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## BRING BAGELS, OR, JUMP CUTS

MY NEW HOME OF SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN has one seven-day-a-week arthouse cinema, which is one more than my previous home of Halifax, Nova Scotia. That cinema, the Roxy, is about to show a new print (well, a 4K transfer) of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which is currently celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. I found this out when I went to a second-run shopping mall cinema owned by the same folks as the Roxy to see Tarantino's latest film, *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood* (2019), which was preceded by a trailer for *Pulp Fiction*. It occurred to me that the much-ballyhooed nostalgia that veritably drips from his new movie really has little to do with the 1960s and 1970s, despite all the Bruce-Lee-this and Sharon-Tate-that. Perhaps the era the film is really nostalgic for is the 1990s, when a commercial-friendly pseudo-independent studio practise (embodied by Harvey Weinstein's Miramax film company, which released *Pulp Fiction*) seemed to be the realization of a long-held dream of having it all—economic resources as well as formal eccentricity. Having seen the film, I think I more or less got it right, although I got the specific Tarantino film wrong. The cinematic unconscious of *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood* is not *Pulp Fiction* but rather *Jackie Brown* (1997)—the best film (by far) Tarantino ever made—and nostalgia has rarely felt so cruel or so disillusioning.

In terms of cinematic form, Tarantino is at the height of his craft. *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood*'s colours would be worth a whole chronicle, and the shot of a jean-jacket-clad Brad Pitt seated in an earth-tone bar crunching down on the celery stalk of his Bloody Mary was alone worth the price of admission (even though it was already included in the trailer). That kind of wood-panelled classicism has made Tarantino famous, and it is on full display here, but there are also loads of weirder and more complicated cinematic moments. The scene where Pitt's character, stuntman Cliff Booth, makes his way up the Los Angeles freeway is defined by an impossibly com-

plex montage of pop songs, which is propelled along so forcefully by the car's breathlessly edited forward motion that you hardly notice its jaggedness. When Leonardo DiCaprio's character, washed-up actor Rick Dalton, is working on the pilot of a small-time TV western, Tarantino gives us two sequences that substitute continuity editing for jump cuts, even though there's no real break in the film's narrative progress. Both are bold gestures, which are just as graceful in their way as the opposite but for our purposes also apposite opening shot of *Jackie Brown*—a breathtakingly long tracking shot that follows Pam Grier down an airport walkway and that I fully expect to be playing on an endless loop in heaven. In contrast to the mere imitation of a lot of the rest of his oeuvre, all of this is genuinely worthy of the French filmmaker who provided the name for Tarantino's production company A Band Apart Films—namely, Jean-Luc Godard, director of the film *Bande à part* (Band of Outsiders, 1964).

Godard also feels genuinely appropriate to invoke when explaining the best part of *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood*, which is its massive, slack middle section. Those two hours or so are in effect a minimalist and somewhat obsessive study of two parallel themes: the production of a few shots in a Hollywood-industrial television series (centring on Rick Dalton) and the somewhat grim yet also brightly-lit life of a worn-down cog in that industry (Cliff Booth). This is totally engrossing in a way that is fully consistent with the best of classical Hollywood cinema, which makes its structural weirdness (in terms of advancing a narrative very little actually happens) and the aforementioned virtuoso moments of montage (which Godard famously called his "beau souci" or "beautiful worry") all feel utterly lucid. I could not stop thinking of Godard's *Le Mépris* (Contempt, 1963), which is not as great as many critics think but is visually lush, structurally weird, and nostalgically sophisticated in a way that offers a fully thought-out analysis of the industry it is a part of. It really does anticipate what's going on in *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood*; indeed, it's minor Godard that paves the way for some of the major stuff that Tarantino is capable of doing.

The old man just doesn't know when to call it a night, though. The last movement of *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood* brings *Jackie Brown* roaring right back, for better and for worse. The 1997 film was, for almost its entirety, as languid, slow, and just-barely-narrative as the great middle section of *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood*, but that sense of languor was shattered at the end by Robert De Niro's sudden and pitiless shoot-

ing of Bridget Fonda—a smarmy, cynical, and misogynistic flash of violence that provoked lots of laughs and a little bit of applause from the audience I saw it with. That sense of queasy horror came over me again during *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood*'s finale of face-smashing and person-torching violence, when the audience I was with once again laughed at the excess of it all. This time, though, the violence went on for a lot longer, and the destruction of women's bodies was a lot more detailed and far, far more about cruelty. The cynical explosion of murderous violence in *Jackie Brown* felt gratuitous, which disappointed me, but I struggled to look past it by hanging on to that opening tracking shot or the images of Grier sharing quiet moments with Robert Forster. The cynical explosion of murderous violence in *Once Upon a Time in . . . Hollywood* cannot adequately be described as merely gratuitous; rather, it flummoxed my vocabulary for such things. I can't struggle past it as I cling to the truly wonderful performance that Pitt gives up until that part of the film. His perfectly delivered line as he assures his old buddy that he doesn't need to follow as he's being taken to the hospital ("Come visit me tomorrow. Bring bagels.") feels like nothing, as I recall it. It's simply not worth the spectacle of that climactic sequence when the psycho hippies descend and all hell, quite literally, breaks loose.

There's another film anniversary that's got me nostalgic this year: the American journal *Jump Cut* is 45 years old. It was founded in 1974 by John Hess and the husband and wife team of Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage. It was published in a tabloid form as a not-quite quarterly from 1974 to 1988, when it changed to an annual publication in a magazine format. It went online in 2001, and it can now be found at [ejumpcut.org](http://ejumpcut.org)—a website that still looks exactly the same today.

The magazine also got its name from Godard, who loved to use jump cuts, most famously of the back of Jean Seberg's head in *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960). *Jump Cut*, though, was inspired more by the hardcore ciné-leftism of Godard's post-1968 productions than by his new wave material. They covered (and continue to cover) more serious political cinema from around the world than just about any other journal, and they have also maintained an intense commitment to the avant-garde, provided that writers were dealing with it in a way that had genuinely radical aspirations. They also engaged Hollywood, and popular media more generally, with that same radical sensibility, as they excoriated *Star Wars* (1977), they had an

odd relationship with *RoboCop* (1987), and they published two long articles on *Smallville* (2001-2011) and a few years later two articles on *The Hills* (2006-2010).

Hess died in 2015 and Kleinhans died in 2017, but Lesage has kept *Jump Cut* going, having just published issue 59. In the magazine's latest editorial, which Lesage wrote herself for the first time, she recounts Kleinhans' contributions to film studies and political criticism in general over the past five decades. The issue also features a long interview with Kleinhans and Lesage by documentary film scholar Brian Winston.

Lesage was my beloved mentor when I was an undergraduate at the University of Oregon from 1989-1992, and I worked on two issues of *Jump Cut* as a kind of editorial intern. She is a great teacher, and one of the things she is teaching us about now is the origins of film studies in North America. She is doing this by putting an enormous amount of Kleinhans' writing, as well as his pedagogical material, online at [archive.org/details/KleinhansWriting](http://archive.org/details/KleinhansWriting). In her introduction to this archive, she makes the point that "Chuck's collected papers are a fascinating compendium of the origins of contemporary film studies from the 1970s on." For those who want to see how a discipline evolved from its very earliest days (film studies doesn't go back that far before 1974), this material is well worth a look.