

*Couch Potato:  
A Scene Analysis of  
Kill Bill Vol. 2*

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Over the course of Quentin Tarantino's filmography it has become very apparent that his films are utterly inextricable from popular media, namely television, cinema, and music. Whether it is a royale with cheese or a Japanese cover of a 1950s rockabilly song, Tarantino's films are laced with references and inspiration taken from his video-store clerk days, and the *Kill Bill* saga is no exception. From the opening shots emulating film noir to the titular climax's fusion of western and kung fu cinema, the audience is persistently engrossed in a world constructed purely from pop culture; a product of our reality yet governed by the rules of fantasy. Taking his fetish for pop media to an even more overt level, Tarantino explicitly displays the characters engaging with televisions, creating an unnerving connection between our reality and the reality of the film.

Shortly after the twisted family reunion, Bill asks his daughter whether she would like to watch a movie with Mommy and she requests *Shogun Assassin*. We see a shadowy shot of Beatrix caressing B.B. while they stare at the camera suggesting that the viewer's vantage point is from the inside of the television. A youthful voice, not unlike B.B.'s, narrates *Shogun Assassin*, praising and idolizing his father's violent acts of revenge, all the while leaving B.B. looking utterly unaffected. Tarantino makes no bones about it; we are in a reality composed of violent samurai fantasies, where revenge is expected and murder is lauded. By positioning the camera inside the television, Tarantino is inducting the audience into this world and he is forcing us to see the reality in which young B.B. is being raised. Even more notably, he is making us self conscious of watching the movie. We become very aware that Beatrix and B.B. are viewers of *Shogun Assassin* much like we are viewers of *Kill Bill*. If the audience can be appalled by the violence that B.B. seems to have internalized and taken inspiration from in her actions with Esteban, shouldn't we also be equally appalled with

our own mass consumption of violent media such as *Kill Bill*? Instead we relish it, much like Tarantino and the characters in *Kill Bill* do. Eventually, the narration fades into the score as Beatrix rises to confront Bill with a distinct air of inevitability. In the world of *Kill Bill*, defined by real world pop movies depicting redemption and ultimate revenge, there is no opportunity for reconciliation, and it is this sort of theatrical and violent expectation that we seem to have inadvertently internalized through the omnipresence of media in our reality.

The next depiction of a television appears when Beatrix and Bill are discussing the location of their ultimate showdown. As Beatrix descends the stairs, an over the shoulder shot depicts a Roy Rogers western in which blows are being exchanged, obviously foreshadowing the impending confrontation between the two cinematic titans. As Bill describes the potential fighting grounds, Beatrix turns her head towards the television and Hanzo sword. The camera cuts to Beatrix's perspective, deliberately centering the image of a stoic and determined Roy Rogers staring back at her while the Hanzo sword seems to be almost an afterthought, perched nearly off the top of the screen. The camera cuts back to Beatrix's eyes before Bill finishes his speech, again placing us within the screen that she is looking at, reinforcing the *Kill Bill* characters' role as consumers of media. Beatrix lunges after the sword causing Bill to draw his western style revolver and shoot at her, ironically destroying the television which serves as the source of inspiration for the director's rules of reality and therefore the character's actions. In the realm of Tarantino, there is nothing at all strange about a man pulling a gun out and destroying his own television while his young daughter sleeps because it's exactly how it happens in the media that defines their reality. In much the same way, we are utterly unsurprised by these actions after watching the

preceding three hours of *Kill Bill* (among countless hours of other sensationalized movies and television) and Tarantino is forcing us to acknowledge the immense integration of fantastical media into our own perception of reality.

Given Tarantino's love affair with cinematic history it comes as no surprise that he would use media within his films to further define them. As Maximilian Le Cain explains in his piece *Tarantino and the Vengeful Ghosts of Cinema*, "'Real life' is largely signified by the discussion of pop culture which appears to be the only alternative to enacting generic cinema rituals – what is not 'cinema' is still defined only in terms of cinema (or music or TV or fast food)." While I would not call Tarantino's movies merely cinematic rituals, Tarantino does indeed use pop media as a means of defining and redefining reality. When Tarantino utilizes screens in *Kill Bill*, we have no doubt we are still watching a movie, but the media serves to connect us to his alternate reality and help us understand the rules by which the characters live, thereby causing us to acknowledge our own compliance in consuming reality-warping media.