

DISMEMBERMENT AND DISPOSSESSION IN THE WORK OF  
QUENTIN TARANTINO AND NATHALIE DJURBERG

by

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ART HISTORY

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University Of South Africa

Supervisor: Dr A U Krajewska

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## Declaration

I, Catherine Terblanche (Student Number 33419914), declare that this dissertation, *Dismemberment and dispossession in the work of Quentin Tarantino and Nathalie Djurberg*, is my own unaided work, except to the extent explicitly acknowledged. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated by means of complete references.

This dissertation is being submitted for the Master of Arts in Art History, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination by any other University.

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Catherine Terblanche

Date: November 2014

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Ania Krajewska, for her help and guidance, especially during the last months of writing this dissertation.

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to apply the biopolitical theories of Giorgio Agamben on *homo sacer* to the stereotypical representation of the violent woman. Using feminist methodologies for dismantling and exposing social stereotypes, this research explores the relationship between femininity, violence and the representation of these. By focussing on the influence of traditional narratives as found in ancient mythology and fairy tales, the study investigates the contemporary portrayal of the stereotypical violent woman using acts of dismemberment and dispossession in the work of Quentin Tarantino and Nathalie Djurberg, which serve as examples of the controversial relationship between real and filmic violence.

**Keywords:** Dismemberment, dispossession, *homo sacer*, stereotypes, violence, film, mythology, fairy tales, Quentin Tarantino, Nathalie Djurberg.

## Preface

As a little girl, I can remember the horror I experienced when I first heard the fairy tales of Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella. Hansel and Gretel was particularly disturbing. What kind of parent would actively abandon her children, knowing that they might starve to death? This was something I could not understand; it was a foreign concept to me.

My mother read books in Latin. I remember seeing *The Illiad* on the bookshelf in the study at home, a mythical code, and a reference to a heroic journey, which my life could echo. My paternal grandmother owned a leather-bound copy of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. Whenever I stayed over, I read the magical stories of how animals came about. With her death this book disappeared and so too, a piece of my childhood. The book somehow contained answers to all the questions about the mysteries of the universe. Stories have always been an integral part of my life, and have constantly informed the way I understand reality.

I grew up in a loving family, the only daughter with three brothers, and both my parents read stories to us at night. I had no frame of reference in terms of experiences when it came to these tales, and the abuse they glorified was alien to me. Somehow as an adult, I still resort to fairy tales and mythological stories to give me comfort and guidance, and most importantly, to entertain and educate me in the form of books, films, animations, cartoons and artworks. My love of narratives, fantasy, and the power of make-believe, has informed and shaped my life and my values. I believe in 'happy endings' and utopian societies. At the start of my studies, I saw myself as a pacifist. However, I have come to understand that violence may, however horrific, have a functional role in society. This study for me has been about the gap between reality and illusion. This in a way reflects the structure of most fairy tales. They start with the fantasy 'Once upon a time' and end with the reality of 'they lived happily ever after...' This I have come to realise does not exist, and what happens in between is a matter of perspective.



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**Figure 74:** Still image from *Kill Bill II*, The Bride wearing a long skirt.

## **Plate XI**

**Figure 75:** Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *Pietà* (detail of Christ's face) (1499). Marble, height 174 cm, width at the base 195 cm. Basilica di San Pietro, Vatican. (Data and image: <http://www.wga.hu/framese.html?/html/m/michelan/1sculptu/pieta/index.html>)

**Figure 76:** Still image from *Kill Bill I*, Split screen with unconscious Bride and Elle Driver.

**Figure 77:** Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *Pietà* (detail of Madonna) (1499). Marble, height 174 cm, width at the base 195 cm. Basilica di San Pietro, Vatican. (Data and image: <http://www.wga.hu/framese.html?/html/m/michelan/1sculptu/pieta/index.html> )

**Figure 78:** Still image from *Kill Bill I*, Unconscious Bride and Elle Driver.

**Figure 79:** Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *Pietà* (front view) (1499). Marble, height 174 cm, width at the base 195 cm. Basilica di San Pietro, Vatican. (Data and image: <http://www.wga.hu/framese.html?/html/m/michelan/1sculptu/pieta/index.html>)

**Figure 80:** Still image from *Kill Bill I*, O'Ren Ishii in kimono.

**Figure 81:** Still image from *Lady Snowblood* (1973). (Image: <http://www.grindhousedatabase.com/index.php/File:Lsnowbloodpic.jpg>)

**Figure 82:** Still image from *Kill Bill I*, The Bride wearing the yellow jumpsuit.

**Figure 83:** Bruce Lee wearing the yellow jumpsuit, *Game of Death* (1972/73). (Data and image: <http://galleryhip.com/game-of-death-1978.html> and <http://img442.imageshack.us/img442/7682/gameogdeath01.jpg>)

## **Plate XII**

**Figure 84:** Nathalie Djurberg, Stills from *We Are Not Two, We Are One* (2008). Clay animation, digital video, 5:33 minutes. Music by Hans Berg. Courtesy of Zach Feuer Gallery, New York and Gió Marconi, Milan. (Data and images: Celant & Koolhaas 2008:212-213).



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The study presents an analysis of selected examples of the work of Swedish born claymation artist Nathalie Djurberg (b. 1978) and American film director, screenwriter, producer, cinematographer and actor, Quentin Tarantino's (b. 1963) *Kill Bill Volume I* and *Volume II*<sup>1</sup>, with the main focus of the study being the portrayal of acts of violence against, and specifically by women, as viewed through the concepts of 'dismemberment' and 'dispossession'. As both artists work in the realm of the narrative, the implications of historical narratives found in ancient mythology and fairy tales are comparatively investigated in order to shed light on the contemporary portrayal of the stereotypical 'violent woman' as outcast. Using a broadly feminist approach, these concepts are investigated in relation to the Italian political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben's (b. 1942) biopolitical theories on "*homo sacer* (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not sacrificed" (italics in original) (1998:8).

*Homo sacer* is an outcast figure whose existence is characterised by a state of exception, unprotected by human and divine law. The life of *homo sacer* is deemed worthless, and as such may be killed without legal or moral consequences. In essence, *homo sacer* personifies "the displacement and desubjectification of more and more human beings in the world today" (Ek 2008:363), exemplified for Agamben by the contemporary notion of 'the refugee'. The study aims to show the relevance of Agamben's *homo sacer* for the portrayal of the violent woman by investigating the concepts of dismemberment and dispossession in the work of Djurberg and Tarantino.

This introductory chapter contains the background to the study and problem statement, its aims and objectives, a brief review of the methodology used to do the research, as well as a brief overview of the chapters contained in the study.

## 1.1 Background to the study

In *The painted witch*, Edwin Mullins (1985:57-84) debates the portrayal of violent crimes against women, such as rape, a common theme in art of the 1500s and 1600s. These portrayals often referenced mythological female figures such as those depicted in Peter Paul Rubens' *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (c.1617) (see plate I, figure 1). The women were violently abducted, raped and then married off, in many cases to their rapists, which in turn 'legitimised' the crime. Kerry Downes comments that this specific painting is about "Romance, not violence" (Mullins 1985:74) and continues to describe the work in very emotionally detached high art terms, which denies the crime committed. In response, the contemporary viewer could easily ask the question: What 'romance' could exist in the realm of 'rape' or 'violence'? The contemporary viewer may also find the function of these rape paintings rather disturbing. According to Margaret Carroll (1989:5-8), paintings of mythological rape scenes were popular with sixteenth century European aristocracy, and were displayed in their palaces as representations of political power. The patron would identify himself with the male god, very often the supreme ruler Jupiter, and the female figures would represent their subordinates over which they ruled. These paintings were often given as gifts to cement allegiances between the aristocracies. In some cases, they were commissioned to celebrate the occasion of a marriage, a foreign concept for contemporary viewers. Historically, therefore, men have produced these images as the object of the male gaze and desire, and as a display of power.

Mostly, the woman's experiences of these violent acts have been ignored and her reactions to these acts have certainly not been the subject of many artworks. One can only speculate on the reaction of a bride being presented with a painting depicting a rape scene as a wedding gift, let alone being the subject of such a violent crime. A lone example in this context would be that of the Renaissance painter, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-c.1652)<sup>2</sup> who painted, on more

than one occasion<sup>3</sup>, the mythological scene of the Jewish heroine, Judith beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes. Many writers such as Raymond Ward Bissell (1968:156) support the idea that Gentileschi's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (c.1620) (see plate II, figure 2) could be a direct reference to her rapist, Agostino Tassi.

Gentileschi's rape and subsequent trial have become inseparable from her persona and her art. For Elizabeth Cohen:

Artemisia Gentileschi continues to be represented as strongly defined by her sexuality. Incomplete and anachronistic readings of the records from the 1612 trial for her rape have underpinned an image of Artemisia as, in the older treatments, a flirt and vamp or, in more recent ones, a feminist and resister of male violence (Cohen 2000:47).

Cohen's statement relates to two important aspects of this study. Firstly the relationship between visual images and lived experience, and secondly, the stereotypes associated with violent women. They are either sexually provocative 'flirts or vamps', in which case they invite violence, or they are feminist fighters or haters of men, who pose a threat to male-dominated patriarchies, and should be treated with violence and contempt.

Skipping forward a couple of hundred years to Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Volumes I & II*, the image of *Judith Beheading Holofernes* still seems relevant, as does the biblical narrative of Judith and Holofernes, and the factual account of the rape of Artemesia Gentileschi. In the still images (see plate II, figures 10 to 13) from Tarantino's *Kill Bill I*, O'Ren Ishii (played by Lucy Lui) decapitates a board member in a pose that resonates with that of Gentileschi's mythological Judith.

This study in essence, investigates the influence of narratives such as mythology and fairy tales on the contemporary representation of violence against, and by, women. The examples so far serve to fix attention on the historical and contemporary representation of violence against women. However, it is the relationship between images of violence against women and images of violence

by women that informs the core of the investigation. The study investigates the option that these are not merely inversions of each other, or a 'simple' matter of replacing male characters with female characters. Binary opposites lead us to believe that a 'woman' should be kind, gentle, passive, non-aggressive and so forth. The women, Artemisa Gentileschi, a real-life rape survivor; Judith, a mythological heroine; and Tarantino's cinematic characters The Bride (played by Uma Thurman) and O'Ren Ishii, were all once victims. They are transformed into 'warrior women' through the violent acts they experience. However, the moment the justification for their violent behaviour has receded, or 'revenge' has been achieved, these women often adopt the female binary characteristics again, such as Tarantino's Bride who, at the end of *Kill Bill II*, returns to her role as 'mommy' once she has achieved her revenge. Violent women, who do not return to feminine stereotypes, are not pardoned but exiled and ostracised in society, as in the case of Aileen Wuornos (1956 – 2002) which is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Another aspect of the study is the vast difference in the way in which each of these women, fictional or real, deals with the violence they have experienced. Tarantino's Bride, on the one hand, actively pursues her perpetrators in a very aggressive manner, even creating a 'hit list' of her enemies and pursuing them one by one. O'Ren Ishii uses violence to uphold her position in the underworld.

Gentileschi's personal reaction to the violent rape may not be as clear to us nearly 500 years after the fact. She did however paint an image of the mythological Judith in a very different manner to the depictions of the same theme by male counterparts such as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (see plate II, figure 4)<sup>4</sup>, who was no stranger to violence himself<sup>5</sup>. Gentileschi's painting shows us a woman who is everything but passive and non-aggressive, she is willing to risk her all to save her nation, or a painter wanting to restore her reputation. The difference is that Gentileschi no doubt had to fight her battle alone, after being ostracised and judged by her community. Judith however,

does not act alone; a maidservant supports her. This to me signifies the backing, and approval, of the community. The community stood to gain by a woman's violent behaviour, and therefore sanctioned, even valorised her behaviour, conveniently ignoring the sexual licentiousness of Judith's act. In his article '*Judith and the woman hero*' (1992), Peter Lucas, seeks to reconcile the "ambiguous role as a seductress", with the representations of Judith as either:

... a seductress whose use of her feminine charms is a means to an end, the overthrow of the aggressive Assyrian general Holofernes, an end which justifies the means... [or] ... a virgin beauty seen as a type of chastity overcoming Holofernes's lust ... [or] ... a figure of the Church representing the conquest of moral degradation and evil typified by Holofernes (Lucas 1992:17).

Despite the fact that Judith has performed various 'immoral' and deceitful acts, ranging from seduction with the intent to kill to the ultimate sin of murder, Judith becomes (at the expense of repetition) "a figure of the Church representing the conquest of moral degradation and evil typified by Holofernes" (Lucas 1992:17). Not only does this imply that "the end justifies the means" but it also implies a grand narrative of good and evil, and a link between the personal and the public. Plate II, figures 5 to 9 illustrate some of the conflicting historical representations of Judith, varying from a virtuous heroine to a blatantly sexually active warrior woman.

The following extract echoes this link between reality and myth, grand and personal narratives:

... the tale of Judith is what Roland Barthes, in his appraisal of the painting by Artemisia Gentileschi, has called a 'récit fort'? that is, a narrative that features both a satisfactory structure, in which the end 'responds' to the beginning after a certain degree of tension, and a moral and/or sensual emotion. As such, it perfectly exemplifies the term 'myth' in its primary sense of a traditional story about a heroic or godly figure who characteristically embodies a particular strength or virtue ... (Ziolkowski 2009:311-312).

This quote implies that the myth of Judith is sanctioned by the fact that she has become the 'hero' who embodies certain 'virtues', even though these 'virtues' may be contradictory in nature.

Moving from the representation of violence in the Judith myth to the representation of violence within mythology in general, I have always been fascinated by the prevalence of violence, both physical and psychological, in these narratives, as well as in their visual representations. This forces me to ask why artists would *want* to depict violent crimes (including those against women and children) and what role mythology plays in the acceptance of such images. The answer for me lies partially in the collective unconscious of society and the process of enculturation.

According to the existential theories of the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) (Scarborough 1994:23), myths are “[p]ossibilities for [h]uman [e]xistence”. He theorises that myths should be “demythologize[d]” in terms of human emotions, actions and thoughts. In contrast, the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) sees myths as “public, collective dreams ... [which] ... carry the neurotic contents of the subconscious” (Scarborough 1994:24). If according to Freud (Scarborough 1994:24) society outgrows the need for myth as it matures, and a healthy society would be free from the neurotic subconscious, one could theorise that the inverse could also point to a society’s health. Consequently, one could argue that the occurrence of mythology in a society is related to its disturbed hidden psyche and therefore its attitude towards violence against women. And by implication, does the appearance of mythology and fairy tales in contemporary art and film reflect a society’s ‘health’? In this context I have also considered Hilary Neroni’s (2005:18, 20) statement that the “violent woman appears at moments of ideological crisis, when the antagonism present within the social order – antagonisms that ideology attempts to elide – become manifest”.

We therefore have the binary opposites of reality and fantasy being linked to the ‘state of a society’s health’. But how do these function? For Jack Zipes (2006:78), fairy tales “are strong indicators of the level of civilization, that is, the essential quality of a culture and social order”. For him, fairy tales are directly linked to

the Western civilising process. The research by the German sociologist, Norbert Elias (1897–1990) on the civilising process<sup>6</sup> informs much of his work. Zipes (2006:33) maintains, “fairy tales operate ideologically to indoctrinate children so that they will conform to the dominant social standards that are not necessarily established in their behalf”.

Jeffery Goldstein (1999:276) implicates Elias’ theories on the civilising process in a different way by saying: “Perhaps our attraction to violent imagery is an outcome of what sociologist Elias (1982) called the “civilizing process,” a way to fill the void left by diminished opportunities to experience the real thing”. With this Goldstein refers to the fact that many violent acts no longer take place with personal, and by extension, public interaction. The ‘void’ left by the absence of experience is filled by the representation of these experiences in the fantasy realm. If one thinks of the consumption of animal flesh in contemporary households, the slaughter of these animals occurs within certain sanitised and socially removed contexts such as the abattoir. The majority of consumers buy their freshly decapitated and prepared animal bodies from retailers without thinking, let alone experiencing, the violence of ‘killing one’s own supper’. Historically these, and similar acts of violence, were deemed necessary to some extent, and were performed within the household or within a specific social context. Goldstein makes another important point. The ‘attraction’ of violent images is directly dependent on whether or not the viewer understands the context of the images within the realm of entertainment (Goldstein 1999:278). It is the fact that certain violent images occur within the realm of fantasy, that allows the viewer the freedom to enjoy the violence.

Thus, on the one hand, we have thousands of years of descriptions of violence against women through mythology and fairy tales, which inform our society. On the other hand, contemporary society is a world over run with images of real life violence that in turn informs a new ‘mythology’. Significantly, Tarantino in his

interview on the DVD version of *Kill Bill* says that he 'sets up the mythology' in *Kill Bill I*, while *Kill Bill II* is the unravelling of the mythology (*Kill Bill I* 2003).

Mythology and narrative are intertwined systems which Jerry Hoeg (2009:2-3)<sup>7</sup> believes is a "precondition for entering and constructing human society". Humans are "hard-wired" for narrative (Hoeg 2009:1) and it functions on four levels, firstly as aid for sexual selection, secondly as tool for testing alternatives for dealing with reality, thirdly as means of social control and fourthly for social bonding. All four of these motivations have direct implications for this study. In my view, Tarantino in the *Kill Bill* films, seems to be presenting the viewer with an alternative way of dealing with the violence The Bride experiences at the hands of her mentor, lover and colleagues, but also the narrative becomes a channel for bonding women who sympathise and support vengeance as a behavioural option for abused women. The victim turned perpetrator seems to win the sympathy of the audience as her revenge actions are somehow justified. In terms of narrative as social control, Marsha Kinder (in Slocum 2001:84) states that Tarantino believes that "cinematic violence is increasingly used as an arena in which rival racial and ethnic masculinities vie for power". As he does not mention women in this quote, one could infer either that women are not part of this power battle, or that women do not use cinema as a platform to challenge power relations. If one further views Neroni's (2005:19) comment that "[t]he depiction of a violent woman upsets [the] association of violence with masculinity", it becomes clear that filmic representations of violent women are highly complicated in terms of the representation of power.

From a different perspective, Djurberg's work can be seen as providing a literal alternative reality to the narrative of violence, by her use of claymation as medium. In contrast to Tarantino's victims, the revenge her victims seek is not socially acceptable and does not lead to social approval. When her victims become perpetrators, their acts seem to be as perverse as the acts that have



been performed on them, leaving the viewer to contemplate the ethical implications of the characters' actions.

The fascination we have with violent images raises many ethical questions, not only regarding the moral behaviour of the individuals portrayed, but also the influence of violent images on society. The controversy lies between the ethical issues<sup>8</sup> surrounding violence itself, and the use of violence as creative inspiration and as an instrument for social commentary.

William Rothman (in Slocum 2001:37-38) notes that America is “a less violent place than it used to be ... [b]ut Americans believe that violence is escalating out of control” and this perception is attributed mainly to the overabundance of graphic violence in mass media. Steven Pinker in his book *The better angels of our nature: why violence has declined* (2011) makes a similar statement. His studies show a long-term decrease in person-on-person violence, as well as war related deaths which he ascribes to the civilising process as identified by Elias which has led to a more humane, intelligent society (Aronson 2013:246). His evidence is disputed by Ronald Aronson, amongst others, on the basis that Pinker does not grapple with the definition of violence, but sees violence as merely a legal principle, which requires “a perpetrator, a cruel act, a harmful effect” (Aronson 2013:255). In fact the nature of violence goes beyond this, and Pinker's statistics do not take into account systemic violence such as poverty, disease and inequality, or institutional violence such as discriminatory laws. The problem of defining violence and its implication for the representation of violent acts is discussed in greater depth in chapter 2, section 2.3.

As with Rothman's statement, Pinker's book does raise questions regarding the prevalence of images of violence and the perpetuation of violence in society. What role do these images play in the tolerance, even incitement of violent acts? To what extent do stereotypes influence the portrayal of violence, and ultimately, violent acts in themselves? I do not propose to have answers to

these questions, which are too generalised and too lofty to be of any relevance in an academic study. I do however propose that by investigating the work of my chosen artists; we may come to some kind of understanding about the relationship between imagined and real acts of violence in contemporary society.

Lastly, my choice of the work of Nathalie Djurberg stems from the disturbing impact viewing her work at the 2009 Venice Biennale for the first time had on my psyche. In my professional capacity as art educator, I am confronted with scores of images daily, many of them violent in nature. I do believe that this constant exposure has conditioned me to accept these kinds of images within an academic environment, which requires an objective, unemotional and analytic approach. My first reaction when viewing *Experimentet* (2009)<sup>9</sup> was one of horrific, repellent fascination, which soon became rather disconcerting and disturbing to me. Since then I have tried to understand why her work in particular, considering my daily exposure to images in academia, had this impact on me. Djurberg's claymations speak to me of someone trying to come to terms with a violent and mostly psychopathic world. Djurberg's work also deals with the precarious relationship of being a victim and being the perpetrator. This is something that she intentionally exploits in her animations. In an interview with the Italian art historian Germano Celant, Djurberg states:

I play all the parts in my films, so I am both male and female in them. When I started animating, I always saw myself as the victim, but then I realized that I was just as much the torturer. I am the victim and the perpetrator (Djurberg in Koolhaas & Celant 2008:108).

The choice of Tarantino's films stems from the fact that they are cult narratives with a broader-based viewership. My reaction to my first viewing of a Tarantino movie, *Pulp Fiction* (1994)<sup>10</sup>, was similar to my reaction to Djurberg's animation. I vividly recall becoming physically sick upon viewing the scene in which Vincent (played by John Travolta) accidentally unloads his gun and vividly splatters the victim's brains across the interior of the car. This was around 1994; the year apartheid ended in South Africa. I believe my reaction was closely related to the violence South Africans in general had experienced in the previous decades,

where violence had been all too real. I left the cinema, nauseous and did not return to watch the film in its entirety until the start of this study, although I became an ardent fan of Tarantino's other work.

As with Djurberg's work, the relationship between victim and perpetrator in *Kill Bill* is relevant to the study. *Kill Bill* is important in its approach to the female revenge narrative. The central figure of The Bride played by Uma Thurman appears as both victim and perpetrator. In contrast with Djurberg's narratives, *Kill Bill* superficially shows women the alternatives to being a victim. I write 'superficially' with intent, as I consider the underlying stereotypes in the film undermining, rather than liberating for women. It is one of the objectives of this study to show that stereotypes, which can be traced back to mythology and fairy tales, still exist in modern narratives to the detriment of women; violent or not.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

By analysing and comparing selected works by the Swedish born claymation artist Nathalie Djurberg and the American film director, screenwriter, producer, cinematographer and actor, Quentin Tarantino, this study seeks to investigate the following issues:

1. Is the perceived increase in the portrayal of violent women in contemporary art and films a reflection of contemporary societal values, and if so, what are these values?
2. How do contemporary portrayals of violent women differ from historical representations?
3. What is the relationship between the depiction of violence and the perpetration of real life crimes?

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between reality and portrayed images of violent women as an indicator of contemporary social norms. This is achieved by investigating the following issues:

1. The contemporary portrayal of violent women in art and film within the context of a comparative analysis of the historical and contemporary portrayal of violence against women in general;
2. The analysis of the stereotypical violent woman in terms of acts of dismemberment and dispossession in the work of the two artists;
3. The influence of mythology, fairy tales and associated stereotypes on the perception and portrayal of violent women;
4. The relationship between mythological and fantasy narratives in the work of the two artists;
5. The violent woman as *homo sacer*.

The central focus of the study is the violent acts of 'dispossession' and 'dismemberment' in the animated claymations of Djurberg and the two volumes of Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films. The debate questions the role of narrative (in ancient mythology, fairy tales, as well as in contemporary narrative art and film) as a mechanism of control and power, with specific reference to the stereotypical views of violent or outcast women, taking into consideration Agamben's *homo sacer*.

### **1.3 Objectives**

By analysing selected works by Nathalie Djurberg and Quentin Tarantino with regard to their portrayal of dismemberment and dispossession, the study will show that

- 1) the relationship between real and fictional violent women is a reflection of contemporary society;

- 2) the relationship between real and imagined images of violence, and their relevance is an indicator of social anxiety;
- 3) the relationship between ancient mythology, fairy tales and the contemporary portrayal of 'the violent woman' is stereotypical and therefore acts as a cultural barometer for the attitude towards women in general;
- 4) Giorgio Agamben's theories on *homo sacer* are relevant for the stereotypical concept of 'the violent woman'.

#### **1.4 Relevance of the study**

I believe the study is relevant on a number of levels and that the investigation of the influence of visual imagery on society, and vice versa, is one of continued importance. Firstly in postmodern society, feminism in its broadest sense, has attempted to free women from patriarchal oppression. I say 'attempted to', as it on the one hand has been "one of the most far-reaching movements of this century, whose influence has been felt in every area of social, political and cultural life worldwide" (Gamble 1998:vii). On the other hand, despite the apparent liberation of women, many women are still oppressed in patriarchal societies where their lives are frequently endangered. One needs only to think of the concepts of 'honour killings' and 'bride burnings' to support the idea that not all women around the world have the legal and political rights feminism has sought, not to mention other social and personal liberties. Thus, firstly the study is an investigation into violence against women, and the inversed notion that women can, and do, commit violent acts as well.

Secondly, the study examines the portrayal of women in visual culture from a specific angle; that of the stereotypes presented of violent women, the precarious relationship between the binary opposites of victim/perpetrator, and the narratives that inform and uphold these stereotypes. Thirdly, the role of film and related visual culture in the continued subordination and oppression of

women needs to be in constant revision in the light of technological advances in the field (Mulvey 2004).

The representation of violence in mass media is also a highly controversial issue. In the introduction of *Killer images: documentary film, memory and the performance of violence* (2012) it is stated that:

Cinema is often directly implicated in the imagination and machinery of mass violence. Thus, if the cinematic image and mass violence are two defining features of modernity, the former is significantly implicated in the latter... cinema offers unique opportunities to explore both the routines of violence as well as the rhetoric and imagination that begets violence (Ten Brink & Oppenheimer 2012:3).

In other words, according to the editors (Ten Brink & Oppenheimer 2012:1), the cinematic image not only shapes how violent acts are perceived, but also how they are performed.

The relationship between the perception of violence and its performance is illustrated most vividly by the idea of copycat murders. A relevant example in terms of this study is the film *Natural Born Killers* (1994)<sup>11</sup>. Tarantino wrote the original screenplay, but it was radically rewritten by the director Oliver Stone, the writer David Veloz and producer Richard Rutowski. On one level, the film comments on the relationship between the serial killers, Mickey (played by Woody Harrelson) and Mallory Knox (played by Juliette Lewis) and the media, which fuels their killing spree with its coverage. On a different level, the film has become notorious for being 'the inspiration' for many copycat killings. John Charles Kunich in his article 'Natural Born Copycat Killers and the Law of Shock Torts' (2000) investigates amongst other aspects the prolific number of copycat murders associated with the movie. Alison Young (2009:6) states that the movie has been implicated in at least 15 murders besides the Columbine shootings. The influence of the movie in the Columbine High School massacre is discussed in chapter 3, section 3.4.

While the idea of re-enacting a murder, or even 'merely' committing murder might be 'off limits' for most people, the issue of copycat crimes is still relevant,

albeit in a different and concealed form. The idea, in essence, reflects the debate around the influence of mass media on crime and vice versa. An example of how film influences the “machinery of mass violence” is the use of film in desensitising soldiers and preparing them for violence. Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer note (2012:2) that the movie *Rambo* (1982)<sup>12</sup> became “a canonical text for the Revolutionary Unit Front rebels [in Sierra Leone], who borrowed their *noms-de-guerre* directly from Hollywood action films”. A discussion of the acts of dismemberment by rebel forces in Sierra Leone takes place in chapter 4, section 4.1. Michel Wieviorka (2009:68) in fact goes as far as to call the relationship between terrorism and the mass media as “symbiotic”, in that they ‘feed’ off each other.

In my opinion, based on the research for this study, it is this relationship between perception (imagination, fantasy) and performance (reality) that is at the heart of the controversy. It is however ‘how’ the individual/society reacts to this relationship, which splits the debate. Central to the study is the relationship between fantasy, reality and the performance of violent acts. By investigating the portrayal of violence in film and art, and relating this to real life crime, the study by implication delves into related issues such as the propagation of violence and the possible functions of violent images.

Most debates regarding violent images focus on the effects of viewing them and the subsequent dissemination of violence in society. However, few ask the question “can violent images have a function other than inciting violence, and what would that be?” David Slocum (2004:25, 2001:13-14) refers to René Girard’s theories on scapegoating in this respect:

Girard claims that the social function of sacrifice begins with the desiring of a single object by two individuals .... [eventually] ... the object loses significance and the rivalry with the other intensifies ... Finally, both look elsewhere for redress, to a marginal member of the community, a scapegoat, who absorbs the violence of the rivalry and is expelled, thereby restoring the community of self and other (Slocum 2001:13).

Girard's writings on the role of scapegoats are relevant to the study on two levels. Firstly, the idea that violent women serve as scapegoats for male anxiety, especially in the light of Neroni's (2005:18,20) statement regarding the appearance of violent women at a time of ideological crisis. Secondly, the role of film as scapegoat is investigated in terms of its perceived ability to promote violence, but also the potential for filmic violence to 'stand in' for society's need for real violence.

A related aspect is the problem of the propagation of violence, and specifically the role of violent images in the propagation of violence. How does violence spread? For René Girard:

... violence is contagious and behaves as an infectious disease. Violence contaminates those individuals that are exposed to it and easily become epidemic, sweeping along an entire community in a cycle of reciprocal violence, of blow and counterblow (Depoortere 2012:157).

In summary, the relevance of the study lies in its investigation of the issues surrounding the portrayal of violence and the stereotypes associated with violent women.

### **1.5 Scope of the study**

This section outlines a number of issues related to the study, but do not specifically form an integral part of it and fall beyond the scope of this research. The explanation for the reasoning is provided as follows. Firstly, the issue of race and the portrayal of racial stereotypes are particularly important in Tarantino's films. Although the study is approached with an awareness of racial and cultural issues, I consider this as being beyond the scope of the study. The reasoning behind this is that although the reasons for individual acts of violence against women occur within specific social and cultural contexts, the violence occurs across racial and cultural boundaries and all women are potential victims or perpetrators. In this respect, the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) sees violence as an attempt to deal with alienation resulting from oppression,



whether this is in the form of political, religious, economic or social (including racial or gender based) oppression. As Tony Stigliano (1983:53) notes Sartre's theory also serves to underscore the violent behaviour as being typical of a certain group or individuals, and paradoxically ends up further alienating the oppressed. It is the alienation that results that is most important, with the contributing factors being of secondary importance for this study.

Secondly, the use of the term 'violence' is a very general idea, and what constitutes violence has been debated by many theorists, with very few of them agreeing. The problematic nature of the definition is discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3. The reason for having a very clear definition of what violence entails, boils down to a practical reason, that of law enforcement. Whether or not a person is guilty of a crime depends largely on the definition of the violence, and whether one has a 'good lawyer' who can debate the limits of the definition in favour of the plaintiff. The problem takes on another dimension if we consider Agamben's *homo sacer*:

Law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the *exceptio*: it nourishes itself on the exception and is a dead letter without it (italics in original) (Agamben 1998:27).

Most dooming, however, is the fact that Agamben views all as potentially *homo sacer*, as Richard Ek (2006:371) states: "You are either *homo sacer* or potentially *homo sacer*; there is no in-between", which paradoxically renders one unprotected by law.

Despite the fact that I have noted the problematic nature surrounding the definition of violence and violent imagery, I have divided this study into two sections. The first focusses on the concept of 'dismemberment' and the second on the concept of 'dispossession'. The reason for this is as follows. Dismemberment, for me represents the physical acts of bodily harm, physical power over another, while dispossession relates to psychological power over another, which may or may not involve the use of physical violence. This relates to the dimensions of violence (structural, cultural and direct) according to the

sociologist Johan Galtung (Schinkel 2010:37-44) as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3, but also Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* which relates to the dehumanisation of large numbers of individuals in contemporary society (Ek 2006:363). By continually juxtaposing binary opposites as a subtext, the study also addresses the complexity of the issues it deals with.

The issue of censorship and regulation of violent images is acknowledged, but will not form part of the study.

Examples of fairy tales and mythology are taken mostly from Western cultures and traditions, as this has been an area of interest for me since childhood. In order to acknowledge the wider relevance of narratives in this study, I have tried wherever possible to use a narrative formula, which refers to the general story lines.

### **1.6 Domain of the study**

The domain of the study is the field of visual culture, film studies and feminist mythology.

### **1.7 Methodology**

Qualitative research in the following areas has been applied in this study:

1. Background to the study and literature review, as well as visual text based research.
2. Establishing the boundaries of the study, and critically establishing the areas of research that are seminal, or relevant, but fall outside the scope of the investigation.
3. Feminist applications of *homo sacer* for the violent woman or outcast.
4. Woman as victim/perpetrator.
5. Woman as stereotype using a broadly feminist approach.

6. Contents and visual analysis of selected claymation works by Nathalie Djurberg.
7. Contents and visual analysis of aspects of Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.
8. Issues of dismemberment and dispossession in Nathalie Djurberg's claymation works and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.
9. Comparative use of narrative in Nathalie Djurberg's claymation works and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.

## **1.8 Outline of the chapters**

### Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction provides the background to the study, the aims and anticipated findings, as well as sets the parameters of inclusion and exclusion of research data.

### Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 contains the brief biographical overviews of Tarantino and Djurberg, as well as an analysis of the core readings, and the implications of their main theories for this study. The sources are briefly summarised as follows:

Human rights/ethics: Giorgio Agamben's *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life* (1998) provides the broad framework for contemporary thought regarding the ethics and human rights issues of violence in society, in relation to the notion of *homo sacer*.

Narrative: Jonathan Gottschall's *Literature, science and a new humanities* (2008a) offers a method of quantifying aspects of stereotypes within mythology and fairy tales, which informs the investigation of the female stereotypes in Djurberg and Tarantino's work.

Mythology: Lillian Doherty's *Gender and the interpretation of classical myth* (2003) provides an anthology of essays around gender systems and ancient mythology.

Film: Some theories around masochism and spectatorship are discussed in Sue Thornham's *Passionate detachments: an introduction to feminist film theory* (1997), and provides a theoretical basis for the understanding of film from a feminist perspective. Hilary Neroni's (2005) writings in *The violent woman: femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American Cinema* comments on the contemporary portrayal of the violent woman in film.

### Chapter 3: The portrayal of 'the violent woman' in art and film

This chapter serves as background to the following chapters, and focusses on the various issues relating to the portrayal of violent women in mass media, film and art, taking Neroni's *The violent woman: femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American Cinema* (2005) as a starting point. The relationship between the real and imagined is investigated, as well as the related issues regarding the influence of violent images on society. A discussion of Tarantino's view of filmic violence is included.

### Chapter 4: Issues of dismemberment

As background, this chapter looks at the role or function of dismemberment in society, using historical examples to illustrate them. An analysis of the concept in Tarantino's *Kill Bill* is followed by a case study in which the narrative of *The Handless Maiden* is compared to the film. The analysis of the work of Nathalie Djurberg is based on the Dionysus myth, as well as the Oedipus myth and Freud's related theories.

### Chapter 5: Issues of dispossession

While dismemberment refers to the physical act of violence, dispossession refers to the conceptual act of mutilation and loss which occurs when women's rights

are marginalised, starting with the role of stereotypes in the oppression of women. This chapter contains a case study of the stereotypes in *Kill Bill*, as well as an investigation into Djurberg's use of the stereotypical fairy tale, Little Red Riding Hood.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The following conventions are used throughout this dissertation:

- a. Where I refer to the *Kill Bill* films, this implies both volumes, seen as one collective work. Only in specific instances where the citation needs to differentiate between the two volumes, do I refer to them as either *Kill Bill I* or *Kill Bill II*;
- b. I refer to the characters in *Kill Bill* by their fictional names for ease of reading. A complete list of actors and characters is supplied in the appendix (number 1 & 2);
- c. In cases where I refer to other films as examples, the name of the actor follows in brackets after the name of the character. Thereafter I will only use the character's name as reference.

<sup>2</sup> Artemesia Gentileschi (1593 – c.1652), Renaissance painter and daughter of Orazio Lomi Gentileschi (1563–1639), was raped by her father's colleague and friend, Agostino Tassi (1578 – 1644) in May 1611. Tassi continued to have sexual relations with Gentileschi on the pretext of a marriage promise. However, Tassi kept on delaying fulfilling this promise, which eventually led to Orazio Gentileschi legally pursuing the case one year later. The trial started in March 1612 and lasted for seven months. Detailed documentation of the trial has survived. Tassi was sentenced to five years in exile from Rome, a sentence never served, and finally annulled in 1613 by his patrons. In an arranged marriage, Gentileschi married Pierantonio diVincenzo Stiattesi (dates unknown) after the trial and moved to Florence. Her husband deserted her and at least one daughter circa 1622. She remained an active painter until her death in 1652 or 1653 in Naples (Cohen 2000:47-49).

<sup>3</sup> Gentileschi painted the same theme again in 1623/25 (see plate II, figure 3).

<sup>4</sup> An image of Giovanni Baglione's *Judith and the Head of Holofernes* (1608) and others (see plate II, figures 5 to 9) are included to illustrate an alternative approach to the myth of Judith by Renaissance painters in general, a very popular theme at the time.

<sup>5</sup> Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) was born at Caravaggio, near Bergamo. Anthony Langdon in the bibliographical entry on Caravaggio in *The Oxford Companion to Western Art* (online via *Oxford Art Online*) states the following:

Caravaggio was an unstable, violent man who lived in a violent age. His life story, his image as a rebel against conservative values, and the powerful immediacy of his art have made him by far the best-known Italian 17th-century painter, but it is not always appreciated that he was a highly intellectual painter (Langdon [Sa]).

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His time in Rome was marked by various violent incidents and a number of imprisonments from 1603 to 1605:

Caravaggio's quarrelsome and antisocial behaviour spiralled out of control during this period. He was sued and imprisoned for circulating obscene doggerels about a rival painter, Baglione, and according to Malvasia he threatened to knock Guido Reni's head off for 'stealing his style'. He was also involved in a string of violent incidents with the swordsmen and whores of the Roman streets, ending with his killing of Ranuccio Tomassoni in a gang fight in May 1606. Fleeing Rome, he was sentenced to death in absentia (Langdon [Sa]).

Caravaggio's next few years were spent between Naples, Malta and Sicily, which included another prison sentence in Malta for assaulting an officer of the law. His violent nature and lifestyle finally resulted in his death:

By 24 October 1609 Caravaggio was back in Naples, for he was then attacked and disfigured in a tavern there. In the next few months he painted many urgent, spare works, often depicting scenes of execution and martyrdom. By July 1610 he knew that a pardon was being obtained for him from the Pope, and he set out to return to Rome. At Palo he was imprisoned, and when he had bought his way out he found that the boat containing his belongings had left without him. He hurried up the coast after the boat but collapsed and died at Porto Ercole (Langdon [Sa]).

Caravaggio died on 18 July 1610 as a result of his wounds. He had also contracted malaria. The papal pardon was granted to him on 31 July 1610.

<sup>6</sup> See Elias (1969), (1982) and (2000).

<sup>7</sup> These various theories regarding narrative are summarised by Hoeg (2009:1) as follows: Geoffrey Miller argued its use for sexual selection, Edward O. Wilson sees it as a way of testing mental options to reality, Joseph Carroll implies that narrative is required for us to make sense of the world, Jerome H. Barkow sees narrative as an important way of exerting social control, while Robin Dunbar thinks that narrative is crucial in social bonding.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Pardue (2008:159-172) in his essay on violence as a resource in Brazilian hip hop discusses some of the ethical issues involved in the debate, such as the conflict between violent inspiration and the perceived glorification of violence for some hip hoppers and rappers, who are, controversially, also role models for the youth.

<sup>9</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. (2009). Installation, claymation, digital video and mixed media, dimensions variable. Music by Hans Berg. Courtesy of Giò Marconi, Milan and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York. (Data: Fondazione la Biennale di Venezia 2009:41).

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<sup>10</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino, written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. *Pulp Fiction*. (1994). Motion picture, 154 minutes. Production company: Miramax Films, A Band Apart.

<sup>11</sup> Directed by Oliver Stone, story by Quentin Tarantino, screenplay by David Veloz, Richard Rutowski and Oliver Stone. *Natural Born Killers*. (1994). Motion picture, 118 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers.

<sup>12</sup> Directed by Sylvester Stallone, written by Art Monterastelli and Sylvester Stallone. (2008). *Rambo*. (2008). Motion picture, 92 minutes. Production company: Lionsgate, The Weinstein Company.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section firstly contains a short biography<sup>1</sup> of both Nathalie Djurberg and Quentin Tarantino as background to the study, followed by a discussion of the core sources that have contributed to this study, and the implications of their main theories for this study.

### 2.1 Overview of artists

Quentin Jerome Tarantino was born on 27 March 1963 in Knoxville, Tennessee. While both his parents and his stepfather work in the film or entertainment industries, he credits his mother with exposing him to films from an early age. His mother, Connie McHugh, who is of Irish-Cherokee Indian decent, fell pregnant with him at age 16. His father, Tony Tarantino is of Italian decent with a family background in film. His parents separated before his birth. McHugh is a movie producer for Prague Indies Productions, and is married to Curtis Zastoupil, a musician and poetry writer (The Quentin Tarantino Archives).

A very intelligent person, with a purported IQ of 160, Tarantino left school at age 16 to study acting (International Movie Data Base, Pratt 2011:13-16). At age 22, he started working at the Manhattan Beach Video Archives in California. In an interview with the actor, Dennis Hopper (1994:11-13), Tarantino states that working in the video store provided him with all the education for his film career he ever needed, more than his formal education did. Here he could watch films throughout his working day, as well as discuss films with like-minded people.

His acting career has been largely obscured by his work as a writer and as a filmmaker, having written several books, scripts and directed or co-directed numerous films. (See Appendix 3 for a complete list of Tarantino's work to date). *Reservoir Dogs*<sup>2</sup>, Tarantino's first major film and his directorial debut, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on 18 January 1992 (Pratt 2011:16) to mixed reviews<sup>3</sup>. Criticism against the movie was largely due to its violent nature.

However, much of the violence takes place off screen and is inferred such as the jewellery heist (Weinberger 2004:47). When violence does take place, it often takes the form of perverted humour as in the scene where Mr White (Michael Madson) cuts off the policeman's ear dancing to the tune of 'Stuck in the middle with you' by Steeler's Wheel. This detached, unemotional, bordering on psychotic portrayal of violence has become a trademark of Tarantino's films, which Stephen Prince summarises as:

Tarantino, though is drawn in his work to violence because he knows it as a movie style, and it is one he finds compelling. The style itself is the subject and form of his work. Accordingly, he has not moved to explore the psychological and emotional dynamics of violence in terms that might reference life apart from the movies (Prince 1998:241).

It is Tarantino's approach to violence and its portrayal in film that is of interest to the study, and is discussed in chapter 3, section 3.4.

According to Lesel Dawson (2014:124) "Tarantino describes the artistic process as a creative form of misremembering in which he corrects and completes well-loved films". This 'misremembering' manifests in Tarantino's films in his use of appropriation and intertextual references, and these have been analysed by various writers and film theorists, as well as the movie going audience who have come to expect the complex layering of ideas in his films. The website, *The Quentin Tarantino Archives* hosts several pages relating to these intertextual references for his various movies, and *Kill Bill* is described as the "movie-geek's movie" *par excellence*<sup>4</sup>. The author and film critic Douglas Kimball Holm (in Rennett 2012:397) refers to Tarantino as "an encyclopedic artist, someone who "draws on anything and everything at hand to tell his stories"". Michael Rennett (2012:392) describes Tarantino's approach to film making as a "cut-and-paste, mix-and-match directorial style". While the idea of dressing Uma Thurman in a yellow jumpsuit is obviously a homage to the martial arts actor Bruce Lee (1940-1973), the difference between 'homage' and 'plagiarism' in Tarantino's work is debateable. This issue is the topic of Laikwan Pang's 2005 article titled 'Copying *Kill Bill*'. But whether Tarantino's use of appropriation and intertextual

references are homages or plagiarism, the use of these points to the underlying, and recurring, similarities in narratives, which is one of the aspects investigated in this study.

Tarantino's portrayal of violent women, and women in general, is another debateable aspect of his work. His films seem to glorify the stereotypical 'warrior woman' and she is included in many of his films, *Kill Bill* and *Death Proof* (2007)<sup>5</sup> being two obvious examples. He has "described *Kill Bill* as a feminist story ... [due to its] ... inversion of traditional gender roles" (Tapia 2006:34). While he believes his work to be empowering to women, this study aims to show, by means of selected case studies, the correlation between oppressive narratives found in mythology and fairy tales and his work. In summary, Tarantino's work is primarily of interest to this study due to his portrayal of violence and his attitude to it, and specifically his portrayal of violent women.

Nathalie Djurberg was born in 1978 in Lysekil, Sweden and she graduated from the University of Malmö where she obtained her MFA in 2002. In 2009, Djurberg won the Silver Lion Award for a Promising Young Artist at the Venice Biennale (Nachtergaele 2009:53, Koolhaas & Celant 2008:237).

Her mother worked as a puppeteer in Göteborg, and working most nights, she left Djurberg to fill the hours by making her own puppets out of toilet paper. While Djurberg is an extremely private person, she does occasionally hint at some of the traumatic experiences that have influenced her, such as her absent father (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:135) and memories of her mother destroying her toilet paper puppets. At age sixteen she enrolled at art school, with sculpture as her main medium (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:51-53). While the puppets in her animations have been made from various materials, it is her use of clay, traditionally a child's toy, that lends metaphoric importance to her work. Her use of puppets as metaphor for dispossession is explored in chapter 5, section 5.4.

References to childhood involve not only her use of clay as medium, and her puppets, but also her references to fairy tales which occur frequently in her work. But as Koolhaas and Celant (2008:13) note these fairy tales “turn out instead to be nightmares for adults, where the torment reaches a maximum level of intensity and becomes catastrophe”.

While Tarantino’s films often portray violent women as ‘warriors’ or ‘heroes’, women fighting with a cause, Djurberg’s animations explore “the destructive character of femine existence” (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:23), and the violence her female characters perpetrate is psychotic, even criminal behaviour. Djurberg often explores the gray area where victims become perpetrators, such as in the narrative of *Hungry Hungry Hippos* (2007)<sup>6</sup> which infers paedophilia. The small baby eventually finds revenge by poking his finger into the anus of one of three obese women that have terrorised him, suggesting a cycle of violence.

## **2.2 Theoretical overview**

The core of this study centres firstly around the book by Giorgio Agamben titled *Homo Sacer: sovereign power and bare life* (1998), and secondly Hilary Neroni’s *The Violent Woman: femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American cinema* (2005). Sue Thornham’s *Passionate detachments: an introduction to feminist film theory* (1997) plays a supportive role, as does Lillian Doherty’s *Gender and the interpretation of classical myth* (2003) and Jonathan Gottschall’s *Literature, science and a new humanities* (2008a). The following section firstly discusses the problematic definition of violence, and secondly discusses the relevance of these sources for the study.

### **2.2.1 The problematic definition of violence**

The problematic nature of the concept of violence, and the implications for this study, as referred to in chapter 1, section 1.3, are discussed in this section. A clear definition of violence is firstly necessary as the process of law making depends on it, which in turn has ramifications for the understanding of

Agamben's *homo sacer*, which is paradoxically situated beyond the boundaries of law. As a starting point, even the dictionary definition of the term 'violence' is generalised and disparate as can be seen in the following extracts:

*The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* states that violence is:

Action that injures or destroys that to which it is applied. Structural violence is that which is inherent in a situation whose intentional or unintentional result is injury and destruction, and to which the authors of the situation are indifferent. In this sense coal-mines, or family life, may conceal structural violence (Blackburn 2014).

A longer and more explanatory definition is found in *A dictionary of human geography* that describes violence as follows:

The intentional use of physical force to cause harm or physical injury, either actual or threatened. Violence may be directed towards oneself (e.g. suicide), towards others (inter-personal violence), or by one collective against another, including in the form of political violence (see crime; sexual violence; terrorism; war). Although violence is often thought of as direct or immediate, Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung conceptualized 'structural violence' as the systematic prevention of individuals' potential by government action; racial discrimination is an example (see racism). US political theorist Iris Marion Young similarly examined 'systematic violence'—including physical attacks, sexual and racial harassment, and intimidation—as an obstacle to justice (Castree et al 2013).

In my opinion, the most relevant definition in terms of this study comes from Elizabeth Stanko's introduction to *The meanings of violence* (2003):

Understanding the context of violence means that we specify what happened, when, where and between whom as the beginning in our search to challenge the use of violence. Four elements are crucial in grappling with the meanings of violence: (1) the act itself; (2) the relationship of the participants to each other; (3) the location of the act; and (4) the outcome or the resultant damage. All of these elements combine to create a message from the meaning of violence (Stanko 2003:11).

In other words, violence is result of the interaction between various elements, of which not only the act, but the 'relationship' between the participants is important. It reflects the precarious nature of the individual's status as victim or perpetrator, which is investigated in this study.

In addition to these definitions, Willem Schinkel in *Aspects of violence: a critical theory* (2010:13), suggests a "distinction is [to be] made between private violence, state violence and structural violence ... as ideal-typical forms of

violence". Furthermore, violence can be seen as being either 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate', with legitimate violence normally referring to violence for or by the state and illegitimate violence denoting violence in or by society (Schinkel 2010:23). Immediately upon reading these two statements, one is struck by the paradox that even though most state violence could be seen as 'legitimate', or occurring within the scope of the law, the violence may not be ethical. For instance the violence committed by the Nazi regime was 'legitimate' and sanctioned by their laws, but was in no way 'ethical'. It is this discrepancy, the conflict between 'legitimate' and 'ethical', that informs many of Agamben's theories addressed in *Homo Sacer* (1998).

Connecting the term violence primarily with physical acts, as seen in the above definitions, is also problematic. Abstract acts of violence that relate to the psychological, emotional and mental wellbeing of a person or society need to be considered in the definition of violence. In this respect, Schinkel (2010:45) continues by stating his definition of violence as involving the "reduction of being".

It is Schinkel's (2010:37-44) opinion that the most comprehensive definition of violence is provided by the sociologist Johan Galtung<sup>7</sup>. Galtung (1969) distinguishes between structural violence (related to social structures or institutions), cultural (related to prevailing attitudes and beliefs) or direct (interpersonal, most commonly physical violence). The analysis of violence would therefore involve the examination of the intersections between the different forms of violence.

In addition to this already problematic definition of violence, Michel Foucault (in Slocum 2001:3) highlights another inherent problem, that "language itself communicates violence by giving a name to certain behaviors and constructing certain objects and subjects of violence". Thus if the role of language is already problematic in trying to understand the concept of violence, the relationship between language and visual imagery is even more so. One cannot simply

assume that an understanding of the concept 'violence' automatically translates into an understanding of violent imagery. Issues related to the understanding of violent imagery are discussed in section 2.6 of this chapter.

### 2.2.2 Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and the violent woman

*Homo Sacer: sovereign power and bare life* (1998) by Giorgio Agamben<sup>8</sup>, investigates the biopolitics of violence, man as sacred being, sacrificial killing and human rights in terms of the life of '*homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*' (Agamben 1998:8). The relevance of his theories for this study lies in the debates on violence in society from an ethical perspective in the "real" world, in contrast to the imaginary level on which violence in art and film functions, and specifically for the portrayal of the violent woman.

Agamben's theories are firstly dependant on the conceptual understanding of the nature of 'the sovereign'. In defining the sovereign as "one to whom the juridical order grants the power of proclaiming a state of exception" (Agamben 1998:15) which is "inseparable from our conception of democracy and the legal State" (Agamben 1998:30), Agamben (1998:15) notes the paradoxical existence of the sovereign who is "at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order". In other words, while the sovereign 'is' the law itself, it also has the power to decide on the boundaries of the law, or that which is included and that which is excluded. Law by its very nature is based on the ideas of inclusion and exclusion (Agamben 1998:26-27), and the sovereign has the power to decide on the 'state of exception'.

Agamben (1998:24-25) further argues that the changing nature of state of exception results in "zones of indistinction" as follows:

Law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the *exceptio*: it nourishes itself on this exception and is a dead letter without it ... The sovereign decision traces and from time to time renews this threshold of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion, *nomos* and *physis*, in which life is organically excepted in law. Its decision is the position of an undecidable (italics in original) (Agamben 1998:27).

Based on Agamben's theories, Bülent Diken and Carsten Laustsen (2002:291) argue that it is the chaos and terror generated by the zones of indistinction, which characterises contemporary urban life, and creates the space in which *homo sacer* exists.

While the nature of the sovereign for Agamben (1998:15, 71) is paradoxical and contradictory, the nature of *homo sacer* is ambivalent and uncertain. The relationship between the two is further explained as follows:

... the sovereign and *homo sacer* present two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns (italics in original) (Agamben 1998:84).

Although Agamben bases his theories on the archaic Roman concept of the life of "*homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (italics in original)(1998:8), his application of this archaic theory focusses on contemporary society. Richard Ek (2006:363) suggests that Agamben's work on *homo sacer* exemplifies the physical and social isolation, as well as the state of dispossession suffered by increasing numbers of people worldwide. James Tunstead Burtchaell (2000:626) in his review of the Agamben's book, *Homo Sacer*, points out that the author's preoccupation is the "modern legal innovation whereby whole victim groups are made available to misuse by being categorized out of the body politic". For Anthony Downey (2009:109) *homo sacer* equates to the "refugee, the political prisoner, the disappeared, the victim of torture, the dispossessed" and suggests, again echoing Agamben, that these are characteristic of contemporary society, not merely the exception. It is the proposal that *homo sacer* is the distinguishing feature of contemporary society which this study explores.

Until recently, the interpretation of Agamben's work on *homo sacer* has been confined mostly to the realms of politics. However if one considers the statements above in respect of *homo sacer* "being representative of contemporary society" (Downey 2009:109), the potential influence of Agamben's



theory in other areas becomes apparent. In terms of this study, the concept of *homo sacer*, for me, is linked to the concept of dispossession (displacement and desubjectification), which in turn legitimises the power of the 'sovereign' over *homo sacer*, ultimately allowing for physical abuse (including dismemberment) of the subject without any recourse to the law. In this study I compare the concept of *homo sacer* not only to the stereotype of 'the violent woman', but also to the experience of violence by women.

In order to grasp the implications of the concept *homo sacer* for the notions of outcasts, 'nonpersons' or even 'non-women' in this study, it is necessary to look at the meaning of the original word and thereafter to relate this to Agamben's theories. Agamben (1998:78-79) refers to the writings of William Warde Fowler in this regard. In his 1911 article, 'The original meaning of the word *Sacer*', Warde Fowler's opening words are as follows:

In Roman religious law the word *sacer* indicated that the object to which it was applied was the property of a deity, taken out of the region of the *profanum* by the action of the state, and passed on into that of the *sacrum* (italics in original) (Warde Fowler 1911:57).

The use of the words 'object' and 'property' in this quote are significant in context of this study, as they indicate a lack of humanness (object) and a state of possession or dispossession (property).

Warde Fowler (1911:62) continues by explaining that the word *sacer* refers simultaneously to the relationship between a god and "any object brought into connexion with him"<sup>9</sup>, and to the original Latin meaning of the word 'taboo'<sup>10</sup>, which is accompanied by a sense of damnation and rejection. At the same time though, the adjective *homo sacer*, allows for the transcendence of the outcast from being a purely divine possession to being an object, which although sacred, can be killed with impunity. But most importantly, "[s]*acer esto* is in fact a curse; and the *homo sacer* on whom this curse falls is an outcast, a banned man, tabooed, dangerous" (Warde Fowler 1911:58, Agamben 1998:79). In other words, *homo sacer* can be viewed partially as an anarchic individual living beyond the boundaries of the law. Implied is the fact that this anarchic individual may be

treated in ways that transgress the law, without the fear of retribution. On the other hand, the mere fact that the person lives beyond the confines of the legal system, they have no recourse to the law, and as such are vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, the violence that *homo sacer* experiences originates from the idea of double exclusion.

In an interview with Ulrich Raulff, the Culture Editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2004:609), Agamben states that *Homo Sacer* “deals with the strange relationship of law and lawlessness, law and anomy”. For Agamben this is the crux of the paradoxical existence of the sacred person who can be “killed with impunity” (1998:72). Although sacred and offered to the gods, in essence a possession, the person condemned as *homo sacer* may be hunted down and killed, and his/her killing would be unpunishable. Anyone could kill *homo sacer* and not be held accountable for the death. Therefore, *homo sacer* exists simultaneously within the law and outside the law. I find this statement about lawlessness particularly relevant in this study. The characters in Tarantino’s films often function in a lawless vacuum, and their actions are never submitted to the ramifications of the law. Crimes are committed with no legal consequences, and neither do legal consequences form part of the film’s narrative. In terms of this, Agamben draws on Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’<sup>11</sup>, and one problem raised by Benjamin is the criteria to be used to evaluate whether or not violence is justifiable (Morgan 2007:49). The question of ‘ethical’ violence seems to be paradoxical. Could violence be ‘ethical’ even if it ‘unethical’ and vice versa? In other words, could the result of violence be a justification of the means and what would the criteria for this be?

An example of this paradox is given by James Spence in his essay ‘The moral lives of *Reservoir Dogs*’ (in Greene & Mohammad 2007:43-54) discusses the complex morality of immoral criminals at the hand of Tarantino’s film *Reservoir Dogs*<sup>12</sup>. Traditionally we would not link the concept of ‘morality’ with the likes of murderers and gangsters. However Spence (in Greene & Mohammad 2007:46-

49) shows that an alternative moral code does in fact exist for these outcasts, for instance the fact that one gang member refuses to tip the waitress is met with serious disgust from the other gang members. A nearly laughable situation unfolds where the morality of 'withholding a tip' is debated by gangsters who kill for a living. This theme of criminal morality appears in many of Tarantino's films, and *Kill Bill* is no exception.

Using Agamben's theory on *homo sacer*, it is logical that violent acts such as revenge killings could paradoxically exist within the law and outside the law simultaneously. *Kill Bill* centres on the main protagonist, Beatrice Kiddo aka The Bride (played by Uma Thurman) and her quest for revenge. In the film, her colleagues execute the pregnant Bride after she decides to leave 'the business' of assassination. The Bride however survives the hit, and when she eventually awakes from her coma, goes on a "roaring rampage of revenge" (*Kill Bill I*, 2003). Somehow the audience is cajoled into sympathising with a criminal (outcast) and we find ourselves even rooting for her in the battle scenes. On the one hand we see the character of The Bride herself as being *homo sacer* – existing within and outside the law simultaneously, but her victims are also designated as *homo sacer* – those who 'may be killed' and their deaths will go unpunished.

Agamben provides another example of *homo sacer* which relates to this study. The case of Karen Quinlan, an American girl who survived many years in a coma due to artificial respiration and intravenous feeding, is related to the concept of 'bare life'. Once her artificial life support was turned off at the request of her parents, she continued to 'live' begging the question ... what constitutes bare life? For Agamben (1998:163-164) this zone of indetermination equals "the state of exception inhabited by bare life". In Tarantino's *Kill Bill I*, The Bride awakes from a coma and realises that she has been the victim of various rapes, orchestrated by one of the hospital orderlies while she was unconscious, her life reduced to 'bare life of *homo sacer*' and at the mercy of the 'sovereign'.

Why would someone be labelled as *homo sacer*? What would be the criteria for someone to find themselves in this state of exception and how does this relate to the way violence is portrayed in contemporary film and art? If the consensus is to be believed, this state is one that is “representative of contemporary society” (Downey 2009:109). Obviously, this issue does not function only in the realm of the imaginary or fantasies; there are too many real life examples of bride burnings<sup>13</sup>, honeymoon assassinations, dismemberment and rape-as-punishment<sup>14</sup> crimes to name. Despite the fact that feminism and women’s rights have become household words, many, many women still suffer daily at the hands of violent men. It is often only in the case of extreme violence and perversion, that media attention will be afforded. Most domestic violence goes unnoticed by the press and neighbours. When these abused women in fact do retaliate, they are often met with scorn such as in the case of Aileen Wuornos, which is discussed in chapter three of this study. But with sympathetic manipulation of the female stereotype, numerous women have been liberated from a pending death penalty, such as the case of Lizzie Borden, which is also discussed in chapter three. This study aims to investigate the questions of how the stereotypes of violent women portrayed in films and art, relate to the lives of women in general, and the implications of the state of exception, or *homo sacer*, for women, violent or not.

Agamben’s theory has been related in varying degrees to ‘the city’, to refugees/detainees, and other groups. But what are the further implications of Agamben’s *homo sacer* for this study? Firstly, the obvious correlation is with the victim, but in my opinion, it also relates to the state of exception experienced by perpetrators. As an example, I refer to a study, by Dale Spencer, PhD candidate in sociology at Carlton University, Canada (2009:219-240) which links Agamben’s theories of *homo sacer* to sex offenders. This again illustrates the ‘no man’s land’ those deemed as *homo sacer* find themselves in. Although sex offenders are normally thought of as being paedophiles, the label can include any sex crimes such as rape of adults. Djurberg’s work often deals with the theme of

paedophilia and sexual transgressions. Spencer argues that the “sex offender can be conceived as *homo sacer* – that is, life without form and value, stripped of political and legal rights accorded to the normal citizen” (2009:220). These offenders are outcasts and considered a danger to society. In Britain, the identities of these convicted paedophiles, as well as their whereabouts are published as part of a ‘naming and shaming’ operation. In this way these offenders have become *homo sacer*, stripped of all legal rights, labelled as an outcast and returned to the community for their ‘punishment’. Incidences of violence towards these offenders by their communities have been documented, and in most cases sanctioned by the communities. The problem here lies with someone that has been unjustly convicted of a crime he/she did not commit, and secondly, that the offender’s (innocent) families are often stigmatised and ostracised by implication as well. Paradoxically the offender will not be safer in prison, as sex offenders or paedophiles are outcasts in prisons as well, and in constant danger of being killed in the lawless space occupied by *homo sacer*. Spencer (2009:234-235) concludes that the utilisation of GPS monitoring, as well as forced chemical and physical castration of the sex offender also relates to a different aspect of Agamben’s theories of ‘life without value’, that of the confinement or tracking of human mobility (Ek 2006:374).

The prison system is an obvious example of Agamben’s ‘camp’ which controls and regulates the flow of human mobility. As with *homo sacer*, Agamben sees “the camp ... [not the city as] ... the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West” (Agamben 1998:181). It is within the camp that the sovereign’s obsession with security, surveillance and the increased containment of human mobility, comes to fruition, epitomised by contemporary airports<sup>15</sup>, which for Agamben equates to detention camps (Ek 2006:374). The concept of the ‘camp’ is a physical manifestation of the idea of inclusive exclusion, and the distinction between the sovereign and *homo sacer*.

Closely related to Agamben's *homo sacer*, and relevant to this study, is the notion of scapegoating or substitute sacrificial victims as proposed by René Girard<sup>16</sup>. It is the sacred nature of Agamben's *homo sacer* which establishes this relationship, and by implication its connection to violence. Colby Dickinson summarises Girard's views on the relationship between violence, sacrifice and substitute sacrificial victims or scapegoats as follows:

... the violence implicitly at work in any form of communal self-understanding, as well as how the world's religions and myths have tended either to conceal and thus perpetuate this violence (as in the realm of myth, Greek, Roman, etc) or to reveal and thereby denounce it (as in the Judeo-Christian heritage). That is, according to Girard, every community is prone to select and exclude its scapegoats (a choice often resulting in their death or exile); only a revelation of this hidden violence can possibly bring about a peaceful resolution (Dickinson 2011:953).

This study explores the notion of scapegoats in relation firstly to the role of violent women as symbols of societal anxiety based on Hilary Neroni's writings, but also in relation to the function of violent images in society, taking the blame for society's inability to deal with violence in general.

### **2.2.3 Neroni and the portrayal of the violent woman**

Hilary Neroni (b. 1969) is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Vermont, United States of America, and her contribution to this study lies in her investigation of the portrayal of the 'violent woman' stereotype in American film. Psychoanalytic theories inform her approach to film theory, which focus on issues of feminism, violence and narrative in contemporary American film. This study echoes these areas of investigation in that the influence of film narratives on the perception of women, and specifically violent women, as well as the repercussions of it for women's rights. This study also explores, as a subtext, the impact of several of Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychoanalytic theories and writings. Freud wrote extensively on mythology, as well as violence in society. However, it is his theory on the Oedipus complex and castration, which is particularly relevant to this study. Chapter 4, section 4.3.1 discusses the Oedipus complex in relation to Djurberg's work.

In the preface to *The violent woman: femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American cinema*, Neroni summarises the contradictory nature of violent women on screen as follows:

... violent women actually disrupt the structure of filmic narratives, call into question our conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and reveals the limits of, or failures of, ideology. Our simultaneous condemnation of and fascination with the violent woman stems from this disruptive position that she occupies. On the one hand, we want to preserve our society against the threat of the violent woman, but on the other hand, her threat excites us because it involves overturning the ideological structures (most especially those involving gender) that regulate our experiences (Neroni 2005:ix-x).

She also explores the link between violence and narrative by saying:

... even the most stylized violent films need narrative in order to exist, because narrative provides the background through which the violence acquires its significance and meaning (Neroni 2005:5).

Neroni deals firstly with the development and historical background to the concept of the violent woman, and secondly the contemporary portrayal of the violent woman in film. Significantly, the title of the first chapter, "Complementarity and its discontents", references Freud's book *Civilization and its discontents* (1930), and reflects her theory regarding the appearance of the violent woman in times of ideological crisis (Neroni 2005:18) or anxiety. In this regard, Neroni firstly explores the traditional representation of masculine violence in contrast to the depictions of violent women and then relates it to concept of trauma proposed by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) that the experience of trauma is related to the reaction an event produces (Neroni 2005:59). Neroni discusses this in relation to various murder cases by women and the public reaction to these cases. Her case studies are particularly relevant to this study as they not only explore the manipulation of the stereotypes associated with violent women, but also the relationship between real life violent women and their fictional counterparts.

Another important aspect Neroni investigates is the romantic notion of the violent woman as 'hero' or the alter ego of the male hero, or rather the female 'side kick' in action films, of which Sarah Connor (played by Linda Hamilton) in

*Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991)<sup>17</sup> and Trinity (played by Carrie-Ann Moss) in *The Matrix* (1999)<sup>18</sup> are good examples. The violent women in these films generally follow the stereotypical notion of the male hero, including their physical appearances, which feature short hair and muscular bodies. However, despite these women being strong-willed and independent, they are portrayed in a “complementary relationship” with their male counterparts (Neroni 2005:86-87), with the women showing some or other ‘weakness’ which is normally counteracted by the male hero. It is the fact that these women still ‘need a man’ that validates them.

It is however when the violent woman turns psychotic that the anxiety associated with the stereotype increases (Neroni 2005:113-131). These women often seem to be enjoying violence for its own sake, such as the character of Mallory (played by Juliette Lewis) in the film *Natural Born Killers* (1994)<sup>19</sup> originally written by Quentin Tarantino. One aspect this study explores is the manipulation of the violent woman stereotype in relation to the societal acceptance of their behaviour.

#### **2.2.4 Feminist film theory and the violent woman**

Sue Thornham is a Professor of Media and Film at the University of Sussex. Her book, *Passionate detachments: an introduction to feminist film theory* (1997) firstly provides a historical overview of feminist film theory, and secondly delves into some of the current debates in this field. The contribution by her book, is best summarised by the following extract from her introduction:

This book, then seeks to chart ... [the] ... history [of feminist film theory]. At the heart of its debates is the difficult triangular relationship between three central figures. First, there is the figure of ‘Woman’ as image or cinematic representation. Second, there is the figure of the real-life woman, who is always in fact *women* – a whole array of female subjects positioned differently within history and culture. Finally, there is the figure of the feminist theorist who – in however complex or theoretical a way – *speaks as* a woman. This relationship – [is] always tense, always a struggle over power and precedence ... (italics in original) (Thornham 1997: ix-x).



Thornham (1997:3) sees contribution of the feminist writer, Simone de Beauvoir (1908 – 1986) as seminal in the historical development of feminist film theory. De Beauvoir's statement that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1988:295) influenced the work of early feminist film theorists such as Mary Ann Doane<sup>20</sup> (b. 1952) on spectatorship and stereotypes, Patricia Mellencamp<sup>21</sup> concerning the representation of women in mass media, and Linda Williams<sup>22</sup> (b. 1946) on sex, pornography and violence.

A further contribution to the field of film theory is that of semiotics<sup>23</sup> and structuralist theories relating to the notion of film as 'text', although these deny to a large extent the influence of social factors on the production and understanding of film (Thornham 1997:xiii). In contrast, psychoanalytic theories such as those proposed by Laura Mulvey<sup>24</sup> (b. 1941) provided a means to understanding issues pertaining to spectatorship and the cinematic apparatus. The issue of voyeurism is of particular relevance to this study, due to the fact that it is often implicated in the debate on mass media violence.

A related issue Thornham (1997:93-116) investigates is the relationship between fantasy and violence which she discusses in terms of the 'fantasy theory', originating from Freud's 1919 essay, 'A child is being beaten' (1997:159-193) and its implications in beating fantasies. Djurberg's work often deals with the thin line between the fantasy and the reality of physical violence and this Freudian interpretation is of interest here. The study of masochism and spectatorship is equally important for the understanding of viewer fascination with violent images, such as those encountered in Djurberg and Tarantino's works.

The importance of Mulvey as a theorist is acknowledged by firstly Thornham's use of the term 'passionate detachment' which features in the title of her book. It was first used by Mulvey in 1973, (Thornham 1997: ix) and refers to Mulvey's view of how the feminist scholars should approach the study of cinema. Mulvey, who is Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of London, wrote

the seminal essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' in 1973, which was first published in 1975 in the journal, *Screen*.

In the essay, Mulvey states the crux of the matter as follows:

As an advanced representation system, the cinema poses questions of the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking (Mulvey 1975:7).

She relates the image of woman to Freud's psychoanalytic figure of woman as 'castrated' Other (Thornham 1997:41, Mulvey 1975:6) and as such she becomes merely the vehicle for male fantasies and desires:

The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands as lynch pin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies (Mulvey 1975:6).

An important aspect Mulvey further discusses is the pleasure of viewing or 'scopophilia', which relates both to the act of deriving pleasure from viewing, but also the pleasure derived from "being looked at" (1975:8-9), which in turn relates to Freud's theories on voyeurism, and a related idea, that of narcissism. Mulvey's own words best explains the relationship between voyeurism, narcissism and fantasy:

Sections II. A and B [of the essay] have set out two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation<sup>25</sup>. The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's<sup>26</sup> fascination with and recognition of his like (Mulvey 1975:13).

In other words, the pleasure derived from viewing film is linked to voyeurism on the one hand, which refers to the projection of desires onto an object, and narcissism on the other hand, which refers to the person's own identification with the image. It is this play between the association with the self and the longing for something 'not of the self', which informs fantasy, and also acts for the basis of many studies into the effects of violence in mass media.

The ideas of voyeurism and fantasy have been linked to the concept of symbolic catharsis (Berkowitz et al 1963:218-219), in that media violence could act as 'vent' for social aggression and pent up anger. This was the aim of the Berkowitz and Rawlings study of 1963, which showed, in conclusion, "little comfort for those who contend that fantasy aggression necessarily has socially beneficial effects" (Berkowitz et al 1963:229). The idea that filmic violence plays a cathartic role persists. Numerous studies<sup>27</sup> have been done regarding the effect of media violence on society, and taking these studies as a collective, no conclusive evidence has been found to either support or deny its influence (Felson 1996:123). David Slocum's article 'Film violence and the institutionalization of the cinema' (2002) explores the historical developments relating to film violence and the cultural and social contexts they occurred in.

Freud's essay titled 'A child is being beaten' (1919), later informed the 1964 essay by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, titled 'Fantasy and the origins of spectatorship'. The importance of this essay for this study lies in the connection it makes between fantasy and desire, and that it is related not so much to the object itself, but to the setting or as Thornham (1997:95) puts it "[f]antasy, then, is the *staging* of desire ... Fantasy crosses the boundaries between conscious and unconscious" (italics in original). An extension to the idea of fantasy is that of sadism, masochism, perversion and which manifest in the "body genres" of pornography, horror and melodrama, as posited by Linda Williams in her 1991 essay 'Film bodies: gender, genre, and excess'.

### **2.2.5 Mythology, fairy tales and the violent woman**

One common thread, which links contemporary art and film to ancient narratives such as mythology and fairy tales, is the use of stereotypes. Lillian Doherty<sup>28</sup> is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Maryland who explores the portrayal of gender stereotypes in ancient Greek and Roman mythology through the lens of current feminist theories as well as Freudian, Jungian, structuralist and post-structuralist theories. Jonathan Gottschall<sup>29</sup> on the other hand

rigorously attempts to dissect our preconceived ideas about stereotypes by putting them to the test in a quantitative analysis of fairy tales and folklore. Gottschall is Adjunct Assistant Professor at the English Department of Washington and Jefferson College, Washington.

At the core of Lillian Doherty's *Gender and the interpretation of classical myth* (2003), is the issue of gender representation in classical Greek and Roman mythology, seen through the lens of contemporary feminist theories.

Doherty explores the influence of the psychological approaches of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) on the interpretation of mythology. Both men wrote extensively on the topic, and their views resulted in two different approaches in the understanding of mythology, which is still evident today. Doherty (2003:46-47) sums it up as follows:

While both men saw myths as reflecting the structure of the unconscious mind, Freud emphasized their connections with pathology, that is, with the maladjusted mind and the sources of its pain, while Jung emphasized the adaptive and creative functions of the myths for 'normal' as well as disturbed people. Both men believed that some structures of the unconscious were universal. But Freud insisted that these had to be recreated in the mind of each individual in early childhood. Jung, by contrast, believed that the 'personal' unconscious' recognized by Freud was only part of the picture. It was matched, he thought, by a '*collective unconscious*', an inborn set of images or 'archetypes' shared by all people (italics in original) (Doherty 2003:46-47).

Freud's view of mythology, that of a pathological regressive tendency which culminated in his writings on the Oedipus complex and castration anxiety (Doherty 2003:48), is contrasted with Jung's positive view of myth which resulted in his study of archetypes, which greatly influenced the writings of Joseph Campbell (1904-1987). Campbell's book, *The hero with a thousand faces* (1949) which investigates the hero archetype, is a seminal source in this study. Jonathan Gottschall's *Literature, science and a new humanities* (2008a) also takes inspiration from Campbell. In terms of this study, the relationship between the filmmaker George Lucas (b. 1944) and Joseph Campbell is of interest, as Lucas has inferred that the narrative of the first *Star Wars*<sup>30</sup> film (1977) was based in part on Campbell's book. This relationship is amongst the issues explored in a

series of interviews done at Lucas' Skywalker Ranch in California by Bill Moyers titled *Joseph Campbell and the power of myth*, and was first broadcast in 1988. This is once again an example of the close connection between reality and fiction.

The relationship between myth and ritual is also examined by Doherty. One of the most important writers in this field for Doherty was Jane Ellen Harrison<sup>31</sup> (1850-1928), one of the earliest feminist writers of mythology and part of the so called Cambridge School. Her writing on the connection between myth and ritual, specifically initiation rituals (which relate to transition), sacrifice, and the myth of Dionysus, is of particular interest to this study. A brief outline of Harrison's thoughts on the myth of Dionysus is included in Doherty's book (2003:83-85).

Harrison's writings further influenced the work of Walter Burkert<sup>32</sup> (b. 1931) and René Girard (b. 1923), both having written extensively on mythology, as well as the concept of sacrifice. Girard was mentioned earlier in relation to Agamben's theories on *homo sacer*. Doherty (2003:77-78, 86) explains the difference in approach between Burkert and Girard regarding the notion of sacrifice as follows:

The radical claim of both Burkert and Girard is that sacrificial ritual was the crucial step in the creation of human society. Girard sees the sacrificial victim (animal or human) as a scapegoat who allows the members of a group to vent their aggressive impulses without turning against each other. Burkert finds the origin of social bonding in a more complex sacrificial pattern of aggression followed by reparation, which he traces back to the rituals of Palaeolithic hunters (Doherty 2003:86).

As stated earlier, Girard's theory on scapegoating forms an important part of this study, and also relates to Agamben's writing on *homo sacer*. The relationship between Girard's theories, and that of Agamben's is explored in the article by Colby Dickinson (2011), 'Beyond violence, beyond the text: the role of gesture in Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, and its affinity with the work of René Girard'.

Doherty also explores the idea of 'Myth as charter', or the influence of myth on society in general, in relation to the writings of Mircea Eliade<sup>33</sup> (1907-1986) on comparative mythology, as well as the contributions by structuralist and post-structuralist theorists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss<sup>34</sup> (1908-2009) which sought to analyse mythology and culture in terms of linguistics, and Jean-Pierre Verant<sup>35</sup> (1914-2007).

Doherty concludes by reviewing the most important theories with regards to myth, folklore and popular culture, as well as the relationship between these. Jack Zipes<sup>36</sup> has written extensively on the role of fairy tales and folklore and the civilizing process. Commenting on the contribution by Zipes, Doherty (2003:157) states that "he examines the hazy areas where myth and folktale (by his definitions) overlap, and where they blend with the more modern genres of fairy tale, mass-market fiction, and film". Another important contributor to feminist writings in this field is by the cultural historian Marina Warner<sup>37</sup> (b. 1946). Her contribution has been mostly in terms of the re-evaluation of traditional gender roles.

Jonathan Gottschall's *Literature, science and a new humanities* (2008a) stems from what he calls the "crisis in the humanities" (2008a:1) which refers mostly to the systematic marginalisation of the humanities in academia and education systems in contemporary society. He proposes that for the humanities to retain its importance as a field of study, contemporary research methodology needs to shift to quantitative (in other words, more scientific and more objective) methods. Structuralist theories attempted to do this, but the narrow focus on language has meant a limited application.

Gottschall investigates the possible applications of various scientific methods to the field of literary studies, using various case studies to illustrate his proposed methodology. The chapter entitled 'The heroine with a thousand faces: universal trends in the characterization of female folktale protagonists' has particular significance for this study. Drawing inspiration from Joseph Campbell's *The hero*

*with a thousand faces* (1993), Gottschall and his research team analysed 1440 folktales in respect of their depiction of 'the female hero' (Gottschall 2008a:94-95). The relevance of certain of their findings for this study is discussed in chapter 5, section 5.3.2 which analyses the stereotypical portrayal of violent women.

Chapter 5 of Gottschall's book titled 'Testing feminist fairy tale studies' relates to Doherty's book *Gender and the interpretation of classical myth* (2003) in that it uses the writings by Zipes on the role of fairy tales in the process of enculturation as starting point, specifically the idea that "fairy tales enforce cultural norms that exalt [female] passivity ... and perpetuate the patriarchal status quo" (Gottschall 2008a:115). One of the aims of this study is to show the relationship between narratives (both in mythology and fairy tales) and the work of Tarantino and Djurberg as a reflection of contemporary society.

In conclusion, the writings by Giorgio Agamben inform the notion of man as political entity, while Hilary Neroni's work reflects on the portrayal of violent women in contemporary American cinema. Sue Thornham offers information on the various discourses feminist film theory deals with. Lillian Doherty provides the theoretical background to the interpretation of gender and mythology. Jonathan Gottschall provides an alternative view on evaluating data in the field of the humanities.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> While postmodern theories claim that authorship should not be considered when analysing work, one aspect this study investigates is the close relationship between reality and fiction, as well as the intertextual references between these. For this reason, I include a short biographical introduction to the artists.

<sup>2</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino, written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. *Reservoir Dogs*. (1992). Motion picture, 99 minutes. Production company: Live Entertainment, Dog Eat Dog Productions Inc.

<sup>3</sup> For reviews at the time of release see [metacritic.com/movie/reservoir-dogs](http://metacritic.com/movie/reservoir-dogs)

<sup>4</sup> See [wiki.tarantino.info/index.php/Kill\\_Bill\\_References\\_Guide](http://wiki.tarantino.info/index.php/Kill_Bill_References_Guide) for an extensive list of references to other movies in Tarantino's work.

<sup>5</sup> Written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. *Death Proof*. (2007). Motion picture, 113 minutes. Production company: Dimension Films, Troublemaker Studios.

<sup>6</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Hungry Hungry Hippos*. (2007). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 4:20 minutes. Edition of 4 + 2 artist proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:233).

<sup>7</sup> See Galtung (1969).

<sup>8</sup> See Agamben (2005), (2004), (1999), (1994) and (1993).

<sup>9</sup> In the footnote to his article, Warde Fowler (1911:63) notes that the word *sacer* could also refer to sacrificial animals. Girard (1979:97) also infers that "there [is] no essential difference between human and animal sacrifice.

<sup>10</sup> Freud wrote extensively on the concept of taboo and the notion of "the sacred and the damned" (Agamben 1998:78). See Freud's *Totem and taboo* (1918). Published in German in 1913 as *Totem und tabu: einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der wilden und der neurotiker*.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin's essay 'Critique of violence' was written in 1921, first published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1921, and translated by Edmund Jephcott.

<sup>12</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino, written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. *Reservoir Dogs*. (1992). Motion picture, 99 minutes. Production company: Live Entertainment, Dog Eat Dog Productions Inc.



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<sup>13</sup> The following publication was consulted in this regard:

Pope, N. 2012. *Honor killings in the twenty first century*. [eBook]. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>14</sup> Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* is particularly relevant to the violent form of rape as punishment is that of curative or corrective rape. While it occurs worldwide, it is especially common in the Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) communities in South Africa. As homosexuality is viewed as unnatural, and 'un-African' in most African communities, curative rape is considered an appropriate way of 'fixing' the problem. The extent of the problem is not reflected in the statistics, as many lesbians do not report the crimes for fear of further abuse by police and legal authorities. Luleki Sizwe, a South African non-profit organisation reports that more than ten lesbians are violently raped on a weekly basis. (Statistics as reported in the 2011 article: Author unknown. 2011. South African lesbians at risk for 'corrective' rape. *Contemporary Sexuality* 45(7):8. Corrective rape in the Black LGBTI community in South Africa is often the topic of work by the South African artist and activist, Zanele Muholi. See Gunkel (2009) and Makhubu (2012). Brown (2012) and Morrisey (2013) provide statistical information on corrective rape in South Africa.

<sup>15</sup> According to Richard Ek (2006:374) Agamben refused to travel to America in 2004, and equated the immigration control measures, the biopolitical tattooing (i.e passport numbers) and tracing of human mobility at American airports to the physical tattooing of Nazi victims in the Holocaust.

<sup>16</sup> See Girard (1972).

<sup>17</sup> Directed by James Cameron. Written by James Cameron and William Wisher, Jr. *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. (1991). Motion picture, 137 minutes. Production company: Carolco Pictures, Pacific Western.

<sup>18</sup> Directed and written by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski. *The Matrix*. (1999). Motion picture, 136 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers.

<sup>19</sup> Directed by Oliver Stone, story by Quentin Tarantino, screenplay by David Veloz, Richard Rutowski and Oliver Stone. *Natural Born Killers*. (1994). Motion picture, 118 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers.

<sup>20</sup> See Doane (2002), (1991) and (1987).

<sup>21</sup> See Mellencamp (1996), (1992) and (1990).

<sup>22</sup> See Williams (2008), (1989) and (1981).

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<sup>23</sup> See De Lauretis (1984).

<sup>24</sup> See Mulvey (2005), (1996) and (1975)

<sup>25</sup> Mulvey's review of her initial essay included an explanation in this regard. For Mulvey (2004:1289), the 'traditional' cinematic "conditions of cinema exhibition: darkness, the projector beam lighting up the screen, the procession of images that imposed their own rhythm on the spectator's attention", were important contributors to the notion of voyeurism. Contemporary viewing of film no longer includes all of these aspects, for instance the viewing of a film on DVD in a general home setting does not include any of these aspects.

<sup>26</sup> In a later article written in 1981, titled "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)", included in her book *Visual and other pleasures* (1989), Mulvey reviews her original article to comment on issues such as female spectatorship.

<sup>27</sup> See Felson (1996) for a historical overview of the most important studies done regarding the effect of media violence until the mid-1990's.

<sup>28</sup> See Doherty (1995) and (2009).

<sup>29</sup> See Boyd, Carroll & Gottschall (2010), Gottschall (2012) and (2008), as well as Gottschall & Wilson (2005).

<sup>30</sup> Written and directed by George Lucas. *Star Wars* (original title). (1977). Motion picture, 121 minutes. Production company: Lucasfilm, Twentieth Century Fox Film Company.

<sup>31</sup> See Harrison (1913/1978).

<sup>32</sup> See Burkert (2001), (1985), (1983) and (1979).

<sup>33</sup> See Eliade (1991), (1971), (1967), (1963), (1961) and (1958).

<sup>34</sup> See Lévi-Strauss (1969) and (1966), as well as Lévi-Strauss & O'Flaherty (1979).

<sup>35</sup> See Vernant (1988) and (1984).

<sup>36</sup> See Zipes (2011), (2006), (1997) and (1979).

<sup>37</sup> See Warner (2013), (2010), (2002), (2000), (1995) and (1976).

## CHAPTER 3: THE PORTRAYAL OF THE VIOLENT WOMAN IN ART AND FILM

### 3.1 Introduction

The depiction of a violent woman upsets [the] association of violence with masculinity (Neroni 2005:19).

This chapter investigates the portrayal of ‘the violent woman’ in art and film, as a reflection of contemporary society. I start by discussing a number of real life cases involving violent women based on case studies cited by Hilary Neroni in chapter three of *The violent woman: femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American cinema* (2005). She uses Jacques Lacan’s (1901-1981) idea that “we know that an event is traumatic, not because we uncover a direct experience of the trauma, but rather through the ways that we react to the trauma” (2005:59) to show how the public and legal system’s reaction to these women were influenced by the image they projected of themselves. Using her case studies as a starting point I comment on the manipulation of stereotypes and visual imagery relating to these cases.

Secondly, this chapter investigates the relationship between reality and fiction<sup>1</sup>, and how art and film are influenced by reality: but also how art and film influence reality. Closely linked to the idea of ‘art imitating life’ or ‘life imitating art’ is the issue of the representation of violence, and its role in the propagation of violence in society. What influence does the proliferation of violent imagery have in contemporary society? Lastly the chapter investigates current debates around the issue of images of violence, including Quentin Tarantino’s views on mass media violence.

### 3.2 Neroni’s case study of violent women

*The violent woman: femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American cinema* (2005) investigates various aspects surrounding violent women in film,

including how violent women have historically been depicted in films as well as their reception by movie-going audiences. Throughout her book, Neroni links fictional female criminals in films to real life female criminals, which is a very important zone of transience in this study as well.

Neroni (2005:59) starts with Lacan's idea of trauma, which is not seated in the experience itself, but rather in the reaction to the experience. She theorises that in order to understand the "status of female violence – in order to determine if it is traumatic for the social order or not – we must look not only at the way acts of female violence are represented but the public reactions to such acts" (Neroni 205:59). The trauma experienced by society is therefore linked to the manipulation of the stereotypical portrayal of the violent women. Neroni uses the examples of three female murderers, Lizzie Borden (1860-1927), Ruth Snyder (1895-1928) and Susan Smith (b. 1971) (see plate III, figures 14 to 25) to illustrate her argument. She highlights the public reaction (or more specifically media reaction, which is interpreted as being the general public reaction) to the violent acts committed by these women. She links the acceptance or the ultimate rejection of these women's crimes to the construction of their sexuality. She states that "[u]nless involved in a sex crime, a male criminal's sexuality rarely comes up, but the media almost always suggests that an admitted female criminal is also promiscuous" (Neroni 2005:74). In her case study, she compares three different murder cases with different outcomes. The outcomes, in her opinion, were largely influenced by the public's perception of the woman's immorality, and not the violent act supposedly committed.

Lizzie Borden (see plate III, figure 14) killed her father and stepmother using an axe to "make mincemeat of the head of Mrs. Borden and the face of Mr. Borden" (Neroni 2005:63-64). Abby Borden was struck 19 times and Andrew Borden 11 times with a sharp object, believed to be an axe (Jones 2012:145). Stereotypical notions propose that a woman (or rather 'a lady') would be incapable of

physically committing such a crime, and Neroni (2005:64-65) is of the opinion that Borden exploited these expectations to her advantage.

During her court trial, Borden apparently took great care to present herself as a 'lady', even fainting at the mention of her parent's smashed skulls (see plate III, figures 15 and 16). Her behaviour in court probably supported the ultimate decision to acquit her (Neroni 2005:63-65). Further descriptions of her in the media noted that she often carried a bouquet of flowers, along with a lace fan that matched her outfits, and that she was prone to weeping, all signs associated with femininity and social standing (Neroni 2005:65). Plate III, figure 17 shows a newspaper illustration<sup>2</sup> of Borden and her legal counsel before the announcement of her acquittal<sup>3</sup> (Jones 2012:146).

In contrast, Ruth Snyder (see plate III, figure 18 to 21) was branded as a "promiscuous, coldhearted [sic], non-female monster ... a devouring 'serpent'" (Neroni 2005:67). Aided by her adulterous lover Henry Judd Gray (1892-1928), she killed her husband by knocking him unconscious, asphyxiated him with chloroform and then used a picture wire to strangle him. Neroni (2005:68-69) argues that it was Snyder's blatant disregard for the traditional female stereotype and generally accepted moral values, which finally led to her demise. A 'good' (read 'lady') woman such as Lizzie Borden got the public's sympathy vote, while the 'bad' (read 'whore') woman such as Ruth Snyder was 'crucified', despite the fact that both had committed violent crimes. Photographs (see plate III, figures 19 and 20) taken of Snyder at the time of the trial show her wearing pearls and a fur coat. While the clothing worn by Borden at her trial supported her image of a well-bred, traumatised lady. Snyder's choice of clothing seemed only to underscore her image as an avaricious, adulterous murderer. These two cases demonstrate how the adherence or rejection of societal norms informs the value judgements of society. The case of Susan Smith on the other hand shows that while the stereotypical notion of the violent woman involves the rejection of societal norms, some crimes are more 'acceptable' than others.

Susan Smith (see plate III, figures 22 to 25), generally acknowledged in her town as a 'good' mother, committed the ultimate crime of drowning her two children by rolling her car into a lake while they were strapped inside and unable to escape a traumatic death (Neroni 2005:72). Autopsy results showed that the boys were still alive at the time of the car entering the water (Kraus 2012:1688). Smith initially stated that her car, along with the two boys, was hi-jacked by an African American man, even appearing on television<sup>4</sup> (see plate III, figure 23) in an attempt to 'find the killer'. Smith later admitted to the crime, but her accusations that a Black man had committed the crime angered the community, and was seen as blatantly trying to exploit racist stereotypes (Kraus 2012:1688-1690).

During the trial, it emerged that Smith was sexually abused as child, which could have won her a sympathy vote. However, the rumours of her consensual sexual relationship with her stepfather, and various other men (in one instance with a young man and his father) probably exacerbated public condemnation leading to a severe prison sentence (Neroni 2005:72-76). Additionally, the fact that Smith had killed her children in the hope that her latest ex-lover would return to her, was considered morally unacceptable. Generally accepted morality dictates that mothers die for their children; children are not killed by their mothers. Smith was sentenced to life imprisonment with the option of parole after 30 years (Kraus 2012:1688).

While none of the cases used by Neroni involve dismemberment as part of the crimes, they are none the less relevant in terms of the stereotypical portrayal of violent women. Neroni's aim with these cases was to investigate the relationship between real life murderers and the anxiety generated by their deeds, which she then relates to relevant films. Neroni does not include any images in her book, and I believe the visual imagery associated with each case played an important role in the perception of the women, and ultimately the final verdicts. The

inclusion of these images in this study, for me, is a crucial extension of Neroni's investigation (see plate III, figures 14 to 25).

I have purposely placed photographs of the three women together on one page alongside photographs related to their trials and as well as selected media images in order to visually represent the aspects discussed in this section. It is important to note that photographic evidence in the Borden case is very limited due to the limited availability of photography at the time. In the Snyder case, more photographs are available including courtroom photographs<sup>5</sup>. Of specific interest is a photograph (see plate III, figure 21) taken by Tom Howard<sup>6</sup>, a photographer for the *Chicago Tribune*, who was fitted with a hidden camera around his ankle and he was able to photograph the moment of Snyder's death by electrocution. The photograph<sup>7</sup> was published in *The New York Daily News* of 13 January 1928. This image is considered to be the first of the so-called 'tabloid' photographs (Murderpedia).

But what happens to our experience of the 'violent woman' if the violence she commits is in the realm of the imaginary, the unreal, such as in film or art. Neroni theorises that our reactions parallel those of 'real life' crimes, and she uses the example of the 1991 film *Thelma and Louise*<sup>8</sup>. The plot revolves around the seemingly unnecessary killing of a 'potential' rapist. Thelma (played by Geena Davis) finds herself in a situation where her friend Louise (played by Susan Sarandon) saves her from being raped. Unfortunately, Louise shoots and kills the rapist after the danger has dissolved. Had Louise killed him in self-defence at the time of the alleged incident, a court of law would have acknowledged the mitigating circumstances and probably dismissed the case. However, the killing is done as an act of revenge, an afterthought, and in this lies the controversy of the film.

The resultant media hype around the film invariably focussed on the two women's sexuality in order to process the violent act (Neroni 2005:77-80). Sarandon unwittingly added fuel to the fire by commenting<sup>9</sup> to the media: "The

violence I liked, in a way, because it is not premeditated. It is primal, and it doesn't solve anything" (Neroni 2005:180). For most people this statement would be very uncomfortable to read. Neroni (2005:78-79) thinks it is this discomfort, which caused some media reports to deny either the violence of the act or on the other hand focus on the sexuality of the two lead actors (on and off screen) in order to judge and process the event.

In relation to this film, the comment by Carmen Eraso (2001:69) that "what turns out to be most revealing is the fact that women's illegal acts in the film are always the result of men's crimes, which somehow justifies the female leads' actions and vindicates the unfairness of the current legal system" highlights certain issues discussed throughout this study. Firstly, the perception exists that women are generally non-violent by nature, and need to be provoked by extreme circumstances to commit violent deeds. Secondly, if the violence occurs as a reaction to the crimes committed against them, their actions are morally 'justified', in film at least. In reality, these women are often 'crucified' for their unacceptable behaviour. Lastly, the comment also suggests the problems and discrimination women experience when having to report crimes such as rape.

The relationship between 'real life' documentaries and film is a complicated one. While the narrative of *Thelma and Louise* is based on fictitious events, the biographies of real-life violent women could serve as inspiration for films. The words 'based on a true story' seem not only to inspire fantasy roles and scripts, but could translate into a sizeable income, such as in the case of Aileen Wuornos (1956-2002) who was convicted of killing seven men from 1989 to 1990. Wuornos (see plate IV, figures 26 to 35), a lesbian prostitute, maintained throughout her trial that she killed these men in self-defence, claiming that they had either raped or attempted to rape her (Pearson 2007:258, Schilt 2000:51). Her violent life served as the basis for the film *Monster* (2003)<sup>10</sup> (see plate IV, figure 35) with the lead role portrayed by South African-born actress Charlize Theron (b. 1975). Two documentaries<sup>11</sup> about her life were made at the time,



namely *Aileen: life and death of a serial killer* (2003) and *Aileen Wuornos: the selling of a serial killer* (1992) (see plate IV, figures 33 and 34).

In an ironic twist, the connection between reality and fiction is further emphasised by the fact that Theron also survived a violent childhood. At the age of fifteen, she witnessed her mother shooting and killing her father in self-defence (Horeck 2007:149). For Thomas Doherty (2004:4) another subtext for the movie is the physical appearance of Theron, a beautiful woman transformed with the help of make up, prosthetics and temporary weight gain into the 'ugly' lesbian serial killer Wuornos (see plate IV, figures 26 to 28). Horeck (2007:149) states that this was done intentionally in order to make "the story of Wuornos palatable for a wide, mainstream audience". While the good-looking Theron bore some resemblance to Wuornos after the make up sessions, her onscreen lesbian lover played by Christina Ricci bore very little resemblance to Wuornos' real life lover, Tyra Moore (see plate IV, figures 29 to 32).

The director, Patty Jenkins justified her casting choices as follows:

It wasn't about making someone look just like her real girlfriend, it was about capturing that essence. To put another actress next to Charlize and to have her missing teeth and be fat I just thought would push the audience away. Too much sameness between the women might be threatening therefore the difference has to be exaggerated so that spectators can distance themselves from the odd couple (Jenkins quoted by Horeck 2007:155-156).

This again reiterates Neroni's (2005:59) use of Lacan's idea that trauma does not lie in the experience itself as much as it lies in the reaction to the experience. In Jenkins' opinion having both the lead roles portrayed as the stereotypical fat, ugly, toothless, man-hating, killer lesbians would alienate audiences. In this respect, Kyra Pearson (2007:258) notes that "her sexual 'deviance' as a prostitute and lesbian was used to pathologize Wuornos". The reality of this, together with the physical violence portrayed would be too shocking for audiences to handle. The fact that Theron is a beautiful, heterosexual woman donning 'ugliness' for the role, and afterwards reappears as her good-looking self at film premiers to collect her awards, also reduces the trauma of the experience

for the audience. Thus, paradoxically, the reality portrayed should not be 'too real'.

This incident also raises questions regarding the physical beauty of victims and the portrayal of violence. Carine Mardorossian (2002:746) touches on this issue in a footnote to her article 'Towards a new feminist theory of rape', when she refers to the "ideology of rape" associated with the representation of sex crimes against women:

When films (including progressive movies and documentaries) stage rape or its retelling by a victim on screen, they often fall into the trap of representing the suffering (and usually beautiful) victim in terms of pathos and horror (Mardorossian 2002:746).

While the connection between the portrayal of beauty and victimisation seems obvious, it is the link between beauty and associated goodness, and the portrayal of violent women that becomes more problematic. In this respect Gottschall (2008a:118) remarks that physical attractiveness is an important aspect associated with the stereotypes relating to the female protagonist in fairy tales. The implication of this is that the portrayal of the violent woman, and her destiny in society, is related to her appearance and her compliance with social stereotypes.

One related issue in this case referred to by Pearson (2007:260) is the issue of violence against sex workers and prostitutes. The first problem is that of defining rape in a situation that requires payment in return for sexual favours, despite the fact that rape is not seen as a sexual act in itself, but rather an act of physical aggression, as proposed by Foucault<sup>12</sup> (Cahill 2000:43). Prostitutes are regularly victims of violent abuse, not only by their clients and their pimps, but also by law enforcement agents. The fact that prostitution is not legal in many countries leaves little recourse to the law for victims, and many crimes go unreported. In this respect one can think of prostitutes in terms of Agamben's *homo sacer*, as someone "who may be killed and yet not sacrificed" (1998:8), an "unperson" who lives in a state of exception, unprotected by the law, which in turn leads to exploitation<sup>13</sup>.

The day before her execution by lethal injection on 9 October 2002, Wuornos stated in an interview “You sabotaged my ass, society. And the cops. And the system. A raped woman got executed and was used for books and movies and shit” (Horeck 2007:141). Questions of exploitation cannot be avoided. The movie *Monster* grossed \$661,783 in the opening weekend in Italy alone (International Movie Data Base) and Theron went on to earn 17 awards for her role as Wuornos, including that of the 2003 Academy Awards for Best Actress. Pearson (2007:260) hints at Theron’s further exploitation of Wuornos when she notes that “in her acceptance speeches for three separate best actress awards for portraying Wuornos in the film, Charlize Theron never acknowledged Wuornos, nor did she use these occasions to raise awareness of violence sex workers commonly face”. For Pearson, Theron was in the ‘ideal’ position to comment on violence against prostitutes, which she for some reason chose not to do.

According to Miriam Basilio (1996:56) two important people closely involved with Wuornos gained financially from exposing her exploits. Tyria Moore, Wuornos’ former lover who collaborated with police investigators on a television documentary, and Arlene Pralle who adopted Wuornos after her arrest, both benefitted directly from interviews, articles etc. According to Doherty (2004:4) some of the police officers initially on the Wuornos case were dismissed for trying sell ‘the story’ to Hollywood. Ironically, the origin of the case lies in Wuornos herself exploiting her customers, killing and robbing them for her own gain. While Wuornos did not profit financially from these filmic exploitations, she did however earn the dubious honour of becoming “America’s first female serial killer” (Pearson 2007:256), and as such will always occupy a certain place in history and popular culture, both in reality and on screen.

### **3.3 Violence in everyday life versus violence in mass media**

Having looked at Neroni’s case studies on real-life and onscreen violent women, the question logically arises about the influence each have on the other. What is the relationship between fictional violence and actual violence? The effect of

film violence and its influence on society is a highly contested issue, while the effect of reality on film violence seems to be merely one of mirroring society.

Slocum (2000) in his article 'Film violence and the institutionalization of cinema' traces the evolution of film violence in relation to the historical development of film on the one hand and on the other hand world history itself. Although he (Slocum 2000:650) admits that this theory is problematic due to its generalised nature, I do believe that a brief summary of his article is relevant here, as it highlights the relationship between film violence and society in general.

Slocum (2000:658) states that for instance, in the 1950s, "For many, representations of violence epitomized the popular cinema's process of mirroring conflict [sic]—from Cold War paranoia and consumer culture anxiety to post-World War Two traumas and family tensions—pervading contemporary society, reality, and psychology". However most of the films produced during this time were "biblical epics and non-explicitly violent fare" (Slocum 2000:657), and the violence portrayed served as representation of the triumphs of justice and social control. Biblical narratives implicitly denote a battle between good and evil, and a battle in which Good (or God) always triumphs over Evil (or the Devil), which symbolically relates to the wars fought around this time.

The 1960s and 70s saw an unprecedented increase not only in the volume of film violence, but also in the aggressive nature of the images, and according to Slocum (2000:659) "increasingly mirrored cultural preoccupations with violence". Many of the films produced during this time have violent action as their core theme such as martial arts films and similar genres. Relevant examples are for instance *Dirty Harry* (1972), and its sequel *Magnum Force* (1974)<sup>14</sup>, characterised by male heroes on an honourable mission. An important film from this era is Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)<sup>15</sup>. The film was based loosely on the life of the convicted killer, Ed Gein (1906-1984), again reflecting the relationship between reality and art. Hitchcock's film pushed many boundaries in film making such as

his innovative use of camera angles and the inclusion of rapid succession close ups in the notorious 'shower scene'<sup>16</sup>.

In the 1980s and early 90s, film violence starting taking on a depraved nature, sometimes bordering on pornographic representations mixed with psychotic violence as seen in films such as David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986)<sup>17</sup> and Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994)<sup>18</sup>, which has significance for this study. Slocum (2000:672) is of the opinion that film violence of the 1990s and onwards not only reflects the fragmentation and blurring of boundaries associated with postmodern culture, but also that the use of digital film effects has served to further alienate the viewer from reality. These issues, amongst others, were raised by the committee investigating the influence of media violence on the two teenage boys responsible for the Columbine shootings<sup>19</sup> (Slocum 2000:673). This issue is discussed in greater depth in the next section relating to Tarantino's view of screen violence.

According to Neroni (2005:15), this period also saw a dramatic rise in films featuring violent women, and particularly violent women in lead roles, most notably *Thelma and Louise* (1991). As previously stated, Neroni relates this to a crisis for the male identity:

Violence – or at least the ability to be violent – is one of the main ways that men differentiate themselves from women. If gender difference becomes elided, then there is seemingly nothing to stop a woman from taking up violence as well, from being as violent as a man. In a sense, the appearance of the filmic violent woman, then, is a cautionary tale about the elision of difference (Neroni 2005:20).

The 1990s also saw Tarantino's directorial debut, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), which interestingly featured no women, except for the brief appearance of a waitress in the opening scene. Mary Pratt (2011:28) also notes that "when they [women] are [acknowledged], it is usually in derogatory terms". Furthermore, Pratt (2011:34) sees the film as a response to the "crisis of masculinity" that serves to pacify the male ego by portraying a violent world where men are still in charge and women only appear in their fantasies or as servants.

Tarantino has also produced a number of films featuring violent women in the lead roles, most significantly *Jackie Brown* (1997)<sup>20</sup>, *Kill Bill Volume I & II* (2003, 2004) and *Death Proof* (2007)<sup>21</sup>. Various aspects relating to Tarantino's portrayals of violent women are discussed in chapters 4 and 5, while his attitude to the portrayal of violence in general is discussed in the following segment.

### 3.4 Tarantino's view of screen violence

To me, violence is a totally aesthetic subject. Saying you don't like violence in movies is like saying you don't like the dance sequences in movies. I do like dance sequences in movies, but if I didn't, it doesn't mean I should stop dance sequences from being made (Tarantino quoted in Brintnall 2004:69).

Kent Brintnall (2004:69) in his article 'Tarantino's Incarnational Theology. *Reservoir Dogs*, Crucifixions and Spectacular Violence' refers to Tarantino's view<sup>22</sup> of the use of graphic violence in films as "flippant" and according to Tarantino film violence is "justifie[d] ... as a mere aesthetic choice". Tarantino's non-chalant attitude to film violence and its impact on society is controversial, but simultaneously raises several questions. Can images of violence be viewed in isolation, as mere aesthetic objects? The answer to this question needs to take into account the contemporary theories regarding the interpretation and intertextuality of cinematic texts.

In this respect, the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (b.1932) believes that the interpretation of a cinematic text by the viewer differs vastly from the interpretation of a literary text (Haaland 2009:157-170). Firstly, the reader needs to go through a complex linguistic analysis of a written text before evoking an emotional response to the images provoked by the text. In contrast, cinema produces the "emotive, or even physiological, reaction to its immediate impact which only in the second instance is rationalized and conceptualized in the form of critical detachment to the image" (Haaland 2009:161). Cinema for Eco also "consists of multiple *"representations of a present"* related to each other through editing" (italics in original) (Eco in Haaland 2009:162). Furthermore, the viewer interprets cinema through the reactions to the plot structures and

narrative conventions which inform first and foremost their emotional reactions, and in turn is informed by the viewer's own awareness.

The second issue for Eco relates to the cinematic narrative conventions which produce a new form of temporality due to the decomposition of time (Haaland 2009:163). The process of editing film and the narrative conventions used in cinema, results in a 'data base' of segmented visual imagery for the viewer. For instance when recounting a specific film, one would preferentially remember certain scenes over others. These scenes then become part of the personal, and by extension the collective, memory bank and serve as intertextual references for all other interpretations (Haaland 2009:162). In the case of *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) most viewers will remember the 'ear cutting' scene above all others, due to the emotional response it evokes, which in turn becomes representative of the film as a whole. The viewer's emotional response precedes the rationalisation and understanding of the cinematic text. From this perspective one cannot dismiss violent films as 'mere' aesthetic objects. In fact, many contemporary theorists emphasise the connection between narratives and the emotional responses they provoke:

Narratives have always been used to disseminate knowledge to the society in which they arise and are spread. Some scholars, like Oatley (2004), claim that there is a particular value in fictional stories, to encourage empathy, which is sometimes referred to as the emotional knowledge or information about inner workings of emotions in ourselves and others. He understands that the power of fictional stories, as opposed to non-fiction, lies exactly in the empathic responses humans produce while listening to, watching or reading stories about others' experiences and the human trait of being available for strong identification with the characters of such fictions (Krajewska 2014:173).

One cannot ignore the subtexts, which are inherently part of film. For example, in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000)<sup>23</sup> the fight scenes are highly choreographed and presented as aestheticised acts of human behaviour. The aesthetisation further emphasises the ethical undertones, such as the fight between good and evil and in turn justifies either the revenge or the assertion of freedom, be it personal or societal.

This of course leads to questioning the relationship between images of violence and society, the function of these images, as well as their influence not only consciously, but on a subconscious level as well. One can deduce from Tarantino's comments that he sees the debate on the influence of mass media violence as roughly divided into those who believe there is a direct correlation between mass media violence and crime rates, and those who believe that there is not. Of course, this statement is too simplified to be valid in any way as the discussion so far has shown. Factors that need to be taken into consideration range from cultural and religious factors, which relate to societies in general, to more individual factors such as psychotic illnesses (including other biological conditions) and abusive backgrounds. Mayra Buvinić and Andrew Morrison (2000:58-72) list social customs, poverty, a history of family violence or abuse, age and the use of drugs and alcohol as additional influences. With so many variables to consider, one can easily appreciate Tarantino's attitude to this issue, and the thought that mass media acting as an easy scapegoat for the problem becomes viable. This idea was originally investigated 1963 by Leonard Berkowitz and Edna Rawlings<sup>24</sup>, who suggested that film violence served as a symbolic catharsis, a means of purging society of negative emotions without having to engage with violent acts *per se*. However, this study relates the catharsis to the audience's sense of justification of the violence. In other words, the cathartic experience is linked to the fact that the violence can be rationalised as long as the perpetrator receives a just punishment in the end (Berkowitz, Corwin & Heironimus 1963:220-221). Since then the debate around film violence has evolved and contemporary thinking focusses mainly on social cognitive theories, the 'catalyst model' which proposes a link between genetics and early social influences, or the moral panic theory<sup>25</sup> as proposed by David Gauntlett (2005).

It is however, the increased prevalence of mass shootings by adolescent perpetrators that has been cause for concern. The Los Angeles premier for Tarantino's film *Django Unchained* (2012) was cancelled following the shootings on 14 December 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary, Newton, Connecticut, in which



20 children and six adults were killed. This once again stimulated the debate, even though a direct link between the shootings and cinematic violence was not indicated<sup>26</sup>. This shooting incident followed an earlier shooting on 20 July 2012 at a movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado in which the suspect, James Eagan Holmes, shot dead 12 people and injuring 58 others during a screening of the film *The Dark Knight Rises*<sup>27</sup>. While neither of these two incidents are directly related to any of Tarantino's films, the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold could be. The film *Natural Born Killers* (1994) has been implicated in at least 15 murder cases besides the mass shooting at Columbine (Young 2009:6). Despite these statistics, the production of violent films shows no signs of abating, in fact it seems as if the production of violent films is ever increasing. In this regard I return to the statement by Rothman (in Slocum 2001:37) that the perception of the level of violence in contemporary society is directly linked to the increased violent imagery in mass media. One could also question the motives of the film industry, if violent films sell, more violence would bring in more revenue. This becomes a never ending competition to produce a more violent film, which will generate more money than the previous. From this perspective, the effects of violence on society are either not relevant or of little importance, and one could view Tarantino as being correct in a certain sense. He is indeed producing an aesthetic object with the sole function of generating capital. The moral and ethical implications of producing violent imagery would compromise his ability to capitalise on it, and by denying the influence on society he is free to continue.

Tarantino has always been very outspoken about his views on cinematic violence, steadfastly rejecting any claims that his films incite violence. As a further example, FoxNews.com quoted the differences in opinion of the lead actor of *Django Unchained*, Jamie Foxx and the director as follows:

Actor Jamie Foxx told the Associated Press that the entertainment industry needs to start bearing some responsibility for the violent content that it produces. "We cannot turn our back and say that violence in films or anything that we do doesn't have a sort of influence," Foxx said. "It does." But director Quentin Tarantino, who has built his career on

depictions of graphic violence in films like *"Inglourious Basterds"* and *"Kill Bill,"* said he was tired of having to defend his movies, noting that "tragedies happen" and the blame should fall on those guilty of committing them (McKay for Foxnews.com 2012).

It is important to note too that for Tarantino there is a clear separation between film violence and real life violence. Gwynneth Symonds quotes Tarantino as saying:

In real life, I have a moral stance towards violence, but in films, no. I feel completely justified in saying that I get a kick out of violence in movies while I abhor it in real life (Symonds 2008:167).

The fact that Tarantino understands the clear delineation between the real and fantasy violence in his work, could serve to justify his aesthetic creations for himself, morally, ethically, and aesthetically. However, this study has repeatedly given examples that show that the relationship between fantasy and reality is not as clear-cut as he would like to think and not all movie-going audiences understand the distinction as he sees it. In fact this study shows that the relationship between fantasy and reality is far more complicated and interrelated than acknowledged.

The shootings at Columbine, Sandy Hook Elementary and Aurora are extreme examples of a few individuals engaging in violent acts on a spectacular scale. Although these types of indiscriminate mass killings and 'school shootings' have increased dramatically, these kinds of violent acts do not occur daily, but are really the exceptions. Incidents of domestic violence and rape are far more common, and occur worldwide despite advances in feminist rights. Present statistics point to one woman being raped in South Africa every four minutes<sup>28</sup>. While the influence of violent images on crime is most spectacularly illustrated by incidents such as mass shootings, it is the effect on the relatively 'insignificant' crimes such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and rape in general that requires further investigation. Logic dictates that intimate partner violence existed before the invention of film and related contemporary mass media. Therefore access to images of violence does not necessarily equate to an increase in violence, and I suggest rather that it is the underlying narrative of the

inferiority of women in general that is at the heart of the matter. The reasoning that the narratives are more important than the violent images themselves, informs the case studies in each section.

The parallels between the violent film narratives of Tarantino and the claymation works of Djurberg, and real life criminal acts are easy to find. At the time of my writing the original proposal, the killing of Anni Dewani, a British citizen on honeymoon in South Africa made headlines. Her husband was subsequently accused of allegedly paying for his wife's hi-jacking and murder while on honeymoon in Cape Town. He is finally being prosecuted in South Africa in 2014 after lengthy extradition negotiations with Britain<sup>29</sup>. This has a sick 'life-imitating-art' parallel with Tarantino's *Kill Bill* where The Bride's assassination is ordered by her lover. Unfortunately, the British bride did not, as in the movie, survive to seek revenge.

While the debate on the influence of violent images in mass media shows few signs of being resolved, the production of these images is steadily increasing as illustrated by Slocum's timeline, which only focusses on film, and disregards other media such as documentaries, news coverage, YouTube videos, video games to name a few. Logic dictates that similar tendencies occur across all visual media. It is the nature of the violent image that is questioned, not the nature of the media. The following section will investigate the nature of the violent image as aesthetic object as produced by Tarantino.

Quentin Tarantino has made a sizeable contribution to the genre of violent films. His films are characterised by scenes of extreme violence. However, I am of the opinion that the violence does not lie principally with the mise-en-scène aspects of his films, although these cannot be disregarded totally. If so, what then makes his films so extreme, so disturbing?

For one, it is the way Tarantino combines popular music, or as Lisa Coulthard (2009:2-7) puts it "torture tunes" with the violent acts. The way he sets up the scene, for instance in *Reservoir Dogs*<sup>30</sup> where Mr. Blond (played by Michael

Madsen) cuts off the ear of the policeman, the violence takes place against the background music of Stealers Wheel's 1972 song 'Stuck in the Middle with You'. The incongruence and the contrast between the gruesome act and the light-hearted music adds to the perverted nature of the deed (Ulatowski in Greene & Mohammad 2007:97). A similar technique was used in 1971 by Stanley Kubrick (1928-1999) in *A Clockwork Orange*<sup>31</sup> where the protagonist, Alex DeLarge rapes a woman while singing the upbeat ditty 'Singin' in the Rain', a direct reference not only to the song, but also the 1952 movie *Singin' in the Rain*<sup>32</sup> featuring Gene Kelly (Coulter 2009:2-7). The use of these 'older' songs adds to the feeling of nostalgia, but also to the intertextuality of the films. In both films the nostalgia generated by the music is generally linked to 'good memories' for most people, and the juxtaposition with the onscreen violence results in discomfort (or anxiety) for the viewer.

While Tarantino's films are known for their intertextual references, they are also famous for their fragmented, non-linear narratives. Charles Ramirez Berg (2006:5-6) uses the term "the Tarantino effect" to refer to the non-linear or "alternative" film narratives which became popular in the late 1980s and 90s, and are probably best illustrated in Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992)<sup>33</sup> and *Pulp Fiction* (1994)<sup>34</sup>. While this method of storytelling is not unique to Tarantino, it has become a hallmark of his films.

According to Bruce Russell (in Greene & Mohammad 2007:4) another element to consider is the "glimpses of compassion and morality among the tough, cruel, and immoral people that populate them". An alternative morality that occurs in a world of immorality. The relationship between ethics and morality is described by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (1998:92) who note that "[e]thics takes the form of a 'dis-interestedness' opposed to the 'interestedness' of the world of political and social exchanges ruled by morality". I believe it is the tension between dis-interestedness and interestedness that allows the viewer to accept

the violent imagery in the context of the film. The idea of emotional disinterestedness also relates to the portrayal of the violent personas. Stephen Prince (1998:240) notes that “Tarantino’s images are pastiches ... [and that] ... the character does not reference a real human being, but rather only other movie characters”. In other words, the viewer understands that that the character is fictional, and that allows the viewer the freedom of impartially enjoying the screen violence, without moral obligation towards the victims. I would suggest that the tension between disinterestedness and interestedness also relates to the notion of nostalgia generated by Tarantino’s use of music.

In summary, this chapter started out by looking at the relationship between real life and the filmic portrayal of violent women, based on Neroni’s case studies. As Neroni theorises that the filmic violent woman appears at a time of ideological crisis, an overview of relevant films and the historical contexts in which they appeared, was discussed. Lastly, the chapter discussed the problematic nature of Tarantino’s attitude towards film violence.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan proposed the three orders of perception as being the symbolic, the real and the imaginary. See Evers 2012. Lacan's theories have influenced various authors such as Laura Mulvey. Slavoj Žižek has also written extensively on the relevance of Lacan's theories for cinema. See Wright & Wright 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Illustration originally appeared in *Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper*, dated 29 June 1893, and can be accessed via United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID cph.3c23237. (Source: [http://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BW\\_Clinedinst,\\_the\\_Borden\\_murder\\_trial\\_cph.3c23237.jpg](http://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BW_Clinedinst,_the_Borden_murder_trial_cph.3c23237.jpg))

<sup>3</sup> Borden was found not guilty of the murders and went on to live to the age of 67. The murders of Andrew and Abby Borden remain unsolved, yet Lizzie Borden remains the only possible suspect (Jones 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Smith and her estranged husband and father to the murdered boys, David Smith, appeared on the CBS television programme *This Morning* on 3 November 1994 in an attempt to find public support in finding the 'killer' (Kraus 2012:1688) (see plate III, figure 23).

<sup>5</sup> See plate III, figure 17. Caption for image on Murderpedia reads "Photo-illustration by Charles George for an exposition. On the left we can see Albert and Ruth Snyder (with her mother and daughter). On the right, Ruth on the witness stand, and Henry Judd Gray, co-accused."

<sup>6</sup> Murderpedia statement accompanying images of Snyder case:

Photographers are not permitted into executions in the United States. For the notorious Ruth Snyder case, the New York Daily News was desperate to get pictures; so they hired a Chicago Tribune photographer Tom Howard—virtually unknown to the prison warders or journalists in the New York area. On that fateful day (12 January 1928), Howard, posing as a writer, arrived early in Sing Sing Prison and took up a vantage position. A miniature camera was strapped to his left ankle, the shutter release button was concealed within his jacket. As Snyder's body shook from the jolt, Howard hoisted his pant leg and secretly snapped with a one-use camera.

That day's Daily News' cover simply said, 'DEAD!' with the final blurry image above, which instantly become one of the most indelible images of the 20th century. Howard gained overnight popularity. He received a princely sum and went on to become the head of photography for the White House. The state attempted to prosecute Howard and the newspaper, but nothing ever came of it. For many years afterwards witnesses to executions were searched and asked to hold up their hands so they could not operate hidden cameras. But the damage has already been done. The photo has become a rally cry for the opponents of the death penalty (Murderpedia [Sa]).

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<sup>7</sup> Front page of the *New York Daily News*, 13 January 1928. (Murderpedia [Sa])

<sup>8</sup> Directed by Ridley Scott, written by Callie Khouri. *Thelma and Louise*. (1991). Motion picture, 130 minutes. Produced by Pathé Entertainment.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Saradon quoted in Richard Schickel's, "Why Thelma and Louise Strikes a Nerve" *Time magazine*, 1991 (Neroni 2005:180).

<sup>10</sup> Written and directed by Patty Jenkins. *Monster*. (2003). Motion picture, 109 minutes. DVD released by Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment.

<sup>11</sup> Directed by Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill. *Aileen: life and death of a serial killer*. (2003). Documentary, 89 minutes. Directed by Nick Broomfield. *Aileen Wuornos: the selling of a serial killer*. (1992). Documentary, 88 minutes. Both distributed by Optimum Releasing (Horeck 2007:141, Doherty 2004:5).

<sup>12</sup> See Cahill (2000) for a discussion of the implications of Foucault's theories on the desexualisation of rape.

<sup>13</sup> See Sanchez (2004) for an additional discussion on the relevance of Agamben's *homo sacer* for prostitution.

<sup>14</sup> Directed by Dan Siegel, written by Harry J. Fink and Rita M. Fink. *Dirty Harry*. (1971). Motion picture, 102 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers.

Directed by Ted Post, written by Harry J. Fink and Rita M. Fink. *Magnum Force*. (1973). Motion picture, 124 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers.

<sup>15</sup> Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Screenplay written by Joseph Stefano, based on the novel by Robert Bloch. *Psycho*. (1960). Motion picture, 109 minutes. Production company: Shamley Productions.

<sup>16</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycho\\_\(1960\\_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycho_(1960_film))

<sup>17</sup> Directed and written by David Lynch. *Blue Velvet*. (1986). Motion picture, 120 minutes. Production company: De Laurentiis Entertainment Group.

<sup>18</sup> Directed by Oliver Stone, story by Quentin Tarantino, screenplay by David Veloz, Richard Rutowski and Oliver Stone. *Natural Born Killers*. (1994). Motion picture, 118 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers.

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<sup>19</sup> The incident known as the Columbine High School massacre took place on 20 April 1999, when two senior students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 students and one teacher, as well as injuring 21 additional people. They both committed suicide afterwards. Their plan included the installation of numerous explosive devices in the school's cafeteria and cars parked in the adjacent parking area, timed to explode during the cafeteria's peak time. The bombs did not explode at full power, if they had, the death toll could have included another 488 students present in the cafeteria at the time.

Some attempts at finding a rationale for the killings involve the perpetrators' obsession with violent video games such as Doom, as well as violent movies such as *Natural Born Killers* (1994). Quentin Tarantino wrote the original screenplay for *Natural Born Killers*, which was extensively adapted by the director Oliver Stone.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbine\\_High\\_School\\_massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbine_High_School_massacre))

<sup>20</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Screenplay written by Quentin Tarantino based on novel by Elmore Leonard. *Jackie Brown*. (1997). Motion picture, 154 minutes. Production company: Miramax Films, A Band Apart.

<sup>21</sup> Written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. *Death Proof*. (2007). Motion picture, 113 minutes. Production company: Dimension Films, Troublemaker Studios.

<sup>22</sup> Djurberg's opinion is not included due to the limited availability of reference material on her work. However, I think this is significant, as it once again shows the power of the male hierarchy.

<sup>23</sup> Directed by Ang Lee. Written by Du Lu Wang (book) and Hui-Ling Wang (screenplay). *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. (2000). Motion picture, 120 minutes. Production company: Asia Union Film & Entertainment, Ltd.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Berkowitz and Edna Rawlings. 1963. Effects of Film Violence on Inhibitions against Subsequent Aggression. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66: 405-412.

<sup>25</sup> Moral panic here refers to the ability of mass media to promote and sustain illogical public fears, such as the fear that violent films will produce violent children (Gauntlett 2005).

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2012/12/18/premiere-bloody-django-unchained-canceled-movie-still-scheduled-to-open-on/#ixzz2L9mzqFWB>

<sup>27</sup> See Wikipedia, sv '2012 Aurora shooting'.



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<sup>28</sup> A 2013 anti-rape campaign by South Africa's radio stations in response to the brutal assault and murder of a 17-year-old girl, Anene Booysen, broadcasted a chime every four minutes to symbolise the number of victims of the crime each day.

(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/9859074/A-chime-every-four-minutes-for-the-victims-as-South-Africa-radio-stations-join-rape-outcry.html>)

<sup>29</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder\\_of\\_An timer \\_Dewani](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_An timer _Dewani)

<sup>30</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino, written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. *Reservoir Dogs*. (1992). Motion picture, 99 minutes. Production company: Live Entertainment, Dog Eat Dog Productions Inc.

<sup>31</sup> Directed by Stanley Kubrick, screenplay by Stanley Kubrick based on the novel *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Motion picture, 136 minutes. Produced by Hawk Films.

<sup>32</sup> Directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, produced by Arthur Freed. Written by Betty Comden and Adolph Green. *Singin' in the Rain*. (1952). Motion picture, 103 minutes. Distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

<sup>33</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino, written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. *Reservoir Dogs*. (1992). Motion picture, 99 minutes. Production company: Live Entertainment, Dog Eat Dog Productions Inc.

<sup>34</sup> Directed by Quentin Tarantino, written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. *Pulp Fiction*. (1994). Motion picture, 154 minutes. Production company: Miramax Films, A Band Apart.

## CHAPTER 4: ISSUES OF DISMEMBERMENT

### 4.1 Introduction to dismemberment in art and film

Various definitions of dismemberment exist, but the definition I feel most apt for this study comes from Wikipedia<sup>1</sup> due to its every day, conventional nature, which reflects society's general understanding of the concept:

Dismemberment is the act of cutting, tearing, pulling, wrenching or otherwise removing, the limbs of a living thing. It may be practiced upon human beings as a form of capital punishment, as a result of a traumatic accident, or in connection with murder, suicide, or cannibalism. As opposed to surgical amputation of the limbs, dismemberment is often fatal to all but the simplest of creatures. In criminology, a distinction is made between offensive and defensive dismemberment (Wikipedia, sv 'dismemberment').

The introduction to this chapter serves to supply background information to the concept of dismemberment in general. In it, I discuss the idea of dismemberment in relation to the above definition, the physical removal of human body parts for a specific purpose, and the visual portrayal of such incidents.

The definition firstly looks at the physical act of removing body parts from a person or animal. The definition makes no distinction between the various body parts, or the method. In contrast, this study will investigate the loss of specific body parts, namely the hands and the penis, as well as the various methods used. In the definition, dismemberment can occur by any means, although a violent act is implicit in the idea. The intention with which it occurs is also addressed, and this does not necessarily have to be criminal.

It is important to note that in reality, a sudden, traumatic loss of a limb or body part can be fatal, but in the realm of fantasy not necessarily so. When dismemberment occurs in Tarantino's films, the visual aspects are exploited with the victim losing more blood than a body could possibly contain, and in spectacular fashion. Neither is death a certainty. The scene in *Kill Bill I* where The Bride annihilates the Crazy 88 gang is a good example of this. Copious

amounts of blood shoot from decapitated victims in what could only resemble a punctured garden sprinkler system under pressure. Yet at the end of the carnage, many of these victims are still writhing on the floor for The Bride to reprimand. Djurberg's animated figures lose their limbs without any loss of blood, but the dismemberment is as gruesome and disturbing as any realistic depiction of violence.

In a slightly different definition, Tracey Lemos (2006:226) refers to a related word, 'mutilation' as being "a negatively constructed somatic alteration". What is important in terms of her definition is the fact that firstly the act should be perceived as "negative", and that acts of mutilation are culturally and socially informed. She gives the example that the "alteration of the male genitalia (namely, circumcision) is considered by most people to be normal and acceptable while that of the female genitalia is considered barbarous" (Lemos 2006:226). It is important to note that the idea of mutilation differs from dismemberment in that mutilation does not necessarily involve the act of *removal* of a body part, but does involve the act of bodily alteration.

This chapter investigates the reason for the contrast between the reality of dismemberment and the fantastical portrayal of it, along with the aspects mentioned above. Due to the complexity of the ideas and their relationship with each other, my approach is to discuss the various aspects of dismemberment in relation to the artists' work by means of case studies. This for me also echoes the nature of the relationship between reality and fantasy, which is difficult to untangle.

#### **4.1.1 Role or function of dismemberment in society**

In order to understand the visual portrayal of dismemberment in art and visual culture, this investigation started by examining the purpose and meaning of it in reality. I see the role of dismemberment in society, and in terms of this study, firstly as a way to identify certain social groups, secondly as punishment and the related act of revenge, and thirdly as sacrifice.

a) Dismemberment as sign of covenant or membership.

Dismemberment is a membership prerequisite in certain societies, most notably in the Jewish society where males are circumcised seven days after their birth as an initiation rite into the community, but this also serves as a reminder of the original covenant between Yahweh and Abraham. Violence is central to this covenant that involved “sacrifice, blood, and dismemberment as a way of establishing the roles of Yahweh as central authority and of Abraham as the origin of the communal Body” (Bryson 2003:5). It is the very act of dismemberment which becomes the instrument that binds the society into a united whole, as Bryson describes:

The original sign of a communal Body involved the "dismembering" of corporal bodies; flesh was cut off of the body so that the body might not be "cut off" from the Body. The pattern of symbolizing Bodies with bodies, of using mutilation and dismemberment to symbolize the formation of a unified communal Body, and of using that Body as a symbol of totality, of centralized authority, is established at the beginning of the scripture (Bryson 2003:5).

At the same time, while the act or ritual serves as a binding factor for the community, the physical mutilation serves to identify people as belonging to a specific group, the outsiders or the other. Significantly, it was the very idea of the Jewish nation as ‘the other’ that led to the killing of millions of Jews in Nazi Germany in World War II, with the physical sign of circumcision used to prove one’s otherness. Agamben (1998:136-143) argues that it is the very concept of “a life unworthy of being lived” which equates to the bare life of *homo sacer* which gave the Nazi government the sovereignty over, and thus the ‘permission’ to extinguish bare lives they deemed unworthy. These included the mentally ill, physically disabled, sexual ‘deviants’ and, in their opinion, other impure races such as the Jews.

The issue of the male penis, whether circumcised or not, also functions on another level in this context. The human race is for the most part, divided into two groups, those with penises and those without (read dismembered). The unconscious fear of castration (which relates to dismemberment) as first

described by Freud serves to further divide the human race into two groups, 'those who have' and 'those who lack'. Chapter 4.3.1 examines Freud's Oedipus theory in relation to the study.

Another example of a communal body identified by dismemberment is that of the mythological tribe<sup>2</sup> of female warriors, the Amazons, a "war-like society of women, living on the borders of the known world, reknowned for archery and riding skills" and characterised by the fact that "[t]heir right breasts were removed by cauterization (to facilitate archery, presumably)" (Hardwick 1990:16,18). The word Amazon means "without breast" (Auerbach 1975:54) or "breastless" (Dowden 1997:97). However, Ken Dowden (1997:97) speculates that the word could have been misinterpreted from the original Greek and might refer to the fact that Amazons presumably did not eat barley bread, rather than being 'breastless'. Whether these women would have survived such an intervention, is something which Dowden (1997:97) and many others have speculated on. Dowden (1997:97) also notes that the historical representation of Amazons in art very rarely depict them without a breast (see plate V, figures 36 to 39), but often dressed in either male attire or exposing one breast. One could argue that the mythology surrounding the Amazons could be incorrect based on the misinterpretation of the original word. Another reason could be that the depiction of a woman warrior missing a breast would be too uncomfortable for the male viewer<sup>3</sup>, particularly bearing in mind that these women fought men on the battleground. Marina Warner (1985:267-293) refers to 'the slipped chiton' as allegory for the representation of Victory and Liberty, especially popular during the French Revolution. These depictions take the form of an Amazonian warrior type woman normally wearing see-through tunics, which have conveniently slipped off one shoulder to reveal a naked breast (see plate V, figures 38 and 39). The breast is a contradictory symbol of power and subordination, as explained by Warner:

By exposing vulnerable flesh as if it were not so, and especially by uncovering the breast, the softest and most womanly part of woman, as if it were invulnerable, the semi-clad

female figure expresses strength and freedom ... It presents itself as a zone of power, through a primary connotation of vitality as the original sustenance of infant life, and secondly, though by no means, through the erotic invitation it extends, only to deny (Warner 1985:277-278).

While the removal of a breast in the mythological Amazonian tradition is unheard of in contemporary society, the removal of breasts is rather common. Here I refer to the surgical procedure of mastectomies to remove cancerous tissue<sup>4</sup>. In an attempt to save a woman's life, surgeons would suggest the removal of one or both breasts. In this respect one could also view membership to the 'sisterhood' of breast cancer survivors being denoted by the removal of their breasts. The fashion photographer, David Jay published a series of nude photographs of breast cancer survivors as part of The Scar Project<sup>5</sup>, in an attempt to portray the reality of women affected by the disease (see plate V, figures 40 to 41). It is interesting too that the language used in relation to breast cancer refers to violent women. Women are 'fighting the battle' and they are 'survivors' or 'brave women'.

The actress Angelina Jolie (b. 1975), known amongst others, for her role as Lara Croft<sup>6</sup>, the ultimate fantasy female warrior, has recently undergone a 'preventative mastectomy' in an attempt to escape her susceptible genetic predisposition<sup>7</sup>. The effect of Jolie's mastectomy on the perception of her character's sexuality and power could be investigated in a separate study. Plate V, figures 43 and 44 shows the highly sexualised images associated with the depiction of warrior women such as Lara Croft, both in the rendition of the animation character of the video game and the film character played by Jolie. Chapter 5, section 5.2.1 discusses the character traits associated with the portrayal of warrior women in greater depth.

The alternative social structure of the Amazons was further identified by their rejection of 'normal' female behaviour. Men were only allowed for procreative reasons, and any male infants born from the unions were left to die (Hardwick 1990:17-18). The notion that violence and lesbianism is cause for male anxiety

was commented on in the discussion of Aileen Wuornos in chapter 3, section 3.2. I believe that the lack of images of 'one breasted' women, supports the idea that violent (or strong) women are cause for male anxiety, and the power associated with them.

Interestingly, both societies given as examples in this section, use the dismemberment of a significantly sexual organ, the penis or the breast, to signify the adherence to a specific social group, regardless of whether they are real or fictional societies. However, dismemberment can firstly function in the unification of communities and serve to concentrate social power, or it can signify one's otherness, which in turn renders one *homo sacer*. Dismemberment as a form of punishment on the other hand, has a distinctly different character, and is discussed next.

b) Dismemberment as form of punishment.

In contrast with the idea that acts of dismemberment may function to unite, or identify communities, one finds the idea that the act of dismemberment may be used to punish those individuals who dare to contravene the norms of society. Dismemberment not only serves to remove the individual from the community, both physically and psychologically, but it accentuates the power of the dominating party. As this study will show, unfortunately, dismemberment as punishment is also a sign of belonging to a group, a sign of otherness, and of *homo sacer*.

In terms of punishment, the public dismemberment of individuals has historically been very common. Probably the most notorious historical period for public executions was the French Revolution<sup>8</sup>. Capital punishment of this nature served firstly to humiliate and punish individuals, and secondly to reinforce the ruling governing body's power over its subjects. Public executions also served as a warning to the community. According to Katherine Royer (2003:330) these butcheries were carefully engineered spectacles designed for maximum visual impact. Dismembered body parts were often displayed in public spaces or sent

back to their homelands. This further emphasised the power of the executing body, or in Agamben's terms, the sovereign.

Punishment and shame are related issues. While dismemberment functions as a physical punishment for the individual, the idea of shame is an extension of the punishment. In this respect:

Benjamin Kilborne has written that shame "relates: (1) The (internal) experience of disgrace together with fear that . . . others will see how we have dishonored ourselves; (2) The feeling that others are looking on with contempt and scorn at everything we do and don't do; and (3) A preventative attitude (I must hide or disappear in order not to be disgraced)"<sup>9</sup> (Lemos 2006:227-228).

While Kilborne's ideas relate to the individual, the 'private space' and their experience of shame, it is important to note that shame has a very public interface and that "shame is above all visual and public ... [and] requires an audience; a watchful community" (David D Gilmore quoted in Lemos 2006:228).

Tracy Lemos (2006:234-235) proposes that the display of severed body parts is an integral part of shaming victims, and refers to an example mentioned in the introduction of this study, the beheading of Holofernes by Judith. The act of dismemberment of an Assyrian army general by a woman, could be embarrassing enough. But the additional display of his head in public was most damning and shameful, not only to his army, but also the nation he represented.

In the case where dismemberment does not result in the individual's death, such as removing a hand or a finger, the dismemberment does not only punish the victim, but serves to identify them as traitors, conspirators and the likes. A case in point is the civil war in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. The rebel forces used the violent dismemberment of limbs to support their reign of terror, to express dominance over individuals, mostly civilians, and to mark them as 'dissidents'. Human Rights Watch (1999) reported that violent amputations of limbs, especially of hands and arms were extremely common, as were double arm amputations. Neither adults nor children were exempt from this torture, and many years after the end of the civil war, and until their deaths, the



individuals who survived these amputations have to live bearing the very visible scars of being *homines sacri*. Bearing in mind what Lemos (2006:225) suggests that “mutilation signaled a newly established power dynamic between the victim and the aggressor”, one could argue that the control over the victim extends beyond the limits of the physical interaction itself. The dismemberment serves as a perpetual reminder of the powerful hold of the aggressor over the victim, whether the aggressor is present or not.

In terms of this study, the example of the mass dismemberment of civilians in Sierra Leone’s civil war also relates to another aspect, that of the influence of film violence on society. As noted in chapter 1, section 1.4, Ten Brink and Oppenheimer (2012:2) commented on the use of violent films to desensitise soldiers to violence and killing. For the rebels in Sierra Leone one of these films was *Rambo* (1982)<sup>10</sup>. The relationship between reality and fantasy is also reflected in the fact that a number of films have been produced about the war in Sierra Leone, most notably the film *Blood Diamond* (2006)<sup>11</sup> featuring Leonardo di Caprio.

Although the example of Sierra Leone is a relatively recent one, the consensus is that public dismemberments, and especially on the scale as seen in Sierra Leone, is a rare occurrence in contemporary society. The discussion thus far has also focussed on the act itself, and the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) involved. In terms of Lemos’s ideas on shame and public participation, the viewer or audience is necessary for the punishment to be linked to a sense of shame. As this study focusses on the relationship between the imagined and the real, this raises the question regarding the role of the viewer or audience in relation to visual representations of dismemberment as punishment.

According to Madelain Hron (2008:22-23), Michel Foucault in his 1977 book *Discipline & Punish*, stated that torture and punishment as public spectacle, such as the beheadings of the French Revolution, have more or less “disappeared” in modern society. Hron (2008:23) challenges this idea by stating that “[c]ontrary

to Foucault's claims, the public spectacle of torture has not disappeared; it has simply moved from the town square to our living room". Obviously one cannot equate the punitive function of dismemberment in reality to its function in visual representations of it, but the presence of the viewer or spectator is required in both instances. This leads me to ask whether the function of dismemberment in visual culture relates more to the concept of revenge or the associated notion of sacrifice, than to discipline and punishment.

c) Dismemberment as revenge

My first thoughts in terms of revenge would be to see it as an inversion of the idea of punishment. Punishment is inflicted on another in lieu of punishment bestowed on 'me'. However, from the outset, this idea is problematic. Firstly, because it is dependent on the idea of what punishment is. Secondly, one could ask what kind of revenge would justify what kind of punishment? This idea is supported by research in the field. For one, Leo Zaibert (2006) in the article 'Punishment and revenge', investigates just this problematic notion and proposes that they could in fact be the 'same thing'. He argues that punishment and revenge are not easily distinguishable by merely categorising punishment as "lawful" and "institutionalised" (thereby implying rationality) and revenge as "barbaric" and "private" (occurring outside the law) (Zaibert 2006:82). As seen throughout this study the concept of 'law' itself is problematic, as it is, using Agamben's (1995:15) terms, based on a state of exception in which the sovereign dictates law by the process of inclusion and exclusion.

Trying to distinguish between punishment and revenge based on the attitude with which they are dispensed, is also problematic. While it is generally accepted that revenge is performed with a large amount of vindictiveness, punishment could also be administered in this manner (Zaibert 2006:85). The implications of the theory that punishment and revenge are similar ideas in terms of this study, and the act of dismemberment, is that one could view the punitive function of

dismemberment to be equivalent to its role in revenge. However, the portrayal of revenge as cinematic narrative does not necessarily relate to real life revenge.

A different description is given by Jon Elster (1990:862) who defines revenge as “the attempt, at some cost or risk to oneself, to impose suffering upon those who have made one suffer, because they have made one suffer”. The relevance of this statement in terms of this study extends past the literal notion of sadism, to the act of viewing film and the pleasure derived from it (scopophilia), which Mulvey associates with voyeurism:

Voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness (Mulvey 1975:14).

Another important point Elster (1990:876) makes is that revenge behaviour “occurs mainly (although not exclusively) in societies without a strong centralized state”. In other words, if society feels that the legal system does not adequately deal with problematic situations, individuals start taking the law into their own hands. On the one hand this statement relates to Agamben’s theories in general, and on the other hand it also points to the relativity of moral values, so often the topic of films.

The alternative morality frequently seen in Tarantino’s characters, as discussed earlier in relation to Agamben’s *homo sacer* (see chapter 2), is once again relevant here. David Johnson (in Greene & Mohammad 2007:55-56) argues that the underlying morality of Tarantino’s characters (although alternative, is not always blatantly ‘evil’) justifies their revenge. Thus one could say that within the specific context of a film, such as *Kill Bill*, the revengeful actions of The Bride are justified due to the lawless context in which it occurs, as well as the fact that she appears to behave within a certain moral framework. Johnson (2007:72) gives the example where The Bride, when confronting her first target, Vernita, does not extend her revengeful actions to include killing Vernita’s daughter, Nikki who enters the home unexpectedly. Although The Bride could easily have done this, her decision not to kill an innocent bystander adds to her perceived morality,

which in turn justifies the revenge. I would add to his example that the relative morality of the other characters is an important consideration as well. The Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, despite The Bride being the focus of their retribution, kills everyone at the wedding rehearsal. This action of killing innocents purely due to their association with The Bride, morally alienates the characters from the viewer and further justifies The Bride's revenge.

The ideas of revenge and sacrifice seem to be intertwined in a similar manner as punishment and revenge. For Girard (1979:15-16), the difference between vengeance and sacrifice lies in the act of reprisal. Retaliation causes a vicious circle of violence informing further violence. Importantly, the act of sacrifice does not allow for revenge, and the "sacrificial process prevents the spread of violence by keeping vengeance in check" (Girard 1979:18).

d) Dismemberment as sacrifice

The previous discussion investigated amongst others, the close relationship between punishment and revenge. The idea of sacrifice is similarly related both to the notions of punishment and revenge. The relationship between punishment and sacrifice is explored in the following section.

René Girard (1979:1) states that "the sacrificial act assumes two opposing aspects ... the legitimate and the illegitimate, the public and the all but covert". Following from this, Brian Smith in the article 'Capital punishment and human sacrifice' (2000:5) proposes that modern executions<sup>12</sup> are highly ritualised procedures and as such relate to the idea of sacrifice. The contribution of the viewer or spectator/participant is also an important element in sacrifice, as well as with executions (Smith 2000:9). Although executions no longer take place in public, they are often mass media spectacles as in the cases of Ruth Snyder and Aileen Wuornos discussed in chapter 3. He then relates the executed criminal to Girard's scapegoat or sacrificial victim, who becomes "the symbolic representative of 'illegitimate' violence in society as a whole" (Smith 2000:16)

and presumably the death of the scapegoat would quell society's anxiety around violence and injustice (Girard 1979:14).

I would further suggest that the difference between punishment and sacrifice could possibly lie in the difference between Girard's scapegoat and Agamben's *homo sacer*. The two figures appear to be similar, if not the same, at first glance considering their close relationship with the notion of the sacred, as well as their deaths being marked by a sense of exemption. Frederiek Depoortere (2012:160) sees the difference as follows:

[Girard's scapegoat is] the surrogate victim [who] draws all aggression and violence to himself and unites in this way all other members of the community in their hostility for him. When the victim has been killed, the community is left without adversaries and it finds itself restored in peace and calm (Depoortere 2012:160).

Agamben's *homo sacer* on the other hand cannot be a sacrificial victim due to the double exclusion *homo sacer* experiences in the realms of human *and* divine law:

Because of this twofold exclusion, the *homo sacer* cannot be sacrificed, but he may nevertheless be killed with impunity. The violence that befalls him is neither homicide nor sacrifice, but a form of violence that is more originary [sic] than both of these (Depoortere 2012:159).

While Depoortere (2012:156) emphasises Agamben's insistence that *homo sacer* is not a sacrificial victim, this does not mean that *homo sacer* cannot become one. The state of exception that *homo sacer* find themselves in probably facilitates their seizure as sacrificial victims or scapegoats.

While the notion of sacrifice in film firstly functions as a narrative device, it is the idea that film itself functions as scapegoat that is important to this study, which is discussed in chapter 3, section 3.3 and 3.4.

The above is obviously not a comprehensive discussion of all the functions of dismemberment. I have only covered the ideas relating to this study in order to set up a framework for the investigation of the display of severed parts or the visual imagery relating to dismemberment. Therefore, the next section

investigates the relationship between the function of violence, and specifically dismemberment, in visual imagery such as film and art.

#### **4.1.2 Historical portrayal of dismemberment**

David Slocum (2000:649) states that mass media has traditionally served either as an agent for social change, or as an agent to further existing social control, in an 'either/or' scenario depending on the social circumstances of the time. Consequently, he theorises that film violence, acting as "an agent of social control and change" (Slocum 2000:649) is thus a reflection of society at any given stage.

The portrayal of dismemberment in art and film is not new, and the examples are plentiful. In this section, I highlight only a small number of instances that are relevant to the study, and discuss them in terms of Slocum's statement that these images function to regulate social behaviour. While his statement refers specifically to mass media, I have extended this to include visual images in general, regardless of the method of distribution, which in Slocum's case refers to electronic media. My rationale for this is that I see all images as being potentially 'mass produced', especially in terms of the digital technology available today. By doing this, I fully acknowledge that some of these images were not necessarily produced within the conventional idea of 'mass media', but I suggest that images of dismemberment are always, purposefully, produced as a form of social control.

##### **a) Dismemberment (and sacrifice) in Aztec art**

In Aztec worldview, ritual killing and dismemberment are a necessary transition to rebirth and fertility probably because this conception was reinforced by the flow of life and death in nature, and since the earth goddess represents nature, blood (the life sap) was intended to give renewed strength and fertility to the nature goddess, the bestower of all nourishment. Blood fecundates the womb of earth as we can see from a number of rites in which the blood of the victim, whether man or animal, was solemnly spread over the fields (Granziera 2004:253).

The visual depiction of acts of dismemberment can be traced back to the Aztec empire, which generally refers to the Nahuatl population of central Mexico in the Early Aztec period (around A.D. 1150-1350) and Late Aztec period (A.D. 1350-1521). The Aztec empire's reputation for violence and sacrifice is not unwarranted if statistics are to be believed. Caroline Dodds Pennock (2012:279) states that around 20 000 people were sacrificed per year, though figures of up to 50 000 victims per year have been claimed by some authors. It is important to bear in mind that the Spanish invasion of the New World occurred at around the same time, and some authors speculate that the Spanish inflated the numbers of sacrificial victims in order to justify their own pillaging in the name of religion (Arnold 2007:552). No matter what the real nature of the numbers are, this amounts to a large number of victims losing their lives.

Human sacrifice was an important aspect of worshipping the sun, which according to Aztec belief, needed to be fed human blood in order to allow for its constant renewal. Central to Aztec mythology, is the myth of Coatlicue, an important earth goddess and mother to Huitzilopochtli, a great warrior and god of the sun. According to legend (Arnold 2007:566, Granziera 2004:251-252), Coatlicue became pregnant when she hid a ball of feathers (or down) in her blouse while sweeping at the temple. Her daughter the moon, Coyoxauhqui, and her 400 brothers, angry at their mother's shameful pregnancy decided to kill her. At the moment of the attack, Coatlicue gave birth to Huitzilopochtli, clad in armour, who then proceeded to decapitate Coyoxauhqui. Her body became dismembered as it fell down the hill, and her brothers fled in fear. While Philip Arnold (2007:566) sees this myth as primarily representing part of the daily cycle of the sun, that of daybreak (birth) and the vanquishing of the moon and stars, Patrizia Granziera (2004) traces the gradual evolution of this myth, and others, into the various cults involving the worship of the Virgin Mary. She (Granziera 2004:250) suggests that the transition from pagan goddess worship to the cult-like worship of the Christian Virgin Mary was aided by the similarities and close relationship with nature shared by these figures. Viewed in this light the

similarities are apparent, not only in the miraculous conceptions experienced by both Coatlicue and the Virgin Mary, but in the idea of sacrifice as well. In Christian mythology Jesus<sup>13</sup>, the Son (could this be a version of the Sun) miraculously conceived by God, was born as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The belief in Jesus also allows one to be 'reborn' in a similar way. The blood of Christ<sup>14</sup> is also an integral part of the ritual of communion, in which the believer would renew their covenant with God.

This example shows firstly that the idea of dismemberment is not 'new', but also that the narratives which inform many of our myths and legends evolve over time. The fact that the pagan and Christian narratives in this case are very similar allowed for the transition from a pagan to Christian country. I suggest that in the same way, similarities in 'old' and 'new' narratives are a prerequisite for transformation (or rebirth) in society, and these parallels are investigated in the various case studies.

**b) Dismemberment and society: Joan of Arc and the cult of Lustucru**

Joan DeJean's article, *Violent Women and Violence against Women: Representing the "Strong" Woman in Early Modern France* (2003), investigates the appearance of images involving the character Lustucru around the 1660s in Paris (see plate VI, figures 49 to 52). Thought to be a reaction to the increasingly popularity of Amazonian type warrior women such as Joan of Arc<sup>15</sup> (see plate VI, figures 45 to 48), this fictional executioner is charged with the ritual of "debraining" these women by beheading them and thus returning 'sanity' to the patriarchal society (DeJean 2003:134-135). The motto "on a woman without a head, everything is good to eat" became associated with Lustucru and the obsession was supported by the production of various mass media images such as newspapers, almanacs, shop signs, even coins containing references to headless women, making it something of a "mass media event" (DeJean 2003:136-137). Unfortunately DeJean was not able to link the popularity of the Lustucru images to an increase or decrease in violent behaviour towards women



in this period, but if one considers Girard's (1979:14) statement that the "function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting", one could argue that the sacrificial nature of the images probably served to subdue male anxiety about 'strong' women such as Joan of Arc. This also links with Neroni's (2005:18) statement that the "violent woman appears at moments of ideological crisis, when the antagonism present within the social order – antagonisms that ideology attempts to elide – become manifest".

### **c) Dismemberment (and rebirth) in Surrealism**

Amy Lyford (2000) in her article *The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the Musée du Val-de-Grâce in 1917*, links the origins of Surrealism to the concepts of dismemberment and regeneration, or rather reconstruction, and specific surgical reconstruction. Surrealist founders, Louis Aragon (1897-1982) and André Breton (1896-1966) (see plate VII, figure 55) met working as physicians-in-training at the Val-de-Grâce Hospital in Paris during World War I. The hospital, which became known for its cutting-edge medical technology and reconstructive surgery, also housed a museum that contained amongst others, a collection of preserved, dismembered body parts, photographs and sketches, as well as wax and plaster casts known as *moulages*, which documented the surgical repairs of disfigured and maimed soldiers (see plate VII, figure 53). Although these were mainly used as teaching aids for medical staff, they were also turned into propaganda tools when it was realised that the displays of surgical repairs done on severely mutilated soldiers were a testament to the physical and psychological reconstruction of France as a nation. As Lyford (2000:52) states "[b]ody parts had already been turned into aesthetic objects for national consumption by the early 1920s, although at Val-de-Grâce the body-in-pieces symbolized France's regeneration rather than its destruction".

Lyford describes the connection between dismemberment and the Surrealist aesthetics as follows:

The logic of an aesthetic of dismemberment was something that they [the Surrealists] and their cohort would later deploy as a sharp, political weapon. The collections of Val-de-Grâce proposed a grammar of the human body that parsed the human form into pieces that could be manipulated for aesthetic purpose just as words and parts of speech were mobilized in the process of poetic construction (Lyford 2000:51).

Plate VI, figures 54 to 58 are examples of how dismemberment manifested in Breton's home, in the Surrealist photographs of Man Ray, and most notably in the covers for the two editions of Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924 and 1929).

In terms of the functions of dismemberment, one could argue that these images functioned, primarily in order to unite and encourage a society devastated by war. Lyford (2000:47) also relates the appearance of dismemberment in Surrealist art to "progress", which is understood as modernity in the broadest sense. The period around the two world wars saw many innovations, of which successful reconstructive surgery was but one. Linda Nochlin relates the appearance of 'the fragmented body' to modernity. She notes that:

... the fragmented body and its variable significations in the visual representation of the modern period ... [refers to the] social, psychological, even metaphysical fragmentation that so seems to mark modern experience – a loss of wholeness, a shattering of connection, a destruction or disintegration of permanent value ... (Nochlin 2001:23-24).

Nochlin (2001:24-25) further investigates the influence of photography and the manner in which artists perceived objects. Impressionist painters such as Edgar Degas (1834 -1917) increasingly used "cut-off views of the body and the cropped picture/surface" (Nochlin 2001:25), resulting in the fragmented, often alienating, view of modern life.

Importantly, while Nochlin views the fragmented body as symbolic of modern life, as a manifestation of society's disintegration, these images do not appear in isolation and the relationship between the images themselves and society is of importance. In this respect Lyford (2000:49-50) comments that the original hospital *moulages* "were arranged in sets – usually pairs, but sometimes in groups of three or more – that depicted the different stages of surgical treatment". This implied a narrative of reconstruction, of healing and

restoration. The moment one of these *moulages* is separated from the rest “its visceral charge emphasizes trauma as something permanent, static, endless” (Lyford 2000:50). This suggests that the presence of a narrative is required for an image to read as ‘rebirth, reconstruction, renewal’ etc.

Lyford (2000:55-56) also refers to Ruth Leys’ theories on trauma, that in order to process a traumatic event, one should repeat it, relive it in a sense. In this respect, Lyford suggests that the production of images of dismemberment by the Surrealists was an attempt at coming to terms with the traumatic memories of the war by reliving them. By implication one can ask the question: are all images of dismemberment not just an attempt to deal with some or other traumatic event? This would once again support the idea that images of dismemberment reflect some sense of societal anxiety.

The influence of violence on Breton’s life and thought can further be seen in the essay he wrote in collaboration with Leon Trotsky<sup>16</sup> (1879-1940), the communist activist and theorist in 1938. For them the artist has a crucial role to play in commenting on violence, the artist has a ‘duty’ to represent violence:

The communist revolution is not afraid of art. It realizes that the role of the artist in a decadent capitalist society is determined by the conflict between the individual and various social forms that are hostile to him. This fact alone, insofar as he is conscious of it, makes the artist the natural ally of revolution (Breton & Trotsky 2007:500).

Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim in the introduction to the essay, go as far as to say that the artist’s role is to facilitate renewal, or in the context of this study, rebirth:

Art is the key, and they see art as bringing about a revolution that would free not only art and the artist, but also, through their freedom, ensure a more encompassing freedom, by way of a more complete and radical reconstruction of society (Lawrence & Karim 2007:492).

In summary, Lyford’s article shows the link between fantasy and reality, the source of inspiration for the Surrealists, as well as the relationship between dismemberment and rebirth. On the other hand, the writings of Breton, and Trotsky, emphasise the role of the artist in the portrayal of violence.

Viewing the various historical periods I have mentioned, in terms of dismemberment, one could be tempted to think that there is some notion of progress (from sacrifice, to punishment, to revenge to reconstituting honour, and somewhere along the line, rebirth and reconstruction) inherent in the history of the visual representation of dismemberment. However, I think this is too simplistic. Nevertheless, I am convinced that proliferation of images of dismemberment reflects the anxieties and fears of society.

#### **4.1.3 Narrative similarities in fairy tales, mythology and art: functions of dismemberment**

This section investigates the relationship between narratives, whether linguistic or visual, acts of violence, and the contribution of narrative towards the functions of dismemberment.

Paul Crowther in *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (2003) theorises that how we react to images of violence is mediated by three factors which relate to the narrative, expressive (or emotional) and aesthetic functions of the image. The most important in terms of this study, is that of the narrative function, implying that the depiction of violence carries with it “the affirmation of prevailing sets of moral or cultural values, or ... the rejection of such values” (Crowther 2003). In other words, images of violence infer a narrative of morality and ethics to which the viewer will respond depending on their cultural background. On the other hand, a number of theorists support the discourse that narratives, such as fairy tales and myths, are essential to the process of acculturation. For instance Maria Tatar (1992:xxvii) states that “[f]airy tales serve as instruments of socialization and acculturation precisely because they capture and preserve disruptive moments of conflict and chart their resolution”. Jack Zipes echoes a similar sentiment regarding the civilising process when he quotes Norbert Elias:

Human groups specialized for the means of violence, orientation, capital accumulation and investment, and organizing other groups of people, were able, at one time or another, to establish themselves as controllers of the central monopolies of a state and thus, alone or in partnership, to perform ruling functions in their society. Recurrent power conflicts within or between states, whether between competing establishments or between established and outsiders – in other words, hegemonial and survival struggles of various kinds – formed one of the strongest, perhaps the strongest, driving force in the development of societies (Zipes 2006:20).

However Zipes (2006:20-21) feels that Elias's theories on the civilising process does not emphasise thoroughly enough the question of male dominance. Add to this the fact that fairy tales have "always been concerned with sex roles, social class and power" (Zipes 2006:21) one is able to understand how these narratives could start to function as mechanisms of control. If this is related to Crowther's (2003) declaration that "[t]he representation of violence is a source of enduring pleasure and fascination ... [and that it] is found pleasurable because it reflects, and thereby consolidates, male fantasies of virility, power and control", one cannot but assume that both narratives and images of violence serve to uphold patriarchal hegemony.

An important mechanism of control is that of violence, or the threat of violence, which could serve a deterring purpose. Tatar (1992:58-59) emphasises the role of fairy tales in acculturation and teaching of children, and specifically the threat of violence (such as cutting off heads and limbs) to contain and eradicate disobedient behaviour.

Zipes (2006:27) states that the influence of fairy tales on the civilising process has all but diminished in the twenty-first century. He is of the opinion that its influence has in fact increased even further due to the increase in mass media communications. The popularity in recent years of animated fairy tale films seems to support his claim. If we consider film as being an extension of narratives such as fairy tales and mythology, one would infer that Film, would have a similar function in the civilising process.

## **4.2 Analysis of dismemberment in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill***

Acts of dismemberment abound in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*. This section contains a general analysis of dismemberment in the film, followed by a case study in which Tarantino's *Kill Bill* is compared with the fairy tale narrative of *The Handless Maiden*. I investigate the differentiation between the victims and perpetrators, and the methods they employ, and relate this to the various functions of dismemberment as discussed in the introduction to this section.

### **4.2.1 Antagonists and victims**

The distinction between victims and perpetrators in *Kill Bill* is not clearly defined, and most of the characters find themselves at some stage in either state. For the purposes of this study, I make the distinction between the victims as those who are dismembered, and the perpetrators as those who dispense the dismemberment.

A number of incidents occur in the first volume of *Kill Bill*, starting with the scene in which The Bride bites off the tongue of the unnamed rapist in the hospital. The next act of dismemberment occurs during a board meeting of the Tokyo underground leadership when O'Ren Ishii beheads a board member, Boss Tanaka for his remarks about her mixed race background. This incident is the only one in which The Bride is not responsible for the dismemberment. Visually, the scene echoes many of the paintings portraying the Judith and Holofernes myth (see plate II, figures 2 to 13), as discussed in the introduction to this study. Conceptually, this scene also relates to the Judith and Holofernes myth in that both O'Ren Ishii and Judith use decapitation to establish a new power base by punishing and shaming their enemies.

The scene in which The Bride confronts O'Ren Ishii and her subordinates is one of the most violent and extended fight scenes in the film. Firstly, Sofie Fatale (Julie Dreyfus) has her arm chopped off by The Bride, before she proceeds to annihilate and dismember the seemingly endless stream of troops in the Crazy

88 gang. In the Crazy 88 fight scene I have counted five arms, two heads, one hand, four feet, one leg lost and one body cut in half. The sheer amount of dismembered bodies in this scene alone is enough to qualify The Bride as a warrior woman. The final dismemberment in *Kill Bill I*, occurs in the fight scene between The Bride and O'Ren Ishii, who has the top of her head chopped off by the sword wielding Bride.

In contrast, in *Kill Bill II*, only one scene of dismemberment occurs when the Bride plucks out the eye of Elle Driver, but this does not lead to her death. The significance of the film being presented in two sections, and the drastic reduction of incidents, for me relates to the transformation which The Bride is about to undergo, from warrior woman to mother.

The Bride's hit list includes three women (Vernita Green, O'Ren Ishii and Elle Driver) and two men (Bud and his brother Bill) (see plate VIII figures 60 to 65). Of the three women, two are dismembered by The Bride, with O'Ren Ishii losing the top of her head and Elle Driver losing her only functional eye. Vernita Green is killed by a knife thrust into her chest. Tarantino's use of cross referencing is unconcealed here. O'Ren Ishii's decapitation is an echo of her earlier actions where she beheaded a board member with her sword. One cannot help but be reminded of the adage 'live by the sword, die by the sword' (Greene & Mohammad 2007:87).

Significantly, neither of the two male antagonists suffers any dismemberment. Both are spared the trauma of death by dismemberment, or in Freudian terms, the fear of castration. One can only speculate whether Tarantino unconsciously protected the male characters from dismemberment as per Freud's Oedipus complex. Bud's death does not come at the hand of The Bride. Instead, he is killed by a black mamba, stuffed into a briefcase of money by Elle Driver. Snakes and serpents are ambivalent ancient phallic symbols (De Vries 1974, sv 'Serpent'). Both are limbless creatures, representing on the one hand, evil and deceit, and on the other hand, healing and rebirth, for example the motif of the

snake feeding on itself to create a 'wheel or cycle of life'. This duality is also reflected in the myth of Medusa, the vicious Gorgon with snakes sprouting from her head, who is simultaneously "a healer as well as a destroyer" (Dexter 2010:25). The mere sight of Medusa was enough to kill one. Medusa finally died at the hands of Perseus, who decapitated her. The decapitation resulted in Medusa giving birth to Chrysaor and Pegasus (Dexter 2010:26-28). Elle Driver's relationship with the myth of Medusa goes beyond the mere affinity for snakes. The eye patch worn by Elle Driver is a metaphoric reference to the Gorgon's gaze that kills, and also relates to Elle's profession as assassin. Her dual nature as healer and destroyer relates to her visit to the comatose Bride in hospital. Initially on a mission to 'destroy' The Bride, Bill defuses her assignment, and The Bride is allowed to 'heal'. Elle Driver is also the only member of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad who survives The Bride's revengeful attacks, a narrative choice by Tarantino that allows for the possibility of further movies.

As mentioned previously, the two male characters do not suffer any dismemberment. Thus the further implications of the Medusa myth for Bud's death are related to Freud's castration complex, which is summarised as follows:

Sigmund Freud interwove the story of Medusa with his theory of the castration complex. According to Freud, "to decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something." Freud believed that the snakes upon Medusa's head were derived from the castration complex. The snakes "replace the penis." Further, "the sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror . . . becoming stiff means an erection." However, Freud argued that the decapitated head/castrated genitals are so terrifying because they represent "the terrifying genitals of the Mother" (Dexter 2010:39).

The issue of Bud's masculinity surfaces again in the discussion regarding the weapons used for dismemberment. The death of the other male character, Bill, significantly does not involve any mutilation of his body either. The Bride uses the "five point palm exploding heart technique" to kill him using her bare hands. The symbolic importance of hands in this instance relates to a sense of empowerment, while the loss of hands implies a state of dispossession. The



narrative similarities between the tale of the handless maiden and *Kill Bill* is discussed in greater depth in the case study at the end of this analysis.

#### **4.2.2 The sword as weapon of choice**

Even weapons are gendered: guns, notes Deborah Homsher, an American author and novelist, are usually associated with masculinity, and more specifically with penises: 'they point, they ejaculate, they penetrate, they can be shocking when exposed and they usually can be found adorning men' (as quoted in Alexander & Throsby 2008).

For most of the incidents of dismemberment that take place in *Kill Bill*, the samurai sword is the weapon of choice. The two exceptions are the rapist's tongue that is bitten off by The Bride, and the removal of Elle Driver's eye. According to Neroni (2005:24-26) violent women have a tendency to prefer methods of killing which do not involve much hand to hand combat or physical exertion, such as using poisons or using handguns. A woman can pull the trigger of a gun without it affecting her physical appearance and femininity. In the case of Lizzie Borden, discussed in chapter 3, the fact that the murder weapon was an axe or similar object, and not normally associated with female murderers, probably supported her acquittal (Neroni 2005:63).

Poison, a means often used by women to kill, is Elle Driver's preferred method. Not only is she commissioned to kill The Bride using a lethal injection, she uses a deadly snake to kill Bud, and kills her former master, Pai Mai by poisoning his food. Vernita Green, known for her knife fighting skills, tries to shoot The Bride with a gun hidden in a cereal box, but ironically meets her death by a knife flung into her chest. I agree with Neroni's opinion of the killing methods used by the women in relation to her real life case studies. However, the weapons used by fictional characters seem to be more 'masculine' and definitely require more physical strength and skill to use them. In the book *Modern Amazons: warrior women on screen* (Mainon & Ursini 2006:11-16) a checklist of characteristic features of the cinematic warrior woman, point 5 states that "She uses classic warrior woman weapons and tools", of which the bow and arrow, and the sword

are examples. The use of the sword and its implications for understanding the issue of dismemberment in this context is central.

In this section the focus falls on the use of swords in *Kill Bill*, and the checklist will not be discussed in this section. The full list of features of the modern warrior woman, as per Dominique Mainon and James Ursini, is given in chapter 5, where the stereotype of the warrior woman in recent cinema is discussed.

In Freudian dream psychology “the sword was a phallic, or masculine symbol ... the possession of a sword, in a woman’s dream, promised good fortune, whereas, in a man’s dream, a sword falling into water foretold the death of a woman” (Biederman 1996:335). For Mark Conard (in Greene & Mohammad 2007:163-175), the sword in *Kill Bill* is symbolically linked to the transitions between “pussy” (read female identity) and “cock” (read male identity). The sword features prominently throughout the film, and not only in the hands of the two central male characters, the brothers Bill and Budd, but also in the hands of the female antagonists O’Ren Ishii, her body guard Gogo, and Elle Driver. How the sword’s phallic symbolism differs in relation to each character says something about their character.

Conard (2007:169-170) sees Budd’s relationship with the sword to be symbolic of his emasculation. I have already discussed the implications of the Medusa myth and the related Freudian fear of castration in relation to Bud’s death. Bud’s emasculation is further supported by his dealings with the sword. Bud, who turns out to be Bill’s brother, is a drunkard living in a trailer in the desert and working at a strip club (or “titty bar” which equates to “the pussy”). His emasculation is underlined by the scene in which he is instructed to clean the women’s toilets which are overflowing, after a fight with his boss. Having to clean the excrement of women is the ultimate symbolic gesture of supreme emasculation. But most significantly, Budd has sold his Hattori Hanzo sword, presumably to finance his drinking. Having lost his “symbolic penis” (Conard 2007:170), he retrieves it temporarily after he ambushes The Bride, shoots her

and takes her sword (see plate VIII, figure 64). He tries to sell the sword to Elle Driver, who promptly kills him with the venomous snake in her suitcase, and takes the sword anyway. The phallic sword and its powers, originally the possession of The Bride, are transferred to Elle (see plate VIII, figure 62). Later the battle between The Bride and Elle does include this sword in the fight, but Elle is not killed by it. Rather The Bride plucks out her only functional eye. As Conard (2007:172) puts it “Elle is now completely blind, symbolic of her blindness to her servitude to a masculine conception of power, and to Bill, her master”.

But it is the sword in relation to the female protagonist, The Bride, which is central. In *Kill Bill I*, after she awakens from her coma, The Bride flies to Okinawa to obtain a sword made by the legendary sword maker, Hattori Hanzo (played by Sonny Chiba). Conard (2007:167) sees the scene (see plate VIII, figure 68) in which Hattori Hanzo hands over the newly made sword to The Bride, as symbolically handing over his “penis”, which in turn empowers The Bride for her quest of revenge. Visually the scene relates to the scene in *Kill Bill II* where Bill and The Bride, by now known by her real name, Beatrix Kiddo, are seated at the table when Bill abruptly attacks her with his sword (see plate VIII, figure 69). Beatrix blocks the attack with her sword, implying that she no longer needs Bill’s ‘penis’ or the power that goes along with it. She finally kills him with the five-point-palm-exploding-heart technique.

While Conard (2007:169) relates the sword to Freud’s Oedipal complex, stating that for The Bride, now symbolically empowered by the sword, to kill the father, Bill, he first needs to be “turned into a man”, which also implies the Christian mythology around the Trinity. God, the Father, needs to be transformed into the mortal figure of Jesus, whose sacrificial death serves to free believers. The godlike nature of Bill, the father, is enhanced by the fact that in *Kill Bill I*, Bill is not seen by the viewer except for a short scene showing only his hand stroking the phallic symbol, the sword, while giving Elle Driver instructions over the

phone (see plate VIII, figure 67). Bill is continuously off screen, or in a godlike realm from which he barks instructions, or in Conard's (2007:173) words, a "godlike, removed, an ever-present threat". In *Kill Bill II*, the Father becomes human, visible to the audience, and the Bride, now known as Beatrix, is able to kill him, significantly though not with a sword, but her hands, although the sword still features:

... their final clash begins with sword play, but Beatrix's sword is quickly flung away in the fight, and as Bill jabs his sword towards her, she sheaths it in the case she's still holding. If the sword has all along symbolized the penis and the power it represents, then the sheath is symbolically the vagina, and consequently the pussy overcomes the cock in this fight, the woman, *as woman*, defeats man (italics in original) (Conard 2007:174).

Warner (1985:159-160) reminds us that the sword as "usurped phallus, or the completion of the poor defective woman's body by the addition of a substitute penis in the form of a sword" is a contemporary idea, influenced by Freud's theories. Historically<sup>17</sup> the sword was "[o]ne of the conventional ways of depicting justice" (Warner 1985:159) or the battle between good and evil, and specifically the triumph of justice over evil.

[The sword] acts as the tool of separation, as the instrument which cleaves one into two ... Justice's sword represents the ability of humanity to judge between one thing and another, to part right from wrong, truth from falsehood, yes from no ... (Warner 1985:160).

Even if we deny the phallic connotations of the sword, it still remains deeply symbolic in *Kill Bill* as representing the battle between good and evil, despite the ethical and moral questions raised by the actions of the various characters. The sword as phallic symbol on the other hand relates to the possession of power in *Kill Bill*. The sword indicates the seat of power, which is in constant flux throughout both films. Whoever possesses the sword possesses the power. Lastly, the sword acts as instrument of dismemberment, and the method by which the purpose of dismemberment is achieved.

### 4.2.3 Case study: *The Handless Maiden* and *Kill Bill*

As already noted in this section, the symbolic significance of the hand as signifier of power, and as weapon has been discussed. As an extension of this idea, this case study investigates the parallels between the narratives in *Kill Bill* and *The Handless Maiden* or the tale of the maiden without hands. The tale of the maiden without hands (AT 706)<sup>18</sup> has many variants, but generally the narrative formula would include the following elements:

I. The Mutilated Heroine. The heroine has her hands cut off (a) because she will not marry her father, or (b) because her father has sold her to the devil, or (c) forbids her to pray, or (d) because her mother is jealous of her, or (e) because her sister-in-law has slandered her to her brother.

II. Marriage to the King. A king finds her in the woods (garden, stable, sea) and marries her in spite of her mutilation.

III. The Calumniated Wife. For the second time she is cast forth with her newborn children, because (a) the parents-in-law, (b) her father, (c) her mother, (d) her sister-in-law, or (e) the devil changes a letter to the king.

IV. The Hands Restored. (a) By a miracle in the woods she gets her hands back again. (b) She is restored to her husband. (Full extract taken from Knedler Jnr 1942:315).

The two most important aspects of the tale in terms of this case study, are the incestuous relationship between father and daughter, and secondly the bodily mutilation dispensed on the hapless heroine as punishment for her father's perverted desires. These ideas are reflected firstly in the opening scene of *Kill Bill I*, the heroine is attacked and mutilated by Bill's Deadly Viper Assassination Squad because she has decided to leave 'the business' and become a mother. An incestuous relationship is hinted at by not only the age gap between The Bride and Bill, but also the fact that he calls her 'Kiddo', implying a parent/child relationship. Although Bill is introduced to the bridegroom as The Bride's father, it is the fact that The Bride is pregnant with Bill's child which seals the incestuous nature of the relationship. It is The Bride's choice to distance herself from Bill, her refusal to marry her 'father' which leads to her disfigurement. Her dismemberment is not only the loss of her child, but she is also symbolically

removed from the Viper Squad, her 'family'. It is also this event which triggers the subsequent acts of dismemberment which take place mostly in the first film.

Although the father's role is essential in this narrative, a quote by the Jungian psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992:407) links the act of dismemberment to a specific instrument. She states that in the original versions of the tale, it is the "father [who] wields the silver cutting tool ... [and] ... we understand the father as an organizing principle, a sort of ruler of the external or worldly psyche". The importance of the sword as instrument of dismemberment, and its relationship to Freud's castration complex has been discussed.

The portrayal of The Bride's 'father' further relates to the metaphorical idea of dismemberment. Bill's appearance in the first film is limited to two scenes showing only his hands, together with a gun in the first and a sword in the second scene, both of which are phallic symbols of power as discussed in the previous section. Bill's first appearance is in the opening scene of *Kill Bill I* where he wipes the blood off The Bride's face before proceeding to shoot her. In the second, he instructs Elle Driver not to kill The Bride while she lies comatose in hospital (see plate VIII, figures 66 and 67). In this scene, Bill's hand lovingly strokes the handle of a samurai sword, almost in a sexual way, while speaking to Elle over the telephone. The character of Bill in the first *Kill Bill* film, therefore consists of hands removed from their bodily presence, dismembered for all intents and purposes. Thus we have in one scene references to the sword as masculine or phallic symbol, as identified in Freudian psychology (Biederman 1996:335) as well as various metaphoric implications of the violent amputation of hands in narratives. These are summarised by Estés as follows:

Hands are not only receivers but transmitters. When one shakes a person's hand, one can send a message, and often unconsciously does so by pressure, intensity, duration, and skin temperature. Persons who consciously or unconsciously intend meanness have touches that feel as though they are poking holes in the psychic soul-body of the other. At the other psychological pole, hands laid upon a person can soothe, comfort, remove pain, and heal [...] In too many parts of the world, an egregiously pathological way of demonstrating inhumanity is to kidnap an innocent person and cut off their hands; to dismember the human feeling, seeing, and healing function. The killer does not feel, so he does not wish for his victim to feel either (Estés 1992:409).

Significant in the context of this analysis too, is the recurring theme of orphaned children separated from their parents which occurs several times, relating to the segregation of the mutilated heroine from her family, as indicated in the narrative formula. The Bride firstly kills Vernita leaving her daughter, Nikki, an orphan with possible revenge motives later in life, a scene which is followed by the account of how O'Ren was rendered an orphan when the Yakuza boss, Matsumoto killed her parents. Insinuations that The Bride, Bill and his younger brother, Bud are also orphans occur (Greene & Mohammad 2007:89), strengthening the idea of an alternate family structure existing between the members of the Viper Squad.

The second stage of the narrative formula, involving the marriage to a king, and the importance of the heroine's mutilation is also reflected in *Kill Bill*. The Bride is about to be married to Tommy, who she met in a music shop, when the attack occurs during their wedding rehearsal. He is willing to marry her despite her carrying the unborn product of an incestuous relationship, but whether he is aware of this fact is debatable. It is important to note that the physical mutilation of The Bride occurs after the intended marriage to the 'king' in contrast to the narrative formula which requires the mutilation before the wedding. One could also argue that the incestuous creation The Bride is carrying could be a form of mutilation and in that way also fulfils the requirements of the narrative formula.

In the third stage of the narrative formula, the heroine experiences extensive condemnation, denigration and hardships, which she needs to conquer. In a sense the rest of *Kill Bill* and all the experiences The Bride lives through after waking from her coma, relates to this stage. What is important at this stage are the recurring battles and hardships that need to be faced, and in doing so the heroine becomes empowered. In this respect, a quote by Estés, who sees the tale as one of survival and perseverance in the face of hardship, is relevant:

'The Handless Maiden' is about a woman's initiation into the underground forest through the rite of endurance. The word endurance sounds as though it means 'to continue

without cessation,' and while this is an occasional part of the tasks underlying the tale, the word endurance also means "to harden, to make robust, to strengthen," and this is the principal thrust of the tale, and the generative feature of a woman's long psychic life. We don't just go on to go on. Endurance means we are making something substantial (Estés 1992:388).

The last part of the narrative formula is characterised by the miraculous and restoration, restitution and rebirth, and the reconciliation with her husband. In the final scenes of *Kill Bill II*, The Bride confronts the last of her death list victims, who also happens to be the father of her child. On the one hand the confrontation with Bill provides the final act of revenge<sup>19</sup>, which leads to the restoration of The Bride and her new role as mother. Her own rebirth is visually portrayed in one of the last scenes in *Kill Bill*, where Beatrix is lying on the bathroom floor in a foetal position, cradling herself. The fact that the viewer is looking down on her from above, is also significant as it implies a 'view from above' or from heaven.

The issue of the miraculous is also presented in the form of the now present child, The Bride's daughter who she thought had died in vitro, and the reason for her revenge. Ruby Rich (2004:27) compares this to the miracle of Christ's birth from the Virgin Mary as all the procreative activity, from immaculate conception to birth, between The Bride and Bill takes place off screen in a cinematic vacuum. I would include the appearance of the child, once thought dead, but now alive, as another miraculous event which also echoes the life and death of Christ, who was thought to be dead, but was found alive.

The relationship of the narrative with the miraculous and religion is of further importance in this case study. Warner (1988:152-56) associates dismemberment, and specifically decapitation, with not only incest and the refusal of a daughter to submit to her father's sexual advances, but also with martyrdom and sainthood. One such example is that of the saint, Dympna (or Dymphna) who was beheaded by her father after refusing him on the basis of her Christian faith. Ironically she went on to become the patron saint of the insane, apparently



because her father's inappropriate passions angered her to the extent that it made her "sick in the head" (Warner 1988:154). The relationship between dismemberment and sainthood is important in this study, as it relates the act of violence to certain Christian stereotypes, such as 'the virgin' and 'the saint'. A discussion of these and other stereotypes in relation to *Kill Bill* is contained in chapter 5.3.

While the act of dismemberment is the most disturbing part of the tale, I believe the narrative is important as it reinforces the disempowerment of women. As Tatar (1992:123) states "[w]ith hands severed from their arms, the heroine's body stands as an emblem of disempowerment, helplessness, and victimization". Reading the narrative of the handless maiden as a subtext in *Kill Bill* repudiates the idea that the film supports the empowerment of women.

#### **4.3 Dismemberment in the work of Nathalie Djurberg**

In contrast to the representation of dismemberment in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, which is generally portrayed as empowering, even liberating, Nathalie Djurberg's use of dismemberment obsessively focusses on the perverse and depraved. While the central concept of Djurberg's work, according to Rem Koolhaas and Germano Celant (2008:14), is "Dispossession" as the perversion and renunciation of one's own autonomy", many of her animations contain scenes of dismemberment, and the concepts are intrinsically linked to each other. This section investigates the use of dismemberment in the work of Djurberg, while the issue of dispossession in her work is discussed in chapter 5.

Violence is a recurring and central theme in the claymation short films produced by Djurberg. The violence is often accompanied by "apparently child-like formal language" (Kunsthalle Wien 2007:66) the result which is "[s]imultaneously childish and terrifying" (Nachtergaele 2009:53). References to fairy tales are often found in her work, such as the little red riding hood wolf in her 2003 exhibition *Untitled (Vargen)*<sup>20</sup>. Koolhaas & Celant (2008:13) echoes this by saying "Hers is a firmament of narratives that appear to verge on children's fairy tales [...] but turn

out instead to be nightmares for adults, where the torment reaches a maximum level of intensity and becomes catastrophe". In an interview with Celant, Djurberg states the source of her stories as follows "they're usually mixed with memories from early childhood, something I read, something I saw, someone who said something, they come together to form an idea" (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:107). In this respect the temptation to project Freud's theories about the unconscious onto Djurberg's work, as well as the implications of Freud's Oedipus complex, is overwhelming, and the following section investigates the feasibility of this.

#### **4.3.1 Freud's Oedipus complex and dismemberment**

Djurberg's work is a Freudian delight. Firstly, Freud saw myth as "reflecting the structure of the unconscious mind ... [and] ... emphasized their connections with pathology that is with the maladjusted mind and the sources of its pain" (Doherty 2003:46). Djurberg's victims seem to be nothing but maladjusted minds ritually being subjected or subjecting others to sources of pain, in an endless re-enactment of fairy tales and myths. However, Freud's Oedipus complex theory of 'anatomy as destiny', the repressed desires all women have due to their lack of penises, and their subsequent pathological behaviour to compensate for this (Doherty 2003:50), seems to be at the centre of Djurberg's conceptual thinking. The pathological behaviour of her characters includes paedophilia and incest. The relationship between dismemberment and incest in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, was discussed in terms of the narrative formula for the handless maiden in chapter 4, section 4.2, and serves as background to the discussions of Djurberg's work.

The most obvious of incestuous myths is that of Oedipus, and serves as basis for various theories for Freud. In the myth, Oedipus unwittingly kills his father, then marries his mother and has four children with her. Eventually Oedipus investigates the murder of his wife's former husband (and his father), and finds out to his horror that he was the perpetrator and that he had committed, by

implication, the most evil of sins, that of incest. His mother hanged herself in shame, while Oedipus gouged out his own eyes, and then disappeared into exile supported only by his daughters (Larousse encyclopaedia of mythology 1960, sv 'Oedipus').

Freud's Oedipus theories have been attacked by feminist theorists from the moment of their 'conception', and most objections centre on the fact that his theory serves to reinforce gender inequality and oppression (Doherty 2003:51). Djurberg on the other hand, seems to argue that Freud's theories are effectively still influencing society's ideas of 'normal' relationships and are still valid. Her female victims have not benefitted from feminist theories or revolutions. Her women are disempowered victims subjected to "unending sexual and emotional "invasion" and penetration. They are nearly always naked in the face of a troglodytic or patriarchal male, and they are almost always prisoners of a place or a family relationship: *Florentine* (2004)<sup>21</sup> and *On Fire* (2006)<sup>22</sup>" (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:14-15).

#### **4.3.2 Case study: Oedipus and Djurberg's *The Necessity of Loss***

In Djurberg's *The Necessity of Loss* (2006)<sup>23</sup>, a man with a phallic-like nose is systematically dismembered by a young girl until only his head and phallic nose remain, the nose is then used for sexual penetration (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:19) (see plate IX, figures 70 and 71). While the title of the work, and the dismembered penis like nose have obvious Oedipal connotations, Djurberg prefers to think that this work is rather about the inability of contemporary society to deal with certain social taboos, such as staring at a disfigured person or making racist comments concluding that people would rather avoid addressing the real issues behind their behaviour. Koolhaas and Celant (2008:19) summarise this work as follows:

This is a kind of sexuality, practiced with a mutilated, handicapped body, that people don't talk much about, let alone offer up to our gaze, and it is conjoined with an eros that is cruel and extreme (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:19).

When asked to explain her fascination with mutilation, and why it occurs so often in her work, Djurberg comments “I think what is left over becomes much more important” (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:193). In many of the examples discussed so far in the study, it is the dismembered limb that is the focus, for example in the scene where O’Ren Ishii beheads a board member, Boss Tanaka (*Kill Bill I*), the focus is on the decapitated head, which is held up as a trophy and as a warning to those around. In Djurberg’s work, the remainder, that is, the mutilated or disabled body instead becomes the focus. She also sees the mutilation of her characters as a sign of otherness, brought about by the simultaneous repulsion and curiosity a person feels when being confronted by someone with a disability. She is in fact commenting on the alienation and ridicule disabled people experience, and how they are viewed as objects or oddities rather than complex people in their own right (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:193). This idea is embodied by the words in the speech bubble, which appears towards the end of the animation: “What do we do now when your onley [sic] a face” (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:156-157) (see plate IX, figure 71).

While this work relates mainly to the idea of dismemberment as sign of membership or belonging to a certain group, in this case ‘the disabled body’, the underlying Freudian subtext cannot be denied. Hélène Cixous (1981) in her article ‘Castration or decapitation?’ suggests that both male and female have a fear of dismemberment which is rooted in Freud’s Oedipus complex. But whereas “man operates under the threat of castration ... the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head” (Cixous 1981:43). Ironically, in Djurberg’s *The Necessity of Loss*, it is the male who is dismembered until he is nothing more than a head, and its normal function is denied by reducing it to a mere instrument of sexual penetration. There is also a tongue in cheek reference to the stereotypical notion that men are always thinking about sex, even if they are ‘not’.

### 4.3.3 Dionysus, dismemberment and rebirth

Dismemberment and the concept of rebirth, strangely, go hand in hand, and have been discussed at various stages of this study. The myth of Dionysus<sup>24</sup> is of particular interest here. Terry Eagleton (2011:83) notes that the “idea that death and dismemberment lie within the very impulse of exuberant life and the drive to build civilization was known to the ancient Greeks as the Dionysian, because Dionysus is life and death, Eros and Thanatos together, builder of cities and wrecker of them, both joy and destruction, affirmation and negativity”. Dionysus is of importance to this study, firstly due to the acts of dismemberment that occur in the myth, but secondly, due to his association with ritual practices and religion, and specifically the parallels between Dionysus and Christ. Djurberg’s work relates to the Dionysian myth on both levels as the animations often contain scenes of dismemberment in orgiastic perversion, such as in *The Necessity of Loss* (2006), as well as references to the abuse of religious power and sexual abuse specifically in the Catholic Church, such as in *Experimentet* (2009)<sup>25</sup>. One of the animations which forms part of this installation is titled *Greed*, and shows three male figures dressed in priestly robes who repeatedly drag two female figures across the floor and then force them below their robes, insinuating the occurrence of clandestine sexual acts.

One particular mythical narrative surrounding Dionysus is that of king Pentheus of Thebes who wished to eradicate the worship of Bacchus in Greece. After giving orders to have Bacchus executed, he went to the mountain Citheron where a large number of worshippers and Bacchanals were, amongst them his own mother, Agave. His mother in a state of blind frenzy mistakes him for a wild boar, and leads the attack on Pentheus, who is ripped to pieces. Pentheus is killed by his own mother, with the help of his aunts Autonoë and Ino, the very women who were supposed to be his nurturers (Bulfinch 1993:198-203, Larousse encyclopaedia of mythology 1960, sv ‘Dionysus’). For Wendy O’Flaherty (1980:89-91) the maenads, and in particular Agave is the epitome of the evil mother who in spite of caring and suckling fawns and wolves, not only abandons

her own human child but is also responsible for his death. The shame of Agave's undignified sexual behaviour causes her son to reject her, but it is her murderous deed, coupled with the possibility of a mother devouring her child's flesh which labels her as an exceptionally depraved outcast. The idea of the evil, sexually corrupt mother killing or abusing their own, relates on the one hand to the Susan Smith murder case, but it is also a thematic association in Djurberg's animation *Hungry Hungry Hippos* (2007)<sup>26</sup>. In the animation, three obese women traumatise a dark-skinned baby "nearly to the point of suffocating and devouring him, although he achieves some degree of vengeance by sticking his finger into the anus of one of them" (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:19).

According to Doherty (2003:85) the Dionysus myth, and in particular the actions of the Maenads/Bacchanals, are linked to "the ritual practices of *sparagmos* and *omophagia* –'tearing apart' a sacrificial victim and 'eating the flesh raw'". Girard (1979:130-131) sees the act of *sparagmos*, the dismemberment of Pentheus as both the *result* and the *resolution* of the conflict in his kingdom, simultaneously an act of revenge by his subordinates, and a sacrificial act<sup>27</sup> which serves to defuse the situation. The dismemberment, a violent act in itself, becomes the means to end the violence, and leads to restoration. In this respect, Albert Henrichs (1984:209) points out that both Walter Burkert and René Girard<sup>28</sup> shared a similar view of the relationship between Dionysus and violence:

... both authors interpret the emphasis on violence and ritual murder in some of Dionysus' myths and cults as a beneficial religious mechanism that helped preserve social stability through simulation of temporary violence and its ritual resolution (Henrichs 1984:209).

The relationship between Dionysus and Christ occurs on various levels, starting with the parallels in their miraculous births, and rebirths. The symbolic use of bread and wine are important symbols of transformation or transcendence for both figures. In the Dionysian myth, food and wine encourage altered states of consciousness associated with drunken orgies, and in Christianity these symbols are associated with the Eucharist and resurrection of Christ (Henrichs 1984:216-217).

The relevance of the Dionysus myth for this study goes beyond mere narrative similarities, but is also inherently part of the structure of horror narratives. This is the view of the American author and filmmaker, Stephen King (b. 1947), known for his horror stories, books and films, who sees the Nietzschean Dionysian and Appollonian principles as an intrinsic part of horror narratives. Linda Holland-Toll (1999:131) explains King's view on the relationship between principles and horror narratives, as discussed in his book, *Danse Macabre* (2010/1981) as follows:

[King] claims that horror fiction works to reaffirm our sense of community and our essential humanity. In Nietzschean terms, for example, King sees the Dionysian, the forces of ecstasy and disorder, constantly subsumed into and appropriated by the Appollonian, the voices of harmony and control and order. Horror fiction, in other words, showcases the Dionysian in order to privilege the Appollonian. According to this paradigm, the restoral of order is the main concern of horror fiction (Holland-Toll 1999:131).

It is the sense of ritual, and the contrast between the socially acceptable conventions of sex and the perverse, that are at the centre of Djurberg's animation *The Prostitute* (2008)<sup>29</sup>.

#### **4.3.4 Case study: Dionysus and *The Prostitute***

'Dismemberment' and its opposite 'copulation' are recurring ideas in Djurberg's films, and are "presented as the sole rituals in the lives of the characters... [and] Djurberg ... decides their fate in life and death, in sorrow and pleasure, as if they were creatures in the hands of a deity subjecting them to cruel and inhuman rites" (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:13). In Djurberg's animation titled *The Prostitute* (2008)<sup>30</sup> the never-ending ritual of copulation is illustrated by the disembodied hands, presumably male, who seem to endlessly open and close the red curtains, which hang around the bed, enclosing the prostitute, poking fingers through holes in the curtains and manhandling her. The square bed with its red velvet curtain has the uncanny feel of being a traditional confessional booth, but at the same time evokes associations with the 'shower scene' in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)<sup>31</sup>, except that in this instance the woman is anticipating, even welcoming the 'terror'. Round holes are cut into the curtains, through which the customers

ritually poke their fingers, with obvious symbolic references of ritualistic, and multiple penises entering vaginas. As there is more than one hole in the curtain, one could see this as being a metaphoric reference to all women, not just one particular woman.

While the animation relates to the Dionysus myth with regards to the ritual aspects of sex and religion, it also relates to the myth in terms of the idea of voyeurism. Firstly, the voyeuristic behaviour of king Pentheus, ultimately leads to his dismemberment and death. Consumed by the need to punish and remove Dionysus from his kingdom, he disguises himself as a woman and stalks the orgiastic festival in an attempt to capture him. However, Pentheus is mistaken for a wild animal and torn to pieces by his own mother (Larousse encyclopedia of mythology 1960, sv 'Dionysus'). In Djurberg's *The Prostitute*, the clients are already dismembered and exist only as hands and arms, yet this does not discourage their voyeuristic observation of the female's body.

Secondly, the voyeuristic-scopophilic nature of film as proposed by Mulvey (1975) is an intrinsic part of viewing film. Mulvey notes that while Freud's idea of scopophilia implies the pleasure one derives from viewing, it is the obsessive fixation found in voyeurism, and for Peeping Toms, that informs the perversion (Mulvey 1975:8-9). Obsessive, ritualistic, perverse voyeurism is a core idea in *The Prostitute*, where the viewer voyeuristically observes the voyeuristic behaviour of the clients observing the prostitute, who stares directly back at the viewer.

In the same way that Dionysus represents the liminal states between real and fantasy, Djurberg's animation *The Prostitute* occupies a liminal state in this study. While many of her animations include scenes of dismemberment, it is the association with the Dionysus myth in this case which relates to the state of dispossession experienced by violent women, and is the focus of the next chapter.



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The definition for dismemberment used in this study is taken from Wikipedia due its encompassing nature. The definition given by *Cambridge Dictionaries Online*, sv 'dismemberment' defines it as merely a physical act, which aims "to cut, tear, or pull the arms and legs off a human body".

*The Urban Dictionary*, sv 'dismemberment' emphasises the idea that for the general public, dismemberment is ultimately linked to cinematic spectacle:

The coolest way to see someone die, whether it's in a movie, or in real life. Dismemberment is when you separate the body into pieces. There are many ways to dismember somebody. You can blow, chop, cut, slice, rip, dice the body into pieces.

<sup>2</sup> Abstract of article by V.I Guliaev (2003:112) states that "[n]ew archaeological evidence from the territory of ancient Scythia suggests that stories of the legendary Amazon warriors were not a simple myth or fantasy".

<sup>3</sup> Warner (1985:279) equates the portrayal of the Amazons in Greek art as "close to the delirious undress of the Maenads, the followers of Bacchus ... which suggests their abandonment, their whole-hearted ardour". The role of the Maenads as objects of voyeuristic obsession in the ritual of *sparagmos* or dismemberment associated with the myth of Dionysus is discussed in section 4.3.3 and 4.3.4.

<sup>4</sup> The South African National Cancer Registry rates breast cancer as the top cancer affecting one in 35 women, while other cancers have a much lower occurrence for example uterine cancer which affects one in 176 women in South Africa. The last available report from the registry is dated 2007 (<http://www.cansa.org.za/south-african-cancer-statistics/>).

<sup>5</sup> See Huffpost Arts & Culture article of 16 October 2013, entitled '9 Striking portraits that will change the way you view breast cancer survivors'.

<sup>6</sup> Directed by Simon West, written by Sarah B. Cooper and Mike Werb. *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. (2001). Motion picture, 100 minutes. Production company: Paramount Pictures.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/29/2013-eyewitness-accounts-angelina-jolie-breast-cancer>

<sup>8</sup> With reference to the French Revolution, Linda Nochlin (2001:8) states that "[t]he fragment, for the Revolution and its artists, rather than symbolizing nostalgia for the past, enacts the deliberate destruction of that past, or, at least, a pulverization of what were perceived to be its

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repressive traditions. Both outright vandalism and what one might think of as a recycling of the vandalized fragments of the past for allegorical purposes functioned as Revolutionary strategies.”

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Kilborne. 1992. Fields of Shame: Anthropologists Abroad. *Ethos* 20: 231. Quoted in Lemos 2006:227-228.

<sup>10</sup> Directed by Sylvester Stallone, written by Art Monterastelli and Sylvester Stallone. *Rambo*. (2008). Motion picture, 92 minutes. Production company: Lionsgate, The Weinstein Company.

<sup>11</sup> Directed by Edward Zwick, written by Charles Leavitt and C. Gaby Mitchell. *Blood Diamond*. (2006). Motion picture, 143 minutes. Production company: Warner Brothers, Virtual Studios.

<sup>12</sup> Smith’s (2000) article refers only to executions performed within the context of the legal system, and not to executions done by terrorist organisations or other illegal circumstances.

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 4, section 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 investigates the parallels between the myth of Dionysus and the life of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> The words ‘the blood of Christ shed for you’ are routinely spoken during the Eucharist.

<sup>15</sup> Joan of Arc’s death in 1431 at the stake was related, amongst others, to charges of witchcraft. The issues of witchcraft and its relationship to the stereotype of violent women, as well as its justification of violence against such women, are not discussed in this study. For an overview of the persecution of witches and their role as scapegoats, see Nenonen (2012). Background information regarding the life and death of Joan of Arc was obtained from Lucie-Smith (1976) and Warner (2013).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Manifesto: towards a free revolutionary art’, translated by Dwight Macdonald, was first published in 1938 in *Partisan Review* 6 (1), Fall.

Text also available: Breton, A & Trotsky, L. 1968. Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art, in *Theories of modern art: a source book by artists and critics*, edited by Herschell B. Chipp. Berkeley: University of California Press:483-86.

<sup>17</sup> Professor Bonnie Wheeler, the director of the Medieval Studies Program at Southern Methodist University, discusses the importance attached to the various swords used by Joan of Arc in the audiobook titled *The great courses: Medieval Heroines in history and legend* (2002). The sword obtained from the church of Sainte-Catherine-de-Fierbois under the guidance of her mystical visions was particularly instrumental in cementing her reputation as prophet. At her trial, the inquisition never followed up on the circumstances in which the sword was found,

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which Wheeler proposes could have been used as clear evidence of Joan's involvement with witchcraft. In this instance, the sword was firstly a symbol of the transfer of power from previous generations of male heroes such as the mythical King Arthur, but also as a symbol of justice. Interestingly, despite the perception of Joan of Arc as a 'warrior woman', she never killed anyone on the battlefield. This again attests to the stereotypical notion of what a violent woman is, as well as the power of the sword as metaphoric weapon (Wheeler 2002).

<sup>18</sup> The Aarne-Thompson index (generally abbreviated as AT) is a system of classifying folktales according to narrative similarities and recurring motifs (Zipes 2000, sv 'Aarne-Thompson').

<sup>19</sup> One aspect which the narrative of *The Handless Maiden* does not address is that of revenge, whereas it is a central theme in *Kill Bill*.

<sup>20</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Untitled (Vargen)*. (2003). Charcoal animation, video, silent, 4:02 minutes. Edition of 4 + 2 artists proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:232).

<sup>21</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Florentin*. (2004). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 3:36 minutes. Edition of 6 + 2 artists proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:232).

<sup>22</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *On Fire*. (2006). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 2:37 minutes. Edition of 4 + 2 artists proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:232).

<sup>23</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *The Necessity of Loss*. (2006). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 4:16 minutes. Edition of 4 + 2 artists proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:233).

<sup>24</sup> Various spellings of the god's name exist. Dionysos refers to the earliest written version of his name inscribed on a clay tablet found at the palace of Nestor, Pylos (Kerényi 1976:68-69). Most contemporary texts use the version Dionysus, and will be used in this study for ease of reading. In instances where a direct quote contains a different spelling of the name, that has been retained.

<sup>25</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. (2009). Installation, Claymation, digital video and mixed media, dimensions variable. Music by Hans Berg. Courtesy of Giò Marconi, Milan and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York. (Fondazione la Biennale di Venezia 2009:41)

<sup>26</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Hungry Hungry Hipoes*. (2007). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 4:20 minutes. Edition of 4 + 2 artist proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:233).

<sup>27</sup> A similar narrative occurs in William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), in which the ritual dismemberment, or *sparagmos*, of the scapegoat is both the result of and the resolution to the crisis in the society. See Dick (1964).

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<sup>28</sup> Henrich (1984:209) notes that co-incidentally Burkert's *Homo Necans* and Girard's *Violence and the sacred* were both first published in the same year, that of 1972.

<sup>29</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *The Prostitute*. (2008). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 2:53 minutes. DVD edition. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:233).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Screenplay written by Joseph Stefano, based on the novel by Robert Bloch. *Psycho*. (1960). Motion picture, 109 minutes. Production company: Shamley Productions.

## CHAPTER 5: ISSUES OF DISPOSSESSION

### 5.1 Introduction

Cinema does not represent women – it creates them. These creations provide audiences with gendered experiences of a racialized, gendered social order built on inequality, masculinity and violence (Denzin 2005).

The relationship between dismemberment and dispossession is one of seemingly obvious antagonism, with dismemberment occurring in the physical realm and dispossession in the psychological and mental realm. Stereotypes are the basis of dispossession as they are a denial of the individual, and inform the values which result in discrimination and prejudice. However, stereotypes are also important in terms of education and socialisation, and film plays a significant role in either upholding or challenging stereotypical notions of violent women, and women in general. In this lies the predicament of films that stereotypes can either be challenged or be used to reinforce existing negative ideology.

Maggie O'Neill and Lizzie Seal (2012:43) state that current legal and cultural methods of dealing with violent women falls broadly into two categories. The first is to vilify her to such an extent that she becomes monstrous, and as such poses a great threat to society and should be disposed of. The other response is to recuperate her into femininity by highlighting the justification of her actions in relation to the circumstances of the crime. For instance if a woman kills an abusive partner, her actions could be justified as she was provoked by circumstances beyond her control. I find the term 'recuperate' as used by the authors problematic as it implies a disease, which may or may not be 'under one's control'. I suggest that the term 'rehabilitate' could be more appropriate, especially in terms of this study, as it implies firstly the process a drug addict would go through in order to 'detox' from an illegal substance. The process of detoxification involves a variety of approaches, not all successful, but each a valid exploration in itself, while the process of recuperation implies a mere return to the status quo. The use of either terms, recuperation or rehabilitation, however still have negative implications for the study, and for the manner in

which violent women are dealt with. The core idea has ramifications for the stereotypes associated with violent women, either she is an evil, monstrous being or she is an abused victim of circumstances beyond her control.

Agamben's theories on *homo sacer* are once again relevant. The bare life of *homo sacer* implies a life unprotected by law, bereft of even the most basic of human rights (Agamben 1998:8). For Agamben this bare life is epitomised in the figure of the refugee. Refugees are often viewed as undesired, unwanted, stateless outcasts or "unpersons", who function in "a no-man's land – physically and, more importantly, definitionally – wherein all civil and human identities and rights are unavailable" (Tunstead Burtchaell 2000:627). Agamben (1998:170) likens this no-man's land to the camp, exemplified by the concentration camps, where a state of exception exists.

In other words, Agamben's *homo sacer* is an outcast (a stereotype) without any legal rights, existing in a non-space, where no law functions. *Homo sacer* is thus dispossessed of all human rights, as well as being dispossessed of any land or material possessions. In this chapter I investigate the representation of outcast women in terms of the concept, dispossession. While the concept of dismemberment as discussed in the previous chapter, lends itself to descriptive representations of physical acts, the concept of dispossession is more abstract, more conceptual, and less obviously represented in art and film. The use of narrative and stereotypes play an important part in this representation, and are discussed in the following section.

## **5.2 Stereotypes and dispossession**

Stereotypes have long been a hurdle for social interaction, and are mostly based on "distorted or erroneous information" or an "oversimplification" of ideas based on prejudices, most often "learned by word of mouth or from books and films" (Burgess 1974:167). The distinction between stereotypes and archetypes is very vague, and for many people, they seem to be one and the same thing.

The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology (Pickering 2007) states that stereotypes are an oversimplified “way of representing and judging other people in fixed, unyielding terms”. Stereotypes, such as ‘the blond bimbo’ or ‘lazy housewife’, are intimately linked to culture, social values, gender and race and can change over time. Paradoxically, media such as films and advertising are dependent on the use of stereotypes in order to communicate. A fine balance between the individual and stereotypes portrayed could either encourage audience acceptance or rejection of a character, or a product.

In contrast to the above-mentioned concept of stereotypes, the concepts of archetypes, generally attributed to Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), are static prototypes or ideal universal forms such as the father god, the hero, et cetera. As universals they are part of the collective unconscious, found across cultures and for Jungians cannot change in primal character (Bennet 2001:54-60, Goldenberg 1976:447-448). It is due to the fact that archetypes transcend time and culture that they are often used in the analysis of myths, folklore and fairy tales, as well as in contemporary films and art making.

According to Jung:

The concept of the archetype ... is derived from the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairytales of world literature contain definite motifs, which crop up everywhere. We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, deliria, and delusions of individuals living today. These typical images and association are what I call archetypal ideas. The more vivid they are, the more they will be coloured by particularly strong feeling-tones ... They impress, influence, and fascinate us. They have their origin in the archetype, which in itself is an irrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche, and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at any time (Jung as quoted in Fredericksen 1980:51).

Various other writers such as Marie Louise von-Franz<sup>1</sup> have also used Jung’s archetypes to analyse fairy tales. But it is Joseph Campbell’s seminal work *The hero with a thousand faces* (first published in 1949), that provides a Jungian attempt at defining the universal qualities of the archetypal ‘hero’, which also just happens to be ‘male’. It is suggested that the female hero, or more specifically the ‘warrior woman’ stereotype is merely a repetition of the male archetype in a different guise. Jonathan Gottschall in *Literature, science, and a*

*new humanities* (2008a) suggests that statistical analysis of folk and fairy tales should be undertaken in order to correctly analyse whether this is indeed the case. Gottschall uses Joseph Campbell's *The hero with a thousand faces* (1993) as the crucible for his ideas. Where Campbell's 'hero' is almost exclusively 'male', Gottschall, in contrast, attempts to quantify the universal qualities of female protagonists and antagonists in relation to the male 'hero'.

Gottschall's (2008a:91-113) study analysed the data of 1440 folk and fairy tales of 48 different cultures from across the world, and the results were in some instances as predicted, and in other instances totally opposite to the perceived outcomes. The study firstly supported the idea that most protagonists (heroes) are male, outweighing female protagonists in a ratio of 1 to 3. These female protagonists were mostly younger, around 20-29 years of age, whereas the female antagonists are normally much older, around 40 and older (Gottschall 2008a:97-98). Age and power seem to go hand in hand, and as most tales involve a power struggle of sorts, this is a logical assumption.

The pursuit of a marriage partner or "the process of attracting and securing mates" (Gottschall 2008a:102) is a very common narrative in most fairy tales. Gottschall's statistics show that 77 percent of male and 78 percent of female protagonists are unmarried at the start of narratives, and at the end 64 percent of both male and female protagonists are married. In contrast, only 33 percent of female antagonists and 22 percent of male antagonists find themselves married towards the end of the stories (Gottschall 2008a:102). The study also found that for both male and female protagonists the choice of mate was most often based on the physical attractiveness and kindness of the person, and not dependent on their wealth or status. However, for the antagonists of both sexes, kindness of a potential mate is hardly considered, and their choices are nearly always based on their wealth and status, reinforcing the stereotypical idea that antagonists are people who prefer material (evil) benefits over spiritual or moral (good) qualities (Gottschall 2008a:105).



In terms of the physical attractiveness of protagonists and antagonists, Gottschall's study found, predictably that the female protagonists are nearly always physically attractive, with only 8 out of 1440 tales noting that the main female character was unattractive (Gottschall 2008a:106). The physical attractiveness of female antagonists on the other hand is down played, but is still a significant issue with 69 percent of female antagonists being described as physically attractive. The specific types of heroic acts were also analysed, and it was found that female protagonists would be less likely to involve physical exertion or risk, and would rather be acts of moral courage focussed on the well-being of their families (Gottschall 2008a:108-110).

In a different study, Gottschall et al (2006) went about to try and quantify the qualities which make up the 'virgin/whore' stereotypical dichotomy, where 'virgin' equals 'good' and 'whore' equals 'bad' by once again analysing folk and fairy tales. He predicted that "female characters who are literally or symbolically promiscuous will be more likely to play antagonist roles in literature, whereas female characters who are non-promiscuous will be more likely to win protagonist status" (Gottschall et al 2006:5). Obvious initial problems were encountered with the definition of 'promiscuity' which varies not only across cultures, but also genres and historical timeframes of the narratives. As predicted, the results supported the idea of female antagonists having multiple sexual partners; while female protagonists were generally portrayed as sexually chaste. The study however highlighted another interesting aspect, that the antagonists were nearly always much older than the protagonists. Older men or women have a greater statistical chance of having multiple sexual partners due to the loss of a marriage partner through death. Remarriage thus only indicates having more than one sexual partner, and not promiscuity as such (Gottschall et al 2006:10).

A number of violent women have had their criminal sentences reduced or commuted by hiding behind the stereotypical notion of a 'good' or 'virginal'

woman. A case in point here is again Lizzie Borden. Her defence attorney referred to her as “a little girl” and “this poor defenceless girl” (Filetti 2001:473) which could roughly be translated as the stereotypical ‘virgin’. Lorena Bobbitt (b. 1970), who in 1993 made headlines when she cut off her husband’s penis after suffering apparent longstanding physical abuse from him, wore a crucifix necklace to court every day, which could have added to her image as “a good Catholic girl” (Jones quoted in Filetti 2001:473) or the stereotypical ‘virgin’.

Although Gottschall (2008a:127-130) admits to certain mistakes in methodology, such as the problem of “cultural lumping”, his studies are never-the-less important. Thus using these as a guideline, we should find that the female antagonist or outcast should be an older woman, approximately 40 years or older, intensely focused (in other words, actively pursuing) the acquisition of material benefits to enlarge her power base. Promiscuity or increased sexual activity is another stereotypical behaviour linked to female antagonists. The next section looks at the stereotypical portrayal of the ‘warrior woman’ using Gottschall’s findings as starting point.

### **5.2.1 The emergence of the ‘warrior woman’ in art and film**

Recent years have shown an increase in films portraying violent women in heroic roles previously reserved for male characters. According to Coulthard (2007:154) these films, such as *Kill Bill*, are “[m]arked by popular appeal, narrational centrality of active female characters, genre hybridity, and sophisticated fight choreography”. On the one hand, many theorists, such as Neroni (2005:18, 20) see the appearance of violent women in film as being related to the breakdown of traditional gender roles brought about by changes in social, political, religious and economic circumstances of a culture. On the other hand, taking into consideration the comments by O’Neill and Seal (2012:43), that violent women are either turned into monsters, or need to be recuperated into femininity, one becomes aware of the power of stereotypes to enforce existing patriarchal

systems. Thus while superficially appearing to empower women, these stereotypes in fact are still the source of disempowerment.

To illustrate this point, I refer to the 'Warrior Woman Checklist' as found in Dominique Mainon and James Ursini's *The modern Amazons: warrior women on-screen* (2006). According to them the stereotype should contain at least two or three of the traits in some form:

1. She fights in aggressive and physical manner when required
2. She is not merely a sidekick to a man
3. She is part of a female-run organization or culture
4. She displays some level of kinship and sisterhood with her own gender
5. She uses classic warrior woman weapons and tools (bow arrow and motorcycle .... horse)
6. She dresses and adorns herself in warrior garments
7. She is independent and doesn't need a man to save her
8. She lives or comes from a "lost civilization"
9. She may be homosexual, bisexual, or simply not desire men

(summary of main headings in Mainon & Ursini 2006:11-16).

I propose that each of these traits could be manipulated even further in order to project the violent woman as either a monster or as a slight deviant as per O'Neill and Seal (2012:43). In both cases, the stereotypes are disempowering and often exploited in cinema as such:

Mainstream cinema's project is typically to explain away, qualify, and often to actively "undermine . . . female potency as it becomes threatening", usually containing the threat by reinstating "archetypal femininity" (Stella Bruzzi quoted in Purse 2011:187).

The following section investigates some of these character traits in relation to the stereotypes found in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, and discusses the extent to which these are manipulated.

### 5.2.2 Case study: Stereotypes in *Kill Bill*

Uma Thurman isn't just fighting her way through her death list, she isn't just fighting her way through the Deadly Vipers, she's fighting her way through the annals of exploitation cinema from all over the world. Tarantino in an interview with Ryan Gilbey, *Sight & Sound* (2009:18).

If Uma Thurman is “fighting her way through the annals of exploitation”, she is definitely fighting her way through stereotypical renditions of women in cinema by implication. I propose that while Tarantino ‘thinks’ he is rewriting feminine stereotypes to empower women, the subtexts of disempowerment still remain in his films and manifest as stereotypes. In order to do this, I analyse some of the stereotypes found in *Kill Bill* using the quote below by Ruby Rich as a starting point. In the *Kill Bill* films, Ruby Rich (2004:26) identifies six stereotypes within the Bride’s (Uma Thurman) character, these being the “Final Girl, Oedipus, Electra, The Father, The Son and Mary herself”.

Who is the Bride, then, this not quite Final Girl, not quite girl, not quite Jesus, who wants to kill the father she’s already slept with and whose baby she was carrying before she was so brutally dispatched? Ulysses, perhaps, back from his wanderings to exact vengeance. Oedipus, maybe, in female drag. Or Electra, bent on revenge. Perhaps ‘virgin birth’ rings a bell? Virgin delivery, rather: not a child without a father, but a child without a mother (Ruby Rich 2004:27).

In the following section, this statement and the relevance of the various stereotypes are discussed, bearing in mind the character traits of the warrior woman, and the manipulation of the stereotype as per O’Neill and Seal.

The first stereotype under discussion is that of ‘the bride’, and one of the primary stereotypes in the film. The reason for Uma Thurman’s character being called ‘The Bride’ is explained in the scene where the wedding massacre is being investigated by the sheriff (played by Michael Parks):

Earl McGraw: Who's the bride?

Edgar McGraw: Don't know. The name on the marriage certificate is "Arlene Machiavelli." That's a fake. We've all just been calling her "The Bride" on account of the dress.

*Kill Bill* I.<sup>2</sup>

In the discussion between the sheriff and his partner, The Bride is reduced to nothing more than 'the dress', a specific kind of dress, highly symbolic and associated with many rituals, myths, and superstitions. According to western traditions, white as a colour for a wedding dress is associated with virginity, but also with rebirth, renewal or a new start (Monger 2004:73). Thus the colour of Tarantino's Bride's dress not only points to the stereotypical bride's dress, but also the pending transitions that she will be facing. It is also considered unlucky for the groom to see the bride in her wedding dress before the ceremony (Monger 2004:39). Tarantino's Bride wears her dress to the wedding rehearsal, a gesture which heralds the bad luck about to befall the couple. The Bride's fiance also emphasises this point by stating that it would be a waste to wear the dress only once (*Kill Bill II*). In terms of O'Neill and Seal's (2012) comments regarding the final reception of the violent woman, the wedding dress is a powerful signifier that The Bride will be recuperated (rehabilitated) into femininity, and in so doing renders the violence perpetrated by The Bride acceptable.

Significantly, in the final scenes of *Kill Bill II*, the clothing worn by The Bride in her confrontation with Bill also indicates that she is about to undergo a transformation (see plate X, figure 74). Her upper body is still dressed as the warrior or killing machine, complete with weapons. Her lower body is dressed in a long flowing skirt, which would no doubt be difficult to fight in. Significantly, she also wears the sandals she wore with her bride's dress in the wedding scenes (see plate X, figures 72 and 73). This could signify her return to what could be seen as the normal cycle of events associated with marriage, which is that motherhood follows marriage.

In western marriage traditions, shoes have a rich symbolic history (Monger 2004:250-251). Horseshoes are a symbol of good luck and are often included in the bride's bouquet, in confetti shapes, or on the bridal garter. Often, old shoes were tied to the bumper of the couple's car for good luck, also signifying a 'new journey' ahead for the couple. An archaic tradition involved the father of the

bride tapping her head with her shoes after tapping the head of the groom, which signified a transfer of patriarchal authority to the groom (Monger 2004:250-251). Shoes are therefore highly symbolic of transformation a bride experiences during the marriage rituals.

Not only are shoes highly symbolic in the marriage ceremonies of the west, shoes also play a significant role in fairy tales. The most well known of these being Cinderella. At this point I refer once again to the narrative of the handless maiden discussed in chapter 4, section 4.2.2. Some versions of the tale involves cutting off a wife's hand on her deathbed by her husband. For the husband to marry again, the wedding ring taken from the deceased wife's hand would have to fit the finger of the prospective bride, which often turns out to be the daughter of the deceased wife. It is this comparison which links the narrative of the handless maiden to that of Cinderella, with the symbolism of the shoe test being more or less interchangeable with the ring test (Dundes 1987:58-60). Bearing in mind the highly incestuous nature of the narrative of the handless maiden as discussed in chapter 4, section 4.2.2, it is significant that The Bride wears the same pair of shoes in both her confrontations with Bill. The first occurring at the beginning of *Kill Bill I*, with Bill as the perpetrator, and the second occurring at the end of *Kill Bill II*, with The Bride taking on the role of perpetrator. The Bride could literally and metaphorically be 'taking a stand against' Bill and everything he 'stands for'. Once again, this supports the idea that the violence perpetrated by The Bride was due to circumstances she found herself in and that she would be reinstated into the feminine realm by either marriage and/or motherhood.

The next stereotypes under discussion are those of the religious figures, Jesus Christ and his mother, the Virgin Mary. The relationship between Christ and Dionysus as discussed in chapter 4, section 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 serves as background here. Both Christ and Dionysus are linked to the ideas of death and rebirth, a theme which has surfaced in many different forms throughout the film. One

particular scene in *Kill Bill II* shows The Bride trapped in a coffin, to be buried alive after her failed confrontation with Bud. Conard calls this scene:

... a blatant metaphor for death and resurrection ... The Bride has been reborn or resurrected and can now both wield power *and* be a woman and a mother, something she previously thought impossible. Because of this transformation, because she realizes and connects to her true nature, she now gains her identity and can be named” (italics in original) (Conard in Greene & Mohammad 2007:171).

This statement again reflects the idea that The Bride will be recuperated (or reborn) into femininity and so find her true nature which no longer requires violence. Other instances of rebirth also occur in the film, such as the scene where The Bride lies comatose in hospital (see plate XI, figures 76 and 78). Elle Driver visits her with the intent to kill her by lethal injection. However, the attempt on her life is called off by Bill, and The Bride is given a second chance at life. In the phone call Bill again emphasises the alternative morality that exists within criminal groups. If The Bride were to be poisoned while in a coma, this would have been seen as a cowardly act by the Viper Squad (*Kill Bill I*). While the scene references this underlying ‘morality’, it also contains various visual references to the stereotypes of Christ and the Virgin Mary (see plate XI, figures 75 to 79).

Still images taken from the film have an uncanny resemblance to the *Pietà* (1499) by Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, known as Michelangelo (1475 - 1564). The aerial view of the dead<sup>3</sup> Christ is an almost exact copy of the unconscious Bride, and neither of their bodies showing any signs of the trauma they have experienced (see plate XI, figure 75 and 76). The image of the comatose Bride appears on a split screen together with the image of Elle Driver, dressed in a nurse’s uniform and carrying a tray with medical paraphernalia (see plate XI, figure 76). The use of the split screen implies a duality as found in the concepts of life/death, good/evil, victim/perpetrator and so forth. However this duality does not translate exactly into the characters. For instance the character of Elle, in this scene is that of the perpetrator or the evil killer. The relationship between Elle and the snake, as discussed in chapter 4, section 4.2.1, noted the

ambiguous meaning of the snake as symbol of death and as healer. Elle's ambiguous nature is further enhanced by the glow of light appearing behind her head and has the effect of producing a halo, albeit a rectangular one<sup>4</sup> and not a round form normally associated with the depiction of the halo (see plate XI, figure 76).

Viewing the image of Elle alongside that of the Virgin, one is struck by further visual similarities (see plate XI, figures 76 and 77). The nurse's cap blends with Elle's hair to such an extent that it 'becomes' the Virgin's headdress. Elle's eye patch echoes the Virgin's sash across her chest, which is inscribed with the artist's signature. But what does the correlation between Elle's character and the Virgin Mary imply? I suggest that the answer might well lie in the relationship between the fictional characters, The Bride and Elle Driver, and the Christian icons, Christ and the Madonna.

The relationship between the Christ figure and the Virgin is further developed in the following scene where Elle views The Bride, lying comatose in the hospital bed. Visually this scene once again echoes that of the *Pietà*, with a small difference; the Madonna looks down at Christ with compassion, while Elle looks down at The Bride with contempt (see plate XI, figure 78 and 79). I propose that this could be the key to understanding the metaphorical relationship between the two works. O'Neill and Seal (2012) proposed that the reception of the violent woman is either to turn them into monsters, or on the other hand see them as victims of circumstance who can be rehabilitated into femininity. If one sees the stereotype of 'the Virgin' as being that of the idealised woman, one could argue that the 'violent woman', in this case Elle Driver, has the potential to be recuperated into femininity and in the process she will be restored.

The *Pietà* provides another subtext, which is related to its own history of mutilation and dismemberment. The first incident occurred when the fingers to the left hand of the Virgin were broken off during the move to the basilica, and



were restored in 1736 by the sculptor Giuseppe Lironi (Lavin 1966:103-104). In a way this specific *Pietà* echoes the narrative of the handless maiden as discussed in chapter 4, section 4.2.2.

The second incident happened on 21 May 1972 in an attack on the *Pietà* which lasted two minutes. The Hungarian-born emigrant to Australia, Laszlo Toth, hit out at the figure of the Madonna, her left arm, eye and nose, and the folded veil with a hammer. During questioning his defence was that he was Jesus Christ (Teunissen & Hinz 1974:43). The art critic and writer Robert Hughes said of this attack that "Nobody will ever know what went through the scrambled circuits of Laszlo Toth's brain.... But one may guess: Toth had lost all power to distinguish between an image and the reality it connotes" (Hughes quoted in Teunissen & Hinz 1974:44). While this statement by Hughes seems highly speculative, it does once again question the relationship between reality, fantasy, and violence. Teunissen and Hinz (1974:47) propose that it was rather "an attack on the ideology" that the *Pietà* represents, and that Toth's intention could have been to restore the pagan society and traditions informed by the mythic Dionysus, the pagan parallel figure of Christ. As their study aimed to examine the archetypes associated with the incident in an attempt to understand the actions by Toth, rather than the factual circumstances of it, these are assumptions about the real reasons for the attack and therefore problematic as evidence. I do however find it uncanny that the historical narrative of the *Pietà* reverberates on a variety of levels with the various narratives of this study, and once again confirming the close relationship between reality and its representations.

The last stereotype under discussion is that of the warrior woman herself. The warrior woman appears in many guises in the film, and in all the female characters to some extent or another. The focus of the discussion is therefore on one specific part of the film, entitled 'Showdown at the House of Blue Leaves', and specifically the final fight scene between O'Ren Ishii and The Bride. The reason for this focus is firstly because this scene contains two warrior women set

against each other; but the manner in which Tarantino treats them is vastly different.

In the final scenes of *Kill Bill I*, O’Ren Ishii and The Bride fight each other in what must be the most beautifully choreographed scene of the film. This scene in particular, as well as the character of O’Ren Ishii, based on the stereotype Japanese female warrior, is a homage to Japanese<sup>5</sup> action films and an exploitation of Western stereotypes of Asian women (see plate XI, figures 80 and 81).

The characterization of O’Ren Ishii is strongly informed by the generic conventions of 1970s Japanese exploitation films featuring masculinized female avengers and *sukeban*<sup>6</sup>. In particular, *Kill Bill I* references the display of the female body, violence, and revenge plots prominent in the *Lady Snowblood* and *Female Convict Scorpion* (1972-73) series, and the film *Sex and Fury* (Suzuki 1973)<sup>7</sup> (Lueng 2012:161-162).

O’Ren Ishii wears a traditional kimono which today is worn mainly at weddings, funerals and coming of age ceremonies (see plate XI, figure 80). Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni (1999:361) equates the kimono to the corsetry worn by Victorian women, explaining they were a “device for the subordination of women” in that they restrict a woman’s motion and renders her defenseless. Dressing O’Ren Ishii in a traditional kimono for the final fight scene relates again to the idea of the violent woman having the potential to be recuperated back into femininity, and submission.

In contrast to O’Ren Ishii, The Bride is dressed in a yellow jumpsuit for the final showdown (see plate XI, figures 82 and 83). A similar yellow jumpsuit was worn by the iconic Chinese martial artist and film actor, Bruce Lee (1940 – 1973) in the unfinished film *Game of Death* (1972)<sup>8</sup>. In doing so, Tarantino firstly pays homage to Bruce Lee and Chinese cinema (Pang 2005:141), but at the same time he is dressing The Bride in masculine attire associated with a great hero. As The Bride still has to fight a number of individuals, she still needs to draw on the masculine aspects of violence, and as such is not ready to be recuperated back into femininity. This will happen once her ‘mission’ is completed.

In conclusion, this section investigated the stereotypes of the bride, Christ and the Virgin, and that of the female warrior as portrayed in *Kill Bill*. While the stereotypes seem to conform to accepted notions, they are deceptively ambiguous. The ambiguity is often related to the idea that the violent woman is about to be recuperated into femininity. I suggest too that this notion of recuperation occurs in the depiction of most of the violent women in *Kill Bill*, and as such undermines the idea of the film being liberating for women in the manner that Tarantino thinks of his film (Tapia 2006:34).

### **5.3 Dispossession in the work of Nathalie Djurberg**

The issue of dispossession in Djurberg's work is not related as much to her use of stereotypes, but rather to her working methodology and use of puppets. The following quotation by Germano Celant illustrates Djurberg's use of puppetry and its relationship to the concept of dispossession:

"Dispossession" as the perversion and renunciation of one's own autonomy is the central theme of the artist's [Djurberg's] entire adventure in film. And the first indication of this perverse condition of existence is provided not only by the contents of each individual work, but by the language used, the filming of events involving puppets – that is marionettes and figurines, human and animal, made out of fabric, clay and plasticine and displaying real, sensual bodies and features ... The puppet itself is a manifest allegory of a body becoming "someone else's tool". A person is nullified and placed in the hands of others; he or she becomes the means of a decision made by another person, the puppeteer. The puppet becomes an entity with human features reduced to the status of object, the pure mask of a manipulated life. Its destiny is defined by its availability to any and all who may exert some kind of power (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:14).

Koolhaas & Celant (2008:14) states that her work is "an analysis of "normal" relations" whereby "[e]mancipation is achieved ... [by those] ... who are dispossessed of their subjectivity because they are controlled by others". This dispossession for Djurberg is a perverted activity. Her puppets, marionettes and clay figurines have no autonomy, and Djurberg as their creator presents them as anatomically destined to perform endless rituals for the 'pleasure' of others. This aspect of performance is inherently part of puppetry. In this respect, Frank Proschan uses the term "performing object" to refer to "material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in

narrative or dramatic performance" (Proschan in Bell 1988:15). Significantly, Djurberg destroys her puppets after each film as "[t]hey have lost their meaning" (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:53) and sees her role as creator as ambiguous, including both the acts of creation and of destruction, very much in the Dionysian tradition:

I create to be able to destroy, but I also destroy to be able to create. My creation is simply destruction, but also the other way around, and I am responsible for that destruction. I destroy therefore I am (Djurberg in Koolhaas & Celant 2008:53).

The idea of creation and destruction not only manifests itself in the artistic process, but in her thematic considerations as well. "Annihilation through seduction" (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:23) is a common theme in Djurberg's work, and could be related to the mythical sirens, who would seduce and ultimately annihilate men with their song. As outcasts from society, sirens are depicted as monstrous fusions of the bodies of birds and heads of women, and their sole intent is to seduce and destroy men (Bentley 1995:194). Due to their amalgamated bodies, sirens represent hybridity in "her physical body and in her role as the traversor of cultural, ethnic, and regional spaces" (Austern & Naroditskaya 2006:7). Like many mythological outcasts they are disembodied beings occupying the liminal spaces between life and death, much as the violent woman, and *homo sacer* occupies liminal spaces throughout this study.

Paradoxically, in one version of the origin of the outcast siren's hybrid body, it came about when the daughters of Achelous asked Zeus to provide them with wings in order to pursue Hades after they had witnessed his rape of Persephone (Larousse encyclopaedia of mythology 1960, sv 'Sea monsters-The Sirens'). This extension of the myth sets up a link between the trauma of witnessing the rape and the sirens' later destructive seductive behaviour towards men. Lust, violence and power struggles are evident in both Djurberg's videos and the siren myth. Michel Foucault quoted in Djurberg's catalogue for *Denn es ist schön zu leben* (Kunsthalle Wien 2007:83) says "[l]ust and power do not mutually cancel each other out, nor do they turn against each other, they encroach on each other's

territory, overlapping, pursuing and stimulating one another". In Djurberg's work the power struggles between victims and perpetrators seem to echo this phenomenon. Her victims often become perpetrators when they start seeking revenge for the crimes they have suffered. Such is the case in the previously mentioned example of the animation *Hungry Hungry Hippos* (2007)<sup>9</sup> where the child victim, in a pathetic attempt of perverted revenge, sticks his finger into the anus of one of the hippopotami (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:15).

Sirens are also equated with harlots and whores with their voices the instruments of temptation, which should actively be resisted by any God fearing man (Austern & Naroditskaya 2006:21). The price payable for giving into this temptation is that of death; physical and/or psychological. Sirens are not exclusively female (Austern & Naroditskaya 2006:1) and a very obvious comparison with Djurberg's work is her collaboration with her life partner and musician Hans Berg. Just as the siren uses her music to lure her victims, so too Djurberg uses the soundtracks to attract and lull the viewer into a hypnotised viewing of her work. Once Djurberg has completed a video, she allows Berg free reign in the production of the soundtrack. The disturbing recordings vary from electronic music produced by Berg to the inclusion of sound effects Djurberg herself produces while under a blanket with a microphone (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:190-191). Linda Austern and Inna Naroditskaya (2006:9-11) equate the male poet, musician or artist, and more specifically the Romantic poets and artists, to the male siren who has usurped the female siren's seductive powers for his own creative and artistic expressions.

### **5.3.1 Case study: Red Riding Hood and the work of Nathalie Djurberg**

After all, there is no end to her story: even though Little Red Riding Hood is constantly mutilated by the wolf and dies, she is always reincarnated in some retold form to mark shifts in our attitudes towards gender formation, sexuality, and the abuse of power (Zipes 1993:xi-xii).

Jack Zipes in the preface to the second edition of *The trials and tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (1993:xi) states that the "unique history [of the tale] can

reveal to what extent the boundaries of our existence have evolved from male phantasy and the sexual struggle for domination". The book charts the various narrative versions of the tale, which include Little Red Riding Hood as a victim of rape, or as a tale of sexual awakening, and even that of Little Red Riding Hood as being the ultimate sexual temptress (Zipes 1993:375).

Additionally, Zipes (2006:ix) sees fairy tales as "play[ing] an intricate role in acculturation, that is, in forming and reflecting the tastes, manners, and ideologies of members of a particular society". While fairy tales appear to have an educational function, they are also the means of oppression. Much feminist critique of fairy tales is aimed at their oppressive nature. The reason being the perpetuation of the male dominance over females, providing women with the stereotypical foundation, which keeps women passive and submissive. Some critics even go as far as to say that fairy tales "train girls to be rape victims" (Gottschall 2008:116). By implication, one could speculate that the converse 'fairy tales train boys to be rapists' is also possible. This would put the 'blame' of raising rapists squarely on to the shoulders of the 'female' figurehead (regardless of sex) entrusted with the education of children.

Bruno Bettelheim (1989:168-191) implicates the larger society in the 'downfall' of Red Riding Hood. The male character of society appears either as the wolf (the seducer and destroyer) or as the hunter (rescuer or father figure). The Wolf obviously also appears as the main perpetrator, and is "not just the male seducer, he also represents all the asocial, animalistic tendencies with ourselves" (Bettelheim 1989:175). The hunter, on the other hand is largely invisible, until the rescue. But it is the role of the other women in Red Riding Hood's life, her mother and grandmother, which is particularly problematic to Bettelheim, it oscillates between desertion and forms of allegiance. I see this as an allegory, which reflects the state of dispossession the violent woman finds herself in. As victim she needs to be 'rescued' by an otherwise uninvolved male order (and

brought back to femininity), all the while having to deal with the contradictory nature of femininity and the stereotypical portrayal of violent women.

Catherine Orenstein in *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: sex, morality and the evolution of a fairy tale* (2002:241-245), gives a very relevant example from her own life. As young child she played with a “Janus-faced” doll which consisted of the two characters, Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, sewn together to form one toy. Flipping the doll over to one side would present the doll as Red Riding Hood, and flipping it over and manoeuvring the dress would change the doll into the character of the Wolf dressed up in the grandmother’s nightgown. As she states:

There was no way to play with them at the same time; no way to make the wolf eat Grandma, and no way to put Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed together, at least not side by side, as the plot demands. In short, there was no way of dealing with the characters as physically separate entities ... they were multiple aliases for the same body (Orenstein 2002:241).

For Orenstein (2002:241) this doll represents the central theme of the fairy tale, which is the inability to separate archetypes and stereotypes into clearly defined, delineated concepts, but rather they are complex ideas in which their dualistic nature is an intrinsic part. Djurgberg’s animation *We are not two, we are one* (2008)<sup>10</sup>, echoes this idea, as Red Riding Hood seems to grow from the Wolf, always at his back in a metaphoric and literal manner (see plate XII, figure 84). However the Wolf, seemingly at home in the domesticated scene, struggles to move around his apartment and is burdened by Red Riding Hood, which points to the ongoing struggle between genders, as well as the burden of femininity in general. Still images from the animation (see plate XII, figure 84) also provide another link to the myth of Dionysus. The apartment walls are covered with religious images, as well as pornographic images, underlining the relationship between the sacred and the profane, the Dionysian and the Apollonian. It is as if Djurberg is commenting on the stereotypical portrayal of women. Women are either ‘virgins’ or ‘whores’, and any attempt to cross these boundaries results in an uncomfortable graft of genders onto each other.

As this study has shown through the various case studies, stereotypes are open to manipulation and exist in the liminal spaces of society's acceptance.



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See Von-Franz (1993).

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0266697/trivia?tab=qt&ref\\_=tt\\_trv\\_qu](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0266697/trivia?tab=qt&ref_=tt_trv_qu)

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars such as Joseph Lombard argue that the figure of Christ is alive, rather than dead, because the right hand is clasping the Virgin's clothing, something that could not happen during rigor mortis (Hilloowala & Oremland 1987:88).

<sup>4</sup> The motif of the square 'halo' is thought to indicate that a portrait was done while someone was alive for example in the portrait of Pope Leo IV at San Clemente, Rome. At the very least the square halo indicates that the image is of accurate likeness, in other words that the sitter was known to the artist (Osborne 1979:64).

<sup>5</sup> The transnational issues raised by the fact that Tarantino places Japanese, Chinese and American cultures against each other in this scene is acknowledged, but falls beyond the scope of the study. Pang (2005:142) notes that inclusion of stereotypes and archetypes from the various cultures, does in fact have a very sinister agenda:

Transnational borrowing also helps facilitate Hollywood's global receptions. As many scholars have demonstrated, Hollywood's cultural imperialism is built on an effective appropriation or copying of transnational ideas. The mythologized American nationality portrayed in Hollywood films is made possible through a narrative structure that tends to produce plural meanings to suit different viewers, encouraging diverse populations to read them as though they are indigenous. These narratives have meaning to so many different cultures because they allow viewers in those cultures to project their own values, archetypes, and tropes into the films. Instead of debauching a unified national identity, such diversification of meanings holds a fantasized Americanness together (Pang 2005:14).

<sup>6</sup> *Sukeban* generally refers to 'delinquents' ([wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukeban](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukeban)).

<sup>7</sup> *Female Convict Scorpion* series (1972-73) directed by Ito Shunya, Toei. *Lady Snowblood* (1973) directed by Fujita Toshiya, Toho. *Sex and Fury* (1973) directed by Suzuki Norifumi, Toie.

<sup>8</sup> Written, directed and produced by Bruce Lee. *Game of Death* (incomplete). (1972/1973). Motion picture, 39 minutes. Production company: Golden Harvest, Concord Production Inc.

<sup>9</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *Hungry Hungry Hippos*. (2007). Clay animation, video, music by Hans Berg, 4:20 minutes. Edition of 4 + 2 artist proofs. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:233).

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<sup>10</sup> Nathalie Djurberg, *We are not two, we are one*. (2008). Clay animation, digital video, 5:33 minutes. Music by Hans Berg. Courtesy of Zach Feuer Gallery, New York and Gió Marconi, Milan. (Koolhaas & Celant 2008:212-213).

## CONCLUSION

This study set out, in the broadest sense, to investigate the relationship between real and filmic violence, in terms of the concepts dismemberment and dispossession as seen in the work of Nathalie Djurberg and Quentin Tarantino.

While the issue of the influence of film violence on society remains unresolved, and probably will be for a long time, this study illustrates the close, almost interdependent relationship that exists between real and filmic violence, as demonstrated by the various examples of real and fictional violent women.

The understanding of the biopolitical identity of violent women is informed by Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*, which is relevant to this study on a variety of levels. Many women, violent or not, find themselves in this designation purely due to their gender. The violent woman in particular is an outcast, whether in real life or in fictional depictions. Stereotypical renditions of the violent woman show that the stereotype can either be manipulated in favour or against the violent woman. She therefore finds herself continually in a state of exception.

The study shows that Agamben's *homo sacer* is useful too in the understanding of alternative moralities of the deviant characters associated with violent images in film and art. Since these characters occur in the liminal space between inclusion and exception, their actions are beyond the 'law', and at the same time beyond 'reality'. As such they can be "killed with impunity" (Agamben 1998:72). If the cultural productions are to some degree reflections or mirrors of societal trends, preoccupations or attitudes, then the portrayal of violence in popular cinematography can be viewed as mirroring violent instances in society. On the other hand it perpetuates and reinforces the idea that women, and especially violent women, are *homo sacer*, and it leads to discrimination and dispossession.

According to Richard Ek (2006:371) most of the critique against Agamben concerns his treatment of gender, or rather his lack of it. Lisa Sanchez (in Ek

2006:371) notes that “*homo sacer* is gendered as masculine” and as such reinforces the state of exception experienced by women. The following extract from her article 'The global e-rotic subject, the ban, and the prostitute-free zone: sex work and the theory of differential exclusion' (2004) highlights the issue:

His outlaw [Agamben's *homo sacer*] is not complete, but emblematic of a kind of privileged and partial exclusion, a displacement that is temporary and conditional and that depends upon a figure whose exclusion is more complete ... the prostitute is the excluded exclusion that makes *homo sacer's* displacement and return to the social possible. Agamben's abrupt dismissal of the women in the text as not a part of 'what is important' is symptomatic of precisely the kind of erasure we see repeated in the myths and legends of our history (Sanchez 2004:868 as quoted in Ek 2006:371).

Evidently, additional research needs to be undertaken to further understand the relevance of Agamben's *homo sacer* for all aspects of feminism. By comparison, Tarantino believes he is pushing boundaries for women by producing what he calls 'feminist' films (Tapia 2006:34). The study shows how the underlying narratives and stereotypes in *Kill Bill* are contradictory and as such disempower women. This is achieved through the analysis of the stereotype of the violent woman, which shows how the violent woman is constantly in a state of exclusion, even if she is 'accepted' or rehabilitated into the feminine fold.

The first stage of the investigation involves a comparative analysis of various narratives found in ancient mythology, fairy tales and contemporary film and art in terms of the concept of dismemberment. The narrative of *The Handless Maiden* is compared with Tarantino's *Kill Bill* in order to show how this narrative could function as a subtext to the film. The relationship between the myths of Oedipus and Dionysus and the work of Nathalie Djurberg shows not only the mythological undercurrents of her work, but also comments on the contemporary relevance of Freud's theories. Djurberg's work, in contrast to Tarantino's, does not presume to be empowering, in fact, dispossession is a central theme of her work. Instead of presenting the violent woman as 'hero', she presents the violent acts as they 'really' are; perverse visual spectacles.

The second stage of the investigation focusses on the notion of dispossession, and specifically on the contribution of stereotypes in this matter. By examining the manipulation of various stereotypes in *Kill Bill*, the examples show a superficial tendency to portray violent women as the equivalent of the stereotypical male hero. The analysis also illustrates the extent of the social acceptance of the violent woman, which is closely linked to the possibility for recuperation into femininity.

Throughout the study, the connection between real and fictional violence is highlighted in order to show society's attitude towards violent women as symptomatic of societal fears and anxiety. I believe the contemporary prevalence of violent images showing dismembered bodies, not only in film and art, but in other forms of mass media too, is a signifier of a society in turmoil. This turmoil extends past the issues of gender equality, into the realm of the political, social and religious concerns. Unfortunately, it is mainly women and children who suffer physical abuse and dispossession as a result.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: List of characters in *Kill Bill I* (in credit order)

Uma Thurman ... The Bride  
Lucy Liu ... O-Ren Ishii  
Vivica A. Fox ... Vernita Green  
Daryl Hannah ... Elle Driver  
David Carradine ... Bill  
Michael Madsen ... Budd  
Julie Dreyfus ... Sofie Fatale  
Chiaki Kuriyama ... Gogo Yubari  
Shin'ichi Chiba ... Hattori Hanzo (as Sonny Chiba)  
Chia-Hui Liu ... Johnny Mo (as Gordon Liu)  
Michael Parks ... Earl McGraw  
Michael Bowen ... Buck  
Jun Kunimura ... Boss Tanaka  
Kenji Ohba ... Bald Guy (Sushi Shop) (as Kenji Oba)  
Yuki Kazamatsuri ... Proprietor  
James Parks ... Edgar McGraw  
Sakichi Satô ... Charlie Brown  
Jonathan Loughran ... Trucker  
Yoshiyuki Morishita ... Tokyo Business Man  
Tetsuro Shimaguchi ... Crazy 88 #1 (Miki)  
Kazuki Kitamura ... Crazy 88 #2  
Yôji Tanaka ... Crazy 88 #3 (as Yoji Boba Tanaka)  
Issei Takahashi ... Crazy 88 #4  
Sô Yamanaka ... Crazy 88 #5 (as So Yamanaka)  
Julie Manase ... Crazy 88 #6 (Girl) (as Juri Manase)  
Akaji Maro ... Boss Ozawah  
Goro Daimon ... Boss Honda  
Shun Sugata ... Boss Benta  
Zhang Jin Zhan ... Boss Orgami  
Xiaohui Hu ... Young 88 (Spanked Boy)  
Ambrosia Kelley ... Nikki Bell  
Sachiko Fujii ... The 5, 6, 7, 8's  
Yoshiko Yamaguchi ... The 5, 6, 7, 8's  
Ronnie Yoshiko Fujiyama ... The 5, 6, 7, 8's  
Shu Lan Tuan ... Okinawa Airline Ticket Agent  
Ai Maeda ... O-Ren (anime sequence) (voice)  
Naomi Kusumi ... Boss Matsumoto (anime sequence) (voice)  
Hikaru Midorikawa ... Pretty Riki (anime sequence) (voice)

Source: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0266697/fullcredits?ref\\_=tt\\_ov\\_st\\_sm](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0266697/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_st_sm)

## Appendix 2: List of characters in *Kill Bill II* (in credits order)

Vivica A. Fox ... Vernita Green  
Ambrosia Kelley ... Nikki (as Ambrosia Kelly)  
Michael Parks ... Earl McGraw / Esteban Vihaio  
James Parks ... Edgar McGraw  
Jonathan Loughran ... Trucker  
Michael Bowen ... Buck  
Kenji Ohba ... Bald Guy (as Kenji Oba)  
Yoshiyuki Morishita ... Tokyo Businessman (as Yoshijuki Morishita)  
Jun Kunimura ... Boss Tanaka  
Goro Daimon ... Boss Honda  
Kazuki Kitamura ... Boss Koji / Crazy 88  
Akaji Maro ... Boss Ozawah  
Shun Sugata ... Boss Benta  
Sachiko Fujii ... The 5, 6, 7, 8's (as The 5 6 7 8's)  
Ronnie Yoshiko Fujiyama ... The 5, 6, 7, 8's (as The 5 6 7 8's)  
Yoshiko Yamaguchi ... The 5, 6, 7, 8's (as The 5 6 7 8's)  
Sakichi Satô ... Charlie Brown  
Tetsuro Shimaguchi ... Crazy 88  
Yôji Tanaka ... Crazy 88 (as Boba)  
Sô Yamanaka ... Crazy 88 (as So Yamanaka)  
Issei Takahashi ... Crazy 88  
Julie Manase ... Crazy 88 (as Juri Manase)  
Chiaki Kuriyama ... Gogo  
Chia-Hui Liu ... Johnny / Pai Mei (as Gordon Liu)  
Yuki Kazamatsuri ... Proprietor  
Lucy Liu ... O-Ren Ishii  
Shin'ichi Chiba ... Hattori Hanzo (as Sonny Chiba)

Julie Dreyfus ... Sofie Fatale  
Bo Svenson ... Reverend Harmony  
Jeannie Epper ... Mrs. Harmony  
Stephanie L. Moore ... Joleen  
Shana Stein ... Erica  
Caitlin Keats ... Janeen  
Christopher Allen Nelson ... Tommy Plympton (as Chris Nelson)  
Samuel L. Jackson ... Rufus  
Reda Beebe ... Lucky  
Sid Haig ... Jay  
Larry Bishop ... Larry Gomez  
Laura Cayouette ... Rocket  
Clark Middleton ... Ernie  
Michael Madsen ... Budd  
Daryl Hannah ... Elle Driver  
Claire Smithies ... Clarita

Helen Kim ... Karen  
David Carradine ... Bill  
Perla Haney-Jardine ... B.B.  
Uma Thurman ... Beatrix Kiddo  
Victoria Lucai ... Trixie (as Vicki Lucai)  
Venessia Valentino ... 1st Grade Teacher  
Thea Rose ... Melanie Harrhouse  
William Paul Clark ... Soda Jerk (as William P. Clark)  
Stevo Polyi ... Tim  
Al Manuel Douglas ... Marty Kitrosser  
Patricia Silva ... Hooker #1  
Maria Del Rosario Gutiérrez ... Hooker #2  
Sonia Angelica Padilla Curiel ... Hooker #3  
Veronica Janet Martinez ... Hooker #4  
Lucia Cruz Marroquin ... Hooker #5  
Citlati Guadalupe Bojorquez ... Hooker #6  
Graciela Salazar Mendoza ... Hooker #7  
Maria de Lourdes Lombera ... Hooker #8  
Jorge Silva ... Bartender / Pimp

Source: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0378194/fullcredits?ref=tt\\_ov\\_st\\_sm](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0378194/fullcredits?ref=tt_ov_st_sm)



### Appendix 3: List of works by Quentin Tarantino.

All information obtained from The Quentin Tarantino Archives, unless otherwise stated. Works are listed in chronological order, starting with the most recent.

TITLE	YEAR	MEDIUM	POSITION HELD
<i>Django Unchained</i>	2012	Movie	Director/Writer/Producer
<i>Inglourious Bastards</i>	2009	Movie	Director/Writer/Producer
<i>Death Proof</i>	2007	Movie	
<i>CSI</i>	2005	TV series. Double episode: "Grave Danger" Parts 1 & 2	
<i>Sin City</i>	2005	Movie	Special Guest Director
<i>Kill Bill Volume II</i>	2004	Movie	
<i>Jimmy Kimmel Live</i>	2004	TV show. Episode: 20 April	
<i>Kill Bill Volume I</i>	2003	Movie	
<i>Jackie Brown</i>	1997	Movie	
<i>Emergency Room</i>	1995	TV Series. Episode: Motherhood	
<i>Four Rooms</i>	1995	Movie. Segment: The Man from Hollywood	
<i>Pulp Fiction</i>	1994	Movie	
<i>Reservoir Dogs</i>	1992	Movie	
<i>My Best Friend's Birthday</i>	1987	Movie. Unfinished	
<i>Love Birds in Bondage</i>	1983	Movie. Destroyed	

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