MARTIN SCORSESE, QUENTIN TARANTINO, AND THE CRIME FILMS OF THE
NINETEEN NINETIES

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For The Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Matthew Daniel Magnani, B.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1996
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Martin Scorsese's films, GOODFELLAS and CASINO, and Quentin Tarantino's RESERVOIR DOGS and PULP FICTION are examined to determine if the crime film of the 1990s has become increasingly more in the style of film noir. The differences and similarities between the two crime films each director has either written or co-written in the 1990s are delineated to demonstrate this trend.

Other crime films of the latter 1990s (SEVEN, THE USUAL SUSPECTS, and MULHOLLAND FALLS) are also examined to aid in defining the latest incarnation of the crime film as "Noir Modernist," a term that is demonstrated to be a more accurate description for the current crime films than B. Ruby Rich's, "Neo-Noir of the 1990s."
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Bruce Kawin defines the auteurist theory as, "The critical methodology that attributes the thematic and stylistic coherence of a movie to the artistic vision, the recurring personal concerns, and the specific instructions of a single artist, usually the director, and that adopts as a primary criterion of value the "personal signature" or the felt presence of the 'author' in the work." (Kawin 540) Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino are masters of the modern crime film. While has been much written about their work, the literature contains few detailed comparisons of the two. I have elected to focus on Scorsese's 1990s films, GOODFELLAS (1990) and CASINO (1995), and Tarantino's films, RESERVOIR DOGS (1992) and PULP FICTION (1994). These films are works each director has either written or co-written as well as directed. Therefore, this study includes films where each has had maximum directorial control. In relation to classic Hollywood Gangster film and film noir, Scorsese and Tarantino are creating films that have their own "signature," yet somehow seem very familiar. Using elements of the crime film's past, these directors create fresh and different films.

The films in this study contain stylistic elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film of the 1930s and of film noir. Film noir underwent a revival during the 1970s, and has its incarnation today in what B. Ruby Rich has termed, "Neo-Noir of the
Rich's theory does not characterize Tarantino's films. Where Scorsese's films are made in the style of the classic Hollywood gangster film and film noir, Tarantino's RESERVOIR DOGS is an homage to the film noir of the 1940s and 1950s and PULP FICTION, a pastiche. These films deserve the label, "Noir Modernist" films, a combination of postmodernism and film noir. This thesis posits that as the years progress, each of these auteur director's films have become decidedly more noir, yet, simultaneously, combine many elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film of the 1930s.

Tarantino's "Noir Modernist" and Scorsese's 1990's cycle of films differs from the 1970's neo-noir, the temporally closest incarnation of film noir, in the reintroduction of stylistic elements from the classic Hollywood gangster films of the 1930s. Where 1970's neo-noir uses solely film noir elements, Tarantino and Scorsese draw from further back in the crime film's past to create films that are unique to the 1990s.

There is a circular connection between Scorsese's and Tarantino's films to film noir and 1970's neo-noir in regard to casting. WHITE HEAT (1949) and KISS TOMORROW GOODBYE (1950), two films made late in the original noir cycle, star James Cagney, an icon of the classic Hollywood gangster film, playing, essentially, a classic Hollywood gangster-esque character in both films. Both films combine not only the iconographic Cagney with other classic Hollywood gangster film conventions, but represent a melding of the genres that is also seen today in Scorsese and Tarantino's films with the casting of Robert DeNiro and Harvey Keitel, two stars of 1970's neo-noir from films such as Scorsese's own MEAN STREETS and TAXI DRIVER, and Lawrence
Tierney, a veteran of many crime films of the 1940s and 1950s, such as DILLINGER. And, prior to the 1990s, 1970's neo-noir reintroduced Robert Mitchum, a veteran of film noir in films such as, Peter Yates', THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE (1973). Therefore, utilizing iconographic stars from the previous era of the crime film is in the noir tradition.

With approximately ninety years of the crime film in Hollywood's past, Scorsese's first film of the 1990s, GOODFELLAS (1990), opened to great critical success on several levels. Film Comment claimed it was, "teeming with authentic action, color, and character." (Murphy 25) Leonard Quart of Cineaste says, "Scorsese's GOODFELLAS is arguably one of the best films ever made on the social milieu and values of the Mafia." (Quart 43) And, Film Quarterly contends that of all of Scorsese's prior work, "GOODFELLAS is arguably the apex of Scorsese's most openly ethnic production." (Film Quarterly 43) While these criticisms were written prior to the release of CASINO, they still hold true today.

To critics, CASINO made five years later, does not seem "fresh." Much of the criticism concentrates on the characters: Sam "Ace" Rothstein (Robert DeNiro), Ginger (Sharon Stone), and Nicky Santoro (Joe Pesci). Film Threat claimed "..[CASINO's] not just like GOODFELLAS; it's like all of Scorsese's movies. The troubled trio at its center echoes similar threesomes throughout his work." (Patterson 57) Newsweek exclaimed, "Robert DeNiro and Joe Pesci play -surprise!- mobsters in Scorsese's forthcoming corrupt-gambling epic." (Ansen 84) Johnathan Romney of Sight And Sound asserts, "The similarity with GOODFELLAS is at times uncomfortably close --Joe Pesci's variant on
that film's psychotic hood takes an adjusting to—but Scorsese invites the comparison by
collaborating again with co-writer Nicholas Pileggi, again casting Pesci and DeNiro, and
again using a relentless pop soundtrack." And, Entertainment Weekly stated,
"GOODFELLAS DeNiro and Pesci have played this hand before." (Entertainment Weekly
25) However, when Scorsese is asked about the similarities to GOODFELLAS, he
responds, "I don't know what to say; I can't defend myself. I'm attracted to characters
because they play right on the edge. There's life and death in every decision they
make." (Weinraub 7C) At the heart of these characters is the auteur theory of
filmmaking. Scorsese's depiction of these characters and the situations they experience
represents his personal "signature" on the crime film of the 1990s.

Between Scorsese's two films, Quentin Tarantino emerged as a favorite
filmmaker of young people. Criticism of Tarantino's, RESERVOIR DOGS, concentrates
on its similarities to other films—which, in itself, is a postmodern element of the film.
RESERVOIR DOGS, follows a group of criminals before and after a jewelry store
robbery (which is never seen), and is most often compared to Ringo Lam's, CITY ON
FIRE (1987), from which Tarantino is accused of copying not only the premise, but even
shot-by-shot sequences. (Kennedy 33) The use of colors for names can be seen in Joseph
Sargent's THE TAKING OF PELHAM ONE, TWO, THREE (1974), the non sequential
story is associated with Stanley Kubrick's THE KILLING (1956), and the organizing of a
gang for a robbery is attributed to John Huston's 1950 film, THE ASPHALT
JUNGLE. (Dawson, 71) An interesting analogy is posited by Owen Gleiberman of
Entertainment Weekly: "It's like John Huston's ASPHALT JUNGLE or Stanley Kubrick's
THE KILLING remade by the Scorsese of MEAN STREETS. "(Keough 226) Despite this criticism, the film was still well received. Douglas Brode claimed it to be, "surprising, refreshing, even brilliant."(Brode 210) David Lyons of FILM COMMENT stated it is "richly acted" and "sharply shot."(Lyons) And, according to Kim Newman of Sight And Sound, "[RESERVOIR DOGS] is a film of considerable acuity and power."(Newman 52)

Aside from RESERVOIR DOGS' similarity to other films, the homosexual undertones of the film were recognized as well. Robert Hilferty notes, "Because of its insidious latency, and the irrational fear of its expression, homosexuality unyieldingly emerges as a recurrent, structural anxiety for macho sexuality, a thorn in the side of institutionalized heterosexuality."(Hilferty 81) Like postmodernism, homosexual subtexts would also become part of Tarantino's "signature" in his films.

PULP FICTION was well received by critics. Criticism, like that of GOODFELLAS, focuses on a variety of aspects of the film. Excessive violence is the most frequent criticism of PULP FICTION. Richard A. Blake of America sees it as, "yet another attempt to deal with violence in America" and noted that "Mr. Tarantino has chosen to view American violence as an absurdist comedy."(Blake 22) While most reviewers acknowledge the violence, they note the "pop-culture" element, as well. Films In Review claimed, "PULP FICTION is terminally hip. As the bodies pile up so do attitude and inside jokes."(Pawelczak 56)

After PULP FICTION Tarantino emerged as the new leader of postmodernism and pop-culture. More importantly, he inherited Martin Scorsese's position as the premier American crime film director. The comparisons between the two also increased.
Brode states: "Following RESERVOIR DOGS—a critical if not commercial success—Quentin Tarantino had no competition as the most significant auteur to emerge in the crime-film genre since Martin Scorsese unleashed MEAN STREETS more than twenty years earlier." (Brode 237) Pawelczak also noted that the interaction of Vincent Vega (John Travolta) and Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) was reminiscent of MEAN STREETS. (Pawelczak 57) Harvey Keitel's appearance in both Tarantino's films strengthens the link to Scorsese's past. (Pawelczak 57) The link between the two has been established and strengthened with the subsequent releases of each—the old master and the new talent creating gritty urban tales of crime steeped in the artistic style of auteur filmmaking and the crime film's past.

Like the characters who share common ground in Scorsese's films, elements of 1970s pop-culture, clothing, "throw-away" conversations, homosexuality, and race permeate Tarantino's films. These aspects of Tarantino's films serve as fascinating asides to his character's conversations, filmic subtexts and themes, and aid in placing his distinct "signature" on each of his films. What links these filmmakers in the latest and bloodiest decade of the crime film? Where have the long acclaimed master and Hollywood's latest directorial darling taken the Little Caesars, Walter Neffs, and Johnny Boys of the crime film's past?

The Classic Hollywood Gangster Film

In order to understand Scorsese's and Tarantino's crime films of the 1990s, it is necessary to understand the origin of the crime film. America during the 1920s would be remembered as the era of the gangster. With the passage of the Volstead Act of 1920,
America would forego alcoholic beverages and attempt to live a sober, if not righteous and pious life. The Volstead Act and Prohibition would give rise to the rural bootlegger and the urban gangster who controlled the illegal distribution of alcohol in the major urban areas. Gangsters, such as Al Capone, would be etched in the lore of American criminals whose lives would soon be material for the greatest myth-making machine in history, the Hollywood film.

Hollywood's gangster represents a perversion of the "America dream"—financial success in a country where anyone, especially immigrants, has the chance to "make it." Arthur Sacks asserts that the classic Hollywood Gangster is a "prime example of American rugged Individualism." (Sacks 7) The Hollywood gangster did achieve wealth and success, but it was in the criminal underworlds the Hollywood studio created, where he was to later lose his "life," (the life of money, women, and violence, and often his physical life) at the end of each film. Robert Warshow, in his invaluable work, The Immediate Experience, claims "brutality itself becomes at once the means to success and the content of success—a success that is defined in its most general terms, not as accomplishment or specific gain, but simply as the unlimited possibility of aggression." (Warshow 132) Violence allows the Hollywood gangster to fulfill the Horatio Alger myth. Violence also becomes the hook to pull gangsters back into the world of everyman. As Warshow states: "the gangster's whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies because he is an individual; the final bullet thrusts him back, makes him a failure after all." (Warshow 133) According to Sacks, "one of the main concerns of the gangster is his
attempt to define himself. In an existential sense, he defines himself by what he does — who and how many he bumps off, how he gains and keeps control of the North or South side, etc. His gangland actions are not the source of his being, they are his raison d'etre. "(Sacks 7) The gangster's constant attempt to define himself by crime and violence will only end in his death. This aspect of the classic Hollywood gangster film is especially compelling for examination of Scorsese's films in this study. Sacks, Warshow, and Whitehall's descriptions of the classic Hollywood gangster's perversion of the "American dream," could easily be a characterization of GOODFELLAS', Henry Hill (Ray Liotta), and CASINO's Sam Rothstein (Robert DeNiro), or a portion of a plot summary for both films.

Warshow recognizes and decodes the hegemonic nature of the classic Hollywood gangster film. According to Warshow, in the "deeper layers of modern consciousness" the gangster is "doomed" because he must succeed, but any attempt to succeed is an act of aggression and will ultimately lead to failure and punishment. His unlawful means are not the reason for his failure. The gangster, therefore, serves as a metaphor for an individual who attempts to succeed, which creates a dilemma -- failure is a death of sorts, and success is evil. This dilemma is resolved, with the gangsters death and failure, and not that of the audience. The audience escapes the pain and suffering, but receives the message. (Warshow 133)

The hegemonic message is that if an individual steps out of line, he will be punished. The audience can live out the experience of defying the ideal behavior model as established by "the powers that be" and not suffer the consequences. Therefore, the
Hollywood gangster becomes a vehicle for the audience, as well as a mouthpiece for the controlling powers of the United States. This message was a relevant and timely one given the desperate economic conditions of the United States during the Great Depression, i.e. at the height of the classic Hollywood Gangster film era. The growing attraction of Communism and Socialism to many Americans during this time, and the attraction of crime to desperate people in a desperate situation, prompted the "Establishment" to promote the need to maintain order. In the filmic world of the Hollywood gangster, violation of the Volstead Act (Prohibition) must necessarily result in the gangster's punishment, if not death.

There are certain iconographic elements that help define every genre. Studio sets, a distinct language style, clothing, automobiles, and, of course, guns are the most prominent defining elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film genre.

Studio sets are a major component of the gangster's underworld. Hennelly sees the gangsters world as possessing a "shrinking sense of freedom." (Hennelly 252) Using crafted sets as opposed to location shooting helps define that loss of freedom. In a set, the gangster is controlled. He does not reside in the "real world" of freedom of choice. He is destined to die and while he is alive must reside in the lifeless world of the Hollywood set.
Foster Hirsch notes that there are very few exterior scenes in the classic Hollywood gangster film. (Hirsch 62) As Hirsch states:

The gangster drama is enacted against immutable settings: the tenement kitchen and bedroom; the backroom meeting place with its pool table and naked overhanging light, and the inevitable blinking neon sign outside that gives evidence of an ongoing life beyond the circumference of the story; the ritzy apartment, done up in white, that indicates the gangster has arrived; the classy art deco night club, the neighborhood saloon, with its long lonely stretch of bar. There are usually one or two street scenes, a row of glum brownstones, a downtown avenue seen through the plate glass windows of a restaurant (sure to be shattered in a sudden shootout). These studio settings are conventionalized, and for the most part, interchangeable. (Hirsch 62)

This also connotes a sense of confinement. The microcosm that is established traps the gangster. His world appears as big as the room he is in, thus heightening the detachment that Hollywood has with the real life gangster who walked the same streets as the audience. The detachment, in effect, relegates the gangster to much the same frames that enclosed his picture in newspapers and helped in mythologizing him, in that, he is enclosed in a world where his image comes to mean more than his actions; the images archetypally being those of James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson.

Along with the physical confinement of the gangster is his verbal confinement—his language. Hennelly asserts that, "the gang develops its own language for communication, a metaphoric jargon which revitalizes the sterile vocabulary of the marketplace, while insuring the oral group-identity of a gangland coterie." (Hennelly 249) The gangster's own dialect removes him from the viewer and the other presumed non-gangster members that inhabit the same filmic world, thereby creating a centripetal, factious world from which the gangster is even further removed.
Both Scorsese and Tarantino use language to give a sense of realism and humanity to their characters. Scorsese is especially conscious of his characters' speech since both GOODFELLAS and CASINO revolve around characters who are working class, urban Italian-Americans and Jews. His characters, like those of the classic Hollywood gangster films, are removed from a larger mosaic of Americans within the film and audience.

Like confined spaces and language, clothing plays an important part in defining the classic Hollywood gangster film genre. Clothes are used to define a character's rise to power and also to bring forth inherent qualities within the character. According to Hennelly, "the most common metaphor illustrating the unknownability of the Other in the Underworld is 'threads,' that is, costume and disguise."(Hennelly 243) As in westerns, black clothing is used to symbolize evil, and white, goodness. White clothing also symbolizes power and success and is often worn by the gangster when he is at the pinnacle of his "career." However, when a gangster wears white, it is usually his disguise, symbolizing his goodness in fulfilling the "American Dream" of success. Colin McArthur states: "the peculiar squareness of their hatted and coated figures is an extension of their physical presence, a visual shorthand for their violent potential."(McArthur 26) McArthur also notes that the gangster's purchase of new clothing is a key element in many of the classic Hollywood gangster films. As the white suit indicates a gangster's rise to power, so does the purchase of the clothing.(McArthur 26)
Clothing serves a different function for Scorsese and Tarantino in their crime films of the 1990s. For Scorsese, it indicates success and wealth, and for Tarantino's characters, their black suit, black tie, white shirt, and sunglasses are exactly what McArthur describes as "a visual shorthand for their violent potential." (McArthur 26) While they do not wear fedoras or overcoats, they are equally as menacing in the latest incarnation of this aspect of the classic Hollywood gangster film.

Like clothing, the automobile as a classic Hollywood gangster film icon not only symbolizes a gangster's wealth, but also represents a tool of his trade. (McArthur 36) The automobile, like the gun, comes to symbolizes death and destruction.

Perhaps the most recognized icon of the classic Hollywood gangster film -- especially the "Tommy-Gun," a gun is an instrument of death and representative of the erotic replacement of sex with violence and demonstrates the abnormality of the gangster. It leads the audience to rationalize that Little Caesar or the Public Enemy is "not like us" --that there is a perversion that distances the gangster from the audience and would seemingly reinforce hegemonic subtexts about acting out against the law.

While "rubbing out" rival gangs is the gangster's method of controlling his territory, gambling, among the other "victimless" crimes like bootlegging, is also presented in the genre. It is not looked down upon by the gangster or the Hollywood filmmaker. Posh gambling parlors required people not affiliated with gangs to complete the crime, therefore creating a victimless crime. A citizen who chose to gamble, faced the consequence of losing money. It was not taken from him at gun point. (Sarris 7)
Bootlegging and speakeasies, if anything, were seen as providing a service to in the alcohol deprived filmic world.

In GOODFELLAS and especially CASINO, Scorsese adopts this element. Where the amount of elements from the classic Hollywood gangster are posited in this thesis to decrease as the films in this study advance into the decade, the presence, and overall importance of gambling and gambling metaphors in Scorsese's films, increases. Tarantino ignores this element of the classic Hollywood gangster film altogether.

There are searches for homosexual subtexts in all films where male characters are as prominent and interactive as in the classic Hollywood gangster film. The homosexual subtext is encoded in the gangster's Don Juan Syndrome and escaping commitment by constantly returning to the gang. As Sacks states: "There is something about the proximity, and the intimacy, and the violence of these gangsters who try to prove themselves as men which lends itself to such an interpretation." (Sacks 8) This subtext is used by Hollywood to suggest that there is something amiss with the gangster; that he is "not like us" and in someway that might not be readily apparent to a viewer, is evil.

Homosexuality is an important component of all four films examined in this thesis. However, Scorsese's GOODFELLAS utilizes a homosexual subtext that is very much in the vein of the classic Hollywood gangster film. Sack's observation could easily be applied to a criticism of GOODFELLAS were he examining Henry's (Ray Liotta) sexual behavior. GOODFELLAS is the only film in this study to feature a character who continually favors the "gang" over his wife. It is fitting with this thesis that this
specifically classic Hollywood gangster film element is portrayed in, chronologically, the first film that this thesis examines.

With the repeal of Prohibition the gangster’s image would gradually fade from the Hollywood film. Soon after his departure a new type of criminal and crime film was emerging. In 1941, American cinema would turn decidedly darker —thematically and visually. A new type of cinema would become part of the American motion picture style, that being film noir.

Film Noir

Film noir is difficult to define as a genre because it is more of a "mood" than a definable list of settings, characters, iconography, or conflicts. Subsequently, there is much confusion over what a film noir is. Paul Schrader's seminal article, "Notes on Film Noir" states, "film noir is not a genre...it is not defined, as are the western and gangster genres, by conventions of setting and conflict, but rather by the more subtle qualities of tone and mood. It is a film "noir" as opposed to the possible variants of film gray or film off-white."(Schrader 8) Rebecca House agrees with Schrader with her statement that, when taken as a whole, film noir contains none of those easily identifiable elements that make up a genre --there is no standard group of characters, settings, or iconography that appear in all --or even many-- film noirs. While westerns have their Dodge City cowboys and horror films have their subterranean monsters, film noir is defined by the more elusive qualities of mood, style, and tone. And it is just that elusiveness that allows each critic to form his own personal definition of film noir and to include or exclude various films at within...therefore, in defining film noir, one must use the time period, and the mood, as criteria. Of course, this is easier said than done.(House 64, 66)
Schrader and House's theories of film noir allows this thesis to posit that GOODFELLAS, CASINO, RESERVOIR DOGS, and CASINO are modern day film noirs, or at least contain elements of the "elusive" style, mood, and tone. While Schrader and House seek to define the original film noir cycle, their theories are equally applicable when attempting to explain the films of Scorsese and Tarantino that this thesis studies. The four films are very different from each other in their setting, characters, and iconography, while being united in the "elusiveness" which makes the defining of a film as film noir so difficult. The fact that these films were produced over a five year period fulfills the temporal criteria that House identifies.

Richard Dyer disagrees with Schrader about his non-categorization of film noir as a genre.

Paul Schrader's desire in his useful article to term it a 'mood' is understandable, thereby emphasizing its affective quality and acknowledging how much 'looser' it is as a film kind than the Western, the gangster thriller or the backstage musical. Yet if its characteristic mood or 'feel' is what is most important about it, this is nonetheless a highly specific quality and not just some generalized pessimism or Angst which one can find in an enormous range of films. Moreover, a mood is not something that is poured over a film or injected into it but is carried by identifiable aesthetic features. It seems to me that there are such features at the levels of structure, iconography, and visual style that recur from film noir to film noir and thereby identify it as a discrete film kind and that just such an observable continuity in a batch of films is what makes a batch a genre. (Dyer 18)

Dyer's ideas can also be applied to both Scorsese and Tarantino, but more accurately reflects the auteur style of filmmaking in each director's work. Both inject their personality and interests into their films. Therefore, the common elements that each director injects into his work supports the auteurist theory. However, there are
elements that these films do have in common, such as, the presence of drugs, the breaking of trust, and a circular structure that begins with an introductory scene that establishes characters and tone.

Dale E. Ewing Jr. states that a film has to "...reflect one aspect or several aspects of the film noir spirit; it has to reflect every aspect of the film noir spirit or it is something other than noir."(Ewing 61) Frank Krutnik contends,

it is highly doubtful that one could convincingly show that noir is actually characterized by a unified body of stylistics --rather it seems to be the case that what is referred to as the 'noir style' tends to be a more disparate series of stylistic markings which can be seen as noir when they occur in conjunction with sets of narrative and thematic conventions and narrational processes. In isolation or even when combined together, then elements identified by such critics as Paul Schrader and Place and Peterson --compositional imbalance, chiaroscuro lighting, night-for-night shooting, etc.-- are not specific to the film noir, nor to the crime film, nor even to the 1940s cinema. Much of the critical work on film noir tends further to overvalue such classical norms of Hollywood-style film making. Such critics do not pay sufficient heed to the function of the noir 'stylistic extravagance' within the conventionalized parameters of 1940s classical Hollywood.(Krutnik, 19,20)

Considering Krutnik's point, style-is-content should not be the only approach to film noir, nor any genre, for that matter. The effect of the stylings is really is at the heart of the matter. But then, that is the "mood" and "tone" of the film, which is what Schrader uses to define a film as film noir, and with which Krutnik disagrees.

Ewing, Jr. agrees with Krutnik, believing that, "although film noirs were supposed to be more nihilistic that the usual Hollywood films, they were still Hollywood films. In other words, a film noir cannot be defined adequately until the movie in question is evaluated as a complete work in which the themes develop from a plot that
has the conventional beginning, middle, and end characteristic of Hollywood movies during the noir period." (Ewing 61) Ewing's point is important. True evaluation cannot begin without placing a film in the period and location in which it was made and comparing it to other films that share similar period and location characteristics. Once that has been done, it seems the next logical step would be Krutnik's method of defining, and then ultimately arriving at Schrader's definition of the characteristic "mood" and "tone" phenomenon of film noirs.

Schrader insightfully stated that, "since film noir is defined by tone rather than genre, it is almost impossible to argue one critic's descriptive definition against another's." (Schrader 9) In effect, taking all the observations made by these critics into account, the adage, "you know one when you see it" is applicable when viewing film noir.

The films that are generally included in discussions of true film noir of the 1940s have their roots in three predominant areas: the German Expressionist Movement of the 1910s and 1920s, the hard-boiled detective novel, as written by Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Raymond Chandler, and the Warner Brothers gangster films of the 1930s. (Schrader 10; Hirsch 58) Film noir also included elements of Existentialist philosophy, Orson Welles', CITIZEN KANE (1941), and Italian Neo-Realist movement. (Porfirio 213; Hirsch 67) War and post-war disillusionment would also play a key role in the development of film noir. (Schrader 9)

German Expressionism's greatest impact would be on the visual and character aspects of film noir. The movement itself flourished from circa 1910 through the mid-
1920s. German Expressionist films, such as Robert Weine's, THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (1919), Robert Murneau's, THE LAST LAUGH (1924), and Fritz Lang's M (1931) are archetypal examples of films made at the beginning and end of the movement, and important films in defining the Expressionist roots of film noir. THE LAST LAUGH and M do not use Expressionist styling to distort the filmic world within each film to the extent of THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, but rather, reserve the highly stylized visual elements for key sequences in each of the film's protagonist's humiliation and defeat. (Hirsch 55, 56)

That German expressionism made its way into film noir is really no surprise given the number of Germans and Eastern Europeans who were working in Hollywood during the noir period. Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Billy Wilder, Franz Waxman, Otto Preminger, John Brahm, Anatole Litvak, Karl Freund, Max Ophuls, John Alton, Douglas Sirk, Fred Zinneman, William Dieterle, Edgar G. Ulmer, Curtis Bernhardt, and Rudolph Mate, were directors and cinematographers who helped give film noir its' distinctive look. (Schrader 10) These students and disciples of German Expressionism brought to American cinema chiaroscuro lighting, oblique lines and angles, stylized urban settings, fractured and splintered space, and subjective camera/experience. (Schrader 11; Hirsch 57)

The German influence on film noir creates a filmic world that is dark and uncomfortable. The harsh contrasts of light that result from the pools of chiaroscuro lighting allow a viewer to see very little and sense the confinement of the character(s). Chiaroscuro creates a centripetal world within the filmic world of film noir. Foster
Hirsch notes, "the films reserve their most bravura manipulation of light and shadow for climactic moments, where chiaroscuro intensification is a signal of imminent and present catastrophe." (Hirsch 90)

Paul Schrader sums up the preference of the oblique and vertical line over the horizontal with: "oblique lines tend to splinter a screen, making it restless and unstable. Light enters the dingy rooms of film noir in such odd shapes -- jagged trapezoids, obtuse triangles, vertical slits -- that one suspects the windows were cut out with a pen knife. No character can speak authoritatively from a space that is being continually cut into ribbons of light." (Schrader 11) Hirsch expands on Schrader's observation with, "Horizontal, barred, criss crossed lines on walls create a prison-like aura, underlying the psychological and physical enclosure that is at the core of most noir stories." (Hirsch 90) When comparing the lighting of 1930s gangster films with film noir, Robert G. Porfirio claims, the mise-en-scène of the film noir reinforced the vulnerability of its heroes. Although the habitat of the 1930s gangster was 'the dark, sad city of the imagination,' the gangster hero himself was generally well illuminated by a bright key-light, though his surroundings may have fallen off into the darkness. Not so in the film noir. The hero moved in and out of shadows so dark at times to obscure him completely; diagonal and horizontal lines 'pierced' his body; small enclosed spaces (a detective's office, a lonely apartment, a hoodlum's hotel bedroom), well modulated with some sort of 'bar' motif (prison bars, shadows, bed posts, and other furniture), visually echoed his entrapment. Small wonder that he found it hard to maintain any degree of rational control. (Porfirio 215)

Both Scorsese and Tarantino have adopted the confinement that "small enclosed spaces" give to their characters that Portfirio outlines above. While Scorsese only uses it for key scenes in GOODFELLAS (i.e. the shooting of Spider in the basement of one of the gangsters), Tarantino's RESERVOIR DOGS takes place almost exclusively in a
mortician's storage facility. PULP FICTION would follow in GOODFELLAS footsteps by relegating only pivotal scenes (i.e. the rape scene in the basement dungeon, the shooting of the college boys in their apartment, and the shooting of Vincent in Butch's apartment) to the small enclosed spaces.

Stylized urban settings are a key element of film noir. Adopting the use of the city from the classic Hollywood Gangster film, film noir stylized them and made them places of modern day terror. Cities are portrayed as a "place of terror and seduction, as a modern wasteland, an environment indifferent to people, a carnival edging toward disorder...a place of sexual promise and release...glittering with temptation...as beautiful as it is corrupt, as majestic as it is also putrid...a cradle of crime and a cauldron of negative energy." (Hirsch 82, 83) Porfirio states, "for the film noir protagonist the city is both mother and whore." (Porfirio 217) Stylizing them was accomplished with chiaroscuro lighting, shadows, and oblique lines and angles. Staircases, fire escapes, girder, patterns from bricks, and window panes all helped giving the noir city the appearance of also being "cut with a pen knife." Chiaroscuro lighting helped create the shadows which would seemingly double the effect.

Within these nightmarish cities of the noir world, protagonists are placed in symbolic and revealing surroundings that serve as another means of exposition and character development. "Places in noir reveal character. The cramped tenements, the joyless middle-class apartments, the dingy furnished rooms that populate the genre carry the history of their inhabitants. Settings are chosen for thematic reinforcement. Cars and trains and boxing arenas figure permanently in noir stories because they provide visual
metaphors of enclosure and entrapment," according to Hirsch. (Hirsch 85) The sense of confinement that these locations create is similar to the confined areas of the classic Hollywood gangster film.

Scorsese's CASINO more than the other films in this study has adopted the stylized urban settings that the original film noir had made so "terrifying" and "seducing." The flashing neon lights of Las Vegas, the lure of the casino, and the promise of fortunes seduce Sam and Nicky, as well as the millions of gamblers drawn to Las Vegas each year; ultimately to take their money and leave them shattered. This essential element of film noir, and CASINO, chronologically the last film produced in this study, is further evidence of a shift to a more noir style by these directors.

While the cities noir characters inhabited were dark mazes of sex and duplicity, the homes of noir characters offered no comfort or safety either. Dyer claims,

settings tend to be in the public world rather than the domestic. For the hero a basic domestic ritual like eating is transferred from family to public eating place. Indeed, the lunch counter comes close to being one of the true icons of the form....In this way, the hero is denied an environment of safety, coziness, or rootedness. If such an atmosphere is evoked at all, it serves to sharpen the depiction of the noir world by being threatened by the latter or actually destroyed by it. (Dyer 19)

At times, noir characters would even find themselves in surreal or bizarre surroundings. Hirsch states, "Noir exploits the oddness of odd settings, as it transforms the mundane quality of familiar ones, in order to create an environment that pulses with intimations of nightmare. Whether in seemingly familiar or unusual surroundings, noir depends on settings that radiate nuance and instability." (Hirsch 86)
Film noir would occasionally use settings away from the cities. Emptiness and isolation are key feelings derived from country settings in noir. According to Dyer, "...the country is as desolate in its way as the city landscapes. Long deserted dusty roads are the countryside of POSTMAN and DETOUR, and the Western PURSUED (1947), generally regarded as part of film noir, uses the barest and most fruitless Western scenery imaginable." (Dyer 19) The bareness of the landscapes creates a sense that anything can happen. There is nowhere to run, or hide. In the country, a noir character is left to their predetermined fate. They are truly powerless.

Scorsese capitalizes on this subtle, yet rarely used, effective convention of film noir. Both "upstate" in GOODFELLAS and "the desert that surrounds Las Vegas," serve the same purpose --a dumping ground for dead bodies, or as Nicky tells the audience in the voice-over narration of CASINO, "a place where a lot of the town's problems are solved." Yet again, it is the most recent film which possesses a noir element that Tarantino's preceding films ignored and Scorsese's own GOODFELLAS used minimally (in comparison to CASINO).

Scorsese has also capitalized on the neo-realist stylings in both GOODFELLAS and CASINO, principally in the adoption of the real life stories of Henry Hill and Lefty Rosenthal. Both films use extensive location shooting to support the real life origins of the stories. Tarantino's RESERVOIR DOGS is shot entirely on location, which gives the film a sense of reality and rawness. PULP FICTION combines location shooting for gritty outdoor scenes (i.e. Butch and Marsellus' street fight and chase) and interiors (i.e. the diner at the film's beginning and end, the apartment building in which the murder of the
college boys takes place, and Jimmy and Bonnie's house), with stylized studio sets, such as "Jack Rabbit Slims," the 1950s theme restaurant where Vincent (John Travolta) and Mia (Uma Thurman) eat. But, it is Scorsese who has managed to take the "real" and evoke a surreal atmosphere in his settings, therefore arriving at the stylization so common in noir cities.

Equally important in the roots of film noir is the hard boiled style of writing which is its' literary background. Appearing for the first time during the 1910s in America, dime novels were, for their time, lurid and violent. The hard boiled detective novel, or "pulp magazines" as they were referred to because of the cheap paper on which they were printed, flourished from the 1920s through the 1950s as novels. (Krutnik 34) Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, Cornell Woolrich, Ernest Hemingway, and Raymond Chandler were the preeminent writers of the hard-boiled detective novel and revolutionaries in bringing the language of the detective story down from the lofty heights of writers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allen Poe, and Agatha Christie. As Hirsch observes, "Poe is oratorical; Hammett is swift, concrete, simple....taut, slangy style, filled with precise descriptions of characters and settings, his character drawing and his themes."(Hirsch 27,29)

While Scorsese's characters are known for the street-wise, realistic, ethnic language, Tarantino's are known for their witty and intelligent conversations, ranging from the deconstruction of Madonna's song, "Like a Virgin," to the processes of television programming and production. Scorsese's characters could never be mistaken for anything but what they are --gangsters. Yet, Tarantino's, at times, step out of their
gangster roles to emerge as intellectuals when compared to Scorsese’s characters. This difference is an indication of the “Noir Modernist” films Tarantino is producing. "Noir" language, is countered with "non-noir" language in “throw-away” conversations and asides. The sometimes comical result is indicative of the pastiche that Tarantino is attempting.

When describing the hard-boiled style, Krutnik states:

"in the hard-boiled mode, ratiocination --the power of deductive reasoning-- is replaced by action, and the mystery element is displaced in favor of suspense. Gunplay, illicit or exotic sexuality, the corruption of the social forces of law, and personal danger to the hero are foe...the mystery element serves often to give but a sense of coherence to the narrative, and its principal purpose seems to be to permit access to those features which serve as the real interest of the story: the presentation of an exotic milieu of crime and corruption; a representation of characters who scorn the moral regimentation of 'conformist' society; a sequence of scenes structured around principles of masculine testing where the hero defines himself through the conflict with various sets of adversaries (criminals, women).(Krutnik 39,40)

This statement is compelling for both Scorsese and Tarantino, in that both feature characters who do not want to be ordinary; GOODFELLAS' Henry Hill, (Ray Liotta) seeks individuation from his neighborhood yet ultimately is exiled to a community where houses are the same and he is "average," and CASINO's Nicky does not want to conform to Remo and the other bosses "back home." RESERVOIR DOGS' Mr. Pink (Steve Buscemi) refuses to tip because "society deems it necessary," and PULP FICTION's Jules wants to retire and "walk the Earth," rather than reintegrate into a "civilian" society. This important facet of film noir strengthens the argument for labeling these films, or parts thereof, as noir.
Just as the terse, tough language of noir is an integral component of the film noir "hero," so is Existentialist philosophy. In his article, "No Way Out: Existential Motifs in Film Noir," Robert G. Porfirio delineates the existentialist elements of film noir. Porfirio claims that existential philosophy accounts for the meaninglessness, loneliness, alienation, chaos, violence, paranoia, ritual, and order that is ever present.

Porfirio defines the existentialist philosophy as: "...an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept. It places its emphasis on man's contingency in a world where there are no transcendental values or moral absolutes, a world devoid of any meaning but the one man creates himself," yet admits that it is virtually impossible to define. (Porfirio 212, 213) Porfirio acknowledges that it was not until after World War II that Existentialism as a philosophical movement was known in America, therefore films made prior to World War II would most likely not be influenced. However, after World War II, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were becoming known in America, and Jules Dassin's 1947 film, BRUTE FORCE, does contain a character that claims to be familiar with Existentialism. (Porfirio 213, 214)

Porfirio's definition seems to capture the "mood" Schrader described as film noir. In fact, Porfirio captures the very essence of Schrader's definition in his statement that: "[film noir's] atmosphere is one in which the familiar is fraught with danger and the existential tonalities of 'fear' and 'trembling' are not out of place; even less than the sense of 'dread' which is taken to mean a pervasive fear of something hauntingly indeterminate." (Porfirio 217) This statement could also aid in understanding the flashbacks and voice over narration typical in film noir, as well.
The noir 'hero' is a somnambulist to whom anything can happen (harkening back to Cesare in THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI). He is not in control of his own destiny, therefore living a predetermined life, much like the classic Hollywood gangster who is doomed to die at the end of every film. He is trapped in a world over which he has no control, and realizing this, subsequently, accepts his fate as a doomed man.

Porfirio claims, "the word 'hero' never seems to fit the noir protagonist, for his world is devoid of the moral framework necessary to produce the traditional hero. He has been wrenched from his traditional moorings, and is a hero only in the modern sense in which that word has been progressively refined to fit the existential bias of contemporary fiction."(Porfirio 214) According to Schrader, "The hard-boiled writers had their roots in pulp fiction or journalism, and their protagonists lived out a narcissistic, defeatist code."(Schrader 10) House states, "The anti-hero protagonist is also a convention of film noir. In the later, darker films he is either nearly psychotic, extremely violent, or just too much of a selfish son of a bitch to give a damn."(House 75) Larry Gross claims,

[film noir's] themes were primarily psychological, centering on obsessive, perhaps insane heroes trapped in morally corrupt society...Film noir postulates the existence of a 'bad' society, but the stress is laid on the efforts of the hero the extricate himself from that badness, rather than the social structure itself. Society and the individual are at odds without ever coming into view of one another.(Gross 44)

However, the noir "hero's" fate has already been decided for him. Predetermination is an integral component of all four films with either revealing pre-title sequences (GOODFELLAS, CASINO) or out of sequence action (RESERVOIR DOGS, PULP FICTION). Yet, Gross's statement is fitting only to CASINO's Sam, who attempts
to remove himself from his organized crime past by running a legitimate casino, although he remains a puppet of the mob social structure that he worked up through as an "earner" and who placed him in power. Again, it is the latest film produced in this study that has a noir quality the other films do not.

Perhaps one of the most famous pretitle sequences that reveals a character's fate occurs in Orson Welles' 1941 film, CITIZEN KANE. Welles' film establishes many of the structural and visual conventions of film noir from which Scorsese and Tarantino would later draw. Hirsh observes, that the flashbacks, divided frames, and rich textures of light and shadow that reveal Kane's psyche are key noir stylings that appear in CITIZEN KANE. Add to these Welles' use of oblique angle shots in the film, and nearly all of the visual and structural stylings are present that became the grammar of film noir. (Hirsch 122) Porfirio claims Welles' film "also provided a new psychological dimension and a morally ambiguous hero." (Porfirio 213)

As CITIZEN KANE was released in 1941, the same year as John Huston's, THE MALTESE FALCON, it is considered to have as great an impact as Huston's film, although CITIZEN KANE is not a crime film. But, the journalist in his pursuit of the meaning of "rosebud," Kane's last words, is similar to the noir detective in a murder mystery. (Hirsch 122)

Welles' influence, visually, on film noir can be seen in two very distinct incarnations in Scorsese and Tarantino's films. Scorsese has adopted an "eye-popping" style that combines angles, shadows, pans, tilts, and complicated compositions that are reminiscent of the most intense moments of CITIZEN KANE, where Tarantino and
cinematographer Andrzej Sekula have adopted the deep focus and low angles that Welles and cinematographer, Gregg Toland, pioneered. Scorsese and Tarantino have adopted the labyrinthine narratives and morally ambiguous heros, but it is CASINO that uses first person narration. This serves as another indication of a move to a more noir crime film from these directors. This filmic device was not adopted by Tarantino even though his films were made after GOODFELLAS, a film which uses voice-over narration, but not to the same extent as CASINO.

The subjective experience of film noir is most readily apparent in its voice-over narration and use of flashbacks, at times, even flashbacks within flashbacks. Porfirio claims that, "instead of writing his story, the hero tells it to us directly, and the combined techniques of first person narration and flashback enhance the aura of doom. It is almost as if the narrator takes a perverse pleasure in relating the events leading up to his current crisis, his romanticization of it heightened by his particular surroundings." (Porfirio 216)

Schrader writes: "A complex chronological order is frequently used to reinforce the feelings of hopelessness and lost time...The manipulation of time, whether slight or complex, is often used to reinforce a noir principle: the how is always more important than the why." (Schrader 11) Dyer believes the flashback creates uncertainties and that it is, "both vaguer as to the nature of destiny and fate and is more frightening. It gives the aesthetic structure of predestination without any ontological back-up to make it comprehensible." (Dyer 19) Hirsch contends that, "noir stories are often designed to stump the viewer. And they are presented, typically, in a non-chronological order. In a fractured time sequence, as flashbacks intersect present action, characters try to
reconstruct the past, combining it for clues, facts, answers." (Hirsch 72) These observations prove how fascinating and complex film noir is. The interweaving of time manipulation, predestination, and search for clues combine to give meaning and importance to the noir flashback. This filmic device of time manipulation combines many of the elements that give film noir that elusive "mood" and "tone." The flashback is at the core of noir iconography and narrative structure.

But, overall, Dyer's observations seem more applicable to the films this thesis examines. CASINO seems to epitomize Dyer's statement with its opening explosion and seeming death of Sam. While GOODFELLAS and CASINO feature characters who retell their stories, they do not appear to be "combing it for clues, facts, answers."

Instead, they fit J.P. Telotte's observation in his article, "Film Noir and the Dangers of Discourse," in that the voice-over narrator feels that he must talk, yet realizes the risks involved in doing so. As Telotte states,

> the persistent need to 'talk' and the 'danger,' as [Michel] Foucault puts it, that resides in our speech, however, point to the relatedness of these private and public modes, and to a paradoxical amalgam of necessity and jeopardy which, inscribed within the patterns of human discourse, underlies the project of film noir. Thus the dark, intersecting city streets, the crisscrossed purposes of human lives, and the pervasive interplay of desire and violence that we typically associate with noir might be seen as emblems of a more fundamental intersection --that of man's longing even his need to participate in a world of discourse, which must always be weighted against the potential of that world to frustrate or destroy him. (Telotte 111)

Subjective camera sequences in film noir are reserved for dream sequences or drug induced delirium. During these sequences, a subjective camera gazes out to an out-of-focus world where the character is either "coming to" or "going out" of consciousness.
The major exception to this rule is Robert Montgomery's 1947 film, THE LADY IN THE LAKE, in which the entire film is from a subjective point of view.

Women assume an unflattering role in film noir. They are dangerous objects of erotic desire and more often than not, the downfall of the male protagonist. Women cannot be trusted to do anything less than deceive men in attempts to rob them of money, power, and ultimately, life. According to House, "...the women are just cold and frustrated and greedy and ambitious and vicious and selfish and cruel and mean and nasty." (House 76) Porfirio claims, "the major female protagonists of the film noir were no more socially inclined than the men. The 'femme noire' was usually also a femme fatale, and a host of domineering women, castrating bitches, unfaithful wives and black widows seemed to personify the worst of male sexual fantasies." (Porfirio 216)

Janey Place divides women in film noir into two categories: the "spider woman" and the "nurturing woman." (Kaplan 42, 50) The nurturing woman appears less frequently and is more redeeming, loving and serves as a means for a lost man to return back into society. (Kaplan 50) The "nurturing woman" is less an icon of film noir, as those generally referred to as the "spider woman" or femme fatale.

The reason for the creation of the "spider" woman stems from wartime fears of a society where women had assumed control of positions traditionally held by men. This translated into a female character who, according to Steven Farber, possessed a "shocking ability to humiliate and emasculate her men." (Farber 9)

Traditionally, Hollywood women before film noir were presented in the roles of mother, wife, girlfriend, and prostitute. The purpose was to afford the man the ability to
carry out the films' ideological goals. In a male dominated society that is not threatened by women assuming positions of power in social and domestic spheres, this would seem to explain the casting of women as such. When men returned from World War II, however, the ideological male nightmare of women assuming positions of power in factories and in the homes had come true, and Hollywood reflected it. According to Hirsch, "noir's treatment of women is thus symptomatic of the way in which the genre transforms reality: women who in real life were strengthened by their wartime experience, while their husbands were away, appear in films as malevolent temptresses, their power confined almost entirely to the sexual realm, their strength achieved only at the expense of men." (Hirsch 20)

Ann Kaplan claims that, women are at the core of film noir's machination. The male protagonist must free himself from the lure of the femme fatale's sirens song of sexuality and amoral behavior. As Kaplan believes noir women to be,

Defined by their sexuality, which is presented as desirable but dangerous to men, the women function as the obstacle to the male quest. The hero's success or not depends on the degree to which he can extricate himself from the woman's manipulations. Although the man is sometimes simply destroyed because he cannot resist the woman's lures, often the work of the film is the attempted restoration of order through the exposure and then destruction of the sexual, manipulating woman. (Kaplan 3)

Film noir's treatment of women is hegemonic. The shift to a peace time United States created a sudden shock in what was a major moment of women's liberation. With the men at war, women were in control of their households, lives, and incomes --none of which fit into the traditional role of women in American society. The hegemonic messages regarding gender roles in film noir are the depiction of women. The
dominating, vicious bitch that is portrayed is really just a male nightmare of a historically patriarchal society gone awry. She is sexual, gorgeous, and dangerous. No longer will they be in the bedrooms of their husbands, but in those of another man's, conspiring to murder their husbands.

The "maleness" of film noir and Hollywood affects the manner in which women are defined in film noir. The patriarchal structure of American society at the time of noir's heyday is the cause of the oppression of which women bear the burden in film noir.(Ewing 65) According to Ewing, "the contradiction rests in threatening women's roles that victimize the male heroes and undermine the patriarchal order. The extent to which the hero becomes disenchanted with these roles and attempts to combat them illustrates the dialectical relationship between the oppression and empowerment of women as a group."(Ewing 65)

This dialectical relationship that Ewing identifies affects how women are presented in film noir. How noir women are presented visually is an integral component in defining the roles to which they are ascribed. Janey Place claims,

the source and the operation of the sexual woman's power and its danger to the male character is expressed visually both in the iconography of the image and the visual style. The iconography is explicitly sexual, and often explicitly violent as well: long hair (blond or dark), makeup, and jewelry. Cigarettes with their wispy trails of smoke can become cues of dark and immoral sensuality, and the iconography of violence (primarily guns) is a specific symbol (as perhaps the cigarette) of her 'unnatural' phallic power. The femme fatale is characterized by her long lovely legs...[and] a directed glance from the viewpoint of the male character who is being seduced.(Kaplan 45)
The physical portrayal of women that Place identifies reinforces Ewing's observation by demonstrating the sexual power ascribed to the "femme fatale." Not only are noir women in charge of their own sexuality, they control that of men, as well. Yet, they maintain the physical attributes of male ascribed sexuality.

Of the classical noir femme fatale, Dyer states:

> the long faces of Lauren Bacall, Veronica Lake, and Lizabeth Scott are emphasized by waves of hair hanging down around them; the hair is groomed and lit lustrously, it flows in "natural" curves that have yet somehow obviously been coiffed; the foundation make-up makes the face very pale while the lips are heavy and dark. To this combination of artificial and sensuality is frequently added the use of luxurious clothes made of highly tactile, yet man-made fibers, and of course the furs are often used to identify women with savage nature. (Dyer 19)

These descriptions seem appropriate to the character of Ginger in CASINO. The only film in this study to feature a femme fatale, Ginger is a woman who, visually, could belong to any number of films from the original noir cycle. Again, it is important to note that the most recent film produced contains an absolutely key element of film noir, demonstrating the move to more noir style of film.

How the camera views the femme fatale affects how the audience will "see" her. Place notes that women draw the camera's attention in noir, and the camera adjusts to her movements. Focus is often pulled to allow the audience to see the woman in the
background when they are not centered in the foreground, as they usually are. (Kaplan 45)

According to Place,

> They control the camera movement, seemingly to direct the camera (and the hero's gaze with our own) irresistibly with them as they move...The femme fatale ultimately loses physical movement, influence over camera movement, and is often actually or symbolically imprisoned by composition as control over her is exerted and expressed visually: sometimes behind visual bars, often dead, sometimes symbolically rendered impotent. The ideological operation of the myth (the absolute necessity of controlling the strong, sexual woman) is thus achieved by first demonstrating her dangerous power and its frightening results, then destroying it. (Kaplan 45)

Place's observations relate to Ewing's, in that, even the camera assumes its' control over noir women. Where first they control the camera, as the patriarchal order is restored, the camera and composition control the woman.

Ginger, again, fits the observations of Place and Ewing's perfectly. Ginger first controls the surveillance camera's gaze, then the steadicam that follows her into the Tangiers casino as she tips the staff, and she ultimately loses control of the camera's gaze as a stationary camera "sees" Sam force her downstairs at their home while he is meeting with Charlie "The Banker."

As equally an important facet of film noir as the heterosexual elements, is the subtext of homosexuality. However latent and repressed, ambiguous sexuality is a major component in defining individual characters and relationships between characters. The subtext of homosexuality is one of the lingering elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film. Dyer asserts that there are four important points to be made regarding homosexuals in film noir. First, he observes that there is only a small majority of film
noir in which gay characters appear, yet, believes that their absence from other film
genres of the period and the caution with which film noir incorporated them suggests that
it is, indeed, a defining element of the "genre." Secondly, Dyer asserts that homosexuals
in film noir are not flamboyant or transvestites. Instead, they are "rough and severe"
women, instead of "glamorous and sensual" women. Men, on the other hand, are
"fastidious," rather than "careless." Next, Dyer contends that lesbianism is not well
defined iconographically in film noir, because of the difficulty lesbian culture had
developing in its' own right, "under the double oppression of gayness and femaleness."
Lastly, the homosexual iconography is not sexual --"Gays are thus defined by everything
but the very thing that makes us different." (Dyer 20)

Dyer also asserts that the introduction of a gay character is a component of the
labyrinthine structure of film noir that a heterosexual character must overcome in order
to achieve the heterosexual union at the film's end. Along with the femme fatales, Dyer
believes that not only does a gay character function as a frustration, but also as a villain
in the development of the heterosexual character. (Dyer 20) A homosexual character and
undertones of homosexuality, heighten a sense that something is amiss. A possible
reason for the inclusion of such a theme is interesting immediately after a time of war. It
would appear to be a hidden fear among Americans that soldiers after spending so much
time together and being separated from women, would return home as homosexuals.
Where empowered women could raise a patriarchal fear of homosexuality and disrupting
the natural order of heterosexuality, they might also possess a matriarchal fear of the men
no longer needing them. Hegemonically, it represents the labeling of homosexuals as evil
and villainous.

RESERVOIR DOGS, PULP FICTION, and CASINO all use homosexual subtexts
in the noir vein. In general, the trend in these three films has been to a more refined use
and one fitting to noir. Where RESERVOIR DOGS uses brash homosexual dialogue (i.e.
Eddie (Chris Penn) and Vic (Michael Madsen) in Joe's (Lawrence Tierney) office),
implied sexual relations between Mr. White (Harvey Keitel) and Mr. Orange (Tim Roth),
and the sado-masochistic torture of a policeman by Mr. Blonde, PULP FICTION reserves
it for the labyrinthine obstacle that stands between Butch and Fabienne's (Maria De
Medeiros) heterosexual union. In CASINO, Sam prefers the flashy suits and coiffed hair
that Dyer identifies as an indication of homosexual character in noir, and Nicky exhibits
the homosexual undertones that make his beating of the man in the bar "back home"
"frightening." Therefore, as the films progressed, the use of homosexuality became truer
to the original noir stylings.

1970's Neo-Noir

The revival of film noir during the 1970s is no surprise. America was still
embroiled in Viet Nam during the first half of the decade, and experiencing what
President, Jimmy Carter termed a "malaise" over the guilt and anger caused by the war,
during the second half. Closer to home, Watergate had shattered America's belief in its' government. This dark period of American history was the perfect time for America's
dark cinema to reemerge as "neo-noir." Films like Robert Altman's, THE LONG
GOODBYE (1973), which saw the reincarnation of noir character, detective Philip
Marlowe, and Roman Polanski's, CHINATOWN (1974), feature detectives who solve crimes and mysteries, yet have little positive effect on their filmic worlds. Much like the original film noir, neo-noir represents the turmoil in American society, and through its themes and motifs, is a dismantled culture speaking to itself.

Larry Gross' invaluable article, "Film Après Noir" delineates six key components of neo-noir. First, Gross identifies the hero's functioning in a "discontinuous" world, where morals are no longer important. (Gross 45) Gross uses this as a dividing point from the original film noirs where the filmic world has a sense of unstoppable moral decay. A world where morals are no longer relevant is emblematic of America's situation during the 1970s.

Next, Gross identifies the cities of neo-noir as "extended works of art rather than places to live in," claiming that a "place determines action rather than being the external correlative to some aspect of the inner life of the characters." (Gross 45) Essentially, Gross identifies a hyper-stylization of an already stylized urban environment which forces the neo-noir characters to act, whereas, in the original film noirs, the settings sought to explain the characters.

While not a detective, Nicky acts, and urges Sam to act with him, in establishing Las Vegas as their own territory in CASINO. The bright neon lights, women, and money have an effect on Nicky. While this may appear contradictory to the city seducing Nicky, as previously observed, they do work conjunctively, in that, the seduction was the initial drawing in of Nicky to Las Vegas -- the result is his acting because of the environment
Gross' third observation also seems to explain neo-noirs revival during the 1970s -- "criminals no longer behave like businessmen, because the distinction no longer exists." (Gross 45) Gross claims that the film noir hero's fear, guilt, and revenge have been replaced in neo-noir with confusion because there is no moral distinction to be made in the resolution of the crime. (Gross 45) This refers to Gross' first observation of a "discontinuous world."

Next, Gross claims that sexuality is not a "locus of guilt or moral responsibility," as it was in film noir. Instead, sexual identity itself has declined to a point where "sexual identity is revealed as a hollow vacuum." (Gross 45) Gross theorizes that the hero is too confused to be preoccupied with sex. Ironically, this occurs at the time of the "sexual revolution" which fostered a more open attitude toward sex. However, not noted by Gross, the sexual aspects of crime become more erotic and perverse. This is evident in CHINATOWN which has a theme of incest, and Martin Scorsese's, TAXI DRIVER (1976), with its character, Iris (Jodie Foster), a thirteen year old prostitute.

Fifth, Gross hypothesizes that since the hero is unable to express himself sexually, he responds to his environment through violence. Gross states that violence emerges as "grotesque, excessive, and (in one way or another) funny." (Gross 45) The neo-noir cities are so morally reprehensible, that the violence is only part of the horrible urban landscape painted by these films.

RESERVOIR DOGS' Mr. Blonde is the best representation of this character. Given Mr. Blonde's homosexual undertones, it is plausible that he cannot express himself sexually, reverts to violence, therefore explaining the torture of the policeman.
Lastly, neo-noirs have the same endings which are steeped in futility and delusion. The character makes no lasting effect on the world, nor is he any type of authority figure, or anybody else for that matter. (Gross 45)

No films incorporate Gross' elements of neo-noir better than Martin Scorsese's MEAN STREETS (1973) and TAXI DRIVER (1976). These two films would begin the acclaimed career of Martin Scorsese and become inspiration for many future filmmakers, among them Quentin Tarantino. The futile endings, isolation and confusion of the characters, violence, portrayal of sexual identity, and depiction of the urban settings as moral wastelands, like all "neo-noirs," are representative of the time at which they were produced. Scorsese's two films, in particular, would have a lasting impression on the American cinema, and even popular culture, with the fascination TAXI DRIVER's psychotic urban warrior, Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro), generated with his infamous mohawk haircut and question, "Are you talking to me?"

The "Neo-Noir of The '90s"

Neo-noir would not be as prominent in the 1980s as it had a decade before. However, in the 1990s, noir would re-emerge as The "Neo-Noir of the '90s," a term coined by B. Ruby Rich in Sight and Sound, the film journal of the British Film Institute. Rich asserts that "Neo-Noir of the 90s" harkens back to the later days of film noir in which the protagonists were more psychotic than earlier in the original cycle. The later noirs were already parodying and subverting the earlier films. "The Neo-Noir of the '90s" attraction to these films indicates the postmodernism that is inherent in the "Neo-Noir of"
the 90s.” Filmmakers today use the worlds of the later noirs as inspiration for the new psychotic worlds they create. (Rich 8)

But why look back to film noir? Why make films today that resemble the darkest portion of the black film? Rich hypothesizes that the climate in today’s America is not very different from fifty years ago. According to Rich, after World War II, Americans were under the impression that they had triumphed over evil (the Axis Powers) when, unexpectedly, the Communists became the new enemy. The filmic result is film noir, to which Americans were drawn to "...pacify themselves with its equally tangled narratives and unreliable narrators." (Rich 8)

"The Neo-Noir of the 90s" serves much the same purpose to Americans today as film noir did during its’ original cycle. With radical militiamen, the Oklahoma City federal building bombing, and the Branch Dividians at Waco, Americans have a new enemy to combat now that the Cold War is "over." Xenophobia is still present, as are concerns about the uncertainty of the economy and our future. (Rich 8) As Rich states:

The end of the Cold War seems to have thrown the US into as much of a dither as its beginnings, old ideological formations are once again destined for the junkheap, and faith has gone missing. Whenever nobody can be trusted, society may disintegrate but noir can flourish. Enter Neo-Noir to rewrite the genre’s circuitry to the currents of the present, flashing across its screen some fascinating messages about the fears and dilemmas of our age. (Rich 8)

An interesting divergence from film noir and the "Neo-Noir of the 90s" is the treatment of women. While women are not treated very differently, their motivation is no longer sheer malevolence, but greed. As Rich states: "Their blood runs green, not red, as they sacrifice the men who cross their path to their insatiable and inscrutable quest for
big money —and big-time betrayal." (Rich 8) Rich does concede that, "the women of Neo-Noir may be inexplicably evil, but that's what audiences love about them. Their rapacious acts, their disregard for human life, their greed and lust and lack of restraint all elicit cheers and whistles of approval and enthusiasm." (Rich 9)

While Ginger is physically a femme fatale, her actions are archetypally a woman belonging to the "Neo-Noir of the '90s." She is motivated by money and willing to betray Sam to get it. She possesses the "greed and lust and lack of restraint" that define these woman as generic elements.

Men are portrayed, according to Rich, as the "dumb-lug" who, motivated and lured by sex, become entangled with a woman only to be bankrupted by her. (Rich 10) It appears that the men who are once again the victims, (as they were in the Cold War-era wars in Korea and Vietnam, as well as the post-Cold War military campaigns of Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, and now Bosnia,) are being attacked from within. Empowered females appear to be the "enemy." The fifth column that Rich claims Americans fear is not the militiamen, but women.

Women are more powerful than at any time in American history. Traditional gender roles in American society are becoming blurred. Men are no longer the "bread-winners" in many American homes. More women are entering the workplace and more families are relying on two incomes. The portrayal of women in the "Neo-Noir of the 90s," therefore, is for much the same reason as it was during the 1940s --men are afraid of empowered women and Hollywood is representing that fear in women who are "irresistibly sexy and inexplicably evil, the men as dumb as they come and heading for a
fall." (Rich 8) Rich even acknowledges this possibility: "Their display of power, however depraved and unmotivated, is being accepted as a new version (albeit warped) of female empowerment, the dominatrix as a model of agency. (Rich 9)

In 1973, Porfirio claimed that, "what keeps film noir alive for us today is something more than a spurious nostalgia. It is the underlying mood of pessimism which undercuts any attempted happy endings and prevents the films from being the typical Hollywood escapist fare many were originally intended to be. More than lighting or photography, it is this sensibility which makes the black film black for us." (Porfirio 13)

Twenty three years later, Porfirio's statement still seems credible. Film is considered by many to be a culture speaking to itself. Thusly, via the "Neo-Noir of the '90s" America is telling itself about the violent and treacherous world in which it lives.

The crime film in all its incarnations has spoken to the American film-going public. Like all film, it is a reflection of the society in which it was created. But, there is something special about the Little Caesars, Walter Neffs, and Travis Bickles that have drawn filmmakers back to them in the 1990s. Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino keep these characters alive, as well as the genre of films in which they were created. Two filmmakers whose crime films of the 1990s draw from the same origins create vastly different images of society and crime, but what will their impact on the crime film and their legacy ultimately be?
CHAPTER II

WHACKING, THE 1970s, AND THE AUTEURIST STYLE OF FILMMAKING

Overview

During the 1990s, Martin Scorsese crafted two extraordinary films that explore organized crime and the lives of those who belong to it—GOODFELLAS (1990) and CASINO (1995). In the five years separating the two films, the man many critics compare to a young Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, would produce two crime films, RESERVOIR DOGS (1992) and PULP FICTION (1994) that would rejuvenate the crime film and sustain interest in the genre between Scorsese's films. Examining these films in the order in which they are produced will reveal that Scorsese's GOODFELLAS utilizes the most elements similar to the classic Hollywood gangster film, but in Tarantino's films, and Scorsese's own CASINO, the classic Hollywood gangster film elements give way to more noirish ones, yielding films that are successively more in the noir style.

Film noir differs from the classic Hollywood gangster film in a variety of ways. Classic Hollywood gangster films trace the rise of the criminal to his violent downfall at the hands of the law, where film noir presents characters caught in schemes and duplicitous situations whose demise is their own doing. The classic Hollywood gangster's tale would be told without the noir elements of voice-over narration, flashbacks, and terse, tough dialogue written by "hard-boiled" writers such as James M.
Cain and Dashiell Hammett. Where the classic Hollywood gangster films were shot in studio sets, noir protagonists found themselves in real cities. For the classic Hollywood gangster, the city represented the territory he controlled, but for the noir protagonist, the highly stylized city would lure him in and become a nightmarish world of shadows, chiaroscuro lighting, oblique lines, and rain soaked streets. And, lurking in these wastelands of morality are evil female characters, or "femme fatales" as they are referred to in noir, who use their sexuality to trap the protagonist in a web of deceit. The noir protagonist, unable to break free of the femme fatale's spell, suffers the consequences of illicit sexual encounters and duplicity.

This chapter seeks to explore these differences among Scorsese's and Tarantino's crime films of the 1990s and establish connections and a general trend to a crime film that becomes "truer" to noir in "mood" and "tone." Therefore, this chapter is divided into sections dealing with the elements of the films, such as, narrative styles and techniques, characters, and settings, among other topics.

**The Films**

GOODFELLAS is an epic approach to organized crime in much the same vein as Francis Ford Coppola's, GODFATHER films --a study of "the mob" over decades. Where Coppola's films focus on an entire family, GOODFELLAS focuses on the Irish/Sicilian, Henry Hill (Ray Liotta), and his organized crime friends, Jimmy Conway (Robert DeNiro) and Tommy DeSilva (Joe Pesci). Hill's involvement with organized crime is traced from his teen years in East Brooklyn, New York through his enrollment in the Witness Protection Program as an informant, or "rat." GOODFELLAS combines
elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film of the 1930s with elements of film noir to create a film that is, stylistically, different from any other crime film made in 1990s. GOODFELLA S is an attempt to understand not only the criminal life of the gangster but his sociological and cultural environment, as well. Scorsese's first film of the 1990s combines more elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film with film noir than the other films in this study, and arguably, any other film this decade, yet still manages to maintain that elusive "mood" and "tone" of a film noir.

A crime film quite different from the neo-noirs of the 1970s that Scorsese was so influential in defining, GOODFELLA S would not set the tone however, for his second gangster film of the 1990s, CASINO (1995). While CASINO includes elements of the classic Hollywood Gangster film of the 1930s, it is truly a "Neo-Noir of the 90s."

Tarantino's first film, RESERVOIR DOGS (1992), is a visceral account of the events that take place before and after a jewelry store robbery. By not showing the robbery, Tarantino shifts his focus from the crime to the criminals and their relationships with one another. The result is a film that is steeped in film noir stylings and homages.

Tarantino's second film, PULP FICTION (1994), attempts to recreate stories in the hard-boiled style of Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Raymond Chandler. Interweaving three stories ("Vincent Vega And Marsellus Wallace's Wife," "The Gold Watch," and "The Bonnie Situation") creates a cohesive whole of PULP FICTION's achronological structure. The central location linking the three stories is a diner, a classic noir setting. However, voice-over narration is not used in either film.
CASINO, based on Nicholas Pileggi's novel of the same name, revolves around the lives of Sam "Ace" Rothstein (Robert DeNiro), Nicky Santoro (Joe Pesci), and Ginger Rothstein (Sharon Stone) in the modern day Sodom and Gomorrah, Las Vegas. CASINO's themes focus on love, friendship, and most importantly, trust. With its voice-over narration, flashbacks, classic noir characters and settings, and themes, CASINO becomes a visual assault that has the "mood" and "tone" that defines film noir.

The Narrative Styles

Voice over narration is an essential element of film noir. The first film produced in this study, GOODFELLAS, contains this generic convention even though it is a film much in the vein of the classic Hollywood gangster film style. There is a definite need to talk, as it is demonstrated later in the film when Henry is testifying at trial of Paulie Cicero (Paul Sorvino) and Jimmy. Even after Henry rushes off the stand, he addresses the audience directly. He is so emotionally charged from telling his story that he must continue.

The perverse pleasure in the retelling of events that Telotte identified as a component of the voice-over narration in film noir is demonstrated by Henry in GOODFELLAS' voice-over. He loves his time in East Brooklyn as a teenager working at the Cicero's. Not only is this clear in the tone of Henry's voice, but in the yellow tint of cinematographer, Michael Ballhaus' lens, which aids in creating the aura of "golden memories" of Henry's youth. Henry adores the money and respect that follows his association with the "wiseguys" (mobsters). He relishes, among other things, making more each week than most of the adults in his neighborhood, his neighbors not parking in
his family's driveway (even though they did not have a car), and being moved ahead to
the front of the line at the bakery because they "knew who I was with." Henry
experiences the greatest pleasure when he says that one day, other neighborhood children
carried his groceries for him --"out of respect." Henry punctuates his statement with a
tone of obvious pride. He is somebody in a neighborhood of nobodies. Henry most
relishes the adoration he received from his peers, even more than from the adults in his
neighborhood. His dreams of individuating were fulfilled. This is interesting, in that,
Scorsese is using a noir technique (the voice-over narration) to arrive at a classic
Hollywood Gangster convention --individuation. This is an excellent example of
Scorsese's melding of the two genres in GOODFELLAS.

GOODFELLAS apparent connection to the classic Hollywood Gangster film is in
its' sociological elements --the how and why of becoming a gangster. Henry Hill
embodies a perversion of the "American Dream." Tony Bennett's "Rags To Riches" is
heard on the soundtrack after Henry declares, "Ever since I can remember, I always
wanted to be a gangster." This juxtaposition indicates Henry's reason for joining
organized crime. Moments later, Henry says in the voice-over narration, "To me being a
gangster was better than being President of the United States...It was being somebody in
a neighborhood of nobodies."

Henry relishes his association with the "wiseguys:" "I was the luckiest kid in the
world. I could go anywhere, I could do anything. I knew everybody, and everybody
knew me." This establishes Henry as character in the classic Hollywood Gangster
tradition. He needs to individuate from his community, uses crime to as a tool to
accomplish this, and while he does not die, he is exiled in the Witness Protection Program. While Henry may be a "movie star with muscle" for a while, in the end, according to Henry: "I'm an average nobody. I get to live the rest of my life like a schnook." Henry has lost his "life." Henry loses his friends, money, women, and as the credits state, even Karen (Lorraine Braccio), his wife of twenty-five years.

Henry's voice-over narration proudly describes the Air France robbery. According to Henry, "Air France made me. We walked out with $420,000 without using a gun." This scene, too, has the "golden memories" aura of Henry's teenage experiences. Henry seems equally enraptured about Jimmy's success with the Lufthansa heist, but quickly learns how a paranoid Jimmy kills everyone associated with the crime to avoid having it traced back to him. Henry's voice over and a soundtrack consisting of the second portion of Derrick And The Domino's "Layla" are the core of a montage that shows many of Henry's dead friends. "Layla" gives the sequence a melancholy feeling that speaks with the lyricism and eloquence that Henry is unable to muster.

Where Henry's desire is for individuation from the neighborhood, Karen (Lorraine Braccio) desires assimilating into the lifestyle of a "wiseguy's" wife. Karen's voice-over narration explains her dates with Henry and her socialization as the wife of a gangster. Henry and Karen's wedding and Jimmy's wife, Mickey's, hostess party are Karen's primary rituals of initiation. At the wedding, Karen tries to memorize dozens of people with the traditional Roman-Catholic names of Peter, Paul, and Marie. Karen states that they had two families, their birth families and the "crew." At the hostess party, Karen claims that "they had bad skin and wore too much make-up. I mean, they didn't look very
good. They looked beat up, and the stuff they wore looked thrown together and cheap—a lot of pant suits and double knits. And they talked about how rotten their kids were and beating them with broom handles and leather belts; that their kids didn't pay any attention. When Henry picked me up I was dizzy." Karen learns how different the women are and wonders if she can ever be like them. Karen and Henry's first home is subtle and well decorated, however, the new home they move into after Henry is paroled is gaudy is in its' decoration. Karen has become one of the women she held in modest contempt. Karen's voice-over, therefore, serves as a means to measure her socialization and incorporation into the life of a gangster's wife over the course of the film.

Where Karen and Henry both seemed to enjoy explaining their "lives," there appears to be absolutely no pleasure in Henry's retelling of the events surrounding Billy Bats' murder. Henry's voice assumes the "aura of doom" also associated with film noir voice-over narration. As Henry states: "With Bats, we had a real problem." The voice-over combined with Henry's astonished look when Tommy apologizes for getting blood on the floor of his night club, The Suite Lounge, indicates no pleasure in re-telling the event. The killing of Billy Bats marks the beginning of the end, and Henry's tone reflects it as such. Ironically, it is when Bats' body is exhumed that there appears to be a pleasure in retelling the event with the film's attention to the incident during a relatively long sequence that involves Tommy making jokes, Jimmy laughing, and Henry vomiting because of the foul smell. While there is no voice-over narration, the attention to the scene and the intense narration about the original killing seem to indicate Henry's pleasure in "showing" it to the audience.
Similarly, the voice-over narration of CASINO is typical of the film noir style. During the introduction of the characters and establishing Sam in Las Vegas, Scorsese uses what could be termed more accurately "hyper-narration" by both Sam and Nicky. While film noir is narratized, the "hyper-narration" that Scorsese uses exceeds the typical noirs (Movieline magazine estimates the film to contain forty-one minutes of voice-over). (Movieline 70) Sam, predominantly, tells the story, but Nicky frequently gives his point of view, and Marino interjects at one point to comment on Remo's questioning him about Nicky and "the Jew's" wife having an affair. Porfirio states: "Instead of writing his story, the [film noir] hero tells it to us directly, and the combined techniques of first person narration and flashback enhance the aura of doom. It is almost as if the hero takes a perverse pleasure in relating the events leading up to his current crisis, his romanticization of it heightened by his particular surroundings." (Porfirio 216)

The next film produced, Quentin Tarantino's, RESERVOIR DOGS, is an example of a film whose influences lie in film noir. While there is no voice-over narration, as in Scorsese's films, in 1992 Tarantino created a film that has the "mood" and "tone" Schrader identified as belonging to the genre. Like voice-over narration, the use of flashbacks is an archetypal noir styling, and because of this, RESERVOIR DOGS' achronological sequence is truly in the noir vein. Tarantino masterfully constructs a film where the robbery is never shown and segments entitled with the character's names aid in explaining some of the individual characters and the premise of the crime.

Flashbacks within flashbacks are also employed. Mr. Orange's "Commode Story" is an example of this. Already in a flashback, Mr. Orange is seen telling Joe, Mr. White,
and Mr. Orange the story he has memorized to work his way into the gang. As Mr. Orange tells the story, the camera trucks in an arc around the booth where the event is taking place. Suddenly, the camera is continuing the pan around Mr. Orange, still telling the story, but in the bathroom where the incident allegedly took place. The switch is excessive but aids in demonstrating the attempt to codify the story. Mr. Orange's police partner tells him earlier in the "Mr. Orange" segment, "undercover cops got to be Marlon Brando. You got to be a great actor, you got to be naturalistic." Mr. Orange has immersed himself so into the role of a criminal that Tarantino allows a glimpse into his mind as he tells the story. Taubin claims, "The undercover cop prepares for his 'interview' like a method actor rehearsing an audition piece. Identity is a fabrication; lies are as convincing as truth, provided they reference a collective cultural experience and are told with improvisory abandon." (Taubin 3) The visible emersion exemplifies the codification Mr. Orange has undergone in becoming a member of the gang. This scene aids in explaining his shooting of the woman in the car --his attraction to criminality has overpowered his previous life as a policeman, therefore, he can kill people standing in his way when his life is in danger, much like a criminal fleeing the crime scene. In a sense, the id has overpowered the ego, which also explains his latently homosexual relationship with Mr. White, and his vacillation over whether or not to wear the ring. Like film noir, much about the characters are revealed in these flashbacks.

According to Pat Dowell, the structure of Tarantino's sophomore runaway success, PULP FICTION, more closely resembles that of television, a motif interestingly, that is present in "The Gold Watch" sequence, not film noir. Dowell
believes, that moving from one story to the next closely resembles "channel surfing" and
the interruptions between each story represent commercials. This gives the film the appearance of movie being broadcast on commercial television. (Dowell 5)

The structure that Dowell has identified differs greatly from the noir convention of flashbacks. Instead, Tarantino constructs a film where the audience is left to put the pieces together and to make sense of what is taking place. Essentially, the audience connects intersecting scenes and characters, not the private eye or war buddy of film noir.

When speaking about the stories, Roger Avery, who co-wrote them with Tarantino, states: "The stories would be the oldest chestnuts in the world. You've seen 'em a zillion times, alright -- the guy who's supposed to take out the boss's lady, "But don't touch her;" the boxer who's supposed to throw the fight but doesn't; and the third story is kind of like the opening five minutes of every Joel Silver movie -- two hitmen go and kill somebody. We hang out with these two hitmen for the rest of the morning and see what happens." (Dawson 143) The nature and style of these stories are established by the opening definitions in the film of "pulp:" a soft, moist, shapeless mass of matter; a magazine or book containing lurid subject matter and being characteristically printed on rough unfinished paper," which is seemingly given credence by the citation of the American Heritage Dictionary: New College Edition as the source of these definitions. But it lacks the voice-over narration indicative of the style it seeks to pastiche.

Dowell's and Avery's observations are indicative of the postmodernism of PULP FICTION, of which James Boman claims the film is the, "high watermark, artistically speaking, of postmodernism in America so far." (Bowman 75) Tarantino's film is about
films whose basis was in stories written sixty and seventy years ago, therefore, eluding any genre classification as film noir, classic Hollywood Gangster, or "Neo-Noir of the '90s." Instead it is a postmodern, pop-culture film that is a hyper-nineties interpretation of those films.

Where voice over narration is not a part of Tarantino's films, Scorsese uses it again in CASINO. Sam's voice over narration during the pre-title sequence is classic noir. As Sam walks to his car, he seems trapped and helpless. He "tells" the audience, "When you love someone, you've gotta' trust them --there's no other way. You've got to give them the key to everything that's yours. Otherwise what's the point. And for a while, that's the type of love I believed I had." The nihilistic, defeatist tone of this statement enhances the sense of doom that precedes Sam's car exploding into a ball of flames that fills the screen. The camera tracks next to him during this sequence, making him seem trapped and helpless, which not only aides in establishing the nihilism of the scene, but makes the impending doom that awaits Sam certain. Given his apparent death at the beginning of the film, anything after can be assumed to be a flashback. Sam is presumed dead until nearly the film's end when he is shown at home in San Diego. Scorsese, therefore, has masterfully used the generic flashback structure in a manner similar to Billy Wilder's DOUBLE INDEMNITY (1944).

CASINO's classic noir structure continues during the title sequence. As Sam hurtles through the flames, a metaphor for hell, the casino lights of Las Vegas are shown as if through a prism, from red tones to blue tones, and finally a rainbow effect as if looking through a flawless diamond. Sam reappears hurtling through the lights of Las
Vegas, then head first into the flames that appear again. The sequence is scored with the operatic "Matthaus Passion." Saul Bass, who crafted the opening sequence with his wife, Elaine, states, "We attempted to create a metaphor for the Las Vegas of betrayal, twisted morality, greed, hubris, and in the end, self destruction. The descent into Dante’s inferno."(Kirkham 12;13") By centering the lights of Las Vegas between the flames of hell, the sense of the city both "as majestic as it is putrid" is established.(Hirsch 83) While it is beautiful and alluring on the outside, underneath, it is evil and motivated by greed --much like the women of the "Neo-Noir" of the 90s."

The pre-title sequence notwithstanding, the aura of doom is established by both Sam and Nicky very early in the film. Sam tells the audience about his ability as a gambler, how he was given "paradise on Earth" by being placed in charge of the Tangiers, and how the $62.7 million needed to open the casino was obtained. Nicky takes over the voice-over narration and tells how it should have been "perfect" because of him and Ginger right there with Sam. Nicky then states: "But in the end, we fucked it all up. It should've been so sweet. But it turns out it was the last time street guys like us were ever given anything that fuckin' valuable again." In conjunction with the pre-title sequence, this creates the "aura of doom" Porfirio identified.

Like GOODFELLAS, there seems to be a perverse pleasure in retelling the events of CASINO. Sam is presumed dead throughout most of the film, having died in the car explosion in the opening scene. He delineates his career as a top gambler and "earner" for the mob with an air of cockiness and an earnest tone. Even Nicky is impressed with how seriously he takes betting and his ability to win. When Sam is shown at the end of
the film at home in San Diego with a wall of televisions and a desk full of phones and papers in front of him, it becomes easy to pity him, yet be repelled by his love of something that has, essentially, imprisoned him. Therefore, given the situation in which the audience finds Sam at CASINO's end, the convincing tone of his voice-over narration is understandable.

Sam's confrontation by the FBI men who have pictures of Nicky and Ginger together is another indication of his pleasure in retelling the story. Sam claims he did not look at the pictures or the FBI men, yet he eagerly tells an unknown entity (the audience), as complete strangers to him as the FBI men, the sordid details of his rise, fall, and marriage. Sam seemingly does not want to look at the pictures out of disgust and embarrassment. His embarrassment, or fear thereof, is evident by his wanting to place Ginger in a discrete rehabilitation center, promising Ginger they'll "keep her name out of the papers." This inconsistency serves as an example of Sam's pleasure in retelling the story.

This pleasure extends to the deaths of Nicky and Ginger. Sam appears to blame Nicky for most of his downfall. He wants nothing to do with Nicky's crime spree, his intent to "start a war" with the mobsters "back home," and is disgusted with him because of his affair with Ginger, and believes Nicky ordered the bomb to be placed in his car. Nicky's death is violent, savage, and a relatively long segment in the film. Sam states that Nicky and his brother, Dominic, were killed because Nicky "ordered the hit" on Sam, and were summarily made examples of for stepping out of line. The length of the sequence mirrors Sam's disdain for Nicky. Nicky's pain is Sam's contribution to the
murder. This is evidenced by Nicky sounding much like the "little girl" he turned the man into at the bar, an incident at which Sam was present. Sam, remembering the man's pain, made Nicky sound much the same way.

Even the text in the establishing credits serves as an example of the pleasure they derive from telling their stories. The non-specificity of naming where they are from is made coy by referring to their home as "Back Home." This reference to their home indicates more pleasure in being coy, than trying to protect their identities, as a person telling a story like CASINO's might do. This is carried even further when no specific dates are given. The time "back home" is simply referred to as "years ago."

The structural and narrative differences between Scorsese's and Tarantino's films are apparent. Tarantino relies on flashbacks and achronological structures and Scorsese uses both in CASINO and GOODFELLAS, in addition to voice-over narration. CASINO does stand apart from GOODFELLAS in its' amount of narration, but CASINO's narrative and structural elements enable the "mood" and "tone" of film noir to permeate the film in other manifestations, such as characters, music, and sexuality and arrive at a film that approximates the ineffable atmospheric qualities Schrader tried so diligently to define. Ultimately, GOODFELLAS is unable to do this because of its' numerous elements in the classic Hollywood gangster film tradition.

The absence of the noir element of voice-over narration in RESERVOIR DOGS and Pulp Fiction renders CASINO a "truer" noir than Tarantino's films. While CASINO does have considerably more narration than a typical noir, it is truer than GOODFELLAS in the "tone" maintained by Sam and Nicky. Where a majority of
GOODFELLAS narration concentrates on Henry’s rise to power, CASINO’s traces the loss of power, which is also more in keeping with the noir tradition.

The Femme Fatale

CASINO possesses the noir element of the femme fatale. Where Karen was a minor character in relation to Henry’s downfall, Scorsese’s next female character, Ginger, is the femme fatale of the 1990s. Rich claims the women of neo-noirs are “usually pure evil, with sexuality and greed the markers of character.” (Rich 8) She is motivated by money, lives for money, and would die for money. When Ginger is introduced, it is as a hustler stealing from her John at a craps table. She marries Sam because he promises she would always be taken care of --"set for life"-- if their marriage does not last. When she tells Nicky about her marriage to Sam, she claims, "do you think I’d go into this thing without being covered on the back end;" clearly showing her motivation. When it does fail, Ginger wants nothing more than her money and jewelry. She never loves Sam. She simply loves his money and ruins him, herself, and Nicky to get it.

Ginger’s clothing is of the classic noir femme fatale. Ginger enters the casino tipping the valets and casino staff wearing a blood red dress and a full-length white fur coat. As Dyer states, "furs are often used to identify women with a savage nature." (Dyer 19) Ginger’s savagery is based on money. Her red dress, a color often associated with sex, signifies the means by which she will obtain money. Ginger accepts her jewelry from Sam, on the bed, wrapped in the chinchilla fur he has given her. Yet, when she meets Lester Diamond (another reference to wealth and money), (James Woods) her old
boyfriend, she is wearing a coat with only small amounts of fur accents, indicating a kinder nature with Lester.

The snake motif of Ginger's clothing is carried over to County Commissioner Webb's wardrobe, as well (Webb, on his first visit to Sam, is wearing a hat with a rattlesnake head with its' mouth open and snakeskin boots --on which the camera lingers. When Webb informs the gaming officials that Sam claims he's "in charge" of the Tangiers he, again, wears the hat. At Sam's trial, Webb forgoes the hat for a tan colored suit, much like the color of snake skin). The snake motif is first introduced in Ginger's clothing when Sam presents her with jewelry. The one piece of jewelry that Sam has given her that Ginger asks if she can wear all the time is a bracelet of a coiled snake. It is also the piece that she tries on her daughter, Jennifer, when the two are seen at the bank immediately after Sam says, in the voice-over narration, that the people at the country club did not know what "really moved her." Ginger frequently wears a ring shaped like a snake, before Lester is beaten, and throughout the film, afterward. The image of the snake pays an important role in CASINO because it symbolizes a lack of trust by Ginger. This is established in her first conversation with Nicky about her marriage to Sam after the Lester beating. Ginger tells Nicky that Sam is a double Gemini, whose astrological symbol is a snake and, "you can't trust a snake."

After Sam has Lester beaten in the parking lot, Ginger's clothing is more often made of leather. She wears a suede skirt and jacket when she goes to Los Angeles with Lester, and she is wearing a black leather skirt and jacket on her return home. At the
height of her affair with Nicky and the nadir of her marriage to Sam, she wears matching bronze leather pants and jacket that give her the appearance of a snake.

Ginger's change in clothing styles goes beyond the changing fashions of CASINO's time span. Her clothing is an integral medium for Scorsese's portrayal of her motivations. Scorsese is an intelligent filmmaker who utilizes all facets of the filmic image to convey his message and meanings. Wardrobe is certainly one of these facets.

Ginger draws Sam's gaze, much in the same way women of film noir drew the gaze of men. Sam first sees Ginger on the surveillance camera monitor in the control room above the casino floor. On the monitor, Sam sees an extreme close-up of her hand and purse, stealing from her John, and goes down to the floor to see for himself. When the John accuses Ginger of stealing from him, she throws his chips in the air so that a ravenous mob of gamblers can clamor for them. Suddenly, in a freeze frame of Ginger, "Love Is Strange," by Mickey and Sylvia is heard on the soundtrack. Scorsese cuts away to Sam looking at Ginger and smiling at her, cuts back to Ginger in slow motion glancing at Sam, then cuts away to Sam looking back at her. The extreme close-up, slow motion, and freeze frame amplify the glances that film noir femme fatales draw from their men when they meet for the first time. It fetishes the malicious, savage nature of a woman obsessed with money and hustling -- the very two things about Ginger that lead to Sam's downfall.

Ginger's character is another indication that CASINO is closer to a film noir than the other films. The femme fatale and the somnambulistic protagonist are a classic pairing of cinematic characters. Without the femme fatale, the element of sexuality that
permeates film noir is missing. Ginger gives CASINO that sexuality and duplicity that made Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford, and Rita Hayworth icons of film noir.

The Return Of The Latter Period Noir Psychotic

Where the femme fatale makes her way only into CASINO, all four films share the common psychotic character prevalent in so many later film noirs. The original noir psychotic moved through three phases of this character's presentation. At first, he (or she) was presented as psychotic killer who was "a subject worthy of study."(Schrader 12) Next, the character became a "fringe threat." Finally, the character became the protagonist.(Schrader 12) There is no reason given for their psychopathy --they are simply just the way they are.(Schrader 12) The last phase of this evolution is the character Scorsese and Tarantino include in their films.

GOODFELLAS' Tommy is the first in this study to recall the latter film noir psychotic. Tommy is violent in a "non-business" manner and out of control, while Henry states that "hits" never bother Jimmy because he viewed them as part of "work." Tommy breaks a wine bottle over, Sonny, The Bamboo Lounge owner's head, kills Billy Bats because he is "out of order," and kills Spider because he tells Tommy to "go fuck himself." Tommy is referenced to a cowboy four times in GOODFELLAS. Paulie refers to Tommy as a cowboy when he warns Henry to stay away from dealing drugs, and in an homage to Edwin S. Porter's, THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (1903) Tommy, shooting directly into the camera, is intercut with Henry stepping outside to get a morning paper while in the Witness Protection Program at the films' end. During one of the truck robberies, Tommy yells, "Let's take the loot and go back to the hideout," then shoots his
gun upward, like many of the Hollywood western "badguys" do after a robbery, and before Tommy shoots Spider in the foot, refers to himself as the Oklahoma Kid, a role played by classic Hollywood Gangster icon, James Cagney. Ironically, when Tommy asks the name of the Humphrey Bogart western, Jimmy offers, George Stevens', SHANE (1953), chidingly. Les Keyser notes that Bogart, an icon of film noir, is the villain in THE OKLAHOMA KID and that his identification is with the "bad guy." (Keyser 204) Of all the possible films Tommy is drawn to for comparison to himself, he chooses one with two crime film icons. This is a key element in demonstrating the combination of the two genres from which Scorsese draws in his characterizations of the "goodfellas."

The sado-masochistic personality of RESERVOIR DOGS' Mr. Blonde is apparent in the torture sequence. In a scene that is an homage to John Cromwell's, DEAD RECKONING (1947), Mr. Blonde listens to music and dances as he slashes the captured policeman's face and cuts off his ear, after first making clear that he does not have a "boss." The gruesome act of cutting off the ear is never seen by the camera. Instead, the camera trucks left to a doorway with, "Watch Your Head" spray painted over the lintel. After he has committed the act, he asks the policeman, "was that as good for you as it was for me?" Hilferty claims that this sequence allows Mr. Blonde to prove that he is his own man and submissive to no one. (Hilferty 79) This sequence reinforces Mr. Blonde's assertion that he is in control of sexual situations, as is evident in his and Eddie's exchange in Joe's office. Taubin claims that the torture scene is essential to RESERVOIR DOGS, and is a distillation of the "slap/kiss manipulation" of the film. (Taubin 4) The dancing, joke cracking, and brutal Mr. Blonde represents Tarantino,
who is laughing at his control over the audience's simultaneous fascination and repulsion by the scene. (Taubin 4)

Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) is the embodiment of the Shafts and Dolemites that starred in 1970's blackploitation films. He most closely resembles the latter period noir psychotics in PULP FICTION. Jackson, unlike John Travolta, is not an icon of the era, but merely playing one: the African-American hypersexual, hyperviolent gangster. Physically, Jules is the synthesis of twenty years of iconographic Afro-American "machismo." Jules combines "seventies sideburns with eighties Jeri curls" to place him in no specific time period. (Willis 64) Emotionally, Jules also combines a 1960's spirituality with a sixteenth century puritanical interpretation of "the wrath of God." It is this combination that makes Jules the perfect postmodern African-American gangster: violent enough to kill mercilessly, smart enough to explain television production to his partner, spiritual enough to recognize "divine intervention," and physically atemporal.

The most recent, and "truest" to the original character, Nicky most closely fits the later film noir psychotics. The first indication of Nicky's psychotic behavior occurs in the bar "back home." After he is assigned by Remo, the head mobster, to protect Sam, he savagely beats a man and stabs him with the pen because he told Sam to shove a pen "up his ass." After the beating, Nicky mockingly asks, "Ya' hear a little girl, Frankie? Ya' hear a little girl, Ace? Is that a little girl? What happened to the fuckin' tough guy who told my friend to stick it up his ass?" In voice over narration, Sam says, "while I was trying to figure why the guy was saying what he was saying, Nicky just hit him." The unfilinching use of violence by Nicky alarms even Sam.
Yet, as psychotic and violent as Nicky may be, he thinks of violence as being only a part of "business." Nicky describes the process of burying people in the desert in a business-like manner with no emotion in his voice, only the annoyance of having to dig other graves if there are witnesses (he even tells how long it takes). When Nicky's gang tortures Tony Dogs, he tells Tony, "Don't make me be a bad guy" as he puts Tony's head in a vise to torture him even more. Nicky needs information for Remo, and must get it. (Tony makes Nicky "a bad" guy who becomes even angrier when Nicky discovers whom Tony was protecting.)

The relegation of violence to "business" is further emphasized by Nicky who makes breakfast for his son, Little Nicky, each morning, attends his school events, and watches him play baseball. At the baseball game, Nicky tells the audience that his son's coach was a Metro Intelligence cop, but that it did not matter, "since it was all about the kids." Nicky is able to separate his personal life from his "professional," i.e. criminal, and even associate with off-duty policemen. Also, when Nicky and Sam are talking in the car in Sam's garage, Nicky tells Sam that they can discuss Sam's problems with Ginger because "it's family."

Nicky serves as the Shadow of Sam. When back home, Sam says, "Yeah, we made a great a pair. I made book, and Nicky made sure they collected." One feels that Sam understands that he might not collect his winnings if Nicky were not there, yet is disgusted by Nicky's violence.

Nicky is also Sam's shadow, in that, he compensates for Sam's latent homosexuality with his hyper-sexual maleness. Nicky and Ginger are the only two ever
seen engaging in sexual activity. While money replaces sexual intercourse between Sam and Ginger, Nicky and Ginger's intercourse, seen in the hotel room during an afternoon rendezvous, is harsh and animalistic. The relationship is purely sexual in Nicky's mind. When Nicky and Ginger are in the hotel room, Nicky warns Ginger not to tell anyone about their relationship, Ginger replies, "What do you think I'm stupid?" Nicky replies, "No, I think you're beautiful" and kisses her.

Visually, Nicky's physical shadow is presented in one key scene in CASINO. At the beginning of the crime montage that is scored by the Rolling Stones, "Gimme' Shelter," Nicky's shadow is seen in a high angle shot that rolls 360 degrees and pans to see Nicky beating a man. This concept of the shadow serves as an important element of the film noir styling of CASINO. Nicky's clothing is either black or very dark except for two instances, when Nicky and Jennifer attend Little Nicky's presentation at school, and during the Little League game --two occasions when neither Sam or Ginger are present. Nicky's dark clothing, in contrast to Sam's flamboyant and often times, brightly colored clothing, aids in establishing him as Sam's shadow.

While all four films share this psychotic character, Nicky is the most developed of the four. Where the character is part of the mob organization in GOODFELLAS, brash and unrefined in RESERVOIR DOGS, and undergoes a miraculous, and generically uncharacteristic, change of heart in PULP FICTION, CASINO's Nicky, exudes the "mood" and "tone" of film noir that lurks in dark side of the film's characters, Sam and Ginger.
The Homosexual Subtext

As these men are an integral component in these four films, so is the homosexual subtext that accompanies films about men. The homosexual subtext of GOODFELLAES combines elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film and film noir. The latent homosexuality depicted in Henry is in the classic Hollywood gangster tradition. He is constantly returning to "the boys," even soon after he is married. When Henry returns home early one morning after being out all night, Karen's mother screams, "A married man does not stay out like this. Normal people don't act like this." His dating Janice and Sandy could be "Don Juanism." However, Henry's relationship with Sandy is centered on the dealing of cocaine. Henry claims that to keep Sandy happy and productive all he has to do is tell her that he loves "every once in a while."

Maury's homosexuality is more in the vein of film noir. While not a villain, he is an obstacle in the labyrinthine struggle of organized crime. Equating the success in criminal activity (here, the success of the Lufthansa robbery) with the union of the heterosexual couple, Maury's character is more easily explained. Maury constantly asks Jimmy for his portion of the money. Jimmy's fear of "getting pinched"(arrested) leads him to have Maury killed. Twice, he refers to Henry as "sweetheart," therefore inferring an effeminate air about him. Also, Maury wears a toupee, hiding his baldness and serving to make him seem more masculine in front of other men (the gangsters).

Homosexual references are made at least three times in GOODFELLAES. Sonny complains to Paulie that Tommy is treating him like "half a fag" when describing his fear of Tommy. Billy Bats says to his group after Tommy leaves the bar, "I used to fuck kids
like that in the ass in the can. In the ass I fucked them." Before Henry leaves the bar for one final drink before going to jail, he kisses all his friends good-bye on the cheek.

Maury, refers to Henry as "Henry, sweet Henry" and Tommy calls out, "Say hello to those blow-job hacks. You're gonna' motherfuck them every chance you get, huh." These comments are directed at and made by Tommy, a character who also exhibits "Don Juanism" and tells his mother that he does not want to get married because he wants to live with her. Tommy also repeatedly refers to people as 'pricks," a slang for penis (i.e. he calls Spider a "stutterin' mumblin' little prick just prior to shooting him in the foot).

Tommy's masculinity, be it as a "Don Juan" type, employing feminizing as a joke, or his "hair-trigger" temper when his masculine authority is challenged, overlaps into his choice of handguns. Tommy, chidingly, draws his snub-nosed .38 after his confrontation with Henry as to whether he is funny. When he shoots Spider, he uses a massive, black .45, and when he shoots Stacks (Samuel L. Jackson) he uses the same gun with an equally massive silencer. Tommy has no intention of shooting Henry, and therefore, does not need to demonstrate his masculinity with his gun. Tommy has Henry, and the people at their dinner table, so frightened that he does not need to demonstrate his "erect phallus." Yet, he shoots Spider to retain his masculinity when told "to go fuck himself" in front of his friend.

One of the most criticized elements of RESERVOIR DOGS is its' homosexual subtexts. The homosexual subtexts are more in the tradition of film noir than the classic Hollywood gangster film style. A woman's physical presence in RESERVOIR DOGS is hardly ever seen. However, the popular music singer, Madonna, waitresses, the 1970s
television actress, Pam Grier, and E. Lois, a waitress at Joe Cabot's club who glues her husband's penis to his stomach, are all the topic of lengthy conversations. Sharon Willis points out that RESERVOIR DOGS is a film "where women only enter as smutty jokes."(Willis 59) There are no women for the men to leave to "hang out" with each other. However, when Mr. Orange (Tim Roth) leaves his apartment to meet Nice Guy Eddie (Chris Penn), Mr. Pink (Steve Buscemi) and Mr. White in a car waiting outside, he empties a basket of coins to find a gold band that appears to be a wedding ring which he puts on. The sequence is surprising as no mention is ever made of a wife.

The most obvious homosexually subtexted relationship occurs between Mr. Orange and Mr. White. After the robbery, Mr. White is consumed with Mr. Orange, whom he feels was shot because of him. Before they arrive at the warehouse rendezvous, Mr. Orange is shown bathed in blood and writhing in pain in the back of a car. According to Amy Taubin, "The masochistic (feminized) position of the audience is inscribed in Mr. Orange's bleeding body."(Taubin 4) He has been shot in the stomach and is bleeding profusely (the blood contrasting greatly to the white interior). Mr. White reaches back and grabs hold of his hand to comfort him, making him sing, "you're gonna be okay," much as father would sing to a wounded child. About Mr. White's nurturing care throughout the film, Willis writes, "Keitel, however, also figures as a father; in RESERVOIR DOGS, he cares for Mr. Orange with a certain tenderness, as the authority of experience, in a way that is firmly coded as paternal, and he instructs the other criminals in such a manner."(Willis 47)
However, Willis ignores the homosexual aspect of their relationship. While he is nurturing and "tender," Mr. White's care for Mr. Orange could be interpreted as a husband caring for a wife. And, while he does "instruct" the other criminals, when he is angered, he raises his voice and becomes aggressive (i.e. his discussion with Mr. Pink about who is the "rat," and his confronting Mr. Blonde about his shooting spree in the jewelry store). The anger and betrayal felt by Mr. White when he discovers that Mr. Orange is the "rat" can only be released by a gut wrenching moan and killing Mr. Orange while he cradles him in his arms.

Unknown until later, Mr. White tells Mr. Orange his Christian name, Larry, which destroys the anonymity Joe Cabot (Lawrence Tierney), the gang's leader, had intended. When Mr. White reveals to Mr. Pink that he has told Mr. Orange his name, he claims it was part of a "natural conversation." Robert Hilferty wonders, "what could be more natural than letting your name slip during an intimate, sexual encounter?" (Hilferty 80)

The car sequence is an important signifier of the homosexual relationship between Mr. White and Mr. Orange. In the pre-title scene which occurs in a diner, Mr. Brown (Quentin Tarantino) interprets Madonna's song, "Like A Virgin," to be about a woman, a "fuck-machine," who is reminded of her first sexual experience when a later sexual encounter is painful. Mr. White's belief that the pain and injury suffered by Mr. Orange is his fault is similar to the man who reminds the "fuck-machine" of her virginity.

Willis contends that Mr. Orange's bleeding is a violent soiling: "as the film progresses, more and more blood drains out of Orange, until he writhes and struggles and
slides around in what looks more and more like a spill of red paint. Consequently, this blood seems to signify something other than the violence that produces it, and to refer more definitively to the shocking aesthetic effects the smears of red on white background produce—a violent soiling." (Willis 43) Willis, however, ignores the homosexual subtext of the film and the juxtaposition of the sequence with the pre-credit Madonna discussion, focusing, instead, on the role of the bathroom as a tool to connect "blood and violence to anal eroticism and smearing." However, these sequences precede this connection, therefore Willis ignores the juxtaposition and subtextual relationship between the two.

Another sequence reveals how Mr. Orange's wound was inflicted. In attempting to flee the crime scene, Mr. Orange is shot by a woman whose car he and Mr. White attempt to steal after they stop her. He shoots her in return, presumably killing her. Until this sequence, it is assumed that Mr. Orange was shot during the actual robbery, not during the escape. The shooting does not appear to be Mr. White's fault. When the infliction of the wound is revealed, the homosexual relationship appears to be an act and the metaphor of the broken hymen destroyed. What is explained is the wedding ring. Mr. Orange's donning of the wedding ring indicates a heterosexual lifestyle, that is also "undercover" to catch the criminals, in particular, Joe Cabot.

However, there are mutually homosexually undertoned actions committed by both men in the warehouse. Almost immediately after Mr. White lays Mr. Orange on the ramp, he unbuckles his belt and loosens his pants, a close-up of which is shown. He whispers something in Mr. Orange's ear which causes both to chuckle. Mr. Orange asks Mr. White to hold him because he is scared.
RESERVOIR DOGS' ending is also homosexually tinged. According to Hilferty:

Struggling, White drags himself towards Orange --for one last embrace? This gesture, like everything else about their behavior, indicates a strongly affectionate, even sexual, bond. He takes Orange in his arms, their mouths almost touching, as they are about to kiss. In a Pieta-like position --I have never seen such tenderness between two men in an ostensibly straight crime film-- the final tragic scene is played out like a veritable Libestod. When Orange confesses who he really is --"I'm a cop, I'm sorry"-- he seems to follow it up with the tacit question, "Do you still love me?" (Hilferty 80)

When Mr. Orange tells Mr. White that he is a policeman, Mr. White seems lost between his affection for Mr. Orange and his instincts to kill him. With his massive gun pressed against Mr. Orange's mouth (which is a metaphor in itself), Mr. White appears on the verge of tears. Mr. Orange's betrayal is so deep that all Mr. White can do is grunt. Mr. White's shooting of Mr. Orange and his subsequent shooting by the police that stream into the warehouse off camera, causes Hilferty to posit that the two are united in death. (Hilferty 80) This again weakens Willis' argument over the "paternalistic" care given by Mr. White.

Often in noir, homosexuality is given to a character to give them an added level of malevolence and to make them seem different from the other characters.

RESERVOIR DOGS' most blatant homosexual subtexts are reserved for Mr. Blonde, also known as Vic Vega.

Mr. Blonde's first homosexual act occurs in Joe Cabot's office. After wrestling with Nice Guy Eddie in his father's office, Eddie exclaims, "Daddy, when he had me on the ground, he tried to fuck me!" Eddie then tells Mr. Blonde, "You sick bastard. Look, Vic, whatever you want to do in the privacy of your own home, go do it. But don't try and
fuck me. I don't think of you that way. I mean, I like you a lot, buddy, but I don't think of ya' that way." Verbally sparring, Mr. Blonde states, "If I was a butt cowboy, I wouldn't even throw you to my posse." Eddie interrupts, "Ya know, four years of fuckin' punks up the ass, I'd think you'd appreciate a nice piece of prime rib when you see it." Vic retorts, "I might break you in, Nice Guy, but I'd make you my dog's bitch." In a response that is emblematic of the revulsion/attraction to Afro-Americans in RESERVOIR DOGS, Eddie responds, "Ain't that a sad sight, Daddy, a man walkin' into prison white and comin' out talkin' like a fuckin' nigger. You know what, I think it's all that black semen been pumped up your ass so far has backed up so far in your brain it's coming out your mouth.

" Vic's final response is, "Eddie, you keep talkin' like a bitch, I'm gonna' slap you like a bitch." Hilferty notes that very briefly during this sequence, Mr. Blonde is framed with Mantegna's "St. Sebastian." Hilferty claims, "Why should such a classic gay icon of male beauty be included in such a film, if not to hint at its subtextual orientation."(Hilferty 79)

Also during this sequence, Joe and Eddie refer to Vic as "Toothpick Vic," which is an indication of the size of his penis. Ironically, the man with the smallest phallus (using his nickname as a reference to the size of his penis) is the most violent, dangerous, and well respected by Joe and Eddie.

Like RESERVOIR DOGS, homosexuality in PULP FICTION is in the noir style. The "labyrinthine structure" Dyer identifies as an element of noir is most applicable to the raping of Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames). After a long chase through the streets and alleys of Los Angeles (the beginning of the labyrinth), Butch and Marsellus attempt to finish their fight in a pawn shop owned by Maynard (Duane Whitaker), who is later
joined by Zed (Peter Greene), and The Gimp (Stephen Herbert), Maynard and Zed's male sex slave. After being detained by Maynard, Marsellus and Butch are brought into the basement of the shop, where they are bound to chairs with duct tape and gagged with sado-masochistic devices, then awakened by Zed and Maynard. As Marsellus is raped in another basement room, Butch manages to escape, only to retrace his steps back into the "labyrinthian" basement to free Marsellus with a samurai sword from the store. As Dyer states: "The menace of the labyrinth is often heightened by the film's failure to fulfill two of the dominant expectations we have of film stories -- that mysteries will be solved and that the heterosexual couple will get it together."(Dyer 19). While Maynard and Zed are not villains allied with Marsellus in his battle with Butch, Dyer's statement that, "...the gay characters when not actually villains frequently constitute one of the blind alleys of the labyrinth, lengthening the process of solving the mystery of threatening the heterosexual union."(Dyer 20) It seems imminent that Butch, too, will be raped and later killed by a shotgun armed Marsellus and not be reunited with his waiting girlfriend, Fabienne (Maria De Medeiros). The battle between Marsellus and Butch, the mystery, seems as though it will never be resolved. Will Butch live? It is only after the rape that the outcome is known.

Homosexuality in CASINO is manifested most clearly in the latent homosexuality of Sam. Sam's relationship with Ginger is a key indication. There is never a romantic or sexual moment between the two. Sam's gift of jewelry after their wedding represents the consummation of the marriage with money instead of sex. The substitution is further emphasized by the bestowal taking place on their bed. In the following sequence when
the two are in the bank vault putting cash in the safe deposit box together, they are shown pressed up against each other trying to push the safe deposit box back into the wall. While these movements simulate sexual intercourse, they are not intercourse itself, and again, are based on money. The most "sexual" moments between the two do not involve physical sex.

The replacement of sex with money in Sam and Ginger's relationship serves a two-fold purpose. First, Sam is buying a "trophy" wife to fit into the Las Vegas scene. In an effort to look "normal," Sam marries a woman well known around the casinos in Las Vegas—a world in which he is king. He uses Ginger and his marriage to make him socially acceptable in life away from the casino. This is evident in his acceptance into the Las Vegas Valley Country Club. At the reception, as Ginger socializes, Sam marvels at how charming she is and how "everyone fell in love with her." Ginger is the tool he uses to achieve his ideal world. The second purpose relates more to Ginger and her obsession with money and savagery to get it. In both cases, this replacement allows Sam not to have sexual relations with Ginger.

Sam's latent homosexuality manifests itself in his clothing. While Sam's clothing could be interpreted as a vulgar display of affluence, often in film noir, neatness and meticulous dressing are reserved for homosexual characters, or characters with homosexual undertones. Sam's row upon row of $1,000 suits, watch faces that match his shirts, and slicked back hair are not the clothing and haircut of a typical noir protagonist.

At one point, Sam's clothing implies that things are not as they seem. Just before Sam has his meeting with County Commissioner Webb (L.Q. Jones), Sam is facing the
camera sitting at his desk. He is wearing a light blue shirt and silver tie. After his secretary informs him that Webb is there to see him, Sam gets up from his desk and it is revealed that he is not wearing pants. The impression is that Sam is wearing a disguise. For the first time, the audience is allowed to see how Sam dresses one way privately, while he dresses another publicly. While Sam may appear to be well dressed, his "flashy" clothing, and lack thereof in this scene, indicate that something about Sam is amiss. An alternative reading would be that this scene is a metaphor for the shallowness of Las Vegas -- scratch below the "glitzy" surface and find nothing beneath.

CASINO, again, uses this element in a style that is closest to film noir. Where GOODFELLAS homosexual subtext is predominantly reminiscent of the classic Hollywood gangster film, Tarantino's, RESERVOIR DOGS, uses this element in a brash and unrefined style that not typical of this subtle undercurrent in noir. Structurally, PULP FICTION uses the subtext in accordance to noir stylings, (the labyrinthine structure of the basement dungeon and interference with the heterosexual union), but like RESERVOIR DOGS, the excess of having the characters raped by sado-masochistic goes beyond the noir portrayals and implications of homosexuals and homosexuality. CASINO uses the subtle qualities of this element that permeated film noir to imply homosexuality.

Sam, Nicky, and Ginger are archetypal characters of the "Neo-Noir of the 90s." Sam is the typical "dumb-lug" who falls in love with a woman who only wants him for his money. However, Sam is by no means mentally "dumb." He is not a character cut
from the same cloth as Forrest Gump. Sam's "dumbness" is his involvement with Ginger and his blindness to her motives, thereby drawing pity, not laughter.

The Postmodern Factor

Almost as difficult to define as film noir is postmodernism. In this study, the definition of postmodernism is derived from Jim Collins' theories of irony, intertextuality, and hyperconsciousness. Although Collins applies these terms to television, they are applicable to discussions of film, as well. Essentially, "the already said" of which both participants (here, filmmaker and audience) in the conversation (film or an existing work) are aware is rewritten for one's own purposes. The audience, therefore, understands the reference to the preceding text, and appreciates the creation of a new text. When the reason for creating the new text is not to ridicule the antecedent text, the result is a pastiche rather than a parody. Ann Kaplan believes the pastiche does not demonstrate "any clear positioning toward what it shows or toward any earlier texts that are used."(Allen 270)

Especially compelling for Tarantino are Collins' observations that the "irony is often written off as mere 'camp' recycling and that the new texts can be "given an entirely different cultural significance than the antecedent text had when it first appeared."(Allen 333) PULP FICTION's descriptions by many as "cool" and "hip" are evidence of Collins' observations in action, and in fact, can be applied to all these films in their manipulations of elements from the crime film's past.

Tarantino's borrowing of elements from Hong Kong action films, 1970's neo-noir, and the latter film noir period of the late 1950s is evidence of his postmodernism. Ringo
Lam's 1987 film, CITY ON FIRE, is the most often cited, of which Tarantino is accused of copying the premise, and even shot-by-shot sequences. The use of colors for names can be seen in Joseph Sargent's THE TAKING OF PELHAM ONE, TWO, THREE (1974), the non sequential story can is associated with Stanley Kubrick's THE KILLING (1956), and the organizing of a gang for a robbery is attributed to John Huston's 1950 film, THE ASPHALT JUNGLE. Tarantino is undaunted by the accusations: "I love CITY ON FIRE and I have a poster of it framed in my house. It's a great movie. I steal from every movie. I steal from every single movie ever made. I love it. If my work has anything it's that I'm taking this from this and that from that and mixing them together...I steal from everything. Great artists steal, they don't do homages." With the inclusion of elements from other films, Tarantino yields new postmodern films with familiar structures, characters, and plots.

The casting of John Travolta as Vincent Vega in PULP FICTION serves as a cinematic foundation from which Tarantino builds his postmodern, noirish film. Travolta, an icon of the 1970's as Tony Manero in John Badham's SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER (1977), represents the link to the 1970s in this atemporal story, the height of which is achieved at "Jackrabbit Slim's," a 1950's theme restaurant in which film and music icons of that area are recreated by impersonators. Tarantino claims Jackrabbit Slim's is a "cross between '50s restaurants that exist, the nightclub where Elvis Presley and the car racers hang out in SPEEDWAY, and the bar where all the racecar drivers hang out in Howard Hawks', RED LINE 7000." When Travolta dances, he is an icon from another era. Although heavier, Travolta's Vincent is trapped in the filmic
world of the American imagination; an imagination that remembers a Travolta disco
dancing twenty years before in the iconic white suit. Richard A. Blake states: "He dances
an arthritic twist with Mia in a scene that is part homage and part parody of the film that
made him a star so many years ago and then made it impossible for him to be taken
seriously for any other role."(Blake 23) According to Amanda Lipman, "flashy Vincent
is what the disco-loving street boy Tony Manero would have grown up to be after
SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER."(Lipman 50) Sharon Willis notes that Christopher
Walken's "Captain Koons" operates in a similar fashion: "Walken himself operates as a
certain icon of the 70s re-readings of the Vietnam war, through his performance in THE
DEER HUNTER. In some sense, as he tells Butch (Bruce Willis) the story of the watch's
itinerary through family history, and through men's bodies, he reproduces the deranged
voice and look of his character in the earlier film."(Willis 46) These are key examples in
determining the type of postmodernism PULP FICTION represents—a pastiche.(Dowell
4)
Lipman states:

...several of the cast appear to be playing warped versions of characters for which they are known. Bruce Willis' tough guy Butch may be a DIE HARDSMAN, but this time round, Butch is a little stupid and has a nasty temper. Rosanna Arquette's crazy lady from AFTER HOURS has turned into a junkie's housewife, utterly absorbed in the piercings on her body. Harvey Keitel reprises his role in the NIKITA remake THE ASSASSIN, as the icy, mute killer, who cleans up after of the living ones. Only this time, the grim-faced wolf has absurd touches of Regular Guy about him. He chats about coffee, and his clean-up does not involve acid baths but soapy sponges and hosing-downs. Some of the actors are not even playing out their own roles in this rag-bag of film references: to take just Tarantino's own work, Honey Bunny and Pumpkin, who open and close the film, are straight out of TRUE ROMANCE, while the hitmen Jules and Vincent could have been in RESERVOIR DOGS. (Lipman 50)

A bizarre sequence in CASINO involves Sam's television program, "Ace's High," a variety/interview program where Sam discusses gambling, his problems with the state gaming agency, and features Las Vegas celebrities, such as Frankie Avalon. In this sequence, Sam appears to be a parody of Rupert Pupkin, the character DeNiro portrayed in Scorsese's, THE KING OF COMEDY (1983). While Sam is shown primarily challenging Webb to appear on his show and debate his license problems, there is a scene that is reminiscent of DeNiro's previous character where Sam is seen juggling. This section of the film is part of the postmodernism that B. Ruby Rich views as an inherent part of all "Neo-Noir" of the '90s.

The Father Figure And The Gang As An Island Unto Itself

But prior to DeNiro's revival of Rupert Pupkin, he portrayed Jimmy Conway in GOODFELLAS as the father figure in Henry's life. Jimmy is tough, funny, and a pedagogue for Henry. Jimmy teaches Henry the ethics of being a "wiseguy" -- "never rat
on your friends" and "always keep your mouth shut." This is the very code of ethics that Henry violates when he is arrested on drug charges.

Joe Cabot, the father figure in RESERVOIR DOGS, during the "Mr. Blonde" sequence, is situated between two phallic elephant trunks. The size of these indicate power, virility, and patriarchal authority. Hilferty believes Joe's baldness and deep-voice are also evidence of his "overflowing testosterone."(Hilferty 79) These are contrasted with Vic's nickname, "Toothpick Vic." In the preceding "Mr. White" sequence, when the trunks are not as visible in the frame, Mr. White asks Joe, "what's the cut, Papa?" Joe responds, "juicy, Junior, real juicy."

When Joe assigns the names, it is similar to a father naming his children. This scene introduces another interesting aspect of Joe's personality. When Mr. Pink demonstrates his displeasure with his name, and ask why he is named accordingly, Joe responds, "because you're a faggot." At the film's end, he refers to Mr. Orange as a "cocksucker" when he informs the remaining criminals that Mr. Orange is an undercover policeman. When the male order is threatened, he reverts to feminizing, yet when his son, Eddie, and Vic wrestle in his office, the homoeroticism is ignored by Joe, but amplified by Eddie when he announces that Vic tried to "fuck" him. Joe's authority was never in question while Eddie and Vic were wrestling, therefore, the feminizing begins when the patriarchal power is threatened. Hilferty claims, "Cabot is the 'big dick,' the hunter, the giver of names, the tribal chief. No one can challenge his authority without consequences. Homosexuality, as form of dissent, is therefore invoked by him anytime the macho order is threatened."(Hilferty 79)
While Jimmy may be a father figure to Henry, he is only an "uncle" in the patriarchal, business-like structure of organized crime where Paulie is the head of the family. During the cookout at Paulie's house, Henry explains in the voice-over narration how the "organization" was protecting people/workers from other "organizations" trying to steal from them. His reference to the mob as an organization clearly indicates an attempt to legitimize the mob by using a business term to define it. Also, on Karen and Henry's first date, Henry claims that he must leave because he has "business" to attend to at a "meeting" with Tutti, Paulie's brother. Karen claims that their husbands are not brain surgeons, they are "blue collar guys trying to make some extra bucks." In Karen's mind, too, Henry and his "crew" are working men, not gangsters.

The segregation of Henry and his "crew" from the outside world is most apparent to Karen. During a sequence which shows photographs from their vacations in the Islands, Karen claims, "there was never any outsiders" and that it all "seemed so normal." This also accounts for a majority of GOODFELLAS occurring indoors. The longest outdoor sequence of GOODFELLAS occurs during the final montage which traces the day Henry is arrested for drug trafficking. During this sequence, Henry is operating without Paulie's permission and, therefore, not as a member of the organized crime syndicate GOODFELLAS traces.

As decidedly film noir in style as RESERVOIR DOGS is, there is a connection to the classic Hollywood gangster film of the 1930s. Taubin notes; "Violence is the only privilege these under class men have. It's what allows them to believe that they're the oppressor and not he oppressed (not female, not black, not homosexual)." (Taubin 4)
This is similar to the classic Hollywood gangsters who used violence to pull themselves up the social ladder and achieved a perversion of the "American Dream." The "Reservoir Dogs" refer to themselves as "professionals" throughout the film. This indicates a structured order perceived by them, where "niggers who are constantly threatening to kill one another," "first year thieves" panic and violate rules of anonymity, and "psychopaths," and "sick assholes" mercilessly shoot "regular people." Atop this well defined social order, sit the "professionals" who use violence properly to succeed.

The corporate-like structure of the gang is emphasized in the classic Hollywood gangster film and it is done in CASINO, as well. The money used to establish the Tangiers is described in great detail, as are the means by which it was obtained and how it is administered. Throughout CASINO, emphasis is placed on following "orders" from "back home," much like employees who must follow their boss's orders in the corporate world. When Sam wants Nicky to leave Las Vegas for the "heat to cool off," he suggests to Stone that Nicky "take a vacation for awhile."

The hierarchy of the mob is also well delineated. Remo and the Mid-West bosses in Kansas City control Las Vegas while Nicky makes sure everything runs smoothly (i.e. no other "crews" attempt to take over), and Sam runs the Tangiers. As Nicky increasingly interferes with the casino, the corporate structure breaks down, and the Tangiers fails. The corporate structure is parodied with Artie Piscano's books and records of his travel expenses, much as they are kept in the corporate world. The illegal corporation of the mob comes too close to being run like a legitimate corporation which ultimately leads to its downfall.
Their language aids in separating the "goodfellas" from the outside world. "Wiseguys" and "goodfellas" are both used to indicate gangsters, where "bulls" refer to policemen and "getting pinched" to being arrested. The use of Italian words interspersed in conversations carried on in English also helps in separating the "goodfellas" -- sometimes even from each other. Neither Henry nor Jimmy, who are Irish, understand "rue de contenta" (a person who is content with the world knowing he is an idiot) when Tommy's mother tells them a joke. Tommy has to explain the meaning to them. Also, Carbone is constantly reverting to mumbling in Italian. While no other character does this, it stands to separate him from the rest and makes his death easier to understand as he is not close to Jimmy (even though they are frequently seen together).

The language of CASINO harkens back to the classic Hollywood gangster films of the 1930s. Slang is an integral component of the film, and is essential element in separating Sam and Nicky from the rest of Las Vegas. Sam labels high rolling gamblers like Itchegowa, "whales." Nicky refers to flaws in diamonds as "niggers" and Arab jewelers as "sand niggers." In the voice-over narration, Nicky even says, "sand niggers, you know, Arabs" to explain to the audience about whom he is talking. The coded language is at its height when Sam and Nicky must speak on the phone in code to keep the FBI from learning of their meetings.

In what could be an homage to Robert Siodmak's film noir, THE KILLERS (1946), and Ernest Hemingway's short story of the same name, Sam refers to a young man as a "bright-boy." When Sam and Ginger are approached at the country club by a young man who works at the Tangiers and comments on how beautiful Ginger is and
how lucky Sam is to be her husband, Sam refers to him as a "bright-boy" in the voice-over narration. This unusual term is used by the hitmen to refer to the counterperson and customer in THE KILLERS. It seems to be a unlikely choice of words without being an homage and aids in further categorizing CASINO as a film noir.

**Race And Ethnicity**

Unlike film noir, though, race is an integral component in both the language and mentality of the characters in these films. While ethnicities are often presented in noir, stereotypes or epithets are not. Race is an integral component in the speech of the "goodfellas." Jews, Afro-Americans, Irish, and Italians, are all subject to racial and ethnic slurs. The racial components of the film's dialogue is an ethnographic approach to the vernacular of working class, Italian-American New Yorkers during the period Goodfellas spans. By accurately replicating the speech of the working class, Scorsese gives authenticity to the portrayal of his characters. While the "wiseguys" are separated from the other inhabitants of their filmic world, an accurate portrayal of their speech is essential in establishing them, as Karen claims, as "blue collar guys" — ordinary people.

Race plays an important part in the definition of masculinity in RESERVOIR DOGS. African-American men are referred to as "niggers." This is evident in Nice Guy Eddie's statement that Vic is talking like a "nigger" in his father's office and Mr. Pink's observation that "niggers" always threaten to kill one another. To be a black man is to be inferior. Tarantino admits that this is the view his "Reservoir Dogs" have of African-American men: "The main thing these guys are coming from is that they don't look at
blacks as professionals at their job, alright. They rob liquor stores. Now, if there was a black guy, say, a gunman that they trusted they'd be different...you know, 'Marvin's different, he's a good guy, you can trust Marvin, he's a goodfella.' (Dawson 73) However, when asked why the gang can't pick their own names, Joe claims everyone wants to be "Mr. Black." According to Willis, "Through white men's identifications with them, black men become icons, gestural repertoires, and cultural artifacts, as the threads of cross-racial identification are wound around a white body that remains stable. Perhaps more important, these fantasmatic identifications maintain an aggressive edge: the white subject wants to be in the other's place without leaving his own." (Willis 61) The association is with the "Shafts" and "Dolemites" of the 1970s blaxploitation films. Black equals raw, unbridled power, while white equals power with stability -- "professionalism." Willis agrees, in that, "what results is a reinscription of black masculinity as an image, a cultural icon, seen through white eyes." (Willis 61) Black men and black masculinity, therefore, are reduced to a Hollywood icon of a decade before.

Yet, simultaneously, black women are revered for their toughness and sexuality, as evident in the car ride when the story of E. Lois is told by Nice Guy Eddie. Eddie describes how attractive she is by claiming that every man who sees her masturbates and a mutual admiration is evident in her revenge by gluing her boyfriend's penis to his stomach while he is sleeping. The ensuing conversation regarding "Christie Love" is highlighted by Eddie and Mr. White's repeating "Christie Love's" famous catch-phrase, "freeze, sugar."
The distinctions between African-American men and women relate directly to the theme of masculinity that permeates RESERVOIR DOGS. Heterosexuality is discussed in a hyper-sexualized manner. Mr. Brown's analysis of "Like a Virgin" includes a man who's a "John Holmes muthafucker," a "cat like Charles Bronson in the Great Escape" that is "diggin' tunnels everywhere." Even later in this scene, it is announced that "waitresses are the one group the government fucks in the ass on a regular basis." When Mr. White and Mr. Orange are sitting in a car discussing the robbery outside the jewelry store, Mr. White points to a woman and asks Mr. Orange, "that girl's ass?" Mr. Orange responds, "right here on my dick." Even Eddie's comment about men's reaction to E. Lois fits this pattern. Hyper-masculinity is associated with aggressive sexuality, just as, masculinity is linked to violence, and its "professional" use. Therefore, the disintegration of the hyper-masculinity to homosexuality and the "non-professional" use of violence ultimately leads to the gang's downfall.

PULP FICTION relies on the word "nigger." But where in the other films it is used only as an epithet, Jules refers to Marsellus as "nigger" and Marsellus calls Vincent, "My main nigger." In all the films, Vincent is the only character who does not mind being called nigger, as here it is a term of endearment. But, PULP FICTION does use "nigger" as an epithet. The most blatant is when Jimmy (Quentin Tarantino) asks Jules if he saw a sign saying, "dead nigger storage" outside his house. The paradox is that it is revealed, when she is shown returning home in a scenario, that Jimmy's wife, Bonnie, is black. Therefore, Jimmy, like Tarantino's criminals in RESERVOIR DOGS, looks down on African-American men, but is attracted to the women.
Where African-Americans were the object of a majority of Tarantino's racial slurs, Jews bear the brunt in CASINO. Sam is an outsider in the underworld of CASINO because of his Jewish heritage. He, like Stone, is killed because he is not Italian. As Sam becomes increasingly distanced from Nicky, he is treated as an outsider. Nicky calls him a "Jew muthafucker" during their meeting in the desert, tells Marino (Frank Vincent) that code words for killing Sam will be, "go see the Jew," and refers to him as "a crazy Jew prick" to Ginger. The fact that Sam is Jewish and maintains a sense of otherness allows the viewer to have more sympathy for Sam than if he were Italian and more of a mob insider. He becomes a man caught up in something that is completely out of control, rather than someone who could not follow orders from the mob and deserves his fate.

Settings

Often, the characters in these films use racial slurs and epithets in noir style settings. The warehouse, where the majority of the action occurs in RESERVOIR DOGS, is an archetypal film noir setting. It contains coffins stored vertically and a gold colored hearse shrouded in a transparent plastic cover. The coffins create an aura of doom and set the mood and tone of a nihilistic outcome for the criminals. Their upright storage makes them appear to loom over the criminals, as though death is imminent. The enclosed space affords Polish-born cinematographer, Andrzej Sekula, the ability to create a stark and claustrophobic world, although wide angle lenses are used which exaggerate spacial relations but create a deep focus which is a classic noir styling. The coffin
warehouse clearly was chosen for its "thematic reinforcement" and, the looming coffins and hearse clearly exploit the "oddness of an odd setting." (Hirsch 85)

The settings of PULP FICTION are also in the noir style. Lance's (Eric Stolz) run down house, Fabienne and Butch's hotel room, Butch's apartment, Marsellus' night club, and the college boys' apartment are all the run-down, working class rooms that comprised a majority of film noir settings. Direct sunlight never enters these rooms, which is another noir convention.

But while PULP FICTION may use the interior stylings of film noir, Los Angeles is only sporadically presented in the noir tradition. The rain soaked streets so common in noir are only seen once when Vincent drives Mia to Lance's house after her drug overdose. Except for this scene, a majority of PULP FICTION takes place during the day, an inconsistency with its noir heritage since a majority film noirs occur at night.

However, PULP FICTION does borrow from the classic Hollywood gangster film, as well in its use of interiors. Marsellus' house is entirely white, a color reserved for the gangster when he has "made it." Therefore, when Vincent enters in his black suit, Tarantino elicits a stark contrast between Marsellus' overwhelming success at crime and Vincent's minor success. One could even go so far as to contrast Marsellus' home against his black skin color and further the demonstration of his success.

If PULP FICTION uses white in a manner similar to the classic Hollywood gangster film, there is no mistaking CASINO's Las Vegas as the dark, bleak moral chasm of a classic noir city. Its bright lights, casinos, prostitutes, and money all serve as sirens singing sweetly to Sam, Nicky, and Ginger, luring them to moral corruption and betrayal.
Las Vegas is truly a city that "glitters with temptation," is "a place of sexual promise and release," "a cauldron edging toward disorder," and "a cradle of crime and a cauldron of negative energy." (Hirsch 82; 83) All three characters feed on this; it is their life blood. For Sam, it is a religious experience: "For guys like me, Las Vegas washes away your sins --its like a morality car wash. It does for us what Lourdes does for humpbacks and cripples." Like the classic femme fatales of film noir, Las Vegas is Place's "Spider Woman" who lures her victims in, only to destroy them with sexuality and trickery. Critic Gavin Smith states: "CASINO's Vegas --man's creation-- is a carefully constructed spectacle that doesn't just exploit it, it parodies the American Dream." (Smith 60) Smith's point aids in establishing a link between CASINO and the classic Hollywood gangster films of the 1930s.

The Tangiers, the casino in CASINO, stylistically, is a true film noir setting. Its rows of slot machines and gaming tables create the "narrow streets and dim lit interiors" that define film noir. (Hennelly 245) The sense of confinement is overwhelming. Sam is constantly surrounded by gambling. It is over his shoulder, behind him, and in front of him in nearly every shot inside the casino. This claustrophobic environment creates a centripetal frame and filmic world, thereby creating a sense of awkwardness when Sam is not in the Tangiers.

Hennelly also notes that recurrent metaphors of chance and gambling are recurrent metaphors in gangster/crime films, from the classic Hollywood gangster films of the 1930s, through film noir and neo-noir. (Hennelly 254) In CASINO, the metaphor becomes a motif. Not only is it confined to Sam in The Tangiers, but it is what propelled
Sam to such high status as an "earner" "back home years ago." Sam gives himself "fifty-fifty" odds of living through his meeting with Nicky in the desert after he discusses Nicky taking a vacation with Stone (Alan King), where beforehand he had a "99%" chance of not being killed. The metaphor even recurs in Sam's nickname, "Ace." While it is used to connote a mastery of something, i.e. the mastery of gambling, it is also representative of the aces in a deck of cards.

Thematically, the desert is a classic film noir setting. As Sam states: "At night, you couldn't see the desert that surrounds Las Vegas. But it's in the desert where lots of the town's problems are solved." The voice over switches to Nicky who says, "A lot of holes in that desert. And a lot of problems are buried in those holes." The specter of this looming evil that is the emptiness of the desert whose only inhabitants are "solved problems" is heightened by Nicky's voice over. The panoramic shots of the desert emphasize loneliness, desolation, and uncertainty and also help to give it the classic noir "mood" and tone" of a non-urban environment. Using the Jungian image of "the Shadow," it is as if, the desert is the shadow of Las Vegas. Las Vegas is established as an oasis of sex, greed, and money, in a desert of death.

CASINO is the only film in this study to emphasize the city, as well as the thematic setting of the countryside. Las Vegas is portrayed as much a femme fatale as a location. It is blamed for all the sin and evil that the characters succumb to. As Sam states: "After awhile, Las Vegas got to us all." Las Vegas fits every description of the classic noir city. From its' stylized look of blinking lights and neon signs, to its' portrayal as the cause of the character's downfall, Las Vegas is the temptress, seducer, and
entrance to hell for these characters. The only missing noir element is the rainsoaked streets that became icons of the genre.

As in film noir, restaurants and public places play an important role in all four films. In GOODFELLAS, restaurants are the principal noir setting. Restaurants are used to reveal attributes of peoples' personalities. At the Bamboo Lounge, Tommy is seen to be unstable as he convincingly teases Henry by asking him, "What's so funny?" When the teasing is over, Tommy kiddingly says, "I'm worried about you Henry, you may fold under questioning." This foreshadowing is an integral part of GOODFELLAS. Henry does "fold under questioning" when he "rats" on his friends.

Karen and Henry's relationship is developed in restaurants. It is during the times when they double date that Tommy is seen as a "ladies' man." Also, when Karen and Henry go to the "Copa," Henry's connections, power, and success are demonstrated as he tips a doorman to watch his car, takes Karen in through a back entrance, and has a table for the front row for the show. This is the first display of Henry's success.

The Airport Diner is used for a wide range of scenes throughout GOODFELLAS. It is at the diner where the adult Henry is first seen, where the truck driver phones to report "two niggers" had just stolen his truck, and from the pay phone outside where Jimmy learns of Tommy's death. The last time it is seen is when Henry meets Jimmy for breakfast to discuss his case. This meeting legitimizes Henry's fear that Jimmy would have him killed to protect himself.

Restaurants in RESERVOIR DOGS, like GOODFELLAS, are places where characters reveal information about themselves. In the pre-title sequence, the diner is the
location for Mr. Brown (Quentin Tarantino) to deconstruct Madonna's, "Like A Virgin," for Nice Guy Eddie to reveal that he likes 1970s music, for Mr. Pink to explain why he does not like tipping, and to establish Mr. White and Joe's relationship as closer than the other criminals with Mr. White's taking of Joe's address book. These revelations not only give the characters added depth, but establish relationships and motifs (1970s pop music) that appear later in the film. The criminals could have easily met in a pool hall, or bar, but what the diner affords them is a chance to eat together in a circle, much like primitive men sitting around a fire.

In PULP FICTION, the diner represents a place of new beginnings. In the pre-title sequence, Pumpkin (Tim Roth) and Honey Bunney (Amanda Plummer) reactivate their criminal careers by deciding to rob diners. Later in the film, Jules makes his decision to retire and "walk the earth" and does not kill Pumpkin when he quotes from Ezekiel. Different from the other films in this study, the diner not only represents a place for character exposition, but serves as a place of redemption.

Where diners were the predominant public place in the other films, CASINO's Sam seems most comfortable at the Tangiers where he is "Mr. Rothstein." When Sam and Ginger are at home, they fight constantly. The exception is when Sam first brings Ginger home and presents her with jewelry. Their massive platform bed mocks the non-existent sexual relationship. However, Sam does take Ginger to a restaurant after she returns from Los Angeles to talk about her relationship with Lester and drags her home from Nicky's restaurant, The Leaning Tower, after her relationship with Nicky has begun.
Instead of these scenes taking place in private, they, as Dyer claims, remove any aura of "safety, coziness, and rootedness." (Dyer 19)

CASINO's public places, like its other settings, are the closest to traditional noir. While there are scenes in restaurants, CASINO is not confined to them. The Tangiers elevates the film above the others as closer to noir because of its' importance to Sam, Ginger, and Nicky's relationship. Like Las Vegas, the Tangiers is almost a character in the film.

The Color White

The interiors of PULP FICTION are not the only places the color white, an element of the classic Hollywood gangster film, are used. Prior To PULP FICTION, the color white in GOODFELLAS is used to signal the pinnacle of gangster's career and wealth. Henry wears a white shirt when he pays Paulie his "tribute" after the Air France robbery, the crime which "made" him. Also, after the Lufthansa robbery, Henry buys a white Christmas tree which, according to Henry, is the most expensive one the store had.

On the day Henry is arrested on drug charges, his white shirt (which has thick black lines that give the appearance of prison bars) becomes progressively unbuttoned and unkempt. He is not the well dressed man he once was, and his wild hair and haggard look add to his appearance of coming undone. Henry wears this white shirt after he is released from jail and returns home to find that Karen has disposed of $60,000 worth of cocaine, which he was going to sell for money to escape. Henry, with no money and nowhere to go, is ruined. It is the lowest point of his criminal career and he is mocked by his white shirt.
Similarly, the suit Tommy wears when he is killed is lighter than any in his wardrobe prior to this sequence. Tommy’s being “made” is supposed to be the pinnacle of his gangster career, yet, ironically, serves as the opportunity for his murder.

Although not a white outfit, the bubble gum pink jacket and shirt Sam is wearing during the pre-title sequence mark the bloody end that will come to a man whose power is lost and whose suit was once white. Therefore, his clothing in this scene marks his destiny even before it is known to the audience. Unlike Tarantino, who uses white in the classic Hollywood gangster film style, Scorsese uses it in CASINO to elicit the noir element of existentialist predetermination.

Motifs And The Auteurist Style Of Filmmaking

Food, in the other films, is centered around where it is consumed. In GOODFELLAS, Scorsese emphasizes the preparing and consumption of food. Food is an important component of the Italian-American culture (the culture in which Scorsese was raised) and Scorsese pays close attention to its preparation. In jail, a long sequence follows the preparation of sauce, garlic, and steaks. Henry also explains how he prepares the veal cutlets and peppers on the day he is arrested. Numerous times, the gangster’s are shown eating. Henry’s dismay about having to leave New York and “the life” is evident in his dismay over the “Italian” food he is served where he lives in the Witness Protection Program: “I can’t even get decent food. Right after I got here, I ordered spaghetti with marinara sauce and I got egg noodles and ketchup.” Scorsese’s concentration food is used to illustrate the Italian-American lifestyle. While GOODFELLAS’ characters are not representative of the overwhelming majority of Italian-Americans, his attention to
food is an ethnographic approach to his subjects, and allows the viewer (especially the non-Italian-American) to witness another dimension of their lifestyle. While his attention to food may seem as though it is a hyperbolic gesture to the gangsters, it is that extra dimension that makes them seem more human, yet different from the outside world, and the filmic world in which they reside.

Where Scorsese concentrates on food, in RESERVOIR DOGS Tarantino has a fetish for the decade of the 1970s. Like Scorsese, who injects the element of food from his background, Tarantino injects the music, television, and films from his youth. From K-BILLY's "Super Sounds Of The 70s Weekend," whose music is the soundtrack of the film (According to Tarantino, "I wanted to go for the super sugary bubblegum sounds of the early 70s. One, is because some people are annoyed by it. Two, because I have affection for it."(Dawson 80)), to the discussion of "Get Christie Love," Tarantino traps his "Reservoir Dogs" in an indistinguishable time after 1979. Lyall Bush claims, "Tarantino's characters mostly know what they know via mediation. They know things as they relate to American pop culture of the past twenty years, and they like to surf the detritus of their memories of marginal films and buried rock 'n' roll and drug culture. That's how they understand things and that's how they feel real."(Bush 86)

Tarantino's inclusion of 1970s popular culture is part of the inherent postmodernism Rich identifies as part of the "Neo-Noir of the '90s." The casting of Harvey Keitel and Lawrence Tierney are further indications. Keitel, star of Scorsese's MEAN STREETS and TAXI DRIVER, films often considered in the noir tradition, is as well an icon of the 1970s. Jeff Dawson believes Keitel's Mr. White to be like Keitel's
Charlie in MEAN STREETS, in that he acts as a "minder to a doomed colleague." (Dawson 71) Bush even claims that the black suits worn by the "Reservoir Dogs" were discarded from MEAN STREETS. (Bush 84) According to Dawson, the discussions place the film in the 1990s, but "...it certainly has a classic look, due to the use of the black suits, black tie, and shades --a throwback to the standard out of 1950s film noir and also the same kind of gear worn in the Hong Kong bullfests of John Woo, a director Tarantino's clearly drawn inspiration from." (Dawson, 78) Stella Bruzzi notes, "The defeat of the gangsters in RESERVOIR DOGS is symbolized by the disintegration of their look: the loosening of ties, the removal of glasses, the drenching of shirts in blood." (Bruzzi 27) Lawrence Tierney, starred in many of the crime films during the 1940s and 1950s by which RESERVOIR DOGS is so heavily influenced.

Where Scorsese concentrates on food in Goodfellas, the motif of money is a key element of CASINO. Physically, money is first introduced in stacks of rolled coins which are then shown being sorted by intricate machines in the Tangiers. The "count room," to which Sam refers as the "Holy of Holies" is then shown. A long steadicam following shot of Nancee demonstrates the process of "skimming" done for the mid-west mob bosses. The voice over switches to Nicky who tells the audience that no one ever seems to see him go in or out. As Nancee fills his Captain's case with money, the camera focuses on the counters (which also seems to be ignoring Nancee). Once Nancee has taken the money out of the cabinet, the camera pays more attention to him and follows him out. A series of jump cuts follow Nancee, and the money, (which the audience learns is close to $700,000) from the Casino to Kansas City, where he gives the money to
the bosses. The detailed explanation of whom Ginger tips on her way into the Tangiers is also evidence of Scorsese’s money fetish. To begin the sequence, a close-up of Ginger’s hand demonstrates how she folds a bill to hand to a valet. The remainder of the sequence is devoted to whom she tips.

The Music

While postmodernism and motifs play a role in the narrative and visual structure of these crime films of the 1990s, so does music. Throughout the history of film, music has been an integral component in telling a filmic story. From the musical accompaniments by orchestras and organists during the silent era, to films with the latest popular song, music in film has heightened emotions, created tension, and maintained suspense. Richard Younger states: "Music, which plays upon our emotions mysteriously, and lyrics, which can be explanatory, oblique or ironic, can be used to affect us in ways that visuals cannot. Aside from their entertainment value, songs have proven to be a powerful element in the rich art of film noir." (Younger 50) These four films are no exception to Younger’s statement.

The music of GOODFELLAS heightens the emotion in the scene. The soundtrack varies from lounge music, to Cream, to Sid Vicious. Until the killing of Billy Bats, lounge and 1950s and early 60s popular music is heard. With the killing of Billy Bats, the rock-music soundtrack begins, signifying the change from the older order of the mobster who followed orders to the younger, wilder "cowboys," such as Tommy, who kills Bats, a "made man." As Henry states in his voice over narration: "Bats was a really touchy thing...before you could touch a made guy, you had to have a good reason. you
had to have a sitdown, and you better get an okay or you'd be the one that got whacked."

Tommy's violation of the mob's "code" is representative of the emergence of the "cowboy" and reflected in music more representative of the younger mobsters.

Donovan's, "Atlantis," is the music bed for Bats' killing. Bats is nearly beaten and kicked to death as Donovan sings, "Way down below the ocean, where I want to be."

This is an element of postmodernism, as it is an homage to THE GODFATHER's famous "Luca Brasi sleeps with the fishes" statement that announces the death of Luca Brasi.

"Sunshine Of Your Love," by Cream marks the evil turn GOODFELLAS is about to take. As the song is heard, a slow truck-in from a long shot to a medium shot of Jimmy creates a malevolent aura that precedes the wave of killings he orders. While Jimmy is a likeable character to this point, his instincts for self-preservation become more obvious and he subsequently appears more dangerous and distanced from the audience.

"My Way," performed by Sid Vicious, underscores the perversion that organized crime has undergone. Where once the soundtrack was "crooners," Sid Vicious' version of the Frank Sinatra signature song under the film's closing credits mirrors the recklessness and perversion of the younger members of organized crime. Metaphorically, Henry's first arrest prompted Paulie to congratulate him by saying, "Hey, you broke your cherry."

When Henry is arrested again, he does not "keep his mouth shut" and "rats on his friends," disregarding Jimmy's tutelage. This violation of Jimmy's code of ethics
indicates the perversion that has occurred in Henry's "moral system" and is also punctuated by Vicious' "My Way."

The song most associated with RESERVOIR DOGS is Stealer Wheel's, "Stuck In The Middle With You" —the soundtrack to the infamous ear slicing scene. Its' lyric, "I'm so scared I guess I'll fall off my chair," demonstrates Younger's point regarding the irony lyrics can have in films. Here, the scene is heightened by the music emanating from Mr. Blonde's radio. Were the music to be non-diegetic, the scene would seem heavy handed and the irony would give way to comedy. However, this "super sugary bubblegum" sounding song juxtaposed with Mr. Blonde's brutal act serves to attract and revolt the viewer. The viewer is attracted to the dancing Mr. Blonde prior to the actual ear slicing, and then revolted by his horrible act. Again, Tarantino reaches back into the crime film's past to "steal" a scene from DEAD RECKONING, which features a torture scene to diegetic music.

The music of PULP FICTION is an interesting blend of "surf" music, funk, R&B, and country. There are no key songs in PULP FICTION, an anomaly given the integration of music as a form of exposition in GOODFELLAS and RESERVOIR DOGS. Instead, popular music is diegetic (the car radio in the pre-title sequence, the reel-to-reel tape player in Mia's home, the music speakers and performers at Jack Rabbit slim's, and the car radio in Butch's car), but the "surf" music is non-diegetic. PULP FICTION's music adds atmosphere in these instances. An example is the music that scores Vincent's heroin high. "Surf" music adds a dreamy, relaxed feeling to Vincent's injection of the drug, and later, his driving. The "surf" music also creates a 1950s feel that reinforces the
postmodernism of the film by making Tarantino's pastiche of the film noirs of the late 1950s that much more visible, since the music harkens back to that era.

Money consumes much of the thematic and visual elements of CASINO, and music comprises a majority of the soundtrack after Nicky Arrives in Las Vegas. Overall, the music of CASINO is an important factor in establishing the "mood" and "tone" that Schrader believes to permeate film noir, and in many instances substitutes for dialogue or narration in the establishing that "mood" and "tone." Scorsese uses an eclectic array of music, ranging from 1950s crooners to classic rock, and from blues to Devo, to create a soundtrack that could, in itself, tell the story. Three songs are the essence of the film: "Can't You Hear Me Knocking," performed by The Rolling Stones; "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," performed by Devo; and "House Of The Rising Sun," performed by Eric Burden.

"Can't You Hear Me Knocking" announces Nicky and his gang as the top criminals in Las Vegas. As the guitar begins the song a track from left to right spots icons of the old West—the wooden Indian and cattle skull-- and tracks across Nicky's gang in head level close-ups, finally stopping on a tighter close-up of Nicky. This brash a song is used much the same way Scorsese used "Sunshine Of Your Love," by Cream, in GOODFELLAS and elicits the same effect. The scene not only equates the gang with the ones of the legendary and Hollywood mythologized wild west (i.e. the use of the iconography and taking place at Nicky's jewelry store, The "Gold Rush"), but marks Nicky's attempt to take over the city and the mob "back home." Sam states in the voice-over narration, "To Nicky, Las Vegas was the wild West."
"(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" by Devo marks the disintegration of everything in Sam's life. Originally a Rolling Stones song, Devo's version marks a perversion of what once was and the disjointedness of the present. The song is first heard during a bird's eye view shot of Sam walking into the bar area of The Tangiers. He is walking on a zebra striped carpet that gives the frame a very confused and disorganized look, much like the life that's unfolding for Sam. At other points in the film, the song is heard again in briefer segments, but used in all instances to add an aura of confusion.

"House Of The Rising Sun" marks the end of everything for Sam, Nicky, and Ginger. The song is first heard when the FBI men confront Sam with the pictures of Nicky and Ginger together. It extends through Nicky and Dominic's killing and Ginger's drug overdose. "House Of The Rising Sun" also serves as advice to the audience from Sam, as the lyric cautions, "Momma, tell your children not to do what I have done."

Scorsese's use of music is closest to the style of film noir. While songs in GOODFELLAS are used for exposition and heightening emotions, CASINO simply uses more and for greater effect. Like the forty-one minutes of voice-over narration in CASINO, the music "wallpapers" the film, giving exposition, commentary, and feeling to the film that the voice-over narration is unable to provide.

**Noir Style Lighting**

Lighting, like music, can often heighten the emotion of a scene or serve as a form of exposition. While there is no chiaroscuro lighting in GOODFELLAS, there are instances when the frame is bathed in red light. These occur when Henry pulls the car over and Tommy stabs and shoots Billy Bats in the trunk, and again when Henry, Jimmy,
and Tommy exhume him. At both times, the red light is used to indicate blood, symbolically bathing them in it.

In Casino, chiaroscuro lighting makes its way into the film during Sam and Nicky’s meeting at the crossroads bar in the desert. Shafts of light slice through the window in the door. One shaft lands on Sam and Nicky’s table, drawing the viewer’s attention to that spot. A more modern form of chiaroscuro lighting is used when Scorsese darkens the frame, but leaves light around key elements. This occurs during the cheater sequence in the Tangiers and at one point when Nicky and Marino are walking outside The Gold Rush. In the cheater sequence, the frame darkens except in circles around the cheaters, Sam and the security guards. Outside The Gold Rush, the frame darkens except around Nicky and Marino, as if to show the FBI’s point of view from their surveillance position across the street.

In both instances, Scorsese’s version of chiaroscuro lighting is used to draw the viewer’s attention to a particular spot, much like the original film noirs, but CASINO’s is "truer" to the original because the darkening of the frame most closely resembles chiaroscuro lighting.

Conclusions

CASINO is a highly stylized and visually arresting film whose influences can be traced back to noir in the foundation Orson Welles established for the genre in CITIZEN KANE (1941). Cinematographer, Robert Richardson uses oblique angles, whip pans, 360 degree horizontal and vertical pans and trucks, which are similar to the innovations introduced in Welles’ masterpiece. Editor, Thelma Schoonmaker uses jump cuts and
fades, and montage editing to tell the story of CASINO. Gavin Smith claims, "the film's reckless, overloaded exposition parades broken rules and berserk visual mannerisms (whip pans, speed shifts, dizzying tilts, freeze frames) and neologisms (like the triple jump-cut dissolves when Nicky first meets Ginger) that constantly threaten to topple the movie into pure hyperbolic gesture." (Smith 63) Scorsese's film stands as a modern landmark for the visual elements of cinema story-telling, much like CITIZEN KANE did more than fifty years earlier.

While CASINO utilizes elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film, it most closely fits B. Ruby Rich's definition of a, "Neo-Noir of the 90s." Possessing all the elements that define it as such, it will stand as a yardstick by which to compare all other crime films made this decade and the ones to follow. The shift in Scorsese's crime film is from one that utilizes more elements in the style of the classic Hollywood gangster film to a film where more elements are in the style of film noir, as is evident in the progression from GOODFELLAS to CASINO. However, even with its numerous elements in the style of the classic Hollywood gangster film, GOODFELLAS still possesses the elusive noir "mood" and "tone."

Tarantino's films use many elements in the style of film noir, but in RESERVOIR DOGS, they do not reach the level of refinement that they do in Scorsese's CASINO (i.e. the homosexual subtexts). Also, while CASINO does feature the fall of organized crime, it is ancillary to Sam, Ginger, and Nicky's relationship, and the money, lifestyle, drugs, and greed that destroyed it. While PULP FICTION is a step closer to CASINO, Tarantino's film applies the noir elements to tell a tale (or tales) steeped in noir stylings,
but whose purpose is to recall a previous era's films in order to imitate them. From its' title and music, to its' characters and stories, PULP FICTION would seem to have all the required elements of film in the noir tradition, but the serious, brooding "mood" and "tone" that define a true noir ultimately elude the film.

The five year period between Scorsese's films is filled by Quentin Tarantino, a director often compared to a young Martin Scorsese. Tarantino would change the direction of the 1990s crime film, strengthen the link of 1990s crime film to film noir, and possibly be influential in the dramatic difference in the narrative and visual stylings between GOODFELLAS and CASINO.
CHAPTER III

OTHER 1990S CRIME FILMS AND THE "NOIR MODERNIST" CRIME FILM

The Films

The 1990s crime films of Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino are united not only in the time in which they were produced, but in their synthesis of elements in the style of the classic Hollywood gangster film and film noir, and their creation by filmmakers renowned for their auteurist style of filmmaking. But, where do these films' structure, narrative technique, characters, and visual style fit among other recent crime films, such as David Fincher's SEVEN (1995), Bryan Singer's, THE USUAL SUSPECTS (1995), and Lee Tamahori's, MULHOLLAND FALLS (1996)? Do these films continue the trend toward a more noir crime film observed in Scorsese's and Tarantino's films? And, is B. Ruby Rich's term, the "Neo-Noir of the '90s," the best description of today's incarnation of film noir?

Bryan Singer's THE USUAL SUSPECTS (1995) is structured in a manner that resembles a film noir. Like GOODFELLAS (1990), RESERVOIR DOGS (1992), and PULP FICTION (1994) that came before it, Singer's film utilizes a pre-title sequence to establish a pre-determined fate for its protagonist. However, THE USUAL SUSPECTS is misleading, a twist on what had previously been done by Scorsese and Tarantino, and as Philip Kemp points out, similar to Alfred Hitchcock's, STAGE FRIGHT, which also uses
a misleading flashback. The film is "built around a long flashback that's a lie from start to finish."(Kemp 61) But, in this misleading sequence, the "mood" and "tone" of film noir is established, with Dean Keaton's (Gabriel Byrne) death at the hands of an unseen assailant, as it is in GOODFELLAS, Tarantino's films, and CASINO (1995) which followed. CASINO features a large explosion during its' pre-title sequence, as well.

Working conjunctively with the flashbacks is the voice-over narration. Verbal Kint (Kevin Spacey) or, Keyser Soze as his identity is later revealed, recites for Detective Kujan (Chazz Palminteri) the events leading up to his capture at the harbor in San Pedro, California. Verbal's monotone gives way to emotion few times during the voice-over narration. The voice-over narration is used predominantly to establish scenes, unlike GOODFELLAS and CASINO, which use voice-over narration to give commentary to scenes and, essentially, tell the story of each film.

Aside from the structure of THE USUAL SUSPECTS, is the classic noir element of a protagonist attempting to extricate himself from his criminal surroundings and past, similar to Sam (Robert DeNiro) in Casino. Keaton attempts to lead a "normal" life of owning restaurants and dating a district attorney (Suzy Amis), yet is drawn back into the criminal life by Verbal and the other members of the gang. This is another element that gives THE USUAL SUSPECTS the "mood" and "tone" of a film noir.

Where THE USUAL SUSPECTS' narrative structure and style can be related to Scorsese's and Tarantino's films, it does possess one element in common with Tarantino's RESERVOIR DOGS --the iconographic detective. Tarantino's detective, Mr. Orange (Tim Roth), is muddled and unrefined. Tarantino concentrates on his relationships with
Mr. White (Harvey Keitel), his partner, and the other gangsters. His quest to trap Joe Cabot (Lawrence Tierney) is ancillary to his assimilation into the gang and his betrayal of Mr. White. Scorsese's films features scenes with FBI men and police, but they never become characters integral to the story. GOODFELLAS' and CASINO's voice-over narrations by the protagonists establish how the FBI and police catch the mobsters, but the audience never sees the investigative process as it does in THE USUAL SUSPECTS. The audience follows Detective Kujan as he attempts to unravel the mystery of Verbal, the events that took place at the pier, and the identity of Keyser Soze, only to see him discover that Verbal is Keyser Soze and that his story is an ingenious amalgamation of words and images scattered throughout the office in which Verbal is being questioned.

Detective Kujan's office is in the classic noir style, but Singer gives it a special twist. Noir settings are typically used to define characters. Verbal's story, which the audience and Detective Kujan are lead to believe is the truth, is fabricated from words and images throughout Detective Kujan's office (i.e. the lawyer's name, Kobayashi, is taken from the bottom of Kujan's coffee mug, the fat member of the barber shop singing group is taken from a reward poster, and Verbal's incarceration in Skokie, Illinois is derived from the manufacturer of the blackboard behind Kujan).

The inclusion of foreigners, according to B. Ruby Rich, represents the current xenophobia in America. Keyser Soze is a Hungarian gangster, and Kobayashi is his Indian messenger/lawyer. Neither Scorsese nor Tarantino feature foreign characters to this extent. While GOODFELLAS and CASINO feature Americans of Italian extraction, they are part and parcel of a film about mobsters and are as much a part of the classic
Hollywood gangster film as Little Caesar himself. Foreigners only manifest themselves in Tarantino's PULP FICTION in a conversation during the pre-title sequence between Pumpkin (Tim Roth) and Honey Bunny (Amanda Plummer).

Like THE USUAL SUSPECTS, David Fincher's dark and brutal, SEVEN, was released in the time between PULP FICTION and CASINO. SEVEN follows detectives, Mills (Brad Pitt) and Somerset (Morgan Freeman) on their quest to find a serial killer who bases his killings on the seven deadly sins. Their quest takes place in an unnamed, rain-drenched city of the Midwest, teeming with decay and hopelessness. Like the other films studied in this thesis, SEVEN represents a trend to a crime film with more elements in the style of noir.

As in CASINO, the city in SEVEN is so integral to the film that it almost assumes the role of a character. The city at first glance resembles the cities of 1970's neo-noir, with its amorality and hopelessness. Somerset, who has lived there his entire life, believes the city is a different place from what it once was. He no longer understands the crime nor the community. However, Mills is drawn to the city because he believes he "can do some good." Like CASINO's Nicky who is drawn to Las Vegas' bright lights, casinos, and the prospect of making money, Mills, the policeman, is drawn to the city and the prospect of fighting crime. And, like Nicky, who loses his life to Las Vegas, Mills suffers the consequences of entering SEVEN's city. Therefore, the city thematically fits the classic noir definition as both "mother and whore" to its' characters.

Where CASINO's Las Vegas possesses all the thematic elements of film noir, SEVEN's city is visually an archetypal noir city. Throughout the film, the city is soaked
with monsoonlike rain, never allowing a clear view of the morbid, grey urban jungle. When the city can be seen, powerlines and fire escapes cut the screen into a frenzy of lines.

The visual elements of classic film noir are not confined to the presentation of the city. SEVEN adopts film noir's run-down apartments and sunlight deprived interiors. Moral decay and emptiness permeates SEVEN's city. The apartments and interiors of buildings are devoid of life and color. Mills and Tracy's (Gwyneth Paltrow) apartment is a pale yellow, dimly lit, and has little furniture. Somerset's apartment is neat, but dark and uninviting, and furnished in a style that could very well have been mistaken for Walter Neff's or Sam Spade's. Neither Scorsese's or Tarantino's interiors incorporate this level of the noir "mood" and "tone."

The action within these interiors is also in the noir tradition. Following PULP FICTION's chase scene through the alleys of Los Angeles, SEVEN uses the iconographic labyrinth in Mills' and Somerset's chase of John Doe (Kevin Spacey) through the apartment building, surrounding buildings, and alley, as well as their arrival at the "lust" crime scene. In this instance, Mills and Somerset venture down a series of staircases and hallways to arrive at the crime scene. But unlike PULP FICTION, and classic film noir, this labyrinth does not pose a homosexual threat to a heterosexual union.

SEVEN's settings also fit Hirsch's observation that, "Noir exploits the oddness of odd settings, as it transforms the mundane quality of familiar ones, in order to create an environment that pulses with intimations of nightmare."(Hirsch 86) This is best exemplified by the apartment where the "Sloth" murder victim is found. What appears to
be a run-down apartment in a run-down building, quickly turns into a nightmare. A series of dimly lit, fetid rooms, lead to a room where hundreds of pinetree shaped air fresheners dangle from the ceiling. This gives way to yet another room where the still living, partially mummified body is found. The nightmare quality of the setting is compounded by the photographs depicting the victim's progression to the state in which he is found.

Like CASINO, SEVEN uses the country to elicit the noir "mood" that anything can happen. The ghastliest crime for Mills and Somerset occurs while they are in the country with John Doe. No matter how far Mills and Somerset are from the city, they are not safe. Mills' life is destroyed, Somerset's forever altered, and John Doe's taken by the experience in the country. The high tension powerlines that dissect the aerial shots of the final sequence mimic the lines that cut up SEVEN's city, creating another level of confusion to the scene. Also, with the suspected connection between the electrical energy and cancer and impotence in humans, this location becomes even more symbolic, as the powerless Mills cannot stop the crazed John Doe who has already killed Tracy, Mills' wife.

Like THE USUAL SUSPECTS, SEVEN features the iconographic detective. But in Fincher's film, they figure more into the classic noir character by not being confined to an office. Mills and Somerset venture out in to SEVEN's city and countryside to capture John Doe and solve the murder mysteries. However, the inability of Mills and Somerset to have a positive effect on their world is closer to the themes of 1970's neo-noir.
Like GOODFELLAS and CASINO, SEVEN employs voice-over narration. At
the film's end, Somerset says, "Ernest Hemingway once said, 'The world is a fine place
and worth fighting for.' I agree with the second part." Not only does this statement
reflect the nihilism and further emphasize the noir "mood" and "tone" of the film, but this
reference to Hemingway is interesting, given CASINO's later use of the word
"brightboy," which is a term prevalent in Robert Siodamk's 1946 film, THE KILLERS, a
film based on Ernest Hemingway's short story of the same name.

The latest film from Lee Tamahori, MULHOLLAND FALLS, which is set in the
1950s, continues the trend of a Hollywood crime film in the noir style. Where the other
filmmakers bolster their film's noir "mood" and "tone" with visual imagery, Tamahori, a
New Zealander, attempts to steep his film in the classic noir nihilism. What separates
MULHOLLAND FALLS from the other films this thesis examines is that Tamahori's film
most closely resembles 1970's neo-noir. Robert Abele claims the film, "...ultimately
wants to have the same resonance as CHINATOWN."(Abele 32) Statements such as,
General Timms', "human sacrifice is the cornerstone of civilization" and "a hundred must
die so that a thousand can live" are followed by Max's (Nick Nolte) telling the Colonel
(Treat Williams) that he has nothing left to live for since his wife, Kathryn (Melanie
Griffith) knows of his affair and has left him. The result of this is Max's partner,
Coolidge's (Chazz Palminteri), death.

MULHOLLAND FALLS' nihilism culminates in its' ending. After Coolidge's
funeral, Kathryn decides to leave Max because of his affair. The final shot is of Kathryn
walking "into the sunset" through the graveyard. Surrounded by gravestones, Kathryn
leaves Max surrounded by death. This ending is decidedly 1970's neo-noir. Max has made no difference in the world, nor is he any type of authority figure. He is merely a Los Angeles detective who cannot stop the United States government's atomic tests or its "cancer ward" at the test range. He is powerless to help the "hundred who must die so that the thousand may live."

Like the graveyard in which the final sequence of MULHOLLAND FALLS takes place, the desert is a thematically classic noir setting. MULHOLLAND FALLS' desert, like CASINO's, is a place where anything can happen and death abounds. Not only are the mysterious glass chips found that match the ones in the dead woman's foot, but "the cancer ward" is also discovered on the military base.

While MULHOLLAND FALLS may possess the mood of 1970's neo-noir, its' plot has roots in Robert Aldrich's later period noir, KISS ME DEADLY (1953) which features a mysterious package containing a nuclear bomb. The presence of atomic power, a murdered girl, and the detective (also like SEVEN), all seem derived from Aldrich's film.

Tamahori is not the first director to borrow from Aldrich's film. Tarantino uses the element of an unknown, glowing substance in a briefcase. Although the contents are never revealed, based on the character's reactions to the contents of the briefcase, the audience is lead to believe it is rare and valuable.

Another interesting element of MULHOLLAND FALLS is the Ernest Hemingway book Kathryn is reading on the couch. As in CASINO and SEVEN before it, MULHOLLAND FALLS also draws attention to the novelist. Max claims that Hemingway must never have talked to a woman, judging from his flowery references to
them in *Farewell To Arms*. This is interesting because like *SEVEN's* Somerset, Max debunks Hemingway's writing. While some of Hemingway's short stories are considered "pulp," he is not considered to be as influential to film noir as Hammett, Cain, and Woolrich. Therefore, in an attempt to be "truer" noirs, *SEVEN* and *MULHOLLAND FALLS* refer to a minor, but well known, author of the genre's literary background, unlike *CASINO* which pays homage to *THE KILLERS*, a film that is universally considered a film noir.

There is little use of the classic, iconographic noir structure in *MULHOLLAND FALLS*. Occasionally, Tamahori does use flashbacks, but there is no fragmented storyline or voice-over narration. Flashbacks take the form of Max's memories about his affair with Allison, their meeting, and break up. While they are essential for establishing the relationship, they are not misleading, as in *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*, or serve as the story of the film, as in *GOODFELLAS* and *CASINO*.

*MULHOLLAND FALLS* is the only film this thesis examines to be set entirely in the 1950s. While portions of *GOODFELLAS* and *CASINO* take place in that decade, they are not period films. Scorsese's films span a great deal of time and incorporate flashbacks from this era, but their stories are not limited to that period. Tamahori's film represents a new step in the direction of the crime film of the 1990s.

Where Scorsese and Tarantino incorporate elements from film noir, neither capture the essence of post-World War II America. *MULHOLLAND FALLS* incorporates the fear of communism, the dawn of the atomic age, and men as "war buddies." Scorsese's interests are in his character's relationships and downfall,
Tarantino's in the "slices of life" of his characters. Tamahori is the first director to attempt to tell his tale by having his characters function in the climate of America that helped spawn film noir. This is an important factor in the continuation of Hollywood's trend to a more noir crime film.

The "Noir Modernist" Crime Film

What is the crime film of the 1990s? This is an interesting question and B. Ruby Rich is the only critic thusfar to address this topic. For the most part, Rich's theory seems to be accurate. These films do harken back to the later, original cycle of film noirs with their inclusion of the noir psychopath and parody of earlier films. Also, when a femme fatale is present, her blood "runs green, not red" such as CASINO's GINGER (Sharon Stone), because of her greed and willingness to sacrifice Sam to satisfy it. But do these films really fit Rich's outline of the 1990s crime film? While Scorsese's, Tarantino's, and the others' films may include one or all of these, the "mood" and "tone" Rich intimates to exist in the "Neo-Noir of the '90s" is not present in these films. Money is at the root of the "Neo-Noir of the '90s": "mood" and "tone," yet CASINO is the only film this study examines to possess this. This is a limiting definition of the crime film, today. Where does this leave GOODFELLAS, Tarantino, and the other films with regard to genre and the second phase of the latest incarnation of the crime film?

Clearly Rich is accurate when she identifies the crime films of the 1990s as being the latest incarnation of film noir. This thesis has proven that there is a shift from GOODFELLAS, which combines many elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film and film noir to yield one of the first and most significant crime films of the 1990s, to
films that incorporate more noir visual, thematic, and structural stylings. All, however, undeniably possess that elusive noir "mood" and "tone." And, as the crime film has progressed through the 1990s, the trend has been to incorporate and refine these elements, but, as Rich overlooks, on occasion, still include some elements of the classic Hollywood gangster film, which have also become more refined as the decade progressed.

Rich's article does not include how filmmakers elicit the noir "mood" and "tone" in today's film noir. There appears to be an attempt by the filmmakers to strive for correct noir stylings and themes in order to elicit the dark "mood" and "tone" of film noir. Rich never accounts for elements, such as the city in SEVEN, Verbal's misleading story in THE USUAL SUSPECTS, and the inclusion of atomic energy in MULHOLLAND FALLS. The Tangiers in Scorsese's CASINO, also fits into his film in a similar manner. These elements are living entities within the films that give and take life from the characters and story. They are as much characters as Rich's "dumb-lug" and "greedy" femme fatale, yet it is the life and death that these elements bring to the films that spawn the "mood" and "tone" of true film noir.

Where does Tarantino fit among Rich's observations and others presented above? RESERVOIR DOGS and PULP FICTION are male oriented films. RESERVOIR DOGS' cast is entirely male and, for the most part, so is that of PULP FICTION. Neither possess the "greedy" femme-fatale or the "dumb-lug" who is lured by sex. The closest to this relationship is that of Mr. White (Harvey Keitel) and Mr. Orange (Tim Roth). While a homosexual subtext between the two exists, it is not greed that attracts the "dumb-lug,"
Mr. White and the "femme-fatale," Mr. Orange, the undercover policeman, but Mr. Orange's attempt to capture Joe Cabot (Lawrence Tierney).

The homosexual subtext of RESERVOIR DOGS is a point that Rich's article does not entirely explain. This brash and unrefined element of the film covers the film in a noir "mood" and "tone" that is unique among the other films. With homosexual subtexts typically given to noir characters to deepen their malevolence or to thwart a heterosexual union, the actions, conversations, and motivations of the characters in RESERVOIR DOGS are the cause and effect, rather than the result of, this subtext. The overall prevalence of homosexuality in RESERVOIR DOGS is so important to the plot, that were greed of the femme-fatale not an indispensable factor Rich's theory, RESERVOIR DOGS would qualify as a "Neo-Noir of the '90s."

PULP FICTION presents a different problem. Where RESERVOIR DOGS is an attempt to recreate the crime films of the 1950s, PULP FICTION uses elements from these films to create a postmodern 1990s films, in the style of the earlier crime films. Rich's theory does not take the pastiche into account. By incorporating, among others, the later period noir psychotic, the non-sequential filmic structure, the unknown substance in a briefcase, and the dingy apartments, Tarantino has created a film that is unique among film noirs. It is steeped in noir's "mood" and "tone," yet with a tongue-in-cheek result. Not a comedy and not a true film noir, PULP FICTION is a bastardization of noir elements with a 1990s spin. The characters are neither "dumb-lugs" or "greedy" femme-fatales.
If Rich's theory is no longer applicable, what is a more suitable theory and definition of the current cycle of crime films? This thesis posits that the crime film of the 1990s better fits the description "Noir Modernist," a combination of the film noir and postmodernist. This term more accurately reflects the nature of the crime film today and the crime films to come.

The films examined harken back to film noir. All use many noir stylings, such as voice-over narration, classic noir settings, and the terse noir dialogue. There is an undeniable visual, thematic, and narrative connection between these films and film noir that culminates in the defining noir "mood" and "tone." Aspects of these films can be traced to the original film noir cycle, 1970's neo-noir, and Rich's "Neo-Noir of the '90s," as well as the classic Hollywood gangster film of the 1930s. By not limiting the term to the original cycle, all of noir's later incarnations can be included in the definition.

The structure of the "Noir Modernist" films varies. It need not include all the classic noir conventions of prettitle sequences, flashbacks, and achronological storylines, but at least one of these is present in Scorsese's (who utilizes all three) and Tarantino's films, as well as the other films discussed in this chapter. Rather than concentrate on the structural elements of film noir, the "Noir Modernist" director concentrates on the visual and thematic elements, striving for that nightmarish descent into a dark and desperate place if not visually, as in SEVEN, then thematically, as in CASINO.

Aside from Scorsese's GOODFELLAS and CASINO, voice-over narration seems to be a minor part of the "Noir Modernist" film. SEVEN's brief statement by Somerset at
the end of the film and Verbals occasional voice-over that aid in establishing scenes are the only examples of this in the other films this thesis examines.

Elements of postmodernism are apparent in these films' references to previous film noirs as they use them to create new tales. Be it MULHOLLAND FALLS' atomic power, PULP FICTION's unknown glowing substance, or CASINO's "brightboy" scene, the use of these and other elements from noir's past to create new films is a postmodern element. As the inclusion of these elements does not result in ridiculing or showing a bias one way or the other toward the texts from which their origins can be traced, the filmmakers pastiche these "borrowed" elements, rather than parody them.

A male character resembling the latter period noir psychotic is also an element of the "Noir Modernist" film. Both Scorsese's and Tarantino's films feature this character, as well as the films by the other directors this thesis examines. Fincher's SEVEN is propelled by the crimes committed by John Doe. The audience learns that Doe is attempting to "preach" to the world through his crimes modeled on the seven deadly sins, but never learns why. THE USUAL SUSPECTS features the legend of Keyser Soze who, according to Verbal, intentionally murdered his own family and all but one of the members of a rival crime syndicate whom he had caught raping his wife in front of his children, to prove that he was willing to do anything and establish a fearsome reputation for himself. Tamahori, like Fincher, never lets the audience learn enough about Keyser Soze to understand how a man could murder his own family. MULHOLLAND FALLS' Max becomes very violent with little warning. This is evident in his assault of the FBI agent (Daniel Baldwin) and his leading a group of detectives known for pushing
gangsters down an extremely steep hill in order to intimidate them and intimidate them from gaining a foothold in Los Angeles. What makes Max become so violent, so quickly? What these characters have in common is that no explanation is given by the filmmaker as to why they act as they do. The audience must simply accept that these characters are violent and psychotic, much as they do in the original film noir.

The detective also appears to be making a resurgence in this latest incarnation of film noir, with RESERVOIR DOGS, THE USUAL SUSPECTS, SEVEN, and MULHOLLAND FALLS all utilizing this iconographic noir element. The detective is yet another attempt to bring the cycle closer to the original in an attempt at recreating the "mood" and "tone" of film noir.

Like Alan Ladd, Humphrey Bogart, and Edmund O'Brien in the original film noir cycle, the "Noir Modernist" films are steadily developing a stable of iconographic male actors. In Scorsese's GOODFELLAS and CASINO, Robert DeNiro and Joe Pesci have emerged as the most prominent faces of organized crime in Hollywood. Similarly, Tarantino has utilized the talents of Harvey Keitel in both RESERVOIR DOGS and PULP FICTION, establishing him as his premier criminal face. And, Chris Penn's appearance in RESERVOIR DOGS and MULHOLLAND FALLS, as well as Chazz Palminteri's in THE USUAL SUSPECTS and MULHOLLAND FALLS further increases this stable of generic male stars for the "Noir Modernist" films from which to draw.

Money and the femme fatales who are motivated by it are no longer a factor in the "Noir Modernist" film. CASINO's Ginger is an aberration. Women will no longer be the noir protagonist's downfall. Instead, women are being placed in roles that are more
submissive and tied to the protagonist. GOODFELLAS' Karen (Lorraine Braccio) would be killed along with Henry because of his betrayal of the crime family to which he belongs. Mia's (Uma Thurman) life in PULP FICTION depends on Vincent's ability to administer an adrenaline shot to her heart after she overdoses on his heroin. SEVEN's Tracy is beheaded because Mills reveals his name to John Doe who poses as a reporter during the investigation of the "sloth" crime scene. Kathryn's and Max's marriage fails because of Max's infidelity and agitation of the FBI who mail films of his affair to their home. Even CASINO's Ginger is intimated to have been murdered because of Sam's mob connections and their attempt to silence anyone who knew about the illegal aspects of the casino operations. Where Rich claimed men to be the "dumb-lugs" who are destroyed by the femme fatale, in the "Noir Modernist" film, it is the women who are ultimately destroyed by their men.

Unlike their male counterparts, however, there are no iconographic female faces. Nor, do the women cast in the "Noir Modernist" films do not share common physical attributes. With the exception of CASINO's Ginger, the long faces with waves of groomed, lustrous hair coiffed, yet natural in appearance, that helped define the iconographic noir femme fatale are no longer present, neither are the luxurious clothing or furs that the femme fatales donned. (Dyer 19) The women in the other "Noir Modernist" films could be described, comparatively, as average. None are presented as the glamorous or sexual "spider women" who came before.

The race and ethnicity of these male and female characters are major components of "Noir Modernist" films. Scorsese and Singer, among those examined, are the only
directors to incorporate ethnicity in their films. Scorsese revels in the Italian heritage of his gangsters, often times injecting elements, such as food, from his own Italian-American upbringing. Singer gives his character, Keyser Soze, a Hungarian background. RESERVOIR DOGS' Caucasian criminals talk often of African-American men in a degrading manner, but demonstrate a reverence for African-American women. As Tarantino did in PULP FICTION, Fincher pairs an African-American and Caucasian in the lead roles. Overall, the presentation of African-Americans is very different from the original cycle of film noir, where African-Americans are virtually non-existent.

While not presenting characters of other racial or ethnic backgrounds, MULHOLLAND FALLS with it's depiction of post-World War II America and the atom bomb, presents a fear of foreigners, therefore implying a fear of other races and ethnicities—a ironic subtext given Tamahori's New Zealand citizenship.

Homosexual subtexts abound in Scorsese's and Tarantino's films, as well as in Tamahori's MULHOLLAND FALLS which features a gay character (Andrew McCarthy). Tamahori's gay character is a voyeur who,several occasions, films the woman making love in the apartment next to his. Tamahori appears to use this device to add another level of deviance, much as in the original noir cycle, as well as Scorsese's and Tarantino's films. THE USUAL SUSPECTS character, Dean Keaton, is drawn back to the gang and a life of crime rather than to his girlfriend, Edie (Suzy Amis), and a "straight" life as a restauranteur. Because of Keaton's return to the gang rather than his girlfriend, THE USUAL SUSPECTS' homosexual subtext, like that in GOODFELLAS, is in the tradition
of the classic Hollywood gangster film, rather than film noir. The "Noir Modernist" film, therefore, often has a homosexual subtext, but more often, it is in the style of film noir.

The "mood" and "tone" of noir is an overriding concern in these films. So much attention is given to the elements that comprise the "mood" and "tone" of these films, that eventually, the messages resemble each other — everybody loses. From RESERVOIR DOGS' annihilation of the gang in a mortuary warehouse, to SEVEN's nightmarish city, and CASINO's over-the-top camera work and editing, these films concentrate on loss. The loss of power, pride, and life are secondary to how and where their story is told. Only PULP FICTION's Butch (Bruce Willis) leaves a winner, and he goes through hell to do it.

Rich described the crime film of the 1990s as representing male America's fear of empowered women and their desire to obtain men's wealth. Clearly these films, overall, do not present this scenario. What these films do represent is the rediscovery of many of the crime film's incarnations over the years and a new cycle in the crime film's long and celebrated history. The "Noir Modernist" is a new style of film built on the past, a part of the present's popular culture, and a foundation for tomorrow's crime film. Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino are at the forefront of the "genre" and continue to shape the look of the crime film of the 1990s. With other directors, such as Bryan Singer, David Fincher, and Lee Tamahori creating films that are also of significance during this era of film, it is difficult to say whom future critics will regard as masters of the crime film. In any event, all have made significant contributions and will help change and define the crime film of the 1990s.
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