



Cesar **Diaz**, cesara.diazr[at]utadeo.edu.co
Universidad de Bogota Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Colombia



An agentive account of the “commode story” in Quentin Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs*

There’s a broad semiotic literature pertaining the formal structure of complex narratives. However, although there are already several cognitive approaches to complex or “unnatural” narratives, and they provide at the same time an overview of *basic* narrative comprehension and *complex* narrative comprehension, there’s still no literature that accounts for the way that cognition handles different and overlapping levels of “reality” when we process and understand (or don’t understand) embedded narratives of the type known as *mise en abîme*.

Formal accounts alone cannot explain this type of complex narrative comprehension, and given some basic features of the processes involved, can even clash with cognitive theories in some respects. For instance, because of cognitive processing constraints and other factors such as the structure of memory, narrative comprehension happens online and tends to economy, which seems to clash with the potentially “infinite” recursiveness of these narratives.

On the other hand, cognition tends to coherence, and certain instances of *mise en abîme* tend to incoherence. Such is the case of the segment of Quentin Tarantino’s film *Reservoir Dogs* that we intend to analyze: a flashback sequence with a series of story-within-a-story structures, and a climatic scene where Mr. Blonde, the protagonist, is telling outloud a story in the spatial and temporal setting of the events depicted by the story itself, and to some minor characters that take part, but shouldn’t know the story in the first place.

I intend to explain Tarantino’s version of *mise en abîme* with the cognitive framework of Niño’s *agentive semiotics* (Niño 2015), because it solves some of the inconsistencies posed by the Aarhus version of Fauconnier and Turner’s conceptual blending theory (Brandt 2013): it gives a more precise explanation of the role of a *sense of reality* in meaning-making, it accounts for the way that purpose limits the extent of meaning-making; and finally, it is not only a theory of cognition, but it also allows to account for the features of semiotic items themselves in order to guide meaning construction and attribution. But beyond that, I intend to explain *Reservoir Dogs* itself (or at least, the segment analyzed) as a fictionalized “agentive” account of narrative production and comprehension, because of its construction of characters as *fictive narrational* (narrative+rational) *agents*; and because of its explanation of narration as enaction and “presentification”.