

TITLE: PULP FICTION

DATE VIEWED: 11/8/94.

FILM: /

FIRST: /

ENGLISH LANG: /

EXAMINERS: JOK / RUP / etc.  
(+ JK / MF)

VIDEO:

2ND/3RD:

FOREIGN LANG:

REPORT BY: Richard Felton

RESUB:

SUBTITLED/DUBBED:

INITIAL CATEGORY SUGGESTION	18								CLASSIFICATION ISSUES	Violence, Drugs.									
									OUTLINE/PLOT	Gangster peroxide and pop cultural essence compendium.									
CATEGORY & CUTS	Uc	U	PG	12	15	18	R18	CUTS / REMARKS											
THEME																			
TREATMENT																			
VISUALS: NUDITY																			
SEX																			
VIOLENCE																			
SEXUAL VIOL																			More Homosexual Rape / S.M.
HORROR																			High fuck 'ent.
LANGUAGE																			
CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR																			
DRUGS																			?
IMITABLE TECHNIQUES																			
LEGALITY: OBSCENITY																			
CHILDREN																			
ANIMALS																			
BLASPHEMY																			
FILM AS A WHOLE																			
KEYWORDS:	Thriller, Crime, Gangster, <del>Dr</del> Comedy, Peroxide, Drugs, Sexual Violence.																		

CONSUMER ADVICE

VIOLENCE	Occasional Strong
SEX / NUDITY	-
LANGUAGE	Frequent strong
THEME / CONTENTS	Gangster violence.

Use any combination of the following adjectives in the relevant box above:

BRIEF, OCCASIONAL, MILD, FREQUENT, STRONG

Next to 'THEME / CONTENTS' box eg. Horror, Monsters, Drug Use, Educational, Homosexuality



In an LA diner, two young British stick-up artists in love, Pumpkin (Tim Roth) and Honey Bunny (Amanda Plummer) talk themselves into holding up the diner as an alternative to convenience store robberies. Two killers, Vincent (John Travolta) and his Ezekial-quoting sidekick Jules gun down a group of teenagers who have cheated their mobster boss Marcellus Wallace, after arguing about the proprieties involved in Marcellus having defenestrated a gangster who had given his wife Mia a foot massage. **Vincent Vegas and Marcellus Wallace's Wife:** Vincent prepares for an anxiety-inducing evening 'looking after' Mia (Uma Thurman) arranged by Marcellus by shooting up some heroin he has just scored from his dealer, Lance. After an uneasy evening in a 1950s Hollywood themed diner, Vincent returns home with Mia, where she snorts the heroin thinking it is coke and collapses from an OD. In a panic, Vincent turns to Lance, and in a stoned haze, he tries to deliver an adrenaline injection, the shock of the attempt bringing Mia round. **The Gold Watch:** Boxer Butch (Bruce Willis) ignores Marcellus's instructions to take a dive in a championship fight, wins, killing his opponent in the process, and goes on the run with his childlike French girlfriend, Fabian, who has forgotten to pack a gold watch, passed down through generations of combat-hardened forebears. Butch goes back for the watch to find Vincent coming out of the toilet and kills him. Driving away from the scene, he runs over Marcellus in his car and in the ensuing struggle finds himself trapped by the evil sadomasochist owners of a secondhand store, who rape Marcellus. Butch escapes, killing their captors and freeing Marcellus, who allows him to leave town unmolested if he keeps quiet about the rape. **The Bonnie Situation:** Vincent and Jules, after killing the teenagers in the first sequence, take one of them with them and Vincent's gun goes off by mistake ruining their car and forcing Jules to contact his friend Jimmy (Tarantino) who is worried about his unpredictable wife Bonnie coming home and finding him doing 'gangster shit' in the kitchen, like disposing of a corpse. Jimmy calls 'The Wolf' (Harvey Keitel), who supervises the cleaning up and disposal of the car. After their exertions, the pair go and have breakfast at the diner where Pumpkin and Honeybun are discussing the stickup. Jules, who, having been the beneficiary of what he considers a 'miracle' when a hidden teenager emptied his revolver at him at the scene of the job and none of the bullets hit him, wants to renounce his violent ways and be like Caine in *Kung Fu*. After a Mexican standoff with Pumpkin and Honeybun, he gives them his money and lets them leave the diner with the proceeds of their robbery.

Seemingly effortlessly excellent and supremely vivid new movie from Quentin Tarantino, which has arrived justifiably bearing the *Palme D'Or* from Cannes. Taking three short tales, the substance of which are so much the stuff of pulp cliché (boxers not taking dives, mobsters and the jealous boss's wife, the hitman's change-of-heart after a job etc.) that they sustain a Chinese Box load of unforced cinematic references and resonances, Tarantino, whose genuine love of the crime thriller in all its forms elevates him far above the miserable status of postmodern *pasticheur*, takes these tales and fascinates us with a lurid world in which every conversation, whether about foot massage, collective memories of TV, 50s' films, the quality of burgers or the cost of a shake is lent profound meaning by the proximity of the angel of death. If the *Cahiers* critics of the 50s loved American pulp for what they called its 'trash existentialism' yet failed to understand its distinctive American components, Tarantino understands our fascination with fast and precarious high lowlife, knows its pop cultural manifestations like the back of his hand, and turns pulp into poetry.

Like *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* shows us little violence, but holds our attention with charismatic characters for whom violence is merely a prominent item on their job spec. As in



the earlier movie, we are placed in a masochistic viewing position a lot of the time by Tarantino-made aware of our own mortality by a director who knows we love the grace and cool of his violent male heroes, but is prepared to have them blown away in the time it takes for a Pop Tart to jump from a toaster. Apart from the gunning down of Vincent (about whose place and function in the narrative a thesis could be written), the most violent sequence, in terms of its manipulation of audience masochism/ sadism and its direct manipulation of audience fears, is the capture of Butch and Marcellus by Zed and the store keeper. Here the rules and codes of the violent killers who are our heroes are ignored and a window is opened on a world of evil over which even these characters lose control for a while - the taunting and raping of Marcellus occurs mostly offscreen, but evokes a range of terrifying scenes from *Deliverance*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and of course *Reservoir Dogs*. It is impossible to assert a dominant meaning for this sequence without reducing the whole film to a series of trite moral assertions which are not adequate to the viewing experience. Like *Reservoir Dogs* this is, to use the fashionable term, a deeply transgressive film - its morality is complex, its view of violence is realistic, sadistic, besotted, masochistic, glib and witty in rapid succession and sometimes at the same time. A complex treatment, in fact, of a complex phenomenon, which is why this film is, in my book, a masterpiece which ranks with, and bears many similarities to, Altman's *Short Cuts*.

The main issue is not the violence, though, but the drugs sequence beginning 16 mins. into Reel Two, with its close attention to the paraphernalia of hard drug usage, from the opening of Vincent's leather pouch containing his equipment, through the assembling of the syringe in macro close up, to the needle piercing the flesh in e.c.u. and the syringe barrel filling with blood. This montage is accompanied by a brilliant piece of 60s surfer music and followed by a shot of Travolta driving while high, stressing his satisfaction. The French censors have apparently removed this, and it is not hard to see the thinking behind this move, although I profoundly disagree with it. This bears all the hallmarks of the 'selling' of the pleasures of drugs to the viewer. The point is, though, that we have to understand and share some of Vincent's high in the following sequence with Mia, and be sold on the attraction of the existential abyss over which these characters are dancing. At the 18 level at which this film is pitched, it is clear that we can rely on an audience relating this sequence not merely to the idea of the pleasurable fetishisation of these instruments and processes, but to the bleeding septum and frothing mouth of Mia after she has sniffed the drug. The cinematic pleasures of the depiction of life on the edge, particularly given the supremely talented nature of this film must have a place in adult films, including the acknowledgement that taking heroin is a pleasure, which is why some people do it. The price, not only of the drug taking, but of the lifestyles on display here are clearly not ignored by the film, but it is part of our fascination with the lurid matter of pulp fiction that characters bring us messages back from a place that we would be worried about looking at with binoculars. We would have to be pretty damned sure of our model of the spectator-film relationship to cut this or any other part of *Pulp Fiction*, and this is not special pleading for a 'good' film, merely an acknowledgement that what makes a film good also removes from censors the certainties necessary for reasonable exception. Pass 18, no cuts.

(PS. The language is pretty ripe, too, but at 18, who gives a ...)