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ASPECTS OF MASCULINTY: THE FILMS OF ROBERT DENIRO  
AND MARTIN SCORSESE

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## INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity is the premise of Modernism, that is the personal view of the individual as expressed by the artist. The individual ego reigns supreme, its expression constitutes modernist art. Allowance for the feelings or political opinions of others is not taken into consideration; preference is accorded to the unhampered elucidation of the ego. Due to the fact that the emphasis placed on the artist is to produce work which reflects reality as he perceives it, the truth when wrought from within is not to be watered down by others or the other. If the produced work is offensive to some it is excused as a very personal expression/impression rather than an ideal, the truth about how the artist feels and consequently valid. An artist may produce work which is sexist, Eurocentric and elitist but as it is the personal viewpoint of the artist it is legitimate. The 1970's Feminist aphorism "the personal is political" takes on a chauvinistic conservative slant from this perspective.

A society's culture is a collective of its artistic subjects, the sum of its individual egos. This does not give an omnipresent understanding of western society as modernism is primarily male. The female, non-European and populist are neglected in deference to the Eurocentric male ego. Leaving aside artistic achievements for the moment, what I wish to emphasise here is the link between art practice in western society and sexism. Due to the lack of educational opportunities and the subjugation (political, social etc..) imposed on them by patriarchal society, women could not participate meaningfully in the Arts at the time of The Enlightenment, the birth of Modernity, when their brothers were making the leap: artisan to artist; craftsman to genius. Thus artists were men and art was coded masculine.

The sensibilities of Robert DeNiro and Martin Scorsese are entrenched in the modernist tradition. Any criticism of their work must address it from this perspective. It is naive to argue that their work is sexist, they work in a medium and point in history which is inherently sexist. However it is silly to believe that they are not aware of this situation. The male perspective is continually addressed (not taken for granted) and their films should be viewed as a critique of the patriarchal system from within. It has been argued that femininity is a construction, a fetish based on the abstract emotionally supportive concepts of "kindness, tenderness and understanding" complimentary to the similarly constructed notions of masculinity "independence, aggressiveness and toughness". It's a man's world out there, femininity has been constructed so that women could lend emotional support and replenishment to their male partners who rely on their harder masculine character traits to survive "the rat race". DeNiro, Scorsese and sometimes screen-writer Paul Schrader examine the role of and strain on the male ego when the character traits of masculinity are taken to extremes.

This essay's argument is twofold, DeNiro and Scorsese work during a time when the dominant culture is Eurocentric and phallocentric, they must labour within the system for their work to be seen and so agitate but they



utilize the apparatus to critique it. Secondly I will examine this supposition through DeNiro as much as through Scorsese. These two auteurs have forged a mutual enigmatic link which strenghtens their collaborations in the manner where the sum of the two is greater than the individual talents: Scorsese's best films feature DeNiro; DeNiro's finest performances have been directed by Scorsese.

The analysis of masculinity in cinema is a large and complex undertaking even when dealing with the oeuvre of just one collaboration team. I will confine myself to an examination of the depiction of masculinity in Scorsese's films and the nature of viewer identification with characters DeNiro depicts.

In Chapter 1, through *Taxi Driver*, I will examine the personas of the film makers along with the nature of the main character, Travis Bickle in relation to viewer identification, essentially male viewer identification, utilizing Laura Mulvey's text 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

Chapter 2, will deal with *Raging Bull* in terms of the film as a critique of masculinity by depicting it in it's worst form rather than presenting it in an idealized manner, how it ought to be. We will then go on to consider the idea of positing the male body (DeNiro as the young LaMotta) as an object of the erotic gaze, a notion which according to Mulvey is impossible, and look at some challenges to her thesis.

Chapter 3 will consider the range of characters played by DeNiro throughout his work with Scorsese. DeNiro excels at interpreting the darker side of the psyche. Scorsese's films of the Seventies confined themselves to examining these extremes, consider Johnny Boy's aggression, Travis' psychosis, Jimmy's egoism and Jake's paranoia. During the Eighties and Nineties however we see him begin to consider alternative types of masculinity enacted by Nick Nolte and Daniel Day-Lewis.

Contemporary gender theory tends to regard masculinity as being without a fixed set of criteria, hence the title, *Aspects of Masculinity*.

## CHAPTER 1

This chapter deals with the notions of persona, and how they interrelate for both film makers and audience. The central protagonists in a Scorsese film are usually surrogates for aspects of his own psyche and personality. The nature of these surrogates is informed by his childhood. Scorsese lived with his parents in the suburban area of Queens until he was eight years old when his father ran into financial difficulties and was forced to move the whole family back into a tenement in Little Italy. The young boy immediately became conscious of the neighbourhood's twin power structures, "wiseguys" and church and was equally fascinated by both. The pageantry and theatre of the church had a deep affect on him and within a year he was determined to become a priest, an ambition thwarted by poor grades and the distraction of girls and



rock'n'roll. He was expelled from his junior seminary and decided to attend New York University where he could study his other great love, Film. Movies were the other side of the coin for the young Scorsese. Whereas the church and mobsters were constants within the neighbourhood, under whose rule everyone must comply, the cinema offered a means of escape. His father was a film buff and used to bring his son regularly to the cinema. These visits increased when he developed Asthma and took pleasure in little else. Also, the Scorseses were the first family on the block to acquire a television. In the fifties American television

did not show contemporary American films as the big studios, regarding television as a rival were unwilling to release them for viewing. The stations showed old cowboy films and foreign films, especially British and Italian ones, in the manner of the local theatres, twice per weeknight and three times on Saturdays and Sundays. Scorsese watched them all repeatedly. What he refers to as "the apocalyptic" nature of the church, its ability to ingrain in the young boy an obsession with personal salvation and redemption and the guilt instilled by it coupled with the power, glamour and violence of the gangsters of the neighbourhood form the backbone of his oeuvre's content. His obsession with film defines his life. If you look at any Scorsese interview you will notice that his whole life is defined by movies: when this happened to me it was like the scene in such and such a film. He is obsessive in terms of content and style.

DeNiro's background, though Italian-American, was different. His parents were artists who met as students. They separated shortly after Robert was born and the young DeNiro was brought up by his mother. As both of his parents were dedicated professionals their son developed a precocious sense of independence. He disliked school and rarely attended high school, spending his time in the movie houses, reading and hanging around Little Italy. By the age of sixteen he had started acting and over the next few years he began to regard it as a prospective serious profession and enrolled in various acting classes, primarily Stella Adler's. Adler's and Lee Strasberg's at Actor's Studios were the two most prestigious schools of acting in New York at the time, both were developed from Stanislavski's method. Though both schools were similar they had different approaches to achieving characterization. Adler encouraged the students to use the words in the play to "step out" of himself/herself and use the imagination to construct the characters. Strasberg believed the actor could choose a personal experience which was similar to the scene being acted in the play and draw on it to produce the feelings of the character and so make the role more "true". Thus Adler based her approach on the actor using the clues given by the author to prompt the imagination to create the character, that is, working from the outside in. Whereas Strasberg, on the other hand, encouraged his students to create a personal history and context for the role and draw on one's own experience in order to work from the inside out. Scorsese says that "DeNiro's not really a student of any particular method of acting. He took what he liked best from different teachers, from Stella Adler to Lee Strasberg and others" (Thompson/Christie, p. 47). And DeNiro himself "...you always bring something of yourself to a part, but to me acting means playing different parts, trying to get as close to the reality of the character as possible, learning



his lifestyle ,how he holds his fork,how he carries himself,how he talks,how he relates to other people.It's hard to do because it means you always have to keep looking .... I like to travel before I do a part so I can feel I've prepared as well as I can.I want to feel I've earned the right to play a person"(McKay.p.52) DeNiro learned his craft under his teachers and on the stages of New York's workshop theatres and college tours.He began to make a name for himself with the New York theatre critics in 1968 with his performance in the off Broadway play Glamour,Glory and Gold.In the year his first film break came with the release of Brian De Palma's Greetings.Then came a role at the suggestion of Shelley Winters in Roger Corman's Bloody Mama.DeNiro had made connections in both the theatre and the cinema and his star was in the ascent.His theatre performances were highly praised though the actual plays were being lambasted.He also appeared in a number of films in the early 1970's which were commercial flops,until 1973 when he starred in Bang the Drum Slowly where his portrayal of terminally ill baseball player Bruce Pearson won him the New York Film Critics Award.In the meantime Scorsese had finished college,made a number of short films and directed two features.They ran into each other at a party and struck up a friendship.Scorsese cast him as Johnny Boy in Mean Streets without ever having seen him act.

So much for real life personalities on screen DeNiro, irrespective of how much research or how much of himself he brings to each role,when he is in a in a Scorsese film he enacts whichever aspect of the psyche is of concern to Scorsese in that particular film.In terms of masculinity and ways of seeing, Taxi driver is a particularly interesting film.One of it's main interests is the appeal of DeNiro's portrayal of Travis Bickle and the audience's ability to identify with him.

What I wish to do now is examine the process of viewer identification using Laura Mulveys "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"which to my knowledge offers the most comprehensive and believable means of examining any "mainstream" film.Using psychoanalytic theory she convincingly describes all classical Hollywood films as sites for the continual reworking of the Oedipus complex (the stage of development where children are initilized into the nature of the sex roles in in western society),thereby regarding all narrative cinema as representing the structures on which patriarchal society is founded.As narrative cinema represents patriarchal society she states that it should be read as being exclusively structured for the male viewer to observe an endless resolution of the Oedipus situation through his identification with the male protagonist.Women in cinema have no meaning other than to symbolize the castration threat crucial to the Oedipus complex.Woman (according to Freud),due to her lack of a penis is a continual reminder of the threat of castration.In order to allay that fear Man endows her with a symbolic penis (phallus).In cinema this is done by"the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman,demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation,punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of film noir);or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous



(hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star)"(Mulvey)

According to Mulvey viewer identification is derived from two areas of the psyche; sexual drives and ego formation. One of the pleasures offered by cinema is scopophilia, the process of "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze". It is one of the component instincts of sexuality characterised by the voyeuristic activities of children their desire to see and make sure of the private and the forbidden "curiosity about other peoples genitals and bodily functions, about the presence or absence of the penis and retrospectively about the primal scene". "Although the instinct is modified by other factors ... it continues to exist as the erotic basis of pleasure in looking at another person as an object". "One of these factors is the formation of the ego which also plays its part in cinema identification. Mulvey utilizes Lacans mirror stage to develop her theory of spectator identification. "The mirror phase occurs at a time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences". The child both recognises himself but misrecognises his image as being superior. Cinema allows for both the temporary loss of ego thereby bring the viewer back a pre-mirror phase stage allowing her scopophilic enjoyment and the reinforcement of the ego which also relates to the mirror phase where instead of seeing a presumed superior image of oneself one observes movie stars, alternative ideal egos. Mulvey goes on to explain how the combination of sexual instinct (scopophilia) and ego formation (analogy with the mirror stage) played on by narrative cinema allow the spectator to identify with the male protagonist as he controls the female lead and so indirectly possesses her.

The process of identification is at the heart of *Taxi Driver*. It is a "corrected" right film about vigilantism, the vigilantism is supplied by Schrader the correction by Scorsese. Robin Wood describes Schrader to be "plainly (and quite unashamedly) neo-fascist: his films (as writer and director) amount to a systematic repudiation of all minority groups and possible social alternative, in order to reassert a quasi-mystical sense of male supremacy, heterosexual superiority and a totally spurious "transcendence (which amounts to little more than one person's right to slaughter other people, on the basis of some supposed achievement of spiritual transcendence with no basis in material reality)". "Taxi Driver is a reply to *Death Wish* and *Dirty Harry* type films where Scorsese is saying that this is what these guys are really like". The process he used was too make the audience with the vigilante, Travis then have Travis carry out an atrocious act of violence which would repugnate the audience leaving them questioning the validity of identifying with movie vigilantes.

Identification with Travis occurs not only through Mulvey's theories as above but due to the performance of De Niro, when we first meet him he is quite likeable and strangely interesting. Writing on psychopathic characters on stage



Freud describes how the audience can relate to a character who is psychopathic but only if we meet him in a "normal" state first. Psychological drama turns into psychopathological drama when the source of the suffering in which we take part and from which we are supposed to derive pleasure is no longer a conflict between two almost equally conscious impulses but between a conscious impulse and a repressed impulse. Travis is conscious of his desires to help Iris and cleanse society, but he represses until the end of the film his desire to kill. Identification with Travis is not too difficult due to warmth and imagination of DeNiro's performance. However whether or not this identification serves the purpose that Scorsese intended it, is less clear. He is easily identified with but whether the audience experiences the sense of catharsis hoped for by Scorsese where the viewer would feel an emotion release through Travis's actions but then question the reasons for identifying with him. Certainly for those clued into Scorsese's reasoning the irony of that scene in conjunction with the media hype which misrepresents it makes it understandable but for much of the audience the violence does not lead to a reappraisal of their attitude towards violence: Its cool! A testament to the misunderstanding of Scorsese's work.

Irrespective of Scorsese's intended use for the violence people still get their kick because Travis "kick's ass". Mulvey explains how the cinematic apparatus by its nature lends itself towards presenting ideal egos for the spectator to consume. DeNiro makes it easier to identify by bringing his persona to the role. But what makes Travis an irresistible offer for male spectators to identify with is the famous mirror scene. Scorsese said "my training in handling actors comes from watching a lot of movies and being thrilled by them. That's how a lot of mirror scenes in my movies come about. I used to fantasize in front of the mirror playing all my hero". Here we see Travis fantasize in front of his own reflection, his ideal ego. According to Mulvey's application of Lacan and Scorsese's camera angles it is also the viewer's ideal ego. This puts the viewer in the position where his ideal ego, as personified by a movie star, impersonates tough guys in front of the mirror. This is a validation of hero worship and the vicarious thrills offered by identifying with movie stars.

Taxi Driver constantly plays games with the spectator's gaze and its objects. Scorsese uses the apparatus to comment on the nature of the system. A clue to this approach is offered by his method of filming the female lead Cybill Sheppard. When we first meet her she walks in front of the camera which pans along to follow her into her office. As the camera picks her up a man in the street catches sight of her too and watches her walk into the building, duplicating the panning action of the camera. The man is played by Scorsese, the director. A visual pun on the nature of filming, of the ability of the camera to control the object, to possess her. An observation preceding Mulvey.

## CHAPTER 2

DeNiro initiated Raging Bull. He first read former middle weight champion of the world Jake La Motta's autobiography while on location in Sicily shooting The Godfather 2. He passed it on to Scorsese who bought the rights and asked Mardik Martin and Paul Schrader to write the screen play. In 1978 DeNiro and Scorsese decided to give the project their full attention, rework the script and go into production.

'Method acting' thrives on the portrayal of inarticulate brooding characters. According to Richard Dyer, the Method "... privileges emotional meanings above all other aspects of the character .. although in principle the Method could be used to express any psychological state in practice it is used especially to express disturbance, repression, anguish etc... partly in line with the belief that such feelings vaguely conceptualised as the Id and its repression are more authentic than stability and open expression" (Dyer, p. 161)

The link between the nature of Method acting and the type of character portrayed is very strong and most clearly defined by the first generation of actor/stars, who utilized it, Brando, Clift and later on Dean Hopper etc... It was Marlon Brando's though who really fired the imagination, a star, teen idol, icon of youthful rebellion and according to Tennessee Williams, the greatest actor of the Twentieth century, Olivier included! Shelley Duvall a contemporary of his at the Actors Studio, said that he instinctively understood the ideas of Stanislavski so well that "sending him to study the Method was like sending a tiger to jungle school"

The archetypal Method actor playing the archetypal Method role is Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire. Kowalski is unintelligent, belligerent and lacking in verbal wit. He is resentful of his sister-in-law Blanche's extended stay at his house and of the way she continually slights him with regard to his "uncouth manner" and at how his wife continually extols him to complement her. He is a frustrated aggressive man, the dream Method character. Again quoting Dyer "In Streetcar Brando evidently built his character around his sense of Stanley Kowalski's animal aggression. Sometimes this is innocently canine as when his incessant scratching of his back and belly remind us of a dog after fleas. But the Kowalski character is also destructive, as we are told of in Brando's use of the mouth, he chews fruit with loud crunching noises, munches up potato chips with the same relentless jaw muscles, washes beer around in his and swallows it with physically noticeable gulps." Brando's excessive mannerisms draw our attention to him and make us more inclined to look at him

closely in order to gain more insight into his character. Kowalski lacks the verbal capabilities to inform the audience about his character's make up so it is up to the audience members to observe Brando to see Kowalski's "inner-self" through his mannerisms. This is made somewhat easier by Brando due to his great talent and good looks, combining the two forges a link between



method acting and a kind of to-be-looked-at-ness.

DeNiro's portrayal of LaMotta has much in common with Brando's Kowalski in terms of the physicality of the role. LaMotta shares Kowalski's inarticulateness and both rely on brute-force in the same way as Brando and DeNiro rely on their bodies to articulate their respective characters. DeNiro takes the use of his body and the Method to extremes by gaining sixty pounds to play the older over-weight LaMotta. Brando popularized the importance of looking at the film actor as a means of understanding how the performer uses his body to show 'insight'. *Raging Bull* is steeped in nostalgia for New York of the Fifties, the clothes, cars, atmosphere and the look of the era's films. Homage is also paid to 'the working man', standing up for his rights, another reference to Brando quoted from *On The Waterfront*. The importance of the young Brando to Scorsese and DeNiro is evident from their inclusion of the famous "I could have been a contender speech" in Jake's cabaret act.

Brando's-to-be-looked-at-ness and DeNiro's in *Raging bull* is not of the same type as that mentioned by Muley in relation to women. The glamorous women in the Hollywood cinema are fetishes, components of the Oedipus complex. Glamorous men are for male consumption they represent ideal egos. "As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the powers of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active powers of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror." (Mulvey) Mulvey describes how classical hollywood cinema is a construction of the patriarchal system and so represents it's structures therefore it is an entirely male construction created to ease male anxiety, there is no avenue open for female identification and consumption and she is left outside the system. However women do identify with characters in film and desire male movie stars facts which Mulvey does not deal with but which other writers have written about.

Pam Cooke's 'Masculinity in Crisis' raises the issue of female desire as arousal by DeNiro in *Rageing Bull*. She argues that he is presented as an object for the erotic gaze. Cooke uses this system of looking to separate Vickie from the viewers' erotic gaze. To mark her off as 'maternal'. Cooke further sets out the Oedipus situation by coding Jake as the 'child', Vickie as 'the mother' and Tommy, head of the mob as 'the father' and goes on to conclude that because the film so clearly sets out the oedipus scenario which is the order on which patriarchal society is based, the film must therefore endorse it. She seems to imply that setting the male body as the object of the spectators' gaze deflects the gaze from the female star and so subordinates her to the male star's property.



She observes with bemused irony the fact that it is Jake's extreme, quest for power and success in the ring which keeps him fit and makes him an object of desire. When Jake loses these drives he loses interest in continuing his career and grows fat thereby losing his beauty. The dilemma here for the feminist viewer who finds De Niro attractive is that he is physically beautiful when chauvinistic but loses his beauty when he loses his chauvinistic drives. "Whatever power we may have thought he had, through our sadistic gaze at the bruised and battered male body, we lose through identification with the hero's loss." Jake's beauty is a by-product of his drive to power; in order to fight he must be fit, when he is fit he is beautiful. However, chauvinistic men are not necessarily physically beautiful men, the analogue is specific to Jake and is more coincidental than symbolic.

The function of the female 'star' as the object of the erotic gaze has been theorized, however no such theory with regard to the male body as object to this gaze exists. If Mulvey is to be believed it is impossible, in mainstream cinema, to posit the male body in this situation. However, women desire male stars irrespective of whether or not this desire has been theorized.

Cooke delves into this area by speculating on the ramifications for the female image as the bearer of the gaze after it has been usurped by the male. "The spectators look at De Niro/Jake is direct, unmediated desire, but are accessed to Vickie/Cathy Moriarty is mediated through Jake's desire for her. We see Vickie entirely through Jake's eyes, literally, as the expression of his desire for her a prolonged eroticized gaze cut in, with reverse shots of him looking at her. The effect is to deflect the spectators' access to the woman's body, confirming identification with the male hero as simultaneously desiring subject and object of desire." Mulvey has shown how the erotic is exclusively male with a female object. Cooke's analysis directly contradicts this. One is more inclined to side with Mulvey as she takes on the patriarchy on its own terms. She theorizes, cinema, an off-shoot of Western society using Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalysis, the theories which offer the most recognized understanding of our society. Cooke's is further weakened by suggesting that Jake's 'look' at Vickie cordons her off for his own exclusive consumption. This helps to define her as maternal. The full reading of the Oedipus scenario when applied to Raging Bull is, Jake as the child, Vickie as the mother and Tommy (the gangster boss) as the father. Cooke finds a film which so clearly outlines the system on which patriarchal society is founded to be retrograde, by passing the issue of female desire and "continuing to locate female sexuality on its traditional place within the family as entirely maternal." She mixes up the symbolic structures as outlined in the Oedipus reading of the film with the occurrences in the diegesis. In the Oedipal reading Scorsese portrays the structures which form the patriarchy, and sets up the father, mother, son situation but in the diegesis he shows how these structures do not create a smooth resolution of



everybody's position in society. Scoreses shows us how society is structured through the symbolic depiction of the Oidepus Complex, this is left in the background. Foregrounded is the strain exherated on the characters who exist in this system. Jake is shown to be a man heavily endowed with the drives that form the system

but it fails him, he loses family and financial security. Therefore, although the film sets out to show how the system works it does not endorse it.

Steve Neil approaches the concept of the male body as bearer of the gaze from the point of view of male spectator's consumption. He works from the notion of the male movie star as an ideal ego but problematizes it with the anxiety posed by the ideal insofar as it can never be lived up to. "While the ideal ego may be a model with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires it may also be a source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate". He maintains that the male hero is capable of being an object of the erotic gaze which appeals to a repressed homosexual drive in the spectator. The male body must be fetishized in order to allow for anxiety free contemplation of the male body by male spectators. This is done in a similar method to Mulvey's description of how the spectator investigates or fetishises the female star. The process by which the male body may be disqualified as an object of erotic contemplation and disire is also to investigate it. Neil makes reference to male genre films, action films such as war films, westerns and ganster movies. The nature of these films is to make someting happen. These refer back to Mulvey's idea of investigating the woman, in terms of film noir and Hitchcock being a means of allaying castration anxiety. The male star can opperate in this position not because he induces castration fear but because as an ideal ego he causes anxiety about being able to live up to the ideal. The importance is the anxiety caused, not by the type of anxiety. His theorization allows for the male star to be the object of the erotic gaze.

### Chapter 3

Mean Streets the film which began the Scorsese/DeNiro collaborations is one of the director's early works and so replete with the concerns of his youth: the glamour of gangsters; sex; male bonding and Catholic guilt. Angst ridden Scorsese examines these concerns through Harvey Kietel who plays Charlie the angst ridden central protagonist. Charlie is rendered immobile by his indecision, he desires a synthesis between his material existence as an aspiring crime-boss under the aegis of his uncle Don Giovanni and his spiritual contentment through the church. They are mutually exclusive, a fact which is not lost on Charlie. He is unable to achieve the quasi-compatibility between the two power structures enabled by compartmentalizing one's life, that to say church on Sundays and business ("which is only business") during the week. Charlie has a sense of spirituality which permeates his life seven days a week, "you make up for your sins on the streets", and he does not fit into the system. The alternative is to leave, this is hinted at throughout the film. His opportunity for doing this lies primarily with women. In his friend's club he watches a show-girl dance and muses on the possibility of a liaison with her but the severe break with the community is sardonically hinted at in the banal racist dialogue, "she's really beautiful but she's black". Another opportunity of escape is offered by his Italian girlfriend, Teresa. She intends to move out of the neighbourhood and asks him to join her. This kind of independence in a young woman is incomprehensible to The Don, who represents the views of the community in the film and so Charlie declines. His uncle's disapproval of her makes Charlie feel he should break with her but he is unable to do so which leaves him caught between his conscience and his desires. If Charlie is Scorsese's surrogate in Mean Streets he represents these desires and his conscience, that which he wants and that which restrains him, his ego and super-ego.

Charlie is caught between two stools, unwilling or unable to move. DeNiro's Johnny Boy is the catalyst in Charlie's life, that is to say, it is he who kicks them from under him.

Johnny is irrepressively aggressive, in constant search of "kicks", he and Charlie can be read as two components of the one person. Charlie represents the ego and super-ego, he knows what he wants and needs but is impeded in the satisfaction of his desires by an overbearing sense of self-preservation. Johnny on the other hand has no such forbearance and represents the id, unsublimated drives and desires. They complement each other and so are friends but their association is not based only on affection, they are useful to each other in other ways. Charlie regards his friend as his personal charge, his pennance whom he must look after in order to atone for his sins. Johnny is forever causing trouble, falling into debt, neglecting to pay-up then insulting Michael his debtor, causing fights and wildly firing bullets into the night's sky. Charlie tries to keep him in check partly out of regard for him and his cousin Teresa but



primarily as a penance in order to find a personal sense of redemption. Combined they represent the psyche of one person struggling to come to terms with his drives while being conscious of his needs and a sense of spirituality. That one person of course, is Scorsese and *Mean Streets* represents a watershed with regard to the aspects of his psyche he wishes to explore. His first feature-film *Who's That Knocking On My Door*, starred Kietel in a similar role to that of Charlie dealing with the themes of Catholic guilt and sexual and social propriety. *Mean Streets* develops these concerns but with the introduction of DeNiro his interests turn from the old concerns to dealing with the themes of the extremes of masculinity. *Mean Streets* sees Kietel pass the torch of being Scorsese's screen surrogate to DeNiro. The new leading man is the embodiment of a different scope of issues. The concern changes from metaphysical/christian considerations to dealing with extremes of masculinity. The change of leading-man symbolizes the change in concerns.

The seventies' films examine the reaction of the individual placed under these strains. The onus is on the protagonist, how he deals with his drives. Thus, we watch Travis play out an onanistic nightmare where his narcissism and inability to deal with others in a conventional socially acceptable manner make him lay aside normal manners of social interaction in a blood-bath of violence to satisfy his drive to affirm his sense of propriety. Normal channels of behaviour are not available to him due to his introverted personality. His desire to interact with others is frustrated by this so he puts these channels aside in preference to brute-force. New York New York's Jimmy is driven by his insatiable egoism. His interests in ascending order are "money, women and music". His dedication to jazz, a sublimated drive for power, destroys his marriage and his financial success is a by-product of his music and not as substantial as his ex-wife's. His drives bring power but frustrate his social interaction, a theme dealt with more forcefully in *Raging Bull*. Jake sublimates (partially) his paranoia induced jealousy over what he perceives to be his wife's infidelity. The contained rage is unleashed in the ring where its destructive nature enables him to become World Champion. Total sublimation is impossible and eventually that which brought him professional success causes personal disaster, his wife and brother leave him. All of these films are about men re-channeling destructive drives into their professional lives to attain power, respect and fame, they question how successful they are at maintaining the sublimation. *King of Comedy*, a more straight-forward reworking of *Taxi Driver* in terms of The Oedipus Complex and the media's role in "star making", looks at Rupert's drive to power, sublimated as his quest for comic success. He lacks a super-ego and feels no qualms about putting himself in situations which would make others cringe. The result is a clear outline of the drives which motivate men in the patriarchal system. For Scorsese, DeNiro represents the instinctual drives of the male psyche. In the Eighties and Nineties he continued to use him but shifted the emphasis of his examination from using DeNiro as the protagonist to antagonist. The central character offered for consideration represents a more balanced version of contemporary man with DeNiro in the background constantly reminding us how he could behave or



what is in all men that we fear or struggle to contain.

Goodfellas presents DeNiro in this light. He plays Jimmy the successful crook a shining example to the film's central protagonist, Henry of what he should aspire to. Every effort is made to draw the viewer into identifying with Henry; he is the protagonist (we see the world from his point of view); he is good looking; on occasions funny and disassociated from the more repugnant occurrences in the gangster world. Henry though he enjoys the life is a professional, he does what he has to do, he is "enterprising". Jimmy, more in keeping with the DeNiro persona, is driven. He is by nature a violent man, he began carrying out 'hits' for 'the mob' at fifteen, he enjoys stealing, "he used to cheer on the bad-guys in the movies". Likewise Tommy is a man of extremes. He lacks a sense of professionalism and lives life for kicks. Eventually his inability to control himself catches up with him when he is fingered for the killing of a "made man" in Henry's bar and is ceremonially executed. Henry's two friends represent the extremes in himself which he must curtail in order to survive.

This approach is more clearly developed in Cape Fear. Scorsese regards this as a less serious work, a commercial piece, a film he could work on for a year and earn his pay as a professional director. This does not mean that it should be taken less seriously as his American-film-director-idols, Howard Hawks and John Ford both regard themselves as professional directors, as opposed to auteurs and so in a kind of tongue in cheek way, Scorsese's self depreciation is really a mark of respect for his heroes. Cape Fear can be read as an exploration of how a married man in the latter part of the Twentieth Century must contain what Scorsese feels are instinctual drives in order to keep his family together. Nick Nolte as Sam Boden represents the "new-man" and DeNiro represents the old version of beligerent masculinity Sam must overcome to retain his family. The old style man is aggressive and power hungry Sam uses these sides of his character in his professional life to succeed at work but he must renounce them in order to retain his family. Here he must be patient, indulgent and willing to be made fun of. This is the dilemma of the "new-man" as Scorsese sees him, caught between the professional and the domestic he is shown to be both indecisive and ineffectual. Due to his old drives he is drawn to an office colleague but is not willing to consummate the affair because of his attachment to his family.

On the home front life is not easier. He has a shaky marriage due to his previous extramarital relationships which have induced a lack of trust and support from his wife. She is easy going and liberated on first appearance, she smokes, works is willing to stand up to her husband but once provoked the easygoing facade cracks. She berates him on the supposition that he is having an affair and wishes death on whoever murdered her dog. Due to her mood swings she is not the traditional supportive wife Sam seems to want during his crisis, not that he particularly deserves one. Juliette Lewis portrays his teenage daughter who is going through the hormonal blues which makes for an uneasy relationship with either parent. Scorsese sets up the situation of nuclear family as in the original version of the film hinting at the 1950's American Dream type family through the clean cut appearance of both



Nolte and Lange both with fifties haircuts. This is especially noticeable in the stylized scene where Nolte brushes his teeth and he and Lange smile at each other. They look like two perfect American W.a.s.p.s in a fifties advert promoting toothpaste.

The family only appears to be perfect, underneath the relationships within are not solid. To maintain the family situation Sam has to repress certain drives. These drives are what define DeNiro's character Max Cady. Cady represents what is in Sam that he can at times utilize for success at work and to attract women but when they are given free reign are ultimately malign. The method of showing this internal struggle is to personify the instinctual, crude, destructive drives in DeNiro's character and the more balanced drives in the Nolte character and play them off against each other.

Sam is under pressure from all sides he must deal with Cady but he does not have the support of his family to fall back on. Nolte's role is just begging to be played by a traditional, hero type, leading man like John Wayne. If it was his family would idolize him and his only concern would be to deal with the psychopath stalking his family. But John Wayne never understood that, the thing that gave him his strength was the same thing that gave his enemies strength. Scorsese is aware that power drives are an integral part of masculinity the character of a man is defined by how much he draws on these drives. Initially Sam tries to deal with Cady through legal means, as they prove ineffectual he slips into using brute force, a characteristic of Cady's and a symbol of the darker side of his psyche, which he represses. Sam first uses force through intermediaries but finally it is he who beats Cady at the end of the film and causes him to drown. Scorsese's message seems to be that there is a dark side to masculinity which we suppress but it is sometimes necessary to draw on it in order to survive.

An overview of the Scorsese/DeNiro films sees a change in emphasis to the examination of masculinity where these drives are contained. DeNiro the embodiment of these drives was absent from Scorsese's most recent film *The Age of Innocence*. His absence denoted a change of concerns. Where formerly the onus was on extremes and their detrimental effect now it is on the total repression of desire. The leading man played by Daniel Day Lewis pines for his would-be mistress but cannot be with her due to the constraint felt by him by the need for decorum prevalent to his place in society. He is another Scorsese character caught in a dilemma unable to move. The major difference with this story is that there is no external force present to push him into action. The result is that he does not leave his wife and when the possibility of an encounter with his would-be mistress occurs years later after the death of his wife he is unwilling to follow up on the opportunity. For Scorsese masculinity is characterised by instinctual drives the nature of the man depends on how he utilizes them. Unmediated use of them, while it may lead to professional success leads to social disaster, total repression of them leads to inactivity and unhappiness. The precarious solution according to him is to try and find a balance between the two.

## Conclusion

In her conclusion to *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey calls for the establishment of a new and alternative cinema, free from the constraints of the patriarchal system. According to her, unless this is achieved women will not be able to make films independent of the system which subjugates them both through the diegesis and by the very apparatus. This new cinema would be the site for an investigation of feminist concerns outside the present system where, according to her, it is impossible to operate. It is to be supposed that this new cinema, by its very nature could not be used to depict current types of masculinity as they are anathema to that which would be its concerns. It is for this reason that Scorsese remains within the dominant mode of cinema, narrative and 'mainstream'. From this position he can critique the system from within. Ordinarily his films have a very strong symbolic structure, with regard to the Oedipus Complex where each of the main characters can be read as 'father', 'mother', 'son'. This structuring of his films has led to criticism that he is non-progressive and supportive of the dominant order. However, his characters, usually played by DeNiro represent extreme cases of men who are charged by the drives that produce the patriarchy. They are shown to have achieved a certain amount of power and success from their drives but to be totally ineffectual in their social relationships, especially with women. The result is the depiction of a flawed society representative of flawed masculinity, which orders and controls it. His world is one where men must draw on their instinctual drives in order to survive (achieve professional success) but if they give in to these drives completely they become cut off from others and unable to interact socially.

Scorsese's love affair with the apparatus of cinema, primarily camera techniques are knowingly used to draw the spectator into the film, to identify with the central protagonists whose character leaves him wondering whether or not he should identify with him or not. Scorsese and DeNiro continually collaborate due to their shared concerns and because of DeNiro's adeptness at creating characterizations which though extreme and often repugnant are no less fascinating.



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