

PULP FICTION - A CULT MOVIE?

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cult / kŭlt / *n.* **1. a.** A religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader. **b.** The followers of such a religion or sect.

2. A system or community of religious worship and ritual.

3. The formal means of expressing religious reverence; religious ceremony and ritual.

4. A usually nonscientific method or regimen claimed by its originator to have exclusive or exceptional power in curing a particular disease.

5. a. Obsessive, especially faddish, devotion to or veneration for a person, principle, or thing. **b.** The object of such devotion.

6. An exclusive group of persons sharing an esoteric, usually artistic or intellectual interest.

*American Heritage Dictionary
Fourth Edition¹*

¹ <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/>

Introduction

Cult movie. A term everyone knows, but only few can define. The advertising industry promoting Hollywood's latest blockbuster, or the distant relative trying to start a conversation on your aunt's wedding ceremony by talking about her favorite movie. They all use the word, but none of them can answer one simple question. What makes a movie a cult movie?

This comes from the fact that nobody really has an idea of what a cult movie really should be like. Therefore, to analyze whether *Pulp Fiction* is a cult movie or not, it is necessary to give a definition of the term and to establish several criteria which must be fulfilled by the movie. After that, it will be possible to examine Tarantino's masterpiece with a focus on these certain attributes.

1 What is a cult movie?

It is hard to give a proper definition of the term cult movie, because there are many ideas about what it really is. A lot of movies are actually considered to be cult, but they are all different.

1.1 Definition

First of all, most cult movies fail to achieve any financial success and never arouse noteworthy public interest, except for bad criticism. However, "a small, devoted group of viewers, often «film buffs» or film students, show an extreme appreciation of the film."² This brings us to the conclusion that not a particular director, actor or producer makes a movie a real cult film and neither does the advertising industry. Cult movies are rather made by the fans. Their self-invented rituals, their empathy with the protagonists, their flaming enthusiasm and their endless interest in little details are the determining factors. Even the participation of a person in a movie, who is generally seen as a cult character, does not assure the movie will ever reach cult status. Evidence for that is given by cult director Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997), which is generally seen as a good movie, but in contrast to Tarantino's other works not as a cult film. Another definition is given by Tim Dirks of www.filmsite.org, who defines a cult film as having

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cult_film

"limited but special appeal. Cult films are usually strange, quirky, offbeat, eccentric, oddball or surreal, with outrageous and cartoony characters or plots, garish sets and they are often considered controversial."³ He points out the one thing all cult movies have in common. A deviation from the norm. Conforming to standards does not create cult. Being different shocks the majority and fascinates a minority. Cult films are movies for minorities. Whenever in the history of filmmaking, norms and practices have been modified, destroyed or at best invented, a cult movie has been created.

These two definitions certainly illustrate the diversity of the word as well as its history.

1.2 The history of cult films

It all started with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). It is seen as the first movie to become a cult film. Although it failed at the box office, it received more and more attention when a growing group of fans started to show up in "midnight movie" screenings in repertory theatres a few years later, wearing costumes and practicing fixed rituals like for example throwing rice at a wedding scene. As such movies were cheap to hire, cinema owners showed them at the lower attended midnight screenings instead of current releases. Dozens of movies achieved their cult status through repeated late night screenings at repertory theatres. But in the early 1990s the situation changed and many small movie theatres were replaced by huge multiplex cinemas, run by international corporations whose owners had no understanding for the strange rituals of the film freaks. Due to that change, television and video became the new media for cult movies.⁴ The cultists were forced to move from the cinemas to their own living rooms which usually do not allow bigger meetings of like-minded people. The fans of a cult film existed no longer as a real community, but as a loose gathering of individuals and the remaining rituals were nothing more than eating potato chips and drinking beer. This loss of identity led to an inflationary abuse of the word cult film as the advertising industry began to use it for their own benefit. Almost once a month, we get to see the trailer of a movie on TV,

³ <http://www.filmsite.org/cultfilms.html>

⁴ cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cult_film

ballyhooed as the new cult film of director XY. This artificial media hype eliminates the possibility for a movie to become a cult film, because it obviates the development of a fan culture as a part of a marketing strategy. A viewer who is only temporarily attracted by a movie and keeps watching new ones is more profitable than someone who buys a DVD and watches it over and over again. The intruding question whether the classic cult film died together with the repertory theatres was answered by the Internet. With the rise of this new technological achievement, the old meaning of the word cult movie was almost restored. Online forums and chats became a new communication platform for the cultists and allowed the exchange of ideas with like-minded people on the whole planet. It also helped organizing conventions and meetings. With this revival, the term cult film had two meanings. On the one hand the classic definition which had regained its importance and on the other hand the advertising industry's "light version" which can be applied to almost any movie. Therefore, *Pulp Fiction* will here be examined with regard to the classic definition.

2 Pulp Fiction

In 1991, a film titled *Reservoir Dogs* hit the Sundance Film Festival and made its screenplay writer and director, a newcomer named Quentin Tarantino, world famous. Three years later, *Pulp Fiction* was released. It won the 1994 Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival as well as the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay and is commonly regarded as one of the best movies of the nineties.⁵ The visitors of imdb.com have voted *Pulp Fiction* in the top 10 of "IMDb Top 250 List"⁶ and it is placed in the "100 Years... 100 Movies" list of the rather conservative American Film Institute.⁷ With grossing \$100 million at the box office and the astonishing critical success, *Pulp Fiction* does not really meet the basic requirements for becoming a cult film. Nevertheless, to answer the question whether *Pulp Fiction* is a cult film or not, it is important to take a deeper look at the things that make this movie so special.

⁵ cf. <http://imdb.com/title/tt0110912/awards>

⁶ cf. <http://www.imdb.com/chart/top>

⁷ cf. <http://www.afi.com/tvevents/100years/movies.aspx>

2.1 Plot

2.1.1 Non-chronological order

Pulp Fiction consists of five interwoven and overlapping stories which are told in a non-chronological order. The film initiates with a small-time thief-couple and how they come to the decision to rob coffee shops and then continues with two hitmen assassinating two men in an apartment, because they have stolen a briefcase. A jump cut later, we see one of those hitmen dating his boss's wife and rescuing her from a drug overdose. After that, the film tells the story of a boxer who defies the same crime boss by not throwing a fight and ends up trapped with him in the basement of a pawnshop whose owner and his friend are perverts and want to rape them. It then switches back to the two hitmen in the apartment having a near-death experience when somebody shoots at them but misses. Back in the car, they accidentally kill their accessory and go to a friend's house to clean up the mess the blown-off head has left behind. The film ends with the thief-couple robbing a coffee shop where the two hitmen have a breakfast.

This narrative element is one of Quentin Tarantino's trademarks and is one of the reasons why his films are so famous. The director himself says the following about the permanent change of the point of view during the film: "I keep applying to cinema the same rules that novelists have when they come to writing novels: you can tell it in any way you want. It's not just, you have to tell it linearly. It's inherent in the stories. Reservoir Dogs and Pulp Fiction would be dramatically less interesting if you told them in a completely linear fashion."⁸ This quote leaves space for two possible interpretations. Either the lack of a standard chronological order makes no sense and the stories are just randomly put together or there is an intention behind it. A further examination of the sequence shows that the second possibility is by far more likely. If we take the three storylines, namely the coffee shop robbery, the "everyday life" of the two hitmen and the happenings around the boxing match, we discover that all of them reach their climax at the end of the movie,

⁸ Peary, Gerald. "When You Know You're In Good Hands." *Quentin Tarantino Interviews*. Ed. Peter Brunette. University Press of Mississippi / Jackson, 1998. 112.

which increases the viewers' excitement. Additionally, the obvious chronology in the dialogue proves that Tarantino had this narrative technique in mind when he began writing the script. Although the scenes are not arranged in a chronological order, the dialogue always knows exactly its place in the movie.⁹ Roger Ebert suggests that each of the three main stories is told in a way that they all end with redemption, one of the movie's main themes.¹⁰

2.1.2 Correct time sequence

The storyline is hard to understand if you watch the movie the first time, and a protagonist appearing on the screen after he was shot makes it even more confusing. Therefore it takes a couple of viewings to put the story in the right order.

The story initiates with the two mob hitmen Vincent Vega (John Travolta) and Jules Winfield (Samuel L. Jackson) driving to an apartment where they assassinate two men who have stolen a suitcase from the gangster boss Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames). Only seconds later, a third man who hides in the bathroom comes out shooting, but miraculously misses every single shot. Jules believes to have witnessed an epiphany. They kill him and take their accessory Marvin (Phil LaMarr) to their car to go to Sally LeRoy's, Marsellus' bar. Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin in the car, causing a bloody mess on the rear windows and the seats. Jules immediately drives to the house of his friend Jimmie (Quentin Tarantino) to find a way out of this misery. As Jimmie used to work for Marsellus, he is aware of the situation, but afraid his wife might divorce him if she comes home and discovers the hitmen and the corpse. Jules calls Marsellus to ask him for help and Marsellus dispatches Winston Wolfe (Harvey Keitel) to solve the problem. "The Wolf" makes Vincent and Jules clean the car and forces them to change their clothes. Afterwards, he takes them to "MonsterJoe's Truck and Tow" where they get rid of Marvin's corpse, the clothes and the car. Mr. Wolfe leaves and Vincent and Jules take a cab to a restaurant to have a

⁹ cf. <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20010610/REVIEWS08/106100301/1023>

¹⁰ cf. <http://www.godamongdirectors.com/tarantino/faq/secrets.html>

breakfast. The story then continues with the restaurant scene. The small-time thieves Ringo (Tim Roth) and Yolanda (Amanda Plummer) sit in a restaurant and talk about the risk of being shot or having to shoot someone when robbing a liquor store. Ringo comes up with the idea to rob coffee shops, because he does not expect any resistance from the employees and sees the wallets of the customers as an additional prey. They decide not to miss the window of opportunity, pull out their guns and start a robbery. When Jules, who is sitting at a table having a breakfast, refuses to give them the suitcase of Marsellus, they try to intimidate him with threats of murder. Jules draws his gun and takes Ringo as a hostage, but does not kill him because of the miracle he has seen in the apartment. He gives Ringo the money in his wallet "to buy Ringo's life"¹¹ and lets the pair go free. The two hitmen leave the coffee shop and finally go to Sally LeRoy's, where the boxer Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis) has a conversation with Marsellus about throwing a fight. Then we see Vincent buying drugs and meeting Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman), because his boss Marsellus requested him to give his wife a good time while he is out of town. They go to a bizarre 1950s club called Jackrabbit Slim's, eat, talk and enter a dance contest. When they are back in Mia's house, she discovers Vincent's heroine in his trenchcoat while he is in the bathroom and accidentally mistakes it for cocaine because of the wrong packaging. When Vincent comes back to the living room, he discovers Mia having a drug overdose. He immediately takes her to his drug dealer Lance (Eric Stoltz) who rescues her by injecting adrenaline into her heart. The next scene is a flashback into Butch's childhood. A soldier named Captain Koons (Christopher Walken) gives him a gold watch Butch's father inherited from his grandfather and wore it around his wrist when he was shot down over Hanoi in Vietnam. When he died of a disease in war captivity, he asked Koons to give the watch to his son. After this excursion to the boxer's past, we see him getting ready for the fight he is supposed to throw. Later, we find out he has knocked out his opponent and killed him. He gets into a cab and goes to a motel where he meets his girlfriend. Marsellus asks his hitmen to find the boxer and kill him. The next morning, Butch realizes that his girlfriend forgot

¹¹ Tarantino, Quentin. *Pulp Fiction*. Great Britain: Faber and Faber Limited, 1994. 186.

his gold watch in their apartment. Due to the legacy it contains, he decides to go back to his apartment and get the watch. When he arrives, he surprises Vincent being in the bathroom and kills him. With the watch on his wrist, he gets back into his car. On his way to the motel, he sees Marsellus walking over the street. Butch deliberately hits Marsellus with his car, but jumps a red light and causes an accident. A chase starts and later ends in a pawnshop whose sadist owner knocks them both out and traps them in his basement. Together with his friend Zed (Peter Greene), he takes Marsellus in a back room to rape him. Meanwhile, Butch is able to escape and faces the decision whether to just leave or rescue Marsellus. He chooses the latter and goes back to the basement with a samurai sword he found in the shop. While Butch attacks the rapists, Marsellus frees himself and says that he seeks revenge for this humiliation. Nevertheless, he forgives the boxer's betrayal, but asks him to leave the town and never come back. Butch steals Zed's chopper, picks up his girlfriend and leaves town.¹²

2.2 Trivia and theories

What makes the Oscar-winning screenplay by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary even more interesting is the attention they paid even to the smallest details. The number of discoveries that can be made by watching the movie over and over again is astonishing. Additionally, the unanswered questions in the script leave room for the wildest speculations. The discussion about these topics has been one of the main reasons for a Pulp Fiction fan community to develop.

2.2.1 Little details

The film is full of little details. There are links to other movies, signs which reveal what will happen next and weird connections between different scenes and several aspects of the story the viewer might at first not notice.

Reservoir Dogs is a movie Pulp Fiction often refers to. The Buddy Holly waiter in Jackrabbit Slim's for example is played by Steven Buscemi who refuses to tip waitresses as Mr. Pink in *Reservoir Dogs*.¹³ This is,

¹² cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulp_Fiction

¹³ cf. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110912/trivia>

however, not the only link to *Reservoir Dogs*, but I will deal with that topic later.

One might also notice that the opening scene of the film is a debate between Vincent and Jules about the intimacy quotient of a foot massage and Mia being barefoot for most of the movie, as well as Esmeralda driving her cab barefoot. According to Uma Thurman, Tarantino has a foot fetish.¹⁴

The next thing is the signs in the movie, which lead to what happens next. The room in Lance's apartment where Mia receives the injection of adrenaline contains two board games, Operation and Life. Another one is in the pawnshop where there is a neon sign for "Killian's Red" beer. Some of the letters are burnt out, so the sign only says "Kill Ed." Later, when Butch escapes on the chopper, he looks at the key-ring with a big metal "Z". Both put together is "Kill Zed", which is what Marsellus will ask "a coupla pipe-hitting' niggers"¹⁵ to do.¹⁶

Dozens of other little details can be discovered in the film, but naming all of them would go beyond the scope of this research paper.

2.2.2 Emerging questions

Watching *Pulp Fiction* brings up a lot of questions. Some of them can be answered by reading the screenplay, others have been answered by Tarantino in interviews and articles after the film had been released. To find answers to the remaining questions is left to the viewer's imagination. Here are some examples of questions the movie brings up.

What party is Winston Wolfe at in a tuxedo at eight o'clock in the morning? At first, this seems very unrealistic, but the script explains that Winston was in a hotel suite where people were gambling. If we listen closely, we can hear someone in the room telling the gamblers to "place their bets".¹⁷

Why did Vincent leave his gun on the stove when he went to the bathroom? Well, he did not. Marsellus' employees always work with a partner, which is proved by Vincent and Jules assassinating the men who

¹⁴http://www.starpulse.com/news/index.php/2005/12/10/uma_thurman_convicted_quentin_tarantino_

¹⁵ Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 151-152.

¹⁶ cf. <http://www.godamongdirectors.com/tarantino/faq/secrets.html>

¹⁷ cf. Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 131.

have occupied the suitcase and Paul (Paul Calderon) and Vincent starting the search for Butch after the boxing match. It is very unlikely that Marsellus sent out only one man to go to Butch's apartment, but more likely that he himself accompanied Vincent after Jules had quit his job. After all, we see him crossing a street near the apartment carrying two paper cups, of which one may be for his partner. Therefore the gun rather belongs to Marsellus than to Vincent.¹⁸

How does a nice guy like Jimmie know a gangster like Jules and why does Jules refer to him as "his partner"? It was suggested that Jimmie is Wallace's nephew by marriage, but Tarantino said in an interview with the Denver Post that Jimmie used to work for Marsellus and when he married his wife, she made him quit. This would also explain why Jimmie is so sure of her reaction, if she sees the gangsters in her house.

2.2.3 The mysterious briefcase

The content of the briefcase is by far the most discussed topic in the Pulp Fiction forums on the Internet. The only things we know for sure is that its lock combination is 666, the number of the Beast, and that the content glows and fascinates everyone who sees it. According to Quentin Tarantino, there is no official version of what is in the briefcase, it is up to the viewer to think of something that could be in there.¹⁹ The case is simply a "MacGuffin", namely a

"a plot device that motivates the characters and advances the story, particularly one whose importance is accepted completely by the story's characters, yet from the audience's perspective it might be minimally explained or may test their suspension of disbelief if it is scrutinized."²⁰

Nevertheless, a lot of theories have been created to explain why the briefcase is such an important matter for Marsellus. The theory, which is the least creative, is that the briefcase contains drugs and that the three men who have occupied it are drug couriers. Other theories are that it contains the

¹⁸ cf. <http://www.godamongdirectors.com/tarantino/faq/secrets.html>

¹⁹ cf. <http://www.tarantino.info/content/view/304/41/>

²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGuffin>

stolen diamonds from *Reservoir Dogs*, the golden Elvis Presley jumpsuit from *True Romance* (1993), the holy grail, a stolen Academy Award or simply gold.

The most popular theory is however the briefcase containing Marsellus Wallace's soul. According to this theory, the exit point of Marsellus' soul was the back of his head, explaining the band-aid we get to see when he talks to Butch. It argues that Marsellus has sold his soul to the devil and the three men in the apartment were the devil's helpers. Realizing his terrible mistake, he tries to buy it back. This would also explain the divine intervention Jules experiences, because god helps them to save Marsellus' soul. The lock combination, the mysterious glow and the amazement of the people seeing the content also support this theory.²¹

2.3 Moral standards

2.3.1 The banality of murder

The protagonists' moral standards play a very important role in the movie, because many characters face decisions that put their ethical values to the test. The difference between the values within the almost nihilistic Pulp Fiction universe and the classic occidental values we know, is made obvious by the unscrupulousness with which people are killed in the movie. Most of Pulp Fiction takes place in workaday world, wherein Jules and Vincent perform tasks for their boss as if being a killer was a common profession. It is questionable whether this brutalization is their fault or whether they are just a product of the crime milieu they work and live in. Murder has become a part of their everyday life. To Vincent, even "keying" another man's car is a more serious crime than murder.²² Butch becomes more and more violent the more he is confronted with the world of the gangsters. At first, he kills another boxer by accident. Later, he shoots Vincent and tries to kill Marsellus because he thinks becoming as ruthless as his enemies would be the way out of this vicious circle. However, the movie proves him wrong.

²¹ cf. <http://www.snopes.com/movies/films/pulp.htm>

²² cf. Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 42-43.

2.3.2 Redemption

Redemption is one of the main themes in *Pulp Fiction*. Vincent, Jules and Butch all come to a point where they realize that they are about to decide whether to change their life and hope for forgiveness or to go on as if nothing had happened. Jules calls this a "moment of clarity"²³. When he and Vincent miraculously do not get shot in the apartment, he realizes the mistakes he has made in the past and decides to work on himself. Whenever Jules kills someone, he quotes an altered bible passage:

" The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who in the name of charity and good will shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee."²⁴

This passage refers to a system of values by which one could lead one's life and make moral decisions. At first, he just thinks of this quote as "a coldblooded thing to say to a motherfucker before you pop a cap in his ass"²⁵ without ever questioning its content. Then he finds the meaning in there and takes it as a moral standard. He quits his job and survives. In contrast to that, Vincent does neither acknowledge the miracle he has witnessed²⁶ nor accept the opportunity to change his life and gets killed later.

Butch's "moment of clarity" is when he is about to exit the pawnshop and hears Marsellus screaming. He could either rescue Marsellus or abandon him to his fate. Although he has tried to kill Marsellus twice, he decides to save his life and hope for his "grace" (note that Zed's chopper has "grace" written on it). In the end, he escapes his enemy not by becoming like him, but by saving his life.

²³ Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 175.

²⁴ Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 32.

²⁵ Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 187.

²⁶ cf. Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 137-140.

2.3.3 Loyalty

The only value almost every character seems to respect is loyalty. This starts with Jules and Vincent obeying Marsellus' orders, which is also a form of loyalty. Ringo and Yolanda are loyal to each other and Jimmie is loyal to his friend Jules. Butch is a loyal romantic, as he indulges his girlfriend's neuroses, as well as Jules who is a vegetarian because his girlfriend is. Vincent is loyal, too. Although he is a really mean guy who picks on Butch for no reason and is unfriendly to Mr. Wolfe, he is not only loyal to his partner but also to his boss. We can assume that he refuses to sleep with Mia not because of fear, but because of loyalty.

2.4 Style

To create an own style is the most important thing for a movie to become a cult film. Pulp Fiction did this like no other movie in the nineties. It has inspired many artists (directors as well as authors, musicians and painters) around the world and even revolutionized filmmaking in some parts. Its impact on America's movie industry is often compared to the impact of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941).

2.4.1 Dialogue

Although the performances and editing are incredible, what makes Pulp Fiction stand above over other movies is the dialogue. Tarantino and Avary probably won the Academy Award because of this. Not because of using the so-called "f-word" 271 times or even the "n-word" 13 times²⁷, but because of the dialogue not being plot-driven all the time. It is also describing certain circumstances and situations, setting up oncoming scenes and introducing characters in a way we would rather expect from a novelist than from a screenplay writer. Of course, the vulgar language makes the movie more authentic, but this is not the point.

Take the scene where Butch comes back to his girlfriend after his boxing match. She says, she has been looking in the mirror and she wants a pot belly. Butch tells her she already has one. She then adds: "If I had one,

²⁷ cf. Holm, D. K. "Pulp Explosion." *Quentin Tarantino*. Ed. D. K. Holm. Herts: Pocket Essentials, 2004. 82.

I'd wear a T-shirt two sizes too small to accentuate it. [...] It's unfortunate what we find pleasing to the touch and pleasing to the eyes is seldom the same."²⁸ This apparently irrelevant conversation shows how Tarantino uses the dialogue to describe things, in this case Butch's girlfriend's personality and their relationship to each other. In other movies, the conversation would have been about the boxing match or about Marsellus Wallace's vengeance, about things we already know.²⁹ Another example is the opening conversation between Jules and Vincent. They talk about how burgers are called in Europe, about drug laws in Amsterdam and about what happened to Tony Rocky Horror.³⁰ It characterizes the two hitmen and reveals that Vincent takes drugs. Additionally, it provides the content for both Jules' conversation with Brett (Frank Whaley) and Vincent's conversation with Mia in the restaurant scene.³¹

Humorous dialogue is used to decrease the negative effects of graphical violence. When Mia gets the adrenaline injection and a huge needle goes through her chest into her heart, what we actually do not get to see, viewers tend to laugh instead of feeling disgusted, because of the reaction of Lance's wife, a piercing-freak who just witnessed the ultimate piercing. This technique makes some scenes seem less violent than they really are.

2.4.2 The "Tarantino Universe"

Pulp Fiction takes place in an almost alternate universe in which influences of the different decades of the twentieth century are united. This includes Mia, who looks like a character from the 1920s, Jules' cellphone, a scene in a 1950s restaurant, Mr. Wolfe's Acura NSX from 1991, a reel to reel tape player in Marsellus' house and many other things.

Music is a part of this universe. The soundtrack consists of many different kinds of music from different eras, but mainly of surf music. Tarantino uses it as the basic score as he does not understand its connection

²⁸ Tarantino, Pulp Fiction, 97-98.

²⁹ cf. <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20010610/REVIEWS08/106100301/1023>

³⁰ cf. Tarantino, Pulp Fiction, 13-23.

³¹ cf. <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20010610/REVIEWS08/106100301/1023>

to surfing but thinks its style fits to Pulp Fiction.³² Music creates atmosphere and is therefore essential for some scenes. Tarantino has stated that the scene where Vincent arrives at Mia's house was unimaginable for him without the song "Son Of A Preacher Man" by Dusty Springfield and that he would have cut it if he could not get the rights to the song.³³ Another scene in which the score plays an important role, is in the Jackrabbit Slim's restaurant where Vincent, played by the 70s dance icon John Travolta, takes part in a dancing contest.

The next important aspect of the Tarantino world are the brand names. Tarantino hates product placement and has therefore invented several brands which he uses in his films. The Big Kahuna Burgers which the three men eat in the apartment have also been eaten in *Reservoir Dogs* and *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) and the Red Apple cigarettes are also being smoked in *Four Rooms* (1995).³⁴ His resistance to product placement is even so intense that he invented a boxing glove brand for Pulp Fiction.³⁵ In *Reservoir Dogs*, a Jackrabbit Slim's commercial can be heard in the radio.³⁶

Connections to Tarantino's other movies in general also play an important role for film freaks, the people who, as we have learned before, are the basis for the cult status of a movie. Is Vic Vega from *Reservoir Dogs* really Vincent Vega's brother? What has the Fox Force Five to do with the DiVAS in *Kill Bill* (2003/2004)? When Mr. White mentions a nurse called Bonnie in *Reservoir Dogs*, does he mean Jimmie's wife? Was Mr. Pink able to escape, to sell the diamonds (in a briefcase) to Marsellus and to find a job as a waiter, maybe under a false name? These questions maybe seem to be of no relevance to those who sit in a cinema, wait until the movie is over, get up and go home, but also very fascinating to those who stay seated for a couple of minutes and take some time to think about a movie, especially if it was a good one. And this is the difference between Pulp Fiction and most other movies of the last few years. It raises questions, it gives the viewer

³² cf. Peary, Quentin Tarantino Interviews, 69.

³³ cf. Holm, Quentin Tarantino, 84.

³⁴ cf. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110912/trivia>

³⁵ cf. Holm, Quentin Tarantino, 83.

³⁶ cf. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110912/trivia>

something to think about. To create a fiction always means to draw a comparison to reality, to question the status quo.

Conclusion

Pulp Fiction does not leave anyone cold. It is not one of those movies you watch and then forget after some weeks. It separates its viewers into convinced opponents and ardent fans. The latter make Pulp Fiction a cult movie. Their endless enthusiasm for Tarantino's masterpiece, the lively interest they take in even the most trivial details of this movie and the impressive fact that there really always is something new to discover bear every comparison with classic cult movies like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).

We have learned that there is no exact definition of the term cult movie and that there is no ultimate checklist to gauge what is a cult movie, but I, for one, strongly believe that if there was a cult movie in the nineties except for *The Matrix* (1999) and maybe *Star Wars Episode I* (1999), it is Pulp Fiction. However, not everyone subscribes to this view.

For example the distant relative I met on my aunt's wedding. What the American Heritage Dictionary is trying to say by talking of an "exclusive group of persons"³⁷ in the definition of the word cult, suddenly became clear to me when me and my relative discovered that we share a love for so called "gangster movies" and I asked her if she knew Pulp Fiction. "Yes," she answered. "It's one of the worst movies I've ever seen."

³⁷ <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/>

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