes are creating a discourse on the role of the Manson Family within the Western realm. When talking about circularity and being trapped, another obvious feature is the omnipresence of bronco buster statuettes in several shots. They represent the typical Western protagonist trying to tame a dauntless steed. This figure becomes interesting when one notices its orientation changes from one shot to another (fig. 69&70). It is as if the bronco buster statuettes were alive and given a voice to overtly impose their judgmental gaze over the Manson Family and their behavior.



Figure 69 The Bronco Buster statuette is pointed towards the television...



Figure 70 ... only to be re-orientated differently later on

The *chiaroscuro* of the second shot intensifies the emphasis put on the two statuettes and their importance within the sequence itself. It shows a fundamental disagreement between the place itself and the people that live there. Here, Western tropes are used in order to comment on the Manson's Family's fashion to run counter to the evolution of the Western genre itself, the one Cliff represents. In that sense, these character associations allow the audience to rethink genre representation in cinema.

Right before Cliff enters George's room, Quentin Tarantino pushes the reference to Hitchcock's thrillers even further, to the point where he used a few unused soundtracks from the movie *Torn Curtain* (1966). By the middle of the 1960s, Bernard Hermann had composed the music of several of Alfred Hitchcock's films, notably those of *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959) or *Psycho* (1960). It is then no surprise that the composer was asked to create a new soundtrack for *Torn Curtain*, Hitchcock's latest political thriller starring Paul Newman and Julie Andrews. However, their relationship stopped when they disagreed over the score of the film, only for Hitchcock to replace Hermann's soundtrack for a brand new one by John Addison. Hermann's unused *Torn Curtain* songs were recorded by conductor Elmer Bernstein and sold to the public after his death. This record is used several times by Tarantino in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. In the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence, the title "The Ship – The Radiogram" plays when Lynette changes stations on the radio. Hence, one can say the soundtrack is diegetic, though it seems to have an enhanced quality compared to the other channels Lynette was listening to. The record indicates that the audience's fight with suspense is not over. As Cliff reaches George's doorway, the tension peaks until Cliff closes the door behind him – the music stops, George is safe, and the Manson Family are quite literally out of the picture. Here, Tarantino plays with our genre expectations. Cliff should have engaged in an intense fight after this scene, just like we expected Melanie to run away from the birds. However, this does not happen because it is not real. Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme would not

have had access to these unused records anyway. Elmer Bernstein's rendition of Hermann's songs was released in 1978. How could Lynette listen to a record that was officially released almost ten years later? Squeaky, as shown in the film, belongs to Tarantino's fictional universe. She is here to play the bad one and play it until the end, no matter if what she triggers is anachronistic or unrealistic. Here, this play on genre tropes both subverts the audience's expectation and shines a light on the fictional nature of the Spahn Movie Ranch sequence, insisting on Tarantino's fashion for genre-blending and storytelling.

b. The Death of the Classic Western: Cliff Meets George

As seen previously, the ranch acts as a sort of rejection of the ideology of the Manson Family, welcoming them against its will. As a matter of fact, the presence of the bronco buster culminates when Cliff reaches George's room only to find a grumpy disabled and amnesic old man. The wallpaper is full of bronco busters, as if the presence of the classic Western film industry was culminating here (fig. 71).



Figure 71 George is a spectre of the American Western film, surrounded by bronco busters

When Cliff asks him how he is doing, he answers “I’m not doing okay... I can’t see shit! Would you call that the matter? The man can’t see shit!” (01:45:27). He does not remember Rick nor Cliff, so he lost both his memory and one of his five senses – sight. What is a Western film without historical staging and the sight of epic settings, shots and characters? Nothing. He appears as a sort of relic – someone no one cares about anymore which eventually embittered him. Why embittered? When he tries to sit, Cliff wants to help him and George answers “Everyone don’t need a stuntman” (01:46:23). In the early days of the American Western movie, stuntmen were more and more needed as action films gained popularity. People wanted to see impressively choreographed films. Some “riding extras” eventually became movie stars thanks to innovative devices such as Jack Pidgeon who played in John Ford’s *Iron Horse* (The Museum of Western Film History 2). While George might have said this as a joke, it nevertheless shows how careless and embittered he has become, disregarding film history and

the crew that worked with him. George is the allegory of Classic American Western films and TV shows that have been trampled on by the Manson Family. The producer has now turned into a sunken ship, the weary shell of a man, yet thankful for Cliff to have come and seen him. “I don’t know who you are, but you touched me today” he says. In the Manson Family world *à la* Tarantino, cars are replaced by horses, the late 1960s symbolise a return to tradition in an early American Western fashion. Yet, they do not even seem to respect it or care about it. This sense of complete carelessness is intrinsic to spaghetti Westerns, its epitome in *Once upon a Time in the West* represented by Frank. In the end of the film, he even clearly states it: “Future don’t matter to us. Nothing matters now – not the land, not the money, not the woman.” (02:20:40).

c. Maintaining Suspense: Foreshadowing the Final Fight

Once Cliff leaves George, tension is re-installed. This time, another suspense means is used – silence. Upon commenting the Ranch sequence, Tarantino said “You get that kind of... dead quiet, dead dread. [...] I don’t want you to feel it on the surface, you feel it on the inside.” (California Film Institute 23:20). While most scenes until now had diegetic music, there is none when Cliff leaves the Ranch. Only the whirling wind can be heard when the camera passes by a broken car or tilts up to Pussycat’s face (01:48:15), which gives a feeling of anxiety to the audience. Here, the slight presence of sound effect implies that danger is still here, that Cliff is not over with the Manson Family. Soundscape indicates that this situation is not , imposing the presence of the Manson Family on Cliff as a sort of fatality. This scene keeps on foreshadowing another encounter between the stuntman and the Manson Family as dogs bark from afar when Cliff and Pussycat start quarrelling. This hints at the importance Brandy is going to have in the final fight, participating in the murder of Tex, Katie and Sadie.

The extra-diegetic *Don’t Chase Me Around* from the movie G-A-S-S-S-S then plays in the background, which is only fitting since the Manson Family members will meet Cliff again at the very end of the film for the final fight scene. Then, Cliff notices one of the Manson Family members punctured his tyre with a knife. Cliff tells him to fix it, to which the Manson member replies, “Fuck you!”. The record stops. Cliff proceeds to hit the man several times until he agrees to change the tyre. The stuntman then lights a cigarette, which seems like a way to reclaim his right as a western film figure, asserting his masculinity and power in front of a mob of Manson girls (fig. 72).



Figure 72 Cliff reasserting his masculinity

Tex is informed that Cliff has beaten down one of the members, yet he arrives at the ranch too late, which might be yet another sign of the Manson Family's backwardness. The Western genre has evolved and Cliff is a step ahead. This foreshadows the end of the final fight scene between Cliff and Tex and indicates Cliff's superiority over the Family members. The aesthetics of both the western and thriller genres have increased the gap that was originally formed between the "hippies" and "the old-looking dude in a Hawaiian shirt", and paradoxically between the old and the new.

All these elements, by referring to pre-existing genres and films, make of the Spahn Ranch sequence one of the most metafictional pieces of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. Pastiche is exploited to its extreme here as this sequence is key to fully understand the climax of the movie at its very end, when Cliff is confronted to the Manson Family members. All in all, these metafictional tropes are part of a larger discussion on the Hollywood industry and its evolution.

3. “THAT’S AN OLD TRICK PULLED BY THE NETWORKS!” – A UNIQUE DISCOURSE ON THE NATURE OF CINEMA AND HOLLYWOOD

3.1. Duality and the Intricacies of Stardom

Duality in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is showcased on many different levels. This part is going to analyze those levels in depth – whether it be Rick’s own duality translated by a constant internal conflict, or Rick and Cliff’s relationship. Since Rick shows more signs of internal conflict and ambivalence than Cliff, he will be at the center of the studies in this section. Yet, both mirror the intricacies of making it in Hollywood and reflect the actor/stunt double interdependent relationship.

a. Rick’s Own Moral Ambivalence through the Transition

From the beginning, it seems obvious that Rick wants to be mythologized. A huge panel showing his face lies in front of his parking lot (fig. 73). Everything he does is motivated by this frantic search of power. He wants people to see he plays in *Lancer* and wants them to associate him with the role he is playing. However, he does not like the hippie look casting director Sam Wanamaker wants to give him because it hides what Jake Cahill represents. Rick is a man of the past. This imagery can be found right after he leaves Marvin Schwarz and tells his concerns to Cliff (fig. 74). The low angle shot serves to put the panel behind them into perspective with what Rick is currently going through, rather than putting the two characters in position of power. It says “Musso & Grill: Oldest in Hollywood”.



Figure 73 A panel on Rick’s parking lot showcases his face (03:25)



Figure 74 Rick as the “Oldest” actor in Hollywood (14:01)

The panel lurks over Rick as if he was doomed to be forgotten. He is the shadow of the Golden Age of Hollywood. In order to become a myth, the idea of being morally irreproachable is extremely important – especially under the influence of the Hays Code. Thus, Rick is actually his own Western film hero who has to be good and always play the good guy to be a good actor. This moralisation of acts is embedded within the history of American Westerns. Something Tarantino does not fail to recall when Rick and Cliff watch an *FBI* episode the former stars in. Indeed, the episode starts with a black screen with word written on it: “The mission of the FBI is to protect the innocent and identify the enemies of the Government of the United States” (01:54:43). This shot indicates the fundamental importance of moral righteousness in cinema and TV series. As early as 1915, the controversial *The Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith started with “A plea for the art of the motion picture” making it a judiciary case, a sort of national concern. These words were followed by “we do demand, as a right, the liberty to show the dark side of wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue” (01:07). The strong didactic aim in *The Birth of a Nation* was Griffith’s first design when creating the film. Indeed, “Griffith’s intention was to re-create a historical episode in terms that would display its moral significance” (Slotkin 238). This idea stuck throughout the beginnings of genre cinema – and particularly the Western. Hence, moral righteousness lies at the heart of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* and defines Rick’s character.

One pictorial representation of Rick as an American Western film character is the table shot of his meeting with Marvin, where he is positioned on the right side of the frame (fig. 75). Later in the film, when he plays Caleb DeCoteau, a similar table shot showcases him on the left side of the frame, sitting next to Jim Stacy’s character Johnny Madrid (fig. 76). Since Rick and Caleb do not sit on the same side, this ambivalence in morality and the importance of being good to be recognised as a good actor is emphasized.



Figure 75 Rick and Marvin talk business (11:37)



Figure 76 Caleb and Jim have a discussion around the table (01:14:24)

As such, Tarantino offers a comment on the long-lasting Hollywood trend of moral righteousness and the relationship actors had with this very notion. Within his job, Rick is told being good is the only way to achieve success. Being an actor means he struggles with morality, but also with being under the spotlight. Indeed, when Rick rehearses his *Lancer* sequences, he is showcased preparing cocktails behind a counter at home (fig. 77). During the *Lancer* scenes, he talks to Jim in front of the counter and is the one ordering things. Here, the counter serves as a metaphor for being under the spotlight or not.



Figure 77 Rick is behind the counter (26:37)



Figure 78 Rick is in front of the counter (01:13:47)

When Rick plays Caleb in front of the counter, he forgets his lines (fig. 78). Moreover, the lines he says right in front of the counter are the ones he was rehearsing at home. This metaphor translates the intricacies of being an actor – managing exposure and people’s perception on your own morality – and finding balance between those dualities.

b. Rick’s Evolution: New Hollywood and the Western

Rick’s evolution starts with his embodiment of a Western film character. It can be seen in his relationship with women. When talking about John Wayne and his characters in classic Westerns, Irinia Chirica mentions a “generally condescending attitude toward women” which explains “that the Duke’s wife or sweetheart is dead in *Red River*, *Yellow Ribbon*, *Hondo*, *The Horse Soldiers*, *The Train Robbers*, etc.” (63). Rick has very little contact with women throughout the beginning of the film but has an interesting interaction with Trudi (a young actress who plays in *Lancer*) halfway through it. Throughout the sequence, his condescending tone in the scene confirms this idea of superiority found in classic Westerns. For instance, Rick tells Trudi that in fifteen years she will go through the same crisis and calls her “pumpkin puss” (59:12). Even if he is a bit rough around the edges with her, his encounter with Trudi serves as a catalyst for Rick’s evolution instead of an element taming him down and emasculating his Western hero figure. Indeed, he experiences a kind of shock due to his meeting with the epitome of a very professional new generation, educated on cinema and its intricacies, ready to go forward with the New Hollywood Era. Trudi only responds to her character’s name Mirabella Lancer, she reads Walt Disney’s biography, and seems to have the maturity to understand the complexity of her job when saying “It’s the actor’s job to strive for 100 percent effectiveness. Naturally, we never succeed, but it’s the pursuit... that’s meaningful” (55:00). The following scene is crucial as Rick indirectly opens up to Trudi by telling her the story of Tom “Easy” Breezy, a bronco buster that is becoming worse at his job every day. The whole scene happens in a blocking lasting approximately three minutes from 55:53 to 58:26 (fig. 79).



Figure 79 Blocking on Rick telling the story of Tom “Easy” Breezy

This blocking gives a sense of transparency to the scene and insists on Rick’s honesty. It indicates the decisions he is going to take after filming *Lancer* will utterly change him. More than this, the scene also challenges the importance of the female character in western films, giving Trudi the role of a therapist, someone Rick can open up to.

Trudi holds another important role within Rick’s evolution as she offers the audience a discourse on the implications of getting into character. During her conversation with Rick, her speech seems confusing. She argues she wants to keep being called Mirabella to stay in character, but she reads a Disney book for herself. There is a comical dimension to the scene when Trudi is patting Rick’s knee to comfort him when he is crying. She says, “It’s okay, Caleb, it’s okay” (fig. 80), as if Caleb (and not Rick) were the one crying and exteriorising the pains of being an actor.



Figure 80 Trudi is patting Rick’s knee (58:52)

The low-angle over-the-shoulder shot emphasizes the pathetic aspect of the scene, which eventually seems comical in this context. Here, talking personal matters becomes the problem of the fictional and not the real. Trudi mixes the two realms and therefore translates the complexities of the actor’s job. One’s own personality can always mingle with one’s character impersonation. The trick is to find the balance in this duality.

Thus, there is a duality in discourse. Trudi seems to understand that work is work, that getting into character is different from actually being who you are on set. Differentiating the actor from the man is something she claims to handle well. Yet, Rick plays at his best when it comes from the heart. Putting his personal frustrations in his acting allows him to go from playing the heavy to playing what Sam calls “evil sexy Hamlet” (01:31:13) – again, stressing on the importance of a sort of stage presence. Through this dual thought on theatricality, Tarantino engages a discourse on the intricacies of being an actor/actress and understanding the boundaries of character impersonation. Trudi is the catalyst for Rick’s change precisely because she indirectly addresses those issues.

After shooting *Lancer*, Marvin finds a starting point to Rick’s spaghetti Western career with *Nebraska Jim*. This helps Rick figure out which type of character he eventually aimed at playing and completely changes the “oldest in Hollywood” Western figure he was. After an ellipsis, stunt coordinator Randy narrates what we have been missing and tells us “Rick made a rather compelling Nebraska Jim existing quite nicely within Sergio Corbucci’s rogue gallery of antiheroes” (01:59:19). The question of morality thus disappears from Rick’s concerns, as if it was suddenly never important. Ultimately, by rejecting European trends and meeting with the epitome of this transitional period that is Trudi, Rick finally learns that these trends are inevitably part of the new culture that represented the New Hollywood Era, and he has to stick to them. Now married, Rick gets back to Hollywood being a different man. The influence of Europe on him is depicted through his resemblance with the most important couple figure in the film – Sharon Tate and Roman Polanski. When Rick gets back from Italy, he has found himself an Italian wife, Francesca Capucci. The two couples act as a sort of chiasm. Indeed, Sharon was supposed to be turned “into a new Golden Age siren” (Collin, 08:04) while Rick was the ultimate masculine American Western hero. Francesca Capucci and Roman Polanski represent the strong European influence that imposed itself in the US. Aesthetically speaking, both couples are portrayed in the same manner at different occasions in the film. Sharon and Roman are flying on a Pan Am aeroplane to get back to America, and land in the very same airport that Rick and Francesca will land in later on in the film (fig. 81, 82, 83 & 84). This creates a strong link between the two couples.



Figures 81&82 Sharon and Roman arriving at the airport (04:20/04:26)



Figures 83&84 Francesca and Rick arriving at the airport (02:03:53/02:04:03)

The shots are almost perfectly similar, indicating the hegemony of the influence of Europe on the US. This is then no surprise that Jay Sebring talks to Rick, and that Sharon finally speaks with her neighbour as they share a strong link. She opens the gate since both of them are now ready to meet and rewrite history, marking a smoother transition to the New Hollywood Era and a new perception on the Western film (02:35:22).

c. The Struggle to Accept Europeanization and the Evolution of a Genre

While Rick does evolve throughout the film, he also reflects the American ambivalence between accepting and rejecting the Europeanization of Hollywood. When Randy describes his trip to Italy, he says “He didn’t love the Italians’ way of making movies. In fact, he thought the post-synched, “every actor speaks their own language”, Tower of Babel shooting style of European movies was ridiculous” (01:59:39). When Leone’s Dollars Trilogy was released in the United States, critics debated on its legitimacy within the Western genre. Bosley Crowther, the famous New York Times critic, wrote an article on *A Fistful of Dollars* in 1967. He seemed to blame less its morbid violence than its European influences, sarcastically mentioning its “European-made, English-dubbed, Mexican-localized [...] put together as an Italian-German-Spanish co-production and shot for the most part in Spain” western (29). While the criticism against violence and cynicism in this new kind of Western was certainly felt, the controversy lied in this question: can a film be a western if its cast, crew, locations and style are not inherently American? What seemed to disturb American critics was a foreign gaze set on a genre that was deeply rooted in the American culture. It explains why they decided to call it

'spaghetti' westerns, making it a "counter-genre expressing criticism of the American Western" (Fridlund 3). These new features scared film critics because it suggested the end of the American cinema as they knew it. William McClain mentions in the *Journal of Film and Video* that "in Leone's films critics found echoes, and perhaps causes, of deeply disturbing trends in domestic film culture—trends that would later culminate in what would be dubbed the "New Hollywood"" (52). This very effort to accept foreign trends during the transition to the New Hollywood era is well described by Rick's thoughts. While Rick did evolve throughout the film, Randy indicates that adapting himself to a new kind of cinema was not easy.

Rick's evolution mirrors the change the western genre had to go through, but apart from sticking to new European trends, he never really adapts to the new Western codes either. The resemblance between the movie star and the character slowly fades away as he enters the New Hollywood era. After all, the Western hero is a lonesome man. Chirica says "at the end of a western, the hero cannot settle down without losing part of his manhood and becoming less than he is" (63), however Rick completely changes. He settles down. Rather than staying a disillusioned hero, he joins forces with the epitome of the Golden Age, innocence and purity represented onscreen – Sharon Tate. Can we say Rick acts as a John Wayne-type figure then? There are elements that show he tries to reach this star status, and that he definitely wants to be like him. There is no denying that his relationship with women and sense of pride serve his classic American Western film persona. However, Rick's character is going through far too much introspection to be the composed Western figure he so-wishes to embody. The scene that showcases a helpless Rick after the first shooting sequence of *Lancer* is the epitome of that. In the van, the camera puts Rick at the center of the frame, surrounded by mirrors. He confesses he drinks too much, only to drink more and to realize he needs to stop acting the way he does. The most interesting part is the moment when he looks at himself in the mirror on the left side of the frame, saying "You don't get these lines right, I'm gonna blow your fucking brains out tonight. All right?" (01:19:02). He seems to be addressing himself, and the audience as well. He starts by saying "Let me tell you something" then proceeds to look at us right in the eyes. He breaks the fourth wall so we can have an idea of what it is like to be Rick Dalton and to understand how distressed he is (fig. 85). After all, we only get this information through his reflection, his hidden self, but this is actually what the film displays the most. This lack of composure is eventually felt within his acting, which becomes more and more theatrical as the filming of *Lancer* goes on. The last shooting sequence is made up of several long shots, as if to give room to Rick's acting (fig. 86).



Figure 85 Rick breaks the fourth wall and opens up (01:19:01)



Figure 86 A long shot gives room for Rick's theatrical acting (01:28:44)

The use of close-ups, a typical Western trope usually associated with the gaze turned into a tool to emphasize his anger and instability – when he asks fifty thousand dollars from Murdoch Lancer right before throwing Mirabella on the ground for example (01:30:47). His evolution and the fact that he overtly shows his feelings to the audience makes him a very questionable Western hero, even though he wants to be its real-life embodiment. Being part of the New Hollywood also means losing the inner classic Western hero he cannot portray or be. As a result, Rick is constantly swinging between embodying a classic western character and being a flawed, more rounded human. In a sense, many people were disillusioned to the likes of Rick during the transition, which brought about new Western characters that mirrored this feeling. Composure, mystery, and carelessness became some of its important features. Here, the character that sticks out as the Western hero would more naturally be Cliff, as if Rick passed the torch on to his stunt double.

d. Cliff as Rick's Complementary Cowboy Figure

Rick and Cliff are constantly associated with each other whether it is through their jobs, their personalities or what they symbolize. For instance, Rick is the actor, the man that is in front of the screen while Cliff is the stunt man, the one “carrying his load” (02:21) in his

shadow. However, the fundamental point of reference between the two is how they are embedded within the Western genre. For instance, at the end of the film, Randy's voiceover clearly indicates that the two characters will be taking separate ways in an uncanny manner: "So these last four Italian flicks, after nine years together, would be Rick and Cliff's final rodeo" (02:03:02). Rodeos belong to the Western pictorial tradition, and its use here is telling. Indeed, the way they both present themselves indicate they belong to the Western genre.

As seen in the previous part, Rick is a mostly depicted as a classic Western figure to the likes of John Wayne or Steve McQueen, but often fails at keeping this representation intact. The way Cliff describes himself indicates his association with the Spaghetti Western: "'Prison's been trying to get me all my life. It ain't got me yet. The day it does, it won't be because of you.'" (01:26:16). Here, Cliff presents himself as an outlaw, a typical figure of the Spaghetti Western – one that is "escaping from society rather than protecting it" (Kehr 05:55). When talking about the Western film, the use of weapons and firearms needs to be analyzed. Brandy is an interesting figure, a complementary element to Cliff's personality. She acts as both a prop and a sidekick to him. Cliff owns a gun but does not carry it around. It is no surprise that his dog then appears as the most effective weapon. She is the means of defence Cliff uses whenever he is in danger. Brandy almost appears as a substitute, if not pastiche, of the regular gun in westerns. When Cliff and Rick go to Italy, Cliff leaves his guardian angel in the US and picks her up when he is back. This further suggests the safety link Cliff has with European trends and spaghetti Western since he does not need any kind of protective figure to help him while in Italy. During the fight against the Manson Family, Cliff uses Brandy as Tex would use his gun. She was tamed to eliminate rodents, or pests. She is fed "Good food for means Dogs" which is "rat"-flavoured, on several occasions during the movie (fig. 87).



Figure 87 Brandy's food is rat-flavoured (24:10)



Figure 88 Close-up on the rat in George's house, which is associated with the Family (01:42:50)

During the Spahn Movie ranch sequence, Cliff enters George's house after Squeaky lets him in. One of the first things he sees upon entering is a rat that is caught in a trap, indicating the resemblance between the Manson Family and pest (fig. 88). Tarantino playfully showcases Brandy as a loving being, Cliff calls her "darling" when she first appears onscreen (23:11). Even the entity that serves as weapon has a dual figure – she is a sweet creature, she saves Rick and Cliff, helps them be safe, but she kills several members of the Manson Family. Even one of the main features of the Western genre is turned into a questionable emblem of morality. Cliff is intrinsically tied to its representation and whether he is a moral or immoral character. Much to the likes of his sidekick Brandy or Harmonica, he has killed and also appears as a hero. But watching the end of the film, Tarantino shows that it ultimately is not something that matters. In Leone's film, Cheyenne and Jill sum it up when he says, "I'm not the right man... and neither is he" when talking about Harmonica, and she replies, "Maybe not, but it doesn't matter" (02:32:37). This is an aspect Rick struggles with during most of the film. There is a real sense of duality within Rick as he ambivalently swings between the powerful masculine western character and a broken, more realistic self with his own anxieties. Something that Cliff overtly contradicts, already setting himself as the hero of the fictional realm. It is then no surprise that, when Cliff sees Rick crying in front of the Musso and Grill panel, he says "Don't cry in front of the Mexicans!" (14:19), playfully indicating his belonging to the western *à la* Leone.

Another indicator of Cliff's relevance within the Spaghetti Western world is his clothes in the final fight sequence. At the very end of the film, Cliff and Tex engage in a duel in a very symmetrical shot (fig. 89) which resembles that of the Harmonica and Frank duel in Leone's film (fig. 90). Both Tarantino and Leone built these shots to be more cynical than aesthetically pleasing. While Leone mocks the dichotomy between good and bad by showcasing Harmonica in a white attire and Frank in a black one, Tarantino gives Tex a black outfit and Cliff a white

trouser and black top. It further increases the moral ambiguity that Cliff represents. Moreover, Tarantino does not even give Cliff a gun. The character just mimics it with his hand.



Figure 89 Duel between Tex and Cliff (02:24:27)



Figure 90 Duel between Harmonica and Frank (02:25:41)

This all results in Tex and Cliff laughing hysterically at one another, out of madness, or the use of drugs – or out of cynicism. Indeed, Dave Kehr said that one of the tropes of the classic American Western character is displaying a man “who is traumatised by the exposure to violence” (04:20). Here, the very contrary is happening. Violence is going to happen no matter what, Cliff has taken drugs and Tex presents himself as “the devil” (02:25:24). This aspect is typical of Spaghetti western, which both connects and differentiates Rick and Cliff as western characters. If anything, Rick (or at least his characters) is a classic western figure when Cliff is a Spaghetti western one.

In the middle of the film, Cliff and Rick experience two western-like moments. While Rick plays in the TV series *Lancer*, Cliff meets the Manson Family at a Ranch. Both men experience different westerns: one that is real and the other is fictional. Hence, many similarities can be spotted between the two. For instance, the baddies are positioned in a similar way at the beginning of both sequences. In *Lancer*, some men gaze at Johnny Madrid (Jim Stacy’s

character) from afar (fig. 91). They are shown sitting around the saloon, completely passive. The same attitude is adopted by most members of the Manson Family at the Ranch (fig. 92).



Figures 91 & 92 The bad guys adopt similar postures... (01:11:00&01:34:37)



Figure 93 ... already present in Spaghetti Westerns (07:43)

They keep quiet and stare at Cliff. In both cases, the camera displays Cliff and Johnny Madrid in the position of the ‘stranger walking into town’, a trope that has shaped many westerns over the years. This formula has notably been exploited in Leone’s Dollar Trilogy with Clint Eastwood’s famous ‘Man with no name’ character walking into a town he is not familiar with. In *A Fistful of Dollars* (Leone 1964), the first few scenes introduce men that stare at Clint Eastwood’s character in the streets (fig. 93). Though these shots are different, their composition is very similar – the starers are positioned in a similar way. As seen in the previous part, Cliff’s western is revisionist, most shots are infused with a new meaning and differ from original western tropes. In that sense, many women appear to be the starers here when men are showcased in traditional classical westerns – such as the *Lancer* sequence. Both Johnny and Cliff have a final goal – either defeating opponents or reaching the Ranch to see George. Cliff also resembles Luke Perry’s Scott Lancer in the next sequence as they both want to rescue a hostage – whether it be Mirabella or George. In a similar way, we have seen Rick’s character Caleb is depicted as a hippie to the likes of Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider*. As Dennis Hopper and Charles Manson shared a similar ideology, it is no surprise to see Caleb also resembles Charles Manson. Both wear dark long hair, leather jackets and flared trousers (fig. 94).



Figure 94 Charles Manson both resembles Caleb and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* character (51:40)

By portraying both Rick and Cliff as western characters, Tarantino displays a strong parallel between the two and links both real and fictional worlds. This parallel also stresses on the interdependent nature of Cliff and Rick's relationship as they embody different types of western characters that are opposed and yet complement each other.

During the very first minutes of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, a shot presents Rick and Cliff sitting next to each other with the names of both actors written on screen... only to find Brad Pitt associated with Rick and Leonardo DiCaprio associated with Cliff (fig. 73). Here, Tarantino uses contemporary cinema to comment on itself. The audience knows exactly who Pitt and DiCaprio are and who they embody. They have reached the star status Rick is endlessly seeking. Indeed, David Roche wrote that "the stars are used very much like the preexisting music – as material with baggage." (Roche 252) Here, the baggage is mediated so that we understand Cliff and Rick act as a Ying and Yang, completing each other to the point where the real actors' names are switched. Overall, the director plays on the idea of stardom on two historical levels – the now and then.

This idea of Ying and Yang is showcased in the cinematic language used. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* displays many different crane shots to get a general sense of movement within the city. Cinematographer Robert Richardson himself said, "the crane has become second nature to [Quentin Tarantino and I], and to the entire crew" (qtd. in B. Benjamin). However, upon commenting the film, Richardson noted two "amazing crane shots" (Pirello) that are dear to him in the film. The first one is a crane shot over the Van Nuys drive-in cinema as Cliff drives home to his van (from 22:03 to 22:28) and the second depicts Rick rehearsing in his pool, only to head over to the Tate and Polanski house (from 26:57 to 27:50). The first crane shot is going towards Cliff's home from front to back, while the second one wanders off in the opposite direction from back (Rick's house) to front (Sharon's house). Here, movements are

linked with the characters they first depicted. For instance, in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1940), the famous *El Rancho* scene displays the cabaret under a stormy weather (from 14:21 to 14:50). Before the camera peaks in the cabaret, the audience is faced with a window allowing a view on the inside (fig. 95).



Figure 95 A broken window mirroring the state of Kane's widow (14:41)

The camera goes over the *El Rancho* only to introduce the audience to Kane's second wife Susan Alexander, mourning at a table. Very much like the weather and the derelict state of the window the camera seems to pass through, Susan seems shattered by the death of her former husband. Crane shots transpose an environment onto personalities. This is also what stands out in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. Cliff literally lives behind a drive-in cinema. He thence lives in Rick's shadow, avoiding fame. Contrary to Cliff, Rick had just been bragging about how proud he was to live next to Tate and Polanski's house, a place where the camera readily leads us to. One enjoys living under the spotlight while the other does not care. As such, shots that are associated with these two protagonists appear as complementary in shape and meaning.

In the end, there are several signs of Rick's evolution and Cliff's stagnation. For instance, Rick's role in the final fight is similar to an earlier scene displayed when Marvin discusses business with Rick – the *Fourteen Fists of McCluskey* scene. In both sequences, Rick holds a flamethrower, except one showcases one of his's characters and the other displays Rick at his house. Additionally, this dissertation previously underlined the importance of composer Bernard Hermann's work in the film. During the *Fourteen Fists of McCluskey* sequence, the soundtrack that is playing extradiegetically is "The Killing", another unused record from Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*. The same song is played during the final fight scene, when Rick burns Sadie to death. He suddenly becomes a hero, similar to the ones he used to portray in the

past. This could indicate Rick's evolution – after all, he used to be afraid of using a flamethrower. Indeed, when Marvin asked, “That’s you operating the flamethrower isn’t it?” he answered, “You bet your sweet ass it was, yeah, yeah [...] Lemme tell you that’s one shit fuck crazy weapon you do not want to be on the wrong side of... oh boy oh boy [...] I was shit scared of the damn thing to be honest” (08:52). Except here, Rick is not afraid anymore. He is filmed in a low-angle shot, giving him the power he thought he had lost over the years (fig. 96).



Figure 96 Low angle shot on Rick holding a flamethrower (02:28:59)

Cliff and Rick have both participated in the elimination of the Manson Family members. This is one of the rare moments when the audience sees Rick and Cliff actually working together, which can be a subtle way to put forth the importance of considering the actor and the stunt man's jobs as a whole. Something that indicates Cliff's importance in Rick's everyday life is the moment when Rick starts his first day of shooting *Lancer*, Cliff says “You’re Rick fucking Dalton, don’t you forget it” (34:29). Here, Cliff acts as Rick's self-confidence. Someone that can reassure him when times are tough. In that sense, it becomes very significant when Rick claims “Rick fucking Dalton!” (01:32:46) to himself when he manages to perform well on the *Lancer* set. The influence they have on one another is very telling of the interdependent relationship they have.

Moreover, Rick evolves in a manner that resembles Cliff as he gets closer to a fictional character. Indeed, at the very beginning of the film, a *Bounty Law* sequence is shown onscreen. The sheriff asks Jake Cahill if he “ever brings them in alive” (0:45), to which he answers, “Not when there’s three of ‘em and one of me!”. This sentence sounds like Jake had foreshadowed this end of the movie, or rather as if Rick had taken his place. When he kills Sadie, Rick can be identified with Jake. Yet, what fundamentally marks the difference between Cliff and Rick is their evolution throughout the film. Cliff does not show sign of ground-breaking development. In the beginning, Cliff and Rick meet producer Marvin Schwarz for the first time. When Rick

tells him Cliff often drives him around Los Angeles, he proceeds to tell Rick that Cliff “sounds like a good friend”, to which he says “I try” (06:11). Now back to the scene right after the bloodbath at Cielo Drive, Rick tells him “You’re a good friend, Cliff”, and again, he answers “I try” (02:32:07). It emphasizes the circularity and stagnation of Cliff’s character. By being more human and going through a (quasi) coming-of-age story, Rick points at the postmodern simulation Cliff represents, an illusion, a cardboard character. As such, *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is an efficient metafiction as it manages to point out “insights [...] into [...] the representational nature of all fiction”(Waugh 5). Cliff relies on the history of myths and how they have been presented onscreen since the beginnings of cinema. There is no better way for the director to depict Cliff through spaghetti western tropes as they depict the character’s apparent nonchalance and cynicism well. When Rick fails at presenting those tropes correctly, he points at the fictional dimension of his counterpart, indicating his artificiality. Yet, even with these differences, both of them complete each other. This is well-summed up during the fight, Cliff gets stabbed and is wounded. When he gets picked up by an ambulance after everything is over, the camera tilts from a poster of *Tanner*, a Western starring Rick, to Cliff on a stretcher (fig. 97). The poster shows Rick’s character with wounds that have been inflicted on him.

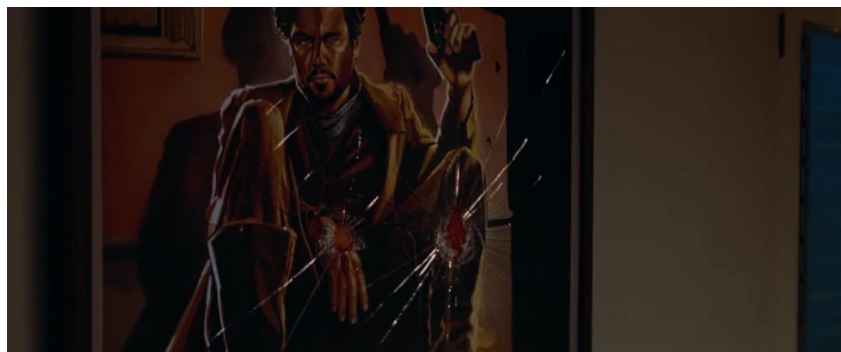


Figure 97 Poster showing a wounded spaghetti Western hero, reminiscent of Cliff’s condition (02:30:26)

These wounds are the result of the killing of one of the Manson Family girls – Cliff bashes her head on the frame. This image of a wounded Western hero associated with a tilt on Cliff deliberately shows him as the ultimate hero of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* and insists on the ambiguity between Rick and Cliff as complementary Western movie figures.

By showcasing the various degrees of duality to the audience – particularly when it comes to Rick and Cliff or Rick himself – Tarantino offers a variety of comments on what it is like to be an actor and to work in the industry. Rick’s problems and ambivalent morality showcase the intricacies of stardom and acting. As such, Cliff and Rick appear to be different

sides of the same coin, completing each other as stuntman and actor do. If one seems more realistic when the other belongs to a fictional realm, it is for them to embody the metaphorical Ying and Yang of Hollywood. In many ways, their polar oppositions are what make them complementary. The stunt double takes stock of the dangerous situations and deals with them when the actor pretends but does not deal with these situations directly. Rick deals with internal conflict, with his own struggles, while Cliff deals with external conflict, real-life danger.

Hence, duality is at the center of a discourse on the actor's role in the industry, and more broadly on his/her relationship with other people that also belong to Hollywood. The most important metaphor of this discourse lies behind the Rick and Cliff relationship. Yet, Tarantino does not stop there and provides a commentary on his own cinema, with the use of a precise cinematic language.

3.2. Tarantino on Tarantino

Many directors have used self-reference as a way to underline artificiality in cinema. From Brian de Palma to Edgar Wright, directors have often included visual hints to their previous movies in recent films (Films in Films Staff). In his case, Quentin Tarantino uses self-reference as a way to inscribe all his works within a whole or to pinpoint his stylistic evolution. In both manners, this section will investigate how those references help create a discourse on his own cinema.

a. Post-Classical Narration and Intensified Continuity

Quentin Tarantino often put a strong emphasis on editing. Before 2010, his relationship with editor Sally Menke defined the final versions of the director's movies. In the documentary *The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing* (Apple), Menke explains she had to convince him to bring the Vincent and Mia scene down in *Pulp Fiction* and spent eight months constantly working with the director, "so intense, I [saw] him more than my husband" (17:40). Though Tarantino changed editor after Menke's sudden death, this relationship translates well the importance the director gives to editing. As we discussed Tarantino has an overall postmodern style, editing is crucial in the way his films are built. In terms of pace of the editing, David Bordwell specifies that the 1960s represented a turning point.

Between 1930 and 1960 [...] the average shot length (ASL) hovered between 8 and 11. [...] In the mid 1960s, several filmmakers seemed to accelerate their cutting rates. Many A-films of the period contain ASLs of between 6 and 8 seconds, and have some significantly shorter averages. (Bordwell 121)

This rapid editing which grew more and more during the 1960s is part of Bordwell's "intensified continuity", typical to the transition to a new kind of film production. As a result, this subpart investigates whether or not Tarantino's style belongs to intensified continuity and reflects a New Hollywood-type of editing. Indeed, Bordwell indicated that the average shot length decreased through time leading to a more rapid editing. Roche calculated several average shot lengths from Quentin Tarantino films to analyze its relevance within modern narration styles. When taking the final scene of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, one can count an average of 81 shots for 136 seconds between the moment the fight starts and the one when Cliff faints (02:25:38 – 02:27:54) which makes an average of about 0.6 shot per second (or an ASL of 1.7 second/shot). It has a slower cutting pace than "the *Inglourious Basterds* shoot-out [92:37-2:53] and *The Hateful Eight* massacre [129:50-130:12] [which] both have an ASL of less than 1 second/shot" (Roche 164) for example. This editing style is representative of intensified continuity. However, much to the likes of Roche's conclusion, Tarantino uses it "merely as a punctuation device in order to vary and expand the range of narration [...] with the quick cutting and camera movements taking on a mimetic function" (164). In that sense, rather than really embedding his film in the era he describes, the director punctually uses intensified continuity to inscribe his movies within the same universe. If anything, editing is a tool to unify his motion pictures within a whole.

b. Cinematic Language and Composition Meta in Tarantino's *Oeuvre*

Quentin Tarantino uses strong visual signs that come back regularly in his films. His cinematic language helps indicate that the film belongs to his wider universe. As such, David Roche listed his signature devices in his book *Quentin Tarantino: Poetics and Politics of Cinematic Metafiction*. Among them are low-angle shot/ high-angle reverse shot, circling camera during conversation, eye-level frontal two-shot portraying interracial or intergender relationship, lateral tracking shot following heroine/hero, split screen, frame-within-frame composition through doorway, fast zoom-ins and -outs, and switching from color to black and white to color (Roche 172-192). The technique of low-angle shot/ high-angle reverse shot is not remarkable in the film, though it is considered one of Tarantino's most memorable devices.

The circling camera, which often appears during a conversation around a table, is a trademark the director plays with – notably during the *Lancer* sequence. This device is often associated with the post-classical movement of intensified continuity as Bordwell defined it. As the latter wrote, “by the mid-1990s, a very common way to present people gathered around any table – dinner table, card table, operating table – was by spiralling around them.” (*Intensified Continuity* 20). One of the most famous circling camera take from the director is the opening scene in *Reservoir Dogs* (from 0:20 to 02:20). There are many table shots in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* but only one scene where the camera is circling. Right before Rick forgets his line for the second time, the camera circles around Jim Stacy. Rick freezes when he asks for the line. After Rick gets angry against himself, the camera goes back with noises of camera rolling on the tracks only to circle around Jim again (01:17:00). The noises underline the artificiality of the filming process while putting forward the “behind the scenes” of one of Tarantino’s most famous devices – as it was used by the director as early as the beginning of *Reservoir Dogs*. According to David Roche, this technique usually leads to “creating intimacy, establishing power relations, conveying rhythm” (Roche 177). Here, the camera circles clockwise when the scene is filmed and counterclockwise when Rick has to get back into character. The two characters and actors share no intimacy, however the scene does establish strong power relations. Jim is the one who mostly speaks within the scene. In fact, the camera seems to circle around him. Additionally, the camera running counterclockwise reveals Rick’s nature and goes against Caleb’s charisma. Rick is one camera move away to go from hypnotic star quality to ridicule. In *Reservoir Dogs*, the camera was spiralling around the characters as a way for the audience to understand their personality and what connects or differentiates them. In *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, the circling shot defines Rick’s character impersonation. Here, Tarantino plays with fiction and reality again to give a new meaning to this cinematic device.

Contrary to many Tarantino films, one eye-level frontal two-shot portraying interracial relationship showcases opposite characters who have just fought against each other – Cliff and Bruce Lee (fig. 98). Here, the interracial relationship is also displaying a difference in genre characters. Both of them just had a fight where Cliff has mocked Bruce’s fighting noises by mimicking them (48:30). The Spaghetti Western character fights the martial arts professional, the Kung Fu specialist.



Figure 98 Eye-level frontal two-shot portraying Cliff and Bruce Lee (49:11)

Cliff asserts himself as the hero of the situation, the winner of a battle of genre characters. This two-shot is shown after Janet arrives on set and stops the argument. David Roche has noticed the use of this device in several Tarantino films such as *Jackie Brown*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Death Proof*, *Kill Bill*, *Inglourious Basterds*, *Django Unchained*, and *The Hateful Eight*. All of these instances offer comments on character representation and inequalities in power relations. This one is no exception, though very different from its predecessors. On this still, Bruce looks much more serious than Cliff, who takes the situation very lightly. Indeed, Bruce insists on the fact that “nobody beat the shit out of Bruce, it was a friendly contest” (49:16). While this scene became highly controversial – something we will investigate later on – this fight is revealing of the culture war under the New Hollywood era, when foreign cinema started having a consequent influence on Hollywood. Hence, the composition of this shot interprets power relations of race and culture in this particular era.

Another eye-level frontal two-shot in the film portrays intergender relationships. It brings together Steve McQueen and actress Connie Stevens (fig. 99). When Connie first appears next to McQueen, we suspect they might form a tandem, or engage in a private conversation. As they share a cigarette, the frontal two-shot puts them on an apparent equal footing. Yet, prior to this very shot, important celebrities surrounding Sharon Tate had their names written onscreen (fig. 100).



Figure 99 Eye-level frontal two-shot of Connie Stevens and Steve McQueen (31:49)



Figure 100 Connie is neither here, nor mentioned onscreen (29:14)

For an audience that is unaware of the late 60s trends or celebrities, Connie Stevens is not someone people can easily identify. Additionally, the more the conversation evolves, the more the audience realizes Steve McQueen's real interest is towards Sharon Tate. This is all revealed when the two-shot pans toward Steve to completely erase Connie from the picture (31:10). This shot explores staged power relations, something the director previously did in *Jackie Brown* with the depiction of Ordell and Louis in a frontal two-shot (fig. 101).



Figure 101 Ordell and Louis appear to be equal (04:30)

They seem to be relaxed, watching television as two friends would do. They are both depicted on the same level, but Ordell will show to be more powerful than Louis in the film. As David Roche says, “it serves to question the terms of power relationship that is staged as equal” (Roche 179). Though Connie and Steve are depicted as equal, Connie’s presence is barely justified in this scene. She is solely here to listen to Steve’s story and to hear his frustration. It is a conversation that slowly turns into the monologue of an ode to Sharon Tate, literally erasing other women from the picture.

As seen previously, lateral tracking shots following heroes and heroines are probably the most recurring type of shots in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. In his previous films, Tarantino notably shot *The Bride (Kill Bill)* and *Jackie Brown* through a lateral tracking shot (fig. 18&21). Lateral tracking shots follow Jim Stacy (fig. 32), Rick (fig. 33), Cliff (fig. 56), and the Manson Family (fig. 102).

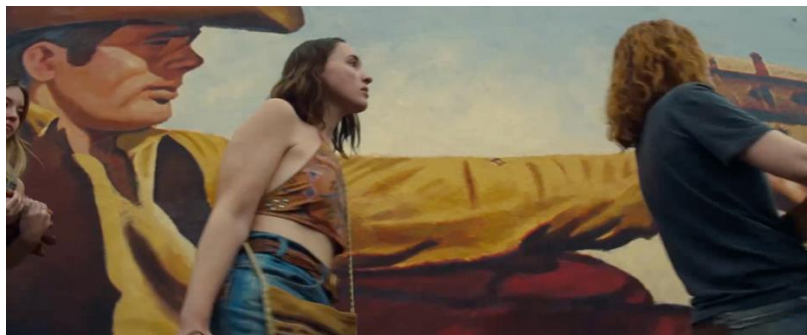


Figure 102 Tracking shot of the Manson Family with a cowboy behind them (16:03)

The only lateral tracking shot that seems odd in all of them is the Manson Family one. They are shot with a low angle so the audience can see the cowboy pointed towards the right. A recurring trope within Western films is the opposition between East and West, civilisation and wilderness, and progress and tradition. David Roche mentions in his book that “Generally speaking, the movement from left to right or right to left abides by Western pictorial conventions, with the right symbolizing progress [...], the left, a return or regression.” (Roche 217) Thus, these movements are generally depicted through tracking shots or pans. The cowboy seems to guide the Manson Family through Los Angeles from left to right. He symbolises their home, the Spahn Movie Ranch, where they stay with its owner George. Going in the direction of the ranch would thus symbolise an evolution towards something new. This direction is also the one Jim, Rick and Cliff all go towards in the respective shots mentioned. In Cliff’s case, Pussycat is forcing him into going that direction. Moreover, we have previously seen that the Ranch is the symbol of a lost classical western tradition. Rick and Jim are dressed in their *Lancer* attire when

the tracking shot follows them, indicating Tarantino wanted to challenge the meaning of this pictorial convention. Here, the new is not particularly a symbol of evolution or progress but lead back to a traditional approach to cinema. Cliff being the best symbol of a character fully integrated in the New Hollywood landscape, it is no surprise he reluctantly goes in this direction onscreen. Tarantino's use of lateral tracking shot in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* not only introduces characters to the audience onscreen but inscribes them in a broader pictorial tradition – here again, the western. In that sense, camera movement can influence characterization.

The split screen appears once in the film and is mostly used as a symbolical plot-driven device. It is a decisive shot in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* as it announces the end of Rick and Cliff's long-lasting partnership onscreen. This shot separates Francesca from Rick and lets Cliff be Rick's plane neighbor, revealing that their relationship is the glue that holds the film together (fig. 103).



Figure 103 Split screen reuniting Rick and Cliff (02:03:27)

When the line that splits the screen appears, an editing noise comes along with it. As Randy talks about their “final rodeo” (02:03:07), this noise almost sounds like bringing the curtain down. Right before the documentary-like part of the film, the sequence seems highly romanticized. Indeed, the split screen shot lasts for 25 seconds (from 02:03:07 to 02:03:32) while Randy sums up their relationship with a perceptible nostalgia. He says: “When you come to the end of the line with a buddy who is more than a brother and a little less than a wife, getting blind drunk together is really the only way to say farewell.” (02:03:24). By juxtaposing several characters in slightly different locations, Tarantino points at the dramatic dimension of the story. Rick and Cliff are not even sitting next to each other, but the audience is meant to believe they are both thinking about each other. Reality is somewhat manipulated. This device is similar to *Inglourious Basterds*' split screen shot and brought upon in the same way – the

original shot being the left side of the frame to which the right side is added after the line appears onscreen (fig. 104).



Figure 104 Split screen in *Inglourious Basterds* (01:02:42)

In this shot, flammable film and a sequence from Hitchcock's *Sabotage* (1936) are superimposed. To illustrate this idea of flammability, a fiction movie is used to illustrate reality. In the same way that the *Inglourious Basterds* split screen “demonstrates that images can be resignified” (Roche 185), the audience is manipulated into believing the heavy pathetic dimension to Rick and Cliff's relationship in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*.

The switching from color to black-and-white to color sequences in the film mostly refer to the transition from TV footage to Rick's 1969 reality. This is not surprising as, historically, this type of sequences “served to signal a passage from one world to another” (Ibid. 190). Most films Rick starred in are showcased in color, but the *Bounty Law* sequences are in black and white. As a result, all the Jake Cahill appearances are in black and white, which serves to differentiate Rick from Jake. In *Death Proof*, the black and white sequence hints at Stuntman Mike's gradual loss of power over the second group of women in the film led by Zoë Bell (fig. 105).



Figure 105 Stuntman Mike staring at the girls (57:25)



Figure 106 A Red Apple cigarettes ad (02:39:07)

In *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, the last black and white sequence comically stresses the difference between actor and character as Jake promotes Red Apple cigarettes (fig. 106). When the filming is over, Rick claims “right, this cigarette tastes like fucking shit!” (02:40:10). Here, the purpose is mostly narrative. The Jake Cahill dream must be kept alive. More than this, it also signals the slow decay of the “Old Hollywood” flicks and TV shows that people gradually found disconnected from their late 1960s society. The switch from color to black-and-white to color forces Rick to be a character from his era, reaching an inescapable evolution.

There is one fast zoom-in in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* that is remarkable. As Sadie falls in Rick’s pool, the latter goes to fetch his flamethrower. When he arrives by the pool, Sadie turns around and points her gun at him in a fast zoom-in (02:29:01). As David Roche explains it:

The technique is borrowed from the Shaw Brothers productions that *Kill Bill* pays homage to [...] The effect is expressive, with the violence of the camerawork mimicking the intensity of the sensation and/or emotion, while our attention is forcefully drawn either to a detail (usually someone’s eyes) or, less frequently, the bigger picture. (Roche 187)

In this case, our attention is drawn to a position and a perspective. It appears to be a point-of-view shot from Rick’s standpoint as Sadie is shown through a high angle. The camera zooms in when she turns towards Rick. She seems to be engaging in a duel, much to the likes of Cliff and Tex prior in the sequence. It gives a western-like feeling to the scene. This is confirmed with a following lateral shot showcasing the two characters facing each other (fig. 107), which is typical of the western (fig. 89&90).



Figure 107 Lateral shot showcasing Rick and Sadie in a duel-like posture (02:29:03)

The fast zoom-in thus inscribes Sadie as a villain part of Tarantino's universe. It does stress on the intensity of the scene, but also gives a cartoon-esque ridicule to Sadie for the grand finale. In that sense, the Rick/Sadie fight mirrors that of Cliff and Tex, which leaves Tex emasculated, playing on genre tropes once again.

The frame-within-frame composition was already mentioned in this dissertation in the Spahn Movie Ranch analysis (fig. 57). As the shot is often associated with the Western genre, it seems highly reorganized here. The Spahn sequence is already heavily infused with western pictorial elements, so the shot was composed so it is not too obvious the whole scene is a western. However, the reference is clearer in other Tarantino films such as *Kill Bill* or *Inglourious Basterds*. David Roche pointed out that the common thread between those films is revenge. This could well serve as interpretation for *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* as Cliff will fight the Manson Family at the end of the film. In a way, this shot foreshadows the climax at the end of the movie. This frame-within-frame composition comes back several times when Cliff engages in a conversation with Squeaky on the Ranch doorstep. As the tension rises, the more canted the wooden pillars are.

This point on obliquity brings me to my last point on cinematic language and composition meta – the importance of the canted angle. This type of shot was already discussed earlier on but it is particularly salient in the film and puts forward the metafictional aspect of the film. David Roche mentioned the importance of “oblique shots” under the category of “conspicuous shots” or, as Tarantino calls it, “forced perspectives” which Roche does not fail to mention (Roche 169). Something he further explains as being when “the camera's taking some odd point of view” (Smith and Tarantino 66). The canted angle is easily noticeable and can give a whole new atmosphere to a film. For instance, Carol Reed's noir film *The Third Man* (1949) is famous for being shot through many canted angles. Tarantino used the Dutch angle

in many of his films, including *Reservoir Dogs* and *Inglourious Basterds* for example (fig. 108&109).



Figures 108&109 Canted (or Dutch) angles in Reservoir Dogs and Inglourious Basterds (15:40&34:25)

The canted angle overtly draws to the art cinema and the film as an artefact, which makes it by essence metafictional. I would argue that, more than in his previous films, the canted angle is one of the star devices in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* as it appears 36 times throughout the film. The Dutch angle is the main cinematic tool in the Manson Family introduction scene (from 15:28 to 15:53), the boat scene with Cliff and his wife (from 43:05 to 43:19), the cinema scene between Sharon Tate and the ticket booth employee (from 01:05:29 to 01:05:54) and the confrontation between Cliff and Squeaky at the Movie Ranch. These sequences have almost nothing to do in common, which proves that the director used it as a tool invested with different purposes. In that sense, the Movie Ranch scene recalls this funny feeling the audience had while watching the Manson Family introduction scene. Here, the Dutch angle leads to unease, fear and disorientation. In other cases, it is a tool used to remind the spectator the film is invested with a dream-like aspect, or that it is all fiction – in boat or cinema scenes for instance. In the cinema scene, the canted angle can also act as a sort of red herring, a suspense tool that misleads us into thinking Sharon Tate might be in danger. Though Quentin Tarantino did not invent or popularize the shot, his latest film is filled with different Dutch angle shots which reinvent the meaning of this very device.

c. Intertextuality: Visual Representation and Star Status

It is now clear that Quentin Tarantino understands and knows cinema like no other. It is why the actors' roles are so important in his films. Many intertextual references are made within *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, notably those that look back on the career of several actors, actresses, or even stunt doubles. Intertextuality also hints at visual representations he frequently uses in his motion pictures.

For instance, one of the most famous trademark Quentin Tarantino is known for is foot fetish. After all, rumor has it that if Marsellus Wallace was angry against Antoine in *Pulp*

Fiction, that is because “Antoine had given [Mia] a foot massage” (44:01). Something Mia finds hard to believe as foot massages are not supposed to be erotic to the point Marsellus would throw Antoine out of a window. Yet, feet appear frequently in Tarantino films and have intrinsically become part of his narratives. For instance, women in Tarantino films are often showcased as going out and about barefoot. Whether it be Mia dancing barefoot with Vincent in *Pulp Fiction* (fig. 110), one of “The Girls”’s feet in a car in *Death Proof* (fig. 111), or Sharon Tate’s long white boots shown through a lateral tracking shot in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (fig. 112), feet define their characters.



Figures 110 & 111 Feet in *Pulp Fiction* and *Death Proof* (46:36&01:36)

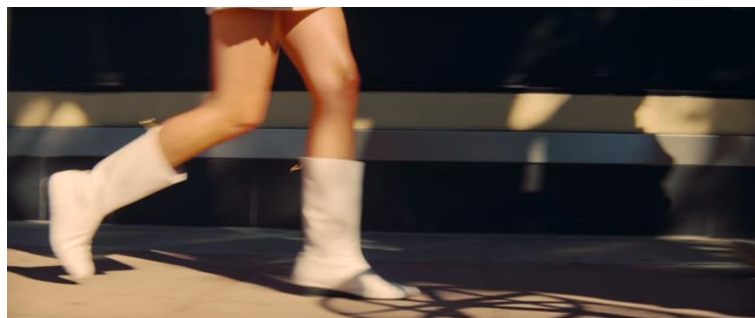
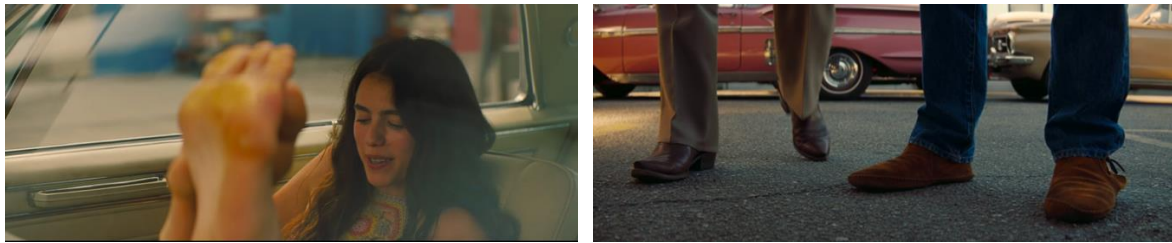


Figure 112 Sharon Tate walking towards the cinema (01:01:10)

When women like Mia or Sharon are dancing barefoot, a sense of (controlled) freedom comes from the shots. If Sharon wears her white boots, the color reminds us she is supposed to be innocent and carefree. However, something that is common to all of them is the gaze. The aforementioned male gaze is present in all of these sequences – and is particularly salient in *Death Proof*. As a matter of fact, Laura Mulvey said that the presence of a woman in films “freeze[s] the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (Mulvey 837). This is exactly what happens in the film, as “The Girls” are an entity deprived of an identity. They do have a voice but tend to be represented and described through the gaze – something the sunglasses hint at on the shot. A similar shot that echoes the *Death Proof* one is the Pussycat sequence. When Cliff brings her back to the ranch, she puts her feet in the exact same position (fig. 113). This shot mirrors that of *Death Proof* and acts as a sort of response to the clear eroticization that the

original one was conveying. Pussycat is clearly emancipated on the sexual level and appears as uninfluenced by the dogmas of traditional American society in that sense.



Figures 113&114 Different treatments of the foot (01:24:30&03:55)

As for men, feet (or what covers them) usually reflect their personalities (fig. 114). Costume designer Arianne Phillips mentioned in an interview that shoes were central to the characterization of both Rick and Cliff. She said: “Rick Dalton wears cowboy boots, right? [...] it makes you feel like a badass [...] tough, strong, protected. And it’s a pair of boots he probably would have worn on *Bounty Law* or *Lancer*, so it’s a part of his persona.”(Foutch) As for Cliff, she said: “It’s total confidence to wear a soft shoe like that. [...] He doesn’t have to prove to anyone he’s a tough guy.” (Ibid.) This mirrors what was said earlier on Cliff and Rick being two sides of the same coin, one that presents the cowboy to the world when the other does not have to pretend. Foot fetish appears as one of the most consistent aesthetic tools in Tarantino’s filmography and also participates in characterization.

Intertextuality can also be found in a few references, such as the aforementioned Red Apple cigarettes. Something that is striking in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is the double meaning behind the *Green Door* song. Many theories lie behind the use of this song in the film and its original meaning, “ranging from underground taverns to gay clubs” (Tyler). However, the green door recalls the Butch and Marsellus sequence in *Pulp Fiction* when Butch goes back in the basement to save Marsellus from rapists (fig. 115). The diegetic frantic jazzy music of the *Pulp Fiction* scene evokes the piano playing behind the green door that is mentioned in the song. There are no particular narrative common points between the two sequences, but someone that knows the director’s movies well might see a similarity here.



Figure 115 *The Green Door in Pulp Fiction (01:41:02)*

While this may seem a bit far-fetched, it can still foreshadow the danger Rick will find himself in at the end of the film. This might appear as hidden behind an apparent light tone, but it still translates the anxiety and paranoia Joan Didion felt during the late 1960s. Indeed, she wrote:

It seems to me now that during those years I was always writing down the license numbers of panel trucks, panel truck circling the block, panel trucks parked across the street, panel trucks idling at the intersection. I put these license numbers in a dressing-table drawer where they could be found by the police when the time came. (Didion 19)

Behind the light-hearted and comical feeling the scene conveys lies a darker note – which also emerges with the many canted angles displayed throughout the film.

Additionally, there seems to be similitudes between *Inglourious Basterds*' Aldo "The Apache" Raine and Cliff Booth. For instance, Cliff is a war veteran and Aldo is the leader of "The Basterds" that organize operations against Nazis. At the end of the film, Cliff gets stabbed and a close-up reveals a tattoo of an Apache chieftain on his arm (fig. 116).



Figure 116 *Cliff with a tattoo of an Apache chieftain on his arm (02:27:10)*

This refers to Aldo's nickname coming from his fashion for scalping Nazis. In the beginning of the film, the *Fourteen Fists of McCluskey* footage is also reminiscent of the burning cinema in the end of *Inglourious Basterds* which, again, shows the special relationship Cliff and Rick have (08:30). By linking them to the same film, Tarantino reinforces their bond in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. With this sort of subtle reference, Tarantino creates threads between his films and inscribes them within the Tarantino Universe.

Intertextuality does not solely lie in characters but also in the cast members that are present in the film. For instance, DiCaprio plays the heavy in *Django Unchained* which creates an extra-metatextual layer as Rick despises playing the heavy in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. Here, Tarantino playfully comments on his actor's previous works. Many references to Calvin Candie lie in Tarantino's latest film. For instance, when Rick is asked to impersonate a sort of "evil sexy Hamlet", a sequence in *Django Unchained* comes to mind. Candie just learnt he had been fooled by Mr. Schultz and Django Freeman the entire time. He then comes back to the room where his guests were waiting for him and puts a skull on the table (fig. 117).

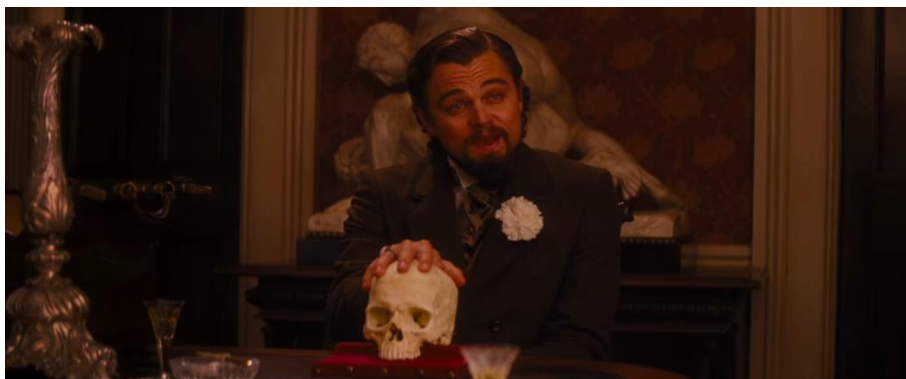


Figure 117 Calvin Candie echoing Rick's "evil sexy Hamlet" Caleb (01:56:37)

From this moment onwards, Candie's character is at his most theatrical. This skull mirrors what Yorick's skull is to Hamlet. When Sam tells Rick he wants him to be an "evil sexy Hamlet", the audience who knows about Quentin Tarantino's previous films can associate Rick with Calvin Candie. In the same way, there is a comical aspect when Janet (Zoë Bell) shouts "What's up, Randy, is that your loser asshole wife-killing buddy boy here was beating the shit out of Bruce" (49:06) when Kurt Russell actually plays the killing machine in *Death Proof* and how Zoë Bell's character was a victim of that. Zoë Bell has been acting in several Quentin Tarantino films as well as being Uma Thurman's stunt double on *Kill Bill*. Here, she plays a stunt coordinator, which seems uncanny when the audience knows about her main job as stunt

woman. Additionally, actors like Michael Madsen – who is famous for taking part in several Quentin Tarantino films – plays a character in the *Bounty Law* footage. He also had important parts in *Reservoir Dogs* as Mr. Blonde, *The Hateful Eight* as Douglass or Joe Gage and Bill's brother Budd in *Kill Bill*. Kurt Russell also had a part in *Death Proof* as Stuntman Mike and *The Hateful Eight* as John Ruth and now plays the central part of Randy, that is both the producer and the voiceover to the end of the film.

Another example that ties *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* with other Tarantino films is the director's postmodern style – for instance, the way he mixes “high” and “low” forms of art. Indeed, Brian Patrick Young explains in his dissertation on cinematic reflexivity that “Tarantino's celebration of the B-movie, the grind-house film, and the cult/niche market of American cinema provides, perhaps, one of his strongest ties to notions of postmodernity. Raising up the “lowly” is, in many ways, indicative a postmodern sensibility.” (33). Young exemplifies this “raising of the lowly” with the use of drugs in *Pulp Fiction*. A similar analysis can be made of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, especially within the context of the late 1960s, where drug-taking was fairly popular. For instance, Cliff has an acid cigarette at the end of the film. As soon as he lights it, and inhales the first puff, he says “and away we go” (02:12:23). Here, drug-taking serves as a sort of loophole, foreshadowing the ending as an idealised version of events. When he gets back to Rick's house, he adds “the train has left the station” (02:20:05), indicating he has left his own fictional realm to enter a new one, which deepens the layers of perception within Tarantino's film. Indeed, the use of drugs is mostly depicted and put forward in the body of fiction in the film. Cliff is not a fictionalized version of an existing character. He himself is entirely fictional, much to the likes of Vincent Vega in *Pulp Fiction*. The treatment reserved to the Manson Family is different, as they talk about having “trip sessions” which supports their nonsensical ideology. Drugs trigger violence in both cases but one can argue Cliff uses it as mere self-defence when the Manson Family are just acting out of plain madness. The only form of drug-taking that deserves to be raised is the one that belongs to the fictional realm, which makes the use of drugs a highly self-referential tool – a way for Tarantino to create bonds with his different films. There are other occurrences of self-reference in the movie, like the several Pan Am aeroplane shots that recall *Jackie Brown*'s Pam Grier playing a stewardess. He goes beyond the 1969 realm to inscribe *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* in his own cinematic universe. He explained:

I have said many times that there are two different worlds that my movies take place in [...] One of them is the ‘Quentin Universe’ of *Pulp Fiction* and *Jackie Brown* –

it's heightened but more or less realistic. The other world is the Movie World. When characters in the Quentin Universe go to the movies, the stuff they see takes place in the Movie World. They act as a window into that world. (Charyn 168)

In his terms, *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is part of the 'Quentin Universe', the window which opens to another kind of cinema, one that Tarantino reinvents through his postmodern style.

Another hint at intertextuality appears at the end of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* when Sadie screams continuously throughout the final fight. Her scream can be heard from 02:25:45 to 02:26:02, then from 02:26:20 to 02:28:01, and finally from 02:28:11 to 02:29:23 which makes it a total of 3 minutes and 10 seconds. Each scream is loosely associated with the character that attacks her, first Cliff, then Brandy, and ultimately Rick. This is reminiscent of the fight between The Bride and Elle Driver. Indeed, when Beatrix scratches Elle's eyeball from its socket, Elle starts screaming from 01:19:53 until 01:21:08. *Kill Bill* often stresses on the artificiality of its fights, so it is not surprising to find this very long scream within the second motion picture. As for *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, the scene imitates the first one in the film – the *Bounty Law* sequence. Rick shoots a man on top of a roof, while falling the man screams in a peculiar way as a Wilhelm Scream is used (0:53). It was used for the first time in the 1951 film *Distant Drums* starring Gary Cooper. Many sound designers decided to use this scream in films from then on, which eventually gave a comical and gimmick-like aspect to the sound. Each type of scream informs us of the world in which the characters evolve. Jake lives in a fictional realm where the Wilhelm scream was still highly fashionable when Rick is completely embedded in the aforementioned Quentin Universe. By challenging the conventional length of a scream and extending it, the director inscribes Sadie's scream in his Universe of fictional characters. He also marks a clear distinction between Rick and Jake as different fictional figures belonging to two separate worlds. All in all, it is safe to say Sadie is the closest reference to *Kill Bill* in the film. She seems to mirror a cartoon-esque vision of violence Tarantino depicted in this previous film.

Through intertextuality, cinematic language, and composition, Quentin Tarantino offers a variety of discourses on his own cinema. He frequently uses his own film tropes, either for different or similar purposes. The director goes further as he even comments on the critiques that were made upon the release of his previous films, making of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* his potential utopia.

3.3. Tarantino's Catharsis: Between Meta-Critique and Utopia

a. Meta-Critique

Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood is a personal piece displaying Tarantino's love for cinema while also debating the involvement of the audience. The camera sometimes highlights moments where characters enjoy watching either the small or big screen. One of those instances happens when Rick and Cliff watch the *FBI* episode Rick stars in "All the Streets Are Silent" at the latter's house. The television is presented to the audience in a *mise en abyme*, putting us into Rick and Cliff's shoes. Here, the spectator is almost fused with the protagonists as he/she can hear Cliff claiming in a laugh "I like that shot!" while Rick's character looks through a broken car window (01:56:51). Then, Rick comments on his co-stars by pointing out his buddy in the series is "a fucking prick" when his nemesis is "Bobby Hogan, he's a good guy". While it creates a comical aspect, a deeper feeling comes from this scene. Rick is noticeably a man who does not resemble his characters. Something less detached, more human comes out of him. Most importantly, morality matters to him. Here, the audience acknowledges a sort of reversal of morality when it comes to the characters of *the FBI*. It feels like Quentin Tarantino is stepping into the film and indicating that there is no real link between fictional and real characters, that there is a fundamental difference between the actors' real selves and the people they are impersonating. This difference is pointed out by Rick, who has now an audience-like gaze on his own work. In this scene, the director seems to be building his vision of a perfect audience – one that would be able to understand when fiction is taking over reality.

Upon watching a press conference in Russia, one can notice Tarantino was saddened that people had criticized the fight sequence between Cliff and Bruce Lee:

Could Cliff beat up Bruce Lee? Brad would not be able to beat up Bruce Lee, but Cliff maybe could. It's like if you asked me the question "Okay, who would win in a fight? Bruce Lee or Dracula?" It's the same question! He's a fictional character. If I say Cliff could beat Bruce Lee up, he's a fictional character, then he could beat [him] up. (McClain)

His depiction of Bruce Lee was highly controversial when the film was released because Tarantino chose to represent him as arrogant. When he engages in a fight with Cliff, he claims to be the best, and yet gets thrown in a car by Cliff. What Tarantino points out in this press

conference is the importance of the fictional aspect of his pieces. According to him, the purpose of this sequence was not to offend anyone, but rather to entail a comic relief from Cliff's daydreaming on top of Rick's roof. The director here tries to remind everyone that what he depicts is not what would have happened in real life because Cliff does not exist. Even if he chose to use real-life characters or events, Tarantino deeply believes that fiction does not supersede reality. For the director, mingling fiction and the real is a way to create a new whole. Similar controversies occurred with his treatment of slavery and the n-word in *Django Unchained* as director Spike Lee wrote "American slavery was not a Sergio Leone western." on Twitter (qtd. in Child). Through this short *mise en abyme* and Rick's comments, Tarantino seems to insist on the boundary between fiction in a body of art and real events to finally rule out any controversy. The critiques made on Bruce Lee's character representation indicate that these reminders failed to convince the whole of Tarantino's audience. However, these scenes still show how personal *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is to the director, to the point where it feels metacritical. Thus, the film acts as a utopian counterpart to the real audience reaction, where the spectator would understand the boundaries of using elements of reality in a movie. Here, the addressee meta offers a reflexion on the way Tarantino's audience reacts to the content of his works in general.

Another hint at the metacritical dimension of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is the way violence is treated in the film. Contrary to many of his films, extreme violence is only really showcased in the very final scenes of the movie. It relies on the aforementioned paradoxical approach to cinema of the Manson Family – violence is supported by Hollywood, so they hate anyone who works for the industry when they do watch TV a lot. They purport being a counter movement to the 1969 American Society while taking part in its doings. In a moment that acts as a sort of comic relief, Tex even states he "had a *Bounty Law* lunchbox that was [his] favorite of all [his] lunchboxes" (02:17:14). Sadie wants to "kill the people who taught us to kill" (02:17:48). In that way, the 'Rick kills Sadie with a flamethrower' scene has a double meaning. The first one being a sort of revenge scenario by reversing the power relations between Rick and Sadie – the decision maker suddenly becomes the victim and vice versa. This stands as a general critique of the belief that violence onscreen triggers violence in real life. This idea was already discussed in *Jackie Brown* when Ordell explains his client wants "a .45" because John Woo's 1989 killer had one (05:45). Upon mentioning this scene in his book, David Roche argues that "Ordell's comments reflexively draw attention to the displacement of stylistic concerns over social causes: those who point the finger at the influence of cinema are

examining the surface, not the root of the evil.” (Roche 280) This is exactly what happens with the Manson Family – displacement of the reasons for violence. Violence from that era came from excesses, notably with drugs, and their disconnection from society. As Karina Longworth noted, “amongst young people in Los Angeles at this time, if you weren’t an outlaw, you were part of the problem” (Longworth 20:23). Hence, the Manson Family’s belief on violence in films was made up by their environment, which is the real root of the evil here. Tarantino’s comment here is consistent with what was previously put forward in *Jackie Brown*, as noted by David Roche.

The second meaning behind the Rick and Sadie scene is that violence becomes a spectacle. By holding a flamethrower, Rick suddenly becomes his *Fourteen Fists of McCluskey* character. Violence thus has a theatrical aim in the scene. A similar scene is showcased in *Inglourious Basterds* with the first onscreen appearance of the ‘Bear Jew’ (from 33:02 to 35:09). His killing of Nazi Sergeant Werner Rachtman is both described by Donowitz as a baseball game and by Aldo Raine as similar to going to the movies. The presence of an extradiegetic soundtrack in both film – Morricone’s *The Big Gundown* music in *Inglourious Basterds* and Hermann’s *The Killing* in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* – bring out violence as entertainment. This also responds to the critiques that point out the director’s fashion for “glamourizing violence”, something critic Jan Wahl told Quentin Tarantino on KRON as they were talking about female empowerment in *Kill Bill*. Jan believed that *The Bride* was “violent and vicious” in the film (*ReservoirWatchDogs* 01:45). While it angered Quentin Tarantino, the dimension of fun the audience gets from watching violence in his movies is a recurring theme, which comments on our relationship with violence at large. This idea is supported by Marvin’s character upon watching *The Fourteen Fists of McCluskey*. He says, “that is so much fun... All the shooting!... I love that stuff, you know.” (07:25) As mentioned above, Marvin has both the roles of producer and audience. Hence, the underlying meta-discourse on spectatorship and its relationship with violence is strong in the film. However, this discourse is always kept under the realm of fiction, as the director never fails to point out: “Jan, you’re all messed up because you’re talking about real life when I’m talking about the movie!” (Ibid. 02:55). In this case, Rick’s flamethrower scene is filmed as a cathartic moment when Rick both reconnects with his fictional character and reaches the ahistorical wish fulfilment the movie was aiming at. In the same way we take pleasure in watching Nazis die in *Inglourious Basterds*, *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* comments on the fun we have watching the Manson Family die in gruesome circumstances – and lets us wonder whether it is legitimate or not.

The fictional dimension of violence in Tarantino's films is something he further investigates in the movie. Indeed, theatricality and body language are interesting to differentiate two approaches of violence in the film. For instance, I will use the second *Lancer* sequence (a fictional scene) and the final fight scene between Cliff and Tex (a scene that is real in the realm of the film) to discuss the importance of theatricality in Tarantino's approach to violence. These two sequences were selected because they all featured spaces showcased in a theatrical manner – “they have doors, offer enough room for movement, and are divided into several sections” (Roche 247). In the second *Lancer scene* (from 01:27:44 to 01:31:20), Rick's character Caleb is portrayed in the saloon he was already in in the previous scene. He is displayed in a long shot, sat on a chair with Mirabella on his lap (fig. 118). Caleb is using Mirabella as hostage to get to talk with Scott Lancer. This long shot contrasts with both Caleb's stillness and the reverse shot showcasing Scott and his men (fig. 119).



Figure 118 A long shot gives room for Rick's theatrical acting (01:28:44)



Figure 119 The other side displaying less room for theatricality (01:29:05)

The room is divided into two clear sections between the good and the evil characters. With the amount of space surrounding him, Rick seems like a bomb ready to explode. He tries to joke with Mirabella only to point a gun at her head seconds later while implying he would blow “the heads of little girls” (01:29:49) if he has to. The fact that the scene ends with Caleb throwing Mirabella on the ground in an excess of rage shows that violence was the inescapable ending

of the sequence, a consecration for the bad guy Rick is supposed to portray. The camera then focuses on Mirabella on the ground, as if the void around Rick had suddenly been filled (01:30:52). This is something he gets rewarded with many compliments for. Sam Wanamaker comes to him and congratulates him on his “evil sexy Hamlet” (01:31:12). The stage could only be well-filled if it was filled with a sudden excess of violence. However, as tension builds up when the three Manson members open Rick’s door to kill everyone inside, the upcoming violence feels different. The room is shot in a two-dimensional way most of the time, probably to stress on the duel-like aspect of the sequence – to the likes of the *Lancer* sequences. The first instance when Cliff and Tex are joined together on the frame is when Cliff asks him “You are real, right?” (02:24:03). While pointing his gun towards Cliff, Tex answers “I’m as real as a doughnut motherfucker”, which Cliff responds to in a frantic laugh. Here, this frantic laugh serves two purposes – mocking Tex’s strange “doughnut” line and answering his illegitimacy to use violence in reality. Both the *Lancer* room and Rick’s living room resemble each other in terms of setting. It is very dark, which indicates the presence of evil characters. Both rooms are sectioned by the camera in a fairly similar fashion. Yet, Tex is about to fill the available space in a manner that is unfit for reality. This is why Cliff mocks him when he dramatically says, “I’m the devil, and I’m here to do the devils business” (02:25:24). The former simply replies: “Nah, it was dumber than that. Something like... Rex” (02:25:30). Rex, which rings like a dog’s name, will unsurprisingly be attacked by Cliff’s dog Brandy, turning Tex’s whole plan into a ridiculous show. This type of “evil Hamlet” energy is only useful within the fictional realm, and unnecessary if used in a sensibly real universe. The realest the violence is, the less it is taken seriously by characters in the film. As such, theatrical excess or theatrical violence saves the fictional and is condemned by the real. This reflects Tarantino’s thought on real violence being incomparable to cinematic violence.

b. Utopia

Since Tarantino’s latest film is so heavily loaded with meta-critical discourses, it is interesting to wonder whether the whole movie has a utopian dimension. The Collins Dictionary defines a utopia as “any real or imaginary society, place, state, etc, considered to be perfect or ideal” (Collins Dictionary). In this case, by questioning critiques that have been made on his films, Quentin Tarantino showcases characters that indirectly understand his cinema. The director also seems to produce a positive discourse on his own film.

One aspect of metafiction that was not yet mentioned in this dissertation is paratext – and more specifically, epitext. In the case of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, Quentin Tarantino

asked artists Steven Chorney and Renato Casaro to design a “number of artworks to be used within the film as ‘prop movie posters’” (Chorney qtd in Curry). Hence, a few posters were rolled out in the streets of Los Angeles, New York, or even Cannes right before the festival started (fig. 120).



Figure 120 The promotional posters on the former Aquarius theater by Chris Nichols for LA Mag

By doing this, the director imposed the fictional arc of Rick Dalton on a 2019 society. Quentin Tarantino has put much effort into rendering Rick Dalton a believable character, someone that would fit the era perfectly. He described the process of creating DiCaprio’s character as writing “the chapter of a film book” (California Film Institute 11:14). Indeed, with these poster designs, Tarantino inscribes Rick in a line of actors who were painted by Casaro for marketing purposes. Casaro is all the more important as “his greatest work was done in Italy in the ‘60s and ‘70s [...] so he was the perfect artist to illustrate Rick Dalton’s films” (Curry). Putting these posters on the streets seems like a desire to fulfil his utopia, to give extra “real” layers to Rick Dalton, and to project the character into our contemporary world. Casaro’s website states that “the job of film poster artists is to bring people to the cinema. Renato Casaro brings the cinema to people” (Casaro) and it feels like this is what Quentin Tarantino tried to do. Through paratext, the director allows himself to give life to the embodiment of a re-interpretation of film history. In that sense, it is no denying Tarantino made of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* a wish fulfilment, his utopia onscreen.

Another poster that appears in the film transmits the hopes of Tarantino – showcasing Sharon Tate during her rise as a Hollywood star rather than on her death bed. Right after the Playboy Mansion scene, Cliff hears Paul Revere and the Raiders being played while fixing the antenna on Rick’s roof. Sharon is then shown dancing in her bedroom. While she dances away from the camera, a rack focus displays a print of a 1900 poster by Alfons Mucha, *Autumn* (fig. 121).

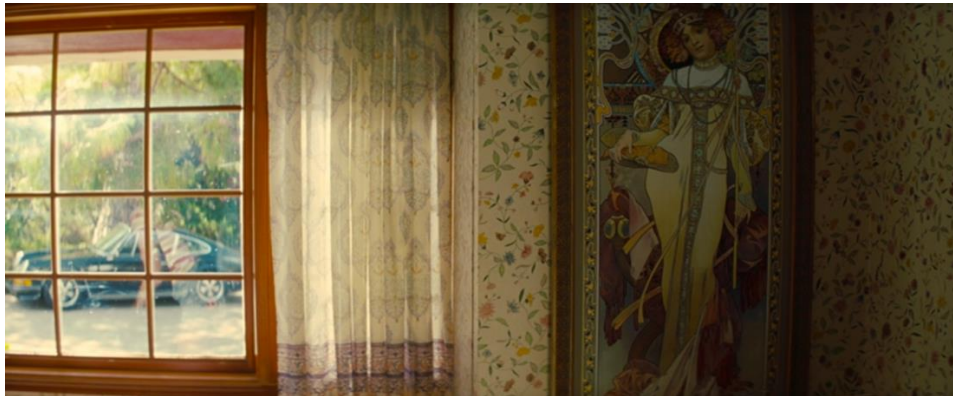


Figure 121 Alfons Mucha’s 1900 *Autumn* on Tate’s wall (40:11)

The print usually comes with a poem on the bottom right side of the poster which reads “Autumn, symbolizing the year’s coming of age and bearing the vineyard harvest bounty, presents fruit that the summer sun has turned to gold” (Poster Auction International). Mucha’s *Art Nouveau* lithograph was not put there by chance. Autumn is the season that collects the fruits of the summer’s labor. In this context, Tate celebrates a fruitful year and her rising career as a Hollywood star. While she is sometimes portrayed through and envied by the eyes of men, Tarantino wanted her to be celebrated for the life she was about to begin. Much to the likes of *Autumn*, she appears as a nymph-like figure throughout the film. This stylised and idealized version of Sharon Tate, often wrapped in white clothes to suggest her purity, is part of the imagery of a utopia that belongs to the director himself. By putting Sharon Tate into a fictional world, Quentin Tarantino leaves endless possible futures to her character – which is in itself a way to celebrate her. This perspective on the ending can be felt after reading an article by Stephanie Chatfield on the film which reads: “My initial dislike of Tarantino’s ending was due to my knee-jerk assumption that an ending is final. That’s true in the real world, but not in art. In art, endings are often launch pads to new thoughts, new projects, new worlds.” (Chatfield).

One article argues that the whole of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is filled with Tarantino’s hopes and desires:

Loin de pouvoir rédimmer le réel par la fiction – l’acharnement déployé lors de l’affrontement final tenant moins de la jubilation que de l’aveu d’impuissance –, le film préfère œuvrer à l’exténuation d’un désir, en reconstituant de toutes pièces un monde impossible et idéalisé, où la circulation du cinéma à la télévision, de la télévision aux productions italiennes, de l’avant-garde européenne à Hollywood, relèverait d’une citoyenneté universelle. Un monde où ces multiples réalités s’harmoniseraient grâce à l’extraordinaire précision de la mise en scène, qui ne cesse d’élargir le réseau signifiant de cette éphémère utopie. (Bonelli)

While many metacritical elements mentioned above support the ideas Damien Bonelli put forwards in this article, I would argue that Tarantino’s film is not all happiness and wish-fulfilment. For instance, Rick displays many signs of struggle to accept the Europeanization of Hollywood, even at the end of the film. After all, the future appears more uncertain than ever to Rick at the end of the movie. He is about to part ways with his best friend and does not yet know what will happen after playing in Spaghetti westerns. I believe that rather than showcasing a glorified “universal citizenship” in the industry, there is a dimension of resilience and acceptance in the movie. Along with his new life, new wife, and the recent Europeanization of the film he stars in, Rick cannot afford to work with Cliff anymore. This is something he announces to Cliff around a table (fig. 122).



Figure 122 Rick and Cliff in another table shot (02:01:59)

He is positioned on the right side of the frame again, which mirrors the table shots of his conversation with producer Marvin Schwarz in the beginning of the motion picture. While I previously analyzed this position as suggesting a moral ambivalence, I also believe this hints at the fact that Rick evolves career-wise but does not completely change in substance. Tarantino’s aim with Rick’s characterization was also to be realistic – some actors do not accept such a quick change in the Hollywood landscape, especially after so many years of the Hays Code.

Through Rick's depiction, the director shows signs of resilience and acceptance in the midst of a final fight that seems revengeful. The landscape in the industry changed and still changes, but some things also stay still, like a fixed image. Even if Rick is opened the gate to Sharon Tate's house, Cliff is still trying to be a good friend, and the plot will not change.

All in all, to say the director's film is his utopia is a bit much – though there are hints that this film is one of his most personal ones. Tarantino's film is a glimpse at a period dear to his heart that he cannot hold back. *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood's* cinematography and almost reluctant circularity makes it a dazzling fixed image acting as a time loop, a magnifying glass reflecting the "twilight of a Golden Era" à la Tarantino (Collin 04:15).

CONCLUSION

Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* is a highly personal representation of this transitional year that was 1969. There is no denying that it is the challenged hopes and dreams of people living in the United States, disillusioned by the violence of the War and more broadly by a whole system. It is the deconstruction of the moral codes that were so popular before then. It is a tribute to the Industry that was changing and its population. But more than everything, it is Tarantino's love letter to an era dear to him, showcasing characters living in a period that they do not know is coming to an end. As Robbie Collin put it, "We know these people are hurtling towards a reckoning, the whole town is hurtling towards a reckoning; but they kind of doubt, they're not aware of it. That's what the core tension of this movie is, and the reason that it kind of wringed me out from the inside is that you're watching time being killed when there is not enough time to kill." (03:23). Such evolution had to be shown onscreen, especially through Western film tropes. This genre is the quintessence of American cinema and serves as a means to vehicle Tarantino's ideas – whether he passes them through the depiction of classic American film tropes or spaghetti Western ones. He uses these pictorial conventions to inscribe his characters in both a solid cinematic fiction and the transition to the New Hollywood Era. As the movie is so embedded in cinematic genres, history and film history, Quentin Tarantino delivers a unique meta-discourse infused with his style. The director plays with characterization by offering a message on duality in the film – whether it be on a personal level like Rick, or on a professional level when it comes to Rick and Cliff's relationship. Both characters are complementary in the workplace as actor and stunt double but also in their western representation. Additionally, much of Tarantino's cinematic language translates his evolution in style when compared with the rest of his filmography. Here, a metafictional discourse can also be applied to his own cinema, which eventually signs a bittersweet utopia – if such a thing exists to his own eye. The camera follows Rick's life, and later on Cliff's to finally join the two together as a means to pass on the torch and allow the rise of a new culture.

Tarantino's postmodern style also betrays the director's opinion on the era, and to some extent, his point of view on the state of contemporary cinema. Indeed, the director said in an interview that "Westerns reflect the decade in which they were made" (The Narrative Art 01:35). In that sense, this film is also very contemporary in its anxieties. It shows Quentin

Tarantino's reflexion on what cinema is today and whether or not he still has a place in this everchanging industry. Thence, it is not a surprise that this might be one of Quentin Tarantino's last film. In the end, Cliff stays the same, and he leaves the set while the gates to Sharon Tate's house open to Rick. Something has been lost along the way, but cinema will always move on. A Guardian editorialist pointed out that "The film's conclusion, the literal opening of New Hollywood's gates, make perfect punctuation to the end of a career." (Hoffman). When talking about the Western genre, the director added:

I love the postmodernist westerns of the 1970s as well. I love something like *Little Big Man*, or *Soldier Blue*, or something like that [...] but I actually think that if you're really trying to make the Western genre really work its magic, then you've got to do your version of it. It would be silly for me to try to do a John Ford type movie now, because who would I be making that to? Those films [...] were made for a different audience, for a different America. (The Narrative Art 0:29)

This statement dates back from 2016 and one can already feel Tarantino's anxiety to reflect the audience's desires. He already repeatedly exposed his opinion on digital cinema representing "the death of cinema" as he knows it (Festival de Cannes 05:35). He said, "the fact that most films now are not presented in 35 millimetre means that the war is lost, and digital projections, that's just television in public [...] what I know is: cinema is dead." (05:40). When Robbie Collin talked about the overwhelming sense of time passing by in the film while the characters do not get this perception, Quentin Tarantino certainly displaces this feeling to himself and his position in the industry.

A very perceptible nostalgia is present in his latest film, whether it comes from the cinema of his childhood or anything that is linked to it. As a matter of fact, Quentin Tarantino will release his first movie novelization in June 2021. The novel will center around the setting and characters of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. He said in a statement:

In the '70s, movie novelizations were the first adult books I grew up reading. And to this day I have a tremendous amount of affection for the genre. So as a movie-novelization aficionado, I'm proud to announce *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* as my contribution to this often marginalized, yet beloved sub-genre in literature. (Hellerman)

The director seems to have made of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* a reflexion on the roots of his cinematographic style, pushing it to a level where parts of his childhood transpire in the film – and consequently, the novel. Quentin Tarantino also signed a second book deal with HarperCollins and this time decided to focus on film critiques. The publisher describes the book (called *Cinema Speculation*) as a “deep dive into the movies of the 1970’s, a rich mix of essays, reviews, personal writing, and tantalizing “what if’s”, from one of cinema’s most celebrated filmmakers, and its most devoted fan” (qtd. in Fleming Jr). The director’s recent opinions on film and his desire to make of his latest film a big memory piece betrays a heavy sense of melancholy towards the cinema and era he knew as a child. A part of himself does not know where to stand as he feels he is at the edge of a new era, something he has no control over. By opening these gates, he gives room to a new generation of filmmakers, and a new generation of cinemagoers to constantly redefine what cinema and fiction mean.

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FIGURES

Most of the figures used in this dissertation come from Quentin Tarantino films, and more specifically *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019).

Figure 20 (02:39:00), **22** (25:12), **23** (26:30), **24** (01:22:06), **25** (01:41:17), **26** (02:16:37), **27** (29:06), **28** (33:24), **29** (28:30), **31** (02:06:46), **32** (02:01:48), **33** (01:09:17), **34** (01:27:11), **35** (07:33), **36** (13:22), **37** (38:15), **38** (15:32), **40** (15:29), **41** (02:26:09), **42** (01:52:35), **43** (02:16:55), **44** (02:29:45), **46** (52:17), **47** (49:27), **48** (04:58), **49** (43:10), **50** (01:05:31), **51** (01:24:47), **52** (01:09:36), **53** (01:34:04), **55** (01:39:42), **57** (01:34:26), **58** (01:37:58), **59** (01:20:38), **60** (01:36:23), **61** (01:38:09), **62** (01:38:11), **63** (01:38:37), **64** (01:38:47), **66** (01:38:19), **67** (01:40:42), **69** (01:39:21), **70** (01:41:57), **71** (01:45:27), **72** (01:51:35), **73** (03:25), **74** (14:01), **75** (11:37), **76** (01:14:24), **77** (26:37), **78** (01:13:47), **79** (57:54), **80** (58:52), **81** (04:20), **82** (04:26), **83** (02:03:53), **84** (02:04:03), **85** (01:19:01), **86** (01:28:44), **87** (24:10), **88** (01:42:50), **89** (02:24:27), **91** (01:11:00), **92** (01:34:37), **94** (51:40), **96** (02:28:59), **97** (02:30:26), **98** (49:11), **99** (31:49), **100** (29:14), **102** (16:03), **103** (02:03:27), **106** (02:39:07), **107** (02:29:03), **112** (01:01:10), **113** (01:24:30), **114** (03:55), **116** (02:27:10), **118** (01:28:44), **119** (01:29:05), **121** (40:11), **122** (02:01:59) all come from Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019).

Figure 1 (01:42), **2** (01:45) come from Edwin S. Porter's *Uncle Josh at The Moving Picture Show* (1902).

Figure 3 (14:04) comes from Adam McKay's *The Big Short* (2015).

Figure 4 (06:46) comes from Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1963).

Figure 5 (01:14:10), **45** (01:19:25) come from Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969).

Figure 6 (01:10:01), **17** (01:03) come from Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* (1967).

Figure 7 (08:40) comes from The Wachowskis' *The Matrix* (1999).

Figure 8 (17:12) comes from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).

Figure 9 (31:06) comes from Michel Hazanavicius' *OSS 117: Cairo Nest of Spies* (2006).

Figure 10 (55:45) comes from Terence Young's *Dr. No* (1962).

Figure 11 (12:05) comes from Damien Chazelle's *La La Land* (2016).

Figure 12 (39:10) comes from Bob Fosse's *Sweet Charity* (1969).

Figure 13 (01:51:51), **39** (02:02:23), **54** (12:28), **56** (02:23:28), **90** (02:25:41) all come from Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968).

Figure 14 (06:53) comes from Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000).

Figure 15 (06:31), **105** (57:25), **111** (01:36) all come from Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (2007).

Figure 18 (00:58), **30** (01:43:30), **101** (04:30) all come from Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997).

Figure 19 (02:29:28), **104** (01:02:42), **109** (34:25) all come from Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009).

Figure 21 (01:06:00) comes from Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003).

Figure 65 (01:11:53), **68** (01:40:24) come from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1962).

Figure 93 (07:43) comes from Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).

Figure 95 (14:41) comes from Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1940).

Figure 108 (15:40) comes from Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992).

Figure 110 (46:36), **115** (01:41:02) come from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

Figure 117 (01:56:37) comes from Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012).

Figure 16: Cover illustration: "Hollywood: the Shock of Freedom in Films". *TIME*, December 8, 1967, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,844256,00.html>.

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