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God's Lonely Man: an Analysis of Martin Scorsese as Auteur

Sirens roar, trains rattle, and street walkers proposition men with insatiable sexual desires- Manhattan's 1970's Lower East Side is alive. "Loneliness has followed me my whole life," narrates Travis Bickle, as he examines these surroundings. "Everywhere. In bars, in cars, sidewalks, stores, everywhere. There's no escape. I'm God's lonely man." In this moment of Martin Scorsese's iconic 1976 film, *Taxi Driver*, Bickle has assumed the voice of Scorsese himself, whose own identity was largely shaped by the very environment he recreated for his film. In professing his state of loneliness, the protagonist has manifested a thematic pillar of Scorsese's authorship. As such, this paper, through the scope of Janet Staiger's two theories of authorship as origin and authorship as personality, will serve to argue for Scorsese's status as author through the analysis of recurrent thematic elements of loneliness in *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, and *The Departed*.

First championed by the Cahiers du Cinema film critics of 1950's France, the theory and definition of Auteursm have endured a storied history. In his original promotion of the idea in 1954, French filmmaker Francois Truffaut called for a small scale personal cinema that would reflect the author, or Auteur's, moral values and unique visual style. Unlike the popular French "tradition of quality" films of the time, these new works would remain loyal to the literary works, which they adapted, a term Truffaut coined as "invention without betrayal." (Truffaut, 13) As with any new theory, it faced criticism, initially in the face of Andre Bazin, who, as a Cahiers publisher, countered

many of Truffaut's claims. In response to Truffaut, he downplayed the responsibility of an auteur by noting the necessity of the studio system while criticizing the universal acclaim assumed by auteurs. Bazin wrote that while an auteur transcends society, society remains an inescapable influence. This latter point would serve to be a long lasting and important criticism of auteur theory. From its origin in France, this highly contested theory would travel to England, where contributors at *Movie Magazine* in 1962 used it to rank working directors. At about the same time, *Village Voice* critic Andrew Sarris introduced the idea to an American audience, ranking all major directors into categories, with the highest esteem reserved for those who were considered "Pantheon" directors. Not unlike in France, the theory received backlash in America, most notably from Sarris's contemporary Pauline Kael who presented flaws in the sexist and oversimplified aspects of Auteurism. It is apparent then, that authorship has been defined and redefined countless times, and that Truffaut's definition is different from that of the American New Critics. Curating various different perspectives remained Janet Staiger, who in 2003 released a collection of approaches she argued could be useful in determining authorship. In her work, she acknowledges the theory's long history as she states, "The history of authorship studies has involved various strategies that I shall organize into seven approaches... Moreover, all of these approaches assume some form of the communications model whereby the author produces a message for the reader." (Staiger, 30) The two approaches selected to form the foundation of this essay are Authorship as Origin and Authorship as Personality.

Authorship as Origin is perhaps the oldest and most researched approach of the seven. As Staiger attests, this approach to authorship is inevitably old because of its inherently religious nature. She remarks,

What (godly) source produced this writing? The implications in such an approach, deriving as it does from a religious hermeneutic tradition, include the evaluation of writings on the basis of the biography of the author. If the author's life was devoted, wholesome, upright, then the writings- a flow of the author's morality onto the page- must display and reveal the morality of the life, and, of course, vice versa. (30)

Her explanation draws many similarities to Truffaut's original depiction of the canvas as an honest representation of the artist. This interpretation rests on the important notion that the work of an author is the product of an author's individual agency, or freedom. She explains, "Thus, in authorship as origin, the author is conceptualized as a free agent, the message is a direct expression of the author's agency, and production is untroubled philosophically or linguistically..." (30) In continuation, contemporary critic Bordwell explains that such an approach to authorship is based on two fundamental models: the "transmission" theory in which the message is inserted deliberately and an "object-centered theory of meaning" whereby the object determines its own meaning. Regardless, it remains the choice of a free-thinking, ever-aware author.

However, this approach to authorship has undergone revision, as American New Criticism also decrees that, "A basic premise is that evidence for interpretation of a work is internal to the text and public information." (31) In essence, these critics suggested the meanings derived from the actual work, rather than biographical information, ought to be used to form and defend interpretations of authorship. Some other criteria imposed by

American New Criticism are that “form and content cannot be split, and evaluative criteria are universal and public as well.” In this way, the structure of any given film is as much of the discussion of its potentially authorial nature as the content. It is important to note that “evaluative criteria being universal and public” democratizes the process of film criticism, as no one individual is given higher interpretational standing. However, there inevitably exist holes in such an approach. Intentionality is difficult, even irrelevant, to determine. In collective works, it does not take into account the indubitable effects of biographical/ social/ industrial forces as well as the roles of other crew members. Lastly, and perhaps most troublesome, the evaluative criteria of New Critics privilege transcendental/universal elements over historical/social ones.

Authorship as Personality, especially in conjunction with Authorship as Origin, serves as an interesting way to study the work of auteurs. This approach is rooted in the works of the original Cahiers critics who bore it partly out of practicality. Staiger explains, “Developed during and after World War II most obviously in France but in nascent forms elsewhere, authorship-as-personality analysis permitted a means of marking out French films as different from Hollywood product and, thus, potentially increasing their market value.” (34) Not only differentiating French films from mass-audience films, this theory would prove to align French films with their newer American counterparts, which were perceived as works rebelling against the Hollywood system. In addition, Auteurism, also rooted in American literary critic M. H. Abram’s Romantic analogy of the author as a lamp, elevated filmmaking as a legitimate art form. If the author was successful in aesthetically conveying sophisticated emotions (as all auteurs

were argued to be capable of), he could be viewed as a sensible, sophisticated artist such as practitioners of traditional high art.

In contrast to Authorship as Origin, this approach claims that the personal idiosyncrasies of an auteur often override intent, making the work of an auteur a montage of unique character traits rather than a work of fully informed decisions made by a wholly conscious author. As a result, the author may be “no longer a fully conscious agent but often ideally has a coherent personality that appears in the production of the text.” (33) In light of such a claim, it would be useful to symbolize a film as the body of an auteur, as traits unique to the director would subconsciously manifest themselves through repetition in the work. Staiger says, “The logic is that directors may be handed a script, but they are the individuals charged with controlling the acting, lighting, staging, and use of set design. So one naturally would look to those features of the film for directors’ authorial statements.” (36)

As the other approaches to authorship, Authorship as Personality retains its criticisms. Bazin warned that the excessive emphasis on the auteur as the source of a text could result in an unjustified sense of superiority. To him, the idea of authorship could be at times a naively romantic idea. (Bazin, 10) In addition, John Hess is known to have bashed authorship as an expression of personal vision as conservative and reactionary.

Using the Authorship as Personality approach, it is feasible to analyze the beginnings of Scorsese’s authorial nature in his first major directorial effort, *Mean Streets*. Released in 1973, *Mean Streets* explores the character of Charlie, as played by Harvey Keitel, and his various relationships with his uncle, his love affair, and his friend Johnny Boy, as played by Robert DeNiro. Balancing loyalties between his actual and de

facto families, Charlie must handle disputes of debt in a community run by mobsters who order murders as feverishly as they attend Sunday mass. Therefore, Keitel's character constantly struggles between loyalties and responsibilities, as a churchgoer and a low-level criminal. Because of the narrow desires of his uncle and the reckless nature of his best friend, Charlie is lonely in his struggle. There exists no understanding. This is perhaps best portrayed as Charlie and Teresa walk along the beach discussing potentially moving out of the neighborhood. Showing his desire to be pious throughout his struggle, Charlie says "Francis of Assisi had it all down... He knew," to which Teresa responds, "Saint Francis didn't run numbers." "Me neither," responds Charlie, who at that very moment exposes his incapacitation, both physical and moral. He cannot leave his neighborhood for he does not want to sever his ties, and he cannot negotiate his desire to please his mob superiors with his desire to be a man of good faith, in defending his friend Johnny Boy. It can be argued, then, that through Charlie's struggle, Scorsese's own loneliness is manifested. Elizabeth Street, a central section of Little Italy and Scorsese's childhood home, introduced a young Martin to a gritty, primarily Sicilian urban environment where gangsters and popes reigned supreme. Scorsese saw his own father's business failures and as a result, it seems as if many of Charlie's preoccupations, especially with family and finance, correlate with those of a young Martin Scorsese growing up in the same crime riddled, but highly pious neighborhood. Charlie's struggle is Martin's, and the loneliness with which they are burdened proves to resonate through Scorsese's filmography.

Released only three years after *Mean Streets*, Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* seems to

only further explore the author's own loneliness. Centered on the character of Travis Bickle, the film explores the double edged sword of subjective morality through a protagonist who, being unable to find his place and purpose, progressively descends into insanity. It is without a doubt that the form of the film informs much of the sentiment of loneliness. The camera assumes the role of Travis, as the audience sees the world through Travis' own perspective. As a result, shot selections are voyeuristic, distanced, and often mediated, many times with the use of windows. Robert Kolker explains in his book, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, "Scorsese... does something quite different... His characters do not have homes that reflect comfort or security. The spaces they inhabit are places of transition, of momentary situation." (195) Whether it is at work or at home, in his taxi or in front of his bedroom mirror, Bickle is always looking out from a self contained space. His frustration is best portrayed during a conversation with Isis, a young girl who he seeks to save from a life of prostitution. When she does not seem to mind her current situation, Bickle remarks, "You're a young girl. You should be at home. You should be dressed up, going out with boys, going to school, you know, that kind of stuff." In sharing his advice, Bickle informs young Isis on what he perceives to be normal behavior, although the lack of any meaningful relationships in his own life proves the protagonist's own desperate state. With many of the same images of religion, masculinity, and independence, *Taxi Driver* narrates a story of a man driven to madness by his inability to form palpable connections with the world around him. As Charlie in *Mean Streets* is alienated by his struggles between responsibilities, Travis is rendered a loner by his own perceptions of righteous behavior.

Three decades after the success of *Taxi Driver*, Martin Scorsese revisits themes of loneliness in his 2006 film *The Departed*. Using the binary of characters of Colin Sullivan, as played by Matt Damon and Billy Costigan as played by Leonardo Dicaprio, Scorsese concerns himself with the place of morality and identity in a world full of corruption. As Frank Costello plays the role of a mob boss, essentially a more involved version of the leader in *Mean Streets*, the environment and power structure in *The Departed* is as seething and realistic as that of 1900's New York. Through Scorsese's narrative structure, it is often difficult to determine who is responsible for what crime, and who has committed the moral wrong between two upcoming police officers. This double identity, or sense of dual morality, is driven by both Dicaprio and Damon's inability to discern truly what they desire. They are paralyzed by their loyalties, and the cinematography and editing show exactly the murky nature and community in which they must base their decisions. By revisiting and updating structures of power, Scorsese is able to analyze the sense of loneliness that both leads feel.

Scorsese's childhood experiences would undoubtedly inform the subject matter in his films. Whether it was due to his asthma or fascination with movies, young Martin Scorsese was often alone, on Elizabeth Street in Little Italy. Three of his films, *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, and *The Departed*, convey through four different protagonists such loneliness. In fact, the auteur himself says in *Scorsese on Scorsese* that ever since watching his first movie, Roy Rogers' *Trigger*, "at the age of three I dreamed of being a cowboy." (Scorsese, 33) Through his characters, he is able to do just that.

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Definitions and examples of the theory of Development: A review of dominant theories within the context of tourism development. Theories of development and their definitions have changed over time. Until recently they predominantly followed Euro-American models of "development" and were focused on economy. The theories assumed that "developed" nations' value standards were superior to those of "the developing nations". From the 1960s, the tourism industry was, and still is, seen as an effective developmental growth-pole, and tourism has been used by many countries to improve their economic development. Director François Truffaut, writing as a critic in the influential French journal Cahiers du Cinéma (Cinema Notebook), developed the concept of the auteur in his 1954 essay "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" ("A certain trend in French cinema"). Truffaut wrote about the films of several new French filmmakers who he termed auteurs. He drew contrasts between auteurs and directors of mainstream studio movies whom he dismissed as merely *metteur en scène*, or "stagehands" of a script written by another artist. Truffaut argued that the filmmakers who made the best films were those who wrote and directed. Tourism is the movement of the people from their normal place of residence to another place (with the intention to return) for a minimum period of twenty-four hours to the maximum of six months for the sole purpose of leisure and pleasure. Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing industries and a major foreign exchange and employment generation for many countries. It is one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena. The word "tourism" is derived from the Latin word *tornus*, meaning "a tool for making a circle". Tourism may be defined as the movement of the people from their normal place of residence to another place (with the intention to return) for a minimum period of twenty-four hours to a maximum of six months for the sole purpose of leisure and pleasure. history definition: 1. (the study of or a record of) past events considered together, especially events of a particular country. Learn more. Later chapters cover ores and waste products, diamonds and their histories and the nature of the planetary bodies of the solar system. From the Cambridge English Corpus. Large forces and weighty histories are at work here, and their presence should be acknowledged and thought about. From the Cambridge English Corpus. No simple equivalence was found in the distance histories of the profiles. From the Cambridge English Corpus. Other population histories were considered to demonstrate the generality of (1) and (4). From the Cambridge English Corpus. See all examples of history.