Characteristics of Quentin Tarantino's Style

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad
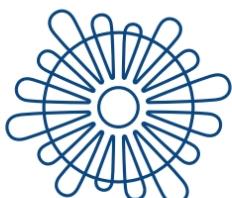
2017

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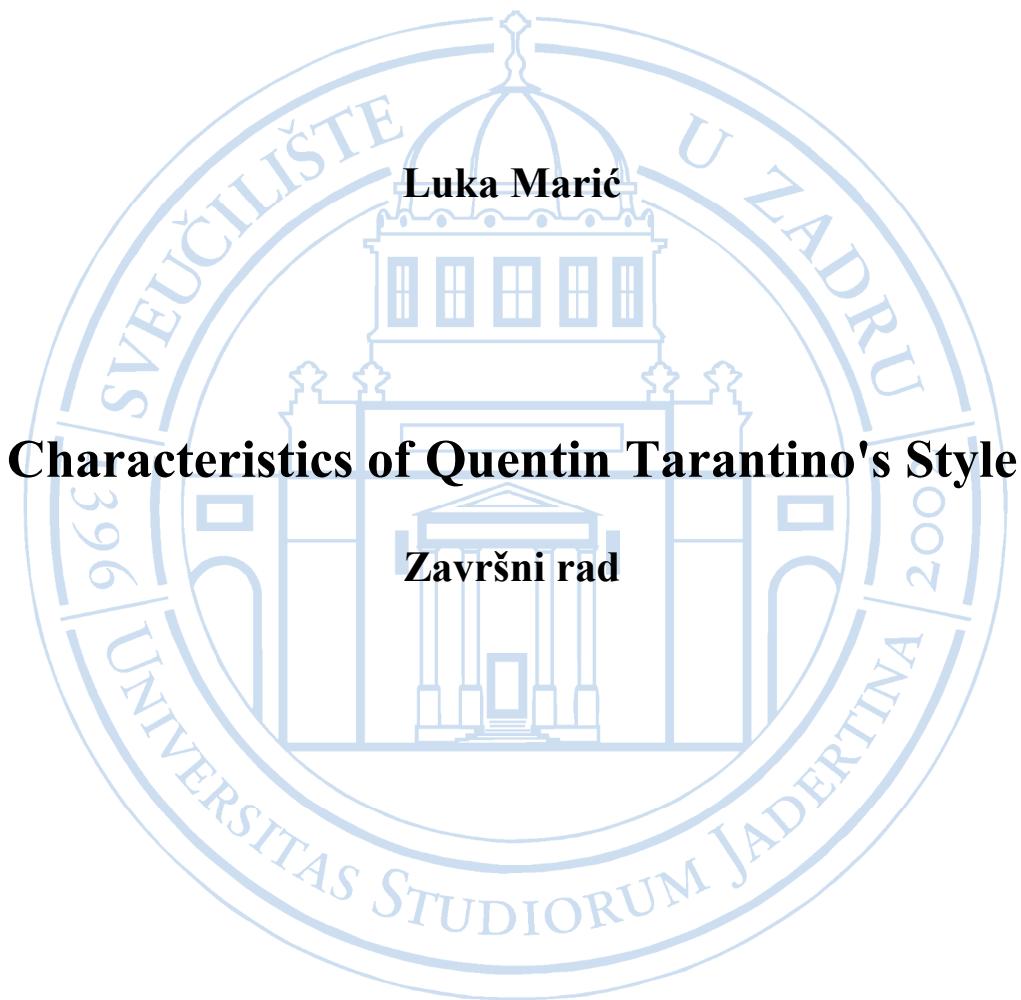DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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Student/ica: Mentor/ica:

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Zadar, 2017.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 15. prosinca 2017.

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Characteristics of Quentin Tarantino's Style

1. Introduction

This paper will deal with the director Quentin Tarantino, who emerged in the 1990s and became very popular after two very successful films. In order to better understand Tarantino, we must first analyze where he comes from, what are the characteristics of the period when he started creating, what influenced him and what style does he belong to. In order to do these things, we must first analyze postmodern film (we can see many elements of postmodernism in all films made by Tarantino) and independent film, because independent directors had more freedom to do what they wanted to do with their films, and we must see how this affected Tarantino's films. In the first three chapters the characteristics of postmodern art and postmodernism in general will be discussed in detail, and a brief overview of the Hollywood system will be given in order to understand why independent directors are so important. In the fourth chapter, we will see how Tarantino is connected to both postmodernism and independent filmmaking, and discuss how they both affected his films. In the fifth chapter Tarantino's use of violence and music in his films will be discussed. An additional analysis of some of his films will be done at the end.

To end this introduction, let us see first who even is Quentin Tarantino by taking a look at his biography. Tarantino's place of birth is Knoxville in Tennessee. He lived there for the first four years of his life. His father worked as an actor and a musician, and his mother as a nurse. When he was four years old, he and his mother moved to California. According to Wensley Clarkson's book *Quentin Tarantino: Shooting From The Hip*, it was his mother who influenced his love for cinema, comic books and pulp literature. After leaving school he got a job in a video store and was impressed by films so much that he started watching as many of them as he could, disregarding their fame or quality. Working at a video store was like a

dream come true for him. His fame as a director is akin to that of a rock star, at least that's how the youth viewed him after his first success (Clarkson, 1997).

Tarantino's first notable film is *Reservoir Dogs (1992)*. The film was a big success and brought great fame to Tarantino. His next film, which made him the famous director that he is today, is *Pulp Fiction (1994)*. In 1995, the film was nominated for the Best Picture, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay at the 1995 Academy Awards. Out of the three, he won the award for best original screenplay. Shortly after the success of *Pulp Fiction (1994)*, he worked on two more films: *Four Rooms (1995)* and *From Dusk Till Dawn (1996),* both of which did reasonably well. In the two decades that followed, Tarantino has worked on many films, most of which enjoyed both financial and critical success. Those include *Jackie Brown (1997), Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (2003), Kill Bill: Vol. 2 (2004), Inglorious Basterds (2009), Django Unchained (2012)* and the most recent *The Hateful Eight (2015).*[1]

2.1 Postmodernism and Postmodernist Film

Tarantino and his movies can be classified as postmodernist films, because they reflect postmodern ideas, and postmodernism is an era and a movement which moves away from modernism. So in order to better understand his movies, where they draw inspiration from, and most importantly to understand his style, first we must analyze postmodernism and postmodernist film. Modernism is a philosophical movement, which also caused cultural trends and changes, and it is a result of the changes that started happening during the late 19th century, mainly industrialization. Modernism includes the creations of those who felt that traditional forms of art and ways of thinking were no longer fit for the "new" world that they were living in, a world changed by the industrial growth in the western society. From the

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[1] In addition to Clarkson's book, most of the information about Quentin Tarantino's biography was found on the website Internet Movie Database http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000233/?ref_=nv_sr_2

Oxford dictionary, modernism is "modern character of quality of thought, expression, or technique; a style or movement in the arts that aims to break with classical and traditional forms; a movement toward modifying traditional beliefs in accordance with modern ideas(...)".

> Postmodernism is the "late-20th-century style and concept in the arts, architecture, and criticism that represents a departure from modernism and has at its heart a general distrust of grand theories and ideologies as well as a problematical relationship with any notion of "art.". Typical features include a deliberate mixing of different artistic styles and media, the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, and often the incorporation of images relating to the consumerism and mass communication of late-20th-century post industrial society." (Oxford dictionary)

This dictionary definition gives us a good general idea of what postmodernism is. Parts that are important for this paper are "a general distrust of grand theories and ideologies as well as a problematical relationship with any notion of art" and "mixing of different styles and media and the conscious use of earlier styles and conventions". More on these things will be said later.

Postmodernism is a movement that goes against the ideas of modernism, and many of its "doctrines (...) can fairly be described as the straightforward denial of general philosophical viewpoints that were taken for granted during the period of 18th-century Enlightment" (Duignan, 2014). Let us now take a look at some of the basic ideas of modern philosophy and describe how postmodernism criticizes them. While Modernism believes that there is an objective natural reality, as well as an objective truth, postmodernists (according to Duignan, 2014) consider reality to be just a conceptual construct, and that truth doesn't exist.

> "Through the use of reason and logic, and with the more specialized tools provided by science and technology, human beings are likely to change themselves and their societies for the better. It is reasonable to expect that future societies will be more humane, more just, more

enlightened, and more prosperous than they are now. Postmodernists deny this Enlightenment faith in science and technology as instruments of human progress. Indeed, many postmodernists hold that the misguided (or unguided) pursuit of scientific and technological knowledge led to the development of technologies for killing on a massive scale in World War II. Some go so far as to say that science and technology—and even reason and logic— are inherently destructive and oppressive, because they have been used by evil people, especially during the 20th century, to destroy and oppress others". (Duignan, 2014)[2]

According to the same article as the quote above, postmodernism considers reason and logic, much like reality, to also be conceptual constructs, which are "valid only within established intellectual traditions in which they are used" (Duignan, 2014). According to Duignan (2014), human nature does not exist. Everything about humans, including our psychology, is socially constructed, says Duignan (2014). As far as scientific theory is concerned, postmodernists say that it is impossible to create "general theories", that a theory cannot be used to explain the world (Duignan, 2014). They claim that the Enlightment brought about an unhealthy tendency to totalize systems of thought, or create "metanaratives".

"Modernism utilized a foundational theory of knowledge which begins with knowable ultimate Truth. From this perspective, all knowledge is built from that which can be certainly known. The well-known example of Descartes demonstrates the epistemology and methodology of this perspective. Descartes began questioning everything he could question and came to the conclusion that he could not question that he was thinking, which means he exists (i.e., "I think therefore I am"). This statement, often cited as the beginning of modernism, asserts that all knowledge must be built from this basic foundation of knowledge. Descartes began with rationalism, but his theory evolved into a more scientific approach which combined rationalism and a form of empiricism (i.e., knowing through the senses).

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[2] The quote is from an article found on Encyclopaedia Britannica titled *Postmodernism,* written by Brian Duignan.

These two ways of knowing were the privileged epistemologies of the modernist period. The primary methodologies of logic (a rationalistic method) and science (application of reason to empiricism) were elucidated from these ways of knowing." (Hoffman et al., 2008:8)

From this quote we can see that the basis for modernism is logic and rationalism, as well as empiricism. There is an "ultimate Truth" and it is something that can be reached with knowledge, in other words we can know it.

Postmodernism criticizes the epistemologies and methodologies of modernism, and it even started creating an alternative to the epistemologies and methodologies of modernism, claims Hoffman (2008). He says that, regardless of whether the absolute truth exists or not, "there should be multiple epistemologies and methodologies" (Hoffman et. al., 2008:8). In other words, there are multiple ways of knowing, and none of them are superior to others.

"Quine and Ullian (1978) developed a web theory providing the basis for a postmodern theory of knowledge.(...) Quine and Ullian's theory conceptualized knowledge as being similar to a large web of knowledge. Each point of connection represents a piece of knowledge, which is not an ultimate truth, but rather the current understanding which is subject to reformulation. Knowledge, like a spider web, is interconnected and most dependent on the connection points closest to it. If any connection point is changed, it impacts all the other points in the web. The closest points are impacted more than the distal points. In this view, points of knowledge should continually be re-examined and reconsidered." (Hoffman et al., 2008:8)

However, Hoffman (2008) says that this theory does not view "all ways of knowing as equal" (which is the most common criticism against this theory). Postmodernism is pluralistic and accepts "many different viewpoints and approaches"(Hoffman et. al., 2008:9), but it does not actually claim that they are all equal.

There is also an alternative opinion offered by Stephen Hicks (and others), who claims that postmodernism and modernism do not differ significantly. Hicks (2004) says that postmodernism never challenged the framework that modernism adopted at the end of

the nineteenth century, and there is more continuity than discontinuity between the two. Both postmodernism and modernism are rooted in a broader cultural framework which was relevant in the late nineteenth century.[3]

To summarize the basic idea of this chapter is: Postmodern art, and therefore postmodern film, is art that reflects the ideas of postmodernism. Basically, what it means is that modernism is a way of thinking, a doctrine that says that there is a proper or "normal" way of doing things. There is one reality, there is a truth and there is a lie, there are such things as human nature, there is a proper way humans should behave and think; logic and reason is "normal", illogical things are "bad". On the other hand, postmodernism says the exact opposite. There is no single way that things need to be in order to be "normal", there is no universal truth, there is no objective reality, those things are constructed by the dominant narrative, what is normal in one field does not necessarily need to be normal in another. For example, what is normal in one country or part of the world is not necessarily normal or acceptable in another. This basic principle of modernism and postmodernism works the same way for art. In the period of modernism, there was a proper way of "doing" art. There was a piece of art that was considered normal, beautiful, and all art followed that general principle. For example, in a story based art (like film), the perfection that modernism strives for is accomplished in the structure of the narrative. The movie takes itself seriously and says what it wants to say, but makes no attempt to achieve anything beyond that. It also follows (in most cases) the proper way of making a narrative, which also means that the narrative is structured in a way that assumes that a proper narrative does indeed exist.

On the other hand, postmodern art breaks these rules. Postmodern film wants to tell a story in a way that changes the meaning of storytelling. There is no proper way of doing a narrative. And postmodern movies also try to make their audience aware of the fact that other

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[3] For more on this, see Stephen Hicks: *Why Art Became Ugly.*

movies are encoded with meaning that wants to control the thinking of the viewer in a way that it tells him what is normal and good. This can be seen rather well in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction,* where he breaks the usual narrative, first by following the story of multiple very different characters and connecting them all in the end, as well as by telling a story in a non chronological order.

2.2 Characteristics of Postmodern Film

Intertextuality is one of the characteristics of postmodern film, which is the acknowledgement of previous works. Postmodern films often reference other works, both acknowledging their existence (and the fact that what we are building today is based upon the things from the past), as well as to test and complement their knowledge of other works.[4] The first example that comes to mind is the animated TV show *South Park*, where nearly every episode references other works, as well as real life events from contemporary society. Not only does a person miss the point of the episode if they don't know what the episode references, but he or she will probably not even understand it at all. The said TV show also references events and other works in order to mock them, and often these are things that a person would not usually find funny, which is another characteristic of postmodern films- playfulness, irony and black humor. Depicting serious matters in a non serious way, but in a humorous way instead is something that characterizes most postmodern author.[5] As mentioned before in the description of the difference between postmodern and modern, modern films take themselves seriously, try to hide the fact that they are works of fiction. On the other hand postmodern films play with the narrative, they don't try to hide the fact that it is a work of fiction, in fact they encourage the viewers not to take them too seriously, they are

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[4] Information found on a blog on the website *Postmodern Media* http://postmodernmedia1.blogspot.hr/2012/03/identifying-postmodern-films.html.

[5] According to a list found on http://postmodernblog.tumblr.com/post/106532710/a-list-of-postmodern-characteristics.

watching a movie after all. An example of the fact that they don't hide the fact that they are a work of fiction that comes to mind is the animated sequence from Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, where he shows the history of the character O-Ren Ishii. This is a good example because an animated sequence automatically removes the illusion that what we are watching is in fact real.

Another common feature of postmodern films is pastiche. "Pastiche is an artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period".[6] They imitate previous works and past styles, as well as mix them together to create something new (mixing of various film genres is common). Taking things from other films from the past is something that is common in postmodern films[7], and Tarantino sometimes recreates entire scenes from other movies in his own.

Mixing high and low culture is another prevalent feature of postmodern film. This allows both the viewers from high and the low to enjoy the film (for example those from low culture will not understand the references in the movie as they haven't seen the movies that it refers to, or they don't know the thing it refers to in general, but they can appreciate this and the movie is still enjoyable for them. On the other hand those from high culture will know the references and they will appreciate the film even more). (postmodern media) Mixing of high and low art is when an "(...)author combines, for example, visual arts, literature, or highly appreciated films (so called *high art*) with popular culture such as posters, television or video games (so called *low art*) creating a unique combination of constructs(...)" (Tahija, 2015:8).

Martin Irvine points out a characteristic of postmodern style which is very important for the topic of this paper. He describes postmodern style as a nostalgic, retro style which

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[6] Found in Oxford Dictionary http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/.
[7] According to *Postmodern Media* http://postmodernmedia1.blogspot.hr/2012/ 03/identifying-postmodern-films.html.

uses old genres and styles in a fresh, new way. This is of importance for Tarantino, as we will see later on in this paper.

Page also points out another two characteristics in his book *Quintessential Tarantino*, those being self-reflexivity and rejection of grand narratives. Rejection of grand narratives means that grand narratives, or dominant narratives built on the idea that there are truths that unify whole humanity, are being replaced by mini-narratives which are concerned with localized events and individual perspectives. Jean-François Lyotard thought that postmodernism would provoke skepticism about universal truths and theories, as we (humans) have outgrown our need for grand narratives after World War II (Elliot et al, 2002).

Fragmented narrative is another feature of postmodern film. This has already been described in the previous chapter with Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* as an example.

2.3 Independent Film

Tarantino is an independent filmmaker, which means that his films were made independently of the system of major film studios. It is important to know this because it was this fact that probably had a major influence on his films, as he had a freedom to create what he wanted to create. On the other hand his films had, as most other independent films, a lower budget then the productions of major studios. In this chapter the brief history of Hollywood film studios will be presented, what they meant for the industry as a whole, how independent artists like Tarantino came to be and what they meant for the film industry, and the important influence this had on the films made by Tarantino.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, the authors of the book *FILM ART, An Introduction* open the chapter on history of film with the sentence: "not everything is possible at all times". What they probably wanted to say with this is that technology allows us to do

things which we could only dream about in the past. It is technology and advancements in the field that allowed Tarantino to turn his vision into films that he has created.[8]

The period from 1893 to 1903 was the period of many inventions that allowed first films to be made. Thomas A. Edison, one of the most important early inventors of this period, tried to make a profit by exploiting the inventions made by his company. In other words, he used patents to sue them, and tried to create a monopoly of sorts (Bordwell, Thompson, 2001).

"One other company, American Mutoscope & Biograph, managed to survive by inventing cameras that differed from Edison's patents. Other firms kept operating while Edison fought them in court. In 1908 Edison compromised with Biograph to bring these other companies under control by forming the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), a group of ten firms based primarily in Chicago, New York and New Jersey. Edison and Biograph were the only stockholders and patent owners. They licensed other members to make, distribute and exhibit films." (Bordwell, Thompson 2001:402)

This might be seen as a greedy attempt by Edison to make money. He wanted to control what others do under the guise that they were "using his invention" and this would mean that a single company controls what type of films others make, how, when, how they distribute and exhibit them. This would mean the death of creativity and artistic value of films, as they would likely become a mass product for making money (it is hard to argue that this is not the case today). Luckily, Edison did not succeed.

Numerous other companies, independent ones, were established in this period. The government decided that MPPC is a monopoly in 1915. Edison accepted the existence of other companies, mainly for the following reason: the demand for new films was so high, that it was impossible for a single studio to supply them. "Before 1920, the American film

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[8] This chapter was written with the help of *FILM ART: An Introduction,* a book written by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. More information about the topic can be found there.

industry assumed the structure that would continue for years: a few large studios with individual artists under contract, and a peripheral group of small independent producers." (Bordwell, Thompson 2001:403) By the end of the century, a factory-like system was developed in Hollywood. What was produced was decided by the producer, and he didn't work on the film itself. In other words, what individual artists were making was under control by a major studio.

The following quotation, from Bordwell and Thompson (p 406), perfectly summarizes what might be the biggest problem with major Hollywood studio productions. By the end of the 1920s, "(...) the classical Hollywood cinema had developed into a sophisticated movement, but the Hollywood "product" was remarkably standardized. All of the major studios used the same production system, with a similar division of labor at each. Independent production was less important. Some Independent firms made low-budget films, often Westerns, for small and rural theatres." (Bordwell, Thompson 2001:406)

While it did seem like Hollywood was doing quite well in the 1960s, it soon became apparent that not everything was as great as it seemed. Expensive productions started failing financially, television networks stopped buying films after they finished airing in the theaters, and numerous other problems started occurring. It was a group of young directors, known as the "movie brats", that brought hope again by making several hits in a row. Some of these include Francis Ford Coppola and his *The Godfather (1972)* and George Lucas with his *Star Wars (1977).* They did not "come through the ranks of the studio system" (Bordwell, Thompson 2001:422), and most of them attended film schools. They also had a huge admiration for classical Hollywood, and were very knowledgeable about movie history. They grew up watching Hollywood films (which explains their admiration for classical Hollywood), and because of that many of their creations were based on Old Hollywood. We can relate this to pastiche and postmodernism that was mentioned before, as they borrowed

heavily from past directors and films (like De Palma from Hitchcock for example). However, we can also relate it to modernism, as they worked within classical boundaries and rules. This renaissance that happened in Hollywood, which was brought about by the "movie brats", is often called "New Hollywood". In the 1980s, another renaissance happened thanks to another generation of young directors, called "New New Hollywood" (Bordwell, Thompson 2001). In this period (1970s and 1980s) the importance of independent filmmakers started rising. Some of them managed to become mainstream, producing films with high budgets and famous movie stars. Others remained independent.

The mainstream directors continued making films in the classical Hollywood tradition. They used traditional storytelling strategies, and some did minor changes that revitalized the storytelling a bit. However, it was the less founded New Hollywood directors that experimented with the film. One of these directors that emerged in the 1990s was Quentin Tarantino, according to Bordwell and Thompson (2001). So while the mainstream directors were keeping the classical Hollywood alive, it was the independent directors, like Tarantino, that started experimenting with film and brought about interesting new trends. Independent directors also experimented with narrative construction (a trademark of postmodern style, one that Tarantino clearly displays in *Pulp Fiction* (1994), where the plot happens in a non-chronological order).

But sometimes even big-budget films made by independent filmmakers had distinctly experimental attitudes. Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) encouraged many filmmakers to experiment with the narrative (for example *The Sixth Sense* (1999) was a film that the viewer was encouraged to see more than once, given how he has been mislead by the narrative).

3. Analyzing Quentin Tarantino

3.1 Quentin Tarantino- an Independent, Postmodern Filmmaker

"By 1994, a new descriptive critical term appeared: *Tarantinoesque*. Like *Kafkaesque* before it (…or *Hitchcockian*), it seemed to say everything and nothing at the same time. Or perhaps it should be put this way: The reader knew what was meant without necessarily being able to define the term" (Holm, 2004:19).

As mentioned in the previous two chapters, understanding postmodernism and placing Tarantino in a time and place in the film history (independent film) is important to understand where he comes from and what influenced his style of filmmaking. He belongs in the group of young directors that started emerging in the 1970s and 1980s (although he emerged in the 1990s). As mentioned before, these filmmakers can be split into two groups. One group is made of mainstream directors who followed the classical tradition of American cinema, used traditional narrative structures and storytelling. The second group is made of directors who were less founded, they were not mainstream directors, and it was them that brought innovation. They are the ones who pushed the envelope, the independent film directors that Quentin Tarantino was a part of. It gives us an insight as to why his films were different than most that came before him.

The first group, the one that followed classical rules, could be said to belong to modernism. They followed classical rules and adopted them to the modern times, to the new technology. Tarantino and the second group can be seen as postmodern, they moved away from the classical, and can be seen as postmodern. They experimented with the film and tried new things.

To repeat the basic definition of postmodernism, "Postmodernism is the late-20th-century style and concept in the arts, architecture, and criticism that represents a departure

from modernism and has at its heart a general distrust of grand theories and ideologies as well as a problematical relationship with any notion of art." This is what we established postmodernism is at the start of this paper, and already here we can find an important feature in films made by Tarantino, based on this definition alone. In particular the distrust mentioned here, the distrust of grand theories and ideologies. The distrust of authorities and the law is something that can be noticed in Tarantino's films. He recently participated in an anti-brutality rally, and called the policemen murderers at the said rally, which resulted in the police of few USA police departments to boycott his most recent film, *The Hateful Eight* (2015). This distrust can be seen in his films as well. We can use *Pulp Fiction* (1994) as an example. During the course of the film, a lot of bad things happen, a lot of violent and illegal things. At no point are authorities or the police ever mentioned, nor do any of the characters ever rely on them. They make their own path, and their success depends on them alone. Let us take for example the scene at the diner, where Vincent and Jules are eating. At a certain point during the scene, a couple gets up from their table and initiates a robbery. They go into a lengthy conversation with Jules and Vincent, at gun point. The whole scene lasts for quite some time, yet no one ever called for help or called the police. Another scene from the diner is when Vincent and Jules discuss meat. From the movie script:

Vincent: "Want a sausage?"

Jules: "Naw, I don't eat pork."

Vincent: "Are you Jewish?"

Jules: "I ain't Jewish man, I just don't dig on swine."

Vincent:" Why not?"

Jules: "They're filthy animals. I don't eat filthy animals."

Vincent: "Sausages taste good. Pork chops taste good."

Jules: "A sewer rat may taste like pumpkin pie. I'll never know 'cause even if it did, I wouldn't eat the filthy motherfucker. Pigs sleep and root in shit. That's a filthy animal. I don't wanna eat nothin' that ain't got enough sense to disregard its own feces."

In this conversation, it would seem that Vincent and Jules are talking about pork. And they are, but there is a hidden meaning behind their conversation, that fits with the overall theme of the movie. If we consider the slang word *pig* for a policeman, their conversation gets a whole new meaning. "I don't eat pork" can easily be seen as "I don't trust cops".

It was mentioned previously that intertextuality is the acknowledgement of previous works. Postmodern films often reference other works, both acknowledging their existence (and the fact that what we are building today is based upon the things from the past), as well as to test and complement their knowledge of other works. A good definition was given by Joshua Wucher: "The suggestion that all texts are (to varying degrees) related to one another because of our common cultural heritage, and, in some cases, that texts actually make use of plots, characters, events, themes, heroes and heroines, and stylistic devices found in texts that preceded them. Intertextuality, then, involves the use in texts, either consciously (through "quotation") or unconsciously, of material from other texts" (Wucher, 20015:3).

This is something that we can see in many of the films made by Tarantino. He references other works in his films, and there are so many examples that even going through all of them in just one of his films would take up the rest of this paper. Nevertheless, we can still take a look at a few examples to show what kind of references they are. For example, the scene in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) where Marcellus stops in front of Butch's car and turns his head slowly to see Butch behind the wheel is directly taken from the movie *Psycho* (1960). In the same movie, when Vincent takes Mia on a date to Jack Rabbit Slim's, a waiter and a waitress there are dressed up like James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, celebrities from the 1950s and 1960s.

Closely related to intertextuality is the term pastiche. Tarantino takes scenes from other films and recreates them in his films. This imitation of other works, and mixing them together to create something new is pastiche. The films that Tarantino makes represent the idea of pastiche as seen by Frederic Jameson:"the mimicry of other styles and particularly of the mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles. . .the wearing of a stylistic mask" (Jameson, according to Wucher, 2015) The type of films Tarantino makes would be called nostalgia films. Nostalgia films are a kind of pastiche. They try to recreate the atmosphere and style of a past period. However, Wucher (2015) notes that Tarantino's films are more like "anomalies of nostalgic films like *Star Wars* that try to reinvent the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period" (Wucher, 2015:3) In other words, he is creating something new and fresh by using old styles.

He also recreates scenes that the actors in his film already did in another film. For example, in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003), there are scenes with Uma Thurman and David Carradine that are the same as the ones from their previous films, like the scene where David is playing a flute is the same as the one where he played a flute in *A Circle of Iron* (1978). The scene where the Bride played by Uma Thurman is surrounded by the Krazy 88 in a circle is the same as when Bruce Lee is surrounded in *The Chinese Connection* (1972). In fact, many viewers claim that this film reminds them of Asian martial arts or samurai films. That is because Tarantino intended for that to happen, because he was paying homage to those kinds of films. Homage is "special honor or respect shown publicly"[9] or "respect or reverence paid or rendered", "something done or given in acknowledgment or consideration of the worth of another".[10] In other words, he believes that those kinds of films had something of value, and he was paying his respect to those films in his own.

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[9] Definition found in an online dictionary http://www.dictionary.com/.
[10] Definition found in *Oxford Dictionary* http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/.

Another characteristic of his films is the fact that the story is often not told in a chronological order (although this is not present in all his films). He breaks the classical rules of narrative, and the story is told in a non-chronological order, often split into multiple "scenes", or "acts". This can be seen in his film *Pulp Fiction,* where he tells the story of multiple characters, and it is all mixed up. He keeps jumping between characters, and does not help the viewer understand what is going on, instead pushing him to think and come to a conclusion how all these different characters and story arcs are connected. It is probably clear by the end of the film, and it encourages you to watch it another time with the insight you have from your previous viewing. In fact, a scene in which one of the characters, Vincent, is shot and killed is shown before the scene where he is eating a meal with his friend Jules. This narrative style is present in his latest film as well, *The Hateful Eight* (2015), where the story is shown from the perspective of a group of travelers, and all the questions are answered when we see the whole thing from the perspective of the other group.

> "Quentin Tarantino receives as much criticism as he does adulation. Most reproaches, like Liel Leiboviz's criticism of *Inglorious Basterds* and Tarantino's "failure of imagination and morality," hearken back to the aesthetic dilemma that Frederic Jameson says emerges in postmodern culture: that writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds–they've already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible; the unique ones have been thought of already. (...)The problem with Jameson's pronouncement that postmodern work is simply citation and no innovation is that it invariably delimits the potentiality of artistic originality. However, instead of accepting that innovation is "not possible" in the postmodern era when artists merely "imitate dead styles," cinematic authorship needs to be reconceptualised for directors like Tarantino, whose distinctive style of generic reconfiguration leads to creative, intricate films. In other words, what establishes Tarantino as an innovative postmodern director is how he appropriates and intricately reworks cinematic genres." (Wucher, 2015:1)

Tarantino's films are not meant to be philosophical or present some complex ideas. Instead, his films are meant to be entertaining, the meaning in his films "comes through accentuating the affective power of cinema as spectacle." (Wucher, 2015:2) His films are nostalgic, and he mixes ideas from various film genres that he himself loves, such as kung-fu or Westerns. They are also full of intertextuality. "These intertextual collages are metanarratives, self-reflective studies of his cinephilia where reworking genres creates unique visions that help "breathe new life into the old forms he loves" and transcend the simple postmodern recycling of old movie bits and generic plot lines to a thoughtful look at how such relics of the filmic past can come alive in the present" (Wucher, 2015:2).

Tarantino sets up his movies by following the usual genre tropes that go with that type of movie, and then completely takes them by surprise by going against them (though one might argue that his attempts to be unpredictable are resulting in him being more predictable as of late, because you know he will go the "Tarantino" route in the end, and do the exact opposite of what would be expected from a standard film of a particular genre). It is often hard to see what is fact and what is fiction in his films, as well as what is actual history and what is fantasy. This is perhaps best seen in some of his more recent films, like *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), where he presents historic events, but changes history. Wucher(2015) says that postmodern art "often contradicts and breaks down the cultural divide between low and high art by clustering clichés and tropes with the goal of marshalling them to something larger. That something in Tarantino's case, is using film to intervene in material history, which is representative of "[his] fantasy of making his mark within History reduced to film history".[11]

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[11] Quotes found on page 3 of Wucher's Let's Get Into Character: Role-Playing in Quentin Tarantino's Postmodern Sandbox.

Not only did he change history in *Inglorious Basterds* by making Hans Landa betray the Nazis and killing Hitler, Tarantino also wants to emphasize the power of cinema, literally turning it into a weapon in one of the scenes.

"Shoshanna uses the film medium to end the war. She directs her own film, which she splices into the Goebbels' film that dozens of high commanding Nazi officials and Hitler himself are screening at her cinema. Taking a cue from her film, Shoshanna's lover ignites a pile of nitrate filmstrips behind the theatre screen. The room erupts in screams as flames shoot through the screen displaying Shoshanna's face, which serves as ''Tarantino's own filmic gesture to the history of cinema. Opening up a series of interpolations, Dreyfus' 'giant face' contains within it a filmic archive of classic Hollywood (*The Wizard of Oz*) and Weimar German (*Metropolis*) cinemas, European avant garde (*Persona*), contemporary horror (*Carrie*) and popular culture (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*)''(Kligerman 155). "This is the face of Jewish vengeance," as Donny and his comrade alter history by emptying clips into Hitler and Goebbels. Tarantino describes his weaponizing the film medium: "I like that it's the power of the cinema that fights the Nazis. But not just as a metaphor, as a literal reality." (Wucher,2015:13)

3.2 Violence and Music in Tarantino's Films

If you have seen any Tarantino film, there is one thing that you cannot miss about them- they all have moments or scenes of extreme violence. Due to major concerns (whose justification is questionable, but that is a debate for some other time) that violent movies make people violent in a real environment, Tarantino commented on violence in his films on numerous occasions. Some of the comments "The bottom line is I'm not responsible for what some person does after they see a movie. I have one responsibility. My responsibility is to make characters and to be as true to them as I possibly can." "If you ask me how I feel

about violence in real life, well, I have a lot of feelings about it. It's one of the worst aspects of America. In movies, violence is cool. I like it." [12]

"To say that I get a big kick out of violence in movies and can enjoy violence in movies but find it totally abhorrent in real life - I can feel totally justified and totally comfortable with that statement. I do not think that one is a contradiction of the other. Real life violence is real life violence. Movies are movies. I can watch a movie about the Hindenberg disaster and get into it as a movie but still feel it's a horrible real life tragedy. It's not the same thing at all".[13]

From all of these comments it is obvious that he does not believe the violence in his movies to have an impact on real life, and he believes that violence in his films serves to entertain the viewer. "I think it's good cinema", to quote him. However, when commenting about violence in his films *Inglorious Basterds* and *Django Unchained*, he says there are two kinds of violence. One of them serves a purpose. For example the violence in *Inglorious Basterds* was there for "Jewish revenge", he wanted to give the Jews an opportunity to have their revenge on the Nazis for what they did to them during World War II. The violence in *Django Unchained* serves to show the brutality of slavery. His movie started the discussion about slavery that was not there in American society for 30 years (according to Tarantino). Then there is also the cathartic violence, when Django comes back for blood and kills the slavers.

Reservoir Dogs (1992) is a film that changed the way violence is shown in films. The scene that stands out the most is the torture scene, in which the character played by Michael Madsen tortures a police officer. The reason why this particular scene stands out is the music- the song that was used during the brutal scene of torture. "Stuck in the Middle with You", a

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[12] The quote is from an interview with Quentin Tarantino, found in an article written by Esther Zuckerman on thewire.com https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/quentin-tarantino-violence-quotes/319586/.

[13] The quote is from an interview with Quentin Tarantino, found in an article written by Esther Zuckerman on thewire.com https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/quentin-tarantino-violence-quotes/319586/.

catchy, upbeat song performed by Stealers Wheel, is in stark contrast with what is actually being shown on screen- it is both ironic and a display of indifference to pair a song like this with a torture scene. Lisa Coulthard (2009) says that the music in Tarantino's films does indeed have the same function as the music scores in films usually do, which is "guiding viewer response, cuing narrative significance, encouraging and shaping affective and identificatory engagement, providing rhythm and temporal and spatial unity, and tying music to characters' thoughts and actions" (Coulthard, 2009). However, this scene marked the beginning of a new way of showing movie violence, often called "new brutality", as well as "Hollywood ultraviolence" (Coulthard, 2009). Films that follow this new trend often depict extreme scenes of violence in an ironic, humorous way. According to Coulthard (2009), they mix (...) violence with humor", show "a lack of affect and a celebration of independent, alternative culture", which is characteristic for postmodernism. Thus we can conclude that even the way Tarantino uses music in his films is an example of postmodernism, as it does all of the things said above. [14]

3.3 A Short Additional Analysis of Individual Tarantino's Films

The reason why the title says "short" is because we have already talked about these films and used many examples in the previous chapters. However, I would like to go into a bit more detail with some of them, and to write some things that did not fit in the structure of previous chapters.

Reservoir Dogs

The scene to focus our attention on right away is the very first scene in the movie, where the main cast of characters is sitting at a table and discussing tipping the waitress. In this scene one of the characters, Mr. Pink, says that he doesn't tip. He doesn't believe in doing

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[14] More information about Tarantino's use of music can be found in Lisa Coulthard's Torture Tunes: Tarantino, Popular Music, and New Hollywood Ultraviolence.

it just because society tells him he should. This scene ties in with what was said before about postmodernism, and how it does not accept social constructs and universal truths. Tipping is one of those constructs, and Mr. Pink does not conform to social rules simply because society deemed that tipping anyone is a norm.

The plot of the film is fragmented, split into chapters and non-linear. A lot of the missing information in the story is presented via non-linear flashbacks. "The film fills in vital information via an assortment of flashbacks. This is an ambitious structure, but Tarantino pulls it off with panache" (Billson). Also, the movie is about a group of criminals performing a heist, but not a single scene in the film shows the heist itself. Page points out in *Quintessential Tarantino* (on page 51) that the fact that this does not detract from the narrative shows how great Tarantino's storytelling abilities are.

The mixing of high and low art is visible in this film as well. On the one hand we have a story split into chapters and those chapters being named after characters (these things are usually associated with literature, or high culture). On the other hand we have things like characters talking about Madonna's song *Like a Virgin* and references to comic books which celebrate low art (Tahija 15). I have already talked about the song *Stuck in the Middle with You* , which Mohammad and Greene claim provokes an ironic response in the viewer rather than an emotional one, because of how unfitting and wrong it feels in the scene it is used in.

Pulp Fiction

Yet again we have a non-linear, fragmented narrative divided into chapters. However, Tarantino has outdone himself this time, because of how the whole film feels like a puzzle. The order and the way in which scenes are presented makes the viewer think of a reason why these seemingly unrelated events are even in the same film. By the end of the film all the pieces fall into place. I like how the film ends with a scene of a character who we saw die during the first part.

Again we have a mix of low and high culture. The film is divided into named chapters, much like *Reservoir Dogs*, and the characters reference pop culture in their conversations (popular drinks and fast food restaurants for example).

The scene that I want to point out as one of the most important scenes in the film is the date that Vince (John Travolta) and Mia (Uma Thurman) go to, which takes place in a diner called Jack Rabbit Slim's. The whole scene is very postmodern, full of references to old films and rock stars. This scene also pays homage to another film, by Federico Fellini named *8 ½ (1963)*. Vince and Mia's dance from *Pulp Fiction (1994)* is the exact copy of the dance performed in *8 ½ (1963)* by Gloria and Mario, the two characters from the film. I also find it brilliant that Steve Buscemi (who played Mr. Pink in *Reservoir Dogs* and talked about "not believing in tipping") plays the role of a waiter in Jack Rabbit Slim's. I also mentioned before that one of the scenes is also a reference to *Psycho* (1960), and there are probably many more examples of pastiche in this film.[15]

Inglorious Basterds

Tarantino's 2009 hit *Inglorious Basterds* is a historic movie, but not quite. It takes place during a real period in recent human history, and the setting is real enough, but the events are completely made up. It's a story about a group of soldiers killing Nazi officers to bring an end to WWII. During the opening credits, Tarantino pays homage to spaghetti westerns by using a font that is very similar to that of 1960s and 1970s westerns. He also used Ennio Morricone for the soundtrack, a man whose popularity for composing music for westerns needs no mentioning.

Like the others, this movie is also split into chapters, each one having a title. After the name of the first chapter, *Chapter One*, appears on screen, the words *Once upon a time...*

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[15] A much larger and more detailed analysis of these two, as well as all other films made by Quentin Tarantino, can be found in *Quintessential Tarantino,* a book by Edwin Page, who does an amazing job at analysing them on a scale much larger than the one I can fit in a paper of this size.

follow, while Beethoven's *Für Elise* is playing. This is an example of high art, because it resembles literature and fairy tales. On the opposite end, (as noticed by Tahija) *low culture* is perhaps most noticeable through the baseball bat used in torturing Nazis since it echoes both American sport as part of their culture and the American way of extorting a beating. Flashbacks and non-chronological narration are present yet again, although it is not as emphasized as in *Pulp Fiction*, for example.

Lastly, let us talk about the cast of actors and the irony behind it. Tarantino chose a very diverse cast of actors for this film with very diverse backgrounds. We have American actors such as Brad Pitt and Eli Roth, but also French ones like Melanie Laurent playing a French Jew. Then we have actors from Germany and Austria, whose knowledge of German contributed to the feeling of authenticity in the film, such as Christoph Waltz, whose performance as colonel Hans Landa is simply unforgettable. A very unique case is that of Michael Fassbender, as noticed by Tahija. Born in Germany and raised in Ireland due to the fact that his mother is Irish, he plays a role of a character who is an English soldier picked by Winston Churchill for the mission based on his ability to speak German so well. So is it not ironic then, much like the irony in *Reservoir Dogs*, when a popular, catchy song plays during the torture scene of a cop? A scene that invokes an ironic reaction, is it not also ironic that Tarantino went so far to make the movie feel authentic, yet it is a movie that completely changes history and has nothing to do with actual historic events, despite the setting?

4.Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to give an overview of postmodernism and independent filmmaking, and tried to explain and find examples of how this influenced the director Quentin Tarantino. I explained what postmodernism is- an era and a style in art that came

after modernism, which tried to do the opposite of what modernism did. Instead of adhering to classical rules, they did the exact opposite. In the case of film, it means going against the classical rules of filmmaking. Some of the examples are: not using the classical narrative structure, not trying to hide the fact that a film is indeed just a film and not reality, references to other works, pastiche, mixing high and low culture and so on. Tarantino is "guilty" of most if not all of these in his films, as I have illustrated in this paper. After analyzing characteristics of postmodern film and finding those in the films made by Tarantino, I would conclude that his films are indeed examples of postmodern films. However, although Jameson said that the original idea is gone- everything has already been thought about and made, and the era of postmodernism is one that has no originality, I believe this is not the case with Tarantino. The way he uses old styles and mixes them together is quite unique. What distinguishes him as a director is how he, by mixing old styles and genres, creates creative, unique films.

The major characteristics of his films are extreme violence and an interesting use of music for his films. Despite being often criticized for violence, he does not believe it to be harmful. Real life violence is horrible, but in a movie it is (or can be) entertaining. It is not harmful because it is fictional and not real. The type of over-the-top violence that Tarantino displays in his films is often called ultraviolence, and it is a trend that he started in Hollywood. However, although violence is used to entertain in his films, he also said that it had a different purpose at times (to give Jews the satisfaction of revenge in *Inglorious Basterds* and to show the brutality of slavery in *Django Unchained*, for example). The music in his films is used in an interesting way. It serves the usual purposes that it does in other films (to quote Lisa Coulthard (2009) once again: "guiding viewer response, cuing narrative significance, encouraging and shaping affective and identificatory engagement, providing rhythm and temporal and spatial unity, and tying music to characters' thoughts and actions").

What stands out is his pairing of music to a particular scene where it doesn't belong by classical standards, such as pairing a catchy pop song with a scene of extreme violence in *Reservoir Dogs.*

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Abstract

Characteristics of Quentin Tarantino's Style

In this paper, we took a closer look at the director Quentin Tarantino and his films. The goal of this paper was to determine the characteristics of his style of filmmaking, what makes his movies different from most mainstream Hollywood productions. By analyzing his films and literature written by various authors, we have determined that Tarantino's style was largely influenced by the fact that he is an independent director, and that his films have many characteristics of postmodern art. Then, we have determined various things that characterize a postmodern film, and found examples of them in films made by Tarantino.

Key words: Tarantino, postmodernism, independent film

Sažetak

Karakteristike stila Quentina Tarantina

U ovom radu bavili smo se redateljem Quentinom Tarantinom i njegovim filmovima. Cilj ovog rada bio je utvrditi karakteristike Tarantinovog stila izrade filmova, odnosno što njegove filmove čini drukčijima od većine Hollywoodskih produkcija. Analizom njegovih filmova, kao i literature raznih autora, utvrdili smo da je na Tarantinov stil najviše utjecala činjenica što je bio nezavisni redatelj, kao i to da su u njegovim filmovima prisutne mnoge karakteristike postmoderne umjetnosti. Potom smo utvrdili koje su karakteristike postmodernog filma, te primjere istih pronašli u Tarantinovim filmovima.

Ključne riječi: Tarantino, postmodernizam, nezavisni film