Reservoir Dogs Scene Critique

Reservoir Dogs, writer/director Quentin Tarantino’s filmmaking debut released in 1992, inspired by Stanley Kubrick’s *The Killing*, features a memorable image in which the fresh out of prison Mr. Blonde tortures a kidnapped cop. Through the images shown in the scene, Tarantino skillfully parallels the excessive violence in society and the commonplace position it assumes. The image perhaps aims to show that there is not always reasoning behind every action, as the torture of the man is unjustified.

Tarantino works the artistic angle in this scene through his deliberate panning away from Mr. Blonde cutting off the cop’s ear. Here, Tarantino simultaneously lessens and increases the intensity—diminishing it by concealing the act yet heightening it by creating a sense of uncertainty and undeniable horror. In addition, Tarantino continually features the restrained cop in close-up shots. In doing so, he forces the viewer to sympathize for the man.1 More generally, the director casts dark shadows and dim lighting consistently throughout the scene, evoking a brooding, suspenseful and dark mood.

It can be said that the images in this Tarantino scene are extremely metaphoric. The beginning of the scene shows a close-up of Mr. Blonde’s boot perhaps demonstrating the rugged individualism and pure American sense of the situation, dealing majorly with America’s glorification of violence. Also, the scene and the images that it is composed of can be viewed as ironic. The lighthearted song “Stuck in the Middle With You” by Stealers Wheel that plays is juxtaposed with the heaviness of the situation, but also works well to describe the situation as some of the words of the song correlate to what is then happening.

Tarantino likely wanted to elicit different emotional responses for each gender.2 He wanted men to be enamored by the shockingly gruesome images. Any disturbance would be slight in comparison to the magnitude of their respect for such a riveting scene. For women, Tarantino likely wanted to scare them, perhaps make them reconsider watching, creating the ultimate sense of horror. Regardless of his initial intent, the images in this scene have undoubtedly become memorable and iconic.