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Film 485

Professor Jellerson

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Analysis #1

“Taxi Driver”

The film, *Taxi Driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese, follows the story of a young man named Travis who becomes a taxi driver in New York City because of his ongoing struggle with insomnia. Day and night, Travis continues driving the winding streets of the city observing the lifeless world through his own eyes. As Travis drives, his mind seems to drift further and further away from reality, and this can be seen clearly through Scorsese’s camera work. Scorsese does a mindful job of consistently switching the viewpoint and seamlessly using the camera as a technique to elaborate Travis’s loneliness and mental state. For instance, the shots are very slow and meticulous, indicating that something is not quite right in the world Travis lives in. There is a specific scene that really stood out to me because it seemed to be the pivotal moment of Travis’s unconscious motives turning into conscious ones. In the article, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud mentions, “in so far as conscious impulses always have some relation to pleasure or unpleasure, pleasure and unpleasure too can be regarded as having psycho-physical relation to conditions of stability and instability” (pg. 2). The scene where we see Travis talking to Betsy and the camera pans right to an empty hallway and lingers there, has importance in

bringing Travis's instability into the conscious world. The scene helps display the repeated symbols of isolation, loneliness, violence, and misunderstanding of the film as a whole.

The scene starts off with Travis twirling his pencil over his diary while talking to Betsy. This was after he mistakenly took Betsy to a porn movie on their first date without realizing the potential issue of the situation. He calls her apologizing and asking questions, such as, "can we go on another date? Or did you receive my flowers?" The whole time he is on the phone, his body is more to the right of the screen rather than being in the center. I believe Scorsese did this

to display the start of Travis's off balanced mind, and the beginning of a more "straight" violent path he considers his destiny. Additionally, the idea behind him twirling his utensil on his diary filled with confused and often cruel thoughts is



significant because it foreshadows those entries/thoughts turning into real life actions. Travis's unconscious motives and desires will eventually become conscious impulses due to his serious vulnerability. Scorsese then makes the bold decision to very slowly pan the camera to a hallway around the corner, making Travis fade away from the camera's view. The empty hallway is now centered across the screen, while the door is open to the life of the outside world. A definite symbol of isolation, and the idea of Travis feeling closed off from reality. It also signifies the harsh concept of the world continuing on and not stopping for anyone or anything. Reality does not care about how Travis feels or what is going on in his head, everyone just continues their daily lives because time does not stop. What is also interesting is the idea that the only door open



throughout the hallway was the outside one, representing that there is only one clear route Travis can take now and it is as narrow and straight as the one seen on the screen. In addition, I came to understand that there is a clear juxtaposition between the winding roads

Travis drives on and the distinct image of this straight hallway. Later on in the film while Travis was at the Senator's rally, we hear the dialogue of the Senator talking about roads,

"We are meant today at a crossroads. Columbus circle. This is no ordinary place. It is a place where many roads and many lives intersect. It is appropriate that we be here today, because these are not ordinary times. We meet at a crossroads in history. For far too long, the wrong roads have been taken. The wrong roads have let us into war, into poverty, into unemployment, and inflation. Today I say to you, we have reached the turning point. Now I would lie to you if I told you the new roads would be easy. They will not be easy. Nothing that is right and good, have never been easy. We the people know that. And we the people know the right ones and the good."

Travis drives the city roads every night, twists, turns, red lights, green lights, etc. He has no clear path and the roads just take him wherever the people take him. They are different every night, and no matter what night it is, there is always a trace of violence. Since the hallway we see in this scene is straight with not much dimension, it symbolizes Travis's view of his destiny. When we hear the Senator speak, it is actually a description of the thoughts running through Travis's

head. To Travis, there is no more confusion or haziness in life, and his new path (the straight hallway) is the “right” and “necessary” one to him.

Additionally, nothing in the hallway stands out, no vibrant colors, no clear objects, and bare minimum movement, which makes the viewer have clear focus on Travis’s conversation with Betsy. Having Travis talk over the shot made this scene even more intriguing and is part of the reason why I found it to hold a lot of importance to the film as a whole. With the thought of not being able to see Travis, it closes off the emotion and makes Travis seem lifeless. We cannot see his feelings of Betsy turning him down, nor can we see Betsy’s emotion. The idea of not seeing either of them, embodies the miscommunication Travis had with her. They were both not on the same page, and not being able to hear Betsy’s side of the conversation represents that there was no actual communication taking place. After Travis hung up the phone, he makes his way into the view of the hallway and walks down it to the outside. The sad jazz music starts to play again and Travis reads his thoughts in his diary. The music and his diary reading continue as the camera cuts to his house filled with

wilting flowers. The camera pans across the flowers, all of them slowly dying, symbolizing Travis’s last hope of humanity. Moreover, towards the end of the pan, a clock starts to eventually tick in the



background, which is a clear sign that Travis is evidently running out of time. Lastly, Travis emphasizes a specific phrase at the end of this sequence, “you are only as healthy as you may feel.” The repetition of those words means that Travis’s reality is getting shakier and shakier, and

that his mental illness will take complete control. Everything that he may “feel” at this point in time in the film, is nothing but his demented unconscious thoughts. He has lost control over reality and has taken a path of destruction.

This sequence plays a massive role in the film as a whole and as mentioned before, is the distinct turning point for Travis. Travis has a distinct clear focus now and his plan does not seem to be blurry anymore. It portrays Travis’s distance from being socially accepted, and how he lives in a never ending mindset of loneliness. The viewers cannot bear to witness his rejection, therefore, the camera turns away to see the distance he has from society. When he finally walks down the hallway, it is his vow to shoot a pimp and cleanse society of all the dirt it possesses. This beautifully constructed sequence by Scorsese, exhibits the true isolation of Travis overall, and the seriousness of insomnia/mental illnesses.

Word count	×
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Words	1302
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