

Analysis of reservoir dogs and the killing in terms of narrative and genre essay ...



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The films *Reservoir Dogs* by Quentin Tarantino and *The Killing* (1956) by Stanley Kubrick fall into a sub genre of the gangster genre called the heist film. Heist films typically carry the same themes, codes and conventions as a gangster film however the story will revolve around a heist of some kind involving a group of mismatched characters. Most heist films will involve a problem that disrupts the proceeding of the heist which forms the film's plot. In the films under discussion, the gangs are affected by betrayal from a member of the gang which is a common theme through a number of heist films.

The characters in a heist film usually have opposing personalities and there are often purely "business" related. In *The Killing*, the relationships between the gang members are set because of their skills or that they happen to work in the racetrack so none of them really have any good relationships established. With these sorts of relationships between the characters, there can be scenes of conflict and mistrust involving the characters accusing each other of betrayal which will make the story more interesting. There is usually one character that has organized and controls the heist with all the other gangsters working for him.

The locations in heist movies are usually really rundown areas which show where the characters come from and their social status. Here is commonly a warehouse/disused factory set used as a meeting place in heist films just as there is one in the films *Reservoir Dogs* and *The Killing* (*Reservoir Dogs* is almost completely set in a warehouse.) an old warehouse setting is not only not only accentuates the downtown atmosphere of the film but it is also a

very cost effective place to shoot, which is one of Tarantino's main reasons for his choice of setting.

The most typical weapon of a heist film is a pistol though it has evolved from the iconic gangster weapons of the thirties, the Tommy gun. A pistol is a very masculine symbol so it promotes the manliness of the gangsters.

Another iconographical convention seen in most gangster films is a suit worn by the gangster, most commonly black. Back in the 1930's gangster films, gangster were usually distinguished by their pinstripe suits and trilby hats, this symbol was carried through the years in the gangster genre and evolved in accordance to the evolution of fashion.

The suits used in the killing are clearly different to those used in Reservoir Dogs though they both have the same effect and create the right impression that the directors intended the audience to perceive,. Having the characters wear suits allows them to carry the professionalism that they are trying to demonstrate. Notice that in both films, the suits seem to become less and less smart as the plan gradually falls apart which could be seen a physical parallel to the characters becoming less composed: this technique can also be seen in another of question Tarantino's films, Pulp Fiction.

The two scenes I will be analysing are the "shoot-out" scene from Reservoir Dogs starting from where Joe enters the warehouse and finishing with the death of Mr white and Mr orange, the "whereas the jerk" scene in the killing starting with the radio announcement and ending with Johnny Clay escaping with the money. Both of these scenes are similar as they both involve the climax of the betrayal of one of the group members resulting in the shooting

of most of them similarities between the two films can be confirmed by Tarantino's claim that Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* was a major inspiration for *Reservoir Dogs*.

Each of these films are original in terms of narrative design. In *Reservoir Dogs*, the story makes sense through interlocking the aftermath of the heist with back story of the main characters. *The Killing*'s narrative is similar but shows different times of the day in the wrong order from the point of view of different characters to piece together the proceedings of the whole job. Though this narrative makes for an interesting and innovative piece of cinema in terms of originality, it also adds to the effect of the plot progression.

If *Reservoir Dogs* was shown in chronological order, the audience would know that Tim Roth's character (Mr Orange) was a police officer too early in the film for it to be a surprise. With Tarantino's narrative, you can also get a deeper understanding of the individual characters as the film has three chapters based on each of the three most important characters. Though these two films are similar in terms of codes and conventions remaining the same, there have been some generic transformations occurring that separate the films in terms of the generation in which they were made.

Clearly, *Reservoir Dogs* is by far a more violent film with scenes of "ear mutilation" and gallons of blood whereas in *The Killing*, the violence does not exceed a few less shootings. Violence was not really necessary in *The Killing* as the criminals are only initiated by an outsider attempting to steal the money. In *Reservoir Dogs* however, violence was needed in order to show

what kind of men the colour codes gangsters are. It could however be argued that the lack of violence in the killing was due to censorship regulations in effect in the time it was released which would be yet another example of the evolution of the genre.

In the two scenes the directors use generic elements in order to build certain audience responses. Each of these scenes contains a gunpoint standoff, a typical anticipation in the audience because they know that the scene will end in a shooting but they do not know who will be shot. In each of the two films, the gunpoint standoff is the climactic point where the criminal's plan falls apart and is the most physical way of representing conflict between gangsters.

Tarantino's films are often fuelled by dialogue, which keeps the audience interested and contains both comedy and drama, a contrast to Kubrick's story telling methods in which he applied many plot twists and surprises to attract the audiences attention. The dialogue used in reservoir dogs shows the film to be a generic hybrid as it has elements of black comedy as well as the conventions of a gangster film. Therefore, both films show examples of challenging the typical conventions of a heist movie.

The conclusion of the films leave the audience on a cliff gangster because it is not overly clear what eventually happens to all the characters, a technique also used in the classic heist film, the Italian job, a film without closure allows the audience to invent their own ideas of what happens, in the end of reservoir dogs, we hear gun shots and shouting from outside the warehouse though I can not be certain where or not the bullets were fired by Mr pink or

police officers, the killing's ending suggests that Johnny Clay is about to be arrested though he seems to want to make an attempt at escape s the audience are left to wonder.

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