Tarantino the Cartoonist

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With the animated sequence 'The Origin of O-Ren', in *Kill Bill volume 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2004)*,* we witness a clear punctuation of the live-action surface of Tarantino's work. This instance of animation represents a diegetic mode that echoes throughout the films of Quentin Tarantino: cartoon. In *Kill Bill* this assumes the form of Anime, but in other films he is also interested in animation (with retro cartoons appearing diegetically), and throughout his work there is an idiosyncratic live-action 'cartoonism'.

Before outlining the methodology of this article, it may be useful to define the neologism I intend to pioneer in this essay: 'cartoonism'. While the word cartoon has been assimilated into everyday speech as a term to denote classic Warner Bros seven-minute shorts and in some cases even Disney features, other, less obvious art forms also have equal claim to the title cartoon. Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist* is a cartoon, in relation to the original Italian definition 'cartone' meaning 'big paper', as it is 'a full-size drawing made on paper as a study for a further artwork, such as a painting' (Anon I, 2006). 'Cartoonism' refers to a process whereby filmic live action (in this case the films of Tarantino) seeks to imitate or utilise the conventions of cartoon, namely the melee of comic strips (that is the aesthetic element of fragmentary, yet contiguous, framing, rather than the contents of individual frames, such as narratological speech bubbles and idiosyncratic illustrative techniques), graphic novels (specifically the violence employed to engage their target audience – teenage upwards), and *toons* (in particular the cartoon characteristics of cartoon

'immortality' and hyperbolic violence). The detailed styles and their respective conventions all feed into 'cartoonism', and the influence that *toons* have upon cinematically applied 'cartoonism' is considerable.

There is no evident use of animation in *Jackie Brown* or *Reservoir Dogs*. This may be because while Tarantino is keen to incorporate elements of the cartoon, he does not wish to lose sight of his filmic objectives, and with regards to *Reservoir Dogs* and *Jackie Brown* this is to present a homage to the crime thriller and the blaxploitation movie, respectively. As Tarantino once said, 'I don't do anything in my [work] just to be clever. That's the first thing that goes, it has to . . . be true to itself' (Anon II, 1998). Truth to the material in the case of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Jackie Brown* does, however, generate a noticeable 'cartoonism' in the treatment of characters and action.

This article provides an alternative reading of Tarantino's films. This re-reading develops from a close commentary on Tarantino's use of anime and animation, with coverage of specific instances of idiosyncratic Tarantinian 'cartoonism'. This consideration of Tarantino's artistic ambition, to create a new filmic art form through the marriage of animation and live-action, will conclude with a brief reflection on his recent work on *Sin City* (Robert Rodriguez, 2005) and how this alters the concept of mise-en-scène.

Tarantinian Anime

Tarantino, with 'The Origin of O-Ren', adopts an anime style of cartoon native to Japan, one of O-Ren (Lucy Liu)'s three nationalities (the other two being Chinese and American), to tell her story. The style of this anime sequence reflects O-Ren's Japanese

ancestry, and although it artistry is not on par with *Princess Mononoke* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1997) or *Spirited Away* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001), it follows on aesthetically from such films as *Akira* (Katsuhiro Ôtomo, 1988), *The Animatrix* (Peter Chung; Yoshiaki Kawajiri; Takeshi Koike; Mahiro Maeda; Kôji Morimoto; Shinichirô Watanabe, 2003), and *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995). Stylistically, by dividing the screen into frames, Tarantino also subtly reinforces O-Ren's disparate ancestry, by providing a complete utilisation of screen space that sees O-Ren at the centre of three disconnected frames (figs 1-3).

Tarantino, by dividing the screen in sections during the anime sequence, essentially creates his own filmic comic strip. In doing so he overtly exerts his control over the narrative, restricting our understanding of this sequence to what we can interpret from the still images. Will Eisner makes the following observation regarding comic framing and panelling: 'the panel must… be addressed as a unit of containment although it too is merely a part of the whole comprised by the story itself' (Eisner, 1985: 63). Therefore, in relation to opening animation of 'The Origin of O-Ren', Tarantino wields the same power of artistic containment through these comic frames. Furthermore, through a playful application of animation and striking framing, as seen when O-Ren recollects her childhood, sequences such as the O-Ren comic strip can enhance the level of enjoyment the audience gains from viewing the film. Edward Branigan notes, when discussing the Marvel comic book Nick Fury, the extremes of cartoon framing

promise the spectator that a storyteller is in command of a vast range
of information from the intimate to the grand, and that all important

information will be provided. Yet these somewhat arbitrary extremes

of framing also seem to be warning that the story will be marked by

sudden turns of events and… [t]he spectator should anticipate the

pleasure of being surprised… (Branigan, 1992: 80).

This conceit is clearly evident in 'The Origin of O-Ren' sequence, and represents a

narrative process that Roland Barthes refers to as a 'catalyser'. In 'Structural Analysis of

Narratives' Barthes defines two clear narrative functions: the cardinal function and the

catalyser. Barthes proposes that for 'a function to be cardinal, it is enough that the action

to which it refers open (or continue, or close) an alternative that is of direct consequence

for the subsequent development of the story, in short that it inaugurate or conclude an

uncertainty' (Barthes, 1977: 93-94). Therefore, O-Ren's retaliatory killing of yakuza boss

Matsumoto (Naomi Kusumi), after the murder of her parents, is the anime sequence's

closing action – its cardinal function. It is how Tarantino chooses to present this process

that is most telling, for as Barthes argues of the 'catalyst' function:

it is of great importance in a narrative because it acts to maintain

contact with the spectator. A catalyst addresses the spectator's

interest and attention by enhancing, accelerating, or (here) slowing

down an event but without altering its course. It encourages a

spectator to remain attentive by relating fascinating but minor

incidents, or by providing additional description and detail…

(Barthes, 1972: 140).

The animation itself, therefore, is Tarantino's way of rewarding the spectator; providing the audience with a vividly detailed passage of anime in which common cardinal functions are played out in an unconventional manner.

Most important though, is the use of anime in this sequence as a way to retain a sense of fidelity with the character, for anime would have been the cartoon of O-Ren's childhood. In reality, two influential Japanese anime series that would have aired during the time of O-Ren's fictional childhood are the *Lupin III* series (Yasumi Mikamoto; Kyosuke Mikuriya; Shigetsugu Yoshida, 1977-80) and *Mazinger Z vs. Devilman* (Hirosho Meguro, 1977). Like the character of O-Ren, who behaves unscrupulously, both *Lupin III* and *Mazinger Z vs. Devilman* pioneered the movement away from clearly 'good' and 'bad' characters in Japanese anime, with both series establishing the now familiar moral '"unconventionality" in anime, and… [expanding] its characterization formulae' (Anon IV).

Perhaps anime's characteristic big eyes and hair, frequent two-tone shading, and intense attention to detail, which distinguishes it from western cartoon, *is* the reason it appears in *Kill Bill*, as it helps to strengthen the idea of exotic otherness between O-Ren and Kiddo (Uma Thurman). We do have some knowledge as to Tarantino's views on the politics of cartoon. Upon being questioned about his short guest direction of the *Itchy and Scratchy* (1990- to date) short 'Reservoir Cats', featured in *The Simpsons* (1990- to date) episode *Simpsoncalifragilisticexpiala-D'oh-cious* (Chuck Sheetz, 1997; 8:13), he replied, 'What I'm trying to say with this cartoon is that violence is everywhere' (Anon V, 2005). The violent nature of 'Reservoir Cats' and the O-Ren anime sequence indicates the

persistence of Tarantino's filmic idiosyncrasies, or as Robin Wood phrases in relation to auteur theory, 'fingerprints… of the individual artist' (Wood, 1977: 668).

While the violence contained in 'The Origin of O-Ren' clearly reflects Tarantino's unflinching nerve when it comes to portraying blood-stained action, it also demonstrates an awareness on the creator (Production IG co-ordinator Katsuju Morishita in tandem with Tarantino)'s behalf of the precursory violence exhibited by some modern Japanese animation. In recent years the anime production *Ninja Scroll* (Yoshiaki Kawajiri & Kevin Seymour, 1993), and the manga series *Koroshiya* (Hideo Yamamoto, 1998- to date), which spawned the live-action *Ichi the Killer* (Takashi Miike, 2001) and subsequent Original Video Animation (OVA; can also be abbreviated as OAV) *Koroshiya 1: The Animation Episode* (Shinji Ishidaira, 2002), have helped to define an anime subgenre (much like Mecha anime, which refers to a type of anime concerned with machines and vehicles, such as the *Gundam* series [Yoshiyuki Tomino; Ryoji Fujiwara, 1979-81]) concerned with hyper-violence.

The overriding visual stimuli during 'The Origin of O-Ren' anime sequence are the primary colours red and blue. This concerted use of colour visually conveys precise emotional and psychological information. The colour red is found in the animation's background, the characters' blood, and the fire which engulfs the Ishii apartment. With specific reference to the function of colour within cinema, Daniel Frampton proposes that red carries an 'abundance of meanings: lust, heat, sin… [and] blood' (Frampton, 1996: 90), these denotations are clearly present in the anime – Matsumoto's sin and lust colour his judgement and cause his demise, heat is found in the fire, while blood is spilt judiciously. The juxtaposition of red with blue generates a sense of purpose within the

sequence, as blue symbolises 'moral and religious codes' (Frampton, 1996: 90).

Therefore the blue represents O-Ren's concealed presence during the murder of her

parents' (of which the principal colour is red: sin, blood, and heat); thus it is O-Ren's

vengeance (with the concession of Matsumoto's blood) that sees the balance between the

colours red and blue reinstated – in effect the partially Chinese O-Ren is yin to

Matsumoto's yang.

       While at no other point do we see a complete transformation from live-action to

cartoon within Tarantino's existing oeuvre, there are two instances of cartoons being

projected from television sets into the live-action world. The first is in *Pulp Fiction*

(1994), in the scene where Captain Koons (Christopher Walken) presents the ill-fated

watch to a young Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis). While the cartoon featured contains no

actual violence, the racial stereotyping characteristic of the *Clutch Cargo* (1959-c.1964)

series would be considered politically incorrect by contemporary standards. There is,

moreover, an element of *Clutch Cargo* that is of the utmost significance in relation to

Tarantino's use of cartoon within his earlier work. A comparison of *Pulp Fiction's*

original script with that of the finished film reveals a discrepancy, as in the original script

Tarantino writes: '*Fade Up: On the cartoon 'Speed Racer.' Speed Racer is giving a*

detailed description of all the features of his race car 'The Mac-5,' which he does at the

beginning of every episode' (Tarantino, 1994: 84). However, in the finished film we fade

in on an episode of *Clutch Cargo*. Perhaps, due to copyright complications, Tarantino

ironically opts to use *Clutch Cargo* as it screened directly before *Speed Racer* (1967-

1968) in the original afternoon schedule when first aired on network television (Anon VI,

2006). This explanation would not do the substitution justice, however, for at this

relatively early stage in Tarantino's Hollywood career he demonstrates a clear desire to subvert the conventions of filmmaking. By using the animated series *Clutch Cargo* Tarantino attempts to blur the boundaries between cartoon and live-action, for it was *Clutch Cargo* that first brought a combination of live-action and animation into American homes on a recurrent basis. Owing a stylistic debt to *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (Georges Méliès, 1902), and anticipating *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964) by five years, *Clutch Cargo* featured real actors' mouths mixed with animated bodies and surroundings (Anon VII, 2006). Perhaps through his inclusion of *Clutch Cargo*, Tarantino is symbolically stating his intent to subvert and seek divergence within his work, whilst acknowledging the fact that ultimately he is just a mouth, trapped in a framework of convention, seeking the freedom that cartoon affords. Interestingly, this reflects the way we have come to appreciate Tarantinian characters, exemplified by Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) and Vincent (John Travolta)'s discussion of hamburgers in *Pulp Fiction*. Jules and Vincent's discussion reduces them as 'characters', making them literal mouthpieces for discourse and consumption of fast food (McDonalds), and Tarantinian dialogue (a commodity within cinema). Now, if ever we see characters in cinema talk this way, they are immediately considered Tarantinian.

The proliferation of cartoon within the live-action filmic order continues in *Kill Bill volume 2* (2004), in what is almost the last shot of the film. Kiddo has been reunited with her daughter B.B. (Perla Haney-Jardine), and while Kiddo lies crying in the bathroom, B.B. sits alone watching an episode of *Heckle and Jeckle* (1946-1982). While *Heckle and Jeckle* shares the political incorrectness of *Clutch Cargo* with regards to its stereotypical representation of foreigners, the episode B.B. is watching differs from

Clutch Cargo, as it becomes increasingly violent as the scene unfolds. As this cartoon follows the anime sequence of *Kill Bill 1* the violence it contains seems dated and of less significance than if it had preceded the anime. Instead the presence of this cartoon serves as a statement, as Tarantino's films have often been criticised for their violent content. Cartoons such as *Tom and Jerry* (1939-1993) and *Itchy and Scratchy,* which contain a relatively high level of violence, escape comment:

> most press accounts during… [*Tom and Jerry's*] era did not castigate
> cartoons for their violent content, explicitly noting the difference
> between real violence and the fantasy actions of animation, a distinction
> that seems to have been lost in most discussions of television violence
> today (Mittell, 2003: 43).

By depicting a loving mother/daughter couple watching a violent cartoon, Tarantino hopes to highlight the difficulties with such criticisms of his work. In an 'American context… animation in all its forms, not merely those played for laughs, has served to operate as a distorting and re-positioning parallel genre both to established live-action film and television texts (and their predominantly conservative codes of representation)' (Wells, 2002: 5). Therefore by incorporating a violent cartoon for the couple to watch, Tarantino highlights the inequities between cartoon and live-action; what one art form can subvert the other must obey.

These instances of cartoon within the Tarantinian opus present an acute crystallisation of what I believe to be a key directorial facet, a recurrent utilisation of a

'cartoonish' mode of filmmaking. While these cartoons are merely brief releases of animation, they indicate a well of potential beneath the live-action surface that should be explored thoroughly. Frequently, live action is either supplemented with animation or the cinematography lends a 'cartoonish' feel to the action. The first clear example of animation invading live-action territory within the Tarantinian oeuvre features in *Pulp Fiction*, when Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman) responds to Vincent Vega's reluctance to eat at Jack Rabbit Slim's as he wishes to get a simple steak. Instead of simply responding verbally she remarks, 'You can get a steak here daddy-O. Don't be a…' then traces a 'square' with her hands, which is realized through a nondiegetic box that appears onscreen (fig 4). The dashes that mark out Mia's hand movement, removing any doubt as to her meaning, and consolidate the argument that this shot is comic book-esque, as 'comics… are [largely] unambiguous…' (Carrier, 2000: 33). This is a factor noticeable in Tarantino's style of characterisation; while his films may be full of subtlety, his character types are clearly defined, leaving little room for ambiguity.

Tarantinian Cartoonism

A popular component of current Japanese anime and manga (for example, *Fist of the North Star* [Toyoo Ashida; Takashi Watanabe, 1984-2005] and *Pokemon* [Masamitsu Hidaka; Kunihiko Yuyama, 1997- to date]) is a phenomenological extension of character, at the commencement of fight sequences, predominantly realised through a zoom in on the protagonist's face accompanied by special effects. This aesthetic is precisely realised at various points in *Kill Bill* and *Kill Bill 2*, most vociferously when Kiddo vengefully confronts certain Deadly Viper Assassin Squad members. A notable feature of the

cartoon-like extensions of Kiddo's character is the red hue superimposed over the action, an indication of her uncontrollable bloodlust.

Through dynamic cinematography that revolves around vivid use of colour, *Kill Bill* – from its outset – presents the viewer with cartoon-esque live-action. *Kill Bill 1* opens with a scene that introduces the characters Kiddo and Bill (David Carradine) in black and white. The chiaroscuro quality of this sequence reduces the live action to two binary colours, which has the effect of stripping away a fundamental convention associated with live-action – realism. This feature is not restricted to just this opening sequence, as it also powerfully features during Kiddo's opening monologue in *Kill Bill 2*.

The Crazy 88 fight sequence of *Kill Bill 1* snaps from full colour to black and white, then to a rich blue, with the initial switch to black and white reflecting the colours of the Crazy 88'S suits, as they attempt to overwhelm Kiddo. Dana Polan identifies a similar technique in *Pulp Fiction*, where 'bright colours that seem to shimmer on screen… black and white contrasts… sharp angles and boldly composed shots that call attention to themselves' (Polan, 2000: 73-74) offer further proof of cartoon aspirations, as they mimic the 'strongly dramatic framings [associated with] a cartoon or comic-strip panel' (Polan, 2000: 73-74).

The plane sequence of *Kill Bill 1* highlights a definite attempt to reconcile the styles of cartoon and live-action into a new filmic art form. Tarantino, with reference to *Kill Bill*, is constantly reminding the viewer, with his use of anime style and vivid cinematography, of the importance of animation and cartoon in Japan. Therefore when Kiddo finally embarks for the Orient, she travels in a makeshift chrysalis – a plane's fuselage. This is necessary in order to negotiate the stylistic change occurring outside, as

Tarantino opts to shoot a constructed 'model of the Tokyo cityscape (built by the same

Toho effects crew that works on the Godzilla films), rather than use a helicopter to cruise

over the "real" Tokyo skyline' (White & Loreforce, 2004). 'The Japan [Kiddo] enters

is… [a] comic book version of Japan as seen in anime, Godzilla films and the Karate

films of Sonny Chiba (in a way, [when Kiddo] meets Chiba in Okinawa, he acts as the

gatekeeper for her entering Japan)' (White & Loreforce, 2004), this serves as a mimetic

rite-of-passage, highlighting Kiddo's entry to Japan as an equal.

Tarantino's manipulation of narrative structure within *Kill Bill* and *Pulp Fiction*

has much the same effect as the closed boxes of a comic strip. If the films were re-cut to

reveal the story chronologically they would be conventional, with death being a

permanent condition and not just a short term side-effect of being mortally wounded.

This is not how they are presented, however, and each of the chronologically incongruous

segments affords its subjects 'cartoonish' immortality. In *Pulp Fiction*, when the adult

Butch is forced to return to his apartment, after Fabienne (Maria de Medeiros) uncannily

forgets the ill-fated Coolidge heirloom, he ends up in his kitchen where his worst fears

are realised, as sitting next to his toaster is a dormant TEC-9. Picking up the weapon

Butch spins around to the sound of his toilet flushing, revealing a startled Vincent, into

whose chest Butch sprays several rounds. Vincent is dead: he knew it, Butch knows it,

and the audience definitely knows it. Wrong: after Butch makes his triumphant, yet short

lived, escape, the narrative circles back to 'The Bonnie Situation' (as the inter-title

informs us), where we find Vincent living out another chapter of his asynchronous life.

Vincent provides a live-action example of what is a long-standing cartoon tradition, the

aesthetic death, characterised by the likes of *Itchy and Scratchy*, *Ren and Stimpy* (1991-

1996)*,* Kenny McCormick (from *South Park* [1997- to date]) and *Pinky and the Brain* (1995-1998) (a Steven Spielberg creation).

In a variation on this scenario, *Kill Bill 2* opens with a re-telling of the Bride's Tale through dynamic chiaroscuro that lends the scene an unreal tone, not unlike that of a cartoon. Physiologically speaking, the very fact that the Bride – in true 'Itchy and Scratchy-esque' style – recovers from a gun shot wound to the head, wakes from a four-year coma in double quick time and sets out on a roaring rampage of revenge, only serves to consolidate and heighten the 'cartoonism' of this sequence. What both these sequences have in common is a disregard for film convention, favouring instead the 'cartoonism' of character regeneration.

In narrative film, one of the most effective modes of storytelling is the facial close-up. Here again, Tarantino's style indicates the influence of cartoon. As film theorist Béla Balász notes:

> facial expression is the most subjective manifestation of man, more
>
> subjective even than speech, for vocabulary and grammar are subject
>
> to more or less universally valid rules and conventions, while the play
>
> of features… is a manifestation not governed by objective canons,
>
> even though it is largely a matter of imitation. This most subjective
>
> and individual of human manifestations is rendered objective in the
>
> close-up (Balász, 1952: 306).

The facial close-up is a useful way of conveying emotional context in live-action cinema; however, in the world of cartoon and animation it is a necessity. Further analysis of Tarantino's films, with an emphasis on the close-up (in this case particularly cartoon-like close-ups), yields further proof of 'cartoonisms'.

The close-up, combined with zooms, highlights a concerted attempt by Tarantino to interpret the conventions of cartoon through live-action. Tarantino's recurrent 'cartoonism' is evident even in his work as guest director on the successful television series *ER*. The episode *Motherhood* (Quentin Tarantino, 1995; 1:23) features classic Tarantinian close-ups. However, in this instance they focus on an instrument rather than a face. These close-ups, in this instance of Dr Benton (Eriq Le Salle) with a surgical saw, adhere to the conventions of classic rivalry-driven cartoons such as *Tom and Jerry* and *Itchy and Scratchy*, where the imminent action gains added impact through a comically timed close-up of the assailant with his weapon – typically, in the case of Itchy and Scratchy, metallic and sharp.

While Tarantino's first feature, *Reservoir Dogs*, features close-ups, none of them appear overtly cartoon-like. *Pulp Fiction*, in contrast, does feature such a sequence when Tarantino brings a masochistic edge to the darkly comic overdose sequence. As we focus in close-up on the hapless Vincent whose fate it is to administer the adrenaline shot on the overdosed Mia Wallace, Tarantino juxtaposes a long take with close-ups decreasing in shot length, culminating in a shallow focus extreme close-up on the needle, which subsequently creates a sense of anxiety in the viewer. It is through this series of juxtaposed close-ups that Tarantino dares the viewer to watch – masochistically – as Vincent plunges the needle into Mia's exposed chest. These rapid close-ups imitate the

function of the cartoon close-up, which 'can… [express] a variety of divergent points of view, while at the same time accommodating a dominant paradigm of established social meaning' (Wells, 2002: 13), a factor which is consolidated with Jody (Rosanna Arquette)'s closing comment, 'that was trippy', revealing the surreal unification that his sequence achieves through elements of 'cartoonism'.

The episode of *ER* also offers an early indication of a camera technique that would bring a sense of 'cartoonism' to subsequent Tarantino features – the long take tracking shot (LTTS). The LTTS can in certain instances relate to a specific aspect of cartoon. One of the greatest appeals of cartoon and animation is its absolute freedom, its ability to depict a world of incredible intricacy limited in detail only by the animator's patience, and the 'camera's' ability to meander and charge through this world without restriction. Therefore the extreme LTTS (anything above two minutes) indicates an attempt to realise – through live-action – the freedom enjoyed by the cartoonist, by employing a fluid camera dynamic.

Although it could be argued that the LTTS at the start of each *E.R* episode reflects a self-imposed paradigm, which mimetically establishes the hectic nature of the emergency room, this does not take into account the hyperbolic nature of Tarantino's LTTS. His confident use of steadicam is dramatically evident as it spins dizzyingly through the Emergency Room, flitting between surgeons and nurses at a ferocious rate. Only the episode *Full Moon Saturday Night* (Donna Deitch, 1995; 1:19) comes close to Tarantino's mimetic realisation of 'ER' life, with a LTTS three seconds longer than that of *Motherhood*.

Tarantino uses the LTTS to introduce the viewer to the world of Jack Rabbit Slim's, seeking to imbue the audience with the same sense of fantastical artificiality that Vincent feels. During the course of this LTTS Tarantino confronts Vincent with clones of Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, whilst throughout, a duplicate Ricky Nelson provides a diegetic rendition of the song 'Waitin' in School' (fig 5). Tarantino presents these elements in one long take so their cumulative association will help dispel the initial sense of anachronistic surrealism, which in turn allows the viewer (along with Vincent) to become immersed in this giddying 'cartoonism'.

Jackie Brown begins with an extensive LTTS that functions in much the same way as the LTTS that introduces each episode of *ER*; additionally this serves as a mimetic reinforcement of Jackie (Pam Grier)'s occupational need to travel. This particular LTTS, featuring at the beginning of the film and with the credits superimposed over the action, is perhaps best categorised as another example of Tarantino's eye for intertextual reference, as it provides a perfect imitation of the opening credit sequence of *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967).

The LTTS that features in *Kill Bill 1* exceeds the Jack Rabbit Slim's LTTS in all aspects of subjective merit. While Tarantino is concerned only with one character – Vincent – in *Pulp Fiction's* LTTS, the House of Blue Leaves LTTS in *Kill Bill 1* sees Tarantino switch between three: Beatrix Kiddo, The Blues Leaves proprietor (Yuki Kazamatsuri) and Sofie Fatale (Julie Drefus). The camera work also differs from that of *Pulp Fiction's* steadicam tracking of Vincent. In *Kill Bill 1* Tarantino makes use of his custom-built set, incorporating crane shots to move seamlessly through the restaurant.

Conclusions

Tarantino employs cartoon for three main reasons: to take advantage of its conventions in an attempt to reiterate his control over the storytelling process; as a means of subverting the accepted dichotomy of live-action and cartoon; and, by inserting reference to specific cartoons, he highlights inaccurate preconceptions regarding violence and cartoon. By deploying a blend of superimposed animation, articulate cinematography and models, Tarantino is able to create an almost hazy state of cartoon/live-action synergy, which once in place facilitates the various instances of 'cartoonism' that we have seen. Through his idiosyncratic use of chronology, close-ups and LTTS, Tarantino realises some of the fundamental techniques of cartoon and animation through his live-action features, challenging deep-seated conventions of modern cinema, ensuring his films stand out in contemporary Hollywood as fresh, difficult and often misunderstood.

It is possible to locate instances of 'cartoonism' throughout film history, and this could form a potential avenue for further discussion. Silent cinema, for philosopher Slavoj Žižek, provides perhaps the earliest example of live-action 'cartoonism', as he suggests that 'silent figures are basically like figures from cartoon, they don't know death, they don't know sexuality, they don't know suffering – they just go on in their oral egotistic striving like cats and mice in a cartoon' (Žižek, 2006). In the film *Duel* (Steven Spielberg, 1971) it is the pursuit of David Mann (Dennis Weaver) down desert roads by an unrelenting truck that carries overtones of 'cartoonism'. *Duel* offers a live-action reworking of the popular cartoon *Road Runner* (Chuck Jones; David DePatie; Friz Freleng, 1949-66), with the film's protagonist, Mann, assuming the role of Road Runner, while the possessed truck reflects Wile E. Coyote's trademark desperation. This

'cartoonsim' is giving extra credibility by Spielberg's 'emphatic comic-book framing' (Baxter, 1996: 78) and as John Baxter notes, 'to Spielberg, the lessons of… cartoon proved perfectly applicable to live-action' (Baxter, 1996: 80). In the case of *Batman: The Movie* (Leslie H. Martinson, 1966), as opposed to Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) that attempted to capture the darker side of Batman's psyche familiar to fans of the comic Batman, numerous examples of cinematic 'cartoonism' are visible. What separates this 'cartoonism', from the two previous filmic examples, is its intersection with a 'Camp' sensibility: 'Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It is not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman". To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role' (Sontag, 1999: 56). Thus The Penguin (Burgess Meredith)'s iconic flipper-powered submarine, Batman (Adam West)'s protracted bomb disposal and implausible shark fight, all function as cartoonish live-action spectacles, yet simultaneously present a camp codification of the Batmanian 'submarine', 'bomb', and 'shark'.

Underlying Tarantino's mixture of live-action, animation and modeling is his struggle to unite these heterogeneous concepts into a new art form; which in 2005, with the help of fellow 'Sundance 92 grad' (Holm, 2004: 99) Robert Rodriguez, he does. With the release of *Sin City*, Tarantino got the chance to escape the politics of his own work and indulge his cartoon aspirations, by helping Rodriguez translate Frank Miller's graphic novel series onto the big screen. Tarantino was handed the wheel of the Dwight (Clive Owen) and Jackie Boy (Benicio Del Toro) car scene, in which he fully explores in graphic detail the limits of black comedy. In this sequence Jackie Boy gives Dwight advice about Shelley (Brittany Murphy) despite the reality that his throat has been cut

from ear to ear, a factor which results in his head flopping back and forth with the rise

and fall of the car's acceleration. By taking part in this film, Tarantino will forever be

remembered as helping to herald a new filmmaking movement:

> This was one of several films around the world to be shot on a
>
> completely "digital backlot" (i.e. with all the acting shot in front
>
> of a green screen and the backgrounds added during post-production).
>
> While… other movies (*Immortel (ad vitam)* [Enki Bilal, 2004],
>
> *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* [Kerry Conran, 2004],
>
> and *Casshern* [Kazuaki Kiriya, 2004] - two of which were shot on film)
>
> were shot first, [*Sin City*'s] use of High-Definition digital cameras
>
> (like "Sky Captain") in addition to the "backlot" method makes [it]
>
> one of the world's first "fully-digital" live action motion pictures
>
> (Anon VIII, 2005).

Aesthetically *Sin City* uses CGI to create sombre chiaroscuro that evokes a 'hyperbolic

noir pastiche' (Fuller, 2005: 12), severe stylisation reminiscent of a UFA production, and

localised yet emphatic colouration against a backdrop of black-and-white (like the 'hand

tinted red' [Taylor, 2000: 35] flag, symbolic of the social protagonist that drives *The

Battleship Potemkin* [Sergei Eisenstein, 1925], and the girl in the red dress in *Schindler's

List* [Steven Spielberg, 1993]). In effect, Rodriguez's *Sin City* heralds in an age of CG

cinematography that can be best described as 'photoexpressionistic'.

Moreover, the CGI used by Rodriguez poses a notable complication to the phraseology and application of the term mise-en-scène. Mise-en-scène can be roughly translated as 'placing in the scene', and refers to the pro-filmic process of composing the precise filmic aesthetic that the camera will capture: sets, props, actors, costumes, (camera) movement, lighting and performance. Therefore, from the perspective of the director, High Definition (HD) technology and CGI programs appear as liberating tools with regards to real-time mise-en-scène manipulation (via digital based programs on set). While postproduction special effects have been evident in cinema since its conception (one need only look at the work of D.W. Griffith to see this) there has always been a sizeable discontinuity between the actual capture of the pro-filmic reality (that being the unaltered mise-en-scène), and the postproduction manipulation of the image. However, directors capturing the pro-filmic mise-en-scène digitally with HD cameras can bridge this gap between capture and manipulation (and even presentation), by having a portable HD dedicated monitor on set for the sole purpose of representing the manipulated image in near real-time. Therefore, HD technology does not call for a redundancy of the term mise-en-scène, instead it brings the potential of new meaning to it through the capture of the physically configured mise-en-scène and the near real-time digital re-configuration of a conceptual mise-en-scène.

Tarantino's 'cartoonism' is clearly visible in *Sin City*; furthermore, it is this clarity that indicates that future film readings may be able to utilise 'cartoonism' as the basis of an interrogative critique. As the collective sum of the aforementioned elements of animation, *Sin City* successfully problematises the idea of a clear division between cartoon, animation and live-action; subsequently it will most likely go down in film

history as did *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugène Lourié, 1953), for its

revolutionary Ray Harryhausen animation, *Mary Poppins* for its combining of live-action

with animation, and *Tron* (Steven Lisberger, 1982) for its innovative computer generated

imagery. In future discussions it will no doubt prove illuminating to work through a

'cartoonism' based methodology when interpreting films such as *Sin City* and its

successors.

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