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## DJANGO UNCHAINED AND THE NEO-BLAXPLOITATION WESTERN

*Django Unchained's* treatment of slavery and race issues has polarized audiences, especially African-American audiences.[1] While Harvard professor and public intellectual Henry Louis Gates Jr. published a favorable three-part interview with director and screenwriter Quentin Tarantino on his weblog *The Root*, filmmaker Spike Lee has charged Tarantino with (once again) overusing the “n-word” and with turning African American history into a Spaghetti Western spectacle of violence – an act he called “an insult to his ancestors” (quoted in Stern). Talk show host Tavis Smiley has likewise condemned the film as a misrepresentation of African American history, lamenting that Hollywood would only “greenlight a spoof about slavery, and it’s as if this spoof about slavery somehow makes slavery a bit easier to swallow” (Ibid.).

Tarantino himself is notorious for withdrawing from the political debates that surround his work by pointing out his disinterest in politics. At a press conference on *Jackie Brown*, for instance, when asked about the “n-word” Tarantino suggested that – much as he would like to have the word “de-powered” – in his work

[t]hat’s not my job. I don’t have a political agenda in my work. I am a writer and I’m writing characters. I promise you that the use of the word ‘nigger’ is true to Ordell [Samuel L. Jackson’s character]. That’s the truth as far as he’s concerned, the way he talks. To not have him say that would be a lie. And if you notice, Jackie doesn’t use ‘nigger’ a lot. She uses it very specifically, at specific moments, because she’s a different human being than Ordell. It’s different human beings: they’re not blacks, they’re not whites, they’re different human beings. (Keough 201)[2]

The naïveté of such a statement reveals Tarantino’s lack of awareness of how any work of art or fiction engages with or reproduces ideology, regardless of whether the creator sees himself as political or not. When following Althusser’s definition of ideology as “represent[ing] the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1350)[3] and Stuart Hall’s expansion of Althusser’s, Gramsci’s, and Laclau’s Marxist critique of ideology to describe racism as a dominant “articulation” of race, it is impossible to regard Ordell and Jackie as simply “different human beings.” They are racialized, not because they happen to have a different pigmentation of skin, but because they live in a society which labels them as African American and teaches them to regard themselves as such – or, more precisely, they are fictional characters imagined as such individuals; constructs which embody racial identities, thus ‘teaching’ the audience about race through the representations of racialized bodies and their (inter)actions on screen. The use or lack of use of the term nigger is simply one aspect of their articulation of race – or more precisely Tarantino’s articulation of the race of the characters he shaped and co-created with his crew through his writing, direction, as well as costuming, lighting, make up, mise-en-scène, the acting of, in the above case, Pam Grier and Samuel L. Jackson, and so forth. It is – following Hall’s call to always historicize – a (re)articulation of a mix of ideological positions towards the complex of race dominating a late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> century US-American context.

The ideology of race is articulated through many channels, among them the media and the stories produced by Hollywood which – to return briefly to Althusser’s terminology – constitute one branch of the Ideological State Apparatuses, the ‘schools of ideology,’ if you will, which reproduce “submission to the rules of the established order” (1485). From Hall’s Marxist cultural studies perspective, race “is the modality in which class is ‘lived,’ the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and ‘fought through” (341). Whether or not we buy into the concept of a class struggle, if we accept the presence of ideology as a force in the way people make sense of their lives and their position in society, there is no such thing as an unpolitical text – perhaps least so if its author, like Tarantino, claims to be disinterested in politics. Following Frederic Jameson, I contend that

the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life. [...] To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there already exists a realm of

freedom – whether it be that of the microscopic experience of words in a text or the ecstasies and intensities of the various private religions – is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity [sic] over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation. The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that *there is nothing that is not social and historical* – indeed, that *everything is "in the last analysis" political*. (20; my emphasis)

Indeed, Tarantino's work seems a perfect example of the "purely individual [...] project" Jameson writes about, a project which reveals that everything is in fact political. Tarantino's is a universe seemingly removed from our lived experience, at least to the extent that our experience – one might be tempted to say unlike Tarantino's own – is lived outside the world of video stores. As Richard Alleva correctly points out, like earlier Tarantino movies *Django Unchained* "takes place in movieland, the only country Tarantino knows" (16) – a fact apparent from its title sequence with its extensive borrowings from the opening of Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966). The film nevertheless engages with ideological positions of our non-fictional world, most clearly in the statements about race and race relations it makes, not least through its choice of setting.

The first few minutes not only locate the film in movieland, they also place it in history – and a politically contested history at that. After the end of the title sequence we read "1858 / Two Years Before the Civil War." Despite 'getting its dates wrong' – the American Civil War did not start until 1861, suggesting either a blatant oversight or more likely another subtle connection to "movieland" – the movie, nevertheless engages with U.S. history, and more specifically the history of slavery and racial relations in the pre-Civil War U.S., as the response to the film suggests. If the film tries to establish an alternate history by having the Civil War begin in 1860, it does so too subtly for most viewers' immediate grasp of historical date.[4] Whatever the case may be, the connections to our shared idea of an ante bellum South are strong, one of them being notions about the foregrounding of Django's racial identity. What Tarantino describes as his obligation towards a 'truth to character' in his screenwriting leads to the (re)production of a dominant reading of a pre-Civil War Southern mindset in which all blacks are "niggers." The film thus inescapably emphasizes a racialization of both its subject and its protagonist on a diegetic level. This positioning of the film's action within or close to 'actual' U.S. history 'forces' Tarantino, according to the logic of his screenwriting outlined in the above quote, to reproduce a racist society to 'stay true' to his characters. Under the guise of a supposedly 'realist' backdrop in which to place the film's exaggerated acts of violence, the film thus reproduce the dominant ideologies of the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century racial relations. Furthermore, as I will argue below, the diegetic racialization of its black characters is balanced against a stance in which the filmmaker invites his audience to "become" Django. The film's cinematic appropriation of Foxx's African American identity puts the audience into a transracial opposition to slavery, regardless of the viewer's race, and suggests that all the troubles of white-black interaction which still permeate the contemporary United States are solved as we cheer a black protagonist who avenges the wrongs of the past on 'our' behalf – 'solving' the historical 'dilemma' of the dehumanization of African Americans contained on the silver screen; entertaining, yet atoning for nothing.

### **1. *Django Unchained* as a Pastiche of Exploitation Films**

It is in the particularly in its narrative setup and countless allusions that the movie invites a comparison with 1970s exploitation films, particularly Blaxploitation, and a Blaxploitation Western trilogy featuring Fred Williamson and D'Urville Martin, *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (1972), *The Soul of Nigger Charley* (1973) and *Boss Nigger* (1975), as well as the slavery-themed exploitation film *Mandingo*. On a direct textual level, the film includes a number of more or less obvious references to these earlier films, which I will lay out in the following paragraphs. On a more abstract level, *Django Unchained* also shares with these exploitation films a politics of representation. As I will argue Tarantino's film 'updates' a filmic tradition, Blaxploitation, which still divides critics into those who see it as liberating and those who see it as troubled. Indeed, the similar division of audience responses to Tarantino's Western shares some similarities with the conflicting readings of Blaxploitation. In the final analysis, its direct reference to earlier exploitation films, as well as its similar use and abuse of African American disenfranchisement both in history and on screen puts *Django Unchained* in a position that I will term Neo-Blaxploitation.

As is well known, Tarantino has repeatedly expressed his love of exploitation films in interviews.[5] In his previous films he has evoked and reworked exploitation genres countless times. His most extensive homage to the Blaxploitation genre was his vehicle for one of the genre's main female stars, Pam Grier, in his 1997 *Jackie Brown*.

Virtually all of his movies show the influence of exploitation films, however, e.g. in his Blaxploitation-inspired use of driving music to punctuate and comment on the action of his characters, often as ironic counterpoints to the action shown visually, his use of a certain '70s 'cool' in his dialogue, and so forth. Staying true to Tarantino's hip postmodern pastiche style, a style of referencing older works which Noel Carroll has termed "allusionism" (52), *Django Unchained* includes several direct quotations from Blaxploitation cinema.

A minor, but obvious, reference includes the name of Django's wife Broomhilda von Shaft, a bow to Gordon Parks' Blaxploitation classic from 1971. Django's costuming, especially towards the end of the film, likewise references many of the genre's protagonist's 'pimp aesthetic.' As critics such as Scott Nelson mention, there are also a number of parallels taken from the Blaxploitation Western cycle starring Fred Williamson. These films supply a number of key ideas and allusions for the first half of *Django Unchained* until the film's action turns to the plantation and Tarantino's primary intertext shifts to the slavery-exploitation film *Mandingo*.

Most central to the first half of *Django Unchained* is Tarantino's borrowing of the structuring premise of a black gunslinger in a racist West. The film follows the development of Williamson's Blaxploitation cycle by first telling of the protagonist's freeing himself (or in Django's case, being freed) from the shackles of slavery to enter life as a black cowboy facing a racist West, a premise which informs *The Legend of Nigger Charley*. It then goes on to tell the story of a black bounty hunter, an idea central to the beginning of the Fred Williamson-scripted *Boss Nigger*. The premise and problems of a black bounty hunter provide the plot dynamics for the first part of both *Boss Nigger* and *Django Unchained* before each film moves on to more personal confrontations concerning the liberation of the protagonist's love interest. The refusal of a black cowboy protagonist (played by Williamson) to bow to a white racist society is central in all three installments of his Blaxploitation cycle, but it is most centrally formulated in the last part of the trilogy in which Amos, in typical Blaxploitation manner, frames the two black men's personal fight in racial terms – making their quest for money into an act of racial retribution: "Well, you all been huntin' black folks for so long, we just wanted to see what it felt like hunt'n' white folks." Django's answer to Schultz's question how he likes the idea of bounty hunting – "Kill white people and get paid for it? What's not to like?" – resonates strongly with his filmic ancestor's remark.

Tarantino not only appropriates the source of conflict, he in fact includes a number of scenes which look like conscious recreations of the earlier films. A scene in which King Schultz and Django ride into town to find their first victim who poses as sheriff resembles similar scenes in *The Legend of Nigger Charley* and *Boss Nigger*. In the first film Charley and his two fellow runaway slaves, Toby and Joshua, in the second Boss and his sidekick Amos, enter Western towns for the first time and the situation is filmically dramatized in similar ways. A mobile camera travels with the riding protagonists, occasionally adopting a subjective camera angle as we watch the villagers through Boss' and Amos's position or through that of the group surrounding Charley. The editing cuts back and forth between shots of the protagonists riding and the villagers who eye them suspiciously. These shots and editing choices are recognizable in the work of Tarantino's cinematographer Robert Richardson and editorial team, despite the much slicker visuals of Tarantino's major budget production. There even is a low angle shot of a woman in an upper story window, supposedly a prostitute, in *The Legend of Nigger Charley*, a genre staple which Tarantino's film reuses. The following scene in which Schultz and Django clear the saloon through Django's presence as a black man in a slave state saloon, forcing Schultz to get their beers himself, likewise shows similarities to one of the next scenes in *Legend* in which Charley more actively clears the saloon of the racist white patrons, including the barkeeper, by violently kicking them out, and Toby serves beer to Joshua and Charley. There are other strong parallels with *Boss Nigger*, as when Boss and Amos ride into town with a dead white man flung over the back of a horse, a scene whose visuals Tarantino recreates with Schultz and Django delivering their bounty, and so forth. As Aisha Harris has argued, in scenes like these Tarantino's film – in stark opposition to the director's claims to novelty and empowerment in his promotion statements – is often much less radical than those of his Blaxploitation predecessors, which are even more obviously freed from 'realistic,' historically accurate depictions of a segregated late 19<sup>th</sup> century America. In *Boss Nigger*, for instance, Boss and Amos take over a town as sheriff and deputy, enforcing their own desegregation and anti-racism laws by e.g. fining or imprisoning everyone who calls them nigger. As Harris writes: "in the style of Blaxploitation, a situation that in real life likely would have resulted in Boss and Amos's immediate lynching instead proves opportunistic: They [capitalization sic] create a set of rules for the town (among them: a fine for calling them a 'nigger' in public) and jail everyone who defies their rules." In contrast, Tarantino's 'truth to character' shackles his racial revisionism of the genre.[6]

Whereas Williamson's *Nigger* trilogy serves as the structuring intertext for the first half of the movie, the second half borrows extensively from the 1975 exploitation film *Mandingo*. Not only the depiction of the decadence and decay of the old South – shabby and bedraggled in *Mandingo*, of late Roman splendor in *Django*, and full of hubris in both – reveals Tarantino's source of inspiration, the idea of slave fighting, the so-called Mandingo fighting, is central to *Django*'s second part. As historian Scott Reynolds Nelson points out, there were no Mandingo fights in American history. Instead Tarantino, once again, takes his inspiration from film history. Tarantino's source is clearly Richard Fleischer's "full-on, gigantic, big budget exploitation movie," which the director/screenwriter has called one of his favorite movies in a 1996 interview (Udovitch 172), but has more recently apparently disavowed (cf. Samuels). Apart from the idea of slave fights, a borrowing indicated by the adoption of the name Mandingo, which he transfers from a "superior breed" of slaves in the 1975 film to the fights themselves, there are several other striking parallels with Fleischer's exploitation movie. Leonardo DiCaprio's character, Monsieur Candie, is an expanded and slightly modified version, one is tempted to say the parody of a parody, of a crazy French slave owner whom Hammon Maxwell, *Mandingo*'s white protagonist, meets in New Orleans. This slave owner urges Maxwell to enter his slave Ganymede, the film's 'Mandingo,' into a fight in the first place. His role in the plot, the costuming, carefully groomed beard, affected mannerisms and aspirations to be regarded as French of DiCaprio's character all link back to his antetype in Fleischer's movie. Similarly, the thinly veiled hints of incestuous desires between M. Candie and his sister draw their inspiration not only from the gothic trope of Southern inbreeding, whose roots go back at least to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher;" the idea of incest as a sign of Southern degeneracy is also central to *Mandingo*, where it plays a key part in the form of a past liaison of the female protagonist with her brother which leads to the film's catastrophe.

The last scene I want to discuss is among the most uncomfortable scenes in both films. When Django gets caught after the first shootout in Candyland, he is hung up naked by his feet in a shed waiting to be castrated, a gruesome punishment and yet another reference to *Mandingo*. In *Mandingo*, too, a disobedient slave is hung up by his feet in a barn to receive a beating: his naked behind is beaten with a wooden paddle. Both scenes stage the powerlessness of the slave. Both do it in a way, however, which puts the viewer in a voyeuristic position gazing at naked black male bodies being displayed and physically punished. Their simultaneous display, punishment, and the act of emasculation, symbolic in one case, literal in the other, could be read as a response to the imagined threat of black male sexuality, which is central to *Mandingo*'s action, but repressed in *Django Unchained*, only clearly surfacing in this scene of threatened emasculation. The scene in *Mandingo* displays the film's uneasy mix of voyeurism and its simultaneous attempt to distance itself from its sexploitation by masking it by its white master's display of disgust, and most prominently by putting it right after a scene of even more obvious sexual abuse of a female slave – a scene in which Hammond Maxwell explains to one of his slaves, Dite, that she cannot keep the child he is responsible for as he undresses and prepares to have sex with her. The scene's last framing dissects the black woman's body, showing her legs and one of her naked breasts, leaving her face in the shadow, while Hammond, his face fully lighted, kneels by the bed and says his evening prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep..." The next shot after the cut shows the male black slave's equally naked and displayed body surrounded by the three dressed figures of Hammond, an adult slave, and a child slave, as he is hoisted up. Like the previous scene this one is once again an uneasy mix between a voyeuristic display of a naked black body (this time cinematographically dissected at the bottom), violence, and its discontent. While the black slave's pain is displayed, the gaze is clearly a white one, as the film focuses on Hammond's reaction to the beating: he is seen flinching in a close up as we hear the blows strike, and when the camera pans after him as he leaves the barn the sound no longer features the abused slave's groans and screams despite the camera position remaining in the barn, marking it as subjective. The scene ends when Maxwell 'rescues' the slave from his cousin's more merciless beating. It thus neatly fits the film's agenda of portraying slavery as a bad institution deforming whites while maintaining that its protagonist essentially possesses a good heart. In contrast, *Django Unchained* is more blunt in its voyeuristic display of Foxx's body, lingering on his well-trained, aestheticized body. Despite their different stances, both films resonate with the underlying dynamics of the diegetic world (and our own), a "dialectics of white fear and fascination underpinning colonial fantasy" which governs dominant attitudes towards the black phallus as a symbolic "threat to the secure identity of the white male ego and the position of power which whiteness entails in colonial discourse" (Mercer and Julien 194). Django himself is not directly sexualized through his actions. He is in fact much closer to a chivalric monogamy in his dedication to his wife than the frequently promiscuous Blaxploitation protagonists who often confirmed stereotypes of black men as studs. Django is thus not punished for any literal sexual transgressions in the film, save his phallic gun wielding.

Rather his physicality as a muscular black man embodies the larger inscription of black masculinity as threatening in dominant (i.e. white) ideology existing beyond the film's text, while his machismo in his role as a black slaver resonates with the stud image of his cinematic ancestors. As such, the film could be argued to contain and partially unmake the promise of a more liberating – if problematic and stereotype-ridden – black male sexuality which many commentators have seen as central to Blaxploitation's initial appeal (e.g. Lawrence 19 f., Guerrero 252 f., 255, and passim), while on the surface avoiding some of its pitfalls by making Django confirm to more acceptable heteronormative, monogamous ideals, yet still lingering in many scenes on the connotation of racial stereotypes and racialized sexual dynamics societally inscribed onto his body.

Many of the resonances of earlier Blaxploitation and exploitation movies are less easy to pin down to exact scenes, characters or costumes than the ones outlined above. Tarantino's use of music, for instance, is a wild mix of songs whose selection and use in part recalls the music and sound editing of Blaxploitation films. Tarantino puts songs from Spaghetti Westerns by, among others, Luis Bacalov, Ennio Morricone, and Riz Ortolani, next to classic folk songs (Jim Croce's "I Got a Name") and soul or R&B-inspired music, as it could have been used in classic Blaxploitation films of the 1970s (e.g. John Legend's "Who Did That to You"). Both Legend's music, and hip hop function as an updated version of Blaxploitation's reliance on current black music for its scores, e.g. Rick Ross's "100 Rifles" or most strikingly the remix combining James Brown's funk song "The Payback" and 2Pac's "Untouchable," which can be heard during the first shootout in Candie's mansion. Apart from the pleasure of detecting intertextual references to other works, this use of music also has the effect of revealing the historical setting as even more pseudo-historical. In a film like *Boss Nigger* Leon Moore's driving and frequently repeated title song about the film's protagonist, along with Fred Williamson's leather outfit, are more than a bit reminiscent of *Shaft* (cf. Harris). Both equally contribute to the over-fictionalization of the subject and actualize the film's message to a contemporary situation – *Boss Nigger*, even more obviously than most Westerns, says very little about the late 1800s and much more about the mid-1970s. Tarantino likewise forges a link between the audience's popular culture and historical events, but in Tarantino's allusionism there is a third presence, 1970s exploitation film history.

Music that contradicts what is being shown on screen is a major feature in *Mandingo*, which features soft ambient music more appropriate to images of romance or soft pornography than the depicted physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. In fact, *Mandingo's* choice of music is frequently so out of place as to make the viewer wonder whether the movie makers had a strange and horribly twisted way of trying to expose the cynicism of the depicted society by making the viewer uncomfortable or actually want to paint the rape scenarios they show in a romantic light. Tarantino, famous for 'inappropriate' music since his directorial debut *Reservoir Dogs* with its ear cutting scene to the sounds of Stealers Wheel's "Stuck in the Middle with You," also ironically juxtaposes the film's diegetic action with its soundtrack, e.g. when Richie Haven's classic Woodstock song "Freedom" begins to play as Django lays down his weapons and is taken prisoner by Stephen, the non-diegetic soundtrack mixing with the diegetic sound of Broomhilda's sobs.

## **2. Django Unchained as Neo-Blaxploitation**

Having established some of the intertextual connections *Django Unchained* shares with Blaxploitation and a number of specific films in the exploitation tradition, I will now focus on the politics of Blaxploitation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I will read Tarantino's film as neo-Blaxploitation, not only because of the direct textual allusions laid out above, but also because of its stylistic and structural links. I particularly want to focus on the political implications of producing a film that links back to the Blaxploitation tradition in the year 2012, and one made by a white director/screenwriter at that. I will highlight how the representational strategies of the film updates it from a direct pastiche of Blaxploitation to a neo-Blaxploitation film, which simultaneously gratifies and exploits a contemporary audience in new ways.

While it significantly transforms its host genre, *Django Unchained* resonates with the Blaxploitation formula, not only through its numerous allusions, but also through its narrative setup of a black protagonist against a white racist society. As an exploitation genre, Blaxploitation has always met with ambivalent reactions, and *Django Unchained* is no exception to this rule. According to Ed Guerrero's seminal discussion of Blaxploitation, the genre came into existence at a time of financial crisis within the Hollywood system in which Hollywood began for the first time to recognize black inner city audiences as a major part of its revenue. Thematically the genre is heir to the 1960s Civil Rights movement and the increasing radicalization of parts of the African American population in the late 1960s and early 1970s Black Power Movement, which largely coincides temporally with the period of Blaxploitation. Many Black

Power critics rejected a “white aesthetic” (Reid 24), protested against the lack of representation of African Americans on screen, and renounced those earlier depictions of blacks which existed in the 1960s, foremost the “ebony saint” image prevalent in many Sidney Poitier roles (Guerrero 252 ff.). In a 1970s context Blaxploitation is often read as initially functioning as an empowering tradition (at least for its male black audiences) by presenting a new type of African American masculinity: a violent, sexualized “superstud,” who shows agency and retaliates against the corrupt elements of white society.

Blaxploitation also had its fair share of political and ideological problems, however, ranging from its gender images to the economic and narrative incorporation into the white Hollywood money-making machine, which eventually led to its demise. Hollywood’s taking over the production of films in the Blaxploitation tradition resulted not only in an economic ‘exploitation’ of black audiences by white producers, but also in a gradual toning down of the radical anti-white chords struck by the earliest movies, a strategy adopted in order to broaden its viewer base to include white audiences. Most troubling, however, was the virtual disappearance of African American roles when the cycle was deemed to be exhausted in the mid-70s, having come under fire from black leaders and Hollywood realized that African American audiences were as willing to pay for Blockbusters not dealing with issues of race. In Ed Guerrero’s words, in Blaxploitation

Hollywood was able to combine its traditional moneymaking ingredients of violence and sexploitation with the distorted imagery and the symbols of the urban Black underworld, and at the same time keep insurgent Black political thought and cultural expressions of the times to a minimum. The resulting product was targeted for the huge black audience eager to see a broader representation of its humanity and aspirations validated on the commercial screen. Hollywood was able to play on black people’s new-found identification with its increasingly politicized and militant underclass, while shifting the industry’s black imagery and stereotypes, in the words of critic Daniel Leab, “from Sambo to Superspade.” (Guerrero 265; plagiarized in Grant 42)

A central element in what is often read as Blaxploitation’s empowering aspect is an identification of a black disenfranchised lower class with the protagonist. This aspect entered the Blaxploitation formula following the success of Melvin Van Peebles’s independently financed *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (1971) in which the protagonist, despite his image as a tough individualist, remained embedded in a black community, as Manthia Diawara explains:

*Sweet Sweetback’s* aesthetic draws on the logic of Black nationalism as the basis of value judgment, and defines itself by positioning the spectator to identify with the Black male hero of the film. Barbara rightly criticizes the centrality of Black manhood at the expense of women in *Sweet Sweetback*, but recognizes nationalist narratives as enabling strategies for survival, empowerment, and self-determination. As Sweetback is helped to escape from the police by one Black person after another, the nationalist discourse of the film transforms the ghetto, where Black people are objects, into the community, where they affirm their subjecthood. (600)

*Django Unchained* likewise positions the spectator to identify with its black protagonist and his revenge, but crucially disconnects Jamie Foxx’s character from the collective, thus unmaking one of Blaxploitation’s central accomplishments, as I will argue below. There are no subjects in Tarantino’s version of slavery, only those subjected to its deformation.

Being not only a Hollywood but more specifically a Tarantino film, *Django Unchained* foreseeably does little to correct the position of (black) women. Whereas the film leaves open a space to read Broomhilda as “human” and “keenly aware of her selfworth,” as Tamara A. Lomax’s reaction shows (Leonard and Lomax), I would argue that Broomhilda remains marginal; her helplessness is central to the film. While she is part of a black-black relationship based on mutual love, a sight still rare in Hollywood cinema, she nevertheless fulfills the classic role of damsel in distress, as King Schultz points out to both Django and the viewer when he tells his version of the story of Siegfried and Brünhild. Broomhilda furthermore confirms the culturally dominant stereotype that women have little control over their feelings when she betrays her affection for Django over the dinner table. It is *her* conspicuous attention for Django, explicitly named by Stephen as the reason for his suspicions, which exposes Django’s and King Schulz’s cover. Django in contrast shows the restraint so central to the Western hero’s masculinity. A little later her equally stereotypical female immobility in the face of danger is responsible for Django’s capture. Perhaps most significantly, however, the agency her character shows – her repeated attempts to escape from slavery – is not part of the film. What the film’s male

gaze focuses on is the objectification of her body. Even the punishment she is subjected to in response to her failed attempts to escape – she is beaten by the Brittles and incarcerated in the so called “sweat box” – is framed through Django’s observation. It is made clear that Broomhilda is made into a sex object by her owner when he offers her to King Schultz, which recalls similar scenes from *The Legend of Nigger Charley* and *Mandingo*, even if Tarantino’s film unlike its exploitation ancestors shows enough taste to not screen its actual rape scenes.

The center of the film, and – apart from Tarantino’s trademark hipster cool dialogue – arguably the thing it does best, is certainly its male quest for blood. Only the occasion provided for the blood-spilling changes as the film progresses: Django and King Schultz kill first for money, then to free Django’s wife, and finally Django returns for vengeance. The social and historical context provided for this bloodbath seems to lend itself well to the logic of Blaxploitation, with its positioning of a black man against “The Man,” in this case white, racist, Southern society before the Civil War. Tarantino’s genre mixing and his transformation of the black protagonist into a white-black duo, however, changes the genre’s politics of racial opposition. Through the addition of the white dentist Dr. King Schultz, Tarantino’s film surreptitiously unmakes the genre’s central organizing dichotomy while pretending to share in the genre’s traditional opposition. Instead the white-black duo (led throughout most of the film by the indulgently verbose German) converts the film’s stance into a post-racial mush in which the film loses Blaxploitation’s edge, the antagonists’ clear opposition along race lines, which – if one sees Blaxploitation as politically subversive rather than providing a safety valve for a more radical potential – is the very thing which politicizes its acts of violence. The changed dynamics of Tarantino’s film seem to presuppose a post-racial present, in which American society is no longer divided along race lines, and can thus fraternize in its gaze at a past when this was not yet the case. This is a stance that can be read as either progressively utopian – which enlightened thinker does not wish for a world in which race no longer matters? – or highly problematic when juxtaposed with such events as the juridical farce surrounding the shooting of Trayvon Martin or the real inequalities of conditions still persisting in America today. I agree with David Brauner when, taking as an example the widely publicized incident in which Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested for breaking into his own villa, he reminds his readers that race is still very much a category which influences how people act, despite utopian claims to the contrary:

[T]he media coverage of the case and, in particular, of Obama’s intervention, has provided ample proof, if proof were needed, that the euphoric declarations of a post-race America that greeted Obama’s election were ridiculously premature and that prophecies of a post-ethnic future for America are likely to remain the stuff of utopian idealism. (14)

Tarantino’s film transforms Blaxploitation’s racial opposition into a metaphysical struggle between righteous humanity, as exemplified by Django and the opportunistic would-be abolitionist Dr. Schultz, and depraved, incestuous, Southern degeneracy, personified by both Leonardo DiCaprio’s white dandy, Calvin Candie, and Samuel L. Jackson’s black Uncle Tom character Stephen.[7] The film even transfigures the final act of redemptive violence so central to the Blaxploitation genre, in which the film’s black protagonist comes out on top in an act in which he punishes a corrupt and racist white establishment, as a stand-in for its disenfranchised inner city black audience (while, on an extra-textual level, cynically working to reproduce real economic inequalities by transferring its black target audience’s money to the film’s usually white producers). When watching *Django Unchained*, black and white audiences are equally included in the black-white protagonist duo’s revenge against the ‘peculiar institution’ painted as being upheld by both whites *and blacks*. By having both King Schultz and Django fight against “The Man,” the film fulfills a cathartic function for all members of an American audience. The fact that the final confrontation is initiated by the dominant King Schultz, who thereby, on top of his earlier domineering attitude, robs Django of his chance to retaliate against Candie changes the narrative even further. Schultz’s act turns the black Stephen – cinematically elevated above his ‘master’ in an earlier scene in which he summons Candie to the library and awaits him sitting in his master’s chair, sipping his master’s cognac – into the main villain from a dramatic perspective. It furthermore cleanly divides the film’s main acts of vengeance along racial lines, in which the white hero kills the white villain, the black hero the black villain.

Through the film’s mixed racial makeup of its protagonists, Tarantino invites viewers into a position in which all members of the audience are united against slavery regardless of their historical positions and the advantages or disadvantages these still result in. Through Schultz’s removal by death and Django’s avenging of his white mentor/friend, the film opens up a space in which it can appropriate Foxx’s racial identity and the position on the ‘right side’ of history his body signifies. Tarantino thus attempts to appropriate his actor’s body in a similarly casual way in

which the film earlier appropriated the originally African American Blaxploitation genre, African American music, and, finally, the historical victimization of African Americans. It thus seems to complete an urge towards reverse passing apparent throughout most of Tarantino's previous films, as well as his public statements.[8] As David J. Leonard puts it:

at times [Foxx's] character felt like QT's fantasy, a racial cross-dressing fantasy for himself; the centrality of cool, the camera's gaze upon his body, particularly his penis, and the importance of violence, leaves me questioning how Django embodies QT's racial fantasy, a longing to embody those qualities that he sees and locates within blackness. (Leonard and Lomax)

This invitation to take opposition against slavery by rooting first for a black and white team of gunslingers, then the black survivor, could be seen as a step towards a healing process; it would be easier to accept, however, if a real debate about slavery and its historical consequences had taken place within Hollywood and American culture at large, and if overcoming the history of slavery did not come – and stop – at the price of a movie ticket. At this historical moment a cultural appropriation of a formerly enslaved and still largely disadvantaged part of society seems problematic.

When read through the Blaxploitation tradition's link of hero and community, Django's position as a stand-in for black empowerment likewise becomes questionable, since his extreme individualism separates him from the community throughout much of the movie. His roles as a free man, – initially a valet, who in the words of the white plantation owner Spencer Bennett "is not like other niggers," then a black slaver watching the beating and killing of black men and threatening them from atop his horse – first isolates Django and then sets him in direct opposition to all other African Americans seen in the film. The movie nevertheless leaves open several spaces in which to read Django's retribution as one which is not only personal, but also takes in the larger slave community. In the first half of the movie, when Django punishes and executes the Brittle brothers, the camera frequently frames Django with his slave 'audience' in his back, and narrates the sequence through close ups of the reactions of the slaves watching, among them the female slave Jody who is spared a whipping through Django's intervention. Before he shoots Lil Raj, his rhetorical question to the slaves – "y'all wanna see something" – suggests that he sees himself as the executor of their shared wish for retribution against the Brittles.

The film's second part, however, essentially cuts Django off from any racial community. The protagonist's nihilistic individualism, taken over from the Spaghetti Western tradition, in which all means justify a highly personal end, not only cuts the protagonist off from the black community, but in fact positions him against it. While the cynicism of the Spaghetti Western hero's rejection of community is more or less unproblematic as long as we have a white male body, in other words a body that is regarded as 'unmarked' by race (and class and gender) by most viewers at the current historical moment, it becomes questionable when we shift this depiction to a black body – that is, a body almost necessarily read as racially marked, as the numerous discussions surrounding the film (including this one) reveal. What is an unpolitical act for the white Spaghetti Western protagonist becomes politicized when the protagonist and his environment are racially marked – and even more so since the 'historical' environment the film portrays is highly politicized and ideologized along questions of race. What is more, Django's single-minded pursuit of his wife, in which he is willing to victimize everyone else, outdoes even the cynicism of a Sergio Leone protagonist. Whereas Eastwood's character(s) in the Dollar Trilogy showed little regard for human life, they did not go quite as far as to passively watch the victimization of innocent bystanders – at the end of the day Blondie in *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), for example, stands up for the disenfranchised Mexican community. Even Franco Nero's Django in Corbucci's film, driven by a similarly individualistic goal as Tarantino's Django, did not show as glaring a disregard for ethics in his single-mindedness as Foxx/Tarantino's Django does in the film's hardest to watch scene: the graphic ripping apart of a runaway slave by Calvin Candie's dogs – an act for which Django is at least partly responsible through his provocations.

The most direct attempt to reinstate Django as an avenger for African Americans at large occurs only after these scenes, in the third part of the movie. After Foxx has blown up Tarantino in a cameo as an Australian mine employee, mounted his horse, and ordered (not asked) the other black prisoners to throw him the dynamite that is conveniently stored in the prison wagon, the camera slowly moves in on the face of the man who has just passed Django the dynamite. The camera distance is reduced from a medium shot to a close up, and we see him slowly beginning to smile as he watches Django return to Candyland while we hear John Legend's "Who Did That to You" playing. This is the central scene which opens up the possibility of reading Django as the avenger of all those subjugated to the



system of slavery. This is particularly true when we recognize the man as the former slave who was earlier castigated by Django-as-slaver for spitting on the ground to show his disgust with Django's supposed identity. His changed behavior suggests that the former slave approves of Django's 'act' now that he 'gets it.'

The suggestion that the black slave's acknowledgment excuses Django's earlier behavior and turns it into an act of subversive resistance on behalf of all African Americans is highly problematic at best, however, since it necessitates that we forget Django's repeated victimizations of others in his single-minded quest to save Broomhilda – a mental leap made possible only by the fact that every other person of color in the movie remains a cipher and that this is the first real emotional reaction we get from any black person in the movie, not counting Broomhilda's coy smiles and her display of stereotypical female frailty. The lyrics of Legend's song furthermore paint the scene and Django's actions in a primarily metaphysical – not a racial – light. As Django emerges from the smoke of the explosion he just set off – his symbolic resurrection – the song's lyrics inform us that he is "not afraid to do the Lord's work" and that his "judgment is divine." Django-as-Christ's acts can no longer be related to Blaxploitation's black protagonist's embeddedness in, reliance on, and acting on behalf of his community. Unlike Sweetback, Django is not helped by the black community, and neither does he help it. In fact the absence of any real members of such a community separates *Django Unchained* from the inheritance of Blaxploitation. As Novotny Lawrence writes,

Blaxploitation films feature a variety of African American supporting characters. Significantly, the black hero or heroine does not emerge as a token character or an exception to the stereotypical ideals generally held about blacks by whites. The protagonists are surrounded by other black characters who are integral to the plot. Often, the films' protagonists function with or in opposition to those characters. For example, *Shaft* features the title character joining forces with a group of black militants, while *Super Fly* depicts drug dealer, Youngblood Priest, rejecting the politics of a similar group. (Lawrence 19)

In *Django Unchained* there are no fleshed out African American characters apart from Jackson's Stephen. Broomhilda is marginalized and silenced, and even Django is flat and one-dimensional when compared to the more colorful Schultz and Candie to a point where it becomes questionable if Schultz is not in fact the real protagonist of the film.[9] The benevolent, white Dr. King Schultz takes over the role of a paternal figure, the experienced 'hand' initiating and protecting his younger counterpart from his own rashness. King Schultz teaches Django how to defend himself with a gun, as well as with his tongue, the former being a lesson which Django, 'a natural' as his feat of executing Spencer Bennett in full gallop shows, does not really need. What he does learn from the white doctor, however, is how to maneuver in white society, a task he masters almost as flawlessly as the discipline of gun-slinging. In fact, in the end Django becomes the new Schultz, further strengthening the film's striving for a post-racial attempt to move beyond the vulgar assignment of guilt which is such a bothersome part of the history of slavery. Through countless parallels Django is cinematographically and narratively linked to Schultz. His almost accidental freeing of his fellow captives in the mining company's wagon bears strong parallels to Schultz's presumptuously casual freeing of the slaves in Django's chain gang in the beginning. Django's way of talking himself out of captivity is a gruffer application of Schultz's skill, and in the end he not only rides Schultz's horse Fritz, but his actions are seemingly blessed from beyond the grave through a flashback editing of Schultz's approving: "You know what they're going to call you? The fastest gun in the South." In the end, Django has not only learned from King Schultz how to use his gun and tongue, but he is also the true inheritor of his apolitical, egocentric stance in which nothing apart from personal gain and the adherence to a technocratic code of behavior really matters.[10] What ground there is to assume that Django's act of vengeance is the beginning of an alternate history slave war in which Django frees his fellow slaves, as has been suggested by Willi Winkler, comes from the viewer's wishful thinking, rather than the film's text.

The film's personalization and individualization of Django's quest departs not only from the Blaxploitation hero's rootedness in the community of the African American ghetto – or, in the case of the Blaxploitation Western, threatened black enclaves in the West –, it also blinds out the history of slave rebellions and resistance, a source of criticism brought up by a number of reviewers (e.g. Reed, Cobb). Django's acts and his individualism personalize the promise of a redemptive act of violence against "The Man" at the heart of Blaxploitation to take the revolutionary edge off his revenge. Django's insistence that he is "that one nigger in ten thousand" essentially integrates his character into (white) narratives of American Exceptionalism and (white) individual male heroism, while also cutting it off from a history of African American resistance still largely unknown to the wider American public. As history

professor Jelani Cobb writes:

Tarantino's attempt to craft a hero who stands apart from the other men – black and white – of his time is not a riff on history, it's a riff on the mythology we've mistaken for history. Were the film aware of that distinction, *Django* would be far less troubling – but it would also be far less resonant. The alternate history is found not in the story of [the] vengeful ex-slave but in the idea that he could be the only one. [...] The primary sin of *Django Unchained* is not the desire to create an alternative history. It's the idea that an enslaved black man willing to kill in order to protect those he loves could constitute one.

Tarantino's choice of genre mixing, of transforming the African American Blaxploitation hero, grounded in his community, into the (Spaghetti) Western hero, necessarily isolated from others by genre convention, seems particularly maladroitness given his professed goal of making amends for the lack of representation of slavery in films set in the mid-1800s. His film thus misses the opportunity of informing its viewers about a largely unknown aspect of (African) American history, the resistance of slaves. On the contrary, *Django Unchained* reformulates ideologically dominant positions such as the need for heroic male individualism and the meek subjugation of most slaves. When it tells its audience that slavery was wrong and cruel, the film makes a statement that is certainly true, but seems neither particularly profound, nor revolutionary, and one that hardly anybody open for its message should be surprised by.

It could be said that it is nitpicking to criticize *Django Unchained* for its politics. It is, after all, first and foremost fiction and entertainment, and as entertainment it is effective: it has the slick cool in both visuals and dialogue of all Tarantino films, a move which makes the film both enjoyable to watch and difficult to criticize. Tarantino's "cool cynicism," as bell hooks has called it (47), makes everyone who takes issue with its depiction of history, gender roles, or race appear pedantic, since the movie seems removed from all of these issues in its ironic postmodern stance which refuses to take anything seriously, while portending that we are all on the same page, we all know how things were/are and that, in hooks' words, "none of that shit really matters, or if it does it means nothing 'cause none of it's gonna change" (47).

Even within a reading that focuses on race the film leaves open a different reading for those who wish to see the film as empowering. It *does* give a certain agency to a black man after all, even if the necessity to point this out says more about the still lingering dearth of strong African American leads in Hollywood over 40 years after the beginning of Blaxploitation's admittedly oftentimes stumbling attempts to remedy such a situation. We *do* see the black cowboy ride into the sunset with his woman, which is, on a very basic level, extremely gratifying. Yet if the film did not open up such windows for reading it as affirmative of a position in which – especially with such a loaded and rarely tackled topic as slavery – audiences, black and non-black, still long to see African Americans' "humanity and aspirations validated on the commercial screen," (Guerrero 265), *Django Unchained* would not function as Blaxploitation in the truest sense of the word. It is Cobb's account of how he watched the film in a Harlem theater, where "the largely black audience cheered each time an overseer met his end," and his assessment of his experience which tie the final connection to Blaxploitation. As Cobb writes: "The trade-off for an audience indulging in that emotionally powerful and rarely depicted brand of black heroism is overlooking aspects of the film that were at least as troubling as the other parts were affirming." The audience's emotions are thus exploited in the original meaning of the: they are presented with a film that is gratifying on a surface level, but reproduces the dominant ideologies of our times in almost all other ways, as I have tried to show. Like earlier Blaxploitation films which, as Lawrence writes, "often included an intertextual relay within the narrative that focused on past and present issues plaguing America's black population," *Django Unchained* brings the as yet largely neglected history of slavery to the silver screen. Because it does not explore, problematize or even accurately render the history of slavery or its depiction on film, or question the portrayal of the racialized bodies it displays, but turns them into a spectacle, it merely updates the genre of Blaxploitation to a time which is less politicized, but more aware of its ironic sophistication. The film thus offers instant gratification to African American and non-black audiences alike who want to see the wrongs of slavery set right, if only for two and a half hours, and – at least for many of the white viewers – only in a contained environment in which there are no real ramifications.

The movie finally takes the path of Blaxploitation after its absorption into the Hollywood system to its logical conclusion. It depicts its black protagonist in a way that gratifies all viewers, viewers of color as well as liberal whites, while threatening none. It is Blaxploitation in the original sense for those who are of African American descent, but becomes a different kind of exploitation for those white audience members who would like to dream of a post-racial

present or those who, like Tarantino, want to take a cross-racial vacation. In other words, the film is Neo-Blaxploitation, slicker, more ironic, more intertextual, but it still only pays lip service to the real problems of contemporary or historical America and its race relations. In many ways the film thus remains classic Tarantino material. As bell hooks put it almost twenty years ago about *Pulp Fiction*:

Tarantino's films are the ultimate in sexy cover-ups of very unsexy mind-fuck. They titillate with subversive possibility (scenes that are so fine you are just blown away – like that wonderful moment when Vincent and Mia do the twist in *Pulp Fiction*), but then everything kinda comes right back to normal. And normal is finally a multicultural world with white supremacy intact. (48)



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[1] I would like to gratefully acknowledge the thoughtful comments I received from Wibke Schniederermann as well as the editors Elisa Bordin and Stefano Bosco.

[2]As with most statements about his work Tarantino has made this point repeatedly, using very similar words in a 1994 interview: "That's the way my characters talk [...]. I also feel that the word 'nigger' is one of the most volatile [sic] words in the English language and anytime anyone gives a word that much power, I think everybody should be shouting it from the rooftops to take the power away" (Mooney 76), as well as in a 1996 interview: "Words are words. To give any word too much power – whether that word be *f---* or *nigger* or whatever – is to give a word too much [sic] power" (Hoberman 159).

[3]Insightful as I find his theory, I share Stuart Hall's assessment of Althusser's notion of ideology and ideological state apparatuses – while at the same time being wary of Hall's own occasionally dusty Marxist terminology: "Althusser sometimes tends to represent ideology as rather too functionally secured to the rule of the dominant classes: as if all ideology is, by definition, operative within the horizon of the 'dominance ideas' of the ruling class. For Gramsci, ideologies are thought of in a more contradictory way – really, as sites and stakes in the class struggle" (334).

[4] I am in fact indebted myself to Michael K. Johnson's insistence that this must be a willful anachronism on the movie's part.

[5] E.g. "When I started to develop, for lack of a better word, my 'aesthetic,' I loved exploitation movies. I loved the '70s when New World [Pictures] was cranking out their pure stuff, like Jonathan Demme's [women-in-prison film] *Caged Heat*" (Ciment and Niogret 12).

Cf. also Joshua Mooney's comment: "In *True Romance*, the hero interrupts his deadly confrontation with the killer pimp to set the record straight on the movie playing on the TV in the background: it's blacksploitation [sic] classic *The Mack*, he saw it seven years ago, and it stars Max Julien and Richard Pryor. That's Tarantino talking – he spent his adolescence in black movie theaters watching kung fu, exploitation and blacksploitation flicks- 'I grew up around black culture and love it,' he says. 'Especially the '70s black culture.' You can see it in his own movies: from shootouts to attitudes, plenty of moments that owe as much to hard-core inner city '70s action films like *The Mack*, *Coffy*, *Superfly* et.al. as they do to spaghetti westerns or the French New Wave" (77).

[6]The list of intertextual references could be continued. There is, for instance, also a scene in which a number of white men rip up Charley's freedom papers at the beginning of *The Legend of Nigger Charley* which is referenced in Tarantino's screenplay when King Schultz warns Django: "Say you show [your freedom papers] to some rascals and they tear them up" (23). This scene was, however, not included in the theatrical release. The straw hat and full beard of one of the slaves in the prison wagon in *Django Unchained's* third part could be read as an homage to Bill Cosby's character in *Man and Boy* (1971), and so forth.

[7] I use the term “Uncle Tom” in the sense in which it has been used by African American authors and critics. To me Jackson’s character, while brought to life by a performance at least as Oscar-worthy as Waltz’s, is very much a product of a white imagination. He is similar to the act Uncle Robin puts on in Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada*, but without the subversive twist Reed adds to his character, when he reveals that Robin has secretly been poisoning Massa Swille. Tarantino’s twist, the suggestion that Stephen is in fact the real master of the plantation, manipulating Candie through his Tom-ing, in contrast makes Jackson’s character into an “evil” of metaphysical proportions.

[8] E.g. in his statement regarding, once again, his use of the n-word: “I grew up around blacks and have no fear of it, I grew up saying it as an expression” (Hoberman 159).

[9] Ishmael Reed has taken the critique of Foxx’s role in the movie and its promotion furthest, but it is one raised by quite a few critics. Reed writes:

The German dentist dazzles the screen with his eloquent talk and vocabulary and puts together constructions like “shan’t.” I would loved to have been present at the marketing meetings about this movie. The cynicism must have been as thick as cigar smoke. Jamie Foxx has been promoted as the star of *Django Unchained*, and has assumed the role as movie defender—the same role played by Viola Davis in the promotion of the equally offensive *The Help*. Foxx serves as a buffer between the producers and the wrath of blacks.

[10] Unfortunately I do not have the space to go too deeply into one of Tarantino’s most interesting moves, i.e. to make Waltz play essentially the same character he played in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), ironically gaining him two Academy Awards for the same role in which he takes center stage in both films through his dazzling performance as a soft-spoken sociopath: Landa the “Jew Hunter” becomes Schultz the head hunter; the historical position shifts and Waltz ends up on the ‘right side’ of history this time, but the technocratic conduct of his character remains the same. Sabine Hake’s description of Landa can easily be transferred to King Schultz. “Landa also speaks fluent French” (176), as does Schultz. Like Schultz, Landa is the “dramatic center of the film” (181), and their characters are more than a bit similar: “Landa is a brilliant conversationalist, using every rhetorical trick to assert his power over his interlocutors [...], he revels in the art of domination. [...] [H]e quickly turns into the caricature of a European gentleman of the old school: gallant in an almost obnoxious way, meticulous to the point of fussiness, courteous with a hint of superiority, and charming with an undertone of aggression” (181 f.). Like Landa, Schultz perfectly fits the description of the malignant narcissist, which Hake takes from Erich Fromm’s *The Heart of Man*. “The malignant narcissist stands out through his extreme sense of entitlement, pathological need for attention, and chameleon-like personality; for Fromm, he represents “the quintessence of evil” (182).

As suggested to me half-jokingly by Michael Butter in a personal communication, the fact that even Waltz’s character rejects slavery could be read as Tarantino’s strongest comment on slavery. Waltz’s character can easily be read as a Nazi when viewed in light of Hollywood’s connotation of German (or in this case Austrian) accents with Nazism, his technocratic callousness, and his intertextual connection to his earlier performance as SS officer Landa, a character with whom Schultz shares the same malignant narcissism. Landa as “the personification of evil, defined here as the absence of empathy, [...] represents the absolute enemy in a narrative cinema until recently built around empathy as its main mechanism of character identification. As he resists such conventional forms of engagement, his version of evil eludes all moral categories and becomes the maker of a very different kind of abjection [...], the] decidedly postmodern ailment: narcissism” (183). When regarding Schultz as a version of Landa suffering from an equal absence of empathy, the two films could also be read as a cynical comment on historical perspective – a retreat as Hake suggests for *Inglorious Basterds* into a seemingly apolitical “affective detachment achieved through citation and appropriation” (Ibid.), in which the malignant narcissist, “the quintessence of evil” becomes the good guy cheered on by the audience.

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